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ROMEO AND JULIET
Critical Essays

John F. Andrews

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Introduction

Romeo and Juliet was the first drama in English to confer full tragic dignity on the pangs and perils of youthful ardor. Its protagonists are now enshrined on the high altar of love's sanctuary, and the lyricism that seals their death-marked union has made their vows legendary in every language that possesses a literature.

Shakespeare evidently completed his portrayal of Verona's pride in the mid-1590s.[1] From all indications their story moved audiences in the playwright's own day, and it has maintained a secure position in the repertory from the author's theater to our own. For more than a century it has been a staple of the school curriculum. Speeches from it have been recited by teenagers the world over, and it has probably occasioned more amateur performances than any other play. Not surprisingly, it has also spawned a prolific progeny of offshoots, among them evocative scene-paintings by William Blake and Henry Fuseli, a stately opera by Hector Berlioz, soul-stirring ballets by Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky and Sergei Prokofiev, a pulsating Broadway musical by Leonard Bernstein, Arthur Laurents, Jerome Robbins, and Stephen Sondheim, an affecting 60s film by Franco Zeffirelli, and a lacrimose best-seller (later made into a 70s movie) by Erich Segal. Meanwhile, as might be expected, it has provided an irresistible target for parodists. People who have never read the work or witnessed a staging of it can repeat puerile jests about the Balcony Scene. As a consequence the heroine's initial utterance in a setting that has been petrified into a cliché is arguably the most frequently cited—and undoubtedly the most widely misunderstood—query in the lexicon of popular culture.[2]

Today *Romeo and Juliet* is a title that everyone is expected to know, or at least know something about. Its central figures are household names. But distorted impressions of them, and of their tragedy, are now so indelibly fixed in our memories that many of us are inclined either to disregard the drama entirely or to regard it too lightly to register its capacity to touch a modern theatergoer's deepest sympathies.

And that is the reason behind the present anthology: to reintroduce contemporary readers to a masterpiece that is considerably more resonant, complex, and problematical than it is usually assumed to be.

The volume commences with eight articles on the aesthetic qualities of *Romeo and Juliet*, the impact its structure has upon the way we experience the play. Mark Van Doren opens the collection with some remarks about the imagistic brilliance of an early work that he describes as "furiously literary." Then D. A. Traversi contemplates the "'metaphysical' balance" of a plot that oscillates between the "twin realities, at once separate and identical, of love and death." Harry Levin reflects on what he classifies as a technical paradox: a dramatic "form" that both employs and supersedes the "formality" it subjects to critical inquiry. M. M. Mahood scrutinizes the tragedy's verbal medium and shows that *Romeo and Juliet*'s incessant wordplay is integral to the suspension of judgment it solicits from the audience as the action unfolds. Susan Snyder then demonstrates that this suspension is generic as well as semantic: she notes that *Romeo and Juliet* depends for many of its effects upon the arousal and frustration of expectations that derive from comic conventions. In an analysis of what he diagnoses as a tendency toward "nominalism" in the protagonists, James L. Calderwood suggests that both the lovers and the play itself are involved in an ontological and experiential quest for "everlasting rest." Marjorie Garber calls attention to the repetitive patterns and scenic juxtapositions that organize the events of the drama and guide our responses to them. And Ralph Berry argues that in both formal and thematic respects "the sonnet is the channel through which the play flows."

From a concern with structure the anthology moves in the second section to nine articles on the text of *Romeo and Juliet* as a score for performance. James Black points to some of the stage pictures, the "reduplicated groupings" an audience sees while watching the tragedy evolve in the playhouse. Jack Jorgens emphasizes the visual aspects of Zeffirelli's cinematic interpretation of the drama. Then three actresses comment on the plot from their viewpoints as erstwhile participants in it: Dame Peggy Ashcroft and Julie Harris approach the play from the perspective of Juliet, and Brenda Bruce looks at the lovers and their situation through the eyes of Juliet's Nurse. Approaching the same character from an external observer's coign of vantage,

Stanley Wells assesses the theatrical potential in the Nurses's apparent "inconsequentiality." Philip McGuire outlines the role that dance plays in the action. In an effort to discern what America's most ambitious musical illustrates about the twentieth-century appeal of Shakespeare's most famous couple, Robert Hapgood compares the tragedy to *West Side Story*. Then Barbara Hodgdon draws on recent productions and adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* to raise some radical questions about what constitutes a dramatic script.

To conclude we turn to eight attempts to assay *Romeo and Juliet* with touchstones from the age that gave rise to it and conditioned its inaugural reception. Franklin M. Dickey situates the protagonists of Shakespeare's work against their counterparts in the playwright's primary source, the 1562 poem on *Romeus and Juliet* by Arthur Brooke. John W. Draper and Douglas L. Peterson relate the principles of Renaissance astrology to the psychology of the drama's characters. And James C. Bryant offers evidence that Elizabethans might have brought a less trusting attitude to the Friar than do most of today's viewers. From here the investigation proceeds to three articles on the part that gender has in what happens on the Shakespearean stage. Coppélia Kahn explores the difficulties of "Coming of Age" in the Renaissance, with special focus on the maturation process for young men. Marianne Novy links male role-modeling to the nexus of love and violence in the supercharged atmosphere of an early modern city-state. And Edward Snow shows that "Sexual Difference" is inscribed in the very discourse of the hero and heroine. The collection then draws to a close with the editor's own speculations about what a sixteenth-century London playgoer might have made of the ethical and theological issues implicit in Shakespeare's earliest love tragedy.

It goes without saying that the twenty-five essays in these pages are but a sample of the vast commentary *Romeo and Juliet* has elicited over the centuries. Many a valuable study is referred to in the notes accompanying the articles assembled here, and the person who puts such information to its fullest use will heed the counsel of a pinstriped Yankee diamond expert and "look it up."

NOTES

1. The range of dates usually assigned the play is 1594–96, with most scholars leaning toward late 1595 or early 1596. A few have tried to push the date back to 1591, and a handful have urged an even earlier period of composition.
2. The situation was not helped when a 1984 "translation" of the play by A. L. Rowse rendered the line "O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore are you, Romeo?" Shortly after Rowse was interrogated about this reading on "The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour" (April 23, 1984), Russell Baker wrote a *New York Times Magazine* column ("The Romeo Riddle," May 20, 1984) in which he confessed that, like most of his acquaintances, he had gone through life thinking that Juliet's question meant "Where are you, Romeo?" rather than "Why do you have to be named Romeo?"

Romeo and Juliet

John F. Andrews

Falling in Love: The Tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*

What happens in *Romeo and Juliet*?[1] What did a dramatist of the 1590s want the "judicious" members of his contemporary audiences to see and hear, and how did he expect them to feel, as they attended the play[2] a later age would laud as the most lyrical of all love tragedies? Before I hazard a response to what is admittedly an unanswerable question, I should make it clear that what I'm really posing is a query about the "action"[3] of Shakespeare's drama, and more specifically about the effect such an action might have been intended to have on a receptive Elizabethan playgoer.[4]

As the late O. B. Hardison emphasizes in the commentary that accompanies Leon Golden's 1968 translation of Aristotle's *Poetics*,[5] there is much to be said for interpreting the earliest technical term for tragic effect, *catharsis*, as a word that means "clarification," and for conceiving of the experience it describes as one that takes place, not in the characters of a dramatic work, but in the audience that participates vicariously in those characters' thoughts, emotions, and interchanges. Hardison reminds us that Aristotle defines tragedy as that category of imitation (*mimesis*) which produces pleasure through a cogent representation of fearful and pitiable incidents. He and Golden stress the passage in which the great philosopher observes that realistic renderings of even the most displeasing subjects delight the viewer by assisting perception and eliciting insight. And they infer that when the father of dramatic theory speaks of the purgation that results from a tragedy, he is focusing primarily on the learning any coherently constructed work of art fosters: the sorting out, the clearing away of confusion or temporary

misapprehension, that occurs as a responsive spectator notices, and appreciates, an aesthetically satisfying pattern of logical connections. When Aristotle refers to the catharsis that derives from a well-devised imitation of fearful and pitiable incidents, then, Hardison and Golden deduce that he is probably thinking of the enlightenment—the sense of mental relief, psychic release, and spiritual insight—that a member of the audience enjoys when he or she is able to make sense of a sequence of happenings that initially strike an onlooker as disparate and disorderly.

When we bring this concept of catharsis to bear upon the various species of tragedy, we discover that in some instances the intellectual, emotional, and ethical clarification attained by an attentive theatergoer parallels the hard-earned wisdom of a character who has arrived at self-knowledge through a siege of suffering. In tragic actions which feature this kind of recognition (*anagnorisis*) the central figure is divested of any impurities of mind or heart that impede "Clearer Reason" (*The Tempest*, V.i.68), and he or she acquires a degree of awareness that approximates the comprehension a perceptive member of the audience obtains by tracing and assessing the character's fortunes.[6]

In some instances the clarity a tragic figure realizes is a judgment that amounts to self-condemnation, as happens in *Richard III* and *Macbeth*. In these dramatic sequences the protagonists acknowledge their own guilt and wretchedness in ways an audience can endorse. In other instances the down-cast hero goes beyond an accurate mental evaluation of himself to a remorse that penetrates the conscience, as with the title characters of *Othello* and *King Lear*. Here the protagonists feel sorrow for what they perceive themselves to have done, and in the second case if not the first the audience may be led to conclude that the hero has gone a step further—from remorse to repentance, to a resolve to do whatever is required to make amends for the pain he has inflicted on others and cleanse his own soul.

In rare instances a tragic protagonist proceeds all the way to a complete reconciliation with himself, with those he has injured, and with the Heavens. In these sequences the protagonist arrives at a sense of "at-one-ment" that signifies redemption. In dramatic actions in which this kind of conversion occurs the central figure wins deliverance through an epiphany that transports him or her past the point where even the most sage of witnesses can hope to follow. In Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, for example, or in Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, the central character is granted a

culminating vision in which death is swallowed up in a kind of victory. The hero completes his mission nobly, and as he expires he crosses the threshold to a mysterious but presumably more exalted realm on the unseen side of this world's veil of tears. Here the clarification that takes place in the protagonist surpasses the apprehension of the viewer, and the catharsis that issues in the well-tuned playgoer is akin to ecstatic rapture: a "calm of mind"[7] that accompanies the "wonder"[8] evoked by powers that move us to awe.

In most tragic actions the audience's catharsis is something that can be more aptly described as a sense of "woe" or "pity"[9] for a character whose grasp on reality is shown to be in some way deficient. As we watch a misguided protagonist come to grief under the lamentable circumstances that tragedies usually depict, we feel a wrenching disparity between our own observations and those of the focal figure. If we receive the kind of catharsis the usual tragedy is designed to provide, in other words, we emerge with an understanding that is both broader and more lucid than the impaired perception of the lost hero or heroine.

So what do we find when we turn our attention to *Romeo and Juliet*? As we watch this play do we sense that the protagonists share our view of what undoes them? Do we feel that in the end they transcend our vantage to claim a better world elsewhere? Or do we finally conclude that they fail in some manner, and lack the insight to assess their failure with the acuity an alert audience acquires by contemplating their "misadventur'd piteous Overthrows" (Prologue.7)?

Adherents can be found for all of these interpretations and more. There are many who accept the title characters at their own estimate, perceiving them as helpless pawns of conditions they have no means of countering. There are some who react to them with admiration, even reverence, canonizing them as pure "Sacrifices" of their families' "Enmity" (V.iii.304). And there are a few who blame them for intemperance and hold them responsible not only for their own tragedies but for the untimely deaths of several other characters.

Perhaps the best way to enter the world of the play is to take note of its cosmic imagery, its all-pervasive references to Fortune, Fate, and the Stars. If we hope to recapture something of the experience *Romeo and Juliet* provided its original audience, we need to come away from the tragedy with a conception of what

it would have meant in Shakespeare's time to be a victim of "fatal Loins," to feel like "Fortune's Fool," and to seize upon the extremest of measures to "shake the Yoke of inauspicious Stars" (Prologue.5, III.i.144, V.iii.111).

The most important locus for medieval and Renaissance thinking about Fortune and Fate was Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, a Latin dialogue that had probably been written in A.D. 524. Chaucer had used the *Consolation* extensively in the fourteenth century, and it remained so popular in the late sixteenth century that it was translated into Elizabethan English by no less a personage than the Queen herself. When Shakespeare alluded to the *Consolation*, then, he would no doubt have assumed that any literate member of his audience would be nearly as familiar with this masterwork as with the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer.

Any playgoer who had read Boethius would have known that the *Consolation*[10] involves a conversation between Lady Philosophy and a statesman who has fallen into disfavor and now awaits death. The imprisoned political leader is the author himself, and he calls upon a personification of Wisdom to explain why Fortune has treated him so cruelly. During the exchanges that ensue, Lady Philosophy points out that "Fortune" is properly to be regarded as a fictional abstraction, a symbolic embodiment of the role of mutability in human affairs. To those who view her aright, Dame Fortune is nothing more than a convenient name for the fickle and seemingly irrational "Goddess" who bestows and withdraws such worldly gifts as riches, honors, political office, fame, and pleasure. Lady Philosophy acknowledges that many mistakenly believe that happiness is to be found in the possession of goods that are subject to Fortune's caprices. But she insists that those who examine their lives carefully will eventually realize that the only felicity which lasts and is free from anxiety is that which is fixed on a Supreme Good higher than, and unaffected by, the vicissitudes of Fortune. Lady Philosophy doesn't deny that Misfortune is painful, but she insists that if we take it in the right spirit it provides a salutary reminder that everything in this life is fleeting. In the process it encourages us to focus our sights on Heaven, where, according to an even more authoritative spiritual guide, "neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matthew 6:20).[11]

Many writers used the terms "Fortune" and "Fate" interchangeably, but Boethius drew a subtle distinction between

them. For him "Fortune" was a name for Mutability itself, for what we now refer to as blind Chance. "Fate," on the other hand, was his term for a higher authority that presided over Fortune's seeming arbitrariness. For Boethius, and for subsequent Christian philosophers, Fate (or Destiny, as it was often called) was actually a pagan disguise for Providence, and the author of the *Consolation* saw it as a cosmic principle that was ultimately benign, though forever shrouded in obscurity.

Boethius was valued in Renaissance England for the way he had adapted Christianity to a quasi-Stoic frame of reference. In similar fashion, Saint Augustine was revered for the way he'd made Christianity fit a quasi-Platonic framework two centuries earlier. Augustine's treatise *On Christian Doctrine*[12] and his monumental discourse on the *City of God* were both familiar to educated Elizabethans, and Shakespeare's contemporaries would have seen the author of these two works as a theologian whose writings were fully compatible with Boethius' philosophy. Boethius' dichotomy between those pursuits directed to the Supreme Good (which is immutable) and those directed to all lesser goods (which are mutable) would have been accepted, then, as merely another means of expressing Augustine's distinction between those pursuits that lead to the supreme felicity of the City of God (Jerusalem) and those that leave one mired in the confusion and frustration of the City of Man (Babylon).

According to Augustine, all movement of the soul is prompted by the Will, and that which moves the Will is Love. Love, then, is the basic motivating force in human behavior, and it falls into two categories: (a) Sacred Love, or *caritas* (charity), which urges the Will in the direction of eternal life, and (b) Profane Love, or *cupiditas* (cupidity), which pulls the Will in the direction of temporal life. From Augustine's viewpoint, the sole purpose of religion and ethics is to teach believers what things are to be loved and enjoyed in and of themselves and what things are to be employed in the service of true Love. In his system the proper relation to things (loving and enjoying only the things of God, and using the things of this world solely in obedience to God) is *caritas*; the improper relation to things (loving and enjoying the things of this world, and abusing the things of God for the sake of temporal things) is *cupiditas*.

The cohesion between Augustine's theology and Boethius' philosophy becomes evident as soon we note that only those things which are temporal are subject to Fortune. To be under

the sway of Fortune, then—to seek happiness by setting one's heart on those goods that are subject to Fortune's bestowal and removal—is to be guilty of *cupiditas* (misplaced or inordinate love). On the other hand, to rise above Fortune's sphere by aspiring to the immutable Supreme Good—to seek happiness through union with that which lies beyond the realm of Fortune—is to live in accordance with *caritas* (well-placed and duly ordered love).

But what about the Stars? How did they relate to Boethian and Augustinian thought? According to most medieval and Renaissance thinkers, "the Stars" (the Sun, the Moon, the Planets, and the constellations of the Zodiac) exercised a degree of influence on Earth, and this influence conditioned the general and particular destinies of human beings. But it was commonly believed that the Stars could directly affect only the material and corporeal levels of existence. Since Will and Reason were regarded as spiritual rather than physical (material or corporeal) in nature, it followed that these faculties of the human soul could not be influenced directly by the Stars. Will and Reason could be affected by the lower parts of the soul (the Senses and the Passions), however, if they did not maintain proper control over these earth-bound dominions; and the lower nature (since it was corporeal in composition) could, in turn, be influenced by the Stars. If the Will or the Reason allowed themselves to be usurped by the Senses or the Passions, then, they became subject to indirect astrological influence and thus to Fortune.[13]

Let us sum up. As we've observed, Fortune, Fate, and the Stars were perceived in Shakespeare's time as interwoven concepts, and all three were integral to a system of ethics that drew heavily on the writings of Boethius and Augustine. Through these concepts, errant behavior could be depicted by any of several interchangeable means of expression: as unfortunate behavior caused by the influence of the Stars, as irrational behavior caused by the whims of Fortune, as improper and intemperate behavior caused by Reason or Will's subjection to the Senses or the Passions, or as disobedient, sinful behavior caused by misplaced or inordinate Love. For an alert Elizabethan, the name one applied to wrongheaded behavior was of little moment; the only thing that mattered was that sooner or later a person recognize it as a course that would result in disaster if it continued unchecked.

We should now be in a position to return to the questions posed at the outset. What "happens" in *Romeo and Juliet*? Do the

lovers succumb to forces beyond their control? Do they somehow triumph over the circumstances arrayed against them and emerge as martyrs, as unblemished agents of redemption? Or do they "fall in love" in some ethical and theological sense that would have been meaningful to an audience familiar with Augustine and Boethius?

Suppose we begin our scrutiny of the action by reviewing some of the perspectives the play offers on the protagonists' romantic attachment. The Chorus who speaks the Prologue to Act II describes Romeo's sudden infatuation with Juliet as "Young Affection" gaping to be the "Heir" of "Old Desire" (lines 1–2); he goes on to suggest that the only reason Juliet has replaced Rosaline in Romeo's heart is that this time Romeo's feelings are requited (line 5). From the Chorus' point of view, then, what draws Romeo to Juliet is no different in kind from what attracted him to Rosaline. The young hero is simply shifting his attention to a more receptive subject as he responds to the erotic spurring implicit in his name.[14]

Friar Lawrence's initial response to Romeo's news about "the fair Daughter of rich Capulet" (II.iii.58, 66–68) echoes the Chorus' sentiments:

> Is Rosaline, that thou didst love so dear,
> So soon forsaken? Young Men's Love then lies
> Not truly in their Hearts but in their Eyes.

In a way that recalls Mercutio, who refers to his friend as "Humours! Madman! Passion! Lover!" (II.i.7), and Benvolio, who comments that "Blind is his Love, and best befits the Dark" (II.i.32), Friar Lawrence appears to feel that, notwithstanding its intensity, Romeo's zeal for Juliet is as likely to be a manifestation of "Rude Will" as of "Grace" (II.iii.28). Hence the old man's admonition to "love moderately" (II.iv.14).

Despite his solemn advice, however, the Friar does nothing to impede the "wanton Blood" (II.v.71) that he and Juliet's Nurse both see in their eager charges. Before he even speaks with Romeo's betrothed, Friar Lawrence agrees to channel the youths' ardor into a clandestine marriage. With the Church's sanction, then, they consummate their vows within twenty-four hours of their initial encounter. So much for moving "Wisely and slow" (II.iii.94).[15]

There can be no question that what draws Romeo and Juliet to each other at the outset is physical attraction. But would it be just to assert that their union is based on nothing more elevated than erotic desire? I think not. The poetry with which they declare their feelings makes it well nigh impossible for us to conceive of any situation in which the protagonists could ever again be severed, let alone drift apart. After all, to preserve herself for the husband to whom she has plighted troth, Juliet defies and deceives her parents, evades a match that would advance both her own fortunes and her family's, dismisses the Nurse when the old retainer's pragmatism becomes the voice of "Ancient Damnation" (III.v.235), and drinks a potion she fears may be lethal. Meanwhile, for his part, Romeo proves more than willing to "give and hazard all" (*The Merchant of Venice*, II.vii.16) to uphold his pledge to Juliet. As we see the lovers increasingly isolated by events and, more importantly, by the folly of their elders and the insensitivity of even their closest confidants, we cannot help responding with sympathy for their predicament and admiration for the courage their consecration to each other inspires. By the end of the play it is patent that no one in their society really understands them; they're left completely alone in a world that seems at best indifferent, at worst hostile. In soul-trying times their loyalty to each other is severely tested, and it never falters.

But if the tie that binds Romeo and Juliet is the most precious thing the setting of Shakespeare's tragedy affords, does it follow that we are meant to regard the lovers' "extreme Sweet" (II.Chorus.14) as a delicacy that supersedes all other treasures? Are we to join our hearts and minds with the protagonists' fathers and erect statues of "pure Gold" (V.iii.299) to honor the title characters' fidelity to each other and to Love?

Perhaps so, but I find it difficult to locate a lot to celebrate in the events with which the play concludes. Old Capulet and Old Mountague clasp hands at long last, and if only by default a feud that has wrought untold devastation appears to be history. But at what cost? According to the city's sovereign, the only thing that remains when all is said and done is "A glooming Peace"—that and the Prince's haunting pronouncement that "All are punish'd" (V.iii.305, 295).

So what are we to make of the mood with which the final scene draws to a close? Is it possible that Shakespeare expected his audience to include the lovers themselves in the Prince's stern accounting of Verona's "Woe" (V.iii.309)? Can it be that a

relationship so rare that it has become proverbial, a bond that appears indissoluble, was meant to be viewed as in some way defective? The answer, I submit, is yes. I think it more than likely that the playwright intended to have his earliest theatergoers see Romeo and Juliet as protagonists whose tragic flaw derives from the same source as their strength and beauty: the very fact that their devotion to each other is so all-consuming that it eliminates everything else from consideration.[16]

At their first greeting Romeo bows before Juliet as if she were a "holy Shrine" and he a "Pilgrim"; Juliet accepts this description of their venue and grants Romeo's "Pray'r" "lest Faith turn to Despair" (I.v.96, 99, 104, 106). In the Balcony Scene, the next time the protagonists meet, Romeo describes Juliet successively as "the Sun," as "bright Angel," and as "dear Saint," and he tells her "Call me but Love, and I'll be new baptiz'd" (II.ii.3, 26, 56, 50). Juliet responds in kind and declares Romeo's "gracious Self" to be "the God of my Idolatry" (II.ii.114, 115). What this imagery implies is that Romeo and Juliet are forswearing an old creed in favor of a new; their professions, accordingly, are to be understood as the religious vows of converts to a faith that differs from that of their fathers.

In Act III, having just learned of his banishment, Romeo says "'Tis Torture and not Mercy! Heav'n is here/Where Juliet lives" (III.iii.29–30). To be exiled from Juliet's presence is, for Romeo, to be condemned to outer darkness. A few hours later, as the lovers are saying farewell on the morning that ends their one night together, their aubade suggests that their lives are now fundamentally "out of Tune" (III.v.27) with the lark, the daylight, and other manifestations of a harmonious natural order. It is thus apropos that after Romeo's departure Juliet asks "Is there no Pity sitting in the Clouds/That sees into the Bottom of my Grief?" (III.v.198–99). Shortly thereafter she cries "Alack, alack, that Heav'n should practice Stratagems/Upon so soft a Subject as my self" (III.v.211–12).

From these and numerous other passages it is demonstrable that the relationship between Romeo and Juliet is a species, however refined, of *cupiditas*—a form of pseudo-worship in which one's deity is a creature rather than the Creator. Each lover views the other as the Supreme Good. Each accords the other a degree of adoration that Augustine (and innumerable later theologians) had defined as properly directed only to God. Their love becomes

a universe unto itself, and when they are deprived of it each of the protagonists concludes that there is nothing left to live for.

But of course if Romeo and Juliet fall victim to idolatry, it is because they also succumb to passion. By indulging the senses and emotions, they allow first the concupiscible (pleasure-driven) and later the irascible (wrath-driven) divisions of the lower, sensible soul to gain hegemony over the rational soul (the Reason).

At the beginning Romeo is subject to the melancholy of a frustrated suitor. He keeps to himself, and when he is sighted by even his closest friend he slips into a "Grove of Sycamour" (I.i.125). Romeo is himself a "sick-amour," a youth afflicted with love-sickness, and his father observes that

> Black and portendous must this Humour prove
> Unless Good Counsel may the Cause remove. (I.i.145–46)

Romeo's Reason emits warnings, both in the dream to which he several times refers in I.iv and in the misgivings he expresses at the end of that scene (I.iv.106–11), but the protagonist allows Mercutio's set-piece about Queen Mab to convince him, against his better judgment, to put his fear of "Consequence" out of mind. As the title character consents to attend the Capulet ball, his pivotal comment makes it obvious that what his intellect tells him is being suppressed by an act of will: "he that hath the Stirrage of my Course/Direct my Suit" (I.iv.112–13).[17]

From this point on, the hero plunges headlong into action. At his first glimpse of Juliet his senses are so entranced that he is oblivious to the threat posed by Tybalt. Later, in the Balcony Scene, it is Juliet, not Romeo, who expresses apprehensions; he declares "thy Kinsmen are no stop to me" (II.ii.70) and defines himself as a bold mariner (II.ii.83–85). Disregarding her instinctive caution, Juliet allows herself to be seduced by such bravado and agrees, against *her* better judgment, to become the partner of her suitor's rash ventures.

Up to this juncture the concupiscible passions have dominated the behavior of both lovers. Following Romeo and Juliet's hasty marriage, however, the irascible passions begin asserting themselves. Almost as soon as he departs from his wedding Romeo comes upon an incipient quarrel between Mercutio and Tybalt. The fresh bridegroom is not yet ready to reveal his new kinship with the Capulets, and as a result his conciliatory reply to a challenge Tybalt thrusts at him is misinterpreted by Mercutio

as an expression of "calm, dishonorable, vile Submission" (III.i.76). Romeo's hotheaded friend steps in to defend the honor he assumes a lethargic and cowardly Mountague is incapable of maintaining for himself. In an urgent attempt to prevent needless conflict, Romeo lunges between the two duelers. Unfortunately the protagonist's efforts at peacemaking prove fatal to Mercutio, and Romeo's ally dies cursing the house of Mountague as vehemently as he had earlier scorned the Capulets.

To this moment in the scene Romeo has "thought all for the best." For the first time in the play, he has acted with judgment, restraint, and genuine valor. But now he finds himself in an unaccustomed position. By turning the other cheek and trying to comport himself as an honorable gentleman, he has unwittingly made himself appear dishonorable and contributed to a calamity. After a too-brief pause for reflection, he reacts to the "Plague" in his ears by accepting Mercutio's erroneous judgment on measured behavior that the audience will have recognized as anything *but* "Effeminate" (III.i.112, 114, 122). Casting aside his momentary self-control and rationality and yielding to an idolatrous concern for the kind of male "Reputation" that demands vengeance,[18] Romeo spurns "respective Lenity" to make room for "Fire-ey'd Fury" (III.i.119, 131–32). He disregards the Prince's prohibition against further bloodshed and takes the enactment of "Justice" into his own hands (III.i.189–91).[19]

The slaying of Tybalt functions as the turning-point in the action. Before this development there has been at least a possibility of success for Romeo and Juliet. Their fathers have both shown a willingness to end the feud, and there has thus been some basis for the Friar's optimism that the marriage of a Capulet to a Mountague might bridge the way to a more harmonious future. With the deaths of Mercutio and Tybalt, however, the hostility between the two factions is rekindled, and the Prince can see only one way to prevent further carnage: by removing Romeo from "fair Verona" before more "Civil Blood" makes more "Civil Hands unclean" (Prologue.2–4).

By the time Romeo arrives at the Friar's cell in III.iii he is practically beside himself. Upon learning that he has been banished, he falls to the ground, his abject posture symbolizing the topsy-turvy state of a soul no longer led by Reason. In this condition he draws a dagger, and only the Friar's intervention forestalls an instant suicide:

Hold thy desperate Hand!
Art thou a Man? Thy Form cries out thou art!
Thy Tears are Womanish; thy wild Acts
Denote th' unreasonable Fury of a Beast!
. . . . . .

Hast thou slain Tybalt? Wilt thou slay thy self?
And slay thy Lady that in thy Life lives
By doing damned Hate upon thy Self? (III.iii.107–17)

The answer to the Friar's last two questions will turn out to be affirmative. And the questions and answers that precede them explain why.

In IV.i Juliet comes to the Friar's cell, like Romeo with a knife, and like Romeo determined to take her own life. Seeing in her "the strength of will to slay [her] self" (line 72), the Friar suggests a less desperate remedy for her difficulties. He then gives her a potion that will suspend her bodily functions for enough time to allow her to be mourned and entombed. Meanwhile he sends a message to Juliet's husband. Due to unforeseen difficulties Romeo fails to receive it, and a day later he has no way of knowing that there is literal truth in his servingman's euphemistic report that the heroine is "well" and "sleeps in Capel's Monument" (V.i.17–18).

Now the protagonist descends into an even deeper depression. Purchasing poison from an Apothecary whose appearance resembles that of Despair in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*,[20] he makes his way to Juliet's tomb. Upon his arrival, as he dismisses his man Balthasar, Romeo depicts himself in language that summons up memories of the Friar's rebuke in III.iii.107–17:

The Time and my Intents are savage wild,
More fierce and more inexorable far
Than empty Tigers, or the roaring Sea. (V.iii.37–39)

The pertinence of these words is almost immediately borne out when the desperate title character is provoked by an uncomprehending Paris and kills him. Moments later Romeo's portrayal of his "Intents" is illustrated yet again when he downs the liquid he has brought with him to the cemetery:

Come, bitter Conduct; come, unsavory Guide.
Thou desp'rate Pilot, now at once run on
The dashing Rocks thy seasick, weary Bark. (V.iii.116–18)

Within seconds Juliet awakens to find her dead husband, and his example inspires her to plunge his dagger into her own breast. Thus does Romeo "slay" his "Lady" by "doing damned Hate" upon himself (III.i.116–17). And thus does Shakespeare emblematize the fatal consummation of a union forged in unregimented idealism.

We should now be in a position to comment on the roles of Fortune, Fate, and the Stars in *Romeo and Juliet*. As we have observed, the protagonists are prompted by their concupiscible passions into an idolatrous relationship that makes them vulnerable to forces beyond their ken. As chance would have it, these forces combine to unleash the irascible passions that destroy Mercutio, Tybalt, Paris, and eventually Romeo and Juliet themselves. To put it another way, by forfeiting rational governance over their own behavior, the lovers subject themselves to the waywardness of happenstance. They become Fortune's fools (III.i.144). In a sense that they don't recognize, they become "fated."

In the process, by reducing themselves to menial servants of emotional and astral influences that would have had no power to manipulate them if they had kept their souls under the guidance of Reason, they become "Star-cross'd" (Prologue.6). Ironically and sadly, at no point in the action are the "Stars" more securely in command than at the moment when a tragically misled Romeo commits a mortal sin in a futile effort to "shake" their "Yoke" from his "World-wearied Flesh" (V.iii.111–12).

It should not escape our notice, of course, that most of the play's other characters are also culpable victims of Fortune, Fate, and the Stars. The Capulets have sought to rise in worldly status, using their daughter as an unwilling instrument to that end, and that is one of the reasons we cannot bring ourselves to place much blame on Juliet for disobeying her unfeeling parents. It seems altogether apt that the Capulets' "ordained Festival" turns to "black Funeral"; they learn by bitter trial that on the Wheel of Fortune "all things change them to the contrary" (IV.v.84–85, 90). Meanwhile Mercutio, Tybalt, and Paris all submit in their own ways to Fortune's turns and suffer the consequences.

Even the sententious Friar can be seen as Fortune's plaything. For a man of the cloth he seems inordinately preoccupied with his worldly standing (hence his well-intended but ill-advised efforts to use unauthorized means to end the city's feuding, and hence his frantic scurrying about to cover his traces and avoid

being caught at the graveyard in Act V), and many of his error-prone judgments and makeshift expedients presuppose an improvident reliance on Fortune's notoriously unreliable cooperation.

In many respects the play's society as a whole is shown to be at the mercy of Fortune, Fate, and the Stars. The setting for Shakespeare's tragedy is, after all, a microcosm of postlapsarian humanity. And in this context the fates of Romeo and Juliet turn out to be a "Scourge" (V.iii.292), a divine judgment, in senses that exceed the meaning intended by the Prince.

But how should all of this affect an audience experiencing the drama? Ultimately, like most of Shakespeare's tragedies, *Romeo and Juliet* appears designed to leave us with an enhanced appreciation of what it means, in Christian terms, to be human. If we've profited as we ought to from the action, we will know the protagonists better than they know themselves. And we will understand—alas, in a way they do not—what brought their story to its grievous denouement.

And how will we appraise the "Death-mark'd Love" (Prologue.9) of these beautiful and pitiable youths? If we have attended to what we have seen and heard, our sentiments will echo the humility and compassion implicit in a sixteenth-century cleric's prayer of thanksgiving. As he witnessed a small company of wrongdoers being carted off to their dooms, he said "But for the grace of God, there goes John Bradford."[21]

NOTES

1. I realize, of course, that "What happens in *Romeo and Juliet*" varies each time the tragedy is performed; this was no less true of productions in the playwright's own lifetime than of those that have occurred in "After-hours" (II.vi.2). For a provocative discussion of the impossibility—if not indeed the undesirability—of "definitive" realizations of a dramatic script, see Jonathan Miller's *Subsequent Performances* (New York: Viking, 1986). For a thoughtful application of Miller's principles to recent interpretations of Shakespeare's most famous love-drama, see Barbara Hodgdon's "Absent Bodies, Present Voices: Performance Work and the Close of Romeo and Juliet's Golden Story," in *Theatre Journal*, 41:3 (October 1989), 341–59.

2. I am acutely conscious of oversimplification when I refer to "the play" as if there were a single rendering of *Romeo and Juliet* (or of any of Shakespeare's works) that can answer to such a term. What a given person sees or hears on a particular occasion depends not only on the sensibility he or she brings to the encounter but also on what text of the drama is presented and how that text is treated by those who present it.

   In 1597 and 1599, respectively, two versions of *Romeo and Juliet* appeared in quarto printings. The later version is less crude and appears to be more directly related to an authorial manuscript than the earlier; it advertises itself as "Newly corrected, augmented, and amended," and (appropriately, in my view) it constitutes the control text for modern editions of the title. Because the Second Quarto is itself flawed in places, however, it too is usually "corrected, augmented, and amended" by modern editors, frequently with material spliced in from the comparatively corrupt First Quarto and less frequently with material drawn from the derivative later quartos—Q3 (1609), Q4 (undated but evidently issued around 1622), and Q5 (1637)—and from the 1623 First Folio (whose *Romeo and Juliet* appears to have been set from the Third Quarto). An inevitable consequence of the plethora of options afforded the post-Elizabethan editor, director, and commentator is that no two *Romeo and Juliet*s are exactly the same.

   In this article all quotations from the plays and poems are referenced to *The Guild Shakespeare* (New York: GuildAmerica Books, 1989–92), a 19-volume annotated edition I've recently completed for the Doubleday Book & Music Clubs.

3. For Shakespeare's own use of the terms "judicious" and "action," see *Hamlet*, III.ii.1–52.

4. I would underscore the word *might* in this sentence. We have very little information about how Elizabethan playgoers responded to Shakespeare's tragedies, and much of what we do have is subject to debate.

5. See *Aristotle's Poetics: A Translation and Commentary for Students of Literature* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), particularly pages 115–20. My thinking on catharsis in Shakespeare has also been richly informed by Hardison's "Three Types of Renaissance Catharsis" in *Renaissance Drama*, n.s. 2 (1969), 3–22, and by the writings of the late Virgil K. Whitaker, especially in *The Mirror Up to Nature* (San Marino: The Huntington Library, 1965), and Roy Battenhouse, above all in *Shakespearean Tragedy: Its Art and Its Christian Premises* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969).

6. The situation I describe here is the norm for Shakespearean comedy and romance, where catharsis ("dis-illusionment") must

occur in the central characters in order to bring about the resolution that constitutes a happy ending. I've written in more detail about the relationships between tragedy and comedy in "Ethical and Theological Questions in Shakespeare," an article in Volume II of *William Shakespeare: His World, His Work, His Influence*, edited by John F. Andrews (New York: Scribners, 1985). For further comment on the relationship between "disillusionment" and catharsis in Shakespearean tragedy, see the Editor's Introduction to Volume 4 (*Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*) of *The Guild Shakespeare*.

7. *Samson Agonistes*, line 1758.
8. *Hamlet*, V.ii.375. Among Shakespeare's tragedies, the only one that strikes me as approaching this kind of denouement is *King Lear*, where (depending on how the final moments of the play are staged) a long-suffering protagonist can be construed either as dying in despair or as departing from "this tough World" with a glimmer of faith and hope that promises to "redeem all Sorrows" (V.ii.311, 264). There are some who see *Hamlet* and *Antony and Cleopatra* as tragedies that also carry us to the verge of "divine comedy." I can find some basis for this reading of the Prince of Denmark's final moments, but up to the point where Hamlet and Laertes exchange forgiveness I see little reason to take at face value the allusions to Providence that are usually interpreted as indicating a "sweet Prince" with his heart in the right place. In *Antony and Cleopatra* I discern no textual warrant for the view that an audience is to be persuaded by the protagonists' grandiloquent assessments of themselves or by the "New Heaven, New Earth" they claim to win by disavowing the "dungy" clay kingdoms they cede at last to Caesar (I.i.17, 35). I discuss Milton's appropriation of tragic form in "'Dearly Bought Revenge': *Samson Agonistes*, *Hamlet*, and Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy," *Milton Studies*, 11 (1979), 81–108. For a fascinating new analysis of the different types of Christian tragedy, I recommend "Religious Patterning in Shakespeare's Major Tragedies" by Sherman H. Hawkins in *Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences* 50 (June 1991), 151–88.
9. See *Hamlet*, V.ii.375, and *King Lear*, V.iii.231–32.
10. The edition of *The Consolation of Philosophy* that I have used is the translation and commentary by Richard Green (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962).
11. Friar Lawrence invokes "Philosophy" in III.iii.55–56 of *Romeo and Juliet* when he explains to a desperate Romeo that he should welcome "Adversity's sweet Milk." Both here and later in the play (see V.v.65–83), the Friar calls attention to Lady Philosophy's

teaching that "bad" fortune is actually better for us than what we incorrectly think of as good fortune. In *As You Like It*, II.i.1–17, Duke Senior sounds a Boethian note when he observes that "Sweet are the Uses of Adversity." And in *King Lear*, IV.i.19–21, Gloster speaks similarly when he says that "Full oft 'tis seen/Our Means secure us, and our mere Defects/Prove our Commodities."

12. I am indebted to the translation and commentary by D. W. Robertson, Jr. (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1958). Robertson also discusses *On Christian Doctrine* extensively in *A Preface to Chaucer* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962).
13. For a more detailed exposition of the relationship between astrology and medieval and Renaissance psychology, see Walter Clyde Curry's "Destiny in *Troilus and Criseyde*" in *Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1926). Also see John W. Draper, "Shakespeare's Star-Crossed Lovers," *Review of English Studies* 15 (1939), 16–34; Douglas L. Peterson, "Romeo and Juliet and the Art of Moral Navigation," pp. 33–46 in *Pacific Coast Studies in Shakespeare*, edited by Waldo F. McNeir and Thelma N. Greenfield (Eugene: University of Oregon Books, 1966), and James L. Calderwood, "*Romeo and Juliet*: A Formal Dwelling," in *Shakespearean Metadrama* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971).
14. Romeo's surname in all the original texts is spelled "Mountague." Given Shakespeare's wordplay on "ague" (fever) in "Sir Andrew Ague-cheek" (as the name of the foolish suitor is rendered in the First Folio text of *Twelfth Night*), it seems reasonable to assume that the playwright was fully aware of the symbolic potential in "Mount-ague." See *Love's Labor's Lost*, IV.i.1–4, for related play on "Mounting," and compare the aptness of such additional Shakespearean names as *Launcelet* ("small lance") in *The Merchant of Venice* and *Fortinbrasse* (a rendering of the French *Fortinbras*—"strong in arms"—that picks up on "Brazen" and "Mettle" when the name is introduced in I.i.65–102) in the Second Quarto of *Hamlet*. In V.iii.159 of *All's Well That Ends Well*, we learn that Diana, the maiden Bertram believes himself to have mounted, derives from "the ancient Capilet," an Italian family whose surname can be translated "small horse." What's in a name then? Quite a lot, particularly if we disregard modern editors' "corrections" of Shakespeare's spelling and retain the designations the playwright himself provided. See *The Guild Shakespeare*, Volume 16, page 468, for a note on "Doctor Buts" and other symbolic nomenclature in *Henry VIII*.
15. See James C. Bryant, "The Problematic Friar in *Romeo and Juliet*," *English Studies* 55 (1974), 340–50, for background that might have

been pertinent to an Elizabethan audience's perception of the Friar and his role in the events that lead to tragedy.

16. A. C. Bradley is seldom recalled nowadays, but one of the wisest and most memorable observations ever uttered about Shakespearean tragedy is his remark that "[i]n the circumstances where we see the hero placed, his tragic trait, which is also his greatness, is fatal to him." In my view, Romeo and Juliet illustrate both this and another of Bradley's generalizations about Shakespeare's tragic protagonists: "In almost all we observe a marked one-sidedness, a predisposition in some particular direction; a total incapacity, in certain circumstances, of resisting the force which draws in this direction; a fatal tendency to identify the whole being with one interest, object, passion, or habit of mind." See *Shakespearean Tragedy* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1904), pp. 26–27.
17. Here I retain the Second Quarto spelling *Stirrage*, which plays on *stir* (compare I.i.9, where Gregory observes that "To move is to stir") and reminds us that Romeo's "Steerage" will prove that "Love" can be considerably more "rough" (I.iv.27) than the jesting Mercutio suspects. Romeo's nautical imagery anticipates what he will say to Juliet in II.ii.83–85 ("I am no Pylat, yet wert thou as far/As that vast Shore wash'd with the farthest Sea,/I should adventure for such Marchandise") and what he will say just before he expires in V.iii.116–18. The *Pylat* spelling in II.ii.83 may be an authorial allusion to Pontius Pilate; if so, it casts an ironic light on the sacrificial imagery in Capulet's benediction at V.iii.304.
18. We sometimes forget that an excessive love of "Reputation" was regarded as a form of idolatry in the Renaissance. For a consideration of this theme in another Shakespearean love tragedy, see David L. Jeffrey and J. Patrick Grant's "Reputation in *Othello*" in *Shakespeare Studies* 6 (1970), 197–208. Meanwhile, for perceptive observations about the part gender plays in male codes of behavior, see Coppélia Kahn's "Coming of Age in Verona," in *Modern Language Studies* 8 (Spring 1978), 171–193; Marianne Novy's *Love's Argument* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); Edward Snow's "Language and Sexual Difference in *Romeo and Juliet*," in *Shakespeare's Rough Magic*, edited by Peter Erickson and Coppélia Kahn (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1985); and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).
19. In doing so, of course, he disregards the teaching Elizabethans would have been familiar with from the homily *Of Obedience* (1547) and the later homily *Against Disobedience and Willful Rebellion*

(1574), both of which drew on the Apostle Paul's Epistle to the Romans (12:17–13:7) to remind subjects that they should "Recompense to no man evil for evil," instead leaving to God and his ordained "powers that be" the judging and punishing of crimes. The popularity of revenge tragedy in the Elizabethan and Jacobean theater was an implicit acknowledgment that men who prized their honor (their self-respect and their social standing) frequently found it difficult, if not impossible, to submit themselves to passive, longsuffering forbearance, even though they recognized that the code duello was explicitly condemned by the Lord they claimed to worship (see the Sermon on the Mount, especially Matthew 5:38–44). For a fuller discussion of the ethical, social, and political tensions that resulted from this disparity between supposedly "masculine" and "feminine" approaches to the resolution of conflict, see Fredson Bowers' *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy, 1587–1642* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940) and Eleanor Prosser's *Hamlet and Revenge*, revised edition (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971).

20. See Book I, Canto ix, stanzas xxvii–liv. I owe this observation to Professor Joan Hartwig of the University of Kentucky, who shared it with me in 1971 when we were both teaching at Florida State University.
21. An earlier version of this essay, "The Catharsis of *Romeo and Juliet*," appeared in *Contributi dell'Istituto di Filologia Moderna* (Milan, 1974), pp. 142–75. I am grateful to the editor of that volume, Professor Sergio Rossi of the University of Turin, for permission to publish a revision of the original article. I also wish to acknowledge the degree to which my thinking about *Romeo and Juliet* has benefited from the writings of others not previously cited in these notes, among them Ralph Berry, *Romeo and Juliet*: The Sonnet-World of Verona," in *The Shakespearean Metaphor* (London: Macmillan, 1978); James Black, "The Visual Artistry of *Romeo and Juliet*," in *Studies in English Literature* 15 (1975), 245–56; Franklin M. Dickey, *Not Wisely But Too Well: Shakepeare's Love Tragedies* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1957); Harley Granville-Barker, *Prefaces to Shakespeare*, IV (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946); Jack J. Jorgens, "Franco Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet*," in *Shakespeare on Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977); Harry Levin, "Form and Formality in *Romeo and Juliet*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 11 (1960), 3–11; M. M. Mahood, *Shakespeare's Wordplay* (London: Methuen, 1957); Thomas E. Moisan, "Rhetoric and the Rehearsal of Death: The 'Lamentations' Scene in *Romeo and Juliet*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 34 (1983), 389–404; Norman Rabkin, "Eros and Death" in *Shakespeare and the Common Understanding* (New York: Free Press, 1967); Susan

Snyder, "*Romeo and Juliet*: Comedy into Tragedy," *Essays in Criticism* 20 (1970), 391–402; and Stanley Wells, "Juliet's Nurse: The Uses of Inconsequentiality," in *Shakespeare's Styles*, edited by Philip Edwards, Inga-Stina Ewbank, and G. K. Hunter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

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