

Timeline of Shakespearean Works

Othello

- Othello is general of the Venetian army but his promotion of Cassio leads Iago to vow his destruction (Shakespeare 1.1)
- Othello is discussed and insulted racially by Iago in the beginning of the play: “sir, you’re robbed. For shame... an old black ram/ Is tupping your white ewe” (Shakespeare 1.1.94-98)
- Although Othello is respected by the Venetians is primarily referred to as the Moor. For example, when Othello comes before the Duke, a senator announces “here comes...the valiant Moor.” (Shakespeare 1.3.55)
- Desdemona’s love for Othello is derived from his prowess in war, and “[battles,] sieges, [fortunes]” he endured (Shakespeare 1.3.151)
- Iago plots the downfall of Othello:
The Moor is of free and open nature
That thinks men honest that but seem to be so,
And will as tenderly be led by th’ nose
As asses are
I have’t. It is engendered. Hell and night
Must bring this monstrous birth to the world’s light. (Shakespeare 1.3.442-447)
- Othello becomes suspicious of Desdemona after she pleads on Cassio’s behalf and Iago warns against his jealousy (superficially) (Shakespeare 3.3)
- Desdemona loses her handkerchief and this furthers Othello’s jealousy (Shakespeare 3.4)
- Othello’s mental ailments of jealousy and aggression manifest in a physical fit of epilepsy in which Othello seems to fall into a trance (Shakespeare 4.1.50-60)
- Othello kills Desdemona, then kills himself, urging Lodovico to “these unlucky deeds relate”, saying “speak of me as I am.” (Shakespeare 5.2.401-402)

Hamlet

- The audience first encounters Hamlet as Claudius holds court and addresses his recent appointment as King and marriage to Hamlet’s mother. Claudius urges Hamlet to stay in Denmark and repeatedly pushes him to move on from his father’s death and embrace his new role as prince of Denmark. (Hamlet 1.2.1-130)
- After Claudius finishes his address, all but Hamlet leave the stage and he gives his first soliloquy, lamenting the death of his father and acknowledging that he no longer wants to live. Hamlet cites many reasons for his despair, among others, his father’s death and mother’s hasty marriage to Claudius. (Hamlet 1.2.130-165)
- Horatio, Marcellus, and Barnardo inform Hamlet of their supposed encounter with the past king’s ghost, describing his appearance in detail and urging Hamlet to come observe him with them the coming night. Hamlet is alarmed by their account and vows to investigate the matter himself, exclaiming “all is not well/ I doubt some foul play. Would the night were come!” (Hamlet 1.2.277-278)
- Laertes urges Ophelia to pursue Hamlet cautiously, noting that although he seems obsessed with her at the moment, both his stature and age will make him likely to change

his mind. Laertes advises Ophelia that “nature, crescent does not grow alone... as this temple waxes/ the inward service of the mind and soul/ grows wide withal” (Hamlet 1.3.14-17)

- Hamlet talks to his father’s ghost and learns of Claudius’ murderous ascent to the throne. Hamlet is horrified by the realization and vows to exact revenge on Claudius, commenting that the memory of the ghost will persist in his “distracted globe” (Hamlet 1.5.104)
- Hamlet recounts his discussion with the ghost to Horatio and declares that he may in the future chose to “put an antic disposition on” (Hamlet 1.5.192) in his quest to avenge his father’s murder, setting the stage for the remaining action of the play.
- Polonius talk to Hamlet, who appears greatly disturbed and discusses the futility of life in a seemingly crazy and erratic manner. However, Polonius comments that “a happiness/ often madness hits on, which reason and/ [sanity] could not so prosperously be delivered of” (Hamlet 2.2.227-29)
- Hamlet decides he will use the actors performance to judge the guilt of Claudius, acknowledging that he may be led astray by “a devil” (Hamlet 2.2.628), which is taking the form of his father.
- Hamlet delivers his famous “to be or not to be” soliloquy while Polonius and Claudius observe and Ophelia stands in the background. In his speech, Hamlet analyzes mortality and the ways in which human’s fear of the unknown leads to cowardice and suffering. (Hamlet 3.1.60-100)
- In the aftermath of the play, Claudius rushes out visibly upset, confirming to Hamlet his guilt. Emboldened by the plays confirmation of his suspicions Hamlet vows to avenge his father and acknowledges that he could now “drink hot/ blood” (Hamlet 3.2.422-23)
- Hamlet in a fit of rage kills Polonius and proceeds to chastise his mother for her role in marrying Claudius and expresses his discontent with Claudius’ behavior and plot to send Hamlet to England. (Hamlet 3.4)
- Hamlet encounters Fortinbras and vows to return to Denmark and avenge his father by murdering Claudius, announcing that his “thoughts be bloody or nothing worth” (Hamlet 4.4.69)

Romeo and Juliet

- The play opens with a fight between the Montagues and Capulets (Shakespeare 1.1)
- Romeo and Juliet meet and fall in love (Shakespeare 1.5)
- Balcony scene, Romeo and Juliet decide to get married (Shakespeare 2.2)
- Romeo seeks out the help of Friar Laurence in arranging their wedding (Shakespeare 2.3)
- Romeo and Juliet are married by Laurence (Shakespeare 2.6)
- Tybalt and Mercutio duel, Mercutio dies so Romeo kills Tybalt and is subsequently banished (Shakespeare 3.1)
- It is decided that Juliet will marry Paris (by Lord Capulet) (Shakespeare 3.4)
- Romeo leaves for Mantua (Shakespeare 3.5)

- Friar Laurence advises Juliet to take a drug which will allow her to fake her death so she can be with Romeo (Shakespeare 4.1)
- Juliet takes the drug (Shakespeare 4.3)
- Juliet is discovered (Shakespeare 4.5)
- Romeo learns of Juliet's supposed death (Shakespeare 5.1)
- The message from Friar Laurence to Romeo informing him of Juliet's plan was not successfully delivered (Shakespeare 5.2)
- Paris dies, Romeo dies, Juliet dies... (Shakespeare 5.3)

Timeline of Shakespeare in African American Culture

Voodoo Macbeth by Orson Welles (1936)

- Mostly the same as *Macbeth* by Shakespeare with some key differences
- Set in Haiti rather than Scotland similar to the *The Tempest*
- Welles recruited an all black cast and transformed the witchcraft of the original play into “voodoo”
- Welles expanded the role of Hecate into a ringmaster of magicians who appears frequently not simply in one scene as in *Macbeth* and who closes the play with the line “The charm’s wound up”
- The play was set with a scene design of a jungle and a single set.

West Side Story by Arthur Laurents (1957)

- Jets (Tony) vs. Sharks (Maria)
- Tony agrees to go to the dance when asked by Riff
- At the dance he meets Maria and falls in love with her
- Tony calls to Maria through her bedroom window and asks her to come down (recreation of balcony scene)
- Tony confesses to Doc that he’s in love and is advised against it
- Bernardo challenges Tony to a fight, he backs down and Riff steps in and is ultimately killed. Then Tony stabs Bernardo
- Maria and Tony agree to meet at the bus station and leave town to be together
- Tony is kept in hiding by the Jets from the police
- Anita tells the Jets Maria is dead
- Tony runs out of hiding and asks Chino to kill him
- Tony is shot just as Maria arrives

“Why I Stopped Hating Shakespeare” by James Baldwin (1964)

- Begins by discussing his instinctive distaste for Shakespeare as an example of black oppression, a sort of symbol for the English, white colonization of blacks and black culture
- Also feared Shakespeare’s prowess for the English language
- Discusses the murder of Caesar in *Julius Caesar* in the context of good and evil
- Originally saw English as a language which didn’t reflect his experience but then this transformed into a belief that he had simply not attempted to use it as his own
- “My relationship, then, to the language of Shakespeare revealed itself as nothing less than my relationship to myself and my past” (79)
- Sees Shakespeare as a poet who was responsible to the people, to reflect the true state of things and relishes in this role
- Therefore, Shakespeare should not be hated because it is the greatest testament to poetry in its truest nature: a reflection of true reality, changing times and changing people.

Timeline of the Civil Rights Movement (For context)

- Brown v. Board of Ed. (1954)
- Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955)
- Little Rock Nine (1957)
- Freedom Riders (1961)
- March on Washington (1963)
- Civil Rights Act (1964)
- Malcolm X assassinated (1965)
- Selma to Montgomery March (1965)
- MLK Jr. assassinated (1968)