

WHAT HAPPENS IN ACT V, *ROMEO AND JULIET*

Scene 1

Summary

Romeo is in Mantua where he advises the audience that he had a wonderful dream the night before concerning Juliet finding him lying dead, but she kissed him and breathed new life into his body.

He meets Balthasar who has news from Verona concerning Juliet. He advises Romeo that Juliet has died; found dead that morning in her home. Romeo cries out, defying the stars. He writes a letter which he asks Balthasar to deliver to Montague and that he will return to Verona that night. Romeo intends to lie with Juliet in her tomb. He goes to find a seller of drugs and eventually persuades him to give him a vial of poison, despite this being illegal.

Analysis

Balthasar has sought out Romeo to give him the news of Juliet's death. Shakespeare cleverly shows the audience how Romeo is being trapped by fate and they too sense the inevitability of the situation. When Romeo shouts 'Then I defy you stars' he is shouting against the fate that is stealing away from him his heart of desires. He resigns himself to these forces and pledges to take his life at Juliet's side.

Scene 2

Summary

Friar John returns to Friar Laurence saying he has been unable to deliver the letter to Romeo due to an outbreak of plague, he being confined in a quarantine house. Friar Laurence realizes that Romeo will not know about Juliet's false death, and there will be no one there to retrieve her from the tomb. He does not realize that Romeo has learnt of Juliet's death from another source.

Friar Laurence obtains a crowbar so that he can release Juliet from the tomb. He sends another letter to Romeo warning him about what has happened and how he plans to keep Juliet in his cell.

Analysis

The Friar's plan starts to unravel due to a sequence of near misses. The outbreak of plague forces the messenger into quarantine, thus the letter to Romeo is not delivered; whilst Balthasar just misses the quarantine, he is able to deliver the bad news to Romeo concerning Juliet's death. Romeo, knowing nothing of this, believes it is fate that stands between him and his love, Juliet. He is not willing to put up with this any longer and intends to defy the stars by taking his own life.

The message here is that Romeo and Juliet cannot be together and live in this world. Fate has decreed that they will be kept apart. The only way they can be together is through death. In a way, Romeo is a victim of his own fate. If his character was different, less headstrong and emotional, that is, more mature, the double suicide would not occur. Had Juliet explained the truth to her parents that she was already married, then again the double suicide might not occur. The type of love they have, intense, passionate and transcendental, exists solely because of the kind of people they are.

Scene 3

Summary

It is night time at the Capulet tomb and Paris enters with a servant. He starts to scatter flowers on Juliet's grave. He hears someone approach and hides. It is Romeo carrying a crowbar accompanied by Balthasar. Romeo tells Balthasar that he has come to take back a valuable ring he had given to Juliet and asks him to leave. He is to deliver to Montague his letter in the morning, but Balthasar mistrusts his master's intentions.

Paris reveals himself, confronting Romeo, the man who murdered Tybalt and has indirectly murdered Juliet, since he supposes it was grief that killed Juliet. Paris thinks that Romeo wishes to defile the Capulet tomb and dishonor the corpse of Tybalt. Romeo pleads with Paris to leave him, but a fight is inevitable and Romeo kills Paris. Paris' servant runs off to obtain the civil watch. Paris makes a dying request to Romeo that he is laid near Juliet in the tomb. Carrying Paris' body Romeo descends into the tomb and wonders how Juliet can look so beautiful in death. He kisses Juliet then drinks the poison and dies.

The Friar enters the churchyard and meets Balthasar who informs him that Romeo is in the tomb. The Friar enters the tomb where he finds the body of Paris and then that of Romeo. Just then Juliet awakes. Juliet asks for her husband, but the Friar responds that both Romeo and Paris are dead and that she must leave quickly before the watch arrives. Juliet refuses and the Friar leaves without her. Looking at the empty vial, she assumes that Romeo has taken poison and hopes that there might be some drops left on Romeo's lips, but to no avail. The civil watch approaches and Juliet unsheathes Romeo's dagger, says 'O happy dagger, this is thy sheath' stabs herself and falls upon Romeo's body.

There is mayhem in the churchyard when the watch arrives, on the discovery of bloodstains near the tomb. They apprehend Balthasar and Friar Laurence who are discovered nearby, and then the Prince and Capulets enter. The three bodies are discovered in the tomb and then Montague arrives declaring that his wife has died from grief over Romeo's exile.

There is much confusion until the Friar tells the story of Romeo and Juliet's secret marriage and its outcome. Balthasar gives the Prince the letter Romeo had written to his father, thus confirming the Friar's story. The Prince shows his anger and condemns the two families concerning their feud, and also the loss of so many kinsmen. Capulet and Montague clasp hands and agree to put the past behind them and end their feud for good. They agree to build golden statues in honour of Romeo and Juliet. The Prince closes the tragedy with the line 'A story of more woe than this of Juliet and her Romeo'.

Analysis

It is useful to catalogue the events leading up to the final tragedy.

- Juliet drinks a sleeping draught, which makes her appear dead.
- Romeo thinking Juliet is dead drinks poison.
- Juliet regains consciousness. Seeing her dead husband, she stabs herself through the heart with Romeo's dagger.

A recurring theme throughout the play has been the possibility of suicide. The climax of the tragedy is the double suicide in the Capulet tomb. The passion that Romeo and Juliet have for one another cannot be stifled or suppressed and combined with their youth provides a recipe for final and absolute tragedy. Being unable to live for their love, Romeo and Juliet die for it.



Shakespeare makes a comment that the world in which they lived was not worthy of the love they had for each other, and so the lovers have robbed the world of their special love. Shakespeare cleverly uses Juliet's final kiss of Romeo as a weapon of potential death and when Juliet fails to pick up any poison from Romeo's lips she is overjoyed to find his dagger,

exclaiming 'Happy dagger' because this implement of death will reunite her with her love.

The closing scene has all the powerful forces converging on the tragic set. From beyond the grave the love that Romeo and Juliet had for each other is sufficient to heal the rift between the two families and perhaps through their sacrifice, the world that they left may become a better place. The Prince recognizes this. The irony is that this new world in Verona would have allowed Romeo and Juliet to live and love together. Romeo and Juliet's deaths were inevitable because they were products of the world in which they lived.

Over the centuries, Romeo and Juliet have epitomized true love, because they were willing to sacrifice their lives in order not to compromise their love. Shakespeare was making the statement that their love is not just for this world, but also for all eternity.

Questions on Act Five

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

1. *The Friar promised to find Romeo's man who would keep Romeo posted as to events in Verona. Did he keep his promise?* No

How did his failure influence the outcome of the play?

Balthasar, Romeo's servant saw (as he thought) Juliet borne to her death chamber. He rushed to Mantua to inform Romeo. The latter hurries to Verona armed with some poisonous drug, finds Juliet in her tomb and considering her dead, takes the poison and dies. Juliet, awakening to find him dead, takes her life. Balthasar should have been warned by Laurence as to what had happened: Juliet was merely drugged.

2. *What has these scene given us in terms of action?*

All has come to a conclusion. Romeo and Juliet are dead; Paris also. Lady Montague is dead from grief. Montague and Capulet are sadder and wiser men, each, we presume childless and his family line extinct. Friar Laurence will no doubt be pardoned, for the Prince and Capulet have spoken golden words about him. According to the story from which Shakespeare took his own, both the nurse and the apothecary were punished.

3. *What creates dramatic interest in the scene?*

The winding up of the story with its retribution and rewards; semi- melodramatic action throughout; midnight, a churchyard, a tomb, a watcher concealed, a low whistle, flames and shadows of torches and lanterns, a duel, a self-poisoning, a lover's dagger used in self-slaughter, mistakes, outcries, passionate expressions, the pathos of Paris. We have a great variety of actors, and much rapid and secret coming and going, the rushing of the people from the street, the holding of a sort of court-room trial. Much of the language is beautiful, poetic and noble.

4. *What else do we learn about the characters?*

Each of the characters adds a new emphasis to some quality: Romeo and Juliet are faithful and passionate; Friar Laurence is humble, penitent and ready to atone for his errors; Paris is tender, compassionate, and loyal; the Prince is wiser than on previous occasions and, we feel, just; both Capulet and Montague are submissive to heaven and ready to turn their adversity into good.



*"A glooming peace this morning with it brings.
The sun for sorrow will not show his head.
Go hence, to have more talk of these sad things.
Some shall be pardoned, and some punished,
For never was a story of more woe
Than this of Juliet and her Romeo."*

<http://www.learnthings.co.uk/default.asp>