



# **VIOLENCE**

## **2022**

### **Obsessions and Fears**

notes taken from *RENAISSANCE DRAMA: ARDEN SHAKESPEARE* – BRINDA CHARRY

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## THE VALUE OF SEEING THE PLAY

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It is always a good idea to see the play

- Seeing the whole tragedy at a sitting gives a good idea of its architecture, the structure of the action that so easily gets lost in the detailed process of reading.

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## THE PRACTICAL EFFECTS OF THE FIGHT

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Shakespeare's Globe was a busy, noisy place

- Nothing, however, commands initial audience attention better than a fight
  - the opening scene of Romeo and Juliet may be seen as uninspiring with its list of puns
    - however, Shakespeare uses it to build up to a full-scale brawl

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## THE OPENING INTRODUCES THE IMPEDIMENT TO THE LOVE STORY

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the main impediment to a happy outcome of the love story is established in the prologue as well as the opening scene

- even the servants of the two opposing families are at each other's throats
  - and for no apparent reason
    - except that they just hate each other

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## WAS THERE EVER A CAUSE FOR THE FEUD?

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In the prologue, the feud is introduced as 'an ancient grudge'

- the cause has evidently been lost in the mists of time
  - but the venom is no less intense for that
    - Benvolio, whose name means 'good will' in Italian, is unable to part the contestants (Samson and Gregory)
      - even when he invokes the words of Jesus from the cross as he asked God to forgive his killers
        - 'you know not what you do' (1.1.63, Luke 23.34)
          - Tybalt's part is already sharply defined here in his remorseless contempt for Benvolio's appeal for peace:
            - 'I hate the word / As I hate hell, all Montagues, and thee' (1.1.68–9).





- Nameless citizens materialize, eager to take sides in what has become open war, and then the principals declare themselves ready to join in
  - Old Capulet in his dressing gown calls for a sword, despite his wife's reminder that a crutch would suit his age better, and while he lays hands on old Montague, only the entrance of the Prince puts a stop to the senseless violence by naming the penalty that will in due course have the effect of parting the lovers.

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## THE COMEDIC EFFECT OF THE FIGHT AT THE BEGINNING

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Shakespeare's exposition foregrounds this conflict through the minor characters of Sampson and Gregory. The representation of these characters' immature behaviours may serve to dramatically position the audience's response to the conflict by conveying it to be ridiculous. Sampson and Gregory, as representatives of the house of Capulet, are immediately presented as comedic through their excessive machismo, false bravado and crude puns; for example, Sampson's line, 'My naked weapon is out' is a crass pun that, perhaps, portrays Sampson as a character with little intelligence and sensitivity, but which also provides the audience with a, somewhat, light-hearted start to the play in contrast to the foreboding nature of the opening Prologue. The comic nature of their characterisation makes the conflict seem absurd and pointless, however, Sampson's childish behaviour, such as 'biting his thumb' at Abraham of the Montague household sets off a chain of events that sparks an equally comedic fight in the streets between the Montagues and Capulets. If it were not for the foreshadowing nature of the opening Prologue, an audience watching Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet' for the first time may have been forgiven for thinking that the play is a comedy. The entirety of the Montague and Capulet households join the fight without even knowing what the cause was, which Shakespeare likely designed to be symbolic of the entire feud between the two families; in the Prologue, Shakespeare describes the feud as an 'ancient grudge' which suggests two ideas: that the feud is extremely old and that the cause of the feud has been lost over time. Capulet's entrance reflects this idea with his very first line: 'What noise is this?' However, without a response, he immediately orders, 'Give me my long sword, ho!', suggesting that the fighting between the two families is more of a masculine ritual than anything else. Lady Capulet's comedic response, 'A crutch, a crutch! Why call you for a sword?' in response to her husband's irresponsible show of bravado further highlights the nonsensical nature of the feud.

### Bibliography

Charry, B. (2017). *The Arden guide to Renaissance drama*. Bloomsbury The Arden Shakespeare, pp.28 - 35.

