

INTRODUCTION

In a copy of the 1623 folio of Shakespeare's *Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies*, an early reader paid particular attention to *Romeo and Juliet*. He drew a line down the margin of passages he thought especially commendable, or perhaps just liked: in general, he preferred lyrical verse, the lovers' dialogue, and passages of description. He corrected obvious typographical errors and compared his copy with another edition, making emendations as an editor would. Most notably, he copied the play's prologue, not printed in the folio text, into the space at the end of the previous play, *Titus Andronicus*, neatly titling it 'The prologue to Juliet and Romeo'.

The reader was identified in 2019 as John Milton, author of *Paradise Lost*. He was 14 in 1623, and seems to have acquired the book by the late 1620s. There is no evidence that he ever saw the play performed, but the seriousness and the pleasure of his reading are visible not only in the emendations but in how his curving vertical lines are so often extended, to take in more of Shakespeare's text.¹

Taylor Swift re-released her 2008 hit 'Love Story' as 'Love Story (Taylor's Version)' in 2021. The 2008 video depicted a tongue-in-cheek romantic fantasy, framed as a daydream within a schoolyard encounter: Taylor on a balcony in an off-the-shoulder corseted dress, an almost parodically sultry young man in a floppy white shirt, intercut with scenes of a ball, a garden at night, a meadow, a horse. And there's a fantasy happy ending, when 'Romeo' proposes and this day-dreamy love story ends with parental approval, a white wedding and a heartfelt 'yes'. A reviewer described it as being about 'the kind of extravagant feelings you have when every interaction with your crush is life-or-death in a way that can only be expressed by referencing the Shakespeare play you were just discussing in your high school English class'.² *Romeo and Juliet* is one of the most performed, read, studied, adapted and referenced of Shakespeare's plays, one of the best known and most popular by any definition, and it seems that it always has been. The play's resonance with teenagers in particular has a long history: in the 1623 folio acquired by the Bodleian Library in Oxford in 1624, the play which shows most wear is *Romeo and Juliet*, its most worn scene the lovers' first meeting.³

c.1595: A Poet-Playwright at Work

In the plays he wrote in 1595 – most likely *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Richard II* and *Romeo and Juliet* – Shakespeare 'reached a new level of artistic

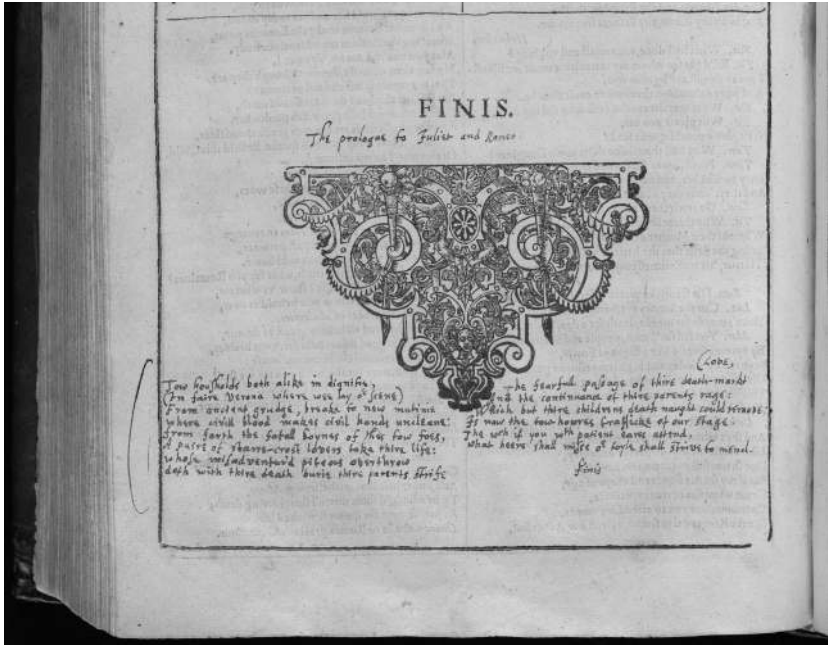
¹ See Claire Bourne and Jason Scott-Warren, "'thy unvalued Booke": John Milton's copy of the Shakespeare First Folio', *Milton Quarterly* 56 (2022), 1–85.

² Simon Vozick-Levinson, *Rolling Stone*, 12 February 2021.

³ Emma Smith, *Shakespeare's First Folio: Four Centuries of an Iconic Book*, 2016, p. 75.

Romeo and Juliet

2



1 The prologue to *Romeo and Juliet*, written on the page (sig. ee2^v) facing the play's opening in a copy of the 1623 Folio by a seventeenth-century reader identified as John Milton. (Courtesy of the Free Library of Philadelphia, Rare Book Department)

development'.¹ Trying to pin down the exact sequence of those plays is less interesting than thinking about them as having been worked on in parallel, as a series of interrelated poetic and dramaturgical experiments. While the near-total closure of the London playhouses from summer 1592 to summer 1594, mostly by plague, is usually referenced in relation to Shakespeare's writing of *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, it's also important context for the plays generally agreed to have been performed for the first time in 1594–5. The figures for new plays over this period are stark: the *British Drama Catalogue* has thirty-four entries in 1592, and only eleven in 1593; there are twenty-six in 1594; and in 1595, forty-five.² This basic outline shows both the precarity of the playing companies and, much more positively, the preconditions for the abundance of new writing for the stage in 1594–5. The closure of the theatres in 1592–4 doesn't have to be thought of solely in terms of Shakespeare's writing of his long poems: a cluster of Shakespeare's works can be approached as being part of the same extended, mutually informative creative process, as Shakespeare read and wrote both poetry and drama.³ The next part of this section looks at some examples of

¹ Hugh Grady, *Shakespeare and Impure Aesthetics*, 2009, p. 52.

² See BDC III.

³ BDC suggests *TGV* 1594; *Rom.*, *R2*, *MND* 1595; *MV*, *LLL* 1596.

how Shakespeare worked with his chief source, Arthur Brooke's *Tragicall Historie*, at the level of plot, transforming a long narrative poem into drama, and then goes on to explore some of the other things that were 'in the mix' around 1595, in what Shakespeare was writing himself, and in works by other writers. Setting *Romeo and Juliet* in the context of its poetic and dramatic moment more generally suggests that Shakespeare saw no hard-and-fast distinction between poetry and drama, at the same time as he was exploring and experimenting with the particular qualities and potential of both theatre and verse.

The identification of a play's sources and its date are often mutually dependent. *Romeo and Juliet* certainly has specific sources, above all Brooke's *Tragicall Historie*; Brooke's poem is frequently cited in the commentary notes, and substantial excerpts are included as an appendix to the online edition. The main way in which sources and dating are intertwined is in the establishment of the earliest possible date for a work's composition (because it demonstrably makes use of a source not available until that time) and the latest possible date (because the work itself becomes a source, established by clear allusions in other texts) or (even more definitively) by its appearance in print. A key text here for some editors is Thomas Nashe's *Have With You To Saffron-Walden*, printed in 1596, but which it's been argued Shakespeare knew in manuscript; there are certainly some possible verbal echoes in *Romeo and Juliet*, noted in the Commentary. Editors of *Romeo and Juliet* have sometimes tried to identify the earthquake described by the Nurse in 1.3, too, as a way of dating the play.¹ But the discussion here is less concerned with tying *Romeo and Juliet* to a particular date (which it broadly assumes is 1595) than with establishing what sort of conversation Shakespeare's play might be having with other texts around that moment.

The story of Romeo and Juliet long predates even Brooke's poem. The feuding Montecchi and Cappelletti were first mentioned in Dante's *Purgatorio* (1320): the Montecchi were Ghibellines, from Verona, supporting the Holy Roman Emperor, and the Cappelletti were Guelphs, from Cremona, supporting the Pope. These factions divided Italy from the twelfth to the fifteenth century. Next came the publication of Masuccio Salernitano's *Novellino* (1476), including a story broadly similar to the play; Luigi da Porto's 'Hystoria novellamente ritrovata di due nobili amanti' (1524), set in Verona and naming Romeo and Giulietta; and Matteo Bandello's 'La sfortunata morte di due infelicissimi amanti' (1554), expanding da Porto; both da Porto and Bandello set the story in the late thirteenth century, when Bartolomeo della Scala governed Verona. Finally, Pierre Boaistuau translated Bandello as 'Histoire troisième de deux Amants' in his *Histoires tragiques* (1559).² Most significant for Shakespeare's play, however, was Brooke's narrative poem *The Tragicall Historie of Romeus and Juliet* (1562), based on Boaistuau, and the publication of the second volume of William Painter's *Palace of Pleasure* (1567), which included a prose version also based on Boaistuau. Very little is known about Brooke, who did not live to see his poem's influence: he drowned in 1563.

¹ See Weis, pp. 36–41, and Levenson, pp. 99–102, on the earthquake and Nashe.

² See the timeline by Christopher Dearnier in Julia Reinhard Lupton (ed.), *Romeo and Juliet: A Critical Reader*, 2016, pp. xiv–xxiii.

Romeo and Juliet

4

His poem was reprinted in 1567 and 1587. The first volume of Painter's work was printed in 1566 and reprinted in 1569, the second volume was reprinted in 1580, and *both* volumes were printed together in 1575; Shakespeare might have had that 1575 edition (and by early 1594) because he echoes Painter's version of the story of Lucretia (which is in volume 1) in his own *Lucrece*, which was entered for publication in the Stationers' Register on 9 May. But the story of Romeo and Juliet was well known.¹

As Catherine Belsey suggests, 'analysis of the way the play treats its sources is as close as we can get to seeing Shakespeare at work':² what follows are some particular examples of Shakespeare's transformations of his sources. As Brooke's *Tragicall Historye* begins, young Romeus is going to lots of parties in Verona in an attempt to get over his infatuation with an unidentified woman. He goes with his friends to a Christmas party and they dance with the ladies, but when the time comes to unmask he is 'bashfull' and with 'shamefast face forsook / The open prease, and him withdrew into the chambers nooke' (171–2). Then he sees Juliet, and the sight of her puts all thought of his former love out of his mind, 'as out of a planke a nayle a nayle doth drive' (207).³ Shakespeare draws on another source for further details of his lovers' meeting, however: Christopher Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*. Although it wasn't printed until 1598, it must have been written before Marlowe's death (30 May 1593), and editors now assume that Shakespeare knew it in manuscript.⁴

In Brooke, Juliet has sat down with Romeus 'at thone side of her chayre' and on the other 'one cald Mercutio'. This is not the unforgettable friend Shakespeare gives his hero: Brooke's Mercutio has just one memorable quality, his icy hands. 'As soon as had the knight / the vyrgins right hand raught: / Within her trembling hand her left / hath louing Romeus caught.' (Mercutio's hands are just as cold in Painter's version.) Brooke is a very long way from the extraordinary intimacy of the sonnet which Shakespeare's lovers share, and its erotic charge is partly supplied by the meeting of Marlowe's lovers. *Hero and Leander* is not drama, but emphatically the work of a dramatist. Leander has seen Hero at a festival of Venus and they have instantly fallen in love: 'Where both deliberat, the love is slight / Who ever lov'd, that lov'd not at first sight?', the narrator observes. (Romeo on seeing Juliet: 'Did my heart love till now? forswear it, sight! / For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night', 1.5.51–2.)⁵ Leander kneels in prayer, at which 'Chast Hero to her selfe thus softly said: / Were I the saint hee worships, I would heare him.' And, when Leander and Hero meet, 'These lovers parled by the touch of hands'.⁶ Juliet's plight in Brooke is comic, one

¹ See Jill Levenson, 'Romeo and Juliet before Shakespeare', *SP* 81 (1984), 325–47.

² Catherine Belsey, *Romeo and Juliet: Language and Writing*, 2014, pp. 68–9.

³ Seeing Silvia, Proteus quotes the same proverb (*TGV* 2.4.185–8); Brooke was probably a source for *TGV*. See M. S. Allen, 'Brooke's "Romeo and Juliet" as a source for the Valentine–Silvia plot', *University of Texas Publication: Studies in English* 18 (1938), 25–46.

⁴ *Shakespeare's Poems*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones and H. R. Woudhuysen, 2007, pp. 20–1.

⁵ See also *AYLI* 3.6.80–1.

⁶ *Hero and Leander* 175–9, 185, in Marlowe II. Roma Gill in *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe*, vol. 1, ed. Gill, 1986, notes that 'the encounter seems to anticipate the first contact – "palm to palm" – of Romeo and Juliet': 183–5n. There are other echoes: notably *Rom.* 3.2.26–31 closely follows *Hero and Leander* 237–42.

hand in Mercutio's clammy grip, the other warmly clasped by Romeo, but it's a scenario which would not easily translate into drama. Marlowe's poem, however, *does* suggest a kind of symbiosis of the poetic and the dramatic, the voice and the body. Like Marlowe's lovers, Romeo and Juliet 'parl', speak (at least at first) by the touch of hands (pp. 34–5).

At the end of the party, Brooke's timeframe dilates: Romeus hangs around under Juliet's window, night after night, and she spends hours vainly looking out for him, until one night they coincide, see each other and declare their love. Romeus persuades the Friar to marry them, the Nurse acts as go-between and they are married under cover of Juliet going to confession. There is a rope ladder and the wedding night duly follows. Shakespeare compresses this into mere hours. In Brooke, there's not only a gap of weeks between the lovers' meeting and their encounter at Juliet's window, but after their marriage the lovers' relationship continues for a further three months, Romeus visiting his wife every other night before the crisis caused by Tibalt's killing. In a narrative poem, time can be as easily compressed as it can be dilated, with months reduced to a few lines. The headlong, passionate intensity in Shakespeare's play is fostered by its careful time-scheme – five days – but it's also a recognition that such repetitive action, night after night, would be both difficult to convey and, even more, inherently non-dramatic. (An early modern audience, perhaps cued by actors' bodies and physical action to think in more realistic ways, might expect a crisis to be occasioned by pregnancy, as is the case for Juliet's namesake in *Measure for Measure* 1.2.126–36.)

Shakespeare engineers the crisis via the challenge that Tybalt sends to Romeo the morning after the party, the day of the lovers' wedding, but in Brooke the outbreak of violence is months later and not directed at Romeo at all: Tibalt leads a Capilet gang who ambush the Montagewes. Romeus tries to stop the fight but, in the space of ten lines or so, he kills Tibalt, and in another dozen lines, he's banished. Shakespeare personalises the crisis (the challenge, Mercutio's goading of Tybalt, their duel, Mercutio's death and Romeo's grief-stricken revenge) and it takes place immediately after the wedding. But he also adds suspense by leaving Romeo's fate undecided for considerable stage time: the Prince's verdict is only given after Benvolio's narration of events and the parents' interventions, all of which take up around fifty lines before Romeo is banished. In Brooke, Juliet hears of her cousin's death and her husband's exile almost immediately, but in the play the scene changes to Juliet's soliloquy as she awaits the wedding night (pp. 36–7), and the Nurse takes another thirty or so lines to state plainly that 'Tybalt is gone and Romeo banishèd' (3.2.69).

It's only at this point in Brooke that Juliet's marriage is mooted by her parents: Paris hasn't even been mentioned. The action continues much as in the play, with Juliet's initial defiance, her desperate visit to the Friar, his provision of the potion, her overcoming her fear of taking it, the discovery of her apparent corpse, and her funeral. Romeus's servant Peter sees the funeral procession and goes to Mantua to tell Romeus, who finds an apothecary and buys poison. He rides at speed back to Verona; he and Peter break into the tomb (no Paris), he laments, embraces Juliet and takes the poison, dying with a prayer for God's forgiveness. The Friar arrives and Juliet

Romeo and Juliet

6

awakes; she laments and ‘A thousand times she kist [Romeus’s] mouth as cold as stone’ (2731). (By a simple inversion, Shakespeare focuses the pathos far more terribly in Juliet’s heartrending ‘Thy lips are warm’, 5.3.167, p. 40.) The Friar flees and Juliet kills herself. The Friar is taken to the Prince and tells his story, and the Prince delivers his judgement: the Nurse is banished, Peter is forgiven, the apothecary is hanged, and the Friar is exonerated. The families are reconciled and Brooke concludes that, in Verona, ‘There is no monument more worthy of the sight: / Then is the tombe of Iuliet, and Romeus her knight’ (3019–20). Shakespeare’s final couplet ostentatiously remakes Brooke’s. The point of setting out these comparisons is not simply to demonstrate that ‘Shakespeare does it better.’ What’s striking is how Shakespeare’s version of the story of Romeo and Juliet is so distinctive as *drama*, but, as Gordon McMullan argues, ‘in *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare seems wilfully to refuse to differentiate between his two vocations: poet and playwright’.¹

Many possible sources or echoes for particular phrases, lines or passages in *Romeo and Juliet* are cited in the commentary notes, but it’s also illuminating to trace larger connections between the play and 1590s lyric poetry, especially sonnets, with which Shakespeare often seems to be in conversation, and with other things that Shakespeare himself is writing, especially his own plays. The next part of this section makes some of those comparisons and connections – the kinds of things that might have been noticed by an audience member who saw *Romeo and Juliet*, *Richard II* and *Midsummer Night’s Dream* at around the same time (and which could almost have been in-jokes for actors; this seems particularly the case with *Romeo and Juliet* and ‘Pyramus and Thisbe’) and who was *also* reading (or writing) the poetry which was fashionable in that same mid-1590s moment. The point is not trying to pin down what came first, who was borrowing or quoting whom, but mapping some of the possible connections – between Shakespeare and sonnets by Sidney and Spenser, for instance, or *Romeo and Juliet* and *epithalamia*, wedding poems, written in 1594–5 by poets including Spenser and John Donne.

The publication of Philip Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella* in 1591 fuelled a sonnet-writing craze,² including sonnet sequences by some of the better-known poets of the day: Samuel Daniel’s *Delia* (1592), Michael Drayton’s *Idea the shepherds garland* (1593) and *Ideas mirrour* (1594), and Edmund Spenser’s *Amoretti* (1595); there were many other sonnets published by less well-known poets, as well as all those that never made it into print. That Romeo has been reading Petrarch or his imitators is not in doubt: Montague describes him as ‘private in his chamber pen[ning] himself’ (1.1.129), shutting himself away, but a quibble on ‘pen’ suggests writing too. In Baz Luhrmann’s 1996 film, Romeo is first seen writing (p. 65), his lines in voiceover (1.1.167–70), his oxymorons an example of ‘the numbers that Petrarch flowed in’ that Mercutio accuses Romeo of churning out (2.4.34–5). Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella* is demonstrably an influence on Shakespeare’s play;³ its sonnets and songs are also frequently dramatic in their effect. Four sonnets (79–82) remember, imagine or

¹ McMullan, p. xii.² *Astrophil and Stella* was written c.1581.³ See 5.3.118 supplementary note.

anticipate kissing Stella, but a kiss itself cannot be contained in the sonnet; it's always just outside its envelope. Astrophil nearly kisses Stella in the Second Song; and in the Eleventh, they duet: 'Who is it that this darke night, / Underneath my window playneth?', asks Stella (1–2). Sidney's sequence plays with what sonnets are capable of and also what they apparently *can't* do.¹ Thomas Nashe's preface to the unauthorised 1591 edition calls it 'this Theater of pleasure . . . a paper stage streud with pearle . . . whiles the tragicommodity of loue is performed by starlight', but 'the chiefe Actor here is *Melpomene*'.² Whether or not the idea of a 'tragicommodity of loue . . . performed by starlight', its action shaped by Melpomene the tragic muse, was noted by Shakespeare, Nashe thinks about the inherent theatricality of sonnets. Shakespeare takes up the challenge and makes it flesh; he explores the potential of what staging sonnets might do (pp. 34–40).

Almost all the *Amoretti*'s sonnets are in Spenser's own elaborately interlocking form (rhymed *ababbcbccdcdee*), and the sequence opens by imagining the book being read by Elizabeth, whom he married in 1594: 'Happy ye leaues when as those lilly hands, / which hold my life in their dead doing might / Shall handle you and hold in lous soft bands, / like captiues trembling at the victors sight' (1.1–4). Spenser's conceit is tactile, as the poem slips between the poem itself, the book's pages and his wife's hands: this sonnet is a nest of words and hands intertwined, and Romeo and Juliet's first meeting perhaps glances at it. The *Amoretti* are followed by a long poem, the *Epithalamion*. An *epithalamium* is a classical form;³ literally a song sung outside the bridal chamber, it can refer to wedding poems more generally. Spenser's is not quite the earliest English epithalamium (Sidney included one in the *Arcadia*, published 1593), but it is unusual in being in his own voice as poet-bridegroom (they are more usually sung by wedding guests). John Donne's 'Epithalamium made at Lincoln's Inn' was likely written as a response to Spenser's, possibly for the Christmas revels in 1594–5;⁴ its dramatic occasion is suggestive. A further epithalamium *was* written for a real wedding, that of Lady Elizabeth Vere and William Stanley, Earl of Derby, at Greenwich Palace on 26 January 1595, by John Davies (pp. 8, 24–5).⁵ There is a long tradition of speculating that *Midsummer Night's Dream* might have been performed at the Vere–Stanley wedding, although no definitive evidence has ever been found.⁶

These offer a suggestive cluster of analogues for Shakespeare's epithalamium, Juliet's 'Gallop apace'.⁷ Like Spenser, Juliet speaks her own epithalamium. The versions by Donne and Davies seem to have been written for performance. In Spenser's poem, the poet-bridegroom waits impatiently for nightfall on the longest day, urging on the sun: 'Hast thee O fayrest Planet to thy home / Within

¹ See David Schalkwyk, *Speech and Performance in Shakespeare's Sonnets and Plays*, 2002, p. 68.

² *Syr P.S. His Astrophel and Stella* (1591), sig. A3.

³ Catullus 61, 62 and 64 were the most important models.

⁴ See Donne, pp. 617–18.

⁵ Davies, pp. 202–7, 407.

⁶ The case has been made for two, the Vere–Stanley wedding and the Carey–Berkeley wedding (19 February 1596).

⁷ See 3.2.1–4 supplementary note, and Gary M. McCown, "'Runawayes Eyes' and Juliet's epithalamium", *SQ* 27 (1976), 150–70.

Romeo and Juliet

8

the Westerner fome: / Thy tyred steedes longe since haue need of rest' (282–4).¹ Juliet calls on night to 'Spread thy close curtain' and imagines being concealed by night's 'black mantle' (3.2.5,15); Spenser's speaker implores night to 'spread thy broad wing ouer my loue and me, / That no man may vs see, / And in thy sable mantle vs enwrap' (319–21).² The point is almost less the echo than the voice, the direct invocation which Spenser models, and the sense of dramatic occasion, of really speaking aloud, which is affirmed by Donne and Davies. In the final sonnet of Davies' 'Epithalamion', the muse promises the couple that their names will be written in the heavens 'in starry letters': 'Longe shall you shine on earth, like Lampes of heaven, / Which when you Leave, I will you stellifie' – that is, transform into stars. When Juliet instructs that, if night gives her Romeo, 'when I shall die, / Take him and cut him out in little stars' (3.2.21–2), the parallel with Davies is striking (p. 37).

Shakespeare also quotes himself, and not just in words but in situations and staging. Quite possibly written for the same actors, the farewell between Richard and the Queen in *Richard II* poignantly echoes the *meeting* of Romeo and Juliet:

RICHARD One kiss shall stop our mouths, and dumbly part.
Thus give I mine, and thus take I thy heart.
QUEEN Give me mine own again. 'Twere no good part
To take on me to keep and kill thy heart.
So, now I have mine own again be gone,
That I may strive to kill it with a groan.
RICHARD We make woe wanton with this fond delay.
Once more adieu, the rest let sorrow say. (5.1.95–102)

Romeo and Juliet and *Richard II* also share their careful use of the upper stage. In the balcony scene, Juliet's location literalises Romeo's idiom as he addresses her as sun and angel, with the audience too gazing up: at the Theatre, they might have had to shade their eyes against the afternoon sun (p. 15). Romeo's adoration of Juliet was quite literally turning west to east. (With his obscenely tragic Wall in 'Pyramus and Thisbe', Shakespeare demonstrated that he also knew exactly how *not* to stage a pair of separated lovers: vertical yearning is poignant, horizontal somehow ridiculous.) 'Characters appearing above are always a focus of attention, and typically the raised location is thematically significant':³ in *Richard II*, the King enters '*on the walls*' when he surrenders to Bullingbrook at Flint Castle, appearing 'As doth the blushing discontented sun / From out the fiery portal of the east / When he perceives the envious clouds are bent / To dim his glory and to stain the track / Of his bright passage to the occident' (3.3.62–7). These are Bullingbrook's words, but Richard identifies himself with the sun too: when he finally comes down, he descends 'like glistening Phaëton' (3.3.178). The invocation of Apollo's ill-fated son is as ominous for

¹ See Catherine Belsey, 'The elephants' graveyard revisited: Shakespeare at work in *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *All's Well That Ends Well*, *S.Sur.* 68 (2015), 62–72: 67–8.

² Belsey, 'Elephants' graveyard', 68.

³ Leslie Thomson, 'Staging on the road, 1586–1594: a new look at some old assumptions', *SQ* 61 (2010), 526–50: 535, and pp. 15–16.

him as it is for Juliet and Romeo. *Romeo and Juliet*'s audience are cued by torches and even more by words to imagine night; in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, however, Peter Quince and his company are sceptical that their courtly audience will be able to imagine anything, let alone moonlight, without crashingly literal cues, at the same time as they worry that the audience will enter into the illusion (the lion, the killing) too far (3.1.8–55). *Romeo and Juliet*'s audience are four times (2.3, 3.5, 4.4, 5.3) invited to picture day-break: in the dawn scene, Juliet says that 'It is not yet near day', Romeo counters that 'envious streaks' of light are appearing, Juliet denies that it's the sun (3.5.1–15). If the Chamberlain's Men revived *The Taming of the Shrew* in the late 1590s,¹ then Katherina and Petruchio's argument and Katherina's capitulation ('And be it moon or sun or what you please; / And if you please to call it a rush-candle, / Henceforth I vow it shall be so for me', 4.5.13–15) would have sounded even more hollow by comparison with the poignantly shifting vision of Romeo and Juliet's aubade (pp. 37–9).

Midsummer Night's Dream and *Romeo and Juliet* are most obviously connected by the story of 'Pyramus and Thisbe', staged at the wedding celebrations for Theseus and Hippolyta, Demetrius and Helena, and Hermia and Lysander. The coincidence of the bathetic 'Pyramus and Thisbe' with the tragic *Romeo and Juliet* suggests considerable confidence on Shakespeare's part in both his actors and his own writing. Beyond their correspondences in terms of plot, the most striking link between *Romeo and Juliet* and *Midsummer Night's Dream* is Mercutio's 'Queen Mab' (1.4.54–95), which reads like an off-cut of the fairy play. The fairies in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth and Mustardseed, are apparently tiny, but Mercutio's minuscule imaginings are more threatening: Mab herself is 'no bigger than an agate-stone / On the forefinger of an alderman', in her nut-shell chariot, pulled by 'little atomi / Over men's noses as they lie asleep', the coachman 'Not half so big as a round little worm / Pricked from the lazy finger of a maid' (1.4.55–69). She gallops through dreams, and as Mercutio's speech gets faster and more vivid, the audience's heads must whirl too, with the effort of keeping up, the effort of imagination. It's a heady space to be in (modern productions sometimes supply hallucinogens) and, in some ways, Mercutio's speech creates the pre-condition for the lovers' *coup de foudre*, their explosive love-at-first-sight, for the audience as well as the characters. A spell is cast, no fairy magic needed.

The earliest allusions to *Romeo and Juliet* are found in both poetry and drama. John Marston's *Scourge of Villanie* (1598) mocks 'Luscus', who speaks 'naught but pure *Iuliat* and *Romio*', although Luscus's theatre obsession ('h'ath made a common-place booke out of plaies') is at least 'warranted by Curtaine *plaudeties*' – that is, by applause at the Curtain; Marston might also have meant *Romeo and Juliet* in his allusion to 'some new pathetique Tragedie', although it was not especially 'new' by 1598.² Other plays around this date referenced Shakespeare's play: Henry Porter's *The Two Angry*

¹ BDC 916.

² John Marston, *The scourge of villanie* (1598), sig. H4^r. *Rom.* would have been relatively new in print in 1598.

Romeo and Juliet

10

Women of Abingdon (1598) has verbal echoes, feuding families and a balcony scene, and there are balcony/window scenes in Marston's *Blurt, Master Constable* (1600), although 'the popularity of *Romeo and Juliet* has caused most amorous balcony exchanges to be labelled imitative'.¹ In the first part of *The Return from Parnassus*, a Cambridge student play (1598–1601), Ingenioso says of his foolish patron Gullio, 'We shall haue nothinge but pure Shakspeare, and shreds of poetrie that he hath gathered at the theators', to which Gullio responds with a near-quotation from *Romeo and Juliet* (2.4.35–7, ironically Mercutio mocking Romeo for his tired poetic commonplaces). 'Marke Romeo and Iuliet', Ingenioso continues, 'o monstrous theft, I thinke he will runn throughe a whole booke of Samuells Daniells.'² This is neat evidence not just of *Romeo and Juliet*'s popularity but of theatre and poetry's inseparability for young men of this kind: Luscus copies bits from plays into his commonplace book, Gullio too gathers 'shreds' at the theatre, and such extracts are thought of in the same way as 'a whole book of Samuells Daniells', one of the most prolific and popular sonnet-writing poets of the day (p. 6). There are numerous passages from *Romeo and Juliet* in the popular anthology *England's Parnassus* (1600), arranged under headings such as 'Love'. More mysterious is *The Passionate Pilgrim* (1599): it includes two of Shakespeare's sonnets (138 and 144), three poems from *Love's Labour's Lost*, and an anonymous poem which 'may have been suggested by Romeo and Juliet's night-time parting at the end of 2.2';³ there are verbal echoes, although not close: 'Good night, good rest, ah, neither be my share' (compare 2.2.184–7); 'While Philomela sits and sings, I sit and mark, / And wish her lays were tuned like the lark' (compare 3.5.1–7). But all of these examples suggest the easy slippage between the 'dramatic' and the 'poetic', in the witty and rivalrous homosocial world in which such texts circulated and were consumed.

Writing for the Chamberlain's Men

A longstanding narrative held that, in 1594, English professional theatre became a 'duopoly', carved up between the Lord Admiral's Men at the Rose and the Lord Chamberlain's Men at the Theatre, a deal cut by their respective patrons Charles Howard and Henry Carey;⁴ recent research has modified this story considerably, however.⁵ Certainly the years around 1593 saw many changes in London's theatrical landscape, with companies disappearing and reforming, often under different names;⁶

¹ Mary Bly, 'Bawdy puns and lustful virgins: the legacy of Juliet's desire in comedies of the early 1590s', *S. Sur.* 49 (1996), 97–109: 97. See also Tom Rutter, *Shakespeare and the Admiral's Men: Reading across Repertories on the London Stage, 1594–1600*, 2017, pp. 156–62, 198.

² *The First Part of the Return from Parnassus*, in J. B. Leishman (ed.), *The Three Parnassus Plays*, 1949, 3.1.986–94 (pp. 183–4).

³ *Shakespeare's Poems*, ed. Duncan-Jones and Woudhuysen, p. 402.

⁴ See Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespeare Company, 1594–1642*, 2004.

⁵ See Roslyn L. Knutson, 'What's so special about 1594?', *SQ* 61 (2010), 449–67; Holger Schott Syme, 'The meaning of success: stories of 1594 and its aftermath', *SQ* 61 (2010), 490–525; and Bart Van Es, *Shakespeare in Company*, 2013.

⁶ Roslyn L. Knutson, 'Playing companies and repertory', in *A New Companion to Renaissance Drama*, ed. Arthur Kinney and Thomas Warren Hopper, 2017, pp. 239–49: 242.