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William Shakespeare was born around April 23, 1564, in Stratford-upon-Avon. He was the son of John Shakespeare, a glove-maker, and Mary Arden. At eighteen, he married Anne Hathaway, a woman seven or eight years his senior. Together, they raised two daughters: Susanna, who was born in 1583, and Judith (whose twin brother Hamnet died at age 11), born in 1585.

Little is known about Shakespeare's activities between 1585 and 1592, but it seems probable that shortly after 1585 he went to London to begin his apprenticeship as an actor. Due to the plague, the London theaters were often closed between June 1592 and April 1594. In 1594, Shakespeare joined the Lord Chamberlain's company of actors, the most popular of the companies acting at Court. In 1599, Shakespeare joined a group of Chamberlain's Men that would form a syndicate to build and operate a new playhouse: **the Globe**, which became the most famous theater of its time.

While Shakespeare was regarded as the foremost dramatist of his time, evidence indicates that both he and his contemporaries looked to poetry, not playwriting, for enduring fame. Shakespeare's sonnets were composed between 1593 and 1601, though not published until 1609. That edition, *The Sonnets* of Shakespeare, consists of **154 sonnets**, all written in the form of three quatrains and a couplet that is now recognized as Shakespearean.

Shakespeare wrote **more than thirty plays**. These are usually divided into four categories: histories, comedies, tragedies, and romances. His earliest plays were primarily comedies and histories such as *Henry VI* and *The Comedy of Errors*, but in 1596, Shakespeare wrote *Romeo and Juliet*, his second tragedy, and over the next dozen years he would return to the form, writing the plays for which he is now best known: *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*. In his final years, Shakespeare turned to the romantic with *Cymbeline*, *A Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*.

Only eighteen of Shakespeare's plays were published separately in quarto editions during his lifetime; a complete collection of his works did not appear until the publication of the First Folio in 1623. Nonetheless, his contemporaries recognized Shakespeare's achievements. The Chamberlain's Men rose to become the leading dramatic company in London, installed as members of the royal household in 1603.

Sometime after 1612, Shakespeare retired from the stage and returned to his home in Stratford. He drew up his will in January of 1616, which included his famous bequest to his wife of his "**second best bed**." He died on April 23, 1616 and was buried two days later at Stratford Church.

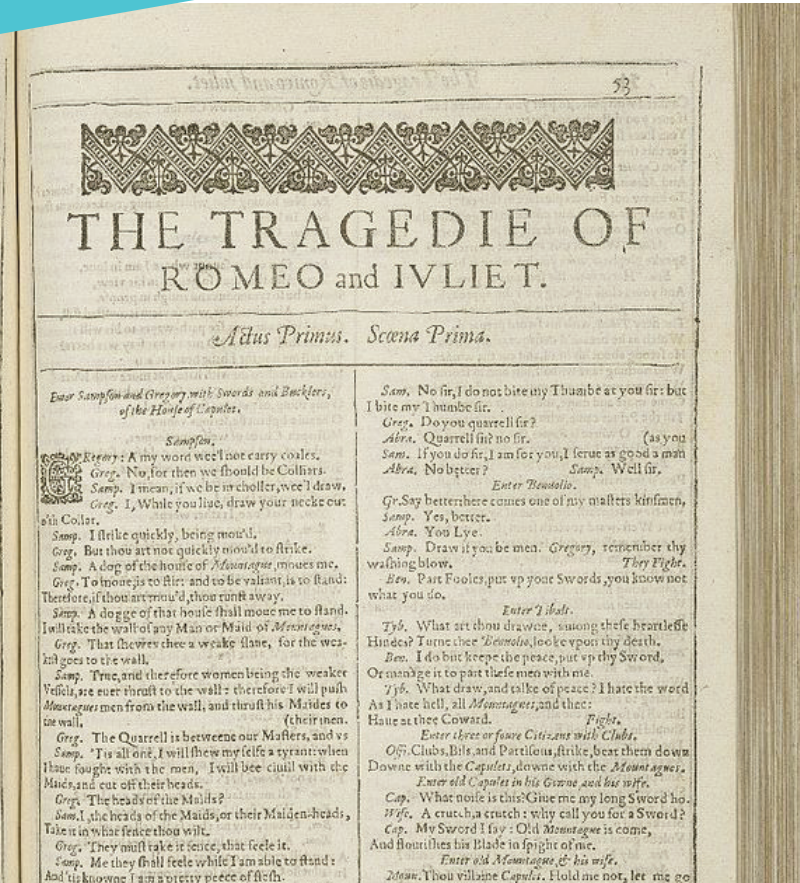
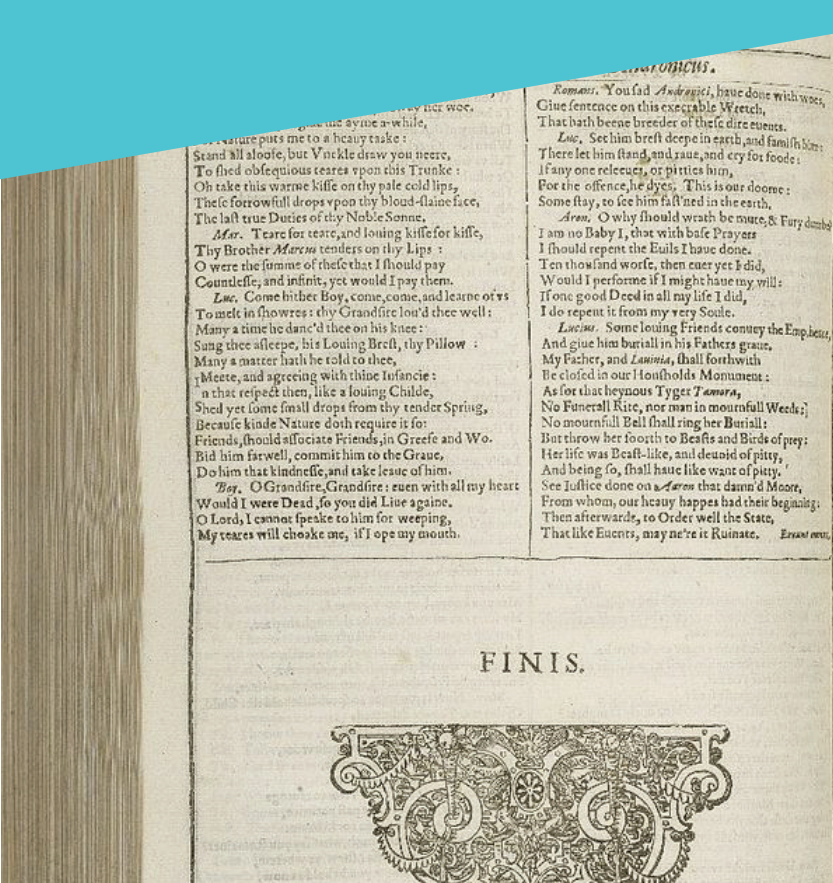


William Shakespeare  
SHAKESPEARE

## Biography of William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

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First Folio of Romeo and Juliet

## Origins of Romeo & Juliet



Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library

The first ever performance of *Romeo and Juliet* is believed to have taken place at the Swan Theatre in London in 1597; the star-crossed lovers then were played by Richard Burbage (Romeo) and Robert Goffe (Juliet), distinguished members of Shakespeare's company the Lord Chamberlain's Men. Women were forbidden from public performance; female roles were enacted by pre-adolescent men whose voices had not yet broken.

When women were finally allowed to perform in England, Mary Saunderson was the first to play Juliet in 1661, sixty-five years after the play was written.

One of the most iconic scenes in English literature is affectionately referred to as "The Balcony Scene." Even without naming the play, most people will recognize "O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou, Romeo?" What people may not know is that balconies didn't exist when *Romeo and Juliet* was written (1596). The first use of a balcony in the staging of *Romeo and Juliet* came decades after Shakespeare's death, from an adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* by Thomas Otway in 1679. The lore of "The Balcony Scene" grew as Shakespeare's play gained popularity.

Check out Emily Zarevich on JSTOR to learn more.

► <https://daily.jstor.org/her-bounvty-is-boundless/>



# Key Characters in Shakespeare's Romeo & Juliet

**Romeo:** The son and heir of Montague and Lady Montague. A young man of about sixteen, Romeo is handsome, intelligent, and sensitive. Though impulsive and immature, his idealism and passion make him an extremely likable character. He lives in the middle of a violent feud between his family and the Capulets, but he is not at all interested in violence. His only interest is love. At the beginning of the play he is madly in love with a woman named Rosaline.

**Juliet:** The daughter of Capulet and Lady Capulet. A beautiful thirteen-year-old girl, Juliet begins the play as a naïve child who has thought little about love and marriage, but she grows up quickly upon falling in love with Romeo, the son of her family's great enemy.

**Friar Lawrence:** A Franciscan friar, friend to both Romeo and Juliet. Kind, civic-minded, a proponent of moderation, and always ready with a plan, Friar Lawrence secretly marries the impassioned lovers in hopes that the union might eventually bring peace to Verona. Friar Lawrence is also an expert in the use of seemingly mystical potions and herbs.

**Mercutio:** A kinsman to the Prince and Romeo's close friend. One of the most extraordinary characters in all of Shakespeare's plays, Mercutio overflows with imagination, wit, and, at times, a strange, biting satire and brooding fervor. Mercutio loves wordplay, especially sexual double entendres. He can be quite hotheaded.

**The Nurse:** Juliet's nurse, the woman who breast-fed Juliet when she was a baby and has cared for Juliet her entire life. A vulgar, long-winded, and sentimental character, the Nurse provides comic relief with her frequently inappropriate remarks and speeches. But, until a disagreement near the play's end, the Nurse is Juliet's faithful confidante and loyal intermediary in Juliet's affair with Romeo.

**Tybalt:** A Capulet, Juliet's cousin on her mother's side. Vain, fashionable, supremely aware of courtesy and the lack of it, he becomes aggressive, violent, and quick to draw his sword when he feels his pride has been injured. Once drawn, his sword is something to be feared. He loathes Montagues.

**Benvolio:** Montague's nephew, Romeo's cousin and thoughtful friend. Benvolio makes a genuine effort to defuse violent scenes in public places, though Mercutio accuses him of having a nasty temper in private.

**Lord Capulet:** The patriarch of the Capulet family, father of Juliet, husband of Lady Capulet, and enemy, for unexplained reasons, of Montague. Often prudent, he commands respect and propriety, but he is liable to fly into a rage when either is lacking.

**Lady Capulet:** Juliet's mother, Capulet's wife. A woman who herself married young (by her own estimation she gave birth to Juliet at close to the age of fourteen), she is eager to see her daughter marry Paris. She is an ineffectual mother, relying on the Nurse for moral and pragmatic support.

**Montague:** Romeo's father, the patriarch of the Montague clan and bitter enemy of Capulet.

**Lady Montague:** Romeo's mother, Montague's wife. She dies of grief after Romeo is exiled from Verona.

**Paris:** A kinsman of the Prince, and the suitor of Juliet most preferred by Capulet. Once Capulet has promised him he can marry Juliet, he behaves very presumptuous toward her, acting as if they are already married.

**Prince:** The Prince of Verona. A kinsman of Mercutio and Paris. As the seat of political power in Verona, he is concerned about maintaining the public peace at all costs.

**Friar John:** A Friar charged by Friar Lawrence with taking the news of Juliet's false death to Romeo in Mantua.

**Balthasar:** Romeo's dedicated servant, who brings Romeo the news of Juliet's death.

**Sampson & Gregory:** Two servants of the house of Capulet, who, like their master, hate the Montagues. At the outset of the play, they successfully provoke some Montague men into a fight.

**Apothecary:** An apothecary in Mantua. Had he been wealthier, he might have been able to afford to value his morals more than money, and refused to sell poison to Romeo.

# R&J in art

As we are unsure of the date of William Shakespeare's birthday, it is traditionally celebrated around the 23rd April, ironically the date of his death. This falls in springtime when, according to the poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson 'a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love.'

In Shakespeare's tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*, the headstrong young lovers refuse to accept the separation caused by their warring families, and are impelled along a path which ultimately leads to their deaths.

The play has inspired art in all forms, from the musical *West Side Story* to Dire Straits' classic hit "Romeo and Juliet," and Malorie Blackman's novel *Noughts and Crosses*. As the success of the recent film of *Romeo and Juliet* from the National Theatre in London demonstrates, the story of the 'star-cross'd lovers' retains its powerful influence today.

## Article by Lucy Ellis for ArtUk

► <https://artuk.org/discover/stories/star-crossed-lovers-romeo-and-juliet-in-art>



**Romeo & Juliet (1867)**  
Ford Madox Brown

While some artists have been drawn to the tragedy of the story, in the nineteenth century artists were swept away by the romance. Ford Madox Brown (1821–1893) shared the aims of the Pre-Raphaelite painters who rejected the rapid industrialisation of their world and revered the early Renaissance ideal of beauty.

Spurning the conventions of academy art teaching they used brilliant colour to celebrate the historic past, glorifying nature and placing an emphasis on emotion and subjectivity which reflected the concurrent Romantic movement in literature and art. The Pre-Raphaelites created a list of 'Immortals' and placed Shakespeare among them.

In this painting of the scene following the night that the young newlyweds have just spent together in secret, Romeo, burying a last kiss in Juliet's neck, gestures urgently with his left hand to show her that he must leave before they are discovered by her mother Lady Capulet. Madox Brown conveys the passion and distress of the moment in the lovers' intertwined bodies. The billowing rich silks of Romeo's red costume suggest the fire of his love, while Juliet glows like an icon in gold. The artist meticulously details the apple blossom growing just below, alluding to Romeo's earlier remark that 'this bud of love, by summer's ripening / May prove a beauteous flower when next we meet'.





**Juliet and the Nurse (1935-1936)**  
Walter Richard Sickert

One of the twentieth-century theatre's most renowned Juliets, Peggy Ashcroft played the part for the second time in 1935 under John Gielgud's direction, with Edith Evans as the Nurse, earning glowing reviews. The part of Romeo was taken on alternate nights by Gielgud and Laurence Olivier.

Gielgud's production features in Walter Richard Sickert's moving depiction of Juliet with her nurse. A frequent theatregoer, Sickert made many friends among actors and painted Peggy Ashcroft and Edith Evans several times. His technique of flat dry-scraped paintwork, seen here, often left bare patches of canvas visible and allowed for expansive flat patches of tonal colour. The graphic style owes something to Sickert's method at this time of painting from press images and embodies the simple heartache of a young girl in the throes of love, drawing comfort from the one person she can trust.

This 1753 painting of the tomb scene is one of three versions by Benjamin Wilson and represents David Garrick's actual staging, with the Capulet tomb set towards the back of the stage. This enormously popular work spawned many engravings and other iterations such as box lids and enamel plaques. Garrick as Romeo stands in a characteristic pose of recoil, seen in other artworks, as he witnesses Juliet come back to life just after he has taken a lethal poison.

To modern audiences, it may look odd to see the lovers both still alive when Shakespeare's text has Juliet waking only after Romeo has perished, but Garrick reworked the scene to allow the lovers the chance to say their farewells, a tradition that endured well into the nineteenth century. In a notorious theatrical battle of 1750, competing productions of the play were mounted at the Drury Lane and Covent Garden theatres with Garrick's Juliet, played by the actress George Anne Bellamy, gaining the best notices. It may be this production shown here.

**'Romeo and Juliet' by William Shakespeare,  
Adapted by David Garrick (1753)**  
Benjamin Wilson





# Romeo and Juliet on screen

Itching for more R&J? These movie adaptations are available to stream online!

1968  prime  
Dir. Franco Zeffirelli



1996  prime  
Dir. Baz Luhrmann



1961  max  
Dir. Robert Wise and Jerome Robbins



2011  Disney+  
Dir. Kelly Asbury





# Love and Hatred

**Psychologist Dorothy Rowe examines how our strongest emotions are intertwined as we cannot be indifferent to those that fulfil our greatest need or inspire our greatest fear.**

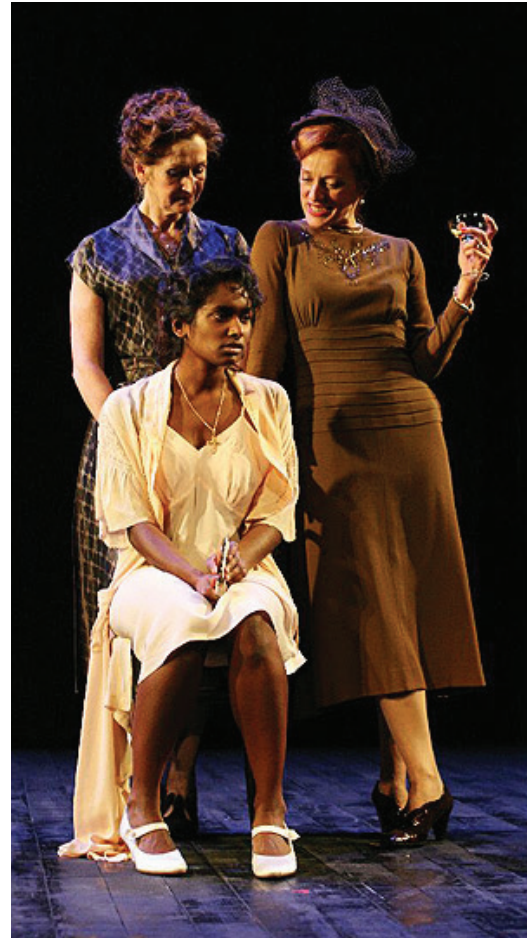
Love and hatred are not opposites but two sides of the one coin. The coin is attachment. We are attached to those we love and those we hate. The opposite of attachment, and thus the opposite of love and hatred, is indifference. We want nothing, neither approval or disapproval, from those to whom we are indifferent. However, we cannot be indifferent to those we love or those we hate because they can fulfil our greatest need or inspire our greatest fear.

The people we love are those who can affirm that we are the person we know ourselves to be, and do so. The people we hate are those who can disconfirm the person we know ourselves to be, and are prepared to do so.

Our greatest need is to become and be the person that we know ourselves to be. When we are young like Romeo and Juliet, our heart often feels that it will burst with our longing to be the person we know ourselves to be, and to have all the people who matter to us - those we love and those we hate - recognise the extraordinary individual that we are. Alas, at that age we do not know how to be ourselves. We have not gained the confidence we need both to be ourselves and to face the hazards and uncertainties of life. The person we know ourselves to be is our most important possession.

In extreme situations we will choose to let our body die, either in an act of heroism or suicide, in order to die in the truth of who we are rather than live the lie of who we are not. Juliet chose not to live the lie of being Paris's wife; Romeo knew he could not continue as the empty vessel he was. He needed to be filled by Juliet's courage and her love which was 'boundless as the sea'.

Knowing yourself to be a person is both a wonderful and a terrible thing. Wonderful because we not only live but know ourselves to be alive: terrible because our 'I' is no more than a structure of ideas which are the guesses our brain has



Royal Shakespeare Company's 2008 production of *Romeo and Juliet*.  
Directed by Neil Bartlett.

constructed about who we are, what the world is, what our past was, our present is, and our future will be. When our guesses are being proved to be right, we feel confident and secure, but when our guesses have been shown to be wrong we begin to feel that 'I' is falling apart, and we are terrified.

When we were children, our explanations to ourselves about what was going on, and our predictions about what was going to happen, were often wrong and we gave vent to our terror as we fell apart in what adults called 'temper tantrums' and 'bad dreams'. In deliberately misunderstanding what a child is experiencing, adults try to hide from themselves their own fear of falling apart. They do not recognise that much of what they do is, at least in part, a defence against the fear of being annihilated as a person. This fear is far worse than the fear of death. We can tell ourselves that, when we die, the most important part of ourselves will continue on as a soul, or a spirit, or in our children, or in our work, or in the memories of those who knew us, but,



Royal Shakespeare Company's 2008 production of *Romeo and Juliet*.  
Directed by Neil Bartlett.

when we are annihilated as a person, it will be that we disappear like a wisp of smoke in the wind, never to have existed.

Every moment of our life, we are monitoring how safe we are as a person. The measures of our degree of safety or danger are our emotions, that is, our interpretations of how safe we are as a person in our present situation. When we are content, or happy, or joyful, or ecstatic we feel safe in ourselves because the world is what we want it to be, and when we are in love we are in the glorious safety where we can be truly and completely ourselves. Anxiety warns us of the first hint of danger, while fear tells us that we are in danger. Our pride tries to rescue us from danger with anger which says, 'How dare this happen to me!' We measure the kind of danger we are in in many ways - hate, envy, jealousy, guilt, shame, and despair. We can be ruthless in trying to preserve our sense of being a person.

Tybalt tries to preserve himself by using his anger and his swordsmanship to inspire fear in other men, even to the extreme of killing Mercutio and thus bringing about his own death. As much as Capulet loves his daughter Juliet,

he is prepared to use her or to destroy her in order to pursue 'an ancient grudge' between his family and that of Montague. He sees a victory over Montague as the measure of his value as a person. Accordingly, he wants to give Juliet in marriage to Paris, a kinsman of Escalus, Prince of Verona. When she refuses, he tells her she can: 'hang, beg, starve, die in the streets, / For, by my soul, I'll ne'er acknowledge thee.' Lady Capulet, whose identity depends on that of her husband, sees her daughter as a threat, and rejects her, saying: 'Talk not to me, for I'll not speak a word: / Do as thou wilt, for I have done with thee.'

The tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* is not just that of the 'star-cross'd lovers' but of the two old men who failed to realise that their hatred and pride tied them to one another as securely as Juliet and Romeo were tied by their love.

**This article first appeared in the show program for the Royal Shakespeare Company's 2008 production of *Romeo and Juliet* (pictured above).**



# Student Discussion Questions

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- 1. All the problems in *Romeo and Juliet* result from a feud between the Capulet and the Montague families.**

Brainstorm a list of conflicts you are aware of today between different groups of people.  
Why do you think these feuds continue?
- 2. *Romeo & Juliet* go to Friar Lawrence for help rather than their parents.**

Talk about communication between kids and their parents today, especially when it revolves around problems.  
Do you think it is harder for kids to talk to their parents rather than to a friend? Why?  
What do you think parents and kids/teens could do to communicate better with each other, so things don't escalate like in *Romeo and Juliet*?
- 3. How could *Romeo and Juliet* have avoided tragedy?**

What could they both have done differently?  
What could the adults around them have done to prevent it?
- 4. Shakespeare often used oxymorons - Two opposing words next to each other. For example, think of when Juliet says goodbye to Romeo: *Parting is such sweet sorrow*.**

Can you come up with five or six oxymorons that we use in language today?