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## Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*: A Communicative Play

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### Introduction:

Shakespeare is above all writers, at least above all modern writers, the poet of nature; the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and life. His tragedy seems to be skill, his comedy to be instinct.

Samuel Johnson (1709-84), *Preface to Shakespeare*

William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is a tragedy about two teenage star-crossed lovers. It is considered as a tragic romance going back to Ancient Greece. An Italian tale is used in its plot and translated into verses as *Romeus and Juliet* by Arthur Brooke in 1562 and retold in prose in *Palace of pleasure* in 1582 by William Painter. Brooke and Painter are thought chief sources for *Romeo and Juliet*. Shakespeare borrowed mostly from both but in order to expand the plot; some minor characters like Mercutio and Count Paris were developed by himself.

The exact date of *Romeo and Juliet*, when it is written is unknown. But the style of *Romeo and Juliet* is similar to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Along with evidence of performances at that time, reveals that it is written between 1595 and 1596. It is believed that Shakespeare may have begun in 1591 and completed in 1595-1596. This book was published in two distinct quartos and priority was given to the publication of the first folio of 1623. The first edition appeared in 1597 printed by John Danter. There were many differences between these editions. As 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 this book has been stolen for publication.

Shakespeare's dramatic skill was powerful in creating and depicting distinctive characters who can reveal themselves through continue actions and dialogue. To rise above his feelings and thoughts, Juliet consistently allow his love and in spite of hearing about Tybalt's death at the hands of Romeo. Juliet displays her youth through her impulsive actions. But it is all due to Shakespeare's skill of demonstrating that Juliet's struggle indicates how intense love for Romeo conquers. Due to this consistency in action, interaction and language, all characters come alive.

Throughout the play, many poetic forms are used by William Shakespeare. *Romeo and Juliet* begin in the form of a Shakespearean sonnet with a 14 line prologue by a chorus. Most part of *Romeo and Juliet* is written in iambic pentameter. A more fluid, non-structured approach is used by Shakespeare is blank verse. Shakespeare matches such forms for those characters that use it. For example, Romeo uses Petrarchan sonnet form in the play when he talks about Rosaline (beloved of Romeo). Mostly Petrarchan sonnet is used at the time of praising women who are impossible for men to attain.

William Shakespeare is famous for the poetic imagery of his language and for his creativity of word pictures. He is remembered more because while he was writing, Latin was dominant language and he was writing in English. Writing in English was started by Chaucer and it was culminated by Shakespeare and he made English an honorable language for expressing personal, complex and imaginative feelings and ideas. Shakespeare's use of powerful visual

language, and his mastery to clear ideas makes him so renowned that his plays are still alive and are reading after four thousand years of written. As AL Pacino accepts that it is due to Shakespeare's language that made sure him for attempting to attract more people to his plays.

Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* rank with *Hamlet* which is one of Shakespeare's most performed tragedies. The story of *Romeo and Juliet* begins with a consuming love. This story is about hatred among two families which is overcome by love, old hate versus young love. The atmosphere is one of passion and swiftness. The whole play set in a hurry, hurry into marriage, hurry into banishment, speed back to Juliet, hurry to another quarter to get married Juliet with Paris, speed in killing someone who interfere and hurry to commit suicide when life seems wastage. *Romeo and Juliet* is a tragedy of storm, full of angry feud between two families (Montague and Capuletsupporters), whole passion and suddenly death.

Set in Verona, the play begins with a street quarrel between Montague and Capuletsupporters who are bitter enemies. Then, the Prince of Verona interferes and declares that next breach of the piece will be sentenced by death. After sometime, Count Paris talks to Capulet about the marriage of his daughter Juliet who is only thirteen. But Capulet request to Paris for waiting two years and invites him to attend a planned Capulet ball. On the other hand, lady Capulet and Juliet's nurse try to accept Juliet for marrying to Paris.

Meanwhile, Benvolio, friend and cousin of Romeo talks with Romeo, son of Lord Montague, about his depression. Benvolio finds out that it is all due to his love with a girl named Rosaline, one of Capulet's nieces. Benvolio and Mercution (another friend of Romeo) prepares Romeo to attend the ball at the Capulet house in hope of meeting Rosaline. On the way to Capulet feast, Romeo articulates, "Being but heavy, I will carry the light". But he never meets her and reveals his turmoil and confusion in youth over the unattainable Rosaline:

Alas, that love, whose view is muffled still,  
Should, without eyes, see pathways to his will!  
Here's much to do with hate, but more with love.  
Why, then, O brawling love! O loving hate!  
O any thing, of nothing first creates!  
O heavy lightness! serious vanity!  
Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms!  
Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire,  
sick health!  
Still-waking sleep that is not what it is!  
This love feels I that feel no love in this.  
Dost thou not laugh?

Fortune doesn't favor of Romeo and he falls in love with another girl Juliet. After sometime, Romeo hears that Juliet vowing her love to him (Romeo) in spite of her family hatred of the Montagues. After the feast, when Juliet says goodbye to Romeo she feels:

"Methinks I see thee now, thou art so low  
As one dead in the bottom of a tomb".

And both of them agreed to marry. By the support of Friar Laurence (a Franciscan Friar and Romeo's confident) who hopes to reunite the two families through the marriage of their children. The next day, they are married secretly.

At the beginning of Act III, weather became hot and “the made blood stirring” (III, I, 4). And Shakespeare starts to plant the seeds of tragedy. Romeo fears about his dream of finding Juliet and a sense of foreboding comes out:

Some consequence yet hanging in the stars  
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date  
With this night’s revels and expire the term  
Of a despised life, closed in my breast,  
By some vile forfeit of untimely death. (I, iv, 107-111)

Tybalt who is Juliet’s cousin confronted and killed by Romeo in a duel. When Juliet comes to know that Romeo is responsible Tybalt’s death, she feels that she is betrayed by Romeo and she thinks that:

What storm is this that blows so contrary?  
Is Romeo slaughter’d, and is Tybalt dead?

The Prince of Verona, Prince Escalus, exiles Romeo from Verona and announces that if Romeo comes back, “that hour is his last”. Romeo secretly spends his night in the chamber of Juliet, where they consummate their marriage. Without understanding Juliet’s grief, Capulet fixes her marriage to Count Paris and warns to disown her if she refuses to be Paris’s “joyful bride” (III, V). When she requests her mother about marriage to be delayed, her mother also rejects her plea.

At this, Juliet goes to Friar Laurence for help. Friar gives her a drug that will keep her into a death-like coma for “two and forty hours”. He promises her to send a messenger to Romeo and give inform about her plan. He wants to rejoin Romeo and Juliet. As was instructed by Friar Laurence, on the night before wedding, Juliet takes the drug and lay in the family crypt. Unfortunately, the messenger does not arrive to Romeo but he comes to know about Juliet’s death from his servant Balthasar. After listening her death, Romeo says, “Then I defy you, stars”. He, himself buys poison and goes to the Capulet crypt. In angry, he encounters Paris, who has come for mourning Juliet secretly. There starts a battle between Romeo and Paris but Paris is killed by Romeo. Romeo believes that Juliet is dead so he drinks the poison. Then Juliet awakens and finds that Romeo is dead and stabs herself with his dagger.

Both of the feud families and the Prince meet at the tomb to find all these dead. Friar Laurence remembers the story of two “star-cross’d lovers”. The feud families are reconciled by the death of their children and agree to bring down their violent feud. The play ends with the elegy of Prince for the lovers: For never was a story of more woe/than this of Juliet and her Romeo”. At the end, they are finally resigned:

Our instruments to melancholy bells,  
Our wedding cheer to a sad burial feast,  
Our solemn hymns to sullen dirges change,  
Our bridal flowers serve for a buried corse. (IV. V. 86-90)

Thus, in the end, we can say that *Romeo and Juliet* had influenced to a great extent the subsequent literature. In Shakespeare’s own days, the literary work of Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher were also influenced by the play. Romance, relationship and culture of the world don’t remain untouched by his plays. For example, the word ‘Romeo’ is used as synonymous of “male lover” in English. The Juliet cap is used in wedding as a headband to hold the bridal veil. Now, this title “The Romeo and Juliet Effect” is used to describe the suffering relationships between two families. Today, the plays of Shakespeare have been filmed numerous times.

Wonderful women! Have you ever thought how much we all, and women especially, owe to Shakespeare for his vindication of women in these fearless, high-spirited, resolute and intelligent heroines?

Ellen Terry (1847-1928), British actress. *Four Lectures on Shakespeare's, 'The Triumphant women'*

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