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Romeo and Juliet

The Cambridge Dover Wilson Shakespeare

VOLUME 30

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

EDITED BY JOHN DOVER WILSON



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BY

JOHN DOVER WILSON

ASSISTED IN THIS VOLUME BY
GEORGE IAN DUTHIE

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TO THEIR FORMER STUDENTS IN THE
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PREFATORY NOTE

The appearance of the present volume leaves another eight or nine to be published in this edition. But for unforeseen accidents, the task might be accomplished single-handed in another eight or nine years. Both the publishers and I are, however, anxious to quicken the pace; my chief reason being the Psalmist's warning to septuagenarians. To this end I have sought help from others, and have been fortunate in securing it from three well-known scholars, Dr Alice Walker, Mr J. C. Maxwell, and Professor Duthie of McGill and Aberdeen; the last consenting to collaborate in two texts, this one and *King Lear*, before setting his hand to *The Oxford Shakespeare*, which he inherits from R. B. McKerrow. The preparation of *King Lear* is well forward, while Dr Walker is engaged with me on *Othello* and Mr Maxwell on *Pericles*, two plays which they will shortly follow, it is hoped, with *Troilus and Cressida* and *Timon of Athens*. Yet, when I observe that Professor Duthie and I began editing *Romeo and Juliet* in 1949, subscribers will be wise not to expect too early a completion of the undertaking. One never knows, indeed, what one may find in Shakespeare. And that the settlement of the present text has not proved an exactly easy job will be evident from our Note on the Copy and from the fact that, as the Notes indicate, we have been obliged to leave some points still undecided. It should be stated, in conclusion, that the following Introduction, except for an abridgment

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of his opening section on the sources, is Professor Duthie's, and the Stage History as usual Mr Young's, while for all the rest—text, Note on the Copy, Notes, and Glossary—Professor Duthie and I are jointly responsible, though we have found it convenient, necessary indeed in matters of disagreement, to sign a note here and there with our initials.

J.D.W.

1954

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In November 1562, Richard Tottel, who a few years earlier had issued that famous ‘miscellany’ of *Songes and Sonnettes* which now passes under his name, published an octavo volume entitled *The Tragical Historye of Romeus and Iuliet, written first in Italian by Bandell, and nowe in English by Ar. Br.* This History was a poem of a little over three thousand lines, in ‘poulter’s measure’ (a six-foot iambic line followed by, and rhyming with, a second line of seven feet); a tiresome metre in large quantities, and hardly capable of intense passion, though here handled with some charm and tenderness. That ‘Ar. Br.’ stands for Arthur Brooke, a young poet who was shortly after drowned while crossing the Channel, we learn from George Turberville, who printed an epitaph on him in 1570 which makes special reference to the promise shown in a poem on ‘Iuliet and her mate’. Most critics agree that this was the poem upon which some thirty years later Shakespeare founded his tragedy, but few, not we think even P. A. Daniel, Brooke’s best editor, have appreciated the fullness of Shakespeare’s debt. The drama follows the poem not only in incident, but often in word and phrase. Many of these verbal parallels are cited in the Notes below, but no verbal balance-sheet can convey a complete sense of the intimacy of the connexion. It looks as if Shakespeare knew the poem almost by heart, so frequently does he recall some expression or train of thought that occurs in one part of Brooke’s story and adapt it to another.

But the tragical history is much older than Brooke’s poem or than Bandello’s prose version (1554) from

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which Brooke professed to draw it, though he actually went to a French rendering published in 1559 by Boaistuau, who added to Bandello's straightforward tale a number of fatalistic and ominous touches, which Brooke also took over and Shakespeare later turned to a still better use. One incident indeed which he inherited, the heroine's use of a potion to escape an enforced marriage, goes right back to the late Greek novelist Xenophon of Ephesus; while the family names of Capulet and Montague, in the form Cappelletti and Montecchi, originally belonged to local branches of the political factions of the thirteenth century, the one of the Guelfs in Cremona, the other of the Ghibellines in Verona, their sole connexion being a line in the sixth canto of Dante's *Purgatorio*,¹ which mentions them together as examples of the warring cliques that tore Italy to pieces at that date. The story in all its essentials was, however, first found in *Il Novellino* (1476) by Masuccio Saleritano, who is deeply indebted to Boccaccio. It was retold some fifty years later by Luigi da Porto, who seems to have invented the names of most of the principal characters. And from Porto it passed to Sevin the earliest writer to give it a French dress (1542). Sevin was in his turn influenced by Boccaccio, adopting certain details from the latter's *Filostrato*, itself the source of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. That Shakespeare himself went to *Troilus and Criseyde* direct for inspiration there is no proof, though he knew the poem, but Brooke certainly borrowed from it,² and thus the two greatest love poems in our language were doubly linked together. One of the details Sevin added was the visit to the apothecary which Boaistuau borrowed in turn from Bandello. Bandello, however, took it, with the rest of the story, not direct from Sevin, but through the medium

¹ vi. 105. ² See 1. 3. 2 ff. n. for an illustration.

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of the Italian pseudonymous poet Clizia, who got it from Sevin. Finally, five years later than Brooke's, a second translation from Boaistuau appeared in English, this time in prose from the pen of William Painter, being one of the tales in his *Palace of Pleasure* (1567). It seems likely that Shakespeare had read Painter, and he may also have made use of a lost play on the subject, which Brooke mentions in his preface, though he does not tell us whether it was in English or Latin. Such in bare outline is the tangled history¹ of the expanding legend of the lovers 'in fair Verona', which when Shakespeare took it over was one of the best known stories of Europe, so much so that it 'adorned the hangings of chambers, and Juliet figures as a tragic heroine in the sisterhood of Dido and Cleopatra':²

For out of olde felde, as man seith,
 Cometh al this newe corn froe yeere to yeere;
 And out of olde bokes in good feith,
 Cometh al this newe science that man lere.

Yet each new crop was different from those before; and features peculiar to Shakespeare's version were doubtless intended to make the story more powerfully dramatic than it is in any of the other versions. Brooke's story extends over a period of several months; Shakespeare's is compressed into a few days.³ This compression no doubt represents an attempt (whether fully successful or not) to induce in the spectator or reader a feeling of tragic inevitability. Again, in Shakespeare

¹ For a comprehensive study of the sources see Olin H. Moore, *The Legend of Romeo and Juliet* (Columbus, Ohio, 1950). See also H. B. Charlton in *Proceedings of the British Academy* (1939), pp. 157 ff., and the citations given by Georges A. Bonnard in *Review of English Studies*, New Series, vol. II (1951), pp. 319 ff.

² C. H. Herford, *Eversley Shakespeare*, vii, 397.

³ On this matter see Georges A. Bonnard, *loc. cit.*

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Paris comes to the tomb in the last scene of the play. In no other known version does he do this, and the effect of the innovation is dramatically powerful. Yet again, if it is one of Brooke's claims to distinction that he produced the essentials of the Nurse's character¹ as it appears in our play, Shakespeare himself, as far as we know, may claim sole credit for the essentials of the character of his own Mercutio who is certainly one of his most vivid creations. The Mercutio of the earlier versions is hardly a character at all.²

* * * * *

Coming to the problem of date we have first to inquire whether Shakespeare composed the play once for all in a single creative act or whether he worked at it in stages at different times. It was formerly, for example, a view widely held, even for a time by one of us,³ that the First Quarto represents a first draft by Shakespeare or some other dramatist, or at least a pirated version of such a draft. With the advance of our knowledge about Bad Quartos it has now, however, come to be accepted that what the First Quarto stands for is a pirated version of Shakespeare's final Second Quarto text, corrupted and perverted by certain actors who had performed it.⁴ Or again it might be suggested that the Second Quarto contains layers of text composed by Shakespeare at different times. Some passages are highly ornate, conventional, artificial, full of verbal ingenuities, full of virtuoso-work, displaying the art of

¹ See note on 1. 3. 2. ff. below. ² See p. 122.

³ See an article on 'The "stolne and surreptitious" Shakespearian texts' by A. W. Pollard and J. Dover Wilson, *Times Literary Supplement*, 14 Aug. 1919.

⁴ This view has been skilfully expounded by Professor Hoppe, *The Bad Quarto of Romeo and Juliet* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1948). See also *R.E.S.*, vol. XIV (1938), pp. 271 ff.

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a verbal acrobat. Other passages are free from this, seeming to come much more spontaneously from the poet's heart—and no more astounding example could be cited than Juliet's terrified soliloquy at 4. 3. 14 ff. These stylistic differences are obvious. But they should not be allowed to rush us into any imprudent theory that the play must be stratified on the assumption that a highly conceited passage was written at one time, and a profound passage lacking in conceits was written at a later period. Harley Granville-Barker, quoting passages of the one kind and of the other in the first couple of pages of his Preface to *Romeo and Juliet*, comments thus:

By all the rules, no doubt, there should be two Shakespeares at work here. But in such a ferment as we now find him...he may well have been capable of working on Tuesday in one fashion, on Wednesday in another, capable of couplet, sonnet, word-juggling, straight sober verse, or hard-bitten prose, often as the popular story he was turning to account and the need of the actors for the thing they and he were so apt at seemed to demand, at times out of the new strength breeding in him.

Again and again the play suggests an excited Shakespeare and a developing Shakespeare. It might not be too much to say that at some points he is writing as he used to write, and at other points he is writing as he is going to write. At any rate, it is to be emphasized that the fact that there are different styles at different points does not necessarily mean that we have to do with preliminary drafting and subsequent revision. On the contrary, the very character of the 'foul papers' of which we catch many glimpses behind the Second Quarto, suggests an imagination working at high pressure and subject to a single impulse. It is not unlikely then that Shakespeare wrote this play once and for all and within a few months. When was this?

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Some would put the composition (at any rate of a first draft) in 1591, because in 1. 3 the Nurse refers to an earthquake as having taken place eleven years ago, and there was an actual earthquake in London in 1580. 'This', Sir Edmund Chambers drily remarks, 'is pressing the Nurse's interest in chronology—and Shakespeare's—rather hard.' He himself puts the play in 1595, as belonging to the lyrical group, not long before *Richard II* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.¹ And that, unless and until further evidence is forthcoming, is likely to remain its accepted date. We would only add that, if the Nurse's chronology be pressed a little harder, the date 1591 looks still more 'tottered', to use one of Shakespeare's favourite words. For the earthquake that shook her dovecot took place on 'Lammas Eve' (i.e. 31 July) whereas the one that shook London took place on 6 April.

* * * * *

Whatever a creative writer may take from his source or sources, he makes himself responsible for his total product and for its theme. What then is Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* about?

It is about two wonderful young people who love each other, and it is about two families which hate each other. These two plot-strands are intertwined, and unless we pay due attention to both of them we shall miss the full meaning of the play—or at any rate the meaning which Shakespeare seems to have wished to convey. He may or may not have succeeded in conveying what he wanted to convey. That is a matter which will have to be discussed in due course. Meanwhile we are concerned with Shakespeare's intentions. The story of the two lovers embodies a certain well-known tradi-

¹ *William Shakespeare* (Oxford, 1930), I, pp. 345–6.

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tional conception of tragedy. But that was not what Shakespeare finally wanted to leave with us. The story of the lovers is fitted into, is part of, the story of the families; and, as we leave the theatre or close the book, we are aware of quite another conception of tragedy—a more deeply satisfying conception.

THE STORY OF THE LOVERS

Romeo and Juliet are 'star-crossed'. Again and again the dialogue brings out the theme of the malignant influence of the stars on human beings. From quite early in the play we have the expression of premonitions of unhappy doom. The lovers are the predestined victims of a malicious Fate. Fortune is against them. The stars, or Fate, or Destiny, or Fortune, or whatever other specific name may be applied to the cosmic force with which we are concerned, brings the lovers together, gives them supreme happiness and self-fulfillment for a short time, and then casts them down to destruction. The spectator or reader is aware of a devastating sense of waste, and he reacts to the spectacle of the destruction of the lovers with a feeling of deep pity. Their doom is pathetic.

Fate works against the lovers in diverse ways. It 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.

The play is full of accident, coincidence, chance. If Friar Lawrence's letter to Romeo had reached Romeo at the time when the Friar was entitled to suppose it would—had not Friar John been unexpectedly detained in a house in Verona suspected of harbouring the plague—then all might have been different. This is but one of the sequence of chance happenings which

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extends throughout the play. Shakespeare does not want us to think of these 'accidents' as merely fortuitous. We cannot avoid the impression that he asks us to think of them as intentionally arranged by Fate. Fate deliberately works against the lovers by this means.

And then we have the family feud. Romeo with friends, masked, presents himself at Capulet's ball. Old Capulet himself is only too ready to forget the feud, only too ready to take the maskers' visit as a compliment (as normally, in any given case, it would be taken). Tybalt hot-headedly objects. Capulet wisely pacifies Tybalt, albeit with difficulty. But Tybalt's rancour outlasts the evening. He seeks out Romeo, intent on avenging what he takes to be a slight on his family's 'honour'. Romeo (with good enough reason, in all conscience) will not fight. Mercutio—ignorant of Romeo's love for Juliet, and thus failing to understand Romeo's attitude—assails Tybalt. This results in Mercutio's death; and then Romeo must needs avenge it. Tybalt dies. Romeo is banished. Had Romeo not been banished, the final catastrophe might never have taken place.

Fate is here operating against Romeo and Juliet through the fact that Tybalt and Mercutio have false ideals, false values. Tybalt is a man whose values are similar to those of Hotspur in *Henry IV*. He is obsessed with the notion of 'honour', but it is not honour in the best sense; it is a mistaken view of honour, and it leads him into conduct which is contrary to reason. Mercutio has essentially the same mistaken sense of honour.

The whole fracas which results in the deaths of Mercutio and Tybalt, and in the fatal banishment of Romeo, is a result of the pressing of the claims of a false sense of honour. Tybalt is to blame initially, certainly; and Mercutio can hardly be absolved of

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blame. Logic may insist that Romeo himself is to some extent blameworthy. He should not, it may be said, have given in to the impulse to avenge Mercutio. Romeo had been pacific when Tybalt challenged him: Mercutio should have let well alone: Mercutio's fate was his own fault: and so Romeo, in his turn, should have let well alone. But we cannot think that Shakespeare wants us to give logic its head absolutely. Romeo started by being commendably conciliatory when Tybalt challenged him. He acted violently only when absolutely forced to do so by the claims of dear friendship. No doubt he should not have allowed himself to be forced: but at least his error is much more pardonable than that of Tybalt, and even than that of Mercutio.

Fate works against the lovers by means of the feud, by means of accident and coincidence, and by means of character-flaws in others. But are the lovers themselves in any way responsible for their own doom? Is there any error in their own behaviour, any fault or faults in their own characters, which may be regarded as at least partially responsible for their unhappy end?

From time to time the dialogue invites us to consider the question, are the lovers too rash, impetuous, reckless? Friar Lawrence thinks they are. Or at any rate he feels that they must be counselled not to be.

Wisely and slow. They stumble that run fast.
 (2. 3. 95)

These violent delights have violent ends, . . .
 Therefore love moderately; long love doth so:
 Too swift arrives as tardy as too slow.
 (2. 6. 9, 14-15)

The Friar is a very worthy man. But surely we must hesitate long before accepting his viewpoint in these passages as being that of Shakespeare. The Friar is prudent; he is worldly-wise. He knows what will work

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and what will not work. Furthermore, we must do him the justice of noting that he is, with genuine religious fervour, anxious to press the claims of the spirit against those of the flesh. But our general impression of the play as a whole forbids us to take the Friar's views as being those which Shakespeare wants to be accepted as valid. We cannot think that Shakespeare wants us to blame these two incomparable young people as being over-hasty; we cannot think that Shakespeare wants us to believe that it would have been better for them, fundamentally, if they had been more prudent, more coolly calculating. We cannot think that Shakespeare wants us to take the Friar's words as indicating the true standard by which we must judge these golden young people. One may, in one's own philosophy, value divine love as infinitely finer than human love. One may, in one's own philosophy, feel that reason, moderation, should prevail over feeling and passion. But surely, if one accepts the assumptions that Shakespeare seems to be implying in this play—if, in other words, one tries to fathom Shakespeare's intentions—one must ask what this well-meaning but dull, timid and unimaginative cleric knows of the ecstasies of a sublime passion which the play, even if it succeeds in doing nothing else, certainly succeeds in glorifying magnificently.

It may, however, be pointed out that it is not only Friar Lawrence who brings up the notion of rashness. Juliet herself says to Romeo—

Although I joy in thee,
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'. (2. 2. 116-20)

This is one of those touches of premonition by which Shakespeare, as noted above, helps to paint in the

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atmosphere of Fate, of oncoming doom, which overhangs the play. But we are not to suppose that Juliet intends it seriously herself or to take it as anything more than a momentary superstitious utterance of a young girl who, having suddenly discovered supreme happiness, is, for a second or two, half-afraid that her happiness is too great to last. 'Half-afraid', for she goes on—

Sweet, goodnight:

This bud of love, by summer's ripening breath,
 May prove a beauteous flower when next we meet.

Her worry has been but the matter of an instant. And soon, having gone in, she is reappearing and calling Romeo back for more words of love—not once, but twice. We cannot think that her 'too rash, too unadvised, too sudden' is meant by Shakespeare to imply blame.

Is Romeo to be blamed for over-hastiness in buying the poison? Is he to be blamed for over-hastiness in committing his suicide? There is nothing blameworthy about his believing Balthasar's report of Juliet's 'death'. Romeo has no reason to doubt the news. And later, when he sees Juliet in the tomb, she certainly seems to be dead. It would be quite ridiculous to blame him for supposing that in fact she is dead. And, since he has, from his first view of her, regarded her as his whole life, how can he be blamed by anyone of good will for killing himself in the belief that she is dead? There is nothing that we can hold against him here unless we insist on the (admitted) validity of moral conceptions that have no meaning for Shakespeare in this play, such as that under no circumstances should a man end his own life, or unless we press the claims of prudent scepticism to the point of insisting that a man is culpable if he accepts a report from his faithful servant without verifying it, or if, seeing his loved one

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lying motionless in a sepulchre, he fails to say to himself that perhaps, despite appearances, she is not dead at all and that perhaps, after all, he had better wait and see. It is true that when he learns of Juliet's 'death' from Balthasar Romeo looks 'pale and wild'. There is emotional unbalance. But, thinking of the magnitude of the blow he has sustained, how can we blame him?

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 basic design of the story of the lovers that spectator or reader should regard their fate as directly caused, even partly, by their own character-flaws.

It seems quite clear that the tragic design which Shakespeare intends to embody in the story of the lovers is a design very popular in the Middle Ages—the conception of tragedy as consisting of the malignant operation of Fate, or Fortune, against human beings, these human beings in no way deserving their doom. The Middle Ages loved their various stories 'de casibus virorum illustrium'. As Mr Howard Baker says,¹

Tragedy in the Middle Ages was the story of a great person's attainment of a special eminence, his brief and precarious triumph, and his fall. Such a story naturally took on a definite shape: its first part accounted for the ascent of the pyramid of worldly success, its second part viewed the man on the very top, and its final part ushered him down the inevitable other side: the story recapitulated in form the image of man's rise and fall upon the Wheel of Fortune.

While the falls of illustrious men exercised this great appeal, writers sometimes turned to the stories of

¹ *Induction to Tragedy* (University of Louisiana, 1939), p. 155. Cf. Introduction to *Richard II* (New Shakespeare), pp. xix–xxii.

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people not of the very highest social eminence, and to private rather than public life. The *Troilus and Cressida* story is a case in point; and indeed Mr Nevill Coghill has declared¹ that 'the most pervasive influence, one which gave Shakespeare the definable form of tragedy that we see in *Romeo and Juliet*, came from *Troilus and Criseyde*'. Chaucer's poem is, says Mr Coghill, 'a formal tragedy on the Boethian plan'. And he goes on—

The essence of this is... a fall into wretchedness after a transient happiness. The reason given as proper to tragedy for this fall is the operation of Fortune. She turns her wheel and we rise upon it to a fickle joy; she turns it still and we fall into some awaiting Hell-mouth. Our fall has nothing to do with our deserts, for though Fortune may laugh to see pride humbled she is no less delighted to turn her wheel against the innocent. This was the shape of tragedy as Chaucer understood it when he came to write his *Troilus and Criseyde*. He passed no judgement on his faithless heroine; it was the pity of it that struck him:

Iwis, I wolde excuse hire yet for routhe.

And *Romeo and Juliet*, the critic says, is to be classified with Chaucer's poem—they are 'the two perfect examples of this form'. 'It is a form,' he continues, 'peculiarly suited to a story of unfortunate love, for love, of all our passions, seems to us the most manifestly predestined, the most pitiful in its crosses'.

As regards the story of the lovers, then, Shakespeare intends to follow the traditional pattern of the tragedy of Fate or Fortune or Destiny or the Stars, which endow human beings with great happiness (sometimes it is worldly success, power, empire, riches: here it is emotional and spiritual self-fulfilment), and then cast

¹ *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet* (Folio Society, London, 1950), pp. 8 ff.

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them down to sorrow and to ruin. Their fall is not their own fault. They are the helpless victims of a malevolent, or at least capricious, universal force. The philosophy underlying this conception of tragedy is a profoundly pessimistic philosophy.

But the play deals not only with the lovers but also with the families.

THE STORY OF THE FAMILIES

The play ends with a reconciliation between the two warring families; and it is with the families that it begins—

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.

(Prol. 1-4)

The lovers are set in this context; and the Prologue indicates that, in the all-embracing pattern of the play, the fate of the lovers is meant to be regarded as subsidiary to the fate of the families. The lovers have 'misadventured piteous overthrows', but the final significance of these is that they bury the strife of the parents. The lovers die and must be buried. They are innocent victims, and we feel a sense of pathos. But at the same time the families' strife dies and is buried, and we feel that in the future all is going to be well in Verona. We have, fundamentally, a happy ending, though it is purchased at a sad cost.

If the play concerned nothing but the 'misadventured piteous overthrows' of the two young people who are the innocent victims of a malignant Fate, then we should have to say that it embodied a tragic design that Shakespeare never attempted again. In *King Lear*

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there is a point at which the Earl of Gloucester declares that

As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods,
They kill us for their sport.

But this is not the final message with which Shakespeare leaves us at the end of *King Lear*. If, in *Romeo and Juliet*, we think of the lovers' story by itself, we shall no doubt feel that that *is* his final message here. That pessimistic message is, in fact, the message of any writer who sets out to deal *simpliciter* with the theme of Fortune's wheel or with the theme of the malignant stars which ruin men for no reason connected with justice. That theme had been dealt with by many writers before Shakespeare's time, and he was fully aware of it. But in this play, handling that theme, he wanted it to fall into place as part of another theme.

The two great protagonists of the drama are the two families. They belong to the same city, and they should, in the light of a moral law that we can all accept, be bound together in a relationship of affection and co-operation. Actually they are at daggers drawn. The families sin, then: and they do so before the hero and heroine are even born. It is a case of 'ancient grudge'. The hero and heroine, living in this context, are brought to a fatal doom which they themselves do not deserve. But their fate brings the two families together, the feud comes to an end, and the future of Verona looks bright. Society is redeemed through suffering and loss. The families are punished for their sin by the loss of their brightest scions. The final message, then, is that the gods are just (punishing the families as they do), and also that the gods are charitable in the highest sense, wishing to replace hate with love in the world. It takes the sacrifice of the innocent to purge the guilty of their sin and to turn strife into amity. But at least the sacrifice of the innocent is contrived in a total design

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which is ultimately regulated by both justice and mercy, in due proportion, in the forces which run the universe.

* * * * *

How far was Shakespeare successful in the carrying out of this design? The answer must be: (i) what he actually accomplished is very fine—the play is deservedly one of the most perennially popular of his works; but (ii) he did not quite succeed in doing what he set out to do, so that, in fact, as Professor Charlton has said,¹ the play ‘as a pattern of the idea of tragedy . . . is a failure’.

The story of the two families is vitally important to the intended design, and that of the two lovers is only part of that design: yet, while the design is clearly perceptible, it seems defective, inasmuch as most of the dramatist’s attention is concentrated on the lovers, his attention to the families frequently (though not invariably) appearing to be somewhat perfunctory. Thus, while the dramatist is trying to convey a certain great tragic conception (which points forward to his maturity), he succeeds, with many readers, in conveying with full conviction only a fragment of that conception—conveys in fact an impression of tragedy different from that which he finally wanted to convey. The play does not fail because it lacks design. The reason why it fails, to the extent it does, is that the author is profoundly interested in parts of the design, and he is not nearly so much interested in other parts of the design. And so the structure is lop-sided.

Two aspects of this failure which have been noted by critics may be mentioned here. One has been noted by Professor Charlton, the other by Professor Stauffer.

Professor Charlton feels, and others feel with him,

¹ *Shakespearian Tragedy* (Cambridge, 1948), p. 61.

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that, while wishing the idea of Fate and the plot-element of the feud to be vitally important components of the design exercising an overwhelming compulsion upon the lovers, Shakespeare has in fact made the feud quite unconvincing and has made of the conception of Fate nothing more important than a matter of sheer bad luck.¹

In this connexion we must, of course, avoid making the elementary mistake of treating partially non-naturalistic drama as if it were meant to be completely naturalistic. Consider the following point. When Romeo falls in love with Juliet, Shakespeare certainly means us to think, right away, of the feud as the only obstacle in the way of the lover's happiness. But before he fell in love with Juliet Romeo was, or thought he was, in love with Rosaline. It is a critical commonplace that Shakespeare wants us to contrast Romeo's love of Juliet with his earlier love of Rosaline. In the one case Romeo is, to use a convenient cliché, in love with being in love. His feeling for Rosaline, while quite sincere, is not deep, not fundamental. He is going through a fashionable stage of youthful development, thinking, behaving, and speaking in accordance with the well-established conventions that the fashion dictated. In the other case he really is in love, if any man in literature ever was. The distinction is clear. But, in successfully making this distinction, Shakespeare ignores a point which, in the light of a strictly naturalistic interpretation, may well seem to involve unfortunate inconsistency. Romeo's love-affair with Rosaline meets with frustration. Romeo is a Montague, Rosaline a Capulet. But his frustration is not caused thereby. One may wonder why. If the feud stands in the way of his love of Juliet, why did it not stand

¹ See *Shakespearian Tragedy*, pp. 49 ff., and *Proc. Brit. Acad.* (1939), pp. 143 ff.

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in the way of his love of Rosaline? It did not: or, if it did, Shakespeare makes nothing of the point. What, he tells us, actually stands in the way of Romeo's success with Rosaline is her ideal of celibacy. Apparently, despite the feud, Romeo has been able to see Rosaline and to plead his case with her. But she has refused to be moved: she has sworn that she will still (i.e. always) live chaste (i.e. unmarried). She is like Olivia in *Twelfth Night* (though Olivia set a seven-year term to her celibacy). 'She'll not be hit with Cupid's arrow.' Shakespeare disapproves of this attitude in *Twelfth Night*, as he does also (in connexion with a man) in Sonnets 3 and 11. No doubt he disapproves of it in *Romeo and Juliet* too, though he does not allow himself to comment explicitly. Indeed, in Rosaline, who is only mentioned, we have an Olivia-like character who might have been quite an interesting dramatic figure had she actually appeared. But our point is this—that a naturalistic critic may say, on the one hand, that there is an inconsistency here which is an artistic blot on the play, or he may say, on the other hand, that we cannot be expected to take the feud very seriously since it seems to have been no obstacle as regards Romeo's first love-affair. To both criticisms the reply must be that Shakespeare's plays are liable to be only partly naturalistic, and that one should always be on one's guard against applying to them critical criteria which are irrelevant to them.

Nevertheless, allowing for all this, Professor Charlton is right. Our first view of the feud on the stage involves nothing more impressive than a vulgar brawl amongst servants, some at least of whom behave in a distinctly unvalorous and ignoble manner. And then we have the heads of the houses coming in and appearing rather ridiculous. Capulet, attired in a dressing-gown, calls for an absurdly obsolete weapon, and we enjoy his

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wife's delightful tartness—'A crutch, a crutch! Why call you for a sword?' Montague's wife treats her lord similarly. It all seems rather trivial, rather silly. Professor Charlton notes this, and he feels that the feud is not presented by Shakespeare in such a way as to seem to be a force, working against the lovers, as terrible and as serious as the author apparently wanted it to seem. Admittedly there are places where it at least nearly seems to be such a force. But Shakespeare does not sustain the idea throughout with full conviction.

Now for the point made by Professor Stauffer.¹ Though, as we have said, it was no part of Shakespeare's consciously intended dramatic design that the hero or heroine should be held even partially responsible for their own doom owing to any character-flaws, that is not the end of the matter.

Indubitable weaknesses of character they have, and Shakespeare does not spare them in pointing these out. When the Friar tells him that he is banished, Romeo rants hysterically. He grovels on the floor. He well deserves the rebuke of the Nurse—'Stand up, stand up, stand an you be a man.' Indeed, he shows 'the unreasonable fury of a beast'. He behaves contemptibly. His conduct is infantile. And it must be noted, too, with however much regret, that Juliet is capable of behaving in a similar manner, though this is not shown on the stage. The Nurse tells us that Juliet lies 'blubbering and weeping, weeping and blubbering':

O, she says nothing, sir, but weeps and weeps,
And now falls on her bed, and then starts up,
And Tybalt calls, and then on Romeo cries,
And then down falls again. (3. 3. 99-102)

They are two very fine young people, certainly: but

¹ *Shakespeare's World of Images* (New York, 1949), pp. 53 ff.