The tender age of Juliet Capulet provides the focus of the initial conversation between Lord Capulet and Count Paris in *Romeo and Juliet*. She is still a child, says her father, "a straunger in the world" who "hath not seene the chaunge of fourteen yeares"; she should be at least 16, he says, before she will be ready for marriage. In Shakespeare's primary source, a long narrative poem by Brooke, she is 16 (or nearly so), and in another English version he might have known, the translation of a *novella* by Bandello, she is almost 18, yet in both accounts she is still considered too young for marriage. A very young Juliet, there-
fore, appears to have been Shakespeare’s idea. Is it to emphasize the “charm of her girlish directness, the pathos of her passion,” to amplify the drama of her progress from innocence to suicide, or merely to “apologize to the audience for the boy who played so difficult a part”? As for Romeo’s age, Shakespeare makes him merely a “yong” man (E3; 2.4.119), whereas Brooke describes him as so young his “tender chyn” sports no beard (54), thus perhaps 15-17, and Bandello gives his age as 20 or 21 (349).

The notion that Elizabethan couples married young has been challenged recently by social historians. Although the setting of Romeo and Juliet appears to be early 14th Century Italy, Shakespeare’s cultural model is primarily Elizabethan England, where physical maturity developed later than it does today: girls matured at 14-15, boys at 16-18. Youths under 15 were still considered children. The earliest legal age for marriage, the age of consent or discretion, was 14, but early teenage marriages were rare, and in the few cases on record, the children were either not formally betrothed or not allowed to consummate their vows until much older.⁴

Popular manuals of health, as well as observations of married life, led Elizabethans to believe that early marriage and its consummation permanently damaged a young woman’s health, impaired a young man’s physical and mental development, and produced sickly or stunted children. In opposing the marriage of her 13-year-old granddaughter, Anne Clopton alludes to the “danger [that] might ensue to her very life from her extreme

³Bullough 279; McDonald 265; C. Brown 42.

⁴The ages of physical maturity are given by Stone, Family 492; Everett 116; and Cook 17, 20. Stone identifies the age of “childhood” in England during this period (Family 512). Citing the Canons of 1571, Baldwin gives 14 as the age of consent for both males and females (773); see also The Oxford English Dictionary (hereafter, OED-2), “Discretion,” sense 6b, which gives 14 for both sexes as the age of discretion. Both Stone (Crisis 652) and Camden (93) give 12 for females and 14 for males as the ages of consent. Laslett notes the prohibition against consummation of childhood marriages (81-86). For further information on early marriage during this period, see Stone, Crisis 589-671.
youth” (Stone, Crisis 656). Capulet echoes such a concern in telling Paris, “Too soone mard are those so early made” (B2'; 1.2.13). The general view was that motherhood before 16 was dangerous (Stone, Crisis 656-57); as a consequence, 18 came to be considered the earliest reasonable age for motherhood (Camden 94), and 20 and 30 the ideal ages for women and men, respectively, to marry (Cook 23).

In actuality, however, Elizabethan women married even later, at an average age of 25-26, and men at 27-29, the oldest of any society known. Shakespeare’s wife and eldest daughter Susanna are typical, marrying at about 26 and 24, while his youngest, Judith, did not marry until 31. That Capulet would offer his daughter to Paris despite her “extreme youth,” thus forcing Juliet to marry Romeo secretly, must have been appalling to an Elizabethan. One historian even wonders whether Shakespeare was deliberately writing a play about the dangers of love and marriage among boys and girls. The playwright’s own unsatisfactory marriage at 18 may have initiated him to some of the unpleasant consequences of premature marriage.

Shakespeare’s alteration of Juliet’s age and deliberate disregard of social custom seem to single out her age for special attention (Cook 28). An obvious consequence is to lessen the young couple’s responsibility for the disaster that engulfs them (Muir 171-72). Yet beyond this, Shakespeare’s symbolic use of Juliet’s age casts over the lovers an ominous shadow, clearly implied in Capulet’s prediction that ignoring natural and social practice invites disaster. Ignoble of him, then, to become the pander for Paris, even though he considers the Count a highly suitable match for Juliet. For his part, Paris apparently wishes to

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5See Laslett 82; Stone, Family 490; Cook 265-67; and Ben-Amos 5. Hill observes that no other known society married so late (195), and Stone offers several explanations for this (Crisis 652-60).

6Laslett 84. Other Shakespeare heroines who marry young are Marina in Pericles, who is 14 (15', quarto of 1609; 5.3.75), and Miranda in The Tempest, who is 15 (A'; First Folio: 1.2.40-41, 53-54).
marry Juliet immediately to forestall rivals in securing the Capulet estate. Brooke’s Capulet tells his wife they must hasten to procure their 16-year-old Juliet a husband to assuage her grief over Tybalt’s death, also because “a mayden daughter is a treasour daungerous” (1862).

Since Shakespeare’s Juliet has not reached even the age of consent, much less the minimum age for marriage, the frequent use of her age within the play must be considered a deliberate attempt to represent the disturbing untimeliness of the marriage. Unquestionably Shakespeare wished the play to convey a sense of inevitability. His success at doing so, however, derives not only from the power of coincidence, fate, feud, and stars, but also from the “child” Juliet’s forced entrance into adulthood: “too rash, too vnaduisd, too sudden,” as she herself admits (D3v; 2.2.118). The “rash, premature assumption of maturity,” Cook observes, “plunges them into the bitterly complicated consequences that always attend adult behavior” (29). Juliet’s being still a child, albeit a precocious one, communicates “the sense of extremity, of a painful too-soonness” (Everett 117).

The Nurse’s daughter Susan, had she lived, would have been the same age as Juliet (B4v, Q1; 1.3.18-20), so as Spencer notes, “Shakespeare thinks of the Nurse as one who had a daughter nearly fourteen years ago” (184), thus conjuring up images of untimely death and a correspondence between birth and death (Everett 115). Only one other character’s age is given in the text, that of Lady Capulet. While speaking of marriage, she says to her daughter, “I was your mother much vpon these yeares / That you are now a maide” (B4v; 1.3.72-73). If this be true, Lady Capulet conceived Juliet when she was about 13, gave birth at 14, and is now 28.7 These numbers, when considered in light of Juliet’s

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7Lady Capulet’s claim to being 28 may be vain pretense to project a false youthfulness, particularly in view of her apparent inability to bear more children (B2v; 1.2.14-15). Hints she is older than 28 might be detected in the Q2 stage prefixes, where she is sometimes identified as “Old La.” (e.g., B4v); or her lament at Juliet’s ‘death”: “O me, this sight of death, is as a Bell / That warnes my old age to a sepulcher” (L4v; 5.3.206-7).
own marriage and consummation at 13, suggest a correspondence between Lady Capulet and her daughter, possibly the older woman's attempt at saddling Juliet with her own destiny (Dash 70-71).

Although no reference to 13 appears in the text, Shakespeare lays heavy emphasis on 14, including it six times in two contiguous scenes (B2-C', Q1; 1.2-3). No such emphasis is found in Brooke or Bandello, wherein her age is given only once. A logical question arising from this unusual repetition is whether Shakespeare uses Juliet's age to determine structural or textual elements. Shakespeare began his career as a poet, hoping the publication of Venus and Adonis (1593) and The Rape of Lucrece (1594) would establish him in the forefront of English poetry (Rollins 447; Levy 84). Because Venus and Adonis exhibits many features of numerical composition popular in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, it offers compelling evidence of Shakespeare's apprenticeship to this school.8 Fowler even suggests that the numerical virtuosity of the poem, together with that of Spenser's Faerie Queene (1590-96) and Epithalamion (1595), actually determined the fashion of numerical composition during this period (Spenser 256). A playwright who uses structural numerology, however, cannot maintain the textual control possible to the narrative or lyric poet, since lines of prose, including stage directions, introduce the element of unpredictability in lineation and pagination. Nevertheless, Romeo and Juliet, which was composed in 1595 during this vogue, displays many indications of being composed with number symbolism in mind.9

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8On the number symbolism in the poem, see Butler and Fowler, supplemented by Franson. Shakespeare's numerical apprenticeship is discussed by Heninger 41.

9In studying Shakespeare's use of numerical composition, I have attempted to follow a strict procedural method, adhering to the following guidelines for numerical studies of literature. I confine my attention to internal passages clearly defined by discontinuities, such as the termination of lines of verse or of sonnets, thus excluding lines of prose. I take no license in setting the termini of a given count, nor do I propose any numerical structures or correlations about which I am doubtful. When a calculation is approximate, I so indicate. Suggestions for numerical studies of literature.
Juliet's name, for instance, has 13 letters, she is the 13th named character to enter, and Romeo refers to her by name 14 times during the play; in contrast, no such numerical correlations with her age, 16 and 18, appear in Brooke or Bandello. These correlations with Juliet's age might be the result of the long arm of coincidence. Fowler suggests that if the probability of coincidence in such elements is under 5 percent, they are worth considering as intentional on the part of the author (Spenser 253). Practically none of the examples cited in the present study, however, have clearly definable limits, thus rendering impossible a statistical evaluation of the probability of coincidence. Nevertheless, the frequent appearance of 13 and 14 in structural and textual elements of the play, in contrast to the absence of a correlation in Brooke and Bandello, strongly

although none specifically for drama, can be found in Fowler, Spenser 251-52; Nelson 52-57; Hieatt, “Review” 557-60; and Hieatt, “Numerical” 70-76.

10In Q1 her name is spelled “Iuliet Capolet” or “Capulet” (A4“), and in Q2, “Iuliet Capulet” (A3”), each variant having 13 letters. In Brooke, it is “Juliets” (223) “Capelet” (30) or “Capilet” (166), both spellings comprised of 13 letters, but not a correlation with her age, 16; in Bandello, it is “Jultieta” (352) “Capellet” (349), or 16 letters, again not a correlation with her age, nearly 18. The first 13 characters enter in the following order (those without names, as well as duplications, are omitted): Sampson, Gregorie, Abram, Benuolio, Tibalt, Capulet, Lady Capulet, Mountague, Lady Mountague, Prince Eskales, Romeo, Paris, Juliet. Regarding Juliet’s entrance, since Brooke and Bandello are writing non-dramatic literature, a comparison with Shakespeare is impossible; in Brooke, Juliet is the fifth different named character to be introduced (223), in Bandello, also the fifth (352), but in Shakespeare, the twenty-first different character named, or introduced, in dialogue. Romeo’s references to Juliet by name are at D’ (2.2.3), F2’ (2.6.24), F4’ (3.1.113), G4’ (twice, 3.3.30, 58), G4’ (3.3.65), H’ (3.3.93), H3’ (3.5.24), K4’ (5.1.15), K4’ (5.1.34), L2’ (thrice, 5.3.78, 80, 85), and L3’ (5.3.101). In addition, Romeo twice uses the possessive Juliet’s. In Brooke’s account, Romeo refers to Juliet only 4 times by name (499, 1543, 1635, 2643); in Bandello, only 3 times (368, 369, 385).

11For instance, regarding Romeo’s calling Juliet by name 14 times, no statistically useful limits can be assigned, other than assuming he will do so at least once, since he does so 4 times in Brooke, 3 times in Bandello, but probably not, say, as many as a hundred times, which would seem excessive. Such arbitrary limits obviously provide no basis for meaningful statistical analysis.
suggests they are a deliberate attempt at symbolizing the young Juliet.

The author has devoted careful numerical attention to the list of guests invited to the Capulet Feast. In Brooke and Bandello, all the ladies, knights, and gentlemen of Verona are invited (159-62; 351), but Shakespeare’s Capulet invites only a few guests, the occasion hastily arranged to accommodate the importunate Paris. The list of guests is thus Shakespeare’s idea, perhaps deriving from the “paper sent” to guests in Brooke’s version (162). There are, appropriately, 13 proper nouns in the list; and Capulet tells Paris, “You among the store / One more, most welcome makes my number more” (B2; 1.2.22-23), bringing the names of the invited guests to 14.12 Because the list also includes unnamed guests, with appellations like “wife and daughters,” there are more than 13 guests specified in the list. Included are nine males, five more being identified at the Feast, bringing the male guests, whose identities are known, to 14. The number of female guests is indeterminate because of plural entries in the list, yet the minimum can be determined, and it, too, is 14.13 Shakespeare has Capulet hint at a numerical significance to the list (B2; 1.2.23; cf. B3; 32-33), perhaps the playwright’s way of leading us to imagine Capulet as responsible for its correspon-

12The proper nouns in the list are Martino, Anselme, Vtruuio, Placentio, Mercutio, Valentine, (Uncle) Capulet, Rosaline, Liuia, Valentio, Tibalt, Lucio, and Hellena (B3; 1.2.64-70). Romeo is invited casually by the Clown-Servant with the qualification, “If you be not of the house of Mountagues” (B3; 1.2.79-80). Because this is not a formal invitation and Romeo does not meet its condition, I have excluded him from the category of invited guests. Kolin (13) points out that certain of the guests’ names convey ominous overtones.

13The nine males in the list are Martino, Anselme, Placentio, Mercutio, Valentine, (Uncle) Capulet, Valentio, Tibalt, and Lucio; Vtruuio’s name also appears, but I exclude him because only his wife is being invited. Five additional males who attend, and whose identities are known, are Paris, Romeo, Benuolio, Tyberio’s son, and Petruchio, the latter two identified by the Nurse (C4; 1.5.129, 131). The 14 female guests are Martino’s wife and at least two daughters; at least two sisters of Anselme; the widow of Vtruuio; at least two nieces of Placentio; Uncle Capulet’s wife and at least two daughters; Rosaline; Livia; and Hellena.
idence with his daughter’s age, and an indication of his discomfort over her youth. In any case, 13 and 14 are apt figures for a social event introducing a girl between 13 and 14, and a memorable instance in which the numbers are conjoined to emphasize Juliet’s actual age between them.

Also apparent in the play is authorial attention to line counting that often corresponds with Juliet’s age. The 14-line sonnets stand out, one presented as the prologue (also in Brooke), a second spoken by the young couple at the Feast (C4; 1.5.93-106), a third begun by them (C4r; 1.5.107-10), and a fourth at the beginning of the second act in modern editions (D6). These poetical units within the dramatic structure emphasize the play’s association with lyric poetry, the love-sonnet tradition, and the techniques of numerical composition. The title-page itself is comprised of 14 lines (Q2), resembling the 14-line title page of Delia (1592), a volume of sonnets by Shakespeare’s friend Samuel Daniel. But even more noteworthy is the numerical care with which Shakespeare locates the occasion of Juliet’s first kiss. While she and Romeo speak in sonnets at the Capulet Feast, Romeo kisses her twice. Although neither Q1 nor Q2 provides stage directions for these kisses, Romeo’s closing line to the first sonnet, “Then moue not while my praiers effect I take” (C4; 1.5.106), clearly constitutes a prelude to the first kiss, just as the ensuing line, “Thus from my lips, by thine my sin is purgd,” must be its postlude. This places Juliet’s first kiss between her 13th and 14th lines (in both Q1 and Q2), a significant juncture in her own text because of its correspondence with the very age at which she is kissed.

The time sequence of the play is delineated with care and accuracy, Shakespeare giving it more emphasis than in any other

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14 A facsimile of the Delia title-page is readily available in Sprague’s edition of Daniel’s Poems and a Defence of Ryme.

15 Although editors often add a stage direction for the first kiss after line 107 (“Thus from my lips,” C4), as Evans does (Riverside), doing so interrupts the second sonnet. Williams (144) argues convincingly that the context requires the first kiss to be placed
play. He shortens drastically the time-spans of Brooke and Bandello: in the former, events take from Christmas until fall (155, 950), in the latter, an indeterminate number of months. Both versions allude frequently to time, often with noticeable specificity. For instance, both identify Saturday as the day Juliet and Romeo are married (Brooke 633; Bandello 359); Bandello mentions specific hours, such as 6 a.m. (379); and Brooke refers to “the eight part of an howre” during which the couple embrace before parting (1535), while in Bandello, they linger “more than a large quarter of an hour” (368). Although no carefully structured time scheme is apparent in these works (many ambiguous time lapses occur), the many references to time may have impressed upon Shakespeare their symbolic possibilities. His own text makes explicit the days of the week, sometimes the very hour, when events occur. This detailed calendaring of events is revealed by Paris on the second day of the play, which he identifies as Monday (H2'; 3.4.18). The first act begins, therefore, on Sunday morning an hour or two before 9 o'clock (B'; 1.1.161) and concludes shortly after sunrise on Thursday, about 5 o'clock—a period of 92 1/2 to 94 hours, or nearly four days. 

An astonishing feature of this four-day sequence is its numerical relationship to Juliet’s age and her upcoming birthday.

neatly between the sonnets, after 106, “Then moue not” (C4'); modern editors who agree include Spencer and Bevington (in the latter’s edition, the line is numbered 107). An earlier numerical correlation between age and kissing appears in Venus and Adonis (Butler and Fowler 128-30).

Draper (26) and M. Johnson (131) note Juliet’s frequent association with the sun, and thus the appropriateness of beginning the play on Sunday, ostensibly her day. During the time-span of the play, July 14-18 (O. S.), or July 22-26 (N. S.), sunrise and sunset occur about 3:50 a.m. and 6:50 p.m., so the days are about 15 hours long (see the “Perpetual Calendar” in a modern almanac; Verona lies at 45° 27’ N. Lat. and 11° 0’ E. Long.). Such information was available to Shakespeare from a variety of sources, such as popular almanacs (Eade 27). Because extreme precision was unnecessary to Shakespeare’s purpose, however, and because the times of sunrise and sunset at Verona do not differ greatly from those at London, where sunrise occurred about 20 minutes later, sunset 70 minutes later, Shakespeare may simply have used London time or estimated the times for northern Italy.
Sunday evening while talking to her daughter about marriage (B4rev; 1.3.10 ff.), Lady Capulet and the Nurse attempt to identify Juliet’s exact age, presumably concerned that marrying two weeks short of 14, the age of discretion, will appear highly improper. The Nurse recalls she was born on “Lammas Eue at night,” or July 31, August 1 being Lammas Day. To the Nurse’s question “How long is it now to Lammas-tide?” (i.e., Lammas Day), Lady Capulet answers, “A fortnight and odd days.” Few modern editors gloss “odde days.” Spencer takes it to mean merely “a few more” (183), as we might denote in “twenty-odd,” but Lady Capulet is being more definite, she and the Nurse being concerned about how close to 14 Juliet is. The Nurse boasts she can tell her age “unto an houre” and specifies not only the day and evening, but its having occurred “at night,” that is, after nightfall, but before midnight. Because the women are attempting to be precise, it seems likely that in specifying “odde days” Lady Capulet has a number in mind. The primary odd number, that is, the number “odd” originally denoted, is three, which appears to be the number she means. If so, the play begins on July 14, a fortnight and three days prior to Lammas Day, and concludes 13 days (nearly 14) short of Juliet’s 14th birthday. A more fitting calendrical representation of a girl approaching her 14th birthday is difficult to imagine.

Yet another manifestation of the playwright’s keen interest in using time to symbolize the prematurity of Juliet’s marriage can be found in the sequence of major events involving the young couple, which occur every 14 hours, Juliet’s age thus functioning as a prime factor in determining when these events occur. This time structure is not readily apparent in the comprehensive time-span of the play, as the sequence of 14-hour intervals does not begin as the play opens, but with Romeo’s

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17 OED-2, “Odd” (adj.), headnote and sense A1. By “odd” Lady Capulet cannot mean 1, as “days” is plural; almost certainly she cannot mean 5, or she would say “nearly three weeks”; nor can she mean 7, or she would say either “a fortnight and a week” or “three weeks.”
entrance, when Benvolio says it is “new strooke nine” (B'; 1.1.161). In this particular hour of the week we might detect a significance in its domination by Saturn, the most malevolent planet, and by the choleric humor (yellow bile) thought to exert a negative influence, particularly upon youth. But subsequent events of importance every 14 hours do not correspond closely with the presumed influence of the planets or the humors, although other events sometimes do, such as the deaths of Mercutio and Tybalt, leading to the conclusion that Shakespeare does not combine astrology and number symbolism in the play. \(^{18}\)

The first 14-hour time sequence, initiated by Romeo’s entrance, ends at the Capulet Party when he meets Juliet about 11 p.m. \(^{19}\) An association of the number 11 with death and mourning (Fowler, TF189n) brings to their first meeting a premonitory signal. Fourteen hours later, about 1 p.m. Monday, the young couple are married—an astonishingly hasty courtship by any standard. \(^{20}\) Their next eventful moment on stage is a tearful

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\(^{18}\) Saturn governs the fifth planetary hour of each Sunday. Unlike the “hours of the clock,” the “hours of the planets” vary with the seasons and begin at sunrise (see Lowes 13-14). On July 14 (O. S.) when this scene occurs, these ‘hours’ are 75 minutes in length during daylight, 45 minutes during the night. The order of the planets begins with the outermost: Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury, Moon. The first ‘hour’ of Sunday (from sunrise at 3:50 to 5:05) is governed by the sun, the fifth (8:50-10:05), when Romeo enters, by Saturn. The humors were thought to predominate as follows: midnight to 6 a.m., blood; 6 a.m. to noon, the time when Romeo enters, yellow bile; noon to 6 p.m., black bile; 6 p.m. to midnight, phlegm (Draper 21-22). For a correlation between selected events in the play and astrological influence, see Draper (22 ff.). Lowes (14) points out that the hours of the planets were associated more closely with human affairs than the hours of the clock. But their computation is too complex for an audience to follow because it requires too much rapid calculation. A reader of the play-script, of course, has the leisure to make such calculations.

\(^{19}\) Evidence they meet about this time can be found in Romeo and his friends’ arrival after supper has been served, immediately prior to the departure of the guests, but well before midnight (C2'; 1.4.105; C4'; 1.5.126-27; cf. H2'; 3.4.34-35).

\(^{20}\) This 14-hour period is defined by the following. The Nurse speaks with Romeo at noon Monday (E3'; 2.4.112-13), whereupon she returns to inform Juliet of marriage arrangements, urging her to hasten to Lawrence’s cell for the ceremony (F'; 2.5.68). Doubtless Juliet loses no time, nor does the Friar, for he says, “We will make short
parting at daybreak Tuesday, shortly after 3 o’clock, approximately 14 hours following the marriage ceremony.\textsuperscript{21}

Juliet takes final leave of her parents on Tuesday afternoon, 14 to 14 1/2 hours after her parting from Romeo. Earlier she had received from the Friar a sleeping potion for “two and forty hours” (I\textsuperscript{3}; 4.1.105), appropriately a multiple of 14, which she is to take Wednesday night (I\textsuperscript{3}; 4.1.90-91).\textsuperscript{22} But upon Juliet’s return home and her ‘consent’ to marry Paris, Capulet abruptly changed the wedding to Wednesday, thus forcing Juliet to drink the potion Tuesday night. Shortly after 3 o’clock Wednesday morning (K\textsuperscript{1}; 4.4.4), Juliet is discovered ‘dead’ and is then interred during the early morning hours, most likely about 7-8 a.m., 13 1/2 to 14 1/2 hours after her disengagement from the Capulets.\textsuperscript{23} Following Juliet’s ‘burial,’ the pattern of 14-hour

workes” of the holy rite (F2\textsuperscript{1}; 2.6.35), leading us to conclude that Romeo and Juliet are married by or about 1 o’clock. Cook (210) draws attention to the canonical stipulation that marriages be performed before noon, which explains Juliet’s anxiety when the Nurse fails to return by noon with word from Romeo (E4\textsuperscript{1}; 2.5.9-11).

\textsuperscript{21}As the scene opens, the light of dawn is just appearing (H2\textsuperscript{1}; 3.5.7-10, 19). The Nurse enters shortly, saying “The day is broke” (H3\textsuperscript{1}; 40), indicating the arrival of dawn, after which Romeo departs for Mantua. Because dawn at Verona begins about 3:15 on this date, sunrise about 3:50, the couple part about 14 1/2 hours following their marriage.

\textsuperscript{22}Lady Capulet says it is near night (I4\textsuperscript{1}; 4.2.39), but too early for evening mass; since the time of sunset is about 6:50, this scene must occur about 5:00-5:30 p.m. Brooke’s Friar gives no time-span for the potion’s effect (2135-57), but Bandello’s mentions “forty hours at the least” (377). Unaccountably, Shakespeare’s designation of 42 hours is inaccurate, as Juliet awakes after about 28 hours, or 14 hours before she is supposed to. Spencer (33, 256) points this out as the only serious discrepancy in the time management of the play. Draper (33) suggests it may be a textual slip for “four and twenty.” Perhaps Shakespeare intended the discrepancy to depict the Friar as more bumbling than has been supposed, the result of approaching senility, for in the earlier versions he is elderly and dies five or six years following the deaths of Romeo and Juliet (Brooke 3004; Bandello 392).

\textsuperscript{23}The approximate time of Juliet’s interment can be estimated with less confidence than previous events noted, perhaps an indication of the approaching chaos. Her ‘burial’ must occur early enough Wednesday to provide sufficient time for Balthasar to travel to Mantua and return with Romeo before the closing of Verona’s gates at nightfall. Balthasar informs Romeo that “presently” after the burial he obtained a horse and departed (K4\textsuperscript{1}; 5.1.21), surely within the hour. The distance to Mantua
periods between major events breaks off. For instance, no specific action occurs at 11 p.m., 14 hours following Juliet’s interment. By then Romeo and Balthasar have returned to Verona, where they remain concealed until well after midnight before proceeding to the Capulet tomb. Tragic consequences now overwhelm the star-crossed lovers, drawing them into rapidly escalating events from which order, pattern, and regularity have disappeared.

Symbolizing Juliet Capulet through temporal numbers would hardly have seemed unusual to an Elizabethan audience or reader, who inherited from the Middle Ages a mathematical habit of life and an interest in numerical symbolism. Numerical composition was popular during Shakespeare’s time, one indication being Jonson’s use of mathematical proportion in the masques; substantial evidence has also been discovered in narrative and lyric poetry. While an audience cannot count lines recited on stage, Elizabethan theatergoers were more sophisticated than is commonly supposed, their reaction to plays exhibiting “a complex and wide-ranging responsiveness” (Gurr 105).

being about 25 miles, riding time would be four to six hours each way, as the occasion does not demand haste (on travel by horseback, see Parkes 61-62). In Mantua, Balthasar arranges for horses (K4*: 5.1.26, 34) while Romeo visits the Apothecary’s shop (K4*: 37 ff.), a delay of perhaps an hour. All told, these events require approximately 10 to 12 hours. Because the young men enter Verona before its gates close at nightfall, which occurred about 7:30 p.m., we can estimate the time of Juliet’s burial at no later than 9:30 a.m., but probably earlier to minimize public embarrassment to the Capulets over the apparent suicide of their only child and heir.

24On Jonson’s frequent use of proportion in the masques, see A. Johnson 203-08, 213-17. Numerical symbolism is also evident, e.g., in Middleton’s A Chaste Maid in Cheapside, 1612 (see Van den Broek), Julius Caesar (McAlindon), and Hamlet (K. Brown). Patrides believes that “numerology as a thematic concern is certainly well-nigh omnipresent in the literature of the Renaissance” (67), while Fowler claims that most good poems of the period are numerologically organized (Spenser 248). Overviews of the tradition that might be cited for their excellence are by Røstvig, Shawcross, Butler, Reiss, and MacQueen. Still the best and most widely accepted study of numerical symbolism in the work of a single author (in this case, Spenser’s Epithalamion) is by Hieatt, Short Time’s Endless Monument, supplemented by Wickert and Fukuda, while the most useful general study of number symbolism is by Hopper.
Shakespeare’s culture was much more oral than ours, and audiences were adept at following complex oral literature and participating in intricate ceremonies (Fowler, “The plays” 166). Easily noticed by an audience attuned to numerical symbolism are such elements as the number of players, the order of their entrance, the number of names in a catalogue such as Capulet’s guest-list, and the passage of time.

Certain numerical details in *Romeo and Juliet*, however, require a perusal of the play-text itself, such as lines on the title page, or the location of Juliet’s first kiss. At least early in his career, Shakespeare seems to have shared with Jonson the view that his play-script was a form of literary art that would be studied outside the theater (on Jonson, see Kernan 241). Plays were, in fact, read and studied (Gurr 100-01). Presumably because Shakespeare thought of himself primarily as a poet when he wrote *Romeo and Juliet*, he included “virtuosic poetic passages and set pieces” often dismissed “as the excesses of a poet as yet undisciplined as a playwright” (Gajowski 26). We should not be surprised, therefore, to find vestiges of current poetical technique, such as numerical composition. Although an idealized notion of Shakespeare would have us believe he never revised, modern studies demonstrate otherwise (Hosley, Bains). As a consequence, it is not difficult to imagine his fashioning a play-text to conform to a predetermined numerical plan.

Perhaps Shakespeare was thinking of the sonnet form in numerical terms while composing this play, for like the sonnet, love has its forms and structures, its beginnings and endings (Kermode 1056). One scholar observes that when Romeo and Juliet speak in sonnets, they are figuratively submitting their lives to its constraints, yet “behind the fun of going beyond the limits of the sonnet [lurks] the hint [that] this new-born love is too violent to respect forms and conventions” (Stamm 11). Another scholar correlates Juliet’s youth with the length of the sonnet: “Juliet’s very age suggests that
she both represents and defeats a translation of sonnet into flesh. At almost fourteen . . . she has years almost equal to the completed form of the sonnet’s fourteen-lined body” (Whittier 40n). In addition, however, Shakespeare seems to have considered Romeo and Juliet “sonnet lovers,” a couple devoted wholly to Venus and the religion of love; the age of love, when one is dominated by Venus, was thought to begin at 14 (M. Johnson 128). Indeed, the heavy numerical influence apparent in the 14-hour sequences spanning most of the play represents a force of love from which Romeo and Juliet never escape.

Shakespeare symbolizes Juliet’s youth in a display of numerical virtuosity designed to impress upon his audience and readers her unripeness for adulthood and its attendant complexities. Through a counting of letters, words, lines, stage entrances, and hours, he transforms her age into a force that drives the play to its catastrophe. Attention to her premature introduction to adulthood, in turn, shifts much of the blame for the disaster to the Capulets, Paris, the Nurse, the Friar, adults who pressure and manipulate Juliet into marriage while she is still a child. The care with which Shakespeare encodes Juliet’s age into the text leads us to believe his imagination was captured by her as by no other character in the play.

Works Cited


