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ENG 581

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Research Plan: Rhetoric of Humor Paper – *Romeo & Juliet*: Comedy in Tragedy

TOPIC PROPOSAL

I plan to write about the comedic parts of one of Shakespeare's earliest tragedies, *Romeo & Juliet*. Even though it is technically a tragedy, some of my favorite parts of this play are the funny ones (or maybe I just have a weird sense of humor). "Everybody" dies but I find myself laughing at funny lines, outrageous characters, and the tension-relief, comic scenes. I would categorize this paper an evaluation (providing analysis and judgement on examples from the text itself).

WHY?

As a high school teacher who has taught *Romeo & Juliet* to 9th grade students every single year I have taught, most often in multiple sections of class each spring semester, I am intensely familiar with the play. However, I don't often get to delve this deeply into its analysis, as I am focused on helping students bridge the language gap to understand Shakespeare and keep track of both the characters and the plot complexity. I think it would be interesting to look at this play in a more advanced and scholarly light.

CLAIMS & EVIDENCE

I claim that this tragedy, while serious and sad, is also tremendously funny. I will specifically look at different types of humor (which I will outline below) and then use examples from the text and secondary analysis of other scholars to back up those claims.

CLAIMS –

- Characters like the Nurse (self-deprecating) and Mercutio (mocking) are integral to the humor
- Small scenes (like the musicians before Act V) provide comic relief through wordplay
- Bawdy humor between Capulet's men at the play's start, the Nurse's lines, etc.

EVIDENCE –

- Lines from the play
- Analysis of those lines
- Secondary commentary on Shakespearean humor

SKETCH

Background on the play and on humor-in-tragedy itself

Division of types of humor:

Bawdy (rude or sexual humor)

Wordplay (punning and contests of wit humor)

Derisive / Mocking (self-deprecating humor of particular characters/making-fun-of humor)

Comic Relief (tension relieving scenes, mostly with lesser characters and “extra” scenes)

A look at particular characters that play the “funny” roles

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Kermode, Frank. "Romeo and Juliet." *The Riverside Shakespeare*. By William Shakespeare and G.

Blakemore Evans. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974. 1055-057. Print.

- Kermode wrote the introductory material before *Romeo & Juliet* in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, possibly the most comprehensive collection of Shakespeare's works. He provides a sense of background and helps fit this particular work within the scope of Shakespeare's works.

Nason, Arthur H. "Shakespeare's Use of Comedy in Tragedy." *The Sewanee Review* 14.1 (1906):

28-37. Print.

- Nason's article is a quick look at how Shakespeare uses comedy even in tragedy and I was delighted to find it. It helps point out some ways that comedy is employed by Shakespeare and provides back up to know I was not alone in seeing the funny parts of otherwise tragic works. While it is not solely about *Romeo & Juliet*, it seems like a helpful source.

Tatum, Tom. "Cruel and Unusual PUNishment (LOW Humor Is Better than NO Humor)." *The*

English Journal 88.4 (1999): 62-64. Print.

- The most recent of the sources I have listed here, this examination of wordplay in has some great definitions I think I'll be able to make use of. While incredibly short, Tom Tatum highlights basic ways that wordplay works within writing.