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Shakespeare's Dog *

by Rick Chafe

adapted from the novel by Leon Rooke

an NAC English Theatre / Manitoba Theatre Centre (Winnipeg)
world premiere coproduction

Study Guide

**The National Arts Centre English Theatre
Programmes for Student Audiences
2007-2008 Season**

**Peter Hinton
Artistic Director, English Theatre**

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***NB: MATURE CONTENT.**



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About This Guide

This Study Guide is formatted in easy-to-copy single pages, which may be used separately or in any combination that works best for your classes.

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Chandos portrait of Shakespeare
(artist unknown; authenticity unconfirmed)

Shakespeare's Dog *

About the Work

He [Shakespeare] was the man who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul.

John Dryden (1631 – 1700)

Where did Shakespeare get his humanity, his breadth of vision, his soul? This question is at the heart of *Shakespeare's Dog*, a new play based on the novel by Canadian novelist Leon Rooke, adapted for the stage by Rick Chafe. In this work we are introduced to Will Shakespeare's family and to his life in the small Elizabethan town of Stratford-upon-Avon.

Life is not easy for the young Will Shakespeare. The son of a lowly glove-maker, Will steals time from domestic cares to practice the art of the stage, convinced that he has the heart of a great actor. But his dog, Mr. Hooker, is sure that Will's talents lie not in acting but in writing. Moreover, Mr. Hooker believes that the task of any great writer is to "*wage battle for the underdog*". The difficulty is to get Will to see things from the dog's point of view — and Mr. Hooker has his hands (or paws) full elsewhere. A deer had been poached on the estate of a powerful landowner; the culprit is a local dog; and that has brought out the feared Forest Regarders — men who mete out brutal justice to dogs who break the law. The scene is set for a dramatic comedy where dog and man must stick together to realize their true destiny.

***NB:** mature content.

The Characters

The Dogs

Mr. Hooker: A middle-aged dog, the protagonist of the play

Terry: Hooker's sister

Marr: Hooker's love interest

Wolf: A younger male dog

Onion: An older dog

The Shakespeares

Will Shakespeare: 21 years old

Anne Hathaway: 29 years old

John: Will's father, former mayor of Stratford

Mary: Will's mother

Joan: Will's sister, "complicated in her simplicity"

The Stratforders

Davey Jones: a tavern owner and amateur theatre producer

Ralph Cawdrey: a butcher

Moll Braxton: a witch

Witch hunters: (variable numbers)

The Forest Regarders

Black Shag: leader

one-four other Regarders

Other

Sir Richard: A Queen's Man

A Production Who's Who

Creative Team

Playwright.....	Rick CHAFE
Director	Larry DESROCHERS
Set and Costume Designer	Brian PERCHALUK
Lighting Designer.....	Scott HENDERSON
Sound Designer	John BENT Jr.
Fight Director	Robert BORGES
Fight Captain.....	Greg KRAMER

Actors

(in alphabetical order)

John Shakespeare.....	Frank ADAMSON
Mary/Moll.....	Sharon BAKKER
Marr	Ardith BOXALL
Wolf	Toby HUGHES
Will Shakespeare	Harry JUDGE
Ralph Cawdry/Onion	Greg KRAMER
Sir Richard Doyle	Barry MacGREGOR
Hooker	Arne MacPHERSON
Black Shag	Wayne NICKLAS
Joan Shakespeare.....	Daria PUTTAERT
Terry	Marina STEPHENSON KERR
Anne Hathaway	Helen TAYLOR
Davey Jones.....	David WARBURTON

Stage Management

Stage Manager	Paul A. SKIRZYK
Assistant Stage Manager	Samira ROSE
Apprentice Stage Manager.....	Ivory SEOL

A Shakespeare Miscellany (page 1 of 2)

Perhaps no other writer in the history of literature has been discussed as much as Shakespeare. Here is a compendium of bite-sized bits — both fact and speculation — about the Bard.

Fact: Shakespeare was indifferent about writing his name and variously signed it, “Shakespere,” “Shakesper,” “Shakespear,” and “Shakespeare.” The last version appears on his will and is generally accepted as the standard form.

Speculation: Sigmund Freud, founder of psychoanalysis, speculated that Shakespeare’s great character Hamlet exhibited an “Oedipus complex” — Freud’s term to describe the sexual attraction of a son towards his mother. In the 20th century it became fashionable to read Shakespeare in light of Freud. The critic Harold Bloom, however, argued that Shakespeare had explored the human mind far more thoroughly than had Freud, and added that it was more interesting to read Freud in light of Shakespeare. (Freud himself once remarked, “*The poets were there before me.*”)

Fact: Shakespeare was born in 1564 in the small English town of Stratford-on-Avon, the son of a Catholic glove-maker, John Shakespeare, and his wife Mary Arden, the daughter of wealthy local landowner. The third child of eight, he was probably educated at the local grammar school and did not go to university. At the age of 18 he married Anne Hathaway, aged 26. The Shakespeares had three children: a daughter, Susanna, and twins — son Hamnet and daughter Judith. These are among the few confirmed facts concerning William Shakespeare’s early life.

Speculation: Many people have speculated that William Shakespeare did not write the poems and plays attributed to him. How (they ask) could this lowly son of Stratford, with his humble origins and limited education, have acquired the knowledge and wisdom to write masterpieces? One of the most enduring choices for the authorship of the Bard’s works is Sir Francis Bacon, the Elizabethan polymath. Proponents of this “Baconian theory” have found cryptograms hidden in the plays — coded messages, supposedly inserted by Bacon himself, that reveal the true author behind the work. Other candidates for the authorship of Shakespeare’s works include the Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford (1550–1604); William Stanley, Sixth Earl of Derby (1561–1642), and Shakespeare’s fellow playwright Christopher Marlow (1564–1593).

Speculation: After the birth of the Shakespeare twins, Judith and Hamnet, their father Will seems to have been lost to history until he surfaces as part of the London theatre scene in 1592. There are many myths and conjectures surrounding these “lost years” of Shakespeare. One of Shakespeare’s earliest biographers, Nicholas Rowe, reported a Stratford legend that Shakespeare was forced to leave town because he was wanted for deer-poaching.

Fact: In contemporary productions of Shakespeare’s most famous plays — *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Othello* — the title role was often played by Richard Burbage, the most famous actor of Elizabethan times. It was Burbage’s father, James, who had established the Globe Theatre in London, where Shakespeare began working as an actor and playwright after he left Stratford. Many believe that the famous Chandos portrait of Shakespeare was painted by Burbage himself.

A Shakespeare Miscellany (page 2 of 2)

Fact and Speculation: The word "honorificabilitudinitatibus", one of the longest words in the English language, appears in Shakespeare's comedy *Love's Labour's Lost* (Act V, scene i.). Over the centuries there has been a fair amount of speculation about the supposed "secret nature" of this word. Proponents of the Baconian theory of authorship (see page 3, paragraph 5) have seen in this word evidence of Sir Francis Bacon's hand behind the plays. A number of commentators have treated it as an anagram (a scrambled message) and rearranged the letters to get revelatory sentences. One of these reads (in Latin), "*These plays, Bacon's offspring, are preserved for the world*". Furthermore, say the commentators, Bacon was known to be fascinated by this word and played with it in his writings.

Fact: If you look up the "first usage" of many familiar words and expressions in a historical dictionary, you will often find quotations from Shakespeare's plays. Shakespeare had the good fortune to appear when English was still fluid, when many meanings had not yet solidified. He was able to stretch and shape the language like a glassblower, and the resulting creations became permanent entries in the world's lexicon. The novelist Virginia Woolf spoke of "*the word-coining genius*" of Shakespeare and the other Elizabethan writers — "*as if thought plunged into a sea of words and came up dripping*".

Speculation: In 2006, throwing her hat into the authorship-controversy ring, Shakespeare enthusiast Robin P. Williams published *Sweet Swan of Avon: Did a Woman Write Shakespeare?*. Williams argued that the real hand behind the poems and plays was not Francis Bacon or any of the other male candidates, but Mary Sydney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke (1561–1621). The *Washington Post Book World* wasn't quite convinced, but lauded the book for bringing attention to a neglected female writer of the Elizabethan age.

Fact: During the years Shakespeare lived in London, he worked as both an actor and a playwright, particularly at the Globe Theatre in which he owned a share. In 1597 he bought a house in Stratford for his family, and for the next two decades travelled back and forth between Stratford and London. He died in 1616. In his will, he left to his wife Anne "*my second best bed*", an ambiguous bequest that has been seen as both an insult and a sign of endearment — the second-best bed, some scholars say, would have been the matrimonial bed.

Fact: Shakespeare, like so many other writers before and after him, regularly changed the known facts of history to better suit his stories. *Shakespeare's Dog* includes several examples of such "poetic license". Examples include: Anne Hathaway uses the modern term "diapers". The young Will Shakespeare is star-struck with the great actor, Richard Burbage, who in fact didn't gain fame as an actor until he performed the parts Will wrote for him much later on. The play refers to Richard Burbage as "Sir", indicating the title of knighthood, when in fact, the first actor ever to be knighted in England was Sir Henry Irving, in 1895. It should also be noted that there is no evidence Will had a dog named Hooker, or that such dog, if he existed, ever spoke English to Will or to anyone else.

"In the Dark Backward and Abysm of Time"*:
The Elizabethan Era (page 1 of 2)

"*Times were hard*", says Shakespeare's dog, Mr. Hooker, in the opening monologue of the play. Times were hard indeed for many inhabitants — both two-legged and four-legged — of Shakespeare's England.

Hard times for country dwellers: Imparkment — the enclosing of land by wealthy landowners — began in the 12th century and continued right up until Shakespeare's day. Through imparkment, game reserves were created which became the exclusive property of the landowners. Hunting deer or other game within the imparked area became the crime of poaching, punishable by the strict laws of the day.

The forests owned by the Crown and private landowners had an army of officials to watch over them. One group, called "Regarders", had the responsibility of meting out punishments to dogs that were illegally on private land. In some instances, Regarders had the right to order "expeditation", called "coxing" in the play — the mutilation of the dog's feet to prevent it from chasing down deer.

Hard Times for Catholics: Under the oath of supremacy, established by Queen Elizabeth I, all subjects of the realm had to swear allegiance to Her Majesty — not just as Queen, but as Head of the Church. This initiated a time of adversity and conflict for English Catholics (dismissively called "papists"), who of course regarded the Pope as the supreme religious authority. Laws against Catholics became increasingly more severe in the course of Elizabeth's reign. Towns were required to submit a list of "recusants" — local people who did not attend the Church of England at least once a month. The churchwardens of Stratford, in naming the town's recusants, listed one John Shakespeare, father of Will Shakespeare.

It is true that John Shakespeare did get into trouble with the Stratford authorities on this and other occasions, but scholars agree that there were other factors at work besides his Catholicism. Elected an alderman in 1565, he was later thrown off the town council for not attending meetings. He was also prosecuted for debt at least once. Records show that he had disputes with several local citizens, including the town butcher, Ralph Cawdrey.

*From Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Act I, Scene ii.

**"In the Dark Backward and Abyss of Time":
The Elizabethan Era** (page 2 of 2)

Hard times for animals: A popular pastime in Shakespeare's day was bear-baiting, in which a bear would be chained to a stake and attacked by trained dogs. The baiting would continue until the bear died or was killed; many dogs also perished in the process. Queen Elizabeth I was a fan of the pastime and kept large groups of dogs and bears for the purpose. The baiting of bears and other animals (usually bulls) was banned in England by the Puritans during the Civil Wars and the Commonwealth (1642-60).

Hard times for "witches": Although many educated people of Shakespeare's day disbelieved in witches, the persecution of people (mainly women) for supposed occult crimes was a part of life, especially in the countryside. Of course the most likely candidates for persecution were the marginal, the friendless and the solitary. Witches were supposedly responsible for odd or inopportune events, such as crop failure or birth defects in animals and children. Witches were said to work their magic with the aid of "familiars" — animals like cats, bats and occasionally dogs.

Local courts devised a number of crude tests to determine if an accused person was indeed a witch. Such tests included throwing her into a body of water (if she sank, it was because the water accepted her in her innocence) and pricking her skin to note her reaction (the Devil supposedly made witches numb to pain). The persecution of witches continued under James I, who himself was a strong believer in them, and then declined gradually — but far more gradually in countryside than in the urban areas.



Hans Baldung Grein, "Witches" (woodcut, 1508)

An Excerpt from the Play (page 1 of 2)

[Will and Mr. Hooker discuss a story-line that Shakespeare will turn into a play]

WILL: *(entering)* I have the story! Most dog-like, I have grown a tale!

HOOKER: Eh?

WILL: Sired by Davy's ale, a grand drama has sprung to life full-formed! And—*(producing a coin)* True to his word, the scholar Jones has paid in advance!

HOOKER: What tale?

WILL: No leaky lips, Hooker. Words are flighty things, the idea's here imprisoned 'till set free by quill and ink.

HOOKER: Then in the name of dog, to the desk—go!

WILL: The scene is an Italian shoreline. A storm howls, huge breakers crash. An enormous wave sweeps in and leaves behind a man. Half-drowned, but of noble birth.

HOOKER: *(amazed)* Will... good start!

WILL: A second wave drops a second man—his bumbling servant.

HOOKER: Our hero, yes! Secretly the brains of the household. Loyal, stout heart, good teeth—

WILL: Shut it, dog, this is genius.

HOOKER: I'm silent, play on.

WILL: There's been a storm, a ship torn to pieces, and though master and servant have survived it, each has lost a brother to the waves. United in grief, they trudge to town. Where they meet...a beautiful red-haired noblewoman and her sultry serving wench with great large bosoms and a fine round behind!

(He slaps Hooker's butt.)

But remember those poor drowned brothers, lost in the storm? They've not drowned at all—they too have been swept ashore...and then trudged to the same town, and met the same noblewoman and serving wench. Ha! And, Hooker... each set of brothers are twins!

HOOKER: *Rrr...what?*

WILL: Twins! Confusion! Romantic entanglements all gone afoul! I stole it from a Greek comedy about one set of twins. I've got twice as many! Ha! Eh, Hooker? Ha!

HOOKER: Big round bosoms?

WILL: Oh, my boonmate, within a week I shall be playing London.

HOOKER: Will, it's stupid.

WILL: And Hooker, the ladies? They line up at the stage door to glimpse every great actor—and bring with them, their lapdogs, panting to meet his famous mutt.

An Excerpt from the Play (page 2 of 2)

- HOOKER: Pay attention, you cretin! Keep the storm, storms are good. Bury the rest, we start again.
- WILL: Oh, pouty dog. Let some light into those dark, critical eyes.
- HOOKER: You're trying to impress the finest players in England!
- WILL: *(leaving)* Cheer up or I'll seek a jollier muse.
- HOOKER: Crap Will, don't pox this up!
- WILL: Get thee to a pickle factory! I've work to do!
- VILLAGER: *(off)* Catch her!
- VILLAGER: *(off)* Grab her up by the heels!
- WILL: What's this?
- HOOKER: Bloody England, what now?
- VILLAGER: *(off)* Singe her!
- HOOKER: There! There's subject for you!
- WILL: *(looking to the ruckus)* Ah, they're after Old Moll Braxton again.
- VILLAGER: *(off)* The witch says only the devil can singe her. I heard it.
- HOOKER: The inhumanity of your fellow man. Scribble on that!
- VILLAGER: *(off)* Cut her off, she's cornered!
- VILLAGER: *(off)* Got you, Moll!
- WILL: Oh, good catch, man!
- HOOKER: You're a writer now—time to throw in your lot with the earth's impugned, the downtrodden!
- WILL: What, sad whiner? We are hooked to our stars, Mr.Hooker—it is not your course to change Moll's lot, nor mine.
- VILLAGER: *(off)* The rope! Bring the rope!
(laughter and cheers from off)
- WILL: There you have it! Entertainment, mutt! That's why they pay us! Try explaining comedy to a dog.
(Will exits)
- HOOKER: *(to audience)* I near wept to hear it. The strutter knew no Latin and less Greek, but in those areas smoked like a chimney compared to what he knew of suffering and misery, of his fellow man's bloated condition.

Pre-performance Activities

Early in the play, Mr. Hooker says, "*Soul seeks out all manner of things — plume or flowerbed, fish or animal*". The play is really about soul and how a writer acquires it. Have the students be alert for references to soul.

Note also that Hooker interacts with the human characters in very different ways. Some (Joan Shakespeare, for example, or the witch Moll Braxton) we might call interlocutors — they speak to him and understand him. Some are foils — they don't appear to understand him and there is no real dialogue. Notice how Will interacts with Mr. Hooker and how that interaction changes towards the end of the play.

Scattered throughout the play are references to Shakespeare's own works, often amusingly transferred to an incongruous context. In the second act of the play in particular there are allusions to *Hamlet* (especially the graveyard scene) and *Romeo and Juliet* (especially the balcony scene). It would help for students to be familiar with these scenes. As the play progresses, students might also try to catch quotes and half-quotes from the Bard's works, such as:

- "*Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow*"
(early in first scene; from *Macbeth*, Act V, scene v)
- "*Get thee to a pickle factory*"
(first act; a parody of "*Get thee to a nunnery*", *Hamlet*, Act III, scene i)
- "*A palpable hit!*"
(first act; from *Hamlet*, Act V, scene ii; used here in a wildly different context)

Finally, have the students read and act out the excerpt, in which Will and Mr. Hooker discuss (without naming it) *The Comedy of Errors*. Having a dog comment on a famous work of literature is high comedy — especially when the dog considers the work in question to be *low* comedy. The students might consider how this irreverent approach helps humanize and demystify Shakespeare, while also exploring the concepts of high (i.e. intellectual) and low (i.e. farcical) comedy. Another example of a humanizing approach to Shakespeare is the film *Shakespeare in Love* (1999), which offers a fictionalized take on the Bard's years in London.

For a variety of exercises on Shakespeare's works, see the website of the Folger Shakespeare Library (www.folger.edu/template.cfm?cid=920).

Post-performance Activities (page 1 of 2)

Discussion Questions

1. What is the first mention of soul? What is the significance of associating it with a plume?
2. What are the similarities and differences between the lives of the humans and the lives of the dogs?
3. "*Dog and witch are one soul, bonded by nature, you and I*", says Hooker to the witch Moll Braxton. Why might a dog of Shakespeare's day regard himself as kin to a witch?
4. What is Will's attitude early in the play toward the established social order? (Note especially his speech about the "*great chain of being*".)
5. What does Sir Richard, "*the Queen's Man*" have to say about the nature of soul? Contrast it to Will's idea of the great chain of being.
6. In the graveyard scene toward the end of the play, Will recounts seeing a beggar help a "*coxed*" dog. What effect does this have on Will? How does the whole episode illustrate Sir Richard's point?
7. What are the attributes of soul, as articulated by the play?
8. Late in the play, Sir Richard gives Will advice on becoming a true dramatist: "*You must learn to look at another and see yourself. You only know your own soul when you have seen it in someone else.*" How does this describe the central trajectory of the play? How does it apply to Will's relationship with Anne?
9. What image ends the play, and why is it appropriate?
10. Keeping in mind the dominant imagery of the play, suggest an alternative title for *Shakespeare's Dog*.

Post-performance Activities (page 2 of 2)

Activity/Research Questions

1. Whatever the real Shakespeare might have been like as a young man, his capacity for empathy — his soul — shines through in his mature plays. Have the students give examples from Shakespeare's plays (and from the works of other writers they have studied) where the author identifies with "*the impugned, the downtrodden*".
2. The play ends with Shakespeare and Mr. Hooker going off to London together. Have the students write a scene in which the two return from the city, and Will recounts to Anne all that has happened (with Hooker providing commentary).
3. One of the mysteries that have captivated scholars is how Shakespeare could have written the plays that he did. His breadth of knowledge, for example, was astounding: scholars have noted that the plays exhibit a vast learning in many areas, from cosmology to the military arts. And yet William Shakespeare of Stratford was not (by all accounts) a learned or well-travelled man. Have the students research the authorship controversy and present the arguments for the various candidates. A good place to start is the website bardweb.net/debates.html.
4. Suppose that Shakespeare was a woman, as author Robin P. Williams has hypothesized. What would her perspective be on the themes and events of the play? Have the students re-imagine the excerpt starting with Williams' premise — a female Shakespeare is arguing with her dog about the first draft of a play. What would *her* version of *A Comedy of Errors* be? How would she have responded to the plight of the witch Moll Braxton?
5. Have the students write a dialogue between themselves and their own pets, with the pets providing commentary on events or concerns of the day—or on the students' artistic efforts.

For Younger Students Especially (Grades Nine and Ten)

1. Instilling empathy and "emotional literacy" is one of the goals of Roots of Empathy (www.rootsofempathy.org), a program in which a neighbourhood parent and infant visit classrooms every three weeks over the school year. Have the students research the program and talk about its aims. How can the novels and stories they read also create "emotional literacy"?
2. Dogs are used in prisons, hospitals and institutions to break down social barriers and reach out to marginalized individuals. Have the students research these programs and talk about their value. What are the attributes of dogs that make them such good envoys of soul?

Theatre Etiquette

Please take a moment to prepare the students for their visit to the National Arts Centre to explain what good **Theatre Etiquette** is and why it will enhance the enjoyment of the play by all audience members:

- 1.** *Shakespeare's Dog* will be performed in the Theatre of the NAC. It is important for everyone to be quiet (no talking or rustling of materials) during the performance so others do not lose their immersion in the "world of the play". Unlike movies, the actors in live theatre can hear and see disturbances in the audience and will give their best performances when they feel the positive involvement of the audience members. The appropriate way of showing approval for the actors' performances is through laughter and applause. For the enjoyment of all, people who disturb others during the performance may be asked to leave the Theatre.
- 2.** Do not put your feet on the back of the seat in front of you. If someone needs to pass you in the row, it is courteous to stand up so as to allow that person to get by more easily. Do not climb over seats. Avoid wearing scented products such as cologne or aftershave, as many people are sensitive or even allergic to these.
- 3.** If you plan to make notes on the play for the purposes of writing a review, please do not try to write them during the performance, as this can be distracting for the actors. Wait until intermission or after the performance is finished to write your reflections, please.
- 4.** It is important that there be no electronic devices used in the Theatre so that the atmosphere of the play is not interrupted and others are not disturbed. **Cell phones, pagers and anything that beeps must be turned off. Cameras and all other recording devices are not permitted in the Theatre.**
- 5.** Tickets with assigned seats will be distributed by your teacher, and to avoid confusion it is important to sit in the designated seat. In the Theatre, all even-numbered seats are on the left side, and all odd-numbered seats are on the right. This means, for example, that seats 10 and 12 are actually side by side.
- 6.** Programs may or may not be distributed at this student matinée. Information on the artists who put this production together, however, can be found in this Study Guide for those who wish to use it in writing a review. Some programs can be made available to teachers if desired as a teaching aid to show how a program is put together.
- 7.** It is advisable to make a trip to the washroom before the performance starts, as anyone leaving while the performance is in progress runs the risk of not being allowed back into the Theatre.



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