

# SHAKESPEARE

was a playwright. Obviously. But many other aspects of his life are reflected in his plays. Let's look at specific examples in *Romeo & Juliet*.

## Shakespeare was a young lover.

He was just 18 when he married Anne Hathaway in 1582 – she was 26 years old and 3 months pregnant at the time.

### Watch:

Does Shakespeare's depiction of young love seem realistic to you? What elements of Romeo's behavior, or Juliet's, seems particularly true to life, or not quite right?

## Shakespeare was a husband and father.

The couple had 3 children together, but lived most of their married life apart; she stayed in Stratford, while he lived in London. Was this evidence of a strained relationship, or simply a convenient arrangement?

### Watch:

Consider the depiction of married life the play presents. Do the relationships seem true to life, and true to Shakespeare's text? What details in the text, or in the actor's performances, are particularly suggestive?

## Shakespeare was a survivor.

The bubonic plague, or Black Death, swept through London in 1593 killing 5% or more of the population – perhaps as many as 10,000 people. The theatres were ordered closed, to help slow the spread of disease, and Shakespeare was thrown out of work.

### Watch:

Mercutio's dying curse, "A plague on both your houses!" would have had a personal resonance to Shakespeare, and an immediate resonance for his audience.

*Romeo and Juliet* was probably written in 1595-1596, about 5 years into Shakespeare's career as a playwright. The first known published version appeared in 1597, and its title-page boasts that the play had "been often (with great applause) played publicly". Shakespeare's chief source for *Romeo and Juliet* was a poem by Arthur Brooke, *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet*, but the story had been retold several times in the previous centuries - all the way back to a Latin version in the 3rd century.