

ROMEO AND JULIET AS A TRAGEDY OF
FATE AND CHARACTER

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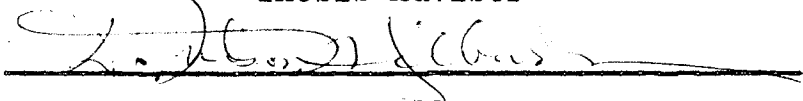
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PREFACE

My young heart is always fascinated by the idea of the young love crushed between the giant wheels of love and hatred. Romeo and Juliet is a tragedy of young love. Shakespeare has written great tragedies. His tragedies present a study in contrast with great Greek tragedies, wherein fate is responsible for the tragic end of the protagonists. Romeo and Juliet is a tragedy which is a fusion of Greek tragedy and Shakespearean tragedy. My purpose is to show whether Romeo and Juliet is a tragedy of fate, or character, or both.

In my thesis I have studied the setting, the characters of Romeo and Juliet, and the action in Romeo and Juliet. I have examined the prologue, the passages which indicate that the tragedy is predestined. My thorough study of the characters of Romeo and Juliet shows that the tragedy is in part the consequence of various flaws in these characters themselves.

In presenting a new outlook on the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet, I have not intended to contradict or discount all other viewpoints in the field. But so far as my research goes, very few critics have attempted to show that Romeo and Juliet is a tragedy of fate and character.

I want to acknowledge my thanks to Dr. David S. Berke-

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Romeo and Juliet in tendency is a transitional play between the sunny comedies and dark tragedies. It is an attractive but immature play on the theme of young love. In the opinion of Dowden it is the work of the artist's adolescence. My attempt in this thesis is to show who or what is responsible for the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet. There are three schools taking three different viewpoints concerning the tragic end of the play. One school, notably including Granville-Barker, Ludwig Tieck, and others, believes that Romeo's impetuosity and too great haste is responsible for the tragic end of the play. Another school, including prominent critics of Shakespeare, namely H. B. Charlton, Dover Wilson, and J. W. Draper, believes that fate is responsible for the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet. The protagonists of the third school, namely G. Thomas Tanselle, Donald A. Stauffer, and Oscar J. Campbell, believe that it is a tragedy of fate and character both. I agree with the fundamental tenets of the third school.

In the following pages I shall set forth the rationales of various critics and try to suggest the strengths and weaknesses of each characteristic position, and I shall sup-

port the stand that I have taken.

Mr. Granville-Barker, who belongs to the first school of critics, states in his book titled Prefaces to Shakespeare:

. . . it is Romeo's haste--of a piece with the rest of his rashness--which precipitates the final tragedy. Shakespeare has provided, in the speech to dead Juliet, just enough delay to stimulate suspense, but it must appear only as the last convulsive checking of a headlong purpose. He had added a last touch of bitter irony in letting Romeo guess at the truth that would have saved him and her and never guess that he guesses it.¹

Likewise, Ludwig Tieck in his book titled Dramaturgische Blätter notes:

The tragedy has been sometimes criticised in that its denouement is brought about by a trifling accident. It is only a seeming accident; the tragic fate lies in the character of Juliet, and especially of Romeo. Had he been calmer, more cautious, less familiar with the idea of suicide, he would not have been Romeo; he ought to have investigated the matter, taken pains to inform himself, visited the Friar, and there would have been no tragedy.²

Granville-Barker, Ludwig Tieck, and other supporters of these views do not take into account the element of feuding, various references to fate by various characters in the play, premonitions of Romeo and Juliet, all of which contribute a great deal in making Romeo and Juliet a tragedy. What explanation do these critics give of the unfortunate events that take place during the later half of the play?

There is another school of critics who regard Romeo and Juliet as a tragedy of fate. We encounter the fact that each critic emphasizes a particular element of fate. Fate in itself includes feuding, premonitions, dreams, and

the element of mere accident.

Mr. Kenneth Muir in his article titled "Shakespeare and the Tragic Pattern"³ compares the lovers to the unlucky protagonists of the novels by Thomas Hardy. Hardy believes in a Supreme Power which is indifferent to human affairs; in The Dynasts Hardy calls it by the name of Immanent Will. The remarks on the injustice of the gods are more pronounced in Tess of the D'Urbervilles than in the earlier novels. They reach their climax in Clare's cry of anguish: "God's not in his heaven: all's wrong with the world." Man's struggle in this novel, as in The Mayor of Casterbridge, is not against man, who is inevitably not villainous in Hardy, but against the inscrutable forces of Fate that contrive their own way to reduce human possibilities of amelioration to a minimum. As in Romeo and Juliet there are omens which become a reality in Tess of the D'Urbervilles: Clare's omission to dance with Tess, foreboding ill-matched marriage; the afternoon cock-crow following their marriage, portending separation; and so on.

Drs. Ulrici, Röttscher, and Vehse believe feuding to be the cause of the tragedy. Dr. Hermann Ulrici in his book titled Shakespeare's Dramatic Art observes:

It is no mere accident that Tybalt kills Mercutio and falls himself by the hand of Romeo, but the inevitable consequence of the reigning feud.⁴

Dr. Heinrich Theodor Röttscher states:

To be the representatives of the bitter, inappeasable hatred of the two houses is the Até of the lovers; it is the tragic basis on which all the woe is founded as by a necessity of nature, although

disguised as free-will. Thus we see the truth of the ancient Até in all her destructive significance reproduced the most modern in its pattern. . . .⁵

In the same way Dr. Edward Vehse in his book titled Shakespeare als Protestant Politiker Psycholog und Dichter remarks in flowery language:

This deadly feud between the Capulets and Montagues is the black soil from which the dazzling lily of Romeo's and Juliet's love blossoms forth, a love whose loyalty in death is depicted with all the ravishing power of poetry. . . . Their death was the result of that hatred, which, from time immemorial, had excited their families to inextinguishable hostility, and which was, for the first time, buried in their grave.⁶

However, Gustav Rümelin states in his book Shakespearestudien:

But as it is, the tragic result is brought about by a mere accident, in the shape of the silliest, and its execution the rashest of all devices.⁷

But Dr. Theodor Sträter observes in his book Die Komposition von Shakespeare's Romeo and Julia:

And as we hearken we seem to see the lofty portals of the world's fate unclosed, and to hear transfigured forms of beautified spirits chanting the eternal song of destiny.⁸

Lawrence Edward Bowling in his article "The Thematic Framework of Romeo and Juliet"⁹ stresses the complex, fatalist, and paradoxical aspect of life. Everybody did his best for the other characters but that best was the only worst possible for that particular character in the given circumstances. Hence we do not label anybody as the villain of the piece.

G. B. Harrison in his book titled Shakespeare's Tragedies¹⁰ observes that as there is too much stress on the

mere accident resulting in the disaster which makes Romeo and Juliet pathetic rather than tragic. It lacks the qualities of a deep tragedy.

However, H. B. Charlton in Shakespearian Tragedy notes:

Two features of the story are as follows: First, Verona was being torn by a terrible, bloodthirsty feud which no human endeavour had been able to settle; this was the direct cause of the death of the lovers, and but for the deaths it never would have been healed. Second, the course of the young lovers' lives is from the outset governed by a malignant destiny; fatal, star-crossed, death-marked, they are doomed to piteous destruction. . . .

The feud is to provide the sense of immediate, and Fate that of ultimate inevitability.¹¹

Charlton further observes that Shakespeare found the story of Brooke--primary source of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet--to be drenched in fatality. Shakespeare, unlike the narrative poet Brooke, depicts the feud in action. Again unlike Brooke he endows his characters with dramatic premonitions as a part of inconstancy of Fortune. Another source of omens in the play is presaging of dreams. Charlton remarks:

Fate was no longer a deity strong enough to carry the responsibility of a tragic universe; at most, it could intervene casually as pure luck and bad luck as a motive turns tragedy to mere chance. It takes entirely the ultimate tragic ἀνάγκη. It fails to provide the indispensable inevitability.¹²

Charlton, concluding, holds:

But as a pattern of the idea of tragedy, it is a failure. Even Shakespeare appears to have felt that as an experiment, it had disappointed him.¹³

E. K. Chambers remarks:

Love is a mighty power, but destiny is mightier still, and cruel. The conflict of these Titanic forces crushing the young lives between them, is the issue of the tragedy.

Dover Wilson in his prefatory notes to Romeo and Juliet observes:

* The lovers are the predestined victims of a malicious Fate. . . . Fate works against them by arranging that they are placed in a context of family hostility. It works against them by contriving a deadly series of accidents and coincidences. It works against them through character-flaws in friends and associates of theirs.¹⁴

Dover Wilson observes the passages indicating the impetuosity of Romeo and Juliet. He suggests that the expressions intimating rashness of Romeo and Juliet are not to be taken as anything more than momentary utterances of young, happy, and hopeful lovers. The Friar's utterances to this effect should be taken seriously as he is a prudent, worldly-wise man given to moralizing. Dover Wilson explains Romeo's rashness by saying that he is emotionally unbalanced when he gets the news of Juliet's death from his faithful servant Balthasar, whom he has no reason to disbelieve. Dover Wilson notes:

We do not say that there are no character-flaws in hero and heroine. On the contrary, there are, as we shall see later. But it is not part of the lovers that spectator or reader should regard their fate as directly caused, even partly, by their own character-flaws.¹⁵

Dover Wilson agrees with Professor Charlton when the latter observes that the theme of feuding is unconvincing because it is not a hindrance to Romeo in his love-affair with Rosaline. Dover Wilson even agrees with Professor Stauffer when Stauffer suggests that hero and heroine should not be held even partly responsible for their doom owing to any character-flaws. Dover Wilson observes:

To both criticisms [i.e., the criticisms of Charlton and Stauffer] the reply must be that Shakespeare's plays are liable only partly naturalistic, and that one should always be on one's guard against applying to them critical criteria which are irrelevant to them.¹⁶

J. W. Draper in his article titled "Shakespeare's Star-Crossed Lovers"¹⁷ classifies Romeo and Juliet as a tragedy of improbable coincidence, and hence to him it is not tragedy but melodrama.

Brooke calls his tale "a wofull chance," and Painter--Shakespeare's other possible source--ascribes the course of events to "False Fortune." In Romeo and Juliet references to fortune appear too late to explain the motivation of the plot. Draper further states:

Thus if Shakespeare meant what his characters seem to say, astral influence actually governs the lives of these "star-crossed lovers"; and like so many of Chaucer's figures they are the puppets of the stars and planets and of the days and times of day.¹⁸

Draper observes a close relationship between the nature of a particular character and the planet under which he is born.

He agrees with Gervinus and R. A. Law when they make a sharp contrast between Tybalt, Benvolio, and Mercutio.

Draper justifies the statement by saying:

The choleric Tybalt and Montague, all under the influence of Mars, the choleric Juliet under the influence of Venus, the phlegmatic Benvolio, the mercurial Mercutio and the Nurse, and the sanguine Romeo, now under the power of love-melancholy and now fury: all of these surely make of Romeo and Juliet an astrological tragedy of humours.¹⁹

Concluding, Draper infers:

Thus the theme of the play is not the evils of the civil faction as in Paynter [sic], or the wicked-

ness of "stolne contracts" as in Brooke, but rather, as in Greek Tragedy, the hopelessness of defying the heavens' will.²⁰

Though fate is one of the most important reasons for the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet, it is not the only explanation of Romeo and Juliet being a tragedy. The supporters of this school take a one-sided view of the play. They completely ignore the impetuosity of Romeo and Juliet which contributes to the tragic end of the play.

There is a third group of critics who believe that Romeo and Juliet is a tragedy of both character and destiny.

G. Thomas Tanselle in his article "Time in Romeo and Juliet"²¹ emphasizes the control by fate, and the ruin by impetuous haste.

Donald A. Stauffer in his book titled Shakespeare's World of Images²² classifies Romeo as a fickle man. His calf-love for Rosaline teaches him to express deep feelings for Juliet. The age-old thirst of feuding between Montagues and Capulets is quenched by the bloodshed of two young innocent victims. Reconciliation between the rival families is brought about with a heavy loss by both the parties. At the end, love proves triumphant over hate. It is not the world of love that is destroyed but the old world of enmity and conflict between the two families that is destroyed.

Stauffer notes:

Insofar as this play is a tragedy of fate-- and Shakespeare sets up dozens of signposts pointing toward the foregone moral conclusion--all accidents and events work toward the final sacrifice. Romeo and Juliet are puppets, since the moral punishment of the raging clans becomes more powerful

in proportion to the innocence and helplessness of the sacrifices.²³

Stauffer continues:

The causes of tragedy lie in the sufferers themselves. The doctrines of individual responsibility and of fate as a social Nemesis offer divergent motivations: this play may fail as serious tragedy because Shakespeare blurs the focus and never makes up his mind entirely as to who is being punished and for what reason. Later he learned to carry differing hypotheses simultaneously, to suggest complex contradictory interactions convincingly; but that is not the effect of the double moral motivations in Romeo and Juliet.²⁴

Oscar J. Campbell in his book titled The Living Shakespeare takes a wider view of feuding. He observes some of the incidents as the working of fatal chance. He compares Romeo with Marlowe's characters in demanding the immediate attainment of his heart's desire. He supports his thesis by remarking:

Fate and chance play some part in precipitating it, but neither is the principal villain. More potent agents of destruction are the evil impulses which control the life of Verona, the world in which the lovers must live. . . .

But the play is also partly a tragedy of character. Romeo is a slave of passion.²⁵

Campbell concludes his thesis thus:

The play therefore is made up of three conventional agents of tragedy, Fate, evil in the society, and passion in the individual. It is Shakespeare's achievement to have endowed each one of these traditional elements with a new human urgency. At the meeting place of these forces big with tragedy he has placed the young lovers.²⁶

I agree with the third school of critics: Romeo and Juliet is a tragedy both of fate and character. Neither the view that Romeo and Juliet is a tragedy of fate nor the view that it is a tragedy of character fully explains the

tragedy of Romeo and Juliet. But the contradiction is only apparent, and it is not difficult to reconcile these mutually contradictory, though complementary, views of Romeo and Juliet as a tragedy. We know for certain that Romeo and Juliet is a tragedy; but we do not know how far Romeo, Juliet, Fate, their stars, feuds or their haste is responsible for their tragic end. The fact is that the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet cannot be ascribed to any single cause: it is the result of many forces working together in a fatal manner.

The following chapters demonstrate the role of personal responsibility and the role of fate in Romeo and Juliet.

NOTES

- ¹(Princeton, 1947), II, 342.
- ²Tr. H. H. Furness Jr. Variorum ed. Romeo and Juliet (New York, 1963), p. 449. Hereafter this work is briefly presented in notes as "Var."
- ³Proceedings of the British Academy XLIV (1958), 145-162.
- ⁴Tr. A. J. W. M. (London, 1846), quoted in Var., p. 452.
- ⁵"Romeo and Juliet analysed with Especial Reference to the art of Dramatic Representations," Philosophie der Kunst, (Berlin, 1842), IV, quoted in Var., p. 453.
- ⁶(Hamburg, 1851), quoted in Var., p. 457.
- ⁷(Stuttgart, 1866), quoted in Var., p. 466.
- ⁸(Bonn, 1861), VIII, 104, quoted in Var., p. 464.
- ⁹PMLA, LXIV, (1949), 208-220.
- ¹⁰(London, 1950), p. 52.
- ¹¹(Cambridge, 1948), p. 52.
- ¹²*Ibid.*, p. 61.
- ¹³*Ibid.*
- ¹⁴Dover Wilson, ed., Romeo and Juliet (Cambridge, 1961), p. xvii.
- ¹⁵*Ibid.*
- ¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. xxviii.
- ¹⁷RES, XV (1939), 16-34.
- ¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 19.
- ¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 30.
- ²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 34.
- ²¹SQ, XV, (1964), 349-361.
- ²²(New York, 1949).

²³Ibid., p. 55.

²⁴Ibid., p. 56.

²⁵(New York, 1958), p. 313.

²⁶Ibid.

CHAPTER II

THE ROLE OF PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY IN ROMEO AND JULIET

In this chapter I shall discuss the role of personal responsibility in Romeo and Juliet. How far are the hero and heroine themselves responsible in bringing about their tragic end? I shall review Bradley's idea of a Shakespearian tragedy, hamartia, impetuosity in Juliet, impetuosity in Romeo, Romeo as a tragic hero, and some qualifications and reservations on Romeo and Juliet as a tragedy of character.

A. C. Bradley derived his views on Shakespearian tragedy from his study of four great tragedies, namely Othello, Hamlet, King Lear, and Macbeth. According to him Shakespearian tragedy is to some extent a tragedy of character. Character is destiny. The fault lies not always in the stars of the hero or heroine, but in themselves also. Fate presents a problem which alone is difficult for the hero at a time when he is least fitted to handle it. This means that had ~~there~~ been any other problem or the same problem at any other time, the hero would have been able to handle it successfully. This also implies that any other hero would have solved the problem easily. If delay proved

dangerous for Hamlet, exactly the opposite of delay--haste--proved Romeo's undoing.

This idea of a tragic flaw in the tragic protagonist comes from the Greek word ἁμαρτία--hamartia, which means missing of the mark. It was used in a sense of throwing a dart and then missing the target. In the New Testament the word is used to mean sin. This way quite an ordinary, everyday term assumed a literary significance. Aristotle defines the term in his discussion concerning the importance of the plot in a play. He says:


The change of fortune should be not from bad to good, but reversely from good to bad. It should come about as the result not of vice, but some error or frailty [ἁμαρτίαν] in a character.¹

There were many dramatists before Shakespeare whose tragedies are hamartia-marked. Marlowe is a case in point. Tamburlaine's tragic flaw is libido dominandi, meaning excessive striving for domination, especially political domination. Faustus's tragic flaw is libido sciendi, which means striving after forbidden or excessive knowledge. Barabas's tragic flaw is a peculiar form of libido dominandi in a sense of monetary domination. But his tragic flaw may better be summed up in one word -- Machiavellianism. The tragic flaw of Edward II is libido sentiendi,² which means a taste for various perverted and forbidden sensations.

Shakespeare's great tragedies, namely Othello, Hamlet, King Lear, and Macbeth, are hamartia-based. Othello is a tragedy of jealousy; Hamlet is widely accounted as a tragedy of indecision; King Lear is a tragedy of an old king

having a violent temper; and Macbeth is a tragedy of over-vaulting ambition. Antony and Cleopatra is a tragedy of divided mind, or sometimes it has been called a tragedy of a sensualist.

Romeo and Juliet, I believe, is a hamartia-based tragedy, a point which links it with the four great tragedies and Greek tragedies, and which dissociates it from pathetic tragedy. Pathetic tragedy is an inferior genre. It developed as a genre, specifically as "she-tragedy," during the Restoration period. John Banks, Nathaniel Lee, and Nicholas Rowe are the exponents of this type of tragedy toward the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century. Rowe gave it the expressive name "She-Tragedy." Vertue Betray'd or Anne Bullen by Banks and The Fair Penitent and The Tragedy of Jane Shore are examples of "she-tragedies." Unlike the great tragedies which deal with the fall of men and produce in us the emotions of pity and terror, these "she-tragedies" deal with women and have heroines whose distresses dominate the plays. They have, characteristically, a feminine tone of refined passivity; and these plays are full of cheap sentimentalism and pathos. Indeed the distinction between "she-tragedies" and sentimental comedies tends to get blurred. Unlike the heroines of "she tragedies" Juliet has a hamartia, impetuosity.

 Juliet is very impulsive, impetuous, and impatient. She sees Romeo at the ball, falls in love with him at first sight, and though later she comes to know that he belongs to

the enemy-family, she persists in her love. She opens her love-burdened heart to the stars. Romeo hears everything. Juliet with the practical instinct of a woman asks for an immediate marriage. Everything is done at breakneck speed. She is impatient to get the message from Romeo about the arrangement of their secret marriage. She says: "Love's heralds should be thoughts./ Which ten times faster glide than sun's beam,/ Driving back shadows over lowering hills" (II,v,4-6). When she hears from the Nurse that Romeo has killed Tybalt, the expression of her emotions reminds us of impulsive Romeo's love speeches for Rosaline. Both use paradoxical expression. Her reaction to Tybalt's death is very abrupt. She says of Romeo: "Oh, serpent heart, hid with a flowering face!/ Did ever dragon keep so fair a cave?/ Beautiful tyrant! Fiend angelical" (III,ii,73-75). There is tremendous haste in falling in love, in expressing that love, in marrying Romeo, and in swallowing the sleeping potion. Brooke told the story of a love intrigue which lasted for nine months and ended unhappily; Shakespeare compressed his play into five days' crescendo of passion and disaster. The opening quarrel scene, Capulet's feast, Romeo and Juliet falling in love, all take place on Sunday. Monday afternoon, Romeo and Juliet are secretly married. The same afternoon Romeo is banished by the Prince for killing Tybalt. The two lovers meet on Monday night. Romeo goes into exile on Tuesday morning. Juliet's marriage with Paris fixed on Thursday is brought forward to Wednesday. Juliet goes to

the Friar and gets from him the sleeping potion on Tuesday. She drinks the potion on Tuesday night. Count Paris--the bridegroom--arrives with musicians to wake up the bride on Wednesday morning. Juliet is taken to the churchyard the same day. On Thursday night to place flowers on her tomb, Romeo and Paris go there at the same time, Romeo kills Paris, and then kills himself. Juliet wakes up from her tomb and kills herself on seeing Romeo dead. The whole action thus is so rapid that there is no time-gap between any two incidents.

Romeo is like Marlowe's characters in demanding the immediate attainment of his heart's desire. He is a slave of passion. We find many examples of his impetuosity. Like Juliet, he is hasty in falling in love, hasty in expressing it, and hasty in marrying. Mercutio's death provokes Romeo to kill Tybalt, a contingency which leads to his banishment and separation from Juliet. When he hears the Prince's edict, he cries like a child. His passion turns him hysterical and he becomes a "fond mad man" who grovels on the floor of the Friar's cell, weeping and blubbering, who is drawn to his feet by the Nurse's words: -- "Stand up, stand up, stand, an you be a man" (III,iii,88) -- only to unsheathe his dagger to kill himself. With all this haste he might have saved the situation had he not brought the poison from the apothecary in haste and taken it without consulting the Friar. Again he has the faint hope that Juliet might be alive. He says: "Thou art not conquered;

beauty's ensign yet/ Is crimson in thy lips and in thy cheeks,/ And death's pale flag is not advanced there" (V, iii, 94-96). After his glance at dead Juliet he turns to her again, obscurely marvelling: "Ah, dear Juliet/ Why art thou yet so fair?" (V, iii, 101-102). Color in Juliet's cheek would indicate that she is not dead. But Romeo pays no attention to it. Again, why should he consult the Friar when he has the news of Juliet's death from his faithful and trustworthy servant Balthasar who has no reason whatsoever for telling a lie to Romeo? Still he should have doubted the news from Balthasar because on the one hand it is a mere report from his servant and on the other hand in the churchyard he has the opportunity to look at the person of Juliet whose cheeks and lips are crimson. Things seen are mightier than the things heard. But when he looks at the recumbent body of Juliet, he forgets everything. He is lost in the sweet memories of the past. We, people of this cold, calculating, and selfish world, can never understand his deep sorrow and unbalanced mind unless we identify ourselves with him. He expresses the same sentiment to the Friar when he talks to him after banishment. He says:

Thou canst not speak of that thou dost not feel.
 Wert thou as young as I, Juliet thy love,
 An hour but married, Tybalt murdered,
 Then mightst thou speak, then mightst thou tear
 thy hair
 And fall upon the ground, as I do now,
 Taking the measure of an unmade grave. (III, iii, 64-69)

He is so much devoted to Juliet that he is prepared to kill himself at the pronouncement of the sentence of banishment.

But though banished, he still has a ray of hope that by hook or crook he will be able to see her as long as she is alive. But that hope to which Romeo clings is dashed to pieces by the news of her death. How can an ardent lover like Romeo think of the whole situation calmly? Had he loved Juliet less than he does, had he thought his life to be more precious than Juliet's, there would have been no tragedy. But all these critical calculations are beyond the reach of an ideal lover like Romeo.

If we think that the love-affair of Romeo and Juliet is hasty and rash, in Shakespeare's comedies also love and marriages are hasty, but they do not meet with a tragic end. Oliver and Celia fall in love with each other quite abruptly; it is love at first sight like the love of Romeo and Juliet, but it ends happily. Why does not the love of Romeo and Juliet end happily? Because there are many forces over and above the character of Romeo and Juliet, namely feuding, destiny, premonitions, and dreams which hastily rush the play to a tragic end.

In the play itself sometimes Romeo, sometimes Juliet, and sometimes the Friar feel that the love-affair of Romeo and Juliet is hasty. Juliet in the balcony scene says:

I have no joy of this contract tonight.
It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden,
Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be
Ere one can say "It lightens." (II,ii,117-120)

When Romeo tells the Friar that he is in sudden haste to go, the Friar says: "Wisely and slow. They stumble that run fast" (II,iii,94). When Romeo asks the Friar to unite

him with Juliet, and he does not care even for death after that union, at that moment the Friar says: "These violent delights have violent ends,/ And in their triumph die, like fire and powder/ Which as they kiss consume" (II,vi,9-11). When Romeo hears of the news of his banishment from the Friar, he immediately decides to kill himself and draws his dagger. At that instant the Friar says:

Hold thy desperate hand.
 Art thou a man? Thy form cries out thou art.
 Thy tears are womanish, thy wild acts denote
 The unreasonable fury of a beast.
 Unseemly woman in a seeming man!
 Or ill-beseeming beast in seeming both!
 Thou hast amazed me. By my holy order,
 I thought thy disposition better tempered.
 Hast thou slain Tybalt? Wilt thou slay thyself:
 And slay thy lady too that lives in thee,
 By doing damned hate upon thyself?
 Why rail'st thou on thy birth, the heaven and earth?
 Since birth and heaven and earth all three do meet
 In thee at once, which thou at once wouldst lose.
 Fie, fie, thou shamest thy shape, thy love, thy wit,
 Which, like a usurer, abound'st in all,
 And usest none in that true use indeed
 Which should bedeck thy shape, thy love, thy wit.
 Thy noble shape is but a form of wax,
 Digressing from the valor of a man;
 Thy dear love sworn, but hollow perjury,
 Killing that love which thou hast vowed to cherish;
 Thy wit, that ornament to shape and love,
 Misshapen in the conduct of them both,
 Like powder in a skill-less soldier's flask,
 Is set afire by thine own ignorance,
 And thou dismembered with thine own defense.
(III,iii,110-134)

Both the actions and the words of Romeo and Juliet are evidence of their impetuosity. Romeo and Juliet both express fears that their actions have been too rash; but these expressions are not to be taken anything more than momentary superstitious utterances of a boy and a girl who, having discovered the seventh heaven of love, are, for a second or

two, half afraid that their happiness is too great to last.

Romeo's love-affair with Rosaline, in its beginning and conclusion, is a testimony of his rashness. His fickleness is simply a manifestation of his tendency to impetuosity. Romeo shutting himself up and making an artificial night, sighing away all day long for the love of Rosaline, gives up Rosaline with ease as soon as he sees Juliet at Capulet's feast. It is an aspect of his precipitate, headlong nature. Mr. Donald A. Stauffer suggests the fickleness of Romeo in his book titled Shakespeare's World of Images:

The hero is still fickle; the heroine, constant. Romeo's moonstruck calf-love for Rosaline must be laughed out of him by his friends Benvolio and Mercutio, by his guide Friar Lawrence, and by his own true love. But since Rosaline is so cool that beauty itself is "starved with her severity," she is easily forgotten. She is no more than a name that proves Romeo an apt pupil for the start, a young man who can mint conceits, imagine the tears of fickle love as "transparent heretics," and cope with the best of witlings in defining his fashionable passion in a rain of paradoxes: "Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health!" -- Once "Romeo is belov'd and loves again," the mutual attraction is strong that any further twitting of his fickleness is wasted.³

Romeo himself expresses the thought that his love for Rosaline was a mere fancy. He says: "Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight! / For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night" (I,v,54-55). The Friar calls Romeo's--a young waverer's--affair with Rosaline doting and not loving. He affects surprise at the sudden change of Romeo's love and says:

Holy Francis, what a change is here!
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.
(II,iii,65-68)

Romeo and Juliet share the tragic flaw of rashness with Oedipus. But in each of these three characters a general disposition of the mind takes a specific form. In Oedipus the hamartia of rashness is exhibited in thoughts, words, and deeds: in killing his father, in marrying the old queen Jocasta, in accusing Tiersias, in insulting Creon, and elsewhere. In Juliet it is exhibited in the particular form of defiance of her parents. The Elizabethan age was an age of parental authority. Shakespeare's Midsummer Night's Dream has as one of its many themes, the theme of defiance of the parental authority. The tragic flaw of Desdemona is her defiance of father's will. Juliet tries her best to obey her parents, but circumstances force her to cheat and disobey her parents. She consents to the will of her mother in seeing Paris during the ball. Like a good, obedient daughter, she says: "I'll look to like, if looking liking move./ But no more deep will I endart mine eye/ Than your consent gives strength to make it fly" (I,iii,96-98). When she dances with Romeo and gives her heart to him, she does not know that her ardent lover Romeo is a Montague. It is too late for her to retreat from the course she has taken. She can only go ahead and hope for the best. She defies the will of her parents in refusing to marry Paris and again she cheats them by feigning death. But there is no way out but to follow this course. How can she--the wife of Romeo--marry Paris in not less than forty-eight hours after her marriage with Romeo? Juliet here is impetuous in a sense

that she does not try to convince her parents of the course of action that she has taken. There is no parental consent in her marriage with Romeo. She is the only known child of her parents to inherit their property. She should have known that her marriage with Romeo may result in her complete disinheritance. Again she knows in Act I, scene ii, that Paris is the expected candidate, favored by her parents as her husband. In such a condition, is it not proper on her part to take her parents into confidence? But Juliet is too rash to think of all these possibilities.

Romeo, I think, is little more of a tragic character than Juliet. Juliet's tragedy is fated. In his definition of tragedy Aristotle uses the phrase "of a certain magnitude" which indicates the freedom of choice that a tragic hero enjoys. Romeo has more freedom of choice than Juliet. He is not as subject to penalties and cruel words of his parents as Juliet is to hers. Juliet is under the control of her parents. Romeo is not rebuked by his parents for loving Rosaline--a Capulet. Lord and Lady Capulet surely would have objected to Juliet's love-affair with Romeo--a Montague. But they never come to know of Juliet's marriage with Romeo till the death of Juliet. We do not know why Romeo is given freedom of choice by his parents? It may be either because he is a boy or the parents of Romeo are better tempered, as the play suggests, than the parents of Juliet. A tragic character should be of a high social status and noble birth according to the Aristotelian concept of a tragic hero. Romeo

is noble in his birth and behaviour. Lord Capulet speaks of him as "a portly gentleman--a virtuous and well-governed youth." He never takes part in feuds. To him, Tybalt is no enemy, even though Tybalt is a Capulet. He fulfills the wish of a dying man, Paris, by putting him by the side of Juliet. His reluctance to fight is not the result of his cowardice but a true nobility of character and generosity of temper. But when he is forced to fight, he hits hard and spares nobody. He is shown in the play as fighting on two occasions--once with Tybalt and then with Paris. On both these occasions the fight is forced on him. Thus he is brave as a tragic character should be.

Critic after critic finds deep significance in single phrase of the opening prologue--"star-crossed lovers"--and ignores completely the tragic flaw in Romeo and Juliet. Nevertheless, one can say that though they are "star-crossed lovers," that does not eliminate the fact that they are impetuous in their love. Their impetuosity in love contributes to an extent to the grand design of fate.

NOTES

¹The Poetics of Aristotle, tr. S. H. Butcher (London, 1922), p. 47.

²This terminology appears in Harry Levin, The Over-reacher, A Study of Christopher Marlowe (Cambridge, 1952), p. 27.

³(New York, 1949), p. 54.

CHAPTER III

THE ROLE OF FATE IN ROMEO AND JULIET

In this chapter I shall discuss the role of fate in Romeo and Juliet. I shall review fatalistic implications about astrology in the Renaissance, friends and associates of Romeo and Juliet, the workings of dreams in the play, feuding, and the elements of mere chance and premonitions in the play.

Don Cameron Allen's book The Star-Crossed Renaissance, taking its title from the phrase "star-crossed lovers" in Romeo and Juliet, is a study in the quarrel about astrology and astrological influence in England. The author provides the background for the matter by citing views of Italian forerunners in astrology. Ficino believed that man's future depends on heredity and not on stars. In the quarrel about astrology, the following were the defenders of astrology: Melanchthon, Joachim Heller, Jacob Milich, Peucer, Jerome Wolf, and Carden. Sixtus Van Hamminga and Jaques Fontaine formed an anti-astrology group. This controversy regarding belief and disbelief in astrology suggests the interest of the Renaissance authors in this subject. Many English poets did not differ greatly from their Italian forerunners. The general attitude of the literary men seldom overleaps the

opinions of their age; seldom are they found in the ranks of violent partisans. Since the Renaissance prevailingly believed in astrology, one should not be shocked to find that Shakespeare, Robert Burton, and Thomas Browne incline to the superstitious side of astrology.

The art of astrology provided the Elizabethan and Jacobean men of letters with rhetorical devices and themes for conceit-hungry sonneteers. According to Allen, it was considered to be a part of national culture in this period. Astrology showed the relationship between man and his cosmos.

Shakespeare's predecessors used the idea of astrology in their literary works. Robert Greene announced a definite relationship between the stars and fortune.¹ Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* accepts the idea of an alliance between fortune and the stars. He constantly talks of his good fortune and his good stars. Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher echo the same ideas in their plays. In The Maid's Tragedy, Philaster ascribes his "weak fortunes" to his "weak stars." Philaster in Greek, one notes, means a star lover. In Sidney's Astrophel and Stella the word "Astrophel" is Philaster with transposition of roots. In The Coronation Arcadius blames his "unlucky stars" for his fate; and in The Prophetess we come upon a discussion of the powers of the stars to alter fortune. Chapman, Drayton, Ford, Heywood, Lodge, and many other writers adopt the same theory and force us to believe that for most men of the Elizabethan and Jacobean

age the influence of the planets and stars was one with that of fate and fortune. They believed in the philosophy of moderate astrologers, who thought that the stars had an irresistible force which is joined to the powers of fortune and cannot be overcome.

Shakespeare was more given to speaking about the stars and their services and disservices to men than most of his literary fellows. He links fortune and the stars in the twenty-fifth sonnet. Hamlet's remarks about those who have "the stamp of one defect,/ Being Nature's livery, or Fortune's star" are illustrative of the sixteenth-century concept of the union between nature, the stars, and fortune. Henry VI makes plans to conquer "Fortune's spite" by living in a lowly condition; by protecting himself he says that he will also protect his people from the malice of his "thwarting stars." In Prospero's speech in The Tempest, I,ii,178-189, one encounters the theory that fortune offers opportunities to the humble and overthrows the great by means of the stars. Lear toward the end of his tragedy cries out:

It is the stars
The stars above us, govern our conditions;
Else one self mate and mate could not beget
Such different issues (King Lear, IV,iii,34-47).

Gloucester in King Lear, IV,i,38-39, and Hamlet in Hamlet, V,ii,10-11 express the influence of the stars on the human actions. In Julius Caesar Caesar is asked by the soothsayer to beware the ides of March. But there are characters--especially the villains--in Shakespeare who do not believe in the influence of the stars. Helena's speech in All's

Well That Ends Well, I,i,231-234 informs us that there is no necessity in the stars. Edmund, a realist in King Lear, I, ii,137-145; Cassius, a conspirator against Julius Caesar in Julius Caesar, I,ii,139-140; Iago, a villain in Othello, I, iii,322-327 express views against the belief in the stars. Thus in play after play in Shakespeare, in his predecessors, and in his successors, we encounter a reference to the fate or the stars governing the actions of men. In Romeo and Juliet Shakespeare does not depart from the belief in astrology: he traditionally follows the pattern of the age in which he lived.²

J. W. Draper in his article "Shakespeare's Star-Crossed Lovers" indicates the relationship of the tragic fall of the characters with astrology. He notes:

Not only is the play replete with ominous predictions but many of these predictions are associated with the hours and days and with the heavenly bodies that mark time. The prologue refers to Romeo and Juliet as "star-crossed lovers."³

I will examine and list some such examples indicating the astral influence. While stepping into the house of Lord Capulet to attend the masked ball, Romeo gazes at the stars and reads there some terrible doom. This feeling on the part of a young man, who is entering the house full of joy and mirth to find cure of his love-sickness, is something unusual and creates uneasy feelings in us. He says:

For my mind misgives
Some consequence, yet hanging in the stars,
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date
With this night's revels, and expire the term
Of a despised life closed in my breast
By some vile forfeit of untimely death (I,v,106-111).

The Friar invokes the good will of the heavens and says: "So smile the Heavens upon this holy act/ That afterthoughts with sorrow chide us not!" (II,vi,1-2). When forced to marry Paris, Juliet appeals to her father to stop it; when she finds her attempts of persuasion to be failing her, she turns for help to her mother whose hatred is cold and deadly, and whose relationship with those who are dear to her—even her daughter—is pathetically imperfect. Juliet addresses her mother appealingly:

Is there no pity in the clouds
That sees into the bottom of my grief?
O sweet mother, cast me not away!
Delay this marriage for a month, a week,
Or if you do not, make the bridal bed
In that deep monument where Tybalt lies (III,v,198-203).

When Juliet obtains no help from Lady Capulet, she tells her Nurse: "Alack, alack, that Heaven should practice stratagems/ Upon so soft a subject as myself!" (III,v,211-212).

At the time of Juliet's seeming death Lady Capulet and the Nurse blame the hour and the day as if the very calendar were responsible for her death. Lady Capulet says:

"Accurst, unhappy, wretched, hateful day!" (IV,v,43). The

Nurse says: "Oh woe! Oh woeful, woeful, woeful day./ Most lamentable day, most woeful day,/ That ever, ever, I did yet behold!" (IV,v,49-51). The Friar more clearly imputes

the misfortunes of Capulet to astral influence. He says:

"The Heavens do lour upon you for some ill;/ Move them no more by crossing their high will" (IV,v,94-95). When Romeo

learns of the death of Juliet, he says: "Then I defy you, stars!" (V,i,24). When resolved to kill himself, Romeo

says: "And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars/ From this world-wearied flesh" (V,iii,111-112). When the Friar looks at the dead body of Paris, he ascribes his death to the heavenly bodies, saying: "Ah, what an unkind hour/ Is guilty of this lamentable chance!" (V,iii,145-146). Draper states:

Thus if Shakespeare meant what his characters seem to say, astral influence actually governs the lives of these "star-crossed lovers"; and like so many of Chaucer's figures, they are the puppets of the stars and planets and of the days and times of the day.⁴

Then he discusses the astro-biological theory of the day.


He remarks:

Tybalt is clearly of the choleric or wrathful type: he is always ready to fight, a quality that brings about tragic catastrophe. . . . Capulet manages to quiet him at the festivity when Romeo appears; for it is between 6 p.m. and midnight in the phlegmatic period of the day; and Tybalt's fight and death on Monday afternoon are quite correctly timed: the day itself was phlegmatic and the time of day melancholy, and consequently his martial powers would have ebbed at noon when the choleric part of the day was over. . . . Could Shakespeare by mere accident, have introduced so many consistent details; and would an Elizabethan audience, steeped in such lore, have failed to realize their significance?⁵

According to Draper, the choleric humor of Old Capulet, the phlegmatic humor of Benvolio, the mercurial humor of Mercutio, and the sanguine humor of Romeo help in bringing about the tragic end of the play. Mercutio, being mercurial, is killed on Monday afternoon--a phlegmatic day and a melancholy time of the day that would depress the mercurial temperament. Juliet is born on "Lammas-eve at night," when the sun is in the house of the constellation Leo from July 21 to August 21. Those born under Leo are hot and passion-

ate. Romeo is born under the influence of Saturn which is styled "the great infortune." He is sanguine and as the humor is described as "variable and changeable" his disposition also changes from melancholy to merry disposition. All these make of Romeo and Juliet an astrological tragedy of humors. Concluding his thesis, Draper remarks:

Some of the actual coincidences, moreover, can be traced to the day or the time of the day: the choleric morning hours would seem to give rise to the initial brawl; and this brawl in turn causes Romeo's fatal banishment. Romeo's going to Capulet festivities "too early" makes possible his meeting with Juliet and his falling in love with her; the phlegmatic hours of evening explain Capulet's success in restraining Tybalt at the moment; and the thoughtless abandon of the balcony scene is quite proper to the sanguine hours after midnight. The crucial deaths of Tybalt and Mercutio, furthermore, take place in the afternoon, when ill-omened melancholy was supposed to rage; and Romeo's banishment and Juliet's wedding fall on Tuesday, the unlucky day of Mars. Indeed, again and again, not only the forebodings of the characters but also the auspices of the humours and the calendar point out to a tragic catastrophe: the "death-mark'd love" of "star-crossed lovers" cannot end happily. Thus the theme of the play is not the evils of the civil faction as in Paynter [sic], or the wickedness of "stolne contracts" as in Brooke, but rather, as in Greek Tragedy, the helplessness of defying the heavens' will.⁶

 In Romeo and Juliet fate works against the lovers by making them unfortunate in their friends and associates and in the hot climate in which they are born. Their dreams presage their tragic end. Fate is antagonistic to them in placing them in a context of family hostility and in contriving a deadly series of coincidences. Their fatal premonitions deepen the tragedy all the more.

Romeo and Juliet are unfortunate in their friends and

associates who are unable to understand the heavenly passions of the lovers. Juliet's companion--the Nurse--a worldly creature does not know much about love beyond sensuality. To her, love is an animal lust. Mercutio laughs at the love of Romeo when the former says: "Romeo! Humours! Madman! Passion! Lover!" (II,i,7). Lord Capulet has been a "mouse-hunter" in his time. To Lady Capulet, love and marriage are merely social institutions and a worldly arrangement. The Friar, although devoted to celibacy, is spiritually closer to Romeo and Juliet's love than any of these characters. He being a priest has peculiarly religious notions about marriage. In the Old Testament, Jehovah is the bridegroom; and Israel is the bride. In the New Testament, Revelation, 21:9, and elsewhere, Christ is depicted as the bridegroom and the church as the bride.

One should not ignore the fated background of the warm South, the Italy in which the love of Romeo and Juliet blossoms. Oscar J. Campbell in his book titled The Living Shakespeare remarks:

The impulsive rashness of Romeo's actions at all the critical points in the plot and the impetuosity of all the Montagues and Capulets seems to be a reflection of the fierce heat of the Italian summer. Benvolio speaks the truth when he says: "And if we meet, we shall not 'scape a brawl;/ For now these hot days is the mad blood stirring: [III,i,3-4].⁷

We cannot ignore the significance of the dreams, another involuntary element, in the plays of Shakespeare and especially in Romeo and Juliet. In Julius Caesar Calpurnia has a meaningful dream presaging the fall of Caesar. Like-

wise, in Romeo and Juliet dreams are a source of omens in the play. H. B. Charlton in his article "Romeo and Juliet as an Experimental Tragedy"⁸ remarks that the dreams are the harbingers of eternity and speak like the sybils of the future. Mercutio distinguishes himself from those who regard dreams as significant in mockingly describing dreams as "children of an idle brain." Romeo dreams of Juliet finding him dead and reviving him by her kiss. Balthasar, waiting outside the tomb of Juliet, dreams of the fight between his master and somebody else. It is needless to say that these dreams accurately mirror the future.

Drs. Ulrici, Röttscher, and Vehse believe the family contention which Romeo and Juliet have inherited to be the cause of tragedy.

Opening scenes of Shakespeare's plays are pivots on which the play revolves. Romeo and Juliet opens with a street fight between the servants of the Capulets and the Montagues. Feuding is such a barrier between the lovers that when at the completion of the ball Romeo comes to know that Juliet is a Capulet, he says: "Is she a Capulet,/ Oh, dear account! My life is my foe's debt" (I,v,119-120). Even Juliet is made aware by the Nurse of the consequences of loving Romeo—a Montague. At that moment Juliet bursts out:

My only love sprang from my only hate!
Too early seen unknown, and known too late!
Prodigious birth of love it is to me,
That I must love a loath'd enemy (I,v,140-143).

Even in their sweet and happy moments they can never forget the world of hatred. Juliet is aware of that gloomy world


when somewhat irrelevantly she says:

O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?
Deny thy father and refuse thy name,
Or if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love--
And I'll no longer be a Capulet (II,ii,33-36).

The Friar consents to the marriage of Romeo and Juliet because that bond may bring a happy reconciliation between the two families. Paris wants to fight with Romeo in the churchyard because he thinks that Romeo--a banished Montague--has come to shame the dead body of Juliet. Prince Escalus, concluding the play, addresses Capulet and Montague: "Where be these enemies? Capulet! Montague!/ See what a scourge is laid upon your hate,/ That Heaven finds means to kill your joys with love!" (V,iii,291-293). Lady Capulet thinks of Romeo and Juliet as "poor sacrifices of our [Capulets' and Montagues'] enmity" (V,iii,304). Paul N. Siegel in his article "Christianity and the Religion of Love in Romeo and Juliet"⁹ notes that the lovers may be imprudent, but the parents are guilty. H. B. Charlton in his article "Romeo and Juliet as an Experimental Tragedy" remarks:

But prior to this the evidences of the feud are so unsubstantial that the forebodings of Romeo and Juliet seem more prompted by fate than feud.¹⁰

H. B. Charlton also observes that the feud is not presented by Shakespeare in such a way as to be a force, working against the lovers, as terrible and so serious as the author apparently wanted it to seem. Admittedly there are places where it seems to be a terrible and serious force. But Shakespeare does not sustain the idea throughout with full conviction. It is curious that the feud was no hindrance to



Romeo's love-affair with Rosaline. His love for Rosaline is noted by his parents and apparently there is no resistance because she is a Capulet. Benvolio never points out the dangerous consequences of loving a Capulet Rosaline.

The element of coincidences in the play is probably more important than the feuding of Montagues and Capulets to the course of plot. In this connection J. W. Draper in his article titled "Shakespeare's Star-Crossed Lovers" lists some of the unfortunate coincidences:

Romeo and Juliet is a tissue of improbable coincidence: Capulet's illiterate servant happens by mere chance to ask Romeo to read the list of those invited to his master's entertainment; Romeo, by a most unusual chance, decides to attend his arch-enemies' festivities, and so chances to fall in love with Juliet; at just this time the Prince chances to make a stringent edict against brawling, and Romeo chances to kill Tybalt and so is banished; and, also at just this time, Old Capulet chances to betroth Juliet to the Count Paris. Any one of these chances might singly be accepted; but why should they all occur within two days and just in the right order to set the plot in motion? Even more a matter of fortuity is the catastrophe: by chance, the Friar's letter to Romeo miscarries; by chance, Romeo meets and kills Paris at the tomb; by chance, the Friar is too late to intercept Romeo; and by chance, Juliet awakens just too late to save her lover's life and just too soon for her father to save her from suicide. Indeed, never was love-affair more perfectly ill-timed; and yet, to emphasize this very fault, the master dramatist, more than in any other play, marks scene by scene, the days of the week, sometimes the very hours of the day.¹¹

Gustav Rümelin in his book Shakespearestudien puts some catastrophe-averting questions before the reader:

We in vain ask: Why does not Juliet simply confess that she is married already and confront the consequences with the heroism of her love? Why does she not flee? She comes and goes unhindered, and even the Friar's plan accomplished no more than

that instead of starting for Mantua from her father's house, she would have to start from the neighbouring churchyard. Why does she not feign sickness? Why is not Paris induced to withdraw by being informed that Juliet is already wedded to another? Why does not the pious Father fall back upon the obvious excuse that as a Christian priest he could not marry a woman while her first husband was still living? But as it is, the tragic result is brought about by a mere accident, in shape of the silliest, and in its execution the rashest, of all devices.¹²

Dr. Hermann Ulrici replies to these speculations of Rümelin in Fahrbuch der Deutschen Shakespeare-Gesellschaft¹³ in the following way. Ulrici thinks Rümelin's remedies to be prosaic and the remedies suggested by the Friar to be poetic. The Friar acts that way to save his reputation and to bring reconciliation between two hostile families. Again we know that in spite of the evidence and confirmation of life in Juliet, the presence of Paris in the graveyard would have worsened the situation all the more. He would not have allowed Romeo to run away with Juliet. There would have been in any case a fight between Romeo and Paris and the result would have been the same--namely the servant of Paris would have called the watch. Others would have soon followed and it is difficult to imagine how Romeo and Juliet could have escaped at all. In other words, the situation is heavy with fatalistic implications for Romeo and Juliet.

Various critics interpret these numerous coincidences variously. Kenneth Muir in his article "Shakespeare and the Tragic Pattern"¹⁴ suggests that these accidents illustrate the operation of the inauspicious stars. Dover Wilson in his introduction to Romeo and Juliet¹⁵ observes that

these accidents are not merely fortuitous but intentionally arranged by fate. Fate deliberately works against the lovers by these means. G. B. Harrison thinks that it is due to this element of sheer chance and coincidences that the play never achieves deep tragedy.

J. W. Draper in his article titled "Shakespeare's Star-Crossed Lovers"¹⁶ suggests that Brooke calls his tale "a wofull chance" and Painter--Shakespeare's other source for the play Romeo and Juliet--ascribes the course of events to "Fortune" or "False Fortune." Shakespeare makes references to fortune governing the action of the play, but these references appear too late to explain the motivation of the plot. Such references are as follows. Juliet is always obsessed by the idea of destiny. She says:

O Fortune, Fortune, all men call thee fickle,
If thou art fickle, what dost thou with him
That is renowned for faith? Be fickle, Fortune,
For then, I hope, thou will not keep him long,
But send him back (III,v,60-64).

When the letter sent by the Friar does not reach Romeo, he pronounces it to be "Unhappy fortune" (V,ii,17). Romeo, after killing Paris, speaks of Paris as "One writ with me in sour misfortune's book!" (V,iii,82). A few passages casually ascribe the directions of events to "God" or "heaven." The promiscuous mingling of references to God and fate, even in the speech of the Friar (who as a professional advocate of Christianity might be supposed to maintain a distinction between the personal God and impersonal Fate) virtually deprive God of personality. Study of Romeo and Juliet,

therefore, removes hesitancy in paralleling God and Fate. Juliet talks of her heart and hands as being joined to Romeo by God (IV,i,55-57). The Friar in his report to the Prince of the bloody slaughter in the churchyard tells him that he requested Juliet to bear the work of Heaven with patience (V,iii,260-261). The Prince, talking to Montague and Capulet of their folly tells that Heaven finds means to kill their joys with love (V,iii,291-293). A certain tragic fate hangs over the play apart from all these. Juliet cryptically answers Paris: "What must be shall be" (IV,i,21).

Reiterated premonitions suggest an evil end. The Prologue refers to the "death-mark'd love" of Romeo and Juliet. The Friar tells of Romeo: "Affliction is enamored of thy parts,/ And thou art wedded to calamity" (III,iii,2-3). He advises Romeo: "Thou pout'st upon thy fortune and thy love,/ Take heed, take heed, for such die miserable" (III,iii,144-145). He tells Juliet: "A greater power than we can contradict/ Hath thwarted our intents"(V,iii,153-154). Both lovers are "pale" and melancholy at parting. Juliet says:

Oh God! I have an ill divining soul.
Methinks I see thee, now thou art below,
As one dead in the bottom of a tomb,
Either my eyesight fails or thou look'st pale.
(III,v,54-57)

Even while arranging for his marriage, Romeo casts his defiance at death and says: "Do thou but close our hands with holy words,/ Then love-devouring death do what he dare,/ It is enough I may but call her mine" (II,vi,6-8). He says

after killing Tybalt: "This day's black fate on more days doth depend,/ This but begins the woe others must end" (III, i, 124-125). Juliet compares her love to the dangerous speed of lightning (II, ii, 119). While going to the Friar for confession, she describes her condition to be of "Past hope, past cure, past help." And as she takes the poison, she says: "I have a faint cold fear thrills through my veins/ That almost freezes up the heat of life " (IV, iii, 15-16). Draper remarks:

Is all this the mere convention of dramatic prolepsis--a mere pious pretence of inevitable catastrophe where no inevitability exists? Is Shakespeare no more than a theatrical charlatan, or did he really see in this issue of circumstance a rationelle [sic] and motivation that is not clear to us?¹⁷

H. B. Charlton in his article "Romeo and Juliet as an Experimental Tragedy" talks of Shakespeare's device of using premonitions:

His most frequent device is to adapt what Broke's [sic] practice had been: instead of letting his persons declaim formally, as Broke's [sic] do, against the inconstancy of Fortune, he endows them with dramatic premonitions.¹⁸

These unconscious premonitions prefigure destiny. To Benvolio's question, if he is mad, Romeo replies: "Not mad, but bound more than a mad man is,/ Shut up in prison, kept without my food,/ Whipped and tormented. . ." (I, ii, 55-57). Before taking the sleeping potion, Juliet speaks following the exit of Lady Capulet: "Farewell! God knows when we shall meet again" (IV, iii, 14).

If we accept the view that Romeo and Juliet is only a tragedy of fate, it would mean that Romeo and Juliet are

just like two counters on the chessboard of this earth. They are puppets in the hands of fate. Fate, thus viewed, seems to have used love and chance as instruments to mar the lovers. We find them crushed under the giant wheel of fate. And we see the futility of the human struggle against the mighty authority of the invisible. We reecho the words of Omar Khayyam:

The moving finger writes, and having writ
Moves on; nor all your piety nor wit
Shall lure back to cancel half a line
Nor all your tears wash out a word of it.

But this is not the view of life that we get in Romeo and Juliet. Casual utterances of the characters should not be taken into account to prove the thesis. There are many references to fate, no doubt about it, but they are the speeches spoken by the characters in highly excited moods, that is to say, in either highly happy moods or in highly unhappy moods. Speeches spoken by the minds in either of these conditions should not be taken seriously to establish a particular thesis. The words of Lady Capulet and the Nurse at the seeming death of Juliet are the words of a mother and the doting Nurse (perhaps never strong in her intellect) and should not be taken seriously. It is an oversimplification to see the action of the play as nothing more than the relationship of the position of stars and planets and human behaviour. No doubt all these things play a significant role in bringing about the tragic fall of Romeo and Juliet. But to harp on the fate of Romeo and Juliet is an exaggeration--an exaggeration of the vital

truth. I do not agree with Draper, Charlton, and other critics who think of Romeo and Juliet as an unmitigated tragedy of fate.

The characters of Romeo and Juliet contribute a good deal in bringing about the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet. They have a shared character-flaw--impetuosity in love--which proves their undoing. It is this view that links Romeo and Juliet with four great tragedies, the point which I have discussed thoroughly in my second chapter.

NOTES

¹Works, ed., Collins, II, 60; Works, ed. Grosart, VIII, 81-82.

²I am heavily indebted to Don Cameron Allen, The Star-Crossed Renaissance (New York, 1966) in my discussion on astrology in the preceding section of my thesis.

³RES, XV (1939), 18.

⁴Ibid., p. 19.

⁵Ibid., pp. 22-23.

⁶Ibid., p. 34.

⁷(New York, 1958), p. 311.

⁸Proceedings of the British Academy, XXV (1939), 143-187.

⁹SQ, XII (1961), 371-392.

¹⁰Proceedings of the British Academy, XLIV (1958), 178.

¹¹RES, XV (1939), 16.

¹²(Stuttgart, 1866), p. 65, quoted in Var., p. 466.

¹³(Berlin, 1868), III, 9, quoted in Var., p. 466.

¹⁴Proceedings of the British Academy, XLIV (1958), 143-187.

¹⁵Dover Wilson, ed., Romeo and Juliet (Cambridge, 1961).

¹⁶RES, XV, (1939), 16-34.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁸Proceedings of the British Academy, XXV (1939), 173.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Even before the play begins, the chorus foretells the ending of the play. The "star-crossed lovers" must, we are warned, "with their death bury their parents' strife." Finally as it is a tragedy less of character than of feuding, the strife of the houses of Capulet and Montague, appearing in the first scene in its trivial aspect, threatens in a moment to become earnest and formidable. We see the dead bodies of young and beautiful human creatures, of Tybalt and Paris, of Juliet and Romeo, the bloody harvest of the strife. Here are lives cut short in their brightness and glory.

It is the traditional view to think of Romeo and Juliet as a tragedy of fate. Critic after critic supports his contention in emphasizing the references to fate by various characters, the element of dreaming, and the unfortunate birth of the lovers in the hostile families. Romeo and Juliet are thus made puppets in the hands of inevitable fate. If we are to take the traditional view of Romeo and Juliet, we associate the play with tragic figures in Chaucer's Monk's Tale, or we associate the play with the "she-tragedy" of Lee and Rowe. It is pathetic to see the death

of two ravishingly attractive young persons. The play thus never reaches the height of the tragic. This view emphasizes the role of fate to such an extent that we find no conflict in the characters of the play; and as Shaw says, no conflict, no drama. Romeo never achieves the height of a tragic hero. He is not the determiner of events in the play. He does not stand prominently forward, a single figure as does Shakespeare's Richard III soliloquizing about the manipulation of the family and his retainers, and about his other plans. The very first scene exhibits the feud which determines the lovers' fate. If Romeo cannot be held responsible for the tragedy, his character is not an active, practical nature like Henry V's, neither is he great by intellect, a thinker in any high sense of the word. He has his being neither heroically in the objective world of action like Henry V, nor in the world of mind like Hamlet.

There is a second group of critics who thinks of the play as a tragedy of character. The play is a presentment of the clash between the bright impetuosity of youth and the cold prudence and prejudice of the elders. Impetuosity or rashness is the tragic flaw--hamartia--of the lovers. Romeo and Juliet thus is a hamartia-based tragedy, a point which links the play with four great tragedies, namely Hamlet, King Lear, Macbeth, and Othello. It also links the play with the tragedies of Marlowe. I have discussed this point thoroughly in the second chapter of my thesis.

It is an oversimplification to believe that Romeo and

Juliet is either exclusively a tragedy of fate or exclusively a tragedy of character. Romeo and Juliet is a tragedy both of fate and character. Fate is a greater power in crushing the lovers than the character-flaw of the lovers. This does not in any way indicate that the lovers are helpless and hopeless victims of fate. They also contribute in bringing about their own tragic downfall. We may say that they are the unlucky children of mutually antagonistic families who came to grief and destruction because of their own impetuous nature.

A question may arise: does the play suffer by blending of fate and character? There are three schools taking three different viewpoints about the tragic fall of the lovers, a fact which suggests that Shakespeare was not very clear on the point as to who should be held responsible for the tragic end of the lovers. But excessive clarity in drama--especially serious drama--repels the reader. Drama should have mysteriousness in it. Oedipus Rex is mysterious. We do not know at which time in the play Jocasta becomes aware of her relationship as wife and mother of Oedipus. She may have known Oedipus to be her son shortly after marriage, or she may first have become aware of it toward the last entry of the herdsman. This is a point instructive in interpreting Romeo and Juliet because of the difficulty of separating the work of fate from the consequences of the main characters' impetuosity. We tend, even without consideration of other matters such as poetry, never to expel

the play from our minds as we do a solved problem in mathematics. The merging and flowing together of fate and character throws a mysterious aura on the play, and our inability to see the play as a solved problem in mathematics draws us, as well as many other things, to reread the play and even in old age to buy tickets to this well-known performance of Romeo and Juliet.

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