

# Racial Conflict Fuels 'Romeo, Juliet' Tragedy

## onstage

By EDGAR KLOTEN

The approach of Clay Stevenson of Youth Theatre Unlimited to present "Romeo and Juliet" by William Shakespeare as a race conflict is a brilliant idea for today.

The play does not ever tell us what the feud between the houses of Montague and Capulet was about. The parents and the children were imbued with hatred for one another and thus the tragic story of the two lovers unfolded.

Since director Stevenson works with a great many inner city children, it is natural that he divide the characters into the black Montagues with the white Capulets. The tragedy then becomes a conflict of race hatred.

The final moment when Prince Escalus says "See, what a scourge is laid upon your hate" tellingly forces the argument that humans are to be loved regardless of color.

**IT IS A REMARKABLE** achievement that the young people could so effectively learn the lines and read them with a certain intelligence. They tell the story and understand the emotional content of the starcrossed lovers and their sad plight with family and friends. Not always are they clear, but that is not entirely their fault as a highly unnecessary musical background often intrudes on clarity.

The big disappointment is in the staging of director Stevenson. He has used a space stage to unify the action but many, if not most, of the scenes are played far upstage and therefore they lose their impact.

It is far more effective to bring the play closer to its audience which a program note suggests is the intent, but the actual activity at the Avery Theatre violates the statement. The absence of a true balcony also is a serious omission.

Tyron Leggatt looking a little like Michael Jackson makes a vigorous and romantic Romeo while Lisa Petruzzi, despite a muddled diction, complements him as his Juliet.

Others in the large cast who are outstanding are David Murphy as the antagonistic Tybalt; Billy Morrissette as the romantic



Shown in a scene from Youth Theater Unlimited's production of "Romeo and Juliet" are Marsha Hogan (left) and Lisa Petruzzi.

speech has him practically with his back to the wall; Marsha Hogan as the nurse and Ron McClelland as an eager Benvolio.

In this production, the youths are far superior to the adults who read the lines on one level and substitute loudness for intensity.

Youth Theatre Unlimited's "Romeo and Juliet" will play to March 24. Even though there are lots of flaws, it is still an opportunity to see this great tragedy of youth and age presented with enthusiasm.