

# 16th century story- romeo and juliet

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16th century was the golden period for English literature culminating from the age of Renaissance born from the deathbed of medieval scholasticism to whole new thoughts, ideas and culture. The human thoughts were free from the bondage of fixed principles of Aristotelian philosophy to the doctrines of Christianity. The period of Renaissance implied a perception of greater beauty and polish in the Greek and Latin Scholars. In other words, it was a birth of a kind of new inventiveness in classicism. The renaissance revived ancient classical learning into an arena of Dramatics. Play writers from liturgical play shifted to the miracle to morality and from the morality to the interlude and from their journey began to with the regular drama of Elizabethan age.

Play writers began to avoid classicist approach in favor of originality and secular ideas defying the old conventional ways. In this air of new thoughts and ideologies and certain social obstructions plaguing the theater world, there was born William Shakespeare, a new soul to whom Ben Johnson a worthy rival and harsh critic gave his glowing tribute with these words:

“ Soul of the age!

Applause! Delight! the wonder of our stage !

Triumph, my Britain! Thou hast one to show,

To whom all scenes of Europe homage owe.

He was not of an age, but for all the time. (Payne & Hunter 2003)

Shakespeare genius operated in his capacity to capture the length and breath of human life's and character in all its complexity and variety and has touched every element of human experience and every segment of human

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sensibility. Within his plays are interlaced the stories in all his variegated form whether it was passion of Othello or agonized sense and spirited Hamlet or the tortured souls of romantic couple Romeo and Juliet. Story of Romeo and Juliet breathes within the heart and soul of lovers for many generations ahead and is admired and loved by very one.

It was Romeo & Juliet that has made Shakespeare realized his full potential as play writer, and he could have been 26 years old then and made him stand apart than the rest of his contemporaries. It was written around 1595 when the major tremor struck London in 1540, and he mentioned this episode through the voice of Nurse in Act 11, scene 3, line 23. (Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation 1996)

Romeo and Juliet should not be visualized as only a tragic love story but deep within lies prejudices of tradition and practices that was the hallmark of the society 16th century. Society demanded women and men, both to adhere to family honor by following the tradition of families even if it was at the cost of bloodshed and the end of love. It is a story of love that flourished even though there was a strong rivalry between two families reaching to the extent of killings.

Montagues and the Capulets are enemies, always ready to take revenge on each other, entangling themselves in bloody feud on the streets of Verona. Each time one member of a family is killed, his relatives will be eager to sort revenge by taking blood of the other and if any one found Romeo meeting Juliet, he is sure to get killed. In this environment of deep hatred and bloodshed, Shakespeare gave a very fervent place to love. Lovers enjoy each others company and bestow their affection for each other, and say all what

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lovers would love to say to each other. Till today, lovers take the example of love of Romeo and Juliet.

It is better to die rather than live without their love, is an essence that spreads through Romeo Juliet and within all of us. They both meet strangely and it is misunderstanding that kills them both. It was the love at first sight and it is to the Shakespeare genius that he told to all the lovers the fact that love at first sight could culminate in true love.

The story start with these lines:

“ Two households, both alike in dignity,  
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,  
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,  
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean” (Act I, Prologue)

And amidst all the confusions and in an effort to meet, both Romeo and Juliet die. Their death was the beginning of new rays of hope for the peace. Both died but it was the love finally that won. The play culminates with the words:

“ For never was a story of more woe (sorrow)  
Than this of Juliet and her Romeo”. (Act V, Scene III)

Romeo and Juliet have all the elements that could make it a good story. It has a plot, climax, accurate settings, characters, symbolism and theme that have made it one of the masterpieces. Amidst this, Shakespeare has knitted very beautifully elements of both distressing scenes but along with that humor, bloody battles and civil enmity, and naive love and unapprised hate formed the part of this play. The setting of Romeo and Juliet took place in the cities of Verona and Mantua, Italy, within a p of four days. Majority of the

action took place at Verona except the scene Act V, scene 1 which occurred in Mantua.

The settings reveal the social life with certain political nuances. Verona became a battlefield due to bloody revenges between Capulet and Montague families and it was a place where Romeo and Juliet were told that they should hate each other owing to their genre. Romeo and Juliet shower their love for each other at the fruitful Capulet orchard at Verona, whereas at Mantua, Romeo is exiled after he kills Tybalt. The lovers took their lives too at the Capulet tomb.

Weather also plays a most crucial aspect to settings. It is a month of July when major incidents happen. The July is a hot season good enough to escalate the tempers of every one. Temper of characters rises high quite often even at the slightest pretext and ends only after bloody revenge. Romeo in whose heart there is an ardent love for Juliet; he too takes revenge on Tybalt and is banished. In the end, without any second thought thinking Juliet is dead, he kills himself. The hot weather is also a sign of igniting the sexual and love passion between Romeo and Juliet.

The play starts with a prologue, as was the general tendency among play writers of that era, which is followed by the sequence of events covered in five acts. Unlike other Shakespearean plays, there is a single plot, which is enacted onstage and is in chronological order. There are no flashbacks and the focus is shown on Romeo throughout the play. The structure of plot is very well developed with exposition, climax, rising and falling action, denouement and symbolism. The climax arises at several points in the story.

In one of them, it reaches the point when Juliet takes a drink pretending to be dead and Romeo did not receive the correct letter.

Shakespeare uses less of symbolism yet it is a very important part of the play. Light and Dark images reflects the intensity of love that is sparking between Romeo and Juliet and their glory of happiness when they are together and sadness when separated. The light and dark images are the symbolic of devilish yet powerful forces bringing them together and also separating them. Darkness brings Romeo and Juliet together whereas light separates them, but darkness again prevails when Romeo dies. In other words, world is not stable but is a constantly changing.

There is always a light after day and day after light. The other symbols are swords representing violent attitude and poison which is not basically evil as it was given to Juliet by Friar Lawrence to make her appear dead. But the irony of the fact is that this potion became a cause of the death. Thus it adopts dual purpose. It became a cause of death but rejoined the two bitter enemies. Another symbol thumb biting by the buffoonish Samson is not a very important symbol but shows the incoherent pride and vulgar display of power.

Romeo and Juliet's characters breath life but not much effort is given to character development. Unlike Macbeth, it is a plot that has generated much interest. The more emphasis is give to the character of Romeo who looses temper very soon. He is just a teen whose love at first sight changes the whole scenario and life of both the families.

Shakespeare is world's greatest play writer and all these elements are so well structured together that they make us realize emotions and appeals of lovebirds within our souls. Society crushed their love by their intriguing patterns and traditional approach, yet from the play, also emerges that eventually in the end it is the love only that always blossoms.

Romeo and Juliet is a true reflection of society of 15-16th century. Royal families' pride and their sense of revenge take their and their relatives and even their children on the bed of blood. But this is not an end though Romeo and Juliet died yet they are there within all of us inspiring in us the true love.

With poetic diction and eloquent words, Shakespeare challenges the old traditional ways to give fresh lease of life. It is an end of Romeo and Juliet but a beginning for many more Romeo and Juliet's in this world.

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