

Romeo and Juliet



<i>year and phase</i>	1594-1595 (1 st)
<i>source</i>	Based on an Italian Story, which was translated in prose and in verse into French and English. In English: Arthur Brooke <i>The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet</i>
<i>genre</i>	Tragedy
<i>setting</i>	Verona

Themes and Comments

- a) The glory of love against the violence of society;
This society is dominated by a feud; the two lovers free themselves from social links and conventions of the time by choosing fate, so they make the society look less powerful and less significant.
- b) The opposition between the young and the old.
R. and J. represent young love, the ardour of their adoration is the mark of first real passion.
Their idea of love is opposed to the other characters' views:
- To the Capulets it's a family alliance (marriage with J's cousin);
 - To the nurse a means for sexual satisfaction;
 - To the friar a way to end the feud in forgiving;
- The tone is Lyrical-dramatic;
- Every character has its language: the nurse uses a popular language; Mercutio a witty language; Friar Lorenzo uses the language of science; Romeo uses a sentimental and conventional language when he speaks of Rosaline, but later in the play, his style changes and it evolves from rhetorical to simple (see the *garden scene* where he uses frank expressions of love, without too flowery sentences) In the opinion of the critics, the language reflects the passage from the young to the mature S.
- The play is rich in imagery and the images are taken mostly from the natural world; the two lovers appear to each other as light against a dark background (dark both for the night and the violence surrounding them); The images of the sun, moon, stars, etc. give an atmosphere of free nature: the lovers are in harmony with nature; in the garden their words reveal the beauty of Nature.
- The play contains poetry:
There is a **Sonnet** (Dear Saint.....);
an **Epithalamium** (Gallop apace though fiery footed ...);
an **Aubade** (at the moment of Romeo's departure) =
= canzone, musica cantata al mattino o
che ad esso si ispira (of Provençal origin)

- ▶ ***Romeo and Juliet* begins with the materials for a comedy - the stupid parental generation, the instant attraction of the young lovers, the quick surface life of street fights, masked balls and comic servants“**
- ▶ **Indeed, one could view *Romeo and Juliet* as a transitional play in which Shakespeare merges the comedic elements perfected in his earlier work with tragic elements he would later perfect in the great tragedies -- *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear*.**
- ▶ **The heroes of the play must contend with external forces that impede their relationship, but, unlike the great tragic heroes, they are devoid of the inner struggle that makes for great tragedy.**

▶ **The Theme of Light**

- ▶ **Scholar Caroline Spurgeon once wrote, "The dominating image [in *Romeo and Juliet*] is light, every form and manifestation of it"**

▶ **The Theme of Destiny**

- ▶ **As critic Bertrand Evans points out: "Romeo and Juliet is a tragedy of unawareness" more so than any of Shakespeare's other plays. "Fate, or Heaven, as the Prince calls it, or the "greater power," as the Friar calls it, working out its purpose without the use of either a human villain or a supernatural agent sent to intervene in mortal affairs, operates through the common human condition of not knowing.**