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Broken Feuds and Devastation, an Analysis of Romeo and Juliet

“Two households both alike in dignity, In fair Verona where we lay our scene.” Romeo and Juliet are two teenagers whose story has taught us all many lessons about the human condition. Throughout Shakespeare’s play, we see many reflections of ourselves. We see the love and devotion between, not only our protagonists, but their guardians as well. We see their anger for being born into such stubborn families, and most of all, we see the feud that birthed from such anger. There were strong themes of forgiveness found in this story. In scene one, we already witness the rivalry between the two circles, and all of the misadventures that follow can be brought back directly to this, most significantly the dual suicide of Romeo and Juliet. After countless murders, acts of violence, and even threats from the Prince of Escalus to end *all* of their lives for the safety of their city, the Montagues and the Capulets come to a tragic realization: The blood of their beloved children is on their hands. This reminds us of a commonly forgotten concept that we have all had experience with: Hatred, like love, is blind and sight can only be found in the equal devastations of its repercussions.

Part 1: Hatred

The detestation between the two clans is apparent from the start. In scene one, two of the Capulet’s servants taunt two of the Montague’s, leading to a pointless fight between the four of them, and eventually many more. The only one to put a stop to this reckless behavior is the prince. In rage, he exclaims,

“What, ho! you men, you beasts,
That quench the fire of your pernicious rage
With purple fountains issuing from your veins,
On pain of torture, from those bloody hands
Throw your mistemper’d weapons to the ground,”

In this quote, the prince talks about the savage tempers that all of the men have. He yells at them, calling them beasts and saying that the only way to relieve their vicious anger is through the shed of fountains of blood. He then threatens to torture them if they do not listen to him and says to put their mistemper’d (angered for wrong reasons) weapons down. This shows how fed up he is with their disruption of the peace, and leads you to believe that it happens often. It may be an introduction, but you can already see the blindness and sensitivity of their hatred.

This is the epitome of a metaphor. When the prince says, “You beasts,” he is referencing their bloodthirsty, predaceous ways, exhibiting to the audience the intensity and instinctive nature of the situation by referring to it in an “is” vs “as” comparison. It also brings us to the conclusion that they need something to survive, like a beast needs lesser animals to feed itself. He continues by saying, “That quench the fire of your pernicious rage with purple

fountains issuing from your veins.” This metaphor proceeds on to a much darker extent. It shows us the destruction of their anger by putting rage in the position of a violent fire, something that needs to burn and consume to survive. Their anger also represents their carnivorous hunger, they must feed themselves with fountains of blood to sustain themselves. Notice how he does not specify whose blood it is, because in the end, it is everyone’s. He wants to show the Montagues and Capulets how cruel and ridiculous they are acting by describing in detail the horrors of his outside perspective.

Since the prince is an outsider, he is able to see the feud for what it really is- barbaric and irrational. He sees the blindness of it all and wishes to guide them to reality with a threat, with the detachment and concern of a witness. When he says, “Throw your mistemper’d weapons to the ground,” he is not only taking authority over them, but telling them that their fight is meaningless and misguided. By seeing this through his eyes, we can now move forward to understanding the complete contrast after the death of Romeo and Juliet.

Part 2: Devastation and Liberation

After the death of their two children, the Montagues and Capulets set aside their past, and regain their empathy for one another. The heads of both of the families exchange these solemn and bestilling words:

CAPULET

“O brother Montague, give me thy hand:
This is my daughter's jointure, for no more
Can I demand.”

MONTAGUE

“But I can give thee more:
For I will raise her statue in pure gold;
That while Verona by that name is known,
There shall no figure at such rate be set
As that of true and faithful Juliet.”

CAPULET

“As rich shall Romeo's by his lady's lie;
Poor sacrifices of our enmity!”

Capulet refers to Montague as “Brother” and offers peace (his hand) to him knowing that that’s what Juliet would have wanted. He calls it her “jointure,” a word which was used back then to describe a marriage settlement, meaning that the end of the feud was like payment for his daughter being wife to his son. He then says he can ask for no more. Montague responds by offering to build a statue of pure gold and that as long as Verona is a city, Juliet will always be praised by its people. Capulet offers to build a statue of Romeo by her side. The interaction finishes with what may be the most important line of the book, “Poor sacrifices of our enmity!” This shows that Romeo and Juliet’s deaths were side effects of the rivalry, and that after seeing what has happened, the families regret their actions.

Because of the length of this excerpt, there are a few different literary devices used, the first of which is a metaphor. When Capulet says, "This is my daughter's jointure, for no more can I demand," he is giving his hand as a symbol of brotherhood. He acknowledges that there was love between their children and he sees that the only fitting payment after such a tragedy is to put a stop to the root cause of their demise. Along with this, there is also a rhyme, "There shall no figure at such rate be set as that of true and faithful Juliet." Rhyme is something used to make a phrase stand out, or simply to sound pleasant to the ear. In this quote, it is used to make the statement solid and true. Montague is speaking of a future in a prophetic way. Juliet will be remembered and worshiped for her story, and that is his word. All of this together confirms a change of perspective in the two men; they are done with the fighting and their peace is secure.

The contradiction of this interaction and the first is the basis of the entire play. Their anger and frustration with each other was so strong in the beginning that it seemed like nothing could break it. In the midst of a powerful emotion we oftentimes lose our own identity and the vision that keeps our quarrel unceasing. Your mind leads you to believe that there is nothing but the feeling and there will never be anything different. The real tragedy of Romeo and Juliet is the truth of our shortcomings. In order to regain sight from the blindness of our sentiment, we have to experience something so opposite that our inner thoughts are forced into a new direction. Capulet expresses his opposition with the line, "Poor sacrifices of our enmity!" If the powerful emotion that was felt in the start of the play was hatred, then the powerful emotion to break it in the end was love (or heartbreak to be more specific). It was not the romance between the teenagers that wrote the treaty, rather the bond between them and their families. This was the equal devastation to their previous loathing, the love between parent and child. Their sight was regained by the thing they dreaded the most.

Part 3: Relation

Throughout Shakespeare's play, we see many reflections of ourselves. Although there may have been a fictional story between these two sections, everyone has seen the same beginning and end in their own lives. The focus of the story wasn't the teenagers' naive exchanges or even the theme of love's importance in our lives, it was a reminder that we have to end the cycle of our mistakes and break the pattern of our regret. See yourself and your life from the perspective of an outsider and your problems can be resolved easily; don't wait to wake up from yourself. Blind distress leads to repercussions, so open your eyes to what is in front of you before you lose the things that are truly important. Don't let your life become a tragedy, "For never was a story of more woe than this of Juliet and her Romeo."

Works Cited:

Shakespeare, William. Romeo and Juliet. New York, N.Y: The Folger Shakespeare Library, 1992. Print.