

Mobilizing Emotion through Structures of Male Friendship in Shakespeare

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Fair Juliet turned to her chair with pleasant cheer,
And glad she was her Romeus approaches so near.
At th' one side of her chair her lover Romeo,
And on the other side there sat one called Mercutio...
Even as a lion would among the lambs be bold,
Such was among the bashful maids, Mercutio to behold.
With friendly grip he seized fair Juliet's snowish hand:
A gift he had that Nature gave in in his swathing band,
That frozen mountain ice was never half so cold
As were his hands, though ne'er so near the fire he did hold

Anna Quercia-Thomas is a PhD candidate at The University of Western Australia. She completed a Masters in Shakespeare and Renaissance Literary culture in 2018 at the University of St Andrews and a bachelor's degree (hons) in English Literature at the University of St Andrews in 2017. Her research focuses on the intersection of male friendship and emotion in Renaissance drama and further interests include friendship, affect theory, history of emotion, and queer theory.

Arthur Brooke's 1562 poem, "The tragical History of Romeus and Juliet" tells the story of the doomed love of Romeo and Juliet. The two titular characters are similar to the ones in Shakespeare's later iteration of the story, but Brooke's poem differs notably in its presentation of the side characters. The excerpt above shows the poem's first reference to the character Mercutio who, in Shakespeare's retelling, becomes one of Romeo's close friends. However, in Brooke's poem, Mercutio's presence is a minor and a negative one. He sits next to Juliet at dinner, is described as flirtatious, and makes her hand cold when he holds it. This portrayal is markedly different from the Mercutio of Shakespeare's version of the story, where he becomes one of Romeo's closest friends and confidants. Another of Romeo's good friends in Shakespeare's text, Benvolio, does not appear at all in Brooke's poem, but plays an important role in Shakespeare's play. Benvolio and Mercutio are both central to Shakespeare's plot, showing that their inclusion is intentional. The fact that a number of the central male friendships in the play are Shakespeare's own additions suggests that these relationships are of particular importance to his adaptation. In this paper, which outlines the theory of my PhD thesis, I draw attention to the strong and passionate friendships Shakespeare builds between his male characters and suggest that, when seen through the lens of history of emotion, these friendships function as emotional communities with their own emotional scripts that govern the expression of emotion both on stage and between stage and audience.



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