

FROM ROSALINE TO JULIET: ROMEO'S ROMANTIC FICKLENESS IN *ROMEO AND JULIET*

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Abstract

In William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the evolution of the character of Romeo reflects a transformation from obsessive infatuation to true love, exposing the irrationality of youth and the fragility of emotions. In the beginning of the tragic drama, we find Romeo in his state of despair after being rejected by Rosaline, which only goes to confirm the shallowness and most likely temporary nature of his feelings. Only Juliet, the love of his life, can bring him to the edge of genuine and profound love. This transformation in the character of Romeo pushes the tragic story and explains the internal conflict faced by characters due to their own wishes, desires and societal expectations. The scheme of his romance with Juliet develops quickly, from their initial meeting to their instant marriage. However, this impulsiveness also leads to their downfall, as their love goes against the long-standing feud between the Montagues and Capulets. Shakespeare uses this character to show the irrationality of love and the power of forces pushing outside. The work is not confined to the analysis of romantic love and its reflection, but also looks at the strife of society that make, shape and eventually kill that love. Romeo appears as a means for Shakespeare's parallel yet different understanding of love – its beauty and its vulnerability, compelling readers to reflect on the power of love and the conditions that allow or prohibit it.

Keywords: *fickleness; impulse; Juliet; renaissance; Romeo; Shakespeare; tragedy*

1. Introduction

The complicated relationship between love ideals and emotional instability is clearly seen in the character of Romeo in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. At first, Romeo acts like a typical passionate lover, infatuated with Rosaline, showing obsession and youthful innocence linked with love (Shakespeare, 2021). His dramatic line, "Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight! / For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night" (Shakespeare, 2006), shows how deeply emotional he can be. This fleeting passion highlights his emotional instability, which sharply contrasts when he meets Juliet. Romeo's quick change in feelings shows how temporary young love can be, making him a tragic hero and a representation of the changing nature of teenage relationships (Bloom, 2010). This character change connects closely with the love norms of the Elizabethan era, adding richness to the story. By demonstrating Romeo's development, Shakespeare questions the idea of love being short-

lived and superficial, pushing viewers to rethink its reality against outside influences like family and society. This complex portrayal shows love as both appealing and fragile, giving critical insight into Elizabethan attitudes about romantic love (Greenblatt, 2012).

Romeo's romantic development also highlights the conflict between personal desire and social demands. His transition from Rosaline to Juliet reflects a larger generational struggle against family loyalty and cultural limits (Kasten, 1999). Shakespeare uses language and irony to emphasize the ridiculousness of Romeo's sudden emotional changes, prompting deeper thought on the difficulties of love and identity. When Romeo tells Juliet:

"My love is as boundless as the sea,
My love as deep; the more I give to thee,
The more I have, for both are infinite," (Shakespeare, 2006),

He shows how powerful their emotions can be. Their shared passion allows them to question societal norms and face the challenges in their path. Through Romeo's story, the play critiques romantic ideals and highlights the tension between individual emotions and communal responsibilities (Marcus, 2009). This exploration lifts *Romeo and Juliet* from a simple story to a significant commentary on human behavior, especially the ongoing clash between personal desires and social expectations (McDonald, 2017). By focusing on Romeo's love's uncertainty at the start, Shakespeare contrasts his initial weakness and confusion with the life-changing nature of true love, which helps him evolve from an unsure youth into a confident man.

"Deny thy father and refuse thy name;
Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,
And I'll no longer be a Capulet." (Shakespeare, 2006)

On one hand, Juliet's willingness to abandon her family's name and title echoes her rebellion against societal norms and familial obligations. She offers two solutions and demands that Romeo accept one of them: either to renounce his family name or to give her a guarantee of loyalty. Both options reflect Juliet's readiness to abandon everything for the sake of their love, reinforcing the authenticity of their passion and their determination to be together no matter the cost.

On the other hand, Juliet shows a more stable and dedicated perspective on love. When the Friar gives Juliet the potion to fake her death, she swiftly accepts the plan, demonstrating her love for Romeo:

Love give me strength! and strength shall help afford.
Farewell, dear father. (Shakespeare, 2006)

This strong determination highlights the play's investigation of love's complexities, showing Juliet as a stable figure in chaos. Together, Romeo and Juliet's adventure illustrates the continued significance of Shakespeare's work, emphasizing the universal battles between love, identity, and societal expectations.

2. Literature Review

Romeo's progression from fascination with Rosaline to profound love for Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* has been a focal point of scholarly analysis, explored through thematic,

psychological, linguistic, and cultural lenses. This review synthesizes insights from verified sources, examining the complexities of Romeo's transformation and its broader implications.

Early scholars such as Levin (1960) analyzed Romeo's linguistic evolution as a reflection of his emotional growth. Levin sees a clear change in Romeo's words, moving from the fancy and forced phrases he used while liking Rosaline to the more genuine and natural talk he has with Juliet. This linguistic transformation, as Levin notes, underscores Romeo's journey from theatrical infatuation to genuine love:

"Romeo's love for Juliet will have an immediacy which cuts straight through the verbal embellishment that has obscured his infatuation with Rosaline. That shadowy creature, having served her Dulcinea-like purpose, may well be forgotten" (Levin, 1960).

Building on this, Nevo (1969) interprets Juliet's active role in their relationship as revolutionary, contrasting sharply with Rosaline's passivity. Juliet's willingness to challenge societal norms and her dynamic participation in the romance enable a profound emotional connection between the two characters. Nevo also highlights Juliet's transformative impact on Romeo, allowing him to move beyond superficial notions of love and into a deeper, more authentic emotional state. However, Nevo emphasizes that Romeo's growth remains incomplete, with his impulsive tendencies driving the play's tragic resolution.

Levenson (1984) elaborates on the contrast between Rosaline and Juliet, arguing that Shakespeare deliberately juxtaposes the unrequited nature of Romeo's affection for Rosaline with Juliet's passionate reciprocity. Rosaline, according to Levenson, serves as a necessary prelude, representing a youthful and transient kind of love natural for Romeo's age. Juliet, by contrast, facilitates a more mature and reciprocal bond, transforming Romeo's understanding of love from an abstract concept to a lived reality.

Ryle (2005) examines Romeo's exaggerated expressions, such as "feather of lead" and "cold fire," while he's all caught up with Rosaline shows his not grown-up and fake view of love. Ryle says that Juliet liking him back helps Romeo grow, giving him a better look at real feelings. However, Ryle also notes that Romeo's impulsivity continues to shape his decisions, contributing to the tragic events of the play.

Lucking (2001) interprets Romeo's romantic volatility as emblematic of adolescent emotional development, viewing his swift transition from Rosaline to Juliet as reflective of the ephemeral nature of teenage infatuation. Lucking underscores that while Juliet brings emotional growth to Romeo, his immaturity remains evident in his impulsive actions.

More recently, Wallace (1991) and Hartley-Kroeger (2020) explore the cultural and psychological dimensions of Romeo's romantic evolution. Wallace examines how Rosaline and Juliet embody contrasting ideals of femininity, with Rosaline representing the distant muse of courtly love and Juliet subverting traditional archetypes by actively engaging in the romance. Hartley-Kroeger critiques Romeo's romantic instability, framing it as a reflection of youthful capriciousness. This aligns with Lucking's earlier argument about adolescent volatility but adds a contemporary perspective on identity formation and emotional growth. Through linguistic, psychological, and cultural lenses, the evolution of Romeo's feelings from Rosaline to Juliet showcases Shakespeare's sophisticated exploration of love's complexities. While Rosaline represents superficial infatuation, Juliet fosters profound emotional growth. Nevertheless, Romeo's recklessness and volatility underscore the tragic inevitability of his journey, solidifying Romeo and Juliet as a timeless study of human emotion.

3. Research Method

This paper uses a qualitative research method to gather and look at data, with a focus on William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* as the main source. Various secondary sources like academic studies, historical data, and critical analyses were chosen to give a full view of the play's themes and Romeo's change in romantic behavior. The data collection involved finding credible academic publications, peer-reviewed journals, and well-known Shakespearean works to ensure their trustworthiness and relevance.

The analysis method combines thematic, linguistic, and cultural viewpoints to examine Romeo's character change. Shakespeare's text was carefully read to find key passages showing Romeo's romantic evolution, and secondary sources were sorted by their thematic focus—psychological, linguistic, or cultural. Each secondary source was assessed for its role in the argument, emphasizing the connection between Romeo's relationships and the societal rules of Elizabethan England.

The study claims that Romeo's rapid emotional changes reflect a young man struggling with his identity and societal demands. Juliet's role sparks his development from a confused, thoughtless youth to a lover who chooses to give up his family, name, and reputation for her. The paper also looks at how Rosaline and Juliet shape Romeo's self-image, showing how Shakespeare critiques the unpredictability of youthful love and the controlling effects of true love. By merging ideas from primary and secondary sources, this analysis offers a detailed interpretation of Romeo's character.

4. Results and Discussion

The data collected from William Shakespeare's play, *Romeo and Juliet*, consists of quotations that examine the evolution of Romeo's romantic fickleness and his shift from Rosaline to Juliet. The analysis is divided into three main focuses: Romeo's Initial fascination with Rosaline, The Transition to Juliet, and a Critical Analysis of Romeo's Romantic Evolution. The play is rich in themes and situations reflecting Romeo's romantic innocence and immaturity, making it a valuable resource for understanding the playwright's intent in shaping Romeo's character this way.

4.1 Romeo's Initial Infatuation with Rosaline

In the beginning of the play Romeo's first feelings and crush on Rosaline is clearly different from his deeper emotions for Juliet. The first relationship is one-sided and is characterized by dramatic expressions of unrequited feelings as Rosaline took a vow of chastity as a result she will remain as an unattainable beauty for Romeo (Garber, 2008). When Romeo, 16-years-old boy, says, "Alas, that love, so gentle in his view, / Should be so tyrannous and rough in proof!" (Shakespeare, 2005, 1.1.172-173), denoting Romeo's melodramatic approach to love, his inexperience, and his suffering like any young boy when affected by love fever.

Romeo's desire for Rosaline is characterized by a deep sense of unrequited passion, the more Rosaline rejects him the more hopeless he feels. In Shakespeare's own expression Romeo refuses to mix with people and his suffering changes his behaviour in a way that he sleeps during the day by creating artificial nights for himself and wanders in the nearby forests as someone who lost a precious thing and tries to find it. Montague, Romeo's father, explains:

"Away from light seals home my heavy son, and private in his chamber pens himself, Shuts up his windows, locks fair daylight out, and makes himself an artificial night." (Shakespeare, 1597/2005)

Romeo laments, "She hath forsworn to love, and in that vow / Do I live dead" (Shakespeare, 1597/2005, 1.1.223-224), underlining the intensity and severity of his one-sided emotions for Rosaline. Benvolio, Romeo's cousin, describes Romeo's condition as one of hyper melancholy, "Amore lies like a withered hermit" (Shakespeare, 1597/2005, 1.1.160). Every single character has been utilized by William Shakespeare to demonstrate Romeo's suffering and his regrettable state is lamentable to let the reader understand the fickleness of Romeo's character after meeting Juliet in the Capulet's ball.

The contrast becomes visible when Romeo first sees Juliet. His language transforms tremendously, as he exclaims upon seeing her, "O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright! / It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night / Like a rich jewel in an Ethiope's ear" (Shakespeare, 1597/2005, 1.5.43-45). This poetic declaration marks a large shift from his previous melodramatic expressions about Rosaline (Bloom, 1998).

In his book *How to Fix a Broken Heart* (2018), the psychologist Guy Winch states that the aftermath of a breakup neurologically mirrors drug withdrawal, such as that experienced with heroin. Functional MRI studies reveal that heartbreak stimulates the same brain regions involved in substance withdrawal. This implies that romantic love works similarly to an addiction, and heartbreak triggers a withdrawal process from the person or relationship that once served as the "substance" (Winch, 2018).

The transformation is further stressed by Romeo's own recognition of his previous infatuation, as if he was unconcious and not aware about his deeds. When speaking to Friar Laurence, he admits his changing emotions: "Thou chid'st me oft for loving Rosaline" (Shakespeare, 1597/2005, 2.3.64), suggesting an awareness of the shallowness superficiality of his earlier feelings and his naïve behaviours. Friar Laurence observes Romeo's fickleness, adding, "Young men's love then lies / Not truly in their hearts, but in their eyes" (Shakespeare, 1597/2005, 2.3.67-68).

Rosaline, who is unresponsive to Romeo's attempts to get close, stands as a symbol of unachieveable goal and an impossible mission for Romeo, "I aim to borrow Cupid's wings" (Shakespeare, 1597/2005), and a desire that makes him feel depressed and sad. In those scenes where Shakespeare writes about Romeo and his crush on Rosaline, they are conveying a specific message that this love, if one can call it love, is a source for melancholy and suffering for Romeo. Shakespeare exaggerates Romeo's affection towards Rosaline and makes his stand in this love a public one by making everyone aware of Romeo's love-sickness, "Ay me! sad hours seem long" (Shakespeare, 1597/2005), from a psychological point of view the reader can comprehend that not only he is suffering, but also his suffering makes his days feel longer which is another evidence about Romeo's fickleness showing his weakness in understanding what he cannot achieve.

4.2 Examination of the language used to describe Rosaline

In William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Rosaline exists as a device or a dramatic structure, the audience cannot see her on stage or has any lines, and she is characterized by her absence like Godot in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, Rosaline's absence is such a significant absence and without her one cannot understand Romeo from a wider scope. The

linguistic portrayal of Rosaline reveals sophisticated layers of Petrarchan love conventions and Romeo's immature romantic perception (Garber, 2008).

Here's much to do with hate, but more with love.
Why then, O brawling love, O loving hate,
O anything of nothing first create;
O heavy lightness, serious vanity
Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms,
Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire,
sick health, Still-waking sleep, that is not what it is!
This love feel I, that feel no love in this.
Dost thou not laugh? (Shakespeare, 2006)

Marjorie Garber in her *Shakespeare After All*, states, "This is the language of Petrarchan formula, empty paradoxes and oxymorons — cold fire, sick health—stale poetic images that say nothing and mean nothing." When Romeo speaks to Benvolio and says, "This love feel I, that feel no love in this." It means that Romeo himself believes that this is not love because the feeling lacks genuine affection, which can be considered as another proof that Romeo is fickle and his feelings are not authentic enough to love someone.

In his early depictions of Rosaline, Romeo used exaggerated and contradicted language (hyperbole and paradox) which are rooted in the traditional courtly love model, "Out of her favor, where I am in love." (Shakespeare, 2006). Romeo's position in Rosaline's case is not that of a young boy who was turned down by a girl; rather it is that of a person who is unable to win the girl he loves because of outside factors (religion). If there was straight and obvious lines where Rosaline declares that she does not love Romeo, his situation might not have been bad and empathetic as it is:

"She is too fair, too wise, wisely too fair,
To merit bliss by making me despair.
She hath forsworn to love, and in that vow
Do I live dead, that live to tell it now." (Shakespeare, 2006)

The language that is utilized by Romeo to describe Rosaline is mainly performative, highlighting Romeo's romantic immaturity. When Romeo tells Benvolio that he is in love he uses the metaphor of a sickman, "Bid a sick man in sadness make his will: / Ah, word ill-urged to one that is so ill! / In sadness, cousin, I do love a woman." (Shakespeare, 2006). Romeo admits that he is in love and instead of making him happy, this love makes him sick and suffering under its burden:

"I am too sore enpierced with his shaft
To soar with his light feathers; and so bound
I cannot bound a pitch above dull woe:
Under love's heavy burden do I sink." (Shakespeare, 2006)

After witnessing Romeo's suffering, Benvolio, "Amore lies like a withered hermit" (Shakespeare, 1597/2005), hints a self-indulgent melodrama that is more about the performance of love and playing the part of lovers than genuine emotional depth (Bloom, 1998). It is interesting to mention that after 428 years of the first publication of *Romeo and Juliet*, people still embed Romeo's in their idiomatic expressions and daily conversations, and

some of those expressions present Romeo as pejorative, for example, people nowadays use "Romeo Syndrome" when referring to someone who is romantically impulsive or naïve (Urban Dictionary, n.d.).

These linguistic choices serve multiple dramatic purposes. They not only characterize Romeo's emotional immaturity but also provide a stark contrast to the more genuine, reciprocal language he later uses to describe Juliet (Evans, 1991).

Friar Laurence: God pardon sin! Wast thou with Rosaline?

Romeo: With Rosaline, my ghostly father? No,

I have forgot that name and that name's woe. (Shakespeare, 2006)

Romeo's explicit admission that he had "forgotten" his former flame, Rosaline, shows his fickleness; he has nearly forgotten that Rosaline is a real person, to him, she is now simply a name. In the opening scenes of *Romeo and Juliet* the reader witnesses how Romeo is suffering because of his unrequited love for Rosaline, then notices that Romeo is not bringing up her name just to comprehend the changing character of Romeo and his Indifference.

4.3 The Transition to Juliet

4.3.1 The sudden shift in Romeo's affections:

First, the depth of Romeo and Juliet's connection is apparent in their first meeting, where Romeo says, "My love as deep; the more I give to thee, / The more I have, for both are infinite" (Shakespeare, 1597/2005). This is significant as it is not a shift from Rosaline to Juliet, but also it can be regarded as a change in Romeo's language compared to the language that he used to speak about Juliet.

Second, In the story of *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet's change from a idle character to a person who is wide-eyed, her relationship with Romeo gives her power to fight for what she desires without giving any importance to the fact that Romeo is from a rival household. At first, she is seen as an submissive daughter limited by her family's expectations and their obedient, "My mother is my lady toward whom my duty / Is strong" (Shakespeare, 1597/2004). In the beginning, readers see a 13-years-old girl who is dutiful to her family and for her family's fame and reputation come first. However, as she discovers true love, she begins to challenge social norms with her newfound strength, i.e., Romeo. This shift from an obedient character into someone who uses her voice is crystal clear when she asks Romeo to marry her, challenging the patriarchal regulations of her family: "If that thy bent of love be honourable, / Thy purpose marriage, send me word tomorrow" (Shakespeare, 1597/2004). From the Prologue of *Romeo and Juliet* Shakespeare made it clear that the reader/audience will witness a tragedy, and in this tragedy of character, Juliet plays a pivotal role in helping Shakespeare to create a destiny for both Romeo and Juliet that is sorrowful, "From forth the fatal loins of these two foes, / A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life." (Shakespeare, 2006).

Although, there is not enough information regarding Juliet's previous romantic relationships except for her family intentions for her marriage with Paris, yet the more Juliet falls in Romeo's love the more she remotes herself from Elizabethan norms of family and society, here Juliet addresses her mother, Lady Capulet, challenges her parents that the only person whom she will marry is Romeo which is a significant transformation in Juliet's personality, on one hand:

I will not marry yet; and, when I do, I swear
It shall be Romeo, whom you know I hate,
Rather than Paris. These are news indeed! (Shakespeare, 2006)

On the other hand, the readers encounter Romeo in different romantic situation which makes it difficult to decide about the seriousness of his feelings, at first he is infatuated with Rosaline, lamenting, "Thou canst not teach me to forget" (Shakespeare, 1597/2004), but then his quick move to Juliet shows his fickle nature. His sudden transformation is clear when he remarks, "Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight! / For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night" (Shakespeare, 1597/2004). In contrast, Juliet's feelings are deep and she seems to be more stable when it comes to her emotions towards Romeo, "My bounty is as boundless as the sea, / My love as deep" (Shakespeare, 1597/2004). Marjorie Garber in her *Shakespeare After All* (2008) states that Shakespeare created a symmetrical play and every single character or object has been presented to serve a specific purpose, the pair Romeo and Rosaline are aligned with Juliet and Paris to differentiate between a simple affection and a deep love:

In fact, in this very symmetrically designed play, the difference between doting and loving is a principal reason why we are first shown Romeo infatuated with someone other than Juliet. Doting on Rosaline, Romeo, in the imitable pattern of Petrarchan lovers, is comfortable only in the dark. When dawn comes he "[s]huts up his windows, locks fair daylight out, / And makes himself an artificial night" (1.132–133). Artifice is "art," but it is also make-believe—this is an artificial night for an artificial love. (Garber, 2008)

4.3.2 Comparative analysis of Romeo's language for Rosaline versus Juliet:

Romeo's feelings for Rosaline can be seen by infatuation, sickness, unrequited yearning, and feeling pity for himself, while Romeo's love for Juliet features exchanged admiration, depth, and transformative passion. Rosaline represents a far, passive, and idealized figure, whereas Juliet becomes the incarnation of love, active, and shared loyalty. To make this point clearer, the scholar will provide three different occasions to show Romeo's transition from infatuation to genuine love.

Data 1:

When Romeo describes Rosaline, he believes her beauty is unmatched and uses hyperbole to exaggerate how flawless Rosaline is, showing infatuation. In Act 1, Scene 1, Romeo describes Rosaline in aesthetic terms: "She is rich in beauty, only poor / That, when she dies, with beauty dies her store." This metaphor implies he views her as an object of beauty, limiting Rosaline's worth to her physical appearance and the fleeting nature of her attractiveness.

"One fairer than my love! The all-seeing sun
Ne'er saw her match since first the world begun."
(Shakespeare, 2006, Act I, Scene II)

However, when Romeo speaks about Juliet, his language sounds more measured and authentic, preventing himself from using hyperbolic expressions as a sign of the genuineness of his feelings.

"Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight!

For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night."

(Shakespeare, 2006, Act I, Scene V)

Data 2:

Rosaline for Romeo serves as a source of pain and despair and this unrequited love makes his days long and isolated him from others. It seems that Romeo thought differently about love and his perspective regarding it was a positive one, yet his love Rosaline is anything but love!

"This love feel I, that feel no love in this."

(Shakespeare, 2006, Act I, Scene I)

As we outlined in the previous sections, Romeo's transformation after meeting Juliet extends beyond verbal and expressive variations; it also followed by shifts in Romeo's attitude regarding family and friends. He describes his love for Juliet as empowering and uplifting, and there no self-pity anymore in his expressions.

"With love's light wings did I o'erperch these walls;

For stony limits cannot hold love out."

(Shakespeare, 2006, Act II, Scene II)

Data 3:

In Rosaline's case, 16-years-old Romeo has not time to think like a young man who loves a girl, and the reader cannot find instances in which Romeo attempts to physically approach Rosaline. This goes beyond logical understandings about love in the youth world that must bring delight and joy but rather a mere source of grief:

"In sadness, cousin, I do love a woman."

(Shakespeare, 2006, Act I, Scene I)

Unlike Rosaline, Romeo's first encounter with Juliet is passionate and immediately makes Romeo's flame burn bright as a young man. This indicates his longing for a real partner and someone who can upgrade him from a fickle boy into a stable man who is ready to die for the sake of his love:

"If I profane with my unworhiest hand

This holy shrine, the gentle fine is this:

My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand

To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss."

(Shakespeare, 2006, Act I, Scene V)

5. Conclusion

Romeo's thoughts on love demonstrate how strong and short-lived young feelings can be, influenced by what society thinks and what his personal desires ask for. Romeo's change from liking Rosaline to truly connecting with Juliet shows how volatile young love is and the immense impact of real passion. By quickly marrying Juliet and fronting Tybalt,

Romeo shows that acting on feelings right away can cause grave problems. Shakespeare points out Romeo's mood swings as well as the cultural ideas of love and honour, showing how these ideas push people to make destructive choices.

The play shows love as something that can uplift but also bring danger, leading to deep pledges but also tragic ends. Romeo's path explores love's complications, looking at how reason and feelings, head and heart fight against each other. The conflict between what people want and what society expects is key since Romeo and Juliet's relationship goes against family loyalty and social rules. Shakespeare uses this struggle to comment on the family conflicts of his day, pushing readers and audience to think about the damage these combats cause.

In the end, Romeo's story highlights the sweet yet miserable nature of love that can both uplift and destroy. Shakespeare's choice for a tragic ending sends a strong message to families and societies about needing to find peace to stop more pain, while also encouraging the youth to avoid rushing into decisions based solely on passion when addressing future challenges. Through Romeo's growth, the play serves as a lasting discussion about youth struggles and the continuing quest for real relationships in a divided world.

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