

Thoughts on *Romeo and Juliet*
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Both of the main characters in William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet never seem to take the time to carefully think through important decisions. For instance, Romeo and Juliet wanted to marry each other before they had even known each other for one day. While it is understandable that they want to be married before their families prevent the marriage, their decision was injudicious. They had only known each other for a few hours before deciding to be married, meaning their "love" is based on only lust. This is demonstrated by the fact that, in the play, Romeo mainly focused on Juliet's beauty while he described her after seeing her for the first time, saying, among other things, that she had "Beauty too rich for use..." (1.5.54). Relationships based on appearance do not usually last as long, nor are they usually as successful as relationships based on features that matter, including personality and character. Romeo and Juliet must learn more about each other and spend time together before they can even begin to consider marriage.

Part of the reason for their lack of consideration in decisions may be due to the fact that they are just experiencing "love" for the first time and their strong emotions may be preventing them from thinking rationally about the situation. Romeo and Juliet are so caught up in love and so excited that they want everything, including marriage, to happen instantly. If they were to wait a few more days and calm down, they might realize that quick, spur-of-the-moment decisions are often not the best ones.

Romeo and Juliet are young, and have little experience with such complex emotions. They should heed the wisdom of some older adults with more experience, namely Friar Lawrence and Juliet's nurse. Friar Lawrence was incredulous when Romeo explained to him

that he wanted to be married after just deciding that he didn't love Rosaline. Friar Lawrence was able to see that this hasty decision was not likely to turn out well (especially considering that Romeo's previous decision that he loved Rosaline was quickly reversed. Friar Lawrence cautioned that Romeo should proceed "Wisely and slowly. They stumble that run fast" (2.4.101). He explained to Romeo that those who are quick to make decisions will often make mistakes, and that those who take the time to carefully plan decisions will often make better judgments. Juliet's nurse also expressed some doubts about Juliet's desire to marry Romeo. The nurse warns Juliet that her decision may be unwise, telling her that she "made a simple [foolish] choice" (2.5.40). Juliet's nurse cautions that while Romeo may be handsome, he is not very polite and not a good choice for a husband. Both Friar Lawrence and the nurse are older, wiser, more experienced, and less caught up in new emotions, and they can therefore give advice that should be taken into consideration.

The main characters continue to make foolish, shortsighted decisions later in the play. After hearing that he would be banished for killing Tybalt, Romeo's immediate response is that he would rather die than be banished. After hearing of his punishment, Romeo told Friar Lawrence to "Be merciful and say 'death',/For exile hath more terror in its look,/Much more than death" (3.3.13-5). Friar Lawrence tries to tell Romeo "philosophy" and reason, but Romeo does not listen. He instead attempts to kill himself with his dagger to end his suffering, for he is so caught up in grief and despair, that he cannot see any other solution. Friar Lawrence, however, understands that suicide will only hurt Romeo and others, including Juliet, and that the situation is not hopeless because the Prince of Verona may allow Romeo to return to his city once the situation calms down. This is yet another example of how quickly and foolishly Romeo

makes his decisions and how much more wisely adults, including Friar Lawrence, who are not emotionally involved in the situation, are able to think through a situation.

The feud between the Montagues and Capulets in William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet was probably exacerbated, and possibly even sustained by the fact that the names symbolize hatred towards the opposite family. When a member of the Capulets is born, they are constantly told that all members of the Montague family are enemies, possibly without an explanation as to the reason for the hatred. That Capulet grows up only hearing that all Montagues are to be despised, and with little interaction between the families, except for fighting, those views of the Montagues are not proved false. The same situation occurs with all Montague children.

All members of the families are arbitrarily grouped into a category based on only their cognomen, not their personality. Regardless of the way a person acts, they are automatically marked a certain way by their family name. This creates a situation in which members of a certain family are obligated to fight members of the other family only because of their name, not because there is reason to fight. A similar phenomenon occurred in George Orwell's Animal Farm. After the animals forced the farmer to flee his farm, the pigs of the farm took control and insisted on the idea that having four legs is good and having two legs is bad. This classified all people and animals into set categories. Regardless of a human's personality, they were automatically assumed to be bad; meanwhile, by claiming that all animals are good, no matter how they act, the pigs were able to steal and cheat without arousing too much protest from the animals. Without names, the Montagues and Capulets would not automatically associate a person as a friend or enemy; instead, a person's actions would determine how others treated

them. This would probably lessen, or even possibly end, the feud between the Montagues and Capulets.

Postscript, 5 Aug. 2014:

I find it a bit risky that schools teach *Romeo and Juliet* because of the [Werther effect](#). Has there been some high-school student for whom *Romeo and Juliet* tipped him/her over the edge for suicide? Probably. That said, some of the writing in the play is brilliant.