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Romeo and Juliet

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posted Aug 2, 2013, 8:58 AM by alaa hagag **[updated Aug 2, 2013, 8:58 AM]**

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 bewitchèd 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.

Hate

Love and hate are usually thought of as opposites, but in *Romeo and Juliet*, love and hate are two sides of the same coin, as two children from warring families (the Capulets and the Montagues) turn their hatred of each other into an insatiable passion. Ultimately, the hatred between their two families propels the lovers towards their tragic deaths. When their parents discover Romeo and Juliet dead in each others' arms, they vow to end the feud between their two families. At last, love triumphs over hatred – but the cost of two young lives is too heavy to bear.

Fate

From the opening prologue when the Chorus summarizes Romeo and Juliet and says that the "star-crossed lovers" will die, Romeo and Juliet are trapped by fate. No matter what the lovers do, what plans they make, or how much they love each other, their struggles against fate only help fulfill it. But defeating or escaping fate is not the point. No one escapes fate. It is Romeo and Juliet's determination to struggle against fate in order to be together, whether in life or death, that shows the fiery passion of their love, and which makes that love eternal.

Fate is not just a force felt by the characters in Romeo and Juliet. The audience also senses it through Shakespeare's use of foreshadowing. Time and again, both Romeo and Juliet unknowingly reference their imminent deaths, as when Juliet says after first meeting Romeo: "If he be married / My grave is like to be my wedding bed." She means that if Romeo is already married she'll be miserable. But the audience knows that Juliet's grave actually will be her wedding bed. In Romeo and Juliet, fate is a force that neither the characters nor the audience can escape, and so every word and gesture gains in power, becomes fateful.

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

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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 they do not always work in concert, each of these societal institutions 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.

Sex

In the hormone-charged atmosphere of *Romeo and Juliet*, it seems that pretty much everything is about sex. A boy and girl from warring families fall in love, and their relationship is marked by both intense chemistry and the constant threat of violence. Romeo and Juliet live in Verona,

a city where the dirty jokes are constant, violence becomes eroticized, and even asking the time of day acquires a sexual connotation. ("The bawdy hand of the dial is now upon the prick of noon," quips Mercutio.) In this hyper-sexual atmosphere, it can be tempting to interpret the protagonists' young love as primarily physical. Their relationship, however, delineates a relationship between sex and love that eludes the stereotypes other characters try to project on them.

Marriage

Romeo and Juliet marry for love, a choice that is standard today. But in the world of the play, marriage for love, rather than money or social position, was a radical and dangerous choice. Romeo and Juliet, the children of rival families, fall in love against their parents' wishes and marry in secret. Their union reflects a new focus on individual passion and inner conviction – and in the play, it comes dangerously in conflict with social and familial expectations. Romeo and Juliet pay a heavy price for marrying for love – their clandestine union propels the lovers towards their tragic deaths.

Family

The conflict between family and the individual is played out in the most extreme fashion possible in the play, as two children from warring families fall in love and have to choose between their families' expectations and their passion for each other. Romeo and Juliet choose passion. They abandon their loyalty to their parents and kinsman and lie to their relatives in order to protect their love. Ultimately, though, Romeo and Juliet can't escape the conflict that divides their families. Bad luck is partially responsible for Romeo and Juliet's deaths, but so is Romeo's obligation to avenge his friend's murder and defend his masculinity and family name. Juliet's father and mother, who try to push her into an unwanted marriage, are also to blame. Though we often think of family as a refuge and a place of security, in *Romeo and Juliet*, kinship is more often a source of danger and battle.

Exile

Romeo and Juliet is not necessarily a political work, and so, in the play, exile is a purely personal matter. Romeo and Juliet, the children of warring families, carry out a clandestine love affair. They have just been secretly married when Romeo is banished from Verona, their home city, for violating an order of the Prince. The prospect of Romeo's exile is unbearable to both of the

lovers. Exile, for them, is no less than death, simply because exile means separation from each other. "Heaven is here, / Where Juliet lives; and every cat and dog / And little mouse, every unworthy thing, / Live here in heaven and may look on her; / But Romeo may not," Romeo says in frustration. Romeo and Juliet's passionate interpretation of exile as separation from a loved one would make an interesting contrast to political accounts of exile.

Theme of Youth

"Youth in this play is a separate nation," writes literary critic Frank Kermode. In the play, Romeo and Juliet's youthful passion conflicts with the values of their feuding parents and their more mature advisors. Juliet ignores her Nurse, who advises her to marry Paris after Romeo is banished. Romeo and Juliet ignore Friar Laurence's warning to slow down and to stop rushing into love and, consequently, their youthful passion propels them towards their tragic end. Thinking Juliet is dead, Romeo immediately commits suicide. But Juliet has only been feigning death to escape her parents' anger. She, too, commits suicide when she realizes that Romeo is dead. Whether the values of the old or the young (or the tension between them) are most to blame for the lovers' tragic deaths is a question the play poses to audiences and readers.

Theme of Transience

Romeo and Juliet's love gains its power from the play's constant reminders that life, love and beauty are ultimately fleeting. Romeo and thirteen-year-old Juliet fall in love at first sight, marry within twenty-four hours of their first meeting, and die in each others' arms only days later. Their passion for each other is so all-consuming that it seems impossible that it could have been sustained any longer. The lovers' awareness of their own transience is crucial to the intensity of their passion. In one of their early scenes, Juliet confesses she is afraid of the swiftness of their relationship. "It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden," she tells Romeo, "Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be ere one can say, 'It lightens.'" Her words are prescient: their love is just as brilliant, and as brief, as a flash of lightning.

Mortality

Freud argued that human love was propelled by two opposing drives: eros, the desire for love, and thanatos, the desire for death. But centuries before Freud, *Romeo and Juliet* provided a very different view of the relationship between love and death. Despite – or perhaps because of – the passion and joy of the play's young lovers, death is never far in the background of

Romeo and Juliet. Because their families have been feuding for as long as anyone can remember, they believe their "forbidden" relationship puts them in constant danger. Consequently, the seeming threat of death adds a spark of excitement to their secret meetings. Shakespeare links death and sex throughout the play and, to some degree, portrays suicide as an erotic act that both consummates the lovers' passion and (re)unites them in death.

Art and Culture

Romeo and Juliet is chock full of poetry, especially *love* poetry. The first time the couple meets, their dialogue forms a perfect Shakespearean sonnet. The famous balcony scene? Well, it's full of great lines that have since made their way into Hallmark cards and pop music lyrics. Shakespeare's not just showing off his skills – the play takes a pretty self-conscious look at the conventions of popular sixteenth-century poetry even as it participates in the art form. The clearest example of this is Romeo's role (at the play's beginning) as the kind of cliché lover that frequently appears in Petrarchan sonnets (love poetry inspired by fourteenth-century writer, Francesco Petrarch), which was all the rage when Shakespeare wrote *Romeo and Juliet* (c. 1595).

Gender

Machismo rules the day in Verona, the city where *Romeo and Juliet* takes place. Male honor –and male sexual posturing – are sources of both the play's humor and its final tragedy. The rivalry between Verona's two warring families, the Montagues and the Capulets, is driven by the testosterone-charged fighting between the young men of each family. Romeo Montague, the play's protagonist, is constantly torn between the male bonds he shares with his friends, especially his friend Mercutio, and his love for Juliet, a Capulet. Juliet, the only daughter of a well-to-do family, also faces some gender challenges that are pretty typical for young women in Shakespeare's literature – her parents choose a husband for her and threaten to disown her if she disobeys

Servants

For a play about the two noble teenagers struggling to preserve their forbidden love, Romeo and Juliet sure has a lot of scenes focused on servants and non-nobles. Shakespeare did this by design. The recurring presence of servants in the play, from Peter, the Capulet servant who

can't read, to the apothecary who's so poor he's willing to sell poison, Shakespeare in Romeo and Juliet goes to great efforts to show that the poor and downtrodden have lives of their own, and that to them Romeo and Juliet's love and death mean absolutely nothing. After all, why would the death of two noble teenagers mean anything to servants just trying to make it through the day and scrounge up something to eat for dinner?

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symboles

posted Aug 2, 2013, 8:57 AM by alaa hagag **[updated Aug 2, 2013, 8:57 AM]**

Light/Dark and Day/Night

Romeo and Juliet is filled with imagery of light and dark. But while light is traditionally connected with "good" and dark with "evil," in Romeo and Juliet the relationship is more complex. Romeo and Juliet constantly see each other as forms of light. In the balcony scene, Romeo describes Juliet as the sun, while Juliet describes Romeo as stars. But the relationship between light and dark is complicated by the lover's need for the privacy of darkness in order to be together. As Romeo says when the sun dawns on the morning when he is to be banished from Verona, "More light and light, more dark and dark our woes!" So while Romeo and Juliet see each other as light, in order for their light to shine brightly it needs the contrast of darkness, of night, to make it powerful

Love as Religious Worship

"Call me but love and I'll be new baptized" (2.2.4). That's what our smooth-talking Romeo says to Juliet as a way to suggest that Juliet's love has the potential to make him "reborn." Jeez. It seems like every time we turn around Romeo compares his love for Juliet to a religious experience. When the pair first meets, Romeo calls Juliet a "saint" and implies that he'd *really* like to "worship" her body (1.5.2). Not only that, but Romeo's "hand" would be "blessed" if it touched the divine Juliet's (1.5.1). Eventually, Juliet picks up on this "religion of love" conceit (a conceit is just an elaborate metaphor) and declares that Romeo is "the god of [her] idolatry" (2.2.12). (We're guessing this is why director Baz Luhrmann fills his 1996 film version of *Romeo*

+ *Juliet* with religions icons, namely crosses. He also makes Romeo's love baptism literal by dunking Claire Danes and Leonardo DiCaprio in a swimming pool.

So, what's up with all this over-the-top talk about religion and love? Have these two kids gone off the deep end? Well, the first thing to note is that Romeo and Juliet didn't invent the idea that love is a holy experience – it's been around *forever* and was especially popular in medieval (roughly 400s – early 1500s) courtly love poetry. (Note, Shakespeare wrote *Romeo and Juliet* in the late sixteenth century.)

We should also point out that, as cheesy or cliché as it may seem to us, all of this erotic talk about "worshipping" does a pretty good job of capturing the intensity of the young lovers' passion for one another. Let's face it. Sometimes head-over-heels love *does* seem to be rapturous, earth-shattering, and even holy. (Ever heard the song "Just Like Heaven" by The Cure?) At the same time, however, Shakespeare also seems to hint at the potential dangers of such an extreme relationship.

Poison

In his first appearance, in Act 2, scene 2, Friar Lawrence remarks that every plant, herb, and stone has its 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 prohiting 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.

Sex and Death

You've probably noticed that sex and death seem to go hand in hand in this play. In the very first scene, Sampson crudely puns on the term "maidenhead" (virginity) when he equates

sword fighting against men with raping women: "When I have fought with the men I will be civil with the maids – I will cut off their heads [...] the heads of maids or their maidenheads" (1.1.7). Even Juliet links sex and death – she puns on the word "die" (Shakespearean slang for orgasm) when, day-dreaming about her impending wedding night with Romeo, she imagines Romeo being transformed into a bunch of "little stars" lighting up the night sky: "Give me my Romeo, and when I shall die / Take him and cut him out in little stars, / And he will make the face of heaven so fine" (3.2.1).

The most obvious example of the sex/death connection in the play is when Capulet sees his daughter's lifeless body and says that "death" has "lain with" (slept with) Juliet: "See, there she lies, / Flower as she was, deflowered by him. Death is my son-in-law, death is my heir" (4.4.9). (By the way, Capulet has no idea at this point that Juliet is married to Romeo – he still thinks she was all set to marry Paris and is still a virgin.)

Shakespeare scholar Marjorie Garber offers one of the most interesting insights when she notes that even the way that Romeo and Juliet each literally die carries symbolic sexual meaning. Romeo drinks his poison from a goblet, a traditional symbol of female sexuality. (This same symbolism is used in the *Da Vinci Code*, where the Grail, a big V-shaped goblet, symbolizes, well, a woman's vagina.) Juliet, in contrast, stabs herself with Romeo's dagger – a traditional symbol of male sexuality. What's this all about, you ask? Symbolically, Romeo and Juliet combine physical death and sexual climax. It's all pretty ironic, really. Typically, sex acts between men and women are supposed to result in the *creation of life* (making babies, that is). Yet, in the play, that's just not the case.

Prince Escalus and Veronese Citizens

As the sole representative of the government to appear in Romeo and Juliet, Prince Escalus symbolizes the law. The citizens of Verona symbolize civil society. These forces seek to contain the feud between the Montagues and Capulets, but over the course of the play it becomes clear that they also try to contain any grand passions, including the love between Romeo and Juliet.

Oxymoron and Paradox

When Shakespeare wrote *Romeo and Juliet*, he seems to have been going through his "I heart

oxymora" phase because the play is chock full of them. An "oxymoron," by the way, is the combination of two terms ordinarily seen as opposites. For example, at the end of the famous balcony scene, when Romeo is leaving, Juliet says "parting is such *sweet sorrow*" (2.2.27). "Sweet sorrow" is an oxymoron.

Think that's impressive? Get a load of Juliet's use of 6 oxymora when she finds out that lover boy (that would be Romeo) has killed her cousin, Tybalt:

O serpent heart, hid with a flowering face!
Did ever dragon keep so fair a cave?
Beautiful tyrant! fiend angelical!
Dove-feather'd raven! wolvish-ravening lamb!
Despised substance of divinest show!
Just opposite to what thou justly seem'st,
A damned saint, an honourable villain*!*
O nature, what hadst thou to do in hell,
When thou didst bower the spirit of a fiend
In moral paradise of such sweet flesh?
Was ever book containing such vile matter
So fairly bound? O that deceit should dwell
In such a gorgeous palace! (3.2.8)

Clearly, Juliet is experiencing some mixed emotions – she wonders how the love of her life, the guy she thought was so wonderful, could be a killer. Juliet's use of oxymoron here gives expression to her turmoil.

There are also some great examples of paradox in this passage. A "paradox" is a statement that contradicts itself and nonetheless seems true. Example: Juliet asks "Was ever a book containing such vile matter so fairly bound?"

We know what you're wondering – how the heck do you tell the difference between an "oxymoron" and a "paradox"? Well, a paradox is different from an oxymoron because it contains contradictory words that are *separated by one or more intervening words*.

Thumb-biting

In Act 1, scene 1, the buffoonish Samson begins a brawl between the Montagues and Capulets 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 Montagues 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 1, 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.

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summary

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In the streets of Verona another brawl breaks 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.

Romeo, the son of Montague, runs into his cousin Benvolio, who had earlier seen Romeo moping in a grove of sycamores. 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.

The feast begins. A melancholy 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.

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.

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. But 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 Capulets 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.

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 Capulets, 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.

critical essay

posted Aug 2, 2013, 8:55 AM by alaa hagag **[updated Aug 2, 2013, 8:55 AM]**

Romeo and Juliet, which ranks among Shakespeare's most popular and well-known plays, is considered by some critics to be the first and greatest example of romantic tragedy written during the Renaissance. The play centers on two youths from feuding families who, upon falling in love, attempt to defy social custom, patriarchal power, and destiny. Their efforts meet with disastrous results, including the deaths of Tybalt and Mercutio, as well as the tragic demise of Romeo and Juliet. Contemporary critics, like their predecessors, often focus on the titular characters, searching for flaws that may be said to have contributed to their tragedy, or, in contrast, defending the lovers against such attacks. Mercutio's character is also the subject of critical analyses, as some critics feel that his death marks a turning point in the play from comedy to tragedy. Other areas of critical scholarship include examinations of patriarchal power, as well as the language, imagery, and structure of the play. Just as these issues are examined by critics in print, directors also explore issues of characterization and language in

performance and film. Numerous reviewers have commented on such contemporary productions of *Romeo and Juliet* as Baz Luhrmann's 1996 film, *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet,* as well as various live performances.

Romeo and Juliet have been accused by some critics of being self-centered and immature. While some may agree, others, including critics such as Elmer Edgar Stoll (see Further Reading), contest the idea that Romeo and Juliet possess flaws that contribute to their fate; Stoll finds that love, destiny, and the feud between the families brings about the deaths of the lovers. Carolyn E. Brown (1996) observes a shift in the critical opinion of Juliet, noting that modern critics have increasingly credited Juliet with being “self-willed,” rather than a passive “victim” of her circumstances and fate. Exploring Juliet's depth of character and emerging selfhood, Brown concentrates on Juliet's language in two scenes typically thought of as romantic (Act II, scene ii, the so-called balcony scene, and Act III, scene v, the morning after the consummation), and finds in these scenes and in the falconry imagery they contain an effort on Juliet's part to control Romeo. As Romeo's closest male companion, Mercutio plays a vital role in *Romeo and Juliet.* Joseph A. Porter (1988) focuses on Mercutio’s relationship with Romeo, stressing that in both criticism and in performance, Mercutio's statements about the value of friendship are often underemphasized. Porter locates strains of homosexuality in Mercutio's phallic language, and in the “warmth and urgency” of his friendship with Romeo, and further analyzes how these homosexual suggestions may reflect Shakespeare's response to Christopher Marlowe's subversive homosexuality. Like Porter, Joan Ozark Holmer (1991) is interested in the relationship between Romeo and Mercutio. Holmer argues that Shakespeare used Mercutio to deepen the intensity of our reactions to the play, noting for example that in Shakespeare's sources, Romeo's duel arose out of self-defense, but the duel in Shakespeare's play stems from Romeo's passionate desire to avenge Mercutio's death.

The translation of Shakespeare's play to film involves numerous challenges for directors. Baz Luhrmann's 1996 version of the play, *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet,* although popularly successful, was often disparaged by critics. Jim Welsh (1997) criticizes the way many of the actors were unable to convincingly deliver Shakespeare's dialogue and notes as well that the “bizarre” visuals of the film called into question its “fidelity” to Shakespeare's text. Leah Guenther (see Further Reading) notes that many reviewers condemned Luhrmann's film and suggests that Shakespeare purists were disdainful of Luhrmann's attempt to create a “Shakespearean vernacular.” After comparing the film to Franco Zeffirelli's 1968 version of the play, Guenther praises Luhrmann's effort to “reincarnate” Shakespeare for the 1990s. Similarly, Elsie Walker (2000) claims that the film should be seen as a “revolutionary” Shakespeare film.

Walker focuses primarily on the film's intertexuality and setting, and the way in which these elements encourage an active response from the audience. Jack Jorgens (1977) reviews Zeffirelli's film, noting that it was critically deprecated. While Jorgens praises the film's "nontheatrical" acting and favorably assesses the way Zeffirelli used visual effects to compensate for the excised dialogue, the critic nevertheless comments that the film as a whole is a "less mature" effort than Shakespeare's play. Other reviewers focus on modern live performances of *Romeo and Juliet.* Russell Jackson (1996) discusses the Royal Shakespeare Company's production directed by Adrian Noble, noting that there were numerous "awkwardnesses" in the staging of the play and that the actors playing Romeo and Juliet lacked passion. Katherine Duncan-Jones (2000) offers her analysis of the National Theatre's "Ensemble" production of the play directed by Tim Supple, noting that the depiction of the two households as racially different had little effect except to generate some confusion and throw an otherwise well-constructed play "off balance." Lawrence Christon (2001) observes some "uneven" performances in the Center Theater Group/Ahmanson Theater's production directed by Peter Hall, but notes that Hall's "theatrical intelligence" helped to move the production along.

Many critics identify within *Romeo and Juliet* an exploration of patriarchal power and its abuses. Sasha Roberts (see Further Reading) studies the relevance of such issues in late sixteenth-century England, contending that understanding such concerns reveals the complexities of Shakespeare's portrayal of the family crises in *Romeo and Juliet.* Roberts goes on to argue that the lovers' secret marriage defied Elizabethan social convention, and that while the play portrays Capulet's patriarchal power, it does not endorse his authoritarianism. Like Roberts, Thomas Moisan (1991) discusses the depiction of patriarchy within the play, demonstrating that gender is portrayed in *Romeo and Juliet* as an agent of patriarchal control. Furthermore, Moisan states that while Shakespeare toned down the clearly misogynistic overtones found in his source poem (Arthur Brooke's *Romeus and Juliet*), the play nevertheless reflects patriarchal concern regarding the potentially destructive quality of female sexuality.

Other areas of critical interest include the play's form, style, and structure, as well as its language and imagery. Jill L. Levenson (2000) and Harry Levin (1960) comment on the poetic nature of the play. Levenson observes that in *Romeo and Juliet,* Shakespeare manipulated the poetic form of the sonnet sequence, deconstructing it and scattering it throughout the play's structure, which is composed of tragic and comic elements. Levin notes that the play arose from Shakespeare's "so-called lyrical period." The critic further surveys the balanced nature of the play's style and structure, finding that the symmetry of the *dramatis personae* is repeated

dramatically in the symmetry of the antithetical style of the play's language. Similarly, Marjorie Garber (see Further Reading) studies the language and structure of *Romeo and Juliet,* and also notices the symmetry of the play's characters; each character has a counterpart on the opposite side of the feud. Garber observes as well that as the play shifts from comedy to tragedy, the characters undergo a dramatic change. The nurse, for example, an amusing figure in comedy, becomes a more frustrating character in tragedy. This transition from comedy to tragedy, argues Garber, is initiated by the death of Mercutio. Taking another approach to the play, David Lucking (1996) is concerned primarily with the function of oxymoron. Lucking asserts that through oxymoron the unifying force of the play is revealed to be the "metaphysics of irreconcilable but reversible opposition," found in both the play's language and plot. Whereas Lucking focuses on the particulars of language, Abdulla Al-Dabbagh (2000) centers on the particular imagery of light and darkness in the play. Emphasizing the importance of recognizing the influence of Arabic culture and ideas on Shakespeare's play, Al-Dabbagh demonstrates that Shakespeare's treatment of light and dark imagery in *Romeo and Juliet* reflects the outlook of Islamic Sufis on the unity of existence and the presence of evil in the world.

motifs

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Light/Dark Imagery

One of the play's most consistent visual motifs 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 seem to revel in their capacity for drama, the servants' lives are such that they cannot afford tragedy of the epic kind.

Criticism and interpretation

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The earliest known critic of the play was diarist Samuel Pepys, who wrote in 1662: "it is a play of itself the worst that I ever heard in my life."[57] Poet John Dryden wrote 10 years later in praise of the play and its comic character Mercutio: "Shakespear show'd the best of his skill in his *Mercutio*, and he said himself, that he was forc'd to kill him in the third Act, to prevent being killed by him."[57] Criticism of the play in the 18th century was less sparse, but no less divided. Publisher Nicholas Rowe was the first critic to ponder the theme of the play, which he saw as the just punishment of the two feuding families. In mid-century, writer Charles Gildon and philosopher Lord Kames argued that the play was a failure in that it did not follow the classical rules of drama: the tragedy must occur because of some character flaw, not an accident of fate. Writer and critic Samuel Johnson, however, considered it one of Shakespeare's "most pleasing" plays.[58]

In the later part of the 18th and through the 19th century, criticism centred on debates over the

moral message of the play. Actor and playwright David Garrick's 1748 adaptation excluded Rosaline: Romeo abandoning her for Juliet was seen as fickle and reckless. Critics such as Charles Dibdin argued that Rosaline had been purposely included in the play to show how reckless the hero was, and that this was the reason for his tragic end. Others argued that Friar Laurence might be Shakespeare's spokesman in his warnings against undue haste. With the advent of the 20th century, these moral arguments were disputed by critics such as Richard Green Moulton: he argued that accident, and not some character flaw, led to the lovers' deaths.[59]

Dramatic structure

In *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare employs several dramatic techniques that have garnered praise from critics; most notably the abrupt shifts from comedy to tragedy (an example is the punning exchange between Benvolio and Mercutio just before Tybalt arrives). Before Mercutio's death in Act three, the play is largely a comedy.[60] After his accidental demise, the play suddenly becomes serious and takes on a tragic tone. When Romeo is banished, rather than executed, and Friar Laurence offers Juliet a plan to reunite her with Romeo, the audiaence can still hope that all will end well. They are in a "breathless state of suspense" by the opening of the last scene in the tomb: If Romeo is delayed long enough for the Friar to arrive, he and Juliet may yet be saved.[61] These shifts from hope to despair, reprieve, and new hope, serve to emphasise the tragedy when the final hope fails and both the lovers die at the end.[62]

Shakespeare also uses sub-plots to offer a clearer view of the actions of the main characters. For example, when the play begins, Romeo is in love with Rosaline, who has refused all of his advances. Romeo's infatuation with her stands in obvious contrast to his later love for Juliet. This provides a comparison through which the audience can see the seriousness of Romeo and Juliet's love and marriage. Paris' love for Juliet also sets up a contrast between Juliet's feelings for him and her feelings for Romeo. The formal language she uses around Paris, as well as the way she talks about him to her Nurse, show that her feelings clearly lie with Romeo. Beyond this, the sub-plot of the Montague–Capulet feud overarches the whole play, providing an atmosphere of hate that is the main contributor to the play's tragic end.[62]

Language

Shakespeare uses a variety of poetic forms throughout the play. He begins with a 14-line prologue in the form of a Shakespearean sonnet, spoken by a Chorus. Most of *Romeo and Juliet* is, however, written in blank verse, and much of it in strict iambic pentameter, with less rhythmic variation than in most of Shakespeare's later plays.[63] In choosing forms, Shakespeare matches the poetry to the character who uses it. Friar Laurence, for example, uses sermon and sententiae forms, and the Nurse uses a unique blank verse form that closely matches colloquial speech.[63] Each of these forms is also moulded and matched to the emotion of the scene the

character occupies. For example, when Romeo talks about Rosaline earlier in the play, he attempts to use the Petrarchan sonnet form. Petrarchan sonnets were often used by men to exaggerate the beauty of women who were impossible for them to attain, as in Romeo's situation with Rosaline. This sonnet form is used by Lady Capulet to describe Count Paris to Juliet as a handsome man.[64] When Romeo and Juliet meet, the poetic form changes from the Petrarchan (which was becoming archaic in Shakespeare's day) to a then more contemporary sonnet form, using "pilgrims" and "saints" as metaphors.[65] Finally, when the two meet on the balcony, Romeo attempts to use the sonnet form to pledge his love, but Juliet breaks it by saying "Dost thou love me?"[66] By doing this, she searches for true expression, rather than a poetic exaggeration of their love.[67] Juliet uses monosyllabic words with Romeo, but uses formal language with Paris.[68] Other forms in the play include an epithalamium by Juliet, a rhapsody in Mercutio's Queen Mab speech, and an elegy by Paris.[69] Shakespeare saves his prose style most often for the common people in the play, though at times he uses it for other characters, such as Mercutio.[70] Humour, also, is important: scholar Molly Mahood identifies at least 175 puns and wordplays in the text.[71] Many of these jokes are sexual in nature, especially those involving Mercutio and the Nurse.[72]

Psychoanalytic criticism

Early psychoanalytic critics saw the problem of *Romeo and Juliet* in terms of Romeo's impulsiveness, deriving from "ill-controlled, partially disguised aggression", which leads both to Mercutio's death and to the double suicide.[73] *Romeo and Juliet* is not considered to be exceedingly psychologically complex, and sympathetic psychoanalytic readings of the play make the tragic male experience equivalent with sicknesses.[74] Norman Holland, writing in 1966, considers Romeo's dream[75] as a realistic "wish fulfilling fantasy both in terms of Romeo's adult world and his hypothetical childhood at stages oral, phallic and oedipal" – while acknowledging that a dramatic character is not a human being with mental processes separate from those of the author.[76] Critics such as Julia Kristeva focus on the hatred between the families, arguing that this hatred is the cause of Romeo and Juliet's passion for each other. That hatred manifests itself directly in the lovers' language: Juliet, for example, speaks of "my only love sprung from my only hate"[77] and often expresses her passion through an anticipation of Romeo's death.[78] This leads on to speculation as to the playwright's psychology, in particular to a consideration of Shakespeare's grief for the death of his son, Hamnet.[79]

Feminist criticism

Feminist literary critics argue that the blame for the family feud lies in Verona's patriarchal society. For Coppélia Kahn, for example, the strict, masculine code of violence imposed on Romeo is the main force driving the tragedy to its end. When Tybalt kills Mercutio, Romeo

shifts into this violent mode, regretting that Juliet has made him so "effeminate".[80] In this view, the younger males "become men" by engaging in violence on behalf of their fathers, or in the case of the servants, their masters. The feud is also linked to male virility, as the numerous jokes about maidenheads aptly demonstrate.[81] Juliet also submits to a female code of docility by allowing others, such as the Friar, to solve her problems for her. Other critics, such as Dympna Callaghan, look at the play's feminism from a historicist angle, stressing that when the play was written the feudal order was being challenged by increasingly centralised government and the advent of capitalism. At the same time, emerging Puritan ideas about marriage were less concerned with the "evils of female sexuality" than those of earlier eras, and more sympathetic towards love-matches: when Juliet dodges her father's attempt to force her to marry a man she has no feeling for, she is challenging the patriarchal order in a way that would not have been possible at an earlier time.[82]

Queer theory

A number of critics have found the character of Mercutio to have unacknowledged homoerotic desire for Romeo.[83] Jonathan Goldberg examined the sexuality of Mercutio and Romeo utilising "queer theory" in *Queering the Renaissance*, comparing their friendship with sexual love. Mercutio, in friendly conversation, mentions Romeo's phallus, suggesting traces of homoeroticism.[84] An example is his joking wish "To raise a spirit in his mistress' circle ... letting it there stand / Till she had laid it and conjured it down."[85][86] Romeo's homoeroticism can also be found in his attitude to Rosaline, a woman who is distant and unavailable and brings no hope of offspring. As Benvolio argues, she is best replaced by someone who will reciprocate. Shakespeare's procreation sonnets describe another young man who, like Romeo, is having trouble creating offspring and who may be seen as being a homosexual. Goldberg believes that Shakespeare may have used Rosaline as a way to express homosexual problems of procreation in an acceptable way. In this view, when Juliet says "...that which we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet",[87] she may be raising the question of whether there is any difference between the beauty of a man and the beauty of a woman.[88]

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characters

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Romeo

The sixteen-year-old son of Montague and Lady Montague. He is cousins with Benvolio, and friends with Mercutio and Friar Laurence. Romeo's defining characteristic is the intensity of his emotions—whether in anger, love, or despair. Romeo is also intelligent, quick-witted, loved by his friends, and not a bad swordsmen. Over the course of the play, Romeo grows from a an adolescent who claims to be in love with Rosaline, but in reality seems more in love with the idea of love and with being a miserable wretch in the mold of classical love poets, to a young man who shares a deep and passionate love with Juliet and is willing to face the obstacles of friends, family, the law, fate, and, ultimately, death in order to be with her.

Juliet

The daughter of Capulet and Lady Capulet. 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.

Mercutio

Kinsman to the prince and friend of Romeo. His name comes from the word *mercury,* the element which indicates his quick temper. Mercutio is bawdy, talkative, and tries to tease Romeo out of his melancholy frame of mind. He accepts Tybalt's challenge to defend Romeo's honor and is killed, thus precipitating Romeo's enraged reaction during which Romeo kills Tybalt.

Friar Lawrence

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.

Rosaline

Rosaline is the gorgeous and aloof woman Romeo crushes on until he meets the love of his life, Juliet. Rosaline has no speaking part, never appears on stage (according to

the stage directions), and isn't even listed in the *dramatis personae* (the cast list). So, why the heck are we talking about Rosaline in our "Character Analysis" when it's quite possible that she doesn't even exist? Well, we may not hear directly *from* Rosaline (or even see her unless we watch, say, Zeffirelli's 1968 film adaptation of the play), but we do hear a lot *about* her from one of the play's major characters, Romeo.

The Nurse

Juliet’s nurse, the woman who breast-fed Juliet when she was a baby and has cared for Juliet her entire life. A vulgar, long-winded, and sentimental character, the Nurse provides comic relief with her frequently inappropriate remarks and speeches. But, 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.

Tybalt

Lady Capulet's nephew and Juliet's cousin. Tybalt is violent and hot-tempered, with a strong sense of honor. He challenges Romeo to a duel in response to Romeo's attending a Capulet party. His challenge to Romeo is taken up by Mercutio, whom Tybalt kills. Romeo then kills Tybalt.

Capulet

Juliet's father is quick-tempered and impetuous but is initially reluctant to consent to Juliet's marriage with Paris because Juliet is so young. Later, he changes his mind and angrily demands that Juliet obey his wishes. The deaths of Romeo and Juliet reconcile Capulet and Montague.

Lady Capulet

Juliet's mother, and Capulet's wife. A woman who married Capulet when she was Juliet's age (thirteen), she loves her daughter but is a flighty woman and an ineffectual mother who left most of the raising of her daughter to the Nurse. When it comes to marriage, Lady Capulet believes more in the material happiness a "good match" can bring than in love.

Montague

Romeo’s father, the patriarch of the Montague clan and bitter enemy of Capulet. At the beginning of the play, he is chiefly concerned about Romeo’s melancholy.

Lady Montague

Romeo's mother, Montague's wife. She dies of grief after Romeo is exiled from Verona.

Paris

A kinsman of the Prince, and the suitor of Juliet most preferred by Capulet. Once Capulet has promised him he can marry Juliet, he behaves very presumptuous toward her, acting as if they are already married.

The Prince of Verona

The Prince of Verona does the best he can to keep the peace, but he can't restrain the violence between the Montagues and the Capulets. If the Prince can't do anything about the feud, it means that the *law* (which the Prince embodies) is powerless against the passions of hate and of love.

Benvolio

Montague's nephew, Romeo's cousin and thoughtful friend, he makes a genuine effort to defuse violent scenes in public places, though Mercutio accuses him of having a nasty temper in private. He spends most of the play trying to help Romeo get his mind off Rosaline, even after Romeo has fallen in love with Juliet.

Prince Escalus

The Prince of Verona. A kinsman of Mercutio and Paris. As the seat of political power in Verona, he is concerned about maintaining the public peace at all costs.

Peter

A Capulet servant attending the Nurse.

Abram

A servant to Montague.

Sampson

Servant of the Capulet household.

Gregory

Servant of the Capulet household.

Balthasar

Romeo's servant.

Samson and Gregory

Capulet servants.

Abraham

Montague's servant.

Peter

An illiterate Capulet servant.

The Apothecary

A poor apothecary (a drug seller) in Mantua.

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