

Why Is My Verse So Barren and So Flat?

Sara Walker, Eshan Mitra

This is a puzzle about Shakespeare's works, as indicated by its title ("Why Is My Verse So Barren") and flavor text ("Snow Globe Theatre"). There are 14 different Shakespearean characters clued in the Cast List:

Cast List:		
FOURTEEN	A man who keeps borrowing stuff from his friends and countrymen	ANTONY
SEVEN	A man who has seen the wavering commons	BAGOT
ELEVEN	A weaver who's kind of an ass	BOTTOM
SIX	A country bumpkin who mixes up letters	COSTARD
THREE	An heiress who steals half of her sister's inheritance	GONERIL
TWELVE	A servant with a pet Crab	LAUNCE
THIRTEEN	An ancient king who's ready to downsize	LEAR
TEN	An Athenian with a conveniently rich aunt who lives out of town	LYSANDER
NINE	A man who gaslights a venomous mammal	PETRUCHIO
ONE	A prankster who's really into eyedrops	PUCK
FIVE	A teen who compares his lover to something hot and gassy	ROMEO
EIGHT	A servant whose boss keeps talking about tomorrow	SEYTON
TWO	A kidnapper who falls in love with a mechanical donkey	TITANIA
FOUR	An accidental bandit king	VALENTINE

Each character is given a number, which can also be found in the sonnet at the bottom of the page. The title also alludes to NPL transformations called flats, and the "missing characters" piece of flavor text describes the specific transformation (known as a transdeletion) that must be applied to each member of the cast before it can be inserted into the poem. The complete sonnet is as follows:

Do lend an EAR and hear a tragic play.
We know one of a wicked UNCLE who
Does use a poisoned CUP the queen to slay.
A TOGA-wearing man, he says, "Et tu?"
To plotters trying to ATTAIN his crown.
We could do a VENETIAN tale of strife
In which a MOOR's advisor takes him down
By spreading words of SLANDER 'gainst his wife.
The troupe's too sad to speak EUPHORIC verse;
The leads were given NOTES and bad reviews

Which did ANNOY them so they quit. And worse,
The understudies just IGNORE their cues!
And though our premier ACTORS have withdrawn,
Our MOTTO says the show must still go on!

The deleted letters can be written in numerical order to produce the cluephrase KILLED BY TYBALT, for the answer MERCUTIO.

Authors' Notes

This puzzle went through several incarnations. The original proposal was for sets of couplets that each clued a character and used a different flat, but this was ultimately set aside in favor of the current puzzle structure. This is partly because coming up with enough different flats that produced a single extractable letter was quite constraining, but mostly because I thought a single sonnet would be more thematic and I am very good at winning arguments by attrition.

I have broken from traditional NPL form in that the original version of the poem does not scan properly; rather, the completed sonnet observes the rules of Elizabethan sonnets. This was meant to aid solvers, as knowing the intended meter should help determine which words need to be inserted, and also because it irks me that solved flats don't read as well as their unsolved versions. I hope the NPL can forgive me.