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Shakespeare's Poetic Dramatic Structure and Tradition of Tragic Romances in Romeo and Juliet

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ABSTRACT *This paper examines Shakespeare's Poetic Dramatic Structure and Tradition of Tragic Romances in Romeo and Juliet. Shakespeare's use of his poetic dramatic structure, especially effects such as switching between comedy and tragedy to heighten tension, his expansion of minor characters, and his use of sub-plots to embellish the story, has been praised as an early sign of his dramatic skill. The play ascribes different poetic forms to different characters, sometimes changing the form as the character develops. Romeo, for example, grows more adept at the sonnet over the course of the play. Romeo and Juliet has been adapted numerous times for stage, film, musical and opera. During the English Restoration, it was revived and heavily revised by William Davenant. David Garrick's 18th-century version also modified several scenes, removing material then considered indecent, and Georg Benda's operatic adaptation omitted much of the action and added a happy ending. Performances in the 19th century, including Charlotte Cushman's, restored the original text, and focused on greater realism.*

Introduction

The play, set in Verona, begins with a street brawl between Montague and Capulet servants who, like their masters, are sworn enemies. Prince Escalus of Veronaintervenes and declares that further breach of the peace will be punishable by death. Later, Count Paris talks to Capulet about marrying his daughter Juliet, but Capulet asks Paris to wait another two years and invites him to attend a planned Capulet ball. Lady Capulet and Juliet's nurse try to persuade Juliet to accept Paris's courtship. Meanwhile, Benvolio talks with his cousin Romeo, Montague's son, about Romeo's recent depression. Benvolio discovers that it stems from unrequited infatuation for a girl named Rosaline, one of Capulet's nieces. Persuaded by Benvolio and Mercutio, Romeo attends the ball at the Capulet house in hopes of meeting Rosaline. However, Romeo instead meets and falls in love with Juliet. Juliet's cousin, Tybalt, is enraged at Romeo for sneaking into the ball, but is only stopped from killing Romeo by Juliet's father, who doesn't wish to shed blood in his house. After the ball, in what is now called the "balcony scene", Romeo sneaks into the Capulet orchard and overhears Juliet at her window vowing her love to him in spite of her family's hatred of the Montagues. Romeo makes himself known to her and they agree to be married. With the help of Friar Laurence, who hopes to reconcile the two families through their children's union, they are secretly married the next day. Tybalt, meanwhile, still incensed that Romeo had sneaked into the Capulet ball, challenges him to a duel. Romeo, now considering Tybalt his kinsman, refuses to fight. Mercutio is offended by Tybalt's insolence, as well as Romeo's "vile submission,"[1] and accepts the duel on Romeo›s behalf. Mercutio is fatally wounded when Romeo attempts to break up the fight. Grief-stricken and wracked with guilt, Romeo confronts and slays Tybalt. Montague argues that Romeo has justly executed Tybalt for the murder of Mercutio. The Prince, now having lost a kinsman in the warring families› feud, exiles Romeo from Verona, under penalty of death if he ever returns. Romeo secretly spends the night in Juliet›s chamber, where they consummate their marriage. Capulet, misinterpreting Juliet›s grief, agrees to marry her to Count Paris and threatens to disown her when she refuses to become Paris›s «joyful bride.»[2] When she then pleads for the marriage to be delayed, her mother rejects her. Juliet visits Friar Laurence for help, and he offers her a potion[which?] that will put her into a deathlike coma for «two and forty hours.»[3] The Friar promises to send a messenger to inform Romeo of the plan, so that he can rejoin her when she awakens. On the night before the wedding, she takes the drug and, when discovered apparently dead, she is laid in the family crypt. The messenger, however, does not reach Romeo and, instead, Romeo learns of Juliet›s apparent death from his servant Balthasar. Heartbroken, Romeo buys poison from an apothecary and goes to the Capulet crypt. He encounters Paris who has come to mourn Juliet privately. Believing Romeo to be a vandal, Paris confronts him and, in the ensuing battle, Romeo kills Paris. Still believing Juliet to be dead, he drinks the poison. Juliet then awakens and, finding Romeo dead, stabs herself with his dagger. The feuding families and the Prince meet at the tomb to find all three dead. Friar Laurence recounts the story of the two "star-cross'd lovers". The families are reconciled by their children's deaths and agree to end their violent feud.

Discussion

The play ends with the Prince's elegy for the lovers: "For never was a story of more woe / Than this of Juliet and her Romeo."[4] *Romeo and Juliet* borrows from a tradition of tragic love stories dating back to antiquity. One of these is Pyramus and Thisbe, from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which contains parallels to Shakespeare's story: the lovers' parents despise each other, and Pyramus falsely believes his lover Thisbe is dead.[5] The *Ephesiaca* of Xenophon of Ephesus, written in the 3rd century, also contains several similarities to the play, including the separation of the lovers, and a potion that induces a deathlike sleep.[6] However, the reference is part of a polemic against the moral decay of Florence, Lombardy and the Italian Peninsula as a whole; Dante, through his characters, chastises the Roman-German King Albert I for neglecting his responsibilities towards Italy («you who are negligent»), and successive Popes for their encroachment from purely spiritual affairs, thus leading to a climate of incessant bickering and warfare between rival political parties in Lombardy. History records the name of the

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family*Montague* as being lent to such a political party in Verona, but that of the *Capulets* as from a Cremonese family, both of whom play out their conflict in Lombardy as a whole rather than within the confines of Verona.[9] Allied to rival political factions, the parties are grieving («One lot already grieving») because their endless warfare has led to the destruction of both parties,[9] rather than a grief from the loss of their ill-fated offspring as the play sets forth, which appears to be a solely poetic creation within this context. The earliest known version of the *Romeo and Juliet* tale akin to Shakespeare›s play is the story of Mariotto and Gianozza by MasuccioSalernitano, in the 33rd novel of his *Il Novellino* published in 1476.[10] Salernitano sets the story in Siena and insists its events took place in his own lifetime. His version of the story includes the secret marriage, the colluding friar, the fray where a prominent citizen is killed, Mariotto›s exile, Gianozza›s forced marriage, the potion plot, and the crucial message that goes astray. In this version, Mariotto is caught and beheaded and Gianozza dies of grief.[11]Luigi da Porto adapted the story as *Giulietta e Romeo* and included it in his *Historianovellamenteritrovata di due NobiliAmanti* published in 1530.[12] Da Porto drew on *Pyramus and Thisbe* and Boccacio's Decameron. He gave it much of its modern form, including the names of the lovers, the rival families of Montecchi and Capuleti, and the location in Verona.[10] He also introduces characters corresponding to Shakespeare›s Mercutio, Tybalt, and Paris. Da Porto presents his tale as historically true and claims it took place in the days of Bartolomeo II dellaScala (a century earlier than Salernitano). In da Porto›s version Romeo takes poison and Giulietta stabs herself with his dagger.[13] In 1554, Matteo Bandello published the second volume of his *Novelle*, which included his version of *Giuletta e Romeo*.[12] Bandello emphasises Romeo›s initial depression and the feud between the families, and introduces the Nurse and Benvolio. Bandello's story was translated into French by Pierre Boaistuau in 1559 in the first volume of his *Histories Tragiques*. Boaistuau adds much moralising and sentiment, and the characters indulge in rhetorical outbursts.[14] In his 1562 narrative poem *The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet*, Arthur Brooke translated Boaistuau faithfully, but adjusted it to reflect parts of Chaucer's*Troilus and Criseyde*.[15] There was a trend among writers and playwrights to publish works based on Italian *novelles*—Italian tales were very popular among theatre-goers—and Shakespeare may well have been familiar with William Painter's 1567 collection of Italian tales titled *Palace of Pleasure*.[16] This collection included a version in prose of the *Romeo and Juliet* story named *"The goodly History of the true and constant love of Romeo and Juliett"*. Shakespeare took advantage of this popularity: *The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Romeo and Juliet* are all from Italian *novelle*. *Romeo and Juliet* is a dramatisation of Brooke›s translation, and Shakespeare follows the poem closely, but adds extra detail to both major and minor characters (in particular the Nurse and Mercutio).[17]Christopher Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* and *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, both similar stories written in Shakespeare's day, are thought to be less of a direct influence, although they may have helped create an atmosphere in which tragic love stories could thrive.[15] It is unknown when exactly Shakespeare wrote *Romeo and Juliet*. Juliet's nurse refers to an earthquake she says occurred 11 years ago.[18] This may refer to the Dover Straits earthquake of 1580, which would date that particular line to 1591. Other earthquakes—both in England and in Verona—have been proposed in support of the different dates.[19] But the play›s stylistic similarities with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and other plays conventionally dated around 1594–95, place its composition sometime between 1591 and 1595.[20] One conjecture is that Shakespeare may have begun a draft in 1591, which he completed in 1595.[21] Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* was published in two quarto editions prior to the publication of the First Folio of 1623. These are referred to as Q1 and Q2. The first printed edition, Q1, appeared in early 1597, printed by John Danter. Because its text contains numerous differences from the later editions, it is labelled a ‹bad quarto'; the 20th-century editor T. J. B. Spencer described it as "a detestable text, probably a reconstruction of the play from the imperfect memories of one or two of the actors", suggesting that it had been pirated for publication.[20] An alternative explanation for Q1›s shortcomings is that the play (like many others of the time) may have been heavily edited before performance by the playing company.[21] In any event, its appearance in early 1597 makes 1596 the latest possible date for the play›s composition.[19] The superior Q2 called the play *The Most Excellent and Lamentable Tragedie of Romeo and Juliet*. It was printed in 1599 byThomas Creede and published by Cuthbert Burby. Q2 is about 800 lines longer than Q1.[22] Its title page describes it as «Newly corrected, augmented and amended». Scholars believe that Q2 was based on Shakespeare›s pre-performance draft (called his foul papers), since there are textual oddities such as variable tags for characters and "false starts" for speeches that were presumably struck through by the author but erroneously preserved by the typesetter. It is a much more complete and reliable text, and was reprinted in 1609 (Q3), 1622 (Q4) and 1637 (Q5).[23] Fully annotated editions first appeared in the Victorian period and continue to be produced today, printing the text of the play with footnotes describing the sources and culture behind the play.[24] Scholars have found it extremely difficult to assign one specific, overarching theme to the play. Proposals for a main theme include a discovery by the characters that human beings are neither wholly good nor wholly evil, but instead are more or less alike,[27] awaking out of a dream and into reality, the danger of hasty action, or the power of tragic fate. None of these have widespread support. However, even if an overall theme cannot be found it is clear that the play is full of several small, thematic elements that intertwine in complex ways. Several of those most often debated by scholars are discussed below.[25] *Romeo and Juliet* is sometimes considered to have no unifying theme, save that of young love.[26] Romeo and Juliet have become emblematic of young lovers and doomed love. Since it is such an obvious subject of the play, several scholars have explored the language and historical context behind the romance of the play.[27] On their first meeting, Romeo and Juliet use a form of communication recommended by many etiquette authors in Shakespeare's day: metaphor. By using metaphors of saints and sins, Romeo was able to test Juliet's feelings for him in a non-threatening way. This method was recommended by Baldassare Castiglione (whose works had been translated into English by this time). He pointed out that if a man used a metaphor as an invitation, the woman could pretend she did not understand him, and he could retreat without losing honour. Juliet, however, participates in the metaphor and expands on it. The religious metaphors of «shrine», «pilgrim» and «saint» were fashionable in the poetry of the time and more likely to be understood as romantic rather than blasphemous, as the concept of sainthood was associated with the Catholicism of an earlier age.[28] Later in the play, Shakespeare removes the more

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daring allusions to Christ›s resurrection in the tomb he found in his source work: Brooke›s *Romeus and Juliet*.[32] In the later balcony scene, Shakespeare has Romeo overhear Juliet's soliloquy, but in Brooke's version of the story her declaration is done alone. By bringing Romeo into the scene to eavesdrop, Shakespeare breaks from the normal sequence of courtship. Usually a woman was required to be modest and shy to make sure that her suitor was sincere, but breaking this rule serves to speed along the plot. The lovers are able to skip courting, and move on to plain talk about their relationship— agreeing to be married after knowing each other for only one night.[29] In the final suicide scene, there is a contradiction in the message—in the Catholic religion, suicides were often thought to be condemned to hell, whereas people who die to be with their loves under the «Religion of Love" are joined with their loves in paradise. Romeo and Juliet's love seems to be expressing the "Religion of Love" view rather than the Catholic view. Another point is that although their love is passionate, it is only consummated in marriage, which keeps them from losing the audience's sympathy.[30] The play arguably equates love and sex with death. Throughout the story, both Romeo and Juliet, along with the other characters, fantasise about it as a dark being, often equating it with a lover. Capulet, for example, when he first discovers Juliet's (faked) death, describes it as having deflowered his daughter. Juliet later erotically compares Romeo and death. Right before her suicide she grabs Romeo›s dagger, saying «O happy dagger! This is thy sheath. There rust, and let me die.»[35][36] Scholars are divided on the role of fate in the play. No consensus exists on whether the characters are truly fated to die together or whether the events take place by a series of unlucky chances. Arguments in favour of fate often refer to the description of the lovers as "star-cross'd". This phrase seems to hint that the stars have predetermined the lovers' future. John W. Draper points out the parallels between the Elizabethan belief in the four humoursand the main characters of the play (for example, Tybalt as a choleric). Interpreting the text in the light of humours reduces the amount of plot attributed to chance by modern audiences. Still, other scholars see the play as a series of unlucky chances—many to such a degree that they do not see it as a tragedy at all, but an emotional melodrama.] Ruth Nevo believes the high degree to which chance is stressed in the narrative makes *Romeo and Juliet* a «lesser tragedy» of happenstance, not of character. For example, Romeo›s challenging Tybalt is not impulsive; it is, after Mercutio›s death, the expected action to take. In this scene, Nevo reads Romeo as being aware of the dangers of flouting social norms, identity and commitments. He makes the choice to kill, not because of a tragic flaw, but because of circumstance. Scholars have long noted Shakespeare's widespread use of light and dark imagery throughout the play. Caroline Spurgeon considers the theme of light as «symbolic of the natural beauty of young love» and later critics have expanded on this interpretation. For example, both Romeo and Juliet see the other as light in a surrounding darkness. Romeo describes Juliet as being like the sun, brighter than a torch, a jewel sparkling in the night,] and a bright angel among dark clouds. Even when she lies apparently dead in the tomb, he says her «beauty makes This vault a feasting presence full of light.»[33] Juliet describes Romeo as «day in night» and «Whiter than snow upon a raven›s back.» This contrast of light and dark can be expanded as symbols—contrasting love and hate, youth and age in a metaphoric way.[40] Sometimes these intertwining metaphors create dramatic irony. For example, Romeo and Juliet's love is a light in the midst of the darkness of the hate around them, but all of their activity together is done in night and darkness, while all of the feuding is done in broad daylight. This paradox of imagery adds atmosphere to the moral dilemma facing the two lovers: loyalty to family or loyalty to love. At the end of the story, when the morning is gloomy and the sun hiding its face for sorrow, light and dark have returned to their proper places, the outward darkness reflecting the true, inner darkness of the family feud out of sorrow for the lovers. All characters now recognise their folly in light of recent events, and things return to the natural order, thanks to the love and death of Romeo and Juliet. The «light» theme in the play is also heavily connected to the theme of time, since light was a convenient way for Shakespeare to express the passage of time through descriptions of the sun, moon, and stars.[34] Time plays an important role in the language and plot of the play. Both Romeo and Juliet struggle to maintain an imaginary world void of time in the face of the harsh realities that surround them. For instance, when Romeo swears his love to Juliet by the moon, she protests "O swear not by the moon, th'inconstant moon, / That monthly changes in her circled orb, / Lest that thy love prove likewise variable." From the very beginning, the lovers are designated as «star-cross›d» referring to an astrologic belief associated with time. Stars were thought to control the fates of humanity, and as time passed, stars would move along their course in the sky, also charting the course of human lives below. Romeo speaks of a foreboding he feels in the stars› movements early in the play, and when he learns of Juliet›s death, he defies the stars› course for him.[39][54] Another central theme is haste: Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* spans a period of four to six days, in contrast to Brooke›s poem›s spanning nine months.Scholars such as G. Thomas Tanselle believe that time was "especially important to Shakespeare" in this play, as he used references to "short-time" for the young lovers as opposed to references to "long-time" for the "older generation" to highlight "a headlong rush towards doom". Romeo and Juliet fight time to make their love last forever. In the end, the only way they seem to defeat time is through a death that makes them immortal through art. Time is also connected to the theme of light and dark. In Shakespeare's day, plays were most often performed at noon or in the afternoon in broad daylight. This forced the playwright to use words to create the illusion of day and night in his plays. Shakespeare uses references to the night and day, the stars, the moon, and the sun to create this illusion. He also has characters frequently refer to days of the week and specific hours to help the audience understand that time has passed in the story. All in all, no fewer than 103 references to time are found in the play, adding to the illusion of its passage.[35] 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."[58] Poet John Dryden wrote 10 years later in praise of the play and its comic character Mercutio: «Shakespearshow›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." Criticism of the play in the 18th century was less sparse, but no less divided. PublisherNicholas 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.[36]

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Conclusion

In general, Shakespeare's plays fall into four categories. These categories can vary, and the plays within them can vary, but for the most part these are the subcategories of his Renaissance plays: Tragedies: These plays, of course, represent the downfall of a tragic hero with all the common elements of a tragedy. Examples include *Romeo and Juliet, Othello,* and*Macbeth*.2. Comedies: Unlike the tragedies, Shakespeare's comedies end happily, almost always with a marriage. Examples include *The Taming of the Shrew, Much Ado about Nothing,* and *Two Gentlemen of Verona*.3. Histories: While these plays normally fall within the bounds of a tragedy because of the hero's tragic downfall, flaw, and realization, they also focus on real-life figures, such as Shakespeare's *Henry V*, *Richard III*, etc. Romances: The rarest of Shakespeare's plays, the romance blends tragic elements with a happier ending. *A Winter's Tale* is the best example of this, and some literary critics would place *The Merchant of Venice* in this category because while it ends happily for the couples; it is tragic for Shylock, and Antonio--another main character--retains his melancholy outlook at the play›s conclusion.

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