
The Character Of Friar Lawrence In Romeo And Juliet By William Shakespeare

Romeo and Juliet is a tragic play written by the reigning poet of the sixteenth century by William Shakespeare. The play depicts a story of forbidden love from two opposing families, which ultimately results in catastrophe. Throughout the course of their romance, multiple forces influence the fates of these “star-crossed lovers”, contributing to their eventual deaths. Through violence, hatred, and intimacy, the everlasting question of Shakespeare’s work remains; who or what was responsible for the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet?

Friar Lawrence’s role depicts the failure of a holy man and friend. He repetitively succumbed to the naïve children despite knowing that Romeo was vulnerable and superficial. “Is Rosaline, whom thou didst love so dear, so soon forsaken? Young men’s love then lies Not truly in their hearts, but their eyes.” (Act 2, Scene 3, Lines 2-4) If he had rejected Romeo’s request, being a respected man of religion who understood the impulses of youth, there would be no marriage, resulting in time to reason and develop a stronger connection. He had the power to steer the lovers in the correct direction, yet continually violated his morals. Friar Lawrence understood that the love between Romeo and Juliet would only breed catastrophe; “These violent delights have violent ends, and in their triumph die,” (Act 2, Scene 6, Line 9-10) which questions the purpose of the actions he knew nothing positive would come off. He was ignorant and permissive, with disregard to the consequences of concocting the disastrous plan, causing Romeo not to receive the letter of Juliet’s death, while knowing the urgency of the situation. In the tomb, Friar Lawrence flees, selfishly fearing himself instead of tending to suicidal Juliet. If Friar Lawrence himself, who understood the legitimacy and details of the lovers’ relationship, can recognize his own contribution to their deaths, nobody can make a better judgment. “...and if aught in this miscarried by my fault, let my old life Be sacrificed, unto the rigor of severest law.” (Act 5, Scene 3, Line 265-268) Had Friar Lawrence never agreed to marry Romeo and Juliet, give them misplaced hope, or organize the scheme, their entire relationship would differ, perhaps without their death.

The feud between the Capulets and Montagues created the perception that to betray was to die. Had Romeo and Juliet not been surrounded by predestined hatred for each other, their families would not object to the marriage. However, the lovers understood the value of loyalty, demonstrated by Capulet’s harsh demands; “Disobedient wretch! ...get thee to church o’ Thursday, Or never after look me in the face...hang, beg, starve, die in the streets!” (Act 3, Scene 5, Line 160-163, 193) Understanding the treatment and influence of her alliance, Romeo and Juliet were driven to secrecy out of fear; “And the place death, considering who thou art. If any of my kinsmen find thee here.” (Act 2, Scene 2, Line 64-65.) No blood would have been spilled given the families had a peace which would prevent Romeo’s banishment and further complications, indicated in the quote; “Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean,” (Prologue, Line 4.) where the lack of civility resulted in death. Prince Escalus, a respected and virtuous man, refers to the families as ‘enemies’ and blames them for the death of Romeo and Juliet. The prince’s acknowledgment, an objective conclusion, validates the morality behind the parents’ role. As the families refused to accept the love between a Capulet and Montague, they lost them instead.

Romeo and Juliet were teenagers who were blinded by desire. They had planned marriage within hours of meeting each other. They had no regard for their families' legacy or the relationship itself; they were eager and in love with the concept of love that fuelled their reckless decisions. Had they allowed the relationship to develop and reviewed their actions, instead of demanding more, they could explore their personalities and make a better judgment. Instead, they rushed into the relationship, recognizing the fact that they barely knew each other. "My ears have not drunk a hundred words of that tongue's utterance, yet I know the sound." (Scene 3, Act 2, Line 58-59.) Romeo and Juliet accepted the love they believed they deserved because they did not understand its true meaning. Had they not defied their parents, they would have lived in separate worlds. They are technically responsible for their own deaths as it was their own choice to kill themselves and follow the guidance of Friar Laurence. Confirming Juliet was dead or recognizing life without Romeo was worth living is part of their youthful impetuosity that compels them to fall hopelessly in love, so much so that they can't live without each other.

Many forces defied the love between Romeo and Juliet. Their secrecy, employed by the feud and guidance of Friar Laurence, bred the catastrophe of their deaths. Shakespeare's work communicates the themes of love, fate, and conflict in a world where loving a Montague is a crime. Under different circumstances, the events of their tragedy would significantly differ. Though they were doomed from the beginning, in death, it was their love that survived, without which there would be no tragedy.