

WHAT HAPPENS IN ACT III, *ROMEO AND JULIET*

Scene 1

Summary

We return to the streets of Verona where Benvolio and Mercutio walk the streets under the blazing sun.

Tybalt enters with a group of his friends and approaches the two Montague men. Mercutio begins to taunt Tybalt. Romeo enters and Tybalt calls him a villain for having gate-crashed the feast. Romeo is now secretly Tybalt's kinsman, and refuses to be angered by Tybalt's verbal attack. Tybalt commands Romeo to draw his sword, but Romeo resists saying that he does not wish to fight him. Rather than fight him he has good reason to love Tybalt, but refuses to disclose the reason for his love.

Mercutio angrily draws his sword, saying that he will fight Tybalt if Romeo won't. Romeo throws himself between the two trying to restore order, but Tybalt stabs Mercutio under Romeo's arm and kills him. As he dies, he curses the families saying '**A plague o' both your houses**'. Romeo is enraged, declaring that his love for Juliet has made him less of a man and that he should have fought Tybalt.

Tybalt returns to the scene, the two fight and Romeo kills Tybalt.

The Prince enters and although Benvolio tells the Prince the whole story concerning the brawl, the Prince exiles Romeo from Verona saying that if he is found within the city he will be killed. Romeo, shocked at what has happened cries 'O, I am fortune's fool!'

Analysis

The audience is brought back to the reality of the streets of Verona by this violent scene. Here in these streets, it is the law of the sword that prevails. Romeo and Juliet's love takes place in a highly masculine world. Shakespeare uses this scene to emphasize how fragile the lovers' romance is, and how outside forces will act to destroy it.

The fight scenes are chaotic and it is clear that passion outweighs reason, and the deaths are needless. Romeo's cry is in desperation and frustration due to his misfortune in having to kill his wife's cousin and getting himself banished. Romeo blames fate for his misfortune whereas Mercutio in his dying speech curses the two families rather than a larger force. His curse will soon come to fruition on both houses.

Shakespeare enforces a belief of the times that too much love makes a man lose his manliness, this being echoed by Romeo at the death of Mercutio.

Romeo's killing of Tybalt was carried out in the heat of the moment and had he the time to ponder the situation he may have acted differently. Romeo's action has threatened the public order of Verona and the Prince has no alternative but to act decisively. Unbeknown to him, his action is aimed at thwarting the love of Romeo and Juliet. The danger now for Romeo in continuing to meet Juliet is increased because he has to avoid the authorities as well as the Capulets.

Scene 2

Summary

We return to the Capulet house where Juliet awaits Romeo. The nurse rushes in to give her news of the fight between Romeo and Tybalt. At first Juliet thinks Romeo is dead, assuming that he has killed himself, but then it is clear that Tybalt is dead, and Juliet fears that she has two to mourn. Eventually the nurse gets the story straight and Juliet understands that Romeo has killed Tybalt and been exiled. She curses fate for having put the spirit of a fiend inside Romeo's sweet flesh. Juliet laments that she will die without a wedding night, a maiden widow. The nurse assures her that she will find Romeo and bring him to her for their wedding night. Juliet gives the nurse a ring to give to Romeo as a token of her love.

Analysis

The young love of Romeo and Juliet is being sorely tested in these scenes, but it is clear from the start that Juliet will stay loyal to her new husband, and it is Romeo's banishment that grieves Juliet most and not Tybalt's death.

Scene 3

Summary

Romeo hides in Friar Laurence's cell overcome with grief. The Friar tells him he is lucky to have only been banished by the Prince, but Romeo states that this is worse than death as he has been sentenced to live, but without Juliet. He falls to the floor threatening to kill himself, but the Friar scolds him for being effeminate.

The Friar states that once matters have calmed down, the Prince may change his mind, and then he puts his plan into action. Romeo should visit Juliet that night in order to consummate the marriage and then depart in the morning to Mantua. The nurse enters and gives Romeo the ring from Juliet, and this symbol revives Romeo's spirits.

Analysis

The passionate Romeo reacts with drama concerning his exile. Although he seems to act immaturely in comparison to Juliet's reaction to the news, she is now mature and loyal to Romeo. In contrast, Romeo acts childishly, threatening to kill himself. It is the Friar's wise counsel that calms him and he is further comforted when he receives the ring from Juliet.

Scene 4

Summary

Lady Capulet and Paris discuss the recent violent events. Paris is anxious to know what Juliet's feelings are towards him, and Lady Capulet will find this out by the morning.

Capulet says that his daughter will abide by his counsel, and that Paris can be assured that his wedding to Juliet will take place on Wednesday, this being Monday. Capulet then decides that Wednesday is too soon and puts it back one day to Thursday.

Analysis

Suddenly we have a date for the wedding of Juliet and Paris, no doubt to bring some joy into the lives of the Capulet household following Tybalt's death. The Capulets also think that Juliet is in deep mourning for Tybalt, but it is for Romeo's exile that she is sad.

Again the lack of station that the women in Verona had is evident. Just a few days earlier, it was proposed that the wedding would take place in two years, but now this has been reduced to a few days.

Act III Scene 5

Summary

It is just before dawn and Romeo prepares to leave Juliet's bedroom and start his exile. There is a birdcall and Juliet tells Romeo that it is a night bird rather than a lark heralding the dawn. Romeo resists, saying that he must leave before morning comes or he will be put to death. However, overcome with love, he stays longer with Juliet.



The nurse enters to warn Juliet that Lady Capulet is coming, and the two lovers tearfully part. Romeo descends, and as she looks down on him, he appears pale as one dead in the bottom of a tomb.

Lady Capulet enters and seeing Juliet's tears, assumes she still mourns for Tybalt. Lady Capulet tells Juliet of her desire to see Romeo dead. With some clever punning Juliet leads her mother to believe that she wishes the same, when in fact she is firmly stating her love for Romeo.

Juliet is advised of the plans for her to marry Paris on Thursday. She is horrified, rejecting the match. She says 'I will not marry yet; and when I do, I swear it shall be Romeo whom you know I hate rather than Paris'. Capulet enters the scene and when he learns of Juliet's response, threatens to disown her.

When her parents leave, Juliet asks her nurse how she might escape her predicament. The nurse tells her to go through with the marriage to Paris as he is a good match and Romeo is as good as dead anyway. Juliet pretends to agree. She then tells her nurse that she is going to make confession at Friar Laurence's cell. Juliet is shocked at her nurse's disloyalty and vows that she will not take her counsel again. She also concludes that if the Friar is unable to help, she still has enough power to take her own life.

Analysis

Romeo describes Juliet as transforming night into day. She has the power to change a lark into a nightingale through the power of language.

There is a repetition of the orchard/balcony scene where the lovers experience visions that foreshadow the end of the play. Juliet describes Romeo as looking pale as one dead in the bottom of a tomb. To Romeo she appears the same, but he describes it as the effects of sorrow. The next time, of course, that Juliet will see Romeo, he will be dead.

Juliet has now fully matured, evident in her domination over her mother who is no match for her daughter's intelligence. She doesn't even recognize her daughter's proclamation of love for Romeo, which Juliet has carefully disguised. Juliet has also decided to break from her disloyal nurse. The nurse was a mentor for Juliet when she was a child, but she had abandoned all ties with her childhood and is now a married woman.

Shakespeare has cleverly linked this maturity with sexual experience, allowing the audience to witness Juliet's metamorphosis. In fact Juliet feels so confident now, that she defies her father being determined to control her own destiny, even if it means her own death.

The reader might wonder why Juliet did not take the option offered to her by her father of being disowned, but this is not a course that she can take. Juliet, as a woman, cannot leave society, for a woman in Verona who cannot control the direction of her life must take the route of suicide.

Questions on Act Three

(answer them mentally, and compare your answers with the prepared responses)

1. What are the main events of this act?

The death of Mercutio slain by Tybalt, the death of Tybalt slain by Romeo, the exiling of Romeo; the marriage of Juliet and Romeo (not presented in the play); the Friar's plan to save the Romeo-Juliet marriage, Romeo's escape, the hurried preparations for Juliet's marriage to Paris.)

2. Which of these actions do you think most important? Why?

Romeo's slaying of Tybalt - it led to Romeo's banishment, the thwarting of Laurence's plan to bring peace to the warring houses, the unceasing tears of Juliet which mistakenly hurried on her marriage to Paris, to the Friar giving Juliet a sleeping drug which will lead to Romeo's error - and death, then Juliet's.

3. What do you consider the dramatic turning point of the play?

We may choose when Tybalt enters about line 35 of scene 1, or when Tybalt falls slain by Romeo, or the Prince's decree and Romeo's banishment. Any one of these leads to the termination of the happiness of Romeo and Juliet and their decline into tragedy.

4. What development of character have you noticed among the actors?

Mercutio has become very clever, very brave, very loyal, very unfortunate. Tybalt has revealed his very quarrelsome nature and his fiery spirit. However, if we are to take seriously the grief of Juliet and the nurse over his death he must have had some good qualities. Romeo has proved a valiant and brave duellist, a chivalrous and ardent lover and a youth easily cast down to the depths. The Friar, still planning for the best, proves wise and helpful. He restores Romeo to spirit. But whether his action will turn out for the best is doubtful. The death of Tybalt spoiled his plans. The nurse is a very divided creature. She means well, shows much kindness to Juliet, but advises Juliet to forget Romeo - a woman without a moral character. Juliet has developed. She has become a mature woman deeply in love; to her parents she is respectful but she knows that she must obey her own heart not her parents. To deceive them is to her sheer necessity. When the nurse advises her to marry Paris she sees how false and shallow the nurse is.)

5. What do you consider the dramatic high spots of this act?

The two duels in which Mercutio and Tybalt are killed, the beautiful Orchard Scene and Chamber Scene featuring Romeo and Juliet, Juliet's being informed of Tybalt's death and Romeo's banishment, Romeo with Friar Laurence, the Capulets trying to induce Juliet to marry Paris.

6. Was the Prince fair and impartial in banishing Romeo?

There is room for argument. The penalty might have been death, and exile was little better in that age. However, the Prince says that he has an interest in this matter for they have slain a kinsman, that they will all feel sorry for his own loss, that the occasion deserves severity, that leniency is poor policy.



*"I'll to the Friar to know his remedy.
If all else fail, myself have power to die."*