

## A Tragedy of Human Nature

In Shakespeare's tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*, the two lovers Romeo and Juliet are wild in their passion for each other despite the problems with their relationship. However, their strong feelings led to many negative decisions that in turn led to their downfall: following their initial choice to love each other and defy their families' mutual hatred, they ended up making a series of dangerous decisions for each other that worsened their own situation and led to the infamous tragedy of the lovers. With choices made that are "too rash, too unadvised, too sudden" (2. 2. 123-125)— as Juliet herself had said about loving Romeo— a dramatic tragedy ensues. Decisions made by a person out of strong emotions will lead to a vicious cycle of hasty negative decisions and potentially even to the person's demise.

No matter a person's regular personality, sudden emotions will engender impulsive, rash decisions. Romeo, for example, is normally a gentle and well-behaved gentleman— even Lord Capulet had acknowledged him positively, finding him "a portly gentleman, and, to say truth, Verona brags of him to be a virtuous and well-governed youth" (1. 5. 75-77). Before Mercutio's death, Romeo had not any plans of violence towards Tybalt or any of the Capulets, but the tsunami of sadness and anger from his friend's untimely and sudden slaughter had invoked a strong urge for revenge, overriding all of his logic and previous intentions for peace. Just prior to Tybalt and Mercutio's fight, he had said, "Gentlemen, for shame forbear this outrage! Tybalt! Mercutio! The Prince expressly hath forbid this bandying in Verona streets" (3. 1. 87-90)— however, when Benvolio attempts to convince Romeo of the same following Mercutio's death, Romeo could not help but fight Tybalt just as Mercutio had done moments before. Ignoring Benvolio, Romeo impulsively assumed Mercutio's provocative personality and said to Tybalt, "Either [you] or I, or both, must [die]" (3. 1. 130-134). If he had just used the slightest bit of sense, he would not have forgotten what he had tried to reason into Mercutio: that a fight like this would be dangerous or deadly, both physically by the sword and by the penalization by the prince. Even Juliet had understood this concept when she said in the balcony scene to Romeo, "Well, do not swear [thy love to me]. Although I joy in thee, I have no joy in this contract tonight. It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden" (2. 2. 123-125). She understood the potential

consequences of their love, passionate but sudden, that would require either extensive planning or an extreme reform between their families to forget their grudges and start unbiased. However, they decided to love and marry each other in the presence of their rival kin, and they stepped right into a marriage of hiding, lies, and a bleak future. Their initial love and hurried marriage, the hidden and secretive plans, Tybalt's death, and Romeo's suicide are all examples of both Romeo and Juliet making reckless decisions throughout the course of the story, amongst many other, smaller choices that they could have improved. Indeed, reckless decisions only lead to nasty conclusions—without the help of logic, outcomes of decisions are subject to catastrophe.

Another essential point that Shakespeare is trying to convey is that hasty, emotional decisions tend to induce more hasty, emotional decisions—a vicious cycle that persists until the person is calm enough to reflect and reform or until the person's downfall. For example, the ultimate downfall of both Romeo and Juliet is part of a larger chain of events, all linked by bad choices made. It starts when Juliet goes to Friar Lawrence for advice when her father suddenly changed his mind to arrange a soon marriage (within days) to County Paris—she threatens to stab herself to show the depth of her devotion to Romeo. By doing this, she forces Friar Lawrence to make a quick, rash plan to “save” her from Paris and join her with Romeo, one prone to failing. She says to the Friar, “I long to die if what thou speakest speak not of remedy” (4. 1. 67-68), and that “if in thy wisdom thou canst give no help, do thou best call my resolution wise, and with this knife I'll help it presently” (4. 1. 53-55). Her desperation is exactly the kind of attitude to avoid, as it evoked a deadly plan. When Friar John, the messenger to Romeo, returned without delivering the message, the Friar knew that Romeo and Juliet could be doomed: “Unhappy fortune! By my brotherhood, the letter was not nice but full of charge of dear import, and the neglecting it may do much damage” (5. 3. 17-20). Then, Romeo, devastated without knowing the Friar's scheme, foolhardily decided to kill himself for Juliet, saying to his messenger Balthasar, “Get me ink and paper, and have post-horses. I will hence tonight” (5. 1. 25-27). Balthasar advised him, “I do beseech you, sir, have patience. Your looks are pale and wild” (5. 1. 28-30), but Romeo ignores him, to his own loss. In this short sequence of events shortly prior to the deaths, it is clear that desperation and hastiness were major influences to the decisions, which went from Juliet's threatening of Friar Lawrence to a double suicide by Romeo

and Juliet, quickly escalating from an unintelligent decision to loss of life. This course of events was without careful, reflective, and logical thinking on the part of the main characters. By stopping to think, much of tragical aftermath may have been prevented. Simple, reasonable thinking may have solved their problems with ease: if Juliet had not been so desperate and threatened to stab herself, then Friar Lawrence could have come up with a better, more reasonable and foolproof plan, and if Romeo had not immediately thought about dying with Juliet but instead moved on or talked to the Friar, then they would certainly have survived and maybe even ran away to live happily. This is similar to Romeo's "love at first sight" for Juliet and marriage the following day. This was a mistake that encouraged their dangerous relationship that caused trouble throughout the plot. With a little bit of logical and creative thinking, Romeo and Juliet could have moved past their drastic and frantic resolutions— instead, they made their decision to love and set off a disastrous, unstoppable chain reaction.

Shakespeare is trying to teach his readers about an aspect of human nature: the power of strong emotions. Love, hate, and anger— all of which were present in *Romeo and Juliet*— can all have disastrous results, because people will become careless and illogical upon encountering them. Both Romeo and Juliet illustrated this, being imperfect, average people that gave in to their emotions and died for each other. Shakespeare artfully used the knowledge of this correlation of emotion and failure to create a fascinating love story and tragedy, a story with many lessons. Thus, the cause of the tragedy of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* was not only the main conflict of familial hatred, but also human nature.