

Line by Line: A Journal of Beginning Student Writing

Volume 3 | Issue 1

Article 5

September 2016

The Weight of Love

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Recommended Citation

Steele, Garrett P. (2016) "The Weight of Love," *Line by Line: A Journal of Beginning Student Writing*. Vol. 3 : Iss. 1 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://ecommons.udayton.edu/lxl/vol3/iss1/5>

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The Weight of Love

Writing Process

This project examines the graphic novel *Romeo and Juliet: The War* and how it relates and connects to "The University of Dayton's Mission Statement on the Catholic Intellectual Tradition" (CIT). In order to get started on the project, I looked over my notes for the CIT as well as for *Romeo and Juliet* and made a list of themes that I thought were interesting and that connected nicely with both works. From there, I created an outline, preparing what I wanted to say in the essay and then wrote a first draft of the essay. The first draft was incomplete and I revised my paper heavily after having it looked at and talking through it with my professor. After this revision, I was happy with the way that my project turned out and so I submitted it as my final draft.

Course

ENG200H

Semester

Spring

Instructor

Elizabeth Mackay

Year

2016

Garrett Steele

ENG 200H

Dr. Elizabeth Mackay

Spring 2016

The Weight of Love

Love hurts, and no other story exemplifies this statement better than that of *Romeo and Juliet*, where two people, despite their families' hatred for each other, kindle a love so strong that not even death is able to separate them. Although the story does not seem to end happily ever after for Romeo and Juliet individually, the gravity of their situation causes two feuding families to stop fighting and consider each other's perspective, bringing peace to a town ravaged by violence. This Shakespearean classic has been told, interpreted, and adapted thousands of times, each with its own unique style and rhetorical situation. One of the most recent versions which puts its own spin on the tragic love story is Stan Lee, Terry Douglas, and Max Work's graphic novel, *Romeo and Juliet: The War*, which places Romeo and Juliet at the forefront of two militaristic families vying for power in an advanced, futuristic world. While it may not seem to be overtly religious, *Romeo and Juliet: The War* can relate in many ways to the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. For instance, different types of light illustrated in the graphic novel contrast the power of love to the destruction of violence. Love is shown to develop out of existing hatred, which it eventually overcomes. The idea of Romeo as a Christ figure also emphasizes his stewardship for creation, shown when he decides to make the ultimate sacrifice. These themes are highlighted in the opposite way by the blind rage that the two families have for each other and their continued violence. Throughout *Romeo and Juliet: The War*, the importance of searching for the truth by engaging in dialogue with others is emphasized both through Romeo

and Juliet's desire to protect the community as well as through their families' complete disregard for the common good and the safety of others.

One of the most prominent visual patterns in *Romeo and Juliet: The War* is the contrast in light between the sun and the moon. These different types of light work to convey certain feelings and emotions throughout the story. The cold, sharp light of the moon seems to indicate all the hatred that the Montagues and Capulets feel towards one another. In much of the beginning the only light present is that of the moon, and during these times the Montagues and the Capulets are usually fighting each other. At the very beginning of the novel, a statue of Dr. Montague and Dr. Capulet joining hands is shown, illuminated from behind by the moon (Lee, Douglas, Work Act 1). Sure enough, Montagues and Capulets run into each other and a huge fight breaks out. This shows how the old alliance between the families has been overcome by hatred, foreshadowing the violence to come. Likewise, every time there is conflict between the two families, such as after the ball when the Montagues are trying to escape, the fights always take place under the piercing light of the moon (Act 1). The fights never accomplish anything and only ever result in serious injuries on both sides. However, when Romeo meets with Juliet on her balcony, what results is not hate, but love. Although the moon is present and shining during their conversation and even appears to be physically separating them in one image, its light is not as intense as usual and is overcome when Romeo and Juliet kiss for the first time (Act 2). The conversation they have seems to show that even out of serious hatred and resentment, love can still be created if we just try to understand each other, a practice that the Catholic Intellectual Tradition defines as "faith seeking understanding" ("Catholic" 1). Later in the story, the moonlight returns and is stronger than ever during the fight between Mercutio and Tybalt. Romeo tries to explain that there is no need to fight now that he and Juliet are married, but he is

too late and Tybalt ends up killing Mercutio (Act 2). This illustrates the danger of not communicating with others and shows how failing to engage in dialogue can result in alienation and even violence (“Catholic” 5). Because Romeo couldn’t get the two to listen, his best friend died as a result. The anger Romeo feels clouds his judgement and in his rage he kills Tybalt as the moon reaches its brightest point (Act 2). When he realizes what he has done, he flees Verona amidst the chaos of the fighting. The moonlight’s continued intensity appears when Romeo is told that Juliet is dead. Again, his grief overwhelms his rationality and he gathers the other Montagues to go get revenge for the death of Juliet (Act 3). This is a huge mistake on Romeo’s part; we know that Juliet is alive but because no one was able to communicate the plan to Romeo, he basically signs his own death warrant and shows no concern for innocent bystanders who may get caught in the crossfire. This shows that Romeo is not perfect, and that his rationality does, in-fact, have limits. The CIT recognizes this by stating that “human rationality can be diverted from the truth through sin and human imperfection” (“Catholic” 4). Even with limitations to rationality, Romeo and Juliet’s willingness to understand each other through “openness to truth and beauty, a sense of moral goodness and the search for happiness” (“Catholic” 5) allows them to comprehend real truth; love. Despite taking a turn for the worse, Romeo and Juliet’s relationship shows how vital it is to just try to understand where other people are coming from in order to overcome differences, however large they may be.

In contrast to the cold light of the moon, the warmth of the sun represents the love that Romeo and Juliet share, a warmth that could overcome all of the hostility that exists in their families. The sunlight is present mostly whenever Romeo and Juliet are together, especially when they are in the church. When Romeo asks the Friar to perform the wedding ceremony for he and Juliet, a soft glow illuminates their conversation (Act 2). Although Romeo and Juliet have

just met, it is clear from Romeo's conversation with Friar Laurence that they are truly in love, a love that shows them what they need to do to help restore peace to Verona (Act 2). Friar Laurence recognizes the gravity of the situation and how it could help to bring about peace, so he agrees to perform the marriage, helping Romeo to "transform the world into a greater realization of the common good" ("Catholic" 4). In an image of the city, there is the sun and its light on one side and the moon and its light on the other side, separated by Juliet's balcony (Act 2). The image seems to symbolize love and hate struggling for power and control over the other. It may also suggest that the light of love is beginning to outshine the cold light of hate. Whenever Romeo and Juliet are together, they are in the church, and although it is usually night when they rendezvous with each other, the light in the church is warm, bright, and is identical to the light of the sun. During the wedding ceremony, the orange light shines down on the two lovers, showing that true love can be fostered and strengthened through a bond as powerful as marriage (Act 2). One of the most important instances of the contrasting lights is shown when Juliet visits Romeo in the church after he kills Tybalt. There is an image where the door of the church is emitting the warm light while the moon shines as bright as ever in the sky above (Act 3), an image that is particularly striking because it brings to mind a delicate flame burning in the night. Romeo and Juliet spend the night in the church talking about what to do and how they can get through this predicament they are in together (Act 3). By bringing "faith and reason into fruitful dialogue" ("Catholic" 5), their conversation shows how love and understanding can be achieved even when tensions between their families have never been higher. The last time that we see the light of the sun is at the very end of the story, during Juliet's supposed funeral. Thousands of people are present and when the two embrace for the last time, they both make the ultimate sacrifice so that they can be together forever. When Dr. Montague and Dr. Capulet realize what their hate has

done not only to the city, but to their children, they come together and unite under the setting sun. When they raise their joined hands (Act 3), it recalls the beginning where the statues held a similar pose but were illuminated by the moon. In the past, both families were blinded by their hate and were opposed to new insights because of their pride (“Catholic” 4). This switch from moonlight to sunlight indicates a change in their attitudes, where instead of hate they decide to work together to rebuild their city. The love exemplified by Romeo and Juliet and the sacrifice that they make together shows their dedication to the principles of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition through engaging in dialogue with others, which can “provide insight in addressing important social questions” (“Catholic” 2) and is critical in caring for God’s creation.

Throughout the story, there is a lot of Christ imagery associated with Romeo which is used to show how much he cares for the solidarity and sanctity of human life. In the beginning, Dr. Montague is speaking to Romeo and says that Romeo is his “only son” and that he is proud of how Romeo has grown along with the metal, “the metal is as much a part of you as flesh and bone” (Act 1). This is reminiscent of God’s relationship to Jesus, who was the only son of God and who grew in the Holy Spirit as he got older, just as Romeo grew with the metal. The only place where the metal is not integrated into Romeo is in his heart (Act 1). This mixture of man and machine allows Romeo to “see the world as a creation- as a gift from God” (“Catholic” 4) and to “appreciate the complexity and the fragility of the human ecosystem” (“Catholic” 6). Later in the story, when Romeo and Juliet get married, the light that illuminates their love also illuminates a crucifix (Act 2). This could be seen as a comparison between how Romeo and Juliet’s love conquers the hatred between their families and how Jesus’ love eventually conquered evil and forgave the sins of humanity by dying on the cross. It also foreshadows the sacrifice that Romeo and Juliet will have to make, just as Jesus did when he was sent down to

earth. By nurturing love out of hate, Romeo acknowledges humanity's responsibility to care for creation, which is a gift from God ("Catholic" 6). At the end of the novel Romeo and Juliet both die and everyone is devastated and overcome with grief (Act 3). This opens the eyes of the Montagues and Capulets and causes them to begin to work together for peace. After realizing their mistakes, both sides cast their differences aside and strive toward a common good by promoting the growth of individuals as well as the community as a whole ("Catholic" 6). Romeo's acknowledgement of the sanctity and value of human life as well as the families' eventual progression toward the common good illustrate the CIT's idea that by collaborating with one another in harmony, we show respect for creation and are able to begin building a better and more peaceful world.

The story of Romeo and Juliet is a triumphant story of the power of love conquering hate, even in the midst of extreme violence and hardship. The contrast of the different lights illustrated as well as the depiction of Romeo as a Christ figure embody the Catholic Intellectual Tradition's practice of faith seeking understanding, which "addresses the great human questions, aspirations, and challenges" ("Catholic" 1) as they unfold throughout our society. By engaging in meaningful dialogue with others and attempting to truly understand other people, we move ever-closer toward caring for the common good and attaining real knowledge. As evidenced in *Romeo and Juliet: The War*, no one side triumphs over the other, and everyone experiences the pain of loss in some way, shape, or form. In the end, what eventually wins is love.

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