

Example by StudyDriver

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Juliet's Abuse Example

During the period of time known as Elizabethan England, the roles men and women played contrasted in many different ways. Men were supposed to be emotionless and strong while women were always required to be submissive. In the tragic romantic play, *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*, William Shakespeare introduces the theme of gender roles through different characters such as Romeo, Paris, and Juliet who all give a glimpse into what was expected of women and men respectively. Romeo and Juliet, the two protagonists of the play come from two families that have maintained an age-old feud.

One fateful night, these two “star-crossed lovers” meet. Unbeknownst to them at the time, the other maintained a part of the enemy family. Against social normalities and the will of their own family, they decide to be wedded to each other without the consent of the patriarchs of their families. The same fate that brought these two individuals together, divides them with the death of the other person. Throughout the romantic play which turns to a calamity, gender themes can be identified which contrast greatly to those common today. Juliet's lack of agency within her major life decisions highlights the way that gender roles silenced the voice of women while simultaneously placing unrealistic standards on the men of the time.

Women had very little say or power within the context of their marriage. The husband made all of the decisions without the consent of his wife. "My child is yet a stranger in the world. / She hath not seen the change of fourteen years, / Let two more summers wither in their pride / Ere we may think her ripe to be a bride." (Rom. I.ii. 8-12) Lord Capulet's precious young child will wed his daughter to the man he sees the best fit for her. Juliet is even absent all while this conversation concerning her future takes place. Using the term "ripe" portrays the image of the Capulets growing and grooming their child for her one purpose in life, to serve and complete a man's personal appearance who she becomes forced into a relationship with. Her youthful age and demeanor allow the parents to infer that she is unable to make decisions for herself. Lord Capulet uses the term "we", (referring to his wife and himself) to tell Paris why he needs to wait just a little bit longer. Shakespeare describes the only contribution Juliet would provide to her husband in the excerpt, "This precious book of love, this unbound lover, / To beautify him only lacks a cover" (Rom. III.i.118-120).

Over and over throughout the story of Romeo and Juliet, we see the symbol of a book to compare to people and love as an overall concept. Every bachelor looks for a wife that will provide a cover to his well-developed "book." He, therefore, searches for a woman that will improve upon his appearance, and not help him make decisions. When one picks up a book, the first thing that catches the attention of the potential reader is the cover, therefore that aspect of the book needs to be the most appealing. The requirements for the perfect wife only entails that the potential bride appears not to be a total sociopath, but does have a pretty face. The metaphor of the "precious book of love" compares Paris to this bound book that has everything together but merely lacks a cover to complete the appearance of the book. Shakespeare constantly presents men as unable to show emotion and instilled with the expectation of having their life together.

Throughout Romeo and Juliet, the author unintentionally exhibits the pressure on men unnaturally feeling as if they have to be emotionless at all times.

Displaying emotion exists looked down upon by everyone which the Nurse proclaims in the quote, "Piteous predicament! Even so lies she, / Blubb'ring and weeping, weeping and blubb'ring.— / Stand up, stand up. Stand an you be a man. / For Juliet's sake, for her sake, rise and stand" (3.3.92-97). The nurse who Shakespeare expertly

uses to intertwine comedic relief into the story now states that Romeo's sentimental breakdown is embarrassing. The Nurse proves that not only did other men expect each other to be stone-cold without feelings, but most everyone else felt that way as well. Romeo lying upon the ground bawling his eyes out only furthers the Nurse and the Friar's disappointment. The Nurse conveys the fact that women have been given the right to display emotion when Juliet is unable to hold herself together, but she expects Romeo to "Stand an you be a man." Romeo speaks upon his own "moment of weakness" in the quote, "O sweet Juliet, / Thy beauty hath made me effeminate / And in my temper softened valor's steel" (Rom.III.i. 118-20). Once again, the reason why Romeo loves Juliet is because of her beauty.

Her personality nor her intellect makes Romeo soften or feel feminine, but her "beauty." The concept of Juliet merely being the cover to Romeo's book further explains women's roles and responsibilities as a wife. The love Romeo expresses for Juliet makes him feel feminine and weak. He views himself as a man that carries himself with valor and a steely-eyed expression. This show of emotion makes even Romeo look upon himself with disdain let alone his peers. Men were provided with an unrealistic standard of being stone-cold showing little to no emotion during the period of time known as Elizabethan England.

The Capulets took away Juliet's ability to make decisions for herself, therefore, silencing her voice. In addition to this, men felt socially pressured to act similar to heartless and unthinking robots. Furthermore, it displays how these social normalities have been more or less eliminated from today. Yet, still, men feel as if they cannot cry out for help and have to bundle all of their emotions inside of themselves under lock and key. The glimpse Shakespeare provides of the gender roles of the time allows the reader to understand the mistreatment women went through and the agonizing restrain men had to maintain to avoid rebukes from others.