

## Cheat sheet for *Shakespeare in Love*

### The little things:

*signing his name*: Why does the camera focus early on Will experimenting with his signature? .

*blotting lines*: Why is Will shown blotting and blotting lines in his manuscript?

*"break a leg"* (as in "Mr. Kempe, . . ."): actors use this ironic phrase to encourage each other — presumably with no reference to John Wilkes Booth, whose star turn, resulting in a broken leg, was unscripted.

*Kit Marlowe*: Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593) was Shakespeare's most influential precursor on the stage: he wrote *Tamburlaine*, *The Massacre at Paris*, *The Jew of Malta*, and *Doctor Faustus*. Accused of blasphemy, perhaps a spy in government service, reportedly homosexual, he did indeed die in a tavern brawl in Deptford.

*"Was this the face that launched a thousand ships / And burnt the topless tow'rs of Ilium?"* Where are these lines from, and why does "Thomas Kent" get the part in lieu of those recite them?

*Wessex*: Is there an Earl of Wessex today, and who is he? Was there one in the reign of the first Elizabeth?

*John Webster* (ca. 1580- ca. 1642) grew up to be a playwright. His *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The White Devil* are particularly bleak and gory tragedies. So where did young Webster get his inspiration for such things?

*"Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?"* See *Norton Essential* 1804, but also Greenblatt ("About that Romantic Sonnet") on the 2080 Blackboard website (week 2).

*"Something more cheerful next time,"* the Queen commands . When did Shakespeare write the play she commissions here, and how do we know what play the screenwriters have in mind?

for the *boy actor* whom WS greets when the Admiral's Men return: see *Hamlet* 2.2.405-414.

for the *Puritan* ("A plague on both your houses," "A Rose by any other name"), see *Norton E.* 37ff; for Mr. Tilney, see 104.

*a souvenir of Stratford* (20th C. manufacture) appears in the first scene in WS's study.

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What other little gags can you pick up?

## *Shakespeare in Love: the big things*

- ***Is it good?*** Why do you think the film was so widely acclaimed (eliciting overwhelmingly favorable reviews and winning seven academy awards)? To what audiences — including but not limited to the critics — do you think it appealed, and why? *On what kinds of “cultural capital” does the film draw, and what kinds of cultural work does it do?*
- ***Is it accurate?*** Do you notice convergences between *SiL*'s representation of the stage/the role of theatre in society and the Norton frontmatter on the other (Stephen Greenblatt's "Introduction" and Helger Schott Syme's "The Theater of Shakespeare's Time" (*Norton E.*, pp. 93ff)? Where does *SiL* “get it right” in terms of the Norton, and where does the film diverge from the Norton's account?
- ***Is it “metatheatrical” (or “metacinematic”)?*** Does the film knowingly allude to its own theatricality? Does it say something (serious, frivolous) about theater? If “art” ordinarily copies or represents “life,” does the film play games with these terms – at times showing that the art of *Romeo* mirrors life, at times inverting that relationship and suggesting that the life of these characters is mysteriously or miraculously driven by the action of the evolving play?
- ***Does it support or debunk the “Shakespeare Myth”?*** Norman and Stoppard, surely, are poking fun at many common assumptions about Shakespearean genius, creativity, authorship, and authority and many elements of the Shakespeare Myth as Michael Bristol describes it. Which ones? Do they *simply* spoof those ideas, or do they also reinforce and celebrate them? If so, how does this ironic double-action work?
- ***What absolutely key fact or circumstance*** about *Romeo and Juliet* does *SiL* deliberately, necessarily, heinously falsify? How would acknowledging that fact have compromised or destroyed the film?