

Analyse the prologue
as a summary of the
events and themes of
the play as a whole...

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Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet' is about two teenage lovers who, despite the ongoing feud between their families, fall in love and get married. However, their lives come to a tragic end, as they die as a consequence of their undying love for one another which results in the peace of their families. This play is similar to a classical tragedy as it has a death at the end as Romeo and Juliet both take their lives.

It also has 5 acts and even though it is not in the actual space and time, it is very limited. A chorus is also present but it doesn't comment throughout. Therefore, the purpose of a prologue in a Classical tragedy is to set the scene and set out the plot and major themes to prepare the audience so they can follow the play. The prologue in 'Romeo and Juliet' is very similar to the prologue of a classical tragedy as they both deal with the topics which are usually associated with tragedy such as death and fate. However, the prologue in this play is shorter and the structure is a lot stronger. As a result, the similarities give us the impression that the play will contain features such as the role of fate which is shown by the use of "two star crossed lovers", death, "children's' end" and the presence of noble families, "two households both alike in dignity" because all of these features of part of a classical tragedy.

In the prologue, the audience is told "where we lay our scene". As well as this, the audience is told that the play is about the children of "two households" who are enemies. They are then informed that the children fall in love and through fate and "a death marked love", they travel down a "fearful passage" to their deaths. The purpose of being told this is because it would have a good reaction from the audience as, at the time, people of all

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classes and areas of society had to be catered for and the prologue includes just enough information to make the main plot understandable to everyone without giving too much away. We are not, however, told the details of the feud of the families or the names of Romeo and Juliet. There are also no details of the deaths of Mercutio, Paris and Tybalt and Juliet's 'fake death' and there is no further information about Juliet and Paris' arranged marriage.

We are not told this information so that we remain interested, it is also conventional not to tell the whole story and there is not enough space or time. Many of the play's key themes are covered in the prologue. A major theme of the play is death and violence. The language used like "strife", "children's end" and "parents rage" gives the audience a clear image that the play is going to focus on scenes of violence, death and misery. Also, love plays a huge role. Words and phrases such as "lovers" and "death-marked love" make the audience picture a romance between two characters in the play, which happen to be Romeo and Juliet.

Another main theme is fate. This can be shown by "star-crossed lovers". This has a double meaning. It means that the paths of the lover's stars have crossed which means that it is fate bringing them together and also that it is the lovers' dream to be together and love each other and die in each other's arms. These themes contribute to the atmosphere by creating a mood of misadventure and mystery. The audience aren't told the exact plot of the story but it creates an exciting mood and makes the audience want to continue with the play.

The prologue is in the form of a sonnet and in iambic pentameter. It gives an idea that the play is going to be about love as sonnets are usually written about love. Shakespeare's sonnet is different from a traditional sonnet in that the form of Shakespeare's sonnet is ' ABABCDCDEFEGG' and the traditional is ' ABABCDCDEFGEFG'. This is different from the original Petrarchan sonnet. The response of the audience at the time would have been that they established the plot and also would find the link between this prologue and a classical tragedy.

The prologue uses a lot of poetic devices. Such as, in line 5 " from forth the fatal loins of these two foes" this is alliteration and imagery and it shows it will be a violent, deadly play but also their love is made of fate and their love and deaths were marked before they even met. It also uses alliteration in that line for effect. Line 9 also creates imagery as it says " the fearful passage of their death-marked love". This is showing that there will be a long and unhappy adventure to, eventually, the death of the lovers.

The prologue contrasts with Act 1, Scene 1, in a number of ways. For example, the prologue is formal. It is very dignified and stately whereas, act 1, scene 1, is informal, casual and unconstrained. Also, the prologue is very serious, sober and humourless but Act1, Scene 1, is partly light-hearted and up-beat. The tempo of the prologue is slow paced, lazy and leisurely which is different to that of Act 1, Scene 1 as it is rapid and hectic. It could also be described as agitated and frantic.

The intended effect of this contrast is to hit the audience face on with the fast, hectic style of Act 1, Scene 1 after a laid back introduction. This is to

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keep the audience interested and gets them ready for the changes in themes and moods throughout the play. Therefore, the prologue is effective as an opening as it gives the audience a good start and it explains the play without boring them as it is full of information but on a range of subjects to keep attention and as it sets out all of the main themes and scenes of the play, it is helpful and informative.