

The present volume is intended to provide a deliberately diverse set of responses to *Romeo and Juliet*, one of Shakespeare's best-known tragedies. Nevertheless, the essays do share many common interests. Not surprisingly (for instance), the famous "balcony scene" is the subject of much commentary by various essayists. Two essays look at specific sections of that scene from multiple perspectives. In addition, two essays examine filmed versions of Shakespeare's play, while another two other essays examine parodies of his well-known text. Multiple essays are concerned with issues of physical *space* in the play, and various essays explore issues of imagination, artifice, and artificiality in the work. So, the following volume is a collection employing varied points of view but also sharing many of the same concerns.

In the essay that introduces this volume, Bruce Boehrer offers a view of Shakespeare's play "as essentially an adaptive and living being, one that exists in a kind of ecological tension with its sources as well as with certain shifts in relation to time and space consistent with the development of early modern urban life." Boehrer views Shakespeare's text "as a recycled play emerging from a centuries-old story-sequence, a play that revises that story-sequence specifically by changing its relation to the recurring cycles of the traditional church calendar," so that "it gives voice in the process to a fear that the cycle of human generational renewal will fail. Here," Boehrer claims, "the play's relationship to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* appears most manifest." Like many other essays in this volume, this article is keenly interested in topics of intertextuality—of relations between one text and others. But Boehrer also relates Shakespeare's play to issues of Shakespeare's life—a life reviewed briefly in an ensuing biographical overview that follows Boehrer's article.

Critical Contexts

The “Critical Contexts” section of the book opens with an examination, by Benedict J. Whalen, of the play’s presentation of Friar Laurence. Whalen suggests that *Romeo and Juliet* “emphasizes the role of the friar, and of confession, as a potential means for reconciling the ‘ancient grudge’ between the Capulets and Montagues. However,” Whalen continues, “Friar Laurence does not make use of the sacrament, or his spiritual authority, when he tries to solve Verona’s manifold troubles; instead, he turns to philosophy and natural science.” This decision, Whalen thinks, “suggests a grave problem at the very heart of the community: the mechanism through which political and spiritual reconciliation could have been accomplished has been lost.” Whalen believes that “Shakespeare’s depiction of the conflict echoes some of the grave effects of the Church of England’s abandonment of the sacrament of auricular confession.” In this respect, “the play engages with contemporary Reformation debates about the nature of the sacraments and the relationship between spiritual and political authorities in a community.”

The next essay in the “Critical Contexts” section is an overview, by Richard Harp, of the play’s critical reception. Harp focuses on such major critical voices as Samuel Johnson, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Hazlitt, Edward Dowden, A. C. Bradley, and many others. He also explores such key topics as *Romeo and Juliet* as lovers; issues of love and death; the play’s imagery; and its use of various kinds of poetry (such as sonnets, the poetry of marriage, and the poetry of morning awakenings). Harp also discusses such matters as oxymorons, stagecraft, the functions of minor characters, and the roles of Mercutio and Friar Laurence.

Harp’s essay is followed by one by Robert C. Evans dealing with the variety of possible theoretical approaches to the play. Using a deliberately “pluralistic” method, Evans examines the first fifty lines of the famous “balcony scene” from nearly twenty different points of view. “Critical pluralism” (Evans explains) is “the idea that no single critical perspective can do full justice to the complexity of any truly complex piece of writing. Instead, multiple perspectives can and should be constantly kept in mind as we read. By thinking

about any particular word or phrase in light of *multiple* interpretive possibilities,” Evans maintains, “we are less likely to interpret any work simplistically or reduce its richness to monolithic meanings.”

Finally, complementing Evans’s pluralistic approach is an essay by Eric J. Sterling that discusses the many different ways in which the most famous line of the balcony scene—“O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?”—has been performed in various filmed versions of the play. Sterling notes that audiences “wait for [the line] to appear and are curious to see just exactly how it will be performed. Stagings of Juliet’s opening words on the balcony typically symbolize the choices made (by actors, directors, and scenic designers) for entire productions.” Sterling examines the ways Juliet’s line is presented in films directed by George Cukor (1936), Renato Castellani (1954), Franco Zeffirelli (1968), Joan Kemp-Welch (1976), Alvin Rakoff (1978), Baz Luhrmann (1996), Rupert Goold (2010), Carlo Carlei (2013), and Don Ray King (2014).

Critical Readings

The volume’s “Critical Readings” section offers numerous different approaches to Shakespeare’s play. It opens with an essay by Maurice Hunt that explores the theme of imagination in the drama as well as the imaginative nature of the text itself. Hunt is interested in the ways Shakespeare “imagines his characters and their speeches,” but he is also interested in the ways Romeo and Juliet imagine “their love, its fulfillment, and its consequences.” He discusses such topics as metaphors, decorum, language, wordplay, puns, conceits, and reason as well as such figures as Petrarch, Cupid, and numerous characters of the play, including Friar Laurence.

Issues of imagination are also central to Frances Teague’s essay. Teague challenges the idea that this drama is a great work because it is realistic: “The idea that *Romeo and Juliet* is great art because it is so universally reflective of life seems to me to be accurate only if you have a taste for melodrama.” Instead, Teague admires the play precisely for its artificiality, particularly the way “the speeches play with heightened language, while the plot plays

with heightened action.” Teague finds the play’s use of paradoxes especially appealing, particularly the way Shakespeare personifies Death as a lover. She explores this latter paradox by discussing the play’s imagery in light of the visual art of Shakespeare’s culture.

Christopher Baker’s essay “*Romeo and Juliet* on Film” broadens the focus of Eric Sterling’s earlier essay. Rather than concentrating on a particular scene or line, Baker explores the history of modern approaches to filming the play in general. He discusses some of the same productions cited by Sterling but adds others as well, and he provides a helpful overview not only of the films themselves but of scholarship about them. Baker comments on the performances of numerous actors in various roles.

Next, James Hirsh, in an important essay that is part of a much larger scholarly project, examines the ways soliloquies are presented in Shakespeare’s plays in general and in *Romeo and Juliet* in particular. Hirsh offers numerous striking arguments, including the claim that “*Romeo and Juliet* marked a major watershed in Shakespeare’s employment of the late Renaissance dramatic convention of self-addressed speech. Plentiful evidence demonstrates,” Hirsh contends, “that, in the process of writing *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare, like the two main characters, fell madly in love. In his case, what he fell in love with were the exciting dramatic possibilities created by the convention governing soliloquies that he himself had helped to establish.”

In an essay on trauma in this work, Robert C. Evans notes that “very little discussion seems to exist of trauma in Shakespeare in general or in *Romeo and Juliet* in particular.” He therefore tries to offer “a comprehensive overview of traumatic moments in this play, focusing especially on the scenes involving the deaths of Mercutio and Tybalt as well as the later scenes leading up to and involving Juliet’s apparent death in her parents’ home.” According to Evans, *Romeo and Juliet* “illustrates many points made by recent theorists of trauma, and trauma is central to much of this drama’s enduring power.” He particularly stresses how the play moves toward more and more intensely traumatic episodes as it develops.

Adam Rzepka's essay begins by intriguingly noting that in *Romeo and Juliet*, "Shakespeare unleashes a blizzard of morbidity, including variations on the words 'death' and 'dead' alone (leaving aside references to 'fate,' 'doom,' the 'end' of life, and an ever-expanding constellation of funereal terms like 'bier,' 'tomb,' 'grave,' and shroud) 126 times—more than in any of his other plays." Rzepka suggests that Romeo and Juliet have a way "of placing themselves in the intimacy of tomblike spaces throughout the play" and that "these spaces take on a metatheatrical cast, as they begin to echo the space shared by the play and its audience. The tomb finds a resonance in the theater, that enclosure where Romeo and Juliet are killed, reincorporated, and reanimated in performance after performance."

Space is also an important issue in Matthew Steggle's provocatively titled essay "Flight and Spaceflight in *Romeo and Juliet*." Steggle proposes that this play is "is far more subversive in its relationship to cosmology than has generally been recognized." Whereas the play is often thought to take for granted Elizabethan ideas of an ordered universe, Steggle proposes that Romeo and Juliet often speak and act as if they can defy gravity. In fact, they "repeatedly figure their activities in terms of altering, and indeed destroying, the heavens." But Steggle also notes that "as the play turns to tragedy, imagery of flight becomes increasingly entangled with imagery of death." Steggle concludes by comparing and contrasting Shakespeare's play with Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*.

In another essay also concerned with space and spaces, Lisa Hopkins notes that the famous balcony scene "treats the relationship between house and garden," but she also argues that "that relationship in itself can be mapped onto a wider pattern within the play which contrasts the natural world with the built environment." She notes that we "do hear of the architectural detail for which Italy was famous in Renaissance England (particularly in the shape of balconies and walls), but bodies swarm over that architecture and cross its boundaries, first when Romeo scales the wall and climbs up to the balcony and then later when living bodies violate the funerary architecture of the Capulet tomb." Hopkins suggests that

“*Romeo and Juliet* pits against each other images of growth and life, particularly images of fruit and flowers, with images of death, which the play connects to man-made structures such as tombs and statues.” She argues that this pattern of imagery, and the paradoxes it implies, helps explain the particular tragic power of this play.

Matters become less serious in Robert C. Evans’ essay on “William Hawley Smith’s Parody of *Romeo and Juliet* (and of *Hamlet*).” Evans discusses one of the more successful of surviving stage parodies of Shakespeare—a play that manages to give two of Shakespeare’s most famous tragedies happy endings by having Romeo marry Ophelia and by having Hamlet marry Juliet. Evans draws on the pioneering work of Richard Schoch (who studied nineteenth-century *English* parodies of the bard) and finds that many of Schoch’s ideas are applicable to Smith’s American parody, first staged in Illinois in 1902. In a related essay, Sarah Fredericks surveys numerous parodies of *Romeo and Juliet* that were first published in American newspapers. Newspaper parodies of Shakespeare seem to have been popular in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America, and Fredericks examines six of them in some detail, showing how they allude to social, political, cultural, ethnic, racial, gender, and economic issues of the day. Fredericks, like Evans, suggests that the sheer popularity of Shakespeare’s works made them inviting targets for parodists who were often inspired by (and who appealed to) a widespread love of the Bard.

Concluding sections of the book offer a chronology of Shakespeare’s life, a chronological listing of his works in various genres, and a bibliography of editions and books relevant to *Romeo and Juliet*.

Chamber, Tomb, and Theater: Living in *Romeo and Juliet's* Spaces of the Dead

Adam Rzepka

The Chorus that opens *Romeo and Juliet* informs us of its lovers' doom in the same sentence that introduces them as lovers: they are "death marked" before we meet them (Pro.9).¹ But didn't we already know this before we entered the theater? Some degree of familiarity with the play's iconic plot can be assumed at least since its immediate and extraordinary success in London's public theaters at the end of the sixteenth century. As the first quarto of the play announced on its title page in 1597, this is a tragedy that had already "been often (with great applause) plaid publicquely."² Even for its first audience, the story might have been familiar from Shakespeare's immediate source for the play, Arthur Brooke's 1562 poem, *The Tragicall History of Romeus and Juliet*, which depended in turn on its own Italian sources.³ Certainly today it would be difficult to imagine many playgoers attending this most popular of Shakespeare's works without already knowing how it ends. As John Channing Briggs has argued, the play seems uniquely to inspire in audiences a "compulsion to repeat, to witness and undergo [its] delights and rigors . . . again and again" (see esp. 295). Seeing *Romeo and Juliet*, then, has been for a long time an act of remembrance. As we watch the play's events progress, we are recollecting precisely how the lovers meet the fate that they have met so many times before, in so many theaters.

One of the strangest and most compelling aspects of the play is that it seems to anticipate this reiterative aspect of its future performances by working the inevitability of its protagonists' tragic deaths into the drama that leads to them. Nowhere else in Shakespeare are dramatic ends woven so intimately into dramatic means, from the Chorus's opening reminder onwards. As the play unfolds, Shakespeare unleashes a blizzard of morbidity, including variations on the words "death" and "dead" alone (leaving aside

references to “fate,” “doom,” the “end” of life, and an ever-expanding constellation of funereal terms like “bier,” “tomb,” “grave,” and “shroud”) 126 times—more than in any of his other plays. To note that love and death are closely related in *Romeo and Juliet* is, on its own, neither new nor particularly surprising, and some basic reasons for that relationship are easy to imagine (see, for example, Carroll). Romeo and Juliet know how extraordinarily dangerous their love is, given the bitter enmity between their families, and they are aware of the dire escalation of that danger once Romeo has killed Juliet’s cousin Tybalt. It’s also true that the fire of passionate, young love was frequently associated in the Renaissance with its impending self-immolation (in Friar Laurence’s rendition, such “violent delights have violent ends / And in their triumph die, like fire and powder, / Which as they kiss consume” [2.6.9-11]). But these explanations, like the general observation that teenage passions in any era have often tended towards expression in dramatically dire terms, do not do justice to the peculiar thoroughness of Shakespeare’s conjunction of death in love in this play. That thematic union is so insistent that it generates an uncanny sense that Romeo and Juliet are not simply hurtling towards death but already living it—that throughout the play, these electrifying young lovers are, in Mercutio’s words, “already dead” (2.4.13). Mercutio’s quip is meant to mock the pallid quality that has overcome Romeo in his unrequited love for Rosaline, Juliet’s predecessor as the object of his overwhelming passion. That hopeless love has rendered him nearly inhuman to his friends, whom he avoids, like a condemned spirit, in favor of deep night, dark woods, and shuttered rooms. Yet once Juliet arrives, she seems only to magnify and focus the quality of living death that Mercutio notes. Later in the play, Juliet is herself described by Friar Laurence as a lover exhumed from a grave; she presents us with three increasingly immersive visions of either Romeo or herself entombed alive; she is the subject of a dream in which Romeo imagines himself to be a conscious corpse; and, of course, both she and Romeo find themselves alive inside an actual tomb in the play’s final scene.

In this essay, I trace this escalation of what we might think of as Romeo and Juliet's self-mourning: the ways in which they seem not only to anticipate their violent end, but to be gradually recollecting and working through it with us. In particular, I am interested in the spaces of this self-mourning, from Romeo's melancholic haunts in the first Act to Juliet's terrifying visions of encryption and, finally, to the paradoxically dark, cloistered, vast, and illuminated Capulet tomb—"That dim monument," as Juliet calls it, where the tragedy finds its promised conclusion. As Ramie Targoff has shown, Shakespeare displays a distinctly Protestant sensibility in erasing from his source for the play any sense that the lovers will be reunited in the afterlife, and in suggesting instead that the best possible conclusion for mortal love is "posthumous intimacy in the tomb" (24). What neither Targoff nor other scholars have attended to is the way that both Romeo and Juliet have of placing themselves in the intimacy of tomblike spaces throughout the play. Ultimately, I will suggest that these spaces take on a metatheatrical cast, as they begin to echo the space shared by the play and its audience. The tomb finds a resonance in the theater, that enclosure where Romeo and Juliet are killed, reincorporated, and reanimated in performance after performance.

Artificial night

A useful way to begin an exploration of *Romeo and Juliet's* spaces of living death is to join Romeo's mother, as the play begins, in wondering where on earth he is. "O, where is Romeo?" Montague's Wife asks Benvolio; "Saw you him today?" (1.1.115). In the audience, we might ask the same question about the eponymous hero of the play we've come to see and share an equal interest in the two successive answers given to us by Romeo's friend Benvolio and by his father, Montague. Both answers present carefully etched portraits of the world as it is lived by Romeo in the profound melancholy of his unrequited love. Benvolio gives the first report:

Madam, an hour before the worshiped sun
Peered forth the golden window of the east,

A troubled mind drive me to walk abroad,
Where underneath the grove of sycamore
That westward rooteth from this city side,
So early walking did I see your son.
Towards him I made, but he was 'ware of me,
And stole into the covert of the wood. (1.1.120-27)

Benvolio's lyrical, visionary description introduces us to the world of the love-melancholic as a quest for secluded enclosure within a cosmic expanse of phantom light. His opening images of the rising sun recall the "rosy-fingered Dawn" of the Homeric epics so directly and with such precise verse that we might well forget that his sighting of Romeo takes place "an hour before" the sunrise. The common effect of vividly describing off-stage events is doubled here: Benvolio allows us to "see" what is no longer present, and also to see a sunrise that was not even present in the scene being described. Romeo flees the approach of his friend, but he also seeks refuge from this impending dawn (as his father's account a moment later makes clear). Stealing into the "covert of the wood" sequesters him from social contact and from a luminous beauty he knows is coming but cannot yet see. Both aversions were thought of as typical symptoms of melancholia in the Renaissance. As Robert Burton tells us in the *Anatomy of Melancholy*, melancholics display a predilection for solitude and specifically for "woods, orchards, gardens, rivers . . . dark walks and close" (262). The nature of Romeo's melancholy, though, is at the more extreme end of these symptoms. Benvolio's own "troubled mind" still welcomes the coming "worshiped sun," and walking "underneath" the sycamore grove is enough cover to suit his sadness. Romeo's particular melancholy requires a deeper darkness and a more secretive enclosure—a retreat from the pre-dawn grove into the lightless woods.

Romeo's father, Montague, rehearses the same visualized elements in his elaboration of Benvolio's observations, returning us to the pre-dawn hour and to Romeo's daily flight into enveloping darkness:

Many a morning hath he there been seen,
With tears augmenting the fresh morning's dew,
Adding to clouds more clouds with his deep sighs;
But all so soon as the all-cheering sun
Should in the farthest east begin to draw
The shady curtains from Aurora's bed,
Away from light steals home my heavy son
And private in his chamber pens himself,
Shuts up his windows, locks fair daylight out,
And makes himself an artificial night. (1.1.137-140)

Montague's account puts Romeo in a more direct relationship with the celestial and meteorological sweep of the wide world outside the walled city of Verona, but then plunges him into an even more profound entombment. We are brought back "there" to the sycamore grove at the city's edge, where Romeo's tears and sighs expand into the dew and mist of the early morning, and this time, he flees into darkness not an hour before the dawn but at first light. Yet Montague seems at pains to convey the degree of confinement that Romeo seeks in direct opposition to these vistas. His refuge is not only to be "private in his chamber," but shut up and locked in, enveloped in an "artificial night" that is, as Montague's grammar allows, not only self-made but "himself." One eye on the break of day in the "farthest east," Romeo constructs a hermetically sealed enclosure in which he embodies and preserves the night. This dialectic between expansive vision and enclosed solitude was also a fundamental property of early modern melancholia, captured precisely in Albrecht Dürer's widely influential 1514 engraving *Melencolia I* (Fig. 1).

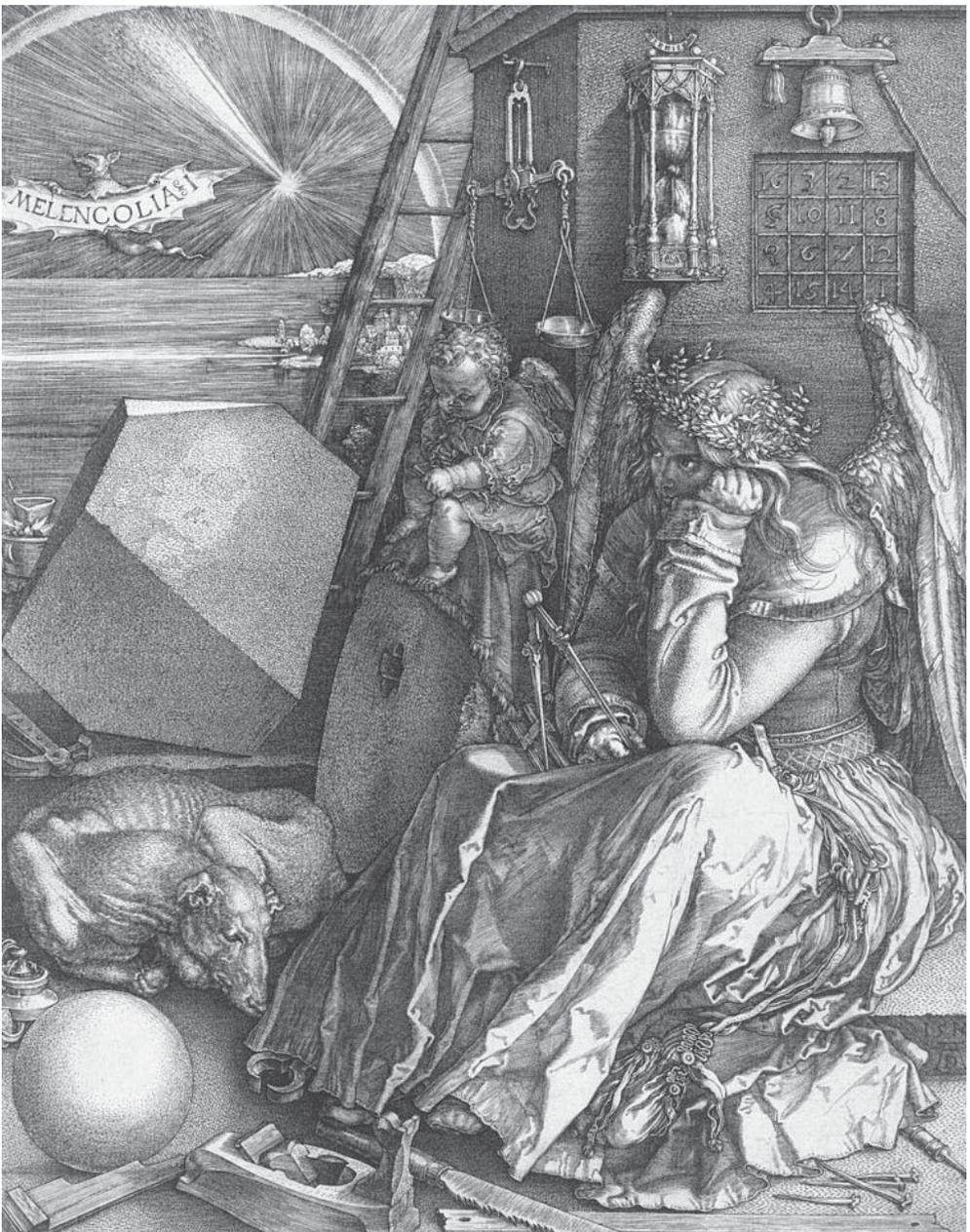


Fig. 1. Albrecht Dürer, *Melencolia I*

In Dürer's portrait of melancholy, its emblematic sufferer is not simply removed from the living, social world and immobilized in "dark walks and close" or private chambers.⁵ That confinement is balanced against a view of the outside world rendered as a vast, illuminated expanse—a "golden window" on a "worshipped sun." This paradoxical marriage of claustrophobic enclosure and cosmic

Chronology of William Shakespeare's Life_____

1564

William Shakespeare is born in Stratford-upon-Avon in April 1564. He is baptized in the local church on April 26. His date of birth is usually assumed to have been April 23. His parents are John and Mary Shakespeare. John is a successful glove-maker who, in the years preceding and following William's birth, is a respected member of the local government, although he later suffers financial and social reversals. In addition to giving birth to William, Mary bears seven other children. William almost certainly attends the local grammar school.

1582

William marries Anne Hathaway, daughter of a prominent local farmer. Anne is three months pregnant at the time of the wedding and eight years older than William. In 1583, Anne gives birth to a daughter (Susanna). In 1585, the couple has twins (Hamnet and Judith). Hamnet dies in 1596.

1585-92

Details of Shakespeare's life during this period are unclear and have been the subject of much speculation. One legend (now widely doubted) suggests that he had to leave Stratford to escape the law after he allegedly poached deer from the property of a prominent local landowner. Other writers have speculated that during his time in Stratford, Shakespeare may have worked for a lawyer and/or may have taught school. Some recent scholars have suggested that during part of this period, Shakespeare may have been living, teaching, and (as an amateur) acting while part of the household of a prominent Catholic family in Lancashire. Numerous other theories abound concerning these "lost years." The idea that Shakespeare taught in some capacity seems plausible to many.

Works by William Shakespeare

For an exceptionally detailed discussion of the chronology of Shakespeare's works (including discussion of the many disputes about this matter) see *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion* by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Norton, 1997), pp. 69-144. See also the similarly detailed discussion by David Bevington, editor, *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* (Longman, 1997), pp. A1-A21. Bevington helpfully gives the full titles of quarto (small format) printings and also makes their dates of publication quite clear.

Plays were usually first performed not long after they were written. In some cases, we have evidence of first (or at least early) performances; in some cases, we do not. Whereas dates of first printings are usually very solid, dates of first performances are often conjectural.

Even the best experts often disagree about the dates of probable composition of Shakespeare's works. In the listing below, Bevington's suggestions are cited alongside those of G. Blakemore Evans (in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd ed., Houghton Mifflin, 1997, pp. 77-87) and Wells and Taylor. The frequent variances will give some idea of how often even the best students of these issues can disagree.

Love's Labor's Lost (Bevington: ca. 1588–1597; G. B. Evans: 1594–95 [“revised 1597 for court performance”]; Wells and Taylor: 1593–95; comedy; first known printing, 1598).

The Henry the Sixth Plays (Bevington: ca. 1589–92; G. B. Evans: 1589–90 [revised 1594–95 for Part One; 1590–91 for Part Two; 1590–91 for Part Three]; Wells and Taylor: Part Three, 1590–92; Part Two: 1590–91; Part One: 1591–92 [with other authors]. Three history plays; the second part was first printed in 1594; the third part was first printed in 1595; the first part [perhaps the last written of the three] was first printed in 1623.

Titus Andronicus (Bevington: ca. 1589–1592; G. B. Evans: 1593–94; Wells and Taylor: 1590–91; tragedy; first known printing, 1594).

The Comedy of Errors (Bevington: ca. 1589–1594; G. B. Evans: 1592–94; Wells and Taylor: 1592–94; comedy; first known printing, 1623).

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In 1982, he was awarded the G. E. Bentley Prize and in 1989 was selected Professor of the Year for Alabama by the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education. At AUM, he has received the Faculty Excellence Award and has been named Distinguished Research Professor, Distinguished Teaching Professor, and University Alumni Professor. Most recently he was named Professor of the Year by the South Atlantic Association of Departments of English.

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