ROMEO AND JULIET

**Introduction**

William Shakespeare was born in 1564, probably on April 23. He was baptized on April 26 in Stratford-upon-Avon . He is also believed to have died on the same date in 1616. He attended the local grammar school and studied primarily Latin rhetoric, logic, and literature.

Shakespeare’s life can be divided into three periods. The first twenty years in Stratford, which include his schooling, early marriage, and fatherhood. The next 25 years as an actor and playwright in London and the last five in retirement back in Stratford where he enjoyed moderate wealth gained from his theatrical successes. The years linking the first two periods are marked by a lack of information about Shakespeare and are referred to as the « dark years ».

At some point during those years, Shakespeare began his career with a London theatrical company. Perhaps in 1589, for he was already an actor and playwright of some note by 1592.

In 1592, the plague closed the theaters for about two years, and Shakespeare turned to writing book length narrative poetry ( Venus and Adonis and The Rape of Lucrece ). During this same period, Shakeapeare was writing his sonnets. He returned to playwriting when theaters reopened in 1594, but did not continue to write poetry. His sonnets were published without his consent in 1609, shortly before his retirement.

Shakespeare ‘s literary legacy included 37 plays, 154 sonnets and 5 major poems. Theater scripts were not regarded as literary works of art but only as the basis for the performance. Plays were simply a popular form of entertainment for all layers of society in Shakespeare’s time.

The first permanent professional theatre in England was built around 1576 and was called the Theater. Other theaters soon opened, including two called the Curtain and the Rose. Not only was Shakespeare working as a playwright and an actor for the Theater, he was also a stock holder. Another theater soon opened and became one of the most famous of the London public playhouses. It was completed around 1599 and was called the Globe.

The play version of *Romeo and Juliet* was probably written in Shakespeare’s early career around 1595 to 1596. The play is considered to be a tragedy and potrays the interplay of human character and motive. The plot of *Romeo and Juliet* was taken from an earlier version of the story. The theme appeared in the fourth century in a Greek tale and later in the 16th century.

**Summary**

*Romeo and Juliet* is a five-act play. The play opens with the servants of the Montague and Capulet families quarreling and fighting in the steets of Verona, Italy. The two families have been enemies for as long as anyone can remember. Romeo, son of Lord Montague, accidentally finds out about a ball (party) given by Lord Capulet and plans to attend uninvited. Romeo and his friends Mercutio and Benvolio put on masks and attend the ball, where Romeo meets the beautiful Juliet and falls instantly in love. Later that night Romeo goes to Juliet’s balcony, and they exchange vows of love. Romeo enlists the help of Friar Lawrence, who agrees to marry the young lovers in hopes of ending the long-standing feud between the two families.

Romeo returns from his wedding and finds that his friend Mercutio is engaged in combat with Tybalt, a member of the Capulet family. Tybalt kills Mercutio. Romeo , enraged over his friend’s death , slays Tybalt. Romeo immediately realizes that he has murdered his wife’s cousin and flees to Mantua.

In the meantime, Lord Capulet, unaware that Juliet is married to Romeo, has promised her hand in marriage to Paris. When Juliet is told about the arranged marriage, she is desperate and seeks the help of Friar Laurence, who gives her a vial of sleeping potion. The potion will have a death-like but temporary effect. The plan is for Juliet to take that potion, appear to be dead, and be laid out in the family vault. Romeo will come to the vault the next night and be here waiting when she awakens. The couple will then flee to Mantia to live there. Friar Laurence sends the important message to Romeo telling him of his plan to help Juliet, but the message never reaches Romeo. Juliet, assured by Friar Laurence that Romeo will be waiting for her she awakens in the tomb ; goes home and drinks the potion.

Hearing that Juliet is dead, Romeo purchases poison from a poor apothecary and rushes to her tomb. Upon his arrival, he finds Paris also in mourning. Thinking that Romeo has come to rob the tomb, Paris fights with Romeo. Romeo kills Paris, enters into the tomb and buries Paris there. He then bids farewell to Juliet and takes the poison. Awakening from her sleep, Juliet discovers her dead lover and kills herself with Romeo’s dagger. Friar Laurence arrives too late to save the lovers and tells the Prince the entire story. The Montagues and the Capulets promise to end their hostilities, which have caused the deaths of their only children.

1. **Fate and free will**

One of the most important issues in the tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* is that of choice. Do the characters have the ability to choose what they want to do, or are they simply destined to participate in death and destruction ? There is ample evidence of both fate and free will in the play, and the presence of both greatly affects the interpretation of the plot and the characters.

Fate as a domination force is evident from the very beginning of the play. The chorus introduces the power of fortune in the opening prologue when we are told that Romeo and Juliet are « star-crossed » (destined for bad luck) and death- marked, and that their death will end their parents’ feud. Fate and fortune are closely related in the play, as they both concern events that are out of human control. By telling us that Romeo and Juliet are destined to die because of their bad luck, Shakespeare gives us the climax of the play before it even begins. This strategy, which seems odd considering the end has been spoiled for the audience, serves two purposes : it allows for the introduction of the power of fate and fortune over people’s lives by declaring the fate of Romeo and Juliet at the very beginning, and it also creates tension throughout the play because they very nearly succeed despite this terrible declaration. Thus the opening prologue sets up the fate/free will problem.

The characters themselves all believe that their lives are controlled by destiny and luck, and Romeo is a prime example of this. When Romeo and his friends journey to the Capulet’s ball in Act 1, scene 4, Romeo hesitates to go because he has had a bad dream :

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, closed in my breast,

BY some vile forfeit of untimely death. (I ; iv. 106-111)

Romeo not only ackowledges the power of the stars, which tell what fate has in store through astrology, but he also believes that his destiny is to die. Romeo’s belief in fate also affects his interpretation of events. When Romeo kills Tybalt in act III, scene i, he claims that he is « fortune’s fool » by having contributed to his downfall. In Act V scene i, Romeo demonstrates his belief in the power of dreams to foretell the future once again when he believes that he will be reunited with Juliet on the basis of another dream. However, when Balthasar informs him that Juliet is dead, Romeo once again rails against the power of fate « Is it e’en so ? Then i defy you, stars /Thou knowest my lodging » (V. I. 24). Romeo finally tries to escape from his destiny at the end of the play by committing suicide to « shake the yoke of inauspicious stars », ironically fulfilling the destiny declared by the chorus in the opening prologue.

Other characters in the play believe in the power of fate as well. Juliet appeals to fortune when Romeo escapes to Mantua in Act III ,scene v.

Oh Fortune, Fortune ; all men call the fickle. If thou art fickle,

What doest thou with him

That is renowned for faith ?

Be ficke, Fortune

For then I hope thou wilt not keep him lo,g.

But send him back III V ; 60-64

Juliet demonstrates here that she not only believes in the power of luck and fate over her own situation, but that Romeo himself has faith in those concepts. Friar Lawrence also shows his belief in the power of destiny over people. When Romeo runs to his cell after killing Tybalt. Friar Laurence acknowledges that Romeo does indeed have bad luck: "Affliction is enamored of thy parts. / And thou art wedded to calamity" (III. iii. II.2-3).

Friar Lawrence also believes in fate. He will also become a victim of fate by the end of the play. His letter to Romeo, which details his plan for Romeo to pick up Juliet at the Capulet tomb after she has awakened from the effects of the potion, could not be delivered because of the "unfortunate’' quarantine of Friar John. Friar Lawrence then has the misfortune of accidentally tripping over gravestones while running to meet Juliet. which delays his arrival until after Romeo has committed suicide. Friar Lawrence recognizes the power of fate to overrule his good intentions when Juliet awakens: "A greater power than we can contradict / Hath thwarted our intents” V. iii. 11. 153-154). The fact that Friar Lawrence, Juliet, Romeo, and the other characters in the play believe so strongly in fate and fortune is not surprising, given the time period. Faith in destiny and luck was typical in the Renaissance, and Shakespearean audiences would not have questioned the dominance of these concepts in the lives of the characters. Indeed. It would have seemed odd if the characters did not believe in the power of faith or in the ability of the stars to dictate lives.

Not only does Shakespeare make the case for the power of fate in terms of the characters’ beliefs in the play, but he also strengthens it by including a multitude of ironic statements that predict events in the play. Romeo and Mercutio both predict their own deaths through their statements in Act I. scene iv. and Act III. scene I, respectively, and Juliet foresees Romeo's death in Act III. scene v. Friar Lawrence makes several prophetic statements throughout the play, including the infamous "Wisely and slow. They stumble that run fast.” From the end of Act II, scene iii, which predicts the mistake that he himself will make at the play's climax. Even Lady Capulet, in her anger over her daughter’s defiance, wishes that Juliet were married to her grave.” in Act III, scene v, which will indeed become the case. Through these statements and the opinions of the characters themselves, Shakespeare would seem to indicate that the power of fate over humanity is unbreakable, and even the power of love cannot overcome it.

The power to control our lives seems insurmountable in light of what the characters say in *Romeo and Juliet,* but when we consider what they actually do, the issue becomes much more problematic. Although Romeo professes a great belief in the power of the stars over his life, he constant!)' acts against what he believes his destiny to be. When he has the dream that he will die if he goes to the Capulet bail, he still goes even though Mercutio’s “Queen Mab” speech has not impressed him. Romeo knows that he should not engage Tybalt in Act III. scene i, and even notes that the consequences of fighting Tybalt will be dire: "This day’s black fate on moe days doth depend; / This but begins the woe others must end” (II 17- i IX). Romeo realizes that his actions and those of Mercutio and Tybalt will have repercussions, but he ignores them in order to exact his revenge for his friend’s death. This makes his complaint about being "fortune's fool" questionable. as he had already' perceived the consequences of his actions. Romeo refuses to follow his fate in Act V, when, despite having a dream that predicted happiness with Juliet, he immediately attempts to procure poison in order to commit suicide without even questioning how Juliet dies or asking Friar Lawrence for details. He also kills himself in order to escape fate, which cannot be possible if fate exists. If Romeo's belief in destiny is as strong as he claims, he should not attempt to contradict it so often.

This tendency to profess a belief in fate but act according to one’s own wishes is typical of more characters in this play than just Romeo. The Capulets and the Montagues. who complain about their bad luck when their children commit suicide at the end of the play, are willing participants in the feud that causes the situation in the first place. Tybalt and Mercutio. who are technically not of either house and should not be involved in the feud, willingly fight each other because of their bad tempers. Friar Lawrence, who states that Romeo has bad luck. tries to counteract it by helping Romeo escape to Mantua and by devising the plan to get Juliet there. Friar Lawrence also acts against his own advice when he runs, panicking, to Juliet's tomb. only to stumble and delay his arrival. If he had followed his own advice, he would have arrived before Romeo commits suicide, and even possibly before Romeo kills Paris. Note that all of these characters choose their actions in these situations—no one has made the Capulets, the Montagues, Tybalt, and Mercutio participate in the feud, and Friar Lawrence does exactly what he tells Romeo not to do by hurrying. The choices the characters make eventually result in the deaths of Romeo and Juliet.

Juliet also acts according to her own mind. despite her belief in fate. Despite her love for Romeo. Juliet knows that a relationship with him is not the wisest choice:

Although I joy in thee. l have no joy of this contract to-night.

lt is too rash. too unadvised, too sudden.

Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be Ere one can say it lightens' (II ii .116-120).

Not only is a relationship with Romeo a bad idea because they have just met, but it is complicated even more by the feud. Juliet chooses to pursue this relationship despite these problems. knowing that ii may result in both of their deaths. When the Capulets demand that Juliet marry Paris so quickly after Tybalt's death (which under normal circumstances would not have been done). Juliet chooses to allow Friar Laurence to concoct a plan to save her, which involves taking the potion. No one makes Juliet take the potion, she does so of her own free will. She also chooses to kill herself rather than confront her parents once Romeo has committed suicide. All of the characters in the play have options, and it is their actions, which contradict their belief in fate, that lead to the deaths that occur.

The problem of fate and free will in *Romeo and Juliet* is a difficult one indeed. There are obvious examples of "accidents” in the play: the servant who encounters Romeo and Benvolio and invites them to the Capulet party, the meeting of Romeo and Juliet, the quarantine of Friar John, and the presence of Paris at the tomb when Romeo arrives. These accidents and the beliefs of the characters in the power of fate and fortune suggest that Romeo and Juliet are indeed death marked. There are, however, obvious circumstances where the characters choose their actions of their own free will: the feud itself. The decision of Romeo and Juliet to marry each other. The fact in Act III, scene i, and the suicides of Romeo and Juliet. The characters choose these actions of their own accord, and nothing has forced them to follow the paths they have chosen for themselves. What then, is the "greater power” that the characters cannot contradict? The only definitive answer is the same as it is for any story: their author.

1. **Light and Dark in Romeo and Juliet**

Light and darkness usually have definite meanings in human psychology. Traditionally; light is considered good because it allows us to perceive the world around us and to work within it. Conversely, dark is usually viewed as “evil” due to our inability to see and the fear that such state brings. Thus day and night, which are distinguished by the amount of light available, have similar connotations. However, and while typical notions of light and dark do appear in Romeo and Juliet, and day becomes evil because it brings death and destruction.

Light and dark are linked with the protagonists early in the play. When Romeo first appears in the play, he is immediately associated with darkness. As Montague observes, Romeo walks around before the sun rises, and

Away from light steals home my heavy sub

And private in his chamber pens himself

Shuts up his windows, locks fair daylight out,

And makes himself an artificial night (I. i. II. 135-138)

Romeo does this, of course, because of Rosaline’s rejection. Romeo’s parents and cousin regard his darkness as “black and portentous”, and consider it a reason for concern. And indeed it is troubling, as this is not typical behavior for Romeo, not is it expected of most people, and there is clearly something wrong with him. Romeo’s relationship with the dark is also strengthened through the object of his love, Rosaline. When Romeo explains his situation to Benvolio, he comments that Rosaline has “Dian’s wit” because she has sworn to be a virgin for the rest of her life, ending, of course, any of Romeo’s romantic pretensions. This creates a link between Rosaline and darkness because Diana is the Roman goddess of the moon, which appears at night and thus is connected to it. This association will become important later in the play when Romeo and Juliet meet. Meanwhile, Romeo’s melancholy at Rosaline’s rejection and his desire to avoid light leads him to want to be a torch bearer at the Capulet party in Act I, scene iv.

Give me a torch. I am not for this ambing

Being but heavy, I will bear the light (II. I 1-12)

Because of his depression, Romeo sees light as a burden, and does not regard it as good. Romeo conforms to the typical notions of dark and light, he keeps to the darkness because there is something wrong with him, and he will be attracted to light when he has overcome his depression.

When Romeo sees Juliet for the first time; he recovers from his unrequited love for Rosaline, and, as a result, finds light good again. Romeo’s first words to describe Juliet are about light.

O. she doth teach the torches to burn bright'

lt seems she hangs upon the cheek of night

As a rich jewel in an Ethiop’s ear (I, v. 11.44-46).

This observation serves two purposes: it indicates that Romeo’ s pining for Rosa line is over (and thus his need for hiding from light) and it creates an association between Juliet and light that will endure throughout the play. This point is expounded further two scenes later. when Romeo sees Juliet on the balcony. Just as in Act I. scene v. Romeo’s immediate reaction to seeing Juliet is to comment on the light she brings:

But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?

It is the East, and Juliet is the sun (II, ii. 11.2-3).

Juliet is more closely bound to the concept of light by Romeo’s metaphor-— not only is she luminous. but by being the sun. she has become the primary source of Romeo’s light. This is in direct contrast to Rosaline. who, as noted earlier. is associated with the moon. Romeo notes this distinction when he continues:

Arise. fair sun, and kill the envious moon,

Who is already sick and pale with grief

That thon, her maid, art fair more fair than she (11.4-6).

Juiiet’s light, then, overshadows the darkness associated with Rosaline. and “kills” the passion that Romeo once felt for her. Hoping to avoid another unrequited love, Romeo then expresses his desire that Juliet not be a “maid" of the moon (i.e., not pledge to be a virgin as Rosaline did). He then continues to ponder the brightness of Juliet’s eyes, which are stars, and her cheek, which he compares to daylight. Through the wonder and the love of Romeo’s soliloquy in Act II, scene ii, we are provided with a strong bond between Juliet and light that is beautiful and good. This bond is evident even in Act V. scene iii, when Romeo is about to commit suicide: Juliet's light makes the vault. a dark and death-filled place, a "feasting presence” (1.86).

Although light's association with Juliet in this play gives it a positive connotation, it does not necessarily follow that ail things associated with light are benevolent. and ail things associated with dark are detrimental. Daytime. when light is strongest. becomes destructive in the play, and night. when darkness rules. becomes loving. When the play opens. it is day in Verona. and thus the reason why the servants of the Capulets and the Montagues are outside. They confront each other. which leads to the fight that eventually involves both families as well. Likewise, the next day brings the fight between Tybalt and Mercutio. which ends in both of their deaths and in Romeo’s banishment. Day becomes associated with violence—it lets life out. as Juliet observes. because it brings the feud between the Montagues and the Capulets. Because of this. Romeo and Juliet cannot be together during the day. The fact that day is their enemy is not lost on Romeo or Juliet. especially in Act III. scene v. when they share their final moments alive in Juliet's chamber. They describe day as ''envious," and the lark, who sings in the day. "out of tune," despite the traditional view that the lark is beautiful because of its singing and because it heralds dawn. They must separate or be discovered. which is painful to them. as Romeo notes. "More light and light—more dark and dark our woes” (11.36). The violence that day brings, which is noted by various characters through their descriptions of day as "black” and fiery.” separates day from the other conceptions of light that exist in the play.

While day has lost its beneficial meaning in the play, nighttime takes a more positive turn. Night is the time of Romeo and Juliet: it is when they can be together without being discovered. and when they can permit love to overcome the hatred of the fend. Romeo calls night "blessed" in Act II. scene ii. and Juliet notes in the same scene that their love is revealed by the night. Romeo delineates the relationship between light and Juliet in the balcony scene and Juliet ponders the association between Romeo and night in Act III. scene ii. Juliet’s soliloquy on the beneficial aspects of night in Act III. scene ii. occurs because both she and Romeo have come to value night as their time. Juliet first describes night as "cloudy." which denotes the fact that it obscure their love from the eyes of their families. Juliet then begins to describe the wonders of night:

Spread thy close curtain, love-performing night.

That runaways' eyes may wink, and Romeo

Leap to these arms untalked 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 (111, ii. 5-10).

Night becomes linked with love in this passage. Because of this link, it also becomes associated with sex. as Juliet mentions in lines 10-16. The reversal of the meanings of day and night is also clearly stated in line 17. when Juliet calls Romeo “thou day in night,” similar the metaphor Romeo uses in Act I, scene v. when he calls Juliet the jewel in Ethiop's ear. Darkness allows the love of Romeo and Juliet to shine as brightly as the sun. and therefore becomes more beneficial than daylight.

The connotations of light and dark in Romeo and Juliet, then, stay consistent with their traditional meanings. While day and night. which should mean the same as light and dark. are reversed. This may be because. as Capulet notes upon Juliet’s apparent death. ail things in this play are “changed to the contrary" (IV, v. 1.90). The reversal of day and night occurs because of the feud. The destruction that occurs during the day does not permit the love of Romeo and Juliet to surface, making day black and dark. However, at night. Romeo and Juliet can allow their love to appear. thus permitting them to generate their own light.

1. **IMAGERY AND LANGUAGE**

**The stars**

With so much emphasis on Fate in *Romeo and Juliet* there is nothing surprising in the fact that Shakespeare makes frequent use of the time-old symbol of the stars in his imagery. Nor, in such a story of romantic love, is it remarkable to find the star-image employed in a second conventional way—as a metaphor for feminine beauty (especially for the eves of the Lady) and for the attraction of lovers. What is, however, of interest is the way in which Shakespeare subtly uses these two sorts of star-image: and perhaps the most striking example of this interpenetration is to be observed in some of the lines spoken by Romeo as he watches Juliet at her balcony :

Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven. 4**«**

Having some business, do entreat her eyes

To twinkle in their spheres till they return.

What if her eyes were there, they in her head?

The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars

As daylight doth a lamp; her eyes in heaven

Would through the airy regions stream so bright

That birds would sing and think it were not night.

[II. ii. 15-22}

No doubt this passage could be dismissed as yet another typical conceit [an elaborately fanciful idea or metaphor) of the time. But the scene in which the lines occur is singularly free from the extravagant conceits and artificialities of Petrarchan love-poetry, which Shakespeare appropriately reserves for the early Romeo, the youth in love with love; and if we submit our imagination to the full effect of the scene, this sustained star-image transcends the mere conceit to assume a new meaning. Juliet is now Romeo's star, his fate; and, as his star, she has the magical power of transforming night into day, of changing his wretchedness into radiant joy and the bitter hatred of their families into love.

There is a similar. though slighter overtone earlier in the play, when old Capulet says to Paris:

At my poor house look to behold this night

Earth-treading stars that make dark heaven bright.

Here, too, it is of course possible to skip the image of ’earth-treading stars' as a familial cliché for beautiful women. But, taking it in conjunction with the phrase 'dark heaven', we may perhaps catch in it a faint announcement of one of the fundamental themes of the play—of the hardness and misery of human destiny , sweetened, if but for a brief moment, with beauty and love.

In the star-imagery of Juliet's speech when she is waiting vainly, after the killing of Tybalt, for Romeo to come to her—

And, when he shall die,

Take him and cut him out in little stars.

And he will make the face of heaven so fine

That ail the world will be in love with night.

And pay no worship to the garish sun [111. ii. 21-5)

We certainly have, so far as Juliet herself is concerned, a playful, fanciful conceit, for in her passion and fulfilment she cannot really think of her lover as dead. Yet- -once more merging into the symbol of the star as fate —how intense this apparent conceit is. with its irony and prophecy. Little as Juliet knows it, heaven and its crossing stars arc in reality soon to lay claim to Romeo; and their way will be just that cruel way of violence that she hints, and Romeo will be nothing but a symbol of the lover, a bright, remote star.

**The Pilot Image**

Side by side with these delicate combinations of the star-image we should note as another effect of the Fate motif in the imagery of the play, the triple 'pilot' image which, emerging at three key-points, illuminates and focuses the development of Romeo.

The first instance of this image is to be found at [I. iv. 112-13]. Though there is something that warns Romeo that it is perilous to accompany Mercutio and Benvolio to the Capulet banquet, he decides at last to follow them.

But He, that hath the steerage of my course.

Direct my sail! On, lusty gentlemen.

Here, without experience or thought as yet, and certainly without any religious conviction, Romeo vaguely believes himself to be under the guidance of some exterior force; but he submits to his destiny without resistance, even confidently. Later, when he is assured of Juliet's love and is growing to a rapid maturity, he is bolder and more self-willed, active rather than passive. So, when it occurs for the second time, the pilot-image changes.

I am no pilot: yet. wert thou as far

As that vas; shore wash’d with the farthest sea.

I would adventure for such merchandise.

(II. ii. 82-4]

Once more there is the lack of complete self-possession: he will dare anything, but still with a modest. hesitant doubt of his own powers to shape a course entirely to his own determination—'I am no pilot.' And indeed, in the first rapture of Juliet's avowed love, why should he think of rocks and insidious currents? But, transformed by harsh experience, Romeo continues to grow, and when the pilot-image recurs for the last time, just before his death, the pilot is at last himself: the determining force that challenges and defies his stars is something within:

Corne, bitter conduct. corne, unsavoury guide!

Thou desperate pilot nj.ny.at once run on | V. m. 110-181

This image is the exact antithesis of the first version, as Romeo is the antithesis of his old self.

**Strife, contrast, contradiction and paradox**

Another salient characteristic of *Romeo and Juliet,* is the simple, single, and all-pervading nature o! its conflict. Its basic theme is that of love arising out of family feud, challenging it, momentarily triumphing over it, and ultimately destroyed by it. From beginning to end the play reflects the eternal struggle between Eros (Love and Life) and the forces of Death.

This being so. it is not surprising that the play abounds in images of strife, contrast. contradiction, and paradox. Most of these arise directly and inevitably from the story and its situations, while much of the tedious antithesis and paradox of Romeo's speech in the first Act springs inevitably from Shakespeare s representation of him as a typical lover of contemporary. mainly Petrarchan love-poetry. But beside these straightforward conflict-images there is another group in which Shakespeare, often subconsciously no doubt, uses the poetry of the play to reinforce and illuminate its themes and motifs.

The most impressive concentration of these strife and contradiction images occurs in Friar Lawrence’s speech shortly before the marriage ceremony. which emphasizes, in a resonant Chorus manner. some of the essential implications of the play. To begin with. there is the detached and generalizing, though no less impressive. restatement of the eternal life-death struggle. which is represented as something absolute:

The earth that's nature's mother is her tomb:

What is her burying grave, that is her womb.

(II . iii. 9-10)

Nor, possibly, is this statement entirely general, for ’womb' suggests love, procreation, perhaps Romeo and Juliet, while ’tomb’, once we come to know the play, is a key-word with a charged. peculiar significance: it is the ’detestable maw', the ’rotten jaws' (V. iii. 47), that is soon to swallow Romeo and Juliet. and it is to be noticed that in the last scene 'tomb' is once more associated with ’womb':

Thou detestable maw. thou womb of death . . .(IV. iii. I45)

Then, both deepening and extending this theme, follows the Friar’s meditation on the contradictory properties of nature's fruits and products, leading. through an inevitable transition, to the contraries and contradiction: of human life—the good that may change into evil and the vice that may change into virtue, and the intermingled stuff of man's nature:

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.

While the words 'canker death' are still ominously echoing in jtsur ears, Romeo enters.

There are several other passages where the incidental imagery serves to illuminate the contradiction or paradox of the-situation from which it arises. For instance, the bold conceit struck out by Romeo at the opening of the Balcony scene—

What light through yonder window breaks?

It is the east. and Juliet is the sun!

[II. ii. I-21

concentrates the essential meaning of the whole scene. In truth a miracle has taken place: the warm. life-giving sun of love has broken unexpectedly. through the dark night of family hatred and strife. But. next to the Friar's soliloquy. the most striking example of imagery that crystallizes the spirit of conflict and contradiction in the plav is the recurrent association of bridal-bed and grave. Death and the lover:

l'll to my wedding-bed;

And death. not Romeo, take my maidenhead:

[111. ii. 136-37)

1 would the fool were married to her grave!

[111. v 140 J

0 son. the night before thy wedding-day

Hath Death lain with thy wife: see. there she lies.

Flower as she was, deflowered by him.

Death is my son-in-law,

Death is my heir;

My daughter he hath wedded.

|!V. v. 35-9|

Shall I believe

That unsubstantial Death is amorous,

And that the lean abhorred monster keeps \*

Thee here in dark to be his paramour. [V. 102-05J

The tone and the immediate purpose of these passages of course vary considerably: but at the core of them all is the powerful. paradoxical image of the play's basic motif—the passionate, interlocking wrestle of love and death. The’lean abhorred monster' is the ultimate lover; the final wedding-bed is the grave.

Lastly in this poetic elaboration of the play's fundamental motif we may notice the highly evocative use that Shakespeare makes of light and darkness. though this is as much a matter of setting and stage-properties as of imagery. To suggest the first dramatic movement, of love arising out of and challenging family feud. he creates the illusion of light irradiating and finally shattering darkness. First, faintly and remotely anticipating the Capulet feast and its aftermath. We have old Capulet's

At my poor house look to behold this night

Earth-treading stars that make dark heaven light.

(I. ii. 24-5]

A little later we see Romeo as the torch-bearer and hear old Capulet raising his cries (the more impressive because they are widely separated) for 'More lights' I. v. 27j and 'More torches' [I. v. 125]. But the effect of such torches as these is slight compared with the light-drenched imagery, the contrasts of brightness and darkness. in Romeo's first entranced vision of Juliet:

O, she doth teach the torches\_to shine bright!

It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night

Like a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear ...

So shows a snowy dove trooping with crows

|I.V. 44-8}

This brilliant radiance of imagery completely floods the following scene, so that the darkness of night is utterly negated. ln this scene. apart from the incidental images of the moon and the lightning. there are the sustained images of Romeo’s magnificent opening speeches. First Juliet is the dazzling sun of dawn—then two brilliant stars— then his ’bright angel |II. ii. 26|.

As glorious to this night. being o'er my head.

As is a winged messenger of heaven

Unto the white-upturned wondering eyes

Of mortals.

|ll. ii. 27-30]

As he leaves. assured of her love. day begins to break, and the image of it is memorably fixed for us by the vivid opening fines of Friar Lawrence's soliloquy ". of this

The grey-eyed morn smiles on the frowning night

Chequering the eastern clouds with streaks of light

And flecked darkness like a drunkard reels

From forth day’s path and Titan’s fiery wheels. (II. Iii. 16-41)

The central image of this passage, of dark dispersing sunlight, is repeated a little later by Juliet:

Love’s heralds should be thoughts,

Which ten times faster glide than the sun’s beams

Driving back shadows over louring hills. ( II. V. 4-6

The second movement of the play consists of a violent recrudescence of the Capulet-Montague feud, leading to bloodshed, in which the lovers are whirled helplessly apart: “black fate” suddenly overshadows the bright day of love and sunshine. This development, too, is partly suggested by the imagery, through the invocation of night and darkness, especially in Juliet’s soliloquy in the orchard. Here, because of its echoes and lyrical fervor, her speech reminds us of Romeo’s rhapsody at the opening of the balcony scene; but where Romeo’s words had been drenched with images of light, Juliet’s are, in contrast, somber and portentious with images of darkness.

sucha waggoriu' !

As Phaethaon would whip you to the west, , , ,

And bring in cloudy night immediately. - I

Spread thy close curtain, love-performing night. ...

Come, civil night.

Thou sober-suited matron, ail in black. ...

Hood my unmann’d blood. bating in my cheeks.

With thy black mantle. ...

Come. gentle night, come, loving. black-browed night.

[111. li. 2-5, 10-1 1. 14-15. 201

The wonderful aubade |a song of lovers parting at dawn] o! Act III, Scene v. also turns on the lovers’ desperate longing for the continuance of the night and darkness. and though in both instances the imagery derives to some extent from the situation since Juliet wants the night to come because it will with the help of Friar Lawrence’s drug, ‘Or bid me go into a new-made grave / And hide me with a dead man in his shroud’[IV. i. 84-5). An ugly image for any youngster to dream up and utter. isn’t it? I had to take a chance on that grotesqueness because 1 was setting up my big dress-rehearsal scene for the actual deaths of both youngsters in the Capulets' tomb."

"Which is that, the dress rehearsal'.'"

"When Juliet is found by her parents, and thought to be dead. I produce a kind of ritual mourning sequence--from father to fiancé to Mom to nurse and round again—which I don't suppose you in your laconic times could be expected to appreciate. It probably even sounds humorous to you. but the thing to look out for is that image of Death returning as Juliet's partner in sex: my grotesque linking of what should be life-producing and exalting with its opposite, in mortuary decay. The foolish old father starts things up (and if you still believe that puns have to be entertaining and amusing. listen in), in such a way that not even the gentility could miss it.

0 son, the night before thy wedding day

Hath Death lain with thy wife. There she lies.

Flower as she was. deflowered by him.

Death is my son-in-law, Death is my heir:

My daughter he hath wedded."

[IV v. 35-9]

"Now I see the significance of the speech that old Capulet made just before that. It's sexual again, isn't it? 'Death lies on her like an untimely frost / Upon the sweetest flower of all the field (IV. v. 28-9). Poor Juliet. So this was the rehearsal for the actual death scene between our lovers, you say?"

"That’s so, but don't leave the fake-death quite so fast, good friend. If you listen closely, you'll hear the culminating oxymoron in my whole play, coming from the unlikely source of the old gaffer’s mouth":

All things that we ordained festival

Turn from their office to black funeral—

Our instruments to melancholy bells,

Our wedding cheer to a sad burial feast. . .

Our bridal flowers serve for a buried corpse;

And ail things change them to the contrary. IV. v. 84-7.

There you have it: *and ail things change them to the contrary.* Can you think of a more succinct description of my play? The flames of sex turn to the ashes of death. My oxymorons would have made my old grammar school instructor in rhetoric proud of me. But I've gone beyond my oxymoronic device to a kind of macabre reality in these two young people's lives, notice, I've given them destinies in which the very seeds of their physical attraction to each other (and observe that Juliet hasn't even seen Romeo's face clearly until the y meet to marry in Lawrence's cell: just his 'gracious self,' in becoming hose) are all along ripening to their blighted, inevitable climax together in that tomb. The big death grows inexorably from out of the little death that we spoke of when I first joined you at this pleasant table. And by now you certainly ought to recognize that not ail of my puns are for laughter among the penny-admissions."

"Ail right. so when Romeo is about to buy the poison and says 'Well, Juliet. 1 will lie with thee tonight’ (V. i. 34], he. too. like her—but unlike her mother and evidently many in your audience—has come to understand the inextricable blending of sex and death in their story."

"Yes, precisely. And you can point out to your classes that there really couldn't be a more appropriate ending to my love-death drama than Juliet's reaching there to kiss the poison she prays remains on Romeo's just-stilled lips. 'Haply some poison yet doth hang on them' she hopes [V. ill. 1651. and Death can now take them both—my famous youthful lovers—into his eternal embrace. I've made a special sort of tragedy out of the very materials of comedy. don't you see? They die, and then they die."

"Just think of it! Those kids of yours met at the Sunday dinner-dance and were dead in each other's arms by Thursday midnight. Four brief days m which they hardly had time to be wedded and bedded. much less gel to know each other-— except in the Bible's sense. Not so much 'love in terms of purity and innocence' as sentimental oldsters would like to think [in the Pelican Shakespeare edition of *Romeo and Juliet*], was there, Will? For that matter, both the compactness and the raciness of the action put me in mind a few years back of the limerick. a verse form that we speakers of English invented after your day but which you would've found delightful. Since the first half of your play, up to the sudden death of Mercutio, is like one super limerick. an unending series of bawdy jokes using sexual slang and double entendre, I’ve encouraged students to write limericks on what’s going on. according to their perceptions, in *Romeo and Juliet.* I find that I get some pretty honest and pretty good ones.

"I'Il need an exemplum. since I don't know the form of this limerick as you call it."

It's: hard to remember a" limerick verbatim when you've been drinking (unlike everyday dirty jokes, which are almost ail content and no form), but I think 1 can gi ve you the idea with onc or two hère. Let’s see:

There once were a couple of teens

Who aspired to commingle their genes

But, in trying to mate.

Were the victims of fate

And succumbed in the saddest of scenes.

Some of mv students really pick up on the punning side of 'your poetry. Will, which I figured would please you. They miss being as nimble-witted as Mercutio, of course, but that also means that they truly miss him as a character once he's gone from the play—miss his ribald intelligence, which they've been learning how to listen for.

Ai the Friar's the kids tie the knot.

And it puts Juliet on the spot:

Will the feuders unite.

Or continue to fight—

And is Romeo coming, or not?

Because Tybalt, her cousin, was dead

And her Romeo now banished.

Juliet could have cried

That her lover had died.

But she kept. after losing, her head.

Well. we've been enjoying ourselves, as you can see. And the students turn out to have been right ail along about Juliet and her teenage boyfriend, whom she helps to become a man, as they say. overnight. ’Stand. and you be a man. / For Juliet's sake. for her sake. rise and stand!" |III. iii. 88-9)- as the nurse so happily puts it. Now. there's a woman! Why. when . . .

"Oh. you have to be on your way: no time for another round? That's too bad: l've enjoyed your company. Well. thanks, and I’ll be. uh. hearing you around." (pp. 70-3)

1. **CHARACTERIZATION** (CHARACTER ANALYSIS)

**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 described 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 on 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 ail and worries about the effect of these actions on the rest of his life.

Many observers debate Romeo's development in the play. Sortie 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 tor 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 mat 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 foo!" (III.i.i36), 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 alternatively 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 because 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 end of the plays. When Romeo’s servant brings word of Juliet's funeral, Romeo 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.

**Juliet**

Juliet is the daughter of Lord and Lady Capulet and one of the two title characters. When the play begins. we learn from the nurse's remarks that Juliet is about two weeks shy of her fourteenth birthday. 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 of her love for Romeo, she speaks of his true perfection of seIf. 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 / bv 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 express 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 (Il.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 lo 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 idea 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. winch 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.

**Lawrence**

Friar Lawrence is a Franciscan\_monk . He is a priest who is able to conduct religions 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 (ll.iii), he is gathering weeds and flowers in the early morning while the dew is still fresh and before the day gets hot. Fie 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 philosophical outlook, an idea heartily rejected by Romeo. When nothing else will work, the friar not only points out to Romeo ail 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 wrongdoing, calling him a "holy man" (V.iii.270). and blames the feuding families for the deaths of Romeo and Juliet.

**Tybalt**

He is a nephew to Lord Capulet and a cousin to Juliet. He does not speak many fines, 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 Montagne households from fighting. By contrast, Tybalt urges 011 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" (l.v.55). Tybalt says he does not consider it a sin to strike Romeo dead.

Tybalt show s his stubbornness at the Capulet party)1. Lord Capulet urges Tybalt to control himself, telling him that lie 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.

**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 of eloquence; and mercury, the poisonous element.

Mercutio's eloquence is displayed throughout the play. In scenes in which he appears and speaks. lie tends to become the center of attention. He dominates his companions with his leasing 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, he 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.

**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 Romeo gently and learns that his problem is lovesickness, he counsels Romeo to look at other beauties and forget about anyone who is not interested in him. Benvolio suggests that Romeo go to the Capulet part) and see other pretty young women.

Throughout the play, Benvolio demonstrates his common sense and his loyalty to his friends. Benv olio tries to serve as a restraining influence on Mercutio. who seems to constantly be taking 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 market place 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 pin 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 he could not dra his sword in time to stop Tybalt and Romeo from fighting.

**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 wav 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 pain 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 toward Juliet shows this mixture of traits also. When Paris asks for her hand in marriage. he says that 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 lII. Capulet assumes that Julie will do exactlv 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 ail 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 m 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.

**Lady Capulet**

Lady Capulet is Lord Capulet’s wife and Juliet’s mother. Juliet’s mother has two important conversations with her daughter in 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 Juliet’s age. The second conversation takes place in Act III, 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 large, 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.

**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.

**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 chat 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.

**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" (l.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.

**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 (l.i. 111.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 death 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 punished” (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.

**The 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 contract 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

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 he 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 her to make sure that Romeo’s intentions are honorable, since Juliet is young and inexperienced. When Juliet learns of what has happened in the market place, 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, she 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 humbling 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.

**CONCLUSION: ROMEO AND JULIETAND ITS MODERN CONNECTIONS**

One of the most prominent features of Romeo and Juliet is the love of the two title characters have for each other. 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 teen agers in love similarly may feel the need to meet secretly, to hide their relationship 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 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 time may help 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 together. 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 with him immediately. Although Lord Capulet restrains Tybalt at the party, he does no stop his wife’s screams for revenge after Tybalt’ death. Only after suffering the heavy, irreparable losses of their children do Capulet and Montague joins hands at the end of the play. Such tensions are also common in modern times and have been dramatically presented by film makers.

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