

How is the parental-child relationships presented to us in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and a selection of poetry?

Whilst exploring *Romeo and Juliet* I have stumbled on many themes that can be compared and contrasted to poems such as: *On My First Sonne*, *Catrin*, *Follower* and *Crabbed Age and Youth*. This essay will be exploring the many parental relationships as well as discussing the themes and flaws.

I would like to start on the poem: *On My First Sonne*. It was written in 1603 when religion paid a significant role of culture and beliefs of early England.

Romeo and Juliet by Shakespeare and *On My First Sonne* by Ben Johnson both share a theme of 'love.' The poem *On My First Sonne* is about a loving father that laments the death of his seven year old child. The poem reflects the pain of his father for his son. In comparison to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* there are scenes in the play that can be compared and contrasted to *On My First Sonne*. Both poems are both arguably a 'love and tragedy' theme: Ben Johnson expresses his powerful feelings of love and affection. These feelings make the child's death extremely tragic to the speaker. Johnson tries to argue this is only rational, the actions he made, caused the early death of his son by loving him too much has made God take back what he has let him borrow for seven years. He sees the child's death happen because of his sin.

In the same manner that Johnson's emotions caused his child's death, you can argue that *Romeo and Juliet's* deaths happened because of their 'parents rage.' In the play, *Romeo and Juliet* the two lovers belong to two families with a hatred for each other. In addition, their death at the end of the play was caused by the actions of their parents, for this reason Romeo and Juliet sacrificed themselves to stop the feud between the Capulets and Montagues. In the same manner of Johnson's poem *On My First Sonne* he stated his son's death happened because of his actions of loving him too much. He vows at the end of the poem that he will now love to a certain extent not making the same mistake again similar to *Romeo and Juliet* where the two families vow to make peace on behalf of their children's respect.

The words 'Seven years thou wert lent to me' are when he explains his son was a loan from God, and that he had to pay back after seven years what he once borrowed. After the speaker says 'and I thee pay, exacted by thy fate, on the just day.' This extended metaphor expands on the 'borrowing from God' it suggests that everyone on this planet is owned by God and can be taken back at any time. Johnson calls his son 'son of right hand.' This proposes that his son is at great worth and is his heir. This exaggerates the whole theme of 'love and tragedy' into a theme of religion.

In the same manner religion is also found in *Romeo and Juliet* as well as 'love and tragedy.' In the play Romeo hides in Friar Laurence's cell after killing Tybalt. Friar Laurence calms Romeo down by saying 'Is my dear son' The phrase he uses helps Romeo open up and to listen to Friar Laurence as a result it lets Romeo experience a father and son relationship that he cannot experience with his own father. Friar Laurence is respected as a holy man; he uses cultural religion to persuade Romeo. Laurence's relationship is like a real parent and child's relationship; this is only allowed to happen because Friar Laurence has no son so Romeo is the closest thing to a son. In the same manner Romeo loves the Friar like a father; he is the closest person in the play that acts as a 'replacement parent.'

Another example where a parent is replaced in Shakespeare's play is when Juliet has a relationship with her surrogate mother, the nurse instead of Lady Capulet. One scene that expresses the relationship with the nurse is after Paris asks the Capulets for Juliet's hand in marriage; the scene begins with Juliet's mother calling the nurse asking where her daughter is. 'Nurse where's my daughter? Call her forth to me.' This quote shows the distant relationship with her daughter. The fact that her mother doesn't know where her daughter is shows how shallow her relationship is with her birth mother. The surrogate mother then replies with (the nurse) 'What lamb! What, ladybird! God forbid! Where's this girl? What, Juliet!' This immediately shows the reader the relationship with Juliet. This quote shows the nurse calling her not by her name but by her nickname. This shows a strong relationship with Juliet almost like a friend, however from Juliet's reply 'Madam, I am here. What is your will?' It shows a secret bond between the two, the conversation was like a mother and child would have.

Further on in the play the nurse shows other motherly qualities. The nurse delivers the news that if she doesn't marry Paris she will be disowned by her father and she will be a disgrace to the Capulets. The nurse advises her to get engaged with Paris as she only wants the best for Juliet. This shows us how strong the relationship is with Juliet, as she expresses her feelings and how she feels about the arranged marriage. After hearing about Romeo's punishment for killing Tybalt, Juliet is devastated. We see restricted independence towards Juliet from her father again this time it shows how apart their relationship really is. The quote 'When the sun sets, the air doth drizzle dew but for the sunset of my brother's son it rains downright. How now! A conduit, girl? What, still in tears?' This shows that Capulet straight away assumes that the cause of her upsetting is from her cousin's death. This shows a lack of understanding and parental skills from her father.

We see similar qualities between relationships in *Catrin*: mother restricting independence is the primary theme. The poem introduces Catrin, (the child of Gillian Clarke) at the beginning of the poem describing her first battle with her mother at childbirth. In the first stanza Clarke says, 'I can remember you, our first Fierce confrontation, the tight Red rope of love which we both Fought over' This describes their first argument (battling for 'the tight red rope') is a metaphor describing the process of her birth, describing the struggles she had with Catrin at labour. This metaphor is then extended in the second stanza reintroducing the 'tight red rope:' 'From the heart's pool that old rope, Tightening about my life, Trailing love and conflict, As you ask may you skate in the dark, for one more hour.' Clarke shows the reader how that rope she thought for is now tightening around her, realising her daughter is growing up has become more painful than Catrin's first confrontation at childbirth. This relationship is similar because nurse has realised Juliet's fate because the Capulets are restricting her to her own will.

Crabbed Age and Youth shows the contrast between the old and young, describing how young is the complete opposite and cannot live together with the old. The writer, Shakespeare says, 'Youth like summer morn, Age like winter weather; Youth like summer brave, Age like winter bare.' This quote shows the two opposites describing youth like 'summer morn' and 'summer brave.' This makes the reader think of feelings that summer is associated with; a journey that starts off as happiness, relaxation and joy, however as the journey of youth ends the journey of age begins and this is described as winter; words like 'cold, bitter, and painful' come into mind. Shakespeare cleverly used the theme of seasons as a simile to show the differences between the two showing the reading that there is no respect from the two ages to each other. This is very similar to Romeo and Lord

Montague's relationship that the two cannot live together or even communicate due to a lack of respect from the father to the son and vice versa; we see this in the beginning of the play when Romeo is depressed about Rosaline rejecting him. To find out what is wrong Montague asks Benvolio to find out what is troubling him. This shows a lack of parental skills from the parents and a lack of communication to the son. Montague also describes the strange behaviour of his son and in response says 'Black and portentous must this humour prove, unless good counsel may the cause remove.' Lord Montague is telling Benvolio to counsel Romeo instead of acting fatherly and asking his son himself, this is in comparison to *Crabbed Age and Youth* saying that old and young do not get on and cannot live together or even communicate. However, you can argue that Shakespeare used this poem as a metaphor to show the differences of experience, showing the contrast between the young. We see this in *Romeo and Juliet* where the nurse is trying to convince Juliet to marry Paris; she is giving her opinion and nursing Juliet from experience. Nevertheless, Juliet disagrees as her opinion is different from the inexperience of being young.

In relation, 'respect' is also found in *Follower* by Seamus Heaney, where he shows great respect to his father as a child. Heaney says, 'His shoulders globed like a full sail strung between the shafts and the furrow. The horse strained at his clicking tongue.' This shows that he paid great attention to his father, describing every detail. 'His shoulders globed' suggests how muscular his father was and how ideal his body was for the job. He also says 'the horse strained at his clicking tongue' suggesting his dad knew a way to communicate with the horses he owned. This shows a wide range of skills he used to plough the earth using horses. Heaney follows by using words like 'mapping, hob-nailed wake, sod and furrow.' This shows how he knew all the farming terms. The subject specific language he used in this poem shows great respect towards his father and how his dad acted like his role model towards life and set how he made his ambitions wanting to be like his father.

At the end of *Follower* Heaney says 'I was a nuisance, tripping, falling, Yapping always. But today it is my father who keeps stumbling Behind me and will not go away.' This is similar to *Crabbed Age and Youth* saying that youth is full of energy and age is weak and holding onto the strongest, in this case it is his father.

Whereas in *Follower* the fathers respect is earned, in *Romeo and Juliet* Lord Capulet gets respect that he doesn't deserve, in contrast with the father in *Follower* who gets respected for his hard work and how he supports his family. Lord Capulet is using Juliet as his foundation to build his reputation and status in Verona, using Juliet he hopes to get the respect and status from others by forcing her to marry Paris, a Prince of that era.

In conclusion, I believe love and respect are the most significant aspects of the parental and child relationship within the texts. Romeo shows great passionate love for Juliet and shows the respect for Friar Laurence. This is found in the relationship between Juliet and her surrogate mother, the nurse. There are several scenes in the play that show the parental relationship between the Friar and Romeo and the nurse and Juliet. In contrast to the relationship between their real parents who show no sign of empathy or understanding towards their children, only disrespect and selfishness is found. However, at the end of the story their parents realise their flaws in their relationship with their children. Shakespeare uses great language to make the reader relate to all the feelings that the characters express by entertaining and moments of tragedy in the play, the themes run through

many poems such as *Followers*, *On My First Sonne*, *Crabbed Age and Youth* and *Catrin* and all of the poems show significant relation or contrast to *Romeo and Juliet*.

By Lucy Colbert – The Gateway Academy