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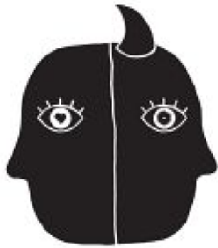
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CONTRIBUTORS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Born more than four and a half centuries ago, William Shakespeare (1564–1616) is generally acknowledged to be the greatest imaginative writer in the English language. He was a major poet, writing two narrative poems, 154 sonnets, and other verses. But above all, he was a poetic dramatist, the author or part-author of almost 40 plays, which range from the most delicate of romantic comedies, such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night*, through a series of plays about English and Roman history, to the most profound tragedies, including *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear*.

Far from dwindling with the passage of time, Shakespeare's reputation and influence have grown from year to year. His works, in their original texts, in translation into most of the world's languages, and in an enormous range of adaptations, are read, taught, and performed all over the globe. They have influenced countless other works of art, and nobody with a claim to a liberal

education can afford to be ignorant of them. This book offers a comprehensive guide to his plays and poems, concentrating on their content and form, while also considering their reception and influence.

"All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players.
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts."

Jaques

As You Like It

Shakespeare and Stratford

William Shakespeare was baptized in Holy Trinity Church in the town of Stratford-upon-Avon, England, on Wednesday 26 April 1564. His exact date of birth is not known, but since the 18th century his birthday has been celebrated on 23 April.

Shakespeare's father, John, came from farming stock and worked in Stratford as a "whitawer" – a tanner of white leather – and glover (glove maker). John's wife, Mary, whose maiden name was Arden, came from a more prosperous background. They lived in the house in Henley Street, Stratford, now known as Shakespeare's Birthplace, a place of pilgrimage for hundreds of thousands of visitors from all parts of the world every year. They had two daughters who died in infancy before William came along, and

went on to have two more daughters and three more sons. The youngest, Edmund, was 16 years younger than William. Like his older brother, Edmund became an actor in London. Very little is known about him except that he died, aged only 27, a few months after the death in infancy of his illegitimate son.

John Shakespeare was a businessman who played a major part in civic life, becoming an alderman and rising to the rank of bailiff or mayor in 1568. At this time, churchgoing was required by law. Both at church and at home, Shakespeare would have gained the familiarity with the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer, and the Books of Homilies (sermons) that is apparent from his writings.

"Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

Thou art more lovely and more temperate.

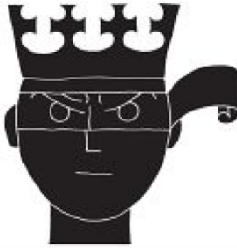
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,

And summer's lease hath all too short a date."

Sonnet 18

Stratford was a market town with a splendid church, a well-established grammar school where education for boys (only) was free, fine houses, and townsmen who were educated and wealthy. The records for the school are lost, but Shakespeare's writings show that he had a typical grammar-school education of the period. Such schools provided a rigorous training in oratory, rhetoric, and classical literature comparable to that of university graduates studying Classics today. From an early age, the boys

were required to write and speak in Latin. In a scene (4.1) in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, a boy called William is put through his paces in Latin grammar, and quotes from a textbook prescribed for use in every such school. It is surely the most autobiographical scene in all Shakespeare's plays.



Marriage and children

As a boy, Shakespeare would have been able to attend and act in plays in Stratford. Touring professional companies regularly visited the town during his boyhood and youth, playing in the guildhall, while local amateurs put on entertainments, especially at Whitsuntide.

Shakespeare probably left school when he was about 15. We don't know what he did for a living at first, but he may have helped in his father's workshop. When he was only 18, towards the end of 1582, he married Anne Hathaway. She was 26. A daughter, Susanna, was baptized six months later. Twins, Hamnet and Judith, followed in late January or early February 1585. Hamnet died and

was buried in Stratford on 11 August 1596. The location of his grave is unknown.

William and Anne had no more children. Except for a passing mention in a law case of 1587, there is a gap in the record of Shakespeare's life from the birth of the twins to 1592 (when he is first credited as a writer). The best guess is that at some point he joined a theatre company – perhaps even one of those that visited Stratford – as actor or writer or both. His wife and children appear to have stayed in Stratford.

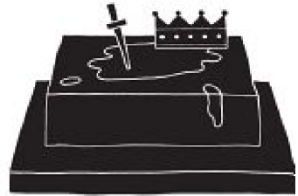
"Articles are borrowed of the pronoun, and be thus declined. *Singulariter nominativo*: 'hic, haec, hoc.'"

William

The Merry Wives of Windsor

In 1596, the College of Heralds granted Shakespeare a coat of arms, bestowing on him and his descendants the status of gentleman and the right to be termed "Master". His father died in 1601, presumably at more than 70 years old, and was buried in Stratford. In 1602, Shakespeare spent the great sum of £320 for the purchase of 107 acres of land in Old Stratford. In 1605, he was wealthy enough to pay £440 for an interest in the Stratford tithes, entitling him to a share in the area's farming income, which would have brought him an annual income of around £40. In London, he lived only in modest lodgings. His daughter Susanna married the physician John Hall in 1607; their only child, Elizabeth, was born

nine months later. Judith married a vintner named Thomas Quiney, with whom she had three children, all of whom died young. Elizabeth Hall died in 1670, and was Shakespeare's last descendant.



Shakespeare's first texts

The first reference to Shakespeare as a writer comes from 1592, by which time he was well established on the London theatrical scene. In 1593, his name appears in print for the first time, not as a dramatist but as the author of the narrative poem *Venus and Adonis*. His second narrative poem, *The Rape of Lucrece*, appeared in the following year. These poems were exceptionally successful, and were reprinted more frequently than any of Shakespeare's plays. In part, this is because plays were written primarily to be acted, so many never reached print. In 1594, *Titus Andronicus* was the first of Shakespeare's plays to be printed, but it seems certain that he must have written a number of other plays before then.

"What win I if I gain the thing I seek?

A dream, a breath, a froth of fleeting joy."

The Rape of Lucrece

In 1595, he is named along with two actors – Richard Burbage and Will Kemp – as having been paid for performances during the previous Christmas season at the court of Queen Elizabeth I by a company of players formed late the previous year under the patronage of the Lord Chamberlain, Lord Hunsdon. From now on, he was the resident playwright of the most important theatre company in the land. No other playwright of the period had so long and stable a relationship with a single company. Shakespeare was also an actor and a “sharer” – a businessman with a financial interest in the company’s success. Plays were normally the property of the acting company for which they were written, rather than of their author. There was, however, a reading public for dramatic texts, and about half of Shakespeare’s plays were printed in his lifetime. These, along with the missing texts, were assembled by his colleagues after he died and published as the *First Folio* in 1623.



The theatrical scene

Shakespeare grew up during a period of increasing stability and prosperity in England. Queen Elizabeth I was unifying the nation, and patriotic sentiment was growing. The arts of music, painting, architecture, and literature were flourishing. Great works of classical and continental, especially Italian, literature were appearing in translation and finding a wide readership. Many of these were to provide Shakespeare with inspiration and with plot material for his plays.

**"Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscrib'd
In one self place, for where we are is hell,
And where hell is must we ever be."**

Mephistopheles

Christopher Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*

Both English dramatic literature and the theatrical profession developed greatly during the early years of Shakespeare's working

life. A major development came in 1576 with the construction of the first successful professional playhouse, called simply the Theatre, in London. A new generation of dramatic writers emerged, including playwrights such as John Lyly and George Peele, with whom Shakespeare was to collaborate on *Titus Andronicus*. Figures from the later 1580s, such as Thomas Kyd, Robert Greene, and above all Christopher Marlowe, author of plays including the two-part drama *Tamburlaine*, *Dr Faustus*, *The Jew of Malta*, and *Edward II*, were all to influence Shakespeare. Growth in the size of acting companies and in the popularity of theatrical entertainment encouraged the writing of longer and more ambitious plays, interweaving plot with subplot, tragedy with comedy, and diversifying with songs, dances, masques, and spectacular effects made possible by the increasing sophistication of theatrical design.

"Can this cock-pit hold

The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram

Within this wooden O the very casques

That did affright the air at Agincourt?"

Chorus

Henry V

Theatrical performances

Theatres of the time were three-storeyed buildings with open roofs and uncurtained platform stages that thrust forwards into

the auditorium. Performances were given during daylight hours. At the back of the stage were doors from which the actors entered, and behind them the tiring house, or dressing room. There was an upper acting level that could represent a balcony or the walls of a city. A canopy over the stage held machinery to allow the descent of gods. There was no scenery. Musicians had their own space. The audience stood at ground level, or occupied the tiers of seating built into the walls. In London today, at Shakespeare's Globe on Bankside, there is a reconstruction of the Globe Theatre, originally built in 1599, for which many of Shakespeare's plays were written. In 1609, the company started to use a more exclusive indoor theatre, the Blackfriars, which had more elaborate stage machinery. These new possibilities are reflected in the stage effects required by, for instance, *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest*. Indoor theatres were lit by candles, and as the candles required frequent trimming to keep them alight, playwrights began to divide their plays more clearly into five acts. The Sam Wanamaker Playhouse at Shakespeare's Globe is an indoor stage that gives an impression of this kind of theatre. The actors who first performed Shakespeare's plays were skilled professionals, required by law to be organized into companies under the patronage of a high-ranking person – such as a nobleman, or even the Queen herself. A typical company was made up of 12 or 14 men, who could be supplemented by extras, known as hired men. Some of Shakespeare's plays require no more than the standard number of actors, but in others the same actor would have had to play two or

even three roles in the same performance. All female roles were played by boys – no professional female actors appeared on the English stage before 1660. This explains the relatively small number of female parts in each play: for instance, only two in *Julius Caesar* – Portia and Calpurnia – and the same number in *Hamlet* – Ophelia and Gertrude.

"But it is certain I
am loved of all ladies, only you excepted. And I would
I could find in my heart that I had not a hard heart,
for truly I love none."

Benedick

Much Ado About Nothing

Music and special effects

Music played an important part in performances, as is evident from the number of songs and dances in the plays. Actors would sometimes have accompanied their songs on lutes, and a band of playhouse musicians supplied incidental music. Ceremonial entries of royal persons and great warriors would be heralded by fanfares and drum rolls. Thunder could be imitated by the use of a thunder run – cannon balls rolled down a wooden trough – and it was even possible to imitate lightning by the use of special stage effects.

Theatres were closed during the 40-day religious observance of Lent, and companies frequently went on tour in the English

provinces. As there were no custom-built playhouses outside London, they had to play in improvised settings such as inn yards, the halls of great houses, guildhalls, and even occasionally in churches. Facilities would be limited, so play texts were adapted to suit the constraints of the new venues.



A wealth of plays

Shakespeare was an extremely versatile playwright, constantly experimenting with new styles of drama and developing his range of subject matter and the depth of understanding of character throughout his career. His first plays include the light comedies *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, the bloody tragedy of *Titus Andronicus*, and four plays, also more or less tragic in form, based on English history – three on the reign of Henry VI and a follow-up about Richard III. All these were written before the founding of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, in 1594. The end of that year saw a performance of his brilliantly plotted *Comedy of Errors*, in which he interweaves a tale of mistaken identity derived from

Roman comedy with the romantic tale of a family parted but eventually reunited.

"Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more."

Macbeth

Macbeth

A successful playwright

As a shareholder in the Lord Chamberlain's Men from 1594, and no longer needing to work in collaboration with other playwrights, Shakespeare had more independence to write what he wanted, but clearly felt he had to provide his colleagues with plays written in a variety of styles, keeping up an average of roughly two a year.

During the next five years or so, he wrote a dazzling series of romantic comedies – *Love's Labour's Lost*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *As You Like It*, along with more plays about English history – *Richard II* and *King John*, both in tragic form, the two parts of *Henry IV*, which feature his greatest comic character, Sir John Falstaff, and their triumphant sequel *Henry V*, as well as the romantic tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*, the somewhat unromantic comedy *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, which also has Falstaff at its centre, and the Roman tragedy *Julius Caesar*.

"My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss."

Romeo

Romeo and Juliet

His company acquired a new theatre, the Globe, in 1599. For this playhouse, he wrote the last two of his romantic comedies, *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*. This is the period, too, of his greatest success to date, the tragedy of *Hamlet*. After this, his plays become darker in tone. They include the highly original, bitter tragicomedy *Troilus and Cressida*, and two other plays – *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well that Ends Well* – which, though comic in form raise serious moral concerns. In this period, he also wrote the profound tragedies *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear*. On the death of the Queen, in 1603, his company became the King's Men.



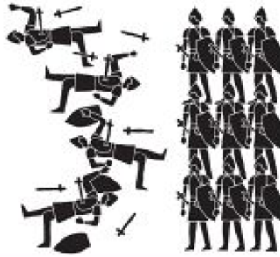
Collaborators and rivals

Around 1606, for reasons unknown, Shakespeare returned to his

former practice of collaborating with other playwrights. Thomas Middleton who, along with Ben Jonson, had emerged as his most serious rival, worked with him on *Timon of Athens*, but the only text of this play that has come down to us is incomplete. A new departure in dramatic style comes with *Pericles*, written with the minor playwright George Wilkins, a tragicomic narrative that foreshadows the later, singly authored *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*.

During this phase of his career, he wrote two highly contrasting tragedies of ancient Rome, the austere *Coriolanus* and the flamboyant *Antony and Cleopatra*, and, with John Fletcher, some fifteen years his junior, a now lost play, *Cardenio*, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and the play known in its time as *All is True* but printed in the First Folio as *Henry VIII*. During an early performance of *All is True* in 1613, the firing of a stage cannon set the thatch of the Globe playhouse on fire, burning it to the ground. Shakespeare's career as a playwright ended with the destruction of the playhouse that had seen some of his greatest successes.

In the last three years of his life, Shakespeare wrote little or nothing. He died in April 1616, leaving most of his property to Susanna, and £150 to his younger daughter Judith. Among other bequests he left 26s and 8d each to three colleagues in his acting company, the King's Men – Richard Burbage, Henry Condell, and John Heminges – to buy mourning rings, a common practice of the time.



What makes him great?

Why is it that Shakespeare, a long-dead author of plays conceived for playhouses very different from those of the present day, written in an increasingly archaic language, employing unrealistic dramatic conventions, and telling stories that are often remote from the daily experience of his audiences, should be celebrated both in English-speaking countries and elsewhere as an author of enduring significance?

Part of the answer is that he was a master of both prose and verse. He could construct powerful pieces of rhetoric, such as Mark Antony's speech to the Roman citizens in the Forum in *Julius Caesar*, and the king's address to his troops before the battle of Agincourt in *Henry V*. He could write beautiful passages of lyrical verse, such as the love scenes of *Romeo and Juliet* and the exquisite speeches of Oberon and Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He could write speeches that are both witty and comic, such as those that Lance addresses to his dog Crab, in *The Two Gentlemen of*

Verona, or those of Bottom and his colleagues in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

He could write with powerful simplicity, piercing our hearts with simple statements such as Leontes's "O, she's warm!" in *The Winter's Tale*, or Prospero's "Tis new to thee" in response to Miranda's "O brave new world, / That has such people in it" in *The Tempest*, or the largely monosyllabic reunion of King Lear and Cordelia.

"This is the excellent foppery of the world: that,
when we are sick in fortune—often the surfeits of our
own behaviour—we make guilty of our disasters the
sun, the moon, and stars."

Edmond
King Lear

Memorable characters

Shakespeare could also tell gripping stories. The overall design of the plays drives the plots forwards – and sometimes there are complex stories with more than one plot, as in *Hamlet* or *King Lear*. He builds tension in individual scenes, such as the trial scene in *The Merchant of Venice* and the banquet scene in *Macbeth*, with great dramatic effectiveness.

He gives us a strong sense of individual character, making us believe in the reality of the people in his plays, often by making

them speak in individual ways – such as the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, or Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* – sometimes by making them behave in a manner that is at once unexpected but credible.

Crucially, he is not judgmental or moralistic. Even the characters who behave badly, such as Paroles in *All's Well That Ends Well*, (perhaps above all) Falstaff in the *Henry IV* plays, or a villainous murderer such as Macbeth, can make us feel what they feel rather than pass judgment on their sins.

His plays provide a wealth of complex and theatrically effective roles, which offer rich and demanding opportunities to actors. Tragic roles such as Hamlet and King Lear, Lady Macbeth and Cleopatra, heroic ones such as Henry V and Coriolanus, wittily comic roles such as Benedict and Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*, and broadly comic ones such as Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, all provide actors with exceptional opportunities to demonstrate their skills.



Stories for all times

Many of the stories that he tells, such as in *King Lear* or *The Tempest*, have a quality of myth or legend that enables people of later ages to relate to them easily. Some plays, such as the history plays and *Julius Caesar*, also have a political dimension that can easily seem relevant to issues of modern times.

To speak of Shakespeare as the world's greatest dramatist is inadequate. It would be closer to the mark to speak of him as a philosopher, a psychologist, or a poet possessed of the artistry that enables him to express his perceptions in dramatic form, and in so doing render them with unique subtlety and communicative power.

Structure of this book

This book offers a section on each of Shakespeare's plays, giving information about their major themes, a concise description of their principal characters, a breakdown of the action arranged by act and scene, and a full synopsis of their plots. This is followed by information about each play's reputation and impact over the ages. There are also informative sections on Shakespeare's narrative poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, on his sonnets, and on his other two poems, *A Lover's Complaint* and *The Phoenix and the Turtle*.

The exact order in which Shakespeare wrote his works is uncertain. In this book, we follow both the text and the chronology of the *Complete Oxford Shakespeare*, General Editors Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, first published in 1986. It was reissued in 2005

with the addition of *Edward III*, which by that time was generally agreed to have been written at least partly by Shakespeare, and the full text of *Sir Thomas More*, a play that survives only in manuscript, and to which Shakespeare appears to have contributed at least one fine scene.

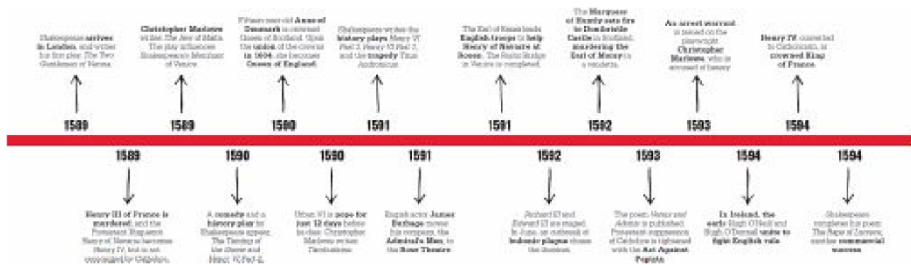
"Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
Of direst cruelty."

Lady Macbeth
Macbeth

INTRODUCTION

The young William Shakespeare probably arrived in London in the late 1580s. We do not know exactly when, however. After the birth of his twins in early 1585, no more is heard of him for seven years.

Some believe he spent these years as a school teacher; others that he travelled to Italy, although there is no real evidence for this. One theory is that he lived with a Catholic family in Lancashire, where he developed Catholic sympathies that he had to keep secret ever after to avoid running foul of England's Protestant regime.



Provincial upstart

All we can really be sure of is that he was living in London and writing plays by 1590 or so. We know this because he was clearly ruffling feathers among the university-educated literary dramatists used to ruling the roost in the capital until he came along. One of these dramatists was Robert Greene (1558–92), who, in 1592, as he lay dying in poverty, wrote bitterly in a pamphlet: “for there is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that

with his Tyger's hart wrapt in a Players hyde, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blanke verse as the best of you: and...is in his owne conceit the onely Shake-scene in a countrey." The phrase "Tyger's hart wrapt in a Player's hyde" is a parody of a line from *Henry VI Part 3*. So it would seem that by this point Shakespeare was already well known, yet still sufficiently new on the scene for Greene to call him an "upstart".

Exciting times

London in the late 1580s was an exciting time to be a playwright. It was the fastest-growing city in Europe, a bustling metropolis rivalled in size only by Paris and Naples. It was a young city – most of the population was under the age of 30 – and the theatre scene was booming. Beyond the city walls, in the lively, squalid city fringes, new theatres were beginning to attract large audiences. James Burbage had opened the Theatre in Shoreditch in 1576, and his rival Philip Henslowe had opened the Curtain Theatre nearby in 1577.

It is speculated that Shakespeare may have started his career with one of these companies as an actor, and he may have started writing plays soon after. His earliest surviving works, *The Two Gentleman of Verona* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, date from about 1590. He may even have written for several companies at the same time.

The Armada effect

These were dangerous times, too. The wounds caused by Henry VIII's break from Catholic Church were still raw, and Catholic sympathizers everywhere were constantly watched by government spies.

In 1587, the long-imprisoned Catholic Mary Queen of Scots was executed after being implicated in a plot to kill her cousin, Queen Elizabeth I. In response, Philip II of Spain sent the 140-ship Armada, the "greatest fleet that ever swam upon the sea". Philip, who had been married to Elizabeth's Catholic sister, Mary I, aimed to invade England, depose the "heretic" Elizabeth, and restore the Catholic faith. Remarkably, the smaller, more manoeuvrable English fleet, with the aid of tides and storms, routed the vast Armada. And though this was a crushing blow for Catholic hopes, there was probably hardly anyone in England, Protestant or Catholic, who did not feel a glow of pride at this unlikely triumph. It secured Elizabeth's reign and sent a wave of patriotic feeling through the country, which Shakespeare rode, writing so successfully about England's history over the following years with his raft of history plays.

He made his mark quickly, and by 1592 already had half a dozen popular successes, including his first series of plays about the Wars of the Roses: the *Henry VI* plays and *Richard III*, and *Titus Andronicus*.

Plague and poetry

Then, disaster struck. A major outbreak of plague ravaged London. To impede the spread of the epidemic, the theatres were closed

from June 1592 to May 1594, and theatre companies banished from the city. Some went on tour, but it is not known what Shakespeare did. He probably used this time to turn his hand to poetry: in April 1593, his great poem *Venus and Adonis* was published. It proved to be the biggest literary success of his life, far outselling any of his plays and going through many reprints. A second poem, *The Rape of Lucrece*, came out the following year. He may also have been writing plays. Perhaps anticipating a hunger for entertainment with the reopening of the theatres, his next two works were comedies.



IN LOVE, WHO RESPECTS FRIEND?

THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA (1589–1591)

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Proteus A young Veronese gentleman.

Valentine Also a gentleman of Verona. Friend to Proteus.

Julia Proteus's first love, later disguised as the page Sebastian.

Lucetta Julia's maid, who makes the breeches and codpiece for Julia's disguise as a boy.

Silvia Daughter of the Duke of Milan, and Valentine's beloved.

Speed Valentine's servant, who is far cleverer than his dim-witted master.

Lance Proteus's servant, and a clownish fellow.

Crab Lance's dog, to which Lance addresses impassioned monologues.

Duke of Milan Silvia's father.

Thurio The Duke's preferred suitor for his daughter. He is not taken seriously by his rivals.

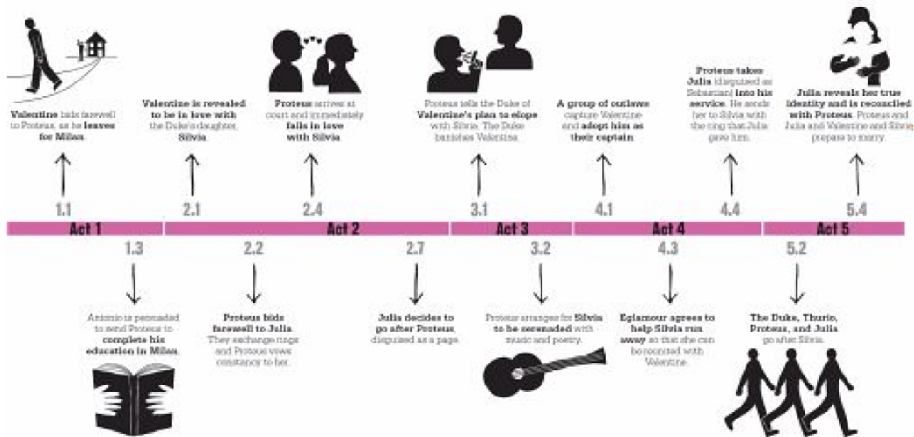
Antonio Proteus's father, who insists that Proteus should follow Valentine to Milan.

Panthino Antonio's servant.

Eglamour A knight who has taken a vow of chastity after the death of his love.

Outlaws Living in the forest outside Milan.

Host Keeper of the inn where Julia lodges.



Valentine prepares to leave for the Duke of Milan's court to complete his education as a gentleman. Proteus refuses to go with him because of his love for Julia. Valentine deplores the effects of love upon his friend.

Julia discusses her suitors with her maid, Lucetta. Lucetta singles out Proteus for admiration, but Julia observes that he has made no suit to her. When Speed delivers a letter from Proteus, Julia pretends that she doesn't want to read it, and tears it up. In private, she pieces the letter together and admits her love.

Proteus is celebrating Julia's confession of love in a further letter, when his father announces that he must join Valentine. Proteus says goodbye to Julia. They exchange rings, and he vows to be faithful to her. Lance gives a comic account of his leave-taking in which only the dog, Crab, remained dry-eyed.

At the court of Milan, Valentine has changed his attitude to love, having become infatuated with Silvia, the Duke's daughter, who is intended for the wealthy Thurio. Proteus arrives at court and is instantly enamoured of Silvia, too. Valentine reveals he and Silvia are betrothed and plan to elope. Proteus betrays this plot to Silvia's father, who tricks Valentine into revealing the rope ladder and letter, hidden in his cloak. The Duke banishes Valentine from Milan.

Proteus offers to help Thurio by praising him in front of Silvia and slandering Valentine. As he sings beneath her window, he is overheard by Julia, who has come in search of her lover, disguised as the page boy Sebastian. Proteus takes her into his employment and sends her to woo Silvia, giving her a letter and a ring (the one Julia gave him). Silvia sends Proteus a portrait of herself, but refuses to read his letter and tears it up. Julia's account of Proteus's betrayal of his first love makes Silvia cry.

Silvia enlists the help of Eglamour, a knight who has taken a vow of chastity after his true love died. They meet at Friar Patrick's cell after confession and make their way towards Mantua, where Silvia believes Valentine to be living.

In the forest, Proteus rescues Silvia from the outlaws who have captured her. Silvia still refuses Proteus's love, and he is about to rape her, but Valentine intervenes. Proteus is immediately contrite. Valentine pities him and renounces all his affection for Silvia. Julia returns to Proteus the ring she had forgotten to

deliver. Proteus recognizes it as one he gave Julia and becomes suspicious. Julia reveals who she is, and Proteus remembers his love for her. Thurio relinquishes his claim to Silvia and the Duke agrees that Valentine shall marry her. The outlaws are repealed from exile and the couples prepare for a double wedding.

IN CONTEXT

THEMES

Friendship, love, lust, ambition, change, betrayal, sacrifice

SETTING

Verona, the court of Milan, a forest near Mantua

SOURCES

1531 The Proteus–Valentine plot echoes the story of *Titus and Gisippus* from Boccaccio’s *Decameron*. Shakespeare may have read this in Sir Thomas Elyot’s *The Governor* (1531).

1542 Jorge de Montemayor’s prose romance *Diana* (1542, translated into English in 1598) may have provided the plot for Julia in male disguise sent to woo her lover’s new mistress. (This could also have come from a lost play *Felix and Felismena* (1585).)

LEGACY

1931 *Yi Jian Mei* (directed by Bu Wancang) – a black-and-white silent film – sets the play in 20th-century China.

1971 *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, a musical adaptation (libretto by John Guare and Mel Shapiro) is originally performed at Joe Papp’s Public Theatre, but transfers to Broadway where it wins a Tony award for Best Musical.

2014 The Royal Shakespeare Company stages its first full production of the play in its main house. The performance is filmed and played live in cinemas across the country.

For a romantic comedy, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is surprisingly negative about the experience of love. Passion is seen to inhibit the development of young men, who should be fighting in wars, studying at university, or travelling abroad. Not only does it stall their intellectual development, it is imagined as being physically destructive: “As the most forward bud / Is eaten by the canker ere it blow, / Even so by love the young and tender wit / Is turned to folly, blasting in the bud” (1.1.45–48).

Valentine may well be reliant on “writers” for this opinion – having never experienced love himself – but when he does fall for Silvia, his behaviour only reinforces the point. His wit is so enfeebled that he does not realize that Silvia is declaring her affections for him when she asks him to write love poetry on her behalf.

**"To leave my Julia shall I be forsworn;
To love fair Silvia shall I be forsworn;
To wrong my friend I shall be much forsworn."**

Proteus
Act 2, Scene 6

Throughout the play, characters describe themselves as being “metamorphosed” by love. Julia puts on male attire and makes a dangerous journey to follow her beloved Proteus. Valentine changes his clothing and behaviour for those of the stereotypical lover. Although Speed’s account of this is largely comic, his

acknowledgement that “when I look on you I can hardly think you my master” (2.1.29–30) reflects the deeper anxieties that surrounded male erotic desire in Shakespeare’s time, where to love was to be rendered effeminate. But Proteus’s transformation is the most serious. In classical mythology, Proteus was a sea god who could change his shape at will. However, Shakespeare’s character has little control over his shape-shifting, which causes him to betray his vows to Julia, and destroy his friendship with Valentine.

Friendship versus love

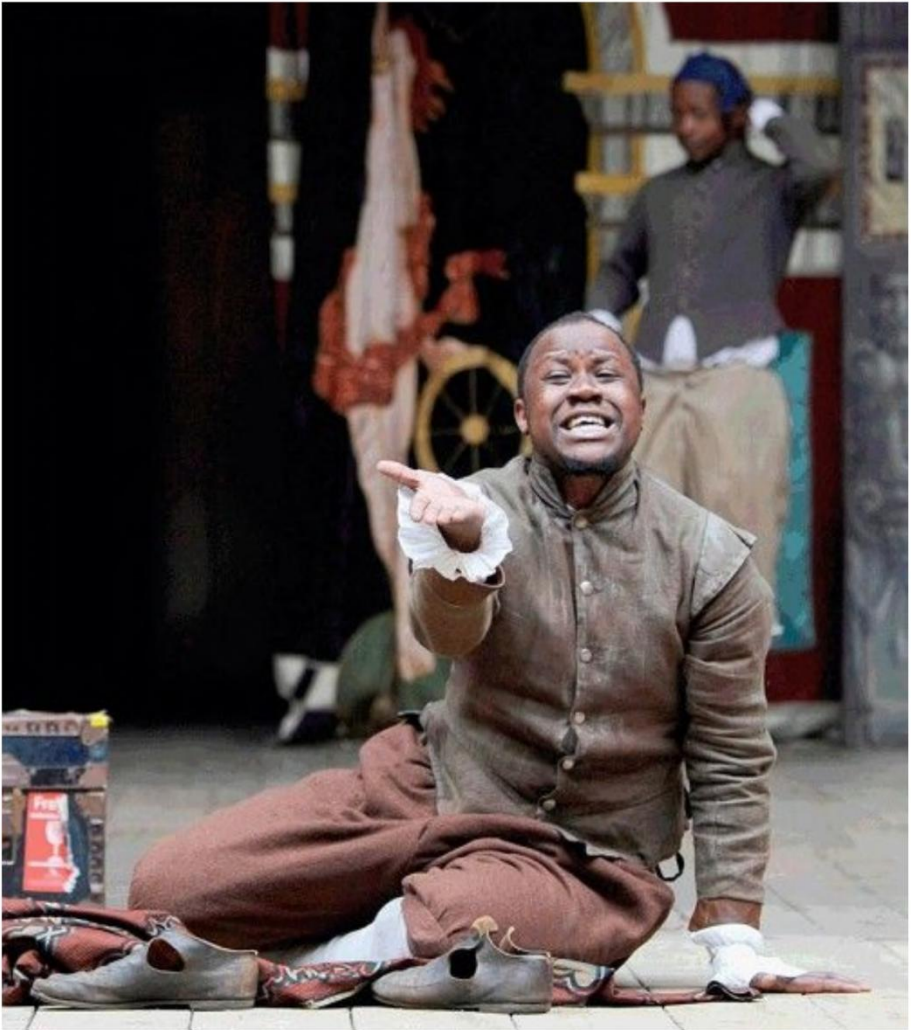
Shakespeare’s times placed great value on male-male friendship, imagining it a pure and ennobling love, without the turbulence of lust. It was thought to enable friends to perfect themselves through the mirror they provided to one another: “true friends should be two in body, but one in minde, / As it were one transformed into another”, said Richard Edwardes in his 1564 play *Damon and Pythias*. Given that friends were meant to share the same judgment, taste, and appetite, and to hold all things in common, it is no surprise that Proteus should desire Valentine’s beloved. One theory that *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* has been used to illustrate is that we are taught what to admire by other people – encouraged to see with their eyes. It is what Proteus does next that is a breach against the friendship code, when he betrays Valentine in order to steal his mistress, insisting that “I to myself am dearer than a friend” (2.6.23).

**"What should it be that he respects in her
But I can make respect in myself,
If this fond love were not a blinded god?"**

Julia

Act 4, Scene 4

Furthermore, in Shakespeare's most notorious addition to the drama, Proteus threatens to rape Silvia. His immediate confession and penitence when interrupted by Valentine can hardly atone for the crime he was about to perpetrate, or the betrayals that have brought him to this point. And yet, Valentine immediately forgives him and, renouncing all ties to Silvia, offers her to Proteus. Proteus seems invigorated by lust, and his betrayal of their friendship might imply that he has escaped the confines of the friendship narrative, even if Valentine has not.



A 2012 **Shona production** related the play's themes of exile and deception to life in contemporary Zimbabwe. All 15 characters were played by one pair of actors.

The place of women

Shakespeare's rape threat has also proven controversial because of the way in which it undermines the play's women. The male characters insist that women say "no" when they mean yes; their characters are soft, as if moulded out of wax. Yet it is the men who are fickle, while Julia and Silvia remain attached to their first loves. As Proteus asserts: "O heaven, were man / But constant, he were perfect" (5.4.109–110). Silvia's fate is finally decided by Valentine, Thurio, and her father, without her uttering a word, and the likelihood of Julia's happiness with the ever-changing, would-be rapist Proteus is not meant to trouble us. The friendship theme gains the upper hand, with Valentine's anticipation of "One feast, one house, one mutual happiness" (5.4.171) invoking less the terms of the marriage service (man and wife becoming "one flesh") than the image of male friends as "one in mind".

While Shakespeare would return to many of the themes and motifs of this play, he would never again risk subordinating romantic love to friendship in this way.

**"It is the lesser blot, modesty finds,
Women to change their shapes than men their minds."**

Julia
Act 5, Scene 4



I KNOW NOW HOW TO

TAME A SHREW

THE TAMING OF THE SHREW (1590–1594)

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Christopher Sly A drunken tinker.

Baptista The father of Katherine and Bianca, who negotiates with their suitors.

Katherine A strong, opinionated woman with a reputation that precedes her.

Bianca Katherine's younger sister, who is the object of affection for several suitors.

Petruccio A gentleman of Verona who travels to Padua to marry into a wealthy family.

Grumio Petruccio's servant, who taunts Katherine with food when his master has forbidden her to eat.

Gremio An old wealthy man who is in love with Bianca.

Hortensio Bianca's suitor, who disguises himself as the teacher Licio in order to gain access to her.

Lucentio A young man from Pisa who disguises himself as the teacher Cambio in order to woo Bianca.

Vincentio Lucentio's father who travels to Padua and is shocked to discover that another man has assumed his identity.

Tranio Lucentio's servant who pretends to be his master while his master plays the part of Cambio.

Biondello Another servant to Lucentio.

is expected of a good wife, and about the nature of the relationship between husband and wife. The guests are left surprised by Katherine's transformation.

IN CONTEXT

THEMES

Love, marriage, power, fathers, daughters, money, status, men, women

SETTING

Warwickshire, England, Padua, Italy

SOURCES

10th century Christopher Sly's story shares similarities with a tale from *The Arabian Nights*, while the tale of the shrewish woman takes its inspiration from ballads and folk stories of the period.

1566 The plot involving Bianca, Lucentio, Hortensio, and Gremio is based on George Gascoigne's comedy *Supposes*.

LEGACY

1611 John Fletcher writes *The Woman's Prize or The Tamer Tamed* as a response to Shakespeare's play.

1874 Hermann Goetz writes an opera based on the play called *Der Widerspänstigen Zähmung*.

1929 First Shakespeare "talkie" directed by Sam Taylor, with Hollywood stars Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks.

1948 Cole Porter's musical adaptation titled *Kiss Me Kate* is first performed.

1967 Franco Zeffirelli's film, starring Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor, is released.

1999 US teen-movie *10 Things I Hate About You*, based on the play, is set in a Seattle High School.

Some critics may wish that Shakespeare had never written *The Taming of the Shrew*. There are actresses today who would not want to be cast as Katherine, and theatre reviewers who would prefer to see the play disappear from the stage. Others, however, would include the play in their list of favourite Shakespearean comedies, and identify Katherine as one of the playwright's most memorable early creations.

In his presentation of the “taming” of a “shrew” Shakespeare gave voice to a variety of attitudes towards women and marriage that were common to his times. Such attitudes are more likely to offend than entertain contemporary audiences, but they reflect the playwright's engagement with the period in which he was living. At this time a woman could be described as “shrewish” if she openly disagreed with a man or seemed bad tempered. The very title of Shakespeare's play promised drama and extreme behaviour. It also promised a battle of the sexes.

The property of men

Women are often spoken about in this play as commodities, owned

by men. Katherine's first utterance is one of disgust at hearing the way in which her father speaks of her to Gremio and Hortensio, underlining her father's financial interest in her marital status. Financial gain is the first thing that occurs to Petruccio when he accepts the challenge of wooing Katherine: "I come to wive it wealthily in Padua; / If wealthily, then happily in Padua." (1.2.74–75). Love does not enter his thoughts, though he clearly has sex in mind: "For I will board her though she chide as loud / As thunder when the clouds in autumn crack." (1.2.94–95). It is clear that Katherine, who is thought of by the men as a "fiend of hell" (1.1.88) will be turned into a "gentler, milder mould" (1.1.60). The question remains whether the transformation will be consensual.



Sexual tension or brutal bullying? Productions have reflected the sexual politics of their time. Franco Zeffirelli's film of 1967 starred husband and wife Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton.

"Have I not in my time heard lions roar?"

Petruccio
Act 1, Scene 2

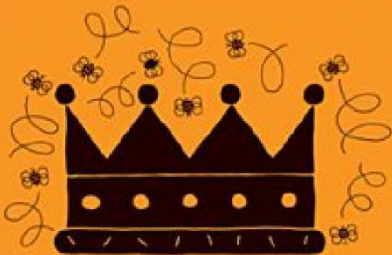
Taming tactics

Shakespeare has Petruccio rehearse his “taming” strategy through soliloquy before meeting Katherine: “Say that she rail, why then I’ll tell her plain / She sings as sweetly as a nightingale. / Say that she frown, I’ll say she looks as clear / As morning roses newly washed with dew. / Say she be mute and will not speak a word, / Then I’ll commend her volubility, / And say she uttereth piercing eloquence.” (2.1.170–176). Without recourse to this soliloquy, Petruccio’s behaviour would seem eccentric and insensitive. While this soliloquy does not excuse his conduct (including withholding food and denying sleep), it serves to emphasize that he is donning a role to achieve a desired result.

As the couple make their way to the banquet at the close, Petruccio’s “reign” (4.1.174) over Katherine is apparent. He has essentially talked her (or in some productions, beaten her) into submission. He treats her, in his own words, like a falcon (4.1.176), shaping her appetites to suit his will. Petruccio’s treatment of Katherine is ruthless. It contrasts strongly with the farcical romantic sub-plot in which Bianca is besieged by starry-eyed suitors. Petruccio does not seem interested in having the love as well as the obedience of his wife. Katherine is bewildered by his behaviour and angered that “He does it under name of perfect love” (4.3.12).

“Why there’s a wench! Come on, and kiss me, Kate.”

Petruccio
Act 5, Scene 2



**THE COMMONS, LIKE
AN ANGRY HIVE OF
BEES THAT WANT
THEIR LEADER,
SCATTER UP
AND DOWN**

HENRY VI PART 2 (1590–1591)

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

THE KING'S PARTY

King Henry VI

Queen Margaret

William de la Pole, Marquis, later Duke, of Suffolk

Duke of Gloucester

Dame Eleanor Cobham

Cardinal Beaufort

Duke of Buckingham

Duke of Somerset

Lord Clifford

DUKE OF YORK'S PARTY

Richard, Duke of York

Edward

Earl of Salisbury

Earl of Warwick

OTHERS

Jack Cade

Sir Humphrey Stafford

Richard kills Somerset. Margaret drags Henry away to London. The Yorkists march on London to proclaim their victory.

IN CONTEXT

THEMES

Ambition, weakness, social order, kingship

SETTING

London, Kent, Blackheath, St Albans

SOURCES

1548 One source for the play is Edward Hall's *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and York*.

1587 As for many of his History plays, Shakespeare also drew on Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*.

LEGACY

1591 Evidence suggests that *Henry VI Part 2* was first staged in 1591 or 1592.

1864 Performance to celebrate Shakespeare's tercentenary at the Surrey Theatre in London.

1963 John Barton and Peter Hall at the RSC combine the three *Henry VI* plays and *Richard III* into the two-part *The Wars of the Roses*.

1987 An English Shakespeare Company production directed by Michael Bogdanov, stresses the play's political issues. It tours Japan, Italy, and Australia.

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