

"I used to think *Romeo and Juliet* was the greatest love story ever written. But now that I'm middle-aged, I know better. Oh, Romeo certainly *thinks* he loves his Juliet. Driven by hormones, he unquestionably lusts for her. But *if* he loves her, it's a shallow love. You want proof?" Cagney didn't wait for Dr. Victor to say yay or nay.

"Soon after meeting her for the first time, he realizes he forgot to ask her for her name. Can true love be founded upon such shallow acquaintance? I don't think so. And at the end, when he thinks she's dead, he finds no comfort in living out the remainder of his life within the paradigm of his love, at least keeping alive the memory of what they had briefly shared, even if it was no more than illusion, or more accurately, hormonal.

"Those of us watching events unfold from the darkness know she merely lies in slumber. But does he seek the reason for her life-like appearance? No. Instead he accuses Death of amorousness, convinced that the 'lean abhorred monster' endeavors to keep Juliet in her present state, her cheeks flushed, so that she might cater to his own dissolute desires. But does Romeo hold her in his arms one last time and feel the warmth of her blood still coursing through her veins? Does he pinch her to see if she might awaken? Hold a mirror to her nose to see if her breath fogs it? Once, twice, three times a 'no.'"

Cagney sighed, listened to the leather creak as he shifted his weight in his chair.

"No," he repeated. "His alleged love is so superficial and selfish that he seeks to escape the pain of loss by taking his own life. That's not love, but obsessive infatuation. Had they wed – Juliet bearing many children, bonding, growing together, the masks of the star-struck teens they once were long ago cast away, basking in the comforting campfire of a love born of a lifetime together, not devoured by the raging forest fire of youth that consumes everything and leaves behind nothing – and she died of natural causes, would Romeo have been so moved to take his own life, or would he have grieved properly, for *her* loss and not just his own?"