



# BEYOND THE STAGE

Dramaturgy Notes for the Illinois Shakespeare Festival



## SHAKESPEARE INSIDE AND OUT

Following last year's model, the 2019 season of the Illinois Shakespeare Festival will feature two productions (*As You Like It* and *Pride and Prejudice*) at the open-air theatre in Ewing Manor and one production (*Caesar*) in Illinois State University's Center for Performing Arts (CPA) Theatre. Incidentally, Shakespeare's company also operated out of two spaces towards the end of his career: the famed Globe and the lesser known Blackfriars. What was this second, indoor space, and how did it influence Shakespeare's playwriting?

In the summer of 1608, The King's Men—the professional theatre company sponsored by King James I—acquired the Blackfriars theatre. Previously, the space had been reserved exclusively for children's companies, such as the popular St. Paul's Boys, that specialized in satirical plays geared towards aristocratic audiences. The King's Men was the first adult theatre company to use this famous indoor theatre as its permanent home. The company focused its programming here during the winter, when it was too cold to perform at the Globe.

The Blackfriars was a relatively small theatre, seating under 1000 compared to the estimated 3000 people that could pack the Globe's pit and galleries. On the other hand, the Blackfriars theatre catered to audiences with more refined tastes, meaning that admission was much more expensive. The performances that were offered there were similar in style to the court entertainment that James I was

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WRITTEN BY:  
KEE-YOON NAHM  
(FESTIVAL DRAMATURG)

THIS ARTICLE IS ABOUT:  
**AS YOU LIKE IT**  
**CAESAR**

known to enjoy. Additionally, the theatre stood in a residential neighborhood within the city limits of London, converted long ago from a former monastery. Its audiences could enjoy theatre without venturing into the rather disreputable area south of the Thames River, where the Globe was located.

Many scholars believe that some of Shakespeare's last plays were written with this newly acquired space in mind. *The Tempest*, probably the last play that Shakespeare wrote by himself before retiring, includes a masque, a spectacular form of court entertainment, that may have required soft music and stage machinery—both of which would have been easier to manage in the smaller indoor space. The Blackfriars theatre could have enhanced the delicate scenes of magic that appear in plays such as *The Tempest* and the ending of *The Winter's Tale*. The stage was likely lit softly by candlelight, either supplementing the sunlight coming in through the windows or providing all the lighting during the dark winter afternoons. Likewise, the actors would not have had to strain and gesticulate as much to command the audience's attention in this intimate space.

Although we do not bring the same expectations to indoor and outdoor theatres as Shakespeare's audiences did, it is interesting to think about how the stage itself influences staging. The CPA Theatre allows for a different theatrical experience compared to the outdoor theatre at Ewing Manor. This season, *Caesar* was chosen for the indoor theatre because our adaptation relies heavily on media technology to merge Shakespeare's Roman play with modern-day politics. Here, the audience will be able to focus on the images onscreen better. It is also easier to control lighting and sound indoors, which can enhance the dark and harsh tone of this tragedy. Meanwhile, *As You Like It* and *Pride and Prejudice*—both plays about young people falling in love—can benefit from the romantic atmosphere at Ewing Theatre as the stars gradually fill the open sky.

The King's Men made adjustments to their repertoire to fully utilize the strengths of their two theatres. Even if a play was written before the Blackfriars was acquired (as was the case for both *As You Like It* and *Julius Caesar*), the different building could lead to modifications in music, lighting, and acting. When you come to our productions at the Ewing and CPA Theatres this summer, take in the theatre itself before the show because it will give shape to the performance you will experience.