

An extract from Kendra's Final Assignment

Name: Kendra Okelola

Year Group: Year 9 (2024-2025)

Scholars Programme Course: "Shakespeare or not Shakespeare? That is the question".

Assignment Title / Question: Which version of Romeo and Juliet is the most reliable?



The First Quarto of Romeo and Juliet was printed by John Danter in 1597. It is commonly referred to as "The Bad Quarto" this is because many scholars believe that Danter acquired the manuscript and published the First Quarto without Shakespeare's knowledge. Common theories that support this idea being the actor theory, where actors on the stage of *Romeo and Juliet* wrote down the lines of the entire play producing a manuscript before handing it over to Danter to be printed. This theory is not very credible as the actors stealing the work of a playwright would be considered plagiarism and they would be fired immediately. Meaning it would be almost impossible to find work, and in a society where poverty almost certainly meant death, it would not be sensible for actors to put their source of income on the line.

The audience theory suggests that Danter hired scribes to go write down the lines of characters in the play to produce a manuscript. This is unreliable as sending only one scribe into the audience would be impractical unless he sent the same scribe multiple times. But that would have raised suspicion. Danter could have sent multiple scribes into the audience but the price of paper as well as the labour fees would be very costly and not much profit could be made.

A third theory by scholar Michael E. Mooney states that after playhouses closed down, Shakespeare and his actors began to perform their plays around the UK. While these theories all explain the 800 lines missing in this version, it still does not make it a reliable text as these summaries still do not encapsulate the true message Shakespeare had intended while writing the play.

These summaries, for whatever reason they were made, do not truly make the First Quarto a reliable version. The uncertainty surrounding the First Quarto is a key reason it is an unreliable text. If the manuscript was acquired through a third party, then it is certain that some of Shakespeare's intent would be lost due to misinterpretation and so, some parts of the text would not have the same effect.

