

william shakespeare



editor sara barkat

ROMEO & JULIET

includes essays and annotations

by callie feyen of

theteacherdiaries

plus essays from hannah haney & karen swallow prior

Romeo & Juliet

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*includes essays and personal annotations
by callie feyen of the teacher diaries
and essays by hannah haney
and karen swallow prior*

w i l l i a m s h a k e s p e a r e



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Why This Book

A love story, an epic tragedy, a cautionary tale about parents respecting their children, even, incredibly, more than a minor note of humor—*Romeo and Juliet* has it all, and its multifaceted nature is part of what allows the play to remain relevant today. Add to this a decided complexity of thought (the true measure of a great work), and, four hundred years later, people are still finding ways to interact with and enjoy *Romeo and Juliet*.

As a child, I was introduced to Shakespeare through what one essay in this volume calls a kind of musical-repetition experience. From the age of five on, I was delightfully treated to numerous video showings of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; my mother believed that Shakespeare's language was difficult only to the untrained ear, so she started us young, with the fun of a faery story, and let repetition do its work. By the time I was twelve, I was comfortably reading Shakespeare (not that I understood all the words; I didn't), and I would always flip straight to the end first, to see what the essays were. It was for this reason that I loved getting multiple volumes of my favorite play, *Macbeth*, and I always wished there were more.

Like *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet* is already available in multiple volumes, with their accompanying commentaries. These publications take critical looks at the play, from many directions. This book is offered as an addition to the ongoing discussion, with essays that range from the personal to the historical to the theoretical.

Written by vibrant women from several generations—not Shakespeare scholars, but ordinary people who like to think about stories and ideas—this volume purposes to decrease the

distance between readers and the text, as well as provide a dialogue that reaches across time and life situations.

Hannah Haney, editor of *Relief Journal*; Karen Swallow Prior, author of *Booked: Literature in the Soul of Me* and English professor at Liberty University; *The Teacher Diaries* author Callie Feyen, and I each speak from a different place in life and offer our unique perspectives. In the first essay, “Coming Back to the Bard,” Haney shares her personal experience with the play, acknowledging the ubiquitousness of the story in popular culture, while expressing her own frustrations with the limits of the tragic genre and Juliet’s choices. In conversation with this, my essay, “Shakespeare Favored the Girl,” suggests that the play is already open to a positive feminist reading, with Shakespeare casting Juliet as the central and, crucially, most pivotal character in the play.

In the third essay, “About Shakespeare: Poet and Playwright,” Prior gives an overview of Shakespeare’s life, explaining that his works, now regarded as classics, and sometimes associated with the elite of both then and now, were once “popular” works written for a wide general audience, so people from all walks of life could enjoy them.

And finally, Feyen—author of this volume’s companion memoir, *The Teacher Diaries: Romeo & Juliet*—has annotated the play within, and she offers two essays. In the first, “The Making of a Heroine,” she provides a witty, personal glimpse into her experience with the sometimes arbitrary nature of books versus literature, as well as her worries in preparing to teach *Romeo and Juliet* (a subject that is further addressed poignantly and humorously in *The Teacher Diaries* memoir). In Feyen’s second essay, “On a Break,” she writes about memories of her own

breakups and how literature allowed her to look beyond the moment; she then includes some fun tips for activities that teachers can use with the play.

Altogether, this *Romeo and Juliet* publication is a quintessential work from T. S. Poetry Press, which values the insights not just of the “experts,” but of a work’s audience—and invites them to speak along a spectrum to a popular or personal reception, encouraging dialogue across the generations.

—Sara Barkat, editor of *The Teacher Diaries: Romeo & Juliet*

Coming Back to the Bard

When I first read *Romeo and Juliet* as a freshman in high school, I vaguely remember being underwhelmed. I'm not a big Shakespeare girl. I read it again (and by *read*, I mean *skimmed*) in college for my literature degree. I was still underwhelmed.

But what regularly fascinates me about *Romeo and Juliet* is its sheer aptness, the way there's something about the play that people hold to, cling to, take with them no matter where their lives go.

[Excerpt. Essay continues]

—Hannah Haney, editor, *Relief Journal*

Shakespeare Favored the Girl

While it may seem unlikely because of the historical time in which *Romeo and Juliet* was written (where we'd least expect to see anything approaching a "feminist perspective"), Shakespeare is surprisingly sympathetic to a young woman protagonist, Juliet. This is apparent through his unusual treatment of the tragic figure, how he stacks the play against Juliet's parents, and his choice to make Juliet the main character.

[Excerpt. Essay continues]

—Sara Barkat, editor

About Shakespeare: Poet and Playwright

Recently, Shakespeare was deemed by a famous radio personality as “unrelatable,” aloof, as he is, in language and distant in time. This critic is not alone in his thoughts about Shakespeare. Many associate Shakespeare with the elite—the royalty of his day and the cultured of ours.

But Shakespeare truly was—and still is—a poet and playwright of the people and for the people—all people.

[Excerpt. Essay continues]

—Karen Swallow Prior, English professor and author of
Booked: Literature in the Soul of Me

The Making of a Heroine

I don’t remember a thing about reading *Romeo and Juliet* my freshman year of high school. That’s not true. I was late to class once during our study of the play because I’d gotten into a fight with a boy whose locker was next to mine. He’d poured grape juice on me, and to pay him back, I punched him in the face with my combination lock. That’s not true, either. Well, the grape juice being poured and the combination-lock punch are true, but it wasn’t a fight. It was one of those rowdy flirtations that boys and girls engage in because they don’t know what else to do with their feelings. Clearly, it had gotten out of hand.

I walked into Mr. Young’s English class, textbookless, my royal blue sweater my parents gave me for Christmas splat-

tered with grape juice, riled up, and confused over what just happened. My seat was in the middle of the classroom, and I had to walk in front of Mr. Young to get to it. The wooden floor creaked under my feet. The desk squeaked as I sat down. Mr. Young was the only one in the room who wasn't looking at me. He read from *Romeo and Juliet* as though nothing else was going on.

I sat still for a few minutes, trying not to focus on the tragedy of the juice on my sweater, and analyzing the events of the last thirty minutes. Had I hurt him? I mean, physically? Did he like me? Did I like him? Is this why we were treating each other this way? How much longer until this class ended and I'd see him again?

Mr. Young handed out an assignment we were to work on and discuss in class. I raised my hand.

"I don't have a pen," I told him.

He stared at me for what felt like an hour and said, "Sounds like a problem." Then he kept teaching.

[Excerpt. Essay continues]

—Callie Feyen, author of *The Teacher Diaries: Romeo & Juliet*



THE TRAGEDY OF
ROMEO & JULIET

PROLOGUE

Enter Chorus

CHORUS

Two households, both alike in dignity,
 In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,
 From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
 Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
 From forth the fatal loins of these two foes 5
 A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;
 Whose misadventured piteous overthrows
 Do with their death bury their parents' strife.
 The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love,
 And the continuance of their parents' rage, 10
 Which, but their children's end, nought could remove,
 Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage;
 The which if you with patient ears attend,
 What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.

Chorus exits

♥ *Starts with a sonnet! Soooo Shakespeare.*

♥ *A study of two here: two households; civil/civil;
 two foes; two hours. Why is two important?
 Romeo and Juliet (two main characters); love and hate
 (two forces); life and death (two outcomes)?*

♥ *Devastating that only children's deaths can end
 the feud.*

♥ *How does telling a story mend?*

🐶 **ACT I**

SCENE I. Verona. A public place.

*Enter SAMPSON and GREGORY, servants of the house
of Capulet, armed with swords and bucklers*

♥ *This opening so clearly screams "BOY!"*

SAMPSON

Gregory, o' my word, we'll not carry coals.

GREGORY

No, for then we should be colliers.

SAMPSON

I mean, an we be in choler, we'll draw.

GREGORY

Ay, while you live, draw your neck out o' the collar.

SAMPSON

I strike quickly, being moved.

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GREGORY

But thou art not quickly moved to strike.

SAMPSON

A dog of the house of Montague moves me.

GREGORY

To move is to stir; and to be valiant is to stand:
therefore, if thou art moved, thou runn'st away.

SAMPSON

A dog of that house shall move me to stand: 10
I will take the wall of any man or maid of Montague's.

GREGORY

That shows thee a weak slave; for the weakest goes
to the wall.

SAMPSON

True; and therefore women, being the weaker vessels,
are ever thrust to the wall: therefore I will push 15
Montague's men from the wall, and thrust his maids
to the wall.

GREGORY

The quarrel is between our masters and us their men.

SAMPSON

'Tis all one, I will show myself a tyrant: when I
have fought with the men, I will be cruel with 20
the maids, and 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.

GREGORY

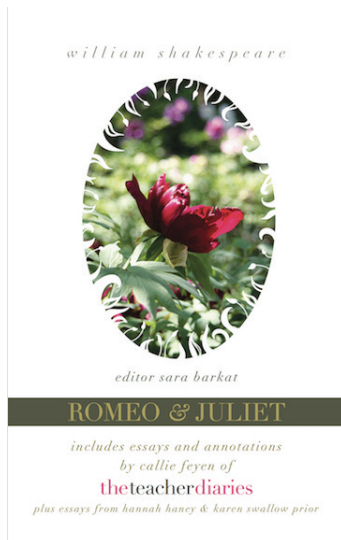
They must take it in sense that feel it.

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SAMPSON

Me they shall feel while I am able to stand: and
'tis known I am a pretty piece of flesh.

♥ *OH. MY. GOODNESS. How in the world
am I supposed to teach this?*



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