

## Romeo and Juliet

### Suicide

- *Romeo and Juliet* famously ends with both characters ending their own lives. Romeo, believing that Juliet is dead, drinks poison. When Juliet wakes up and finds Romeo's dead body, she uses his dagger to stab herself.
- Prior to the play's ending, both Romeo and Juliet see ending their lives as a way of coping with extreme emotional distress.
  - In 3.3, distressed that Juliet will not forgive him for killing Tybalt, Romeo offers to stab himself.
  - In 3.5, Juliet remarks that 'If all else fail, myself have power to die' and in 4.1 she shows the knife she would use for the act to Friar Laurence, stating 'I long to die'.

### Non-Consensual Marriage

- Whilst Capulet initially states in 1.2 that he will not allow Paris to marry Juliet without her consent, after Tybalt's death Capulet makes it clear that Juliet no longer has a choice. If Juliet will refuse to marry Paris, Capulet will leave her to 'hang, beg, starve, die in the streets' (3.5). Juliet does not consent to the marriage, and her family's repeated efforts to force her into a sexual relationship may be triggering for some.

### Anti-Black and Racializing Imagery

- Juliet's beauty is consistently contrasted with Blackness, reflecting a wider early modern pattern where Blackness was associated with ugliness or undesirability and whiteness (or fairness) with beauty and desirability.
  - In 1.5, Romeo describes Juliet as a 'rich jewel in an 'Ethiop's ear'. She is also praised as a 'snowy dove trooping with crows'. In both cases, Blackness is used as the foil against which Juliet's white beauty is admired.
- Similarly, Juliet describes Romeo as 'whiter than new snow upon a raven's back' (3.2). Upon hearing the news that Romeo has killed Tybalt, he becomes a 'Dove-feathered raven' in Juliet's imagination – blending the colour symbolism of black and white.
  - Farah Karim-Cooper argues that Shakespeare deploys an 'interracial poetic strategy': ideas of interracialism or racial mixing are used by Romeo and Juliet to make sense of their forbidden love.

## Violence and Death

- The citizens of Shakespeare's Verona are quick to resort to violence, and several characters die in duels/swordfights.
- Act 1, Scene 1: opens with violence between servants of Montagues and Capulets, continues to escalate, drawing in Benvolio, Tybalt, citizens, Capulet and Montague.
- Act 3, Scene 1: Duel between Tybalt and Mercutio, Mercutio is wounded and dies offstage. Romeo then kills Tybalt with his sword as retribution.
- Act 5, Scene 3: Romeo kills Paris in the Capulet tomb.

## Misogynistic Language

- There are several disparaging references to women as weak, cowardly or promiscuous, as well as allusions to the sexual assault of women.
- Act 1, Scene 1: 'women, being the weaker vessels, are ever thrust to the wall' – Samson boasts that he will push the Montague women against the wall to assault them sexually.
- Act 2, Scene 4: Mercutio mocks Romeo for being in love, and his joke centres around mocking the sexuality of famous historical women: 'Dido a dowdy, Cleopatra a whore, Helen and Hero hildings and harlots, Thisbe a grey eye'.
- Act 3, Scene 1: When Romeo fails to take up Tybalt's challenge to a duel, he complains that Juliet's 'beauty hath made me effeminate'.
- In 3.3, Romeo is told that his 'tears are womanish' and that he is an 'unseemly woman in a seeming man.' Also, a later reference in 4.1 to 'womanish fear'.

## Ableism and Ageism

- The characterisation of the Nurse as a comic figure means that she is often mocked, and particularly in relation to her age and physical ability.
- Act 2, Scene 4: Mercutio mocks the Nurse for being an 'ancient lady' – whilst she is older than the youth of Verona, she is certainly not ancient nor is she a lady (being in a service role).
- Act 2, Scene 5: Juliet is frustrated that the Nurse has not returned sooner, refers to the Nurse as 'lame'. As a descriptor, 'lame' implies physical frailty or infirmity, and is also linked to old age.
  - According to Juliet, if the Nurse had 'warm youthful blood' she would have the speed necessary to deliver the news from Romeo.
  - Juliet describes older people as being essentially dead: 'But old folks, many feign as they were dead, / Unwieldy, slow, heavy and pale as lead.'