STAR-CROSSED LOVERS

OBJECTIVES

LITERARY APPRECIATION: Reviewing drama

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Read this section and say why it is interesting to compare *West Side Story* to *Romeo & Juliet*.

A myth is an ancient anonymous story that reflects the beliefs and ideals of a culture. Myths originally explained one aspect of nature or human life.

*Romeo and Juliet* was written by William Shakespeare in 1595. It is based on an Italian story. Because they belong to two rival families, Romeo and Juliet are "star-crossed" lovers, whose love is doomed from their very first meeting. Throughout the play, Juliet is likened to the star of the stars i.e. the sun, whereas Romeo is associated with the night.

In 1958, Stephen Sondheim (for the lyrics) and Leonard Bernstein (for the music) wrote *West Side Story*, one of the most famous musicals ever produced. The story is based on the tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*. It is set against the backdrop of the war between two rival gangs, the Jets (who are Puerto-Ricans) and the Sharks (who are WASPs) in West Side New York, and it tells of the tragic love between Maria - a Puerto Rican, and Tony - a WASP, following the plot of Shakespeare's tragedy.

LITERARY APPRECIATION

Reviewing drama

When analyzing a play you must ask yourself the following questions:

a. The setting: Is it realistic or not? Is it appropriate?

b. The characters: What are their main features, their speech idiosyncrasies? How are they dressed? How do they interrelate with one another and with the audience?

c. The plot: At which stage in the plot is a scene? (There are four stages: the beginning, the conflict, the climax and the resolution). What do you learn in this scene? What is announced? Is there any suspense?

d. The overall effect on the audience: What is the general mood in the scene? How does language help create such a mood?

LANGUAGE IN CONTEXT

1. Give a synonym for:
   - nothing ... but (l. 4)
   - Everywhere (l. 8).

2. Read the text. Rephrase the following sentences expressing hypotheses with *if*.
   - l. 13: *Romeo would, were he not Romeo called Retain that dear perfection* ...
   - l. 27: *Had I it written, I would tear the word.*

GETTING READY

Watch and compare the beginning of these two versions of “the balcony scene”.

1. Describe each scene.
2. What do they have in common?
3. What is different?
STAR-CROSSED LOVERS

WEST SIDE STORY: TONIGHT

MARIA: Only you, you're the only thing I'll see forever.
In my eyes, in my words and in everything I do,
Nothing else but you, ever!
TONY: And there's nothing for me but Maria,
Every sight that I see is Maria.

MARIA: Tony, Tony.
TONY: Always you, every thought I'll ever know,
Everywhere I go, you'll be
You and me!

MARIA: All the world is only you and me!

MARIA: Tonight, tonight,
It all began tonight,
I saw you and the world went away.
Tonight, tonight,
There's only you tonight,
What you are, what you do, what you say.

TONY: Today, all day I had the feeling
A miracle would happen.
I know now I was right.

For here you are,
And what was just a world is a star
Tonight, tonight.

MARIA AND TONY: Tonight, tonight,
The world is full of light
With suns and moons all over the place.
Tonight, tonight,
The world is wild¹ and bright,
Going mad, shooting sparks² into space.
Today, the world was just an address,

A place for me to live in,
No better than all right³.
But here you are,
And what was just a world is a star
Tonight.

Tonight from West Side Story
Music: Leonard Bernstein, lyrics: Stephen Sondheim © 1956,

ROMEO AND JULIET: THE BALCONY SCENE

This is an excerpt from the “balcony scene”. It is set in the Capulets’ orchard. Romeo, hidden from Juliet sees her leaning on the balcony outside her room. Juliet, speaking to herself declares her love for Romeo even though she knows he is Montague. Suddenly Romeo reveals himself.

¹ wild : (ici) sens dessus dessous
² spark : étincelle
³ all right : (ici) convenable
JULIET: O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore\textsuperscript{1} art thou\textsuperscript{2} Romeo? Deny thy\textsuperscript{3} father and refuse thy name; Or if thou wilt\textsuperscript{4} not, be but sworn my love, And I'll no longer be a Capulet.

5 ROMEO: [Aside] Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?

JULIET: 'Tis but thy name that is my enemy; Thou art thyself\textsuperscript{5}, though not a Montague. What's Montague? It is nor hand nor foot, Nor arm nor face, nor any other part Belonging to a man. O be some other name! What's in a name? That which we call a rose By any other word would smell as sweet; So Romeo would, were he not Romeo called, Retain that dear perfection which he owes Without that title, Romeo, doff\textsuperscript{6} thy name, And for thy name, which is no part of thee\textsuperscript{7}, Take all myself.

ROMEO: I take thee at thy word: Call me but love, and I'll be new baptised; Henceforth\textsuperscript{8} I never will be Romeo.

JULIET: What man art\textsuperscript{9} thou that thus bescreened\textsuperscript{10} in night So stumblest\textsuperscript{11} in my counsel?

ROMEO: By a name I know not how to tell thee who I am. My name, dear saint, is hateful to myself, Because it is an enemy to thee; Had I it written, I would tear the word.

JULIET: My ears have yet not drunk a hundred words Of thy tongue's uttering, yet I know the sound.

ROMEO: Neither, fair maid, if either thee dislike.

JULIET: How cam'st\textsuperscript{12} thou hither\textsuperscript{13}, tell me, and wherefore? The orchard walls are high and hard to climb, And the place death, considering who thou art, If any of my kinsmen\textsuperscript{14} find thee here.

ROMEO: With love's light wings did I o'erperch\textsuperscript{15} these walls, For stony limits cannot hold love out, And what love can do, that dares love attempt: Therefore thy kinsmen are no stop to me.

JULIET: If they do see thee, they will murder thee.

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\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{1} wherefore : why
\textsuperscript{2} thou : you (subject)
\textsuperscript{3} thy : your
\textsuperscript{4} wilt : will
\textsuperscript{5} thyself : yourself
\textsuperscript{6} doff : abandon / take off
\textsuperscript{7} thee : you (object)
\textsuperscript{8} henceforth : from now on
\textsuperscript{9} art : are
\textsuperscript{10} bescreened : hidden
\textsuperscript{11} thou stumblest : you stumble
\textsuperscript{12} thou camest : you came
\textsuperscript{13} hither : here
\textsuperscript{14} kinsmen : family
\textsuperscript{15} o'erperch : overperch
\end{footnotes}
1. L. 1-10: Pick out the two words that are strikingly common to Tony's and Maria's parts. What conclusion do you draw?

2. L. 11-22: What in the song suggests that Tony and Maria's meeting is a case of love at first sight?

3. L. 23-34: How is the notion of miracle rendered in the song?

4. What words rhyme with “tonight”? Read Background Information, p. 1. What conclusion do you come to?

5. Who sings which lines? How is the idea of an immediate fusion between two beings conveyed?

6. What in Tony's words echoes the following lines in Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet?
   a) It is the east, and Juliet is the sun. (Act II, sc. 2, l. 3)
   b) It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden.
      Too like the lightning. (Act II, sc. 2, l. 117-118)

   ✓ The structure of the scene
   1. This scene falls into two parts.
      Where is the turning point?
    ✓ The setting
   2. At what time of day does the scene take place? Why is this?
   3. In West side Story Tony and Maria could see each other. Is that the case here? Why did Shakespeare set Romeo and Juliet’s meeting at night? What part of the stage is in darkness? What part is lit up?

   How did Shakespeare dramatize the fact that Romeo's love for Juliet was impossible? Consider the position of the characters on stage.

   The scene takes place in the Capulets' orchard, which is surrounded by high walls. What makes this setting particularly appropriate? What does Shakespeare suggest by speaking of an orchard rather than a garden?

   A recent movie version features a swimming pool. What does it symbolize? Why have lines 19-20 been cut out from the dialogue?
    ✓ The characters
   7. Show that Juliet and Romeo stand for two worlds that are apart.
   8. Who are “they” l. 40? What values do they represent?
   9. What fundamental question does Juliet ask in the first part? What values does she challenge?
   10. How do you react as a reader? Do you feel that she is right or that she is too daring? Analyze what leads you to judge her as you do.

   Do you find Romeo too rash or rather moving? Explain why.
    ✓ The plot
   12. How many times are the words “love” and “death” used? Which of the two characters uses them? Show that they are central to the myth of Romeo and Juliet.

   Analysing the Myth

   1. Go through the whole scene once more and note down all the single-line sentences. Why do they have such an impact on the audience?
   2. Why do you think the authors of the lyrics of West Side Story chose to change the name of Juliet for Maria? What in each text suggests that there is a sacred quality in this love?
   3. In which text is the notion of impending danger better rendered?
   4. Read the definition of a myth (Background Information, p. 1). What ideals and beliefs are conveyed by the story of Romeo and Juliet? What makes these ideals universal and timeless?

   Expression

   ESLV1 Antille-Guyane Septembre 1999 (350 words): Would you be ready to leave your homeland to follow the one you love abroad? Give your reasons.