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Plot overview

Into the Abyss: Vault of Verona follows protagonist Harriet as she is catapulted back in time into Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet. Mistaken for Juliet, Harriet must figure out how to save the story’s heroes and get herself back to her own time. With help from the cast of Romeo and Juliet, as well as new characters and her own modern-woman sensibilities, Harriet manages to change the plot of Romeo and Juliet.

As the narrative progresses, Harriet must take cues from the characters around her while trying to fit the bits and piece that she remembers of the story together – like a gigantic puzzle piece that has the potential to end in multiple deaths.

[See full version for more details]

Social, political, and historical background

Vault of Verona is a young adult novel that fractures the plot of Shakespeare’s tragedy Romeo and Juliet. Romeo and Juliet follows the title characters, whose families have a longstanding blood feud that goes back centuries. So far, in fact, that neither Lord Montague or Lord Capulet can remember why they are archenemies. In Shakespeare’s classic, Romeo and Juliet fall instantly in love at a party at the Capulet House, to which Lord Capulet has invited Paris in an attempt to betroth Juliet to him. Romeo also attends the ball, and fighting between Romeo, Mercutio (Romeo’s cousin and best friend), and Tybalt (Juliet’s cousin) ensues, and Mercutio and Tybalt both die. Prince Escalus banishes Romeo from Verona, with a sentence of punishment by death to be enforced if he returns to the bustling city. Hoping to end the feud between the families, Friar Lawrence marries Romeo and Juliet in secret before Romeo leaves for Mantua to serve his banishment, regardless of the fact that Juliet has been promised to Paris by her father.

[See full version for more details]

Summary and analysis

Summary: Chapters 1-5

Harriet Hunter, a young Australian woman, is the protagonist of the story. Before she is thrown backwards into a time rift, she is doing an English assignment on Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet. This turns out to be lucky, because Harriet must play the part of Juliet until she is able to gain enough traction to change the storyline of the play. Throughout it all is Harriet’s desire to return home, her fear at finding herself in a time that isn’t her own and her desire to simply escape and return to her own life. Harriet first meets Nurse, who gives her enough clues to determine that she is indeed in the play of Romeo and Juliet. Harriet discovers that she has been dropped into the play on the night of Juliet’s engagement ball. Harriet meets Paris and decides that he seems nice
enough. There is an implication that Juliet has already met Paris, which is a gap in Shakespeare’s original play, and *Vault of Verona* fills that space. Harriet also meets Lord Capulet, and it is during these exchanges that she begins to empathise with Juliet, and to understand just how little control and power she has over her own life. Harriet retires early from the party and is given the potion by Nurse. Harriet summons Friar Lawrence to try and find an alternative to taking the potion herself, which is scandalous in and of itself in this time. However, Harriet has no other option as she doesn’t know where to find the Friar. Friar Lawrence has no insights to offer, and so Harriet deliberates on the predicament she finds herself in. Deciding to give Paris the potion, Harriet breaches social protocol and sneaks into Paris’ room at night to administer it.

**Analysis: Chapters 1-5**

In this section of the novel, readers meet the protagonist Harriet. Harriet admits that she can’t abide a “meek Juliet”, and feels that Juliet is “spineless and weak”. However, by the end of this section of the novel, Harriet understands that Juliet is ruled by an overbearing father who “threatened Juliet with poverty” if she refused Paris and did “anything to sully” the Capulet reputation. Further, his physical force in gripping Harriet’s arm suggests that he is willing to coerce people by brute strength in order to get his own way, a theme that is revisited later in the novel. Harriet’s compassion for Juliet’s plight increases, and so too does her personal investment in helping Juliet to avoid her grisly ending. Harriet’s perspective changes from one of escaping the story at all costs, to doing what she can to assist a woman of roughly her own age to navigate her way through a difficult situation. Nurse is introduced as the convivial character who raised Juliet and knows her better than anyone else. She doesn’t like the situation that Juliet has gotten herself into, as she can see the dangers better than anyone else, but she nevertheless supports her young charge in her search for love with Romeo. It is implied by the author that Lady Capulet is not a maternal character, and that she lacks the spine to stand up for her daughter to her overbearing, tyrant husband. There is a certain irony in this, in that Harriet expects better based upon her own experiences with her mother in her own time. However, what Harriet fails to recognise is that the same pressures and influences that Juliet feels to marry Paris are multiplied in her mother, who has lived with Lord Capulet and his moods for many years. The same leniency that is extended to Juliet on account of her environment is not afforded to Lady Capulet, even though perhaps she may deserve the same consideration.

**Summary: Chapters 6-10**

[See full version for more details]

**Analysis: Chapters 6-10**

[See full version for more details]
Summary: Chapters 11-14
[See full version for more details]

Analysis: Chapters 11-14
[See full version for more details]

Characters

Harriet Hunter
Harriet is a young woman from Wineglass Bay, Tasmania. The protagonist of the story, she is accidentally transported back in time to Shakespeare’s Verona and put in Juliet’s place. She uses her modern-day common sense and empowerment as a modern female to change the plot of Romeo and Juliet, and gives courage and perspective to the female characters of the play. Harriet comes from a traditional Australian family, with a mother, father and two brothers. Her family is close knit, and because of this it is easier for the reader to identify the cracks in Harriet’s life that are caused by the turmoil of late adolescence and the pressure of friendships and achievement in the last year of high school.

Caterina Holland
Caterina is Juliet’s servant and friend in the novel: her character doesn’t exist in the Shakespearean play. She is one of the main gaps and silences in the play, and through her appearance in the novel she acts to make Juliet a more rounded character who clearly had friends and confidantes.

[Nurse]

[Nurse]

Count Paris
[See full version for more details]

Prince Escalus
[See full version for more details]

Mercutio
[See full version for more details]
Lord Capulet  
[See full version for more details]

Donato  
[See full version for more details]

Lady Capulet  
[See full version for more details]

Juliet Capulet  
[See full version for more details]

Tybalt  
[See full version for more details]

Romeo Montague  
[See full version for more details]

Lord Montague  
[See full version for more details]

Lady Montague  
[See full version for more details]

Friar Lawrence  
[See full version for more details]

Logan Hunter  
[See full version for more details]

Carolyn Hunter  
[See full version for more details]
Mason and Tristan Hunter

[See full version for more details]

Themes

Female agency

By transporting a modern young woman back to the time of Romeo and Juliet, the novel highlights the lack of female agency in medieval times. By having Harriet change the storyline, the novel suggests that had women had more power in determining their futures (as Juliet and Caterina do in this version of the story) then many tragedies may have been avoided.

[See full version for more details]

High social status does not mean good character

This theme is illustrated through the juxtaposed characters of Lord Capulet and Caterina. Lord Capulet is the head of his influential family and descended from a noble bloodline. He hopes to ensure his family’s good fortune into the future by marrying his daughter to Prince Escalus’ kinsman, Paris. However, despite his nobility and consequent public esteem, he has major character flaws: he is described as cold, angry, and abusive; he values his family’s good reputation over his daughter’s happiness; he upholds a long-standing feud with the Montague family for no apparent reason; he orders his nephew Tybalt killed to engineer Romeo’s banishment; and he orders his servant Donato to kill Romeo, but then turns on Donato when they are both caught, leaving Donato to suffer death while he himself is simply banished from Verona.

[See full version for more details]

The untold version of events

Soon after her arrival in Juliet’s Verona, Harriet realises that Shakespeare’s version of the story is incomplete and at times, inaccurate.

[See full version for more details]
Literary devices

Time travel

Through the device of time travel, Harriet is sent back to Verona at the time of Shakespeare’s play, *Romeo and Juliet*. In doing so, she is able to experience first-hand the circumstances of the characters of the play as described by Shakespeare. Harriet comes to understand the position of women in medieval times and to engage in the decisions they have to make from a limited range of options.

[See full version for more details]

Symbolism

Symbolism is when an object, person, event or a group of words has a deeper meaning than its literal meaning. One example of symbolism in *Vault of Verona* is the piece of paper that Harriet draws her sketch on. The sketch has the literal meaning, a sketch of what Harriet thinks Juliet looks like, but it also has a deeper meaning.

[See full version for more details]

Simile

A simile is a figure of speech that makes a direct comparison between two objects, characters, events, or actions using the words ‘like’ or ‘as’. One example of a simile in the text is used to illustrate the theme of female agency by showing the way that Harriet feels when Lord Capulet rants about Paris’ death and the perceived difficulties he will have in marrying off Juliet.

[See full version for more details]

Metaphor

A metaphor is a figure of speech that makes a hidden, indirect or implied comparison between two unrelated objects, characters, or actions that share common characteristics. It does not use the words ‘like’ or ‘and’, and it can be a simple comparison over one sentence, or an extended comparison that runs through an entire text.

[See full version for more details]
Important quotes explained

“Well…It’s just like always!” the little maid burst out. “It’s all about what men want! It’s about my father’s wishes, and my brother’s ideas. God forbid I should have some ideas of my own! No! I’m a woman, so what I want doesn’t matter.” Caterina shook her head. “There has to be more than this…”

This quote ties in with the theme of female agency.

[See full version for more details]

“Harriet stared at Capulet, absolutely and totally offended. Even though she wasn’t Juliet, she was outraged and insulted on her behalf. Really! Is this how fourteenth century women were treated?…Oh, the history books mentioned that women didn’t really have a voice and were the property of the men in their families. But reading about it five hundred years later and seeing it in real time were two very different things…She couldn’t imagine her father speaking about her as if she were a prized cow for sale. And she definitely could not see her mother being alright with him doing so! But Lady Capulet did not disagree with her husband, nor did she admonish him for the way he referred to his daughter.”

This quote ties in with the insidious nature of toxic masculinity and its embodiment through characters such as Capulet, Donato and Paolo.

[See full version for more details]

“The difference between the Juliet she knew from the play and the Juliet before her now was even more pronounced. Harriet mused that the mismatch in information was a little like reading a secondary textbook…the facts were there, but sometimes it was easy for things to get lost or missed in the retelling.”

This quote is linked to the theme of the untold version of events, or gaps and silences in texts. Harriet realises that the play Romeo and Juliet was just one version of the story, and as such, the author included some information and characters and excluded other information and characters.

[See full version for more details]

“Rushing headlong into everything didn’t always yield the best outcome. Sometimes a canny and measured silence served just as well as a scream or shout.”

This quote demonstrates Harriet’s maturation throughout the novel. While at the beginning of the text, Harriet was prone to quick and strong changes of emotions, as
demonstrated by her disagreements with her mother, by the end of the novel Harriet can see that initial reactions are not always the way to get what you want.

[See full version for more details]

“Women in this time weren’t the meek, submissive beings they were portrayed as in history books. But neither were they as enlightened as the women of her own time. There was a spectrum…”

Tying into the theme of female agency, this quote again demonstrates that Harriet’s character has matured and so too has her outlook on life. While she understands that medieval women had far less power than modern women, she also understands that medieval women sought to control their own lives but were limited by the social norms of the time.

[See full version for more details]

Further reading

*Shakespearean fractures*

**Scourge of Scotland (Into the Abyss Book Two)** – Marissa Price

*So this is Scotland…the land of the purple heather.*

Harriet Hunter is back again, this time battling against time in her final semester of study. Friendships have imploded, boys are on the horizon and the best friends Harriet has come from a time 600 years earlier. Feeling like a fish out of water, Harriet struggles to find her place in her little Tasmanian high school and in her wider world. Ever since her trip back to Verona six months before, Harriet has searched relentlessly for the key to her time travelling ability…does she belong in contemporary reality, or will she go back to the place that feels more like home at time: Verona.

The winter solstice holds part of the secret, propelling Harriet back to the time of Macbeth - straight into a bloody battle for crown and kingdom. With an unexpected guest in tow, Harriet takes on the persona of a travelling noblewoman far from home. But this time it isn’t just mistaken identities and overbearing fathers that she has to battle against. This time it's powerful dark magic, murderous intentions and slain kinsmen who cloud Harriet’s vision of what she must accomplish in 11th Century Scotland.

Who is Harriet here to save, and will she succeed before she returns to her own reality? Price reimagines the classic tragedy of Macbeth from the perspective of a modern woman accustomed to the attitudes and prejudices of her own time: not those of a pre-medieval society.
Ophelia – Lisa Klein
In this reimagining of Shakespeare's tragedy, Ophelia must choose between her love for Hamlet and her own life. In a surprising twist, she devises a plan to escape from Elsinore forever . . . with one very dangerous secret. Sharp and literary, dark and romantic, this dramatic story holds readers in its grip until the final, heartrending scene.

I Am Juliet – Jackie French
This is the well-known story of Juliet Capulet and her love for Romeo. It also the story about the increasing helplessness Juliet feels as she realises that unlike young men her age, her life will effectively be determined and controlled by others, who see her having an arranged marriage of alliance and becoming a breeder of sons. I am Juliet closely follows the well-known and loved plot of the play, but we also see the point of view of Rob, the thirteen-year-old boy who is the first to play the role of Juliet on the Elizabethan stage. Like many young people today, he too is overwhelmed by 'all those words' that Shakespeare wrote. But Rob realises that the story of love and tragedy is a somewhat simple one and the words are there for their extraordinary beauty and meaning. He will be Juliet and let the power of the words sing - as they still do today.

The Turquoise Ring – Grace Tiffany
The author of Will and My Father Had a Daughter revisits Shakespeare's controversial play, The Merchant of Venice, in the story of a young Jew, Shiloh ben Gozán, who flees the Spanish Inquisition with his infant daughter and a valuable turquoise ring that has a profound influence on his life and those of five remarkable women.

Tempestuous – Kim Askew and Amy Helmes
Miranda Prospero never held much regard for the misfits employed at the mall until a mistake finds her at work with them. Then she finds a way to exact her revenge when a snowstorm locks people in the mall, including the nasty clique that got her stuck in this mess. This take on The Tempest from Askew and Helmes highlights how Shakespeare excelled at stories of teen angst, long before YA was a category.

Dreamers Often Lie – Jacqueline West
After a skiing accident leaves her with a fractured skull and a loosening grip on reality, Jaye decides to lie and say she’s fine in order to get back to her starring role in A Midsummer’s Night Dream. But she’s battling hallucinations of Shakespeare and his characters that have followed her from the hospital to the halls of her school. When Romeo shows up in her anatomy class, Jaye finds the line between reality and delusion continuing to blur as her life tangles darkly with Shakespeare’s famous play.

Saving Hamlet – Molly Booth
There is perhaps no one better than Booth — cohost of the “Party Bard” podcast — to pen a Shakespeare-influenced teen novel. Emma, stage manager for her high school’s production of Hamlet, thinks her peers’ performance is doomed...until she falls through a stage trap door and into the production at London’s Globe Theater. The original 1601 production. Suddenly, she’s switching between two realities, and two cursed Hamlets, in a dilemma well suited to the Bard himself.
Female agency

Ariel – Grace Tiffany
Ariel is beautiful and magical, a creator of dreams and of mischief. Sprung from the mind of a dazed sailor shipwrecked in the Bermuda Triangle, she rules half of her enchanted isle, dreaming of the savior from the east who will help her conquer all. When Prospero, a lost mariner, appears on the beach, his young daughter, Miranda, in tow, Ariel entices him with her visions of conquest. Together, she promises, they will defeat the mysterious tribe whose drums beat beyond the island's rain forest. The homesick Prospero struggles to resist Ariel's charms, but he almost falls under her spell when Miranda falls in love with their servant, the island boy Caliban. Ariel wants to march west, Prospero wants to sail east, and daughter Miranda wants to play on the beach with her boyfriend. Their clash comes to a head when Ariel, summoning her full powers, creates a cataclysmic storm that will change their lives and the island forever.

Shakespeare scholar Grace Tiffany looks at the dark side of Shakespeare's The Tempest, investing a female Ariel with tremendous strength. The Tempest takes on new meaning for new readers, as Tiffany explores the imagination's power to transform grief into dangerous dreams.

Babe in Boyland – Jody Gehrman
Gehrman has found much inspiration in the Bard’s plays, particularly in Shakespeare’s female characters who disguised themselves as men, like Portia of The Merchant of Venice. Babe in Boyland finds a girl entering uncharted territory — the mind of a boy — by posing as a boy. In this contemporary novel, Natalie is her school's advice columnist and she has been accused of giving bad advice because she knows nothing about guys. To get the inside scoop, she goes inside: to a boys' boarding school, where she starts falling for her dreamy roommate. A great fit for readers who like their drama to come with comic relief.

Falling for Hamlet – Michelle Ray
This contemporary retelling of Shakespeare’s tragedy looks at the story from Ophelia’s point of view. She’s the well-known girlfriend to Prince Hamlet and daughter of the Danish king’s most trusted adviser, and that comes with a price: constant intrusion by her boyfriend’s family and always being in the public eye. This one is great for teens who’d like to see an Ophelia with greater control of her destiny.

The Taming of the Drew – Stephanie Kate Strohm
Shakespeare’s The Taming of the Shrew helped pave the way to what we now know as contemporary romantic comedy (to wit, the film “Ten Things I Hate About You”). In Strohm’s version, Cass — a girl happy to be called stubborn, temperamental, and, well, other things — is cast as the lead in a summer theater production of The Taming of the Shrew, only to learn that her co-star Drew is a nightmare. So Cass decides to use art as inspiration and sets out to tame Drew into a more palatable love interest.
Time travel series

Outlander Series – Diana Gabaldon
Claire Randall is leading a double life. She has a husband in one century, and a lover in another...

In 1945, Claire Randall, a former combat nurse, is back from the war and reunited with her husband on a second honeymoon--when she innocently touches a boulder in one of the ancient stone circles that dot the British Isles. Suddenly she is a Sassenach--an "outlander"--in a Scotland torn by war and raiding border clans in the year of our Lord...1743.

Hurled back in time by forces she cannot understand, Claire's destiny is soon inextricably intertwined with Clan MacKenzie and the forbidden Castle Leoch. She is catapulted without warning into the intrigues of lairds and spies that may threaten her life…and shatter her heart. For here, James Fraser, a gallant young Scots warrior, shows her a passion so fierce and a love so absolute that Claire becomes a woman torn between fidelity and desire…and between two vastly different men in two irreconcilable lives.

Shakespeare in fiction

Interred with Their Bones – Jennifer Lee Carrell
A long-lost work of Shakespeare, newly found.
A killer who stages the Bard’s extravagant murders as flesh-and-blood realities.
A desperate race to find literary gold, and just to stay alive…

On the eve of the Globe’s production of Hamlet, Shakespeare scholar and theater director Kate Stanley’s eccentric mentor Rosalind Howard gives her a mysterious box, claiming to have made a groundbreaking discovery. But before she can reveal it to Kate, the Globe burns to the ground and Roz is found dead…murdered precisely in the manner of Hamlet’s father. Inside the box Kate finds the first piece in a Shakespearean puzzle, setting her on a deadly, high-stakes treasure hunt.

From London to Harvard to the American West, Kate races to evade a killer and decipher a tantalizing string of clues, hidden in the words of Shakespeare, that may unlock literary history’s greatest secret. At once suspenseful and elegantly written, Interred with Their Bones is poised to become the next bestselling literary adventure in the tradition of The Thirteenth Tale and The Historian.

The Shakespeare Stealer Series: The Shakespeare Stealer/Shakespeare’s Scribe/Shakespeare’s Spy – Gary Blackwood
Three award-winning novels are included in one volume that follows orphan-turned-actor Widge as he becomes immersed in deception, romance, and danger in Elizabethan London when he joins Will Shakespeare's acting troupe.

**Will** – Grace Tiffany

Will Shakespeare has left Stratford for London and pitched himself headlong into the chaotic, perilous world of the theater. Through raw will—and an amazing gift for words—he raises himself from poor player to master playwright. But as his success earns him great pleasure and adoration from others, it also draws the jealous wrath of Christopher Marlowe, a baby-faced genius whose anger is as punishing as his poetry is sweet... *My Father Had a Daughter: Judith Shakespeare's Tale* is the second novel by Grace Tiffany, this time addressing Shakespeare through the eyes of his daughter.

**All Night Awake** – Sarah A Hoyt

The fairie known as Lady Silver—who gave the creative spark to Shakespeare and Marlowe—is in London, tracking a deadly supernatural beast that is drawn to Marlowe. She must stop it before it destroys both their world and hers. *Ill Met by Moonlight* and *Any Man So Daring* are more of Hoyt’s novels that explore the contemporary life of Shakespeare.

**Mistress Shakespeare** – Karen Harper

Her engagement to William Shakespeare broken by his forced marriage to a pregnant Anne Hathaway of Shottery, Anne Whateley pursues a clandestine and dangerous affair with the bard that is further complicated by Elizabeth I's campaign to eradicate Catholicism.

**Shakespeare in Love** (Film) – Marc Norman

Miramax/Universal/Bedford Falls Company Film starring Gwyneth Paltrow, Joseph Fiennes, Ben Affleck, Geoffrey Rush, Colin Firth, and Dame Judy Dench. It is the summer of 1593, and the rising young star of London's theatre scene, Will Shakespeare, faces a scourge like no other: a paralyzing bout of writer's block. The great Elizabethan age of entertainment unfolds around him, but Will is without inspiration, he just can't seem to work up any enthusiasm for his latest play, "Romeo and Ethel, the Pirate’s Daughter." What he needs is a muse. She appears when Lady Viola, desperate to become an actor in a time when women are forbidden on stage, disguises herself as a man to audition for Will's play. But the guise slips away as their passion ignites. Now Will's quill again begins to flow, turning love into words, as Viola becomes his real-life Juliet and Romeo finds his reason to exist.

**Ink and Steel: A Novel of the Promethean Age** – Elizabeth Bear

Kit Marley, playwright and spy in the service of Queen Elizabeth, has been murdered. His true gift to Her Majesty was his way with words, crafting plays infused with a subtle magic that maintained her rule. He performed this task on behalf of the Prometheus Club, a secret society of nobles engaged in battle against sorcerers determined to
destroy England. Assuming Marley’s role is William Shakespeare— but he is unable to create the magic needed to hold the Queen’s enemies at bay.

Resurrected by enchantment in Faerie, Marley is England’s only hope. But before he can assist Will in the art of magic, he must uncover the traitor among the Prometheans responsible for his death…