Sample Examplepaper

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Archetypes in *Romeo & Juliet*

*Romeo and Juliet* is one of the most famous stories of all time. Shakespeare’s famous drama is ultimately a tragedy, even if it is also the foundation for many modern love stories. *Romeo and Juliet* has been parodied and adapted time and time again, which is a testament to its staying power. One reason it likely resonates with readers is because people can relate to the archetypal characters within the story. An archetype is simply a recurring image or idea, and archetypal characters are thus types of characters that exist in many stories. *Romeo and Juliet* features heroes, damsels in distress, loyal companions, voices of reason, and caregivers. These character archetypes make the story relatable even hundreds of years later, and as a result, it has been copied so frequently that the story can seem rather cliché to modern readers.

*Romeo & Juliet* revolves around a multigenerational feud between the Capulet and Montague families in Verona, Italy. Long before the beginning of the play, the two families began to quarrel over unknown circumstances, and by the beginning of this story, their fighting has become so common and petty that nearly anything will set them off. The opening scene between Sampson, Gregory, and Abraham shows this. Whether it’s with words or swords, this familial fighting is a constant plague on the city. The fighting has become so bad that Prince Escalus had to threaten anyone who continues this fighting in the streets to death.

Set against this feuding is a love story between Romeo, a Montague, and Juliet, and Capulet. At the start of the play, Romeo is smitten with Rosaline, and he is consequently teased by his friends Benvolio and Mercutio. When the three friends learn about a masquerade party being held by the Capulets, they decide to go. His friends are convinced that if he sees the beautiful women at the party, he will forget all about Rosaline, and that is actually what happens. It is at this party that Romeo first meets Juliet.

Juliet is the daughter of Lady and Lord Capulet. She is due to marry Paris when she is of appropriate age, as deemed by her father. Not enthused by this arranged marriage, however, Juliet is stressed and generally in a low mood. When she sees Romeo at the party, she does not realize who he is. They are instantly attracted to one another, and they have fallen so head-over-heels that they pursue one another, even after knowing the other’s identity. Romeo approaches her, in the cover of night, and they exchange vows of love and make plans of marriage at Juliet’s balcony.

Romeo goes to his trusted friend and confidant, Friar Laurence, and asks him to assist them in their marriage. While at first reluctant, Friar Laurence realizes that a marriage between Romeo and Juliet could actually end the feud between the two families. With this goal in mind, he consents to marry them, and Romeo leaves with high hopes. This hopeful mood is shattered when Tybalt, “the prince of cats” and expert swordsman, slays Romeo’s friend Mercutio. Tybalt also dies from his wounds. The Prince is alerted of the conflict, and Romeo, who had been at the center of the conflict, is banished.

Romeo and Juliet, about to be married, now face being split up by this banishment. Friar Laurence comes up with a plan. He gives Juliet a vial of liquid that will make her seem dead, so she can avoid being married to Paris. Afterword, word would be sent to Romeo, and they would be wed in Mantua. However, the plan fails horribly: Paris discovers Juliet, and Romeo ends up killing Paris. Romeo drinks poison and dies, and immediately after he draws his last breath, Juliet wakes up. Seeing her love dead, she stabs herself with Romeo’s dagger. With their deaths, the Capulet and Montague families realize the danger of this feud and agree to make peace.

The hero archetype is one of the most common and easily recognizable of all archetypes. A hero is a character who has virtuous characteristics and, despite facing evil and having to overcome obstacles, pursues a good cause. There are many kinds of heroes, but the most common is a “chosen one,” a hero who in some way is special and has abilities others do not. This type of hero often goes against a monster or a villain of some variety. However, the heroes in *Romeo and Juliet* are tragic heroes who, aside from being born into wealthy families, are simply regular people.

Romeo and Juliet are both tragic heroes in the play. They embody young love, and they are brave even in face of their warring families and threats of death or banishment. They are tragic heroes, however, because they ultimately do not succeed. They are flawed. Their deaths easily could have been avoided, but they are impulsive and rush head-first to their doom. Their youth is a positive trait, because it reflects innocence, but it is also their downfall. Lacking patience or wisdom, these two heroes do accomplish Friar Laurence’s goal of ending their families’ feud, but they manage this only through their dying.

A damsel in distress is a character in need of saving. The most common form of a damsel in distress is a male hero’s love interest. The damsel in distress is usually young, beautiful, and innocent. The damsel in distress serves important roles in the stories they’re in. Their helplessness against evil brings out the hero’s best qualities, and the threats to their lives can create suspense for readers. *Romeo and Juliet* does not have the clearest damsels in distress, but certainly both Romeo and Juliet would qualify. Near the tragedy’s conclusion, they are both in mortal danger, and the reader or viewer’s awareness of this makes the story more engaging.

Another common archetype is that of the loyal companion. Most heroes have their sidekicks, the friends who get them through difficult times. Romeo has Mercutio and Benvolio to help him through life. Benvolio gives him advice and tries to protect him through diplomacy. Mercutio fights Tybalt in Romeo’s place. These two are clear examples of the archetypal loyal companion.

Benvolio also serves a second important role. In addition to being Romeo’s loyal companion, he is also one of the two main voices of reason for the play. A voice of reason is a story’s conscience. This type of character usually reflects the author’s point of view. These characters are intelligent and have pure intentions. They can stand apart from the chaos and, detached from it all, give clear reasoning to characters, in hopes that they might heed the warnings. Benvolio tries to prevent the fighting between the families, out of concern for his friends’ safety. However, his words go largely unheard.

One last archetype that figures importantly into *Romeo and Juliet* is the caregiver. A caregiver is a character who looks out for another character’s safety and wellbeing. Most caregiver characters are older characters taking care of a child. Even if the character is male, they can be a mother figure to the other character. Friar Laurence can fall under this category, as well as the voice of reason archetype. More than Friar Laurence, however, the Nurse is a caregiver. She is a mother figure to Juliet, whose real mother hardly interacts with her in the play. The Nurse has raised Juliet and knows her better than anyone else. Even when they disagree, the Nurse has Juliet’s interests at heart and seeks to protect her.

Each of these archetypes play important roles in *Romeo and Juliet*. The heroes Romeo and Juliet are the driving force in the storyline. Because they are normal people and have flaws, they are more relatable to viewers and readers than a superhuman hero or “chosen one.” The prologue informs the reader that they will both die at the end, so the audience’s awareness of this fact creates suspense as they observe Romeo and Juliet make the mistakes that will ultimately lead to their demise. Their roles as damsels in distress, then, create the tension in the play that leads to a more satisfying climax and resolution.

Benvolio and Mercutio’s involvement as loyal companions further develops the plot and reveals different sides of Romeo through their interactions. They also foreshadow future events in the plot in their dialogue, in particular with Mercutio’s fight with Tybalt and his dying words. Benvelio is especially important for his second role in the story, as a voice of reason. Benvelio is a foil to Mercutio and Romeo. While his friends are impulsive and quick to passion, whether its anger or infatuation, Benvelio is calm and observant. He gives audiences a stable logic to follow throughout the play, in spite of the chaos all around.

Lastly, Romeo and Juliet each have a caregiver. Friar Laurence and the Nurse play important supporting roles, in that they act as parental figures to the two hotblooded youths. However, importantly, their failutres as caregivers are in part a cause of the heroes’ downfall. Their flaws, like Romeo and Juliet’s, make them realistic characters. Together, these archetypal characters make for a story that is easy for readers to follow, even if modern readers might find the Shakespearean language more than a little challenging.

*Romeo and Juliet* is an interesting story for archetypal analysis because it simultaneously draws from centuries of storytelling tropes while at the same time played a massive role in reshaping how stories were told later. Like many authors, Shakespeare was well aware of the archetypal characters, roles, and symbols that made classic stories withstand “the test of time.” Many famous Greek and Roman stories, such as Homer’s *The Odyssey*, were likely much more successful because their situations and characters could cross national and generational boundaries. In other words, like the stories Shakespeare drew on, *Romeo and Juliet*’s use of archetypal character roles made it easy for a wide audience to understand.

However, because these archetypes and tropes have been repeated so frequently since then, many readers in the 21st century will find Shakespeare’s famous tragedy to be cliché. There have been multitudes of parodies and adaptions of the story, and its basic plot is well known to most people, even if they have not read it before. The use of archetypes, the simplistic and basic nature of the character roles, makes the story easy to approach, but it can also make it boring for readers who want to be surprised. Many modern readers want stories that twist expectations or create complicated, dynamic characters. While Shakespeare arguably has some complicated characters, such as Hamlet, *Romeo and Juliet* is not known for having deep characterization.

Shakespeare and his works are not going to disappear anytime soon. They have reshaped how people view storytelling and have been incredibly influential to writers for generations. *Romeo and Juliet*’s use of archetypes, such as the hero, the damsel in distress, the loyal companion, the voice of reason, and the caregiver, gives it an almost universal appeal. Even if it is a story set hundreds of years ago in Italy and is written in difficult Shakespearean language, American teenagers can still follow it because the story is basic. These archetypes give the play its staying power, and even if others may want more complexity or surprises, archetypes are one of the main reason for *Romeo and Juliet*’s ongoing popularity, success, and influence.

Works Cited

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