

Why do Romeo and Juliet kill themselves at the end of the play?

Romeo and Juliet is a tragedy written by William Shakespeare, a prominent playwright from the 15th century. A common tale of love, tragedy and strife, it utilizes several relatively groundbreaking literary devices for the time that make for a well-narrated and well-performed play. Both of the central characters, Romeo and Juliet, tragically commit suicide at the end of the play. This is a result of the pressure on the two characters from the adversarial history between their families, and the rushed aspect of their relationship.

In order to introduce the familial strife narrative, Shakespeare insinuates that the respective sides of Romeo and Juliet's family pressures lead directly to their tragic end. Shakespeare uses a number of literary devices to represent the turmoil between the families, including the use of rhyme scheme. In order to set the stage for the first act of the play, Shakespeare begins with a 14-line sonnet introducing the conflict, characters and setting for his story. This uses an abab-cdcd-efef-gg rhyme scheme.

“Two households, both alike in dignity/In fair Verona, where we lay our scene/From ancient grudge break to new mutiny” and “From forth the fatal loins of these two foes/A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life” opens the play by establishing the existence of these two rival families, and tells the reader of the unnamed “star-crossed lovers” who will take their lives. However, directly after this line follows “Doth with their death bury their parents' strife”. This line, alluding once again to the quarrel between the families, states that the conflict is resolved upon the suicide of the two characters. Immediately, Shakespeare establishes that the root of the issues that occur in the story are based in the hereditary aspect of the play.

These family pressures made Romeo and Juliet believe that the only way that they could be together was to shut everyone and everything else out, which further led to their attachment to each other and disconnect from their heritage. Shakespeare skillfully uses symbolism to

exaggerate the two character's abrupt attachment to one another, their neglect of rationality and narrates their 'love story' with excessive language and description.

In Act 1, Scene 4, Mercutio delivers a lengthy speech while talking to Romeo about dreams and their falsities. He talks about Queen Mab, a fairy who visits people in their dreams. However, it is soon obvious that Queen Mab does not bring good dreams, but instead strives to serve whatever vices the dreamers visited by Queen Mab so willingly divulge in. "And in this state she gallops night by night/Through lovers' brains, and then they dream of love;/On courtiers' knees, that dream on curtsies straight;/O'er lawyers' fingers, who straight dream on fees". Mercutio's Queen Mab symbolizes not only dreams, but waking desires that Mercutio suggests are futile. A jab at the dreamy ideal of true love that Romeo and Juliet hold onto throughout the play, this challenges the overarching themes in the play of "star-crossed lovers". Of course, Romeo ignores this and brushes Mercutio off: "Peace, peace, Mercutio, peace!/Thou talk'st of nothing." Romeo is set on the idea that he is in love. He becomes fixated on the fact that he has discovered his "new true love", disregarding Rosaline. Mercutio's use of symbolism through Queen Mab that contrasts Romeo's futile ideals of love represents how rushed and even forced the connection between Juliet and Romeo was.

This combination of feeling forced into a relationship, the urgency of the situation and the familial pressure forcing them to be secretive convinced the two that they had no other choice than to end their lives without each other. One of the most prominent literary devices that Shakespeare has mastered is evident in the motivation for the tragic ending of the play—imagery.

"There is no world without Verona walls/But purgatory, torture, hell itself." When Romeo is banished from Verona, he is distraught. He cannot imagine a life outside of Verona. After all, it's all he's known his entire life—the boundaries, and the laws of Verona and the two families that largely divide the population. Shakespeare's use of imagery in this line is a comparison of hell and torture to life outside Verona. So, one would think, sure enough that Romeo is distraught of being banished. However, this is not the reason that Romeo is wary of leaving Verona—"Tis torture and not mercy./Heaven is here,/Where Juliet lives, and every cat and dog/And little

mouse, every unworthy thing,/Live here in heaven and may look on her,/But Romeo may not.” Of course, it is dear Juliet he will miss. He is so caught up in his romantic notion with her that he has thus far disregarded his binds to the Montague family and solely attached himself to Juliet. Because he cannot find comfort in his friends or family due to the secret nature of his relationship, Romeo pushes everything but Juliet away. Furthermore, when he is at her deathbed, Shakespeare uses imagery to illustrate Romeo’s grief. “Ah, dear Juliet,/Why art thou yet so fair?/For fear of that, I still will stay with thee,/And never from this palace of dim night/Depart again. Here, here will I remain/ With worms that are thy chamber maids.” He would rather stay and die with her than continue to live without her. He’s even forgotten his friends, including Benvolio, the Friar, and his family. A combination of the secrecy, the disconnect from their families and absurd connection to one another forces Juliet to do the same when she awakens once again.

Romeo and Juliet is a timeless tale of tragedy that is and will be read to generations and generations of young and old interested in literature. The story that follows two love-stricken teenagers uses Shakespeare’s knowledge of literary device to enhance the characters and narrative. The reason for the well-known ending of Romeo and Juliet’s suicide is a commonly discussed topic, but it is evident that familial pressures and the urgent nature of their relationship are direct attributes to the play’s tragic events.