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The Swine of Avon

by Thomas Hischak

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



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CHARACTERS

12-24 actors, each character can be played by a male or female

Pigskin and *Pigsty*, two tour guides

Shankspeare, the greatest playwright of all Swinedom

Mama, Shankspeare's mother

Boarbage, a famous actor and manager of the Glob Playhouse

Swill Kemp, a comic actor

Good Queen BLT the First, reigning monarch of Swinedom

Sir Frankfurt Bacon, a scientist and scholar

A Spy, Stranger, Publisher, piglets, tourists, actors, theatregoers,
and students

Also these characters from Shankspeare's plays, performed by the
actors who portray the above characters:

Don Armadillo, a Spanish nobleman

Mouth, a youth

King Porkrind the Third, a villainous swine

Porkchopio, an Italian ruffian

Katerina Pigiron, a shrew

Porkeron, king of the fairies

Canadian Bacon, queen of the fairies

Pickled-Pig's-Feet, a mischievous spirit

Hogwild, a union foreman

Peter Curlytail, a union worker

Julius Razorback, a Roman general

Brute Chops, a Roman nobleman

MacBoar,thane of Scotland

Lady MacBoar, his wife

Hamhock, Prince of Denmark

Burptrude, Queen of Denmark

Baloneyus, a courtier

Swineo and Drooliet, two young lovers

Porcino, a wizard

PRODUCTION NOTES

The comedy is performed by a company of pigs and any character can be played by a male or female actor. Doubling is possible and the commentary by Pigskin and Pigsty can be delivered by the other actors if one wishes to eliminate those roles.

The play is meant to be performed on an open stage with only props and a few furniture pieces. Each of the actors wears a simple pig nose on an elastic string. The rest of the costume can be simple modern clothes with perhaps a hat, rehearsal skirt or Elizabethan collar used on occasion to indicate a specific character.

This play may be presented with Thomas Hischak's one-act Shakespeare-related comedy CURST BE HE WHO MOVES MY BONES for a full evening of theatre titled DOUBLE BARD TROUBLE.

SUGGESTED DOUBLING FOR A CAST OF TWELVE ACTORS

Actor 1 — Shankspeare

Actor 2 — Boarbage/Don Armadillo/Porkrind III

Actor 3 — Mama/Queen BLT/Lady MacBoar

Actor 4 — Swill Kemp/Porkeron/MacBoar

Actor 5 — Sir Frankfurt Bacon/Pickled-Pig's Feet/Hamhock

Actor 6 — Publisher/Canadian Bacon/Drooliet/Student 2

Actor 7 — Porkchopio/Brute Chop/Porcino

Actor 8 — Mouth/Katerina Pigiron/ Burptrude

Actor 9 — Spy/Peter Curlytail/Baloneyus/Student 1

Actor 10 — Stranger/Hogwild/Swineo/Julius Razorback

Actor 11 — Pigskin

Actor 12 — Pigsty

(PIGSKIN ENTERS, stops and turns, calling offstage.)

PIGSKIN. Right this way, ladies and gentlemen! This way, please!

(Half of the company ENTERS as TOURISTS and join PIGSKIN. They wear loud shirts, straw hats and several carry cameras.)

TOURISTS. Oink! Oink! Oink! Oink! Oink!

PIGSKIN. We are now at one of the most famous of all landmarks here in the town of Fatsford-on-Avon. *(Points out toward audience.)* Here is the birthplace of the great author, Shankspeare.

TOURISTS. Oink! Oink! Oink! Oink! Oink! *(Some take pictures.)*

PIGSKIN. It was in this humble little pigpen that Shankspeare was born. The pen has been restored by the historical society so that it looks exactly as it did in Shankspeare's day. Notice how even the straw and the slop are very authentic.

TOURISTS. *(Impressed)* Oink! Oink!

PIGSKIN. It was in this pigpen that Shankspeare was given a basic education by the mother pig and other sows. It was first here that the young Shankspeare learned snorting, grunting, slobbering, French, iambic pentameter, and Pig Latin. You are-ooking-lay at the-ipgsty-pay of a-enius-jay!

TOURISTS. *(Even more impressed; more pictures are taken.)*
Oink! Oink!

PIGSKIN. You may enter the pigpen to get a closer look. But, please, do not touch anything.

(PIGSKIN and the TOURISTS freeze in position. From the opposite side of the stage, PIGSTY ENTERS, turns, and calls off-stage. The sounds of modern car and truck traffic are heard.)

PIGSTY. Come this way, ladies and gentlemen! Please stay on the sidewalk. The traffic is rather heavy. This way!

(The other half of the company ENTERS as TOURISTS and joins PIGSTY. They are dressed in a similar manner and also have cameras.)

TOURISTS. Snort! Snort! Snort! Snort! Snort!

PIGSTY. That's right...stay on the curb. Very good. At this rather busy intersection lies one of the greatest landmarks in the whole city of Loin-don: the site of the original Glob Theatre.

TOURISTS. Snort! Snort! Snort! Snort! Snort! *(Some take pictures.)*

PIGSTY. On this corner stood the playhouse that has forever been associated with the name of Shankspeare, the greatest playwright of all Swinedom. It was here that such beloved plays as *All's Sow That Ends Sow*, *Corioloinus*, *The Merry Warthogs of Windsor*, *Much Ado About Hogwash*, and *Two Gentle-Hams of Verona* were first performed.

TOURISTS. *(Impressed)* Snort! Snort!

PIGSTY. Shankspeare is believed to have acted at the Glob Playhouse, though mostly in smaller roles. As a writer Shankspeare was a masterful artist; but as an actor, it is believed the pig was

something of a ham. (*TOURISTS laugh.*) Just my little joke. Now if you all would turn left . . .

(*PIGPEN and the first group of tourists unfreeze.*)

PIGSKIN. Are there any questions? I would be happy to answer them. (*One pig raises her hand.*)

PIGSTY. At this time I will entertain any questions you might have. (*A second pig raises his hand.*)

PIGSKIN. Yes, madam?

TOURIST FROM FIRST GROUP. Oink oink oink oink oink oink oink oink oink?

PIGSTY. You there? You have a question?

TOURIST FROM SECOND GROUP. Snort snort snort snort snort snort snort snort?

PIGSKIN. A very good question, madam, and one which scholars have endeavored to answer for over four hundred years.

PIGSTY. An interesting question and one well worth asking.

PIGSKIN. How did such a humble, small-town pig like Shankspeare rise to become the most famous literary giant of all Swinedom?

PIGSTY. How was it possible for one single, mortal swine to possess so much knowledge and creativity?

PIGSKIN. In order to attempt to determine the answer, we must go back and examine the life of this extraordinary pig...

PIGSTY. To understand how such a thing was possible, one must look carefully at all the facts and try to recreate the situation...

(*PIGSKIN and PIGSTY move downstage and continue, addressing the audience, as the TOURISTS EXIT left and right.*)

PIGSKIN. It is 1564 and, in the village of Fatsford-on-Avon, Shankspeare is born into a large family...

PIGSTY. The middle child of sixteen brothers and sisters and the runt of a litter of five piglets born one April day.

PIGSKIN. But from the very beginning Shankspeare was different from the rest...

PIGSTY. Discontented, dreamy, restless, anxious, moody...

PIGSKIN. Not your usual pig in a poke.

(MAMA ENTERS and calls to her piglets off stage.)

MAMA. Sooooo-eeee!

(SHANKSPEARE and the PIGLETS ENTER. They line up behind MAMA and SHANKSPEARE and, with their backs to the audience, hunch over an imaginary feeding trough and eat noisily.)

PIGLETS. Snort Snort! Grunt Grunt! Slobber! Slobber! Snort Snort! Grunt Grunt! Slobber! Slobber!

MAMA. Shankspeare, why aren't you eating with your brothers and sisters?

SHANKSPEARE. I'm not hungry, Mama.

MAMA. Not hungry? Ridiculous! Since when do you have to be hungry to make a pig of yourself. Go! Eat!

SHANKSPEARE. Is that all life is, Mama? Eating and snorting and grunting?

PIGLETS. Slobber slobber slobber!

SHANKSPEARE. And slobbering?

MAMA. Oh, my poor dear Shankspeare! Asking such questions! How I worry about you!

SHANKSPEARE. It seems that there is more to our existence than what I see here in Fatsford. What about the rest of the world?

MAMA. I don't know what the rest of the world is like, my dearest. I've never traveled anywhere. You could ask your father. He was once taken to a county fair in Burgerham. He won a prize of some sort.

SHANKSPEARE. For being a hog. What kind of prize is that?

MAMA. Well, he couldn't very well win it for being a swan! Now, try eating a little something.

SHANKSPEARE. I feel I am destined to do more with my life. Something that will glorify myself and all of my kind. What a piece of work is a pig, how noble in reason! How infinite in faculty!

MAMA. Don't be such a boar, dear. Save the fancy talk for later. Now go and get your snout into that trough like a good little piglet.

SHANKSPEARE. Yes, Mama...

MAMA. Then later the whole family will have a belching contest. Won't that be fun?

SHANKSPEARE. I suppose so...*(Turns and joins PIGLETS.)*

MAMA. What's to become of that little porker, I don't know. I'm afraid it's just another case of pearls before swine.

(MAMA, SHANKSPEARE and the PIGLETS sit downstage with their backs to the audience as the ACTORS ENTER and take their positions on a temporary stage.)

PIGSKIN. Shankspeare might have lived forever the life of a discontented swine in a backwater town...

PIGSTY. But something happened one day that changed the direction of the young pig's life.

PIGSKIN. A troupe of strolling actors, called the Porkrind Players, set up a simple stage in the market square of Fatsford-on-Avon, and performed a play.

(The ACTORS act out the play in dumbshow with plenty of exaggerated gestures and a lot of swinging of wooden swords.)

PIGSTY. They were not the most accomplished of performers and the little drama was rather crude...

ACTOR 1. "Unhand that maiden, sirrah, or I'll puncture your porcine paunch with this prickly pear of a poker!"

ACTOR 2. "Are you addressing me, sausageface?"

ACTOR 1. "Yea! Release Miss Piggy or, prithee, you'll pay the price that every pigheaded porker pays who purloins pure princesses such as she!"

PIGSKIN. Poetry in the theatre was somewhat at a low point...

PIGSTY. But it didn't matter. Shankspeare was mesmerized by the theatrical event and inspiration filled the young pig's heart.

(SHANKSPEARE rises and turns toward the audience. All the others, but PIGPEN and PIGSTY, EXIT.)

SHANKSPEARE. Now my life has a purpose! I will join the theatrical profession and bring drama and romance to audiences everywhere!

PIGSKIN. Some say that Shankspeare left Fatsford that very day, stealing out of the pig pen late at night and joining the players as they rode out of town in their hog cart.

SHANKSPEARE. Goodbye, Fatsford-on-Avon! Farewell familiar old pig pen. It's an actor's life for me! *(EXITS)*

PIGSTY. There is no record of Shankspeare in Fatsford after 1585 and seven years later the name shows up as an actor in the capitol city of Loin-don.

PIGSKIN. Those unaccounted-for seven years remain a mystery that has puzzled and intrigued scholars for centuries.

PIGSTY. Where was Shankspeare during that time and what was the pig doing?

PIGSKIN. Perhaps Shankspeare was a traveling actor but there is no proof.

PIGSTY. Some believe that the future-poet joined the army and saw combat in France.

(SHANKSPEARE ENTERS wearing a helmet and swinging a sword.)

SHANKSPEARE. Once more unto the breech...! *(Rushes across the stage then stops suddenly.)* There's a hell of a lot of French pigs over there. And they all have swords! *(Starts backing up.)* They're coming this way! *(Runs in opposite direction.)* Stand not on the order of your going but...run wee wee wee all the way home!! *(EXITS)*

PIGSKIN. Some have argued that Shankspeare became a teacher during this period and taught Latin to private pupils.

(SHANKSPEARE ENTERS carrying a stack of books, followed by two STUDENT pigs.)

SHANKSPEARE. Today we are going to study the orations of Cicero.

STUDENT 1. I hate Cicero. When do we eat?

SHANKSPEARE. Then we will look at the poetry of Virgil.

STUDENT 2. Virgil! Yeeuch! I'm hungry!

STUDENT 1. Me too! Let's eat!

BOTH. Snort! Snort! Snort!

SHANKSPEARE. Listen to me, you suckling pigs. I'm talking about a whole new kind of nourishment: the food of knowledge!

BOTH. Huh?

SHANKSPEARE. Not food for the body but food for the soul. The majesty of words, the beauty of ideas, the glory of poetry!

STUDENT 2. I'd rather have swill!

STUDENT 1. Me too!

BOTH. Oink oink oink oink oink!

SHANKSPEARE. Let me teach you the dialogues of Plato, the ideas of Erasmus, the philosophy of Bacon—!

BOTH. Bacon? Ahhhhhh! *(They run off frightened.)*

SHANKSPEARE. A little learning is a dangerous thing. I wonder who said that. *(EXITS)*

PIGSTY. One theory has it that Shankspeare went to sea as a sailor during this mysterious period.

(SHANKSPEARE ENTERS wearing a sailor cap.)

SHANKSPEARE. Ah! The bracing sea air, the crash of the waves, the spewing of the foam, the screaming of the gulls, the rocking and rolling of the deck...*(Starts to feel seasick.)* The constant rocking...The continuous rolling...The endless, insistent, merciless rocking and rolling— ! *(Runs offstage sick.)*

PIGSKIN. There is even a theory that during those unaccounted-for seven years Shankspeare was a spy for the government of Swinedom.

(SHANKSPEARE, wearing a conspicuous long cloak with a hood, ENTERS with a pig SPY who carries a letter.)

SPY. After you read the contents of this letter, you must memorize what it says and not divulge the information under any circumstances.

SHANKSPEARE. Certainly.

SPY. Even if you are captured and tortured, you must not utter one word of what is written here.

SHANKSPEARE. Tortured?

SPY. Even if they tear out your tongue and burn your hoofs off, you must remain loyal to the Queen.

SHANKSPEARE. I promise. If they tear out my tongue, I won't say a word.

SPY. Good. Read the letter. (*Hands SHANKSPEARE the letter.*)

SHANKSPEARE. (*Reads aloud.*) "The map to the money for the military is under the molehill in the mire one mile from the mulch mill on the moorings of the Moloch River in Middleton."

SPY. Exactly. Memorize it, eat the letter, then off you go.

SHANKSPEARE. Memorize, eat, then go. Got it.

SPY. God save the Queen!

SHANKSPEARE. God save the Queen! (*SPY EXITS; reads the letter again.*) "The map to the money for the military is under the molehill in the mire one mile from the mulch mill on the moorings of the Moloch River in Middleton." That's easy. (*Folds letter.*) "The map to the money for the molehill is in the mulch —" That's not right. (*Looks at letter again.*) "...under the molehill in the mire one mile...the Moloch River in Middleton..." I've got it. (*Folds letter.*) "The map to the military mulch is moldy in Maryland but moored in Manila—"

(*A suspicious pig STRANGER also in a cloak ENTERS and sees SHANKSPEARE.*)

STRANGER. Who goes there?

SHANKSPEARE. Huh? Oh! (*Shoves the letter into his mouth and chews.*) The mmmm mooo munnn maaaa mmmmm muuu morrrr...

STRANGER. Doesn't speak our language. Maybe it's a spy.

SHANKSPEARE. Mo! (*Shakes head.*) Meeee mooooo

mnnnnnn! (*Starts to EXIT.*)

STRANGER. More like the village idiot. Move along, you!

SHANKSPEARE. Meeee muuuu mooooo mrrrrr....! (*EXITS*)

STRANGER. What fools these morons be! (*EXITS*)

PIGSTY. We will probably never know what actually happened during those seven problematic years in Shankspeare's life.

PIGSKIN. But we do know that in 1594 the name of Shankspeare appears among the actors performing at the Glob Playhouse in Loin-don.

PIGSTY. The Glob was run by the famous actor Boarbage and we believe that it was Boarbage who suggested and encouraged Shankspeare to move toward a new career.

(*BOARBAGE and SHANKSPEARE ENTER.*)

BOARBAGE. You're a rotten actor, Shankspeare. I don't say this to encourage you to be better or to challenge you to prove me wrong. I say it because you're just lousy on stage. I've seen sides of beef hanging in the market that have more acting talent than you. And you don't have the looks for it either. You're not the ugliest performer I've ever seen. Swill Kemp is uglier. But he at least is funny. You can't tell a joke on stage to save your life. You're a total washout as a performer and I mean that in the kindest way.

SHANKSPEARE. Thanks for your...er...honesty.

BOARBAGE. You're welcome.

SHANKSPEARE. But what am I to do? The theatre is my life!

BOARBAGE. As well it should be, dear Shankspeare. But the best thing you can do for the Loin-don theatre is to keep off the stage as often as possible.

SHANKSPEARE. But maybe I will get better.

BOARBAGE. When pigs fly.

SHANKSPEARE. I think I will go and kill myself!

BOARBAGE. That's what I like about you, Shankspeare! Always a flair for the dramatic. I knew it the first time you auditioned.

SHANKSPEARE. But you just said—

BOARBAGE. Hold on a second here...*(Pulls a paper from his pocket.)* I found this in your dressing room. *(Reads)* "My Lady Pig's eyes are nothing like the sun...coral is far more red than her mighty snout." Would you care to explain yourself?

SHANKSPEARE. It's just a poem I was working on.

BOARBAGE. A poem! Why do you waste your time on a poem?

SHANKSPEARE. Well, since my acting roles have gotten smaller and smaller lately, I've had a lot of time offstage so I just sort of doodled—

BOARBAGE. Doodled! You shouldn't be doodling with poems. Plays, my dear friend! You should be writing plays! With this flair for the poetic and your natural bent for the dramatic, you could really bring home the bacon!

SHANKSPEARE. Really?

BOARBAGE. Trust me. The theatre needs great playwrights! Look at some of the slop we have to serve our audiences! If the scripts get any worse I'll have to resort to doing French plays. What do you say?

SHANKSPEARE. I'll do it!

BOARBAGE. That's my Shankspeare! Now get to work. I need a new piece with lots of laughs, a bit of romance, and something to do with a Spanish sword that I picked up cheap at the Army-Navy Store. Be inspired. Use your imagination. Climb the heights. Explore places in the heart and mind that have heretofore not been discovered! *(Starts to EXIT.)* Oh, and I need it in a week. So step on it!

SHANKSPEARE. A week!

(BOARBAGE EXITS and a short stool and a small desk covered with papers are set up in the down right stage corner. They will remain there for much of the rest of the play. SHANKSPEARE goes to the desk, sits, take up a quill pen, and writes furiously.)

PIGSKIN. So Shankspeare put away the greasepaint and took up the pen.

PIGSTY. Day and night the new author worked on a comedy called *Loins Labors Lost*, filling it with young love, comic characters, disguises and masks...

PIGSKIN. And a Spanish sword.

PIGSTY. A week later, Boarbage's company was rehearsing the play on the stage of the Glob Playhouse.

(BOARBAGE ENTERS with a few pig ACTORS, including comedian SWILL KEMP, who wears a large fake mustache and carries an elaborate sword, and his page MOUTH. SHANKSPEARE leaves the desk and joins BOARBAGE to watch the rehearsal.)

KEMP. "I hereupon confess I am in love, sweet youth!"

MOUTH. "In love, master?"

KEMP. "By this sword...*(He pulls out sword, swings it, MOUTH ducks to avoid getting hit.)*...it is base for a soldier to love! So I am in love with a base wench! *(Swings again; MOUTH ducks again.)* If drawing my sword against the humor of affection would deliver me from the reprobate thought of it, I would take Desire prisoner! *(A third swing and a third duck.)* Comfort me, youth. What great men have been in love?"

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