

# Selected Papers of the Ohio Valley Shakespeare Conference

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Volume 13

Article 3

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2023

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### Recommended Citation

George, David (2023) "A Double Time in Romeo and Juliet: Juliet's Rapid Maturity," *Selected Papers of the Ohio Valley Shakespeare Conference*: Vol. 13, Article 3.

Available at: <https://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/spovsc/vol13/iss1/3>

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## A Double Time in *Romeo and Juliet*: Juliet's Rapid Maturity

David George, *Urbana University*

**T**he timeline of events in *Romeo and Juliet* is squeezed into six days in mid-July:

**Saturday night**, Romeo spends his time outdoors mooning about Rosalind (1.4).

**Sunday**, Capulet and Montague's servants brawl in the streets of Verona. Evening, the Capulets hold a ball and Romeo and Juliet fall in love in their famous balcony scene (2.2).

**Monday**, Romeo consults with Friar Lawrence (2.3). Romeo and Juliet are married (2.6). A street brawl kills Mercutio and Tybalt (3.1). Romeo and Juliet's wedding night (3.2).

**Tuesday**, Romeo flees to Mantua; Juliet's wedding to County Paris is set for Thursday (3.5). Juliet consults Friar Lawrence and receives a sleeping potion (4.1). Juliet swallows it (4.3).

**Wednesday**, Juliet is discovered in bed and assumed to be dead (4.5).

**Thursday**, Romeo buys poison from an Apothecary (5.1). Friar John reports his failure to get Friar Lawrence's letter to Romeo (5.2). Romeo reaches the Verona churchyard and kills County Paris; Friar Lawrence enters the church tomb; Romeo drinks poison; Juliet awakes and commits suicide (5.3).

**Friday**, Friar Lawrence, Prince Escalus, and the Capulets and Montagues arrive at the tomb. Montague and Capulet agree to erect statues of Romeo and Juliet (5.3).<sup>1</sup>

Shakespeare read two main sources for *Romeo and Juliet* (c. 1594). He chiefly used Arthur Brooke's *Tragicall Historie of Romeus and Juliet* (1562), but also consulted William Painter's *The goodly Historie of the true and constant Loue between RHOMEO and IVLietta*, Novell 25, in volume II of his *Palace of Pleasure* (1567). Whether Shakespeare made much use of Painter's account is hard to say; he ignored Julietta's a stern warning to Rhomeo after he approaches her home at night: "but if your intent be otherwyse [than marriage], and thinke to reape the Fruycte of my Virginitie, vnder pretense of wanton Amity, you be greatly deceiued, and doe pray you to auoide and suffer me from henceforth to lyue and rest amongs myne equals" (85-8).<sup>2</sup>

Brooke initially chose as the tragedy's cause the couple's "neglecting the authoritie and advise of parents and frendes" and "by all meanes of dishonest lyfe, hastyng to most unhappye death" (Preface). Once he got into his poem, however, he turned to Dame Fortune as the power that dooms the unlucky lovers. Thus Juliet fears their clandestine bridal night: "But now what is decreed by fatal destiny, / I force it not, let Fortune do and death their worst to me" (859-60). Romeus similarly harps on Fortune: "Though cruell Fortune be so much my dedly foe . . . Fortune of her grace hath place and time assigned / Where we with pleasure may content our uncontented minde" (865, 881-2). In fact, Fortune's role is mentioned more often than any other power in Brooke's poem: "fatal sisters three" (501); "tickel Fortune" (1406); "froward Fortune" (1447); "Fortune's wheel" (1471); "frail unconstant Fortune" (1471); "Fortune's cruel will" (1592); "th'assaults of Fortune" (2041); "Fortune's scorn" (2353); "spiteful Fortune" (2746); "frantic Fortune's rage" (2892). These allusions are made by Romeo, Juliet, and even the Friar. The play reduces these to ten.

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations and references to *Romeo and Juliet* are from *The Complete Signet Classic Shakespeare*. Ed. Sylvan Barnet. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1972.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Brooke, *The Tragicall Historie of Romeus and Juliet*. shakespearebrasileiro. org

In fact, Shakespeare took a hint from Brooke concerning another force at work behind the tragedy. Brooke congratulates Romeus that “by happy starre / Art comme in sight of quiet haven” (Juliet’s bedroom) (p. 800), but this is before the consummation of the marriage.<sup>2</sup> In fact, as Shakespeare’s Prologue tells us, they are a “pair of star-crossed lovers” (l. 6). Also, Romeo has a premonition even before he meets Juliet that “Some consequence, yet hanging in the stars, / Shall bitterly begin his fearful date / With this night’s revels” (1.4.107-9).

It was, however, not the stars that affected human behavior, but the seven planets. As the *Oxford English Dictionary* explains under “Planet. †1. *Old Astron[omy]*”: “A heavenly body distinguished from the fixed stars by having an apparent motion of its own among them.” The planets were often confused with the stars, but it was the planets that moved. Before Romeo decides to commit suicide in the Monument tomb, he cries, “O, here / Will I set up my everlasting rest / And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars / From this world-weary flesh” (5.3.109-12). What he means are the planets; if his and Juliet’s had been in the same quadrant of the sky, their horoscopes would have been auspicious, but lined up in opposition, they emit cross-influences and lightning-strikes.<sup>3</sup>

According to John W. Draper, Juliet was born on “Lammas-eve at night” [July 31], a time when the sun was in the house of Leo. Those born under Leo were supposed to be choleric and passionate if not incontinent, inclined to be stout and often barren; and the type was associated with youth and summer. But Draper prefers to describe Juliet “of a hot, passionate temperament. She falls in love with Romeo at first sight, and she even dares to gainsay her father’s orders to his face . . . Her planet should be Mars or the sun; and with the latter the text constantly associates her.” Draper gave up on Mars, however, and cites six allusions to her being influenced by the Sun. Romeo “first appears as an example of the melancholy type, and so suffers under the influence of Saturn, which was styled ‘the greatest infortune’.” He is “heavy” and “cannot bound a pitch

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<sup>3</sup> *OED*, Star. sb.1, 1.3: “In Astrology, used of planets and zodiacal constellations, as supposed to influence human affairs. One’s star or stars: the planet or constellation which, by its position at the moment of a man’s birth, sways his destinies, moulds his temperament, etc.”

above dull woe,” but in the last four acts” returns to his innate quickly returns to his innate merry self the effects of his sanguine humour.”<sup>4</sup>

(In passing, no one to my knowledge has ever found an early illustration of opposed planets striking each other with lightning.) Shakespeare was also referring to what he knew his audiences believed, that it was important for the lovers or their parents to consult the horoscopes before a couple married or undertook any important venture in life. As Philippa Berry noted, “far from being either careful readers of almanacs or observant Catholics, the lovers [in *Romeo and Juliet*] fail to observe a range of different calendrical signals that might conceivably have altered their fates.”<sup>5</sup>

The theme of haste in the play is minor: Romeo and Juliet mention it once each, and so we can boil down Brooke’s ideas of the tragedy’s cause to Capulet’s sense of urgency (four repetitions), Fortune’s wheel, and inauspicious stars. For the “ancient grudge” of Capulet and Montague, Shakespeare had to look at Matteo Bandello’s tale of Romeo and Giulietta in *Le Nouvelle*, Part 2, Novella 9 (1554), or he could have found it in William Painter’s *Palace of Pleasure* (II, 25th Novell, 87-93).

Bandello emphasizes how between “the Montecchi and the Cappelletti . . . there existed a fierce and bloody feud,” and that their followers “augment their mutual hate.” Thus performance directors can choose three driving powers for the tragic result: a disobedient Romeo and Juliet, crossed stars, and the fierce and bloody feud of the Montagues and Capulets. Yet none of these have mattered much in stage productions. “Strangely, we are never told the roots of the ‘ancient grudge between Montagues and Capulets even though it is so central to the action.”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Romeo and Juliet*. San Diego: Greenhaven, 1998. Pp. 121-3.

<sup>5</sup> “Between Idolatry and Astrology.” *Modes of Temporal Repetition in Romeo and Juliet*. *Region, Religion and Patronage: Lancastrian Shakespeare*. Ed. Richard Dutton, Alison Findlay and Richard Wilson. Manchester: University Press, 2003. Pp. 69-83.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Russell J. Bodi, “Lessons from a Street-Fighter: Reconsidering *Romeo and Juliet*,” Chap. 8, *Shakespeare on Stage and Off*. Ed. Kenneth Graham and Alysia Kolentzis. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2019. P. 111: “especially in staged combat, the verbal exchanges preceding all fighting underscores the ritualized, remarkably intimate, enduring aspect of combat.” Abram, a Montague, “begins the belligerent thrust and parry of words that leads in turn to swordplay, signifying the nature of gentle warfare” (qtd. from Dymphna Callaghan, ed., *Romeo and Juliet: Texts and Contexts*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2003).

Shakespeare might also have glanced at Luigi da Porto's *Giulietta e Romeo* (c. 1530), which is filled with Catholic piety and hypocrisy (street-fighting, deception of parents, secret marriage, abuse of the confessional, suicide, lying) and the chicanery of Friar Lorenzo. He toned down the Catholicism and chicanery considerably, but he knew this Italian tradition and adopted from it quite a few details of the Catholic faith. Brooke adopted almost none, though Romeus speaks of "Lord Christ," the Father, and Mary before he takes poison.

A glance at the play's opening scene shows that it starts with Bandello's observation that the servants have imbibed their masters' hate, and soon a fight breaks out between the rival followers of the Capulets and Montagues. (Notably the Capulets and Tybalt start the hostilities, and do so again in act 3, scene 1).<sup>7</sup> So Shakespeare probably preferred "the continuance of their parents' rage" as one force driving the deaths of their offspring, but when he read Painter's version, he could find no trace of Dame Fortune or her turning wheel. Hence we can omit Fortune's wheel because the play never mentions it. Instead, Painter blames Love seizing on "any kynde & gentle subiect" and, finding no resistance to his violent course, slowly undermines the "vertues of natural powers" until the victim's spirit yields to the burden. By this logic, the couple's instant and all-consuming attraction to each other causes them to die together.

Still, given the Prologue's "ancient grudge," much more evident is the force of intense love (which starts in Act 1, scene 5) being a key to the play's success. Audiences and readers always remember the scenes of passion more than they recall the feud. The balcony scene (2.2), the parting at dawn (3.5), and the Monument scene are full of opportunities for moving the audience to deep sympathy and tears, and also of oft-quoted lines. Interestingly, these are all night scenes; "love is entirely a thing of the night and is morbidly bound up with death."<sup>8</sup>

In the sources, Juliet is a little stronger than Rhomeo in Painter's version; she tells Romeo when he approaches her house, "Signor Rhomeo, me thinke that you hazarde your persone too much, and commit the same

<sup>7</sup>"Romeo and Juliet: Playing Shakespeare with Deutsche Bank." Shakespeare's Globe, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Philip Parsons, "Shakespeare and the Mask." *Shakespeare Survey* 16 (1963): 124.

into great danger at this time of the night, to protrude your self to the mercy of them which meane you little good” (220).

However, recent critics have claimed that Juliet matures as the play proceeds. Back in 1932, Dover Wilson claimed that Shakespeare “had not yet learnt how to make characters develop [until after 1599]; he was not to understand spiritual growth until he had experienced it in himself.”<sup>9</sup> In 1988, Peter Levi found Juliet in 3.2 “mature at a blow, and the tragedy which is to run its course begins to be audible in her verse,” quoting lines 5-16.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Jay Halio in 1998 expanded this observation: “Romeo is thoroughly smitten, and rightly so; but we learn along with him that there is much more to Juliet than her external beauty and charm. She is, or becomes, a woman of stature as well. If, in her eagerness in 2.5 to get the Nurse to tell her what Romeo has said, she reveals an impetuosity more characteristic of early teenagers than grown women, by the time she has married Romeo and awaits him that evening, she has matured considerably. Compare her soliloquy at the start of 2.5 with that at the beginning of 3.2. Her anxiety in the former is far more girlish than in the latter, as she impatiently awaits the return of the Nurse.” She loves excessively, as shown in 3.2; here she is “no longer a teenager but a married woman awaiting consummation, her fulfillment as a bride. The rhythms of her verse are stronger, and its mood imperative. Her wit is sharp; her imagery concrete and vivid. This is a woman who knows what she is and what she wants, and her impatience, unlike the impatience of 2.5, is the impatience of eager anticipation and expectation, not of childish anxiety. Her specific reference to childhood shows awareness of the situation — another sign of maturity — as it highlights her feelings: ‘So tedious is the day / As is the night before some festival / To an impatient child that hath new robes / And may not wear them’” (3.2.28-31). After she is shocked to learn that Romeo has killed Tybalt, she quickly recovers her love for Romeo and “by her language and her actions Juliet has taken control of this scene.”<sup>11</sup>

Halio’s insight was followed by Lee Jamieson’s in 2019: “As [Juliet] develops, at lightning speed, she moves into the realm of being one of

<sup>9</sup>*The Essential Shakespeare*. Cambridge: University Press, 1932. P. 86.

<sup>10</sup>Jay Halio, *Romeo and Juliet: A Guide to the Play*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1998. Pp. 40-1, 50.

<sup>11</sup>“A Character Profile of Juliet from ‘Romeo and Juliet,’” ThoughtsCo [on line], 19 Oct. 2019.

Shakespeare's strong women. The demure, respectful obedient girl's inner strength now comes fully into play. . . . When Juliet visits Friar Laurence she displays remarkable courage, first in her assertion that she would kill herself rather than marry Paris, something she means, and then in her willingness to accept the hazardous plan of the reckless friar."<sup>12</sup>

Yet how can Juliet mature so fast in a matter of days? She appears in in 1.3, 1.5, 2.2, 2.5, 3.2, 3.5, 4.1, 4.3, and 5.3. She is cautious about Paris in 1.3 and about Romeo's kisses in 1.5. In 2.2, she calls her quick contract with Romeo "too rash, too unadvised, too sudden"; in 2.5 she is certain that she wants to be married to Romeo, and in 3.2 she quickly recovers from the shock of Tybalt's death. In 3.5, she senses that she has a true vision of Romeo dead in a tomb. In 4.1, she has a dagger ready for her suicide if she has to marry Paris, and in 4.3 bravely swallows the sleeping potion. Finding Romeo poisoned in 5.3, she kisses his lips but then, hearing noise, stabs herself to avoid being taken to a convent. As the play proceeds, she "is as much the wooer and the wooed"; "her excess of love reveals itself fully in 3.2 as she awaits the arrival of her husband."<sup>13</sup>

Her rapid maturity can only be attributed to "double time," first investigated by A. C. Bradley in 1904. Bradley thought that *Othello* was the first time Shakespeare employed two levels of time.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Halio, pp. 40-1.

<sup>13</sup> Bradley wrote. "The main difficulty . . . is that, according to one set of indications (which I will call A), Desdemona was murdered within a day or two of her arrival in Cyprus, while, according to another set (which I will call B), some time elapsed between her arrival and the catastrophe." From a summary of the play's events, Bradley concludes that

"the time between the arrival in Cyprus and the catastrophe is . . . most probably only about a day and a half." But he complains that Cassio has kept away from her by a week and yet Iago claims that Desdemona has committed adultery with Cassio frequently. Iago also mentions Cassio's dream, implying that he has been sleeping close to Cassio "lately" after arriving in Cyprus. The sense of these time-markers is that "probably a few weeks" must have elapsed for the Venetians on Cyprus.

The source of this contradiction is Shakespeare's use of "Short Time," since "it is grossly improbable that Iago's intrigue should not break down if Othello spends a week or weeks between the successful temptation and his execution of justice." "Long Time" is required "because the intrigue and its circumstances presuppose a marriage consummated, and an adultery possible, for (let us say) some weeks." Either someone tampered with the play in 1622 (the date of the first quarto), six years after Shakespeare's death; or "possibly, Shakespeare's original plan was to allow some time to elapse after the arrival at Cyprus, but when he reached this point he found it troublesome to indicate this lapse in an interesting way. . . . Perhaps he said to himself, "No one in the theatre will notice that all this makes an impossible position." The tampering "seems the less unlikely," and the second theory means that Shakespeare did what he seems to have done in no other play he wrote.

<sup>14</sup> "The Problem of Time in *Othello*," shakespeare-online.com, 1-2.



However, he had done it in *Romeo and Juliet*; his most theatrical plays, “like *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*, have a fantastic energy and speed of plot that lead the audience irresistibly on.”<sup>15</sup> The action occupies five days of *Romeo and Juliet*’s lives, but *Juliet* grows up into maturity over what seem many weeks. Brooke extends their first acquaintance and romance over a spring and into September. A trace of this length of time is given by Capulet to Paris: “Such comfort as do lusty young men feel / When well-appareled April on the heel / Of limping winter treads, even such delight / Among fresh fennel buds shall you this night / Inherit at my house” (1.2.26-30). It seems that “Shakespeare made significant changes to the story’s timeline in order to enhance the dramatic momentum, give the lovers’ plight a sense of urgency, and add suspense. Shakespeare’s play gallops apace; Brooke’s poem trots along at a slow and steady tempo. . . . Shakespeare compresses what takes at least nine months to unfold in Brooke’s poem into four days (Sunday through Thursday morning), giving the central relationship a new intensity and putting added pressure on the entire sequence of events. In Brooke’s poem, *Romeo* meets *Juliet* at Capulet’s feast and then passes by *Juliet*’s window ‘a weeke or two in vayne’ before speaking to her at length. . . . Brooke gives *Romeo* and *Juliet* time to enjoy their marital bliss.”<sup>16</sup>

As for *Tybalt*, he does not appear in Brooke’s poem until his fight with *Romeo*. “Shakespeare also came up with the idea of having *Tybalt* kill *Mercutio* and using that murder to motivate *Romeo*’s attack on *Tybalt*.” In 1.2, Capulet invites Paris to his ball, but Brooke does not mention him until after *Tybalt*’s death; in 1.3, the Nurse appears, but Brooke introduces her at the ball; in 1.4, *Romeo*, *Mercutio*, and *Benvolio* put on disguises to attend the ball, a scene lacking in Brooke.

*Mercutio* makes a brief appearance as a guest at the ball in Brooke, but Shakespeare gives him his Queen Mab speech, his teasing of *Romeo* after the ball, and his death under *Romeo*’s arm (3.1). He also gives Paris more scenes: his presence at Friar Lawrence’s cell (4.1), and his entry at the Monument in 5.3 to take *Romeo* prisoner as a felon, which attempt costs him his life.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Wood, *Shakespeare*. New York: Basic Books, 2003. P. 239.

<sup>16</sup> *Shakespearean Tragedy*. Glasgow: University Press, 1905. Pp. 149-77, 178-207.

Yet it is Juliet who is most transformed. In Brooke, she whispers to Romeus at the ball, “You are no more your own, dear friend, than I am yours, / My honour saved, prest t’obey your will, while life endures” (314-15). A little later, weeping alone, she reproaches herself: “Ah, silly fool, quoth she, ‘y-caught in subtle snare! / Ah, wretchéd wench, bewrapt in woe! Ah, caitiff clad with care!” (382-4). She fears that Romeus may be a snake, his speech a poisoned hook “wrapt in the pleasant bait,” and that she may become the laughing-stock of Verona. But then she decides that Romeus is sincere and may marry her, and that the new alliance may procure a lasting peace between the Capulets and Montagues. She says nothing like this in the play.

By contrast, in Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet are so instantly attuned that they speak a mutual sonnet: Romeo begins, “If I profane with my unworthiest hand / This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this: / My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand / To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.” Juliet is ready with the next four lines: “Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much, / Which mannerly devotion show in this; / For saints have hands that pilgrims’ hands do touch, / And palm to palm is holy palmers’ kiss.” Romeo, however, wants to kiss her: “Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?” and Juliet corrects him: “Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.” The sonnet ends at its fourteenth line with a couplet, but then there follow four more lines that include two kisses. Juliet’s tart summation is “You kiss by th’ book,” meaning that she thinks Romeo is following some kind of text to get his second kiss (1.5.95-112).

In the Balcony scene, speaking to herself, Juliet ruminates on Romeo’s belonging to the Montague family. She wishes he would “doff thy name; / And for thy name, which is no part of thee, / Take all myself” (2.2.47-9), and adds, “I should have been more strange, I must confess” (2.2.102). In her next scene, she is naively optimistic about her marriage: “Hie to high fortune!” (2.5.79). After Romeo kills Tybalt, she is devastated, but soon recovers her commitment to Romeo, telling the Nurse to “Give this ring to my true knight / And bid him come to take his last farewell” (3.2.142-3). And as that farewell takes place on the balcony, she foresees how the marriage will end: “Methinks I see thee, now thou art so low, / As one dead in the bottom of a tomb” (3.5.55-6). Then she firmly refuses her mother’s offer of Paris as her next husband: “I pray you tell my lord and

father, madam, / I will not marry yet” and vows that “If all else fail, myself have power to die” (3.5.121-2, 244). At her suicide in the Monument scene, she seizes Romeo’s dagger and calls it “happy” (5.3.170) — a strong contrast with Romeo’s suicide, who calls his poison “bitter conduct” and “unsavory guide” to a desperate death (5.3.116-17).

There is no doubt of Juliet’s commitment and courage in the face of Romeo’s banishment and death. Romeo borrows much from her; “his paradoxes, his puns, even his lamentations in the Friar’s cell, are borrowed things, as his mature friends know; yet Romeo’s ‘misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms’ is catalyzed into inchoate poetry whenever Juliet comes upon the scene, and in the end he achieves in her presence a man’s power to act if not a man’s gift of discretion.”<sup>17</sup>

By contrast, in the scene where she finds Romeo dead, Brooke’s Juliet weeps gushing tears, tears her hair, and kisses his mouth a thousand times. Then she speaks twenty-seven lines, accusing “spiteful Fortune” of appointing Romeo to become “the dainty food of greedy worms.” She bids the tomb to bear witness in the future to “the most perfect league betwixt a pair of lovers, / That were the most unfortunate and fortunate of others, / Receive the latter sigh, receive the latter pang / Of the most cruel of cruel slaves that wrath and death aye wrang” (2734-61).

Shakespeare was well aware of Brooke’s slow timeline, and so he creates the illusion of Juliet increasing, over a much shorter period, her sense that her marriage will end badly. But to make the play’s accidents tumble one after another, hastening the tragic conclusion as inevitable, he shortened the timeline again. Yet the Chorus notes that “Being held a foe, [Romeo] may not have access / To breathe such vows as lovers use to swear, / And she as much in love, her means much less / To meet her new beloved anywhere; / But passion lends them power, time means, to meet, / Temp’ring extremities with extreme sweet” (2.1.9-14). Again, Romeo believes that Tybalt’s slaying of Mercutio will entail a long period of justice: “This day’s black fate on moe days doth depend / This but begins the woe others must end.” Similarly, Friar Lawrence advises Romeo to “sojourn in Mantua. I’ll find out thy man, / And he shall signify from time to time /

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<sup>17</sup> Ryan McKittrick, “How ‘Romeus’ became ‘Romeo.’” <https://americanrepertorytheater.org/?s, 2>.

Every good hap to you that chances here” (3.3.169-71). Clearly, these speakers all envision a lapse of time after Romeo and Juliet fall in love and again after Tybalt’s death.

As for Juliet, she is impatient in the Balcony scene, telling Romeo “If that thy bent of love be honorable / Thy purpose marriage, send me word tomorrow, / By one that I’ll procure to come to thee . . . follow thee my lord throughout the world” (2.2.143-5, 148). By 4.1, however, she can pray, “Love give me strength, and strength shall help afford” (125). From a sudden proposal, she has learned to seek strength.

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