

AN APPROACH ON THE THEMES OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S "ROMEO AND JULIET"

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Abstract

"Romeo and Juliet" is one of the most prominent plays written by William Shakespeare. The play mostly narrates the binary of love and hate. It narrates the love between two main characters, Romeo and Juliet, as well as hate between two families named Capulet and Montague. This study aims to scrutinize the themes that are ultimately also the major concern in defining a play. This research is library research that employs the theory of theme and structural analysis. The finding covers the intrinsic aspects of the play such as plot, setting, and characters that reflect the themes of the play. The themes of "Romeo and Juliet" are the love between Romeo and Juliet, the hate between two family, and also death. Romeo and Juliet are secretly getting married; however, their love becomes a tragedy when they have to overcome their family's conflict. The plot presents a tragedy that is developed in the exposition, rising action, climax, resolution, and conclusion.

Keywords: William Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet, play, hate, love, theme

INTRODUCTION

Reading a literary work is interesting. It challenges our willingness or eagerness to find out what happens in the story and the purpose of the author in creating the story. We can learn many things from the story such as the characteristic of the people in that period. Moreover, the most important thing is that we can learn what author wants to convey through his work (Saputra, 2004). Theme is, ultimately, the major concern in defining the play. It is the basic idea of the play that largely determined the plot of the play.

In contemporary literary studies, a theme is the central topic of a play. Themes can be divided into two categories: a work's thematic concept of what readers think the work is about and its thematic statement being of what the work says about the subject. The most common contemporary understanding of theme is an idea or point that is central idea of a play, which can often be summed in a single word, for example: love, death, and betrayal. Typical examples of themes of this type are conflict between love and hate, live and death, loyalty and betrayal, individual and society, human in conflict with technology, and the dangers of ambition. A theme may be represented by the plot, setting, actions, utterances, or thoughts of characters in a play.

A play may have several themes that are usually implied rather than stated explicitly, along with plot, characters, setting, and style. Theme is considered one of the most important components of a play "Romeo and Juliet" can be classified as a tragedy play and it is Shakespeare's most famous tragedy. The conflict in the play deals with the inborn futility of older people and the young ones. The lovers, Romeo and Juliet thread their way through obstacles set up by the inborn conflicts between Capulet and Montague. In William Shakespeare's "Romeo and

Juliet” the parents are thoughtless and do not know what is best for their children or themselves. Furthermore, it can be seen that the play begins with the setting of conflict of the thoughtless parental generation, the instant attraction of the young lovers, and the quick surface life of street fights.

“Romeo and Juliet” is a transitional play in which Shakespeare merges the comedic elements in his earlier work with tragic elements as in his great tragedies “Hamlet”, “Othello”, “Macbeth”, and “King Lear”. William Shakespeare writes the mixture of styles between comedy and tragedy in “Romeo and Juliet”. The conflicts of the heroes of the play are influenced by the external forces that influence the development of the plot, but, unlike the great tragic heroes, they are devoid of the inner struggle that makes for great tragedy, while no one can deny the merits of Shakespeare’s powerful theme of “Romeo and Juliet” is Love and Hate. To understand the play properly, we must examine the themes which are reflected in the plot, characters, and setting. Based on the topic above, the problems in this research are:

1. What are the themes of Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet?
2. How the themes of Shakespeare’s Romeo and Julie reflected in the plot, characters and setting?

Based on the identification of the problems stated above the writer discusses the themes of William Shakespeare’s “Romeo and Juliet” through the plot, character, and description of the setting. The discussion of the themes will be reflected through the intrinsic elements of the plot, characters, and setting.

Themes are the ideas that Shakespeare explores dramatically through the experience and action of the characters. There are common themes in all of the plays, such as love and hate, but in addition to those, each play explores its own issues, which are dramatized in the language, the actions of the characters, and in the setting. Sometimes Shakespeare will repeat individual theme words throughout the play. In “Macbeth”, the most frequent word is “blood”. “Blood” is a word with multitude meanings. At its most dramatic, it refers to violence—something that is very prominent in the play. There is a lot of killing, a lot of blood seen, and the characters mostly use the word in their dialogues. Shakespeare invented the word “bloody” and turned “blood” into an adjective for the first time. “Blood” also refers to family, as in blood relatives. Macbeth is the cousin of Duncan, whom he murders. Immediately after the murder, the word “blood” is dramatized by the indelible blood on his hands. Blood also suggests such things as courage, youth, and anger.

“King Lear” is a play that explores the concept of possession and identity. Lear is stripped of both. The word “nothing” ripples through the text. Moreover, “King Lear” presents a great deal of cruelty, tenderness, and healing. In this play, Shakespeare repeats the word “hands” throughout. The human hand is used both for cruelty and tenderness and we see images of physical cruelty with hands ripping and tearing, clawing, and wounding. Regan, for example, rips Gloucester’s eyes

out with her hands. We also see hands raising someone up, blessing, and stroking. "Hands" is used for expressing both themes and, in addition, the theme of good versus evil.

Shakespeare uses a particular language device in some of his works. In "Measure", things are being balanced all the time. One of the main themes in the play is justice. Readers may see everything being balanced against something else and it reflects the theme of the play.

Another device that Shakespeare uses is recurring images. In "Romeo and Juliet" there are recurring images that contrast light and darkness, reflecting young love doomed to death.

It is not possible to say definitively what Shakespeare's themes are because each generation finds something that speaks to their generation seriously which previous generations did not. The generations that follow us will find things in Shakespeare's plays that concern them deeply but of which we are not aware. It is possible to see common themes that appear in all the plays. The four most prominent are appearance and reality, change, order and disorder, and conflict. Those were matters that deeply affected Shakespeare as he walked about and observed the world around him. In his declining years, he became interested in the refreshment that the countryside brings as an antidote to the evils and corruption of city life. When he became the grandfather of a little girl, he became interested in the redeeming effect that the youngest generation has on the oldest. He illustrates these aspects in plays like "The Tempest" and "The Winter's Tale and Pericles". The plays narrate a story about young girls who bring about the redemption of the corruption perpetrated by the old, worn-out generation, still pursuing their greedy ambitions.

The story of star-crossed lovers is one of William Shakespeare's gentlest dramas. Shakespeare is sympathetic toward Romeo and Juliet. They both are sincere, kind, brave, loyal, virtuous, and desperately in love. Interestingly, their tragedy is greater because of their innocence. The feud between the lovers' families shows how powerless Romeo and Juliet are. The principal theme is about tension between two houses and all the other oppositions of the play derive from the central one: romance against revenge, love against hate, and youth against age.

METHOD

Theme is ultimately the major concern in defining the play. As stated by Reaske (1966), theme is "the basic idea of the play that largely determines the extension of the play" (p.19). This study analyses the themes in "Romeo and Juliet" that was written by William Shakespeare. "Romeo and Juliet" was published in 1597 and became one of the greatest plays written in sixteenth century. Furthermore, it is also the oldest play of William Shakespeare. "Romeo and Juliet" is not only performed in theatre but also on the film.

This play has maintained a prominent position in the Shakespeare's time. In addition, it has been produced in many versions and among them it has been re-painted by many great dramatists of England. Erich Segal is one of the dramatists who re-arrange Romeo and Juliet

into a novel version. Nowadays, "Romeo and Juliet" becomes a play that everyone is expected to know.

The approach employed in this research is structuralism. The researchers attempt to discuss the intrinsic elements of the play such as themes, plot, characters, and setting by applying the structuralism analysis. The structure is how the plot or story of a play is laid out, including a beginning, a middle and an end. Plays may also include subplots, which are smaller stories that allow the audience to follow the journey of different characters and events within the plot.

The introduction of the play begins with the actions and sets the play moving towards the crisis. The play sets in Verona when there is a street fight between Montague and Capulet servants who like their masters are sworn enemies. The falling action covers in tomb, Juliet finding Romeo dead and she stabs herself with his dagger. The feuding families meet at the tomb to find Romeo and Juliet dead. The study uses the play published by Everyman, and it was newly published in 1993 by J. M. Dent in London. In its complete version, it consists of 259 pages, 5 acts, and 24 scenes. This study uses documentation technique by reading, analyzing, and collecting supporting sources and books in order to get valid and reliable data. In this study, the researchers applied two kinds of data collection techniques, literary and library studies. The researchers read the play and identify the intrinsic elements of the play. Some references are also used to analyze the data.

DISCUSSION

"Romeo and Juliet" play is set in Verona in Italy in 1500. In the Elizabethan imagination Verona is the picture of heat, quick tempers and violence. There is a contrast of moods throughout the play. The mood created by the love between Romeo and Juliet is bright, happy and romantic. The prevailing mood of Verona is ugly, harsh and cruel, as seen through the evidences in the needless conflict between the Capulet and Montague. The death of Romeo and Juliet creates a mood of tragedy and despair.

The major theme of Romeo and Juliet are the issues that the play talks about. It could be something as simple as love and hate, or it could be something more complex. Most plays have more than one theme that can be analyzed.

The plot of Romeo and Juliet is the Montague and the Capulet are enemies, but Romeo goes to the Capulet ball and meets Juliet. The both fall in love and secretly get married. The play is a tragedy because Romeo and Juliet died when we expect them to live happily ever after.

Tragedy as well as comedy deals with a conflict between an individual force and environment circumstances. In tragedy, the individual is overwhelmed. The plot development of a tragedy may be noted in five stages: the exposition or introduction, the complication or rising action, the climax, the resolution, and the denouement or conclusion.

The Plot

Plot is the organized pattern or sequence of events that make up a story. Every plot is made up of a series of incidents that are related to one another. However, a plot is not a simple sequence of events. A strong plot is centered on one moment—an interruption of a pattern, a turning point, or an action—that raises a dramatic question, which must be answered throughout the course of the story. A plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality. Plot is the central aspect of all drama, for drama is primarily concerned with what happens (Reaske, p 35). Most of good plays start with these fundamental components: rising action, conflict, climax, falling action, and catastrophe.

Rising Action

In the streets of Verona, fights break out between the servants of the feuding noble families of Capulet and Montague. Benvolio, a Montague, tries to stop the fighting, but is himself embroiled when the rash Capulet, Tybalt, arrives on the scene. After citizens outraged by the constant violence beat back the warring factions, Prince Escalus, the ruler of Verona, attempts to prevent any further conflicts between the families by decreeing death for any individual who disturbs the peace in the future. Obviously, this is setting up a big confrontation later in the play.

Romeo, the son of Montague, runs into his cousin Benvolio, wants to help him. After some prodding by Benvolio, Romeo confides that he is in love with Rosaline, a woman who does not return his affections. Benvolio counsels him to forget this woman and find another, more beautiful one, but Romeo remains despondent. Meanwhile, Paris, a kinsman of the Prince, seeks Juliet's hand in marriage. Her father Capulet, though happy at the match, asks Paris to wait two years, since Juliet is not yet even fourteen. Capulet dispatches a servant with a list of people to invite to a masquerade and feast he traditionally holds. He invites Paris to the feast, hoping that Paris will begin to win Juliet's heart.

Romeo and Benvolio, still discussing Rosaline, encounter the Capulet servant bearing the list of invitations. Benvolio suggests that they attend, since that will allow Romeo to compare his beloved to other beautiful women of Verona. Romeo agrees to go with Benvolio to the feast, but only because Rosaline, whose name he reads on the list, will be there. In Capulet's household, young Juliet talks with her mother, Lady Capulet, and her nurse about the possibility of marrying Paris. Juliet has not yet considered marriage, but agrees to look at Paris during the feast to see if she thinks she *could* fall in love with him.

Conflict

When the feast begins, a melancholic Romeo follows Benvolio and their witty friend Mercutio to Capulet's house. Once inside, Romeo sees Juliet from a distance and instantly falls in love with

her; he forgets about Rosaline completely. As Romeo watches Juliet, entranced, a young Capulet, Tybalt, recognizes him, and is enraged that a Montague would sneak into a Capulet feast. He prepares to attack, but Capulet holds him back. Soon, Romeo speaks to Juliet, and the two experience a profound attraction. They kiss, not even knowing each other's names. When he finds out from Juliet's nurse that she is the daughter of Capulet—his family's enemy—he becomes distraught. When Juliet learns that the young man, she has just kissed is the son of Montague, she grows equally upset.

As Mercutio and Benvolio leave the Capulet estate, Romeo leaps over the orchard wall into the garden, unable to leave Juliet behind. From his hiding place, he sees Juliet in a window above the orchard and hears her speak his name. He calls out to her, and they exchange vows of love. Romeo hurries to see his friend and confessor Friar Lawrence, who, though shocked at the sudden turn of Romeo's heart, agrees to marry the young lovers in secret since he sees in their love the possibility of ending the age-old feud between Capulet and Montague. The following day, Romeo and Juliet meet at Friar Lawrence's cell and are married. The Nurse, who is privy to the secret, procures a ladder, which Romeo will use to climb into Juliet's window for their wedding night.

Climax

The next day, Benvolio and Mercutio encounter Tybalt—Juliet's cousin—who, still enraged that Romeo attended Capulet's feast, has challenged Romeo to a duel. Romeo appears. Now Tybalt's kinsman by marriage, Romeo begs the Capulet to hold off the duel until he understands why Romeo does not want to fight. Disgusted with this plea for peace, Mercutio says that he will fight Tybalt himself. The two begin to duel. Romeo tries to stop them by leaping between the combatants. Tybalt stabs Mercutio under Romeo's arm, and Mercutio dies. Romeo, in a rage, kills Tybalt. Romeo flees from the scene. Soon after, the Prince declares him forever banished from Verona for his crime. Friar Lawrence arranges for Romeo to spend his wedding night with Juliet before he has to leave for Mantua the following morning.

Falling Action

In her room, Juliet awaits the arrival of her new husband. The nurse enters, and, after some confusion, tells Juliet that Romeo has killed Tybalt. Distraught, Juliet suddenly finds herself married to a man who has killed her kinsman. However, she resettles herself, and realizes that her duty belongs with her love to Romeo.

Romeo sneaks into Juliet's room that night, and at last they consummate their marriage and their love. Morning comes, and the lovers bid farewell, unsure when they will see each other again. Juliet learns that her father, affected by the recent events, now intends for her to marry Paris in just three days. Unsure of how to proceed—unable to reveal to her parents that she is married to Romeo, but unwilling to marry Paris now that she is Romeo's wife—Juliet asks her nurse for

advice. She counsels Juliet to proceed as if Romeo were dead and to marry Paris, who is a better match anyway. Disgusted with the nurse's disloyalty, Juliet disregards her advice and hurries to Friar Lawrence. He concocts a plan to reunite Juliet with Romeo in Mantua. The night before her wedding to Paris, Juliet must drink a potion that will make her appear to be dead. After she is laid to rest in the family's crypt, the Friar and Romeo will secretly retrieve her, and she will be free to live with Romeo, away from their parents' feuding.

Juliet returns home to discover the wedding has been moved ahead one day, and she is to be married tomorrow. That night, Juliet drinks the potion, and the nurse discovers her, apparently dead, the next morning. The Capulet grieve, and Juliet is entombed according to plan. But Friar Lawrence's message explaining the plan to Romeo never reaches Mantua. Its bearer, Friar John, gets confined to a quarantined house. Romeo hears only that Juliet is dead.

Denouement

Romeo learns only of Juliet's death and decides to kill himself rather than live without her. He buys a vial of poison from a reluctant apothecary, then speeds back to Verona to take his own life at Juliet's tomb. Outside the Capulet crypt, Romeo comes upon Paris, who is scattering flowers on Juliet's grave. They fight, and Romeo kills Paris. He enters the tomb, sees Juliet's inanimate body, drinks the poison, and dies by her side. Just then, Friar Lawrence enters and realizes that Romeo has killed Paris and himself. At the same time, Juliet awakes. Friar Lawrence hears the coming of the watch. When Juliet refuses to leave with him, he flees alone. Juliet sees her beloved Romeo and realizes he has killed himself with poison. She kisses his poisoned lips, and when that does not kill her, buries his dagger in her chest, falling dead upon his body.

The watch arrives, followed closely by the Prince, the Capulet, and Montague. Montague declares that Lady Montague has died of grief over Romeo's exile. Seeing their children's bodies, Capulet and Montague agree to end their long-standing feud and to raise gold statues of their children side-by-side in a newly peaceful Verona.

Catastrophe

The cities of Verona, including Romeo and Juliet's parents, come in, the two lovers are lying side by side, both dead. The families decide that maybe this whole thing has gone on long enough and decide to be friends.

The Characters

Robert and Jacobin (1987) in *An Introduction to Reading and Writing* write that character in literature in general, and particular especially, is an extended verbal representation of human being, the inner self that is determined through speech and behavior (p. 119). In this section, there are seven characters that are analyzed.

The first character is Romeo, the son and heir of Montague and Lady Montague. A young man of about sixteen, Romeo is handsome, intelligent, and sensitive. Though impulsive and immature, his idealism and passion make him an extremely likable character. He lives in the middle of a violent feud between his family and the Capulet, but he is not at all interested in violence. His only interest is love. At the beginning of the play, he is madly in love with a woman named Rosaline, but the instant he lays eyes on Juliet, he falls in love with her and forgets Rosaline. Thus, Shakespeare gives us every reason to question how real Romeo's new love is, but Romeo goes to extremes to prove the seriousness of his feelings. He secretly marries Juliet, the daughter of his father's worst enemy; he happily takes abuse from Tybalt; and he would rather die than live without his beloved. Romeo is also an affectionate and devoted friend to his relative Benvolio, Mercutio, and Friar Lawrence.

The second character is daughter of Capulet and Lady Capulet, Juliet. A beautiful thirteen-year-old girl, Juliet begins the play as a naïve child who has thought little about love and marriage, but she grows up quickly upon falling in love with Romeo, the son of her family's great enemy. Because she is a girl in an aristocratic family, she has none of the freedom Romeo has to roam around the city, climb over walls in the middle of the night, or get into swordfights. Nevertheless, she shows amazing courage in trusting her entire life and future to Romeo, even refusing to believe the worst reports about him after he gets involved in a fight with her cousin. Juliet's closest friend and confidant is her nurse, though she's willing to shut the nurse out of her life the moment the nurse turns against Romeo.

The next is Friar Lawrence. He is a Franciscan friar, friend to both Romeo and Juliet. Kind, civic-minded, a proponent of moderation, and always ready with a plan, Friar Lawrence secretly marries the impassioned lovers in hopes that the union might eventually bring peace to Verona. As well as being a Catholic holy man, Friar Lawrence is also an expert in the use of seemingly mystical potions and herbs.

The fourth is a kinsman to the Prince, and Romeo's close friend. One of the most extraordinary characters in all of Shakespeare's plays, Mercutio overflows with imagination, wit, and, at times, a strange, biting satire and brooding fervor. Mercutio loves wordplay, especially sexual double entendre. He can be quite hot-headed, and hates people who are affected, pretentious, or obsessed with the latest fashions. He finds Romeo's romanticized ideas about love tiresome, and tries to convince Romeo to view love as a simple matter of sexual appetite.

After that, Juliet's nurse, the woman who breast-fed Juliet when she was a baby and has cared for Juliet her entire life is described. A vulgar, long-winded, and sentimental character, the nurse provides comic relief with her frequently inappropriate remarks and speeches. Nevertheless, until a disagreement near the play's end, the nurse is Juliet's faithful confidante and loyal intermediary in Juliet's affair with Romeo. She provides a contrast with Juliet, given that her view of love is earthy and sexual, whereas Juliet is idealistic and intense. The nurse believes in love and

wants Juliet to have a nice-looking husband, but the idea that Juliet would want to sacrifice herself for love is incomprehensible to her.

The sixth is Tybalt, a Capulet and Juliet's cousin on her mother's side. Vain, fashionable, supremely aware of courtesy and the lack of it, he becomes aggressive, violent, and quick to draw his sword when he feels his pride has been injured. Once drawn, his sword is something to be feared. Importantly, he loathes Montague.

The last character is Capulet. He is the patriarch of the Capulet family, father of Juliet, husband of Lady Capulet, and enemy, for unexplained reasons.

The Setting

In order to explore how a play creates an experience for the audience, one of the elements of the play that should be studied is setting. As stated by Reaske that most playwrights explore the relationship between man and the natural world in one way or another (p. 81). Considering where and when the action occurs is necessary to get better understanding of the play. The play "Romeo and Juliet" takes place, most generally, in the cities of Verona and Mantua, Italy. Much of the actions take place in Juliet's house. Two cities of Venice are also mentioned in the play. The Capulet and the Montague, the main families of the play, are from noble and wealth; they dress well, live in fancy surroundings, and served by many servants. The play's basic setting therefore is rich and elegant.

Through the setting, Shakespeare shows us that Romeo and Juliet have such different worlds. Romeo is always in the streets, never in his house. In general Romeo is part of a free-wheeling and masculine world, wandering around the streets with the other hot-headed violent street youths from both families. Juliet is a sheltered daughter, almost never allowed outside walls of her father's house. Almost all of scenes take place inside, we never see her on the street. Romeo has to actively invade her worlds in order to meet Juliet by crashing Capulet's party and then climbing up to her balcony. The setting of Friar Lurance's church, is a neutral place where Romeo and Juliet get married. This seems to be the only place Juliet is allowed to go outside of her home. The church as the religious setting is the only neutral place in the play. Like most of Shakespeare's plays, "Romeo and Juliet" is so vague that provokes the passion.

The setting is a representative place, meaning that the stage represents an actual place. All of the scenes occur in Verona, except Act I, Scene 1, which takes place in the city of Mantua. Verona is the home of the Capulet and Montague families. Mantua is where Romeo is banished after he kills Tybalt. A majority of the action in the play takes place out-of-doors in Verona, from the fruitful Capulet orchard where Romeo and Juliet profess their love, to the bleak Capulet tomb where the lovers take their lives. The vision of the world that is suggested by the setting is social, in spite of the political connotations that arise when the lovers are told that they

are to hate each other because of their names. Much of the action of the play is centered on the civil disorder that occurs between the Capulet and Montague families.

Setting of Place

There are three scenes that occur in public locations that distinctly have to do with the consequence of violence among the families in the play. (1) The violence between the feuding families that happens during these scenes helps to drive the story forward. The first scene of the play takes place in a public place in Verona. This scene depicts an argument between the household servants, of both the Capulet and the Montague families. Samson, a servant to the Capulet, attacks Abraham, a servant to the Montague. Benvolio, Montague's nephew, and Tybalt, Capulet's nephew, enter the scene. Benvolio tries to break up the fighting, but Tybalt engages him in combat. As they fight, Capulet and Montague enter the scene and speak of drawing swords as their wife's protest. Finally, through Escalus, Prince of Verona, the audience learns that there have been other public brawls recently between the families.

In Act III, scene 1, Tybalt acts against Romeo's friend Mercutio and Benvolio in a public square while they were searching for Romeo. Romeo enters the scene as they fight. Tybalt tries to provoke Romeo into fighting, but he is now married to Juliet, Tybalt's cousin, so Romeo does not return his insults. Mercutio takes it upon himself to defend Romeo and attacks Tybalt. Romeo steps between them, but Mercutio is mortally wounded by Tybalt under the arm of Romeo. Seeking revenge, Romeo attacks and kills Tybalt. The citizens are up in arms over the fighting and Escalus enters and banishes Romeo to Mantua under penalty of death. Finally, Act V, Scene 3 takes place in Verona at the Capulet's tomb. Paris is first seen at the tomb putting flowers on Juliet's grave. Romeo arrives and Paris, thinking that he is going to take revenge on the Capulet by desecrating the bodies, threatens to kill Romeo. Romeo gives Paris the chance to flee and when he does not, Romeo kills him.

Since much of the play takes place outside, another aspect of setting that is important to discuss is the weather. The play takes place in the month of July. July is a month that is characteristically hot. Tempers are more likely to flare and patience is more easily lost in the heat. Consideration of the heat may help to explain the amount of violence between the families. Heat may also be used in reference to sexual desire. The heat further ignites the passion between Romeo and Juliet. It is more than just the lovers that are affected by the heat. Sexual innuendoes are prevalent throughout the play. For example, the nurse tells Juliet in Act I, Scene 3, that someday she will enjoy tumbling under a man.

Finally, the contrast in setting between Act II, Scene 2 and Act V, Scene 3 is symbolic of the events that take place in them. Act II, Scene 2, is set in the Capulet's orchard. It is here where Romeo and Juliet profess their love for one another. The orchard blossoms, as does their love. During this scene, although it is night, the lovers speak to one another in terms of "light". Juliet

compares their love to lightning while Romeo compares Juliet to the sun. In contrast, the final scene of the play (Act V, Scene 3) is set in the churchyard at the site of the Capulet's tomb. The churchyard is full of gravestones that mark the dreary landscape. It is fitting that the lovers should take their lives in the churchyard, among the dead.

Setting of Time

From Act I, Scene 4 to Act I, Scene 5, the action is continuous. The setting moves from a street near the Capulet's house to a hall inside the house. The actors do not exit the scene. Instead, they march to one side of the stage to give the appearance of traveling to the house. This is testimony to the swift moving action of the play. The play occurs swiftly over the course of four days. The length of the play consists of five acts containing twenty-four scenes. The correlation between the span of days that the play encompasses and the number of scenes in the play is negatively related. The play "Romeo and Juliet" is full of action. The play has to cover four days, which make the twenty-four scenes necessary, but the actual time of the performance moves quickly because the action moves quickly.

The first day of the play, Sunday, consists of the fight between the servants, Romeo and Juliet's meeting at the Capulet's feast, and Romeo and Juliet's declaration of their love for one another. On Monday, the lovers are married at Friar Laurence's cell. Romeo then kills Tybalt and is banished, but he risks his life by spending his honeymoon night with Juliet. Also, during this evening, Capulet arranges for Juliet's marriage to Paris on Thursday. At dawn on Tuesday, Romeo leaves Juliet to go to Mantua. Capulet and his wife then tell Juliet of her coming marriage to Paris. At once, Juliet seeks the help of Friar Laurence and they devise the plan for the lovers to be together. Meanwhile, Capulet changes the wedding day from Thursday to Wednesday. This forces Juliet to drink her potion and fake her death that night. Finally, on Wednesday, Balthasar goes to Mantua to tell Romeo the news of Juliet's death. Not having received word of Juliet's plan from Friar Laurence, Romeo believes that she is dead. He buys poison and rides to the Capulet's tomb. While there, he kills Paris and drinks the poison. Juliet then rises to find that Romeo is dead and she stabs herself with his dagger. The play ends, late at night, with the discovery of the bodies by Escalus, the Capulet, and the Montague.

Night and darkness have an important part in the setting of the play. Several of the scenes involving the lovers occur at night. This is symbolic of the secrecy of their relationship. Romeo and Juliet first meet at night at the Capulet's feast. The balcony scene, where they confessed their love for one another, transpired at night. The lovers also consummated their marriage at night. Lastly, they both took their own lives at the tomb at night.

If the action of the play had not moved so quickly, the course of events in the play would likely be different. What if Romeo had not killed Tybalt? The lovers could have then made their marriage public and possibly ended the feud without any more bloodshed. If the Friar Laurence's

note had gotten to Romeo, he would have known of Juliet's plan to fake her own death. Also, if Romeo had waited to confirm Juliet's death instead of galloping off to the tomb, their lives would have been saved. Unfortunately, none of these events takes place. Verona bears witness to the family feud, between the Capulet and Montague families, which has been in existence for generations. In a matter of days, however, the feud finally ends. However, it takes the deaths of five of the family members for Capulet and Montague to make their peace.

Themes

Love is naturally the play's dominant and most important theme. The play focuses on romantic love, specifically the intense passion that springs up at first sight between Romeo and Juliet. In *Romeo and Juliet*, love is a violent, ecstatic, overpowering force that supersedes all other values, loyalties, and emotions. The literary themes throughout *Romeo and Juliet* have made the story an enduring tragedy for generations of audiences. Death, life, love, hatred, obligation, and destiny all play a hand in the play's famous ending.

The Forcefulness of Love

"*Romeo and Juliet*" is the most famous love story in the English literary tradition. Love is naturally the play's dominant and most important theme. The play focuses on romantic love, specifically the intense passion that springs up at first sight between Romeo and Juliet. In "*Romeo and Juliet*", love is a violent, ecstatic, overpowering force that supersedes all other values, loyalties, and emotions. In the course of the play, the young lovers are driven to defy their entire social world: families ("Deny thy father and refuse thy name," Juliet asks, "Or if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love, / And I'll no longer be a Capulet"); friends (Romeo abandons Mercutio and Benvolio after the feast in order to go to Juliet's garden); and ruler (Romeo returns to Verona for Juliet's sake after being exiled by the Prince on pain of death in 2.1.76–78). Love is the overriding theme of the play, but a reader should always remember that Shakespeare is uninterested in portraying a prettied-up, dainty version of the emotion, the kind that bad poets write about, and whose bad poetry Romeo reads while pining for Rosaline. Love in "*Romeo and Juliet*" is a brutal, powerful emotion that captures individuals and catapults them against their world, and, at times, against themselves.

The powerful nature of love can be seen in the way it is described, or, more accurately, the way descriptions of it so consistently fail to capture its entirety. At times love is described in the terms of religion, as in the fourteen lines when Romeo and Juliet first meet. At others it is described as a sort of magic: "Alike bewitched by the charm of looks" (2. Prologue.6). Juliet, perhaps, most perfectly describes her love for Romeo by refusing to describe it: "But my true love is grown to such excess / I cannot sum up some of half my wealth" (3.1.33–34). Love, in other words, resists any single metaphor because it is too powerful to be so easily contained or understood.

“Romeo and Juliet” does not make a specific moral statement about the relationships between love and society, religion, and family; rather, it portrays the chaos and passion of being in love, combining images of love, violence, death, religion, and family in an impressionistic rush leading to the play’s tragic conclusion.

Love as a Cause of Violence

The themes of death and violence permeate “Romeo and Juliet”, and they are always connected to passion, whether that passion is love or hate. The connection between hate, violence, and death seems obvious. But the connection between love and violence requires further investigation.

Love, in “Romeo and Juliet”, is a grand passion, and as such it is blinding; it can overwhelm a person as powerfully and completely as hate can. The passionate love between Romeo and Juliet is linked from the moment of its inception with death: Tybalt notices that Romeo has crashed the feast and determines to kill him just as Romeo catches sight of Juliet and falls instantly in love with her. From that point on, love seems to push the lovers closer to love and violence, not farther from it. Romeo and Juliet are plagued with thoughts of suicide, and a willingness to experience it: in Act 3, scene 3, Romeo brandishes a knife in Friar Lawrence’s cell and threatens to kill himself after he has been banished from Verona and his love. Juliet also pulls a knife in order to take her own life in Friar Lawrence’s presence just three scenes later. After Capulet decides that Juliet will marry Paris, Juliet says, “If all else fail, myself have power to die” (3.5.242). Finally, each imagine that the other looks dead the morning after their first, and only, sexual experience (“Methinks I see thee,” Juliet says, “. . . as one dead in the bottom of a tomb” (3.5.55–56). This theme continues until its inevitable conclusion: double suicide. This tragic choice is the highest, most potent expression of love that Romeo and Juliet can make. It is only through death that they can preserve their love, and their love is so profound that they are willing to end their lives in its defense. In the play, love emerges as an amoral thing, leading as much to destruction as to happiness. But in its extreme passion, the love that Romeo and Juliet experience also appears so exquisitely beautiful that few would want, or be able, to resist its power.

The Individual Versus Society

Much of “Romeo and Juliet” involves the lovers’ struggles against public and social institutions that either explicitly or implicitly oppose the existence of their love. Such structures range from the concrete to the abstract: families and the placement of familial power in the father; law and the desire for public order; religion; and the social importance placed on masculine honor. These institutions often come into conflict with each other. The importance of honor, for example, time and again results in brawls that disturb the public peace.

Though each of these societal institutions does not always work in concert, they in some way present obstacles for Romeo and Juliet. The enmity between their families, coupled with the

emphasis placed on loyalty and honor to kin, combine to create a profound conflict for Romeo and Juliet, who must rebel against their heritages. Further, the patriarchal power structure inherent in Renaissance families, wherein the father controls the action of all other family members, particularly women, places Juliet in an extremely vulnerable position. Her heart, in her family's mind, is not hers to give. The law and the emphasis on social civility demands terms of conduct with which the blind passion of love cannot comply. Religion similarly demands priorities that Romeo and Juliet cannot abide by because of the intensity of their love. Though in most situations the lovers uphold the traditions of Christianity (they wait to marry before consummating their love), their love is so powerful that they begin to think of each other in blasphemous terms. For example, Juliet calls Romeo "the god of my idolatry," elevating Romeo to level of God (2.1.156). The couple's final act of suicide is likewise un-Christian. The maintenance of masculine honor forces Romeo to commit actions he would prefer to avoid. But the social emphasis placed on masculine honor is so profound that Romeo cannot simply ignore them.

It is possible to see "Romeo and Juliet" as a battle between the responsibilities and actions demanded by social institutions and those demanded by the private desires of the individual. Romeo and Juliet's appreciation of night, with its darkness and privacy, and their renunciation of their names, with its attendant loss of obligation, make sense in the context of individuals who wish to escape the public world. But the lovers cannot stop the night from becoming day. And Romeo cannot cease being a Montague simply because he wants to; the rest of the world will not let him. The lovers' suicides can be understood as the ultimate night, the ultimate privacy.

The Inevitability of Fate

"O, I am fortune's fool Romeo", Act III Scene I

In its first address to the audience, the Chorus states that Romeo and Juliet are "star-crossed"—that is to say that fate (a power often vested in the movements of the stars) controls them (Prologue.6). This sense of fate permeates the play, and not just for the audience. The characters also are quite aware of it: Romeo and Juliet constantly see omens. When Romeo believes that Juliet is dead, he cries out, "Then I defy you, stars," completing the idea that the love between Romeo and Juliet is in opposition to the decrees of destiny. Of course, Romeo's defiance itself plays into the hands of fate, and his determination to spend eternity with Juliet results in their deaths. The mechanism of fate works in all of the events surrounding the lovers: the feud between their families (it is worth noting that this hatred is never explained; rather, the reader must accept it as an undeniable aspect of the world of the play; the horrible series of accidents that ruin Friar Lawrence's seemingly well-intentioned plans at the end of the play; and the tragic timing of Romeo's suicide and Juliet's awakening. These events are not mere coincidences, but rather manifestations of fate that help bring about the unavoidable outcome of the young lovers' deaths.

The concept of fate described above is the most commonly accepted interpretation. There are other possible readings of fate in the play: as a force determined by the powerful social institutions that influence Romeo and Juliet's choices, as well as fate as a force that emerges from Romeo and Juliet's very personalities.

The themes of the play can also be seen in the acts and the scenes of the play as follows:

Light/Dark Imagery

"O brawling...what it is Romeo", Act 1 Scene 1

One of the play's most consistent visual is the contrast between light and dark, often in terms of night/day imagery. This contrast is not given a particular metaphoric meaning—light is not always good, and dark is not always evil. On the contrary, light and dark are generally used to provide a sensory contrast and to hint at opposed alternatives. One of the more important instances of this motif is Romeo's lengthy meditation on the sun and the moon during the balcony scene, in which Juliet, metaphorically described as the sun, is seen as banishing the "envious moon" and transforming the night into day (2.1.46). A similar blurring of night and day occurs in the early morning hours after the lovers' only night together. Romeo, forced to leave for exile in the morning, and Juliet, not wanting him to leave her room, both try to pretend that it is still night, and that the light is actually darkness: "More light and light, more dark and dark our woes" (3.5.36).

Opposite Points of View

Shakespeare includes numerous speeches and scenes in *Romeo and Juliet* that hint at alternative ways to evaluate the play. Shakespeare uses two main devices in this regard: Mercutio and servants. Mercutio consistently skewers the viewpoints of all the other characters in play: he sees Romeo's devotion to love as a sort of blindness that robs Romeo from himself; similarly, he sees Tybalt's devotion to honor as blind and stupid. His punning and the Queen Mab speech can be interpreted as undercutting virtually every passion evident in the play. Mercutio serves as a critic of the delusions of righteousness and grandeur held by the characters around him.

Where Mercutio is a nobleman who openly criticizes other nobles, the views offered by servants in the play are less explicit. There is the nurse who lost her baby and husband, the servant Peter who cannot read, the musicians who care about their lost wages and their lunches, and the apothecary who cannot afford to make the moral choice, the lower classes present a second tragic world to counter that of the nobility. The nobles' world is full of grand tragic gestures. The servants' world, in contrast, is characterized by simple needs, and early deaths brought about by disease and poverty rather than dueling and grand passions. Where the nobility almost seems to revel in their capacity for drama, the servants' lives are such that they cannot afford tragedy of the epic kind.

Symbol



Symbols are objects, characters, figures, and colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

Poison

In his first appearance, in Act II, Scene 2, Friar Lawrence remarks that every plant, herb, and stone has their own special properties, and that nothing exists in nature that cannot be put to both good and bad uses. Thus, poison is not intrinsically evil, but is instead a natural substance made lethal by human hands. Friar Lawrence's words prove true over the course of the play. The sleeping potion he gives Juliet is concocted to cause the appearance of death, not death itself, but through circumstances beyond the Friar's control, the potion does bring about a fatal result: Romeo's suicide. As this example shows, human beings tend to cause death even without intending to. Similarly, Romeo suggests that society is to blame for the apothecary's criminal selling of poison, because while there are laws prohibiting the Apothecary from selling poison, there are no laws that would help the apothecary make money. Poison symbolizes human society's tendency to poison good things and make them fatal, just as the pointless Capulet-Montague feud turns Romeo and Juliet's love to poison. After all, unlike many of the other tragedies, this play does not have an evil villain, but rather people whose good qualities are turned to poison by the world in which they live.

Thumb-Biting

In Act I, Scene 1, the buffoonish Samson begins a brawl between the Montague and Capulet by flicking his thumbnail from behind his upper teeth, an insulting gesture known as biting the thumb. He engages in this juvenile and vulgar display because he wants to get into a fight with the Montague but doesn't want to be accused of starting the fight by making an explicit insult. Because of his timidity, he settles for being annoying rather than challenging. The thumb-biting, as an essentially meaningless gesture, represents the foolishness of the entire Capulet/Montague feud and the stupidity of violence in general.

Queen Mab

In Act I, Scene 4, Mercutio delivers a dazzling speech about the fairy Queen Mab, who rides through the night on her tiny wagon bringing dreams to sleepers. One of the most noteworthy aspects of Queen Mab's ride is that the dreams she brings generally do not bring out the best sides of the dreamers, but instead serve to confirm them in whatever vices they are addicted to—for example, greed, violence, or lust. Another important aspect of Mercutio's description of Queen Mab is that it is complete nonsense, albeit vivid and highly colorful. Nobody believes in a fairy pulled about by "a small grey-coated gnat" whipped with a cricket's bone (1.4.65). Finally, it is worth noting that the description of Mab and her carriage goes to extravagant lengths to emphasize how tiny and insubstantial she and her accoutrements are. Queen Mab and her carriage do not merely symbolize the dreams of sleepers; they also symbolize the power of waking

fantasies, daydreams, and desires. Through the Queen Mab imagery, Mercutio suggests that all desires and fantasies are as nonsensical and fragile as Mab, and that they are basically corrupting. This point of view contrasts starkly with that of Romeo and Juliet, who see their love as real and ennobling.

CONCLUSION

“Romeo and Juliet” is considered to be a love story; the lovers’ action is motivated by love versus lust. As the play begins, Romeo pines over Rosaline, and he complains that “she will not hit with Cupid’s arrow...” (Act I, Scene 1). Romeo’s love for Juliet is love at first sight, he loves her; the same is true for Juliet. They have known each other for a little over an hour, and finally they agree to marriage. Both Romeo and Juliet act rashly, they marry quickly and they react quickly. Love is patient but it is always in a hurry.

The play begins with the chorus calling Romeo and Juliet as “Star-Crossed Lovers” (Prologue, Line 6), it tells us that fate and poor decision cause their death. There are bad luck and unfortunate fate on the play: 1) The failure of the illiterate Capulet servants to read the invitation list in; 2) Romeo spots Juliet first at the Capulet Party; 3) it just happens that the County Paris decides to marry Juliet the same day Romeo meets her; 4) Friar John is unable to deliver an important letter to Romeo in Mantua; 5) if Romeo would have waited one more minute, Juliet would have awakened and the two could have fled together.

There are bad choices and stupid decisions rule in the play: 1) Romeo and Juliet marry too quickly; 2) Romeo chooses to attend the enemy’s party; 3) Friar Lawrence abandons Juliet in the tombs. The play talks about the role of women as good wives and mothers to be obedient to her husband and fathers. It is no surprise, therefore, that when Capulet determines Juliet must marry Paris, all of the women in the play agree with this.

“Romeo and Juliet” is a great love story based on hate. The first is the Capulet Hate. The Montague and Montague hate Capulet. It is this hatred that establishes tension and conflict. Tybalt is unreasonably hateful. The mere sight of Romeo at the Capulet Party angers him to the point of murder. It is ironic that the party which brought the two lovers together sown the seeds that destroy their lives. Shakespeare shows the reader the paradoxical relationship between Love and Hate.

Shakespeare shows us that two emotions are connected. Does love conquer hate or hate conquers love? Romeo’s love for Juliet is destroyed by Tybalt’s hatred of Romeo. The families’ hatred brings to the end of Romeo’s love to Juliet. However, the love that prompted their rash actions brings to the end to the families’ hatred. The themes of this play are love and hate. Everything is about the love between Romeo and Juliet, how they fall in love, how they meet in secret, how they get married, how Juliet to be with Romeo for the rest of her life, and how they kill themselves because they cannot live without each other. The second theme is Family hate. The hate overshadows their love. It is the reason why they should keep it a secret and why Romeo

loses his best friend and Juliet. Another reason why they are dead is that they cannot be with each other and when the plan does not turn out right then it costs Romeo's death.

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