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Views of love
in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*

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XXX

Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Main part: Views of love in <i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	3
2.1. Romeo's and Juliet's view of love: Love as the reason for living	3
2.1.1. Romeo	4
2.1.2. Juliet	6
2.2. The domestics' and Mercutio's view of love: Love means sex	8
2.2.1. Sampson and Gregory, servants of the house of Capulet	9
2.2.2. The Nurse	10
2.2.3. Mercutio	11
2.3. Benvolio's view of love: Be happy, no matter if you are in love or not	12
2.4. Juliet's parents, the Prince and Paris: The Elizabethan attitude towards love and sex	13
2.4.1. Capulet	13
2.4.2. Lady Capulet	14
2.4.2. Prince Escalus	15
2.4.3. Paris	16
2.5. Romeo's parents: A relationship full of love	17
2.5.1. Montague	17
2.5.2. Lady Montague	17
2.6. Friar Laurence' view of love: Violent delights have violent ends	18
3. Conclusion: In how far do the views of love presented in the play reflect the attitude towards love the Elizabethan audience had?	19

1. Introduction

William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* has the "high profile as *the* love-tragedy everybody knows". Although it is regarded as the ideal of romantic love there are many other (quite unromantic) views represented in the play, too. In this term paper I will try to give a survey of the different views of love in *Romeo and Juliet*. First of all there are Romeo and Juliet, the "star-cross'd lovers" (Prologue) who "establish a quality of love, of life intensively lived, that becomes its own value". Apart from these two main characters and their view of love there are in general five other attitudes towards love: to the servants of the house of Capulet, the Nurse

and Mercutio love means nothing else than sex, to Romeo's friend Benvolio the most important thing about love is not only sex but that love makes you happy, Juliet's parents Capulet and Lady Capulet together with the Prince and Paris share an Elizabethan view of love and marriage, Romeo's parents Montague and Lady Montague in contrast to Juliet's parents have a relationship full of love, and last but not least there is Friar Laurence who is afraid that Romeo's and Juliet's passion will lead to a bitter end but nevertheless shows a big sympathy for the young lovers and wants to make their love holy by marriage.

In the following part of this term paper I will have a more detailed look on these shortly sketched views of love, dealing with them in the order just named above and laying great stress on Romeo and Juliet and the way they deal with their feelings.

Finally I'd like to take a short look on the question in how far the views of love presented in the play reflect the attitude towards love the Elizabethan audience had.

2. Main part: Views of love in *Romeo and Juliet*

2.1. Romeo's and Juliet's view of love: Love as the reason for living

The 'star-cross'd' lovers Romeo and Juliet both fall in love at first sight and are determined to marry just after their first encounter. Their love is the most precious thing Romeo and Juliet have in their lives so both are ready to die for each other and chose to die in the end "[...] because each knows that he or she cannot live without the other, and knows this as a simple, literal truth to be acted on at the first opportunity". Romeo as well as Juliet regards his banishment as death. Although the lovers are hoping to see each other again they are willing to die after Tybalt's death/their wedding night.

After their separation due to the banishment both kill themselves in order to be together again: Juliet drinks Friar Laurence's sleeping potion in order to 'die' and be with Romeo again when she awakes, and Romeo drinks the poison to be reunited with Juliet, whom he thinks lifeless, in death. When waking up in the monument and finding her love having committed suicide, Juliet kills herself for the reason of a reunion after death, too. The lovers even drink to each other when they drink their potions.

Up to here Romeo and Juliet seem to share the same view of love but on having a closer look there are some differences in their ways to deal with their feelings. So I'll characterize both separated from each other in detail.

2.1.1. Romeo

From the beginning of the play, where Romeo is introduced as being lovesick, till the end of the action, where he takes the poison and commands himself to die quickly (V, iii, 117-118), Romeo is a Petrarchan lover. In the beginning he indulges himself in eloquent images and enjoys his role as the rejected lover. He pities himself and says that he feels heavy and burdened with his love for Rosaline (I, iv, 12; I, iv, 20-22).

“This is the Elizabethan lover, expressing himself in wild antitheses which are a sort of verbal equivalent for his distracted state balanced between two extremes ([e.g.] ‘feather of lead’, ‘cold fire’ [I, i, 179], etc.), and in conceits ([e.g.] ‘Love is a smoke [made with] the fume of sighs’ [I, i, 189]) which serve to represent the pleasing anguish of the lover, the grief of unrequited love which is yet happier than not loving at all would be.”

But as soon as Romeo lays eyes on Juliet he is so overwhelmed by her beauty that his unhappy love for Rosaline is forgotten at that instant:

“O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright.
It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
As a rich jewel in an Ethiop’s ear - Beauty
too rich for use, for earth too dear.
[...]
Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight!
For I ne’er saw true beauty till this night.” (I, v, 44-53)

He gets to know Juliet after the dance and from the first moment their love is so right and true that their conversation effortlessly forms a sonnet. Romeo uses Petrarchan images in that first conversation (e.g. calling Juliet a saint that he is unworthy to touch) and goes on with this when he watches and describes Juliet in the orchard after the party. She is his ‘sun’ (II, ii, 2 and 3), her eyes are even brighter than the stars (cf. II, ii, 15-22) and she is a ‘bright angel’. When talking to her Romeo wants to swear how much he loves her but she doesn’t want to hear his oaths.

Although in II, ii Romeo’s language is not different from the Petrarchan language he used to describe Rosaline and the love he felt for her, Romeo’s love for Juliet is much different from the love he bore for Rosaline. When loving Rosaline, Romeo was in love with love and unable to act. But now he has found a purpose for living in Juliet and in the fact that his new love “doth grace for grace and love for love allow” (II, iii, 82). Romeo is so much changed by this experience that for a short time he is able to be the old Romeo, the Romeo his friends are missing, again. He jests with Mercutio and wins their battle of wits which makes Mercutio cry out:

“Why, is not this better now than groaning for love? Now art thou sociable, now art thou Romeo; now art thou what thou art, by art as well as by nature. For this drivelling love is like a great natural that runs lolling up and down to hide his bauble in a hole.” (II, iv, 88-92)

Romeo gets more mature by his marriage to Juliet, too. When he comes back from the wedding, he is so full of peace and love that Tybalt's insults cannot hurt him. Moreover he calls Tybalt 'cousin' and tells him

"[I] love thee better than thou canst devise
Till thou shalt know the reason of my love." (III, i, 68-69)

But when Tybalt stabs Mercutio, Romeo accuses Juliet of having made him act so peacefully:

"O, sweet Juliet,
Thy beauty has made me effeminate
And in my temper soften'd valour's steel." (III, I, 115-117)

In a fury he takes revenge for Mercutio's death and kills Tybalt. This action throws him back in the role the feud forces him to play but at the same time it hinders him to be what he intends to be - a peaceful young man enjoying his happiness as a freshly-made bridegroom. Romeo seems to realize this, crying out that he is 'Fortune's fool'. He flies to Friar Laurence's cell and bursts out in tears. When the clergyman informs him that the Prince's doom is not death but banishment, Romeo moans about this banishment because it means that he has to leave Juliet whereas

"every cat and dog
And little mouse, every unworthy thing,
Live here in heaven and may look on her,
But Romeo may not." (III, iii, 30-33)

This clearly shows that Romeo "is himself only in his Juliet; she is his only reality, his heart's true home and idol" and this strong and passionate love he feels for her makes him able to face death in the end of the play.

To Romeo love is the most important thing in life. He "has the blessing and the curse to feel things deeply" so being banished from his Juliet after having killed Tybalt really is "purgatory, torture, hell itself" (III, iii, 18) to him. He doesn't want to live like this, so he denies to hide himself hearing someone (the Nurse) knocking at the door. Learning from the Nurse then that Juliet is in the same state of mind, Romeo is so afraid that Juliet might not love him anymore that he offers to stab himself. But Friar Laurence makes him go to his wife and after having spent the night with her Romeo is so absolute happy that death doesn't give him a fright anymore; he would die at that instant if it pleased Juliet:

"Let me be ta'en, let me be put to death, I
am content, so thou wilt have it so.
[...]
I have more care to stay than will to go.
Come death, and welcome. Juliet wills it so." (III, v, 17-25)

But she makes him leave her at dawn. Bidding her farewell Romeo shows himself certain that they will see each other again and that makes him accept his banishment. Just before he learns

about Juliet's 'death' in V, i, he is happy having had a dream of Juliet which he takes as the harbinger of "joyful news" (V, i, 2). Hearing of his wife's death then he is at once determined to "lie with thee [Juliet] tonight" (V, i, 34) and gets to Verona to commit suicide at his lady's side. He is possessed by this idea and cannot be stopped by Paris who gets in his way. Romeo does not want to "put another sin upon his head" (cf. V, iii, 62) and beseeches Paris to leave him alone. But Paris refuses to go, so they fight and the County gets killed. Romeo promises to fulfil his last wish to lay him next to Juliet in the tomb. Noticing that the man he just killed is Paris, the man who should have been Juliet's bridegroom, he pities him for "being writ with him in sour misfortune's book" (cf. V, iii, 82) and lays the corpse into the grave. Inside the tomb Romeo feels merry; he is with his beloved Juliet again, he will remain at her side and no one will ever separate them again. After having praised Juliet's beauty, having taken her in his arms and kissed her once again, Romeo drinks the poison to his love and "[t]hus with a kiss" (V, iii, 120) he dies.

2.1.2. Juliet

Juliet's attitude towards love is a bit different to that of her lover Romeo. "In this couple, Romeo is the romantic one, and Juliet is the practical one". Whereas Romeo indulges himself in Petrarchan images she "discourages Romeo from stereotyped love-vows, and spurs him to make arrangements for their wedding". In the beginning of the play Juliet is a child, not yet fourteen. To her marriage is "an honour that I dream not of" (I, iii, 66). This changes when she meets Romeo at the party and falls in love with him. To her as well as to Romeo this is love at first sight and right from the beginning her feelings for him are very deep:

"[...] If he be married,
My grave is like to be my wedding bed." (I, v, 134-135)

After the party, Juliet as well as Romeo seems to be too excited to go to bed at once. Instead she is talking to herself in the orchard lamenting about Romeo's name. If he were not a Montague and by this her enemy, she could be in love with him so she bids him to

"doff thy name,
And for thy name, which is no part of thee,
Take all myself" (II, ii, 47-49)

Juliet is as well happy as taken by surprise when Romeo disturbs her. She knows that he has overheard her private counsel and that is why she doesn't want to frown or play around. In her practical mind that would make no sense. Juliet is confused by this unexpected meeting, she is a bit shy. She is very young so this is probably her first love and first secret 'date'. She wants a bit more time to make up her mind about all that has happened so far:

“[...] Although I joy in thee,
I have no joy of this contract tonight:
It is to rash, too unadvis’d, too sudden,
Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be Ere
one can say ›It lightens‹. Sweet, good night. This
bud of love, by summer’s ripening breath, May
prove a beauteous flower when next we meet.
Good night, good night. As sweet repose and rest
Come to thy heart as that within my breast.” (II, ii, 117-124)

However, at her re-entering Juliet has worked out a plan: if Romeo does honestly love her, he shall marry her the next day, otherwise he shall leave her to her grief (cf. II, ii, 143-148 and II, ii, 150-154).

In II, ii Juliet presents herself rather as a child than a young woman. This can be seen in the metaphors she uses to describe her love for Romeo, e.g.:

Juliet: “[...] I would have thee gone,
And yet no farther than a wanton’s bird,
That let’s it hop a little from his hand
Like a poor prisoner in his twisted gyves,
And with a silken thread pulls it back again,
So loving-jealous of his liberty.
Romeo: I would I were thy bird.
Juliet: Sweet, so would I:
Yet I should kill thee with much cherishing.” (II, ii, 176-183)

However, her marriage makes her become a young woman waiting impatiently for her wedding night:

“[...]Come gentle night, come loving black-brow’d night,
Give me my Romeo [...]” (III, ii, 17)

She wants the night to

“[...] learn me how to lose a winning match
Play’d for a pair of stainless maidenhoods.
Hood my unmanned blood, bating in my cheeks,
With thy black mantle, till strange love grow bold,
Think true love acted simple modesty.” (III, ii, 12-16)

But before she can enjoy her wedding night, Juliet is informed about Tybalt’s murder committed by her bridegroom. Although she calls Romeo a “despised substance of divinest show” (III, ii, 77), she repents her words a minute later when the Nurse joins in her laments. If not hers

“what tongue shall smooth thy name
When I thy three-hours wife have mangled it?” (III, ii, 98-99)

Romeo’s banishment is worse to her than Tybalt’s death, she even mourns more over the lost wedding night than over her cousin:

“Take up those cords. Poor ropes, you are beguil’d,
Both you and I, for Romeo is exiled. He made you
for a highway to my bed, But I, a maid, die
maiden-widowed.
Come, cords, come, Nurse, I’ll to my wedding bed,
And death, not Romeo take my maidenhead.” (III, ii, 132-137)

When the Nurse promises to find Romeo for her, she bids her to bring him to her “to take his last farewell“ (III, ii, 143).

The next morning Juliet seems to have enjoyed her wedding night and doesn't want Romeo to leave at dawn. She pretends that

“It is not yet near day.
It was the nightingale and not the lark,
That pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear.” (III, v, 1-3)

Nevertheless she makes Romeo go when he agrees to stay willing to die in case he should be found there. When Romeo descends from her balcony, Juliet is haunted by an evil foreshadowing. She sees him as “one dead in the bottom of a tomb” (III, v, 56) and bids fortune to bring him back to her quickly. After this parting Juliet is forced to get more and more mature. Things happen very quickly. Her mother enters telling her that she shall marry Paris, her father threatens her to throw her out on the street to starve if she doesn't agree to this marriage and she hasn't got a single friend in her household anymore since the Nurse advises her to forget Romeo and to marry the County. But to Juliet her marriage to Romeo and her love for him are holy and she will not betray those. So she turns from the obedient daughter she was in the beginning of the play into a woman who takes charge of her own life. She already showed her loyalty to Romeo when talking to her mother. There she speaks so ambiguously that she appears to be loyal to her family although she speaks well of Romeo, too. Now Juliet turns entirely against her family's will and seeks help in Friar Laurence. She is even ready to die:

“If all else fail, myself have power to die.” (III, v, 242)

Juliet is desperate. Two her there are only two possibilities left; either the Friar finds a solution for her situation or she will kill herself. So she is very curt to Paris when they meet at Friar Laurence' cell. She does not like him and will by no means marry him. When she is alone with Friar Laurence she bids him to do something to prevent her marriage with Paris.

She offers to stab herself like Romeo did before and tells the Friar that she

“will do [everything] without fear and doubt,
To live an unstain'd wife to my sweet love.” (IV, i, 87-88)

Grateful for his plan, Juliet begs him to give her his sleeping potion. Although she is afraid to drink it she finally concentrates on Romeo, swallows the potion and falls asleep. When she awakes again she asks about Romeo and learning that he is dead, she refuses to get out of the tomb. With her only hope Romeo dead, there is no reason for living for Juliet anymore. According to her attitude towards love she has to die now, too, but she is not yet certain by which means she should kill herself when she finds the vial of poison in Romeo's hand. Seeing that it is empty, Juliet lovingly reproaches her husband for having drunk all the poison without

having left a drop to help her after and takes his dagger to stab herself quickly before the watch will enter the tomb:

“Yea, noise? Then I’ll be brief. O happy dagger.
This is thy sheath. There rust and let me die.” (V, iii, 168-169)

In my opinion this reaction is the clearest indicator of Juliet’s growth and the depth of her love. She risked all for the dim hope to live with Romeo in Mantua after waking up again and seeing that this plan has failed she takes the consequence of it without hesitation or regret.

2.2. The domestics’ and Mercutio’s view of love: Love means sex

As already mentioned in the introduction the servants of the Capulet’s, the Nurse and Mercutio share a very sexual view of love. To them it is not so much the feeling that matters but the pleasure of sexual activity or - as Wilson puts it - they “are coarse and harp upon the physical basis of love”. Nevertheless there are differences in their viewpoints and therefore I’ll characterize each of them in detail starting with the servants.

2.2.1. Sampson and Gregory, servants of the house of Capulet

These two servants represent the view of love of the lower class in the play. In their remarks there is a close connection between sex and fighting; Sampson talks about fighting with their enemies, the Montagues, and afterwards having sexual intercourse with the women of the Montague household:

Sampson: [...] when I have fought with the men
I will be civil with the maids, I will cut off their heads.
Gregory: The heads of the maids?
Sampson: Ay, the heads of the maids, or their maidenheads;
Take it in what sense thou wilt. (I, i, 21-26)

Sampson loves to boast about being a very potent man in front of Gregory:

Sampson: Me they shall feel while I am able to stand,
And ‘tis known that I am a pretty piece of flesh. (I, i, 28-29)

In nearly everything the servants say there is ambiguity, e.g. ‘stand’ in the sentence above could mean ‘able to fight’ as well as it could be taken in a sexual context. In the same way the phrase ‘I am a pretty piece of flesh’ is used; on the one hand its meaning could be ‘I am an attractive man’, but on the other it can also be understood as ‘referring to the genitals I’ve got a nice equipment’.

James Sutherland and Joel Hurstfield describe the servants in the following way: “[...] they are making mildly bawdy jokes. The nearest that their talk gets to love is that it turns on sex.” Moreover their cruel attitude towards sex is made very clear; what I called sexual intercourse before seems to be very close to rape.

2.2.2. The Nurse

The Nurse's view of love resembles the attitude towards it already introduced by the servants. To her love means sex but for her there is no cruel connotation in this. The Nurse makes sexual remarks from the moment the reader gets introduced to her. In the first scene where she appears she tells an anecdote about a lewd joke her husband made when Juliet was a child:

“Yea, quoth he, dost thou fall upon thy face?
Thou wilt fall backward when thou hast more wit,
Wilt thou not, Jule? And by my holidame,
The pretty wretch left crying and said ›Ay.‛” (I, iii, 41-44)

This joke represents the Nurse's view of love or better her view of sex very well. Women have to play the passive and conceiving part in having sex (cf. I, iii, 95). The Nurse seems to be enthusiastic about little Juliet's 'willingness' to do so, because she tells the anecdote three times. Juliet's nurse obviously enjoys sex and talks about it very openly. She uses many sexual images and similes in her speech (e.g.: “A bump as big as a young cockerel's stone” [I, iii, 53]) and loves to get bawdy. It is very funny that the Nurse is outraged by Mercutio's lewd jokes, although his style of talking resembles hers very much.

Referring to marriage to the Nurse “one partner is as good as another [...]: what does it matter if Juliet has Romeo or Paris?”. Anyway, she is not so much interested in the marriage itself but in what will happen afterwards in the wedding night. Referring to this she does everything in order that Juliet will be able to “seek happy nights to happy days” (I, iii, 106). After having met Romeo and having settled the time for the wedding with him, she tells Juliet that she

“[...] must another way
to fetch a ladder by the which your love
must climb a bird's nest soon when it is dark.” (II, v, 72-74)

and she adds that

“[Juliet] shall bear the burden soon at night.” (II, v, 76)

Although the Nurse knows about Juliet's secret marriage to Romeo, she praises Paris in highest tunes (cf. III, v, 218-221) when she learns of Capulet's wish of a marriage between Paris and Juliet. To her “Paris is the properer man” (II, iv, 202), to whom Romeo in comparison is nothing more than a “dishclout” (III, v, 219). She wants Juliet to get into a second match

“For it excels your first; or, if not,
Your first is dead, or 'twere as good he were
As living here and you no use of him.” (III, v, 223-225)

All this clearly shows that the Nurse (due to her physical viewpoint of love) can neither understand the depth of Juliet's feelings for Romeo nor the “lovers' emotional and spiritual

bond” and this leads to Juliet’s decision not to tell her, who was her former most intimate friend, anything anymore (III, v, 235-240).

2.2.3. Mercutio

“In some ways, he’s like Juliet’s nurse: he also sees love as primarily sexual.” Mercutio is making bawdy remarks all the time - not only when he is among his friends but also when meeting strangers like the Nurse. One of his first lewd comments when meeting her is his vulgar answer when the Nurse asks what time it is:

“[...] the bawdy hand of
the dial is now upon the prick of noon.” (II, iv, 111-112)

The next thing Mercutio says about his female counterpart is that he takes her for a bawd. Sex seems to be the only content of Mercutio’s thoughts, he does not take Romeo’s love for Rosaline seriously but makes fun of his suffering friend by giving him sexual advice

“And, to sink in it, should you burden love -
Too great oppression for a tender thing.” (I, iv, 23-24)

and

“If love be rough with you, be rough with love;
Prick love for pricking and you beat love down.” (I, iv, 27-28)

After the party at Capulet’s Mercutio tries to anger Romeo, who hides himself, by mocking at Romeo’s language of love (II, i, 7-14) and, having no success with this, gets bawdy again by conjuring him

“[...] by Rosaline’s bright eyes,
By her high forehead and her scarlet lip,
By her fine foot, straight leg, and quivering thigh,
And the demesnes that there adjacent lie.” (II, i, 17-20)

The following two comments uttered by Mercutio are more direct and show in my opinion the sex fantasies of an envious young man:

“[...] ‘Twould anger him
To raise a spirit in his mistress’ circle Of
some strange nature, letting it there stand
Till she had laid it and conjur’d it down:
That were some spite. My invocation
Is fair and honest; in his mistress’ name
I conjure only but to raise him.” (II, i, 23-29)

and:

“ If love be blind, love cannot hit the mark.
Now will he sit under a medlar tree
And wishes his mistress were that kind of fruit
As maids call medlars when they laugh alone.
O Romeo, that she were, O that she were
An open-arse and thou a poperin pear” (II, i, 33-38)

Mercutio's view of love stands in big contrast to Romeo's not only because of all that but also because of "Mercutio's virile presence" and the image of man he creates. "Mercutio considers love mere folly unworthy of a real man and respects only the wounds suffered in combat".

When Romeo is in love, Mercutio does not take him seriously, he calls him

"already dead, stabbed with a white wench's black eye, run through the ear with a love song, the very pin of his heart cleft with the blind boy's butt-shaft" (II, iv, 14-17)

and supposing that Romeo spent the night after the party with Rosaline, he mocks at Romeo saying that

"Now he is for the numbers that Petrarch flowed in" (II, iv, 39-40).

Mercutio prefers not to be in love and to prove himself a man instead. He has a hot temper and obviously enjoys looking for a fight in the streets (III, i). Moreover Romeo's gentle behaviour is not manly enough in Mercutio's eyes; Mercutio cannot understand why Romeo doesn't want to fight with Tybalt. In his opinion this is nothing else than a "[...] calm, dishonourable, vile submission" (III, i, 72).

In other words this is not the way a man has to be. Mercutio's view of love (similar to that of the Nurse) includes a strict role model in which the man is the active and lively part whereas the woman is a "pale hard-hearted wench" (II, iv, 4) if she doesn't act like men expect from her. To Mercutio as well as to Juliet love or better sex seems to be a "winning match" (III, ii, 12) which has to be lost by women whereas men get out of it as winners. His method to achieve this is already quoted above (I, iv, 27-28).

Altogether Mercutio's view of love seems to be the opinion of someone who has never experienced being in love like Romeo and Juliet are yet (cf. Romeo's utterance "He jests at scars that never felt a wound." [II, ii, 1]) and hence cannot understand the power love has over his friend Romeo.

2.3. Benvolio's view of love: Be happy, no matter if you are in love or not

Different to Mercutio Benvolio does not clearly speak about love but his attitude towards it can be read between the lines. In the beginning of the play (I, i) Benvolio finds out that Romeo is lovelorn about Rosaline, a niece of Capulet. The moment he learns about that he feels sorry for his friend and wants to help him out of his depression by finding him another beautiful girl to response his affection. To Benvolio (in contrast to Romeo) the object of love is easily interchangeable in order to get happy (I, ii, 84-89, 96-101).

Even though one of Benvolio's remarks in the first act shows some ambiguity,

"A right fair mark, fair coz, is soonest hit." (I, i, 206)

he does not like to be so bawdy as Romeo's other friend Mercutio whom he tries to stop from angering Romeo by making sexual remarks about his beloved Rosaline in II, i, 22 and II, i, 30-32.

With his non-sexual or at least not obscene attitude towards love, Benvolio seems to understand Romeo's feelings better than Mercutio.

2.4. Juliet's parents, the Prince and Paris: The Elizabethan attitude towards love and sex

The views of love and marriage the following characters have characterize the common viewpoints of the people living in Shakespeare's time. Most marriages were arranged matches, where the parents chose the future husband or wife according to the motto "the children will make mistakes, and so should leave it to the parents, who know better".

2.4.1. Capulet

Capulet's attitude towards love changes during the play. In I, ii, where he is talking to Paris who asks for his daughter's hand for marriage, love seems to play an important role in Capulet's eyes. He appears to be a loving and caring father who does not like to make up an arranged match without knowing if his daughter likes her future husband. In his opinion Juliet is too young to marry but nevertheless he allows Paris to

"woo her, gentle Paris, get her heart,
My will to her consent is just a part,
And she agreed, within her scope of choice
Lies my consent and fair according voice." (I, ii, 16-19)

However, Capulet doesn't take Paris' suit very seriously; he is sure that Paris will find another girl to suit at the party he intends to give that night. Tybalt's death throws Capulet out of gear because afterwards he suddenly changes his mind about love and marriage decisively and neither love nor any other emotions are important to him any longer. Although he mourns over his nephew's murder he meets with Paris and sets the date for Paris' and Juliet's wedding on Thursday which is only two days from that day on. He does not even want to ask his daughter's mind about the wedding anymore, he just wants her to face the facts:

"Sir Paris, I will make a desperate tender
Of my child's love. I think she will be rul'd
In all respects by me; nay, more; I doubt it not." (III,iv,12-14)

This as well as III, v, 191-192 shows that Capulet regards his daughter as his property and being this she has to fulfil his wishes. By acting like this Capulet represents the typical patriarch of

those days to whom it is normal to have an arranged instead of a love match. As to his own marriage (which was probably an arranged match, too) love does not seem to be essential for him. “He has a strained relationship to his wife. He doesn’t say much to her, except to order her around” like in III, iv, 14-17, 31-32 and IV, ii, 41. Besides, Paris is a good catch and Capulet thinks that in him he found

“A gentleman of noble parentage, of fair demesnes, youthful and nobly lign’d
Stuff’d, as they say, with honourable parts,
Proportion’d as one’s thought would wish a man - ”. (III, v, 179-182)

He cannot understand that Juliet denies to marry the County:

“[...] Doth she not give us thanks?
Is she not proud? Doth she not count her blest,
Unworthy as she is, that we have wrought
So worthy a gentleman to be her bride?” (III, v, 142-145)

Nonetheless Capulet might have been different in the past when love (or better sex) might have been of a bigger value to him since his wife describes him as having been a “mouse-hunt” (IV, iv, 11) in his youth. He says so himself at the party in his house:

“I have seen the day
That I [...] could tell
A whispering tale in a fair lady’s ear,
Such as would please.” (I, iv, 22-25)

All in all this makes it quite difficult in my opinion to understand Capulet. His behaviour becomes even more strange when he learns of Juliet’s ‘death’. Partly he returns into the loving father whom we know from the beginning and who mourns deeply about his ‘dead’ daughter. But the other part of him seems to be more sad about the “murder [of] our solemnity“ (IV, v, 61) and about the loss of an heir than about the loss of someone he, referring to what he said in I, ii, loved well. However, this state of mixed emotions is eliminated in the end when Capulet really seems to be hurt seeing his daughter stabbed (cf. V, iii, 201).

2.4.2. Lady Capulet

What kind of woman is Juliet’s mother? She does neither speak of love nor does she appear to love or even like her husband. She makes satirical remarks to hurt his feelings right from the beginning of the play (I, i, 75) where she says that a crutch is fitting Capulet better than a sword. Nevertheless Lady Capulet shows herself as a typical Elizabethan wife; she is obedient to her husband and does whatever he wants her to do, e.g. go to Juliet in the middle of the night to tell her that she has to marry the County Paris two days later. Moreover she expects to cheer her daughter up by this news which is really ridiculous because Paris has never wooed Juliet before as she says in III, v, 118-119. In my opinion, Lady Capulet is not at all emotional.

She tells Juliet to stop grieving so much about her cousin Tybalt advising her that

“[...] Some grief shows much of love,
But much of grief shows still some want of wit.” (III, v, 72-73)

Furthermore she shows no sympathy for her daughter’s denial to a marriage with Paris:

“I would the fool were married to her grave.” (III, v, 140)

Lady Capulet does not even agree to delay the marriage with the County, instead she tells her unhappy daughter

“Talk not to me, for I’ll not speak a word.
Do as thou wilt, for I have done with thee.” (III, v, 202-203)

To her a marriage with Paris seems to be paradise. “He’s not only wealthy, but young and attractive: everything in a husband she might have wished for herself but doesn’t have”. I hold the opinion that this attitude derives from her unhappiness in her own marriage. As already mentioned above, I suppose that the marriage of Juliet’s parents was an arranged one due to the fact that Lady Capulet tells Juliet

“I was your mother much upon these years
That you are now a maid.” (I, iii, 72-73)

So she is not yet thirty. Her husband is probably much older than her as one learns at the party where he talks to his cousin about the time when they used to go in masks, which is already thirty years ago (I, v, 31-42). It might be that Lady Capulet hopes that Juliet’s marriage to Paris, although being an arranged one, will turn out well in the end by believing in the Elizabethan way of thinking: love must come after marriage. Although Lady Capulet’s behaviour up to III, v appears as if she does not bear love or care for anybody except herself, she seems to be fond of her daughter for she mourns her very deeply when Juliet appears to be dead in IV, v and in the end when Juliet is really dead.

2.4.3. Prince Escalus

The Prince’s view of love is the most Elizabethan one. In the last act, the Prince asks Montague and Capulet to

“See what a scrouge is laid upon your hate,
That heaven finds means to kill your joys with love.” (V, iii, 291-292)

By this sentence the whole world view of Elizabethan times is represented. The people living in that time “had a very strong feeling that God ordered the universe in a specific way. When something evil, like the feud among the Capulets and Montagues, broke the laws of this order, that evil had to be checked.” This means that to the Prince the love of Romeo and Juliet had to find such a bitter end because their fathers acted against the heavenly will to keep the peace.

From his point of view there could have been no other way out, even the young people's falling in love was planned by God to take vengeance for his disregarded laws. Hence the Prince's view of love could be described as a religious one; when you fall in love that is part of God's big plan and you can do nothing against it.

2.4.4. Paris

Paris is the perfect Elizabethan suitor who woos not his future bride but his future parents-in-law. From Paris' point of view he acts absolutely normal. He is in love with Juliet (although he doesn't seem to have told her about it as she remarks in III, v, 118-119), so he asks her father for her hand for marriage. With his gentleman-like behaviour, Paris wins the love of Capulet (who calls him 'son' in III, iv, 15 and 'friend' in III, v, 191) and especially that of Lady Capulet (whose enthusiasm about Paris makes her say about him that "Verona's summer hath not such a flower" [I, iii, 77]) but not Juliet's love which can clearly be seen in IV, i, when they meet by accident in Friar Laurence' cell. Paris, who probably knows that he is a good catch, being not only rich but also a kinsman to the king, is sure that Juliet loves him:

"Do not deny to him that you love me." (IV, i, 24)

And:

"[...] I am sure that you love me." (IV, i, 26)

He wouldn't dream of it that it could be different. Since everything is settled between Capulet and Paris, the latter treats Juliet as if she (already) were his property when they meet at Friar Laurence' cell (IV, i):

"Thy face is mine, and thou hast slander'd it." (IV, i, 35)

Nevertheless Paris must really have been in love with Juliet because he mourns for her very deeply and wants to keep obsequies at her grave every night. He also wants Romeo to "stop thy unhallow'd toil" (V, iii, 54) in front of the grave and when he dies he asks Romeo to lay him next to Juliet in the tomb. I suppose that by being buried next to her that should have been his wife Paris intends to stay at her side for eternity. So even if it had not been possible for him to get together with Juliet in life he could at least be together with her in death. All in all Paris' view of love is a quite romantic one with respect to the Elizabethan age and the conditions of love and marriage which are linked with that era.

2.5. Romeo's parents: A relationship full of love

Although there is not much that could be said about Romeo's parents and particularly about their views of love I would like to put down here what I read out of that little bit. After all, the Montagues seem to be much more "close-knit and loving" as Juliet's family.

2.5.1. Montague

The only time Montague talks about his relation to his wife is in the last act, when he tells the Prince that his wife died that night. He is very sad about that and asks

"What further woe conspires against mine age?" (V, iii, 211)

as if there could be no bigger grief in the whole world. I took this utterance as an indicator for the love he has felt for his wife.

Montague's relation to his wife seems to be very different to that of the Capulet-couple. While in the Capulet household the father makes up plans all alone, the Montagues seem to talk about their problems with each other and make up decisions together:

"Could we but learn from whence his sorrows grow,
We would as willingly give cure as know." (I, i, 153-154)

Besides, Montague shows more respect to his wife, whom he entitles with 'madam' (I, i, 158) when he is talking to her, than Capulet who addresses Lady Capulet only with 'wife' all the time (e.g. in III, iv, 15; 32).

Apart from that Montague shows himself a loving father who cares much about the welfare of his son. He is worried about Romeo's behaviour while his son is in love with Rosaline and therefore asks his nephew Benvolio to get to know the cause of Romeo's grievance. Here it is once more shown that the Montagues are somewhat nicer to each other than the Capulets. Montague and his nephew Benvolio have a relationship of a totally different kind in comparison to that of Capulet and his nephew Tybalt.

2.5.2. Lady Montague

Of Lady Montague we learn even less than of her husband. As one can take from her utterances in I, i she seems to be a peace-loving woman, who tries to stop her husband from fighting (I, i, 79) and who is very worried about her son, she is

"right glad [...] he was not at this fray." (I, i, 115-116)

As we learn from Montague in the last act Lady Montague dies of grief when Romeo is banished from Verona. This includes that she must have felt a deep love for her son.

2.6. Friar Laurence' view of love: Violent delights have violent ends

To Friar Laurence love is a serious thing. He gets angry when he learns from Romeo that the young man is no longer in love with Rosaline, for whom he cried many a tear, but with Capulet's daughter Juliet. The Friar tells Romeo off saying that

“[...] Young men's love then lies
Not truly in their hearts but in their eyes.” (II, iii, 63-64)

He cannot understand that sudden change in his young friend who wailed so much over his unrequited love for Rosaline before. Nevertheless Friar Laurence promises to marry Romeo and Juliet to “turn your households' rancour to pure love” (II, iii, 88).

The Friar likes Juliet when he gets to know her later on and he wants to help the lovers to get happy. In his opinion the first step to achieve this is their marriage to prevent them from committing a sin by having sexual intercourse before being married. Their passion seems to be so deep that he dares not to leave them alone:

“Come, come with me and we will make short work
For, by your leaves, you shall not stay alone
Till holy church incorporate two in one.” (II, iv, 35-37)

Friar Laurence regards this passion as dangerous (“These violent delights have violent ends” [II, vi, 9]), according to him love shouldn't be a quick and overwhelming desire so he warns Romeo:

“The sweetest honey
Is loathsome in his own deliciousness,
And in the taste confounds the appetite.
Therefore love moderately; long love doth so.
Too swift arrives as tardy as too slow.” (II, vi, 11- 15)

Nevertheless, Friar Laurence shows a quite romantic view of love in III, iii where he scolds Romeo who offers to kill himself. His friend shall not do so because by killing himself, he would kill Juliet, too, who lives only for him:

“Wilt thou slay thyself?
And slay thy lady that in thy life lives [...]?
[...] Thy dear love sworn [is] but hollow perjury,
Killing that love which thou hast vow'd to cherish” (III, iii, 116-129)

Furthermore it is the Friar who works out a plan to get everything in order again after Romeo's banishment and it is him, too, who sends Romeo to

“[...] get thee to thy love as was decreed,
Ascend her chamber - hence, and comfort her.” (III, iii, 146-147)

When Juliet comes to ask for his help in order to rescue her from a marriage with Paris, the Friar makes the quick decision to give her a sleeping potion to make her appear dead for forty-two hours. In the meantime he wants to give note to Romeo who is supposed to come and take her to Mantua with him where she shall be rescued from “this present shame” (IV, i, 118).

Friar Laurence knows about the risks of his plan but nevertheless decides to act upon it. Unfortunately the plan fails and Romeo, not knowing that his beloved Juliet is not really dead, stabs himself before the Friar gets to the monument.

In the last act it turns out that Friar Laurence, who showed so much sympathy for the lovers and who tried hard to find a solution for their desperate situation, cannot understand the depth of their feelings just as Romeo accused him in III, ii:

“Thou canst not speak of what thou dost not feel“ (III, ii, 65)

Realizing that his plan has failed and that Romeo is dead, Friar Laurence urges Juliet to leave the tomb where

“Thy husband in thy bosom there lies dead,
And Paris, too. Come, I’ll dispose of thee
Among a sisterhood of holy nuns.” (V, iii, 155-157)

Although he should know that life is meaningless to Juliet after having lost her husband, and that she is probably not interested in spending the rest of her life in a nunnery, he is so afraid of being caught in the tomb that he finally leaves without her, leaving her to her fate.

Although Friar Laurence held the opinion that ‘violent delights have violent ends’ he tried to make the best out of Romeo’s and Juliet’s passion. In the end he does not seem to understand that their suicides were the lovers’ only solution to their desperate situation and were committed out of love instead of being a “work of heaven” as he calls it (V, iii, 260).

3. Conclusion: In how far do the views of love presented in the play reflect the attitude towards love the Elizabethan audience had?

To an Elizabethan audience the most tragic thing about *Romeo and Juliet* was not so much “their ill-starred romance but the way the lovers brought destruction upon themselves by violating the norms of the society in which they lived”. The lovers’ behaviour turns all norms upside down. Romeo and Juliet are the children of parents who live in a feud and normally there is a fight whenever two people from the different households meet. But between Romeo and Juliet this is different. “Bewitched by the charm of looks“ (2nd Prologue) they fall in love with each other and misfortune takes its course. They withdraw more and more from the norms of society, they marry secretly and Juliet disregards her parents’ will. Moreover “she gives her loyalty to Romeo over her family, even after he’s killed her cousin”. Besides, the lovers’ understanding of their roles stands in strong contrast to that of the surrounding characters. Romeo as a man should normally be like Mercutio and Tybalt, always ready to fight and lose his life for the sake of the family honour. Instead he is suffering from his unrequited love for Rosaline, he is peaceful after the marriage with Juliet and doesn’t want to fight which makes

him womanish in Mercutio's eyes. Romeo even cries in Friar Laurence's cell which makes the Friar call him womanish (III, iii, 110 and 112), too. Juliet on the contrary appears very practical, preferring to find means to realize a love affair with Romeo instead of making flowery Petrarchan promises like Romeo does. In the end she kills herself with a dagger (which has a male connotation) whereas her lover takes poison (which has a female connotation).

To an Elizabethan play-goer this is too much. Although "an Elizabethan courtier would be familiar enough with the bewitching passion of love to feel sympathy for the couple, [...] he would clearly see where duty lay" and act on this instead of acting the way Romeo and Juliet do.

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