



***Romeo and Juliet* or the Sin of Secrecy**

Biava Kodjo Kloutse

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Abstract

The sad fate of Juliet and Romeo in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is yet factual that it cannot be confined to the world of imagination, for the theme of the suicide of lovers among the youth remains topical nowadays. The purpose of this article is to explore the crucial role of secrecy in the tragedy between the Capulets and the Montagues. Secrecy involves concealing information from others, even from those close to us whom we should trust. This article points out that secrecy, though necessary in some matters, especially those concerning love, should be moderated to avoid irreversible consequences.

Corresponding author:

Biava Kodjo Kloutse
Université de Kara, Togo

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Introduction

Patrice Love is a positive emotion that embodies all that is most admirable in mankind. Throughout history, many risks have been undertaken because of love (de Troyes 11). Love, in its erotic form, creates an emptiness within a person, compelling them to eagerly commit themselves to fill the empty hole (Bunnag 45); whence the quest for one's half. Love can then be regarded as a motive for action, as it is so subtle that no man can resist it when it arises. (Cheung 470), states, "(...) amorous relationships are human phenomena which are obvious and taken for granted in all cultures. The difference lies only in the understanding and interpretation of these phenomena according to the particular cultural categories of meaning". Beyond other feelings, love enters in secret and thrives on secrecy, for it does not tolerate opposing perspectives or even intrusion. The story of Cupid and Psyche in Greek mythology shows that lovers can dare to challenge their parents' decisions to achieve their own ends (Bulfinch 71-79). Love is then a feeling that embraces both rebellion and responsibility. The rebellion meets with risk in taking responsibility in the lovers' passionate love mix to immaturity. The striking case of Juliet and Romeo in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, which culminates in the deaths of both lovers, raises the issue of secrecy in passionate love among the youth.

The current article is based on the functionalist approach applied to literature, which asserts that a matter cannot be discussed in isolation, as it is the outcome of a mechanism known as a system. As (Donne 362) states, "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main." Similarly, (Blackburn 191 & 192) maintains that functionalism is, (...) the modern successor to behaviourism, its early advocates were Putman and Sellars, and its guiding principle is that we can define mental states by a triplet of relations: what typically causes them, what effects they have on other mental states, and what effects they have on behaviour (...) The principal advantages of functionalism include its fit with the way we know ourselves and others which is via their effects on behaviour and other mental states. From a functionalist perspective, this article first explores the various forms of secrecy in the play and then considers the tragic consequences of secrecy as a deliberate choice by the protagonists.

1- Rise of Secrecy

1.1- Nurturing Secrecy as the Lovers' Scheme

Secrecy involves keeping sensitive information concealed from those outside a project. It can also relate to confidence and, therefore, discretion. Discretion in matters of love may be linked to the idea of avoiding ridicule or preventing others from perceiving the intensity of feelings between lovers. This is certainly true of Romeo in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. The play begins with the Montagues' concern about their son's unusual behaviour, as he appears to prefer solitude over the company of his peers. In fact, Romeo has suddenly shifted his mood and demeanour. He seems to no longer appreciate what he once did, as if he has developed a certain disgust for his former diversions and pleasures. Benvolio describes Romeo's new solitary lifestyle to Lady Montague, saying,

Madam, an hour before the worshiped sun
Peered forth the golden window of the east,
A troubled mind drove me to walk abroad,
Where underneath the grove of sycamore
That westward rooteth from this city side,
So early walking did I see your son.
Towards him I made, but he was 'ware of me
And stole into the covert of the wood.
I, measuring his affections by my own
(Which then most sought where most might not be
found,
Being one too many by my weary self),
Pursued my humor, not pursuing his,
And gladly shunned who gladly fled from me. (120-33)

These words by Benvolio, one of Romeo's close friends, highlight Romeo's deliberate choice of a solitary life away from those he cares about. However, the selection of the woods suggests that his solitude is also accompanied by reflection and contemplation of nature, as if he is searching for a solution to a problem. This problem he likely considers more important than the wit of his friends or even his parents. This isolation can be seen as Romeo's way of confronting a challenge alone and bravely, without anyone's help. It simply reflects a mindset of self-reliance. When the experienced Montague sees the

sudden change in his son, he comforts the worried Lady Montague by explaining Romeo's behaviour, saying, "But he, his own affections' counselor, /Is to himself—I will not say how true, /But to himself so secret and so close, /So far from sounding and discovery, /As is the bud bit with an envious worm (...)" (150-54). For Romeo, the calm and silence of the woods, the darkness, and the closeness of the rooms have become the ideal conditions that give meaning to his meditations (134-45). By answering, "Out of her favour where I am in love" (173), it is possible to perceive that Romeo's true concern is not only the love he feels for Capulet's daughter but also the strategy to win her. The strategy is Romeo's main worry as he faces many obstacles, ranging from his bloodline to societal perceptions of such feelings. Even after confiding in Benvolio about his love for Capulet's daughter, Romeo has reverted to his old habit of hiding his plans from his close friends.

Romeo has been unable to devise a strategy to enter the Capulet's house despite his prolonged meditations until Benvolio and his friends intervene. Nevertheless, he still chooses to keep them in the dark about his plans, even though his companions have played a pivotal role in helping him gain access to the Capulet lodge (4). As a result, the friends' presence suddenly becomes a problem. To Romeo, love is a private matter. Those who helped initiate the courtship are excluded once they leave the Capulet's domain. Romeo reflects on why he has forsaken his friends to pursue his heart's desire, soliloquising, "Can I go forward when my heart is here? /Turn back, dull earth, and find thy centre out." (*Romeo and Juliet* 2.1.1&2). To highlight Romeo's eagerness to secretly converse with Juliet, the author has Benvolio, one of his companions, recount how Romeo pursues his desire, saying, "He ran this way and leapt this orchard wall" (6). Running and leaping are two swift actions that convey not only excitement and agility but also a strong desire to leave a place unnoticed in order to reach another swiftly. This behaviour of Romeo emphasises his boldness and determination to take risks in reaching the Capulets'. These consecutive actions by Romeo demonstrate his deliberate choice to handle matters himself despite the dangers of being mistaken for an intruder and being killed by the Capulets'.

The desire to handle things himself involves secrecy. Privacy begins in Romeo's mind and manifests in his actions along his longing to win his beloved Juliet's heart. Before the feast at the Capulets', only Romeo is presented as a figure of both lovers. In this early scene, the playwright sheds

light on an uneasiness that has driven Romeo to withdraw out of sight of his dear people. This portrayal by the playwright suggests that Romeo's previous sources of happiness have faded, replaced by a new, secret longing. The heart indeed governs the body and behaviour (33-46). As a result, Romeo's meeting with Juliet transforms his uneasiness into eagerness.

The meeting with Capulet's daughter and the kiss at the party have highlighted a similar issue for Juliet. She longs to spend more time with her beloved, free from the disturbances of others; (Cheung 5). Therefore, on the very night of the party, Juliet and Romeo engage in a lengthy and secret dialogue, (*Romeo and Juliet* 2. 2). The lovers' conversation does not allow for any interference. The frequency of the Nurse's calls (141-61) reveals how Juliet prioritises her secret meetings with Romeo over the Nurse's calls. Indeed, she answers each call but quickly resumes her conversation with Romeo, only for another call to arrive, as if the previous discussion had not been fully addressed. As a result, the calls come repeatedly, disrupting the lovers' exchange. The playwright deliberately omits the reasons for the Nurse's calls, mute as they are, to prioritise the lovers' vows and promises.

The fact that these discussions occur at night, out of sight of others, emphasises the lovers' desire to handle matters in secret. The risk Romeo undertakes by leaping into the Capulets' orchard highlights the passion guiding his decision. It also shows the subtlety of their meeting and the lovers' eagerness and willingness to break the law. Romeo's ability to go unnoticed clearly demonstrates his skill in the art of dissimulation, (Tzu 77&78). But is it possible to nurture love in complete secrecy? The display of love follows steps that chiefly require confidants. Indeed, secret love involves secret bearers.

1.2- Secrecy in the Choice of Companions

In Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the plot focuses on two families with a harmonious internal structure. Each family is balanced with a father, mother, and a child, to whom relatives can be added. Such balance is ideal, as it helps family members to live together without the risk of isolation and loneliness. However, the affair between Juliet and Romeo has highlighted another aspect of these relationships.

Although there is closeness between the parents and their children, and a sense of complicity among the youth, Romeo's behaviour towards his

parents and companions has eroded the cordiality and trust within his micro-society. The distance Romeo maintains from his parents reveals the nature of the conversations he can have with them. Romeo's withdrawal has led Montague to appoint Benvolio to investigate the cause of his son's new behaviour, as if, as a father, he could not question his son about his apparent concerns. Charging Benvolio with speaking to Romeo reveals his closeness to Romeo, a familiarity that the parents lack with their son. Benvolio is then the confidant of Romeo known to the parents, although that intimacy is relative in Romeo's view. Romeo relies on Benvolio's advice merely to guide his entry into the Capulets' house. As for the choice of confidant, he preferred the friar.

The person chosen by Romeo is Friar Lawrence. Their conversation shows a lot of familiarity, especially since Romeo's secret with Rosaline is known to the friar. However, another aspect of Romeo's connection to the friar can be linked to the ethics of the friar's profession. By visiting the friar both in (*Romeo and Juliet* 2. 3 & 6) and (*Romeo and Juliet* 3. 3), Romeo reveals his trust in the friar's role as a capable priest to marry him to Juliet, and his profession's ethics concerning the keeping of confession secrets. The friar is thus a suitable confidant. It can then be inferred that the multiple visits to the friar are not solely connected to an intimacy between Romeo and him, but rather to the utilitarian role the friar can play in his love affair (Waruwu 5). This assertion is credible, as one can look back to Romeo's uneasiness at the start of the play. Despite such discomfort that drives him away from his people to a solitary life, Romeo did not consider visiting the friar. Consequently, Romeo's choices of confidants are based on their ability to assist or promote his plan and nothing more.

Regarding Juliet, her involving the nurse in her affair arises both from their shared complicity and her inability to manage matters personally. The nurse is not Juliet's first choice but that of her parents. Involving the nurse is the only option left for Juliet to avoid suspicion. However, her visit to the friar demonstrates her trust in the friar's duty to keep the secret of confession (*Romeo and Juliet* 2. 4 & 4. 1). Juliet's step towards the friar indicates her need for confidential counsel, consistent with Romeo, who also values the friar's role in keeping secrets.

In love matters, confidants are those who have the skills needed to support lovers' plans. Therefore, confidants are usually chosen not for friendship but for their positive or constructive role in a relationship (Keith

319). Both Juliet and Romeo have engaged in a practice that excludes even parents and friends deemed incapable of helping. The secret marriage between Juliet and Romeo, with the complicity of Friar Lawrence and without informing their parents, symbolises the fact that the three protagonists have chosen to keep their deed hidden, as it transgresses the common norms of the publicity of marriages. Romeo's silence towards his good friend Benvolio is all the more striking, as the latter appears to be the Montagues' best friend of Romeo. In fact, Benvolio is not aware of Romeo's marriage project and, even after the marriage, he still knows nothing about it. All this confirms how secretly Romeo managed his affairs with Juliet. These behaviours by the two lovers lead to the conclusion that they have chosen secrecy rather than open declaration. But could marriage be limited to privacy, denigrating its social aspect?

2- Failure of Secrecy in Love

2.1- Miserable Boldness of Secrecy in Love

The origin of the secrecy can be traced back to the roots of the enmity between the Capulets and the Montagues. Shakespeare keeps this part of the story hidden from the audience throughout the play. This method of the playwright to conceal such vital information from his audience has guided the play's development in secret. Were the handmen or the lovers aware of the real cause of the enmity between the two families, it would have been resolved by at least one of them. However, the issue seems unknown even to the fighters, who merely declared, "The quarrel is between our masters and us their men." (*Romeo and Juliet* 1.1. 20 & 21). The practice of hiding information is therefore established in the play. The fact that the true cause of the enmity remains hidden has left no room for negotiation or talks. In fact, even the friar was only aware of the fact, without attempting any steps towards peace.

The direct consequence of parental secrecy is that children remain silent about their own matters. Romeo kept the secret of his heart even from his mother and father, who seemed very kind towards him. He appears reluctant to trust anyone or to be open-minded. This lack of openness is evident in his interactions with friends and companions. Such a situation prevents him from receiving assistance or advice. Even the friar is not given the opportunity to counsel Romeo but is instead forced to follow his wishes. During the visit to Friar Lawrence's, it is clear that Romeo has not allowed

the friar any chance to inquire about his inclinations. Romeo compels his desire to marry Capulet's daughter on the friar, who has no choice but to approve (32 & 101).

In response to the friar's request for further explanation of his motive, Romeo could say, "Then plainly know my heart's dear love is set/ On the fair daughter of rich Capulet. /As mine on hers, so hers is set on mine, /And all combined, save what thou must combine /By holy marriage. When and where and how /We met, we wooed, and made exchange of vow /I'll tell thee as we pass, but this I pray, /That thou consent to marry us today" (61-68). The young man left no room for further inquiry but to approve his demand. This behaviour by Romeo can be interpreted as his desire to keep the matter secret and to simply avoid the part he could not hide. If Romeo behaves so towards the friar, he is indirectly communicating to him that everything is already settled and there is no way to reevaluate his resolution. It is then clear that he did not come to the friar in search of counsel but for benediction. In such a situation, he would like the friar to see him as a result-oriented rather than a project debater. By so doing, Romeo has lost opportunities to be counselled and taught by more enlightened people who could have helped avoid the tragedy.

Beside Romeo, who has abusively privileged privacy in his love affair, the one-sided active role of the friar can also be mentioned. Friar Lawrence is a key figure in the marriage of Juliet and Romeo. Without him, the marriage would not have come to pass, and consequently, the tragic ending of the lovers would not have happened. Friar Lawrence is the only official informed of the entire process of the marriage, including the elopement. The story begins with Romeo's visit and the plan for the secret marriage, without the friar seeking the parents' consent (1-37). He even encourages the proposal and favours the marriage. Another aspect of the friar's complicity is his assisting Romeo, much against the city's regulations. He accommodates and comforts the banished Romeo and works for his safe exile to Mantua when even the Montagues did not know the whereabouts of Romeo after the murder of Tybalt (1-186). Such a role beside Romeo clarifies the friar's complicity with the young Romeo and his commitment to his cause. Regarding the public, Friar Lawrence has kept the secret of Juliet and Romeo. Even after marrying the young lovers, he fails to inform Paris, who came to him about his project of marriage with Juliet (1-44). He even plays the game, deceiving the parents and the guests about the

pretended death of Juliet, whereas he is the architect of such a plan (91-129) and (39-101).

For both Juliet and Romeo, the friar assumes the role of confidant and guardian of their secrets, demonstrating unwavering loyalty until the end. His position is that of a follower rather than a counselor; otherwise, he might have brokered peace between the feuding families or even sanctified the marriage. The deaths of the lovers can also be justly attributed to the friar's failure to undertake decisive action. His attempt to withdraw from the distressed Juliet as others approach underscores his lack of authority and resolution (144-65). The secret of the vial is the fundamental cause of the tragedy. Essentially, the root cause is secrecy itself, not love per se. Although the Chinese may regard Juliet and Romeo as martyrs of love, according to (Cheung 472) who states that, "As for the meaning of the tragic end of the lovers, Hong glorifies the martyrdom and the triumph of humanism over reactionary feudalism (...)", it remains evident that love should be celebrated, not terminated through death. Death may carry significance for witnesses, but it ultimately signifies the lovers' inability to alter their destiny, culminating in their demise.

2.2- Macabre Omissions of Secrecy in Love

The suicides of both Juliet and Romeo constitute a tragic conclusion to the play, which, contrary to all expectations, endures as a tragedy. It is evident that the lovers' decision to conceal their sentiments from others influences the play's outcome. By choosing trusted confidants, specifically the Nurse for Juliet and the Friar for both Juliet and Romeo, they appear to have made a fundamental error in judgment.

Although the Capulets and the Montagues are nursing a terrible enmity, the opening scene demonstrates how both Montague and Capulet have not resisted their wives' refusal to engage in conflict, as both Lady Capulet and Lady Montague oppose their respective husbands' requests to go out for a fight (76-82). This reaction of the ladies to their husbands' requests reflects a strong desire for peace among the women, while the submission of the husbands to their wives' opposition indicates their flexibility and respect for their spouses.

Both Capulet and Montague are the main figures in the enmity, but they are gentler than their men, who are eager and quick to fight. In truth,

without Capulet's men provoking Montague's men, the altercation would not have taken place. From this, it can be inferred that, despite their hostility, both Montague and Capulet are inclined towards peace and restraint. This aspect of the ladies' peacekeeping role has not been exploited in peace talks. The fact that Capulet and Montague can respect the peace-leaning inclinations of their wives demonstrates the pivotal role of the ladies within their couples. The ladies are not confined to household chores; they are raised as partners with their husbands in managing the household. This status of women in the play could have been leveraged by the lovers to mitigate the severity of their fathers' disputes. Regrettably, this has not been the case. If a lady can dissuade her husband from engaging in an ancient conflict, she can also soothe his heart.

In addition to the potential use of the ladies' diplomacy, who, by their very nature, cannot oppose too strongly the emotional inclinations of their children, there is the authority of Prince Escalus. Regarding the prince, his authority is neither challenged by the Capulets nor the Montagues. His interventions always silence the rogues and the fighters. The first intervention of the prince was so authoritative that nobody spoke after him. They were all left to return home immediately (83-105). The second intervention of the prince, at the death of Tybalt and Mercutio, was to sanction the protagonists of the fight without any sentimentality despite the pleas of Lady Capulet and Montague (149-207). After the verdict, neither family reacted. Therefore, it can be deduced that the prince's authority is firmly established over his population.

The authority vested in Prince Escalus could have been used by the lovers to have their affections publicly recognised, if they had been willing to open their hearts and seek advice from their peers. For, if the Capulets and the Montagues could not challenge the sanctions imposed by the prince despite the hardships they faced because of his decree, what if he had chosen to summon both factions for a peace dialogue? Mercutio, a relative of the prince, sacrifices his life for the sake of the Montagues. If he could sacrifice his life for his friend's honour, he could also help Romeo in advocating to the prince on his behalf. However, confidentiality led the lovers to conceal their intentions from the prince and even from Mercutio.

Another potential mediator is Friar Lawrence. Contrary to expectations, he has played a limited role in Juliet and Romeo's love affair.

Indeed, his position as a man of God has made him a privileged intermediary for everyone. However, instead of leveraging his position to negotiate peace, Juliet and Romeo have merely engaged him as an assistant for their schemes. His authority and reputation have shielded him from criminal charges related to the lovers' suicides, as though he were innocent. Such a position could have been exploited to attain a peaceful resolution rather than resorting to bloodshed.

The tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* stems also from the lovers' fear of their parents' harsh reaction. They chose the safest way to avoid their parents' opposition by concealing their love, which ultimately led to their downfall. But were both Montague and Capulet truly so cruel towards their children as to deny them happiness? As for Montague and Lady Montague, they are both portrayed as loving parents who care deeply about their child's well-being. Montague is shown expressing great concern over Romeo's sudden change of mood, instructing Benvolio to investigate the cause (134-58). This behaviour highlights how much Romeo's happiness matters to Montague. Regarding Lady Montague, she displayed relief upon hearing that her son was not involved in the scuffle (118-9). Her concern for her son's safety is evident in her actions. From this, it can be inferred that Lady Montague's death following her son's banishment was grief over the tragic fate of her only son. She simply could not endure the banishment of her beloved son. Consequently, she chose death rather than bear the pain (218-20). Such devotion to her son might have led her to support his inclinations, had she been informed. To this deep parental concern of the Montagues can be added their swift reconciliation with the Capulets at the graves of Juliet and Romeo. Montague then vows to erect a golden statue in memory of Juliet in Verona (309-13).

In the Capulets, Capulet and Lady Capulet are portrayed as caring parents towards their unique child. Juliet is even attended by a private nurse, who has been present since her birth. When Paris came for her, the father privileged his daughter's consent (13-20). After Tybalt's death, her grief caused the parents to postpone the wedding, showing their concern for her mood (1-31). Even the marriage with Paris was arranged to console her (*Romeo and Juliet* 3. 5.112-15). In truth, the Capulets are not as unfeeling as Juliet believes. An early discussion with her mother or father might have eased the situation, especially since Capulet himself held great admiration for Romeo.

The admiration exhibited by Capulet towards Romeo can be observed

even prior to the demise of the lovers. As early as the Capulet feast, Romeo was treated with kindness by Juliet's father, who even spoke graciously of him. Capulet warned Tybalt, "(...) Let him alone, / (...) And, to say truth, Verona brags of him / To be a virtuous and well-governed youth. / I would not for the wealth of all this town / Here in my house do him disparagement" (*Romeo and Juliet* 1. 5. 74-9). These remarks made by Capulet regarding Romeo's conduct and reputation indicate that his hostility is not aimed at the son of Montague, but rather at Montague himself. Such testimony from Capulet suggests that he would not have objected to his daughter's marriage to Romeo. The most remarkable aspect of his benevolence is demonstrated through the reconciliation at Juliet's tomb, when Capulet refers to Montague as his 'brother' (*Romeo and Juliet* 5. 3. 306-308), and he expresses admiration for the deceased Romeo lying beside Juliet, stating, "As rich shall Romeo's by his lady's lie, / Poor sacrifices of our enmity." (*Romeo and Juliet* 5. 3. 314-315). All in all, there were many ways to avert the tragedy of love, but secrecy has altered everything.

Conclusion

Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* depicts the tragic outcome of love. Therein, Shakespeare tends to raise awareness of the duality of love. Indeed, love can either lead to happiness or sadness. Its outcome mainly depends on the management of passion and the society. Throughout this study, it has been discovered that the tragic end of the play could have been avoided if the protagonists, especially Juliet and Romeo, had been open-minded and sought counsel rather than succumbing to their stubborn determination to reach their end in secret. Many opportunities were offered to be exploited. But the passion of the youth has taken the lead, overlooking prudence.

Marriage is a social matter. The secrecy surrounding love should not be absolute, as love is meant to be public. It cannot remain permanently hidden, regardless of the outcome, since it cannot be kept secret forever. Even in death, Juliet and Romeo's love has been exposed publicly, revealing what was kept secret during their lifetime. It is clear that there are many ways to prevent the tragic fate of Juliet and Romeo. Consequently, no situation is beyond negotiation; all it takes is the right approach and dialogue. Open conversation should lead, embracing open-mindedness and mutual understanding. Despite the common perception that the enmity between the

Montagues and Capulets is the root, one cannot ignore the role of secrecy. Excessive secrecy has fostered prejudice, turning good hearts into bad ones, and obstructing dialogue and negotiation. This article argues that the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet is not only a love tragedy but also a tragedy of secrecy nurtured by prejudice. Solitude, clandestineness, and voluntary concealment have contributed to this prejudice.

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