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# William Shakespeare as a Purveyor of Re-Productions: Understanding Shakespeare's Plays as Profitable Products

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William Shakespeare as a Purveyor of Re-Productions:  
Understanding Shakespeare's Plays as Profitable Products

Giannina Ong

Canterbury Thesis

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# Prologue

*Romeo & Juliet* is so immersed in our culture, education, and ideologies as the tale of woe involving two star-crossed lovers; we all know the Capulet's and Montague's feud, the love that overcomes both Romeo and Juliet, and the problematic situation this places our two protagonists in, but more importantly, we understand all of this to be the product of William Shakespeare's genius. This assumption of literary genius makes it difficult to see the play as anything other than a beautifully tragic love story. However, we could instead examine *Romeo & Juliet* as an archetype that has been replicated throughout time, a trope repeated for over two thousand years, and a play that Shakespeare rewrote in order to find that there are fiscally motivated reasons that this plot resonates. That revelation paired with the fact that, nowadays, we are committed to Shakespeare's version, replicating his words over and over, leads us to ask: why is that?

Fiscally, the play is no doubt a valuable commodity that yes, adds to the reputation and prestige of William Shakespeare as well as productions similar to it—think Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996) and the Broadway production, *West Side Story*—but also is inherently valuable in its ability to delight paying audiences. Everyone knows the story—heck, some avid fans even know the play line-by-line—so why does Shakespeare's rendition persist beyond that of prior versions and perhaps, of current and future iterations. Furthermore, back in Shakespeare's time, plays were bought and sold between playhouses, but today, his plays are easily reproduced with lack of copyright. This ability to easily reproduce a cultural commodity plus the recognition of an iconic creator, i.e. brand, (see more in the

Biographizing section) creates a way of earning money. But what we don't realize is that Shakespeare himself utilized this strategy of reproducing/repackaging a known story for a brand, i.e. the theater as entertainment, to profit. (Moreover, and beyond the scope of this project, we find that technology is taking us beyond the page and the stage when it comes to entertainment so why are the written plays of Shakespeare still recognized as canon and proliferated as texts in our institutions of education?)

Because the pretext and cultural knowledge of Shakespeare's play can cloud our judgement of its true value financially, we seem to have lost the ability to analyze the play in its time as a product of culture. Often times, analysis of Shakespeare will focus completely on the text devoid of historical context and on the stage, modern renditions will re-place Shakespeare's original vision in our day and age or in alternate realities. The lack of context in order to generalize as well as the adaption for the modern audience allows for Shakespeare to continue to proliferate as a canonical text; investigation of the methods of dissemination of Shakespeare into a concrete part of our culture is very interest but outside the scope of this project. This project focuses on historical and economic context that has been lost through our translation based on the premise that Shakespeare was not the first, nor last to tell this story of star-crossed lovers, yet it is his version that continues to proliferate itself over 400 years later. Therefore, an understanding of his strategic adaptation of plot and modal transformations/actualization of the story will provide insight about the oft-overlooked and disregarded economic prerogatives at play in this quintessential piece of literature and in most pieces of literature.

Although we think of Shakespeare as the originator of these works of art/genius, we must reconsider his creative process as a business savvy venture. It may be easier to envision that what

Shakespeare did is akin to a droplet of water landing in a pond. (This thought experiment is not made to strip Shakespeare of his title as literary genius or artist, but to force us to revise our view of literary creation and acclaim in order to further understand an artist's motivations as a human being who is materially part of our world.) The water was not his creation to begin with and the ripple effect of his plays through time is neither his doing either. While there is no way to go back to 1595's London and witness the first ripple of water, we can trace the water's source as well as the resulting ripple effect. This project aims to point out the water's source and the form/repackaging/strategic placement and aims through which the water is delivered by Shakespeare. By understanding the changes made from the original plot and the tropes known to the society at the time, we can better understand what Shakespeare transformed, emphasized, and humanized in order to appeal to a mass audience varied by social strata, gender, and personal reaction/connection.

This project, "Recasting William Shakespeare in The Business of Playwriting," works to reinvigorate the value gained by reading Shakespeare by:

- Beginning with espousing the importance of reading Shakespeare as a practical businessman first, instead of the mythological literary genius that men decades and now centuries after Shakespeare marketed and herald him as. Although this is not the primary focus of this paper, it is an important framework that begins to enable us to shift our presumptions of the canonical text, *Romeo and Juliet*.
- The next section sets the backdrop, i.e. the environment, in which Shakespeare used an emerging profession to recreate literature and runs through the "ancestry" of the star-crossed lovers archetype.

- Finally, the main section of this project identifies and explicates particular loci where Shakespeare transformed the original text in order to target and appeal to the audience of the times; in particular to *Romeo & Juliet*, this includes that of the creation of suspense, tragedy in relation to comedy, and an interrogation of love at first sight.
- This project concludes with a quick review of other proof of audience recognition within Shakespeare's corpus that can lead to further investigations and close readings of other texts, Shakespearean or not, for financial motivations.

All of which will help readers of Shakespeare come away with a greater business appreciation of his work and possibly force readers to think about the economic constraints and incentives shaping literature.



## “Biographizing” as Business

William Shakespeare has been cast, for what seems to be centuries, as the preeminent literary genius from across the pond: the Bard, the playwright. His plays are famous for their plots, their tragedy and comedy, and for their language; he, himself, is famous for inventing words, for creating such a convincing performance of man on stage (see Bloom, 1998), and for being the man from a small provincial town who made the big time in London. After studying the man and his work for what seems like centuries, we have elevated Shakespeare to a level of literary greatness; his name known around the world, even in the “African bush” (see Bohannan’s famous anthropological article, 1966). In fact, his plays — typically *Hamlet*, *Romeo & Juliet*, or maybe even *Macbeth* — end up being on the reading lists of all high school students, much to their dread. But why is Shakespeare so disliked by the “commoner” and raised higher and higher into elitism? Perhaps, it is time to recast Shakespeare not as artist incomparable, but Shakespeare, the man. While certain biographers attempt to tease out the life of Shakespeare, which I argue is a marketing plot in itself since most of his biographies are steeped in presumptions or an intrinsic, yet invalid relationship between author and work, there is a different side to Shakespeare that can be extrapolated from his work by understanding Shakespeare as a businessman.

It is fair to say that Shakespeare’s plays have become elitist and for some, snobby and exclusionary. Ironically, this is very contrary to Shakespeare’s original intents for his productions (which the next section discusses in detail). This disparity between Shakespeare’s work and the modern day consumer has resulted in an upsurge for information about

Shakespeare, the man, in order to draw readers back to his texts. There are two reasons this connection between man and myth is rapidly developing in our world: First, the growing language barrier created by the constancy in replications of Shakespeare's exact language may lead us to pursue avenues of interpretation outside of the text that we can understand. Second, due to the trickle-up effect Shakespeare's corpus of work has experienced from his time to our culture, biographers seek to remind us about the man behind the fame, i.e. to humanize the genius, but still while lauding his humble origins. Thus, we now search for attributes within the plays that can be tied to Shakespeare's personal life experiences or influences in order to direct our reading of his capabilities and his texts. However, this is a circular argument: for in order to repopularize Shakespeare, we are distancing Shakespeare from his text by attempting to find him within them. This strategy fails to provide a factual and realistic understanding of the literary maneuvers that have made Shakespeare successful throughout time and in his time, and perhaps suggest that biographies are an economy in their own right instead of an account made to investigatively progress our understanding of the literature at hand.

Centering authorship studies and biographies around the products created can be problematic and dangerous. Although it does happen today with biographies of Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg created because of the revolutionary products and services they created, basing the lives of said men completely and solely through a close reading of their products would be quite strange. Unfortunately, with the lack of evidence of Shakespeare's life, especially in certain time periods of it, this phenomena of biographical branding has been occurring for longer than we realize. Shakespeare, the man, was transformed into a mythos, a product of culture that can be economically transacted upon. In this section, I will begin to outline how the branding of

Shakespeare, creating the mythos of the Bard, was not his own doing but instead a marketing strategy utilized by various characters, i.e. contemporaries, scholars, and biographers, throughout history in order to profit. This section serves as a preliminary background that underscores the importance of an economic critical reading of Shakespeare's work and could be further explored, but is not the focus of this research.

## The Author's Interpretation

For many the quest to record a complete and moreover accurate biography of William Shakespeare is the Holy Grail of literature. Being that we proclaim Shakespeare to be the greatest playwright and possibly, author, of all time, the purposes of these biographies have varied; however, many — such as Jonathan Bate's *Soul of The Age* and Stephen Greenblatt's *Will in the World* — seem to indicate that the man's life crossed over into his work. That is to say that we would find a semblance of the man within the work, yet many biographers, especially Bate, often use quotes from his plays to describe parts of his life or alternatively to paint a portrait of Shakespeare's relatively unknown life, almost claiming that Shakespeare's life is not only intertwined with his work, but also that his work can be interpreted through his life and his intentions. While the author's intents are important, we may be aggrandizing Shakespeare by believing that his intentions were to be, as Ben Jonson proclaimed, "Not for an age, but for all time.". As simple as it seems, Shakespeare's intents may be more practically financial than that of creating legacy/branding.

Today, one reason for "biographizing" Shakespeare is to find a deeper interpretation of his plays: as if by understanding his background and how he came to be the playwright his plays

would take on a very specific and final meaning. These scholars are seeking to close out the ambiguities that allow a modern dramaturg to color in the lines of Shakespeare's plays. However, the lines that Shakespeare wrote on their own were enough to captivate audiences then and now; therefore, the specificity sought by those scholars may perhaps be inconsequential. Shakespeare's plays for centuries (in various forms as well as for a variety of purposes and audiences) and during his time have stood quite well on their own. Scholars, such as James Shapiro, who wrote specific study which focused on a year in which Shakespeare lived and the world in that period of time, seem to be taking on less of a new critical approach (i.e. finding meaning in the text itself) and insist on historical criticism. All the while, forgetting to place Shakespeare in his own historical contexts: that his texts stood, yes, supported by an author of budding renown (i.e. the "upstart crow") — but not one with as much renown as today (i.e. the Bard) — more so stood because of an audience who attended the theater and paid to watch Shakespeare's plays.

Jonathan Bate attempts to extrapolate Shakespeare the man from his work in *Soul of the Age: A Biography of the Mind of William Shakespeare*. The book's front panel reads:

"One man in his time plays many parts,  
His acts being seven ages."

In this illuminating, innovative biography, Jonathan Bate, one of today's most accomplished Shakespearean scholars, has found a fascinating new way to tell the story of the great dramatist. Using the Bard's own immortal list of a man's seven ages in *As You Like It*, Bate deduces the crucial events of Shakespeare's life and connects them to his world and work as never before.

Here is the author as an infant, born into a world of plague and syphilis, diseases with which he became closely familiar; as a schoolboy, a position he portrayed in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, in which a clever, cheeky lad named William learns Latin grammar; as a lover, married at eighteen to an older woman already pregnant, perhaps presaging Bassanio, who in *The Merchant of Venice* won a wife who could save him from financial ruin. Here, too, is Shakespeare as a soldier, writing *Henry the Fifth's* St.

Crispin's Day speech, with a nod to his own monarch Elizabeth I's passionate addresses; as a justice, revealing his possible legal training in his precise use of the law in plays from *Hamlet* to *Macbeth*; and as a pantaloone, an early retiree because of, Bate postulates, either illness or a scandal. Finally, Shakespeare enters oblivion, with sonnets that suggest he actively sought immortality through his art and secretly helped shape his posthumous image more than anyone ever knew.

Equal parts masterly detective story, brilliant literary analysis, and insightful world history, *Soul of the Age* is more than a superb new recounting of Shakespeare's experiences; it is a bold and entertaining work of scholarship and speculation, one that shifts from past to present, reality to the imagination, to reveal how this unsurpassed artist came to be.

With the purpose of the book being a "fascinating new way" to tell Shakespeare's story, Bate breaches the knowable but purports these imagining as a tool to captivate readers and of course, sell copies of his book. Even claiming to biographize the "mind" a man seems to be a bit of a stretch in reality, since no one can really ever know exactly what another person thinking, even less so when there are no personal records of Shakespeare to account for. Bate's methodology is to "[Use] the Bard's own immortal list of a man's seven ages in *As You Like It*, Bate deduces the crucial events of Shakespeare's life and connects them to his world and work as never before." In his prologue to this biography of a mind, Bate begins correctly by stating that the reason for our astonishment and praise for Shakespeare is that "[his] body of words, characters, ideas, and stage images [...] have remained alive for four centuries because of their endless capacity for renewal and adaptation," but is mistaken in attempting to plaster Shakespeare's life into the infamous soliloquy "the Seven Ages of Man" which the melancholy Jacques delivers in *As You Like It* as a philosopher of life (Bate xvii). This speech is useful as evidence of Shakespeare's modal understanding, i.e. how theater functions as a presentation in relation to the performance of life (see gender performance, Butler), but not in understanding his own life, because Jacques is not perpetuated to be a god-like character who is all knowing and is in fact, taken lightly

throughout *As You Like It*. The creation of an author, the character, cannot be understood to be the author himself, especially not one who has no direct ties to the author at all, i.e. in other narratives first-person could collate the narrator of the story and the author.

A concept in marketing is answering the consumer's needs and wants; the marketer's job is to identify the wants/needs of an consumer and create a strategy by which the consumer will become aware of the product that satisfies their wants/needs (see an introductory marketing textbook). This need to find the author in their work may be especially relevant in the time that Bate was writing: during this period, there was much scrutiny about the true authorship of Shakespeare's plays; since then, the fear that Shakespeare was not Shakespeare has now dissipated and this need to verify Shakespeare's identity has calmed a bit allowing for scholars to even theorize that Shakespeare co-wrote plays with his contemporaries (see the *New Oxford Shakespeare*, 2016 where Christopher Marlowe was newly credited alongside three Shakespearean plays).

The Elizabethan audience wanted for much, both bread and circuses, in Shakespeare's time, which will be discussed in later sections. However, understanding Shakespeare as a consumer of his time will help us better use his personal life to understand the purposes of his work and how his plays worked as a product of culture. Stephen Greenblatt's *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* takes this angle of historicizing Shakespeare by attempting to fill in the blanks of his life with cultural contexts. The marketing pitch for Greenblatt's book, which received much hullabaloo because it purported Shakespeare's Catholic sentiments (i.e. that he taught at a Catholic school in his "Lost Years") which may or may have not spread to his work in blatant disregard of the Queen's religion Protestantism (through which

we find Greenblatt's intentions come into question, but that could be a book in itself) is as follows:

Stephen Greenblatt, the charismatic Harvard professor who "knows more about Shakespeare than Ben Jonson or the Dark Lady did" (John Leonard, Harper's), has written a biography that enables us to see, hear, and feel how an acutely sensitive and talented boy, surrounded by the rich tapestry of Elizabethan life; full of drama and pageantry, and also cruelty and danger; could have become the world's greatest playwright. A young man from the provinces—a man without wealth, connections, or university education—moves to London. In a remarkably short time he becomes the greatest playwright not just of his age but of all time. His works appeal to urban sophisticates and first-time theatergoers; he turns politics into poetry; he recklessly mingles vulgar clowning and philosophical subtlety. How is such an achievement to be explained?

*Will in the World* interweaves a searching account of Elizabethan England with a vivid narrative of the playwright's life. We see Shakespeare learning his craft, starting a family, and forging a career for himself in the wildly competitive London theater world, while at the same time grappling with dangerous religious and political forces that took less-agile figures to the scaffold. Above all, we never lose sight of the great works—*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and more—that continue after four hundred years to delight and haunt audiences everywhere. The basic biographical facts of Shakespeare's life have been known for over a century, but now Stephen Greenblatt shows how this particular life history gave rise to the world's greatest writer. Bringing together little-known historical facts and little-noticed elements of Shakespeare's plays, Greenblatt makes inspired connections between the life and the works and deliver "a dazzling and subtle biography" (Richard Lacayo, *Time*). Readers will experience Shakespeare's vital plays again as if for the first time, but with greater understanding and appreciation of their extraordinary depth and humanity.

While discomfort, i.e. "a man without wealth, connections, or university education" may be a motivating factor in Shakespeare's life, it is impossible "to see, hear, and feel [the] acutely sensitive" boy who becomes the man wonder of London or to claim that Shakespeare sought fame past his own time, since he is virtually nonexistent in his plays, although many scholars attempt to link his character to certain plays. It seems outrightly silly to use a man's life to conduct literary analysis when so much of his life is not concrete facts, of which pessimistic

biographers claim would only fill a page, and instead educated assumptions and guess work (i.e. Greenblatt's "imagination" that constantly preludes chapters in which he guesses and paints his reader pivotal moments of how Shakespeare became the genius playwright). What is up for grabs is the historical environment, the temperament of the audience that Shakespeare, a businessman, could have played to in order to achieve his own ends.

What has occurred to Shakespeare's life is ironically similar to what Shakespeare himself did to the lives of well-known historical figures. The man, Shakespeare, of today is more of a brand than a person, one that attracts thousands of visitors to his birth and death place of Stratford-Upon-Avon and finds his influence haunted and overshadowing our culture. His works, brilliant as they are, are unable to be understood in such a way that one could overcome his influence, because of the mythos of the man and how we choose to interpret his work as "for all time" instead of "for an age." This is not to lessen the significance of Shakespeare's life or work, but to properly contextualize that praise of "for an all time" that Ben Johnson lauded upon Shakespeare to a date only two years after Shakespeare's passing in 1616. Through understanding Shakespeare's dramatic methods exemplified through the recreation of classic tales and common knowledge stories, we might better understand our own consumerist tastes for literature and the humanities, making our discipline more viable in this capitalistic world. However, this is a pattern that has continued for longer than we may perceive.

## Marketing a Mythos

The biography of Shakespeare, the man, has been researched and famously written by several scholars such as Stephen Greenblatt, James Shapiro, and Jonathan Bates to various ends.



As noted above, Greenblatt uses Shakespeare's time teaching in a Catholic preparatory school to insinuate that Shakespeare was covertly Catholic and infused this religion into his plays, an illegal practice in the Protestant and Elizabethan England. Shapiro takes snapshots of time, particularly 1599 and 1606, in order to provide readers with a better picture of the world Shakespeare lived and created but draws from Shakespeare's background to add to the setting in which the genius was born. Bearman, recently released a wildly different biography in which he tracks Shakespeare's money, which paints the portrait of an entrepreneurial spirit guided by the losses of his father: an artist with the knowledge that his work would not make his fortune but instead keen business maneuvers would. Bearman's portrait, although different, still reinforces the rags to riches narrative or the social mobility that the arts can provide which we hold in high regard when discussing Shakespeare. All these portraits only enhance the modern day enigmatic mythos of the Bard. Creating a mythos of a famous person is not a modern phenomenon; in particular to Shakespeare, the legend that surrounds him has been built over centuries.

Basically the gist of Shakespeare's background or myth consists of a father who struggled to gain wealth in front of his son and townspeople, a wife who was much older than he was, leaving Shakespeare the actor who successfully writes plays for a living but is little known to be part shareholder and actor of The Globe. Raised in Stratford-Upon-Avon, a two hour modern day train ride and one hundred miles from London, young Shakespeare grew up in a world away from busy London streets filled with the groundlings to the high class society he later attracts to the Globe theater. His father, John Shakespeare, married Mary Arden, his mother, in order to gain class and wealth. Shakespeare himself did not marry for money, but instead married Anne Hathaway, who was seven years his elder (yet, eventually outlived him) at the young age of

eighteen as an expectant father. With her, he had a daughter and later twins, Hamnet, whose death at the age of eleven many scholars believe inspired Hamlet, and Judith. Bearman writes of not only of John Shakespeare's debts, but also his attempt to secure a coat of arms, which Shakespeare fulfills later in life which may seem to say that the Bard did regard wealth and social prestige as important which could be potential motivators for his eventual products. While his "lost years" would indicate this better, Shakespeare's choice to go into acting and playwriting could not have been simply a jovial calling as actors were not officially recognized and playing was illegal unless sponsored by a patron. Shakespeare clearly yearned for an exciting life beyond the pastoral Stratford-Upon-Avon and gained his fame, prestige, and wealth through acting not as an altruistic artist, but for utilitarian motives. As I will investigate further later, Shakespeare does not write his own plays from the ground up, but creates texts from primary source texts and instead uses the public sentiment and needs to shape his work. His work is branded with the anxiety of his time, as opposed to the anxiety of influence literary critic Harold Bloom suggests it carries for all future writers. However, the mythos of the pastoral boy turning into the London Bard seems to carry on an excitement akin to the stories of country Americans, such as Brad Pitt or Harrison Ford, bumping a ride to Hollywood and getting a big break. These stories sell consumers on products.

In fact, the first biography of Shakespeare was written after Shakespeare's passing by Nicholas Rowe in order to sell the first illustrated edition of the First Folio in 1709, nearly a century after his death. Nicholas Rowe states himself in the biography that its purposes is "a kind of respect due to the memory of excellent men, especially of those whom their wit and learning have made famous" (Holland 247). However, Rowe's "biography" of Shakespeare was created

more out of public interest, and a marketing tool to sell copies, than to uncover his life's purposes and ability to write. However, it began the tropes of Shakespeare's life that many hold true today: Shakespeare, an uneducated man, was able to overcome the simplistic life, son of a glover and townsman, he educated himself and after several years found himself to be the infamous playwright audiences in London loved. This mythos of Shakespeare, the man, became part of the legend that we prod, herald, and poke at in order to attempt to break the sphere of influence, or at least better understand the sphere of influence that Shakespeare has created for us. Especially in this day and age, we live in an age that equates true artistry with poverty and strife intertwined with a sense of Romanticism and that to be capitalistic is selfish for a true genius is born from discomfort, or from an anxiety (see Bloom, 1973). However, it should be noted that much like Shakespeare lauded historic heros of the past as realistic humans of the stage, we too create and reaffirm Shakespeare in that image with every new biography and writing focused on his life.

Ultimately the true "branding" of Shakespeare seems not to be done by himself but by others. Even in Shakespeare's time, James Shapiro argues that although the number one bestseller of 1599 was *The Passionate Pilgrim*, an unauthorized collection of Shakespeare's sonnets of which some are not even authentically the Bard's, the possibility that Shakespeare wished for his plays to be at the forefront of the printing press were slim, as the publishing industry was ruled by the booksellers and not the authors. Again, seven years after his death, publishers came up with the *First Folio*, whose various editions are owed to the numerous printers of the time. Later in 1769, David Garrick decided to stage a Shakespearean Jubilee in his birth and death place of Stratford-Upon-Avon in order to draw tourists to the town a hundred

miles outside of London. This is not to say that Shakespeare's plays themselves are not the source of praise and that good branding of the man has allowed them to become cultural products, but to say that the author's biography and image have been used for their own business practices and that Shakespeare's true intentions and genius may be mistaken to have more foresight and that he was indeed for an age, unlike his playwright rival Ben Jonson suggested in his poetical acknowledgement to Shakespeare writing the infamous branding that "He was not of an age, but for all time!"

This is to say that Shakespeare's personal life did not impact his work in ways evidenced in his products, his plays, as people suggest and scholars such as Bate yearn to establish. Especially, when it comes to Shakespeare's life, these biographers struggle to fill in his missing years, the "lost years" of 1578-82 and 1585-92. The first period of time being from when he left grammar school until he married Anne Hathaway and the second period of time is right before he played and wrote with the Chamberlain's Men. Scholars attempt to put together what may have occurred to the aspiring actor during those spans of time as if this will answer the question of Shakespeare's brilliance as a playwright. This endless search seems to be the Holy Grail of Shakespearean knowledge, as if whatever he did or whoever he met during those lost years is owed credit for his eventual products. Those lost years, however, should not be singled out as containing the Fountain of Literary Genius. While I will not contest or argue the authorship of Shakespeare's works, I believe the work credited to him is of his own volition and what should be highlighted from his personal life is the more measurable and conceivable goals he might have had based on his upbringing and personal motivations. Perhaps, this search for the lost years of Shakespeare is just the next trend in continuing the legacy of Shakespeare the brand, a

stone still left unturned.

## For An Age, Marketed for All Time

Yes, it is indeed a miracle, and/or a work of brilliance, that Shakespeare's works were written for their time, yet last the test of time. Still, it is especially strange to evangelize Shakespeare as legacy-thinking when scholars such as James Shapiro and Peter Holland point out that Shakespeare never intended his plays to be printed (Shapiro 2005, Holland 1997). The lack of evidence denoting Shakespeare's want to be known beyond the stage and beyond his age seems to suggest that Shakespeare's intentions were not of personal legacy and that the man cannot be found not his plays — or even sonnets, which some believe to be autobiographical. Therefore, if not for the sake of interpretation, then, what good is understanding the life of Shakespeare? I argue that instead of understanding his dramaturgical strategy through elements of his background, knowledge, and schooling, that his purposes will show us what kinds of motivations and purposes drove Shakespeare to be a “businessman” in that he sought to answer the needs of his audience, the consumer, for his own material (and immaterial) gains. Of course, this is not the scope of my project, but this puts a new spin on all the biographies made from right after Shakespeare's death up until recently; these new biographies continue this branding: a myth about the man who wrote a corpus of work which led to the immortality in print and legacy that Shakespeare has today which may have not been the intentions of the artist himself.

What we could possibly find in biographies about Shakespeare's life is that Shakespeare was in dire need/want of certain life goals (such as the ability to purchase a coat of arms and prove economic security, see Greenblatt 2004) and was able to achieve those through giving the audience what they had not seen before, what they could understand, and what they ultimately

wanted in order for Shakespeare to become a man who could return to his birthplace to retire and die comfortable in the second of largest property in his hometown of Stratford-Upon-Avon.

# The Mise-En-Scene

Historical economic context then is necessary for understanding Shakespeare's intentions and marketing strategy. The mise-en-scene is a dramaturgical term for setting the play; similarly and probably more familiarly, in the culinary world, the preparation (i.e. the washing of the vegetables and herbs, the cutting of the fruit, etc.) is the mise-en-place. The mise-en-scene of the theater is all that makes you believe the play, that prepares to immerse you in the scenes; this includes the costumes, the hairstyles and makeup, the backdrop, the props, etc. For us, our mise-en-scene will be facts that contextualize theater going in London during the time of William Shakespeare.

## For Elizabethan Theater

Shakespeare came into this scene at a turning point for the industry. While Stephen Greenblatt hypothetically envisions a young Shakespeare watching, enjoying, and being inspired by travelling theater companies that came into his small hometown of Stratford-Upon-Avon, the theater industry Shakespeare flourished in was one of permanent residences (Greenblatt 2004). Under the female monarch, Queen Elizabeth, the occupation of playing had been at the same time professionalized while still being "outlawed." Previously, travelling companies had patrons who sponsored them and their travels; now, while playing companies still needed patrons in order to play, they preferred to play to the massive and congregated population of the city of London, yet also needed to play outside of the city. Theater was professionalized by the

installment of permanent playhouses just outside the city limits to which the audience would come to see the plays instead of the players going to the audience in small towns and villages.

The business of theater was, at the time, highly criticized. Going to a theater was a form of bawdy entertainment and theaters were often placed next to bear baiting – a spectator sport in which animals, typically dogs were pitted against a wild bear – arenas. This may seem strange to us, as theater has become a form of high entertainment often equated with that of the ballet or symphony. To Elizabethan critics of the theater, the argument against spending money on this form of entertainment, which only became legitimized in the 1590s, was as such: the audience was paying to be deceived and to view an illusion (Gurr 9). Andrew Gurr writes that metatheatricality, the act in which the play itself would acknowledge the creation of illusion including the example of the boy players as women characters, was a relationship in which audience “were rarely allowed to forget that they were engaged in a con-game in which they were willing participants” (Gurr 8). Aside from the lack of pure realism, the illusion of the play was constantly interrupted by the presence of faulty and amateur mise-en-scenes, but also the audience themselves. These theaters or playhouses were regarded as “houses of boudrie” as William Harrison labelled them in his critique of the first playhouses opening in 1576 and equivalent for some to brothels or at least bear-baiting events (Gurr 15).

One of the saving graces of theater was that occasionally the players could be summoned to court to put on a production. Gurr notes that the plays put on in court were not different than those seen in the playhouse, except for the matter of price. In terms of price, the admission fee to see a play was a penny “for [which, the man] had equally the choice of Shakespeare or the baiting of bulls and bears” (Gurr 18). Returning to the criticism of theater at the time: even if it



was a minimal cost, the idea of paying for an experience was akin to paying to gamble except that in the case of theater there would be zero chance at getting any return. This would be similar to contemporarily buying virtual items on a computer or mobile app game; it would seem to the materialist to have no true value other than that of a period of time in which one is entertained. It might also be important to remember that the invention of the printing press in the earlier century had allowed for the proliferation of material books and knowledge in a physical form. This is especially important to the common knowledge of the *Romeo & Juliet* tale as we will see. Still, the fact that the Queen could and would summon the players as easily as a Londoner could go watch a play at a theater indicates the value of this entertainment being that it appealed to both the high and low classes.

Despite all the criticism about the value of playgoing, the theater was still a popular source of entertainment which allows for the possibility of metatheatricality being a consumer want. This is to say that viewing a narrative that seems real but is knowingly not may be the main draw of these plays, in particular Shakespeare's. For if one were to attend a play for simply the same reasons as a bear baiting, i.e. revelry and socialization, then why would Shakespeare's productions and his company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, be singled out as extraordinarily popular and profit turning.

## For An Age: The Elizabethan Audience's Pretext

The forbidding prologue found in *Romeo & Juliet* is not the only reason the London audience would expect a tragic ending. For us, the pretext that construes our knowledge of the fate of the young lovers is Shakespeare's play; however, for the audience of the time, their

pretext of this tragedy was from the prior novellas chronicling the tragic fates of two lovers. Beginning in classical times, the concept of wall-separated and ill-fated lovers was chronicled by Ovid as part of the *Metamorphoses* as the tale of Pyramus and Thisbe. That critics of Shakespeare's time remarked that Shakespeare had "small Latin and less Greek," as the 16th century Ben Jonson wrote as an insult to Shakespeare's schooling, and modern day such as Stephen Greenblatt's acknowledgement of the teaching of Latin and Greek may indicate that Shakespeare had at least some classical knowledge. In "Pyramus and Thisbe," the wall almost becomes a character in itself; whereas, there is no physical wall in *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet does mention the metaphorical walls, i.e. the familial feud, that for her have a connection to death, perhaps due to knowledge of the Ovidian fable:

The orchard walls are high and hard to climb,  
And the place death, considering who thou art,  
If any of my kinsmen find thee here. (2.2.63-65)

We know that Shakespeare knows of the Pyramus and Thisbe narrative because it shows up as a metadrama that is put on in the comedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but we do not know how much he understands about this classical motif of paraclausithyron, that is the talking of lovers through a door, because the text that *Romeo and Juliet* most resembles is one more historically proximate to Shakespeare (this will be discussed more when we foil tragedy and comedy in the next subsection).

A fleshed out version of Ovid's quick tale of Pyramus and Thisbe, one source for Shakespeare might have been the Italian Luigi da Porto's *Historia novellamente ritrovata di due nobili amanti*, a fable about a Romeus and a Giuletta printed and published in 1530 that was translated into French (a version which received much praise) and later adapted into English by

the British poet Arthur Brooke as *The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet* in the 1560s.

According to Jill L. Levenson, the plot and structure of da Porto's rendition included a Romeo, a Juliet, a Friar Lawrence, and followed the same sequence of events and locale because "allusions to the story in England between 1567 and 1595 testify that the fable circulated among the Elizabethans fundamentally unchanged until Shakespeare transformed it" (327).<sup>1</sup> This widely spread tale of Romeo and Juliet stood firm and alone as "a simple and sentimental narrative" in a time when writers attempted to teach and stress the moral significance of love which made it easier for Shakespeare to use because it was likely that the audience had knowledge of this text's plot and takeaways (Levenson 328).

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<sup>1</sup> There might have been other sources and adaptations of Ovid's tale as *Romeo and Juliet Before Shakespeare: Four Tales of Star-Crossed Lovers*, a collection of precursors to Shakespeare's play, present.

## Case Study: Romeo & Juliet

*Romeo & Juliet* is an easy text to understand in our time which makes it a viable example of the economic considerations and marketing strategy that Shakespeare uses to reach such a diversified audience.

Using *Romeo & Juliet* as a case study, we will find out how Shakespeare transformed literature/common knowledge of the times into a profitable commodity through these four elements: the creation of suspense, tragedy in relation to comedy, and an interrogation of love at first sight. However, first, we must separate out our own preconceptions of the play. We might not realize it, but Shakespeare had undertaken the task of not only adapting *Romeo & Juliet* for the stage, but in making the familiar strange. A huge fact of the matter was that the tale of these star-crossed lovers was already well known to the London audience in 1595 which was discussed in the previous section. Much like Shakespeare who becomes a brand, a mythos, *Romeo and Juliet* has become an archetype deeply ingrained into our social psyche. In order to understand what it means for Shakespeare to have made the familiar strange, i.e. to have rebranded a known tragedy, we must understand that the audience of 1595 had their own conceptions; seeing *Romeo and Juliet* on stage was much like us watching our favorite books come to life on screen, a la *Harry Potter*. Only then can we tease out what would be the pretext, i.e. knowledge already assumed to be known by the audience, and how Shakespeare would use the modality of the theater in combination with pretext to develop a state of disbelief in the audience.

## Distancing Romeo & Juliet from Their Shakespearean Legacy

We have come to see the Montague and Capulet feud as perfectly normal: Taylor Swift sings about it in her song “Love Story,” but upon closer inspection, the play follows the antagonistic antics of two families which results in the death of their respective and young children. Love may actually not be the main point of the play, in fact, it is only a device which illuminates the animosity of the families as well as conflicting ideals within Elizabethan society. It is not the love that is tragic, but the environment around it; however, we in our day and age equate the whole scenario to be idyllic. The “star-crossed lovers,” the love that cannot be, is romanticized by our culture, yet at its very core, it is destructive and counter intuitive. Why would we enjoy a love that kills us?

Most obviously, but also most ideological is that by holding *Romeo & Juliet* as the epitome of love, we are essentially idealizing suicidal love. In our time, this would go against our norms because suicide carries its own taboos, religious and otherwise. Yet, this representation of love has become so commonplace that we might say that we “die of love” for someone. This cliché is actually very dangerous in that it may seem to say that true love cannot be and cannot exist while two people are alive (or after marriage, for Romeo, Juliet, and Disney princesses).

Following this train of logic, what seems so “natural” and idealistic in *Romeo & Juliet* may not have been so self-evident to the audience of the times; in fact, they probably had a different set of expectations for the play than we do. For the audience of its time, Shakespeare did have to transform the text to “make it new.” The audience came to be entertained; and, just as we flock to romantic comedies and Disney films knowing there will be a happy ending, the way

*Romeo & Juliet* is positioned in its premier would seem to be similar, but instead the opposite genre, as the audience knew the text to be a tragedy that ended with the death of the young lovers, a fact that not even Shakespeare ignores and presents in the prologue where the audience is told that they are about to witness “The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love” (1.1.9).

## Romeo and Juliet in the Flesh

Although he is aided much by the mode of the theater, Shakespeare practices rather than imposes a sense of mimesis, a replication of reality that mimics and disguises the artifice of the stage. This is a skill that is retroactively lauded by critics of Shakespeare's corpus as realism. To many the title of “realist” is problematic, one reason is that language and realism seem to be in direct conflict, as language is a construct created to describe reality and therefore one step removed. In Terry Eagleton's *Literary Theory*, the first mention of realism coincides with Roland Barthes' distrust of this perspective. Barthes, part of the post-structuralist movement, was a critic that theorized that language was simply a signification system, that is the object is not the word, nor vice versa, and therefore, the word could never make up for the actual object. Language, for Barthes, lacks true meaning. Since to Barthes, languages are only representative, he concludes that the “sign is always a matter of historical and cultural convention” (Eagleton 117). Thus, language may at times try to pose as “natural” or inherent to constructing meaning, but this realism is actually only a deception that language perpetuates.

One form of realism in Shakespeare is his realization of this disconnect between language and reality. J. L. Simmons discusses the bridge between language and reality that Shakespeare forges on the stage. Language to many, such as Barthes, is the opposite of “true experience,” but

Shakespeare overcomes this opposition by acknowledging the lack of truth in his genre and in life: that artifice on stage and in life has the ability to become reality is addressed by Hamlet. Gertrude asks Hamlet why he believes he has seen his father's ghost and Hamlet responds that he need not have seen the ghost truly — and it may in fact be artifice — in order to know the truth. Throughout the play, Hamlet searches for truth, but finds that the words, i.e. the words of his father's ghost, can be tested, but will never be proven completely true. It is not only language that lacks truth, but our realities. Scientific theories can never be proven to be true, they can only be proven to not be false. Reality for each person can be at once the same and different.

The problem is with the nature of perception. Each of us could perceive the exact same situation and view it completely differently. A philosophical question one could think about is “Do we all see colors the same or differently?”. That is what I see as red may in fact be seen to you as something that I would call purple, or vice versa, but in the end, we all call the color “red.” We color our realities inline with one another's, in order to create congruence and an understandable reality, a language to communicate with one another, and perhaps even a stage which we may play on. This ability create congruence is what I believe is realistic about Shakespearean drama and stems from the use of socially pervasive narratives.

Returning to language and Shakespeare, Simmons distinguishes “matter” from the “manner” it is presented in and recognizes that “Shakespearean drama never simply equates the word and the thing itself” (455). It is in this loose relationship between language and reality that many of the plots in Shakespearean comedies are born. One such comedy is *As You Like It* in which Jacques, the melancholy muser of the relocated pastoral court, delivers the famous “All the world's a stage” speech. Shakespeare evokes realism by directly addressing the conflicting

nature of reality presented in the artificial genre of the stage. Using words, Jacques' soliloquy, Simmons argues, is a "reflexive observation as it affects [Shakespeare's] dramatic search for realism. If the world can be equated with the stage, the stage is obviously more of a stage than the world is. Therefore, the stage is capable of revealing more of the world's reality" (Simmons 454). Language may be artifice, in that it can never connote true meaning, and so is the stage. Yet, language is necessary to conducting communications, an essential element of our congruent realities; thus, the stage in its presentation of artificial reality can produce a form of truth. Furthermore, in this moment, Shakespeare acknowledges the impact that his little stage can make on how we perceive the world. This is because on the stage, meaning is a bit more controlled and whereas, in life, with language loose and abundant, meaning is given free rein to wander. According to Simmons, Shakespeare creates realism by understanding the desultory relationship between language and meaning, playing with it, and asking the audience to doubt their own language.

However, what Shakespeare takes advantage of is that Luigi da Porto's novel (and Arthur Brooke's English translation) leaves room for ambiguity, as Jill Levenson argues, "the cause he puts forward may be vague, speculative, a sketch" (Levenson 330). So much is left unsaid that Shakespeare is allowed to construct meaning through his words. Perfect for Shakespeare's production of mimesis, da Porto does not assume but leaves much of the lover's discourse open to interpretation: "Giulietta addresses Romeo for the first time '*perhaps* hoping to hear him speak'; she opens her window as Romeo climbs the balcony, '*either by chance* or because she had heard him on other nights'; Romeo speaks to the awakened Giulietta in the tomb '*perhaps* reminded of Pygmalion'" (Levenson 330, emphasize mine). This conscious choice to leave the



door open, so to speak, may have allowed readers to relate more by filling in their assumptions; however, once, Shakespeare puts on *Romeo & Juliet* on the stage, the playwright would have to overcome these ambiguities due to the nature of performance and must create new areas of “ambiguity” or spaces for the audience to insert their own ideologies and contexts. Shakespeare does this really well, unlike seeing your favorite book character in a live-action movie and being profoundly disappointed, and competes with the profound reader assumptions that must have developed about the fable because it had so many oral renditions and print adaptations by creating new questions and points of contention. As we will see, Shakespeare “fundamentally transforms” this text by subverting two new technologies for his own purposes: Elizabethan theater’s knowledge of comedy and the tradition of Petrarchan love.

## Tragic Expectations: A Mob Suspension of Disbelief

Before descending into how comedy and tragedy on stage are akin to two sides of the same coin, it is important to recognize that Shakespeare’s brand of tragedy was just beginning to develop in *Romeo and Juliet* and continued to evolve until he wrote what some believe to be the epitome of his work and one of the greatest plays of all time, *Hamlet*. Since *Romeo & Juliet* is one of Shakespeare’s earliest tragedies (written between 1591 and 1594), what Robert Hapgood denotes about the audience’s expectations for this genre holds true: “we hope for a transformation in the life of the community which we have shared in imagining during the play” (Hapgood 494). The fact that the audience in a playhouse is very different than a reader of a book allows for Shakespeare to tap into the collective hope of a mob. Just as when grouped together people tend to act alike, this mob mentality was utilized by Shakespeare to encourage

the hope of a happy ending. In his other tragedies, Shakespeare uses moments of comedic relief to keep the mob together, essentially on the same page; in *Romeo and Juliet*, it could be argued that moments of drama and high intensity, from Romeo's fervid love speech for Rosaline to the dueling scenes, keep the audience as a collective group unready to experience the conclusion of the play. Shakespeare leaves the audience hanging on the edges of their seats because of the family drama that surrounds these two youths who simply want to be in love, but ultimately are sacrificed for the benefit of the communities, both the on-stage one (i.e. because of the two deaths, Prince Escalus forces the settlement of the Montague and Capulet dispute) and the audience watching it (i.e. the audience got what they paid for: a tragedy).

In Shakespeare's later tragedies, this sacrifice is not so clean and Shakespeare is willing to have the audience be unsettled by the violence committed on stage. This is apparent in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* with our audience being privy to the plotting of a husband and wife about to commit murder and the resulting madness and downfall of Lady MacBeth and Macbeth with no positive outcome/community building created from the tragedy. However, in *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare is balancing management of audience expectation and his tragical formula.

Aside from the theater's audience/consumer being influenced more as a group, the modality of the theater allowed for specific methods of disbelief suspension. The flesh and blood representation of literary figures may also play into the mob hoping for the best within tragedies. Certain scholars remark that *Hamlet* is a mirror onto oneself, because their claim is that everyone can see themselves in a part of his characterization. However, it might not only be the invention of a unique presentation of humanity, i.e. the realism evocated from the stage, that Shakespeare produced on stage; it might also be that because there is a body on stage, one relates and hopes

more for the good. An example of this might be the immediate visceral and emotional impact of watching the young lovers commit suicide one after another (death on stage will be discussed more later). There is still the sense that this is not reality (i.e. that the boy-actor playing Juliet will not really die), but Shakespeare utilization of suspense may aid the audience in dismissing the holes in his mimesis.

In order to pull off this masking of the artifice, Shakespeare practiced by transforming and subverting common knowledge and assumptions; the two focused on here being comedy on stage and Petrarchan love. Because Shakespeare was aided by the obvious change in modal presentation, there is much that is specific to the theater, to the audience of the time, and to Shakespearean style. Basically, Shakespeare was already taking a popular story and not only simply changing the mode of presentation, he did a lot of work with the text to produce the work we hail today. This is dramaturgy, going through a text or play and picking out what is most necessary for a new presentation; think of it as the process of making a novel into a movie. We will further explicate various exercises of dramaturgy within *Romeo and Juliet* in the following sections.

## Two Sides of the Same Coin: Comedy/Tragedy

One of the biggest points of contention that Shakespeare creates for the audience to grapple with is that the play “becomes, rather than is, tragic” and Susan Snyder continues that “the action and the characters [in *Romeo and Juliet*] being in familiar comic patterns, and then are transformed -- or discarded -- to compose the pattern of tragedy” (Snyder 391). We find Shakespeare’s knowledge of comedic structures to be present in his many comedies, but taking a

look at the other play Shakespeare was working on in the same time period as *Romeo and Juliet*'s production (1595), the comedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, allows scholars to better denote how Shakespeare woos the audience into disbelief. Among scholars, the chronology in which *Romeo & Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was written and played is much debated. What is certain is: in the comedy, a group of foolish players hoping to win a prize put on "Pyramus and Thisbe" which they market as a "tragical mirth." The players on stage are putting on a rendition of Ovid's tale, "Pyramus and Thisbe," as similarly Shakespeare does in *Romeo & Juliet*. While Amy J. Riess and George Walton Williams argue that Shakespeare learned from the comedic moments created in *Romeo & Juliet* and reused them in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (which results in Riess and William's claim that *Romeo & Juliet* came first), there is no doubt that both the tragedy and comedy bear similarities that are more than coincidence.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the scuttle and shuffle of young lovers provides comedy but in certain ways, it is a sadistic humor that finds the audience laughing at the lovers' confusion and true suffering. In the comedy, two pairs of lovers enter the forest to celebrate their love and possibly elope. However, in the forest, the troublemaking Puck, a fairy, causes the lovers to form a "love square" in which pairs are displaced from their original pairings. This, of course, causes hysteria among the lovers to the audience's amusement. However, the inability to be with one's love would in reality result in much agony for a real person. In the world created by the artifice of the stage, these pains are simply ritual. Snyder points out that "Comedy is organized like a game" and that Romeo and Juliet think that they may be simply part of a comic game where lovers are being prevented from uniting (Snyder 392). The ironic joke becomes

apparent when Romeo realizes that the jewel in the Ethiop's ear is in fact a Capulet after having a flirtatious dialect with her.

(Aside) Is she a Capulet?  
O dear account! my life is my foe's debt. (1.5.118-9)

The language of lovers is teased by Shakespeare in both comedy and tragedy. Although language was heralded by critics as evidence of realism in Shakespeare's work, Shakespeare at the same time pokes at the fragile membrane of artifice in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The same quote that Romeo righteously delivers, "Thus with a kiss I die" (5.1.----), is subverted by Shakespeare in his comedic metadrama. Riess and Williams further explicate that this moment "provides a suitable example [of comedy] for Pyramus. Pyramus takes Romeo's simple but dramatic and suggestive 'thus' and 'die' and with great panache begins and ends his farewell, 'Thus die I, thus, thus, thus.... Now die, die, die, die, die' (*AMND* 5.1.293, 299)" (Riess 216). In our own time, the scaling of Juliet's balcony has become commonplace in our entertainment and her overheard and disrupted soliloquy of "O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?" (2.2.33) has almost become a joke to our generation. However, trivialized over time, this famous line that we believe inquires the locale of her lover is actually Juliet expressing her aggravation over the fact that Romeo Montague is of her family's enemy clan. The technology behind the representation is continued through the fact that her soliloquy, her private moment, is not only overheard by Romeo, but the audience. Our privy insight into what would typically be thought (i.e. that which she says on the balcony, but also that which she verbalizes to her nurse) allows the novella to come alive on stage. Thus, the comedy and psychological empathy can reverberate amongst the audience as well as on the stage.

At the conclusion of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the lovers are saved and reunited, yet

Shakespeare throws a “tragical” curveball almost as if to remind the audience of the ominous possibility of a tragic ending for real life lovers displaced. The lover’s comedic escape is juxtaposed by a reminder: the play performed within the play is “Pyramus and Thisbe,” a tale where two young lovers are not only separated by rival families but also a physical wall. One result of this metadramatic staging is that it draws the audience in as part of the mimetic world, making the stage feel more like reality as it puts the audience on the same level as the patrons of the play, King Theseus and Hippolyta.<sup>2</sup> With the lovers in the audience as well, suddenly this warning is not only made to the ignorant and once again blissful youths but to the audience member who may have possibly visited the theater with a significant other.

Furthermore, Shakespeare appears to admit the connection between the metaplay and his *Romeo and Juliet*. This is evident in the titling of each: “The Most Excellent and lamentable Tragedie of Romeo and Juliet’ [in which] ‘The Most ... lamentable Tragedie’ lends its name to its farcical counterpart: ‘The most lamentable comedy and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisby’” as the metaplay is stated to be in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (Riess 217).

Of course, the metaplay is humorously disguised by Shakespeare, but the forewarning is akin to the dark turns that his other comedies take. An example of this is the resulting anger of Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* after he finds out that two other characters in the play have tricked him into believing that the Duchess was in love with him, making him appear crazy. Malvolio unlike the four lovers is not reconciled as a character and swears revenge on the lot (this lot being lovers who finally find themselves in a true pairing).

It appears that love is a game, the language and semantics of which can result

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<sup>2</sup> The classical Theseus and Hippolyta also a love disrupted. This time by another woman, Phaedra, who in Euripides’ play eventually and tragically falls for Theseus and Hippolyta’s son, Hippolytus.

humorously or end tragically, although it seems that comedy may lend itself more towards hope than cynicism. In this section we found that love can often become hilarious when put into words and as we saw can be difficult to describe; Shakespeare also recognized this problem of the variance of emotion and inability for language to relate to all. We will see in the next section how Shakespeare once again utilized already common knowledge/technologies to build on and extrapolate this emotion for a mass audience.

### Romeo's First Loves, Before Juliet

Those who read the synopsis of this play may not realize that Romeo has a love prior to Juliet. Her name is Rosaline. Many readers believe that Romeo and Juliet's love is one of love at first sight, which perhaps it is, but for a love at first sight there seems to be much at stake. Romeo and Juliet's attraction, therefore, ought to be more than love-sickness, but the real deal. Through understanding historical context of the Protestantism pushing for "true love" instead of marital arrangements resulting in love, Shakespeare creates an area of equality for the lovers that seems to suggest that this is a component of true love.

One of the easiest ways of understanding the love between Romeo and Juliet is by comparing it to Romeo's love for Rosaline. Henry David Gray theorizes by reading the First Quarto<sup>3</sup> edition of the play that Shakespeare had begun work on a rough draft of *Romeo and Juliet* that was either inherited or bought by his company or himself. Gray believes that Shakespeare "was able to preserve very little of the earlier work" because "he discovered that none of his [Romeo's] love poetry was adequate to the love he was now portraying" (210). Gray believes that the only area that the old text is represented is in Romeo's lament over Rosaline;

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<sup>3</sup> The First Quarto was thought to be written earlier and is not the edition that is proliferated and popularized due to presumed textual errors.

however, it is important to note that in Arthur Brooke's text, there is a Rosaline as well and thus, using her as a point of comparison is not entirely Shakespeare's invention. Even more neglected is the fact that both Rosaline and Juliet are members of the Capulet family -- in fact, this is the reason why Romeo wishes to crash the party in the first place; thus, what are we to make of the differences in Romeo's loves other than that his love for Rosaline was not as true?

In Romeo's speech about Rosaline, she comes off as an object of desire instead of an active participant. Upon his entrance in 2.4, Mercutio characterizes Romeo's dwelling upon Rosaline (n.b. although at this point Romeo is not enamoured with Rosaline, since this is the scene in which he returns to his clan after being thrown out of the Capulet event):

... Now is he for the numbers  
that Petrarch flowed in. Laura to his lady was but a  
kitchen-wench— marry, she had a better love to  
berhyme her—Dido a dowdy, Cleopatra a gypsy,  
Helen and Hero hildings and harlots, Thisbe a grey eye  
or so, but not to the purpose. (2.4.38-43)

The mention of Petrarch in Shakespeare's time clearly alluded to popular love poetry, which we will discuss further, but this passage itself is chock full of allusions to famous women which also can be pertinent to our discussion. Laura is Petrarch's own love interest. Dido, queen of Carthage, in Virgil's *Aeneid* commits suicide; Cleopatra as well. The mythological Hero suffers a similar fate, throwing herself off a cliff at the death of her lover, Leander. Helen in Homer's *Illiad* is the cause and prize of the Trojan war. Thisbe, the literary predecessor of Juliet, is mentioned here as well, with a "grey eye or so," as a marker of beauty in the time was having grey (i.e. blue) eyes. These women, however, are more or less objectified by the texts they are presented in. These women do not have much of a say in their romances and are acted upon.

Rosaline, instead, scorns Romeo's love and chooses to act against his objectification of



her. Writing at the “zenith” of Petrarchan influence on British culture, as Gayle Whittier claims, Shakespeare realized “Petrarchan conventions can be fatal” and utilized this reality in the structure of his play (27). However, instead of reading the whole of *Romeo and Juliet* as a Petrarchan reinvention of the “lovesick persona, dense metaphor, and emotional extremity” as Whittier does, it can be possible to read Romeo’s love for Rosaline as a warning against false love, a love akin to idolatry instead of mutual desire (Whittier 28). Perhaps Shakespeare is even parodying Petrarch with Romeo’s cries of “O brawling love! O loving hate! / O anything of nothing of first create!” (1.1.176). These overzealous outcries, which Whittier characterizes as “self misshapen, juvenile, resembling a sonnet truncated and inverted,” in comparison to Romeo’s later laments of love for Juliet seem silly as what does “anything of nothing” actually mean (Whittier 29)? Romeo in this same scene recognizes that this is not love when he laments that “This love feel I, that feel no love in this. Dost thou not laugh?” (1.1.173-4). It is indeed “laughable” and perhaps came off as a parody to the audience who knew that Romeo would find Juliet and of Petrarchan sonnets. Later, Romeo refines his commentary on love as scholars such as John Roe points out which makes the play to some readers such as Whittier a fulfillment of the Petrarchan genre.

Moreover, Rosaline is never presented on stage, which goes to say that Rosaline is simply a tool rather than a person; whereas, Romeo’s love for Juliet is truer because it is returned and furthermore, because Juliet is not made an object, but an actor by Shakespeare. Juliet’s inner thoughts are given the stage in the balcony scene and her “womanly” worries about Romeo are played out for the audience in her interactions with her nurse. Although much of the action follows Romeo (i.e. to the Capulet event, to Friar Lawrence, etc.), the final line delivered by the

Prince of Verona is as thus “There was no story with as much woe, / as the tale of *Juliet* and *her* Romeo” (5.3.325-6). Juliet may have killed herself for love, similar to many of the other women listed by Mercutio, but in the end, it is she herself that is memorialized and mourned for; instead of simply being an object of love, Juliet is also the owner of it.

# The Genius: Shakespeare's Audience Awareness

The London audience of 1590s would not have praised or bought into just another rendition of an overused plot; think of the very many Spiderman's origin films that have graced our movie screens and how we regrettably continue to watch them. With *Romeo & Juliet*, Shakespeare not only had to overcome the overuse of this story, but also had to keep up his reputation as the "upstart crow" who famously recreated and layered his plays in order to profit from mass audiences. As discussed in this paper, Shakespeare began his foray into the world of tragedy with a tale which was popularized by others before him, utilizing various pieces of common knowledge to enhance and problematize the play's tragedy.

The economy in which the theatergoing industry of 17th century London blossomed was one where the populus could not afford the quality of art produced. For, London in the 1590s was often plagued with illness, had a population of over a million people, and was hungry for what they call "bread and circuses." The world in which we hold Shakespeare as an artifact for those who could afford it, like fine wine or art, is not the world the Globe theater operated in; in fact, nearly everyone could afford playgoing. Still, there was much uproar about the people paying for what critics would call "nothing" that is the experience and not a physical commodity.

We can recognize that Shakespeare is aware of the audience and furthermore, the necessity of mass marketing: he often addresses the audience in various epilogues asking for their forgiveness if the play offends. Think of Puck's soliloquy in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:

If we shadows have offended,  
Think but this, and all is mended,  
That you have but slumber'd here  
While these visions did appear.

However, what makes Shakespeare particularly business savvy is that not only does he make his plays to entertain all, but that he understands the segmentation of his market by class, with the pay-as-you-go-up system in the Globe theater, and also, by gender. As Donald K. Hendrick notes, in *As You Like It*'s epilogue performed by the boy actor playing Rosalind, there is a segmented address occurring in the lines "I'll begin / with the women. I charge you, O women, for the love / you bear to men, to like as much of this play as / please you." Hendrick claims that "From such a striking awareness of subtle market dynamics we might also ask... What it would mean, for instance, if we were to follow the logic of these epilogues by considering the role of the female spectators, however much they happen to have been in the minority in Shakespeare's audience as something like Shakespeare's actual or desired fan base?" (Hendrick 39). Yet, Hendrick does not connote this gendered audience awareness with a Shakespearean feminist sensibility, but instead to be more like a marketing ploy, similar to making a candy so irresistible to a child that the parent has to buy it.

In this project, we have found that much like the Globe was created from the structure of The Theater by the Burbages, Shakespeare used foundational texts and audience knowledge of that pretext as well as common knowledge of the genre in order to cater to the diversified audience the Globe entertained. Ironically, Shakespeare himself has garnered legacy by this remarketing of his life which we briefly encountered while interrogating the best-selling biographies, literature in itself that can be economically criticized, that we learn of the man Shakespeare from. The Globe was rebuilt in 1997 with Shakespeare's new mythos surrounding the vision for the marketing of the theater; some even liken the new Globe to Disneyland. I hope that this short investigation into the economic prerogatives can be further explored not only in

Shakespeare's work and work inspired by him, but in all literature, especially before we hold it to such high standards that they lose their accessibility.

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