Crushing on a Capulet: Culture, Cognition, and Simplification in Romeo and Juliet for Young People

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Abstract

Much of the current material designed to introduce Shakespeare to elementary and secondary school students emphasizes how to make Shakespeare “fun.” Many texts also maintain that teachers are likely to be frightened of teaching Shakespeare and that curricular materials need to help assuage these concerns. There is very little discussion, however, about the pedagogical reasons for including Shakespeare in the curriculum. This essay provides an overview of current Shakespearean resources for teachers and students in England and the United States, with a focus on Romeo and Juliet. It describes the implicit and explicit assumptions about students, teachers, and Shakespeare that underlie these texts and discusses some responses to Shakespeare found in writings on educational philosophy. It argues that humanists need to devote increased attention to the exploration and explication of the rationales for teaching Shakespeare to children and adolescents and suggests that recent work in cognition and learning is one avenue that warrants particular attention in this endeavor.

Author Biography

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Sheila T. Cavanagh is Masse-Martin/NEH Distinguished Teaching Professor at Emory University and editor of the Spenser Review. She is author of Cherished Torment: The Emotional Geography of Lady Mary Wroth’s Urania (Duquesne, 2001); Wanton Eyes and Chaste Desires: Female Sexuality in The Faerie Queene (Indiana, 1994); and numerous articles on Renaissance literature and pedagogy. She is the Director of the Emory Women Writers Resource Project, which received a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Cavanagh received her Ph.D. from Brown University and is currently completing a Master of Science in College Teaching at the University of New Hampshire, where she is focusing on cognition and learning.
Like young people all over the world, Romeo and Juliet want the right to decide their future for themselves, but in the end, their families are too powerful for them. Romeo and Juliet cannot live without each other, and if they are not allowed to marry and live together, there is only one way out. Juliet, the Capulets’ daughter Tybalt, Juliet’s cousin. Romeo and Juliet, from the 1916 film. Other characters. Escalus, Prince of Verona. b. Paris asks Lord Capulet for permission to marry Juliet c. Romeo secretly meets Juliet and asks her to marry him d. Romeo tells Juliet’s nurse of the wedding plans e. The Capulets and Montagues are caught fighting by Prince Escalus f. Romeo and Juliet discover which families they are from g. Romeo and Juliet meet for the first time at the. The key themes in Romeo and Juliet are love, conflict and family. All three themes interlink with one another. Part of Shakespeare presents the theme of conflict through two warring families: the Montagues and the Capulets. The two families have been taught to hate each other, and this hatred impacts on the family members and the citizens of Verona. The citizens of Verona are unwillingly a part of the conflict as they witness the ongoing battles between the two families - battles which often result in death. Shakespeare also presents the themes of conflict through inner familial conflict and individual conflict. Where conflict is presented, the struggle for power and control is also apparent. How is the theme There are more relationships in Romeo and Juliet than just the one between Romeo and Juliet. We have relationships between parents and teens, between friends, and between enemies. Read the article and try the exercises with your students. Juliet observes that if the Nurse were young she would be “swift in motion as a ball,” but as it is she’s old and slow. Change the word choice and it could be taken from a conversation heard in any high school hallway. First are the parent/teen relationships. Romeo’s parents rarely talk to him. In groups, examine Act III, scene iv and identify the words and images Capulet uses on Juliet. Mistress minion, for example. Would you like to have your father say those words to you? Choose a couple of terms and create tableaux to visualize them. In “Romeo and Juliet”, personifications have been used to convey the depth of certain abiding emotions such as love, sadness, desire or to add a life-like element to natural occurrences such as morning, night and the most dreaded of all natural phenomena, death. Some of the instances of personification from the play are highlighted below Example #1. “Alas that love, so gentle in his view, Should be so tyrannous and rough in proof!” (I. i. 174-175). This quote is delivered by Benvolio while he is conversing with Romeo. In this instance, love is personified as a person who seems gentle and harmless. However, when one has an encounter with love, as an individual, comes across as a cold and rough tyrant who merely exacerbates one’s loneliness and sadness.