

# 10

# SUCH SWEET SORROW— SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA

## Learning Outcomes

In this chapter students will learn to:

- explore real and imagined worlds through close and wide engagement with increasingly demanding texts
- analyse ways in which literary composers transform ideas and experience into texts, including consideration of their insight, imaginative powers and verbal ingenuity
- compose texts that reflect cultural attitudes other than their own.

## Key Words

- tragedy
- dramatic irony
- sonnet
- imagery
- tone of voice
- contrast
- aggressive language
- extended metaphor
- choreography

long standing argument

# 10.1

## Romeo and Juliet, by William Shakespeare

The story of *Romeo and Juliet* is revealed in the first fourteen lines of the play. The lines are spoken by the Chorus. We learn here that the events take place in Verona, Italy. Two noble Veronese families are involved in a feud, which has been going on for many years. The son of one family falls in love with the daughter of the other. Their love is doomed from the start. The young lovers both die. The shock of their deaths leads to their parents shaking hands and patching up their quarrel. The play lasts two hours.

By telling us the story before the play begins, Shakespeare has done away with suspense. We know what is coming. Today we don't like to be told the ending of a novel or a play. 'Don't tell me,' we say, as if the only interest in a piece of writing rests in the details of the plot. What happens is a mystery for the brain.

But if there are no surprises, why do people go to see the play?

The answer is that Shakespeare prefers irony to mystery. Dramatic irony is the name given to a situation where the audience knows more about what is going on than do the characters in the play. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the audience knows what will happen, but not how. There are many 'hows' that the audience still needs to discover. How can Romeo and Juliet fall in love if their families never meet except to fight? How do they manage to get married? How do Romeo and Juliet die? How do their deaths end the feud? And so on. Members of the audience watch the tragic events unfold, but are powerless to stop them. How it happens is much more of an emotional experience.

The fact that the plot is revealed in a sonnet, a traditional Italian form of love poetry, only adds to the irony.

Reading and responding to an imaginative text

At the start of the play Romeo is in love—not with Juliet, but with a girl called Rosaline. He is so absorbed in his love for her that he completely misses out on a brawl in the market square between the two warring families, the Montagues and the Capulets. The chief protagonist in this brawl is Tybalt, a Capulet.

Romeo is a Montague.

Verona, in this play, is a self-governing city-state with its own ruler, Prince Escalus. The Prince stops the fighting in the streets and threatens death to any who brawl in public again.

Meanwhile Paris, a wealthy nobleman related to the Prince, has his eye on Juliet. He goes to Juliet's father and asks for the girl's hand in marriage.

Juliet is a Capulet.

Arranged marriages were common in those days, and Paris would be considered a good catch for Juliet. Lady Capulet is keen for the marriage to go ahead, but Capulet feels that Juliet, who is still thirteen, is too young.

That night Capulet throws a party and everyone is invited. Everyone, that is, except the Montagues. When Romeo finds out that Rosaline will be there, he and his friends Mercutio and Benvolio decide to gatecrash the party. As it is a masked ball, they are able to go in disguise. It's risky, but love conquers all. Or so Romeo thinks. That's before he sees Juliet.

We pick up the play when Romeo first sets eyes on Juliet.

## Act 1, scene 5

(A ROOM IN THE CAPULET'S HOME. A PARTY IS IN PROGRESS. THE ROOM IS FILLED WITH PEOPLE FEASTING AND DANCING. ROMEO SEES JULIET AND CALLS A SERVING MAN OVER.)

**ROMEO:** What lady's that which doth enrich the hand  
Of yonder knight [gentleman]?

Romeo sees Juliet.  
He thinks she's hot

**SERVANT:** I know not, sir.

**ROMEO:** O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright.

— she is brighter than a torch

It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night

As a rich jewel in an Ethiop's [Ethiopian's] ear

— like a diamond against dark

Beauty too rich for [everyday] use, for earth too dear [valuable].

— too special for earth

She shows a snowy dove trooping with crows,

As yonder lady o'er her fellows [companions] shows.

The measure [dance] done, I'll watch her place of stand,

And touching hers, make blessed my rude [rough] hand.

Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight,

For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night.

10

**TYBALT:**

(OVERHEARING ROMEO) This by his voice should be a Montague.

Fetch me my rapier, boy. (THE SERVANT LEAVES) What, dares the slave

Come hither, covered with an antic face [grotesque mask]

To f leer [sneer] and scorn at our solemnity [festivity]?

Now by the stock and honour of my kin [family],

To strike him dead I hold it not a sin.

**CAPULET:** (TO TYBALT) Why how now, kinsman, wherefore storm you so? 20

**TYBALT:** Uncle, this is a Montague, our foe:  
A villain that is hither come in spite  
To scorn at our solemnity this night.

**CAPULET:** Young Romeo is it?

**TYBALT:** Tis he, that villain Romeo. 25

**CAPULET:** Content thee, gentle coz [kinsman], let him alone,  
A [he] bears him like a portly [well-mannered] gentleman;  
And to say truth, Verona brags of him  
To be a virtuous and well-governed youth.  
I would not for the wealth of all this town 30  
Here in my house do him disparagement [injury].  
Therefore be patient, take no note of him;  
It is my will, the which if thou respect [it],  
Show a fair presence and put off these frowns—  
An ill-beseeming semblance [unsuitable appearance] for a feast. 35

**TYBALT:** It fits when such a villain is a guest.  
I'll not endure [tolerate] him.

**CAPULET:** He shall be endured.  
What, goodman boy! I say he shall! Go to,  
Am I the master here or you? Go to [Really!]. 40  
You'll not endure him! God shall mend my soul,  
You'll make a mutiny among my guests,  
You will set cock-a-hoop [start a fight], you'll be the man!

**TYBALT:** Why, uncle, tis a shame—

**CAPULET:** Go to, go to. 45  
You are a saucy [insolent] boy. Is't so indeed?  
This trick [behaviour] may chance to scathe [injure] you, I know what.  
You must contrary [oppose] me. Marry, tis time.  
(TO THE DANCERS) Well said, my hearts! (TO TYBALT) You are a princox, go;  
Be quiet, or (TO SERVANTS) More light! More light! (TO TYBALT) For shame!  
I'll make you quiet. (TO DANCERS) What, cheerly, my hearts!

**(CAPULET LEAVES TYBALT AND RETURNS TO THE FESTIVITIES)**

**TYBALT:** Patience perforce with wilful choler [obstinate anger] meeting  
Makes my flesh tremble in their different greeting.  
I will withdraw, but this intrusion [of Romeo] shall,  
Now seeming sweet, convert to bitterest gall [sourness]. 55

**(TYBALT EXITS)**

**ROMEO:** (TAKING JULIET BY THE HAND) If I profane with my unworhiest hand  
This holy shrine, the gentle [lesser] sin is this,  
My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand  
To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.

**JULIET:** Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much, 60  
Which mannerly devotion shows in this [act];  
For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,  
And palm to palm is holy palmers'\* kiss.

**ROMEO:** Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?  
**JULIET:** Ay pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer. 65  
**ROMEO:** O then dear saint, let lips do what hands do.  
They pray. Grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.

**JULIET:** Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake.  
**ROMEO:** Then move not, while my prayer's effect I take.

**(THEY KISS)**

**JULIET:** Thus from my lips, by thine, my sin is purged [cleaned away]. 70  
Then have my lips the sin that they have took.

**ROMEO:** Sin from my lips? O trespass sweetly urged.  
Give me my sin again.

**(THEY KISS AGAIN)**

**JULIET:** You kiss by the book [expertly].

**(THE NURSE ENTERS TO FIND JULIET)**

**NURSE:** Madam, your mother craves a word with you. 75

**(JULIET LEAVES. ROMEO TURNS TO THE NURSE)**

**ROMEO:** What is her mother?  
**NURSE:** Marry [by the virgin Mary], bachelor,  
Her mother is the lady of the house,  
And a good lady, and a wise and virtuous.  
I nursed her daughter that you talked withal. 80  
I tell you, he that can lay hold of [marry] her  
Shall have the chinks [money].

**(THE NURSE LEAVES)**

**ROMEO:** Is she a Capulet?  
O dear account, my life is my foe's debt.

**BENVOLIO:** (ENTERING) Away, be gone; the sport is at the best [the best is over].  
**ROMEO:** Ay, so I fear; the more is my unrest. 86  
**CAPULET:** (TO THE MASKERS) Nay gentlemen, prepare not to be gone;  
We have a trifling foolish banquet [refreshments] towards [coming].

**(SOME WHISPER THEIR EXCUSES TO HIM)**

Is it e'en so? Why then I thank you all.

I thank you honest gentlemen; good night.

90

**(TO SERVANTS)** More torches here! Come on then, let's to bed.

Ah sirrah, by my fay [faith], it waxes [grows] late.

I'll to my rest.

**(THE MASKERS DISPERSE. CAPULET AND HIS FAMILY GO TO BED.  
JULIET CALLS THE NURSE OVER)**

**JULIET:** Come hither Nurse. **(POINTING TO A GUEST)** What is yond gentleman?

**NURSE:** The son and heir of old Tiberio.

95

**JULIET:** What's he that now is going out of door?

**NURSE:** Marry, that I think be young Petruchio.

**JULIET:** What's he that follows there **(ROMEO EXITS)**, that would not dance?

**NURSE:** I know not.

**JULIET:** Go ask his name. **(THE NURSE FOLLOWS ROMEO OUT)** If he be married,  
My grave is like to be my wedding bed.

101

**(THE NURSE RETURNS)**

**NURSE:** His name is Romeo, and a Montague,  
The only son of your great enemy.

**JULIET:** My only love sprung from my only hate!

Too early seen unknown, and known too late!

105

Prodigious [monstrous] birth of love it is to me,

That I must love a loathed enemy.

**NURSE:** **(OVERHEARING)** What's this? What's this?

**JULIET:** **(QUICKLY)** A rhyme I learned even now

Of one I danced withal.

110

**(SOMEONE OFFSTAGE CALLS 'JULIET')**

**NURSE:** Anon, anon! [coming!]

Come let's away, the strangers [visitors] are all gone.

**(THEY EXIT)**

\* palmers = pilgrims to the Holy Land who brought back palm leaves.

## Focus questions

- 1 If we call someone 'bright' today we imply that they are intelligent. In Shakespeare's day 'bright' meant 'beautiful'. What three images of beauty does Romeo use to describe Juliet in his first speech in this scene?
- 2 Tybalt is Juliet's cousin. What kind of a person is he? Refer to his remarks and behaviour in this scene to support your answer.
- 3 What is Capulet's attitude on hearing that Romeo has gatecrashed his party? Why does he behave as he does?
- 4 Reread Capulet's speech beginning 'Go to, go to'. How do you think the actor playing Capulet should deliver these lines? How many different tones of voice do you think he might employ during the course of this speech? Answer this question with detailed reference to specific lines.
- 5 Do you think Romeo's feelings for Juliet were really feelings of love? Remember, he went to the party to see Rosaline. Give reasons for your point of view and quote from the scene in your answer.
- 6 Why did Juliet enquire about Petruchio and old Tiberio's son at the end of the party?
- 7 What do we learn about Juliet's feelings for Romeo in this scene? Give reasons and quotations to support your argument.
- 8 How does Shakespeare place his audience in this scene? In other words, whose side are we on? Through whose eyes do we view the events at the party? How does this placement increase the tension and suspense of the scene?
- 9 Shakespeare wrote his plays to entertain all members of society, both rich and poor, educated and uneducated. What sections of his audience would enjoy which bits of this scene, do you think, and why?

