

Romeo and Juliet
Dramaturgy Packet
IC Second Stage
Fall 2019
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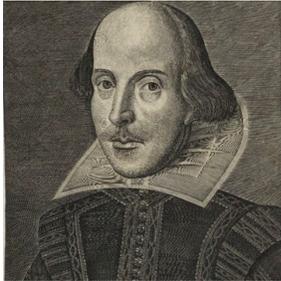


“What on Earth is Going On Here?”

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William Shakespeare



“Soul of the age!

The applause, delight, the wonder of our stage!”

Who was William Shakespeare?

Early Life

William Shakespeare was the son of John Shakespeare and Mary Arden, baptized on the 26th of April 1564, whose birthday is traditionally celebrated on the 23rd of April, aka St. George’s Day. John was the holder of various odd jobs in Stratford-upon-Avon (the town of William’s birth), including most famously a glover, and the town bailiff (a modern equivalent of the mayor). However, John Shakespeare fell afoul of some major debts during William’s middle childhood, putting the family into some dire financial straits. William most likely attended the local grammar school in Stratford, but the records have since been lost, so it is impossible to prove this definitively. At the age of eighteen he married the twenty-six year old Anne Hathaway (who also happened to be three months pregnant with their first child, Susanna. SCANDAL)! This followed the birth of two more children, the twins Hamnet and Judith in 1585. Then comes a seven year period where we know nothing about Shakespeare, but there is a great deal of speculation and a great deal of circumstantial evidence about what was going on in this period. So he was either a Lancashire schoolmaster, Stratford deer-poacher, London stableboy, Catholic priest in training in Italy, mercenary, actor with the Lord Strange’s men, actor with the Queen’s Men, actor with the Lord Pembroke’s Men, or gloving apprentice. Take your pick.

Early Career

Shakespeare is first mentioned (sort of) in Robert Greene’s *Greene’s Groatsworth of Wit* from 1592, which is the death bed musings of an alcoholic no account writer. In it, he bemoans the state of modern drama, including a certain *johannes factotum*, who had a “tiger’s heart wrapt in player’s hide” and thought of himself as the only “Shake-scene” in the country. That’s our boy! This was eventually reprinted with an apology from Henry Chettle, who was asked by some of Shakespeare’s friends to apologize for the nasty things said about Billy Shakes. During this time, Shakespeare was famous for his *Henry VI* trilogy and *Richard III*, four major historical successes in the vein of Marlowe and the anonymous chronicle plays of the Queen’s Men. Alongside these box office smashes, his early comedies were also doing a great deal of box office work,

especially *The Comedy of Errors*, which during a performance at the Gray's Inn on December 28, 1594, led to a minor riot (in the defense of the rioters, it was the first play many of them had seen since the nasty plague of 1594). During this early part of his career (thanks to some really top notch scholarship by Lawrence Manley and Sally-Beth MacLean) we can be pretty sure that Shakespeare was running around with the Lord Strange's Men and, upon the death of their patron Ferdinando Stanley, teamed up with Richard Burbage, William Kempe, and many of their other Lord Strange acolytes to form the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1594, following a brief stint where he worked for the Lord Pembroke's Men. We shall cover the era of 1596 in more detail during the section on historical context, but suffice it to say this was one of the lynch-pin years in the life of Shakespeare. Until the end of the century, Shakespeare built a steadily increasing reputation as the nation's top dramatist, writing and performing in more plays in front of Queen Elizabeth than anyone else, opening the iconic Globe Theatre (after stealing timber from the aptly named Theatre on Christmas Day 1598. This is a truly whack story please ask me about it sometime), and effectively "winning" the Poet's War with his incredible 1599 output, which constituted *Henry V*, *As You Like It*, *Julius Caesar*, and the majority of a little play called *Hamlet*. His father died in 1601, leading to...

The Dark Years (aka King's Man)

During this time until the end of his career, Shakespeare never wrote another full-bred, out and out comedy. He wrote a series of so called "problem plays" (while living as a lodger of the Mountjoy family on Silver Street) which had traditional "happy" endings but questioned a lot of preconceived notions about what a comedy could be/should tackle, and addressed many pressing socio-political issues in late Elizabethan/early Jacobean England. Wait, late Elizabethan? That's right, good ol' Lizzy 1 died in 1603, leading to the Scottish James I & VI ascending the throne, and also naming Shakespeare and the Lord Chamberlain's Men the King's Men, the official playing company of King James. To mark this, Shakespeare went on a tear, writing many of his best known tragedies, including *King Lear*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Macbeth* (*Othello* was MAYBE early Jacobean as well, but for me the more convincing argument is this being the last Elizabethan tragedy, but there's no way of knowing for sure). In 1608, the King's Men finalized the purchase of the Blackfriars Indoor theatre, which had taken them a loooooong time to do (literally twelve years of them being banned from playing there despite technically owning the space, and then losing it, it's a whole mess). Shakespeare had by this point accrued a great deal of wealth from owning the properties whereon his company worked, and through some shrewd (and often quite ruthless) investments, had created a great deal of personal wealth for himself. He seems to have retired to Stratford around 1610-1611, apparently suddenly remembering that he had a whole family up there.

Final Years

During these last six years of his life, Shakespeare spent the majority of his time collaborating with other dramatists, including the young John Fletcher, who would go on to take Shakespeare's spot as the chief dramatist for the King's Men. In November 1613, the Globe Theatre burnt to the ground during a performance of *All is True* (aka *Henry VIII*) due to a special effect go wrong (listen, even then they knew you needed some crazy good special effects to get anyone remotely interested in *Henry VIII*). Following this point, Shakespeare appears to have only returned to London once, in 1614 with his son-in-law John Hall for some minor business. On April 23, 1616, Shakespeare died at the age of fifty-two(ish. Best we can do). The cause of his death is uncertain, but there are innumerable theories, including poisoning, a stroke, syphilis, a night on the town gone wrong with Ben Jonson and Michael Drayton, and, of course, murder.

Regardless, over the course of his life, Shakespeare wrote some forty plays (two of which are known to be lost, with a great deal of apocrypha vying for acceptance in the canon, #edward3isashakespeareplayfightmeanyonewhosaysotherwise), one hundred and fifty-four sonnets, two long form narrative poems, and a handful of smaller bits of poetry, the majority of which have disputed authorship. However, in these works reside the paramount of human achievement, the highest crest of the wave of what it means to be a mortal hurtling through the cosmos on a spec on a spec on a spec. Or, yknow...some pretty good plays.

Further Reading/Smarter People that I Stole Freely From:

Shakespeare by Anthony Burgess

The Lord Strange's Men and Their Plays by Lawrence Manley and Sally-Beth MacLean

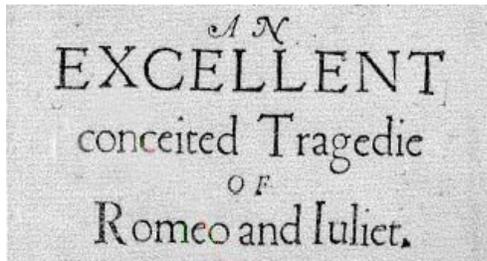
The Lodger Shakespeare by Charles Nicholl

Shakespeare's Lives by Samuel Schoenbaum

1599: A Year in the Life of Shakespeare by James Shapiro

1606: The Year of Lear by James Shapiro

Historical Context



“Faith I can tell her age unto an hour”

Writing

Being one of Shakespeare’s most enduring works, the writing of *Romeo and Juliet* oddly enough is one of the more difficult to successfully date in the canon, with potential ranges extending from 1591 all the way up till early 1597. However, the most commonly cited dates fall between 1594 (when the notorious clown Will Kempe joined the company, who originated the role of Peter) and 1596. Here I shall cite some evidence to support a claim for the writing of *Romeo and Juliet* occurring during the Summer/Fall of 1596. Thanks to the title page of the First Quarto of *Romeo and Juliet* (see “History of the Text”) we know that the play was performed by the “Lord Hunsdon his Servants” “sundry times.” As I mentioned previously, Shakespeare was still technically under the employment of the Lord Chamberlain (one Henry Carey) from 1594 on, so who is this mysterious Lord Hunsdon. Well, the year 1596 was an especially turbulent one for William Shakespeare, as Henry Carey died on July 23, 1596, leading to his being replaced in the office of the Lord Chamberlain by Sir William Brooke Cobham. Shakespeare’s company, without its old patron, was already “persecuted” by the Lord Mayor of London (according to Thomas Nashe) and had lost the favor that they had previously enjoyed. This is a nice way of saying that for nearly a year theatre was literally banned in the city limits of London due to some wacky shenanigans (see “History of Performance”). During this time the company was backed by the far less powerful and influential George Carey, (Henry’s son) and Lord Hunsdon. His patronage continued from the 23rd of July until the 14th of April 1597, when George Carey succeeded William Cobham as the new Lord Chamberlain, and the Lord Hunsdon’s Men reverted back to their original title. But what does this have to do with *Romeo and Juliet*? Well, since the Quarto clearly refers to the play being performed by the Lord Hunsdon’s Men, then clearly somewhere during the seven month tenure of Georeg Carey as Lord Hunsdon *Romeo and Juliet* appeared.

This is also backed by circumstantial evidence, as we know that the Lord Hunsdon’s Men toured the provinces during the second half of 1596, as the city of London was closed due to a plague

outbreak. With the first Quarto most likely being a touring cut of the play (once again see “History of the Text”), a 1596 dating seems likely.

Alongside this piece of evidence, another piece of evidence which may help date the play is the Nurse’s Act One Scene Three reference to an earthquake which occurred some eleven years prior to the action of the play. This “earthquake” is not to be found in any of Shakespeare’s sources, but there was a historical earthquake which occurred in Mottingham (near London) on August 4, 1585, nearly eleven years to the day of the play’s action if it was written in Summer/Fall 1596, as illustrated by the various references to July and summer in the play (see “Setting” for an in-depth discussion). On top of this, there is Mercutio’s allusion to “...spanish blades...” which may be felt to be a reference to the successful Cadiz expedition led by the Earl of Essex in June 1596, celebrated in the city of London in August. With Shakespeare making multiple allusions to the Earl in his later work (most specifically in *Henry V*) this allusion does not seem unlikely, and indeed is helpful in dating the play.

However, aside from these bits of solid evidence supporting a 1596 dating for the writing of *Romeo and Juliet*, there is one piece of circumstantial evidence which I find incredibly compelling. On August 11, 1596, William Shakespeare’s only son, Hamnet Shakespeare, was buried in Stratford-upon-Avon, at the age of eleven. This would place the composition of Shakespeare’s first great tragedy at the same time as the death of his first born son, lending a great deal of personal weight to this, deeply heartfelt tragedy. This is compounded when considered in the context of the Nurse’s own lost child, Susan, who was weaned with Juliet eleven years ago.

A Midsummer Night’s Dream

During the year 1596, Shakespeare also was in the process of writing his classic comedy, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, which, considering its multitude of thematic similarities with *Romeo and Juliet*, is worthy of a more thorough examination. Indeed, aside from the Act Five presentation of *Pyramus and Thisbe* (which in and of itself is basically a drag burlesque retelling of *Romeo and Juliet*) the two plays share a great deal of thematic allusions and source material. Indeed, the two source legends of Romeo and Juliet and Pyramus and Thisbe are often placed together in early modern texts as the archetypal lovers. This can be found most famously in William Pettie’s *A Petite Palace of Pettie his Pleasure* (yes, this is seriously the title of a book *eye roll*), where he refers to parental feuding leading to “...Pyramus and Thisbe[‘s]...woeful end, Romeo and Julietta to untimely death.” Alongside this, Marjorie Garber makes a case for Romeo’s line “It is my soul that calls upon my name” being a reference to the story of Cupid and Psyche, which is related in Apuleius’ *The Golden Ass*, which inspired much of the Bottom plot in *Midsummer*.

Indeed, on a personal note, I think it is often helpful to view these two plays as photo negatives of each other, revealing something unique about the other through a close examination of the self. In both plays we see Shakespeare stolidly defending the right for young love to fight for itself in the face of parental tyranny, upending of traditional social orders, late night romantic rendezvous in forests, and a similar deep and abiding love for poetry.

Other Plays

Similarly, we may look at *Love's Labor's Lost* and *Richard II* along with the aforementioned *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as being the pinnacle of Shakespeare's linguistic and poetic achievements. Each of these plays have, for their respective genres, the highest rate of rhymed lines in the canon (see "Performing Shakespeare") and the love of poetry extends further than a mere stylistic convention. Indeed, many main plot points in these works are often tied up in literal acts of poetry, whether they be the halting attempts at sonnets performed by the Duke of Navarre and his acolytes, Richard II the literal poet king, or the gorgeous linguistic heights reached in the meeting of our titular lovers. From this point on, Shakespeare seems to move further away from conventional poetic form in his plays, and begins to experiment with more naturalistic and idiosyncratic forms of speech as he develops as a writer. However, in these four plays, we see Shakespeare at the height of his powers as a Romantic poet.

Further Reading:

Speaking the Speech by Giles Block

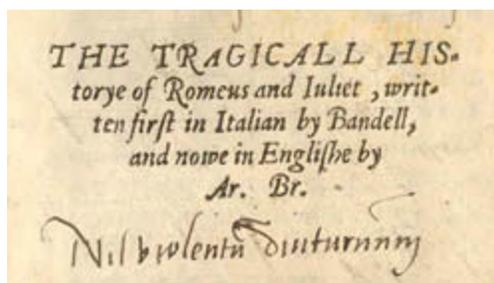
Shakespeare After All by Marjorie Garber

Romeo and Juliet, Arden Third Edition, Edited by Rene Weis

A Note on Textual Dating:

If you would like to have a further discussion on the dating of this play, I am more than happy and willing. Indeed, I have found myself on both sides of the proverbial fence, and for the majority of my life found myself supporting a 1594/5 date based purely on stylistic grounds. However, I am greatly indebted to the scholarship of Professor Weis, who thoroughly convinced me of a 1596 dating for *Romeo and Juliet* (though he still doesn't have me on *Henry IV*, which I feel easily slots into a 1597 setting as an attack on the Cobham family that was entirely intentional by Shakespeare. But I digress).

Sources



“Love hath inflamed twain by sudden sight”

Dante Aligheri and Other Italian Writers

Ah yes, everyone’s favorite creepy poet boi is back at it again. In Dante’s *Purgatorio*, he refers to civil strife within the city of Verona between the Montecchi and the Cappelletti families during the 13th and early 14th century, the earliest such reference to these whacky Capulets and Montagues. The story of the doomed love between Julietta Cappelletti and Romeo Montecchi was told repeatedly in different Italian novellas during the 15th and 16th century (by Salernitano and da Porto respectively), but Shakespeare couldn’t be bothered. Shakespeare had a different source to totally rip off of...

Arthur Brooke and the *Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet*

Though Shakespeare had also probably read “Rhomeo and Julietta” from William Painter’s 1567 collection *Palace of Pleasure*, Shakespeare’s source that he was most indebted to was without doubt Arthur Brooke’s 1562 long form poem, *The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet*. Little to nothing is known about Brooke, except for the poem he left behind and the approximate date of his death (1563, when he drowned attempting to help the Protestants in a war on the continent). However, his poem is one of extraordinary importance to Shakespeare. At approximately 3,000 lines, the poem is nearly the same length as the play uncut, and indeed the play mimics the poem at a few crucial junctures, with many of the longer speeches in Shakespeare directly lining up with equivalent passages in Brooke. Alongside this, Brooke departed from the metrical form found in the majority of the poem (iambic fourteeners) for his induction, wherein he uses iambic pentameter in an *abba* rhyme scheme (aka the Petrarchan sonnet). This is, of course, mirrored in Shakespeare, who opens his play with an introductory sonnet of his own (but a distinctly English one at that).

However, despite the similarities of the two texts, Shakespeare diverges from Brooke in a variety of key points, namely in matters of character importance, timeframe, and, most importantly, tone. Brooke keeps his staunch Protestantism on his sleeve throughout the poem, and routinely (especially in his introductory “To the Reader”) goes to great lengths to villainize the Friar of the piece, and to present any vestiges of Catholicism as deliberately untrustworthy and morally

repugnant. Shakespeare does not do this, instead offering a much more subtle portrait of these individuals. Brooke also views his tragic protagonists as morally corrupt and duplicitous individuals, while Shakespeare paints them as human beings consumed by love.

The narrative poem of Brooke also illustrates vitally different views of characters, and changes a few key paths and character arcs. The most notable of these is dear old Mercutio, who appears in Brooke's text only as an early rival to Romeo for the love of Juliet, who is quickly dismissed. Tybalt as well figures not as prominently in the narrative poem, and is killed by Romeus after inciting a rabble rousing riot against the Montagues. Paris as well does not appear until halfway through the poem, instead of from the second scene of the play as in Shakespeare. Benvolio isn't in Brooke's account, and the ending is dramatically different: the Nurse is banished, Friar Lawrence becomes a hermit, and the Apothecary is hanged by Prince Escalus.

Brooke's poem and Shakespeare also diverge a great deal on the usage and nature of time, both in relation to the age of the protagonists and the use of time itself in the text. Brooke's Juliet (16) is three years older than Shakespeare's (13), and his Romeo seems to be the same age, whilst Shakespeare's Romeo is notoriously ambiguous age wise (see "Characters"). The poem also takes place over the course of nearly a year, with a five month gap separating the action of Shakespeare's 2.6 and 3.1 in Brooke's corresponding narrative. Shakespeare compresses this narrative to less than a week for a variety of dramatic reasons (see "Setting"), however, the most impressive aspect of Shakespeare's adaptation is his keen eye for increasing dramatic stakes.

Though Brooke's poem was published twice more before Shakespeare's play (once in 1582 and again in 1587) it has been relegated to a mere historical footnote in the face of Shakespeare's towering masterpiece. Why? Well for starters, it's not very good. More importantly, Shakespeare is able to distill this story down to its most vital elements, ramping up the dramatic tension and increasing the amount of investment we have by drawing truly human figures to inhabit this world.

Other Sources

Alongside Brooke's *Tragical History...*, Shakespeare used a variety of other sources to inform the writing of his play. We have already briefly touched upon William Painter's "Rhomeo and Julietta", but it being primarily a prose retelling of Brooke, I feel no need to go further in depth here. However, I would like to draw your attention to two obscure works each published in the summer of 1596: Thomas Nashe's *Have With You to Saffron Walden* and the now lost ballad *Romeo and Juliet* by Edward White. Nashe was a noted pamphleteer, writer, and sometimes playwright, who was patronized by the same family as Shakespeare (the Carey's). In *Have With You...* Nashe uses a number of phrases which Shakespeare heavily borrows from, especially in the character of Mercutio, who uses a plethora of Nashe phrases (including but not limited to:

“Prince of Cats”, “rat-catcher,” “fantasticoes,” Mab herself comes from *Pierce Penniless*, etc). This was not the first time Shakespeare would borrow from Nashe, nor the last, but is very important contextually. This places the character of Mercutio as a hyper literate individual, on top of all the latest trends and using and reframing brand new phrases and ideas. The lost ballad, however, is an immensely fascinating document whose rediscovery would shine a great deal of light upon the writing of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. As it stands, this is the only other use of the title “Romeo and Juliet” outside of Shakespeare’s play, and that alone makes it worth investigating. We know next to nothing about this text, aside from its title and its entry date in the Station’s Register (August 5, 1596). Ballads often were used as a sort of early modern piece of advertising for popular plays (indeed many contemporaneous Shakespeare plays exist alongside ballad versions of the stories), but ballads could also be used as the source material for these works. Without the original ballad, there is no way of knowing. However, it is a delightful mystery at the heart of this delightful story.

Further Reading:

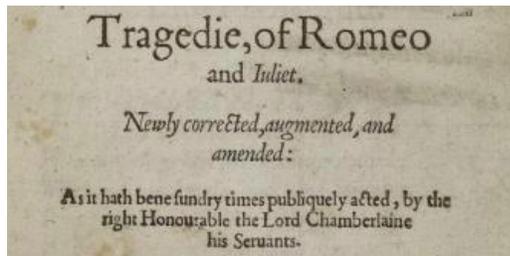
The Divine Comedy by Dante Aligheri

The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet by Arthur Brooke

Have With You to Saffron Walden by Thomas Nashe

Romeo and Juliet, Arden Third Edition, Edited by Rene Weis

History of the Text



“Newly corrected, augmented, and amended:”

Quartos, Folios, and Bears, Oh My!: The Original Texts of Shakespeare’s Plays

Unfortunately, we only have one manuscript copy of a play in Shakespeare’s handwriting in existence currently (*The Book of Sir Thomas More* for those interested). This means that we have to rely on a variety of different texts from the early modern period as our sole source for some of the greatest pieces of writing ever committed to paper. The early modern era is rife with a few major problems for a 21st century reader, chief amongst which being that neither the rules of grammar nor the rules of spelling were standardized during this period. People wrote out words semi-phonetically, and punctuated the same way one speaks. This caused a great deal of consternation for those grammar Nazis in the 18th and 19th centuries, who set about on “fixing” these plays by making them bend to the rules of modern grammar and spelling. This led to the dismissal of many of these early modern texts as “corrupted” versions of the true plays. However, in the 20th and 21st centuries, these books are making a major scholarly and theatrical comeback, as theatre practitioners begin to realize the great deal of clues and guiding principles Shakespeare left for his actors in these original texts (for a more in depth discussion on this, see “Performing Shakespeare”).

Shakespeare’s plays were published in two different formats: quartos and folios. These terms refer to the size of the books, with Quartos being roughly analogous to a modern paperback and folios to modern hardbacks, but this is by no means a hard and fast rule. Approximately half of Shakespeare’s plays were published during his lifetime in Quarto editions, which were usually used to market and advertise older plays which were not as big of draws any more (the oldest play in an Elizabethan company’s repertory would have been no more than five years old). However, these Quartos could also be released to publicize on incredibly popular and enduring works, meaning that the more Quartos published, the more popular the play was. Shakespeare’s most published play in Quarto was *Henry IV, Part 1*, which was published seven times in quarto. Conversely, *Romeo and Juliet* was published four times in Quarto, an incredibly high figure for Shakespeare, showing that this play had already established itself as one of his more instantly popular.

The Folio, conversely refers to the publication of the first “Complete” Works of Shakespeare, compiled in 1623 by his fellow actors John Heminge (or Heminges) and Henry Condell. This book was published with another half of his plays which had never been published before, including *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It*, and *The Tempest*. This book also provides a valuable source for many of the plays which were only published once in Quarto, or who have poor Quarto editions to their name, allowing for modern readers and performers to have a fuller view of what these plays were.

However, this raises a unique point: which of these texts (if any) can we trust to give us the “real” version of the play? Well, in order to do that, we must closely examine the individual publishing history of all five extant versions of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Quarto 1 (1597)

Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* was first published in Spring 1597 as “AN EXCELLENT conceited Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet. As it hath been often (with great applause) played publicly, by the right Honorable Lord of Hunsdon his Servants. LONDON, Printed by John Danter 1597.” Bit of a mouthful as you can see, and also not entirely accurate. John Danter only printed approximately 40% of the play before his shop was raided and impounded for printing unauthorized material, at which point Edward Allde took over and finished the remaining 60% of the play. This version of *Romeo and Juliet* runs a couple hundred lines over 2,000, making it actually relatively plausible that this play was performed in under two hours in the Elizabethan theatre (as that famous prologue suggests). However, this version of the play is rife with many “alternative line readings” to their more famous counterparts. A famous example may be found in the first line of the play, which in Quarto 1 reads:

“Two household Friends alike in dignitie”

Instead of the more famous version we are familiar with. Along with this, many characters are pruned considerably, with the most egregious being that of Juliet. For centuries this copy was dismissed as merely a “bad quarto,” a term derisively used to describe certain early texts of Shakespeare’s plays as memorial reconstructed versions of the original version, often pirated by illicit printing housing. However, this has fallen out of favor in the 21st century, as new evidence has come to light illustrating the importance of these so called “bad quartos” in the world of Elizabethan England. There is still no scholarly consensus as to the “source” of Quarto 1, but three of the leading theories include: a) a “touring” cut of the play prepared by Shakespeare while the company was outside of London (which explains the lessening of the importance of Juliet, since teenage boys on road trips are notoriously hard to deal with), b) an early version and/or draft of the play that fell into the hands of Danter, or c) a memorial reconstruction of the play by a member of the touring company. I tend to fall into the Camp A, supporting this as a

touring version of the script built for the provinces, as this directly coincides with the summer 1596 plague which ravaged London.

Another piece of evidence which helps Quarto 1's case as a legitimate text may be found in its unusually precise and detailed stage directions. Shakespeare's plays are notorious for being incredibly sparse as far as stage directions go, but Quarto 1 of *Romeo and Juliet* has the most specific and exhaustive stage directions of his career, giving a modern reader invaluable insight into the playing practices of Shakespeare's original company when they first performed the play. These stage directions are often used as well to facilitate cuts in the text, which lends some credence to them being used in a touring version of the script.

Regardless, Quarto 1 is the first published version of the play that we have, before Shakespeare himself decided to correct some things.

Quarto 2 (1599)

Published a mere two years after the publication of Quarto 1, Quarto 2 instantly marketed itself as the "superior" version of the text. Printed by Thomas Creede for Cuthbert Burby, the title page itself advertised the play as "newly corrected, augmented, and amended" for publication, and it certainly shows: this version of the play is some 688 lines longer than Quarto 1, a 22% increase, and the two plays only share 800 lines which directly correspond, leaving some 2,200 lines completely different from one version to the next. This is especially interesting in this play as the opening lines clearly state that the intended playing time of the piece was "two hours." However, Quarto 2 uncut runs close to *three hours* in performance. Of course, Shakespeare himself and the Elizabethans as a whole are really bad with keeping track of time, and there are known instances of writers saying similar things and just *lying*, but that's too simple. Quarto 2 is also notable for relying upon Quarto 1 during a few key stretches, namely those involving the Nurse in Act 1 Scene 3, and indeed reprints the text from Quarto 1 exactly in Quarto 2. This means that whoever was publishing Quarto 2 not only had access to Quarto 1, but considered it reliable enough to supplement in gaps in the manuscript they were using for Quarto 2.

This begs the question: where exactly did Creede and Burby get the manuscript for Quarto 2? Quarto 2 was printed based off of Shakespeare's own personal copy of the play, his "foul papers" as it were, which he gave to Burby to have printed in 1599. This can be pretty conclusively proven due to some idiosyncratic spellings that Shakespeare uses in *The Book of Sir Thomas More*, which line up with some idiosyncratic spellings found in Quarto 2. This seems to suggest that Quarto 2 is the most reliable version of the play that we have, right?

Well...not exactly. Even though Burby and Creede were working off of Shakespeare's original manuscript, Shakespeare had TERRIBLE handwriting (ok not actually. He wrote in "secretary

hand” which is just harder for a layperson to decipher than normal longform handwriting) which led to many words being written down incorrectly in Quarto 2 from the manuscript. A key example of this occurs when Mercutio uses the word “pronounce,” which is written in Quarto 2 as “prouaunt” because Shakespeare’s *t*’s and *c*’s, and *o*’s and *a*’s look super similar in his handwriting.

Quarto 3 (1609)

Quarto 3 was printed by a one John Smithwick, and aside from a fun new title (which advertised the play as having been performed by “the King’s Majesty’s Servants at the Globe”) did little to advance the narrative of the different “versions” of this play. Quarto 3 was practically straight reprinting of Quarto 2, keeping a few of its errors but amending some 100 small but significant errors. However, this Quarto is an important reminder to show the enduring appeal of this piece. Again, the average shelf life of a truly “great” play was five years, and here comes *Romeo and Juliet*, a full *thirteen* years after it was originally written still being sold by booksellers. There is even that King’s Men reference, stating in no obscure terms that this play was still being done at the Globe (albeit probably without the same degree of regularity as it was done ten years prior). However, the next two editions of this play are where things get a little crazy.

Quarto 4 (1622)

Though often incorrectly labeled as yet another reprint of Quarto 2, Quarto 4 actually presents one of the most interesting early modern texts that I have ever come across, and throughout my research and work on this production I have come to greatly admire the unknown early modern editor for their unusually thorough care and rigor in the publication and correction of this play. To explain why this Quarto is so unique, we must look at the fact that the publisher did not merely reprint Quarto 2, as they very easily could have done: instead, this editor *compared* all of the available texts, and kept many of Quarto 1’s stage directions (which had been lost in Quarto 2) as well as many of the line readings which Quarto 2 had muddied because of Shakespeare’s handwriting. I cannot overstate how incredibly rare this level of care and attention to detail is for a theatrical text from this era. Theatre was not looked upon as a literary form, it was pop art, and the sustainability of these texts was not even considered. Quarto 4 even corrects many speech prefixes, which were incorrect in previous editions, and are now generally considered to be correct. This suggests that whoever edited this play had a deep affinity and care for the work of William Shakespeare. In fact, we do not even know exactly *when* this Quarto was printed, with 1622 being the best available guess. We know it was published for the same Smithwick who printed Quarto 3, but the amount of autonomy that Quarto 4 retains suggests that a different editor had to have been involved. Whoever it was, I would like to express my most profound gratitude for curating such a wonderful text of this play. Especially considering the what came next.

First Folio (1623)

Oh boy. Time for me to absolutely RAG on some poor intern. So fun gossip time friends. The First Folio of 1623 was the handiwork of five compositors, who took the time to set up the rows of type to print every page of the first Folio. Luckily for us, each of them have certain telling markers that give away which play they worked on, giving us an invaluable piece of knowledge about the process of creating this book. We even know the names of most of them, which is just absolutely bonkers to think about. Ralph Crane is my favorite, and also probably the best, considering that the plays he set are incredibly clean, consistent copies with few errors and incredibly weird but detailed entrance and exit markers. Then there's John Leason.

John...Leason. John Leason (bless his little heart) was a teenage apprentice who came onto the folio project during the late stages of its printing. Yes, a teenage apprentice. This was the first book he ever worked on printing, so naturally the more experienced compositors closely monitored his work-I'm totally kidding. They let him compile literally all of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Titus Andronicus*, most of *Hamlet*, a lot of *Troilus and Cressida* and Act One of *Othello*. And he did it all terribly. All of the plays he set are rife with innumerable errors, whether they be in composition, speech assignment, word choice, entrance/exit markers. You name it, John Leason probably messed it up. And nowhere is this more telling than in *Romeo and Juliet*, whose Folio text is notoriously terrible because a literal child put it together. I could go on and on, but instead I will use just one example: Leason forgot the prologue. To *Romeo and Juliet*. He just forgot it. And kept the Second Chorus. Because he is the absolute worst.

Our Text

To sum up, *Romeo and Juliet* has five incredibly distinct, and each incredibly valid contemporaneous texts for productions to choose from. Each of these offers something unique and vital that can only be captured in each of those individual texts. Which leads to a question every production must answer: which text shall we use?

For our current production, I have spent the past several months going line by line through all five major editions of the play, comparing and contrasting every individual word and punctuation choice used in each edition, eventually choosing the ones found in our script.

On top of this, Cate asked me to freely adapt three more chorus speeches for Queen Mab, which I have done at the top of Acts 3 and 4. These speeches have been taken primarily from Brooke's *Tragical History* and adapted into iambic pentameter from the original iambic fourteeners. Other lines in these speeches come from lines cut from the play proper, and from various contemporaneous works in the era.

I fully expect this script to be filled with innumerable errors, mistakes made by myself, and simply choices that we disagree on. First, I would like to please beg your pardon and apologize in advance for all these. Second, if you wanna change words, cut lines, add lines back in, please feel free to ask me and Cate. This is a living, breathing document, so let's treat it as such and dispense with the whole "Shakespeare is holier than thou" shtick. Anywho, back to the dramaturgy.

Further Reading:

The Book of Will by Lauren Gunderson (a great play that had an amazing dramaturg)

The Second Maiden's Tragedy by Charles Hamilton

The First Folio of Shakespeare by Charles Hinman

Why Has Q4 Romeo and Juliet Such an Intelligent Editor? by Lynette Hunter

Shakespeare's First Folio by Emma Smith

History of Performance



“Our toil shall strive to mend”

Performing in Shakespeare’s London

If we are to take a date of somewhere between 1594 and 1596 for the first performances of *Romeo and Juliet*, we are able to find ourselves at a terribly unique juncture for the Lord Chamberlain's Men, as far as performing spaces are considered. After forming in 1594 out of the remains of the former Lord Strange’s Men, the company decided to set up camp in the playing season outdoors at James Burbage’s The Theatre, the first permanent theatre space in the city of London. Built by James (father of Richard) in 1576, The Theatre had been a highly contentious playing space, in large part caused by James’ legendarily high temper. Seriously. The only reason we have much of the information that we do about The Theatre comes from people complaining that James Burbage had kicked them out of The Theatre. Alongside with being a playing space, The Theatre was a multi-purpose facility for various disreputable events. In 1597, following a performance of the incredibly controversial and politically sensitive *The Isle of Dogs* at the Swan Theatre (written by good ol’ Tommy Nashe and Ben “Throw Me In Prison Twice a Week” Jonson), the practice of doing theatre was literally banned in the city of London because of the political and social ramifications that came with it. Theatre was viewed as a highly dangerous, disreputable, and often counter-cultural act during this time period, and the actors who performed these plays (if they did not have formal patronage) were literally outlaws. Luckily, one of the inner city theatres (the Curtain) reopened, but the message was clear: permanent playing spaces in the city itself were not safe, which led to the majority of the acting troupes moving to the suburbs to get that sweet sweet hit of illegal theatre. But what of The Theatre?

Following the 1597 edict, the Theatre was shut down, partially due to the short term ban and partially due to a major dispute with the landowner. Listen, James hadn’t gotten in a fight for a hot sec, he needed to let off some steam. This left the Lord Chamberlain’s Men without a formal home. In the same year, they moved to the nearby Curtain Theatre, where they probably performed *Romeo and Juliet* the most, with contemporary references referring to “Curtain

plaudits” for the play. They probably stayed there until 1599, when the company built the Globe Theatre in the suburbs from the remains of The Theatre, in the literal heart of the century (someone please make a movie please please). After that, performances continued at the Globe until it burnt to the ground in 1613.

The play (and early Shakespeare as a whole) was especially popular during this time period with young college students, most of whom were studying law. From the anonymous *Parnassus Plays* (contemporary satires about the theatre scene) we know that Shakespeare was viewed as the poet of the “heart-throbbing line”, and was often caricatured as writing silly stories about love that emo boys loved. There’s even a line by one college student in the play about literally hanging a portrait of Shakespeare up in his room to read poems to, proving that terrible dorm decor was not a 20th century invention.

What was it like to perform during this time, let’s say at the Curtain? Well you will often run into a wide variety of answers, with one of the most common being that, “we really don’t know anything about this era or the people who worked in it.”

In actuality, we know an absurd amount of information about performing practices in Elizabethan England considering that this was some highly illegal activity. We know a great deal about the houses in which these shows were done, what the audiences were like, whose plays were the most popular, what sort of special effects were used, how audiences reacted to these effects, and so much more. A lot of this is thanks to Philip Henslowe keeping a really awesome journal filled with all sorts of notes about theatrical productions that he did at the Rose, but even beyond that, this is arguably the most popular theatrical era in history, and one of the better documented eras considering that most of the individuals who did it were a) not very financially well off, b) sorta kinda illegal, and c) left a very small paper trail, especially in the case of Shakespeare’s company. And with some in depth and careful research, some incredible things have been discovered.

As Exhibit A, check out the literal cast list for the first production of *Romeo and Juliet*:

Romeo	Richard Burbage
Juliet	Robert Goughe
Friar Lawrence	Henry Condell
Capulet	John Heminges
Mercutio	Thomas Pope
Prince Escalus	William Shakespeare
Tybalt	William Sly
Nurse	William

	Eccleston
Capulet's Wife	Samuel Gilbourne
Lady Montague	Ned(?)
Samson	Richard Cowley
Peter	Will Kempe

Pretty cool right?

But on a more practical note: performance during this era was much rowdy, rougher, and less “stage-y” than the ensuing generations would suggest. Actors would operate primarily off of cue scripts (aka just a scroll of their lines and their cue, which is where we get the term “role” from), and would rehearse only once before performing the show that evening. Playing companies would perform a robust and large repertory, with one company tallying upwards of forty unique productions with the same cast in a single year. Of these, about 25% would be new plays, and of these new plays half would only be performed once. It was an incredibly demanding process (see “Performing Shakespeare” for an in depth discussion). The Lord Chamberlain's/King's Men would be the primary holder of the rights for the works of Shakespeare up until 1642, at which point Oliver Cromwell and the Puritans took over, and all theatrical presentations of any kind were banned for twenty years.

When the plays were brought back in the early 1660s, William Davenant (poet laureate of England and self proclaimed bastard son of Shakespeare) was a major champion of the Shakespeare plays, and produced a 1662 production of *Romeo and Juliet*, the first since the Restoration of the monarchy. It is also one of the first pieces of theatre criticism we have of Shakespeare, as Samuel Pepys described the play as “the worst that I ever heard in my life, and the worst acted I ever saw these people do.” Yikes. The play during this era and during the 18th century was often edited, changed, and combined with other Shakespeare plays, in order to more accurately cater to “modern” sensibilities. One of the key changes to the play actual still appears in many productions: Romeo and Juliet sharing a few moments together at the end before Romeo succumbs to his poisoning, which does not occur in Shakespeare.

18th Performances

From 1750-1800, the stage was graced with over 400 different performances of *Romeo and Juliet*, as it quickly became the most performed work of Shakespeare's in the period. David Garrick's 1748 production remains probably the most iconic due to Garrick's immeasurable stage presence as Romeo, his changing of Juliet's age to eighteen, and for rewriting the ending, giving himself an ample farewell speech or two. Another popular production of this era was Theophilus Cibber's 1744 production is known for the casting of his fourteen year old daughter, Jenny, as

Juliet, opposite her father's forty-one year old Romeo (yes this is as creepy and disgusting as it appears).

19th Century

The Nineteenth century did not get off to a great start as far as *Romeo and Juliet* concerned, most due to the publication of the *Family Shakespeare* of 1807, a complete works which completely censored everything remotely vulgar in the entire canon. This was and remains, the absolute worst. Alongside that however, the 19th century experienced a great deal of interest in adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet*, with the play being turned into symphonies, operas, and balletic interpretations, all of which would be highly acclaimed. However, the century also featured some iconic performances of the play properly, such as Edwin Booth's 1869 performance at the aptly named Booth's Theatre in New York City.

However, without a doubt the most iconic performance of this period comes in the form of Charlotte Cushman's Romeo, played opposite her sister Susan's Juliet in the 1840s. Charlotte Cushman is widely heralded as one of the most talented and incredible actors of her era, performing as Hamlet, Lady Macbeth, and Viola along with Romeo within a three year stretch. She also put on a version of the play closer to Shakespeare's original than any seen in the ensuing two hundred years. Her performance was rapturously praised, and is widely considered the greatest Romeo of the century. Oh, she was also openly out in the 19th century, which is also really cool, so yeah. Here's to Charlotte Cushman.

20th Century

The 20th century was filled with a wide variety of stage productions (special shout outs to the 1935 Olivier/Gielgud production where they alternated playing Romeo and Mercutio and Ian McKellen's 1976 production at the RSC) but the 20th century was dominated by filmed productions of the play. In fact, *Romeo and Juliet* has often been cited as the most filmed play of all time, whether in its original form or in adaptation. However, two film versions of *Romeo and Juliet* dominated the cultural zeitgeist of the 20th century: the 1968 Zeffirelli film and the 1996 Luhrman production. Both of which are usually cited as being cultural watersheds for young people when each were released, and have inspired rapturous devotion to each film amongst their ardent fanbases. Each of the films plays fast and loose with the text, adapting the story for the medium of film in ways considered both really unique and supported by the text, and ways that, well, aren't.

The Zeffirelli film hues very strictly to the time period of the play, setting the story in 13th century Verona during the historical time period when this actual conflict occurred. The film was also noted for casting two extremely young, unknown leads: 17 year old Leonard Whiting as Romeo (who originally might've been played by Paul McCartney fun fact) and 16 year old

Olivia Hussey as Juliet (who was seriously so good Zeffirelli literally cut her Act IV speech because he was worried it would overshadow the rest of the film. Gah). The film was incredibly popular, and at the time of its release was the highest grossing Shakespeare film of all time. Until....

The release of Baz Luhrman's 1996 *Romeo+Juliet*. Yes, +, because Baz Luhrman is a cool edgy hipster and he wants you to know it. This film version is set in contemporary Southern California, and utilizes Luhrman's frenetic, over the top style to showcase the play for a contemporary audience. This involves many technical/textual decisions to cover up for the play, including making all the guns in the movie "Sword" brand (complete with close up of the brand name to explain why everyone is talking about swords in the 90s) and making "Queen Mab" a sort of generic 90s upper (think x or molly). The soundtrack is also replete with a lot of quintessentially 90s band singing about young love, including Radiohead's "Exit Music (For a Film)" (which is used better in "Shut Up and Dance" from *Black Mirror* don't at me). This release (starring the boi Leo DiCaprio and Claire Danes) is, to this day, the highest grossing Shakespeare movie of all time, and the second best RnJ of the 90s (behind *Lion King 2: Simba's Pride*).

21st Century

Which brings us pretty much up to where we are today. The 21st century has seen a variety of different versions of *Romeo and Juliet*, some where they are seals, some where they aren't seals. There was a widely acclaimed production in 2004 which presented the play in it's "original" pronunciation (early modern English would have sounded closer to Appalachian hillbillies than modern English speakers. Yes, really. And it's hysterical). This production (and the use of Original Pronunciation, known as OP) was lauded for the greater degree of muscularity and boldness in the production: the actors were not going around creating heady, "Shakespearean" performances, but were living and breathing, making bold, muscular choices and thinking on the fly (see "Performing Shakespeare"). However, the majority of the 21st century's history with this play is TBD, which puts us in the wonderful position of being masters of our own destiny, unencumbered by tradition, free to find the play anew for a 21st century audience.

Further Reading:

The Organization and Personnel of the Shakespeare Company by Thomas Whitfield Baldwin

Playing Shakespeare by John Barton

The Elizabethan Stage, Vol. 2 and 3, by E.K. Chambers

Shakespeare's Words by David Crystal

My Life in the Shakespeare Cult by Samuel McClure Taylor

Characters



“Call me but Love, and I’ll be new baptiz’d”

Romeo

The only son of the Montague family and the largest speaking part in the play, Romeo Montague is a series of fascinating enigmas for the play proper. Shakespeare retains the Italian *-o* name ending, rather than switching to Brooke’s Latinized *-us*. This is probably due to the wide variety of rhyming opportunities afforded to Shakespeare with the “o” sound, which he makes extensive use of in this play. Beyond that, Romeo has an extensive group of friends, including his cousin Benvolio, Mercutio (neither Capulet nor Montague), and his servingman, Balthasar. However, Romeo is also especially close friends to Friar Lawrence (who is nearly seventy in the source poem), the local priest. Romeo also quite famously does not share a single line of dialogue with either of his parents in the play, and the only time his father appears onstage with him is after Romeo’s Act 5 death. He begins the play already deeply infatuated with Rosaline, Juliet’s cousin, Capulet’s niece, and probably Tybalt’s sister. However, Rosaline is never given a line of dialogue in the piece, so her thoughts on this arrangement are entirely from the point of view of Romeo.

Romeo is also the source of a great alchemical change throughout the play, which I think is worth noting here. Romeo’s narrative and linguistic arc hews closely to the medieval/early modern practice of alchemy, where lead was “transformed” into gold. However, in the course of the play, we are able to witness Romeo begin with a “soul of lead,” before being attuned to the “silver sweet” sound of his and his love’s voice at night. By the play’s end, Romeo the mortal dies, but Capulet promises to raise a statue of Romeo in “pure gold.” Therefore, we are able to see a Romeo transformed from lead into gold, by the greatest alchemical magic to exist: love.

Romeo’s age has also been a matter of contentious scholarly debate, with the Italian source giving his age as 20 or 21. However, it is unknown if Shakespeare read the Italian, so this is inconclusive. However, in my studies your humble dramaturg has hit upon a pretty interesting piece of evidence, which has helped me a great deal. During Act Three Scene Three, Romeo is in the midst of a speech towards Friar Lawrence, claiming that Lawrence could not understand

what he is going through. Then comes an interesting discrepancy between texts of the play: in the Folio, the line follows as:

“Wert thou as young as *Iuliet* my Loue:”

Then could he speak of this incredible feeling loss. However, in all the Quartos, the line reads:

“Wert thou as young as I, *Iuliet* thy loue,”

This seems a fairly cut and dry case of Leason’s tomfoolery striking again, but I think it lends itself to an interesting idea. In these two lines, both are using the comparison of you to the Friar’s age, and in fact the only difference is the person being compared: in the one, Juliet, in the other, Romeo. So, in the minds of the compositors, the two were viewed as being practically the same age, which places Romeo anywhere from 13-19, but most likely on the younger side, closer to Juliet, which for me scans better with the rest of the play proper and explains a lot of his actions which make less sense for a twenty something to do. However, this is totally a case of actor’s/director’s choice, so whatever you decide can be made to work.

Juliet

Conversely, Shakespeare gives us a more extensive background for Juliet than any of his other characters, and we know more about her and her upbringing than anyone else in the canon. At the age of thirteen, she is far and away Shakespeare’s youngest protagonist, and is also one of his largest speaking heroines (and the holder of the second largest part in the play). Juliet was born on July 31 (Lammas Eve). However, her actual age is never spoken in the play: there are numerous references to her “not” being fourteen, but never to the actual number thirteen. Shakespeare however is acutely aware of the “unlucky” number thirteen, as it figures prominently in her death: Juliet speaks thirteen lines exactly before stabbing herself. Fourteen is also the number of lines in an English sonnet, and considering the deep and abiding love of poetry in the play and the symbolic nature of Romeo and Juliet’s initial meeting sonnet, this also is highly important. But enough about numbers.

Juliet’s name is also the source of much interest. Shakespeare has anglicized her name from the more Italian “Julietta,” but also keeps the name Juliet to mirror the July setting of the play (see “Setting”). However, by keeping her name distinctly English, Shakespeare is going to great lengths to ensure that his audience would view Juliet as a normal person, a person that anyone in his London audience could meet in their day to day lives, and not someone removed from English existence. He does not do the same for Romeo, keeping him distinctly Italian.

Juliet the Leo was nursed by the Nurse alongside the Nurse's daughter Susan, and seems to have also spent a good deal of time with the Nurse's husband as well while her mother and father were away at Mantua (a neighboring town some 20 miles away). Juliet is shown to have extensive knowledge of Greek and Latin mythology from her complex and multi-layered references in the play. Much like Romeo, Juliet is also the only child of the Capulet family, but it is suggested that Juliet had siblings who died as infants. Unlike Romeo, Juliet is not given a wide network of friends to interact with, but instead Shakespeare takes the second half of the play to keenly illustrate her family and home life. Due to Elizabethan England being incredibly oppressive, she is more strictly confined than Romeo, unable to roam the streets due to the nature of her environment. However, unlike all of the authors prior to him, Shakespeare takes a keen interest in the autonomy of Juliet: she, even more than Romeo, anchors the play, and by the end of the play it is Romeo who is defined through the eyes of Juliet. Juliet is constantly in control of her own destiny, and we see a world wherein Juliet sets the parameters not only of her relationship with Romeo, but we see a Juliet who defines her own story and her own destiny.

Despite her extreme age, Shakespeare provides no confidants of her own age for Juliet, and therefore she remains an independent being, who turns to the audience to express her innermost fears, thoughts, ideas, and desires, developing a deep relationship between the hearers of the play and the actor playing Juliet. Juliet is also terribly interesting in the fact that she speaks exclusively in verse (save for a small line of prose at her introduction), making her one of the most staunch verse speakers in the canon. This may have much to do with the idea of verse being the most "truthful" sounding form of poetry (see "Performing Shakespeare") and this inherent truthfulness draws us in and makes us trust Juliet wholeheartedly.

Friar Lawrence

Friar Lawrence (Fra Lorenzo in the Italian) is a member of the Franciscan order of monks, a religious order built on austere living and teaching centered around helping the poor. Indeed, the "bare-footed" Franciscan terminology appears repeatedly in Brooke. Lawrence acts as a figure outside of the Capulet/Montague balance of power, and in the play holds the third largest part. An individual given to many sermons and homilies throughout the work, Lawrence is universally respected in the community, both in Shakespeare and within the source material. Shakespeare makes him Romeo's major confidant, but in the source poem it is said that all people of renown and esteem went to Lawrence for advice and counsel. We see him interact with a fellow Franciscan, Friar John, in Act Five, but aside from that and the ending we do not see Friar Lawrence outside of his role as minister and advisor towards the play's titular couple. Again, the startling contrast between Brooke's sexually rambunctious and disreputable friar and Shakespeare's Lawrence is quite pronounced: the Friar of Shakespeare deserves to be "still known as a holy man." Lawrence also has extensive knowledge of herbs, flowers, and plant life (which itself may be a knowing nod to his Franciscan roots) and throughout the play mentions

multiple different medicines and potions which he makes out of the various plant life around his secluded home by the Church. Marjorie Garber describes the Friar as “all authority and no experience,” which is an interesting take to meditate on and use/throw away. Also of important note: when Juliet comes to the Friar in Act 4, he easily could have protected her and kept her at his Cell using his priestly powers to prevent the family from intervening. Instead, he comes up with his whole sleeping potion plan.

Capulet

Capulet (often misnamed Lord Capulet due to some fun 18th century mistakes) is the leader of the Capulet family, father of Juliet, uncle of Tybalt and Rosaline, and husband to Capulet’s Wife. Cappelletti in the Italian, Capulet occupies the fourth largest speaking role in the play uncut. In the source for Shakespeare’s play and in the play itself, it appears that both the Capulets and Montagues are not nobility themselves, but rather higher members of the bourgeois class.

Throughout the Quarto 1 stage directions, he is referred to as either “Old Capulet” or “Old Man” nine times, and based upon his discussion with his cousin at the feast scene in Act 1 Scene 5, appears to be at least in his middle 50s when the play is taking place. He is surprisingly quite trusting of Juliet in 1.2, saying to Paris that within “her scope of choice, Lies my consent and fair according voice,” meaning that he would support whoever Juliet wished to marry. He also is reticent to marry Juliet, and asks Paris to wait for her to turn sixteen before considering further marital talk. However, this position shifts following the death of Tybalt, allowing for a myriad of choices for the actor.

Capulet’s Wife

Though many modern editors follow Nicholas Rowe in referring to her as “Lady Capulet,” this is actually incorrect, as it implies that she has a higher title than she actually possesses. In Shakespeare, his use of “lady” refers to her gender, and throughout the stage directions she is either referred to as Capulet’s Wife, Wife, or Mother. She tells Juliet that she was already her mother by the time she was fourteen, although at the end of the play refers extensively to her old age, which provides an interesting choice for the actor: either she is joking in 1.3, or she was this barely pubescent bride, which certainly casts her relationship with Capulet in a different light. Capulet’s Wife also has a terribly awkward beginning to 1.3, where she begins to have a private conversation with her daughter before calling in the Nurse, providing a rich opportunity for an actor to define a great deal of this character/her relationships early on in the play. Quick sidebar: most marriages between non-noble families occurred in the late teens or early twenties during this period, and not as commonly assumed, during the teenage years. This was mostly a practice in the nobility and monarchy, so if (and that IF is entirely the choice of the actors/directors) the Capulet family has a tendency of marrying younger women towards older bachelors, this may suggest an air of striving for nobility, by simulating those practices. But again this is getting to me editorializing.

Nurse

The Nurse (who is actually called Angelica in 4.4, so she does have a name) is the companion of Juliet for the first half of the play, and served the function of her wetnurse and now acts as a leading figure in the running of the Capulet household. The Nurse is often described as being older and even “ancient,” and says herself that she has only four teeth. However, the Nurse also had a child Juliet’s age, Susan, who died along with the Nurse’s husband before the events of the play took place. Alongside this tragedy, the Nurse is greatly affected by the death of Tybalt, who she describes as “the best friend she ever had.” Whether this is a statement of fact or the depth of her grief speaking, or a third option, is up to the actor. The Nurse is also highly protective of Juliet, and indulges in a great deal of gossip with “the prettiest babe that e’er [she] nursed.” However, she also uses a great deal of jokes, wit, and sarcasm to mess with Juliet, as shown in 2.5. Marjorie Garber describes her as “all experience, and no authority,” which is an interesting take to meditate on and use/throw away.

Tybalt

Cousin to Juliet, nephew to Capulet and his wife, and probably the brother of Rosaline, the fiery Tybalt first appeared as “Tebaldo Cappelletti” de Porto’s telling of the story, which was later changed to “Tybalt” by Brooke. Capulet’s Wife describes him as her “brother’s child,” which could mean that he is not a Capulet by blood, but by marriage (although of course she could mean brother-in-law, Shakespeare does this a bunch but it’s actor’s choice). His title “Prince of Cats” comes from Nashe, who applies the title to an unrelated character named Tybalt in his text, which is probably a reference to the cat “Tibert” from the folkloric tale, “Reynard the Fox.” Shakespeare, however, takes the opportunity to graft this title onto the character which, coupled with Juliet’s Leo star sign, adds a distinctly feline flair to the Capulet family. Despite his limited stage presence, Shakespeare greatly expands the role from Brooke, using the public shaming of Tybalt by Capulet in 1.5 to justify Tybalt’s vengeful streak against Romeo in Act 3, and indeed it is his murder of Mercutio and death at the hands of Romeo which serves to rip the play from the light rom-com it was into the world of tragedy.

Benvolio

Romeo’s cousin and nephew to Montague, Benvolio is a character entirely of Shakespeare’s invention. The name “Benvolio” derives from the Italian “*ti voglio bene*,” which can be translated as “I love you,” or literally “I want good will to you,” a wonderful descriptor of Romeo’s supportive and loving friend. We first see him in Act 1 Scene 1, trying to impose the order of verse speaking on the prose speaking rabble rousers, trying to bring about peace in the face of Tybalt. Benvolio is close friends with both Romeo and Mercutio, and spends a significant

portion of his stage time trying to free Romeo from the depression that he has found himself in. He is last seen defending Romeo in Act 3 during his lengthy speech recounting the fight between Mercutio, Tybalt, and Romeo. From this point on Benvolio disappears from the play, creating a mystery for the actor and the audience. In Quarto 1, Montague has a line which reveals that along with his Wife's passing, "Young Benvolio is deceased too," suggesting that he also died of a broken heart at the passing of his friend. However, this line only appears in Q1, so it's ultimate provenance resides in the hands of the performer.

Mercutio

Originally called Marcuccio in the Italian, Brooke describes Mercutio as possessing oddly cold hands, and is presented as being a rival to Romeo for the love of Juliet.

Shakespeare was having none of that. Instead, Mercutio becomes Shakespeare's most drastically refashioned character from the original, creating a character well worth his name. The name "Mercutio" calls to mind the word "mercurial," which is defined as "one born under the influence of the planet Mercury...a lively, quick witted, or volatile person." Which is a dead ringer for the larger than life, rambunctious Mercutio. A kinsman of both Prince Escalus and the County Paris, Mercutio is able to exist outside of the Montague/Capulet rivalry, being invited to the feast of Capulet's and being incredibly close friends with Romeo and Benvolio. His character and person is brimming with quips, references, jokes, puns, and word games, and the "Queen Mab" speech is one of my personal favorite moments in the entire canon, an incredibly enlightening look into the psyche of this man. Mercutio is also very quick to fight, as shown in his conversation with Benvolio at the top of 3.1 and his challenging of Tybalt at the midpoint of the scene. Mercutio is one of Shakespeare's most wholly original and unique creations, a character outside of societal norms, one who is so filled and brimming with life that we cannot help but fall in love with this being that remains fundamentally unknowable. "A visor for a visor," Mercutio retorts when grabbing his mask in 1.4, seemingly implying that his face is a mask in and of itself. My favorite quote about Mercutio comes from Dryden, who related an anecdote that Shakespeare was so in awe of Mercutio, that he had to kill him, or be killed by him.

Paris

Sir Paris or the County Paris, as he is referred to in the text, is a nobleman and related to both Mercutio and Prince Escalus. Being a Count, Paris is a member of the nobility (though about middle level as far as hierarchy goes) and probably owns a decent tract of land (the modern term *county* comes from the word which referred to the land owned by a count). Paris is the main suitor for Juliet, and evidently has been trying to convince Capulet to let the two marry repeatedly ("But saying o'er what I have said before" 1.2). Paris is described as a highly desirable bachelor by both Capulet's Wife and the Nurse in 1.3, and Romeo himself describes

him as “noble” after realizing that he killed him in Act 5. Romeo’s references to Paris’ “youth” and his calling him “boy” do not necessarily mean that Romeo is older than Paris: the first is used to express fellowship, whilst the second is derisive, and is used in a similar sense by Tybalt in Act 3 scene 1. However, he is described as “young” by Capulet’s Wife in 1.3, so it is most likely that he is around the same age as the other “young” characters in the play: Romeo, Benvolio, and Juliet.

Prince Escalus

The name “Escalus” only occurs once in Shakespeare’s play, and that is in an early stage direction, so the audience never hears the Prince’s actual name. However, the name Escalus actually is the first name mentioned in Brooke’s poem, and Shakespeare uses the name again in *Measure for Measure*. The name probably punningly references “the scales” of justice, since the two would have been pronounced similarly. The name derives from Bartolomeo della Scala, who ruled Verona when the story is set, and was the patron of, you guessed it, the saddest boi of them all, Dante Alighieri. In the play, the Prince comments on the recurring nature of the family brawls (the word “three” in this instance is not necessarily a literal three, but can also just refer to “countless”), and throughout the play acts as the executor of justice. He is also a relative of Mercutio and Paris, although we do not know how closely related these three are, as the Prince only refers to them as “kinsmen.” The seeming head of both political and judiciary power in the play, Prince Escalus is an incredibly powerful and important individual, and it is the Prince’s banishment of Romeo which separates the two lovers of in Act 4.

Montague/Montague’s Wife

Two characters combined in our cutting for clarity/time, Montague leads the Montague household and is the parent of one son (and presumably only one child), Romeo. However, Montague is also the Uncle/Aunt of Benvolio, and actually speaks with Benvolio far more often than with Romeo, who famously never shares any lines with either of his parents. In the play proper, Montague’s Wife disappears after 1.1, only to be revealed to have died of a broken heart following the banishment of Romeo in 5.3. Montague derives from Montecchi in the Italian, and like Capulet probably comes from the upper crusts of the bourgeois rather than being a member of the nobility themselves.

Balthasar

Romeo’s servingman, who gives the Nurse the rope ladder Romeo later uses to go *ahem* meet Juliet in Act 3, and who also brings Romeo the news of Juliet’s “death” in Act 5. The name is original to Shakespeare, as this character was referred to as “Peter” in Brooke, and the name “Balthasar” occurs only once in the play proper. He is obviously greatly trusted of Romeo, and, aside from the Friar, seems to be the only person Romeo told of his love affair with Juliet.

Peter

A member of the Capulet household, Peter also acts as a personal assistant of sorts to the Nurse in the uncut play. He was for sure played by the noted clown and comic Will Kempe, because two stage directions refer to the actor “Will Kempe” entering instead of the character, Peter. Kempe was the clown in residence of the Shakespeare company, and was thought to have played Bottom, Dogberry, Launcelot Gobbo, and many others for the Lord Chamberlain’s Men.

Samson

A retainer of the Capulet household, whose name derives from the Biblical hero of the same name, known for his superhuman strength. His braggadocious nature and rapport with Gregory set the first scene of the play.

Gregory

Another retainer of the Capulet household, and the more seemingly knowledgeable one of the pair. Gregory is a distinctly English name (again Verona is pretty much just Shakespeare’s London, but they couldn’t call it that for a whole host of reasons. See “Setting”). However, it would also probably call to mind the Catholic popes of the same name, and would thus reinforce the distinctly Catholic worldview of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Abraham

A Montague retainer, whose name never fully appears in the text.

Apothecary

A seller of medicines and drugs in Mantua, who has evidently fallen into deep poverty and has taken to the selling of illegal substances to get by over the course of the play.

Queen Mab

A character invented for the production, so who/what Mab is is mostly going to be a decision between Cate and the actor. However, here I will provide some context for the role of Mab in the story, and also the historical context of the character itself. Here Mab is given the Chorus speeches which originally were given to an unnamed chorus, alongside the three extra choral speeches compiled for this production. Shakespeare evidently set out to write chorus speeches for each act of the play, as he would later do with *Pericles*, where he gives the character of Gower (an actual poet who wrote the source Shakespeare used) a sort of narrator role throughout the story, guiding it towards conclusion. The writing of Mab for this piece was inspired by the existing two choruses of *Romeo and Juliet*, and retain their English sonnet form, whilst also drawing influence from the Chorus of *Henry V* and the aforementioned Gower.

Mab herself is a pretty unique creation to Shakespeare, a “midwife” to fairies who is described in detail by Mercutio in the extraordinary 1.4 speech. This figure seems to serve also as a midwife for mortals, helping to birthe dreams for all people, and draws heavy influence from English folklore. The fairies of this folklore were not benign figures, but played various pranks and devastating tricks on mortals in this realm. Shakespeare probably took major inspiration for Queen Mab from Thomas Nashe’s pamphlet *Pierce Penniless*, where he coined the character of Sammab, whose description I quote from below:

“The spirits of the earth keep, for the most part, in forests and woods, and do hunters much noyance, & sometimes in the broad fields, where they lead travellers out of the right way, or fright men with deformed apparitions, or make them run mad through excessive melancholy, like Ajax Telamoniuss, & so prove hurtful to themselves, and dangerous to others; of this number the chief are **Samaab** and Achymael, spirits of the east, that have no power to do any great harm, by reason of the unconstancy of their affections.”

A fascinating description, from which Shakespeare creates Queen Mab. The figure could also derive from the Celtic mythological ruler of the “little people,” Meadhbhbh. Also of note: the title “Queen” does not necessarily imply that Mab is a figure of royalty. The term had multiple meanings and connotations during the time period: the word originated as another word for woman (so Queen in this case could just be a gender qualifier), but later split into two meanings. One of these refers to an elevated member of royalty (our modern idea of a Queen) and another refers to a “quean,” which was common slang for a prostitute. So a wide range of options ya got there.

Further Reading/People I Stole From:

Invention of the Human by Harold Bloom

Pierce Penniless by Thomas Nashe

Romeo and Juliet, Arden Third Edition, Edited by Rene Weis

Setting



“In fair Verona where we lay our Scene”

Fair Verona...? Location and Shakespeare

So here's one of the dirty little secrets in Shakespeare: even though he sets literally every non-history play (except for *Cymbeline*, *King Lear*, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*) outside of England, all of Shakespeare's plays are kinda...*super duper* English, in setting and in style. A great example in our play are the household servant names: Peter, Samson, Gregory, Abraham, and Balthasar. Two of these names are Biblical, but the other two are super duper not Italian. I mean, how many Italian peeps do you know named Greg? However, Shakespeare uses the backdrop of foreign settings in his plays for a variety of reasons. Firstly and most importantly, big different places and exotic locations sell tickets, and even though they operated primarily without any physical set (see “Performing Shakespeare”), this exoticism still brought something unique to the stories that he was telling and trying to tell. On the other hand, by setting his plays far away from his contemporary time and place, he could avoid running afoul of any sort of political readings in his plays or works. For example, it would be major bad news bears if an Elizabethan or Jacobean playwright wrote a play about killing the current monarch, but what if you wrote a play about killing a monarch 2,000 years ago and in Italy? Best seller. Although this also wasn't a hard and fast rule (Shakespeare got into trouble over how politically sensitive *Richard II* was, partially because of Elizabeth I's self professed affinity for Richard II was, and also because the Essex rebellion totally tried to use this play to start a full on rebellion in 1601 (it's such a goofy story literally they expect the ENTIRE town to come out in support of Essex but no one shows up it's hysterical). So, by setting his plays in geographically remote locations, Shakespeare is able to comment on uber contemporary societal issues without running afoul of any major socio-political factions of the times. Pretty cool, right?

But how much *did* Shakespeare know about the locations where he set his plays? Even though he set a third of his plays in Italy, this answer is going to differ drastically depending on who/when you ask, because this question is (quite unfortunately) tied pretty heavily into the whole authorship debate, which I won't get into here. However, because this question is tied to such a politically sensitive issue, any research one way or the other is vigorously attacked by the other party, making it a virtual landmine to try and actually figure some stuff out. A scholar

seems to confirm that Shakespeare's Verona directly geographically correlates with the real place? A squadron of fifteen other scholars will come down and rip apart any evidence and prove it moot. A scholar tries to claim for certain Shakespeare never left England? Fifteen scholars swoop down with a bunch of uber obscure references from the plays that definitively "prove" that he left the country. Believe you me, it is a whole mess and a half. For our sake and for time, I am going to try and focus on what can definitively be proven, without treading too far one way or the other.

So Verona. It's a city Shakespeare uses twice as major settings in his plays (*Two Gentleman of...well, Verona, and this one*) and mentions it in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Apart from this, however, as far as major, PLOT RELEVANT, geographic landmarks go, the city could just as well be the London right outside Shakespeare's theatre. Shakespeare ties the city intrinsically with lovers, and his setting the play under the pretty much autonomous rule of a "prince" upholds a common Elizabethan view of Italy being primarily made up of a series of unrelated city states. However, Verona is interesting because it only existed under this type of autonomous rule from 1260 to 1387 (which does in fact fall under the same period of time as the alleged feud mentioned in Dante, so this very well could be Shakespeare being INCREDIBLY well informed and correct to his source or Shakespeare taking the common wisdom of his day and age and applying it to a city which it doesn't work towards, but did over two hundred years ago. This is the sorta chicken or the egg game you get into a lot with the arguments mentioned above, but I just wanted to show y'all an example that directly ties into the play. This entire packet could be about these things. Carrying on). This sort of time frame also gives us a really unique answer as to why these two families are fighting. Shakespeare notoriously does not give a reason for this feud, but instead lets it linger in mystery (which also helps the play be adaptable to any setting, as this conflict could be any and every type of conflict). However, during this era of Italian politics, many families would engage in violent conflicts over the political future of Italy, with some families siding with the strong, secular government of the Holy Roman Emperor, and others who preferred the city-state arrangement with all bending to the authority of the Pope. This led to many armed conflicts in the streets to decide the political destiny of the country. Of course, Shakespeare's feud is famously apolitical within the text of the play itself, so whether or not this is super helpful or super not is entirely up to the reader.

Another major event in the play which ties it to its setting is the famous feast of the Capulet family in Act 1 Scene 5, which is, of course, a masked event which allows Romeo and company to not be detected by the Capulets (which doesn't go over well, since apparently his voice is uber recognizable to Tybalt? This was handled in an interesting way in a 1980s RSC production, where they had Romeo and the Montagues be of a different social class than the Capulets, given Romeo a less refined accent and thus allowing Tybalt to pick him out. But also this is looking at it from a scholarly perspective: I read some reviews that said this was very silly in performance).

Masked balls are a staple both of Italian culture and of Shakespeare's Italian comedies, providing the perfect opportunity for cases of mistaken identity, open flirtation, and disguises. He uses this also in *Much Ado About Nothing* and in *Love's Labor's Lost*, but neither of these feast scenes have the same sort of intoxication that *Romeo and Juliet's* provides.

Masquerade balls gained a great deal of popularity in Italy during the 16th century, probably stemming from the masked traditions of the Venetian Carnival, which celebrated a 12th century military victory but turned into an excuse to throw a major party in the streets. However, with the decline of the Venetian trading empire, the popularity of these masked parties soon went out of fashion, and now are primarily a kitsch item.

Street life within the play, with its frequent breaks into acts of extreme violence, also offers a unique perspective into the world that Shakespeare himself was inhabiting. So remember how I said that actors were sorta outlaws during this time period? Well, I wasn't kidding. This was also often a literal fact of life, as can be attested to the amount of writers and actors who would literally murder each other in the streets outside the theatre. Shakespeare's friend Ben Jonson killed the actor (and other friend of Shakespeare) Gabriel Spenser in a street duel, William Knell (the second most popular actor of the 1580s) was killed out on tour, and Christopher Marlowe, was killed at the age of 29 in a bar fight in Deptford. So the Verona streets where people are literally fighting to the death over silly arguments and things, was literally the life of an actor in Shakespeare's London. Despite living in these conditions, there is no evidence that Shakespeare ever fought in one of these brawls, which is INCREDIBLY telling about the character of the writer of these plays, and one could argue that *Romeo and Juliet* also serves as an insider's meditation on the street violence that is literally going on outside his window.

Time

Shakespeare is noted for his, let's call it, flexible use of time. That is to say, Shakespeare did not know how to use a watch. *Othello* and *Twelfth Night* are the most egregious examples, where literally both plays simultaneously take place over three days, and three months. And this happens in 99.999% of his plays. The one exception?

Romeo and Juliet, which actually has one of the most precise time frames of any play in the period. In fact, this time frame is so precise, that we can literally date the action of the play nearly to the hour. This is helped entirely by two references: the first, to Juliet's birth being on Lammas Eve (July 31), the current date being some "fortnight and odd days" away from Juliet's birthday, and due to the (cut in our script) reference to the day of Romeo's purchasing of poison being a "holiday." This evidence means that the date Romeo buys the poison from the Apothecary is July 15, which is, of course, Amazon Prime Day. Kidding. It's actually St. Swithin's Day, which is a meteorological holiday, similar to Groundhog Day, which seeks to

predict the next forty days of weather. If it rains on St. Swithin's Day, according to tradition, it will continue to rain for the next forty days straight. With the "glooming peace" brought on following the death of Romeo and Juliet, Shakespeare showers Verona in eternal mourning.

Timeline of the Play

Sun. July 12	Mon. July 13	Tues. July 14	Wed. July 15	Thurs. July 16
Morning 1.1	Before Dawn 2.1, 2.2	Dawn 3.5	Dawn 4.5	Midnightish 5.3
Afternoon 1.2	Dawn 2.3	Afternoon 4.1	Afternoon 5.1	Near Dawn Epilogue
Evening 1.3	9:00am Juliet sends the	Evening 4.2		
Night 1.4, 1.5	Nurse to get Romeo 12:00pm 2.4, 2.5 Afternoon 2.6, 3.1 Evening 3.2, 3.3 Late Night 3.4, Romeo comes over	Night 4.3		

This is a stunningly exact timeline, especially for Shakespeare, and it's incredible that he manages to stick to it for the entire play, considering how easy it is for one minor thing to-

He totally messes it up doesn't he?

Yep. With literally one line. The Friar tells Juliet that the sleeping potion will last for "two and forty hours," which is interesting for a number of reasons. Number one, this number never occurs in the source material, and in Brooke the period of time given to her is literally twenty-four hours, which fits into this timeline perfectly. Number two, this number occurs in all five contemporary editions of the play, meaning that this number was very specifically in Shakespeare's head when he wrote it. Thirdly, this number makes no sense in the context of the play, and has thrown every Shakespeare scholar into a whole darn fit to try and make it work in the context of the play, when 42 hours just simply does not work, no matter how you read the

play. Juliet clearly takes the sleeping potion at night, so even under conservative estimates, she's waking up at like 6am, which doesn't work for when Romeo shows up and everything goes down. So, this leaves scholars in a sort of a tight spot: most either ignore this, or try to explain the time jump away and push the end of the play to early morning, which sort of ruins the dramatic mood of the moment (not to mention what's literally said in the scene). Of course, there is a third option: the Friar could just be, I dunno, wrong. About the amount of time she will be under. And realizes it after she's left, and decides to go pick her up at the right time. Of course, we could also just change this line to "four and twenty," which scans the same way and keeps the meaning intact for us. Of course, the audience won't notice that forty-two hours doesn't make logical sense, but this is a director's/actor's choice situation if there ever was one.

Lammas Tide and St. Swithin's

St. Swithin's Day

July 15

The feast day of St. Swithin, who was Bishop of Windsor from 852 to 862. At his death, he requested to be buried outdoors. However, a hundred years later, his body was moved indoors, which, according to legend, led to a massive storm. This led to the tradition around St. Swithin's Day, which is first recorded in 13th century manuscripts.

Lammas Tide

August 1

Lammas Tide is a holiday celebrated in the English world, celebrating the wheat harvest, which is the first agricultural harvest of the year. It was customary for practitioners to bring a loaf of bread to church on August 1, or for tenant farmers to bring their first harvested wheat crop to their landlords. The holiday is also celebrated as part of Gaelic and Pagan rituals as Lughnasadh, which marks the first harvest of the year, and also acts as one of the eight sabbats in the Wheel of the Year, marking a major day in the Neo-Pagan calendar. The holiday is also rife with allegorical importance for Juliet, as she is born before the harvest, and dies before she is able to harvest the best days of her life.

Further Reading:

Asimov's Guide to Shakespeare by Isaac Asimov

Performing Shakespeare



“Subtle”

Hiya friends! So this right here is just going to be a little brush up on some FAQs about performing Shakespeare that I think are worth addressing from a dramaturgical standpoint! This is just going to be basic stuff (e.g. verse vs prose and why, punctuation, thou vs. you, etc). If you have further questions please feel free to ask, or if you would like me to go on about what it was like performing during Elizabethan/Jacobean England I would love to talk about it (originally I was going to include it here, but I felt that this was already way too long, so just ask me in person if you are curious). Anyway, onwards

What is verse?

Verse is the most common form that Shakespeare writes in, making up on average about 60-70% of his plays. *Romeo and Juliet* is actually 88% verse, making it one of the most verse-happy plays in the canon. When people talk about verse and Shakespeare, they are usually talking about iambic pentameter, which refers to a line of poetry made up of five beats of two syllables (the first unstressed, the second stressed). An example of this would be

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

Even though this is a form of poetry, Shakespeare chooses to write in this style because it is the closest form to actual human speech. In life, you may often catch yourself accidentally speaking in iambic pentameter. I tend to do it all the time I speak. That right there was a line of iambic pentameter. This manner of speaking has (to steal from Giles Block) the “sound of sincerity.” Even if a character is lying when using iambic pentameter, they are *sounding* truthful and honest in doing so. However, Shakespeare often breaks this pattern with an eleven syllable line, where the last syllable is unstressed. An example of this would be

To be | or not | to be | that is | the question

This is called an
This type of line

amphibrachic ending.
suggests that the thought

a character is having is too great to be contained in the ten syllables, and so spills out past that mark. This occurs in moments of great uncertainty (see the aforementioned line in the soliloquy), and at moments of extreme emotional distress. Or when a character has too much to say. Or when a character is excited. Or scared. Or nervous. The great thing about all of these silly rules is that Shakespeare breaks them all the time, so it is up to the actor to justify why these things are going on. This can be a massive help in understanding the emotional landscape of a character at a certain moment.

Prose

Whenever a character does not speak in a form of poetic verse, they speak in prose. What is prose? Well, it's the language of everyday life. This whole dramaturgy packet is in prose. Human people tend to speak in prose. For centuries there was (and really, is still) this very classist definition of prose vs. verse in Shakespeare, that "the upper class people use verse, and the poors use prose." This is demonstrably false, and can be disproven, because nearly every major character in Shakespeare speaks in prose at some point. Hell, in this play alone, Mercutio (who is related to nobility) speaks pretty much the entirety of their part in prose. So, why do certain characters use prose? Once again to steal from Giles Block (*Speaking the Speech* is the most important book ever written on acting Shakespeare), prose is the sound of something being hidden, of saying something to hide something else. Often, this comes when characters are joking. For example, courtly fools such as Feste and Touchstone speak the majority of their texts in prose, as their job is to create jokes, to be one step ahead of everyone else around them, deliberately hiding themselves behind the jokes and stories they tell. Conversely, characters may use prose when in an altered state, such as when Hamlet pretends to be "crazy" and when Lear loses his grasp of reality. Prose can also be used to hide feelings, to lie, to divert attention. It is not per se the sound of *insincerity*, but often hides truths that characters would like to keep suppressed.

Rhyme

Ah, good old fashioned rhyme. So Shakespeare uses a ton of rhyme in this play (it is the rhymiest of tragedies). Shakespeare's attachment to rhyme is actually really interesting, because it was super out of vogue with the other writers of his day and age, who looked at rhyme as being decidedly "old fashioned" and "fake." However, Shakespeare utilizes rhyme in a variety of unique ways. For starters, many characters are in fact aware that they are rhyming, and are doing so to make a point, to win an argument, or to shut up a conversation. They "choose" to rhyme to prove how much more clever they are than their opponent, and to "win" these verbal battles. Other characters, however, are often unaware of rhyming. Shakespeare uses rhyme as well to express unrequited desire, to make us believe false promises, or to illustrate discovery moments. These "bolts from the blue" (thank you Giles) are moments where characters are struck by these life changing discoveries, discover a decision, or learn something in the moment. Rhymes were

often the tool used to express truth in folk sayings (“an apple a day, keeps the doctor away”) and these sayings *feel* true, in much the same way that these unintentional rhymes do. It is the work of the actor to discover *why* they are rhyming together.

Of course, *Romeo and Juliet* one ups the whole rhyming thing, with one of the most gorgeous passages in literature, and most jaw droppingly cool moments in the lay: when Romeo and Juliet first meet, they improvise a perfect sonnet together.

Romeo

If I prophane with my unworthiest hand,
This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this,
My lips two blushing pilgrims did ready stand,
To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.

Juliet

Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much
Which mannerly devotion shows in this,
For saints have hands, that Pilgrims' hands do touch,
And palm to palm is holy Palmers' kiss.

Romeo

Have not Saints lips and holy Palmers too?

Juliet

Ay pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.

Romeo

O then dear saint, let lips do what hands do,
They pray (grant thou) lest faith turn to despair.

Juliet

Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake.

Romeo

Then move not while my prayer's effect I take.

Beyond adorable, right? This moment goes beyond rhyming- Shakespeare is literally showing that Romeo and Juliet complete each other, both literally and metaphorically, by having them finish each other's sandwiches here. They are aware of the "game" they are playing (setting up the rhymes, rhyming this with them) but do all this swiftly, because their hearts and minds are perfectly in sync. They each start another sonnet that the Nurse interrupts immediately after they kiss here. They are one after this moment, until the end of the play. Was not this love indeed?

Forms of Address

So all those thou's, thy's, and thee's are annoying, right? WRONG. They are actually super helpful for understanding your character's relationship to the people and world around them.

So during this time, the English language had multiple forms of saying what amounts to the words that amount to basically "you, yours, y'all," but the difference comes in intention. So the "basic" rule is that a character uses the word "you" formally, and "thou" informally, but that doesn't really cover all of our bases here. Let's dive in.

So "you" is used between two people either of equal rank, or when addressing someone of a higher social rank than yourself.

"Thou," conversely, is usually used by someone in a higher rank addressing someone lower than them (hence why all those kings and queens thee and thou people constantly), or used to insult someone (hence why all those fighters are thou-ing each other).

BUT

There's a big ol' exception there. Thou, thee, and thy can also be used between two people who are incredibly close (lovers, best friends, parents, deities and the supernatural are usually referenced with this too) and is a sign of intense trust, familiarity, respect, and love. Hence why Romeo and Juliet are coooooonstantly thee thou and thy-ing each other.

Punctuation

Before you roll your eyes and skip over this, this is actually the most important part of this entire section, so please please please read this.

Are you still here? Cool. Oh and it's on the 42nd page, perfect.

Brief background: when Shakespeare wrote, the rules of grammar and spelling were not standardized as they are now (hence why everyone spelt their name a thousand different ways).

However, this lends a really interesting question: why then, did people still use punctuation, especially in scripts?

This is an important reminder that, no matter what your English teacher says, Shakespeare is meant to be heard aloud and not studied in a classroom. This is fun, alive, rambunctious THEATRE, and was not even meant to be read. It was meant to be heard. So, the punctuations are clues given by Shakespeare about how he wants what is written to sound onstage. He writes his plays sort of how a conductor writes a piece of sheet music, with rests, quarter rests, crescendos and decrescendos littered all over the place. This is why I was so adamant on individually going through and replacing all of the punctuation with Shakespeare's "original" punctuation, because it is an invaluable tool to the actor. Below is a short guide.

•	End of thought
,	Emphasize this word (sometimes a catch breath)
:	Emphasis, Change of tactic, shift in thought, or a physical action sometimes
?	Question, surprise or shock (acted as both a ! and ? for the Elizabethans, so they can be both)
!	!
CAPITAL LETTERS	Emphasize this here

This is where I chime in and say that when I say emphasis, this emphasis is always light. It's never "to BE or NOT to BE that IS the QUESTIon." As he said himself

"Speak the Speech I pray you, as I pronounc'd it to you trippingly on the Tongue"

Be quick, but don't hurry. These characters think AS they speak, not before. Their lines are often stream of conscious, they think out loud, and react on the line. When the audience hears Hamlet considering the murder of his uncle, this is the sound of a person actively working through their thoughts out loud, with the people around them (the Elizabethans had no concept of a fourth wall, so all those speeches alone onstage are directly for the audience). Oftentimes when editors use modern punctuation, these characters can sound like stock characters delivering well thought

out, lawyerly arguments. But using the original punctuation, they are real people, living and changing in each moment, letting the thought shape them as they go.

However, we must never forget to breathe. There are conflicting opinions on this next bit, so I will try to summarize both.

When to Breathe??????

One school of thought believes that breath can ONLY come on the punctuation, with a period being a full breath, a comma being a catch breath, and a colon also serving as a catch breath. This serves the mighty purpose of keeping the sense of the line together and in order.

Conversely, another school of thought stresses taking a short, “topping” breath at the beginning of each new line, which can add a naturalistic flavor to the speech. It is never a pause (pauses are very rare in Shakespeare) but it is a breath. For example, let’s look at Hamlet, 3.1. In the first school of thought, the speech would go

To be (CATCH BREATH) or not to be (CATCH BREATH) that is the Question (catch breath)

Whether 'tis Nobler in the mind to suffer

The Slings and Arrows of outrageous Fortune (catch breath)

And so on. Whilst the second

(topping breath) To be, or not to be, that is the Question:

(topping breath) Whether 'tis Nobler in the mind to suffer

(topping breath) The Slings and Arrows of outrageous Fortune,

Where each topping breath is **not** a pause, but a moment where Hamlet finds the next word that they are looking for.

Both have merits and demerits, but in the end, breathe where you want. If this helps you, great. If not, oh well. The most important thing is to say the words and know what they mean.

Saying the Darn Words and Knowing What They Mean

Which brings us to those pesky words. So it is vitally important for an actor of Shakespeare to know exactly what every word they say means specifically. In many cases, words in Shakespeare's day had different meanings than today, or double meanings and puns that actors must look up and understand, so that they know what they are saying onstage. I am leaving my Lexicons in the rehearsal room through this process (this is a vital tool-the dude looked up and defined every word in the canon for Pete's sake). Please use these and use me if you have absolutely any questions.

Punk Rock

I often find it a little bit overwhelming when I think about all the "rules" when it comes to Shakespeare. However, what has always helped me is this quote that Mark Rylance uses: "to live outside the law, you must be honest."

In the end, do what's true, what feels honest, and that's what will read onstage. These have been super helpful tools for me as an actor and I hope you find them helpful as well, but if not, who cares? Just have fun.

Further Reading:

Playing Shakespeare by John Barton (or just watch the TV series on Youtube, it's good)

Speaking the Speech by Giles Block

My Life With the Shakespeare Cult by Samuel McClure Taylor

Secrets of Acting Shakespeare: The Original Approach by Patrick Tucker

Hidden Track

This is just a little space for me to say thank you. I really truly hope this was at least somewhat helpful to your understanding of the play, of Shakespeare, the whole shebang. As I am sure you can tell, I really adore this play and this writing beyond words, and I hope you do as well, or at least have some fun working on this beautiful story. If you have any further questions, I will be in rehearsal whenever I can, and/or feel free to contact me. Merde on a wonderful process.

Love and Mercy,

Will