



# *Romeo and Juliet*

The Atlanta Shakespeare Company

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## *DIRECTOR'S NOTE*

One of the things I love most about Shakespeare is that his stories carry different meanings for me at different points in my life. What resonates for me about the story of *Romeo and Juliet* right now is the impact and terrible cost of prejudice and hatred for the people in the play. The Capulets and Montagues are not written as villains. They are ordinary people who go about their business and care for their own. But they have been raised to hate each other and are set in their ways; they stubbornly adhere to their generations-old family feud, refusing to let their old grudges go or to try to find any empathy for each other. Romeo and Juliet themselves, because they meet and connect before they know that they belong to enemy families, find profound empathy and understanding for each other. By the time they know they're supposed to hate each other, they've already begun falling in love and the baseless hatred they've been taught suddenly seems ridiculous. They listen to each other intently and care deeply about the effect their words and actions have on each other's feelings. But their families'

prejudices are too deep and too violent to be overcome by young love; instead it takes the deaths of two intelligent, kind, empathetic young people to make the feuding Capulets and Montagues finally call each other "brother." Right now, that's the part of this story that's moving me the most: the warning call to examine our own grudges and prejudices and think about the consequences of those prejudices for ourselves and others. I hope that you enjoy the show, and that you find much in it that speaks to you at this point in your life.

*- Mary Ruth Ralston*



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# WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare (1564-1616) wrote thirty-seven plays, which have become staples of classrooms and theatre performances across the world.

The son of a glove-maker, Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, where he received a strong education in Latin and rhetoric at the local school. He married Anne Hathaway in 1582, and they had three children: Susanna, Hamnet, and Judith.

By 1592, Shakespeare had journeyed to London, where he became an extremely successful playwright and actor in the Lord Chamberlain's Men. He profited from being a shareholder in the Globe after its construction in 1599.

Shakespeare's plays were popular with all types of people, including the two monarchs who ruled England during his lifetime: Elizabeth I (1533-1603) and James I (1566-1625).

Shakespeare found both artistic and commercial success through his writing. He amassed a sizable fortune, acquired valuable real estate in Stratford, and purchased a coat of arms, which gave him and his father the right to be called gentlemen. Shakespeare was well-known in England at the time of his death in 1616, and his fame only increased following the publication of his plays in The First Folio in 1623.

2016 was the four hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare's death, and celebrations honoring Shakespeare's contribution to literature took place around the world.

**“He was not of an age, but for all time.”**  
- Ben Jonson on Shakespeare



# Shakespeare: Did You Know?

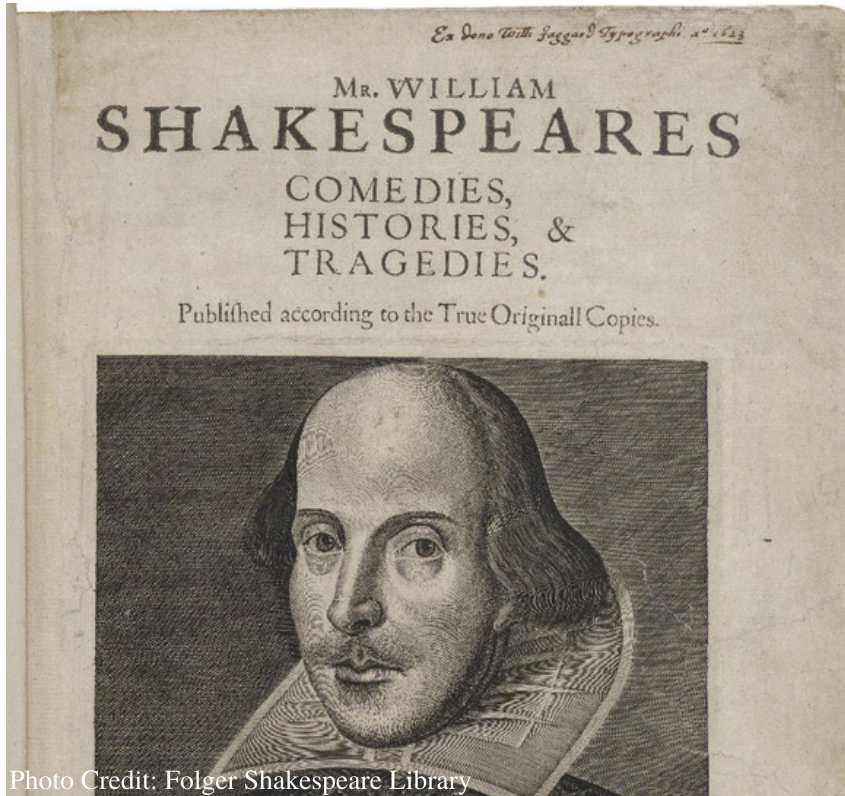


Photo Credit: Folger Shakespeare Library

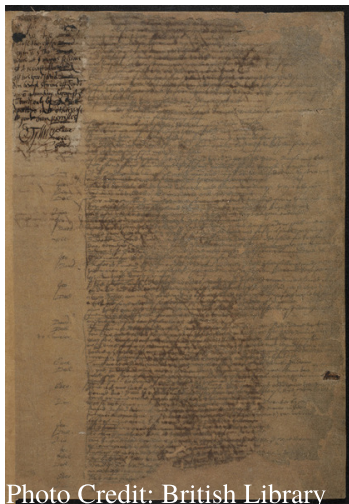


Photo Credit: British Library

## Shakespeare's Handwriting

The only record that we have of Shakespeare's handwriting is a play script of *Sir Thomas More* (above), which Shakespeare helped revise in 1603. Shakespeare added at least 147 lines to the play. His handwriting was not necessarily bad but it is hard to decipher for modern-day readers who are not experts in Elizabethan *paleography*, the study of old handwriting.



Photo Credit: Samantha Smith

## Shakespeare's Last Wish

Shakespeare was buried in 1616 at Holy Trinity Church in Stratford. His grave reads "Good friend for Jesus sake forebeare, to dig the dust enclosed here: blesete be [the] man [that] spares these stones, and curst be he [that] moves my bones" ("Shakespeare FAQ"). However, a recent radar scan suggests that Shakespeare's head might have been stolen by grave robbers.

## Shakespeare's Reception and Legacy

While Shakespeare enjoyed great popularity in his time, he did not escape some criticism. Robert Greene, a jealous contemporary writer, warned Shakespeare's fellow playwrights, Thomas Nashe, George Peele, and Christopher Marlowe, that Shakespeare "supposes he is well able to bombast out blank verse as the best of you; and...is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in the country" (Dunton-Downer 11). While Shakespeare received some criticism in the following centuries for the inconsistent quality of his plays, most critics have looked on Shakespeare very favorably. Similarly, while his popularity has risen and fallen over the years, Shakespeare has been predominantly popular and well-loved by readers. Shakespeare was so popular in certain eras like the Victorian era that critics came up with the word *bardolatry* to describe intense admiration of Shakespeare. Shakespeare is proving very popular in modern times as well. His plays are performed across the world and they have been adapted into successful films and television series.

**Shakespeare penned  
884,647 words and  
118,406 lines.**

## Did Shakespeare write his own plays?

Yes. Over the years, people have made arguments that Shakespeare's plays were actually written by Sir Francis Bacon, Christopher Marlowe, and Edward de Vere. However, scholars firmly believe that Shakespeare wrote his own plays, citing at least fifty references in Elizabethan and Jacobean texts that connect Shakespeare to his plays. Scholars also cite the fact that the actors John Hemminge and Henry Condell, who put together the First Folio, and Ben Jonson, a contemporary playwright who wrote the dedication of the First Folio, all credit Shakespeare with authorship of his own plays.

## Did Shakespeare get along with his wife?

Probably, but we'll never know for sure. Shakespeare spent a lot of time away from his wife, Anne, but that was because he needed to spend time in London to build his career. In his will, Shakespeare left Anne the family's "second best bed" ("Shakespeare FAQ"), but he was not snubbing his wife because that bed would have been the one that he and Anne shared.



# Understanding the Elizabethan Era

**"I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too..."**

**- Queen Elizabeth I to troops at Tilbury facing the Spanish Armada in 1588**

The Elizabethan era refers to the period of time in which Queen Elizabeth I ruled England from 1558–1603. The Elizabethan era is often referred to as the Golden Age of England. Elizabeth's reign saw a substantial decrease in the political and religious turmoil that defined the decade before she assumed the throne. Under her rule, England asserted its power, famously triumphing over the invading Spanish armada in 1588. While Elizabethans did endure plague and some unrest, conditions of the era were reasonably favorable.

Playwriting flourished under Elizabeth's reign; Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare found great success during this time. Theatre during the Elizabethan era was a touchy subject; theatres themselves were not allowed to exist within the city limits and moralists decried the frivolity of theatrical outings and the numbers of unsavory characters and pickpockets attending public theatres. However, Queen Elizabeth enjoyed theatrical performances when the actors came to her court. Moreover, she actively involved herself in theatre of the age by forming and serving as the patron of The Queen's Men in 1583. Elizabeth I died in 1603 and was succeeded by her Scottish nephew James I.



## ELIZABETHAN LONDON WAS...

### HIERARCHICAL

A sense of hierarchy dominated the Elizabethan worldview. Elizabethans believed in the Great Chain of Being, in which God and the angels were superior to humans, who in turn were superior to animals and the natural world. On earth, the English monarch was superior to all his or her subjects, and nobles were superior to people of lesser socioeconomic stations. Everything from the clothing that people wore to where they sat in a playhouse--if they attended public theatres at all--showed their status.

### PATRIARCHAL

Despite having a female queen, the world was very patriarchal, with men controlling many if not all of the actions of their female relatives.

### CROWDED AND DIRTY

200,000 people lived in London when Elizabeth took the throne. Without modern conveniences, the city was overflowing in certain places and ripe with the smell of people and animals.



# Playing Shakespeare Through the Ages



**The Globe**, built in 1599 on the south side of the Thames, was an open-air theatre where many of Shakespeare's plays were performed. The Globe likely was able to hold up to 3,000 tightly-packed audience members. Poorer spectators paid a penny to stand during the performance while richer theatre-goers paid two pennies for a seat and another penny for a cushion. Audience members, especially those standing in front of the stage, were loud and opinionated, often talking to each other or even voicing their thoughts on the play to the actors onstage. Performances took place at 2:00 or 3:00 p.m. to take advantage of the day light, but the time of day meant that many people skipped work to attend the plays, which contributed to conservative politicians' dislike of theatre. While the original Globe does not exist today, a reconstruction, seen in the picture to the left, was built in 1997 in Southwark, London.



**The Shakespeare Tavern Playhouse**, built in 1990 on Peachtree Street in Atlanta, Georgia, features a stage with similar features to the Globe's stage. ASC strives to create productions that are also very similar to the ones that Shakespeare's audience would have seen. All ASC productions incorporate Original Practices, which involve the active exploration of the Elizabethan stagecraft and acting techniques that Shakespeare's own audiences would have enjoyed nearly four hundred years ago. Performances at the Playhouse feature period costumes, sword fights, sound effects created live by the actors rather than pre-recorded sounds, and live music played on the stage. ASC's actors are trained to speak Shakespeare's words directly to the audience instead of using the more modern acting convention of ignoring the audience's presence as if there was an imaginary "fourth wall" separating the actors and audience. Audience members at the Shakespeare Tavern Playhouse should gain a better understanding of Elizabethan style, language, and drama by seeing it performed as Shakespeare's own company might have performed it.



**The ASC touring set**, which is used in the touring production of *R&J:60*, is a playhouse-inspired unit with three curtained entrances from which actors can enter and exit. Like a production at the Shakespeare Tavern Playhouse, all touring productions employ Original Practices. However, the connection between ASC's productions and the performances Shakespeare's contemporaries would have seen is not limited to period-inspired costumes and direct address to the audience. The act of taking a performance like *R&J:60* on tour echoes the Elizabethan practice of actors touring the countryside when outbreaks of the bubonic plague forced theatres, which fostered the spread of disease by enclosing many people in a small area, to close. Elizabethan theatre companies often brought a condensed set, props, and costumes to perform at country estates for noble families or at inns for the common people when the London theatres were closed. In bringing *R&J:60* on tour, ASC strives to carry on this Elizabethan tradition of bringing live theatre to people outside the city.

# Characters in *Romeo and Juliet*

1

## HOUSE OF CAPULET

**Juliet:** A fourteen-year old girl, Juliet is the only child of the Capulets, and she secretly marries Romeo, the son of her parents' enemy. At the end of the play, she dies by committing suicide with Romeo's dagger after discovering that he is dead.

**Lord Capulet:** The patriarch of the Capulet family, Lord Capulet forcefully exerts his power over Juliet to make his daughter marry Paris.

**Lady Capulet:** Juliet's mother, Lady Capulet was a young bride when she had Juliet, and now she wants to see her daughter married for all the advantages of a wealthy husband.

**Nurse:** Juliet's widowed nursemaid, the Nurse is also Juliet's closest confidante and the only member of the Capulet household who knows of Juliet's marriage to Romeo before the two teenagers are discovered to be dead at the end of the play.

**Tybalt:** Juliet's temperamental cousin, Tybalt is an excellent swordsman who kills Mercutio and in turn is slain by Romeo.

**Sampson:** Sampson is a servant of the Capulet household who taunts the Montague servants in the street at the beginning of the play.

**Gregory:** Gregory, a Capulet servant, joins Sampson in goading the Montague servants.

**Peter:** He is an illiterate Capulet servant who seeks Romeo's help in reading the guest list for a Capulet feast, which prompts Romeo and his friends to attend the gathering where he first sees Juliet.

2

## HOUSE OF MONTAGUE

**Romeo:** Romeo, a Montague, is a teenage boy who is frequently falling in and out of love, who falls in love with Juliet and secretly marries her. At the play's conclusion, he commits suicide by drinking poison after he believes Juliet, still under the effects of a sleeping potion, is dead.

**Abram:** Abram is a servant to the Montagues.

**Balthasar:** Balthasar is Romeo's servant.

3

## OTHER

**Escalus:** Escalus, the Prince of Verona, outlaws fighting in the streets and banishes Romeo from Verona when he breaks this decree by fighting and killing Tybalt.

**Paris:** A wealthy young nobleman, Paris is Lord Capulet's chosen suitor for Juliet. Paris is killed during a fight with Romeo in the Capulet tomb where the supposedly dead Juliet lies.

**Mercutio:** Mercutio, Romeo's friend who is related to the Prince, is skilled in both speech and swordplay and dies in a swordfight with Tybalt.

**Benvolio:** Benvolio is Romeo's friend, who goes with him to the Capulet party and who urges Romeo to flee after he kills Tybalt.

**Friar Lawrence:** Friar Lawrence marries Romeo and Juliet and engineers the ultimately ill-fated plan for Juliet to escape marrying Paris by drinking a potion that will make her appear dead.

**“...the feud does appear all-pervasive. No part of society that we see can escape from its influence. Romeo and Juliet themselves are deeply conditioned by it, although they also, necessarily, transcend the family division.”**

– Susan Snyder in *Shakespeare: A Wayward Journey* on the division between the Capulets and Montagues



# Plot of *Romeo and Juliet*

In the Italian city of Verona, two aristocratic families, the Montagues and the Capulets, are embroiled in a long-standing feud. On the city streets, a fight erupts between Montague and Capulet servants, drawing Benvolio, who supports the Montagues, and Tybalt, a Capulet, into the fray. Prince Escalus, infuriated by the brawl, disperses the crowd after declaring that the next man who fights in the streets will die.

Romeo appears, lamenting his unrequited love for Rosaline, who never appears onstage, while Benvolio unsuccessfully tries to cheer him. Meanwhile, Lord Capulet has decided to host a party and sends his servant Peter to invite the guests. Peter is illiterate and approaches Romeo, unaware he is Montague, to read the list of names. After discovering Rosaline will be at the feast, Romeo and Benvolio resolve to attend the gathering wearing masks.

At the Capulet residence, Lady Capulet instructs her daughter to pay attention to Paris, a wealthy count who would like to marry her. While Juliet is hesitant to be wooed by Paris, she obediently consents to her mother's wishes that she be pleasant to him during the evening's festivities.

Romeo, Benvolio, and Mercutio are on their way to the Capulets, when they stop to hear Mercutio's poetical thoughts on dreams and Queen Mab, Queen of the Fairies. Once at the party, Romeo sees Juliet and, completely forgetting about Rosaline, falls deeply in love with her. Tybalt spies Romeo and is furious at the presence of a Montague, but Lord Capulet calms Tybalt's urge to begin a fight. Meanwhile, Romeo and Juliet meet and talk for the first time.

After the party ends, Romeo slips away from Benvolio and Mercutio and hides in the garden beneath Juliet's room. Juliet appears on her balcony, wondering out loud why Romeo must be a Montague and expressing her love for him, despite the feud between their two families. Romeo tells Juliet of his love for her, and they make plans to be secretly married the following day.

In the early hours of the morning, Romeo goes to Friar Lawrence's cell and asks him to perform his wedding rites to Juliet. While he admonishes Romeo for falling in and out of love so rapidly, the Friar eventually agrees to marry Romeo and Juliet, expressing his hope that their marriage might heal the rift between the Montagues and Capulets. When Juliet hears the news that the Friar will marry her and Romeo, she runs to Friar Lawrence's cell, where the two lovers become husband and wife.

On the street, it is hot and an agitated Mercutio, Benvolio, and Tybalt taunt each other. When Romeo appears, Tybalt attempts to provoke Romeo into fighting him, but the newly married Romeo refuses to fight his new Capulet kinsman. With no such reservations about fighting Capulets, Mercutio draws his sword and is mortally wounded in the ensuing fight with Tybalt. When Mercutio dies, Romeo's desire for peace leaves him and he kills Tybalt in a sword fight. Romeo flees the



scene before the arrival of the Prince, who banishes Romeo from Verona for breaking the edict against public dueling.

Unaware of what has transpired, Juliet is impatiently waiting for night to fall so her new husband can secretly visit her chamber. The Nurse informs her of Tybalt's death and Romeo's banishment, and Juliet despairs at the tragic events. The Nurse promises that Romeo will visit Juliet once more before he leaves Verona.

The Nurse finds Romeo weeping as he hides in Friar Lawrence's cell. The Friar and the Nurse convince Romeo to stop mourning his



banishment and to go comfort Juliet. Romeo and Juliet consummate their marriage before Romeo leaves at morning's light to escape to Mantua.

Juliet's parents announce to her dismay that she will marry Paris. When she refuses, Lord Capulet furiously demands that she obey him or he will disown her. Juliet rushes to Friar Lawrence's cell, eager for his help to avoid bigamy. After much thought, Friar Lawrence gives Juliet a sleeping potion to drink the night before her marriage to Paris. The potion will give Juliet a deathlike appearance and her parents will place her supposedly dead body in the family tomb. Friar Lawrence will contact Romeo, informing him that Juliet is not really dead, and then Romeo will come for her and take her with him to Mantua.

That night Juliet drinks the sleeping potion after initially

having second thoughts as she considers horrible fantasies of entombment with the bodies of her ancestors. The next morning, Juliet's family believes she has died, and they place her in the Capulet tomb. Meanwhile, in Mantua, Romeo finds out from his servant Balthasar that Juliet is dead, as everyone in Verona believes. Having heard this news before the Friar's letter can explain the trick, Romeo believes that Juliet is actually dead and resolves to return to Verona to join her in death.

Romeo arrives at the Capulet tomb shortly after Paris, who is grieving for the supposedly dead Juliet. Paris believes that Juliet died of grief from the death of her cousin, Tybalt, whom Romeo killed, so Paris challenges Romeo, and the two men fight. Romeo kills Paris and places his body in the tomb. Romeo goes to Juliet's side, drinks poison, and dies by his beloved.



Moments later, Juliet stirs and awakens to see Friar Lawrence, who has arrived minutes too late to tell Romeo that Juliet is not really dead. The Friar tries to convince Juliet to leave with him but once she sees Romeo's body, she refuses to leave and the Friar, frightened by the tragic situation, rushes away. There is no more poison left for Juliet to drink, so she uses a dagger to kill herself and dies by Romeo's side.

The Montagues and Capulets discover their dead children and, after learning about their marriage from Friar Lawrence, resolve to end the feud and build statues to commemorate Romeo and Juliet.







## Understanding Shakespeare's Language

### *Recognizing Verse vs. Prose*

**Verse:** Verse is defined as “a succession of metrical feet...composed as one line [one sentence pattern]” (Steine 1462).

Example: "It was the nightingale, and not the lark,  
That pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear" (3.5.2-3).

**Blank Verse:** “The term blank verse serves to describe unrhymed lines of iambic pentameter: that is, in the strictest sense, lines of verse with five metrical feet, in which the stress falls on the second syllable of the foot. Irregular blank verse contains nine to fourteen syllables per line....Each of Shakespeare’s plays offers examples of blank verse employed in a drama” (Barton 29).

Example: "O, then I see Queen Mab hath been with you.  
She is the fairies' midwife, and she comes  
In shape no bigger than an agate stone  
On the forefinger of an alderman..." (1.4.58-61)

**Prose:** Prose is defined as "[s]poken or written language without metrical structure, as distinguished from poetry or verse” (Steine 1062). Prose does not have a specific pattern of rhyme.

Example: "'Tis well thou art not fish; if thou hadst, thou  
hadst been poor-john. Draw thy tool. Here comes  
of the house of Montagues" (1.1.31-33).

Note: Verse is always written with line breaks, and the first word of each new line is capitalized, while in prose each sentence leads into the next and looks like this sentence on the page.

### *Understanding Iambic Pentameter*

**Iambic pentameter:** Shakespeare sometimes wrote in iambic pentameter, which is "a common meter in poetry consisting of an unrhymed line with five feet or accents, each foot containing an unaccented syllable and an accented syllable" ("iambic pentameter). The rhythm of iambic pentameter is often compared to a heartbeat. You can scan, or mark the beats of iambic pentameter. You can use this symbol — for unaccented syllables and this symbol / for accented syllables.

Example:

— / — / — / — / — /

But, soft! What lightt from yonder window breaks?

## Understanding Shakespeare's Language

**Unfamiliar words:** Sometimes you will come across unfamiliar words while you are reading Shakespeare, often because words that were popular during Shakespeare's era are not so frequently used now. Be sure to select an edition of the play with copious footnotes because editors often explain words that seem foreign to modern readers. If you encounter an unfamiliar word that is not defined in your edition, look it up in a dictionary. If your school has access to academic databases, look up the word in the Oxford English Dictionary database. Another helpful resource is David and Ben Crystal's book *Shakespeare's Words: A Glossary & Language Companion*.

**Example:** At the beginning of Act One, Sampson says "Gregory, on my word we'll not carry coals" (1.1.1), to which Gregory responds, "No, for then we should be colliers." The Folger Shakespeare Library's edition of the play explains that the phrase "carry coals" means "suffer humiliation patiently" (8) and that "colliers" means "carriers of coal" (8). Sampson and Gregory are saying that they will not suffer humiliation at the hands of the Montagues.

**Figurative language:** You will no doubt discuss all types of figurative language in your class discussions. Pay attention to Shakespeare's frequent use of imagery, or intense, visually descriptive language.

**Example:** Benvolio's "Madam, an hour before the worshiped sun/Peered forth the golden window of the east" (1.1.120-121), Friar Lawrence's "The grey-eyed morn smiles on the frowning night/Chequering the eastern clouds with streaks of light" (2.3.1-2), Romeo's "Look, love, what envious streaks/Do lace the severing clouds in yonder east" (3.5.7-8).







## Analyzing Themes in *Romeo and Juliet*

### The Impact of Fate on the Play's Outcome

As you talk about the themes of *Romeo and Juliet* in your class, you may be asked to track how a certain theme like the influence of fate on the major characters develops throughout the play. Try searching a digitized version of the play for words relating to the theme. For example, you will find that Romeo talks about fate after Mercutio's death, saying "This day's black fate on more days doth depend;/This but begins the woe, others must end" (3.1.124-125). Next re-read the play for lines that address the theme, like the moment of foreshadowing when Romeo and Juliet envision each other dead, which is an outcome of their love story that they cannot control. Before Romeo leaves for Mantua, Juliet says "[m]ethinks I see thee, now thou art so low,/As one dead in the bottom of a tomb/Either my eyesight fails, or thou lookest pale" (3.5.55-57), to which Romeo responds "And trust me, love, in my eye so do you" (3.5.58).

### Individual desire vs. societal expectations

Once you investigate how themes develop throughout the play, you can investigate what scholars have written on the topic. A principle theme in *Romeo and Juliet* is that the main characters are often motivated by fulfilling their individual desires instead of meeting societal expectations. When Juliet marries Romeo in secret, she makes a choice to pursue her own desire for romantic fulfillment through marriage in direct defiance of society's expectation that she will not marry until directed to do so by her father. In an essay on *Romeo and Juliet*, Gail Kern Paster writes, "Secret marriage is the narrative device by which Shakespeare brings into conflict the new privilege claimed by individual desire and the traditional authority granted fathers to arrange their daughters' marriages. Secret marriage is the testing ground, in other words, of the new kind of importance being claimed by individual desire. Shakespeare's representation of the narrative outcome of this desire as tragic—here, as later in the secret marriage that opens *Othello*—may suggest something of Elizabethan society's anxiety about the social cost of romantic individualism" (Paster 259). Scholars' opinions can help you







## Analyzing the Structure of *Romeo and Juliet*

*Romeo and Juliet* was structured in a purposeful way by Shakespeare, who was informed in part by the structure of the sources he drew on while writing the play and in part by his own knack for knowing how to heighten dramatic tension in a play. Sometimes the choices Shakespeare made in structuring the play encourage different interpretations of a character's personality. When Shakespeare first introduces Romeo he is consumed with lovesickness for Rosaline, saying that he is "out of her favor where I am in love" (1.1.173). Benvolio encourages Romeo to attend the Capulet feast, saying that when Romeo examines Rosaline in comparison with other young women he will not think that she is so beautiful (1.3.93-94). When Romeo meets Juliet he immediately falls in love with her, and when he goes to tell the Friar of his new love, the Friar is shocked at his quick change of feelings: "Is Rosaline, that thou didst love so dear,/So soon forsaken?" (2.3.70-71). Although Romeo's love for Juliet proves to be true, the quickness with which he switches his affections from Rosaline to Juliet makes the reader momentarily ponder whether the Friar's comment that "young men's love then lies/Not truly in their hearts, but in their eyes" (2.3.72-73) is accurate.

Think about how Shakespeare introduces the feud between the Capulets and the Montagues. The prologue gives us background on the two yet unnamed families, described as "two households both alike in dignity" (1) whose children will fall in love and commit suicide (5-6). By opening the play with the fight between the

Capulet and Montague servants, Shakespeare illustrates how pervasive the feud is, showing how a sense of hatred for the other family motivates even the lowliest servants of the two households. This information helps us realize the gravity of the situation when Romeo and Juliet, who are higher ranking members of the Montague and Capulet families than the servants, fall in love. As audience members, we know even before Juliet declares that by loving Romeo she must "love a loathed enemy" (1.5.155) that Romeo and Juliet will face insurmountable obstacles because they come from feuding households. While it is easy for us as modern audience members and readers to wonder why Romeo and Juliet do not just declare their love and encourage their parents to end the feud, Shakespeare helps us understand that the intensity of the feud would make that choice seem impossible in the minds of the young lovers.

Also think about how *Romeo and Juliet*, although classified as a tragedy, has many comic elements. One scholar explains how to think about the structure of the play: "The play can be thought of as divided, with the first two acts having comic elements and the last three being predominantly tragic. Tybalt's and Mercutio's deaths at the beginning of the third act is the decisive turning point from which events begin to spiral downwards" (Bladen 10).



## Using Textual Analysis

You will likely be asked to draw on textual evidence from the play while writing about *Romeo and Juliet*. For example, your teacher may ask you to use textual evidence to answer various questions regarding Juliet's relationship with her nurse and her parents. Here are some tips for incorporating textual evidence into your writing.

Refer to line numbers using parenthetical citations to back up your claims about the play.

Example: Juliet's primary confidant and source of emotional support in the play is her nurse, not her mother. While Juliet speaks with her mother infrequently (1.3.7.105, 3.5.65-215), Juliet frequently speaks to and confides in her nurse, even collaborating with her about when she will marry Romeo and how he will visit her at night (2.6.70-82).

Refer to specific lines from the play to support your analysis.

Example: When Juliet's mother declares "[d]o as thou wilt, for I have done with thee" (3.5.215), she effectively disavows her daughter after Juliet disobeys her parents by saying she will not marry Paris (3.6.121-122). While Lady Capulet's opinion about her daughter's behavior fits expectations from the time period that children should always be obedient to their parents, the Nurse's declaration that "Romeo is banished...I think it best you married with the County" (3.5.224-230) is more surprising, given her earlier support of Juliet's marriage to Romeo.

Analyze the specific words that a character uses to support your analysis.

Example: While expressing his anger towards Juliet, Lord Capulet proclaims "[g]raze where you will, you shall not house with me" (3.4.200), and his subsequent use of the verbs "hang, beg, starve die" (3.5.304) give a clear picture of what might very well happen to Juliet in an era in which women without husbands or fathers were incredibly vulnerable.

Combine your own analysis of the text with an appropriately cited quotation or paraphrased opinion of a scholar. Be sure to include the scholar's book or article in your Works Cited page.

Example: Juliet's parents want her to marry Paris because his wealth and social position make him an advantageous match. Lady Capulet encourages Juliet to marry Paris, saying that when she marries him Juliet "shall...share all that he doth possess" (1.4.99) and Lord Capulet describes Paris as "[a] gentleman of noble parentage,/Of fair demesnes [property]" (3.5.191-192). As Prophecy Coles explains in her book *The Shadow of a Second Mother*, "her [Juliet's] parent's wish is that she should be an object whom they can use to further their political aspirations" (57). The Nurse's support of Juliet's marriage to Romeo suggests that she recognizes that love, not socioeconomic gain, should motivate young people to get married (Coles 57).







## Character Development: Mercutio

A key component of studying Shakespeare's plays is understanding how a character develops over the course of a play. The best way to understand how a character develops is to pay close attention to what the character says in each scene of the play. Here we will examine the character of Mercutio, but you can ask the questions below about any character in Shakespeare's play.

*What are Mercutio's main characteristics?*

Mercutio is fun-loving and jovial. He jokes with his friends, especially Romeo, whom he gently mocks for being in love: "I conjure thee by Rosaline's bright eyes...that in thy likeness thou appear to us" (2.1.20-24). His humor frequently is bawdy and inappropriate, which would have appealed to the groundlings watching *Romeo and Juliet* when it was first performed.

Mercutio can sometimes be very contemplative, as seen in his long speech about Queen Mab, a "fairies' midwife" (1.4.59) who visits people when they are asleep and makes them dream about different things. Mercutio uses a great deal of thoughtful imagery in that speech, describing how Queen Mab is "no bigger than an agate-stone" (1.4.60) and how her "wagon-spokes [are] made of long spiders' legs" (1.4.64).

Mercutio is eager to fight, taunting Tybalt by saying "couple it with something: make it a word and a blow..." (3.1.40-41). While Mercutio is not a member of the house of Montague, he is always ready to defend the honor of Romeo's family against the Capulets.

*Do those characteristics change over the course of the play?*

When Mercutio is mortally wounded by Tybalt, the bravado he shows when he was challenging Tybalt to fight dissolves into anger at losing his life because of the feud between the Montagues and Capulets. He curses both families when he utters the famous line "A plague o' both your houses" (3.1.103-104).

*How does Mercutio advance the plot?*

Mercutio's death spurs Romeo to fight and kill Tybalt, which causes the Prince to banish him from Verona. Before Mercutio dies, Romeo tries to defuse the situation with Tybalt because he does not want to fight his kinsman: "I do protest, I never injured thee./But love thee better than thou canst devise./Till thou shalt know the reason of my love:/And so, good Capulet,--which name I tender/As dearly as my own,--be satisfied" (3.1.69-73). After Mercutio dies, Romeo challenges Tybalt, saying "...Mercutio's soul/Is but a little way above our heads./Staying for thine to keep him company:/Either thou, or I, or both, must go with him" (3.1.131-134).

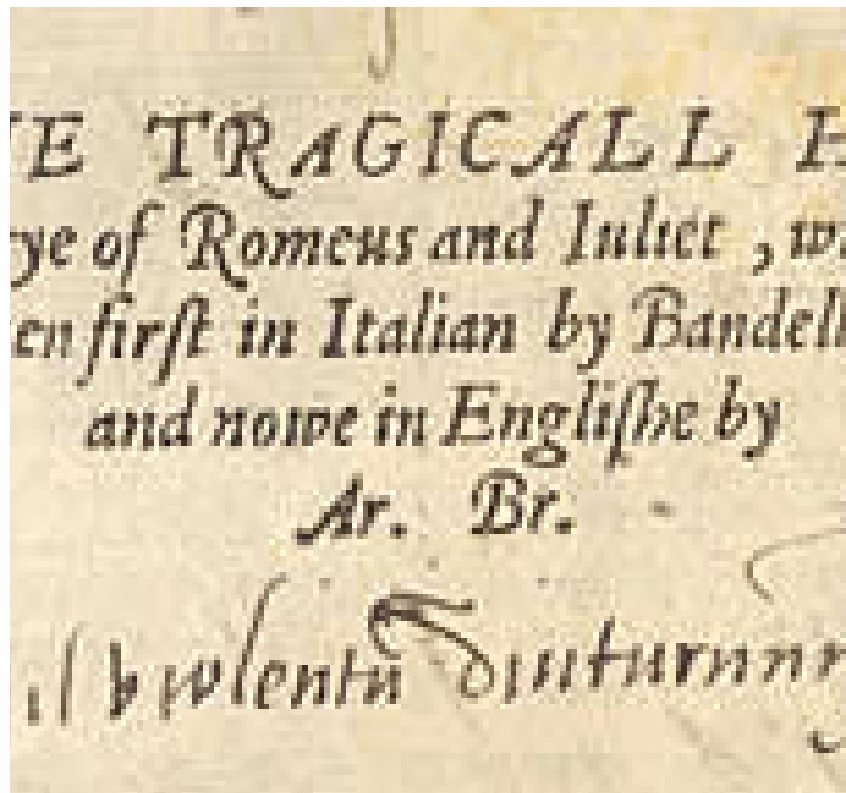


# Analyzing Shakespeare's Sources

Shakespeare was without a doubt a brilliant writer, but much of his creativity and talent manifests itself in the language he composed for his characters, not in the originality of his stories. The Elizabethan concept of originality differed greatly from our modern-day perception of the term. Borrowing heavily from a previous text and adapting features of the original story--an act which today would garner accusations of plagiarism--was a very common practice for Elizabethan playwrights. In keeping with this tradition, Shakespeare took much of the plot of *Romeo and Juliet* from Arthur Brooke's 1562 work *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Iuliet*, which was itself an adaptation of an Italian work by Bandell. The similarities between Shakespeare's work and Brooke's are so intense that one scholar wrote that it seems like Shakespeare "took the material over without serious change except for its rendition in charming lyric and dramatic verse" (Law 86). It is important to know that Shakespeare adapted many of his plots from other sources, but it is also vital to recognize Shakespeare's extraordinary skills in composition, so pay attention to the imagery that makes Shakespeare's rhetoric so unique in *Romeo and Juliet*.

Take a look at the beginning *Argument*, or introduction, to Brooke's *Romeus and Juliet* and note how similar Shakespeare's story is to Brooke's. The following passage shows that the only major difference in the primary components of the two narratives is that in Brooke's version Romeus is secretly married to Juliet for three months before the fatal argument with Tybalt transpires. In Shakespeare's play, Romeo marries Juliet and kills Tybalt the same day, which makes his subsequent banishment even more emotionally compelling because the newly married couple gets to spend such little time together before Romeo must flee the city.

"Love hath inflaméd twain by sudden sight,  
And both do grant the thing that both desire  
They wed in shrift by counsel of a friar.  
Young Romeus climbs fair Juliet's bower by night.  
Three months he doth enjoy his chief delight.  
By Tybalt's rage provokéd unto ire,  
He payeth death to Tybalt for his hire.  
A banished man he 'scapes by secret flight.  
New marriage is offered to his wife.  
She drinks a drink that seems to reave her breath:  
They bury her that sleeping yet hath life.  
Her husband hears the tidings of her death.  
He drinks his bane. And she with Romeus' knife,  
When she awakes, herself, alas! she slay'th."



Compare Brooke's and Shakespeare's descriptions of Juliet's thoughts before she drinks the potion given to her by Friar Lawrence. Note how similar Brooke's and Shakespeare's texts are but pay attention to how Shakespeare uses more imagery than Brooke does.

Brooke's *Romeus and Juliet*, lines 2370-2381

"Or how shall I that alway have in so fresh air been bred,/Endure the lothsome stink of such an heapéd store/Of carcasses not yet consumed, and bones that long before/Intombéd were, where I my sleeping-place shall have,/Where all my ancestors do rest, my kindred's common grave?/Shall not the friar and my Romeus, when they come,/Find me, if I awake before, y-stifled in the tomb?...."

Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (4.3.34-44)

"Shall I not, then, be stifled in the vault,  
To whose foul mouth no healthsome air breathes in,  
And there die strangled ere my Romeo comes?  
Or, if I live, is it not very like,  
The horrible conceit of death and night,  
Together with the terror of the place,--  
As in a vault, an ancient receptacle,  
Where, for these many hundred years, the bones  
Of all my buried ancestors are packed:  
Where bloody Tybalt, yet but green in earth,  
Lies festering in his shroud..."



*The Death of Romeo and Juliet*

John Everett Millais  
Manchester City Art  
Galleries.

*Romeo and Juliet*

Frank Dicksee  
Southampton  
City Art Galleries  
(pictured  
below)



## *Romeo and Juliet* In Other Mediums

*Romeo and Juliet* has inspired countless visual artists, choreographers, and musicians to create works of art related to Shakespeare's play. John Everett Millais and Frank Dicksee are two of hundreds of artists who have painted works of art depicting Romeo and Juliet. Peter Martins choreographed a ballet for The New York City Ballet that tells the story of *Romeo and Juliet*. Tchaikovsky composed *Romeo and Juliet Fantasy Overture* in 1869, and Charles Gounod's French opera *Roméo et Juliette* premiered in 1867. The musical *West Side Story*, loosely based on Romeo and Juliet, premiered in 1957. The multitude of *Romeo and Juliet*-inspired works of art speak to how easily the characters, narratives, and themes of Shakespeare's play can transfer between different artistic mediums.

You can easily analyze the relationship between a painting like John Everett Millais' *The Death of Romeo and Juliet* even if you do not have a lot of experience analyzing visual art. Determine if the painting depicts a particular scene or character from Shakespeare's play. Often the title of the painting is a clue; Millais' *The Death of Romeo and Juliet* suggests that the painting illustrates a moment in Act Five, Scene Two, when both Romeo and Juliet are dead. The number of people in the painting and their grief-stricken expressions indicate that the painting shows the Capulets and Montagues mourning their dead children. Analyze the painting to observe details that relate to the play; for example, there is a man in Millais' painting holding up the vial of poison that Romeo drank. If needed, research articles or books written by art historians to learn more about the history, composition, and technique used by the artist.

Take a look at Frank Dicksee's painting. It is clear from the title that the painting depicts the characters of Romeo and Juliet. Try to analyze the painting to determine what scene it depicts. To figure this out, look at what Juliet is wearing. The fact that she is wearing a nightgown and that Romeo is fully clothed and about to climb out of her window hints that the painting is depicting the parting between Romeo and Juliet after their wedding night,

which takes place in Act Three, Scene Five.

When you are analyzing other representations of Shakespeare's work like a ballet or a musical think about what elements the artist incorporated from Shakespeare's play into the new work. Did the artist change the story? What motivations would an artist have for changing the story or the sequence of events of Shakespeare's play? For example, would a choreographer decide to simplify the story of *Romeo and Juliet* if he or she could not express a complicated rhetorical concept through dance? Do you think an artist needs to retain a certain number of narrative details or characters to maintain the essence of Shakespeare's play?





## Researching *Romeo and Juliet*

If you are writing a paper on *Romeo and Juliet*, there are a multitude of research options available to you. From websites to help you solidify your understanding of Shakespeare's life and the play to books and articles written by scholars, there is plenty of material for you to research any topic relating to Shakespeare's famous tragedy.

For critical essays and more information on *Romeo and Juliet*, look into the Folger Shakespeare Library edition of the play as well as the Arden Shakespeare edition of the play.

For background information on Shakespeare's life and the time in which he lived, visit [www.folger.edu](http://www.folger.edu), the website of the Folger Shakespeare Library, or [www.shakespearesglobe.com](http://www.shakespearesglobe.com), the website of the reconstructed Globe Theatre in London, England. For in-depth information on Shakespeare, his playwriting career, and theatrical trends in Elizabethan and Jacobean England, look into Samuel Schoenbaum's *Shakespeare's Lives*, Michael Dobson's *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation, and Authorship, 1760-1769*, and Andrew Gurr's books: *The Shakespeare Company*, *The Shakespearean Stage, 1574-1642*, and *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London*.

For information on how *Romeo and Juliet* and other Shakespeare plays have been represented in popular culture, film, and the visual arts, look into Douglas Lanier's *Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture*, Mark Thornton Burnett's *Shakespeare and World Cinema*, Sonia Massai's *World Wide Shakespeares: Local Appropriations in Film and Performance*, Virginia and Alden Vaughan's *Shakespeare in American Life*, Courtney Lehmann's *Screen Adaptations: Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet*, *The Relationship Between Text and Film*, and Jane Martineau's *Shakespeare in Art*.

If your school has access to databases like JSTOR and MUSE, use those resources to find articles written by scholars about Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. For best results, do not just type *Romeo and Juliet* into the search bar. Instead, try a more specified search that speaks to your research topic like "*Romeo and Juliet* historical sources," "feminist interpretations of *Romeo and Juliet*," "family arguments in *Romeo and Juliet*," "marriage trends in Elizabethan England," "*Romeo and Juliet* prologue analysis," or "film interpretations *Romeo and Juliet*."

Depending on the type of essay you are asked to write, first determine which characters and scenes you are going to analyze and write down your own thoughts so you can intersperse your original thoughts with opinions from scholars that you will cite using MLA parenthetical citations and a works cited or whatever citation format your teacher requires.



## Interview with Hayley Platt

Hayley Platt plays Juliet in the 2017 Atlanta Shakespeare Company production of *Romeo and Juliet*.

### What do you see as Juliet's most important characteristics?

HP: "Juliet, the beautiful and only daughter of the Capulets, is slated to marry Verona's most eligible bachelor until she takes fate into her own hands. This is a girl who knows what she wants and isn't afraid to fight and fall for it. Juliet may be beautiful, but she's also much more than just a pretty face. In fact, she might even be the play's real protagonist; she speaks to the audience most frequently (often a good indicator of who is important in a Shakespeare play), and her character undergoes the greatest evolution during the course of the play. She's smart, witty, and determined; it's Juliet, after all, who proposes to Romeo, not the other way around: "If that thy bent of love be honorable, Thy purpose marriage, send me word tomorrow," she says (2.2.150-151)."

### How does Juliet develop as a character over the play?

HP: "Juliet starts out as a naïve girl who's dependent on her family and ends up a woman willing to desert that family to be with the man she loves. When we first meet Juliet, she's insisting that marriage is 'an honor that I dream not of' (1.3.71). But the minute she meets Romeo, she's sending her nurse to find out if he's married. That's a pretty quick change of mind, but she is quick to rely on her own judgment and recognize what she wants for herself. Juliet's courage and ability to trust her own judgment in critical situations is evident after Tybalt's death. Juliet's first reaction is to grieve over her cousin and reject Romeo as just another heartless Montague. But then she changes her mind. In a single monologue, Juliet decides to choose loyalty to her new husband over love of her family: 'My husband lives, that Tybalt would have slain,/And Tybalt's dead, that would have slain my husband./All this is comfort. Wherefore weep I then?' (3.2.115-118). What's interesting about this is that Shakespeare uses the

very words she's speaking to show the switch; in the first two lines, 'husband' and 'Tybalt' actually switch places. For a woman in Shakespeare's time, this is exactly what marriage meant; your priority was now your husband and your husband's family. Married to Romeo, Juliet is literally no longer a Capulet. This is one of my favorite monologues in the play. Even though the words are emotional, the monologue is mathematical and logical and has a beautiful reasoning structure."

### What do you believe informs Juliet's decision to commit suicide at the end the play?

HP: "Juliet's path to suicide is different than Romeo's. Romeo has been banished from his home city, but he still has contact with his family and friends. Juliet, on the other hand, has been systematically stripped of the support of everyone around her. She has to undergo a brutal series of scenes that take her from saying good-bye to Romeo after their wedding night, to the news that she is supposed to marry Paris, to her father's rage when she refuses, to a meeting with Paris himself. So, does she have a choice? Her father threatens to throw her out of the house onto the streets if she doesn't marry Paris. Her mother nearly disowns her. Even the Nurse turns against her. Juliet, for all the emotional maturity she gained throughout the play, is still a young woman. As far as we can tell, she hasn't really been anywhere besides her home and Friar Laurence's cell. She has no idea how to survive in the outside world, especially in the Elizabethan world where women couldn't really function without husbands and fathers due to the strict limitations placed on women by a patriarchal society. She chooses suicide because she cannot bear to live without Romeo and because she feels she has no other options."



# Interview with Jacobi Hollingshed

Jacobi Hollingshed plays Romeo in the 2017 Atlanta Shakespeare Company production of *Romeo and Juliet*.

**What was your first experience interacting with the text of *Romeo and Juliet* and how has your opinion of the play changed since then?**

JH: "I first experienced the text of *Romeo and Juliet* during high school. My teacher had us read the play in class over the course of maybe a week. In retrospect, it was reminiscent of a table read. I don't remember who I read for back then, but I do remember being taken by the emotional breadth of the text. I was moved viscerally. Shakespeare pours some of the most beautiful language written in history into this play and even my no-nonsense, arrogant, high school self was able to sense it immediately. My opinion of the play in essence remains the same. I have always loved *Romeo and Juliet* because I'm a romantic and that will never escape me. But, how I view the decisions the characters make in the play have undoubtedly changed because I have more experiences from which to pull than I did when I was in high school. As a high school student, I felt that Romeo and Juliet's decisions were 'too rash, too unadvised, too sudden,' which they are, but now my views of love and its grandeur is more potent, as are my views on fate and destiny, which allows me to have empathy for their choices."

**The balcony scene is easily one of the most recognizable scenes in Shakespeare. Why do you think this scene stands out so much in the canon?**

JH: "The balcony scene epitomizes the fantasies we all have for someone with whom we are infatuated. It has danger, declarations of love, impetuosity, and expectancy, all blanketed by a moonlit night. It makes us all smile inside and yearn for a love as palpable as the love shared between Romeo and Juliet."

**What do you do before *Romeo and Juliet* performances to get into character?**

JH: "As with any performance, I like to spend time alone, connecting with my breath, reminding myself that I have done all that I can in preparation for this moment and now it's time to let it go. I think time before a performance is sacrosanct. It's a period where I have to release all the tensions of the day and put myself in a position to speak heart's truth and mind's truth. It is only then will I be able to open the heart space of people who paid their hard-earned money to be entertained, challenged, and moved."



**What suggestions do you have for first-time readers of *Romeo and Juliet* to understand Shakespeare's language?**

JH: "I would challenge you to be open and to allow the language to affect you. Allow yourself to get angry or weep after reading something instead of rejecting the impulse to emote. Also, I would suggest reading it aloud making sure to complete every word and not skid over them as we tend to do in conversation. Every word has weight and purpose. Lastly, I would recommend falling in love with language because I believe a great deal of understanding Shakespeare comes with relishing language."

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