

Romeo & Juliet

The Book vs. The Movie

William Shakespeare's tragedy Romeo & Juliet is recognized to be one of the best examples of impossible love. The story takes place in Verona, where two families are in feud for power. Romeo meets Juliet at a party, and these young people fall in love at first sight, without knowing that they were falling in love with their enemy. Although they realize the truth in the future, it doesn't keep them apart. Initially Paris, a handsome young man, asks the Capulet's for Juliet's hand in marriage. The Capulet's agree and Juliet is destined to marry him. With the help of Friar Lorenzo, Romeo and Juliet marry secretly. Romeo a few days later is banned from Verona and is sent to Mantua, for killing Tybald. At the same time Juliet goes and asks the Friar for help to prevent the marriage with Paris, so he gives her a potion that would make her appear dead the day of her marriage. Romeo's friend sees her lying dead and goes to Mantua and tells Romeo about it. Romeo was supposed to get a letter from the Friar, explaining that she only appears dead, though he never gets it. Out of desperation he goes and buys poison to kill himself. With the poison he goes to the mausoleum where she is lying, says goodbye to her corpse and takes the poison. The minute he takes the poison she wakes from her sleep and sees him dying and kills herself with his dagger/pistol. Since this Shakespearean play first debuted in the infamous Globe Theatre, there have been numerous versions of the play performed, both on stage and on screen. The 1996 version of Romeo and Juliet, produced by Baz Luhrmann, took on a much more modern-day approach to the story, unlike any other before it.

Luhrmann's setting is probably the most evident contrast between the play and the movie. The characters in Luhrmann's creation have buzz cuts, pink hair, and tattoos, they carry guns instead of swords and daggers, and they travel by car. What the modern environment does is allow the story and confrontations to be much more violent. For example, as the first scene in the movie opens, you see a carload of Montague boys yelling with loud music and basically just having a good time. On the other hand the Capulet's. Immediately, it is evident that this family is much more serious than the Montague's. They are wearing much darker, elegant clothes, in contrast to the other family servant's that have a colorful, fun and comfortable fashion. This is obviously a difference that is brought out simply because of visual additions. This creates almost automatically a feeling of favoritism for the Montague's.

Tybalt is a servant and family member of the Capulet's family who is ready to kill and die with honor. He has black and deep-red clothes on, cowboy boots with spurs, and black greasy hair. He is almost an icon for the devil himself. He is seen by his enemies as:

"More than Prince of Cats. Oh he's the courageous Captain of Compliments. He fights as you sing prick-song -- keeps time, distance and proportion. He rests his minim rests -- one, two and the third in your bosom. The very butcher of a silk button, a duelist, a duelist! a gentleman of the very first house, of the first and second cause.... The pox of such antic, lispings, affecting fantasticoes."

The contrasting character to Tybalt is Benvolio.

Benvolio is a servant and friend of the Montague's family. He has a peaceful behavior: "I do but keep the peace" Romeo's good friend has a hidden dark side though. While Benvolio tries to behave above reproach, he is so ready for action that he keeps getting into trouble. This is a reason for which he gets made fun of all the time, even by his friends.

"Thou? -- why thou wilt quarrel with a man that hath a hair more or a hair less in his beard than thou hast.... Thy head is as full of quarrels as an egg is full of meat, and yet thy head hath been beaten as addle as

an egg for quarreling. Thou hast quarrel'd with a man for coughing in the street, because he hath waken'd thy dog that hath lain asleep in the sun."

During Tybalt and Benvolio's confrontation in the beginning of the book/movie, the actors and the music add an extreme sense of intensity and fear to the scene. The movie brings this out by turning the actor's tones into screams and yelling. The music is loud and nerving. It makes the rivalry between the families seem very real and accentuates the potential violence and genuine, mutual hate. Through hate and violence, the Montague's show fear. In the play it is not as evident as in the movie the way Montague servant's are portrayed to be real cowards.

Another difference between the play and the movie is when Tybalt challenges Benvolio. All the citizens join in and take sides yelling "Down with the Capulet's!" or "Down with the Montague's!" In the movie it is actually quite the opposite. For example when the two families see each other, a bus full of nuns who are on the scene quickly get back in and hurry off, hoping to avoid being a part of the violence. Also, a woman in her car repeatedly hits one of the Montague servants with her purse when he gets near her car, since the violence evidently terrifies her.

Although this version of Romeo & Juliet takes place in modern times, the characters' dialogue are still Shakespeare's very words, which many find to be very awkward, with the modern-day background accompanied by the traditional speech.

Obviously, the movie and the book were written and produced by two very different people with very different aims and in different times. The contrast between the movie and the book basically lie on the settings, violence and fear. But of course they both got the same reactions out of the audience: sadness, grief, and heartbreak, For never was there a story of more woe than this of Juliet and her Romeo.