

Romeo and Juliet: Answered Questions

What were the legal/spiritual laws of marriage: guardian present, age, etc.? Based upon what is staged, was Romeo & Juliet's marriage valid—legally and/or spiritually?

Legal and consensual marriage in Renaissance Italy is loosely defined by the civil laws as the age at which puberty is reached.¹ This could fluctuate anywhere from twelve to fifteen and was different for boys and girls. After the token of rings were exchanged the marriage was sealed with a kiss. Following was a spectacle of celebration during which the bride and groom were to semi-privately consummate their marriage. Typical proof of consummation consisted of presenting bloody gowns or sheets. If there was no proof of consummation the marriage was not legally binding. Religious validity occurred if a priest performed the marriage. While the spiritual conditions are met in the text the public spectacle is not. This opens the door for interpretation depending on the production concept.

What does the word 'minstrel' mean? Nowadays, when we think of it, it is common to think of the minstrel shows.

The word 'minstrel' has changed meaning colloquially since it was first used c.1200 to delineate a public servant who entertained with music.² As civic employees, minstrels typically served one township for their career and were charged with various accompaniment duties including the announcement of weather and social conditions as well as meetings.³ During Elizabethan England, though the term still implied a performance aspect, we see the term deteriorate in meaning to the generic "public nuisance."⁴ Its modern translation could be troubadour or vagabond which are used derisively toward musicians, today.⁵ Our current understanding of minstrel performance derives from the term arriving in America in 1828 in the form of blackface minstrelsy, which is a harmful and obscene racialized performance of blackness by white performers.⁶

Could you provide information on the Writing/Original Production of Romeo & Juliet?

Shakespeare wrote *Romeo and Juliet* between 1595-96, basing it off of Arthur Brooke's translation of *The Tragick History of Romeus and Juliet* (1562).⁷ While the original is a cautionary tale of the chastity of young lovers, Shakespeare's interpretation focuses more on the structure of society. *Romeo and Juliet* called for those under Queen Elizabeth I's rule to see beyond the polarizing forces in society—religion, class, age, tradition—and leverage themselves to benefit the powerless. While the first documented performance of *Romeo and Juliet* is c. 1700, evidence

¹ Hohn, Tara Lynn, "Shakespeare's Deviation from His Predecessors: Aligning "Romeo and Juliet" with Italian Renaissance Marriage Culture" (2021). Honors Theses and Capstones. 604. <https://scholars.unh.edu/honors/604>

² "Minstrel." *Word Origins*, June 2020. <https://www.wordorigins.org/big-list-entries/minstrel>. Accessed 27 Apr. 2024

³ Rastall, R. "Civic Minstrels in Late Medieval England: New Light on Duties and Careers." *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle*. 18 Nov. 2021. www.cambridge.org.

⁴ "Minstrel (n.)." *Etymology*, www.etymonline.com/word/minstrel. Accessed 27 Apr. 2024.

⁵ Glossary of Shakespearean terms; <https://www.shakespeareswords.com/public/glossary.aspx?id=11114>.

⁶ Lunderman, Shelby. "Blackface Minstrelsy & Melodrama." *Theatre Literature and Theory*, Jan 2024.

⁷ Lunderman, Shelby. "Elizabethan Theatre." *History of The Theatre II*, April 2024.

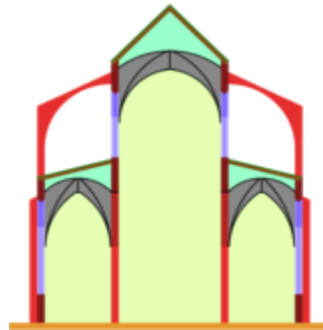
suggests the Lord Chamberlain's Men first performed the show in the late 1500s.⁸ The cast was all male, costumes borrowed, and the set minimal, hence the heavy reliance on verbal description.⁹

Contrasting Brooke and Shakespeare's versions (*spoiler alert*):¹⁰

- Brooke's story takes place over nine months while Shakespeare's lasts five days
- Brooke gives Romeus and Juliet a honeymoon lasting a few months before the death of Tybalt while Shakespeare gives them mere hours
- Brooke's use of Tybalt and Paris is minimal while Shakespeare utilizes them heavily in story-telling

Are Basilicas built into the piazza historically/geographically or are they off the piazza? If they are off, is it in the same location of each town?

A basilica is an architectural form (shown below) that hails from ancient Rome. They were built on the outskirts of Roman forums, which are public marketplaces, and acted as a space to perform civic functions. An Italian piazza is based on this historical forum structure.¹¹ In the post-Nicene period (325-421), the basilica model of construction became the most popular for religious spaces. While it is most common that a piazza and religious basilica are found together, it is not exclusively the case. In historical Verona the Basilica di San Zeno Maggiore was built on the piazza of San Zeno.¹² However, individual productions will need to conjecture about the use of historical accuracy given that Shakespeare's Verona was mythologized.



What is County Paris in charge of and what is his power over? Would Paris have inherited anything as he aged or was his status fixed?

Country Paris was a nobleman. He was born into this status as we see from his relation to the prince. His status was therefore fixed. As an aristocrat he did not deal in business but depended

⁸ Lord Chamberlain's Men, also Shakespeare's home company that performed in The Theatre of London.

⁹ A balcony (built into the theatre), a bed, and a tomb.

¹⁰ McKittrick, Ryan. "How 'Romeus' Became 'Romeo.'" *American Repertory Theatre*, 1 Feb 2006. <https://americanrepertorytheater.org/media/how-romeus-became-romeo/>.

¹¹ The french *place* and spanish *plaza* are unrelated geographical features.

¹² Basilica di San Zeno Maggiore's construction was completed by 1398. Its fame lies in the legend that Romeo and Juliet's marriage happened in this crypt.

solely on his inherited estate for his livelihood. The estate is what he would have charge over. A typical transaction would then occur where an aristocrat or nobleman would marry a wealthy man's daughter to inherit a large dowry to cover the expense of his estate. The wealthy man, in exchange, would gain an important connection. We see this reflected in the case of Paris and Lord Capulet.