

Study Guide for *Omelette: Chef of Denmark*
By Charlie Lovett

- 1) On page 1.20, Mario points out that it's not March, it's July. Why would a July performance at the Globe Theatre be more likely than a March performance?
- 2) Richard Burbage is listed in the cast of characters as "manager of the Globe Theatre." Who was Richard Burbage? What was his relationship with the real Shakespeare?
- 3) On page 2.29, Burbage says that Shakespeare "steals the plots of his plays from other countries." Besides the plays mentioned in the text, can you find examples of pre-existing plots that Shakespeare used? Why do you think he would use plots that had already been used? Why do you think we remember Shakespeare's plays more than their sources?
- 4) On page 2.37 Graymalkin says, "By the time the play is over, the name of our play will be synonymous with disaster in the theatre." Was he right? Can you find out the real origins of "the curse of *Macbeth*"?
- 5) On page 5.20 Paddock says "I think what Macbeth is trying to say is that we have to be sure that something is rotten in the state of Denmark." This alludes to a quote in *Hamlet* (Act I, scene iv) "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark." What other quotes from Shakespeare plays can you find hiding in the text of *Omelette*?
- 6) The cheer of the Scottish team, which first appears on page 6.4–5 reads, "We love haggis, we love plaid, we're from Scotland and we are bad!" Why would Scots love haggis and plaid?
- 7) Like *Hamlet*, the Danish play *Omelette* begins with the sighting of a ghost. In what other ways are the plotlines similar? How do they differ?
- 8) Although the play is ostensibly set in 1599, on page 8.7, Horatio refers to two twentieth-century sports figures, Michael Jordan and David Beckham. What is the term for such references that clearly violate the time frame of the play? Can you find other such references? Why do you think the playwright would mention these athletes, knowing that neither Jordan nor Beckham were alive in 1599?
- 9) On page 11.17 Claudius tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to flip a coin to decide who will escort Laertes to France. On page 12.5 Guildenstern complains that every time they flip it, the coin comes up heads. This incident is an allusion not to *Hamlet*, but to a much more modern play. Can you discover the play to which this incident alludes? Are there any similarities between this play and *Omelette*? Why do you think the author of *Omelette* might have included an allusion to this other play?
- 12) On page 17.3, Burbage says that "the team from Greece used the play-within-the-play very effectively two years ago in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*." To what play-within-a-play is the author alluding? What qualities does the play-within-a-play in *Midsummer Night's Dream* share with *Omelette*?



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10) The author of *Omelette* has written extensively on Lewis Carroll, the author of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. *Omelette*, like *Alice*, contains many examples of a common phrase or famous quote turned upside down by slightly changing the sounds of the words. Can you find examples of this type of humor in the works of Lewis Carroll? In *Omelette*? How do the two authors differ in the ways they create these humorous phrases? On page 24 of *Omelette*, one of the characters utters a direct quote from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Can you find it?

11) Part of the humor of *Omelette* comes from its allusions to a wide variety of sources— not just Shakespeare, but popular culture, advertising slogans, etc. Can you discover to what the following lines allude?

3.29 Burbage “If at any time he is dissatisfied with the performance for any reason, he will ring the gong.”

12.35 Omelette “May no one go cuckoo for your Cocoa Puffs.”

13.13 MacGregor: “My grandfather used to terrorize wee small rabbits in his garden.”

24.36 Harpier “I turned him into a newt.”

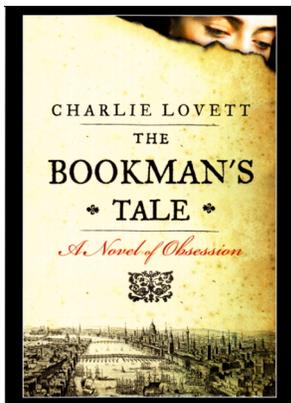
13) What can you learn about the Marx Brothers, on whom the traveling players in *Omelette* are based? Why do you think the playwright would choose to use this quartet in *Omelette*? In what ways are the typical behaviors of each Marx brother incorporated into the script of *Omelette*?

14) Do you think Macbeth's speech on page 23.4–7 is a good summary of the famous “To be or not to be” speech in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*? Why or why not? Look at the complete speech in Act III, scene i. What is Hamlet saying? What do you think he is thinking? Why are Shakespeare's words a better way of expressing those thoughts than Macbeth's paraphrase in *Omelette*?

15) Scene 13 includes a significant amount of dialogue lifted directly from *Hamlet*. Why do you think the playwright chose to use these particular lines in their original form? What other lines in the scene can you find that are similar to Shakespeare's text, but not quite the same? What effect does the playwright achieve through his changing of these lines? Pick a well-known speech from a Shakespeare play and rewrite it changing one element (in the same way that Yorick is changed from a jester to a goldfish in *Omelette*).

16) The commentary provided by Harpo during the sword fight on page 30–31 is a parody of the conversation between two swordsmen in the movie *The Princess Bride*. Why might the playwright want to allude to this particular sword fight? On page 30.26– 27, what types of words does Harpo use for the various types of swordplay? Why are these words particularly appropriate in the context of *Omelette*?

18) What do you think the the saying “You can't make an omelette without breaking some eggs” means? Can you apply this saying to a decision you had to make sometime in your life?



Charlie Lovett's newest book is *The Bookman's Tale: A Novel of Obsession*. Published by Viking Pres, June 3, 2013.

A mysterious portrait ignites an antiquarian bookseller's search through time and the works of Shakespeare for his lost love. Guaranteed to capture the hearts of everyone who truly loves books, *The Bookman's Tale* is a former bookseller's sparkling novel and a delightful exploration of one of literature's most tantalizing mysteries with echoes of *Shadow of the Wind* and A.S. Byatt's *Possession*.