

THEATRICAL PLACING OF PARENTS AND STAGING SPACE IN *ROMEO AND JULIET*

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Abstract: *This essay focuses on the traditional familial structures that developed through biological parent-child bonds in Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet (1595), in the light of geocritical and performance studies that analyse the use of stage space and the play's setting. The ability to give birth and nurture children offered women the opportunity to be active participants in shaping both the household and society in early modern England. Yet the apparently normal and traditional family structure of the two feuding families in this Shakespearean tragedy (the Capulets and the Montagues) is placed in an incongruent relation to the imaginary Italian setting. While Verona and Mantua are resonant Italian locations that Shakespeare takes over from his sources, the compression effects of space and time in Romeo and Juliet demonstrates that the theatrical placing of these apparently normal (even if at enmity) families offers a deceptive and reversed version of space, in which social space shifts dramatically and it is replaced with metaphoric representations of imaginary locations. My essay suggests that through the theatrical placing of parents in Romeo and Juliet, the play dismantles extant understandings of families by establishing private spaces in which characters constitute themselves as subjects. In drama, therefore, parental authority that represents the social backbone of the early modern family is subverted and displaced by the action on the stage. This is the dramatic place of performance, in which representations of location shift with each production.*

Keywords: *environment; family; geocriticism; Romeo and Juliet; patriarchy; parents; theatrical space; tragedy*