LITERARY ANALYSIS: SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA

You can probably guess that a tragedy isn’t going to end with the words “and they all lived happily ever after.” Shakespearean tragedies are dramas that end in disaster—most often death—for the main characters. The conflicts in a tragedy are usually set in motion by the main characters’ actions, but fate can also play a part in the catastrophic course of events. As you read Romeo and Juliet, pay attention to specific characteristics of Shakespearean drama.

• Notice what soliloquies and asides reveal about the characters. Reading these is like being around when someone is “thinking out loud”—you may learn valuable information about characters’ private thoughts.

• Watch for and analyze allusions. Once you decode them, they add an extra layer of meaning to certain passages.

• Consider Shakespeare’s use of comic relief to ease the tension of certain scenes. Think of the comic episodes as brief breaks that allow you to absorb earlier events in the plot and get ready for new developments.

• Pay attention to the rhythm of each line. Shakespeare wrote his plays in blank verse, a poetic form that resembles the rhythm of natural speech.

READING STRATEGY: READING SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA

Though his plays can sweep you away, Shakespeare’s English is sometimes hard for modern readers to understand. These strategies can help:

• Read the synopsis, or summary, of each scene to get an idea of what happens in that part of the play.

• Use the marginal notes to figure out the meanings of unfamiliar words, unusual grammatical structures, and allusions.

• Keep track of events to make the plot easier to follow. All the events in Romeo and Juliet take place in six days. As you read, use a chart to record plot developments and interactions between characters.

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