ROME AND JULIET

TRAGEDY AND TRAGIC HEROES

Tragedy (as a type of drama) is not concerned with the act of violence in the play but with what the act of violence says about life.

Tragedy deals with profound and universal problems: a person's destiny, the nature of good and evil, a person's relations with forces greater than him/herself, consequences of individual actions.

The tragic hero is an admirable character but s/he has a flaw (known as a tragic flaw), an imperfection that links him/her to us (makes them seem like normal humans rather than heroic).

THE TRAGIC HERO

❑ Usually is a positive and active protagonist (the good character (pro=good/for) as opposed to the antagonist (anti=against/bad) who is the bad character, who usually causes the problems for the protagonist) caught up in a sharp conflict with opposing forces.

❑ In the main conflict or struggle for the tragic hero, s/he suffers greatly, moving from good fortune to misfortune.

❑ The struggle is usually spiritual or ethical.

❑ Tragic actions arise from inner conflicts that test the hero's integrity.

❑ Death may overtake the protagonist, but usually s/he is spiritually triumphant.

DIFFERENT VIEWS OF LOVE EXIST IN THE PLAY

Juliet: Prior to meeting Romeo, Juliet’s attitude toward love is one of modesty and lack of comprehension. After she meets Romeo, she allows the passion of love to consume her, but she remains practical and strong.

Romeo: His love for Rosaline consists of his melancholy at being rejected by one who refuses to love at all; his passion for Juliet is fully developed when he is able share his love and passion with one who is willing to accept love.

Mercutio: his brilliant intelligence seems to make ridiculous an all-absorbing and exclusive passion based upon sex

Friar Lawrence: love is an accompaniment to life, reprehensible if violent or unsanctified by religion

Father Capulet: love is something to be decided by a prudent father for his heiress-daughter

Lady Capulet: love is worldly wisdom (her husband gave up dancing thirty years ago)

Nurse: love is something natural and sometimes lasting, connected with pleasure and pregnancy
THE NOTION OF COURTLY LOVE

Courtly love was a philosophy of love and a code of love making which grew out of medieval notions of chivalry. According to the system (reserved for the privileged), falling in love is accompanied by great emotional disturbances. The lover is bewildered, helpless, tortured by mental and physical pain, and exhibits certain symptoms, such as pallor, trembling, loss of appetite, sleeplessness, sighing, weeping, etc. He agonizes over his condition and indulges in endless self-questioning and reflections on the nature of love and his own wretched state. His condition improves when he is accepted, and he is inspired by his love to great deeds. He and his lady pledge each other to secrecy, and they must remain faithful in spite of all obstacles.

DRAMATIC FOIL

A dramatic foil is a character that highlights or brings out the personality traits of another character in a play. Usually, the foil contrasts with the other character, and the contrast serves to emphasize the other character’s traits.

Benvolio and Romeo: Benvolio has a calm and sensitive disposition, which contrasts with Romeo’s moody, emotional disposition.

Benvolio and Tybalt: Benvolio tries to quiet the brawling servants, which contrasts with the fiery Tybalt who always wants to fight.

Romeo and Mercutio: Romeo’s artificiality of sentiment contrasts with Mercutio’s sense of reality. Mercutio is a carefree, outgoing, and optimistic person to whom almost everything is a joke; Romeo is sensitive, moody, pessimistic, and romantic.

Romeo and Paris: Paris becomes a foil to Romeo after Mercutio dies; Paris is built up as a lover whose conventionality and inexperience contrast with Romeo’s newly developed range and depth of feeling for Juliet

Juliet and the Nurse: The Nurse is crude and she talks senselessly. Juliet is romantic, which contrasts with the Nurse’s practical approach to love. The nurse’s easy-going moral indulgence is contrasted with Juliet’s purity.

Friar Lawrence and Romeo: Romeo is all passion and courage while Friar Lawrence counsels caution and moderation. The Friar is a very thoughtful man, one who ponders life’s mysteries, while Romeo is much more a person of action, one who is essentially driven by a single passion.
**NAMES**

**Tybalt:** Tybalt's name comes from a word that means "bold." Tybalt is also named after a kind of cat; Tybalt, or a variation of it, is the name of the cat in medieval stories of Reynard the Fox.

**Benvolio:** Benvolio is from the Latin words bene, meaning "good," and volo, meaning "I am willing."

**Mercutio:** Mercutio's name suggests that he is a mercurial type, that is sprightly, quick-witted, and volatile. His name is also derived from that of the Roman god Mercury, who was known for eloquence, cleverness, and thievery.

**Romeo:** in Italian, Romeo meant 'a pilgrim to Rome’. It is also defined as ‘a roamer, a wanderer, a palmer’ in an Italian dictionary.

**LOGISTICS**

The mutual passion of Romeo and Juliet is surrounded by the mature bawdry of the other characters. However, it is not impaired by it, and nothing in the highly-sexed world seems to damage the intense purity of the two lovers. The youthful lovers have an exuberance and moodiness, and their reactions to the disappointments of love are extreme.

The belief in the fateful influence of the stars upon human life was common during Elizabethan times. Romeo and Juliet frequently make statements indicating that their fates are determined by the stars. A modern audience may not be as responsive to the stars determining fate, and we are more likely to believe that chance (bad luck) determines Romeo's fate.

Romeo does not appear in Act IV of the play. An absence of the principal performer during approximately the third quarter of the play is usual in Shakespeare. It gives the actor a chance of rest, which is especially needed if he is to give a good display of swordmanship in the fifth Act. Juliet has a short dying speech, in contrast to Romeo's long one. Probably, Shakespeare could not altogether trust his boy-actor to maintain the tension for long. Cleopatra is the only one of Shakespeare's women who is allowed to take her time dying.

In the story as told by Luigi da Porto about 1530 and Bandello in 1554, Juliet awakes from her trance before the poison has taken effect upon Romeo. The lovers are thus able to talk together, to lament their unlucky fate, and to take an eternal farewell. This way of dealing with the episode was incorporated in Shakespeare's play in the eighteenth century; extra dialogue was written for the lovers (adapted from a version by Thomas Otway of 1680), and this improvement was the usual theatrical version of Romeo and Juliet until far into the nineteenth century. Many critics complained about this perversion of Shakespeare's artistry because Shakespeare was not writing a sentimental drama, but a grand and rich tragedy of human passion and responsibility. By bringing on their families and the prince, he seems to be deliberately playing down the lovers in this final scene.
CHANGING CHARACTERS

Romeo and Juliet are both rash adolescents who seem to make decisions quickly without thinking through the consequences. It is important to note, however, that both characters mature during the play. Romeo is impetuous, but his rashness is somewhat diminished when compared to Tybalt and Mercutio who show no restraint in the murderous pursuit of honor. Romeo displays concern for others in Act V, which suggests his maturation.

- He feels for the Apothecary as a human being ('Buy food and get thyself in flesh,' V.1.84)
- He arranges for a letter to his parents (V.1.25, V.3.23-4)
- He takes thoughts for his servant Balthasar ('Live and be prosperous; and farewell, good fellow', V.3.42)
- He feels for the plight of young Paris, one writ with him ‘in sour misfortune's book’ (V.3.59-67,74-87)

Juliet changes from the inexperienced girl of near fourteen who walked on the stage in Act 1 to the married woman who has been caught up into a train of passionate events and now stands alone, ready to face death (or the simulation of death) for the sake of her love. Juliet conducts herself with the dignity and noble fortitude of womanhood.

- She is self-reliant
- She is courteous to Paris
- She is candid with the Friar
- She is detached with her mother and father
- She keeps her own counsel with her nurse