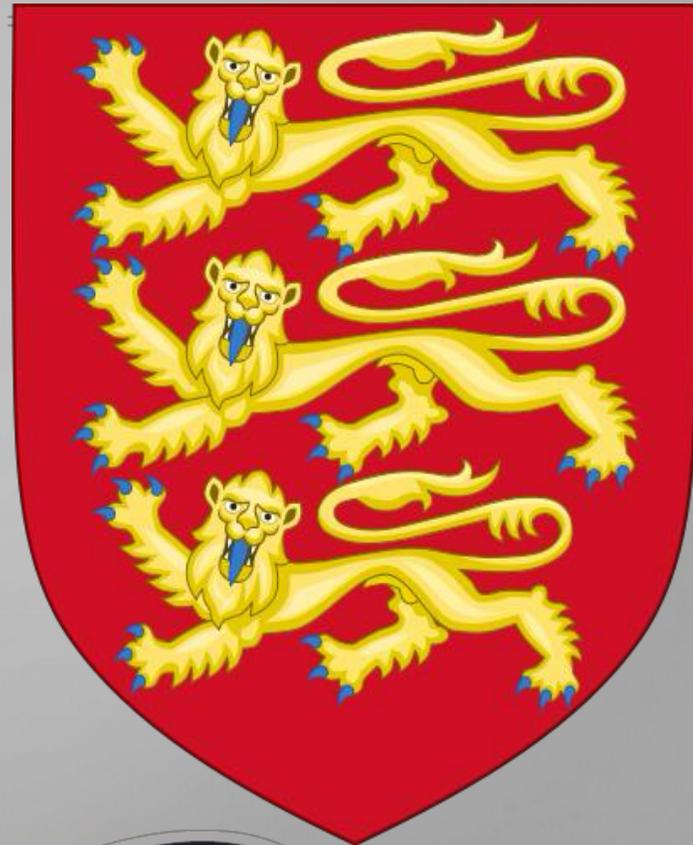# MIDDLE ENGLISH

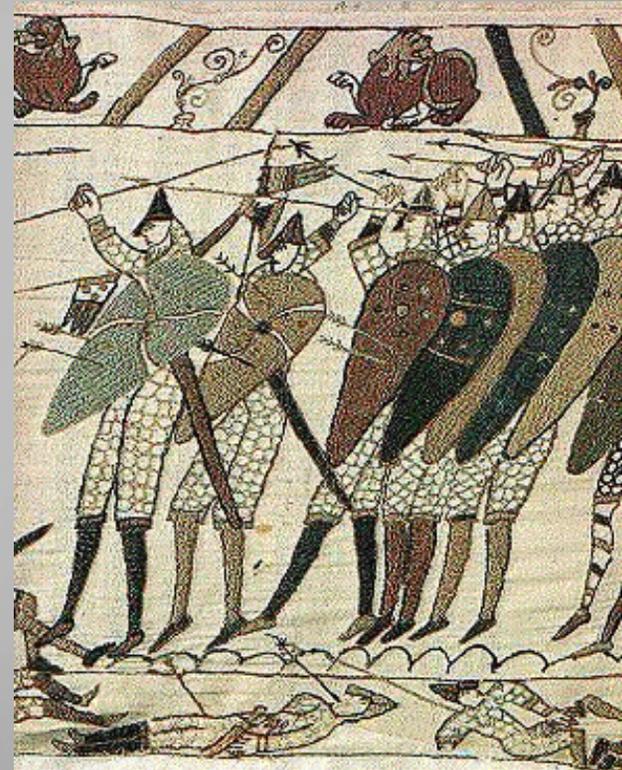*1066 - 1500*

MIDDLE ENGLISH

MIDDLE ENGLISH HISTORY

❖... began in 1066 following the **Norman Conquest** of England.

❖The Normans were Vikings who spoke a French dialect that would permeate English society.

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HISTORY

This literary time period spans the Dark Ages, the Crusades, the Hundred Years War, and the **Black Death**…

HISTORY

… basically, a whole four and a half centuries full of chaotic social and political upheaval …

HISTORY

❖ … which ends around 1500 after the **printing press** is introduced to London in 1470.

❖ A dialect called Chancery Standard gained dominance for most official purposes.

MIDDLE ENGLISH LITERATURE

❖**Significant literature** from this time included chivalric romances, allegorical poems, religious plays, and more secular literature such as folk ballads.

LITERATURE

Geoffrey Chaucer's <u>The Canterbury Tales</u> introduced iambic pentameter, the rhyming couplet, and other Italian conventions to English.

LITERATURE

Other notable works include:

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (Anonymous), Piers Plowman (Langland), and Le Morte d'Arthur (Malory).

MEDIEVAL THEMES

❖ courtly love

❖ chivalry

❖ devotion to God

❖ virtues and sins

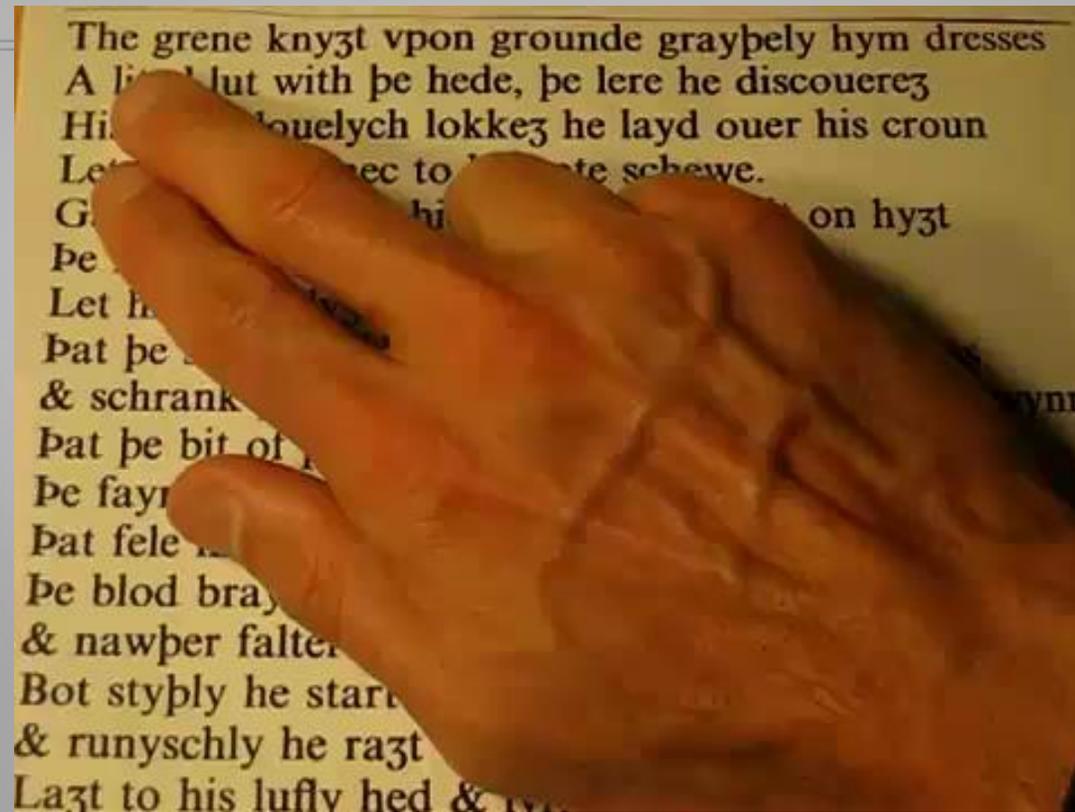# ARCHAIC LETTERS

- ❖ Æ æ   Ash

- ❖ Ð ð   Eth

- ❖ Ȝ ȝ   Ẏogh

- ❖ Þ þ   Thorn

- ❖ Ƿ ƿ   Wẏnn

GAWAIN READING

Early Modern English and The Elizabethan Era

1500 - 1650

Early Modern English
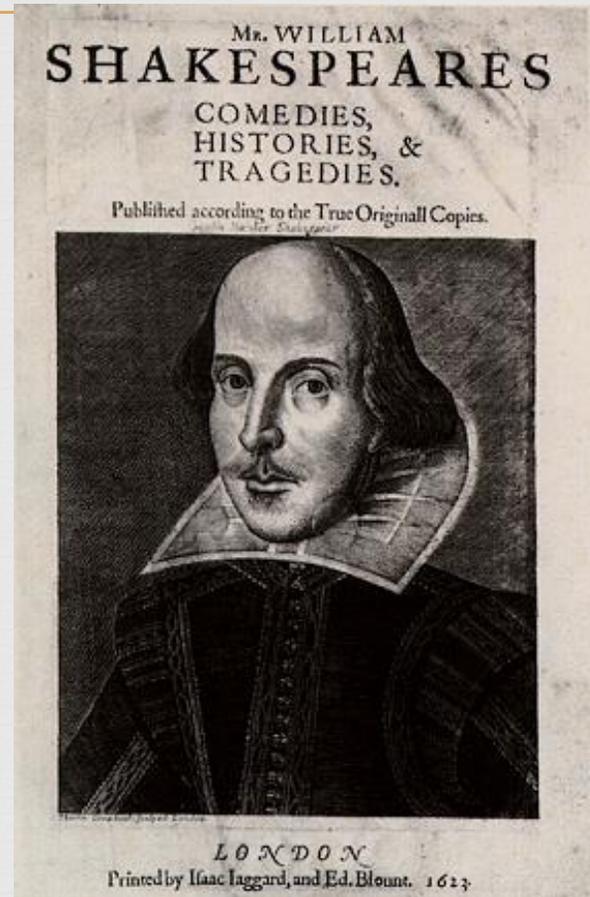
Early Modern English

❖The advent of the printing press in London in 1470 established the Chancery Standard dialect of English as the national standard.

Early Modern English

❧

❖Modern readers of English are generally able to understand Early Modern English, though with some difficulties arising from changes in grammar, word meaning, and spelling.
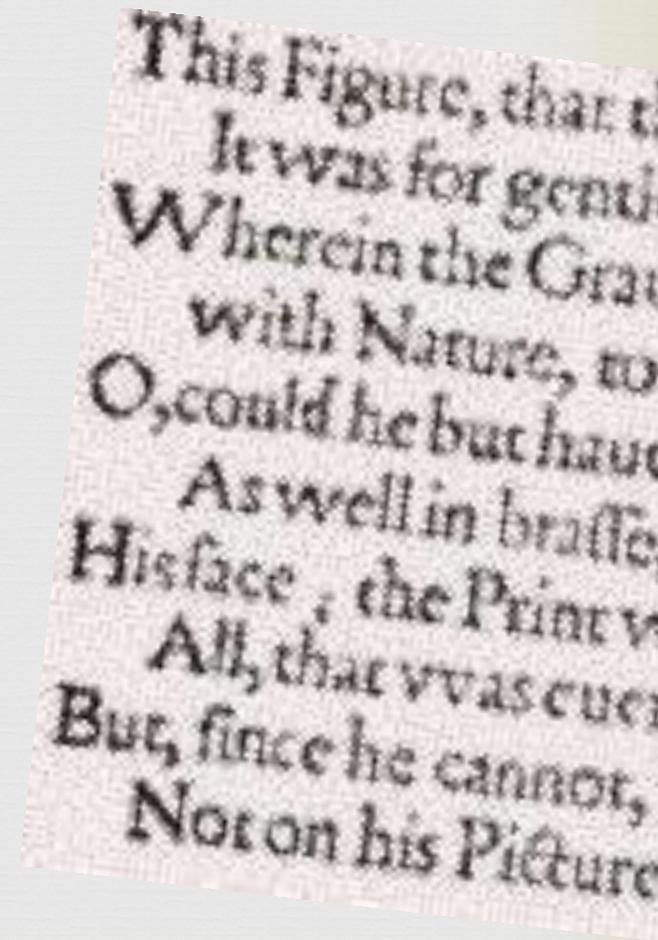
This Figure, that t
It was for gent
Wherein the Gra
with Nature, to
O, could he but haue
As well in braffe
His face; the Print v
All, that vvas euer
But, fince he cannot,
Not on his Picture

Early Modern English

❖English spelling was finally (mostly) standardized in this time period, but it did not happen overnight.

❖Unfortunately, since this era was filled with political and social upheaval, mass migrations after the Black Death …

Early Modern English

… and an exaggerated attempt to further distinguish the "English accent" from that of the French, many peculiarities (i.e. contradictions) in English spelling and pronunciation were standardized into record at this time.

Queen Elizabeth's Reign

Closing off the era of the Tudors, Elizabeth was crowned queen in 1558.

Her reign is considered the start of the golden age of English history typified by national pride, classical ideals, international expansion, military might, and a much-welcomed renaissance of the arts.

Queen Elizabeth's Reign

⁜ In this peaceful era, the arts flourished and culture bloomed.

⁜ Significant writers of this time include William Shakespeare, Francis Bacon, Ben Jonson, Christopher Marlowe, Sir Philip Sidney, and Edmund Spencer.

King James

- Under King James, the golden age of Elizabethan literature and drama continued.

- The <u>Authorised King James Version</u> of the Bible (1611) and Shakespeare's collected works (published posthumously in 1623) are the best examples of the English language from this era and remain the top 2 bestsellers to this day.

King James
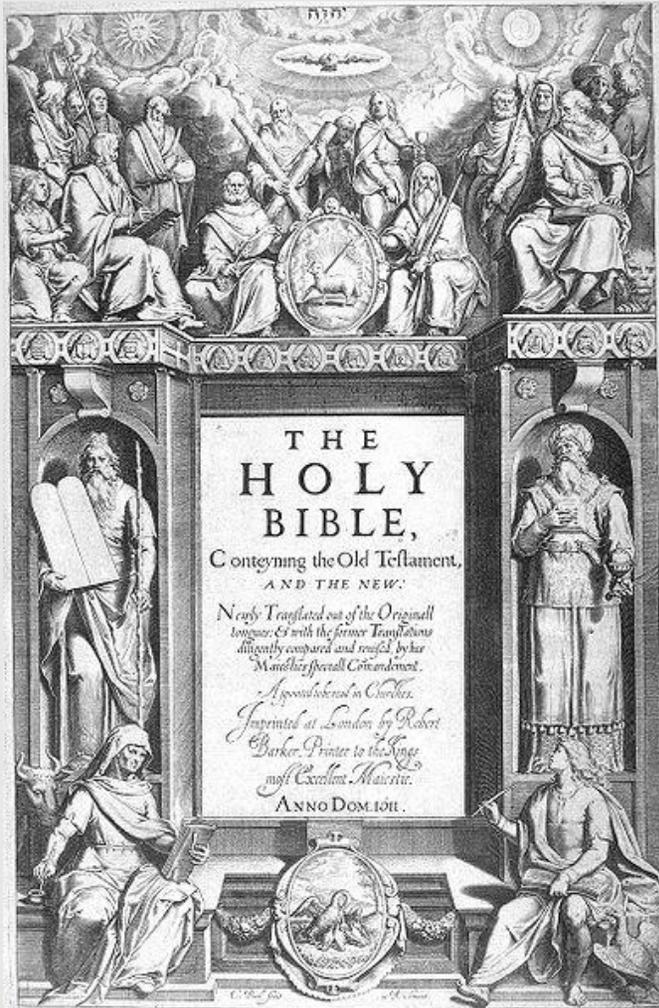
The translators of the King James Version of the Bible intentionally preserved archaic pronouns and verb endings that had already begun to fall out of spoken use.

This enabled the English translators to convey the distinction between the 1st, 2nd and 3rd person singular and plural verb forms of the original Hebrew and Greek sources.

e.g. **2ⁿᵈ Person** *(You)*

ℭ

ꙮ informal singular:
   thou, thee, thy, thine
ꙮ plural / formal singular :
   you, ye, your, yours

Early Modern English Pronouns

Case		1st	2nd	3rd M	3rd F	3rd N
S I N G	N	I	**thou**	he, a	she	it, hit
	A	me	**thee**	him	her	it, hit
	G	my/mine	**thy/thine**	his	her, hers	his, it, its
P L U R	N	we	**ye/you**	they		
	A	us	**you/ye**	them, (h)em		
	G	our, ours	**your, yours**	their, theirs		

Common Themes of Elizabethan Drama

- Revenge
- Sensationalism
- Melodrama
- the Human Condition

William Shakespeare

- … stands out in this period as a poet and playwright as yet unsurpassed due to sheer giftedness and versatility.
- Though most of his plays met with great success, it is in his later years that he wrote what have been considered his greatest works: Romeo and Juliet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth, Antony and Cleopatra, The Tempest, and of course Hamlet.

William Shakespeare

MEET BILL

William Shakespeare

- He was born on April 23, 1564 in Stratford, a town about 100 miles northwest of London.

- Shakespeare's father was a glove-maker, and Shakespeare received no higher than grammar school in his formal education.

William Shakespeare

- At the age of 18 (in 1582), he married Anne Hathaway. She was eight years older than him.

- He left his family behind in 1590 and moved to London.

- By 1592, Shakespeare had become an actor and a playwright, and he was an immediate success with his "Lord Chamberlain's Men".
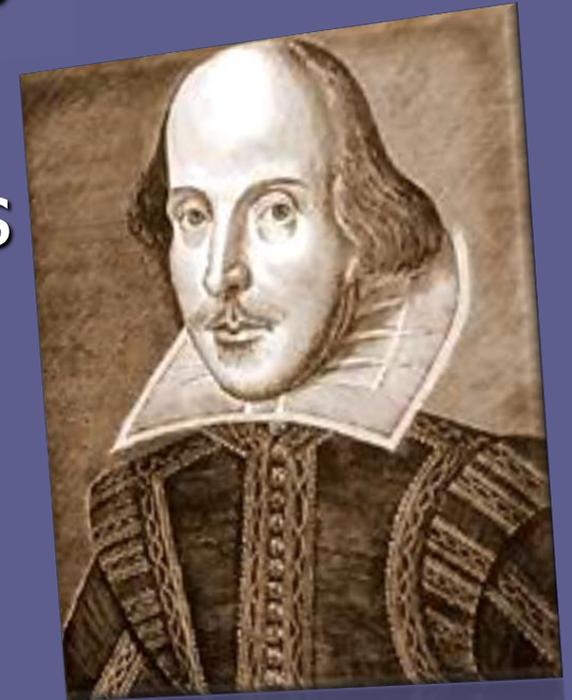
William Shakespeare
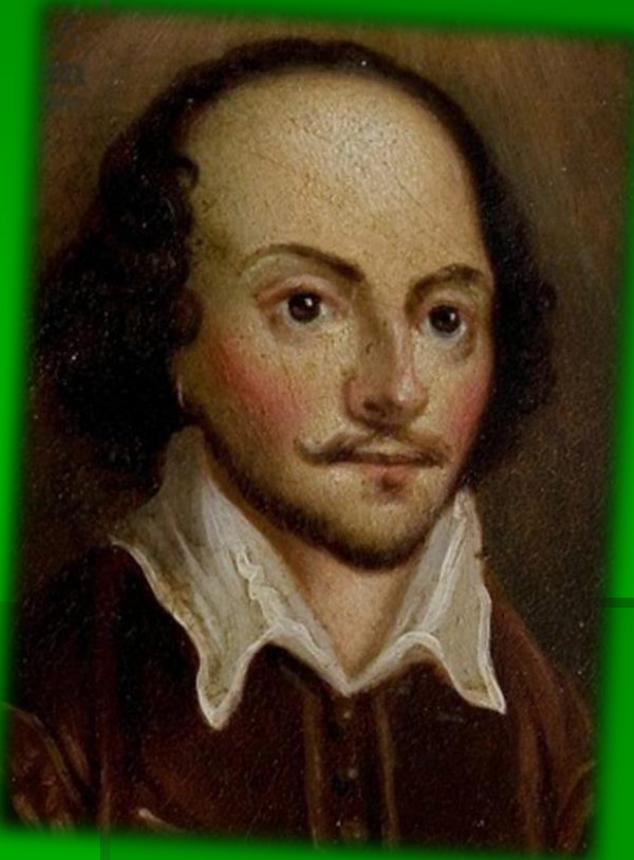
- Shakespeare soon became the most popular playwright of the day as well as a part-owner of the Globe Theater.

- His theater troupe was adopted by King James as "The King's Men" in 1603.

William Shakespeare

- Shakespeare retired as a rich and prominent man of Stratford-upon-Avon in 1613.

William Shakespeare

- When he "retired" – Shakespeare had written over 37 plays!

- Shakespeare died on April 23, 1616.

William Shakespeare

The Company

- In 1603, the "Lord Chamberlain's Men" became the "**King's Men**".

- This was due to the sponsorship of the king … **King James**.

➢ This is the same King James who wanted the Christian Bible to be translated from Latin to English.

➢ King James was a bit strange, though did have the Bible re-translated into English, and he sponsored Shakespeare.

- King James actually traced his ancestry back to the real-life **Banquo**.

- Shakespeare's transformation of the Banquo in Holinshed's *Chronicles* who helped murder the king to the good man in *Macbeth* is therefore a kind of compliment given to King James' ancestor.

- Full Title: *The Tragedy of Macbeth*

- When Written: 1606

- Where Written: England

- When Published: 1623

- Literary Period: The Renaissance
                              (1500-1650)

- Genre: Tragic drama

- Setting: Scotland and England
                     during the eleventh century

Poetry and Prose

➢ <u>blank verse</u> – poetry that is largely unrhymed

➢ <u>iambic meter</u> – when an **unstressed syllable** is followed by a **stressed syllable**, as in the word pre-fer

Iambic *Penta* meter

- This simply means that there are five of these "iambic units" in each line. This is an example spoken by Macbeth:

*"So **foul** and **fair** a **day** I **have** not **seen**."*

Couplets

- When Shakespeare uses rhymes, he generally uses "couplets" (two consecutive lines of poetry that rhyme).

  Good night! Good night!

  Parting is such sweet **sorrow**

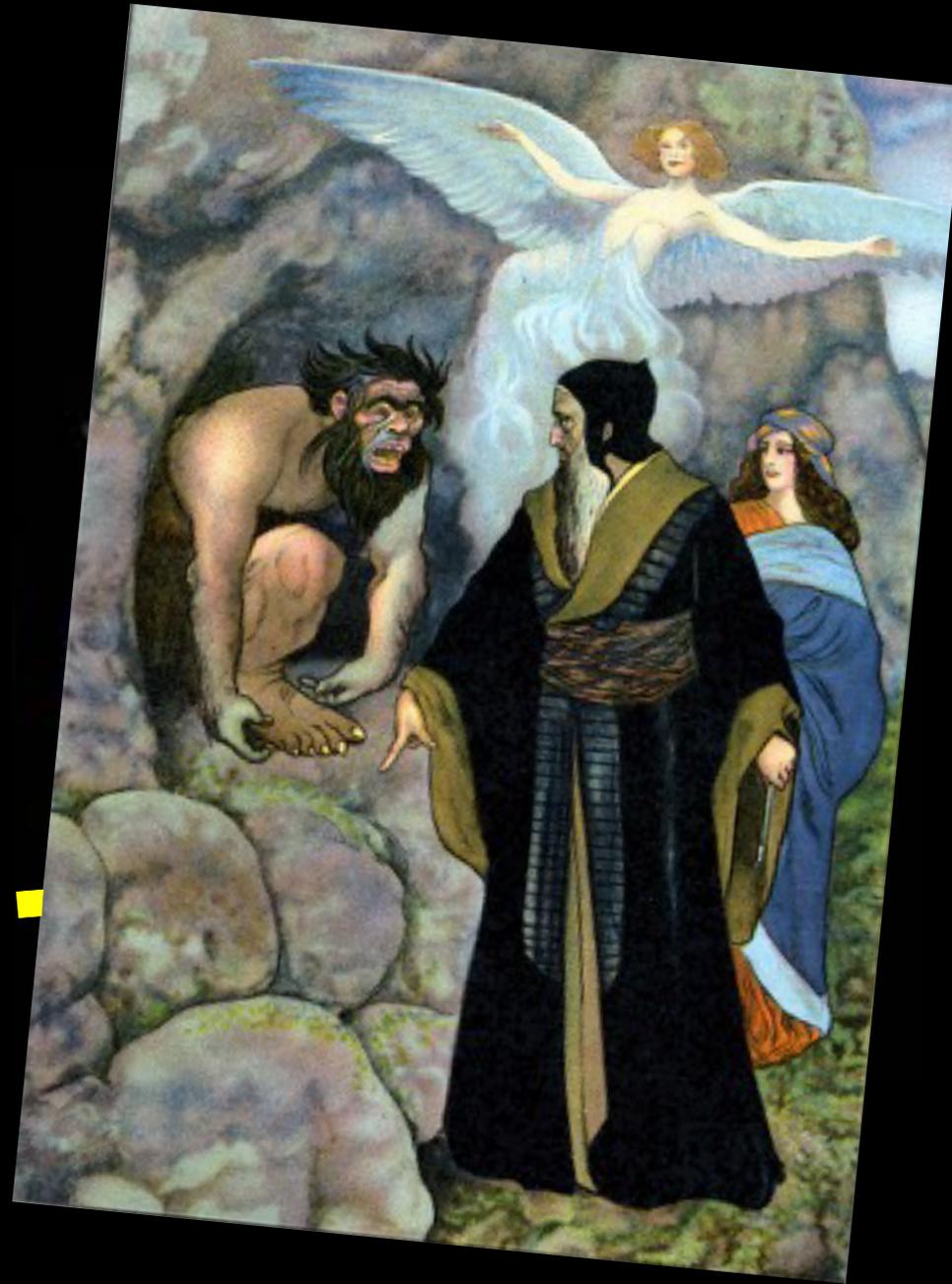 That I shall say goodnight till it be **morrow**.

Shakes' Plays ...

➤ Shakespeare expert Professor Engel says that one of three things always starts off a Shakespeare play:

1. Sexual Humor
2. Violence
3. The Supernatural

The Tempest

BASIC INFO – THE TEMPEST

A wronged ruler strands his former enemies on a remote island through magic, tests them, restores order through reconciliation, and returns to reclaim his position as his daughter's future is secured.

BASIC INFO – THE TEMPEST

A displaced ruler with a taste for control turns an island into his personal command center — using "knowledge," spectacle, and managed fear to keep its inhabitants in line — then stages a storm-born reckoning that restores his status and calls it mercy, even as everyone else is left living with the system he set up.

BASIC INFO – THE TEMPEST

★ **title:** *The Tempest*

▢ **genre:** comedy / fantasy

▢ **written:** early 1600s (often dated ~1610–1611)

▢ **published:** 1623 (First Folio)

▢ **where written:** England

▢ **literary period:** Renaissance / early modern

★ **setting:** a remote island (kept vague on purpose)
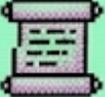
A GUIDING QUESTION

As we read, consider: Is Prospero **restoring justice** — or building a system where his control looks like 'order'?

- 👁⚖️ who controls land, labor, and information?
- 📖 whose story becomes "official"?
- 🎭 who gets framed as "civil," "monstrous," or "grateful"?

ELIZABETHAN WORDS

- **art** — are
- **hath** — has
- **prithee** — please / I beg you
- **hither** — here / to this place
- **hence** — away / from here
- **ere** — before
- **wherefore** — why

Stage directions

🔊)) **aside** — meant for audience (or one character) only

🔊)) **within** — voice from offstage / inside

👻 **invisible** — present but unseen by characters

🎵 **soft music / solemn music** — enchantment cue; control / mood shift

Things to look for while reading 👁

- naming: who gets labeled "monster," "slave," "witch," "civil"?
- permission: who asks, who orders, who bargains?
- knowledge: who knows the past, who is kept in the dark?
- spectacle: how do music, magic, and shows change people's choices?

Miranda

- innocence can function like "proof" that Prospero is good
- her compassion is real — but shaped by what she's allowed to know
- watch when she is encouraged to speak vs. gently redirected or managed

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Caliban

- often framed through labels like monster or slave (language doing harm)
- pushed into the role of "threat" — which can reveal colonizer fear more than truth
- also given moments of startling beauty (especially about the island's sounds) that complicate the stereotype

Ariel

- powerful, intelligent, everywhere — but still tasked and timed
- freedom becomes a bargaining chip: "soon" is a tool of control
- invisibility + music + speed = how power can rule without being seen
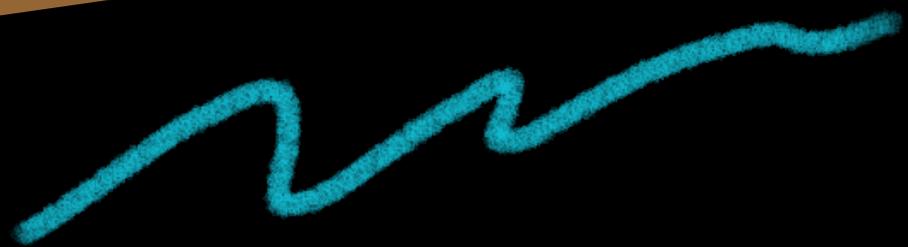
Symbols

⚡ **the storm** — controlled chaos; excuse to rearrange power

🌴 **the island** — home / resource / prison / stage

📖 **books** — knowledge as weapon; control through learning

👁 **sleep / waking** — control through consciousness and attention

What's a comedy?

comedy: ends in repair (reunion, restoration, marriage/community)

tragedy: ends in collapse (death, ruin, irreversible loss)

Tempest question: if it "repairs," who pays the cost of that repair?

thematic *motifs*

power — when someone controls your options, are you free?

freedom — what counts: escape, choice, dignity, or all three?

language — who gets to name reality, and who gets named?

control — when does "order" become domination?

justice — is revenge justice, or pain wearing authority?

forgiveness — who is expected to forgive, and why?

William Shakespeare

■ Shakespeare was buried at Trinity Church in Stratford as an honored citizen. On his tombstone is carved a rather crafty inscription:

Good Friend, for Jesus' sake forbear
To dig the dust enclosed here.
Blest be the man that spares these stones,
And cursed be he who moves my bones.

Ben Jonson

- He wrote plays back then as well – he was always in competition with Shakespeare as was a guy named Christopher Marlowe.

- When Shakespeare died though,
Ben Jonson wrote this:

    *" He was not of an age,
    but for all time."*