

Lorenz Hart

(1895–1943)

and Morrie Ryskind

(1895–1985)

Shakespeares of 1922

Before his premature death at age forty-eight, the lyricist Lorenz Hart teamed up with Richard Rodgers on twenty-six Broadway musicals, including the first adaptation of a Shakespeare play for musical theater: *The Boys from Syracuse* (1938). Morrie Ryskind, who recalls in his memoirs that by the age of ten he had read all of Shakespeare's works, is best known for the scripts and screenplays he wrote for the Marx Brothers, including *Animal Crackers* (1929) and *A Night at the Opera* (1935). Before either of them had achieved fame independently, Hart and Ryskind collaborated on a vaudeville sketch for the actor Georgie Price. Their skit consisted of an opening song—"Broadway has a Shakespeare fad"—followed by five refrains: in each, Price would introduce himself as a famous Shakespeare character (but modernized, so that Antony is a baseball fan and Hamlet the son of a bootlegger), then launch into a witty and parodic speech, before ending with a brief song. Its sophisticated humor and lyrics were intended to flatter the audience's familiarity with the plays (including the "Julius Caesar that we studied at school"). "Shakespeares of 1922" stands midway between the nineteenth-century minstrel shows and the as yet unborn Shakespeare musical.



VERSE

Broadway has a Shakespeare fad,
Actors all are Shakespeare mad,
And I'd like to do
His great plays for you.
But I'll bring them up to date,

Five acts you won't have to wait
 Till you hear the best scenes of the dramas.
 And the plays will look like new
 When I add a song or two.
 I'll make Shakespeare seem the cat's pajamas!

REFRAIN 1

First I'll play Shylock for he's Spanish like me—
 Shylock's from Arverne by the Sea, Long Island.
 He'll be the star of my new Shakespeare revue,
 Shylocks of 1922.

SPEECH

He hath disgraced me, he hath cost me half a million. Laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains. If I sell for four dollars a dozen, he sells for three seventy-five. And what's his reason? I'm a Jehuda! Hath not a Jehuda eyes? Hath not a Jehuda hands, organs, dimensions, broadcloth, velveteen, sateen, tricolette, and different-quality serges? If you gyp us, do we not bleed? If you do not pay us, do we not sue? And if you cancel our orders, shall we not revenge? Revenge! Revenge on Antonio!

FINISH

If I catch Antonio Spagoni the toreador!
 He shall die! Ach ai vei!
 He shall die diddy diddy ei, die, die, die
 Ach oy vei!
 He shall die! He shall die!
 I soon will be takin'
 A pound of his bacon
 If I catch him bending tonight.

REFRAIN 2

Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark, can't make me wince,
 I'll play the Danish pastry Prince.

He wasn't crazy at all,
 But I am crazy to do
 Hamlets of 1922.

SPEECH

To be or not to be, that is the question! Whether 'tis nobler to buy your Gordon's gin, and pay the prices of outrageous bootleggers, or to take arms against this sea of highwaymen, and make your own home brew! To drink, to die (to dream, perchance). Alcohol, aye, there's the rub! Home brew does make cowards of us all.

Mother, you have my father much offended. You made him drink shellac. You are toy queen. Your husband's brother's wife. And, would it were not so, so you my mother.

FINISH

Mammy! Mammy!
 The sun will rise, and the sun will drop,
 But the sun won't shine where you sent my pop!
 Mammy! Mammy! If you make one more drop
 I'll call in a cop,
 My mammy!

REFRAIN 3

Poor old King Lear, who was bearded and gray,
 Without the whiskers I will play.
 How he went mad in the rainstorm,
 I'll show in my revue,
 Lears of 1922.

SPEECH

Blow winds, chap these hands, what care I. They have turned me out. Ah, foul rain, thou art good for crops, but tough on an old bird like me. Alas, O Jupiter, why didn't I get a five years' lease? Here I stand, King Lear, I was raised by the King, my father, I was raised by the Queen, my mother, and now, O ye Gods, now

I've been raised by the landlord. Here I stand in the storm! Ah, daughters, this is a hell of a night to kick thy poor old father out. My landlord. I had to sell my icebox to pay him. I had to sell my flivver to pay him. I belong to the landlord! Even my clothes are rent! I saved and saved. I had to give up my shaving, but I didn't raise my beard to pay a landlord! Blow, winds! Spit! I think I'm going cuckoo! He rents more flats every day. Last week he made an apartment out of the elevator. Next week there'll be no closets. Let fall the rain, Lear should worry!

FINISH

Though April showers may come my way
 They can't grow flowers in bales of hay.
 And when it's raining, I just reflect,
 Because it isn't raining rain at all,
 It's just a stage effect!
 I see a rainbow, and life's worthwhile,
 For I'm insane, bo, that's why I smile.
 I haven't even got a bathtub,
 So I hope the rain is strong
 Whenever April showers come along.

REFRAIN 4

In Julius Caesar that we studied at school,
 Mark Ant'ny knocked 'em for a goal.
 But I don't need hungry supers in my modern revue,
 Caesars of 1922.

SPEECH

Friends, buyers and countrymen! Lend me your ears. I come to bury Babe Ruth, not to praise him! The strikeouts men make live after them, the homers are off interr'd with their bones. So let it be with Baby. Rest these noble bones, for he hath pulled the biggest bone since Merkel forgot to touch second base. Aye, a base bone! Judge Landis, as you know, was Baby's angel. Judge O

ye Gods, when he cut Babe Ruth's salary, that was the unkindest cut of all. For when the noble Babe Ruth saw him stab, he cried, "Et tu, Landis! The Vaudeville for Baby!" So he went to work for Keith. And at the portals of the Palace, great Babe Ruth fell flat! Oh, what a fall there was, my countrymen! But last year, the bat of Babe Ruth would have swung against the world. Now, he makes all his home runs at night!

FINISH

After the ball went over,
Bambino swung, that's all.
All he could hit was the umpire,
After the ball.

REFRAIN 5

All the world loves a lover like Romeo,
They named a cigar for him, you know.
That's why I must find some other name to call my revue,
Dumbbells of 1922.

SPEECH

Ah, there she sits, my Juliet, on the fire escape! Burning up with a tender passion. See how she rests her chins upon her hand. Would that I were a glove upon that hand, then I would be a happy kid! Juliet, our love will be famous forever. They named a cigar after us. Romeo and Juliet. Twenty-five cents. Us for two bits, while Robert Burns for a dime, and Prince Hamlet chokes you for a nickel. What's in a name? Sir Walter Scott had a medicine named after him—Scott's Emulsion! Nellie Melba, she's a peach, Wilson is a whiskey, and Napoleon is a cream cake! They named a vegetable for a baseball player, Corn on Cobb! And the best they can do for Lincoln is to name a penny after him. Mary Garden's only a scent. What's in a name? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet. A Limburger by any other name would smell! Juliet, when I come to you beneath your balcony . . .

FINISH

You'll hear me calling Yoo-hoo
'Neath your window ev'ry night!
You sweetly answer Yoo-hoo
As you're standing in the light.
While I'm climbing up the ladder
And I get a worm's-eye view,
Love may be blind, so Yoo-hoo
Means I love you.

(1922)