

# Romeo and Juliet

## As Characterized by Shakespeare

**Kazuyoshi Enozawa**

Despite the apparent simplicity of its plot structure and its characterization, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is in fact more complex than it looks at first glance. That is why there has been among critics and readers and theatre-goers such a variety of opinions regarding its nature as a dramatic work.

I do not want here to rehearse debates among the critics over whether the play is a tragedy of "fate" or a tragedy of "character". I shall propose instead to register in the following pages my view of what constitutes the core of interest in this popular play. To put it briefly, that core of interest resides in the precocity of Juliet – an adolescent girl who has as yet barely attained the age of fourteen – in contrast to the tardy maturing of her lover Romeo, who starts out as a lovesick young man sighing and pining for a cold-hearted, unresponsive lady by the name of Rosaline, and drags along his romantic attitude even after he has found a new love in the daughter of the Capulets.

My first thesis is that Juliet, for all her extreme youth, is surprisingly mature in her thinking and behaviour. Notice, first of all, her modest maidenly response to her mother who broaches the topic of marriage to her. With County Paris's proposal obviously in mind, Lady Capulet

asks her: "Tell me, daughter Juliet, / How stands your disposition to get married?" To which question, Juliet replies: "It is an honour I dream not of" (I.iii.69-71). This is a very decent reply, expected of a well-bred daughter in making her disposition known to her mother. But her reply is in fact rather ambiguous in implication. It may imply that getting married to someone elevated in social status would be an "honour" beyond her expectations, and that she would be more than happy to have such a gentleman as her husband. Or it may imply that such an "honour" would be unthinkable to her because she is not quite prepared for it (an euphemism for declining a marriage proposal). Juliet's reply then shows a marvelous tact in a girl who has not yet attained an adult age. No wonder that it evokes an instant cry of admiration from the Nurse: "An honour? Were not I thine only nurse, / I would say thou hadst sucked wisdom from thy teat" (I.iii. 72-74).

After a preliminary enquiry about her daughter's disposition for marriage, Lady Capulet goes straight to her point, beginning with a peremptory request: "Well, think of marriage now", and following it with the name of a would-be husband: "Thus, then, in brief: / The valiant Paris seeks you for his love" (I.iii. 79-80). Then she asks her daughter: "What say you? Can you love the gentleman?" (I.iii. 85). Juliet, however, after patiently listening to her mother's elaborate exhortations of the wooer that conclude with "Can you like Paris' love?", replies:

JULIET 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.103-105)

This again is a sagacious reply, conforming to decorum. It is worth noting that she puts cautiously couched conditions into her promise. Readers may well argue that Juliet's polite but well-pondered reply to her mother's insistent questions is proof enough that she is far from being a flippant and shallow-minded "lovebird" as the Nurse calls her without meaning it (I.iii.3).

Some readers may accuse Juliet on the grounds that she is "rash", or "bold", or "unconventional" at any rate, in her behaviour. Today it is a conventionalized pattern in courtship for the lover to confess his love for the lady first and then woo her, not the other way round; naturally, we are inclined to assume that when Juliet confesses her love first in soliloquy and then confirms her confessions to Romeo himself in the "balcony" scene, she is behaving rather too boldly, or going against the socially accepted convention. But we must remember that Juliet is in fact utterly unaware that Romeo is hiding in the orchard, down below her "balcony", in the dark of night. With an almost inaudible sigh ("Ay me"), Juliet utters her famous confession:

JULIET 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.36-39)



Should any readers equate Juliet's "true-love passion" with what they misconceive as her "reckless passion", they could hardly escape from the charges directed against them – charges that they are grossly ignorant of the heterosexual desire of adolescent maidens, or that their moralistic views are either too straitlaced, or too simplistic.

It is true that Juliet shares with Romeo a certain degree of impetuosity. They certainly show their hot temper occasionally. However, Juliet, being a female, rarely shows her violent temper in public. She has been taught, or has taught herself, to hide her real emotions even within her own family, where her father reigns with patriarchal authority. However, when her father threatens to disown her as his sole heiress unless she obeys his orders to take Paris as her husband, she resolutely refuses to comply. Understandably, this indomitable self-will in the daughter incurs the father's wrath. Here is an initial exchange between Capulet and Lady Capulet:

CAPULET

How now, wife?

Have you delivered to her our decree?

LADY CAPULET

Ay, sir, but she will none, she gives you thanks.

I would the fool were married to her grave.

CAPULET

Soft, take me with you, take me with you, wife.

How, will she none? Doth she not give us thanks?

Is she not proud? Doth she not count her blessed,

Unworthy as she is, that we have wrought

So worthy a gentleman, to be her bride?

(III.v. 142-150)





the play to be a pre-meditated action on her part, not a reckless action performed on the spur of the moment.

In the foregoing argument I have concentrated on Juliet in an attempt to rebut the view that because of her “immaturity” and “impetuosity” coupled with her lover’s similar defects of character, the young lovers’ “rash” and “reckless” passion has precipitated their “misadventured piteous overthrows” ([First] Prologue, 7) – their tragic outcome. I shall return to this topic later on, but here in the meantime let me dwell on Romeo’s proclivity for romanticizing his passion and trace his gradual transformation from immaturity to maturity, following upon his consummation while bedding in with his bride.

My second thesis is that Romeo, while proceeding from his infantile infatuation for Rosaline to his maturer love for Juliet, reveals consistently in this process his characteristic trait as a “romantic” lover – “romantic” in the sense that he tends to idolize his idealized lady.

From the earliest scene of the play, it is evident that Romeo is suffering from melancholia because of his unrequited love for his lady (whose identity he keeps to himself at first, but he soon acknowledges, though tacitly, that this lady is in fact Capulet’s niece, Rosaline).

Romeo happens to be absent from the latest scene of a street brawl started between the servants of Capulet on one side and those of Montague on the other. Romeo’s absence has relieved Lady Montague,

but she is still worried about what to her seems irrational about her son's recent behaviour. After the brawling crowds have been dispersed by the magisterial orders of Escalus, Prince of Verona, Lady Montague inquires her nephew Benvolio about her son's whereabouts. Benvolio tells her that he has espied Romeo wandering at dawn:

BENVOLIO Madam, before the worshiped sun  
Peered forth the golden window of the east,  
A troubled mind drove me to walk abroad,  
.....  
.....  
So early walking did I see your son.  
Towards him I made, but he was 'ware of me  
And stole into the covert of the wood. (I.i. 120-127)

Young man as he is, Benvolio shares with Romeo a habit of roaming with a "troubled mind" until daybreak. On this particular morning, while out in the field he espies his cousin from afar and moves towards him. But Romeo, noticing him, hurriedly steals into the woods. Avoiding thus the eyes of others is a symptom of melancholia, often observed in a dejected lover. Thus Shakespeare, even before he brings Romeo on to the stage, lets it known to the audience that his main male character is being helplessly lovelorn.

Lord Montague is also aware of his son's melancholia, as is evident in these lines:

MONTAGUE Many a morning hath he there been seen,  
With tears augmenting the fresh morning's dew,  
Adding to clouds more clouds with his deep sighs.  
But all so soon as the all-cheering sun  
Should in the farthest east begin to draw  
The shady curtains from Aurora's bed,  
Away from light steals home my heavy son  
And private in his chamber pens himself,  
Shuts up his windows, locks fair-daylight out,  
And makes himself an artificial night. (I.i. 134-143)

Montague admits his ignorance of the possible cause of his son's melancholia. And it is just after this admission that lovesick Romeo makes his first appearance. While the Montagues hurriedly step aside, Benvolio turns to speak to Romeo. After a casual greeting, Benvolio asks him: "What sadness lengthens Romeo's hours?" (I.i. 168). Romeo replies in an enigmatic manner:

ROMEO Not having that, which, having, makes them short.  
BENVOLIO In love?  
ROMEO Out—  
BENVOLIO Of love?  
ROMEO Out of her favor where I am in love (I.i. 169-173)

Notice that Romeo is here presented as a typical Petrarchan figure — a lover dejected because he has received the cold shoulder from his lady. Here is how Romeo confesses his rejection by Rosaline:

ROMEO

She'll not be hit

With Cupid's arrow. She hath Dian's wit,  
And, in strong proof of chastity well armed,  
From love's weak childish bow she lives uncharmed.  
She will not stay the siege of loving terms,  
Nor bide th'encounter of assailing eyes,  
Nor ope her lap to saint-seducing gold. (I.i. 216-222)

It is known that the burning passion of the Petrarchan lover and the disdain he gets from his adored lady together constitute a conventional theme in the sonnet sequences popular in Elizabethan England during the 1590s. Shakespeare had penned a sequence of his own at about this time. I harbour suspicions, however, that when he wrote *Romeo and Juliet* Shakespeare was already critical about certain aspects of the contemporary sonneteering fad. The playwright seems to have entertained, for example, his disdain not only of the hyperboles and oxymora mechanically employed by the Petrarchan sonneteers, but also for the uncritical way in which they treated unrequited love as a poetic theme. Particularly offensive to Shakespeare, I suspect, was their idealization of romantic passion.

All this of course is merely my own hypothesis, but quite suggestive to me is Benvolio's down-to-earth realism in proposing to Romeo what he believes to be a practical cure for lovesickness. In Benvolio's view, that malaise is just a passing passion. To Romeo's self-conscious question, "Does thou not laugh?", Benvolio says, "No, coz, I rather weep" (I.i. 188-189), though he is presumably on the point of bursting into laughter.

He counsels thus:

BENVOLIO Be ruled by me. Forget to think of her.

ROMEO O, teach me how I should forget to think!

BENVOLIO By giving liberty unto thine eyes.

Examine other beauties. (I.i. 233-236)

Of course, it is quite out of the question for Romeo, already shot deep through by Cupid's arrow, to cast his eye about to seek other beauties, for, as he says, "'Tis the way / To call hers, exquisite, in question more" (I.i. 236-237). The irony here is that the same lover, the moment he sees Juliet at the Capulet ball, is enthralled by her beauty, and clean forgets his erstwhile love Rosaline and soliloquizes thus: "Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight, / For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night" (I.v. 59-60).

Such an instantaneous transference of love from one lady to another elicits a surprised response from Friar Laurence:

FRIAR LAWRENCE Holy Saint 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.  
Jesu Maria, what a deal of brine  
Hath washed thy sallow cheeks for Rosaline!  
How much salt water thrown away in waste  
To season love, that of it doth not taste!



It may have been this sort of mechanical imitation of the Petrarchan hyperboles and oxymora that offended Shakespeare and prompted him to create the image of Romeo for the audience as an immature young man, implying thereby that he has to undergo the tests of experience before being presented as a well-seasoned young adult.

That young Romeo is still quite immature at this stage is shown most vividly in the scene of his visit to Friar Lawrence's cell. The Friar tells him of the Prince's edict for his banishment to Mantua. The moment he hears the word "banishment", Romeo falls into a frenzied grief, because to him the word means "death", or even worse than "death". Here is an exchange between Friar Lawrence and Romeo:

FRIAR LAWRENCE Here from Verona art thou banishèd.  
Be patient, for the world is broad and wide.

ROMEO There is no world without Verona walls  
But purgatory, torture, hell itself.  
Hence "banishèd" is "banished from the world,"  
And world's exile is death. Then "banishèd"  
Is death mistermed. Calling death "banishèd,"  
Thou cutt'st my head off with a golden ax  
And smilest upon the stroke that murders me.

(III.iii. 16-24)

Amazed by Romeo's logic-chopping in his irreverent-sounding protestations, Friar Lawrence reprimands:

FRIAR LAWRENCE O deadly sin, O rude unthankfulness!  
Thy fault our law calls death, but the kind Prince,  
Taking thy part, hath rushed aside the law  
And turned that black word "death" to  
"banishment."  
This is dear mercy, and thou seest it not.  
(III.iii. 25-30)

Romeo's protestations continue for the length of yet another twenty-odd lines. Not only does he lend no ears to Friar Lawrence's well-reasoned admonitions; he even challenges the Friar by daring to posit to him a hypothetical situation:

ROMEO Wert thou as young as I, Juliet thy love,  
An hour but married, Tybalt murderèd,  
Doting like me, and like me banishèd,  
Then mightst thou speak, then mightst thou tear thy  
hair  
And fall upon the ground as I do now,  
*[Romeo throws himself down.]*  
Taking the measure of an unmade grave.  
(III.iii. 68-74)

Romeo's reasonings may sound plausible to some ears, but the gesture of his throwing himself down, as shown by the italicized stage direction, will produce a somewhat comical effect upon the spectator. The gesture looks too histrionic. If my interpretation is right, Romeo is

behaving here much like a spoiled child who won't behave the way he is expected to do. Just at that moment, the Nurse, with a note from Juliet, comes in. At the piteous sight of Romeo lying on the ground "with his own tears made drunk" (as Friar Lawrence puts it), the Nurse utters her amazement instantly and then, with a bawdy innuendo characteristic of her, reprimands: "Stand up, stand up. Stand an you be a man. / For Juliet's sake, for her sake, rise and stand" (III.iii. 96-97). Assuming from her incoherent report that Juliet, also in a frenzy, is weeping and cursing upon Romeo because he has murdered her cousin Tybalt, Romeo, despairing, draws his dagger to kill himself. Friar Lawrence hurriedly holds him back and voices his stern admonitions: "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, / And ill-beseeming beast in seeming both!" (III.iii.118-123).

All these scenes betoken Romeo's "immaturity", and it is my contention that, in contrast to Juliet's maturity already in evidence, Rome is still far behind in his progress to maturity. To demonstrate this contrast between the two protagonists, I will examine below how their dialogue goes on, from the "balcony" scene to the next, – the *aubade* scene.

There is nothing bold in the monologue Juliet makes in the "balcony" scene, quoted early on, except her demand, "Deny thy father and refuse thy name" (II.ii. 37), which may sound a little too bold for a maiden of her age. But her ejaculations, ending in such a resolute



JULIET How camest thou hither, tell me, and wherefore?  
The orchard walls are high and hard to climb,  
And the place death, considering who thou art,  
If any of my kinsmen find thee here.

ROMEO With love's light wings did I o'erperch these walls,  
For stony limits cannot hold love out,  
And what love can do, that dares love attempt.  
Therefore thy kinsmen are no stop to me.

JULIET If they do see thee, they will murder thee.

ROMEO Alack, there lies more peril in thine eye  
Than twenty of their swords. Look thou but sweet.  
And I am proof against their enmity. (II.ii. 67-78)

Romeo's optimism shows a marked contrast with Juliet's womanly concern. There is nothing particularly repugnant about Romeo's youthful optimism (youth being what it is in any period of history), but when it comes to Romeo's deep-rooted love of vows, it is a different story. It is particularly worth noting that Juliet objects to that bent for vows in Romeo, not just once but as many as three times in the speeches that follow:

ROMEO Lady, by yonder blessed moon I vow,  
That tips with silver all these fruit-tree tops—

JULIET O, swear not by the moon, th' inconstant moon,  
That monthly changes in her circled orb,  
Lest that thy love prove likewise variable.

ROMEO What shall I swear by?

JULIET

Do not swear at all.

Or, if thou wilt, swear by thy gracious self,

Which is the god of my idolatry,

And I'll believe thee.

ROMEO If my heart's dear love—

JULIET Well, do not swear. 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 "lightens." Sweet, good night.

(II.ii. 112-127)

Anyone who denounces Juliet on account of her "rashness" should note that she is counselling Romeo not to make "too rash, too unadvised, too sudden" a marriage contract. Not that she loves Romeo the less, but that she fears the possibility of Romeo's professed love proving as "variable" as the moon he swears by.

To Romeo's protests, Juliet asks him gently: "What satisfaction canst thou have tonight?" (II.ii.133). To which question, Romeo again eagerly replies: "Th'exchange of thy love's faithful vow for mine" (II.ii. 134). This reply, which shows Romeo's proclivity for sentimental vows, attests to a certain callowness in his understanding of what constitutes mature love between man and woman. Romeo must outgrow his callowness sooner or later, if he is to attain the level of maturity at which Juliet frankly acknowledges her own love to him:

JULIET But to be frank and give it [my vow] thee again.  
And yet I wish but for the thing I have.  
My bounty is as boundless as the sea,  
My love as deep. The more I give to thee,  
The more I have, for both are infinite. (II.ii. 138-142)

Nothing demonstrates Juliet's realism, as against Romeo's bent for indulging in romantic rhapsodies, better than the following exchange:

ROMEO Ah, Juliet, if the measure of thy joy  
Be heaped like mine, and that thy skill be more  
To blazon it, then sweeten with thy breath  
This neighbor air, and let rich music's tongue  
Unfold the imagined happiness that both  
Receive in either by this dear encounter.

JULIET Conceit, more rich in matter than in words,  
Braggs of his substance, not of ornament.  
They are but beggars that can count their worth,  
But my true love is grown to such excess  
I cannot sum up sum of half my wealth. (II.vi. 24-34)

So much then for the "balcony" scene. I now turn to the *aubade* scene. After bedding in with Juliet, Romeo notices that day is already beginning to break. Romeo hears the lark and starts up to leave. But Juliet holds him back, saying:

JULIET Wilt thou be gone? It is not yet near day.

It was the nightingale, and not the lark,  
That pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear.  
Nightly she sings on yond pomegranate tree.  
Believe me, love, it was the nightingale. (III.v. 1-5)

The beauty of this *aubade* surpasses that of any others that I know of. Immersed as she is in her lingering sense of happiness after the bridal night, Juliet is reluctant to let her lover leave the bed so soon at dawn. Romeo is no less reluctant, but he is now realistic enough to see the dangers of being found out and killed by Juliet's kinsmen. And so he says:

ROMEO It was the lark, the herald of the morn,  
No nightingale. Look, love, what envious streaks  
Do lace the severing clouds in yonder east.  
Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day  
Stand tiptoe on the misty mountain-tops.  
I must be gone and live, or stay and die. (III.v. 6-11)

But Juliet, still insistent, continues:

JULIET Yond light is not daylight, I know it, I.  
It is some meteor that the sun exhaled  
To be to thee this night a torchbearer  
And light thee on thy way to Mantua.  
Therefore stay yet. Thou need'st not to be gone.  
(III.v. 12-16)

It is at this very point that Romeo begins to transform himself into a man different from what he was in earlier scenes. Contrary to the lovesick weakling that he was – a lovelorn lover sighing and pining for his disdainful lady – he is now growing into a maturer character, revealing his lately acquired magnanimity, for example, in his determined acceptance of whatever his beloved wife wills to say. Says Romeo:

ROMEO Let me be ta'en; let me be put to death.  
I am content, so thou wilt have it so.  
I'll say yon gray is not the morning's eye;  
'Tis but the pale reflex of Cynthia's brow.  
Nor that is not the lark whose notes do beat  
The vaulty heaven so high above our heads.  
I have more care to stay than will to go.  
Come death and welcome. Juliet wills it so.  
How is't, my soul? Let's talk. It is not day. (III.v. 17-25)

Cynics may interpret these lines as reflecting the young husband's doting on, rather than loving of, a wayward wife. But I would prefer to think that Romeo is here confessing his real love for Juliet. He is of course fully aware of the dangers of being found out, "ta'en" and "put to death" by his wife's enraged kinsmen. But he is not in the least daunted by such dangers, because he is now willing to die for his beloved. He is in that sense defying death. And wise Juliet is quick to see both her husband's genuine love and the impending danger. Contrary to her previous pleadings, she now pleads in earnest:

JULIET It is, it is. Hie hence, begone, away!  
It is the lark that sings so out of tune,  
Straining harsh discords and unpleasing sharps.

.....  
.....

O, now begone. More light and light it grows. (III.v. 26-35)

What I would like to suggest is that it is only after the *aubade* scene that Romeo shows signs of his belated growth in maturity. I have already pointed out the first of these signs above. The second sign, I suggest, is seen in the scene where Romeo avoids being provoked into a duel by an insulting challenge from Tybalt, who, incidentally, does not know yet that his opponent has actually become a member of the Capulet family by secretly marrying Juliet.

Tybalt is seeking a chance to start a fight with Romeo when the latter comes around. Tybalt provokes him by throwing an insolent greeting at him, but Romeo, brushing it lightly aside, only allows him a hint that he has a reason now for behaving like a friendly gentleman to him:

TYBALT Romeo, the love I bear thee can afford  
No better term than this: thou art a villain.

ROMEO Tybalt, the reason that I have to love thee  
Doth much excuse the appertaining rage  
To such a greeting. Villain am I none.  
Therefore farewell. I see thou knowest me not.

TYBALT Boy, this shall not excuse the injuries

That thou hast done me. Therefore turn and draw.

ROMEO I do protest I never injured thee  
But love thee better than than thou canst devise  
Till thou shalt know the reason of my love.  
And so, good Capulet, which name I tender  
As dearly as mine own, be satisfied. (III.i. 61-73)

Mercutio, overhearing this, cannot contain his exasperation at Romeo's pacifying attitude, and so he spats out: "O calm, dishonorable, vile submission!" (III.i. 74). He immediately takes up Tybalt's challenge on behalf of his friend Romeo, but while engaging in the duel, gets an accidental but lethal thrust, from under his arm, not by Tybalt's sword but by Romeo's. Prompted by a strong sense of male bonding between Mercutio and himself, Romeo avenges the death of his friend on Tybalt, although he has no personal grudge against him. Romeo's calm but mournful reflections on the unintended death of his friend, briefly stated as they are, affect us all the more deeply:

ROMEO This gentleman, the Prince's near ally,  
My very friend, hath got this mortal hurt  
In my behalf. My reputation stained  
With Tybalt's slander – Tybalt, that an hour  
Hath been my cousin! (III.i. 114-118)

Romeo must have reflected, though momentarily, upon taking either one of two alternatives. One is that he would accept Tybalt's challenge himself and fight valiantly to honour his own family. The other is that

he would avoid fighting with Tybalt so that he might hopefully expect to see an end, sooner or later, to the absurd feuding between the Montagues and the Capulets. The first alternative is out of the question, Romeo must have decided, now that he is wedded, though clandestinely, with Capulet's daughter. The latter alternative might lead to peace and reconciliation between the feuding families, Romeo must have thought. But on further reflection, this again would be unlikely, given the situation in which he found himself placed. Either way, Romeo had to decide in a matter of a minute or two. Given the situation as it was, no one could easily arbitrate on Romeo's behaviour. It would therefore be futile to condemn Romeo, as has been often done by critics, for his supposed "rashness" or "recklessness".

All the rest of the signs pointing to Romeo's growing maturity are seen concentrated in the final Act. Romeo reveals his maturity first in his reaction to the news of Juliet's supposed "death", which his messenger Balthasar brought to him in Mantua. This is how Balthasar reports the ill news to his master:

BALTHASAR Her body sleeps in Capels' monument,  
And her immortal part with angels lives.  
I saw her laid low in her kindred's vault  
And presently took post to tell it you.  
O, pardon me for bringing these ill news,  
Since you did leave it for my office, sir.

ROMEO Is it e'en so?—Then I defy you, stars!— (V.i. 19-25)



The outcome of the play shows that Barthasar's presentiment proves right, but for the moment Romeo's earnest wish to lie with Juliet in her vault surmounts all considerations. And he hits upon the best means of achieving this wish in the procurement of a lethal drug from the apothecary who, he knows, is in direst poverty. The apothecary, being an honest man, at first hesitates to concoct a lethal potion upon the request of a customer, but is finally brought to agree to sell one to Romeo. A bargain is struck between the seller and the buyer:

APOTHECARY My poverty, and not my will, consents.

ROMEO I pay thy poverty and not thy will. (V.i. 79-80)

Romeo's maturity of mind is glimpsed at in this scene through his implied compassion for the needy in general, and through his practical tact, in particular, for driving a fair bargain with a financially distressed apothecary. Romeo, handing the money to the apothecary, says:

ROMEO There is thy gold, worse poison to men's souls,  
Doing more murder in this loathsome world  
Than those poor compounds that thou mayst not  
sell.

I sell thee poison; thou hast sold me none.

Farewell, buy food, and get thyself in flesh. (V.i. 84-89)

Finally I will show how considerate Romeo is not only to men belonging to a socially lower class, but those who are of a standing socially higher than, or equal to, himself.

Arriving at the Capulet tomb, Romeo forces it open with a crowbar. Inside the darksome tomb, he meets with County Paris, who, mistaking that Romeo has come “to do some villainous shame / To the dead bodies”, rebukes him:

PARIS Stop thy unhallowed toil, vile Montague.  
Can vengeance be pursued further than death?  
Condemnèd villain, I do apprehend thee.  
Obey and go with me, for thou must die. (V.iii. 54-57)

Romeo’s reply to Paris’s rebuke shows that he has no intent to accept his challenge, but that he wills to have him go away unharmed.

ROMEO I must indeed, and therefore came I hither.  
Good gentle youth, tempt not a desp’rate man.  
Fly hence and leave me. Think upon these gone.  
Let them affright thee. I beseech thee, youth,  
Put not another sin upon my head  
By urging me to fury. O, begone!  
By heaven, I love thee better than myself,  
For I come hither armed against myself.  
Stay not, begone, live, and hereafter say  
A madman’s mercy bid thee run away. (V.iii. 58-67)

Paris, without pausing a minute to give Romeo’s desperate speech, dare fight with him and be killed by him. Paris, at the brink of his death, asks Romeo to do him a favour, saying: “O, I am slain! If thou be

merciful, / Open the tomb; lay me with Juliet” (V.iii. 72-73). Romeo accepts his request with “In faith, I will” (V.iii. 74).

Romeo’s magnanimous acceptance and fulfilment of Paris’s last-breath request shows that he has finally reached the last stage of his progress towards maturity. It has taken him some elapse of time and a varied experience ranging from ecstatic joy to heart-rending sorrow to attain to that level of maturity which is possible to an impetuous young man. To sum up my argument, Juliet shows herself from beginning to end to be passionate and yet innocent, but she is at the same time amazingly precocious and mature. In contrast, Romeo, though no less passionate and impetuous, is rather tardy and slow in his progress towards maturity. He does show, however, signs of his maturing, at least from the *aubade* scene onwards. And it is gratifying to both the spectator and the reader to witness Romeo as having finally achieved a degree of maturity, near the end of the play, comparable to Juliet’s poise and maturity.

### **Text Used**

All quotations from *Romeo and Juliet* are from *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*, edited by Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine, in The New Folger Library Shakespeare, copyright 1992.

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