

The Character of Juliet - Transcript

Nurse: 'His name is Romeo, and a Montague,
The only son of your great enemy.'

Juliet: 'My only love sprung from my only hate!
Too early seen unknown, and known too late!'

Presenter: Juliet's playful language here is rhythmic and rhyming.

It demonstrates her intelligence to the audience, with an awareness of her misfortune in falling for a man who is an enemy of her family... a misfortune that leads her down a romantic but dangerous path.

Juliet starts the play as a compliant young woman, using obedient language when speaking to her mother...

Juliet: 'I am here; what is your will?'

Presenter: But she shows a headstrong and passionate side, and is besotted when she meets Romeo, using religious phrases to describe her feelings when she says things like...

Presenter: 'palm to palm is holy palmer's kiss.'

The two secretly marry... and when Juliet then announces that she will not go through with the arranged marriage to Paris that her parents desire, it marks a change in her character.

Juliet: 'He shall not make me there a joyful bride.'

Presenter: A shocking act of defiance that sparks tensions within the Capulet house.

Why? Because this was a time when women from powerful families were often expected to see marriage as a diplomatic duty, designed to unite families, and 'love' took a back seat.

As the play progresses, Juliet becomes more and more independent and after much thought she follows her heart, staying loyal to Romeo when he is banished for killing her cousin, Tybalt.

She isolates herself from her family and even her confidant, the nurse... until this star-crossed lover meets a tragic end, choosing to join Romeo in death...

Juliet: 'O! Happy dagger!'

Presenter: ...marking the end of the character arc that takes Juliet from being compliant to independent, but at a great cost.

Through Juliet - and her tragic death - Shakespeare reflects a society where there is no space for a young woman to live outside of her family's expectations.

What comment do you think he was making about the role that women were expected to play at the time?