

Romeo
and
 *Juliet*

William Shakespeare

*"Soul of mine, lily in the shadows."
— Juan Ramon Jimenez*

The Big Questions

Universal • Etiological • Numinous

Who or what is responsible for the deaths of Romeo and Juliet?

What effect does timing have on the play?

What does the Prince mean by "all are punished"?

► Romeo and Juliet is About ◀

the impetuosity of youth
bad luck
an irresponsible Friar
what happens when children disobey their parents
the beauty of true love
the problems the younger generation inherit from the older generation
a bad postal system
lust overcoming common sense
the lunacy of old age

► This Is One of the World's Most Haunting Stories About ◀

love and hate
life and death
young and old
mothers and fathers
sons and daughters
the masculine and the feminine
the warring and the peaceful
the sacred and the profane
bullies and clowns
beauty and the beast
light and dark
day and night
nature and culture
enemies
opposition
duels
dualism
divided vision

► This Is a Play of Opposites and Conflict ◀

O serpent heart, hid with a flow'ring face!
Did ever such a dragon keep so fair a cave?
Beautiful tyrant! Fiend angelical!
Dove-feathered raven! Wolvish-ravening lamb!
Despised substance of divinest show!
Just opposite to what thou justly seem'st –
A damned saint, an honorable villain! (3:2:73-79)

Shakespeare based this tragedy on a very old, popularized Italian love story most recently expressed at his time by Arthur Brooke in his long poem, "*The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet.*"

► He set it in 13th to 15th century Italy – land of ◀
the Renaissance
cultural, intellectual and artistic rebirth
the center of it all – beautiful Florence
Dante
Petrarch
Boccaccio
Giotto
Masaccio
Botticelli
Leonardo da Vinci
Raphael
Michelangelo
Titian

► and also – land of ◀
rival warring noble families
historically volatile city states
feuds
the stiletto/dagger
poison
the Medici
the Borgia
the popes
Machiavelli

▶ Shakespeare lived and worked during the Elizabethan Era ◀

▶ England's Renaissance was a time of ◀

Marlowe

Raleigh

Donne

Spencer

the great bard himself

▶ and also – a time of ◀

primogeniture

divorce

division

regicide

civil war

when Elizabeth the Queen reigned 45 years (1558-1603)

having killed/beheaded Mary Stuart/Stewart Queen of Scots
who was **Catholic**

unlike Elizabeth who was **Protestant**

like her father, King Henry VIII

who broke with the Pope/**Catholic** Church

and founded the Church of England/Anglican Church/
Protestant

so he could remarry at will (he had six wives) without the
Catholic Pope's consent

so he could have sons (he only had one, Edward, sickly, who
died at sixteen)

one of the biggest outcomes of all this being division, and a
series of civil wars in England that pitted **Protestant v.**
Catholic

still being fought in Northern Ireland today

- ▶ This Is a Play of Opposing Forces and Contrasts ◀
- ▶ Expressed Through **Imagery** and **Dramatic Foil** ◀

▶ **Imagery and Contrast** ◀

... O brawling love, O loving hate,
O anything of nothing first created!
O heavy lightness, serious vanity,
Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms
Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health...
(1:1:177-181)

...It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
As a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear –
(1:5:47-48)

She speaks.

O speak again, bright angel, for thou art
As glorious to this night, being o'er my head...
(2:2:26-27)

The earth that's nature's mother is her tomb.
What is her burying grave, that is her womb...
(2:3:9-10)

...the sweetest honey is loathsome
in its own deliciousness...
(2:6:11-12)

... Romeo; come, thou day in night;
For thou wilt lie upon the wings of night
Whiter than new snow upon a raven's back.
(3:2:17-19)

... Wilt thou be gone? It is not yet new day.
It was the nightingale, and not the lark,
that pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear.
Nightly she sings on yond pomegranate tree.
Believe me love, it was the nightingale.
(3:5:1-5)

...Beauty's ensign yet
Is crimson in thy lips and in thy cheeks,
And death's pale flag is not advanced there.
(5:3:94-96)

► **Dramatic Foil and Contrast** ◄

The **dramatic foil** is a character who contrasts vividly with and is juxtaposed to another character to bring out or emphasize the other character's traits.

Benvolio to Romeo

good-humored, patient and consistently good willed

v.

moody, emotional, impulsive

Benvolio to Tybalt

good-humored, patient and consistently good willed

v.

aggressive, angry, hot-headed, fiery, bully

Mercutio to Tybalt

the mouth that can't stop and the mask of the comedian

v.

the 'fist' that can't stop and the mask of the macho-man

Paris to Romeo

predictable, stable, secure, conventional

v.

spontaneous, romantic, impulsive, emotional

► **This Is a Play of Tension, Emotion and Suspense** ◄

► **Expressed Through Dramatic Irony** ◄

When Romeo and Juliet meet for the first time, they don't know they come from the two feuding families. You do.

When Juliet spills her heart on the balcony, she doesn't know Romeo is listening. You do.

When Tybalt fights Romeo, Tybalt doesn't know he's fighting his new in-law cousin. You do.

When Juliet talks to her mother in double entendres about Tybalt's death, Lady Capulet doesn't know Juliet is torn between her love and loyalty to her new husband and her loyalty to her dead cousin. You do.

When Lord Capulet prepares to feast at Juliet's wedding with Paris, the good lord doesn't know Juliet intends to be out cold, imitating death. You do.

When Romeo finds out from the servant boy Balthasar that Juliet is 'dead,' he doesn't know that it's a big ruse. You do.

When Romeo kills Paris over Juliet's 'dead' body, and then kills himself, he doesn't know she is about to wake up from her drugged sleep. You do.

► Final Thoughts ◀

Juliet is the moon
 the sun
 the stars
 the morning dew
 the first morning flower
 the bright angel

She is also her father's 'earth'
 his possession

Romeo is in constant motion
 steered or guided
 by a series of 'pilot' metaphors

Ultimately, who or what guides the lovers?

Their tragic flaw? Fate? Society's expectations?



A Tragedy

is a work of literature, especially a play, that results in a disaster/great misfortune or catastrophe for the main character. In ancient Greek drama and in Shakespeare's tragedies, the main character is a significant person, king or hero, and the cause of the tragedy is

A Tragic Flaw

or weakness in his/her character that sets up the hero/heroine for their fall.

Fate

plays a hand too. The purpose of the tragedy is to arouse feelings of pity and fear in the audience that they rise above; to convey a sense of the nobility of the human spirit because the spirit triumphs despite great misfortune.

*Note

In modern drama, the main character can be ordinary, and the cause of the tragedy can be some evil in society itself, society and social ills being more powerful than the individual and his/her nobility of spirit. This leads directly to the *anti-hero*, the *rebel* and the *rebel without a cause*.



A Comedy

is a work of literature, especially a play that has a happy ending, and is usually humorous and also reveals a **flaw** in the character or in the society.

What is the lovers' tragic flaw?

What is more powerful to the making of their undoing –
their tragic flaw

or

fate?