How does Shakespeare present Prince Escalus and his role in controlling the feud?

In Act 1 Scene 1 of ‘Romeo and Juliet’, Shakespeare introduces Prince Escalus with a powerful speech to attempt to control the feud between the Montagues and the Capulets. He has come to control this because there has been another fight, started by the servants of each household.

Shakespeare begins the speech by establishing the Prince’s authority. He begins by addressing his “rebellious subjects”. This degradation quickly shows the Princes position within this social hierarchy. The Montagues and Capulets are two very influential households, so being more socially powerful than them presents the prince as an authoritative man. In contrast, as the speech continues, the Prince is revealed as hopelessly attempting to gain command, using multiple methods like imperative verbs

Princes Escales’ name could have been chosen by Shakespeare for a particular reason. “Escales” has no direct translation however it is closely linked to “scales”. Scales represent justice and balance, like in a court. From this we can infer the Prince is like a judge in this society. Furthermore, the speech ends with “our common judgement-place”, accentuating his attempt to gain a position in control.

The prince is revealed as irritated by the occurrence. The ‘beasts’ that were fighting demonstrates them as behaving like animals, perhaps uncontrollable and inherently violent. This indicates the ‘men’ are trying to present themselves as more masculine than the other, in the way animals fight for power. We can hypothesise Shakespeare did this to represent his contextual concerns about the patriarchy held within society.

It is made clear by Shakespeare that this has happened before many times. The past ‘three civil brawls’ were created by an ‘airy word’. The Prince is frustrated because there is no reason to ‘disturb’ the streets. The rigid dichotomy between the two households is illuminated here, as they are only fighting because of the ‘ancient’ feud. Previously, the Prince revealed his annoyance near the opening of his speech, asking “Will they not hear?”. This passive aggressive rhetorical question reinforces his irritation, as the ignorant families are so fixated on their “pernicious rage”.

This speech is significant in the play as it creates an additional layer to the social hierarchy presented on stage. The prince is pertinently ‘moved’ by the situation, indicating the problems created by the households permeates through social class. Furthermore, the servants started the fight, reinforcing the scale of the feud and reiterating the effects on different classes.

Not completely finished