Romeo and Juliet Study Guide

Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare

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Introduction

The exact year in which William Shakespeare wrote *Romeo and Juliet* is unknown, but it is definitely one of his earlier works, and one of only two tragedies written in the period from 1590 to 1595. The other tragedy, *Titus Andronicus* followed the conventions of Seneca and Marlowe, i.e., built around a single heroic figure, but *Romeo and Juliet* was innovatively different. The plot was based on a fourteenth-century Italian short story, or novella, written by Matteo Bandello, that included elements of history, tradition, romance, and fable. This story had been put into verse form in 1562 by British poet Arthur Brooke. In Shakespeare's hands, fashionable elements of Elizabethan drama were inserted, certain characters were magnified, and sensational scenes were added. In addition, Shakespeare surrounded the innocent lovers with the mature bawdiness of other characters. In truth, the play was experimental for its time, but it was well-received by contemporary audiences and remained popular through the centuries. For a long time, critics tended to downgrade *Romeo and Juliet* in comparison to Shakespeare's later tragedies. But in the twentieth century the play gained appreciation for its unique merits and became a standard of high school study and was produced in various media.

Romeo and Juliet is as much about hate as love. The play opens with a scene of conflict between the two feuding families and ends with their reconciliation. Nonetheless, the play is considered one of the greatest love stories of all time, complicated by the interplay of fate and repeated misfortune in timing. The juxtaposition of light and dark, the injection of comic moments, and the beauty of the language of love further enhance the play and make it a classic for all time.

Author Biography

William Shakespeare was born to John and Mary Arden Shakespeare in Stratford-on-Avon, in Warwickshire, England, on April 26, 1564 and died there fifty-two years later on April 23, 1616. This period was remarkable in British history in that it was both the time of the Renaissance and the Elizabethan age (1558—1603). Shakespeare received a good classical education as a child, but he did not go on to university studies. In 1582, at age eighteen, he married Anne Hathaway. A daughter, Susanna, was born to them in 1583, and twins, Hamnet and Judith, in 1585. Shakespeare went to London to become an actor and playwright in 1588, the same year that the British navy defeated the Spanish Armada. From 1592 to 1598 he devoted his talents mostly to chronicle histories (tragedies) and comedies, including *Romeo and Juliet*. In 1594, he had become associated with a successful theatrical troupe called the Lord Chamberlain's Men (later, under King James I, the King's Men), and was eventually a prime shareholder and the principal playwright. In 1599, this company built the Globe Theater. However, Shakespeare also gained popularity as a poet for works such as *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, both written about his patron, the Earl of Southampton. A collection of Shakespeare's sonnets was not published until 1609, although his friends had been reading them for years. By 1597, Shakespeare was prosperous enough to buy a large, handsome home in the center of Stratford, and he was soon recognized as England's greatest dramatist. From 1601 to 1609, he wrote his great tragedies and romantic comedies. In 1610, he retired to Stratford-on-Avon, but he continued to write and produced four more plays until his death. In the four hundred years since, his reputation has not diminished. Although there is continued debate about whether he actually wrote all the plays and verse attributed to him, nothing has ever proven otherwise. Consequently, the appreciation of his talent and genius has grown such that he is generally considered the greatest playwright of all time.

Plot Summary

Prologue to Act 1

The prologue tells the audience that this story will be about two prominent families of Verona, Italy, whose ancient feud is erupting anew and that a "pair of star-cross'd lovers" from these families will end the violence by ending their own lives.

Act 1

In scene 1, Capulet servants, Sampson and Gregory, and Montague servants, Abraham and Balthasar, start a street fight that is joined by Benvolio, a Montague relative, and Tybalt a Capulet relative. Escalus, the Prince of Verona, learns about the fight and angrily decrees a death penalty for anyone caught in further feuding. Benvolio finds Romeo and learns that Romeo is forlorn because the girl he loves, Rosaline, will not return his affection because she has chosen to remain chaste. Benvolio advises Romeo to move on with his life and look at other girls. Romeo, however, is quite sure that he cannot forget Rosaline.

Scene 2 opens with Lord Capulet being approached by Count Paris, a relative of Prince Escalus, about marrying Capulet's daughter, Juliet. Capulet thinks Juliet is too young to marry but agrees to let the two meet at a party he is hosting that night. By accident, Romeo and Benvolio find out about the party, and Benvolio encourages Romeo to crash the party with him.

It is in scene 3 that the audience meets the garrulous nurse and learns that Juliet is only 14 years old. Lady Capulet discusses the idea of marriage to Paris with Juliet, who has not yet given marriage any thought, but she obediently agrees to consider the match.

Scene 4 finds Mercutio, another relative of the prince, joining Romeo and Benvolio and other friends on their way to the party. Mercutio teases the lovesick Romeo by scoffing at love. As they reach the party, Romeo expresses a feeling of impending doom.

Scene 5 takes place at the Capulet's party where a disguised Romeo spies Juliet and falls instantly in love. Lady Capulet's nephew Tybalt discovers Romeo's presence but is prevented from attacking Romeo by Lord Capulet who does not want such a disturbance at his party. In a brief encounter with Romeo, Juliet too falls in love. Later, they each learn separately from the nurse the family identity of the other.

Prologue to Act 2

The chorus dramatizes the complications faced by both Romeo and Juliet in their love for one another but predicts that passion will lend them the power needed to be together.

Act 2

In a very short scene 1, Benvolio and Mercutio try to find Romeo, who has climbed a wall to hide in the Capulet orchard. His friends give up when Romeo will not respond to their calls.

Scene 2 is the famous balcony scene in which, ignoring the danger, Romeo hopes for a glimpse of Juliet outside her window. Romeo overhears Juliet talk about her love for him. He then approaches her, and, after declaring their love, the two decide to marry. Juliet promises to send Romeo a messenger in the morning to make plans for their wedding.

In scene 3, Romeo goes to see Friar Laurence to arrange the wedding. Friar Laurence agrees to marry the two in hopes that their union will end the feud.

In scene 4, Romeo meets his friends Mercutio and Benvolio, who are discussing a challenge sent by Tybalt to Romeo. Juliet's messenger, the nurse, arrives and speaks privately to Romeo. The wedding is set for later that day.

In scene 5, the nurse returns to Juliet and, after much teasing to exasperate the eager Juliet, she reveals her news. Juliet uses the excuse of going to confession to get to Friar Laurence's cell.

A tiny scene 6 accomplishes the wedding of Romeo and Juliet.

Act 3

In scene 1, later that day, Benvolio and Mercutio encounter Tybalt and are already sparring with words when Romeo arrives. Tybalt attempts to provoke Romeo into a fight, but Romeo will not fight because, although unknown to the others, he and Tybalt are now relatives by marriage. Instead, Mercutio challenges Tybalt and is killed by a deceitful stab from Tybalt when Romeo tries to separate them. Tybalt flees and Mercutio dies. Romeo is so enraged that he tracks down Tybalt and kills him. Benvolio urges Romeo to flee. Just then, Escalus arrives and banishes Romeo from Verona.

In scene 2, the Nurse tells Juliet that Romeo has killed Tybalt. Despite her intense grief over Tybalt, Juliet's love for Romeo wins out, and she asks the Nurse to find Romeo.

Scene 3 finds Romeo in Friar Laurence's cell. Romeo learns of the banishment order and almost commits suicide when he realizes he may not be able to see Juliet again. However, the Nurse's arrival and the Friar's confidence that the crisis will blow over if Romeo will just hide out in Mantua for a while encourages Romeo to go see Juliet.

A brief scene 4 finds Capulet deciding that marrying Paris will soothe what Capulet assumes is Juliet's grief over Tybalt's death. Capulet sets the wedding for three days away and instructs his wife to tell Juliet.

Scene 5 takes place at dawn after Romeo and Juliet have spent the night together. Just after their heart-wrenching farewell, Juliet's mother arrives and tells Juliet that she is to marry Paris. Juliet refuses, and a terrible fight with her parents ensues. The nurse counsels Juliet to forget Romeo and marry Paris. Feeling betrayed by all, Juliet makes another excuse to see Friar Laurence.

Act 4

Scene 1 is back at Friar Laurence's, where he tells Juliet to take a potion that will cause her to appear dead until Romeo can come to rescue her and take her away with him to Mantua.

In scene 2, Juliet claims that she has repented of her disobedience and agrees to marry Paris. Lord Capulet is so pleased, he moves up the wedding to the next morning.

Scene 3 finds Juliet asking the nurse to leave her alone that night. She then worries about trusting the friar, but she takes the potion anyway.

Scene 4 shows the whole Capulet household working through the night to prepare for the wedding.

In scene 5, the nurse finds Juliet apparently dead. The wedding preparations are changed to those of a funeral.

Act 5

Scene 1 takes place in Mantua as Romeo's servant Balthasar arrives, bringing the news of Juliet's death. Romeo decides to risk his own life by returning immediately to Verona. He buys poison from an apothecary with the intent of dying beside Juliet.

In scene 2, Friar Laurence learns that his letter to Romeo explaining Juliet's deception was not received. His messenger, Friar John, was confined by quarantine. Friar Laurence sends another letter to Mantua and heads off to the Capulet burial chamber to be there when Juliet awakens.

In the final scene, Paris goes to Juliet's tomb to mourn her but finds Romeo there and assumes that, as a Montague, Romeo is desecrating Juliet's grave. A fight ensues and Paris is killed. Romeo places him beside Juliet, then takes the poison, kisses Juliet, and dies. Friar Laurence finally arrives, but Juliet awakens and sees Romeo. Upon hearing noises, Friar Laurence runs away, but Juliet will not leave. Juliet kisses Romeo, stabs herself, and dies. The arriving guards find the bodies, send for the prince, and discover the friar in hiding. The prince, the Capulets and the Montagues all arrive, and Balthasar, Paris's page, and Friar Laurence explain everything. Escalus confronts the two families with the results of their feud and the two lords reconcile with promises to build gold statues to each other's lost child. The play concludes with the prince's declaration:

For never was there a story of more woe
Than this of Juliet and her Romeo.

Act 1, Prologue

Act 1, Prologue Summary

The prologue tells exactly what is the play is going to be about. It explains that there are two families that are feuding. The two lovers in this story are from opposing households. This raises two questions for the audience. The first is if Romeo and Juliet's deaths could have been avoided if their families had stopped their feud. The second is will their deaths show the families that there has been enough bloodshed and maybe help them find peace. The chorus begs the audience to stay and find out.

Act 1, Prologue Analysis

Many plays in Shakespeare's time would start one or more acts with prologues to tell the audience what is going to happen. Many people in Shakespeare's time were illiterate. Therefore, playbills were ineffective and this was only way the people would know what the play was about.

Act 1, Scene 1

Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

The scene begins with Sampson and Gregory of the house of Capulet talking to each other. Sampson makes it clear that they are in a feud with the Montagues. Sampson is not going to let them humiliate the Capulets anymore and he is willing to fight anyone to let them know, even the women and the children. Gregory agrees that they are not going to let the Montagues get away with any more humiliation but he warns Sampson that the feud is between the men of both houses and not the women. Sampson makes it clear that he does not care whether a Montague is a woman or man; he will kill them.

It is at this point that they come across Abram and Balthasar from the house of Montague. Gregory and Sampson want to fight but they discuss how it they will have to let the others draw first. Therefore, Gregory and Sampson walk past the others taunting them, trying to get them into a quarrel. Though they have been insulted, the other two men do not attack. Benvolio, a Montague, now happens upon the scene just as the two sides start to fight. Benvolio tries to stop the by stopping their swords with his. Tybalt, a Capulet, enters the scene, sees Benvolio, and mistakes him for being in the fight. Benvolio tries to tell him that he was just trying to stop a fight but Tybalt does not believe him and draws him into the fight.

At this point, several citizens and an officer enter onto the scene and try to stop the fight. The commotion brings both the patriarchs out. The men see each other and only their wives stop them from fighting. Then the Prince enters and he is angry at the situation. The prince tells them that he has had enough. This is the third time that there has been a fight that has disturbed the people. The prince orders them to stop the feud because the next time it happens they will be put to death. The prince tells the Capulets to come with him and tell them their side of the story now and Montague is to come later.

Everyone exits the scene besides Montague, his wife, and Benvolio. Montague asks Benvolio what happened. Benvolio told him he happened upon the servants fighting, tried to stop them, and then Tybalt showed up and would not listen to reason, so they had to fight. Mrs. Montague then asks about Romeo. Mrs. Montague is glad that he was not part of this fight. Benvolio says that he last saw Romeo when he went for an early morning walk. When Benvolio saw him, he started towards him but Romeo hid from him. Benvolio said that he did not pursue him.

Montague tells Benvolio how Romeo has been melancholy lately. Benvolio asks whether he knows what is bothering Romeo and Montague explains that though he has tried to find out, Romeo has been keeping it to himself. Montague continues to say that he is worried about Romeo and if he could find out what was bothering him then they could maybe help with a solution.

Romeo enters. Benvolio tells his parents to leave and let him try to find out what is bothering Romeo. The parents leave before talking to Romeo. Romeo asks Benvolio whether that was his father that had just left and Benvolio confirms it was. The audience finds out that he is upset because he is in love with a woman who does not return his affections. Romeo thinks that Benvolio is going to laugh at his reason for being so sad but Benvolio comforts him instead. Romeo starts to leave, but Benvolio asks if he can join him. Benvolio tries to get Romeo to tell him who it is that he is in love with. Romeo goes on to tell him how beautiful she is but that she has sworn herself to chastity. Benvolio tells Romeo that he should forget about her and Romeo tells him that he would if Benvolio could show him how. Benvolio responds with he should go find some other women. Romeo says that that would never work. The two men exit.

Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

In the very first scene, we are introduced to the two main families and the depths of their animosity for each other. The audience is not told how the feud started, but we are shown that the feud is a big one; it even penetrates down to the servants of the houses. The audience is told about the proclamation from the prince, that if any more fighting happens that the people involved will be executed. The audience is also introduced to our hero, Romeo. Romeo is upset and his parents are worried. This theme is being played out in many different households, even today. A teenager starting to assert his independence does not tell everything to his parents anymore. The parents not understanding this change in their child are left worried and confused. Benvolio tries to reassure his parents and find out what is wrong with his friend.

Romeo, confiding in Benvolio, whom is close to his own age, is not a surprise. Romeo tells him, his heartbreak over Rosaline not returning his affections. This is another common coming of age problem. Benvolio being the true friend tells Romeo that he needs to get over it and to do that he needs to find some other girl to occupy his time. This creates our first theme in the story. Romeo is a young man looking for love. This shows an important part of his psyche, which will come to play further when he meets Juliet.

Act 1, Scene 2

Act 1, Scene 2 Summary

This scene begins in a street outside of Capulet's house. Capulet is talking to County Paris about his daughter, Juliet. Paris wants to court Juliet. Capulet tells Paris that Juliet is not yet 14, and therefore he believes her too young for marriage. Capulet thinks that she should wait at least two more years. Capulet tells Paris to come to the party that he is throwing that night, if after he has seen the rest of the women and Juliet is still the one that he wants, then Capulet will relent and let him court his daughter. Capulet gives a list of the people to be invited to his servant and tells him to go and invite each one. The servant has a problem because he cannot read.

Romeo and Benvolio continue their talk about Romeo's heartache. Benvolio says that the only way for Romeo to forget about her would be to find a new infatuation. The servant of the Capulets has come across the two while they are talking. The servant stops to ask them if they will read the list to him. After Romeo reads the list for the man, he asks where this party is to be held. The servant says that it is at the Capulet house and he is more than welcome, as long as he is not a Montague. The servant then leaves.

Benvolio convinces Romeo that they should go anyway because there will be many women there. Romeo thinks that one of them will catch his eye and he will get over his infatuation with Rosaline, which we find out is the woman whom he is in love with. Romeo decides that he is going to go, if only because Rosaline will be there. Romeo believes that there will be no one else who will be able to catch his eye like her.

Act 1, Scene 2 Analysis

The audience is introduced to the Capulets, the other family in the feud and we see that there is a suitor interested in their daughter, Juliet. Juliet is 13. While today, this sounds like child abuse, in Shakespeare's time, though this is young, it was not unheard of. Women's roles were very different. Women were brought up to marry and have children and take care of their family and they had no other profession that was acceptable. Juliet's father, therefore, though worried that Juliet is too young, does not refuse the suitor, whom has a position and money, and would be able to support his daughter. Instead, he tells him to come to the party he is having, watch his daughter and if he still is interested, then as long as Juliet agrees, they can marry.

The servant delivering the invitations does not know how to read and therefore not knowing that he is talking to a Montague, asks Romeo to read the list. Romeo sees Rosaline's name on the list and Benvolio devises a plan to go to the party. Benvolio thinks it will help Romeo get over Rosaline once he sees that there are many other available, attractive women at the party. Romeo just wants to see Rosaline.

Act 1, Scene 3

Act 1, Scene 3 Summary

This scene begins in the Capulet house with Capulet's wife asking the nurse to summon Juliet. The nurse and the wife are talking and the wife brings it up that Juliet is coming to the age in which she can be married. The nurse says that Juliet is too young, but the wife says that she will be 14 soon enough. The nurse then tells the wife how much she has loved Juliet, as if she was her own daughter. The nurse mentions that her late husband also loved her. The nurse says that she would love to be able to see Juliet happily married.

Juliet and her mother begin to talk. Juliet's mother asks Juliet whether she has thought about marriage and Juliet responds with no. Mrs. Capulet then says that there are many younger than her that are married and that Paris has asked for her hand. The nurse is excited because Paris is the perfect man in her eyes. The nurse likes him because he is a very faithful man. Juliet's mother goes onto tell her that he will be at the feast that night and she wants Juliet to look him over and then decide whether she will want him. Juliet says that she will be gracious and then decide.

A servant comes in at this time and tells the wife that the guests are arriving and that the dinner is ready. It is time for her to come at once. The wife says that they will follow. The scene ends with the nurse telling Juliet to go and be happy.

Act 1, Scene 3 Analysis

At this point in young Juliet's life, she is not looking to be married to anyone quite yet. The nurse is a symbol of the mothering that Juliet has had. Juliet's mother, like most well to do women at the time, probably did not have much to do with Juliet as a nurturer. The audience is introduced to the nurse now because she is an integral part of Juliet's upbringing and life, much more involved than her mother. Juliet's nurse feels like Juliet is her daughter, and wants to protect her from harm so she makes her feelings clear. The mother and nurse are excited about the prospect of Juliet being married. Juliet does not believe that she is ready for marriage and voices her concern, but as a faithful daughter promises not to be unkind to Paris.

Act 1, Scene 4

Act 1, Scene 4 Summary

The scene begins with Romeo, Benvolio, and their friend Mercutio, along with several other people dressed on masks. Romeo is worried about how they are going to get into the house. Benvolio tells him not to worry that they are masked. Mercutio is in high spirits and starts to pick on his friends. Mercutio tries to get Romeo involved in the game and Romeo appears to be in no mood to play. Mercutio asks what is wrong with him, that they should be happy because they are going to the party. Romeo responds by telling Mercutio that maybe they should not go. When Mercutio ask why, Romeo tells him he had a dream. Mercutio tells him he did too and then proceeds to tell them all a story about the Queen of the fairies that he dreamed about the night before. This agitates Romeo and he tells Mercutio to stop talking. Benvolio tells them to hurry up because they have already missed dinner and he is afraid that they are going to be too late. Romeo mentions that maybe they are not late enough, because he feels that something is wrong.

Act 1, Scene 4 Analysis

The relationship between Romeo and his two cousins are revealed, as Mercutio is the teaser. The men all are disguised as they go to the party in masks, which was an old tradition from their fathers' time. Therefore, though unusual, it will not raise too much suspicion. Romeo feels anxious and second doubts going, but continues with his friends anyway. It is ironic that after all the disagreements between the feuding parties, that Romeo and his group still will risk being found out in order to be around women. When Romeo has second doubts, it is Shakespeare's way of warning his audience about what is to come.

Act 1, Scene 5

Act 1, Scene 5 Summary

The scene opens inside the Capulet house. The servants are talking trying to get things ready and they are obviously rushed and there is too much to do. The servants leave just as Romeo's group appears, along with Capulet, his wife, Juliet and all the guests. Capulet makes a welcoming statement and then the music begins and people start to dance. Capulet then has his cousin, whom is close to his age, come and sit with him. The men begin to talk about the Romeo's group in masks and they reminisce that it been at least twenty-five years since they had last gone anywhere masked. It used to be an old custom.

Romeo stops a servant and asks him about the woman, assuming Juliet. The servant says that he does not know. Romeo then goes onto say how beautiful he finds her. Tybalt overhears him talking and recognizes his voice, instantly knowing he is a Montague. Tybalt starts towards Romeo, but Capulet stops him and asks him what is wrong. Tybalt tells him that he is sure that that is Romeo. Capulet looks at Romeo and then tells Tybalt to leave him alone that he is acting like a gentleman and is causing no trouble. Capulet does not want his party ruined by any sort of trouble. Tybalt starts to tell him that he cannot tolerate Romeo being there. Capulet loses his patience with Tybalt and tells him that he should do nothing of the sort and that he has heard enough.

Tybalt tells his uncle that it is a shame to let Romeo stay, and Capulet says that he knows what he is doing. The Capulet goes back to admiring the dancers at the party. Tybalt vows that though he will leave right now and let things go, he is insulted and he will finish this with Romeo later. Tybalt leaves.

Romeo goes over and starts a conversation with Juliet. Juliet is taken by Romeo and she lets him kiss her hand more than once. Juliet's nurse interrupts them and tells Juliet that her mother wants to speak to her. Romeo asks the nurse who her mother is and the nurse replies that it is the lady of the house, a Capulet. Benvolio comes over and tells Romeo that he thinks it is time to leave. The men give their leave to Capulet and exit.

Capulet decides that it is time for bed. Everyone else exits except for Juliet and her nurse. Juliet asks who the young man that she was talking to was. The nurse tells her the names of a few of the people. Juliet then specifies that she is interested in the one that did not dance. Juliet asks the nurse to go ask for his name. The nurse returns to tell Juliet that his name is Romeo and that he is the only son of Montague. Juliet is upset that she is fallen in love with a Montague. The nurse questions what she said but Juliet puts her off. Someone calls to her from inside and they both go in. End scene and act.

Act 1, Scene 5 Analysis

Like many a young man, the minute he sets his eyes on Juliet, Romeo forgets all about Rosaline. While asking about Juliet, he is overheard by Tybalt, a young Capulet. Tybalt recognizes his name and feels insulted that he has snuck into the party. Tybalt goes to tell his uncle and Capulet, not wanting to make a scene and seeing that Romeo is not causing problems, he tells Tybalt to let it go. Tybalt does, but like a modern gang member, decides that he will make Romeo answer for this insult later.

Romeo and Juliet talk for a brief minute for the first time and both of them instantly fall in love. When she is called away, Romeo finds out that she is a Capulet, his enemy. Juliet finds out that Romeo is a Montague soon after.

The theme of young love permeates this scene. This is the scene where Juliet and Romeo fall in love. The idea of love at first sight is explored here. Is there such a thing as love at first sight or is it infatuation? If Romeo and Juliet had lived, would we find that they soon would fall out of love?

The promise of getting even for the slight he felt with Romeo attending the party, Tybalt foreshadows what will happen later in the play.

Act 2, Prologue

Act 2, Prologue Summary

The Chorus tells the audience that Romeo has changed his affections from Rosaline to Juliet. When he first saw Juliet's beauty, he forgot all about Rosaline. The Chorus explains that theirs is a forbidden love because the families are foes. The couple would never be given permission to court, so they carry on their love affair in secrecy.

Act 2, Prologue Analysis

Again, the chorus tells about the plight of the two young lovers.

Act 2, Scene 1

Act 2, Scene 1 Summary

This scene opens with Romeo jumping over the wall into the Capulet orchard. Benvolio and Mercutio come down the lane looking for him. Mercutio hopes that maybe he has wised up and went home. Benvolio knows that he went over into the orchard and he believes Romeo did so in order to avoid them. Mercutio makes fun of Romeo and his affections. Benvolio tells him that Romeo would be angry if he overheard and should stop. Benvolio says that love is blind and sometimes makes people do foolish things. Mercutio rallies with maybe only the foolish fall in love. The men leave thinking that Romeo is in hiding and does not want to be found.

Act 2, Scene 1 Analysis

Romeo and his friends have just left the party. Romeo is ahead of the others and avoids them, by jumping over the wall into the orchard. Romeo is listening to his two friends. Benvolio and Mercutio believe that Romeo is still hung up on Rosaline and they believe that he is trying to hide from them because he is upset and wants to be by himself. After lamenting about what a fool he is being, both leave.

Act 2, Scene 2

Act 2, Scene 2 Summary

The audience is now in Capulet's orchard with Romeo. Romeo overheard the conversation and states that Mercutio does not know what he is talking about because he has never been in love. Above him, Juliet appears in the window. Romeo realizes that she does not see him. Romeo goes back and forth for a minute trying to up his courage to call to her and tell her how he feels about her.

Juliet finally speaks to no one in particular saying how much she loves him and that she loves him enough to give up her family. Not knowing he is around, she asks him to leave his family for her and he responds that he would give up his name if she would love him back. It startles her and she asks who is there. When she finds him there, she is worried for his safety, because she knows that if her kin were to find him there they would kill him. Romeo says that he loves her so much he will risk it. Juliet asks him if he loves her and to prove it. Romeo is trying to get her to have relations with him and she responds with saying that she cannot.

Romeo tells her that he just needs her to tell him she loves him also. Juliet tells him and then her nurse calls. Juliet asks him to wait, she would be right back. When she comes back, it is only for a minute to tell him that if he means to marry her to send her word tomorrow and she will come to him. If not, then she begged him to leave her alone in her grief. Juliet's nurse calls to her.

Juliet calls him back and tells Romeo that because she knows he is not a suitable suitor she cannot be overheard. The two decide to meet at nine the next day. Then she forgets the reason why she called him back. The couple says their goodbyes and part.

Act 2, Scene 2 Analysis

In this, one of the more famous scenes, Romeo and Juliet declare their love for each other in a very beautiful eloquent way. When Romeo compares Juliet to the sun, he is poetically saying that she is the best thing in his world. For Romeo, the sun rises and sets with Juliet. It is a symbolic way of understanding the intense feelings that he has. Juliet has also fallen in love to the point where she would give up her family and her name for him. Juliet makes the moving speech that Romeo overhears declaring that if Romeo would have her and would not give up his name then she would give up hers. Juliet is cautious though, and lets him know that she is not going to be taken advantage of. In her time, to have relations outside of marriage was a sin and not just frowned upon, but if it were found out she would be shunned and never have a chance to marry. Juliet would be disowned by her family as well. Romeo tells her that his intention is pure and that he loves her and wants to marry her. Juliet tells him that if he does, to arrange it and then send for her the next day. This is a rash decision by both seeing that they

have only met not more than a couple of hours before and have only had the chance to talk for a minute. This is truly the fairytale love at first sight type of love.

Act 2, Scene 3

Act 2, Scene 3 Summary

The scene begins in Friar Laurence's cell. Romeo enters. The friar asks him what brings him so early in the morning. Romeo tells him he wants to marry. Friar is happy that he and Rosaline have decided to get married, but Romeo tells him that it is not her. Romeo tells him that his heart is set to marry Juliet, Capulet's daughter. Romeo then asks the friar to marry the two that very day. The friar is concerned with Romeo's sudden change of heart and asks him about it. Romeo assures him that he loves Juliet. Though concerned he still agrees to marry the two. The friar hopes this will bring the two houses back together.

Act 2, Scene 3 Analysis

Romeo goes to his friar, which is like a priest or minister and tells him that he wants to arrange a marriage for the afternoon. At first, the friar thinks that he has talked Rosaline into marrying him, but then when he finds that it is Juliet, he is concerned. The friar thinks that Romeo may be doing this without thinking. Romeo has just met her and he is taking a very big step with her. The friar warns Romeo not to make a mistake if it is just that he is attracted to her. Romeo assures him that he is in love with Juliet. The friar relents because he believes that this could be the way to get the two families to stop their feud. The friar understands that this could be just an infatuation between the two lovers, but he plays out the theme thinking that maybe this love can bring these two families back from the brink of war.

Act 2, Scene 4

Act 2, Scene 4 Summary

Benvolio and Mercutio are talking about where Romeo is. Romeo did not come home the last night and Mercutio believes it is because he is mourning his love for Rosaline. The two begin to talk about the challenge that Tybalt has sent to Romeo about the night before. The men believe that Romeo will answer it, but fear for him because they believe Tybalt to be the better fighter. Romeo enters at this point. The men are upset that he gave them the slip the night before. Romeo apologizes, telling him that he had some urgent business to attend to. The men are relieved that he seems to be out of his melancholy and back to being his old self.

Juliet's nurse and Peter come up the street and they tease the nurse as she walks by. The nurse chastises them and then asks if any of them know where to find Romeo. The nurse then asks to speak to him in private. Benvolio and Mercutio leave as Romeo tells them he will follow them soon. The nurse is offended by the way that Mercutio talked to her. Romeo tells her that Mercutio likes to hear himself talk. The nurse is upset that Peter let someone talk to her that way. Peter tells her that he heard nothing insulting her because he would have defended her honor for her.

The nurse then tells Romeo that Juliet sent her. The nurse warns him that she will not be happy if he is leading her on and Romeo tells the nurse to tell Juliet that if she comes that afternoon, they will be married at the friar's. The two both make sure that the other is keeping this a secret and that anyone who knows about it will keep it secret.

Act 2, Scene 4 Analysis

Romeo meets with his friends and does not tell them about Juliet. Tybalt has sent Romeo a challenge to come fight him for the insult that Tybalt perceived. This challenge is something that warns of interrupting Romeo's romance later. Juliet's nurse comes up and asks to talk to Romeo alone. Mercutio knows that she is a servant of the Capulets and pokes fun at her for it. The nurse, who is with her man, Peter, is upset that he did not defend her. Romeo apologizes for his friend and asks the nurse to tell Juliet the time for the wedding.

Act 2, Scene 5

Act 2, Scene 5 Summary

Juliet is waiting for her nurse to come and tell her news. Juliet is impatient because her nurse is late. When she does arrive, she assumes by the look on her face that the news is going to be bad. The nurse tells her that she is just out of breath. The nurse tells her she is making a foolish choice if it is just his looks that have led her to pick Romeo. Juliet's nurse then makes sure the Lady Capulet is nowhere around and tells Juliet that they are to be married that afternoon.

Act 2, Scene 5 Analysis

Juliet is waiting for an answer and she is hoping that Romeo did not change his mind. The nurse comes and tells her that she thinks that her picking Romeo is not wise. The nurse is prejudiced against him probably because of the feud and the way his friends treated her. When Juliet does not seem to care, the nurse tells her to meet Romeo that afternoon. Again, love is believed by the two to be enough. Like most young people with love in their hearts, Romeo and Juliet are rash and impulsive.

Act 2, Scene 6

Act 2, Scene 6 Summary

Friar and Romeo are talking while waiting for Juliet to arrive. Juliet comes and the Friar marries them.

Act 2, Scene 6 Analysis

Romeo and Juliet are married less than 24 hours after meeting.

Act 3, Scene 1

Act 3, Scene 1 Summary

Benvolio and Mercutio are in a public place talking about how if they were to encounter a Capulet that they will not be able to escape from a fight. Tybalt enters onto the scene with some other people with him. Tybalt asks Benvolio and Mercutio if he can have a word with one of them. Mercutio does not like Tybalt and makes that clear. Tybalt asks if they are friends with Romeo. Benvolio warns them that if they are going to have words then they had better take it somewhere more secure or keep it civil, because they are in public. Before any more can be exchanged, Romeo arrives on the scene.

Tybalt insults Romeo and Mercutio defends him. Tybalt tries to provoke Romeo into fighting with him, but Romeo does not take the bait and tries to be pleasant with Tybalt. Though no one knows it, they are now related and Romeo does not want to start a fight with him. Since Romeo is not going to fight with him, Mercutio draws his sword. Tybalt and Mercutio begin to fight. Romeo steps in to try to stop them from fighting and in the process, Tybalt mortally wounds Mercutio. Mercutio, knowing he is dying, asks Benvolio to help him to a house so that he does not have to die on the street. Benvolio and Mercutio exit.

Romeo thinks about what just happened and feels guilty because Mercutio was fighting for his honor because he was not willing to defend it. Benvolio comes back to tell Romeo that Mercutio has died. Tybalt comes back down the street and Romeo, angered by the death of Mercutio, challenges him. The two fight and Romeo kills Tybalt. Benvolio tells Romeo to leave because if he does not, then he will be killed by the order of the Prince. Romeo leaves.

Some people come looking for Tybalt to have him pay for killing Mercutio and they find him lying on the ground dead. The Prince then comes with Montague, Capulet, and their wives. The Prince asks for an account of what happened and Benvolio tells him. Lady Capulet does not believe his account because he is a Montague. The Prince decides that instead of killing Romeo, they will exile him.

Act 3, Scene 1 Analysis

This is the big fight scene. Benvolio and Mercutio are looking for a fight. Tybalt enters the scene looking for one, too. Tybalt is looking for Romeo though, because Romeo is the one that he sees as the offender. The tensions between the two sides are high and there is a lot at stake, if they do fight, then their penalty is death. Romeo comes onto the scene and because of Juliet; he tries to back down from the fight. Romeo tells Tybalt that he will not fight him and that there is no problem between to two of them. Even when Tybalt insults Romeo, Romeo does not do anything because he knows that this is family to Juliet and, therefore is now his family, though he cannot tell him that. There is

irony here because someone who two days before was his sworn enemy is now family to Romeo. This makes Romeo more apt to try and not get into a fight. To add to the problem, is the fact that Tybalt does not know how he is now related to Romeo.

Mercutio, already ready for a fight, steps in to defend his friend's honor. Romeo tries to break up the fight and in the process gives Tybalt the chance to fatally wound Mercutio. Romeo, upset over the death of his friend, does not back down when Tybalt comes after him and he kills Tybalt. Romeo leaves before the prince gets there for fear of execution. Benvolio tells what has transpired, but the Capulets still want revenge for Tybalt's death.

The prince, trying to stop the feud and realizing that Romeo was trying to keep out of it, and only killed Tybalt after Tybalt came back at him, decides that Romeo will not die. Romeo's punishment will be exile. If they find him back in Verona, then he will be executed.

Act 3, Scene 2

Act 3, Scene 2 Summary

Juliet is waiting in the orchard for Romeo. Her nurse enters and Juliet hopes she is bringing her word about where Romeo is and what is keeping him. The nurse tells her that someone has died and Juliet is heartbroken thinking that it was Romeo. The nurse then tells her that it was Tybalt that was killed. Juliet's nurse also tells her that Romeo is the one who killed Tybalt and that Romeo has been banished for it. Juliet defends Romeo against her nurse's words and she makes it clear that she knows that Tybalt wanted to kill Romeo. Juliet is so distraught over the idea of never seeing Romeo again that her nurse promises to bring him to see her.

Act 3, Scene 2 Analysis

Juliet knowing nothing of what has occurred is waiting for Romeo in the orchard. The nurse comes in and in the confusion, Juliet first believes that Romeo is dead. Juliet is devastated to find out that Tybalt is dead and that Romeo has done it. Juliet is even more upset when she finds out that for punishment, Romeo is to be banished. Juliet's love for Romeo is not tarnished though, she knew that Tybalt was out to kill him and she is sure he only killed him out of self-defense. Juliet is so upset, that though the nurse does not like him, out of love for Juliet, she goes to find him and bring him to her.

Act 3, Scene 3

Act 3, Scene 3 Summary

Romeo has gone to hide at the friar's after the death of Tybalt. The friar tells him that he is not to be killed for the act, but that he is being banished. Romeo tells him that he would rather die than be separated from Juliet. Juliet's nurse knocks at the door and the friar has Romeo hide. The friar goes to the door and inquires who it is. The nurse replies that she has been sent by Juliet. The nurse asks him where Romeo is and the friar tells her that he is there, grief stricken over the news about the banishment. The nurse tells the friar that Juliet is also.

The nurse reprimands Romeo and tells him that he needs to be strong for Juliet. Romeo is worried about what Juliet thinks of him. The nurse tells him how distraught Juliet is, and Romeo draws his dagger to kill himself over the pain he has caused her. The friar stops him, telling him that he would be killing Juliet too. The friar tells him that he should be glad to be alive. Romeo can go into exile for a while and then after things have settled down, beg a pardon from the Prince, and be allowed to return. Juliet will be there waiting for him and then they can be happy together. The friar then tells the nurse to go tell Juliet that Romeo is coming. The nurse gives him a ring that Juliet has given her to give to him and then leaves. The friar then tells Romeo to go say his goodbyes to Juliet and then he will go to Mantua. The friar will send him word when it is safe to return. Romeo says his goodbyes and then departs.

Act 3, Scene 3 Analysis

Romeo is so distraught when he finds out that he is going to be banished at the idea of not seeing Juliet again, he wants to kill himself. The nurse yells at him and tells him that he had better be strong for Juliet, because she needs him. The friar tells him that he will help him and he makes him see that this is not the end of the world. Romeo is still alive and that means that he is able to be with Juliet, it is just going to take sometime. The friar sends Romeo to Juliet for one last night with her before he leaves in the morning.

Act 3, Scene 4

Act 3, Scene 4 Summary

Capulet, Lady Capulet, and Paris are talking in the Capulet house. The group believes that Juliet is beside herself because of how much she has loved Tybalt and they are worried about her and want to help her get over it. The talk moves to Paris marrying Juliet and they believe that the marriage will make Juliet happy and so they arrange that Paris will marry her in three days.

Act 3, Scene 4 Analysis

The Capulets do not know that Juliet is married to Romeo and that she is upset. The Capulets believe that the reason that she is upset is because of the death of her cousin. The couple wants to be good parents and make her feel better. When a young woman is raised to believe that her being married is one of the best things that can happen to her, the parents decide to go ahead and have Juliet marry Paris. Paris was a person with a position and the wealth; he was also a very religious man. Juliet's parents believe that he will make a great husband for their daughter and they decide that because she is so depressed that the wedding should take place as soon as possible and decide that she will be married in three days. Juliet's parents, though, believing that they are doing what is best for their daughter, actually send Juliet on a path of destruction.

Act 3, Scene 5

Act 3, Scene 5 Summary

Romeo is at Juliet's window in the orchard. The couple is saying their goodbyes when her nurse comes in to tell her that her mother is coming to her chamber. Romeo gives her one more kiss, reassures her that everything will be all right, and then exits. Juliet's mother enters; she sees Juliet up and sees she has been crying. Lady Capulet believes that she has been weeping over Tybalt. The lady goes into how she does not believe that it is fair that Romeo lives. Not wanting to be found out, Juliet plays along.

Juliet's mother then tells her about her marriage to Paris. Juliet is appalled by the idea and tells her mother that she will not marry Paris in such haste and hat she would rather marry Romeo, whom has killed Tybalt, before she would marry Paris. Juliet tells her mother to tell her father, but her mother tells her to tell him that herself. Capulet is told that Juliet refuses to marry Paris and Capulet gets angry and tells her that if she does not marry Paris, he will disown her. Capulet then leaves and Juliet turns to her mother for support but finds none. After her mother leaves, Juliet and the nurse talk. The nurse tries to tell Juliet that Paris is a much better suitor than Romeo is and she would be wise to marry him. Knowing that she cannot win the argument, Juliet decides to act as if she is compliant. Juliet decides she can no longer trust the nurse to keep her secrets and goes to the friar.

Act 3, Scene 5 Analysis

It is almost daybreak and we see that Romeo is at Juliet's window. The audience can assume that they have spent the night together. The couple is saying their goodbyes and are upset because they do not know when they are going to see each other again. Romeo reassures her before he leaves. Romeo does not want to be caught there because if he is he will likely be killed.

Juliet's mother comes in and tells her the good news that she is to be married to Paris. Juliet's mother is shocked when Juliet is not happy about the marriage and refuses to marry him. Juliet's mother is confused because Paris is considered an excellent match and her mother never expected her to turn down the proposal and neither did her father. When he came in, he became angry because his daughter was supposed to follow his orders no matter what. Juliet's father had provided her with a great match and she was refusing it. Capulet is disgusted and tells her that she will marry Paris or she will be disowned.

Juliet feels all alone, because she cannot tell her parents the real reason for her refusing to marry Paris. Juliet knows that right now, they would not be happy to say the least if they found out that she was married to the guy they consider the murderer of her cousin. The nurse, who knows the truth, tries to convince her that with Romeo's

situation, Paris is a better bet. This is surprising because she knows that Juliet is already married and bigamy in the Church is a sin. The nurse though is looking out for the welfare of Juliet and she probably thinks that the other marriage could be annulled in secret.

Possibly if the marriage had been divulged earlier, when Tybalt wanted to fight Romeo, this whole situation could have possibly been avoided. Now, Juliet has to lie to everyone that she knows, even pretending to hate her husband. This isolates Juliet even more. Juliet now has no one that she loves to trust with the secret and her only support is to go to the friar.

Act 4, Scene 1

Act 4, Scene 1 Summary

The Friar and Paris are talking about plans for the wedding. Friar asks Paris if Juliet is in love with him. Paris says that she has been so upset with the death of Tybalt that he has not had a chance to ask her. The reason for the haste is because of a depression she is in. Juliet enters and Paris goes to her and asks her if she has come for confession with the father. Paris tries to make her happier by bringing up their wedding on Thursday and when he sees he cannot, he excuses himself. Paris tells her that he will be looking forward to Thursday and departs.

Juliet and the Friar talk about her situation. The friar tells her that he has a plan. The friar gives her a drug and tells her that it will make it look like she has taken poison and committed suicide and she is to take it the night before her wedding. Juliet will then be put in her family vault. This drug will not kill her. The friar will go get Romeo and they both will come for her. Then she can leave and live her life with Romeo and no one would know.

Act 4, Scene 1 Analysis

In this scene, Paris is with the friar talking about plans for the wedding. The friar is trying to dissuade Paris in his own way, because the friar knows that Juliet has already married Romeo and that there is no way that she can now marry Paris. The friar also knows that no one knows and with the circumstances the way they are, it would be an unwise time to say anything. The friar asks Paris if he thinks that Juliet really wants to marry him and he says that there is no reason why she would not. Paris is able to provide for her and he believes he can make her happy.

Juliet comes in and she and Paris meet and Paris sees that she is upset. Again, the assumption is made that it is because of Tybalt's death. Juliet tries to be nice to Paris but she has much on her mind and is frantic to find a way out of the getting married to him.

When Paris leaves, Juliet asks the friar for help. The friar has already thought of a plan. The friar is going to give her some medicine that will make it appear that she is dead. The friar wants her to fake suicide, then she can go away and live happily ever after with Romeo. This is an unethical thing for a friar to be plotting, because he will be lying about a suicide. Juliet's parents, no doubt, will assume that her soul is going to hell because she has ended her own life. To let her parents live with that thought is unfair and horrible. However, for him, he is stuck in a difficult situation. Who knows what would happen if the truth were found out and he is not allowed to marry her to another man when he knows that she is already married to someone else. This is the only way he sees out.

Act 4, Scene 2

Act 4, Scene 2 Summary

The Capulets are preparing for the wedding. Juliet comes back and she is happier and tells her father that she has repented to the friar and that she has seen her errors. Juliet begs his forgiveness. Capulet is delighted, especially after Juliet tells him that she met the young man at the church and thinks that she could love him. Capulet decides to move the wedding up to the next day instead of Thursday. Juliet and the nurse exit to go find jewelry for her to wear the next day. When she leaves, Lady Capulet tells Capulet that there is not enough time to plan the wedding. Capulet tells her that he does not care; they will be married the next day.

Act 4, Scene 2 Analysis

Juliet is relieved by the plan to be with Romeo and therefore decides to go along with it. It shows how much she loves her husband. Juliet is going to abandon her family in order to be with him and they are both going to be banished which means that they are not going to have access to any money. Juliet does not think of anything though except being with him. Juliet is no longer distraught with the situation and she is now able to play along with everyone and tell them that she is has come to her senses. Juliet's parents are thrilled and her father decides that the wedding should be the next day. Juliet's father probably fears if he waits too long she will change her mind again.

Act 4, Scene 3

Act 4, Scene 3 Summary

Juliet and her nurse are looking through Juliet's jewelry when her mother comes in and asks her if she needs any help. Juliet says that everything is ready and her nurse and her mother leave her. Juliet takes out the drug and she is about to take it when she thinks about whether or not it will work. Juliet grabs a dagger thinking that if it does not work, she would rather really die than to be married to Paris. Juliet drinks the potion and then falls onto her bed.

Act 4, Scene 3 Analysis

Juliet goes along with the farce and she has her mother and nurse help her with the last minute preparations. Juliet acts like she is happy and when they assume everything is fine, they leave her for the night. It is now that she takes the drug and falls back onto her bed.

Act 4, Scene 4

Act 4, Scene 4 Summary

It is the next morning and they have been awake most of the night preparing for the wedding. Juliet's nurse is sent to wake Juliet.

Act 4, Scene 4 Analysis

This short scene is here to show that because of all of the wedding preparations, no one has been sent to check on Juliet. The group believes that she is sleeping peacefully in her bed. The next morning the nurse is sent to wake her up.

Act 4, Scene 5

Act 4, Scene 5 Summary

Nurse enters Juliet's room to discover what appears to be a dead Juliet on her bed and she calls for the lord and the lady of the house. Juliet's mother comes first, sees her lying there, and calls for help. Capulet enters and sees his daughter dead.

Friar Laurence and Paris enter. The two have come to get Juliet for her wedding; they too find her lying there. Everyone is sent into despair. Instead of a wedding, they now have a funeral.

Act 4, Scene 5 Analysis

This is the scene where everyone finds the "dead" Juliet. Imagine what her parents are thinking. The parents know that she has committed suicide and they no doubt blame themselves. The two believed that maybe they should not have pushed the wedding on her. Juliet's parents loved their daughter very much and of course, they are inconsolable. The day that was supposed to be a happy day turns into a very sad one and she is buried in the family vault. The idea of loving one person so much, that you cause pain to so many others by faking your death, shows how immature Juliet really was. Juliet was young and this was the first time that she had been on love. Giving up your family for your love is something that is hard to do, but knowing that they are going to mourn your loss of life when you are somewhere else and healthy, would be very traumatic. If Romeo and Juliet succeed in this plan, Juliet would probably become a very different person and one that could possibly not be happy because of the farce and the guilt that would go along with it.

Act 5, Scene 1

Act 5, Scene 1 Summary

Romeo is on a street in Mantua. Romeo is walking around thinking about Juliet, wondering what she is doing. One of Romeo's men, Balthasar, finds Romeo. Romeo asks him if he has word on Juliet and Balthasar tells him that she has died and that she has been buried in the Capulet vault. Romeo is heartbroken and asks Balthasar to leave him. Romeo decides that he does not want to live and is going to go kill himself. Romeo goes to the apothecary to get poison and then he goes off to Juliet's grave.

Act 5, Scene 1 Analysis

This last act in the play in the ends the tragedy. Romeo is in Mantua, awaiting word on how his beloved is. When he is told of her death, he is inconsolable and decides that if she is dead, then he no longer wants to live. Romeo wants to go to be with her and develops a plot. Romeo is going to go buy poison, go see his beloved one last time, and then die beside her. Romeo's man, Balthasar, knows that he is devastated, but does not know what his plan is. The audience knows that this does not bode well for the young lovers. Romeo believes that Juliet is dead and therefore the friar's plan will not work out.

Act 5, Scene 2

Act 5, Scene 2 Summary

Friar John who has been sent to give a letter about the plot to Romeo returns to Friar Laurence. Friar John was not able to deliver it. Friar Laurence hopes that Romeo has not heard of the death of Juliet but cannot worry about it. The friar needs to go to the vault and be there when Juliet wakes up.

Act 5, Scene 2 Analysis

If the message had gotten to Romeo before his friend did, then Romeo and Juliet would have had a very different ending. This is when the friar finds out that his plan is about to go wrong. The message has not gotten to Romeo so Romeo does not know that Juliet is still alive and he is worried what will happen if Romeo thinks that Juliet is dead. The friar wants to go find him, but he knows that he has to go to Juliet first. Juliet is going to be waking up soon and needs someone to be there to spirit her away and keep her from panicking over not having Romeo there with her. It is ironic that Juliet pretending to be dead will cause the death of her lover.

Act 5, Scene 3

Act 5, Scene 3 Summary

Paris and his page are outside of the vault putting flowers down. Romeo and Balthasar come into the scene. When they see Romeo coming, Paris hides. Romeo has a crowbar and he gives Balthasar a letter that he is to give to Montague the next day. Romeo then sends Balthasar away. Balthasar is worried that Romeo may do something drastic and hides to watch. Romeo opens the tomb. Paris confronts him and Romeo fights him. The page goes for help and Paris is killed by Romeo. Romeo then picks up Paris's corpse and places it in the crypt. Romeo then drinks the poison and falls.

Friar Laurence comes onto the scene and encounters Balthasar. Balthasar tells him about how Romeo had been acting. Friar asks him to come with him to see but Balthasar says that he cannot. Friar goes by himself and finds Paris and Romeo dead. Juliet wakes up at this point and asks where Romeo is. The friar hears a noise and tells Juliet that she needs to come with him; Romeo has killed Paris and then himself. Juliet will not leave. The friar leaves in fear. Juliet tries to kiss Romeo, hoping that there is enough poison on his lips for her too. There is not, so she takes his dagger and stabs herself.

Paris's boy and the watch find Paris, Romeo, and Juliet. Balthasar and the friar are both brought back by more guards. The group all stays there until the Prince comes. The Prince comes with his attendants and asks what happened. Capulet and his wife arrive. Then Montague and others come. Friar tells everyone the events surrounding the deaths, including the secret marriage. The two families see that they are to blame for this and decide to end their feud.

Act 5, Scene 3 Analysis

Paris is outside mourning his fiancé's death, when he hears Romeo and Balthasar approach. Paris and his page hide. Romeo no longer cares for anything and he gives Balthasar a letter to give his parents the next day. Balthasar does not know it that letter is a suicide note, but he thinks that Romeo is acting funny and is concerned. Balthasar decides to stay close. When Romeo goes to the vault to open it, Paris comes out and tries to stop him. Paris has no idea what Juliet was to Romeo and thinks that he is just trying to vandalize the vault because it is the Capulets. The men begin to fight and Paris's page goes to get help. Romeo kills Paris and he then drags Paris's body into the vault. When he sees his beloved Juliet lying there, he realizes that what he has been told is true and he drinks the poison and falls over.

In the meantime, the friar has found Balthasar and Balthasar told the friar that Romeo knows and that he is acting strange. The friar hurries into the vault to try to stop Romeo from doing anything foolish. The friar finds him too late lying on the ground. Juliet wakes

up at this point and asks about Romeo. The friar tells her that he is dead on the ground and she is upset. The guards are coming back with the page and the friar hears them. The friar tries to persuade Juliet to come with him, but she refuses to leave her husband. The friar, for fear of being caught, decides to leave her. Juliet decides that she cannot live if Romeo is dead and tries to end her life by kissing him, hoping that there is some poison on his lips, but she finds that there is not. Juliet then takes his dagger and kills herself.

The guards with the page are the first on the scene. A guard that has caught Balthasar hiding and the guard with the friar, whom was caught running from the scene, are the next to appear. The group stays there until the prince and the two families come. The friar then explains what has transpired. Both families realize that it was their feud that ultimately leads to this tragedy and they promise to end it right then and there. The most ironic part of this play is the idea that it took the murders and suicides of the youngest of both sides to show the elders that the feud was not worth all of this.

Shakespeare tries to make a point about fighting with this play. Shakespeare purposely never lets the audience know exactly what started the whole feud in the first place because that was never the important part. In fact, it makes a statement that in most feuds, in the end, the people involved usually cannot remember what started the feud in the first place.

The most dramatic part of the play is the way this last scene plays out. There are so many "ifs" that could have prevented the tragedy. If Juliet and Romeo had divulged their marriage earlier, if Juliet had told her mother and father she was already married, if Romeo had been able to receive the message, or if the friar had gotten to the scene in time, Romeo and Juliet would not be the classic tragedy that it was.

Romeo and Juliet is the classic tragic drama. Its moral value is that fighting leads to more fighting, death, and heartbreak. A feud is not worth losing so much over. The theme of star-crossed lovers has been explored many times throughout history and in stories. Feuds are another component of many of these stories. Many of them end as tragic as this, but at least Romeo and Juliet ends with the hope of peace between the two families.

Characters

Abram:

He is a servant of the Montagues. Abram appears in the first scene of the play and quarrels with the Capulet servants, Sampson and Gregory.

Anthony:

In some editions of the play, Anthony and Potpan are named as servants of the Capulet household.

Apothecary:

The apothecary is a druggist in Mantua. He only speaks a few lines, but Romeo offer's an insightful description of his poor shop and of his appearance. The apothecary is thin and wears ragged clothes. His shop has a few strange things spread throughout, perhaps to make it look like more than it is: a tortoise, a stuffed alligator, skins of strange fish, green pots, seeds, rose petals pressed into cakes for perfume. He is so poor that he sells Romeo a deadly, fast-acting poison even though it is against the law in Mantua to do so.

Attendants:

As the ruler of Verona, Escalus is accompanied by attendants. The attendants are described as the prince's Train in I.i, and simply as attendants in the final scene of the play.

Balthazar:

He is a servant to Romeo. Balthasar appears with Abram in the first scene of Act I, but does not participate in the quarrel with the Capulet servants. He is loyal to Romeo and tries to help him. After Juliet's funeral, he rushes to Mantua to bring the news of Juliet's "death" to Romeo. He shows his concern for Romeo and asks him to remain patient, to not act hastily. Balthasar returns with Romeo to Verona and accompanies him to the tomb, although Romeo tells him not to interfere. At the end of the play, Balthasar provides Prince Escalus with the letter which Romeo has written to his father. The letter supports Friar Lawrence's account of what has happened.

Benvolio:

He is a nephew to Montague and a cousin and friend to Romeo. His name means well-wisher, which reflects to some degree Benvolio's role in the play as a loyal friend and a peace-maker. Benvolio attempts to stop the fight between the servants at the beginning of the play. Early in the play, Benvolio wishes to help Romeo's parents by learning from Romeo why he has been acting so strangely and trying to avoid everyone. When he questions Ro meo gently and learns that his problem is love sickness, he counsels Romeo to look at other beau ties and forget about anyone who is not interested in him. Benvolio suggests that Romeo go to the Capulet party and see other pretty young women.

Throughout the play, Benvolio demonstrates his common sense and his loyalty to his friends. Benvolio tries to serve as a restraining influence on Mercutio, who seems to constantly be talking himself into trouble. Also, when Benvolio and Mercutio discuss the challenge from Tybalt to Romeo, he shows confidence in Romeo by stating that Romeo will answer the challenge.

In the marketplace scene in which the stabbings of Mercutio and Tybalt occur, Benvolio senses that tempers are flaring, and that the hot weather will lead to trouble. When Tybalt enters and he and Mercutio exchange words, Benvolio advises that they should go somewhere private, or talk calmly in the marketplace, or just leave. This advice, of course, has no effect.

After the fight, Benvolio emphatically urges Romeo to run away before he is caught and put to death. Then, when the prince arrives, Benvolio attempts to provide a fair account of what has happened, maintaining that Romeo behaved properly, but that both Tybalt and Mercutio were hot-tempered and looking for a quarrel. He also points out how everything happened so quickly that he could not draw his sword in time to stop Tybalt and Romeo from fighting.

Capulet (Lady Capulet):

Lady Capulet is Lord Capulet's wife and Juliet's mother. Juliet's mother has two important conversations with her daughter during the play. The first one occurs in Act I. In it, Lady Capulet directs Juliet to think about marriage. She informs Juliet that Paris is interested in marrying her, and reminds Juliet that she herself became a mother when she was about Juliet's age. The second conversation takes place in III.v, just after Romeo's departure for ' Mantua. Lady Capulet informs Juliet that the marriage between her and Paris will take place and that preparations have begun. She at first misunderstands Juliet's sorrow as stemming from mourning for Tybalt. She becomes angry that Juliet refuses to marry Paris. She refers to Juliet as a fool and says she wishes Juliet were dead. Though she tries somewhat to check her husband's similarly angry words, after a long decisive speech from him to Juliet, Lady Capulet refuses to speak to her daughter. Though Juliet's mother shows some tenderness and concern for her in Act IV prior to the wedding morning, her larger, practical concern appears to be

the wedding preparations, not Juliet's feelings. She seems genuinely sorrowful at the discovery of Juliet's body on the wedding morning and once again at the Capulet monument. She even suggests it may cause her to die.

Capulet (Lord Capulet):

A leading citizen of Verona and head of one of the two feuding families. His attitudes seem to display a mixture of qualities rather than conveying a sense of consistency of action. When the audience first sees him, he is calling for a sword to join in the fighting of the servants and young men in the opposing households. He acts this way even though he is an older man and a more dignified behavior would most likely be more appropriate for his age. However, he is concerned with maintaining order in his own house, especially after the prince's promise to execute any disturbers of the peace. Thus, he takes pains to prevent Tybalt from starting a brawl in his house at the party. Capulet is also motivated by his desire to appear as a good host. He jokes with the guests, compliments the dancers, orders the servants to regulate the heat in the room better by subduing the fire, and takes a peaceful attitude towards Romeo's uninvited presence at the feast. His attitude towards Juliet shows this mixture of traits also. When Paris asks for her hand in marriage, he says she is too young and that Paris should let two more years pass. He also seems to say that his agreement is only a part of such an arrangement and that Juliet must agree also. Yet as negotiations with Paris continue in Act III, Capulet assumes that Juliet will do exactly as he wishes. In his conversation with Paris, he also shows more concern about his image than about his daughter's feelings. He thinks she is extremely grieved by Tybalt's death, not at all suspecting the real cause of her grief, Romeo's banishment. He appears to be more concerned about how the scheduling of the marriage will affect townspeople's attitudes towards the seriousness or casualness of his grieving for Tybalt. As Juliet and her parents discuss the arranged marriage to Paris and Juliet's unwillingness to participate in the wedding is revealed, Capulet threatens to throw Juliet out and let her die in the streets. Even after this confrontation with Juliet, Capulet continues with wedding preparations, indicating his complete disregard for Juliet's hopes for her future. When Juliet pretends that she has just returned from confession to Friar Lawrence and is sorry for her stubbornness, Capulet is so pleased he changes the wedding date, demonstrating again how out of touch he is with his daughter's true feelings.

After Juliet's death, sorrow is Capulet's dominant response. Yet his sadness appears to be tinged with the knowledge that he will die without heirs and that the wedding feast is spoiled. Only when he sees Juliet in the tomb bleeding and dead does his sorrow over her loss and over his role in the feud seem complete. Finally, Capulet extends his hand in forgiveness and reconciliation to Montague.

Catling (Simon Catling):

See Musicians

Chorus:

The Chorus speaks twice in the play, before the beginning of Act I and before Act II. The Chorus functions as a commentator on the action and basic meaning of the play. It sets the scene in Verona, a city in northern Italy, and, in a sonnet, summarizes the action. The play will be about two feuding households of equal rank, a pair of lovers from these houses whose misadventures lead them to take their lives, and whose parents thereby finally end their ancient grudges. At the beginning of Act II, the Chorus speaks about young love, "the charm of looks," and the power passion gives to people to overcome obstacles.

Citizens of Verona:

The citizens are unnamed townspeople who appear in public street scenes. Early in the play they attempt to stop the fighting between the two feuding households. They appear in Act III inquiring about Mercutio's murderer and they detain Benvolio so that the prince may question him. The citizens are described as running through the streets toward the Capulet monument in the final scene of the play.

Clown:

The clown is a servant to Capulet. The clown is given the responsibility of delivering Capulet's party invitation to certain people in Verona, but he cannot read. After running into Romeo on the street, he asks Romeo to help him read the list of names. The clown invites Romeo to attend the party. In some editions of the play, this role is identified as "servant" rather than "clown."

Escalus (Prince Escalus):

The ruler of Verona. Fourteenth-century Italy consisted of kingdoms, papal states, and local lordships. Verona under Prince Escalus was in the third category. The prince is physically present in three scenes (Li, III.i, and V.iii), yet his presence is felt throughout the play for he makes the laws and the decisions in Verona.

In his first appearance, Escalus speaks very sternly about the fighting between the servants and the young men in the opposing households. He directs the fighting parties to throw their weapons to the ground, stating that they have started civil wars three times just by words alone. He threatens any disturber of the peace with death. This speech is effective in stopping the current fighting, and the prince effectively separates the angry Capulets and Montagues. Yet, the prince's approach does not put a permanent stop to the fighting, as the marketplace incident later shows.

In his second appearance, the prince must investigate the cause of the deaths of Mercutio and Tybalt. He shows lenience rather than exacting the letter of the law he

pronounced earlier, making his rule seem inconsistent at best: he banishes Romeo rather than executing him, although he warns that Romeo's return would incur the death penalty. Furthermore, he appears to have based this decision on his personal interests, stating that the Capulet/ Montague feud has caused the death of his kinsman, Mercutio.

Both Juliet and Romeo, as well as Friar Lawrence, seem to respect the prince's banishment of Romeo as a firm and definite ruling. Friar Lawrence devises two plans to comply with it, but hopes that the prince can be persuaded to relent.

In his final appearance, the prince is forced to investigate more deaths: those of Romeo and Juliet. He collects eye-witness testimony and corroboration of this evidence. In his grief, his words are brief to Capulet and Montague. From the point of view of the whole community, the prince pronounces insightful commentary of the actions which have occurred, commenting that through the feud, "all are punish'd" (V.iii.295). In other words, all have suffered and lost. Prince Escalus's words accurately describe the tone at the end of the play: "a glooming peace this morning with it brings" (V.iii.304-5). Peace has finally been achieved, but at a cost.

Friar John:

See John

Friar Lawrence:

See Lawrence

Gentlemen of both houses:

These gentlemen appear in public scenes involving the feuding households. Men from both houses are present in the marketplace scene. They assemble when the prince pronounces the sentence of banishment on Romeo and go to the Capulet monument at the end of the play.

Gentlewomen of both houses:

Gentlewomen from the Capulet household appear at Lord Capulet's party. Gentlewomen from both houses assemble when the prince pronounces the sentence of banishment on Romeo and go to the Capulet monument at the end of the play.

Gregory:

As another a servant of the Capulets, he accompanies Sampson, and jokes and puns with his friend. Gregory tries to avoid being led into a fight with the Montague servants by Sampson.

Guards:

They have no speaking part and are not listed separately in stage directions. Some editions of the play refer to the watch as the guards.

John (Friar John):

Friar John is a Franciscan friar who has been asked by Friar Lawrence to carry an important letter to Romeo in Mantua. Before he can deliver the letter, he is quarantined in Verona because of the plague. As soon as he is able, he gives word to Friar Lawrence.

Juliet:

Juliet is the daughter of Lord and Lady Capulet and one of the two title characters. When the play begins, Juliet is about two weeks shy of her fourteenth birthday, we learn from the nurse's remarks. In Juliet's first meeting with her mother and the nurse, Juliet shows herself to be a docile, dutiful child. She comes when she is called, responding respectfully to her mother: "Madam, I am here, / What is your will?" (I.iii.5-6). When her mother discusses the topic of Paris's interest in her, Juliet consents to go to the party and meet Paris. She adds that she will only allow her looks to go as far as her mother gives her permission. Juliet's youthfulness is echoed in comments by her father, who has hesitated over Paris's interest in marrying her.

The first meeting between Romeo and Juliet is a defining moment in Juliet's life. Romeo describes her as lovely and rich in beauty. Juliet speaks this way to him as well. Their words to each other complete a sonnet, in which Juliet, a heretofore inexperienced child, suddenly speaks with great naturalness, insight, and understanding about love. Equally suddenly, Juliet becomes resourceful, and not yet ready to share with the nurse her newfound discovery. Instead of asking the nurse Romeo's name directly, she asks the nurse about the identities of various young men leaving the party, Romeo among them. She realizes in a moment of illumination that she is in love with an enemy to her family. When Juliet speaks to the night her love for Romeo, she speaks of his true perfection of self. Unlike the older generation in the play, she is able to look beyond names and feuds. She utters one of the most quoted lines in all of Shakespeare's works, when she says "That which we call a rose / by any other word would smell as sweet" (II.ii.43-4). She admits her complete love for Romeo, and it is at this moment that he reveals himself to her standing on the ground beneath her balcony. Although Juliet

speaks of the "maiden blush" (II.ii.86) on her face and wonders if she has said too much, she bluntly asks Romeo "Dost thou love me?" (II.ii.80); In addition to Juliet's ability to honestly expresses herself, some commentators have noted that she is quite practical, in contrast to Romeo. She is concerned about Romeo's safety, warning him about her kinsmen and wondering how he was able to get over the high orchard walls. Additionally, it is Juliet, not Romeo, who sets into motion the practical details of the wedding, instructing Romeo to send her word about where and when the event will take place (II.ii. 144-46).

From this point on, Juliet shows herself to be focused on her husband and her love for him and willing to do whatever it takes for the two of them to be together. Her passion shows in her impatience for her wedding night. She can hardly wait and compares her feelings to those of a child with a new outfit to wear but having to wait overnight until the special holiday to do so. When the nurse brings a confused account of the death of Tybalt, making it sound as if Romeo has died, Juliet is devastated.

Even when the account is made plain, Juliet threatens to take her life if she and Romeo cannot be together.

Juliet is willing to take risks and look for opportunities to allow herself and Romeo to be together. When Romeo and Juliet have one night of love together, it is in Juliet's own room. Juliet lets him go, reluctantly. When Juliet's parents come in to talk to her about Paris, she refuses to accept their proposal. The nurse advises her to accept, resulting in Juliet's decision not to confide in the nurse any longer. Juliet mentions her threat of suicide to Friar Lawrence, and states her willingness to do whatever he advises. Before Juliet takes the friar's potion, she thinks of everything that could go wrong with it. She considers the possibility that Friar Lawrence may have given her real poison to protect himself from discovery. She also considers the possibility of poor timing, which would mean that she would wake up in the tomb alone. However, all of these possible mischances are set aside for the chance for her and Romeo to be together. At the end of the play, she has the choice of leaving the tomb with the friar or staying with Romeo and joining him in death. She chooses death rather than living in a world without Romeo.

Lady Capulet:

See Capulet

Lady Montague:

See Montague

Lawrence (Friar Lawrence [in some editions, Laurence]):

Friar Lawrence is a Franciscan monk. He lives in modest quarters suitable to someone who is a follower of St. Francis. He is a priest who is able to conduct religious ceremonies such as marriage and burial. He is also able to hear confessions and forgive sins. He serves as an adviser to Romeo and later to Juliet, and he develops several plans for the young lovers to follow. Also, he comments on the action at key points. Many of his speeches have a philosophical content to them.

When the friar first appears on stage (II.iii), he is gathering weeds and flowers in the early morning while the dew is still fresh and before the day gets hot. He makes medicines and various preparations from the plants he gathers in his willow basket. He comments that there is something powerful and potentially good in each thing on the earth but that everything must be used in a good way to preserve its good qualities.

Friar Lawrence, a friend to Romeo, knows about Romeo's infatuation with Rosaline. When Romeo comes to him early in the morning, he jokes that maybe Romeo has been out with Rosaline and did not get home to rest. He thinks that Romeo's shift in affection from Rosaline to Juliet is sudden and hasty, but he agrees to marry them because he thinks that it may help to end the hatred between the feuding households. Just before the marriage, Friar Lawrence counsels the lovers on the benefits of moderation. He will not allow them to stay alone together until they are married.

To the young lovers in the play, Friar Lawrence seems trustworthy and wise, when many other adults in Verona seem to be full of rejection, ridicule, bad advice, and bad example. Romeo trusts Friar Lawrence so much that he goes to the priest's residence to hide before leaving town. Romeo is frustrated and upset and even threatens to stab himself. Friar Lawrence counsels Romeo against this course of action. He suggests that Romeo should develop a philosophic outlook, an idea heartily rejected by Romeo. When nothing else will work, the friar not only points out to Romeo all the worst things which could have happened but did not, but instructs Romeo to visit Juliet and then to leave town until everything can be worked out with the families and the prince.

Juliet trusts the friar when she has given up on the nurse. She goes to see the friar when her parents are insisting on her marriage to Paris. When Friar Lawrence sees how desperate and frantic Juliet is, he suggests the potion to her. This represents a change of plan from the one discussed with Romeo. This new plan does not make any reference to gaining the approval of the families, yet it attempts to preserve the happiness of the lovers.

The friar's plan fails, mostly due to accidents of mistiming. Romeo receives word of Juliet's "death" through his servant. The friar's news that Juliet is not actually dead has been prevented from getting through to Romeo. Lord Capulet changes the date of the wedding. Romeo arrives just before Juliet wakes up, and then kills himself. Still, Juliet could have been saved. The friar does get to the tomb in time to save her. When she

wakes up, he tries to persuade her to leave. Yet, when he hears a noise, he runs out, afraid of discovery.

After the bodies of Romeo and Juliet are discovered, the friar offers the prince a summary of what has happened. Having confirmed the story with Romeo's letter to his father (delivered by Balthasar) the prince absolves the friar of wrong doing, calling him a "holy man" (V.iii.270), and blames the feuding families for the deaths of Romeo and Juliet.

Maskers:

Five or six people wearing masks accompany Romeo and his friends to the Capulet party. Maskers going to a party at one time would have introduced themselves by a speech. Romeo wrote a speech, as a courteous interloper, but is told by Benvolio that such speeches are out of style now. Perhaps symbolically the maskers could be seen as representing love in hiding or a forbidden love. As a dramatic issue, the masks are necessary to get Romeo and his friends into a party to which they have not been invited.

Mercutio:

Mercutio is a kinsman to the prince and friend to Romeo. Mercutio is often interpreted as a comic foil to Romeo. (A foil is a character who by strong contract, underscores or enhances the distinctive qualities of another character.) Mercutio's bawdy discussions of sex, for example, and his witty and light-hearted use of language contrast sharply with Romeo's romantic view of love and his gloomy lovesickness. It will be helpful in understanding Mercutio to look at some words related to his name: mercurial, an adjective meaning changeable; Mercury, the Roman messenger god and god of eloquence; and mercury, the poisonous element.

Mercutio's eloquence is displayed throughout the play. In scenes in which he appears and speaks, he tends to become the center of attention. He dominates his companions with his teasing and quick wit. When Romeo and his group of friends are walking to the Capulet party, Romeo is moping about Rosaline. The witty Mercutio tries to get Romeo's mind on something else. He also describes imagination in a powerful, memorable way in his "Queen Mab" speech (I.iii.52-94). The speech, a dramatic demonstration of Mercutio's eloquence, describes dreams as coming from a fairy creature. When Mercutio's cleverness threatens to run away with him, Romeo asks him to be quiet. When Mercutio and Benvolio look for Romeo after the Capulet party, Mercutio makes various obscene jokes at Romeo's expense, but Romeo will not reveal his hiding place. His wit and his bawdy humor are also displayed in his conversation with the nurse, who arrives looking for Romeo. Mercutio's changeable nature shows in the fatal marketplace scene. At one moment he is joking with Benvolio about quarreling, and the next moment he is quarreling in deadly earnest himself. He had hoped to see Romeo answer Tybalt's challenge to a duel, and is disappointed by what he sees as Romeo's cowardice or

submission. He suddenly jumps in and accepts Tybalt's challenge himself. He fights well, but is fatally injured when Tybalt takes unfair advantage of Romeo's well-meant interference. Mercutio's bitterness—or poisonous attitude—is shown in his wishing a plague on both the Montagues and the Capulets. Despite his usually easy-going manner, when confronted by a member of the Capulet household Mercutio is eager to fight. He becomes angered by Tybalt's taunts and Romeo's refusal to fight. When he is mortally wounded, curses the houses of Montague and Capulet. The extent of his feelings is revealed by the fact that this acrimonious denouncement is repeated three times by Mercutio: in III.i.91, 99-100, and 106.

Montague (Lady Montague):

Lady Montague is Lord Montague's wife and Romeo's mother. She has very few lines in the play. She seems to be a person of reason and restraint, physically holding her husband back from fighting and tells him not to "stir one foot to seek a foe" (I.i.80). In the final scene of the play, the audience hears from Lord Montague that his wife has died of grief over Romeo's banishment.

Montague (Lord Montague):

Head of the Montague household and Romeo's father. He appears very little in the play, yet he seems to be closer to Romeo than Juliet's parents are to her. For example, he describes Romeo's mysterious behavior to his nephew, Benvolio. He indicates that both he and his friends have tried to learn from Romeo the cause of his behavior. He is pleased at Benvolio's offer to talk to Romeo. During the prince's investigation of the marketplace brawl which left Mercutio and Tybalt dead, Montague defends his son to the prince, saying that Romeo simply acted as the law itself would have in taking Tybalt's life. In the final scene of the play, he appears to be genuinely grieved at his son's untimely death. Recognizing finally that the feud must be laid aside, Montague takes Capulet's hand extended in a gesture of peace. Moreover, he offers to make a memorial statue of Juliet in gold.

Musicians:

Three musicians are present at the Capulet house to play for the marriage between Juliet and Paris. They do not play after Juliet's body is discovered. Peter cannot resist trying to boss them and pun with them. Peter addresses them as Simon Catling, Hugh Rebeck, and James Soundpost. These names are taken from musical instruments.

Nurse:

The nurse is a servant in the Capulet household. The nurse is often interpreted as a comic foil to Juliet. (A foil is a character, who through strong contrast, underscores or enhances the distinctive qualities of another character.) She seems to be in higher

standing than the other servants, since she is a companion to Juliet, is present in private family conversations, and has her own servant, Peter. In Renaissance England, unmarried, widowed, or poor women might work for relatives in positions like the one in which the nurse finds herself. At any rate, she is trusted by the Capulets and informed about their intimate affairs. The nurse's main role in the play is as a companion and advisor to Juliet. She feels affection for Juliet, whom she has cared for since Juliet was an infant. It is revealed that the nurse lost her own child, Susan, and perhaps she views Juliet as a daughter. The nurse's affection for Juliet remains constant throughout the play, even if her advice is of questionable value. Juliet trusts the nurse enough to send her to Romeo the morning after the balcony scene to learn what Romeo's intentions are. On this errand, the nurse takes it upon herself to make sure that Romeo's intentions are honorable, since Juliet is young and inexperienced. When Juliet learns of what has happened in the marketplace, the nurse tries to comfort her and decides to bring Romeo to Juliet. On the morning after the lovers' one night of married happiness together, the nurse warns them that Romeo needs to leave Juliet's bedroom because Lady Capulet is coming. When Lord Capulet scolds Juliet harshly, the nurse tells him he is wrong to do so. She does not back down, so that he even yells at her. When Juliet and the nurse are left alone after the angry scene with Juliet's parents, the nurse tries to comfort and console Juliet.

The nurse, with her bumbling mannerisms and her bawdy language, is often thought to be one of Shakespeare's great comic characters. She is a talkative woman, and tends to repeat herself and to free-associate in her conversations. When she and Lady Capulet and Juliet are about to discuss Paris's offer for the first time, she repeats a story about Juliet as a toddler several times. Lady Capulet has to ask her to stop. When she brings the message back to Juliet from Romeo, Juliet has to ask her to get to the point faster. Under pressure, she also talks in a confusing style that misleads her listener. When she tries to tell Juliet about what has happened in the Verona marketplace, Juliet at first thinks that Romeo is dead because of the way the nurse is garbling the details.

Another aspect of the nurse's conversation is that she does not mind making vulgar jokes. She even does so with Juliet, since the jokes pertain to Juliet's wedding night and the possibility of pregnancy. The nurse also converses in this vulgar manner with Mercutio.

The nurse is depicted as a practical, down-to- earth character. She advises Juliet to marry Paris. Even though she knows Juliet is married to Romeo, she considers that Romeo's banishment makes him useless to Juliet. She sees no obstacle to a second marriage in Juliet's secret wedding vows pronounced to Romeo. She even helps in the kitchen the night before the planned wedding between Juliet and Paris. In this scene, she jokes with Lord Capulet and he calls her by her name, Angelica.

Old Man:

This older relative of the Capulet family attends the Capulet party. Lord Capulet talks to him briefly at the party. He functions dramatically to show Lord Capulet's age. Both he

and Capulet are older men, past dancing. They like to reminisce about the passage of time.

Page to Paris:

Paris's page accompanies him to Juliet's tomb. He is instructed to stay alone in the churchyard and whistle a warning to Paris if anyone approaches. Even though he is afraid, he does as he is told. When he realizes that Paris and another man (Romeo) are fighting, he runs to get the watch. He testifies to the prince at the end of the play about his knowledge of the occurrences within the tomb.

Pages:

Pages are young male servants to people of higher social standing. They run errands, carry messages, and accompany their masters. Mercutio has a page with him in the marketplace; after being stabbed by Tybalt, Mercutio sends his page for a surgeon. Paris also has a page.

Paris:

Paris is a young nobleman and kinsman to Prince Escalus. He is a conventional young lover who seeks Juliet's hand in marriage. He is said by Juliet's mother to be handsome in appearance, and the nurse describes Romeo as a dishcloth compared to Paris. Observing the standards of the time, he first approaches Juliet's father about the possibility of his marrying Juliet. In fact, he has more conversations with Lord Capulet than with Juliet throughout the whole course of the play. When Capulet seems to express reservations about a marriage between his child and Paris based on Juliet's youth, Paris tries to be persuasive. He takes Capulet's advice in going to the party to try to win Juliet's hand there. He does not appear to be aware of Juliet's feelings at all, because he goes to see Friar Lawrence to arrange the wedding without even recognizing that Juliet has no romantic feelings for him and is, in fact, already married. However, he seems to be a genuine and forthright person. He is sorrowful at Juliet's funeral, and, in the last act, he brings flowers to her grave. This suggests that he has true feelings for Juliet, as it is a private action, not a public one performed for the benefit of an audience, such as her family. Additionally, he refers to Juliet as his love. Even at this point, however, he does not seem to really understand Juliet; he thinks she died from grief over Tybalt.

Peter:

Peter is the nurse's servant. He carries the nurse's fan for her on her errand to Romeo from Juliet. He talks in the sexual double meanings popular among the Capulet servants. At the nurse's orders, he stands at the gate when they return to Juliet with Romeo's message. After Juliet's funeral, he asks the musicians to play music to comfort

him. When they won't, he refuses to pay them. He appears to enjoy the opportunity to boss the musicians, probably since he himself is usually ordered about.

Petruchio:

Petruchio is described as a mute follower of Tybalt. He is with Tybalt in the marketplace brawl.

Potpan:

In some editions of the play, Potpan and Anthony are named as servants of the Capulet household.

Rebeck (Hugh Rebeck):

See Musicians

Romeo:

Romeo is the son to Lord and Lady Montague and one of the two title characters. Romeo's first love interest is not Juliet but a young woman named Rosaline, who, like Juliet, happens to be a Capulet. When characters first refer to Romeo, he is de scribed as acting in a peculiar way. His friend and cousin, Benvolio, discovers why: the cause is hopeless, incurable lovesickness. Rosaline has vowed to live unwed and without a lover. (Rosaline, incidentally, never appears in the play.) Romeo's infatuation with Rosaline and her resoluteness to remain celibate inspire Romeo's behavior. He goes out walking near the woods before dawn. If anyone sees him, he runs away into the woods to avoid having company. When the sun comes up, he returns home, retreats into his bedroom, and won't come out. Benvolio advises Romeo that his feelings are infatuation, based on a lack of experience with women. After being encouraged to do so by Benvolio and Mercutio, Romeo attends the Capulet party and sees Juliet. When they meet, they fall in love immediately.

Romeo is surrounded by a group of young male friends. Like his friends, Romeo enjoys joking. However, Romeo's jokes, unlike Mercutio's in particular, usually do not have a sexual double meaning. He also tends to be more serious than his friends. In speaking about going to the Capulet party, Romeo says that he plans to stand at the side of the dance floor and watch the other dancers. He even wonders whether they should be going at all and worries about the effect of these actions on the rest of his life.

Many observers debate Romeo's development in the play. Some argue that he is overly emotional, hasty and immature and that he remains that way throughout the play. While some readers view Romeo as immature for falling out of love with Rosaline and in love with Juliet so quickly, others maintain that Romeo's infatuation with Rosaline early in the

play in a sense prepares him to experience real love. Even though Romeo's speeches about love early in the play are wordy and somewhat awkward, they show that he has a sense of beauty and is trying hard to express what it is like to be in love. When he first sees Juliet, he shows that he is able to appreciate true beauty and express it in a powerful way. His speeches become more eloquent.

Romeo is also criticized by some for his apparent lack of moderation. While he demonstrates self-control in his rejection of Tybalt's challenge to a fight, after Mercutio steps in and is killed, Romeo abandons his self-restraint and fights and kills Tybalt. In his earnestness to avenge Mercutio, he fails to consider the consequences his actions will have on his relationship with Juliet. His words "O, I am fortune's fool" (III.i.136), some would argue, suggest that he does consider the consequences of his emotional actions, but only after it is too late. Many others would argue that Romeo's words demonstrate his attempting to evade responsibility for his actions completely by blaming what has happened on fate.

After he learns he is to be banished for killing Tybalt, Romeo throws himself to the ground and weeps. Friar Lawrence tells him that banishment is better than death, but Romeo responds that being without Juliet is torture. Romeo's desperate weeping is alternately viewed as unmasculine and unproductive or as demonstrative of the passionate depth of his commitment to Juliet. He says he can't accept Friar Lawrence's calm, philosophical advice be cause Friar Lawrence, as a man who is celibate, is not in a position to understand Romeo's feelings: Juliet is his heaven, and hell is being in exile without her. Romeo only accepts Friar Lawrence's counsel when it includes a visit to Juliet.

Some readers believe that Romeo achieves greater maturity toward the plays end. When Romeo's servant brings word of Juliet's funeral, Ro meo decides immediately what he will do and takes action, rather than weeping as he did when he was banished. He thinks quickly of the poison he knows he can buy in Mantua. When he rushes back to Verona, he does not take time to see who Paris is before killing him and joining Juliet, but he does grant Paris's wish to be placed in the tomb near Juliet.

Sampson:

He is a servant of the Capulets. Sampson quarrels with Montague servants and bites his thumb at Montague servants as a gesture of defiance in order to provoke a fight. Additionally, he represents some fairly typical Renaissance attitudes towards women. He uses a biblical phrase about women being the "weaker vessels" (I.i.16), and his comments about women indicate that he thinks of them as sexual objects.

Servants:

The servants in the play are employed by the Capulet and Montague households. Servants announce the arrival of guests, set out napkins, silverware, and trenchers of

food, and serve meals. They also are directed to clear furniture from the hall floor for dancing, tend to the fire and carry logs, and invite guests to various functions.

Soundpost (James Soundpost):

See Musicians

Torch-Bearers:

Torch-bearers carry light to the Capulet party in I.iv. Romeo expresses his wish to carry a torch so as to avoid dancing.

Tybalt:

He is a nephew to Lord Capulet and a cousin to Juliet. He does not speak many lines, but he influences the entire course of the play to a degree that exceeds his seemingly minor role in it. Throughout the play, he demonstrates his angry, resentful, and stubborn nature. When Tybalt first appears, Benvolio is attempting to stop the servants of the Capulet and Montague households from fighting. By contrast, Tybalt urges on the fight and succeeds in drawing Benvolio in to fighting with him. At the Capulet party, Tybalt recognizes Romeo's voice and within ten words is calling for his sword. He also refers to Romeo as a "slave" (I.v.55). Tybalt says he does not consider it a sin to strike Romeo dead.

Tybalt shows his stubbornness at the Capulet party. Lord Capulet urges Tybalt to control himself, telling him that he is acting like a boy trying to be a man. Although Tybalt has to give in to his uncle, he vows to get revenge on Romeo for coming to the Capulet party uninvited. The next day, Tybalt sends a letter to Romeo's house challenging him to a duel. Tybalt's actions in Act III influence the remaining events of the play. He quarrels with Mercutio and challenges Romeo to a sword fight. Tybalt insults Romeo, and he insists that Romeo draw his sword and fight with him. Romeo refuses to fight and Mercutio instead takes up the challenge. Tybalt is a skilled fighter, according to Mercutio, who comments that Tybalt has studied dueling. Thus, when Mercutio taunts him and calls for a fencing move, Tybalt is able to display it. In addition to his being belligerent and stubborn, Tybalt also has no qualms about fighting unfairly. When Romeo steps between the fighters, Tybalt stabs Mercutio under Romeo's arm. After Mercutio is killed, Tybalt declares that Romeo will accompany Mercutio in death. Instead, Tybalt is slain.

Watchmen:

Three watchmen patrol at night to protect the town and to make sure that the prince's rulings are carried out. For example, Friar Lawrence warns Romeo that he must leave Juliet before the watch is set. Paris's page calls the watch when he realizes his master

is in a fight at the Capulet tomb. The watchmen catch Balthasar and the Friar, gather preliminary evidence on what has happened, and report on their findings to the prince.

Character Studies

While most interpretations of the characters of Romeo and Juliet have focused on the nature of their love, there has recently been a greater tendency to emphasize the manner in which they mature as a result of their passion for each other. This emergence into adulthood is clearly illustrated in the development of their language, which progresses from the forced and artificial rhetoric of their early scenes to a more sincere form of expression later in the play. The lovers can also be interpreted through an explicitly Christian reading of the play. Such a perspective stresses that their maturing love reflects a form of spiritual education in which Romeo and Juliet ultimately accept their destiny as part of God's plan to punish and reconcile the opposing families.

The bawdy, or humorously obscene, language of the Nurse and Mercutio present a stark contrast to the purity of Romeo and Juliet's passion. For this reason, these two characters are often interpreted as comic "foils" to the lovers. (A foil is a character who through strong contrast underscores or enhances the distinctive traits of another character.) The Nurse, a well-conceived, rich, and natural character, is often considered one of Shakespeare's greatest comic creations. Mercutio, too, is renowned for his wit and vitality. He is viewed as an extreme egotist and sensualist, whose open personality and coarse sexual humor reflect his individuality and naturalness. Shakespeare has been particularly praised for his well-defined portraits of these characters. This success is especially significant in Mercutio's case, whom the dramatist created from only a brief reference in Brooke's poem.

Throughout the play, Friar Lawrence serves as a friend and counselor to both Romeo and Juliet. He provides a religious dimension to the play, attempting to restore peace in Verona and dispel the evil of the feud by uniting the young couple in marriage. The Friar is generally viewed as a good man who exercises poor judgment when he hastily marries the lovers. He stands by his actions, however, and tries to prevent Juliet's marriage to Paris by devising the sleeping potion scheme. Ultimately, he acknowledges the intervention of a higher order in determining the lovers' fate when he declares "A greater power than we can contradict / Hath thwarted our intents" (V. iii. 153-54). The play also offers another perspective of the Friar. Numerous references demonstrate that had he, too, acted with less haste, the tragic deaths of Romeo and Juliet may have been prevented. For example, had the priest sent the message concerning Juliet's assumed death to Romeo via Balthasar rather than Friar John, the final catastrophe might have been averted. No matter how one interprets his role in the play, Friar Lawrence is indeed an active agent in bringing about the lovers' tragedy.

Conclusion

Each of these characters is an example of the many ways in which Shakespeare skillfully reworked his source. Students and scholars alike have marvelled at his ability to create a lasting work of dramatic art with universal appeal out of the Romeo and Juliet legend. Although there is still no resolution to the debates concerning Shakespeare's tragic design and the relative success of this early experiment in tragedy, there is nearly unanimous agreement that *Romeo and Juliet* is a remarkable and enjoyable play. In attempting to account for the tragedy's enduring popularity, commentators generally point to Shakespeare's moving depiction of the innocence and sincerity of young love. *Romeo and Juliet,* in the words of Robert Metcalf Smith, is "the perfect love poem of the English race and of the world,"

(See also *Shakespearean Criticism,* Vols. 5 and 11)

Themes

The Power and Passion of Love and Hate

Although *Romeo and Juliet* is considered one of the world's greatest love stories, it can be argued that the love story is only a vehicle for the resolution of the story about hate, that is, the feud between the two families. After all, the story starts with a street fight between Montague and Capulet servants and ends with a peace agreement between the two lords. The power of hate is illustrated in the first scene by the exhibition of enmity between servants of the two families. The extent of the hatred has grown from the family itself to its servants. The power of love is seen, of course, in the determination of Romeo and Juliet to defy their families and be together. They love their parents, but the hate between the families causes the young couple to hate those who would keep them apart. The passion of Tybalt's hate is seen in his inability to forget about the party crashing. Even though his uncle talks him out of a fight that night, the next morning he sends a challenge to Romeo's house. Romeo's love for Juliet prevents him from quarrelling with Tybalt because he does not want to fight with his beloved's cousin, who has become his cousin by marriage. But his love for his friend Mercutio is powerful enough to turn into a rage of hateful revenge, so Romeo attacks Tybalt for killing Mercutio. For Juliet, the death of her cousin is a test of her love for Romeo. Which is stronger: her love for her family or for Romeo? As it turns out, her love for Romeo is strong enough to allow her to forgive him for his terrible deed, to choose her family by marriage, her husband, over her blood family. Juliet's love is further tested when she has to overcome her doubts about the trustworthiness of Friar Laurence and her fear of taking the potion. Again, her love is strong enough to risk everything. Romeo's love is strong enough to risk the Prince's punishment to get to Juliet's tomb. Both have love strong enough to be willing to die for the other, and they do. Thus, the whole play is a clash of passionate love and passionate hate, each strong enough to cause tragedy.

The Individual versus Society

A standard type of plot conflict, the individual against society, applies in *Romeo and Juliet* because the young couple is pitted against social and public institutions that are barriers to their relationship. First, of course, is the barrier of family, not only because Romeo and Juliet are from feuding houses, but also because Juliet's father has decreed that she will marry someone else. In Juliet's society, the father, as head of the household, has absolute power. Disobeying him means not only a breach within her family, but a breach of the social fabric that guides family structure in the culture. In fear of dire consequences, Romeo and Juliet have to marry in secret. They have to keep that secret from family and friends. Except for Friar Laurence, they have no one to rely on but each other. Even Juliet's devoted nurse turns on her and leaves her to make the biggest decisions of her life on her own. Finally, after Romeo is banished by the prince, even the local government is involved in keeping the pair apart.

The Problem of Time

While lousy timing fits into the theme of the action being determined by twists of fate, it is not just rotten luck that affects time in *Romeo and Juliet*. The chronology of the play is a rush of time. Romeo and Juliet are married the day after they meet. Romeo kills Juliet's cousin the same day and is banished from Verona only a day after the prince has first announced his intent to severely punish anyone caught fighting because of the Capulet/Montague feud. The couple has only one night of honeymoon before Romeo must run away, as Friar Laurence says,

till we can find a time
to blaze your marriage, reconcile your friends,
Beg pardon of the Prince, and call thee back.

When Friar Laurence devises his plan to rescue Juliet, he needs time to get a message to Romeo, but that time is taken away when Lord Capulet moves up the date for Juliet's wedding to Paris. That change might not have been ruinous if Friar John had not been delayed on his way to find Romeo. There is so little time that the Capulet household stays up all night to prepare for the wedding that turns out to be Juliet's funeral. If only Friar Laurence had made it to the tomb in time, he might have been able to prevent Romeo from killing Paris and/or himself, which would have prevented Juliet from killing herself. But time is against them.

Fate and Forebodings

Elizabethans expected a tragedy to rest upon a twist of fate. Although Shakespeare made *Romeo and Juliet* more complicated than that, there are certainly numerous references to fate in the play, perhaps as a concession to the audience's expectations. The play opens with a reference to "star-crossed lovers" as if their fates are predetermined by their astrological signs. On the way to the Capulet party, Romeo has a sense that something will happen at the ball that will lead to doom. Later, with his dying breath, Mercutio calls a curse upon the feuding families: "A plague on both your houses!" Then Romeo says, after killing Tybalt, that he is "fortune's fool." When Romeo thinks that Juliet is dead, he tells the stars that he will defy them, as if he knows that fate wants to keep them apart, so he will win by joining Juliet in death. All the accidents of timing in the play seem to be fate working against the young lovers for the Elizabethan audience did not see these incidents as coincidences but rather as the hand of fate directing the action.

Principal Topics

Critics and readers have proposed three main ways to interpret Shakespeare's arrangement of the events and circumstances in *Romeo and Juliet.*

(The deliberate construction of the play so that its action seems to lead inevitably to the "catastrophe" of the young lovers' deaths, is known as Shakespeare's "tragic design.") One method is to regard Romeo and Juliet as helpless victims of the arbitrary operation of fate. Numerous tricks of chance in the play support this theory; for example, Romeo's failed attempt to stop the fight between Mercutio and Tybalt and Friar John's inability to leave Verona due to the plague. References to "fortune" and the "stars" throughout the play, particularly the description of Romeo and Juliet in the Prologue to Act I as "star-crossed lovers," also uphold this argument. This emphasis on fortune as a guiding force that determines one's destiny was probably not lost on Elizabethan audiences, who would have been familiar with and likely endorsed this conviction. A second perspective is that *Romeo and Juliet* is a tragedy of Providence or divine wiii. Proponents of this interpretation maintain that the seemingly coincidental or accidental events in the play are in fact initiated by God to punish, and ultimately reconcile, the feuding families. God finally achieves this reconciliation by using the deaths of the lovers as a moral example for the others. A third reading of Shakespeare's tragic design holds that the lovers' own reckless passion leads to their double suicide. Supporters of this viewpoint sometimes regard Friar Lawrence as a spokesman for Shakespeare himself, for the monk does not completely endorse Romeo and Juliet's impetuous behavior but rather cautions them to "love moderately." These three perspectives of Shakespeare's tragic design are perhaps the most commonly discussed issues in *Romeo and* Juliet. At various times throughout the centuries since the tragedy was written, critics have generally emphasized one or another of these interpretations. Recently, however, commentators have argued that Shakespeare actually presents a balance of all three concepts in the play.

Closely related to the problem of Shakespeare's tragic design is the question of the play's effectiveness as an "authentic" tragedy. In drama, a tragedy traditionally recounts the significant events or actions in a protagonist's life which, taken together, bring about the catastrophe. The ambiguity surrounding the cause of the lovers' deaths has led some critics to regard the playas an apprentice tragedy, one in which Shakespeare had not yet developed his skills as a tragic dramatist. In fact, *Romeo and Juliet* is often considered an experiment in tragedy, in which the playwright attempts to break free of traditional patterns by omitting the necessary cause-and-effect relationship between the lovers' characters and their catastrophe.

Another prominent aspect of *Romeo and Juliet* is Shakespeare's handling of the passage of time to underscore the lovers' hasty action, perhaps most evident in the characters' headlong rush to fulfill their love for each other. Shakespeare most notably emphasizes this haste by compressing the several months' action of Brooke's *Tragical Historye of Romeus and Juliet* to only five days. Further, Shakespeare's masterful use of language as well as his various references to the explicit progression of time combine to establish an atmosphere of hasty action. This technique is evident in Juliet's speech in Act III, scene ii: "Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds, / Towards Phoebus' lodging; such a waggoner / As Phaeton would whip you to the west, / And bring in cloudy night immediately. / Spread thy close curtain, love-performing night, / That runaway's eyes may wink, and Romeo / Leap to these arms untalk'd of and unseen!" Subtle patterns of swift imagery and lively dialogue, as well as the Chorus's commentary, create an

undercurrent of tension and impulsiveness that is discernible throughout the play. On several occasions,

Shakespeare ironically contrasts the notion of time and haste with a particular character's dialogue. One example of this technique is the contradiction between the play's hurried pace and Friar Lawrence's warning to Romeo: "Wisely and slow, they stumble that run fast" (n. iii. 94). The priest later fails to heed his own advice, however, when, in Act V he is startled and hastens from the tomb, leaving Juliet to her fate. Shakespeare employs all of these devices to create a frantic atmosphere in which the characters behave recklessly.

Examining the nature of Romeo and Juliet's love is also important to achieve an understanding of the playas a whole. In some ways, the lovers' passion reflects the practice of "courtly love." Courtly love is a tradition that defines what love is and establishes a code of behavior for lovers. It flourished in the Middle Ages and had a significant influence on Renaissance literature. In essence, under this system love is illicit and sensual and is accompanied by great emotional suffering. The lover (in literature, usually a knight) falls in love at first sight and agonizes over his situation until his affection is returned. Once he achieves this goal, he is inspired to perform great deeds. Further, the lovers pledge their fidelity to one another and vow to keep their union secret. Romeo and Juliet's affair closely follows this pattern: they fall in love at first sight; their love is strengthened rather than weakened by the feud; they meet at night and vow to conceal their union; and each promptly resolves to commit suicide upon learning of the other's death. Another important feature of Romeo and Juliet's love is its spiritual quality. The couple treats love with great reverence, and it is their faithfulness to it in the face of violence, hatred, and even death which ultimately restores peace and order to Verona.

Many of the central issues in *Romeo and Juliet* are reinforced by Shakespeare's use of opposites and contradictory images, perhaps most notably the contrast between light and darkness. In most cases, the emphasis on light-starlight, moonlight, sunlight, and lightning-expresses Romeo and Juliet's love for one another. Darkness. however, in the form of clouds, rain, and nightfall, reflects the evil of the feud. In addition, star imagery enhances the theme of fate in the play, serving not only as a metaphor for feminine beauty and the lovers' passion, but also for destiny. Another concept fundamental to understanding *Romeo and Juliet* is the struggle between the opposing forces of love and death. Shakespeare developed this theme by constructing images that personify death as Juliet's lover. This overall impression is achieved through the repeated use of oxymora (the pairing of contradictory terms), such as "death-mark'd love," and more subtle word oppositions, like "womb" and "tomb."

Style

Light and Dark Polarity Motif

A motif is a recurring element such as an incident, formulaic structure, or device that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes. A visual motif used in *Romeo and Juliet* is the contrast of light and dark, but in a sensory way, rather than in the sense of good and evil. For example, Romeo's balcony speech depicts Juliet as the sun that banishes the envious moon and turns night into day. In like manner, the morning after their wedding, they both try to delay Romeo's departure by pretending that it is still night, knowing that "More light and light, more dark and dark our woes." Ultimately, because the light of their love is not allowed to burn brightly, they both choose the darkness of death.

Shakespearean Tragedy

A Greek tragedy has one central heroic, but flawed, figure. *Romeo and Juliet* had two central characters, and neither is presented as having the characteristics of a classical hero. Prior to Shakespeare, Elizabethans used a twist of fate as the single causative factor for the tragic ending. Shakespeare, however, devised more complicated causes stemming from character traits and motives. Another difference between the Greek and Shakespearean tragedies is the use of irony. In a Greek play, the audience is aware of the irony that the hero does not see. The chorus exists to advise the audience about what to expect. For example, the audience knows the secret of the parentage of Oedipus, but Oedipus does not and proceeds to marry his mother. Although Shakespeare uses a chorus in *Romeo and Juliet*, only the basic plot and ending were revealed, not how the drama is to unfold. Shakespeare allows the audience to discover the irony for themselves.

Use of a Chorus

Acts I and II only are introduced by the chorus, a lone actor who serves as a narrator for the play. The speech of the chorus is written in the form of a sonnet with an ending couplet. Shakespeare's prologue to *Romeo and Juliet* follows the Greek pattern of letting the audience know from the start how things are going to end. Otherwise, Shakespeare deviates from the Greek model by not revealing any of the irony or complexity of the tragedy, instead leaving that to the audience's own interpretation. The prologue of the second act assures the audience that Romeo's old feelings for Rosaline are gone and that he and Juliet now love each other. The chorus points out that although the couple has little opportunity to interact, their passion gives them the power and the ingenuity to get together. In other words, where there's a will there's a way if powered by love.

Blank Verse

The normal form of speech in Shakespearean drama is blank, or unrhymed, verse. This form of verse works well for all scenes and persons whose appeal is mainly to the emotions of the spectator or reader. Each unrhymed line has five stresses; however, Shakespeare subtly varied the stresses, as well as rhythms, pauses, and tones in order to convey different moods and even the personal peculiarities of a character.

Rhymed Verse

In the early plays, such as *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare used quite a bit of rhymed verse in five-stress lines, usually in couplets. The prologues to Acts 1 and 2 end in a couplet, as does the play itself. Couplets also often come at the end of a scene or episode to signal changes to those behind the stage. In the process, the couplet achieves an aesthetic end to the dialogue and signals a change in action to the audience even before the actors leave the stage (e.g., act 1, scene 2, Romeo says, "I'll go along, no such sight to be shown, But to rejoice in splendour of mine own"). After a passage of blank verse or prose, rhymed verse could also have the effect of stiffening the dialogue and heightening the emotion. When Romeo and Juliet first meet, their dialogue becomes a sonnet, thus emphasizing the rise of their emotions. Shakespeare cleverly used rhymed verse for another effect□that of contrast□by having one character talk in blank verse while another uses rhymed verse.

Prose

The use of prose in a play that is mainly in verse has the effect of lowering the emotional level and quickening the pace of the play. Prose speech works best for passages of comedy and as the speech of the lower or more comic characters (e.g., the opening dialogue between Sampson and Gregory).

Historical Context

The Renaissance

Both the story of *Romeo and Juliet* and Shakespeare's life take place during the Renaissance, a period that begins in the fourteenth century and extends into the seventeenth century. The term renaissance means rebirth and refers to the revival of an interest in the classical cultures of Greece and Rome. However, there are many social, political, and intellectual transformations that comprised the Renaissance. As the influence of the Roman Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire waned with their inability to maintain stability and unity among the Europeans, the feudal structure broke up and the power shifted to nations that were developing their own monarchies and language. Also of great importance were city-states (e.g., Florence, Italy, as controlled by the infamous Medici family and perhaps fictional Verona as ruled by Prince Escalus). Many details in *Romeo and Juliet* connect it to Italian Literature with which Shakespeare was familiar. One parallel is Pyramus and Thisbe (Ovid). More immediate, Shakespeare probably based his play on the Italian version by Luigi da Porto who sets the tale of Romeo and Juliet in Verona (1530).

During the sixteenth century, ancient Greek and Roman literature was rediscovered, translated, and then widely read. The classical writers focused on the human condition; they explored human nature and asserted some valuable insights about what causes human suffering and what works to establish social order. These ideas, along with many others, converged as a philosophy called humanism. It was in the broadest sense a focus on human beings as opposed to a focus on the supernatural. Renaissance writers such as Shakespeare were well-read in classical literature and were influenced by it. In one sense, *Romeo and Juliet* dramatizes how an inherited feud coupled with impetuosity can disrupt the state and ruin good people's lives. The play shows that passion can be disruptive, dangerous, and destructive, and yet ironically it also expresses love and grief. Through the loss of these two young lovers, the feuding familes find reconciliation, and order in the community is reestablished. This examination of the human scene is an example of humanism with clear connections to classical handling of tragedy, as in *Oedipus* by Sophocles and *Pyramus and Thisbe* by Ovid.

Elizabethan and Jacobean Literature

By the time Shakespeare was born, Elizabeth I was already on the throne. Her long and influential reign from 1558 to 1603 defined the era. As a playwright, Shakespeare was fortunate to write in a time when the arts were supported by patrons and his English contemporaries included Ben Jonson, Sir Walter Raleigh, Christopher Marlowe, Robert Southwell, Thomas Campion, Edmund Spenser, Sir Philip Sidney, John Lyly, and Michael Drayton, all important writers, critics, and celebrities of the Elizabethan Age whose reputations have lasted into modern times. There are numerous and diverse

distinguishing characteristics of Elizabethan literature. This name is strictly a time division in honor of one of England's greatest rulers. However, it is a time in which the poetry of the sonnet, the Spenserian stanza, and dramatic blank verse were very popular. It is unquestionably a golden age for drama. In the area of prose, this era produced historical chronicles, pamphlets, and literary criticism as the first novels began to appear. The tone of literature seemed more darkly questioning during the reign of James I as writers explored the problem of evil. This was the time in which Shakespeare produced his greatest tragedies. His theatre company enjoyed a cordial relationship with the court where the popularity of the masque, an extravagant courtly entertainment, returned. Also during Jacobean times (Jacobean is the name of the period in which James I reigned in England), Jonson influenced comedy with an acid satire and poetry with a lucid and graceful style that was copied by a group of writers known as the Cavalier poets. Meantime, Francis Bacon and Robert Burton were making a name in prose literature with a tougher yet more flexible style. Jacobean literature was undoubtedly an important contribution to the arts, but perhaps the greatest achievement of the age was the production of the King James version of the Bible in 1611.

Modern Connections

One of the most prominent features of *Romeo and Juliet* is the love the two title characters have for one another. In a number of ways the lovers' passion for each other demonstrates the practice of "courtly love." Identifying some of the aspects of courtly love can also highlight the similarities between the relationship between Romeo and Juliet and modern youthful romantic relationships. Courtly love flourished during the Middle Ages and influenced Renaissance literature. Traditionally, the system of courtly love defined a code of behavior for lovers. Under this system, love is seen as illicit, sensual, and marked by emotional suffering and anguish. Typically, the lover falls in love at first sight and remains in agony until he is sure his love is returned. Then, he is inspired to perform great deeds to demonstrate the depth of his love. Additionally, the lovers vow their faithfulness to each other and promise to keep their love a secret. The love between Romeo and Juliet follows this pattern. The two fall in love at first sight, they meet secretly and promise to conceal their relationship, and they vow their everlasting faithfulness to each other. Modern teenagers in love similarly may feel the need to meet secretly, to hide their relationships from their parents, and may often feel that their parents do not or would not understand the depth of their feelings toward their girlfriends or boyfriends.

An additional hurdle faced by lovers in Shakespeare's time was the fact that many marriages were arranged by parents who had economic and social considerations in mind. Romance and personal choice in the matter were often ignored and could cause conflict between parents and young people. Juliet's parents initially hope that Juliet will express interest in marrying Paris. When she does not, they become angered and verbally abusive. For modern readers who are unfamiliar with the concept of arranged marriages, knowing that such arrangements were common in Shakespeare's time may help students to better understand the actions of Romeo, Juliet, and their parents. However, for many modern students, the idea of arranged marriages is not an unfamiliar one, as the concept is a part of many religions.

Another prominent feature of the play is its presentation of the destructiveness of endless feuding between groups of people forced to live near each other. In such self-perpetuating feuds, new insults are always being made and old ones always being avenged. The score never seems to be settled, unless perhaps something catastrophic occurs that forces the feuding people to look seriously at themselves and their responsibility toward their families and each other. Tybalt, for example, grows enraged at the sound of Romeo's voice at the Capulet party and wants to fight him immediately. Although Lord Capulet restrains Tybalt at the party, he does not stop his wife's screams for revenge after Tybalt's death. Only after suffering the heavy, irreparable losses of their children do Capulet and Montague join hands at the end of the play. Such tensions are also common in modern times and have been dramatically presented by film makers. For example, the 1961 film, *West Side Story,* is loosely based on *Romeo and Juliet.* In the film, the animosity that Shakespeare depicted between the Capulets and Montagues, referred to by the Chorus as an "ancient grudge" (Prologue, 1.3), is represented as gang rivalry and ethnic hatred between the family and friends of the two

main characters, Tony and Maria. Although Tony and Maria attempt to overcome these obstacles, they meet the same tragic fate as Romeo and Juliet. Baz Luhrmann's 1996 version of the story is perhaps more familiar to modern readers than is *West Side Story.* The 1996 film, *William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet,* is set in present-day urban California, but uses Shakespeare's original language.

BOOKRAGS

Critical Overview

Even after four hundred years, literary criticism of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and critical reviews of its productions are still being written. Nonetheless, the critical essays written through the centuries remained valid and illustrate how interpretation is affected by various literary movements. Oddly enough, Shakespeare's contemporaries did not review the plays, and other writers barely mentioned him well into the seventeenth century. At that time, Ben Jonson (1572—1637) was held in higher regard as a playwright. Also esteemed as a critic, Jonson considered Shakespeare a talented, but undisciplined writer, according to Augustus E. Ralli in his book on Shakespearean criticism. John Dryden, a seventeenth-century writer, was the first great Shakespearan critic. In his "An Essay of Dramatic Poesy," Dryden compares Shakespeare and Jonson, saying that he admires Jonson but loves Shakespeare because "when he describes anything, you more than see it, you feel it too." Even though he praised Shakespeare, Dryden also found he was "many times flat, insipid, his comic wit degenerating into clenches, his serious swelling into bombast."

Critics into the eighteenth century continued this view that Shakespeare had more natural ability than educated refinement. They discussed his artistic faults rather than his merits, unless they were pulling out those soliloquies and other passages that they thought could stand on their own out of context. In 1775, Elizabeth Griffin commented on the ample selection of "poetical beauties" in *Romeo and Juliet*. However, she found little for moral evaluation except the foolishness of a young couple embarking on plans of their own without the consent of their parents. Thus, Griffin was the first critic to lay the blame for the tragedy not on fate but on Romeo and Juliet.

Even more than Shakespeare, the eighteenth-century neoclassicists believed strictly in the unities of place, action, and time, which Aristotle explained in his *Poetics*. Thus, these critics thought the story of a play should take place in one setting; have a causally connected plot, each event causing the next one in line; and that all of these events should occur within one twenty-four hour day. Samuel Johnson, a moderate neoclassicist and the prime literary figure of his time, excused Shakespeare from these three unities. He found *Romeo and Juliet* to be one of Shakespeare's most pleasing dramas and found the plot varied, believable, and touching. He also thought Shakespeare correct to mix tragedy and comedy because real life is a mixture. Still, Johnson was one of those critics who felt that Shakespeare's work lacked sufficient moral emphasis. Ralli reports that Alexander Pope, another leading eighteenth-century writer and critic, theorized that Shakespeare's genius was dragged down by his involvement with actual theater production, implying that Shakespeare wrote to please the audiences instead of according to the structures of classical rhetoric.

Meanwhile, in Germany, August von Schlegel and others were finding *Romeo and Juliet* to be nearly perfect artistically. Schlegel said of this play: "It was reserved for Shakespeare to unite purity of heart and the glow of imagination, sweetness and dignity of manners and passionate violence, in one ideal picture." Back in England, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, considered a great nineteenth-century Shakespearean critic, began to

share the German view. Coleridge suspected that Shakespeare's irregularities were actually evidence of psychological and philosophical genius. William Hazlitt, another Shakespearean critic of the English Romantic movement, was also an admirer of Schlegel. Hazlitt attributed more depth to the love of Romeo and Juliet than previous critics who found their love shallow and sentimental. Following Hazlitt's lead, by the end of the eighteenth century, Shakespearean scholarship began examining the playwright's techniques of characterization.

In the nineteenth century, criticism associated Shakespeare's genius with many intellectual movements and religious theories. Suddenly, Shakespeare no longer had faults but presented intriguing problems for the astute scholar to explain. In the twentieth century, New Critical scholars searched for something new to say, focusing on minute textual details in order to come up with new theories or interpretations. It is to the credit of the Romantics, however, that they returned to a discussion of the sheer enjoyment of the plays that audiences experienced. In the early 2000s, Shakespeare's works continued to be read, performed, and critiqued by scholars around the world. After all this time, criticism had become a blend of schools of thought and argued interpretations based on new information found by researchers or new approaches connected to advancing theoretical understanding. Generally speaking, though, it is safe to say that Shakespeare is considered the greatest playwright of all time.

Criticism

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Critical Essay #1

[Cole outlines the major elements of Romeo and Juliet *that have typically generated the most commentary in an attempt to explain both the play's significance and its enduring appeal. The critic discusses the tragedy in relation to Shakespeare's other writings; how the playwright adapted the drama from the sources and traditional dramatic and poetic models available to him; the play's language, structure, and themes; and its adherence to conventional tragic dramaturgy, or theatrical representation. In addition, Cole analyzes three principal thematic readings* of Romeo and Juliet - (1) *a tragedy of character in which the lovers are punished for their reckless passion;* (2) *a tragedy of destiny in which fate is responsible for Romeo's and Juliet's deaths; and* (3) *a tragedy of divine providence in which God sacrifices the lovers to reconcile the feuding families. The critic then asserts that the play presents a synthesis of all three issues in its emphasis on the idea that tragic disaster is an inescapable consequence of the precarious balance between good and evil in the world.*]

How does one create an enduring literary myth out of a sentimental romance, a love story already re hearsed in prose and verse in several languages? How does one turn a pair of young lovers into fig ures of such imaginative stature that they will fire the emotions of audiences for centuries to come and even obscure the competing images of lovers from classical mythology and medieval legend? Shakespeare never had to ask such questions of himself when he began to write *Romeo and Juliet,* but the response of the world audience to his play since that time has made them inevitable. No case has to be made for the continuing vitality of *Romeo and Juliet* Its stage history (outmatched only by *Hamlet's)* reveals a nearly unbroken chain of performances for more than three and a half centuries. It has inspired music, opera, ballet, literature, musical comedy, and film. Modern criticism, taking the play's impact for granted, attempts to elucidate some of the things that made Shakespeare's achievement possible (his source materials, his era's literary and dramatic conventions, and his own earlier writing, for example); to define the qualities of its structure and language; and to explore its relationships to Shakespeare's later tragedies. The results of this critical effort help us understand some of the answers to our opening questions, but not yet all. (p. 1)

It was common dramatic practice in Shakespeare's day to draw upon known history. legend, and story for the plot material of plays. Shakespeare did not have to invent the basic story of Romeo and Juliet. Nor did he have to invent a totally new kind of poetic language for handling the theme of love. Such a language lay at hand in contemporary love poetry. with its stock of characteristic metaphors, paradoxes, and conceits derived from Petrarch's famed Italian love poems. Neither was the combination of a lyrically developed love story and dramatic tragedy altogether novel, although it was far more common in the early Elizabethan theater to find love themes treated in comedy. Whatever hints were provided for Shakespeare by all these traditions he was able to refashion into something uniquely superior.

The story of Romeo and Juliet was already an old one when Shakespeare decided to dramatize it for the Elizabethan stage. There were at least half a dozen versions

circulating earlier in the century in Italy and France, and two of them had been adapted by English translators. Shakespeare apparently relied chiefly on Arthur Brooke's long poetic version, *The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet,* first published in 1562 and reissued twenty-five years later. (pp. 2-3)

Many modern readers of Shakespeare may be unaware of the immense difference between the ordinary verse of the Elizabethan age and Shakespearean poetry. They are likely to be even more unfamiliar with the usual quality of dramatic speech written for the developing Elizabethan stage. (pp. 3-4)

The lyricism of Shakespeare's play lifts it far above the stumbling verse of other Elizabethan playwrights, and places it closer to the more literary traditions of love poetry, especially to the flourishing cult of the sonnet. The verse in *Romeo and Juliet* borrows heavily from sonnet conventions of metaphor and feeling, but manages also, as critics never tire of pointing out, to move beyond the conventions to something still more impressive. When Romeo and Juliet at their first encounter share the lines of a sonnet, Shakespeare shows us how a poetic convention can take on entirely new life in a dramatic context.

There is new life as well in Shakespeare's approach to the subject of young love itself. When the Elizabethans wrote tragedies of love, they were likely to emphasize the more lustful and obsessive qualities of passion, aspects which Shakespeare also had taken up in his long poems *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594). The fashion in Italian tragedy, imitated both in France and in England, was to stress the mastery of the god Cupid, who was often portrayed as a malevolent, gloating tyrant. Some of this feeling filters into *Dido, Queen of Carthage,* the love tragedy written by Shakespeare's influential contemporary Christopher Marlowe. In *Dido* the heroine is more a victim than a celebrant of love, and the pattern of action stresses frustration and the pains of love denied or abandoned. The predominant strategy of Elizabethan dramatists was to present characters who were "love-crossed" rather than star-crossed. Their figures lack the sense of mutual dedication and individual purpose that inspires Romeo and Juliet. The love of Shakespeare's characters is conveyed with more compassion and innocence than can be found anywhere else in Renaissance drama.

Although Shakespeare's lovers are more idealized than those found either in Brooke's poem or in Elizabethan love tragedies, and although they speak with a language more lyrical than that of their counterparts in these earlier works, they never become ethereal fantasies. One major reason for this (and another distinguishing element in *Romeo and Juliet)* is the way in which passion and sentiment are modulated with both comic gusto and tragic irony. Mercutio and Juliet's Nurse, for example, are original comic developments of characters mentioned in the source story; in the play they not only become vital and amusing in themselves but also help to link the romance of Romeo and Juliet with an earthy sense of reality. On the tragic side, Shakespeare establishes thematic patterns of greater subtlety and paradox than the usual irony of "destructive passion"; his patterns suggest that even the virtues of loyalty, peace-making, and total personal dedication can unwittingly cooperate to bring about disaster.

Perhaps even more important is the way Shakespeare uses both comedy and tragedy to enhance each other in one play. His earlier *Titus Andronicus* had relied all too heavily on the sensationalistic devices of the neo-Senecan fashion in tragedy: wholesale slaughter, severed hands, rape, children's bodies cut up and served as part of their parents' meal. In *Romeo and Juliet,* thankfully, Shakespeare was trying something new. The tragic pattern he employed was imposed on materials, characters, and moods appropriate to comedy and romance: a comic nurse and clown, obstructing parents, duels of wit and parodic banter, the playful humor of hero and heroine. Shakespeare seems characteristically intent on stretching the range of tone usually assumed in early tragedy. He gives us not a comic play that somehow turns out tragically, but a more complex experience that weaves together intense, lyrically celebrated young love, vivacious and often bawdy wit, and the threatening, obstructive forces of ignorance, ill will, and chance-a combination which expresses the human impulse to affirm what is precious and beautiful in life in the very midst of a more pervasive hostility and baseness in the conditions and circumstances of life itself.

When compared with Shakespeare's later tragedies, the play may reveal a certain lack of profundity, a less far-reaching and momentous drive to open up the disturbing depths of human conduct and capacity. For some critics *Romeo and Juliet* is not yet "mature" tragedy; but we must remember that their norm is based on what Shakespeare himself did afterwards, not on what anyone in the Elizabethan theater had done earlier. It is perhaps fairer to say that the kind of tragic experience *Romeo and Juliet* offers us is different rather than immature, an experience less morally complex than others, but no less valid as an image of deeply moving aspects of our own awareness of life's promises and betrayals.

Poetic and Dramatic Language

If *Romeo and Juliet* marks Shakespeare's first original movement toward serious tragedy, it also marks a movement toward a dramatic language of increasing flexibility and expressiveness. The play shows the poet trying to integrate his skills of verse structure, rhyme, metaphor, and ingenious wordplay with dramatic skills of characterization through style of language and gesture, exposition through action as well as declamation, and imagery patterns that function to blind a diversified scenario into a unified thematic order. Shakespeare's work here displays a texture of marked formality, notable in the abundant rhyme, extended conceits, and above all in a wide range of "set pieces" among them Mercutio's Queen Mab passage, Friar Lawrence's sermons, Juliet's epithalamion [a song or poem written to celebrate a wedding], Paris's elegy, the sonnet shared by the lovers at their first meeting, and the *aubade* [a song of lovers parting at dawn] at their farewell. In patterning so much of the dialogue on these very literary models, Shakespeare was clearly stretching his medium to see what it could do. He was writing this play in the period that included the highly elaborated language of *Love's Labour's Lost,* the extended complaints of *Richard II,* the lavishly decorative erotic poems *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece,* and his own contribution to the sonnet-cycle fashion. In *Romeo and Juliet* we find Shakespeare's virtuosity with formal poetic language extended not only by the demands of dramatic context, but also by an awareness of how easily formality may slip into artificiality.

Shakespeare seems to have delighted in trying his hand at many different kinds of verbal play, but always with some tact about crossing the boundaries of what is truly acceptable. More than any other dramatist of the period, he is capable of inserting near-parodies of the conventional themes and devices he is exploiting. By such means he seems to remind his audience, as Juliet reminds Romeo: "Conceit [i.e., true understanding or invention], more rich in matter than in words, / Brags of his substance, not of ornament" "[II. vi. 30-1].

[Samuel Taylor] Coleridge was perhaps right when he claimed that in this play the poet had not yet "entirely blended" with the dramatist, implying that these elements of poetic formality do not always seem to work effectively in dramatic context. Samuel Johnson much earlier had complained that the characters were always left with a conceit [i.e., an elaborate parallel or metaphor] in their misery-"a miserable conceit"; and actors and actresses in every generation have had their problems with the labored lamentations of Juliet and Romeo in Act Three. Critics move from such examples of awkwardness (only awkwardly justified by the Elizabethan taste for that sort of thing), to matters of tired convention or excessively developed imagery, such as we find in Romeo's first speeches on love or Lady Capulet's comparison of Paris to a book. Here there is more room for argument that Shakespeare knew what he was doing in supplying the love-sick pup Romeo with the most familiar catalogue of Petrarchan oxymora [a combination of contradictory terms] ("O brawling love, O loving hate. . . . O heavy lightness, serious vanity, . . . Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health. . . . " [I. i. 176, 178, 180]), or giving Lady Capulet such artificially toned sentiments, or providing such a bathetic chorus of grief in the Capulet household when Juliet's "death" is discovered.

One can sense in the kind of language used at such points a corresponding emotional or imaginative immaturity in the character, a weakness which will help define later a strength or intensity somewhere else. In a play that works so well with contrasts in theme and mood, contrasts in language have a fit place.

Most critical skepticism disappears in response to the lyrical language of the balcony scene or of the farewell at dawn. Many playgoers know the purple passages from these scenes by heart, but what is often forgotten is the way Shakespeare has rendered his poetry effective by constructing the scene which contains it so that theatrical dimensions (setting. timing, entrances and exits. interplay between characters, etc.) provide the real foundation for the charm and power of the words. There is a "language" in the scenario itself, and in the sequence of actions and reactions within a given scene, which enables the poetic language to convey its maximum meaning and feeling. (pp. 4-8)

Structure

Critical commonplaces regarding the structure of *Romeo and Juliet* tend to emphasize a handful of its characteristics: the swift pace of the action, which Shakespeare compresses into a few days' duration dramatized in two dozen scenes, many of which center on sudden reversals and the need for quick decisions; the emphatic juxtaposition of comic characters and attitudes with foreboding and destructive situations; the heightening of the young lovers' purity of feeling by contrast both with the lustier

attitudes of the Nurse and Mercutio and with Romeo's studied infatuation with Rosaline; the more obvious contrasts between love and hate, youth and age, impetuous action and helpless wisdom; the efficiency and impact of the central reversal scene of Mercutio's death; and finally, for critics with allegiance to Aristotelian tragic formulas, the excessive reliance on sheer accident or chance in order to move the events toward a disaster which seems less inevitable than tragedy demands.

Qualities of pace and contrast are best sensed in performance, where it becomes clear how increasingly masterful Shakespeare's theatrical skill is becoming. He is able to convey more by the pace and proportion of action than he had been even in the violent early history plays. "Proportion" is perhaps a vague term, but it does cover the skill by which Shakespeare shapes his presentation of the lovers' destiny. We are never *directly* aware, for example, that Romeo and Juliet are actually together to share only 330 lines throughout the whole play, about one-ninth of the play's length; but that proportion helps nevertheless to accent the intensity and rarity of feeling embodied in their encounters, as well as to impress upon us the weight and complexity of the outside world's "doings" which obstruct the couple and aid in destroying them. (pp. 10-11)

The comic texture of the play is also kept under a fine control. Roughly one-sixth of the total dialogue can be called comic, and practically all of it is confined to that part of the play before Mercutio's death. It helps to build, even within the more threatening outlines of the family feud, a hearty atmosphere of comradeship, wit, gaiety and high spirits-an atmosphere which seems to hold out a promise for the budding love of Romeo and Juliet, but which turns out to be explosive. Each comic character or event is made to harbor an ironic counterthrust: the gaiety at the ball is marred by a vengeful Tybalt; the witty Mercutio harbors a fatal itch to fight; the sympathetic Nurse betrays her drastic lack of sensitivity when she urges Juliet to forget Romeo and marry Paris. The unifying symbol for these comic people and events, as well as for the lovers themselves and the bustling world about them, can be found in the Friar's osier cage: those flowers, plants, and weeds-some beautiful, many capable of both healing and destroying, all very natural and part of the mortal earth.

The earth that's nature's mother is her tomb;
What is her burying grave, that is her womb;
And from her womb children of divers kind
We sucking on her natural bosom find:
Many for many virtues excellent,
None but for some, and yet all different.
O mickle is the powerful grace that lies
In plants, herbs. stones, and their true qualities;
For nought so vile that on the earth doth live
But to the earth some special good doth give;
Nor aught so good but, strained from that fair use,
Revolts from true birth, stumbling on
abuse. Virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied.
And vice sometime by action dignified.
[II. iii. 9-22]

That comedy and tragedy lie down together in this play not only points up the reversal in mood that takes place with the killing of Mercutio and Tybalt, but illustrates again the inner paradox of our mortal nature.

Theme

I take that paradox, as stated by the Friar, to be at the heart of this play, and also a foreshadowing of a theme given further embodiment in Shakespeare's later tragedies. Others have suggested differing central themes for *Romeo and Juliet,* ranging from a literal insistence on the lovers' star-crossed fate, to a Freudian view of their experience as an embodiment of the death-wish; from a neo-orthodox-Elizabethan lesson in the dangers of passion, to a providential triumph of love over hate.

The reasons for such diversity are discoverable in the play, which seems to hold out a number of keys to interpretation. If we look only at the conclusion, with the reconciled parents and the promise of a golden monument, we may be inclined to see the mysterious ways of Providence working toward good. If we listen chiefly to the Friar's moral admonitions, rather than to his reflections on the natural condition cited above, we may agree that haste and lack of wise forethought bring about the disaster. If we catalogue all the tricks played by chance (particularly Friar John's undelivered message and the unhappy timing of arrivals and awakenings in the final scene), we may see it all as the workings of a hostile external Fate. Tragic theorists become disheartened at the lack of a more highly developed moral consciousness in the central figures and the corresponding lack of close cause-and-effect integration between such characterization and the destructive outcome. And students of Elizabethan piety (both familial and religious) are inclined to feel more harshly about Romeo and Juliet themselves than even Friar Lawrence does at his most chiding moments. The interpretive problem is a problem involving proportion and balance; a balanced view of the play must rest on an awareness of the delicate balance of its diverse elements. To emphasize one to the exclusion of the rest will not give us a theme worthy of the play's actual structure or the dramatic experience it yields in performance.

It is undeniable that the strategy of the play generates strong sympathy for the lovers, heightens their superiority in richness and purity of feeling, and awakens our compassion for their plight. It is also undeniable that Romeo in particular is both reckless and desperate at the wrong moments; partly because he is in love, partly because he is young, partly because he is the histrionic Romeo. By the end of the play Shakespeare makes more of a man of him than the miserable boy (of Act III) grovelling in tears on the Friar's floor, but he also gives him a cruel power with that added strength and determination: the slaying of Paris is the dramatic proof. The combination is deliberate: Shakespeare's sources contain neither the heightened sense of the lovers' innocence nor Paris's murder. The play does not prove that Romeo and Juliet should not have yielded to their love for one another, or disobeyed their parents. or been so quick to marry or to kill themselves. It does suggest that the flower of an innocent love, because of the earth in which it was planted, could foster its own destruction. Shakespeare hints at a natural disaster rather than a moral one, but his conclusion urges something beyond disaster: that such a destruction may in turn foster the

reconciliation of the elders who do not understand love. The beauty and harmony of the lovers does not die with them. (pp. 11-13)

The envy and aggressiveness that characterize the feud do not represent the total threat to the love of the central figures. The feud is always present as a dangerous obstructing condition; it is a reason for keeping things secret which if known would resolve many complications. But it is not of itself a villainous thing that destroys the lovers intentionally. To understand its limitations as an element in the whole balance is to realize that the play cannot be summed up as a conflict between the forces of young love and old hate. Tragic destruction results from a pattern which includes as well the unaccountable element of chance and the more pervading element of unawareness. So many incidents in the play exhibit people who do not know what they are really doing, people who are both agents and victims of an unthinking impetuosity.

The spectrum ranges from the vulgar servants of the opening scene through Mercutio's duel, Capulet's marriage-planning, the murder of Paris, to Romeo's suicide and the Friar's fear of being discovered at the tomb. Clearly this kind of unawareness leads to an irony-often associated with tragedy (although it is also a standard tool of the comedy writer who builds a complication out of interlocking misunderstandings), but in the context of Shakespeare's play it does more than heighten suspense and trigger an agonized "If only he knew!" audience reaction. It serves to impress upon us a basic condition of human interaction-our unconscious limitations in understanding the motives of others (and of ourselves), our ultimate helplessness in the face of the multiple possibilities of things going awry. Once this quality is fully felt, we cannot be content with condemning either stupidity or "rude will" as the basis of destructive evil. We are led once more to an insight or a perception of the mortal world which is broader than the strictly moral one: tragic destruction, though often the consequence of human decision, is beyond that an irremediable aspect of the natural world and man's limited consciousness. That perception is somewhat muted by Shakespeare's concluding reconciliation, but because it is grounded in the conditions of human interaction in the play, it cannot be an element totally "resolved" by this or any other kind of ending.

Fate and Coincidence

Two final problems related to this quality or insight remain. One is the problem of Fate. The other is the feeling that *Romeo and Juliet* lacks tragic inevitability precisely because so much of the action turns on ignorance that might have been remedied and on sheer mistiming. The prologue, the foreboding dreams and intimations of death, and the futility of the elaborately planned attempts to restore Romeo and Juliet to one another all tend to stress that the destiny of the lovers is fated. Each move that they make toward each other is matched by some counterthrust; and though there is no villain or human agent behind the opposition, some readers have felt that Fate itself takes on the quality of a destructive agent, moving events and characters in cruel combination to produce the disastrous outcome. Romeo may want to defy the stars, but in that very defiance he is unwittingly cooperating in his own doom. The trouble with this interpretation again lies in what it must leave out or ignore. If we are to judge the reconciling conclusion of the playas inappropriate to the major design of the tragedy, as a last-minute excrescence

that does not fit well with earlier motifs, then perhaps we may rest content with the vision of inimical Fate. But if we see the ending as purposeful, and as an evocation of the paradoxical good that can spring from a lamented destruction, the simple view of Fate will not satisfy. Nor can we ignore what Shakespeare characteristically stresses in all his tragic drama: the connections between the character of men and the disaster that may befall them. In this case, we have only to recall the care Shakespeare has taken to show us Romeo in an unheroic and desperate hysteria after he has killed Tybalt: a scene frequently embarrassing to actors but nevertheless integral to the play. It shows us the emotional proclivity in Romeo without which the external misfortunes and mischances would not have culminated in his death. If Shakespeare had wanted to put full strength into the Fate motif, he could also have employed such allegorical devices as had appeared in the contemporary play *Soliman and Perseda* [by Thomas Kidd], in which choral figures called Love, Death, and Fortune debate the relative power of their influence on the human lives in the story. The personification of a hostile Fate or Fortune was a fashionable convention in the neo-Senecan tragedy of the Elizabethans; the theme was equally conventional. In *Romeo and Juliet,* however, Shakespeare was moving in another direction. His developing vision of a tragic universe was not to be defined by hostile fatality, but by a paradoxical and all too precarious balance of good and evil. (pp. 14-16)

Time is the enemy even more than chance; it presses in upon the lovers in countless ways-the dawn brings the threat of discovery; a bare second enables the envious sword of Tybalt to fell Mercutio; the marriage date foreshortened by a capricious Capulet demands swift counterplans and decisions, which bring, in turn, disaster. The fast paced world that Shakespeare builds up around his characters allows little possibility for adherence to Friar Lawrence's counsel of "Wisely and slow" [II. iii. 94]. In such a world to stumble tragically is surely no less inevitable than it is for Lear to go mad in the face of human ingratitude. In a vivid performance of the play, things happen so swiftly and suddenly that issues of probability hardly arise. Add the fact that the *emotions* behind the catastrophe have been made probable, and we readily see why we do not look upon the death of Romeo and Juliet as merely a terrible accident.

It is possible to step back from the immediate emotional grip of *Romeo and Juliet* and discover that we have somehow been taken in, that the swiftly moving world of sudden love and sudden death has been arbitrarily contrived, that the mechanism of the plot and the ingenious conceits of the language display a rather self-conscious artistry. At this second level of response, we may become aware that, for all its virtues, the play does not exhibit the power, range, and deeply probing qualities of *Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth* or *Lear.* Its reflective, philosophical dimensions are confined rather tightly to a few discourses by Friar Lawrence, where they remain detached from the emotional intensity of the chief characters; in *Hamlet* and *Lear* those who question the dignity of man and the nature of the gods are those who also suffer the greatest torments. *Romeo and Juliet* is surely a more honest expression of human tragedy than the grotesque *Titus Andronicus* or the melodramatic *Richard III,,* but it has not yet found the most potent articulation for the paradox of good and evil in the natural world. If we feel finally that the play is not *major* tragedy, it is for such reasons rather than for defects in

probability. A moving and compassionate expression of intense and vital passions, it bums with a flame more luminous than searing.

To a certain extent, it cannot do otherwise, granted its subject. As a close-up study of a breath-taking young love, it has little time or place for the probing inner conflicts of Shakespeare's more mature and deeply disillusioned characters. Indeed, one of the marks of the lovers' innocence is that they remain untouched by the experience of disillusionment, the experience that sounds the bass note of tragic anxiety from *Julius Caesar* on and echoes throughout Shakespeare's so-called "problem plays" and later romances as well. Romeo and Juliet are all in all to one another; the radiance of their shared love illumines them with glowing beauty, but casts little light on the world around them. Their experience, and ours as an audience, is thus intense but circumscribed. Shakespeare's structure of contrasts and paradoxes sets off that experience in a rich and colorful design, but he does not choose to emphasize in it the more disturbing deeper shadows that he was soon to explore with such comprehension. Here he was content to temper extremities with extreme sweet, and in view now of the world's reaction to his play who is to say he chose wrongly? (pp. 16-18)

Douglas Cole, in an introduction to Twentieth Century Interpretations of Romeo and Juliet: A Collection of Critical Essays, *edited by Douglas Cole, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970, pp.* 1-18.

Critical Essay #2

[Dickey asserts that fate, divine will, and the lovers' passion are inseparably linked in Romeo and Juliet, *and all of these agents contribute to the catastrophe. According to the crit* ic, *the work is "a carefully wrought tragedy which balances hatred against love and which makes fortune the agent of divine justice without absolving anyone from his responsibility for the tragic conclusion.* " *In this sense, Dickey contends,* Romeo and Juliet *reflects the Elizabethan concept of moral responsibility, a tenet which stressed that all sinners must endure the punishment of God, whose will is carried out through the operation of fate.]*

Romeo and Juliet, above everything a play of love, is also a play of hatred and of the mysterious ways of fortune. Although love in the first part of the play amuses us, in the end we pity the unhappy fate of young lovers, a fate which critics find embarrassingly fortuitous or, in the Aristotelian sense, unnecessary, the accident of chance to which all human life is subject. Despite the compelling poetry of the play and Shakespeare's skill at creating the illusion of tragedy, the play is said to succeed "by a trick." Whereas Aristotle demanded a "glimpse into the nature of things" beyond theatrical sensationalism and required of tragedy "an overwhelming sense of inevitability," Romeo and Juliet die, critics often tell us, only as the result of a series of mistakes and misunderstandings. In this light the lovers' death is pathetic rather than really tragic.

Critics are also embarrassed by Shakespeare's paradoxical treatment of the three great themes of the tragedy. On the one hand it can be demonstrated that the catastrophe develops from faults of character: Romeo's impetuous nature leads him to despair and die. On the other hand the text also gives us reason to believe that the love of Romeo and Juliet comes to a terrible end because of the hatred between the two families. And yet a third view makes fate the main cause of the final disaster: Romeo and Juliet had to die because they were "star-cross'd."

The seeming conflict of these themes and the division among critics has given support to the belief that Shakespeare reveals no consistently moral view of the universe in this tragedy but gives us a slice of life without comment, standing apart from the great guiding ethos which dominates both Tudor philosophy and literary criticism. If the play has any final meaning it is to be found in the passionate rhetoric of love with which Shakespeare expresses his own youthful ardor.

Against these prevailing views. . . [I] propose that *Romeo and Juliet* is a true mirror of the Elizabethan concept of a moral universe although Shakespeare does not preach morality. Judged by Elizabethan standards, the play is not merely a gorgeous and entertaining melodrama but a carefully wrought tragedy which balances hatred against love and which makes fortune the agent of divine justice without absolving anyone from his responsibility for the tragic conclusion. Unlike his source Shakespeare attempts a solution to the problem of evil by fitting the power of fortune into the scheme of universal order. Although Shakespeare's viewpoint is not Greek, Romeo. . . is an agent of God's justice but remains responsible for his own doom. (pp. 63-64)

One of the most solid features in the unchanging ground of Shakespeare is the belief in a just Providence. Mysterious as the ways of this Providence are, the pattern remains visible. Although the innocent suffer, the guilty are always punished. Not fate but the corrupt will makes men the agents of their own destruction. . . .

There is no blind fate in Shakespearean tragedy nor in the Elizabethan universe. Behind what looked like chance stood God in control of his creation. Fortune was a figure of speech devised by men to explain the inexplicable operations of the Deity. (p. 91). .

[A] belief in individual responsibility forms the philosophical background of mature Elizabethan tragedy. The Renaissance God used fortune as the instrument of his vengeance. In Shakespeare the wayward passions of men subject them to the whims of fate. Thus Hamlet, praising Horatio. equates fortune and the will:

blest are those
Whose blood and judgement are so well commingled,
That they are not a pipe for Fortune's finger
To sound what stop she please. Give me that man
That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him
In my heart's core. . .
[Hamlet, III. ii. 68-73]

While viewing drama, especially *Romeo and Juliet,* we often respond passionately as the doomed heroes respond, and this is, as critics have always known, one of the secrets of tragic catharsis. But beneath these passions the ground bass of an unshakable system continues to move, adding harmonies which we who have rejected that ethic no longer hear. Tragic tension results from the contest between human passion and will which work with and against fate in the elaborate Elizabethan harmony.

This *condition humaine* [human condition] helps to explain what otherwise are glaring faults in the progress of *Romeo and Juliet* Shakespeare has promised us at the very beginning that we are to see a pair of star-crossed lovers. Romeo himself first dreads the influence of the stars and then curses them for his misfortune. Both he and Juliet have forebodings of the sorrow to come. Again and again the characters gropingly predict the course of the future. Accident and coincidence add to our feeling that blind fate dominates the action.

But to offset this feeling Shakespeare has provided two commentators to remind us that the terrible things we have seen are all the work of divine justice. When Friar Laurence cries,

A greater power than we can contradict
Hath thwarted our intents. . .
[V. iii. 153-54]

it seems most natural to suppose that the holy Friar is invoking God rather than blind fate, for he has denied that fate is the cause of Romeo's wretchedness. Earlier he has warned frantic Romeo that his fortune depended upon his own virtue and moderation,

that the man who flies in the face of fortune is to blame for his own misery. "Why rail'st thou," he asks Romeo after Tybalt's death,

Since birth, and heaven, and earth, all
three do meet
In thee at once, which thou at once
wouldst lose.
Fie, fie. . .
A pack of blessings light upon thy back;
Happiness courts thee in her best array;
But, like a misbehav'd and sullen wench,
Thou pout'st upon thy fortune and thy love.
Take heed, take heed, for such die miserable.
[III. iii. 119-22, 141-45]

And when he discovers Juliet in the tomb, we learn that he has begged her to come forth

And bear this work of heaven with patience.
[V. iii. 261]

According to the Friar Romeo's actions must determine his ultimate felicity or doom, and yet at the end he finds Romeo's death to be the "work of heaven." It would seem that. . . the Friar does not dissociate human actions and the power of fortune which represents God's will.

The second commentator Shakespeare gives us to point up the meaning of the tragedy is Prince Escalus, who at the ending of the play and at the point of greatest emphasis, sums up the significance of all that has happened:

See, what a scourge is laid upon your hate,
That Heaven finds means to kill your joys
with love.
[V. iii. 292-93]

After hearing these words and contemplating the evenhanded justice which has leveled parent with parent, child with child, and friend with friend, would not the audience sensitive to providential fortune and its use in tragedy understand without any tedious explication that fortune has operated here to punish sin and that this avenging fortune is the work of heaven? Such an audience would not have stuck at applying pitiful Rosamond's words to the lovers [in Samuel Daniel's *The Complaint of Rosamond*],

fate is not prevented, though fore known,
For that must hap, decreed by heavenly powers
Who work our fall yet make the fault still ours.

In *Romeo and Juliet* then fortune may be considered not the prime mover but the agent of a higher power. If fortune is not the independent cause of the catastrophe, then we

must look behind fortune for the actions which set it in motion. Friar Laurence warns Romeo that his own folly in love will doom him. Prince Escalus, speaking as chorus, attributes the tragedy to hate. Both are right, for it is the collision of these passions which dooms the lovers.

Of these two forces love overshadows the other dramatically, since it is the passion of the protagonists and since Shakespeare has lavished his most moving poetry upon the love scenes. But the fact remains that this is not a play centered on one passion but a play of carefully opposed passions. The prologue informs us that we are to see a drama of love and hate. Hatred is the first passion to threaten tragedy in the comic opening of the play; hatred brings about the actual climax of the action, Mercutio's death; and hatred is the theme which Shakespeare introduces with love at the end of the play to explain the workings of fate.

The theme of hatred involves more than the opposition of two private families; because of the street brawls, because of the murderous intrigues of the two opposed parties, it involves the whole state. Romeo and Juliet, whose love would unite the two houses, are forced apart by the quarrel which they seek to avoid. Thus the love story in the play, as in *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Troilus and Cressida,* is more than a tale of love, and the problems of the play are not only ethical but in the broadest sense political. (pp. 92-5)

Thus although our main interest is in Shakespeare's handling of love, we must also inquire into Shakespeare's use of the complementary theme of hatred. *Romeo and Juliet* is built about two passions traditionally opposed, and the interweaving of these two themes, like the ambiguous balance between comedy and tragedy, adds to the peculiar irony which pervades the play. (p. 96)

The full power of hatred comes out in Escalus's speech which sums up the meaning of the action. He calls the miserable fathers from the crowd:

Capulet! Montague!
See, what a scourge is laid upon your hate,
That Heaven finds means to kill your joys
with love.
And I for winking at your discords too
Have lost a brace of kinsmen. All are punish'd.
[V. iii. 291-95]

This speech does not make sense unless we take into account the close interaction of fate, hatred, and love in the play.

Escalus's gloomy judgments give us a true criticism of the whole tragedy. The phrase "your joys" must refer to the lovers, the hope of each of the two warring houses. Their death through love is the punishment of heaven, working through fate, upon the families who have carried on the feud. (p. 100)

When we look back over the course of hatred, we see the truth of Escalus's sentence, "All are punish'd." Fate has worked to produce an evenhanded justice. The force of

Mercutio's dying imprecation on the houses appears at the end of the tragedy in the mysterious death of Lady Montague on the night of her son's suicide. Her death, Shakespeare's addition to his source as are the deaths of Paris and Mercutio, evens the score between the families. Partisan pays for partisan and kinsman for kinsman. Just as love holds families and nations and indeed the whole universe together, so hatred breaks up families, destroys commonwealths, and, represented by Satan, constantly works to unframe God's whole handiwork. It is precise and ironical justice that quenches the one passion by means of its opposite. *Romeo and Juliet,* no less than Shakespeare's mature tragedies, celebrates the great vision of order by which the English Renaissance still lives. (p. 101)

The play is uniquely constructed in that the same passions which make us tearful or indignant before the action ends, do amuse us with little interruption for almost half the acting time. Even the events leading up to Mercutio's death promise comedy rather than tragedy, and it must have startled the first audience to see laughter so quickly turn to mourning. Yet the play is an exceptionally powerful tragedy, even if it sometimes embarrasses critics. Where the first half delights us with love comedy, the last three short acts explore the tragic potentialities of young love. Fortune and hatred threaten to turn the lovers' bliss to ashes, but the immediate cause of their unhappy deaths is Romeo's headlong fury and blind despair. Thus in both the beginning of the play and at the end Shakespeare's view of love remains sound philosophically and dramatically. (p. 102)

Throughout *Romeo and Juliet* Romeo is precipitate in love. Juliet, who loves as faithfully, is much less subject to the gusts of passion which blind Romeo. Romeo never examines the consequence of his actions, but Juliet fears that their love may be "too rash, too unadvis'd, too sudden" [II. ii. 118]. Romeo never shares Juliet's insight. After they have pledged love at Juliet's window, his only concern is that the love he feels seems too delightful to be true. It is Juliet not Romeo who thinks practically of arranging for marriage and who remembers to ask what time she is to send her messenger in the morning.

On Romeo's inability to control either his passionate love or his passionate grief, his death and Juliet's depend. The boundless love which Romeo felt at the sight of Juliet turns as suddenly to despair, just as any well-versed Renaissance philosopher might have predicted, for the man in the grip of one passion was easily swayed by another. (pp. 105-06)

Romeo therefore is a tragic hero like Othello in that he is responsible for his own chain of passionate actions. When we first see him he is already stricken with love. This first love is comic, but nevertheless it is a real attack of the sickness of love, as his father makes clear when he complains that Romeo's humor will turn "Black and portentous" [1. i.141] unless checked.

Since the man stricken with passion could not readily defend himself against new onslaughts of passion, Romeo's sudden passionate about-face when he sees Juliet would have seemed realistic to an Elizabethan audience. Romeo's transports for Juliet

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differ from his first melancholy because she returns his affection. For a time he is cured and conducts himself so reasonably that even Mercutio comments on the change in his temper.

But with Mercutio's death Romeo casts aside all reason and begins a chain of passionate action which leads to death. Rejecting the reasonable conduct with which he had first answered his enemy, he attacks and kills Tybalt. It would certainly have spoiled the play for Romeo to have waited for the law to punish Tybalt, but the fact remains that this reasonable action would have turned tragedy into comedy. In this choice between reasonable and passionate action lies one great difference between the genres. Forgiveness produces the happy ending of comedy; revenge produces the catastrophe of tragedy.

Romeo's next passionate mistake is to fall into frantic despair after the Prince sentences him to banishment. When Romeo cries out against his lot, Friar Laurence, the consistent voice of moderation and wisdom, warns him that he is truly unfortunate only in giving way to uncontrolled grief.

The next step in Romeo's march to destruction is his sudden and complete despair when he learns that Juliet is dead. The direct result of Romeo's frenzied desire to kill himself is his killing of Paris, an incident which Shakespeare adds, like the death of Lady Montague and the death of Mercutio, to his source. Thus Brooke's

Romeus dies with less on his conscience than does Shakespeare's hero. In Brooke Romeus kills Tybalt only to save his own life, not to revenge a friend, and at the end of the play dies guiltless of any additional blood save his own. In our play, however, Shakespeare is careful to make Romeo guilty of sinful action under the influence of passion, while at the same time making us sympathize with Romeo's agonies of despair. In his encounter with Paris Romeo announces both his own mad desperation and the fact that in bringing the chain of passionate folly to its close, he puts one more sin upon his head.

Romeo's last passion-blinded act is to kill himself just before Juliet awakes, and her suicide may be thought of as the direct result of his. Although Shakespeare does not preach, the Elizabethan audience would have realized that in his fury Romeo has committed the ultimate sin. (pp. 114-16)

[The] tragedy of Romeo and Juliet is a true tragedy, preserving the ambiguous feelings of pity and terror-which produce catharsis. Romeo remains a free agent even though he scarce knows what he does. Those who allowed passion to carry reason headlong were guilty of the very fault that Elizabethan ethics were designed to prevent. It is exactly because love could unseat the reason that few men who loved excessively could look forward to a virtuous life and a happy death. (p. 116)

Does this mean that. . . the spectators in [Shakespeare's] day, or that Shakespeare himself, looked upon the playas an edifying lesson in how not to conduct oneself in love? I hardly think so. The pattern of the action, given shape by Friar Laurence's

warnings, Mercutio's satiric ebullience, and the Prince's scattered judgments, revolves around two of the most attractive young lovers in all literature. But the patterns of moral responsibility are necessary to give the action its perspective, and it is these patterns of the destructive as well as the creative force of love and the dependence of fate upon the passionate will which most contemporary criticism neglects or denies. We, who have moved so far from Shakespeare's world, need to be reminded of these things. They would have touched his audience far more deeply than they touch us today. (p. 117)

Franklin M. Dickey, in his Not Wisely but Too Well: Shakespeare's Love Tragedies, *The Huntington Library,* 1957, 161p.

Critical Essay #3

[Eckhoff maintains that Romeo's and Juliet's tragic deaths result from their own impulsive ness. The critic then provides several examples from the play to substantiate this claim.]

Romeo and Juliet are in a precarious situation, like two children playing with fire near a barrel of gunpowder. They should be careful, prudent, mindful of the future, but they are all too prone to be the very opposite. They are too strongly infected with the hectic spirit of Verona, they have the hot blood and the hot temper of their race. They are like two flames which merge into one.

Romeo is lyrical, ecstatic, a man who approves of his emotions and revels in them, goes in search of them, exaggerates them almost. He is what we should call one of Love's lovers. He allows his feelings to direct his actions, as he proves, when despite his many forebodings about a premature death, he sets off for the feast at Capulet's house:

But he, that hath the steerage of my course,
Direct my sail! On, lusty gentlemen.
[I. iv. 112-13]

At the beginning of the play we hear that he is in love with Rosaline, but this love affair is not really to be taken seriously, it is. . . something he has invented, or possibly imagined. At any rate we find it difficult to believe in it. He speaks in outworn antitheses and forced, artificial similes. The truest word he speaks about it is the very passage which shows how airy and artificial it is.

Love is a smoke raised with the fume of sighs. . . .
[I. i. 190]

Romeo is the born lover who has not yet found the real object of his affections, and is wandering about, conscious or unconscious of the fact, looking for it.

In Juliet's eyes Romeo is not only the lover but the liberator. She is only fourteen years old, but she has been waiting for him even before she meets him. She has yearned to get away from a house which is no home, merely an uncongenial place of residence, sometimes almost a prison. She has no one to love, there is no human being with whom she has any intimate contact, neither her nurse. whose broad remarks and stories make no impression on her, nor her subdued mother, nor her hot-tempered father, jovial, fond of festive occasions and brutal to boot, a domestic tyrant, who is convinced that it is the child's duty to love and the parent's duty to command; a father who threatens her with chastisement and expulsion, if she refuses to obey his orders on the instant.

Juliet has preserved all the tenderness of her feelings, and has learnt to conceal those feelings when occasion demands. She is beautiful and wise, courageous and quick to act-admirably equipped, in fact, to play the role which circumstances force her to adopt.

Romeo and Juliet are made for one another, dearer to one another than life itself, and instinctively know this the very moment they meet. They are carried away by the force of fate, they burn and glow with a new intensity, every moment they are tensed and proved to the uttermost of their beings, and in the course of a few summer days they blossom and develop from callow youth to the maturity of man and woman, to an all-conquering and all-besetting passion.

Their very words become music, poetry, fancy. As scholars are quick to remind us, the first words they exchange are in the form of a sonnet, and Juliet's soliloquy on the eve of her bridal night is a nuptial hymn, while their conversation the next morning is a hymn to dawn, an *aubade.* Their life, pulsing hotly, beats to a hectic rhythm. Practically every word Juliet utters in the balcony scene marks a step forward, an action, a decision. She is brisk, and anxious at the dizzy whirl of events:

Dost thou love me? I know thou wilt say
"Ay"... . In truth, fair Montague, I am too fond, And therefore thou mayst think my haviour light:
But trust me, gentleman, I'll prove more true
Than those that have more cunning to be strange. . . .
Well, do not swear. Although I joy in thee,
I have no joy of this contract to-night:
It is too rash, too unadvis'd. too sudden;
Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be
Ere one can say "It lightens". Sweet, good night!
This bud of love. by summer's ripening breath,
May prove a beauteous flower when next we meet.
Good-night, good-night!
[II. ii. 90, 98-101, 116-23]

She is impatient when she is waiting for the nurse to return with an answer from Romeo, and for that reason a highly comic effect is achieved by the irritatingly dilatory manner of the nurse, and the stream of irrelevancies with which she crams her reply. She is more impatient still before the bridal night, as she waits for Romeo:

Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds,
Towards Phoebus' lodging. such a waggoner
As Phaeton would whip you to the west,

And bring in cloudy night immediately.
Spread thy close curtain, love-performing
night!
That rude day's eyes may wink, and
Romeo
Leap to these arms, untalk'd of and unseen!
Lovers can see to do their amorous rites
By their own beauties; or, if love be blind,
It best agrees with night. Come, civil night,
Thou sober-suited matron, all in black,
And learn me how to lose a winning
match,
Play'd for a pair of stainless maidenhoods:
Hood my unman'd blood, bating in my
cheeks,
With thy black mantle; till strange love,
grown bold,
Think true love acted simple modesty.
Come, night! come, Romeo! Come, thou
day in night!
For thou wilt lie upon the wings of night,
Whiter than new snow on a raven's back.
Come, gentle night; come, loving, black
brow'd night.
Give me my Romeo!
[iii. ii. 1-21]

Friar Laurence, who is most likely the poet's mouthpiece, tries in vain to brake the headlong speed:

Romeo:
a! let us hence; I stand on sudden haste.
Friar Laurence:
Wisely and slow; they stumble that run
fast.
[II. iii. 93-4]
Friar Laurence:
These violent delights have violent ends.
And in their triumph die, like fire and
powder,
Which, as they kiss, consume: the sweetest honey
Is loathsome in his own deliciousness
And in the taste confounds the appetite:
Therefore love moderately; long love doth
so.
[II. vi. 9-14]

Romeo too tries to check his ardour. As we have seen, he refuses to fight with Tybalt, and when Mercutio is wounded he is at first calm, and hopes the wound is slight:

Courage, man; the hurt cannot be much.
[III. i. 95]

But when Benvolio returns, and tells him of Mercutio's death, and Tybalt returns in triumph, there is an end to Romeo's patience, and his wrath floods his being, like a river that has broken its banks. It is worth noticing how he approves his own wrath:

Benvolio:
Here comes the furious Tybalt back again.
Romeo:
Alive! in triumph! and Mercutio slain!
Away to heaven, respective lenity.
And fire-ey'd fury be my conduct now!
Now, Tybalt, take the villain back again
That late thou gav'st me; for Mercutio's
soul
Is but a little way above our heads,
Staying for thine to keep him company:
Either thou, or I, or both, must go with
him.
[III. i. 121-29]

Once again the mood of the moment runs away with him. When he hears, after Tybalt's death, that Juliet calls his name and Tybalt's in her despair at what has occurred, he exclaims to Friar Laurence:

a! tell me, friar, tell me,
In what vile part of this anatomy
Doth my name lodge? tell me, that I may
sack
The hateful mansion.
[III. iii. 105-08]

And once again he draws his sword; but this time his impetuosity provokes Friar Laurence's wrath in the shape of a sharp rebuke.

Hold thy desperate hand:
Art thou a man? thy form cries out thou
art: >
Thy tears are womanish; thy wild acts de
note
The unreasonable fury of a beast:
Unseemly woman in a seeming man;
Or ill-beseeming beast in seeming both!

Thou hast amaz'd me. . . .
[III. iii. 108-14]

There is a break of a day and a half between Act III and Act V, but in the course of those forty odd hours Romeo has aged many years. Reverie has gone and given place to grim determination. There is a crude vigour in his words to the apothecary who sells him the poison, and even more so in the last scene by the vault in the graveyard, when he sends the servant away:

. . . therefore hence, be gone:
But, if thou, jealous, dost return to Pry
In what I further shall intend to do,
By heaven, I will tear thee joint by joint,
And strew this hungry churchyard with
thy limbs.
The time and my intents are savage-wild,
More fierce and more inexorable far
Than empty tigers or the roaring sea.
(V. iii. 32-9]

And again when he opens the tomb, and bids Paris retire:

I must (die); and therefore came I hither.
Good gentle youth, tempt not a desperate
man;
Fly hence and leave me: think upon these
gone;
Let them affright thee. I beseech thee,
youth, Put not another sin upon my head
By urging me to fury: a! be gone. . . .
(V. iii. 58-63]

Romeo and Juliet are in a hurry even when it comes to dying. There is no shadow of doubt in their souls that they would rather die than live apart. But had Romeo been in less hurry to die, he would have found a living Juliet.

We may be sure that Shakespeare loved Romeo and Juliet and their love as much as we do, but it is just as certain that he wished to warn young people in his very discreet way not to follow their example. (pp. 51-6)

Lorentz Eckhoff, "Passion, " in his Shakespeare: Spokesman of the Third Estate, *translated by R. I. Christophersen, Akademisk Verlag,* 1954, pp. 4886.

Critical Essay #4

[Ribner provides a Christian interpretation of Romeo and Juliet *in which he contends that the lovers' deaths are ordained by God to reconcile the feuding families. The critic notes how Shakespeare altered the play into something more meaningful than both a traditional Senecan tragedy, where arbitrary destiny causes the catastrophe, and a tragedy of character, in which the lovers are punished for their reckless passion (the term Senecan tragedy derives from the Roman statesman and philosopher Seneca, who in the first century A. D. wrote a number of violent, catastrophic dramas that later became models for Renaissance tragedy. According to Ribner, Romeo and Juliet mature as they experience evil, ultimately realizing that the world is in fact ruled by a benevolent God. Further, the lovers' suicides reflect their acceptance of death, resulting in the restoration of order and a "rebirth of love" in Verona.]*

Critics have usually regarded Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* as a Senecan tragedy of in exorable fate; some have emphasized the sinfulness of the young lovers. We cannot deny the role of fate and accident in Shakespeare's play; it is established in the prologue and it runs as a constant theme through all five acts. We would not expect this to be otherwise, for this was the formula with which Shakespeare began. But Shakespeare's play is far more than a tragedy of fate. It is, moreover, not at all a story of just deserts visited upon young sinners, although some critics have found it so. The fate that destroys Romeo and Juliet is not an arbitrary, capricious force any more than it is the inexorable agent of nemesis, which in Senecan tragedy executed retribution for sin. Shakespeare's play is cast in a more profoundly Christian context. . . ; the "greater power than we can contradict" [V. iii. 153] is divine providence, guiding the affairs of men in accordance with a plan which is merciful as well as just. Out of the evil of the family feud-a corruption of God's harmonious order-must come a rebirth of Iove. and the lives of Romeo and Juliet are directed and controlled so that by their deaths the social order will be cleansed and restored to harmony. Shakespeare uses the story of the lovers to explore the operation of divine providence, the meaning of a fate which in the ordinary affairs of life will sometimes frustrate our most careful plans. . . . It is in Shakespeare's departure from the Senecan tradition he inherited that the particular significance of *Romeo and Juliet* as tragedy lies. Here we see him groping for a tragic design to embody a view of life far more significant and meaningful than what the Senecan stereotypes could afford. (pp. 273-74)

In [the] emphasis upon youth which runs throughout Shakespeare's play, but which is not so evident in his source, we may find a clue to the philosophical pattern Shakespeare imposed upon Senecan tradition. Romeo and Juliet are children born into a world already full of an ancient evil not of their own making. The feud is emphasized in the opening lines of the prologue, and in the opening scene of the play-before either hero or heroine is introduced-the feud is portrayed in all its ramifications, corrupting the social order from the lowliest serving man up to the prince himself, for just as it breeds household rancor. it disturbs also the very government of Verona.

There is a universality in this situation. Romeo and Juliet epitomize the role in life of all men and women, for every being who is born, as the Renais sance saw it, is born into a world in which evil waits to destroy him, and he marches steadily towards an inexorable death. It is a world, moreover, in which his plans, no matter how virtuous, may always be frustrated by accident and by the caprice of a seemingly malignant fate. It is this universality that gives the play its stature as tragedy, for Romeo and Juliet in a sense become prototypes of every man and every woman. They attempt to find happiness in a world full of evil, to destroy evil by means of love, for with Friar Lawrence they see their marriage as the termination of the feud, but evil in the world cannot be destroyed; their fate cannot be escaped, and thus, like all men and women, they suffer and die. This is the life journey of all, but Shakespeare's play asserts that man need not despair, for he is a creature of reason with the grace of God to guide him, and through his encounter with evil he may learn the nature of evil and discover what it means to be a man. The ultimate message of Renaissance tragedy is that through suffering man grows and matures until he is able to meet his necessary fate with a calm acceptance of the will of God. The tragic vision and the religious vision spring ultimately out of the same human needs and aspirations.

Shakespeare saw in the legend of Romeo and Juliet a story which illustrated neither retribution for sin nor the working out of a blind inexorable Senecan fatalism. He saw a story that might be used to portray the maturation of youth through suffering and death. *Romeo and Juliet* may thus be called an "education" play, drawing upon the established morality tradition of such plays as *Nice Wanton* and *Lusty Juventus.* Romeo and Juliet learn the fundamental lessons of tragedy; the meaning of human life and death. Their education can culminate only in death and then rebirth in a world in which evil has no place. We can thus see Shakespeare in this play combining a story already cast for him in Senecan mold with a quite alien medieval dramatic tradition, which in its origins was based upon peculiarly Christian assumptions.

Romeo and Juliet are foolish, of course. They are hasty and precipitous and they make many mistakes. but to speak of a "tragic flaw" in either of them is to lead to endless absurdity. The impetuosity, haste. and carelessness of the lovers are the universal attributes of youth. Their shortcomings are what make them the ordinary representatives of humanity that this type of play must have as its tragic protagonists. Their errors, moreover, are all committed with a virtuous end in view, the same end that leads the wise and mature Friar Lawrence to marry them in spite of the dangers he sees both to them and to his own position. Unlike a later Othello or Macbeth, they are guilty of no deliberate choice of evil.

Both Romeo and Juliet mature greatly as the play unfolds, but to demonstrate the particular progress of the human life jOurney, Shakespeare concentrates upon Romeo. The exigencies of dramarequired that he concentrate upon one figure, and Romeo, of course, was the natural one. The Renaissance generally held that woman's powers of reason were somewhat less than those of man, and the design of the play called for a free-willed rational acceptance of the Christian stoic view of life to which Romeo comes at the end of the play.

How can a man live in a world in which evil lurks on every side and in which the inevitable end of all man's worldly aspirations must be death, a world in which the cold necessity of Fortune cannot be avoided? The Renaissance had a very simple answer which it carried over from the consolation philosophy of the Middle Ages, itself a Christian adaptation of the classical creed of Stoicism. Good and evil are in the world together, but the entire universe is ruled by a benevolent God whose plan is deliberate, meaningful, and ultimately good. The paradox of the fortunate fall taught that evil itself contributed to this ultimate good. Man, bearing the burden of original sin, had evil within him. but as the chosen creature of God, he had good also. When the evil within him predominated he was ruled by passion, but he had the gift of reason, which by proper exercise could always keep passion under control. Reason, of course, lay in an acceptance of the will of God. This central core of Renaissance belief is perfectly expressed by Friar Lawrence:

For naught so vile that on the earth doth
live
But to the earth some special good doth
give,
Nor aught so good but, strain'd from that
fair use
Revolts from true birth. stumbling on
abuse:...
Two such opposed kings encamp them
still
In man as well as herbs. grace and rude
will; And where the worser is predominant.
Full soon the canker death eats up that
plant.
[II. iii. 17-20. 27-30]

Grace, of course, is reason, and rude will is passion. Man can live happily in the world if he allows his reason to guide his actions. to show him that the plan of the world essentially is good and just and that evil itself is designed to further the ends of a divine providence. With reason thus guiding him, man can become impervious to the blows of Fortune. He will accept his fate, whatever it may be, as contributing to a divine purpose beyond his comprehension but ultimately good and just. Through his encounter with evil Romeo learns to accept his fate in just such a manner.

We first meet Romeo as a lovesick boy assuming the conventional role of the melancholy lover, playing a game of courting a Capulet girl who he knows can never accede to his suit. We may well believe that it is because Rosaline is a Capulet that Romeo pursues her, and that because she knows the basic insincerity of his suit, she spurns him with her supposed vows of chastity. This is the boy Romeo, not yet ready to face the responsibilities of life, unaware of the real sorrows that are the lot of man, but playing with a make-believe sorrow that he enjoys to the fullest. We usually think that at his first sight of Juliet he abandons this childish pose and experiences true love. This may be so, for the dramatist is forced to work rapidly even at the expense of character

consistency, but it is not really the sight of Juliet that causes him to change. It is his own precipitous act of leaping out from the dark beneath her window with his

I take thee at thy word:
Call me but love, and I'll be new baptized;
Henceforth I never will be Romeo.
[II. ii. 49-51]

With this hasty speech the game of make-believe love becomes no longer possible. The hasty act of impetuous youth is the means to maturity. Romeo must now face the realities of life with all its consequences both for good and evil. There may be a double meaning in that final line. Never again will he be the same Romeo who had pined for Rosaline. Juliet too can no longer be the same once she has poured her heart out into the night. She too must now face the world as it is. Her unpremeditated outpouring of her love parallels the precipitous speech of Romeo.

Like all young people, Romeo and Juliet are uncertain and hasty in their first encounters with the problems of reality. Their plans at best are foolish ones. The force of evil had already intruded into their world immediately following Romeo's first sight of Juliet. His first poetic rapture [I. v. 44-53] had been echoed by the harsh voice of Tybalt:

This, by his voice, should be a Montague.
Fetch me my rapier, boy.
[I. v. 54-5]

This is Shakespeare's unique poetic way of showing the ever-present juxtaposition of love and hate, good and evil. Before the marriage may be consummated. Romeo must now face this evil force in the world. He is not yet, however, able to accept it as he should. When Tybalt lies dead at his feet and a full awareness of what he has done comes upon him, Romeo cries out in despair: "0, I am fortune's fool" [III. i. 136]. This is a crucial line and all its implications must be understood. "Fool" had two common meanings in Shakespeare's age. On the one hand it had the connotation of "dupe" or "plaything," and thus the word usually is glossed. On the other hand it was a common word for "child." In three other places in the play it is used with this meaning. When Romeo calls himself the "dupe" or "plaything" of Fortune, he is asserting a capricious, lawless Fortune, and thus he is denying the providence of God, of which in the Christian view Fortune was merely the agent. Romeo here sees the universe as a mindless chaos, without guiding plan; he is proclaiming a philosophy of despair.

With this view of life the secondary meaning of "fool" is in complete accord. As long as man sees Fortune as capricious and the universe as without plan, he must be the slave of Fortune. Romeo is the child of Fortune at this point because he is governed by it as the child is governed by his father. He is constrained to blind obedience. He has not yet learned the way of acceptance by which the control of Fortune maybe thrown off. When Romeo's own will is in accord with the universal plan of God, he will no longer be the child of Fortune in this sense. He will be the master of Fortune in that it can never direct him contrary to his own wiii. In this secondary sense of "child" there is also the

implication that Romeo is more fortunate than he himself perceives, that he is protected as the child is by his father. The divine providence whose "fool" he is will lead him, in spite of his present ignorance, to a self-mastery and wisdom, and it will use his present seeming misfortune to restore harmony and order to the world.

From this low point Romeo must make his slow journey to maturity, and Shakespeare shows his progression in three stages. First we find him in the friar's cell, weeping and wailing, beating his head upon the ground and offering to kill himself. This abject surrender to passion is the behavior not of a rational man but of a beast, as the friar declares:

Hold thy desperate hand: Art thou a man? Thy form cries out thou
art:
Thy tears are womanish; thy wild acts denote
The unreasonable fury of a beast.
[III. iii. 108-11]

Romeo's education now begins at the hands of Friar Lawrence, who in a lengthy speech [III. iii. 108-54] teaches him to make a virtue of necessity, that to rail on Fortune is foolish and fruitless, that careful reason will demonstrate to him that he is indeed far more fortunate than he might have been. When rather than kill himself he stops his weeping and goes to comfort Juliet, he has taken the first step toward maturity. .

That his growth is a steady one from that point forward we may perceive from a bare hint as Romeo climbs from Juliet's window to be off for Mantua. "O, think'st thou we shall ever meet again?" [III. v. 51] asks Juliet, and Romeo replies:

I doubt it not; and all these woes shall
serve
For sweet discourses in our time to come.
[III. v. 52-3]

What is significant here is that Romeo has thrown off despair and can face the future with some degree of hope in an ultimate providence. It is but the barest hint of a change in him, and we see no more of him until the beginning of Act V, where in Mantua we perceive by his first words that he is a new man entirely. All of Act IV had been devoted to Juliet. The dramatist has not had time to show in detail the growth of Romeo. The change must be made clear in Romeo's first speech, and it must be accepted by the audience as an accomplished fact. We immediately sense a new serenity about him as he walks upon the stage at the beginning of Act V:

My dreams presage some joyful news at
hand:
My bosom's lord sits lightly in his throne;
And all this day an unaccustom'd spirit
Lifts me above the ground with cheerful

thoughts.
[V. i. 2-5]

He expects joyful tidings, but the news Balthazer brings is the most horrible of which he can conceive. Shakespeare gives his opening speech to Romeo, I believe, so that it may emphasize the shock of the news of Juliet's supposed death coming when happy news is expected, and in the face of this shock to illustrate the manner in which the new Romeo can receive the severest blow of which Fortune is capable. (pp. 274-81)

The design of the tragedy does not call at this point for a Byronic defiance of fate by Romeo, a daring of Fortune to pour its worst upon his head. . . . The design calls for an escape from Fortune's oppression through an acceptance of the order of the universe, and this meaning is implicit in "I denie you Starres" [V. i. 24].

We may ask first what the word "deny" means in the context in which Shakespeare here uses it. We do not have far to look, for In the second act we find a significant clue. Here Juliet speaks:

O Romeo. Romeo! wherefore art thou
Romeo?
Deny thy father and refuse thy name.
[II. 11. 33-4]

She is asking wistfully that Romeo not be the son of his father. and her wish falls naturally into two parts: that he give up the name of his father and that he break the bond which ties him to his father. To "deny" his father is to negate the natural relationship of son to father, one, as the Renaissance saw it, of subjection and obedience. It is thus, in Shakespeare's sense, to cast off his father's authority, to refuse to be ruled by him. "I denie you starres," the line editors have consistently refused to accept as Shakespeare's, is the very line with which Romeo attains the victory over circumstances which is the sign of the mature stoical man. It is probably the most crucial single line of the play. To deny one's stars is to throw off the control of a hostile fortune, just as a son might throw off the control of his father. To Renaissance man there was only one means by which this might be accomplished: by an acceptance of the way of the world as the will of God, and by a calm, fearless acceptance of death as the necessary and proper end of man, which releases him from all earthly evil and assures him of a true felicity in heaven. For Romeo this will be reunion with Juliet

It has been argued, of course, that since the Anglican church taught that the punishment for suicide was damnation. Romeo and Juliet in killing themselves are merely assuring the loss of their souls. We are not dealing here, however, with Shakespeare the theologian illustrating a text, but rather with Shakespeare the dramatist using symbolically a detail inherited from his sources in order to illustrate a greater and more significant truth. The Senecan tradition in which the story came down to Shakespeare endorsed suicide as a means of release from a world full of pain and as a means of expiration for complicity in the death of a loved one. It was in these terms that suicide was so essential a part of the Romeo and Juliet story. There was In the Renaissance,

moreover, much respect for the classical notion of suicide as a noble act by which man fulfills his obligations and attains a higher good than life itself, and on the stage suicide was often portrayed In such terms. Only the most insensitive of critics could regard Romeo and Juliet as destined for damnation; their suicide, inherited by Shakespeare as an essential part of the story, must be regarded as a symbolic act of acceptance of inevitable death. Dramatically it is the most effective means by which such acceptance may be portrayed. The results of the act are not damnation, but instead, the 'destruction of evil by the ending of the feud. Out of the self-inflicted deaths of Romeo and Juliet come a reconciliation and a rebirth of good, a catharsis that would be well-nigh impossible were it bought with the souls as well as the lives of the young lovers.

Shakespeare might easily have written "defy" instead of "deny," for that word might have conveyed a similar meaning. It need not be taken to indicate a Byronic challenge to Fortune. To defy Fortune is to assert one's independence of it, and that is what Romeo does. . . . Shakespeare might have written "defy" had he been a lesser artist, but he wrote "deny" because of the deliberate echo and reminder it might furnish of that earlier and equally crucial line, "O, I am fortune's fool" [III. i. 136]. The fool, or child of Fortune, has now thrown off the authority of Fortune. These two lines mark the two poles of Romeo's development from creature of passion to man of reason. In the meaning of the latter line there is a deliberate echo of the earlier one.

It would, of course, be foolish to measure Romeo's conduct in the final act against a consistent classical ideal of stoicism [a philosophy founded by the Greek thinker Zeno in about 300 B.C. which holds that wise men should be free from passion, unmoved by joy or grief, and submissive to natural law]. A true Stoic would not have committed suicide, but Shakespeare's brand of Christian stoicism was rarely consistent philosophically. The simple point Shakespeare wishes to make is that Romeo has grown to maturity, has learned to accept the order of the universe with all it may entail, that he is ready for death, and that he can accept it bravely and calmly as the necessary means toward the greater good of reunion with Juliet. He will, as he puts it:

shake the yoke of inauspicious stars
From this world-wearied flesh.
[V. iii. 111-12]

When Paris says to him in the graveyard, "for thou must die," it is not merely to Paris that Romeo replies: "I must indeed; and therefore came I hither" [V. iii. 57-8]. In that simple line is a summation of Romeo's development. He has come willingly to embrace the necessary end of life's journey.

The world of *Romeo and Juliet* is a somber, realistic one in which youth is born into evil and must struggle against it ceaselessly until the conflict is ended by inevitable death. But Shakespeare's tragic vision is not one of resignation or despair; it is one of defiance and hope, of pride in those qualities of man that enable him to survive and achieve victory in such a world. It is this tension between pride in man and terror of the world's evil which Clifford Leech [in his *Shakespeare's Tragedies and Other Studies in Seventeenth-Century Drama]* has called the essence of the tragic emotion; and

Shakespeare goes far toward achieving this tension in *Romeo and Juliet.* There is a design for tragedy in this early play, a conception of man's position in the universe to which character and event are designed by the artist to conform. There are, of course, inconsistencies in the design; Shakespeare has not yet been able entirely to escape the limitations imposed upon him by his sources, but we can nevertheless perceive, governing and shaping the matter that Shakespeare took from Arthur Brooke, the idea of tragedy as a portrait of man's journey from youth to maturity, encountering the evil in the world, learning to live with it, and achieving victory over it by death. Like the tragedies of Aeschylus, *Romeo and Juliet* proclaims also that man learns through suffering, but even more strongly than in Greek tragedy, there is affirmation in Shakespeare that the ultimate plan of the universe is good, for out of the suffering of individuals the social order is cleansed of evil. The deep-rooted family feud is finally brought to an end. (pp. 283-86)

Irving Ribner, "Then I Denie You Starres: A Reading of Romeo and Juliet', " *in* Studies in the English Renaissance Drama, *Josephine* W. *Bennett, Oscar Cargill, and Vernon Hall, Jr., eds., New York University Press,* 1959, pp. 269-86.

Critical Essay #5

[Wilson regards Romeo and Juliet *as a tragedy of fate involving "two lovers whose destiny it is to be sacrificed to the healing of their families' strife. " Furthermore, the critic claims, the feud* is *the central concern of the play. Wilson argues that Shakespeare marred this design, however, by making his hero and heroine so attractive that the audience loses interest in the dramatic action once they are dead, thus ignoring the true culmination of the play in the resolution of the feud.]*

The tragic conception of *Romeo and Juliet* is simply stated for us in the opening sonnet-prologue. By thus announcing his theme and describing the central action, Shakespeare prepares us for the method he will follow throughout the play. We are to watch a sequence of events as they move towards the catastrophe in the full knowledge that they are tragic, that the tragic culmination is somehow inevitable. The tragic effect is to be one of anticipation and its realization. The Greek tragedians. . . could count on their audiences' familiarity with the story of the play. Shakespeare uses his opening prologue in *Romeo and Juliet* to establish the same condition.

The action concerns not simply two lovers but two families. An ancient feud breaks forth anew, involving in its course two lovers whose destiny it is to be sacrificed to the healing of their families' strife, "which, but their children's end, naught could remove" [Prologue, 11]. The pathos is that the lovers' sacrifice is inescapable; their love is "death-mark'd"; they are "star-cross'd" [Prologue, 9,6], fated to die in the fifth act. But the tragic outcome is not quite unrelieved. There is to be a kind of reconciliation at the end, though we are not to expect a "happy" ending. Thus carefully are we prepared to understand and anticipate the ensuing action.

This method of foreshadowing the outcome is carried through the play, in the premonitions and misgivings of the two lovers. "I dreamt a dream tonight" [I. iv. 50], says Romeo. as he goes with Benvolio and Mercutio towards the Capulet party. Mercutio at once takes him up, rallies him, makes his melancholy remark the occasion of his elaborate fancy of Queen Mab. Yet as Benvolio tries to hurry them on: "Supper is done, and we shall come too late!" Romeo reflects,

I fear, too early; for my mind misgives
Some consequence, yet hanging in the
stars,
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date
With this night's revels and expire the
term
Of a despised life, clos'd in my breast,
By some vile forfeit of untimely death.
But he that hath the steerage of my course
Direct my sail! On, lusty gentlemen!
[I. iv. 105-13]

As we are later to realize, Romeo's foreboding is all too well justified. Ere another day passes, Romeo will have loved another maiden than the lady Rosaline who now has all his thoughts; he will have married Juliet, anticipating only happiness; but Mercutio will be slain by Tybalt, Tybalt slain by Romeo, Romeo banished from Verona; and the lives of Romeo and Juliet will be eventually sacrificed. (pp. 19-20)

All of these echoes and foreshadowings emphasize and reemphasize a single theme, a single conception: the seemingly inscrutable necessity of the whole action, a necessity imposed by some power greater than men. (p. 22)

The play culminates with the reconciliation of the rival houses, as the prologue states. Old Capulet and Montague, confronted by the terrible results of their hatred in the deaths of their children, are at length brought to recognize their responsibility.

The Prince sums it up:

See what a scourge is laid upon your hate, That heaven finds means to kill your joys with love;
And I, for winking at your discords too,
Have lost a brace of kinsmen; all are punish'd.
[V. iii. 292-95]

The parents are truly penitent, and from this time forth, we are to understand, their hatred was turned to love.

The importance of this ending in Shakespeare's design may be seen by contrasting the culmination of the story in his principal source, Arthur Brooke's poem called *Romeus and Juliet* In Brooke's version, the various instruments of the outcome-the apothecary who sold Romeo the poison, the Nurse, the Friar-are punished or pardoned, but neither the parents nor the enmity of the two houses is even mentioned in censure, Shakespeare's revision of Brooke's ending and his different emphasis are eloquent of his different conception of the point of the tale.

From another point of view, we may test the importance Shakespeare must have attached to the idea the play is designed to express by observing the very arbitrariness with which he manipulates not merely the plot but the characterizations as well, in the interest of working out his total design. The arbitrary insistence upon ironic coincidence in the successive stages of the action is evident. But equally arbitrary is the lack of coherent motivation in Friar Laurence's crucial role. Granted that Friar Laurence is timid and unworldly, and proud of his herbalist's resources, besides; he is still an odd kind of spiritual adviser, without confidence in his authority with the two families, and. we must surely add, without elementary common sense. In real life, any man of sense in Friar Laurence's position would have reflected that the proposed marriage of Juliet with Paris was impossible. Juliet was already married to Romeo. And he would have used this circumstance to force a reconciliation upon the two families-a motive which he professed in marrying the young people in the first place. It is evident that he could

count upon the Prince's support in thus seeking to reconcile the feud, and Romeo's pardon, and his own, would easily follow upon the achieving of this worthy end.

This sort of speculation is obviously not relevant to the playas we have it; for such a solution would have given comedy, and Shakespeare was here intent upon tragedy. We must allow the author such arbitrary means; the tragic idea, and the tragic effect, are more important than any mere question of psychological verisimilitude. In observing the arbitrariness of the contrivance, however, we are able to gauge the more accurately the author's central concern. It is with the idea of the play, and the art-tidal means are an index of the length he is prepared to go in expressing it. Shakespeare neither blames Friar Laurence for his romantic folly, nor allows the common sense solution of the lovers' difficulties to occur to him or to them; and we must not consider that any such point is worth making in our criticism of the play except in so far as our consideration of it may help us the better to understand what the play is about.

If the cumulatively parallel episodes of *Romeo and Juliet* may be called the warp of the play's structural design, the woof is a series of contrasts. It is a drama of youth pitted against age. . . . Correspondingly, youth stands for love, and age for continuing hate. Most fundamental of all is the contrast, which is not fully revealed until the end, of accident and design.

Arthur Brooke's *Romeus and Juliet* is a translated version of a familiar folk-tale rather clumsily worked up as a popular romance in Pierre Boaistuau's *Histories tragiques;* in Brooke's version, as in Boaistuau's, the ironic succession of reversals is attributed casually to "Fortune"-the customary resource of the romancer intent only upon the turns of his plot. Shakespeare more ambitiously undertook to comprehend the relations of chance and destiny in his tragic design.

Carefully, then, the responsibility of the lovers for their catastrophe, in Shakespeare's play, is minimized, as it is not in Brooke's version. The fact of the feud is emphasized at the outset, and the involvement of Romeo and Juliet is not only innocent but against their will. Even in the catastrophe itself, their self-destruction is hardly more than their assent to compelling circumstance. Romeo, it is true, buys poison to unite himself with Juliet in the grave; but before he reaches the tomb, Paris intervenes to seal with his death the one chance of Romeo's pausing in his resolve. [Harley] Granville Barker oddly remarks that Paris's death "is wanton and serves little purpose." Actually, it is calculated to enhance our sense of the pressure of circumstance upon Romeo. He was distraught before he met Paris at the tomb of Juliet, but not utterly desperate, perhaps. Now, with the blood of Paris upon his hands (again contrary to his will and his anguished protest), he has no remaining ground of hope. no reason to delay his purpose. The death of Paris at Romeo's hands is Shakespeare's own addition to the story and hence an especially significant clue to his conception. It is another irony that prepares us for the most poignant irony of all, as Romeo, in his rapt intentness upon joining Juliet in the grave, fails to interpret aright the signs of returning animation in the sleeping girl. . . . Juliet, as she plunges the knife in her breast, thinks only of joining her lover. Shakespeare, of course, is not excusing their self-destruction; but it is no part of his

design to blame them. Their deaths are a *donnee* [known fact] of the story; the point of it lies elsewhere than in their responsibility.

The blame lies with the families, with the elders. But what of the role of chance, of the fate which so evidently has crossed the love of Romeo and Juliet from beginning to end? They fell in love by accident. Romeo went to the Capulet party expecting to indulge his unrequited passion for Rosaline; Juliet came for the express purpose of seeing and learning to love the County Paris. Amid their later difficulties, if Friar John had been able to deliver Friar Laurence's letter; if Friar Laurence had thought to use Balthazar as his messenger, as he first proposed to do [III. iii. 169-71], or if Balthazar too had been delayed; if Friar Laurence, even had been a little quicker in getting to Juliet's tomb-if anyone of these possibilities had occurred, the outcome might have been very different. We are meant to reflect upon this chain of seeming accidents, for they are prominently displayed.

Here, then, in the play as we have it, is the design an arbitrary one, to be sure-of "a greater power than we can contradict" [V. iii. 153], that finds means to humble the rival houses "with love." It is a stem conception of Providence, to the working of whose purposes human beings are blind, which fulfils the moral law that the hatred of the elders shall be visited upon the children-"poor sacrifices of our enmity" [V. iii. 304], as Capulet describes them-yet whose power turns hatred in the end to love. The design of the tragedy has been a Christian moral, implicit but still sufficiently manifest to the thoughtful. Herein lies the rationale of the play's structure. The three entrances of the Prince mark the three stages of the action intended to show a chain of seeming accidents issuing in a moral design adumbrated in the sonnet-prologue, implicit from the beginning. The final entrance of the Prince marks the logical climax of a tightly built narrative scheme. This concluding stage of the action reveals, in recapitulation, the significance of the whole design, a design in which the catastrophic deaths of the lovers contribute but a part; the punishment of the elders, and still more their reconciliation, complete the pattern.

But if the logical climax of the play's conception lies in this denouement, the emotional climax comes before, with the deaths of Romeo and Juliet. In this, the world's favourite love story, Shakespeare has endowed his young lovers with all the riches of his earlier lyrical style, with the music of his sonnets which echoes through the play; and he has given them a grace and a purity of motive, in keeping with his larger design, that ensures our complete sympathy from beginning to end. As we follow their story, we cannot help taking sides with them against the elders-against the blind selfishness and perversity of their parents, against the stupid animality, however amusing, of the Nurse, against the absurd ineptitude of Friar Laurence; and as we see them hasten unwittingly to their destruction, we can only pity their youth, their innocence, and their ill luck. They themselves have no awareness of a tragic misstep, of a price justly exacted for human pride or folly, and neither have we: their story is full of pathos, but is has in itself little or nothing of tragic grandeur.

The tragic irony of the story, as Shakespeare tells it, lies in the blindness of the elders to the consequences of their hatred until it is too late, in the reversal brought about by the

power greater than they. Yet despite the dramatist's efforts to direct our attention to this larger significance of the action-through the prologue and the structural foreshadowing of his whole scheme; through the chain of unlucky coincidences and arbitrary motives; through the reiteration of the theme of fortune and ill chance and fate-our feelings remain linked with the story of the lovers throughout the play; and audiences and actors alike notoriously feel that with the deaths of Romeo and Juliet the interest of the play is at an end, that the subsequent explanations are prolix and anticlimactic and may well be abridged. This feeling is manifestly contrary to what the dramatist aimed at, but he himself is chiefly responsible for our feeling, in having made his young lovers the centre of our regard.

Thus the play misses its full unity of effect because our sympathies are exhausted before the tragic design is complete. The story of a young and idealistic love thwarted is not enough to make a great tragedy; but Shakespeare, trying to place it within a grander conception, has not been able to achieve a larger unity. There is no failure in any detail of execution, and the conception of the playas a whole is worked out with remarkable regularity and precision. But the love story is not quite harmonious with the larger conception; our sympathies do not culminate in this larger conception; they culminate in pity for the lovers. The awe that we should feel as well is not inherent in their story but is indicated (rather than effected) in what seems to us like an epilogue; it is something explained to us at the end rather than rendered immediately dramatic and compelling as the heart of the design. Shakespeare never made this particular mistake again; and we must surely add that, even though he overreaches himself in his play, he yet enchants us with the beauty of what he holds in his grasp.

Even this judgment, perhaps, is too rigorous. If *Romeo and Juliet* is deficient by the severest standard-by the standard of Shakespeare's own later achievements in tragedy-it yet remains one of the loveliest of all his works. And if we consider it not too closely but as we yield ourselves to its lyrical appeal in the theatre, we may find therein a sufficient argument of its unity. The lines from sonnet CXVI:

Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips
and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass
come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and
weeks

But bears it out even to the edge of doom, commemorate the most lasting impression the play leaves with us, the impression of its imperishable beauty. We distinguish between the transitory life and fortunes of Romeo and Juliet and their love, which remains ideal, and, in a sense, beyond the reach of fortune or death. It is not their love that is blighted, after all, but their lives. The tragic episode of their lives may thus be seen as participating in [Dante's] "Divine Comedy"; and, fundamentally, this is what we recognize as we are moved by their story. (pp. 25-31)

Harold S. *Wilson, "Thesis: 'Romeo and Juliet' and 'Hamlet',* " *in his* On the Design of Shakespearian Tragedy, *University of Toronto Press,* 1957, pp. 19-51.

Critical Essay #6

[In the following excerpt, three students (A, B, and C), guided by their teacher (Lecturer or Mr. X), debate whether or not Romeo and Juliet *adheres to the guidelines of Aristotelian tragedy; that is, in the instructor's words, "does it show the fall of a good and great man, brought about by aglow in his own nature, enforced by Destiny or by the law of Nature, and arousing Pity and Terror, and so bringing about a state of tragic purgation?" Students A and B consider the question in light of scholarly essays by H. B. Charlton, A.* C. *Bradley, Edward Dowden, Thomas Marc Parrott, Muriel* C. *Bradbrook, and G. B. Harrison, who generally agree that* Romeo and Juliet *is not tragic in the Aristotelian sense of the term because the hero is ordinary and the idea of an all-controlling fate is unconvincing. Student* C, *however, disagrees with the scholars and offers an impressionistic reading of the play, maintaining that it is solely about love. Student further argues that the Aristotelian debate is pointless because Shakespeare was not concerned with sustaining an overall tragic design.]*

Lecturer (Mr. X). As I told you, we are today to begin the study of *Romeo and Juliet,* a play that enjoyed a great popularity both in Shakespeare's own day and throughout the following centuries.

But since I have frequently impressed upon you the need to consult the best critical opinion before forming your own judgment, perhaps you will tell me now where you have sought for help in reading the play, and what the result of your researches has been.

Student A. Well I've read Professor Charlton

[Shakespearean Tragedy], and Professor Dowden *[Shakespeare, His Mind and Art]* and Dr. Bradley *[Shakespearean Tragedy]* and Professor Parrott *[William Shakespeare,* a *Handbook],* and they all speak very highly of the play. Only I'm not quite sure why they like it. . . .

Student B. So do Professor Harrison *[Shakespeare's Tragedies]* and Dr. Bradbrook *[Shakespeare and Elizabethan Poetry],* and the others I've read. But I must admit I'm still somewhat puzzled, too. I suppose that is because I have always taken the play in a very simple-minded way as being a love-story with a sad ending. But now I am beginning to realise that it isn't as easy as all that. You see, *Romeo and Juliet* is a Tragedy-it was called so by Shakespeare. 'An Excellent conceited Tragedie of Romeo and Juliet' and 'The Most Excellent and Lamentable Tragedie of Romeo and Juliet'-that is what it was called in Shakespeare's own day. Now it's all right so long as you simply think that a Tragedy is a story that ends unhappily-I mean *anyone* can understand it then-that is what Dr. Bradbrook calls 'a tragedy in the newspaper sense'. But it seems that, according to the best academic minds, Shakespeare was trying to do something rather different.

Student A. But how can they know what Shakespeare was trying to do? Isn't it all guess-work, after all? I mean, what evidence have they got?

Student B. Well, of course they haven't any direct evidence, but they can *infer* from what they know of Shakespeare's later work. You see, if Shakespeare first of all wrote a Tragedy called *Romeo and Juliet,* and later on wrote some other Tragedies that were very successful and yet quite different in some important respects from *Romeo and Juliet,* doesn't it seem likely that he was really trying to write something like the later tragedies at the time when he actually wrote *Romeo and Juliet?* I mean, isn't it probable that *Romeo and Juliet* was a first shot that didn't quite come off?

Student A. Well, I must say I think that is pretty far-fetched. I can't see why we can't get on and read *Romeo and Juliet* with Mr. X and see what we think of it. After all, Shakespeare has been dead for a long time, and these guesses about what he was trying to do can't help us much.

Student B. Well, I think we ought to ask Mr. X first of all what he thinks of the ideas we found in the critical works. . . .

Lecturer. I'm glad you're coming round to that. It won't do to go off on your own, spinning fancies about the play out of your heads. A little contact with sound scholarship is essential if you are to get to the heart of the matter. But as I want to be sure that you have really read the authorities, I'll ask *you* to tell *me* what they say. Well, B. . . . ? (pp. 23-4)

Student B. . . .[The] worst feature of the play, according to Professor Harrison, is that it 'lacks the qualities of deep tragedy'.

Lecturer. Now at last we are beginning to be really serious. Obviously, we can't simply go ahead and read the play in a hopelessly unscientific spirit. We must begin by considering what Tragedy really is. Then when we have decided that, we can find out whether *Romeo and Juliet* displays the quality of true Tragedy. If it doesn't, then obviously there must be some defect in it.

Student A. Yes, Mr. X, I think that must be right. At any rate, all the best authorities seem to think that the right way to study a play. Look what I've written down in my note-book. I spent Saturday morning in the Library making notes of what the scholars say; and they all seem very doubtful about the playas a tragedy. Here is what Professor Charlton says: First of all, he points out that there are a great many premonitions of disaster in the play. He gives a good many examples of them; and he says that this is Shakespeare's way of giving us the 'sense of an all-controlling Fate' so as to make the play tragic, and not merely a result of the inconstancy of fortune.

Student B. But Shakespeare does make Romeo say he is 'Fortune's fool' after he has killed Tybalt. And doesn't Juliet cry out on 'fickle' Fortune when Romeo has gone? In the last scene the catastrophe is described as a 'mischance', a 'misadventure', 'some ill unlucky thing' IV. iii. 136]. Would Shakespeare have put those words in if he had been

anxious to put the stress on an 'all-controlling Fate' and not on the 'inconstancy of Fortune'?

Student A. I suppose Charlton would say that these were relics of [Arthur] Broke's poem, from which Shakespeare took the story of the play. He says: 'Instead of letting his persons declaim formally, as Broke's do, against the inconstancy of Fortune, he endows them with tragic premonitions.' But, as you say, it isn't quite true. Shakespeare *does* add the 'tragic premonitions'; but he doesn't remove all the references to 'fickle Fortune'.

Lecturer. But you can see what Charlton is getting at. He wants to show how Shakespeare added, or tried to add, a feeling of inevitability to the events of the play, so as to add tragic Terror to the pity you feel for the unlucky lovers of Broke's poem.

Student A. Yes, but Charlton thinks that it wasn't a success. He says that Shakespeare 'gives to the action itself a quality *apt to conjure* the sense of relentless doom'. But he doubts whether 'the sense of an all-controlling Fate is made strong enough to fulfil its tragic purpose'. He shows that the events in the play in themselves provide no real basis for the 'sweep of necessity'. In the end he comes to the conclusion that the play is radically unsound. It won't really bear careful examination, even though we may be carried away by it when we see it on the stage. He says: 'And so, stirred to sympathy by Shakespeare's poetic power, we tolerate, perhaps even approve, the death (of Romeo and Juliet). At least for the moment.' Then he goes on: 'But tragedy lives not only for its own moment, nor by "suspensions of disbelief". Our sentiments were but momentarily gratified. And finally our deeper consciousness protests. Shakespeare has conquered us by a trick: the experiment carries us no nearer to the heart of tragedy.'

Lecturer. Yes, you see judged by the criteria that Aristotle and Bradley lay down for tragedy, the play hardly succeeds. There are too many accidents in it. But what does Dowden say? He was a follower of Bradley, too.

Student A. He says: 'Thus it came about that Shakespeare at nearly forty years was the author of but two or three tragedies. Of these, *Romeo and Juliet* may be looked upon as the work of the author's adolescence, and *Hamlet* as the evidence that he had become adult, and in this supreme department master of his craft.'

Student B. But just a minute; doesn't Dowden give the earliest date for *Romeo and Juliet* as 1591?

Lecturer. Yes, I seem to remember that he does.

Student B. Well then, Shakespeare must have been at least twenty-seven when he wrote the play. Surely Dowden didn't really think Shakespeare was still *adolescent* at that hoary old age?

Student A. Don't be silly-he only means that *Romeo and Juliet* is *immature.* It's *unripe,* compared with the 'true tragedies'. It was written in Shakespeare's salad days, when he was green in judgment.

Lecturer. Don't waste time quibbling. What else does Dowden say?

Student A. He also says that he thinks Shakespeare worked on the play for five or six years-there's the answer to your question about his age-and that in the end 'there still appeared in the play unmistakable marks of immature judgment'.

Student B. What marks?

Student A. Well, I suppose he relied on the good sense of the reader to spot them. . . . He goes on:

'It is not unlikely that even then he considered his powers to be insufficiently matured for the great dealing with human life and passion, which tragedy demands; for, having written *Romeo and Juliet,* Shakespeare returned to the histories, in which, doubtless, he was aware that he was receiving the best possible culture for future tragedy. . . . '

Student B. In other words, Shakespeare wasn't yet equal to the job, and was thoroughly disappointed with the play when he'd finished. It does seem that if he had written it for an examination in Tragedy he wouldn't have been given top marks by the professors. Of course, it's their job to judge by the very highest standards. . . . But didn't people like it when it was produced?

Lecturer. It seems that it was a great success. . . ran into four editions before the First Folio, besides being produced very often. But, of course, mere popular success has nothing to do with the artistic conscience.

Student A. I somehow can't see the Elizabethan audience putting up with the leisurely charm of stilted poetry. . . but we can always suppose that it was cut in Shakespeare's day, can't we?

Lecturer. Yes, that is what some scholars do suppose. It is the scientific method, you see. Go on, A.

Student A. Professor Parrott (he is or was at Princeton) has a book-this green one-on

Shakespeare. . .. *William Shakespeare-A Handbook,* he calls it. He seems to agree with the others. Where am I? Oh, here it is:

Romeo and Juliet lacks the depth, the power, the tragic intensity, of the great plays of the third period, and it may well be that Shakespeare, no doubt his own severest critic, felt he was not yet ready to deal competently with great tragic themes. At any rate, in spite of the success of *Romeo and Juliet* on the stage and with all lovers of poetry, he turned his back upon tragedy.

Student B. I see-poor chap-he knew the play was no good. It must have been maddening for him to have everybody praising it when he knew in his heart all the time that future Professors of English would consider it a failure. I wonder he didn't blow his brains out.

Lecturer. That will do, B. We don't want unnecessary facetiousness. The only thing to do now is to go to the fountainhead. What does Bradley say?

Student A. Well, perhaps they all got it from him. It's a bit difficult, because he doesn't deal much with this play in *Shakespearean Tragedy,* which is what I read. But he does make some remarks about it, and they agree with those we've heard so far. He says that *Romeo and Juliet* is a 'pure tragedy', but in some respects, an immature one. As far as I can make out, what he means is that the play is meant to be like *Othello, Hamlet, King Lear* and *Macbeth-to* be a 'pure tragedy', in other words, but that it doesn't succeed because Shakespeare was still too immature for successful 'pure tragedy'. But Bradley talks of Romeo as though he was a tragic hero of the same kind as the heroes of the later tragedies. He says:

How could men escape, we cry, such vehement propensities as drive Romeo, Antony, Coriolanus to their doom? And why is it that a man's virtues help to destroy him, and that his weakness is so intertwined with everything that is admirable in him that we can hardly separate them even in Imagination?

Lecturer. Now we are beginning to see the light. Of course Bradley is considering whether the play is truly tragic-does it show the fall of a good and great man, brought about by a flaw in his own nature, enforced by Destiny or by the law of Nature, and arousing Pity and Terror, and so bringing about a state of tragic purgation? That is the real question, and if we can answer that, Bradley realised, we have the answer to the problem of *Romeo and Juliet.*

Student A. But Romeo isn't a great man. He's just an ordinary young chap who falls in love. . . . Oh, now I see. . . that is one *reason* why the play isn't 'deep tragedy'. The hero isn't a representative figure.

Student B. And there is also this other business about the bad verse. All that tedious stuff about Rosaline, and all those long speeches by Mercutio and the Friar. Most of the writers I've looked at think they can forgive Shakespeare, because after all he was a poet, and poets can't always be businesslike. Professor Harrison, you see, even finds a 'charm' in it, though he thinks it ought to be 'cut' in an acted version. But Dr. Bradbrook-she's a Cambridge don, isn't she?-is very severe. Where are my notes? Here we are: 'Parts of the play are in a manner so rhetorical as to be emptied of all feeling. Romeo like Titus moralises on a fly at the height of his laments.' Incidentally, she thinks that the Elizabethans *knew all the time* that the play wasn't a 'full tragedy'. She says that 'if any Polonius [in *Hamlet]* had essayed its classification' (I wonder why she says that?) he would have decided that the play was 'an *amorous* tragicomedy'. It seems that, according to Dr. Bradbrook, the play wasn't really an attempt to write Tragedy at all. it was the beginning of Shakespeare's comic style. And Mercutio and the Nurse are to be understood as *comic* characters.

Student A. Now you are getting me thoroughly mixed up. If we don't even know whether to take the playas immature Tragedy or as immature Comedy, we are simply lost.

Lecturer. Well, we had better sum up, and see where we've got to. The general view is that *Romeo and Juliet* is a good play, but that it is immature, and contains bad verse. It isn't truly tragic, because the hero is too ordinary, and because we don't see any *necessity* in the action. It sometimes rings hollow, and Shakespeare was probably disappointed with it. The only problem left is whether it is the beginnings of true Tragedy or the beginnings of true Comedy. There is no *reason* to feel confused.

(A knock on the door. Enter Miss C.)

[Lecturer.] Oh, Miss C., there you are; you are very late.

Miss C. I'm very sorry, I didn't notice the time.

Lecturer. I see. Well, we have just been discussing the views expressed on *Romeo and Juliet* by informed academic critics. Would you like to give us the benefit of your own studies?

Miss C. Oh! I'm very sorry. You see I've not really looked into that very carefully. I mean to say, I've been reading the play again.

Lecturer. And what did you make of it? Can you help us with the problem?

Miss C. The problem? Is there a problem? I'm sorry, *1* seem to have been so busy this week. . . .

Student A. We have been trying to decide why *Romeo and Juliet* is a comparative failure.

Miss C. But it isn't a failure is it? I mean I think it's simply a wonderful play.

Lecturer. Well. since you have some views after all, Miss C., perhaps you will expand them a little. But try not to be too much carried away by enthusiasm. Impressionistic criticism is never really sound.

Miss C. Well, I expect this sounds very silly, but it seems to me that Shakespeare was writing a play about Love. I think [Samuel Taylor] Coleridge says that he intended it to be a sort of love-poem-he doesn't quite say that, but that is what he obviously means. So Shakespeare shows us two lovers; they have to be young because it is their first love-their first serious love. I mean-and it has to take place very suddenly so that the whole passion can develop to the fullest intensity. And then they must be unlucky and die-not to create Pity and Terror, but simply because their death, and their foreseeing of it, add to the intensity of their love.

Student A. Ah, but you see it all depends too much on bad luck. Juliet's message goes astray by bad luck, and she wakes up just a little too late, and there are lots of other examples. How can that be truly tragic?

Miss C. Well, does it matter whether it is 'truly tragic' or not? The question is: does it work in the play? Surely it does. The lovers are unlucky (though of course they are rash too) and they die. Shakespeare doesn't need to demonstrate that they *had of necessity to die,* because he isn't concerned with the laws of the Universe, and with the tragic terror that these arouse. He only wants to make us realise the *love* as intensely as possible. And the whole play is coloured with the sense of death so as to heighten the ectasy of love. There is no need for tragic necessity. And Romeo isn't meant as a representative tragic hero, who has a 'flaw' and is punished for it by the inexorable hand of Fate. He is a boy who is transformed by love into a man; he is unlucky and he dies. He illustrates the nature of Love, not the nature of the Moral Law. I should have thought that anybody would take the play in that way.

Student A. Ah, but you haven't read the critics. It all seems simple to you. It did to me too, before I read Bradley and Dowden and Harrison and Charlton. But let me ask you one question. Wasn't the play *called* a Tragedy? I mean by Shakespeare, or whoever published the Quarto?

Miss C. Yes, but I don't suppose that the Elizabethans were quite so well up in Aristotle as we are, and of course they hadn't read Bradley or Charlton. It probably seemed quite simple to them, too. I suppose that they regarded almost any story with a sad ending as a Tragedy. Anyway, what's in a name? Though I must say it seems to have brought a great pother on Shakespeare's head. (pp. 24-9)

Student A It seems to me that your way of looking at it is hopelessly uncritical. (p. 34)

Miss C. *No,* that isn't quite true. I think there may be weaknesses here and there in the play. . . . But the main thing is that I am convinced that Shakespeare wrote *Romeo and Juliet* at great speed, and with the fullest knowledge of what he was doing. It isn't the sort of play that is written by a struggling adolescent mind. Doesn't the play ring with triumphant poetry, and doesn't it all move with the greatest sureness? I think that the critics who imagine Shakespeare giving up Tragedy in despair after experimenting with *Romeo* have allowed their own ideas to muddle them. They approach the play by way of *King Lear,* and they measure it by *Othello* and by *Macbeth.* It won't fit on that bed of Procrustes, and so they start to cut and bend, stretch and twist it: and when they have finished they blame Shakespeare. They worry fearfully about Shakespeare's *development,* but I don't believe that he himself worried so much. If he didn't write any more plays like *Romeo and Juliet* for a time, it's more likely, to my mind, that he felt he had really done what he wanted to do and could go on to something else.

Student B. Well, it's your opinion against theirs.

Miss C. No it isn't. It is common sense and the almost unanimous opinion of readers and play-goers over three hundred years against a few apostles of Bradley's. Everybody knows what *Romeo and Juliet* is about until he has read these books. And I doubt whether we should take the academic critics so seriously if they wrote in plain direct English. It's a kind of fog that gets into the mind of writers and readers. (pp. 34-5)

Lecturer. Well. Miss C., you seem to have very decided opinions. I hope your own essay, which is overdue, will show none of the faults you find in the works of Shakespearean scholars. But you must not allow your distaste for scholarship to make you arrogant. Humility is the best approach to literature. (p. 35)

G. H. Durrant, "What's in a Name? A Discussion of 'Romeo and Juliet:" in Theoria, *Pietermaritzburg, No.8,* 1956, *pp.* 23-36.

Clifford Leech

[Leech discusses Romeo and Juliet *in terms of what he views as the three principal elements of dramatic tragedy:* (1) *the events of the plot proceed from no discernible cause:* (2) *the story focuses on an agonizing situation that cannot be corrected; and* (3) *at least one of the central characters represents humankind's capacity for evil and the destruction it engenders.* Romeo and Juliet *cannot properly be termed "tragic,* " *the critic argues, because it violates all three of these conditions. Specifically, the drama diverges from tragedy because it fails to fully establish an element of "mystery" in the action, thereby forcing the reader to attribute the progression of events to the operation of fate: the play suggests, through the "moral lesson" at the end, that the lovers' deaths will reconcile the feuding families: and finally, it presents only "ordinary" individuals, none of whom are truly evil.]*

[*Romeo and Juliet* concludes with] a kind of "happy ending." The feud will be ended, the lovers will be remembered. We may be reminded of the commonplace utterance that we have two deaths: the moment of actual ceasing to be, and the moment when the last person who remembers us dies. These lovers have their being enshrined in a famous play. So they are remembered in perpetuity, and their lives, according to the play itself, will be recorded in their statues. Certainly this is a sad affair, like that of Paolo and Francesca in *The Divine Comedy.* But we may ask, is it tragic?

Tragedy seems to demand a figure or figures that represent us in our ultimate recognition of evil. We need to feel that such figures are our kin, privileged to be chosen for the representative role and coming to the destruction that we necessarily anticipate for ourselves. The boy and girl figures in *Romeo and Juliet* are perhaps acceptable as appropriate representatives for humankind: after all, they do grow up. What worries us more. I think, in trying to see this playas fully achieved "tragedy," is the speech of the Duke at the end, which suggests that some atonement will be made through the reconciliation of the Montague and Capulet families. We are bound to ask "Is this enough?" It appears to be offered as such, but we remember that the finest among Verona's people are dead.

Shakespearean tragedy commonly ends with a suggestion of a return to normality, to peace. Fortinbras [*in Hamlet*] will rule in Denmark. Malcolm [in *Macbeth*] in Scotland. Iago [in *Othello]* will be put out of the way. But these later tragedies leave us with a doubt whether the peace is other than a second-best, whether indeed it is in man's power ever to put things right. In *Romeo and Juliet* the ending of the feud is laboriously spelled out.

But there is also the matter of Fate and Chance. Romeo kills Paris: at first glance that was a quite fortuitous happening. Paris was a good man, devoted to Juliet who unfortunately got in the way of Romeo's approach to Juliet's tomb. At this point Romeo's doom is sealed: he might kill Tybalt and get away with it; he could not get away with killing an innocent Paris, who was moreover the Prince's kinsman. Now it is inevitable that he will die, whatever the moment of Juliet's awakening. There is indeed a "star-cross'd" pattern for the lovers, there is no way out for Romeo once he has come back to Verona. But perhaps Paris's important function in the last scene Is not sufficiently brought out: the spectator may feel that there is simple chance operating in Romeo's arrival before Juliet wakes, in his killing himself a moment too early, in the Friar's belated arrival. Later I must return to the matter of the play's references to the "stars": for the moment I merely want to refer to the fact that tragedy can hardly be dependent on "bad luck."

Even so, though simple chance will not do, we may say that tragedy properly exists only when its events defy reason. The Friar thought the marriage of the young lovers might bring the feud to an end, and that was a reasonable assumption. Ironically, it did end the feud but at the expense of Romeo's and Juliet's lives, at the expense too of Mercutio's, Tybalt's, and Lady Montague's lives. The element of *non sequitur* in the train of events common to tragedy-despite the fact that. with one part of our minds, we see the operation of "probability Or necessity," as Aristotle has it-is well described by Laurens van der Post in his novel *The Hunter and the Whale:*

I was too young at the time to realise that tragedy is not tragedy if one finds reason or meaning in it. It becomes then, I was yet to learn, a darker form of this infinitely mysterious matter of luck. It is sheer tragedy only if it is without discernible sense or motivation.

We may balk at "luck," as I have already suggested, but "mysterious" is right indeed (as Bradley splendidly urged on us in the First Lecture of *Shakespearean Tragedy),* for what "sense" or "motivation" does there seem to be in tragedy's gods? The sense of mystery is not however, firmly posited in *Romeo and Juliet.* Rather, it is laboriously suggested that the Montagues and the Capulets have been taught a lesson in a particularly hard way.

Thus we have several reasons to query the play's achievement in the tragic kind. Do the lovers take on themselves the status of major figures in a celebration of a general human woe? Is the ending, with its promise of reconciliation, appropriate to tragic writing? We have seen that the lovers grow up, and they give us the impression of justifying human life, in their best moments, more than most people do. But the suggestion that their deaths will atone, will bring peace back, seems nugatory: no man's death brings peace, not even Christ's-or the Unknown Soldier's. The play could still end tragically if we were left with the impression that the survivors were merely doing what they could to go on living in an impoverished world: we have that in *Hamlet* and the later tragedies too. Here the laboriousness with which Shakespeare recapitulates all the events known to us, in the Friar's long speech, is surely an indication of an ultimate withdrawal from the tragic: the speech is too much like a preacher's resume of the

events on which a moral lesson will be based. We can accept Edgar's long account of Gloucester's death in *King Lear,* because we need a moment of recession before the tragedy's last phase, where we shall see Lear and Cordelia dead, and because no moral lesson is drawn from Gloucester's death; but at the end of this earlier play, when Romeo and Juliet have already eloquently died, we are with difficulty responsive to the long reiteration of all we have long known through the play's action.

Shakespeare has not here achieved the sense of an ultimate confrontation with evil, or the sense that the tragic figure ultimately and fully recognizes what his situation is. Romeo and Juliet die, more or less content with death as a second best to living together. Montague and Capulet shake hands, and do what is possible to atone. The lovers have the illusion of continuing to be together-an illusion to some extent imposed on the audience. The old men feel a personal guilt, not a realization of a general sickness in man's estate. But perhaps only Lear and Macbeth and Timon came to that realization.

We can understand why Shakespeare abandoned tragedy for some years after this play. It had proved possible for him to touch on the tragic idea in his English histories, making them approach, but only approach, the idea of humanity's representative being given over to destruction, as with the faulty Richard II, the saintly Henry VI. the deeply guilty yet none the less sharply human Richard III. He had given his theater a flawed yet impressive Titus Andronicus and in the same play an Aaron given almost wholly to evil but obstinately alive. But in these plays the main drive is not tragic. The histories rely on the sixteenth-century chronicles, *Titus* on that tradition of grotesque legend that came from both Seneca and Ovid. The past was to be relived and celebrated in the histories; *Titus* was more of a literary exercise in antique horror than a play embodying a direct reference to the general human condition. In *Romeo and Juliet* Shakespeare for the first time essayed tragedy proper that is, by wanting to bring the play's events into relation to things as they truly are-and he used a tale often told but belonging to recent times and concerned with people whom the spectators were to feel as very much their own kin. He may well have been particularly attracted to the story he found in Brooke's poem for the very reason that its figures and events did not have the authority of history and belonged to the comparatively small world of Verona. No major change in the political order can result from what happens in this play's action. No individual figure presented here is truly given over to evil. Without any precedents to guide him, he aimed at writing about eloquent but otherwise ordinary young people in love and about their equally ordinary friends and families. Only Mercutio has something daemonic in him, in the sense that his quality of life transcends the normal level of being. (pp. 68-71)

[If] Shakespeare had no useful dramatic precedents in this task, he had a manifold heritage of ideas about the nature of love; and many parts of that heritage show themselves in the play. The immoderateness and rashness that the Friar rebukes seem, on the one hand, to lead-in the fashion of a moral play-to the lovers' destruction. On the other hand, not only is our sympathy aroused but we are made to feel that what Romeo and Juliet achieve may be a finer thing than is otherwise to be found in Verona. Both views are strongly conveyed, and either of them might effectively dominate the play. Of course, they could coexist and interpenetrate-as they were to do much later in *Anthony*

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and Cleopatra-but here they seem to alternate, and to be finally both pushed into the background in the long insistence that the feud will end because of the lovers' deaths. The "moral" is thus finally inverted: the lovers' sequence of errors has culminated in the error of suicide, but now we are made to turn to their parents' error and to the con solation that Romeo and Juliet will be remembered through their golden statues. And it is difficult for us to get interested in these statues, or to take much joy in the feud's ending.

Yet the deepest cause of uneasiness in our response to the play is. I believe, to be found in the relation of the story to the idea of the universe that is posited. We are told in the Prologue of "starcross'd lovers" [1. 6], and there are after that many references to the "stars." So there is a sense of "doom" here, but we are never fully told what is implied. Many coincidences operate: Romeo meets Tybalt just at the wrong moment; the Friar's message to Romeo about Juliet's alledged death goes astray; Romeo arrives at the tomb just before Juliet awakens; the Friar comes too late. I have already drawn attention to Shakespeare's device by which Romeo has to kill Paris, so that, even if he had arrived at the right time, there would have been no way out for him. We may feel that a similar sequence of chances operates in *Hamlet:* if Hamlet had not killed Polonius in a scared moment, if he had not had his father's seal with him on the voyage to England, if he had not managed to escape on the hospitable pirates' ship, if the foils had not been exchanged in the fencing bout with Laertes, if Gertrude had not drunk from the poisoned cup. things might indeed not have been disposed so as to lead him to Claudius's killing at the moment when it actually occurred. Even so, we can feel that, after all, the end would have been much as it is. Hamlet was a man in love with death, far'more in love with death than with killing: we may say that only in the moment of death's imminence was he fully alive, freed from inhibition, able to kill Claudius: somehow or other, whatever the chances, this play demanded a final confrontation between the uncle-father and nephew-son. In *Romeo and Juliet,* on the other hand, we could imagine things working out better: the lovers are doomed only by the words of the Prologue. not by anything inherent in their situation. It is not, as it is in Hardy's novels, that we have a sense of a fully adverse "President of the immortals": there is rather an insufficient consideration of what is implied by the "stars." Of course, in *King Lear,* in all later Shakespearean tragedy, there is a sense of an ultimate mystery in the universe: "Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts?" *[King Lear,* III. vi. 77-8], Lear asks in his condition of most extreme distress. Bradley recognized that this mystery was inherent in the idea of tragedy, as is implied too in the passage from Laurens van der Post I have already quoted. But in *Romeo and Juliet* there is no sense of the mystery being confronted: rather it is merely posited in a facile way, so that we have to accept the lovers' deaths as the mere result of the will of the "stars" (the astrological implication is just too easy), and then we are exhorted to see this as leading to a reconciliation between the families.

The final "moral" of the play, as we have seen, is applied only to Old Montague and Old Capulet: they have done evil in allowing the feud to go on, and have paid for it in the deaths of their children and of Lady Montague. But, largely because Romeo and Juliet are never blamed, the children themselves stand outside the framework of moral drama. They have, albeit imperfectly, grown up into the world of tragedy, where the moral law is

not a thing of great moment. They have been sacrificed on the altar of man's guilt. have become the victims of our own outrageousness, have given us some relief because they have died and we still for a time continue living. . . . To that extent. *Romeo and Juliet* is "tragic" in a way we can fully recognize. But its long-drawn-out ending, after the lovers are dead, with the pressing home of the moral that their deaths will bring peace, runs contrary to the notion of tragedy. There is a sanguineness about the end of it, a suggestion that after all "All shall be well, and / All manner of thing shall be well," as Eliot quotes from Julian of Norwich in *Little Gidding,* and we can hardly tolerate the complacency of the statement. (pp. 71-3)

[In *Romeo and Juliet* Shakespeare] attempted an amalgam of romantic comedy and the tragic idea, along with the assertion of a moral lesson which is given the final emphasis-although the force of that lesson is switched from the lovers to their parents. But tragedy is necessarily at odds with the moral: it is concerned with a permanent anguishing situation, not with one that can either tie put right or be instrumental in teaching the survivors to do better. When Shakespeare wrote "love-tragedy" again, in *Othello* and *in Antony and Cleopatra,* he showed that love may be a positive good but that it was simultaneously destructive and that its dramatic presentation gave no manumission from error to those who contemplated the destruction and continued to live. Nowhere, I think, does he suggest that love is other than a condition for wonder, however much he makes fun of it. But in his mature years he sees it as not only a destructive force but as in no way affording a means of reform. That *Romeo and Juliet* is a "moral tragedy" -which, I have strenuously urged, is a contradiction in terms-is evident enough. It is above all the casualness of the play's cosmology that prevents us from seeing it as tragedy fully achieved: we have seen the need for a fuller appreciation of the mystery. As with *Titus Andronicus,* the nearest play to *Romeo and Juliet* overtly assuming a tragic guise in the chronology of Shakespeare's works. the march toward disaster is too manifestly a literary device. (p. 73)

Clifford Leech, "The Moral Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet" in *English Renaissance Drama: Essays in Honor of Madeline Doran & Mark Eccles* , Standish Henning, Robert Kimbrough, and Richard Knowles, eds., Southern Illinois University Press, 1976, pp. 59-75.

Critical Essay #7

[Driver examines Romeo and Juliet *in terms of the necessity of condensing "real" time into stage time in such a way that the audience will believe the events of the play have actually taken place. The critic points out that Shakespeare compressed the action of* Romeo and Juliet *in two ways: first, he considerably shortened the length of the action as it appeared in his source, Arthur Brooke's* The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet; *second, he used very brief scenes to account for longer periods of time. This compression, Driver asserts, underscores the theme of haste in the play. The critic also notes how Shakespeare varies the rhythm of the drama, slowing down or speeding up the action to match its meaning.]*

In *Romeo and Juliet* the young Shakespeare learned the craft of creating on stage the illusion of passing time. The Prologue is a kind of author's pledge that we are to see something that really happened. At least, and for technique it amounts to the same thing, it *could* have happened.

Two households, both alike in dignity,
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene.
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
[Prologue. 1-4]

The story is further summarized, and the Prologue ends with this couplet:

The which if you with patient ears attend,
What here shall miss, our toil shall strive
to mend.
[Prologue, 13-14]

Once such a beginning is made, the author is under obligation to be as faithful to the clock as possible. He must show one thing happening after another, according to its proper time, and he must keep the audience informed as to how the clock and the calendar are turning. Shakespeare was well aware of the obligation, *Romeo and Juliet* contains no less than 103 references to the time of the action-that is, 103 references which inform the audience what day things take place, what time of day it is, what time some earlier action happened, when something later will happen, etc. In every case but one Shakespeare was thoroughly consistent.

It is not enough, however, for the dramatist to be consistent. He also must be able to make us believe that in the short time we sit in the theater the whole action he describes can take place. He must compress the action of his story into the length of a theatrical performance.

The fearful passage of their death-marked
love,

And the continuance of their parents'
rage, . ..
Is now the two-hours' traffic of our stage.
[Prologue, 9-10, 12]

Faced with a dramatic necessity. Shakespeare decided to make capital of it. If he has much business to set forth in a short time he will write a play about the shortness of time. In Granville-Barker's words, *Romeo and Juliet* is "a tragedy of precipitate action". No little part of the attraction of the play is due to this frank exploitation of a dramatic necessity.

Come. Montague: for thou art early up
To see thy son and heir more early down.
IV. iii. 208-09]

In addition to the 103 chronological references noted above, the play contains 51 references to the idea of speed and rapidity of movement.

I shall mention only briefly the two ways by which Shakespeare has achieved the uncommonly tight compression of action in this play. His first stratagem was to shorten the length of the action, as found in his source, from nine months to four or five days. With this he achieved two results: he heightened the sense of "o'er hasty" action considerably, and he enabled himself more easily to appear to account for all the "real" time in the story.

He did not, of course, account for every hour, but he came nearer to a correspondence between stage time and "real" time.

His second stratagem was to make very short scenes on the stage account for comparatively long periods of "real" time. This effect, which has been called "double" time, was mastered by Shakespeare in the course of writing *Romeo and Juliet* The play has two notable scenes in this respect: 1. v, the feast at Capulet's house, and V. iii, the final scene. In both, the technique is to focus attention upon a series of small scenes within the major scene, one after another, so that we are forgetful of the clock, and then to tell us at the end that so-and-so-much time has gone by. Because the story has advanced, we are willing to believe the clock did also.

So much for the problem of compressing "real" time into stage time and for Shakespeare's use of the resulting rapidity as a theme in his play. There remains a further complexity owing to the drama's being a performed art. That is the problem of tempo. The sense of rapidity in the movement of the action must be varied. The play must have a rhythm different from the movement of the clock, however that clock may have been accelerated.

There must be a fast and slow, and that fast and slow will account for much of the subtle form which the play assumes under the hand of the dramatist. Here is a major difference between art and life. In life, time is constant. The dull days last as long as the eventful ones, if not longer. In a drama time speeds up or slows down according to the

meaning of the action. The excitement of dramatic art lies very largely in the tension thus established between chronological tempo and artistic, or dramatic, tempo.

Roughly speaking, *Romeo and Juliet* has four periods or phases-two fast and two slow. It opens in a slow time. True, there is a street fight to begin with; but that is in the nature of a curtain-raiser skillfully used to set the situation. Basically, the first period is the "Rosaline phase", and it moves as languidly as Romeo's mooning. The second period, of very swift action, begins to accelerate in I. iii. with talk of Paris as a husband. It rushes headlong, with only momentary pauses, through love, courtship. and marriage until Tybalt is impetuously slain. Here there is a pause, while the audience waits with Juliet to see what will happen, and while Friar Laurence cautions Romeo to be patient until he can "find a time" to set matters straight. It is important to notice that this pause accounts for only a very small period of "real" time. The pause is purely psychological-or rather, dramatic. In the midst of it Shakespeare prepares to accelerate the action once more by inserting between two of the lovers' *andante* [moderately slow] scenes the very remarkable *staccato* [abrupt and disjointed] scene iv of Act III, in which Capulet arranges with Paris for Juliet's marriage. In this short scene of 35 lines there are no less than 15 specific references to time and haste. The scene is all about how soon the marriage can take place-counterpoint to the mood of the lovers, who would turn the morning lark into a nightingale. In the final phase of the play, speed takes over again and we rush to the catastrophe.

It is in the last phase that the most interesting relations between dramatic rhythm and chronological clarity may be seen. Two or three days of "real" time are required to pass in order to make sense of the action: Romeo must be exiled, Friar Laurence must put his plan for Juliet's false death into effect, messengers must travel, family must grieve, and a funeral be held. But the drama, once Juliet takes the sleeping potion, requires a swift conclusion. Therefore, after that event, references to exact time, which hitherto have been profuse, almost entirely disappear from the text. There is no way for an audience to know when any of the scenes in Act V begins. There are no clues as to what day it is, let alone what time of day, until line 176 of scene iii, when the Watch informs us that Juliet has been buried two days. The vagueness is deliberate. The "real" time is comparatively long, but the play wants to move swiftly. Therefore the audience is given an *impression* of speed, but specific time references are withheld.

The foregoing remarks should make it clear that in such a play as *Romeo and Juliet,* where the story demands a setting more or less realistic. Shakespeare strings his art between two poles: on one side, accurate imitation of what would really happen; on the other, bold shaping of events into an aesthetic pattern. We may say that the play results from a tension between these two. The actual technique is to move from one to the other. Tension, however, expresses our *feeling* about the play.

Imagination and reality seem to be combined in a system of stresses and strains. Time is real, and to imitate action is to imitate time. But there is also in men a capacity for transcending time, which the playwright-artist and his audience know well. Time and its events alone do not produce an action; the imagination, transcending but not escaping time, may do so. (pp. 364-66)

Tom F. Driver, "The Shakespearian Clock: Time and the Vision of Reality in *'Romeo and Juliet' and 'The Tempest;" in Shakespeare Quarterly* , *Vol. .xv; No.4, Autumn,* 1964, *pp. 363-70.*

Critical Essay #8

[Stirling offers a detailed analysis of numerous elements that contribute to the theme of haste in Romeo and Juliet *Concentrating on Acts I, II, and III, the critic shows how Shakespeare underscores the theme through such devices as the characters' dialogue, the chorus's commentary, the effect of sound and movement on stage, and plot development]*

The unguarded haste of youth as a tragic motive of both Romeo and Juliet appears repeatedly in their lines and in those of characters who describe them. Our common understanding of this needs to be accompanied, however, by an understanding of the haste theme as it marks all aspects of the tragedy. *Romeo and Juliet* is perhaps unique in its clear-cut and consistent expression of theme through character, choric commentary, and action.

The opening scene of the play establishes the pace at which tragic fate will unfold. In little more than a hundred lines the Capulet-Montague feud is introduced with the thumb-biting scene, is extended by infiltration of the gentry, and is dramatically stayed with choric judgment by the Prince of Verona. This quality of events hurrying to a decision is expressed, moreover, by incidental dialogue: in the beginning, Sampson's line, "I strike quickly, being mov'd" [I. i. 6], and Gregory's response, "But thou art not quickly mov'd to strike" [I. i. 7], comically introduce the theme of impetuous speed, and at the conclusion of the brawl even the interviews decreed by Escalus appear in terms of dispatch: "You, Capulet, shall go along with me; / And, Montague, come you this afternoon" [I. i. 99-100].

Scene ii now presents haste as a theme governing the betrothal: Capulet declares that Juliet "hath not seen the change of fourteen years" and urges Paris to "let two more summers wither in their pride, / Ere we may think her ripe to be a bride" [I. ii. 9-11]. From this is derived the well-worn exposition device of tragic irony which points significantly at a misfortune which will come "too soon."

Paris. Younger than she are happy mothers made.
Capulet And too soon marr'd are those so
early made.
[I. ii. 12-13]

In scene ill the headlong quality continues both in plot movement and thematic dialogue. The question is put to Juliet: "Thus then in brief: / The val iant Paris seeks you for his love. / . . .What say you? Can you love the gentleman? / This night you shall behold him at our feast" [I. iii. 73-4, 79-80]. Twenty lines later, the feast is not only shown as imminent but as characterized by the haste and confusion through which comic characters will express the theme. A servant enters:

Madam, the guests are come, supper serv'd up, you call'd, my young ladyask'd for, the nurse curs'd in the pantry, and everything in extremity. I must hence to wait; I beseech you, follow straight.

[I. iii. 100-03]

Scene iv opens with lines which continue the theme ingeniously in terms of a masking. The maskers reject slow and measured "prologue" [I. iv. 7] entries as "prolixity" [I. iv. 3], and propose to give their performance "and be gone" [I. iv. 10]. . . . (pp. 10-11)

Here also is the first entry of Mercutio who both as a character and as a name will point up the quick, the mercurial, mood of the play. And now a scene which began with the maskers as symbols of dispatch ends with a further thematic turn; a feared lateness of arrival at the feast is first made suggestive and then direct in disclosing untimeliness as a tragic theme:

Benvolio. This wind you talk of blows us from ourselves.
Supper is done, and we shall come too late. *Romeo.*
I fear, too early; for my mind misgives
Some consequence. yet hanging in the stars,
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date
With this night's revels, and expire the term
Of a despised life clos'd in my breast,
By some vile forfeit of untimely death.
But He that hath the steerage of my course
Direct my sail! On, lusty gentlemen!
Benvolio. Strike, drum. *They march*
about the stage.
[I. iv. 104-14]

The theme appears clearly here in exposition which goes beyond dramatic irony into conscious prophecy, and becomes a formulation of the tragedy itself: in the "consequence yet hanging in the stars" the passage echoes the "star-cross'd-lovers" line of the Prologue [1. 6], and it expresses Christian elements of tragedy through Romeo's reference to his "despised life" and his ascription of "steerage" to God's will. Romeo's lines are thus plainly designed for choric purposes. and any thematic material in them may be taken seriously. So it is notable that the passage arises from a quip implying haste (Benvolio's line) and adds earliness, untimeliness, to the conventional tragic themes of fate, *contemptus mundi* [contempt of the world], and divine providence. A concern over exposition as a "validating" factor should not, however. obscure the art by which Shakespeare supports his prophetic lines with dramatic action: as Romeo, sensing untimely death, consigns the steerage of his course to God, his sudden final words, "On, lusty gentlemen!" evoke Benvolio's command, "Strike, drum," and the march about the stage. Choric comment upon speeding fate is thus succeeded instantly by the peremptory drum and a quick-time march of maskers which present the theme in sound and movement.

As scene iv closes with this expression of the haste theme, the next scene continues it with a comic device already noted in scene iii-servants hastily preparing for the feast:

First Servant Where's Potpan, that he helps not to take away? He shift a trencher! He scrape a trencher!

Second Servant When good manners shall lie all in one or two men's hands, and they unwash'd too, 'tis afoul thing.

First Servant Away with the joint-stools, remove the court-cupboard, look to the plate. Good thou, save me a piece of marchpane; and, as thou loves me, let the porter let in Susan Grindstone and Nell. Antony and Potpan

Second Servant Ay, boy, ready.

First Servant. You are look'd for and call'd for, ask'd for and sought for, in the great chamber.

Third Servant We cannot be here and there too. Cheerly, boys; be brisk a while, and the longer liver take all.

[I. v. 1-15]

In Elizabethan staging this passage would come immediately after the close of scene iv and hence would follow Romeo's speech and the lively exit march begun with Benvolio's "Strike. drum." Thus, in the sequence, I. iv. 104 ff. through I. v. 1-17, actual, physical pace issues from Romeo's lines on tragic pace, and this in turn is expanded into lines and action presenting haste on the comic plane. It is also interesting, whether Shakespeare "meant it" or not, that the servant who ends the passage just quoted comically modifies Romeo's speech on swift, untimely tragedy: "be brisk a while, and the longer liver take all."

In the next portion of scene v old Capulet and his kinsman who are met for the feast immediately supplement the theme with dialogue on the rush of time since their last masking; over thirty years it has been since the nuptial of Lucentio whose son's age thus points to the unbelievable passage of a generation. Plot movement then extends this statement of theme with a quick sequence composed of Romeo's first glimpse of Juliet, Tybalt's threat of violence which is restrained by his uncle, and the meeting of the lovers which brings discovery that one is a Montague, the other a Capulet. In attending to verbal expressions of theme it is easy to forget that plot structure can thus silently do its work. In *Macbeth,* for example, the compressed action leading to Duncan's murder parallels the quality of rash obsession which is so dominant in the lines. The structure of *Romeo and Juliet* is similar; from Act I, scene ii onward, audience attention is centered upon a progressively imminent event, the Capulet feast, which in scene v is suddenly presented for a casting of the tragic die. Here Romeo and Juliet meet, their fate becomes implicit in the discovery of their lineage, and prophetic Death in the person of Tybalt is barely restrained from a harvest before the seed is planted. The action itself embodies Romeo's choric lines on fated, fatal dispatch.

The Prologue of Act II continues the theme in its opening passage,

Now old Desire doth in his death-bed lie,
And young Affection gapes to be his heir,
[Prologue II, 1-2]

suggestive lines which are translated into action by the pursuing of Romeo, who "ran this way, and leap'd this orchard wall" [II. i. 5]. The balcony scene now brings a necessary lull or resting point in the fast pace, but the famous exchange between the lovers continues the theme of haste. In II. ii Juliet implies it:

My ears have yet not drunk a hundred
words
Of thy tongue's uttering. yet I know the
sound.
[II. ii. 58-9]

And her lines presently become explicit:

Although I joy in thee,
I have no joy of this contract tonight;
It is too rash, too unadvis'd, too sudden,
Too like the lightning, which doth cease to
be
Ere one can say it lightens.
[II. ii. 116-20]

As before, plot supplements thematic statement; events become imminent as calls by the Nurse end the tryst and induce dialogue which expresses haste compounded with a desire to linger:

Juliet What o'clock to-morrow
Shall I send to thee?
Romeo. By the hour of nine.
Juliet. I will not fail; .tis twenty year till
then.
I have forgot why I did call thee back, *Romeo.* Let me stand here till thou re
member it.
Juliet I shall forget, to have thee still
stand there,
Rememb'ring how I love thy company.
Romeo. And I'll still stay, to have thee still
forget,
Forgetting any other home but this.
Juliet. 'Tis almost morning, I would have thee gone;
And yet no farther than a wanton's bird
[II. ii. 167-77]

If it is to give the illusion of pace, episodic action must have fluidity, a quality Shakespeare maintains here by beginning II. iii on a note carried over from II. ii. Romeo and Juliet have closed the later scene with lines on morning and the haste it brings. Then, as the next one commences, we hear Friar Laurence:

The grey-ey'd morn smiles on the frowning night,
Chequ'ring the eastern clouds with
streaks of light,
And flecked darkness like a drunkard
reels
From forth day's path and Titan's fiery
wheels. Now, ere the sun advance his burning eye.
The day to cheer and night's dank dew to
dry....
[II. iii. 1-6]

It is important to note that this is the first appearance of the Friar and that his role is a distinctly prophetic one. After the lines just quoted he moralizes aptly on tragic symbolism in the herb which "strain'd from that fair use, / Revolts from true birth, stumbling on abuse" [II. iii. 19-20]:

Virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied;
And vice sometime's by action dignified.
[II. iii. 21-2]

Then as Romeo silently enters, Friar Laurence produces the plant which delights when smelled but kills when tasted. After thus establishing the Friar's role as chorus for the tragedy, Shakespeare then makes him spokesman of the haste theme: his greeting dwells solely upon Romeo's "earli ness" and the "distemp'rature" from which it arises:

Benedicite!
What early tongue so sweet saluteth me?
Young son, it argues a distempered head
So soon to bid good morrow to thy bed.
Care keeps his watch in every old man's
eye,
And where care lodges, sleep will never lie;
But where unbruised youth with uns
tuff'd brain
Doth couch his limbs, there golden sleep
doth reign;
Therefore thy earliness doth me assure
Thou art up-rous'd with some dis
temp'rature.
[II. iii. 31-40]

Friar Laurence's thematic moralizing now extends to Rosaline, "so soon forsaken" [II. iii. 67]:

Lo, here upon thy cheek the stain doth sit
Of an old tear that is not wash'd offyet.
[II. iii. 75-6]

And as scene iii closes, the Friar's admonition by indirection changes to an outright statement of the haste theme:

Romeo. O, let us hence; I stand on sudden
haste.
Friar. Wisely and slow; they stumble that
run fast.
[II. iii. 93-4]

The next scene presents dialogue between Romeo, Benvolio, and Mercutio, in which an accelerated badinage continues the theme of oppressive haste: at the end of the exchange, as Mercutio complains that his "wits faint" [II. iv. 67-8] from the quick give-and-take, we hear Romeo exclaiming. "Switch and spurs, switch and spurs, or I'll cry a match" [II. iv. 69-70], and Mercutio observing, "Nay, if our wits run the wild goose chase, I am done. . . " [II. iv. 71-2]. Then, as the scene ends with Romeo's urging of speed in arranging the lovers' meeting, we hear the Nurse commanding Peter, "Before and apace" [II. iv. 217].

Again, as Juliet introduces II. v by reference to the overdue Nurse, there is a lively "run-on" from the exit lines of one scene to the entry lines of another. Juliet's soliloquy and the Nurse's appearance then combine to assert the haste theme fully and impressively:

The clock struck nine when I did send the
nurse; In half an hour she promis'd to return.
Perchance she cannot meet him; that's not
so.
O, she is lame! Love's heralds should be
thoughts,
Which ten times faster glide than the
sun's beams
Driving back shadows over louring hills;
Therefore do nimble-pinion'd doves draw
Love,
And therefore hath the wind-swift Cupid wings.
Now is the sun upon the high-most hill
Of this day's journey, and from nine till
twelve
Is three long hours, yet she is not come.
Had she affections and warm youthful
blood, She would be as swift in motion as a ball;

My words would bandy her to my sweet
love, And his to me;
But old folks, many, feign as they were
dead,
Unwieldy, slow, heavy and pale as lead.
[II. v. 1-17]

The Nurse enters here with comically labored breathing (a device also of scene iii) which accompanies here exclamation of "Jesu, what haste!" [II. v. 29] and the scene shifts back to the cell of Friar Laurence who plays a "slowing" role opposite Romeo analogous to the Nurse's role with Juliet. But the lovers meet in the cell and their marriage is arranged with the dispatch which is now coloring all aspects of the play; Friar Laurence speaks:

Come, come with me, and we will make
short work;
For. by your leaves, you shall not stay
alone
Till Holy Church incorporate two in one.
[II. vi. 35-7]

Act III, scene i now brings the street fight in which Mercutio is killed, and speed in the action is again accompanied by lines which express the haste theme. Mercutio's challenge comes in such terms: "Will you pluck your sword out of his pilcher by the ears? Make haste, lest mine be about your ears ere it be out" [III. i. 80-2]. And at Mercutio's death the lament of Romeo points to the rush of events within a single hour:

This gentleman, the Prince's near ally,
My very friend, hath got this mortal hurt
In my behalf; my reputation stain'd
With Tybalt's slander,- Tybalt, that an
hour
Hath been my cousin!
[III. i. 109-13]

Even the notion of death appears in a metaphor of souls ascending in quick succession:

Now, Tybalt, take the "villain" back again That late thou gav'st me; for Mercutio's
soul
Is but a little way above our heads,
Staying for thine. . . .
[III. i. 125-28]

At this point citizens enter in pursuit which results in an episode similar to I.i as the Prince, with full retinue, quiets the disorder and pronounces judgment on it. One might expect here a speech which would slow the movement, but at this stage of the play all

characters, even those rendering judicial decrees, are given lines which carry the theme of immediacy and hurry. Escalus closes the scene:

And for that offence
Immediately we do exile him hence. . . .
Let Romeo hence in haste,
Else, when he's found, that hour is his
last. Bear hence this body and attend our will.
Mercy but murders, pardoning those that
kill.
[III. i. 186-87, 194-97]

Once more. as a scene is closed with the haste theme, the next one is begun on the same note. The transition, moreover, contains irony which has the sudden quality expressed by the action and the imagery. In III. Ii Juliet's opening lines succeed the Prince's decree which ends III. i. He has banished Romeo "hence in haste" and Juliet, unaware of this, calls for Romeo's return with all speed and urgency:

Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds,
Towards Phoebus' lodging; such a waggoner
As Phaethon would whip you to the west,
And bring in cloudy night immediately.
Spread thy close curtain, love-performing
night,
That runaway's eyes may wink. and
Romeo
Leap to these arms untalk'd of and
unseen! . . .
Come, night; come. Romeo; come, thou
day in night;
For thou wilt lie upon the wings of night.
Whiter than new snow on a raven's back.
Come, gentle night, come, loving. black
brow'd night. . . .
So tedious is this day
As is the night before some festival
To an impatient child that hath new robes
And may not wear them.
[III. ii. 1-7, 17-20,28-31]

The Nurse then enters and increases the effect of haste by maddening the impatient Juliet with confused quibble in reporting Tybalt's death and Romeo's banishment.

It is unnecessary to discuss the full extent to which dispatch appears as a theme in *Romeo and Juliet.* Interpretation need not cover an entire work if it adequately suggests a way of perceiving it. The last half of the play [also] shows a wide range of action, character, and line devoted to the haste theme. . . . (pp. 12-21)

Brents Stirling, "'They Stumble that Run Fast'." in his Unity in Shakespearian Tragedy: The Interplay of Theme and Character, 1956. *Reprint by Gordian Press, Inc.,* 1966, *pp. 10-25.*

BOOKRAGS

Critical Essay #9

Kerschen is a freelance writer and adjunct college English instructor. In this essay, Kerschen considers whether fate, the personal characteristics of Romeo and Juliet, or the demands of justice determine the outcome of the story.

Whenever a tragedy occurs, people want to know what went wrong. They look for the causes, the reasons for the end result. With *Romeo and Juliet*, the opinions have varied as literary criticism has taken different viewpoints through the years. Since William Shakespeare named the play for the two central characters, the immediate reaction is to look at them for fault. However, Shakespeare is never that simple, so a deeper analysis is warranted.

The great German Shakespearean critic, August von Schlagel, blamed fate for the tragedy, but in the sense that the cruel world is too terrible a place for a love as tender as that of Romeo and Juliet. Instruction books such as Kelley Griffith's *Writing Essays about Literature* very matter-of-factly blame fate as well by telling students that "if the plot is only part of a larger or ongoing story, then the characters are more likely to seem at the mercy of forces beyond their control." Therefore, since the plot of *Romeo and Juliet* is actually only one episode of a long feud, the young couple, according to Griffith, "cannot escape the undertow of their families' history." Even the powerful prince cannot prevent the tragedy, although he tries, because Romeo and Juliet are identified by fate as "star-crossed" and "death-marked."

It must be noted that the family feud is the reason that Romeo and Juliet's relationship is a "forbidden love." It should also be noted that the play begins with a fight scene between servants of the two families and ends with a peace agreement between Lords Montague and Capulet. The family feud could then be seen as a bookend structure around the lovers' story. Shakespeare did not create the story□he inherited it. The feud is part of the previous versions that he draws upon, in which the the feud serves as a complicating device that keeps the lovers apart. However, placing the feud first and last in the play, that is, in the most attention-getting spots for the audience, indicates that the feud is the most important facet of the story. Although this play is considered one of the greatest love stories of all time, viewed from another angle, it may be that it is a story about hate; a story that is the final episode of a long-running saga. The love affair of Romeo and Juliet may be only a device to bring about an end to the feud and show how terrible the consequences can be of such violent and vindictive behavior. As a result, the blame according to this theory can be placed with the demands of justice.

Further support for this interpretation is the realization that violence runs throughout the story, linking each event. Romeo meets Juliet at the Capulet party but his presence there fuels Tybalt's challenge to him the next day. That challenge leads to the deaths of Mercutio and Tybalt. That violence is the reason that Romeo is banished. His banishment leads to the risky ruse of Juliet's death, which leads to Romeo coming to Juliet's family tomb. There, the family feud causes Paris to assume that Romeo has evil intent and the resultant fight costs Paris his life. The entrapment and despair that the

feud has precipitated next results in the death of both Romeo and Juliet. With these events in mind, it would be easy to see this play as being about the feud, not the lovers. After all, Juliet says, "My only love sprung from my only hate!"

Many studies of the play remark on the relationship of love and hate. Could Juliet's love spring from hate because they are both intense passions? A nineteenth-century German scholar, Hermann Ulrici, said that the love of Romeo and Juliet had an ideal beauty but was condemned from the beginning because of its "overpowering and reckless" passion that disturbs "the internal harmony of the moral powers." Ulrici concluded that Shakespeare brings balance back to the situation through the deaths of the couple and the end of the feud. Following this interpretation, Denton Snider, an American scholar, later agreed that Romeo and Juliet are destroyed by their own love. He said that, just as with the passion of hate, the intensity of love's passion blots out reason and self-control and leads to destructive behavior. Snider also thought that there was a moral justice involved in that the fire of love that consumes Romeo and Juliet is the fire of sacrifice that is rewarded with peace between their families. Snider writes, "The lovers, Romeo and Juliet, die, but their death has in it for the living a redemption."

So, the argument comes back to the idea of justice. In 1905, American scholar Stopford Brooke wrote that the feud is the central event and cause of the tragedy and that the accord reached at the end was the goal of justice. Brooke counsels that discussions of fate as a determinant in the story would be more correct if the name "Justice" were given to fate.

While Brooke and others reject the mere happenstance of fate for the more intentioned aim of justice, the conclusion is still that outside forces bring Romeo and Juliet to their doom. Another slight turn of the viewpoint sees justice as a moral lesson. In this light, there is the unsympathetic view that Romeo and Juliet are foolish children who are inevitably headed toward ruin because they do not consult or gain the approval of their parents for their marriage. Once again, the sentiment is that passion leads to head-strong, reckless behavior such as a refusal to obey constituted authority (one' parents, one' ruler). This results in a disruption of hierarchical order, and the tragedy works to reestablish that order through loss and grief. One's attention is drawn to the two central figures, and a quite natural reaction is that Romeo and Juliet are impetuous kids. In that case, this story can be interpreted as having a more universal message about young love and not just about the two young lovers in the play. Undoubtedly, it is the universality of Shakespeare's dramas that has made them classics, so perhaps Shakespeare's intent was not just to tell a story, but to give an example. If the theme were not timeless, then Leonard Bernstein might not have taken the story and transformed it into *West Side Story*. There are foolish teenagers in every generation, and there is senseless feuding in every culture.

Although it has been suggested that the love of Romeo and Juliet was too ideal to survive in this imperfect world, it would seem a shame to think of true, passionate love inevitably leading to a bad result. Perhaps the problem is not with the intensity of the emotion, but the inability to control and direct that emotion in a positive way. If that is the case, then Romeo and Juliet are doomed, not by the fates, not by the judgment of

justice, but by their own character flaws. Shakespeare may have altered the classic form of the Greek tragedy, but that does not mean that he totally ignored the Greek formula for the tragically flawed hero.

It can be said that part of Romeo's character flaw is that he believes in the fates and therefore feels powerless to help himself. He has a bad feeling that going to the party may lead to eventual doom, but he goes anyway. He surrenders himself to the guidance of the gods not just out of piety but perhaps because he shirks responsibility. Killing Tybalt is a rash act that needed not have happened if Romeo had been better able to control himself. Instead, Romeo succumbs to an irrational and violent reaction and then feels sorry for himself as "fortune's fool" who has been pushed by fate into committing the terrible deed.

Juliet's nature is more practical and cautious, but her innocence and the intensity of her love are her downfall. Moverover, she lives in a family where her father does not know how to express his love except to make decisions for Juliet that he thinks are in her best interest. Her mother is too cold and distant to give her good advice, and her nurse, though she loves Juliet, is too crude to understand the delicacies and dangers of first love. Consequently, Juliet is not chastised by the critics as much as Romeo for being rash. As a young girl practically restricted to her house by the social customs of her time, she has very little control over anything anyway. Romeo, however, is older and has slightly more autonomy.

Is it fate, a need for justice, or the characters themselves who bring a tragic end to *Romeo and Juliet*? Can it be a combination of all these factors? They seem to be inextricably mixed, despite the efforts of the critics to separate them. Ben Jonson and many others have admitted to Shakespeare's genius, even though they found other faults in his work. Scholars have commented on the depth of Shakespeare's understanding of human nature and the psychological aspects of his plays. Is it not possible, then, the Shakespeare was smart enough and sensitive enough to have picked up on all the nuances of a human situation and been able to incorporate highly complex emotions and interactions in *Romeo and Juliet*? Shakespeare was aware of the conventions of his time and the expectations of his audience for certain elements of tragedy. But he was also innovative enough to blend some of the traditional aspects of tragedy with a much more intricate and multi-faceted dramatic structure that included an amazing depth of characterization. There is a reason that Shakespeare is considered the greatest dramatist of all time, and that reason may be that he was able, better than anyone else, to fill his plays with a richness that, four hundred years later, had scholars still mining its depths.

Source: Lois Kerschen, Critical Essay on *Romeo and Juliet*, in *Drama for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Critical Essay #10

Aubrey holds a Ph.D. in English and has published many articles on Shakespeare. In this essay, Aubrey discusses two film versions of the play.

Romeo and Juliet has always been one of Shakespeare's most frequently performed plays. However, since the late 1960s, many more people have become familiar with the play through movie versions than through live performances in a theater. Franco Zeffirelli's lush *Romeo and Juliet* (1968) has proved enduringly popular. In 1996, Baz Luhrmann's frenetic *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* was a big box-office hit for the Australian director.

The challenges faced by a director who wants to make a film of a Shakespeare play are immense. Not too long ago, Shakespearean purists rejected the very idea of filming Shakespeare. Shakespeare appeals to the ear, they said, whereas the cinema appeals to the eye, so there is a natural antipathy between the two forms. Film favors action, whereas in a Shakespeare play characters often give long speeches. These "talking heads" can be effective on stage, but filmgoers, conditioned by the conventions of the medium, become impatient or bored with them. The film director must therefore cut the original text considerably. Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, contains only a third of the original text, and Zeffirelli was roundly criticized by some Shakespeare scholars for the drastic nature of the cuts, as well as for shifting lines within scenes and occasionally adding a line or half-line of dialogue. The critics complained that Shakespeare was not a hack screenwriter whose work could be chopped up and rearranged at will. But others noted that Zeffirelli had shown himself to be a master of his craft because he was able to compensate for the omitted text by recreating it visually.

Zeffirelli's stated intention was to popularize *Romeo and Juliet* by bringing it to a mass audience. With this goal in mind he decided to cast two young and unknown actors in the title roles. This was a break with tradition since Shakespeare's lovers were usually played by more experienced actors. In a 1936 film version, Norma Shearer, who was 36 years old, played Juliet, and Leslie Howard, 46 years old, played Romeo. In the play, Juliet is barely fourteen years old, and Romeo not much older. So, Zeffirelli chose Olivia Hussey, age fifteen, to play Juliet and Leonard Whiting, age seventeen, to play Romeo. Although older, more experienced actors might have been better able to deliver the lines, they would have found it hard to convey the extreme youth and innocence of the protagonists, which is central to the play and its repeated contrasts of youth and age.

Zeffirelli's film begins with a sober off-screen reading of the prologue by Sir Laurence Olivier as the camera pans across Verona as seen from high above. (Zeffirelli was a great admirer of Olivier's work and this was a deliberate reference to the opening of Olivier's 1944 film of Shakespeare's *Henry V*.) The film then cuts to a busy, noisy, market square, and a wealth of visual detail piles up as the camera pans. It is clear from the beginning that this will be a spectacular film, one in which the setting itself becomes□as Zeffirelli believed it should□like a character in the action.

Although Zeffirelli was forced to cut much of the text, he succeeded in creating visual images that effectively convey Shakespeare's verbal images and themes. This can be seen from two examples, the first of which comes right at the beginning of the film. When the two Capulet servants enter, the camera shows only their legs, clad in tights, and their crotches, which display prominent codpieces. This image replaces the aggressive sexual talk in this scene in the play. After the initial sword fight, the sword-wearing Tybalt enters in a similar codpiece-emphasizing shot. The audience is being invited to identify male sexual energy and pride with the violence that pervades the play.

Interestingly, Zeffirelli does not present Romeo in this way. Faithful to Shakespeare's text, his Romeo is more contemplative, even dreamy, and unwilling to fight until his friend Mercutio is killed. Then, he gets dragged into the cycle of violence. Feminist readings of *Romeo and Juliet* often emphasize this point, arguing that the tragedy results not from the workings of fate, which is the traditional view of the play, but because of the rigidity of the male-dominated social order that Romeo at first resists but that eventually overwhelms him.

The second example of how visual imagery can present verbal themes occurs at the Capulet ball, as Jack Jorgens notes in his book *Shakespeare on Film*. At first, the dancers form two separate circles. After Romeo has set eyes on Juliet and joined the dance, the dancers form two concentric circles, with Romeo in the outer circle and Juliet in the inner one. This might seem on the surface to be an image of harmony, but it should be noted that the circles are moving in opposite directions□a clear allusion to the theme in the play of the inextricable linking of the opposites of love and hate, unity and separation.

Another highlight of Zeffirelli's film, and an example of how he makes up for textual cuts with visual treats, is the long duel sequence between Mercutio and Tybalt. This not only makes gripping cinema but also gives the director a chance to further characterize Mercutio and Tybalt. Killing Mercutio seems to have been the last thing on Tybalt's mind, and Mercutio's death is made even more poignant by the fact that right up to the end, his friends think it is just one more of his jokes.

The purists may have groaned at some of Zeffirelli's methods, but he was certainly vindicated at the box-office. The film became a worldwide success. It has been called a film for the 1960s, and indeed it did succeed in capturing the *zeitgeist* of those turbulent times of "flower power," sexual freedom, and anti-Vietnam war protests. The brief shot of the lovers nude anchors the film in that uninhibited sixties era, as does the very first shot of Romeo walking toward the camera carrying not a sword but a flower. "Make love not war," one of the slogans of the sixties counter-culture, is the subtext here.

If Zeffirelli's was a film for the sixties, Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* was squarely aimed at the youth culture of the 1990s. The film begins (and also ends) with a shot of a small television in the middle of the darkened screen. On the television, a female news anchor reads the prologue as if it were a news item. This is a very different world than that revealed in the stately prologue read by Olivier in Zeffirelli's film. An off-screen male voice then repeats the prologue as a montage shows

the main characters, and some of the words even appear on screen as well, as headlines in newspapers. The director clearly wants to ensure that the audience understands every word of the Shakespearean verse.

The film then leaps into the hot, combustible world of Verona Beach, with its feuding families and family-loyal gangs. Both the Capulets and Montagues appear to be gangland bosses dealing in real estate or construction, and their gun-toting minions, pumped up with testosterone, drive around town in convertibles, looking for trouble. The guns bear the brand name "Sword," thus neatly making sense of the Shakespearean text when the mayhem breaks out.

The opening sequence sets the pace, the camera keeps moving, and it hardly lets up throughout the film. Nor does the soundtrack, a mix of pop and classical, in which hip-hop bands such as Garbage and Radiohead rub shoulders with Mozart and Wagner.

As a director, Luhrmann is inventive and willing to take risks, which give the film an admirable freshness. He certainly has some fun with the Capulets' ball, creating it as a fancy dress extravaganza in which Mercutio is a high-stepping drag queen, Lady Capulet a comic turn, and poor Juliet a winged beauty stuck with the eager but inane suitor Paris, whose picture is shown, in a nice touch of directorial wit, on the front cover of *Time* magazine as "Bachelor of the Year." When Juliet escapes for a moment, she and Romeo gaze at each other through a fish tank.

Leonardo DiCaprio, selected for his appeal to teenagers, is an adequate, even charming Romeo who speaks the verse reasonably well, but it is Claire Danes's Juliet who leaves the deeper impression. She is a more mature, expressive and articulate Juliet than Olivia Hussey in the 1968 film. Her face registers a range of emotions with impressive subtlety. Danes conveys Juliet's practical nature, and she seems older than Romeo, even though this is not the case. DiCaprio's Romeo is a romantic and a dreamer. In both cases, this is quite true to Shakespeare's play.

Luhrmann also exercises his creativity in the traditional balcony scene, in which Romeo and Juliet first pledge their love. This Romeo, like every other Romeo for four hundred years, spies a light at the window and thinks he sees Juliet, but then who should poke her head out of the window but the disapproving Nurse. Meanwhile, Juliet just happens to be taking the elevator downstairs, and when the two finally meet face to face outside, she is so surprised she falls backwards into the swimming pool, taking Romeo with her. The scene that follows has all the innocent appeal that the text demands.

Like Zeffirelli, Luhrmann manages to convey Shakespeare's themes through some startling visual effects. In this all-action, quick-cutting movie, which was aimed at the supposedly short attention spans of teens, there are nonetheless two moments of utter stillness. The first is when the lovers are shown lying asleep together, and this foreshadows the moment they lie together in death at the end. The position of their bodies, with Juliet's right arm draped over Romeo's midriff, and both heads turned to the right, is almost exactly the same in both shots. As in the Shakespearean text, love and death are intimately, tragically, linked.

In the death scene, Luhrmann makes a dramatically effective innovation. Juliet shows signs of life several times as Romeo prepares to take the poison. He is looking elsewhere and fails to see her. Then, just as he downs the fatal mixture, Juliet wakes up fully, smiles and touches him on the cheek. It is too late, but Juliet utters her last speech, beginning "What's here?" while Romeo still lives, and he is still alive as she kisses him, hoping that some drop of poison is left on his lips that will dispatch her too. Romeo's final line, "Thus with a kiss I die," is spoken to a conscious, anguished Juliet, about a kiss initiated by her, not, as in the text, by Romeo on the lips of a Juliet he believes to be dead.

In the cutting of the text, Luhrmann makes different decisions than Zeffirelli. Luhrmann gives more insight into Romeo's state of mind at the beginning of the film. As in Shakespeare's play, Romeo is stuck in love-sick melancholy, pining for a woman named Rosaline who apparently scorns him. This is omitted in Zeffirelli's film, with the result that some of Romeo's lines after he has met Juliet are deprived of their full meaning. Luhrmann includes the scene in which Romeo buys poison from an old apothecary (omitted in the Zeffirelli film, which does not explain how Romeo acquired the poison). Both films omit the incident at the end of the play where Romeo kills Paris, presumably because neither director wanted the hero to have too much blood on his hands. Neither filmmaker fully brings out the reconciliation of the families at the end, although this is clearly announced in the prologue.

But carping over inevitable textual cuts should not obscure the fact that both Zeffirelli and Luhrmann brought a freshness of vision to a four-hundred-year-old play, translated it into a new medium, and in each case won for Shakespeare's tragic story a new generation of enthusiastic admirers.

Source: Bryan Aubrey, Critical Essay on *Romeo and Juliet*, in *Drama for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Critical Essay #11

Dupler is a writer and has taught college English courses. In this essay, Dupler examines the concept of romantic love as it appears in one of the greatest love stories of all time.

The main characters of *Romeo and Juliet* are young "star-crossed" lovers who experience a love that lifts them into ecstatic extremes of emotions for a few days and then leads them to a tragic ending. The idea of love that appears in this play, that a certain type of romantic love can make people willing and able to transcend boundaries and constraints, has lived in Western literature for many centuries. The power of this idea of love has fueled the imaginations of readers and theater audiences for generations. For Romeo and Juliet, this type of love pits them against their parents and against their society, against their friends and confidants, and creates conflict with their religious leader. Their love ultimately brings them the possibility of exile and then helps to bring about their death. At the same time, their experience of love gives each of them the strength and desire to pursue their love against the odds and makes them willing to die for love. Although the play happens in the span of less than one week, both main characters undergo much change. In the end, the death of the young couple heals a long-standing rift between their families. In this play, romantic love is portrayed in a way that reveals its power and complexity; this love is at once invigorating, destructive, transformative, and redemptive.

In the beginning of the play, Romeo is heart-broken over a young lady, Rosaline, who does not return his affection. He is gloomy and withdrawn and claims that he is sinking "under love's heavy burden." Romeo at first describes love as a "madness" and as a "smoke raised from the fume of sighs." Romeo's friends, who wish to see him lifted above his melancholy, urge him to stop philosophizing about his lost love and to seek another young lady as a new object of his affections. Benvolio urges Romeo to heal himself of love's despair by "giving liberty unto thine eyes." Mercutio does the same when he tells Romeo to lessen his sensitivity and to "be rough with love." When Romeo meets Juliet, his vision of love changes profoundly. Later, Friar Laurence acknowledges this change when he remarks to Romeo that his feelings about Rosaline were for "doting, not for loving."

At the same time Romeo is dejected about unfulfilled love, Juliet, not quite fourteen years of age, is being urged by her nurse and her mother to consider marrying Count Paris. For both of these older women in Juliet's life, what matters most is a socially advantageous marriage, and this marriage is being arranged before Juliet has even seen her suitor. Juliet, however, seems to intuit that this type of pairing will not sustain her; she promises her guardians that she will view, but may not like, her arranged suitor. Already, for both Romeo and Juliet, there is a sense that there is a type of love that goes beyond the common, that is special and worth patience and suffering.

Then comes the scene in which Romeo sees Juliet for the first time. He is instantly enamored and entranced, and his melancholy and despair are quickly transformed. Not

long before, Romeo had been speaking of Rosaline's charms but upon seeing Juliet, he claims he "ne'er saw true beauty till this night." From the beginning, there is also something ephemeral and impractical about this love. Romeo sees a "beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear." For Juliet, this sudden love is complicated as well, and she exclaims, "My only love, sprung from my only hate."

The romantic love between Romeo and Juliet occurs with a glance and enters them through their eyes. This is rich symbolism. First, romantic love in this way becomes individualized and has nothing to do with cultural constraints or the advice of mentors. This love seizes the couple with a recognition that seems to go beyond them. This "passion lends a power" that awakens each of them and energizes them. For Romeo, this awakening increases his sense of beauty and his feelings for the world as evidenced in his poetic declarations to Juliet. Romeo's language overflows with a sudden awareness of the beauty of the world and the new importance that has been added to his life. Romeo resolves that even "stony limits cannot hold love out." In addition to the enticements of the attraction, each lover feels a danger in this type of loving. Romeo later states to Juliet that "there lies more peril in thine eye" than twenty swords, while Juliet worries that their love is "too rash, too unadvised, too sudden."

For Juliet, this new feeling strengthens her against the cultural forces that would deny her love and freedom. She pledges that she would "no longer be a Capulet" if such denial would be necessary to sustain her love. Juliet's new feelings of love awaken her to the difficulties of her situation as a young woman in her culture. It is a rough and male-dominated culture. From the beginning, minor characters bicker and threaten violence, with one serving man declaring that women are the "weaker vessels" and another one bragging about "cruelty to the maids." It is a world of long-standing feuds and quick aggression. The friar, or the religious authority, at one point refers to fear as "womanish" and tells Romeo that his tears, or his emotional feelings, are "womanish," implying a disrespect for both the feminine and for Romeo's romantic feelings. Theirs is a world where Juliet's kind of strength is not honored, as when Friar Laurence tells Romeo, "women may fall when there's no strength in men."

Juliet struggles to honor her feelings of love for Romeo. Her closest friend in the play, the nurse, argues against Juliet's love for Romeo and tries to convince her to consider the arranged marriage with Paris. The nurse tells Juliet, "you know not how to choose a man," capitulating to the demands of male authority rather than to the demands of the feminine heart. Juliet also faces tremendous pressure from her parents, who will not allow her individuality and freedom when it comes to considering marriage. Her father uses despicable and shaming language when trying to force her to marry Paris. He threatens to exile her to the streets, calling her "unworthy," "a curse," and a "disobedient wretch." In keeping with the patriarchal arrangment of power, Juliet's father treats Paris with respect and deference. Later, Capulet denigrates Juliet's freedom of choice by referring to it as a "peevish self-willed harlotry." Knowing her place in this society, Juliet's mother refuses to make a stand for her daughter's freedom, pressuring her to accept her father's demands. Juliet despairs over this outward pressure, wondering why fate was so hard on "so soft a subject" as herself. Finally, the force of love prevails within Juliet. Although outwardly she denies her truth and agrees to marry Paris, inwardly she

knows that her love for Romeo has given her intense resolve, or the "power to die" if necessary.

Romeo also struggles with the harshness of the world around him. When Romeo is at his most vulnerable and emotional, his friends urge him to quickly move out of his moodiness into the world of action. For Mercutio, love is nothing more than a "fine foot, straight leg, and quivering thigh." Even Romeo doubts his new feelings of peace and reconciliation that his love for Juliet has brought to him. After Romeo's failed attempt to make peace with Tybalt, Mercutio is slain, and Romeo is unable to remain in his peaceful state. Referring to Juliet, he shouts, "Thy beauty hath made me effeminate." This failure to respect the "effeminate" feelings he experiences with Juliet is Romeo's undoing; when he slays Tybalt in an uncontrolled rage, he sets into motion the tragic ending of the story.

Romeo is not the only character who cannot fully transform or overcome the side of his nature that betrays or fails to support the noble qualities of romantic love. Several characters in the play add their parts to the tragic ending. Mercutio, despite Romeo's peaceful influence, stirs up the fight scene in which he is slain and leads to Romeo's banishment. Juliet's parents, rather than respecting her free will and her true feelings, work against her and force her into what she believes is a hopeless situation. Juliet, constrained by her society, is unable to stand up for her love of Romeo; she lies when she accepts her parents' demands to marry Paris. In a sense, society fails when the letter from the friar to Romeo is not delivered, which would inform Romeo of the ploy to save the young couple. Friar Laurence plays an integral and yet morally ambiguous role in the play. The friar respects and acknowledges the love between Romeo and Juliet when he agrees to secretly marry them. However, by doing this in secret, he subverts the established secular order. In the end, rather than mediating from his position of religious authority, the friar devises a secretive plan that goes wrong and leads to the death of the young lovers.

Love is so powerful for Romeo and Juliet because it takes on spiritual dimensions. Romeo mentions that he will be "new baptized" by their meeting and claims that his love for Juliet is actually "my soul that calls upon my name." Juliet acknowledges the "infinite" qualities inherent in her feelings. Love, or the "religion of mine eye," as Romeo has called it earlier, creates powerful forces in each. Juliet acknowledges that "God joined my heart and Romeo's." When Romeo is banished from the city for killing Tybalt, he claims to the friar that banishment is worse than death because it would be banishment away from Juliet. Again, Romeo seems to be mixing religious feelings with his feelings of love for Juliet. He states that his banishment would be "purgatory, torture, hell itself" and that "Heaven is here, where Juliet lives." In the Biblical sense, hell is the absence of God, while for Romeo, hell now becomes the absence of love as he has mixed his spiritual longings with his romantic ones. The death of the lovers occurs in a vault, and although the lovers themselves fail to resurrect, as was the friar's plan, a new peace is brought with the reconciliation of the warring families.

Source: Douglas Dupler, Critical Essay on *Romeo and Juliet*, in *Drama for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Adaptations

An audiocassette of *Romeo and Juliet* was made by Caedmon Audio in 1996 and features Claire Bloom and Albert Finney.

A film version of *Romeo and Juliet* (1936) was released in black and white, starring Norma Shearer and Leslie Howard and directed by George Cukor. It is available on VHS from Warner Studios.

A color film version of *Romeo and Juliet* (1956) starring Lawrence Harvey was made available on video in 1997 by Hallmark Entertainment. It was also released on video by MGM/UA in 2000.

Kultur Video released a 1966 filming of Prokofiev's ballet version as performed by Rudolf Nureyev, Margot Fonteyn, and the Royal Ballet. It is available on both VHS and DVD.

The 1968 blockbuster version directed by Franco Zeffirelli and starring Olivia Hussey and Leonard Whiting is available on video from Paramount Studios.

A BBC and Time-Life Film production of *Romeo and Juliet* was part of a BBC series on The Shakespeare Plays in 1978. Digitally remastered for DVD in 2001, it is distributed by Ambrose Video Publishing.

A 1996 film version, using Shakespeare's language in a modern update and starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Claire Danes, is available on video from Fox Home Entertainment.

Topics for Further Study

Romeo and Juliet is a story that ends with the suicides of the two teenage lovers. Research the extent of the problem with teenage suicide in the early 2000s and provide a list of resources for those seeking help.

Juliet's parents try to arrange a marriage for her. What cultures in the 2000s still follow the practice of arranged marriages?

An important element in the story of Romeo and Juliet is the sword fights. In the early 2000s, sword fighting is known as the sport of fencing and is an Olympic event. Find out more about this sport and report on its modern practice and events.

Could the tragic ending of *Romeo and Juliet* have been prevented? Cite some instances where a different action or turn of events might have saved the young couple. What would you have done in their place?

Compare the tragedies of ancient Greek theater to those of Shakespeare. What are the differences and similarities? Specifically, what was new about *Romeo and Juliet* for a tragedy in its time period?

Compare *West Side Story* to *Romeo and Juliet*. Match up the characters and the story lines. Comment on how Shakespeare's story has translated into a modern setting and conflict.

Compare and Contrast

1300s: Chaucer receives great acclaim in his own lifetime (1343—1400) from both the British public and the royal court for writing the *Canterbury Tales* and other poetic works.

1590s: Shakespeare starts his career in the London theaters and enjoys popular success from the beginning, even garnering the favor of Queen Elizabeth I.

Today: Both Chaucer and Shakespeare are still considered to be geniuses of literature by people around the world, and their works are studied as part of the standard curriculum in most schools.

1300s: The papacy leaves Rome and is located in Avignon, France from 1309 to 1377 because of political pressures from the French. The first rumblings of the Reformation are heard in England from John Wycliffe.

1590s: The Reformation is in full swing. The conflicts between Protestants and Catholics are often violent, and European countries align according to Protestant or Catholic affiliation.

Today: The world still struggles with religious conflicts. Protestants and Catholics have reached accord in many areas, except for some tension yet in Northern Ireland. However, Muslim extremists wage a holy war in many areas of the world, and some governments forbid religion entirely.

1300s: In 1346, the Black Death kills almost a third of the people of Europe and Asia.

1590s: Plague closes the theaters in 1593, and other such diseases pose a deadly threat. Elizabeth I barely survives small pox, and Shakespeare later succumbs to a mysterious fever.

Today: The plague and small pox are virtually eliminated around the world. Other new contagious diseases such as the ebola virus and AIDS have arisen, but where modern medicine is available, the potential for an epidemic is minimized.

1300s: Important innovations are the blast furnace, the standardization of shoe sizes in England, and, at the end of the century, the Dutch use of windmills.

1590s: The first knitting machine is invented as well as the first flush toilet. Coal mining begins in Germany, and scientists begin to investigate magnetism and electricity.

Today: Technology and computers are universal, and technology witnesses advances occurring so quickly that some equipment is outdated within months of installation.

What Do I Read Next?

For those wanting an affordable, unabridged edition of all 37 plays and the sonnets, a good choice is *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, published by the Library of Literary Classics in 1990.

The Essential Shakespeare has updated language for Shakespeare's greatest plays and a narrative guide. It was published in 2001 by Xlibris Corporation as part of its Essential Library series for the modern reader.

Christopher Marlowe, a contemporary of Shakespeare, was also an outstanding playwright and the author of *Tamburlane* and *Dr. Faustus*. *A Preface to Marlowe* is an examination of his plays and poetry. Written by Stevie Simkin, it was published by Longman in 2000.

A modern-day musical version of *Romeo and Juliet* is *West Side Story*. Norris Houghton published a book with Laure Leaf in 1965 that compares the two hugely successful versions of the story.

Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* was a reworking of the poem "Romeus and Juliet" by British poet Arthur Brooke. In February of 2005, AMS Press was expected to publish a copy of this poem in *Brooke's "Romeus and Juliet": Being the Original of Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet,"* thus making this work newly available for comparison.

Further Study

Literary Commentary:

Bergeron, David M. "Sickness in *Romeo and Juliet"*

CLA Journal XX, No.1 (March 1977): 356-64.

A detailed analysis of the imagery of sickness, disease, and remedy in *Romeo and Juliet* and how it contributes to the tragic structure of the play.

Bruce, Brenda. "Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet."* In *Players of Shakespeare: Essays in Shakespearean Performance by Twelve Players with the Royal Shakespeare Company,* edited by Philip Brockbank, pp. 91-101. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

Provides a theatrical insight into the Nurse's character, describing how she interpreted the role for a 1981 Royal Shakespeare Company production of *Romeo and Juliet*

Chapman, Raymond. "Double Time in *Romeo and Juliet." The Modem Language Review* XLIV, NO.3 (July 1949): 372-74.

Analyzes the methods Shakespeare used to achieve the concept of double time in *Romeo and Juliet,* where action encompasses a longer period of time than is indicated by the repeated references to particular days and hours.

Cole, Douglas, ed. *Twentieth Century Interpretations of "Romeo and Juliet"* Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970, 117 p.

A collection of scholarly essays on *Romeo and Juliet.*

Craig, Hardin. "The Beginnings." In his *An Interpretation of Shakespeare,* pp. 19-46. New York: Citadel Press, 1948.

Briefly discusses the play's sources, themes, and language, as well as Shakespeare's characterization of Romeo and Juliet.

Dowden, Edward. *"Romeo and Juliet"* In his *Transcripts and Studies,* pp. 378-430. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1910.

Summarizes the plots of various retellings of the Romeo and Juliet story, then offers a detailed reconstruction of Shakespeare's play, focusing especially on the characters.

Earl, A J. *"Romeo and Juliet* and the Elizabethan Sonnets." *English* XXVII, Nos. 128 and 129 (Summer-Autumn 1978): 99-119.

Identifies the dominant qualities of Petrarchan poetry and reviews how the tradition of Petrarch was established in England, and eventually in Shakespeare. Earl then

considers certain passages in *Romeo and Juliet* in light of the principal elements of Petrarchan love poetry.

Erskine, John. *"Romeo and Juliet"* In his *The Delight of Great Books,* pp. 99-125. Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1941.

Provides an overview of the major themes of *Romeo and Juliet,* focusing on the contrasts between love and hate, youth and age, gentleness and vulgarity, and haste and patience.

Everett, Barbara. *"Romeo and Juliet:* The Nurse's Story." *Critical Quarterly* 14, No.2 (Summer 1972): 129-39.

Explores the Nurse's narrative function in *Romeo and Juliet,* focusing on her speech at I. iii. 13-62. Everett asserts that although the Nurse's perspective is crude and not completely trustworthy, her common observations offer the reader a fuller understanding of the lovers.

Gray, J. C. "Renaissance Notions of Love, Time, and Death," *Dalhousie Review* 48, no.1 (Spring 1968): 58-69.

Shows how *Romeo and Juliet* exemplifies the ambivalent attitudes toward love, time, and death commonly expressed in Renaissance literature.

Harbage, Alfred. "Mastery Achieved: *Romeo and Juliet."* In his *William Shakespeare: A Readers Guide,* pp. 139-61. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966.

A scene-by-scene plot summary of *Romeo and Juliet* accompanied by critical commentary on various aspects of the play.

Hartley, Lodwick. " 'Mercy but Murders': A Sub-theme in *Romeo and Juliet" Papers on English Language & Literature* 1, No.3 (Summer 1965): 259-64.

Views Paris's death as thematically crucial to the play because it underscores Escalus's ongoing struggle with the ideas of mercy and justice. In addition, it is structurally important because the deaths of Tybalt and Mercutio foreshadow it.

Smith, Robert Metcalf. "Three Interpretations of *Romeo and Juliet" Shakespeare Association Bulletin* XXIII, No.2 (April 1948): 60-77.

Points out flaws in the three leading interpretations of *Romeo and Juliet,* which alternately view the playas a tragedy of character, a tragedy of social justice, and a tragedy of fortune. Smith argues that Shakespeare presents a synthesis of all three readings.

Smith, Warren D. "Romeo's Final Dream." *The Mod ern Language Review* 62, No.4 (October 1967): 577; 580-83.

Considers the lovers' immortality a major theme of *Romeo and Juliet,* arguing that several scenes in the play support the Christian ideal of resurrection after death. According to Smith, this concept is most evident in Romeo's dream in Act V, scene i.

Spurgeon, Caroline F. E. "Leading Motives in the Tragedies." In her *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us,* pp. 309-56. 1935. Reprint. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971.

An important analysis of light and dark imagery in *Romeo and Juliet* Spurgeon discusses numerous instances where images of light are used to represent love and beauty while images of darkness reflect the misery caused by the feud.

Stoll, Elmer Edgar. "Lecture I. Romeo and Juliet." In his *Shakespeare's Young Lovers,* pp. 1-44. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1937.

Contends that fate brings about the tragedy of the young lovers in *Romeo and Juliet* The lovers' impulsiveness. Stoll adds, is consistent with Shakespeare's depiction of their falling in love at first sight and, furthermore, heightens the dramatic interest of their story as well as audience identification with them.

Utterback, Raymond. "The Death of Mercutio." *Shakespeare Quarterly* XXIX, No.2 (Spring 1973):

105-16.

Stresses the significance of Mercutio's death to the structure of *Romeo and Juliet* Utterback maintains that the pattern of provocation, action, and tragic consequences established in this scene (III. i. 35-108) displays the organizing principle for the rest of the play.

Vickers, Brian. "From Clown to Character." In his *The Artistry of Shakespeare's Prose,* pp. 52-88. London: Metheun & Co., 1968.

Asserts that the bawdy wit of Mercutio and the Nurse plays an excessive role in *Romeo and* Ju *liet* Vickers notes, however, that Shakespeare created prose styles admirably suited to the characters and situations in the play.

Wells, Stanley. "Juliet's Nurse: The Uses of Inconsequentiality." In *Shakespeare's Styles: Essays in Honour of Kenneth* Muir, edited by Philip Edwards. Inga-Stina Ewbank, and G. K. Hunter, pp. 51-66. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

Examines the content and structure of the Nurse's speech at I. iii. 11-57, noting that its lack of intellectual logic marks a new dramatic style for Shakespeare.

Williamson, Marilyn L. "Romeo and Death," *Shakespeare Studies* 14 (1981): 129-37.

Contends that Romeo's suicide is not motivated by his love for Juliet but rather by a death wish he harbored before he met her. Williamson admits, however, that the feud

does playa part in the catastrophe: because of the feud, Romeo not only expects an early death, he desires one to escape the guilt he suffers regarding the conflict.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Shakespeare for Students (SfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's�For Students� Literature line, SfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on �classic� novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of classic novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members educational professionals helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
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- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

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A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

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Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

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Malak, Amin. Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition, Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Shakespeare for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

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