

## A. C. Bradley's Concept of the Sublime in *Romeo and Juliet*

Carole Schuyler  
Dixie State College

---

For the sake of “long love,” Friar Lawrence advises the about-to-be-married Romeo and Juliet to “love moderately” (2.6.14).<sup>1</sup> Harold Bloom, referring to “the erotic greatness of Juliet,” claims that “her sublimity is the play.”<sup>2</sup> Moderation and sublimity appear to be at odds.<sup>3</sup> My discussion of sublimity in *Romeo and Juliet* teases out five characteristics in a lecture by A. C. Bradley, who used Edmund Burke’s 1757 *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful* as his springboard. He published an enlarged revision of “The Sublime” in 1909 in *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, a collection of essays not included in his 1904 *Shakespearean Tragedy*. Disappointingly, he doesn’t use any examples from Shakespeare in this essay, though he does apply “sublime” to Antony’s love in his “*Antony and Cleopatra*” essay.

Whereas Burke (and Kant) hold that the beautiful and the sublime are different species (partly because of the transition from the beauty of the eighteenth-century neoclassic style to the sublimity of the nineteenth-century gothic style), Bradley makes the sublime a mode of beauty. He doesn’t attempt to define “beauty,” but regards it in its broadest sense of what satisfies aesthetically and is distinct from goodness and truth—though, as we’ll see with the first characteristic, it’s difficult to keep these separate. Next, he suggests five modes of beauty in ascending order: the pretty, the graceful, the beautiful (a narrower application of “beauty” used for comparison), the grand, and the sublime. Many people, he observes, evaluate the latter most highly, but he doesn’t claim that this ascent is necessarily in value; also, he acknowledges that an object may possess more than one mode of beauty and that observers may disagree about an object’s mode.<sup>4</sup>

Objects belong to one of four categories: physical, such as the sky or sea; vital, i.e., plant or animal nature; works of art; and moral or spiritual figures, ideas, or qualities. (Locating the sublime in an object as well as in ourselves as subjects is antithetical to

Burke and Kant, who placed it solely in observers' mental responses.) Flowers, Bradley says, tend to be pretty, graceful, or beautiful; I would add that a ten-foot sunflower is grand and a field of them as far as the eye can see, sublime. Similarly, he places a village church and a cathedral at opposite ends of the scale.<sup>5</sup> In the play, Juliet advances from the Nurse's "Thou wast the prettiest babe that e'er I nurs'd" (1.3.60) to Montague's implication of her sublimity in "There shall no figure at such rate be set / As that of true and faithful Juliet" (5.3.300-01).

Moving to Bradley's first characteristic, why does the cathedral rank as sublime? Because it impresses us with "greatness, and more—of exceeding or even overwhelming greatness." This greatness—which must remain coupled with beauty in its widest sense—is "of extent—of size, number, or duration."<sup>6</sup> In the play, the night qualifies as sublime. The lovers have no Arden to which they can escape, so the starry night is their transformative space. They pledge themselves to each other under the cloak of the "blessed blessed night" (2.2.139). Juliet tries to hasten "love-performing night" (3.2.5) after her wedding: "Come, gentle night, come loving black-brow'd night, / Give me my Romeo" (3.2.20-21; also 3.2.10-11). The couple kisses for the last time as they recognize night's shelter is receding.

Fate, an actual power in the play (or a powerful idea), is also overwhelming. For Bradley, "Fate or Death, imagined as a lurking assassin, is not sublime, but may become so when imagined as inevitable, irresistible, *ineluctabile fatum*."<sup>7</sup> The Chorus refers to the "star-cross'd" lovers (1.1.6); when Mercutio dies, Romeo refers to the day's "black fate" (3.1.121); when he kills Tybalt, he calls himself "fortune's fool" (3.1.138); when both her parents reject her for refusing to marry Paris, Juliet sobs, "Alack, alack, that heaven should practice stratagems / Upon so soft a subject as myself" (3.5.209-10). When Balthasar tells Romeo of Juliet's apparent death, Romeo exclaims, "Then I defy you, stars!" (5.1.24). In the tomb, Romeo "shake[s] the yoke of inauspicious stars / From [his] world-wearied flesh" (5.3.111-12). We might alternatively understand this force as cosmic love or Christian providence working out its own ends. God's love, permeating and governing the universe, expresses itself in sexual love to counterbalance hatred, violence, and chaos in society. Even though the lovers are destroyed, the families (in some interpretations) are reconciled and civic peace is restored.<sup>8</sup> Thus, seeing Romeo's corpse, the Friar tells Juliet, "A greater power than we can contradict / Hath thwarted our intents" (5.3.153-54).

Working with fate or providence is what Harold Goddard terms "a fountain of wisdom somewhere beyond time"; it is the source of the characters' dreams, visions, and premonitions.<sup>9</sup> Romeo alludes to both pagan and Christian concepts when he agrees to go to the Capulet revels. Though his "mind misgives / Some consequence yet hanging in the stars" that will lead to "untimely death," yet he submits: "He that hath the steerage of my course / Direct my suit" (1.5.106-07, 111, 112-13). Later, when Juliet asks from the balcony how he found her, he replies that love lent him counsel (2.2.81).

In contrast to night and fate is the excessive but non-sublime patriarchal power displayed by Capulet. When his daughter refuses to obey him, he explodes, "Beg! Starve! Die in the streets! / For by my soul I'll ne'er acknowledge thee, / Nor what is mine shall never do thee good" (3.5.192-94). Overwhelming, yes, but such wrath is contrary to aesthetics as well as morality.

Instead of physical power or greatness in extent, the sublimely beautiful may consist of virtue extraordinary in quality and quantity, i.e., in moral or spiritual power. Bradley's example is a prose poem by Turgenev (Tourgénieff). Walking home from hunting with his dog, the author noticed a baby sparrow on the ground fluttering its wings; it had fallen from the nest above. As the dog approached it, a parent bird dropped down and with desperate cries flung herself at the dog's open mouth—repeatedly until she died. Turgenev reflected on his and the dog's response to the sacrifice: "My dog stood still, and then slunk back disconcerted. Plainly he too had to recognise that power. . . . It was really reverence I felt before that heroic little bird and the passionate outburst of its love." Bradley advocates, "This sparrow, it will be agreed, is sublime." How? In the bird's love and courage that prompted her to leave the safety of the bough; in her persistence in the literal teeth of extreme danger until her heart gave out; and in being so tiny compared to the dog.<sup>10</sup>

Juliet's sublime behavior proves her sublime love for the sublime object that Romeo is to her. Gently raised, she is at first circumspect in asking the Nurse the identity of the young man who would not dance (1.5.127-33). Soon, however, she fulfills the "ay" she gave to the Nurse's husband about falling backward and forgets her promise to her mother: "No more deep will I endart mine eye / Than your consent gives strength to make it fly" (1.3.98-99). Her feelings for Romeo cause her to flout propriety on the balcony: "I should have been more strange" (2.2.102). When Romeo accepts her presumption of marriage, she promises, "All

my fortunes at thy foot I'll lay, / And follow thee my lord throughout the world" (2.2.147-48). She and Romeo are untouched by the bawdiness that surrounds them. In contrast to Sampson and Gregory's crudity about maidenheads, Juliet petitions the night, "Learn me how to lose a winning match / Play'd for a pair of stainless maidenhoods" (3.2.12-13). Modest about the sexual act—grateful for the dark to hide her blushes (3.2.14-16)—she also eagerly anticipates it:

when I shall die  
 Take him and cut him out in little stars,  
 And he will make the face of heaven so fine  
 That all the world will be in love with night,  
 And pay no worship to the garish sun. (3.2.21-25)

Brian Gibbons explains that "Juliet quibbles on *death* as also meaning sexual ecstasy: she prays that Romeo may share the experience with her, in death like a rocket soaring up into the night sky and exploding into innumerable stars." He highlights her selflessness: "Romeo will experience a metamorphosis into shining immortality, yet she seems to think of herself as mortally ephemeral—if she thinks of herself at all—in this moment of intense adoration of her lover."<sup>11</sup> The couple's is a love "in its divine sense." For Goddard, "passion it is, of course, but that contaminated term has in our day [c1950!] become helpless to express it. Purity would be the perfect word for it if the world had not forgotten that purity is simply Greek for fire."<sup>12</sup>

Shakespeare stresses Juliet's tender age in an era when women tended to marry in their early- to mid-twenties.<sup>13</sup> "Juliet," as Isaac Asimov points out, is the diminutive for "Julia."<sup>14</sup> The 2005 Utah Shakespearean Festival director of this play, Kate Buckley, emphasized Tiffany Scott's sparrow-like petiteness as Juliet to Phil Hubbard's mastiff; we believe that Capulet's bite would equal his bark in the matter of this upwardly-mobile marriage to Paris.

The test of Juliet's love comes when she must decide between her family and Romeo after Tybalt's death. She severs herself from her parents and then from her closest caregiver, the Nurse: "Thou and my bosom henceforth shall be twain" (3.5.240). Is this growth from timid child to courageous woman-in-love in just two nights and two days believable? Besides the transforming power of eros, Northrop Frye suggests the loneliness of Juliet's childhood and her consequent self-reliance. Her parents are "Sir" and "Madam"; her siblings and a possible playmate, Susan, are dead; she has probably often wanted the Nurse to "stint" her loquacity

and ribaldry; the Friar is available—for confession.<sup>15</sup> And then there is Tybalt, whom the Nurse claims is her best friend (3.2.61) and who kissed her in front of the family in the 2005 Utah Shakespearean Festival production. Because of the custom of fostering boys from age five or six with a relative, he would have been brought up with Juliet as a brother;<sup>16</sup> in this production, we first saw Juliet when she and Tybalt were chasing each other across the stage. So she also chooses between loyalty to “my dearest cousin and my dearer lord” (3.2.66).

Is Romeo’s love as sublime as Juliet’s? Bloom alludes to “the heroic effort of Romeo to approximate her sublime state of being in love.”<sup>17</sup> Why only “approximate”? Though Juliet is surely two or three years younger than Romeo, she seems more mature to him and to the audience. Standing on the balcony above him, she has the misgiving that their commitment is “too rash” (2.2.118); nevertheless, knowing that Jove laughs at lovers’ perjuries (2.2.92-93), she instructs him that honorable intentions mean marriage (2.2.143-44). He leaves and returns in response to her directions; he continues the falconer analogy she begins. At the wedding ceremony, he looks to her to elaborate verbally on their joy, but she corrects him: comprehending what they mean to each other is more important than such ornament (2.6.30-31). Juliet’s love also enables her to see, on her own, that the outcome of the duel could have been worse: “Back, foolish tears . . . / My husband lives, that Tybalt would have slain” (3.2.102, 105), whereas the Friar labors to make Romeo grasp this fact (3.3.136-37). Finally, the bride sends the groom a ring, via the Nurse, before he comes to consummate the marriage (3.3.142).

For Goddard (who doesn’t use “sublime”), Juliet was all for love and so could pass her test in choosing Romeo over her clan. Romeo, however, is a divided soul who fails his test in the fight after the wedding. In love with the world, the new bridegroom at first lets Tybalt’s insult slide over him. But as Mercutio provokes Tybalt to a fight, Romeo descends to the level of law: the Prince’s prohibition. Then he falls to preventive violence when he draws his sword (as Goddard imagines the scene) to separate the men and, finally, after Mercutio’s death, to vengeful violence against Tybalt. Thus, Romeo “falls back on the testimony of all history, that only force can overcome force.” What would Goddard have Romeo do? Romeo should disregard his culture’s code of honor and the love in male friendship that supersedes, temporarily, heterosexual love. Before it’s too late, he should recognize the mistake in his words, “O sweet Juliet, / Thy beauty hath made me

effeminate / And in my temper soften'd valour's steel" (3.1.115-17). Rather, he should persevere for "the miracle whereby beauty melts violence into love!"<sup>18</sup> Is that too sublime a sentiment for the play's and our world?

Because the sublime's greatness can consist of moral or spiritual power, it would be incongruous to substitute "sublime" for "excessive" in phrases about the Nurse's garrulity, Rosaline's chastity, Mercutio's obscenity, Tybalt's pugnacity, Capulet's fury, the apothecary's penury, or the friar's cowardice.

So far, we have seen one characteristic of the sublime: beauty accompanied by greatness. Bradley asks, following Burke, if "we ought at least to go beyond the adjective 'exceeding' or 'overwhelming,' and to substitute 'immeasurable' or 'incomparable' or 'infinite.'"<sup>19</sup> Memorably, Juliet exalts, in what Bloom calls "an epiphany in the religion of love":<sup>20</sup> "My bounty is as boundless as the sea, / My love as deep: the more I give to thee / The more I have, for both are infinite" (2.2.133-5). At their wedding, Romeo calls on Juliet's skill to describe their joy, "if the measure of thy joy / Be heap'd like mine" (2.6.24-25). She demurs and concludes in a Zeno-like paradox, "They are but beggars that can count their worth, / But my true love is grown to such excess / I cannot sum up sum of half my wealth" (2.6.32-34). In her despair, she laments, "Romeo is banished, / There is no end, no limit, measure, bound, / In that word's death. No words can that woe sound" (3.3.124-26). When she uses a number, she still means an immeasurable amount. In the balcony scene, Romeo tells Juliet to send a messenger by nine in the morning. She agrees and sighs, "'Tis twenty year till then" (2.2.169; also 3.5.44-47). Finally getting the information from the Nurse about the fight, Juliet wails, "Tybalt is dead and Romeo—banished. / That 'banished', that one word 'banished', / Hath slain ten thousand Tybalts" (3.2.112-14).

In contrast, grounded in the courtly love tradition, Romeo and his friends cannot help but make comparisons. When Benvolio urges Romeo to "examine other beauties" (1.1.226) (as Capulet asks Paris to do, 1.2.30-33), Romeo returns, "Show me a mistress that is passing fair; / What doth her beauty serve but as a note / Where I may read who pass'd that passing fair?" (1.1.232-34; also 1.2.84-101). Besides ranking her against living beauties, the lover must declare his mistress fairer than the greatest historical and literary beloveds. Mercutio teases Romeo that, juxtaposed to Rosaline, "Dido [is] a dowdy, Cleopatra a gypsy" (2.4.42-43) and so on. At the feast, Romeo finds that Juliet's beauty eclipses Rosaline's: "Did my heart love til now? Forswear it, sight. / For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night (1.5.51-52).

After Bradley briefly reviews conflicting interpretations of literary critics and philosophers about infinity, he concludes that while these metaphysical questions are necessary for a theory of the sublime, they are beyond the scope of his lecture. For his purposes, “the greatness is only sometimes immeasurable, but it is *always* unmeasured.”<sup>21</sup>

Related to this second characteristic are the concepts of embodiment vs. transcendence. The beautiful, for Bradley, fits perfectly in a sensuous form whereas the sublime threatens to break out of its present manifestation to fulfill its expression or is “utterly uncontainable.”<sup>22</sup> Romeo and Juliet first speak to each other in an exquisite sonnet; she recognizes, though, that this is “kiss[ing] by th’ book” (1.5.109). Later that evening, in broken lines of blank verse, they alternate images of falconers and birds with the bliss of forgetting anything but the fantasy they are building together.

A third characteristic of the sublime lies in Bradley’s question below: Would a mountain, a river, or a building be sublime to us if we did not read their masses and lines as symbols of force? Would even the illimitable extent of sea or sky, the endlessness of time, or countlessness of stars or sands or waves, bring us anything but fatigue or depression if we did not apprehend them, in some way and however vaguely, as expressions of immeasurable power—power that created them, or lives in them, or *can* count them; so that what impresses us is not the mere absence of limits, but the presence of something that overpowers any imaginable limit?<sup>23</sup>

What power enables Juliet (and Romeo) to feel and act in a state of sublimity? Cupid wasn’t helping Romeo to score with Rosaline, but then, as Frye notes, “the God of Love . . . [swoops] down on two perhaps rather commonplace adolescents and [blasts] them into another dimension of reality altogether.”<sup>24</sup> Because medieval courtly love is a parody of Christian experience, many of the same terms are used, e.g., “heretic” (1.2.93), “saints” and “pilgrims” (1.5.92-109), “bright angel” (2.2.26), “baptism” (2.2.50), and “heaven” (3.2.33, 40). Romeo’s name even means “pilgrim to Rome.”<sup>25</sup> In this religion of love, “joining the loved one in death qualifies the lover as one of Cupid’s saints and ensures that the two meet in [Paradise].”<sup>26</sup>

Courtly love sometimes cooperates with Christianity (as we saw in the power of cosmic love earlier) and sometimes conflicts with it. As an example of the latter, Juliet flirts with blasphemy in her adoration of Romeo: “Swear by thy gracious self, / Which is the god of my idolatry” (2.2.113-14). Paul N. Siegel, in “Christianity

and the Religion of Love in *Romeo and Juliet*," traces the interaction of these two traditions through all the versions of the couple's story. Because Shakespeare has so skillfully and subtly blended them, he says, critics can argue both that the lovers are innocent victims (e.g., George Lyman Kittredge and J. Dover Wilson) and that they are sinners guilty of mortal sin and therefore condemned to hell (e.g., Roy W. Battenhouse and Nathan A. Scott, Jr.). More moderate critics assign the lovers responsibility without damning them (e.g., A. C. Bradley and Harley Granville-Barker).<sup>27</sup>

Probably Bradley's most controversial variation on qualities of the sublime is (what I'll call) the fourth one: the two-step phase of the experience which he contrasts with the single step of perceiving or imagining something graceful or beautiful. In the latter, Bradley says, "There is in us an immediate outflow of pleasure, an unchecked expansion, a delightful sense of harmony between the thing and ourselves. . . . Something in us hastens to meet it in sympathy or love. Our feeling, we may say, is entirely affirmative. For though it is not always untouched by pain (for the thing may have sadness in it), this touch of pain or sadness does not mean any disharmony between the thing and us, or involve any check in our acceptance of it."<sup>28</sup>

Certainly, Romeo's first sight of Juliet is pure pleasure and reaching out to her: "O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright. / It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night / As a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear . . . The measure done, I'll watch her place of stand, / And touching hers, make blessed my rude hand" (1.5.43-45, 49-50). In continuing the sonnet with him and letting him kiss her, Juliet delights in the first encounter, too.

In contrast, the apprehension of sublimity in an object has two stages: negative and positive. Burke held that the distinguishing trait of the sublime is that it "is always founded on fear." Believing this "impossible to accept," Bradley modifies this negative stage: "If only for a fraction of a second—there is a sense of being checked, or baffled, or even stupefied, or possibly even repelled or menaced, as though something were affecting us which we could not receive, or grasp, or stand up to." Temporarily, it "makes us feel our littleness." For the experience to remain aesthetic, however, there can't be practical fear for one's body: one would feel terror and would fail to attain imaginative sympathy and then self-expansion with the object. But the more prominent the negative aspect and the greater one's sense of powerlessness, then—in the positive, second stage—the more glorious or majestic (in antithesis to graceful) the object is and the more uplift the experiencer gains.<sup>29</sup>



In the play, there are several of these double apprehensions. When the lovers learn each others' identities, both are "checked": Romeo says, "My life is my foe's debt" (1.5.117); Juliet, "My only love sprung from my only hate" (1.5.137). But in the balcony scene, they quickly doff their clan identities and soar on their passion. How seriously does each take the feud? Juliet trembles, "The orchard walls are high and hard to climb, / And the place death, considering who thou art, / If any of my kinsmen find thee here" (2.2.63-65). Asimov proposes that Tybalt, who takes it seriously indeed, would have spread his poison to his impressionable cousin. And he wonders if Juliet is being manipulated: "Romeo may well have recognized the romanticism of the young girl who feels the thrill of loving the family enemy; who loves the risk and danger and sadness of it; and perhaps he would not dream of throwing cold water on that feeling."<sup>30</sup> It didn't seem to bother Romeo that Rosaline was a Capulet, but then his love fantasy was otherwise out of reach. In his first appearance on stage, he is jolted out of his melancholia when he exclaims to Benvolio, "O me! What fray was here? / Yet tell me not, for I have heard it all" (1.1.171-72). The feud, it seems, is ancient and recent, virulent and prevalent.

Twice, the Nurse dismays Juliet by delaying vital news. She looks sad and acts weary while postponing the supremely positive message that Juliet's greatest desire will be fulfilled at Friar Laurence's cell that afternoon (2.5). Later, she lets Juliet surmise that Romeo has been slaughtered before promising to bring him to her chamber for their wedding night (3.2). The next morning, Juliet is sunk by the couple's present circumstances and wonders if they'll meet again. Romeo focuses on the future where love triumphs: "I doubt it not, and all these woes shall serve / For sweet discourses in our times to come" (3.5.52-53).

Another example has a longer negative phase that demonstrates Juliet's sublime love for Romeo. She feels Burkean terror at taking the Friar's potion as she reviews his integrity and her possible physical and emotional responses when she is in its grip (4.3.24-57). Waking up in the tomb with the Friar by her side is the self-expansive, positive phase; she has survived the ordeal and everything in the hideous tomb seems in order: "O comfortable Friar, where is my lord? / I do remember well where I should be, / And there I am" (5.3.148-50). She doesn't yet know, of course, that Romeo is dead on the ground.

Romeo's comparable negative phase passes quickly. When he awakes from his joyful dream of Juliet to the dire news from

Balthasar about her "death," he immediately takes care of business and remembers in detail the little shop of horrors of the wretched apothecary. From knocking on the door until lying again with Juliet, he's on a high.<sup>31</sup>

Bradley dismisses a fifth characteristic of the sublime: Burke's darkness or vagueness that increases terror because the observer can't see or imagine what terrifies him, e.g., "the pestilence that walketh in darkness." Eager to allay terror, Bradley says that a good illustrator, such as Blake, can diminish the obscurity and, hence, this aspect of sublimity.<sup>32</sup> Burkean darkness does, however, pervade the play. There is the tenacious, infectious feud that the Prince is powerless to control. Meanwhile, outside Verona, the plague prowls. For the lovers, the fact of banishment is incomprehensibly appalling. Juliet's life is bounded by the walls of her home, but Romeo's is almost as limited by the city walls: "Banishment! Be merciful, say 'death'. / For exile hath more terror in his look, / Much more than death" (3.3.12-14).

Surprisingly, Bradley doesn't mention a related characteristic of the sublime that provokes much discussion about the play. But Burke writes that just as ideas of pain are more powerful than those of pleasure, so "death is in general a much more affecting idea than pain" in occasioning the sublime.<sup>33</sup> Frye believes that "the *Liebestod* of Romeo and Juliet, their great love and their tragic death, are bound up together as two aspects of the same thing."<sup>34</sup> *Liebestod*, Jill Levenson explains, is an ambiguous term that can mean "love in death," "death in love," "love's death"; or the desire or compulsion for love that becomes a compulsion for death. For the Elizabethans, the connection between the two was the little death or orgasm whose quantity shortened the life span. Typically, the *Liebestod* plot pits two young lovers against impossible obstacles which they secretly try to circumvent, but an accident or misjudgment dooms them.<sup>35</sup> But what deaths, according to Maurice Charney! No tragic flaw of their own is to blame; rather, these martyrs or heroes who prove the intensity of their devotion for each other are too beautiful and idealistic for this world. Their end is not a tragedy but a celebration;<sup>36</sup> Romeo's fifth-act dream comes true—somewhere else.

As with the paradise vs. perdition debate, here again is disagreement, this time about the sanity or sickness of the lovers. Bloom declares, "I think that I speak for more than myself when I assert that the love shared by Romeo and Juliet is as healthy and normative a passion as Western literature affords us. It concludes in mutual suicide, but not because either of the lovers lusts for

death, or mingles hatred with desire."<sup>37</sup> Ivo Kamps, in the Modern Language Association's *Approaches to Teaching* the play, aims to debunk the high school notion "that Romeo and Juliet are a match made in heaven and that the play is the greatest love story ever told."<sup>38</sup> He uses renaissance texts on pathologies that detail how love deceives the eyes, imbalances the humors, destroys the reason, and causes social isolation.

Certainly death, even suicide, is never far from the lovers' consciousnesses, making the sublime's negative aspects more prominent. At his first sight of Juliet, Romeo sighs, "Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear" (1.5.46). When Juliet asks the Nurse to find out Romeo's name, she says, "If he be married, / My grave is like to be my wedding bed" (1.5.133-34). Just before the wedding ceremony, when Romeo should be looking forward to a long and happy marriage, he tells the Friar, "Do thou but close our hands with holy words, / Then love-devouring death do what he dare: / It is enough I may but call her mine" (2.6.6-8). In her "Gallop apace" speech (3.2.1-4), Juliet recklessly wishes for night and Romeo at any cost. Phaeton, too, is young, passionate, and doomed. Eager, but incompetent at controlling the mighty, headstrong horses drawing the chariot of the sun, he sets earth, sea, and heaven on fire until Jupiter slays him with a lightning bolt. Romeo equates banishment with death (3.3.20-21) and then insouciantly declares in the aubade scene, "Let me be taken, put to death" (3.5.17-18). Both Romeo and Juliet display their knives and willingness to use them to the Friar (3.3.106-07, 4.1.66-67).

But the stronger images are of their life and light against death and darkness, as Caroline Spurgeon sums up: "In *Romeo and Juliet* the beauty and ardour of young love is seen by Shakespeare as the irradiating glory of sunlight and starlight in a dark world. The dominating image is light, every form a manifestation of it; the sun, moon, stars, fire, lightning, the flash of gunpowder, and the reflected light of beauty and of love; while by contrast we have night, darkness, clouds, rain, mist, and smoke."<sup>39</sup> The two lovers actually emit light to each other. The light Romeo sees shining through the window is from Juliet (2.2.2-3). Juliet is confident that "lovers can see to do their amorous rites / By their own beauties" (3.2.8-9).<sup>40</sup> Perhaps it is more accurate to say that as they construct a new world with their love and their poetry amidst the violence of Verona, they cause each other to shine.

Bradley uses an example from Longinus that he says has been used in most discussions of the sublime ever since: "God said, Let there be light, and there was light." The idea of the first and

instantaneous appearance of light, and that the whole light of the whole world, is already sublime; and its primary appeal is to sense. The further idea that this transcendently glorious apparition is due to mere words, to a breath—our symbol of tenuity, evanescence, impotence to influence material bulk—heightens enormously the impression of absolutely immeasurable power.<sup>41</sup>

Given a choice, wouldn't the lovers have settled for a long, beautiful marriage instead of a short, sublime one? Which do we prefer as readers and playgoers? Is Maria in *West Side Story* less sublime than Juliet because she will continue living after Tony's death? And what of Heloise and Abelard who led productive lives in their respective monasteries after their tragedy? Goddard reasons, "Cynics are fond of saying that if Romeo and Juliet had lived their love would not have 'lasted.'" Of course it wouldn't in the cynic's sense. You can no more ask such love to last than you can ask April to last, or an apple blossom. Yet April and apple blossoms do last and have results that bear no resemblance to what they come from—results such as apples and October—and so does such love.<sup>42</sup>

### Notes

1. Brian Gibbons, ed., *Romeo and Juliet: The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare* (New York: Methuen, 1980, 1988). All references to the play are to this edition.

2. Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (New York: Penguin Putnam, 1998), 89. Bloom does not explain what he means by "sublime" in this essay. It would be an interesting exercise to see if his application of "sublimity" to Juliet derives from such works as *The Anxiety of Influence* and *Agon*. Certainly, soon after her mother raises the prospect of marriage, Juliet seizes the idea and runs with it—but away from Lady Capulet's concept of wife- and mother-hood.

3. Shakespeare probably knew the word "sublime." In the late fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries, it was used as a verb for the process of heating a substance to vapor, then cooling the purified matter to a solid. Beginning in the mid-sixteenth century, it also meant exalting a person to a high office or honor (*Oxford English Dictionary*, online edition, s.v. *sublime*). The first modern edition of Longinus's first-century *On Great Writing (On the Sublime)* was produced in Basle in 1554. Though the first English translation wasn't printed for another hundred years (Longinus, *On Great Writing [On the Sublime]* trans. and intro. G. M. A. Grube [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1957, 1991, viii]), *sublime* was used as an adjective by the 1590s for lofty ideas and heroic actions expressed in the stateliest style (*Oxford English Dictionary*, online edition, s.v. *sublime*). Edmund Burke's 1757 *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful* was followed in 1763 by Kant's *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* and in 1790 by his *Critique of Judgment*. Dozens of philosophers and literary critics who have continued the conversation include Schiller, Hegel, Coleridge, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Croce, Samuel Holt Monk, Thomas Weiskel, Jean-François Lyotard, Neil Hertz, and Frances Ferguson.

4. A. C. Bradley, "The Sublime," *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1909), 37-40.

5. *Ibid.*, 43-43, 47-48, 62-63. If you've been to the North or the South Rim, do you think the Grand Canyon should be bumped up to the Sublime Canyon?

6. *Ibid.*, 41, 42.

7. *Ibid.*, 47.

8. Paul N. Siegel, "Christianity and the Religion of Love in *Romeo and Juliet*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 12 no. 4 (Autumn 1961): 383.

9. Harold C. Goddard, *The Meaning of Shakespeare*, vol. 1 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951, 1960), 123.

10. Bradley, "Sublime," 44-46, 63.

11. Gibbons, *Romeo and Juliet*, 170 n.21.

12. Goddard, *Meaning of Shakespeare*, 119.

13. Peter Saccio, *William Shakespeare: Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies*, Part II, Lectures 19-20, prod. The Teaching Company, 1999, audiocassette.

14. Isaac Asimov, *Asimov's Guide to Shakespeare* (New York: Wings Books, 1970, 1993), 480. There were many comments from audience members in the morning-after-the-play literary seminars and from reviewers about how convincingly young the actors looked and behaved, especially Tiffany Scott as Juliet. Kate Buckley, the director, removed all references to Juliet's age in the play.

15. Northrop Frye, *Northrop Frye on Shakespeare*, ed. Robert Sandler (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 18.

16. Leslie Brott, Actors' Roundtable, The Wooden O Symposium at the Utah Shakespearean Festival, Cedar City, 3 August 2005.

17. Bloom, *Shakespeare*, 89.

18. Goddard, *Meaning of Shakespeare*, 132, 129, 131. In the USF production, Romeo didn't carry a rapier. He duelled with a dropped one and killed Tybalt, it seemed, by strangling him.

19. Bradley, "Sublime," 58.

20. Bloom, *Shakespeare*, 91.

21. Bradley, "Sublime," 59.

22. *Ibid.*, 59, 62,

23. *Ibid.*, 48.

24. Frye, *On Shakespeare*, 19.

25. *11,000 Baby Names, Meanings and Origins* (<<http://www.BabyNamesWorld.com>>, 2003).

26. Siegel, "Christianity and Love," 372.

27. *Ibid.*; 371. Siegel also lists the following critics as sympathetic with the lovers: F. S. Boas, R. G. Moulton, George P. Baker, C. H. Herford, Raymond M. Alden, Allardyce Nicoll, E. K. Chambers, Elmer Edgar Stoll, Thomas Marc Parrott, Hazelton Spencer, William Allan Neilson, Charles Jarvis Hill, H. B. Charlton, and Ian Duthie. Those condemning passionate love (in line with orthodox Christian ethics) are H. Edward Cain, Franklin M. Dickey, and Charles Jasper Sisson. Among the moderates are Oscar James Campbell and Donald Stauffer.

28. Bradley, "Sublime," 51.

29. *Ibid.*, 58, 54, 52, 54, 54-55.

30. Asimov, *Guide to Shakespeare*, 486, 488.

31. E. F. Carritt, a professor of aesthetics, ethics, and political theory, and a contemporary of Bradley at Oxford, savaged his colleague in an essay with the same title, "The Sublime," in *Mind*, Vol. 19 no. 75, July 1910. While making the sublime a species of beauty instead of its antithesis does avoid difficulties, Carritt says that it also renders the concept too vague—especially when Bradley has not provided a philosophy of beauty and when he allows moral force to be included in the concept of the sublime. Carritt's *Theory of Beauty* was first published in 1914; the sixth edition, in 1962.

More specifically, Carritt disagrees with the doubleness of apprehension. He has different responses to Bradley's examples (such as siding with the dog rather than the sparrow); he doesn't always have the "check" phase; sometimes the positive phase comes first. His examples are mostly natural phenomena, works of art, and Prometheus with only glancing references to other literary characters.

32. Bradley, "Sublime," 56-57.

33. Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. and intro. Adam Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 36.

34. Frye, *On Shakespeare*, 26.

35. Quoted in Jill Rutherford, "Q: Who Says That *Romeo and Juliet* Is More Than Just Another Love Story? A: University of Toronto English Professor and Shakespeare Scholar Jill Levenson, Who Wrote the Book on It" (<<http://www.news.utoronto.ca/bios/00/levenson.htm>>, 12 February 2000).

36. Maurice Charney, *Shakespeare on Love and Lust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999) 80-81.

37. Bloom, *Shakespeare*, 93.

38. Ivo Kamps. "I Love You Madly, I Love You to Death?: Erotomania and *Liebestod* in *Romeo and Juliet*," in *Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet*, ed. Maurice Hunt (New York: Modern Language Association, 2000), 38.

39. Caroline F. E. Spurgeon, "The Imagery of *Romeo and Juliet*," *Shakespeare: Modern Essays in Criticism*, rev. ed., ed. Leonard F. Dean (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957, 1967), 73-74.

40. Perhaps this is not so unusual a phenomenon. During the Actors' Roundtable for *Romeo and Juliet* at the Wooden O Symposium in August 2005, the actors discussed performing in the indoor Auditorium Theatre vs. the outdoor Adams Shakespearean Theatre and, in the latter, in the early evening light vs. the night. When they felt that one or more members of the audience were sympathetic to their characters, they saw light in those areas of the seats. For example, in the 2003 production, Leslie Brott as Queen Elizabeth received this support when Henry Woronicz as Richard III was asking to marry her daughter.

41. Bradley, "Sublime," 57.

42. Goddard, *Meaning of Shakespeare*, 139.