

Romeo and juliet

Literature



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In Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the character Friar Laurence had the greatest influence on the tragic outcome of the play. Friar Lawrence was a trusted holy man whose judgment was held in the highest reverence by Romeo and Juliet. However, he failed to provide a wise solution to their dilemma. Romeo and Juliet's demise was the product of the Friar's predisposition to act in haste, his irresponsibility and his fear of being disgraced.

The Friar's first shortcoming that contributed to the tragic result is the way he commits to impulsive and rash decisions. For example, when Romeo tells the Friar of his new love for Juliet, the Friar tells Romeo that he is acting too hastily and not thinking about the consequences, " ... they stumble that run fast." (II. III. 94). However, despite his advice to Romeo of thinking before acting, he decides to marry them in hope that this will end the family feud, even though he knows that the secret wedlock can only further infuriate the two families. This is evident when the Friar says:

"... I'll thy assistant be,

for this alliance may so happy prove

to turn your households' rancor to pure love"

(II, III, I. 90-93).

Both Romeo and Juliet respected Friar Laurence's decisions, and although he preaches the value of patience, his own impetuous conclusions is the first way he led Romeo and Juliet to catastrophe.

Friar Laurence's second inadequacy that had a negative impact on the play is his irresponsibility. Although he should be the figure of dependability, the Friar is the one whose plan is the least dependable. Instead of thinking of a way to diplomatically arrive on a mutually satisfying agreement between the Capulet and Montague houses, he devises an outrageous plan that has almost no chance of success. He gives Juliet a potion to make her appear dead, and although Juliet knows this plan carries a huge risk, she is so distraught by Romeo's banishment that she is willing to try anything. She even goes as far as questioning the Friar's motives:

" What if it be a poison, which the friar,
Subtly hath minister'd to have me dead,
Lest in marriage he should be dishonour'd,
Because he married me before to Romeo?
I fear it is..."

(IV. III. 24-28)

Instead of avoiding senseless plans, the Friar not only generates a plan which is doomed to fail, but does not even responsibly administer the plan. He sends Friar John to send the letter to Romeo that explains the plan. He had not made it clear to Friar John how important the delivery was, since the messenger became quarantined in a house due to suspicions of being infected with disease. Friar Laurence should have been responsible enough

to deliver the letter himself, and this is the second way in which he negatively affects the outcome of the play.

The final way in which Friar Laurence unconstructively influenced the play is his fear of sin and getting in trouble. In the tomb, Juliet woke up and found Romeo's dead body beside her. Friar Laurence had been late to wake up Juliet and when he realized what happened, he directed Juliet to escape with him:

" Stay not to question, for the watch is coming.

Come, go, good Juliet. I dare no longer stay."

(V, III, I. 158-159)

He then cowardly ran out of the tomb because of his fear of being caught by the Prince and his men. He left the shocked Juliet alone and he knew she was willing to kill herself over Romeo's death. Later on, when Juliet killed herself and the Capulets and Montagues wanted an explanation, he admitted that he was at fault:

" Miscarried by my fault, let my old life be sacrificed....

Unto the rigor of severest law."

(V. III. 267-269)

This fear of being caught is the third way that Friar Laurence has negatively affected the play.

In conclusion, Friar Laurence was important because he holds the greatest blame for the tragic events in the play. He did this because of his hasty decision-making, his irresponsibility and his uncertainty for his safety. The outcome of the play might have been happier if someone else directed Romeo and Juliet's actions. He does have the best intentions for Romeo and Juliet, and it is ironic how his best intentions cause the greatest tribulations for the two lovers. If the Friar had acted the way he had preached to Romeo, he would be a hero. As he had described the misapplied virtue of the herbs in the garden, the same applies to him: " Virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied". (II. III. 21)