

Romeo and Juliet



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare's father was a glove-maker, and Shakespeare received no more than a grammar school education. He married Anne Hathaway in 1582, but left his family behind around 1590 and moved to London, where he became an actor and playwright. He was an immediate success: Shakespeare soon became the most popular playwright of the day as well as a part-owner of the Globe Theater. His theater troupe was adopted by King James as the King's Men in 1603. Shakespeare retired as a rich and prominent man to Stratford-upon-Avon in 1613, and died three years later.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

As with many other of his plays, Shakespeare adapted his version of *Romeo and Juliet* from earlier sources. Shakespeare's most direct source was an English narrative poem published in 1562 by Arthur Brooke, which was itself based on a French version of an Italian story. Shakespeare's play and Brooke's poem share many similarities of plot, including how Romeo and Juliet met and died. However, while the plots are similar, Brooke's version is generally considered to be plodding, while Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is one of the most exciting plays ever written. Shakespeare transformed the story in a variety of ways. Three of the most important include cramming a plot that in Brooke's poem took nine months to unfold into just four frenetic days, having Tybalt kill Mercutio, and having Romeo and Juliet's wedding day occur on the same day that Romeo is banished. But just as important in creating the ecstatic intensity of *Romeo and Juliet* is the unparalleled power of Shakespeare's language. In addition to its similarity to earlier versions of the Romeo and Juliet story, Shakespeare's play is also similar to the story of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, which was best told by the Roman poet Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*.

Shakespeare was not only aware of the similarity between the stories of Romeo and Juliet and Pyramus and Thisbe, he explicitly references *Pyramus and Thisbe* within *Romeo and Juliet*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Most Excellent and Lamentable Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*
- **When Written:** early to mid 1590s
- **Where Written:** England
- **When Published:** 1597

- **Literary Period:** The Renaissance (1500-1660)
- **Genre:** Tragic drama
- **Setting:** The Italian cities of Verona and Mantua during the Renaissance (around the fourteenth century).
- **Climax:** Romeo and Juliet's double suicide in the Capulet tomb.

EXTRA CREDIT

Shakespeare or Not? There are some who believe Shakespeare wasn't educated enough to write the plays attributed to him. The most common anti-Shakespeare theory is that Edward de Vere, the Earl of Oxford, wrote the plays and used Shakespeare as a front man because aristocrats were not supposed to write plays. Yet the evidence supporting Shakespeare's authorship far outweighs any evidence against. So until further notice, Shakespeare is still the most influential writer in the English language.



PLOT SUMMARY

In Verona, Italy, during the Renaissance, two noble families, the Montagues and Capulets, are locked in a bitter feud. After a series of public brawls between both the nobles and the servants of the two families, Prince Escalus, the ruler of Verona, declares that anyone in either family involved in any future fighting will be put to death.

Every year the Capulets throw a masquerade ball. The Montagues, of course, are not invited. Capulet and Lady Capulet hope that this year their daughter Juliet will fall in love with Paris at the ball, since at thirteen she will be of marriageable age soon, and Paris would be a good match. But two Montagues, sixteen-year-old Romeo and his cousin Benvolio, along with their friend Mercutio, a kinsman of Prince Escalus, crash the party. Romeo attends the party only because he wants to see Rosaline, a young woman he has been unsuccessfully pursuing for quite some time. That lack of success has made him noticeably lovelorn of late. But at first sight of Juliet, Romeo falls in love. Juliet is equally smitten. They speak, and kiss. As the party ends Romeo and Juliet separately discover that they belong to rival families, and are both distraught. Yet Romeo is already so in love that instead of leaving the Capulet's residence with his friends, he jumps a wall and hides beneath her balcony. Suddenly she emerges, and tells the night sky about her forbidden love for Romeo. Romeo jumps out from his hiding place. They exchange vows of love. The next day, with the help of Friar Laurence and Juliet's Nurse, Romeo and Juliet are secretly married.

That same day, Benvolio and Mercutio encounter Tybalt, who is Juliet's cousin. Tybalt is furious that the Montagues crashed the Capulet party (he spotted them). He has challenged Romeo to a duel. While Mercutio mocks Tybalt, Romeo himself shows up. Tybalt challenged him to fight. Romeo, who is now secretly Tybalt's kinsmen by marriage, refuses. Before Romeo can explain his reasons, Mercutio disgustedly steps in. Romeo tries to separate them, but Tybalt stabs and kills Mercutio under Romeo's arm. Mercutio dies cursing both Montagues and Capulets. In a rage, Romeo kills Tybalt.

Because Romeo at first tried to stop the fighting, instead of ordering him executed the Prince banishes him from Verona. Juliet is devastated when she learns that Romeo killed her cousin, but she decides that her loyalty must be with her husband. That night Romeo comes to her room and the lovers are able to spend one glorious night together before Romeo, at dawn, must flee Verona to Mantua.

The death of Tybalt affects Lord Capulet deeply. He decides to marry Juliet to Paris immediately. Juliet refuses. Capulet threatens to disown her. Lady Capulet sides with her husband, and even the Nurse advises Juliet to marry Paris and forget Romeo. Juliet rushes to Friar Laurence, who comes up with a plan: he gives her a potion that will make it seem like she's died but will really only put her to sleep. She will be laid to rest in the Capulet tomb, and there will wake up. Meanwhile, the Friar promises to get news to Romeo so that he'll secretly return from Mantua and be there when she wakes up. She follows the Friar's advice. The next morning the Capulet household wakes to discover Juliet has died. Instead of a wedding, they have a funeral. Juliet's body is put in the tomb.

But the Friar's letter to Romeo goes astray. Romeo hears only that Juliet has died. In despair, Romeo buys poison and, after fighting and killing a grieving Paris, sneaks into Juliet's tomb. In the tomb, Romeo gazes on what he thinks is the dead body of his beloved, drinks the poison, and dies. Seconds later, Juliet wakes. She sees Romeo's body. Friar Laurence rushes into the cell too late. He tells Juliet what happened, but hears people approaching. He begs Juliet to come with him, but she refuses. He flees. In order to be with Romeo, Juliet kills herself with his dagger.

The Montagues and Capulets are grief-stricken when they learn the truth. They agree to end their feud.

friends, and not a bad swordsman. Over the course of the play, Romeo grows from an adolescent who claims to be in love with Rosaline, but in reality seems more in love with the idea of love and with being a miserable wretch in the mold of classical love poets, to a young man who shares a deep and passionate love with Juliet and is willing to face the obstacles of friends, family, the law, fate, and, ultimately, death in order to be with her.

Juliet — The beautiful thirteen-year-old daughter of Capulet and Lady Capulet, and cousins with Tybalt. The Nurse is her closest friend and advisor. Juliet is naïve and sheltered at the beginning of the play, and has given almost no thought to love. But as soon as she meets and falls in love with Romeo she quickly develops into a woman of remarkable strength and resolve in pursuing what she wants. Like Romeo, she is willing to face all obstacles of society, fate, and death to be with her love. Yet even while head over heels in love, Juliet remains more grounded than Romeo. She even calls him on his silliness when he gets overly poetic. It seems possible to attribute much of Romeo's transformation from a callous youth to a passionate lover to Juliet's influence.

The Nurse — The Nurse is a servant who nursed Juliet as a baby (the Nurse's own baby died just before Juliet was born), and raised her through childhood. She is Juliet's best friend and confidante, and in many ways is more her mother than Lady Capulet is. The Nurse can be quite sentimental, but also tends to go on and on with bawdy and sometimes embarrassing stories. Though the Nurse will do anything for Juliet, and helps Juliet to marry Romeo, in the end she proves herself to be pragmatic when it comes to love.

Mercutio — Romeo's close friend, and a kinsman of Prince Escalus. Mercutio is a wild, antic, and brooding youth. He is a whiz with wordplay and is constantly dropping sexual puns, but beneath this playful and sarcastic veneer lies a bitter world-weariness. Mercutio hates romantic ideals of any sort, whether about honor or love, and mercilessly mocks those who hold them.

Friar Laurence — A Franciscan monk and a friend to both Romeo and Juliet. He preaches moderation because he understands that intensity of any kind of emotion, good or bad, can lead to disaster. Yet he gets caught up in his own hope for ending the feud between Montagues and Capulets. In the process, he shows himself to be quite a schemer.

Capulet — Juliet's father, Lady Capulet's husband, and Tybalt's uncle. He is the leader of the Capulet family, and an enemy of Montague. Capulet tries to appear like an even-minded and loving man, and he certainly does love his daughter, but he believes he knows what's best for her, never consults her about her feelings, and is quick to anger when crossed or disobeyed.

Lady Capulet — Juliet's mother, and Capulet's wife. A woman who married Capulet when she was Juliet's age (thirteen), she



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Romeo — The sixteen-year-old son of Montague and Lady Montague. He is cousins with Benvolio, and friends with Mercutio and Friar Laurence. Romeo's defining characteristic is the intensity of his emotions—whether in anger, love, or despair. Romeo is also intelligent, quick-witted, loved by his

loves her daughter but is a flighty woman and an ineffectual mother who left most of the raising of her daughter to the Nurse. When it comes to marriage, Lady Capulet believes more in the material happiness a "good match" can bring than in love.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Benvolio — Montague's nephew, Romeo's cousin, and Mercutio's friend. Of the three boys, he is the most calm and the least quick-witted. On a few occasions he tries to keep the peace rather than fight. Yet Benvolio is seldom successful in his peacekeeping efforts, and will fight if pushed.

Tybalt — The nephew of Capulet, and Juliet's cousin. A hothead consumed by issues of honor and well known for his skill with a sword, Tybalt hates the Montagues with a profound passion. He seems to look for excuses to fight.

Paris — A kinsman of Prince Escalus who wants to marry Juliet. Paris is a good-looking and wealthy man, but is rather pompous, a tad boring, and lacks Romeo's passion. His love for Juliet seems genuine, but, like Capulet, he seems to think he can make Juliet's decisions for her.

Prince Escalus — The Prince and leader of Verona. Escalus is concerned primarily with keeping order in the city. He will do anything in his power to stop the feud between the Montagues and Capulets from affecting the other citizens of the city.

Montague — Romeo's father, Lady Montague's husband, and Benvolio's uncle. The leader of the Montague household, and quick to anger at his bitter rival, Capulet.

Lady Montague — Montague's wife and Romeo's mother. She barely appears in the play.

Friar John — A Franciscan friar.

Balthasar — Romeo's servant.

Samson and Gregory — Capulet servants.

Abraham — Montague's servant.

Peter — An illiterate Capulet servant.

The Apothecary — A poor apothecary (a drug seller) in Mantua.

Rosaline — A young woman who has taken a vow of chastity, yet with whom Romeo is infatuated at the beginning of the play.

The Chorus — An on-stage commentator on the events of the play (usually a single person).



LOVE

Love in *Romeo and Juliet* is not some pretty, idealized emotion. Yes, the love Romeo and Juliet share is beautiful and passionate. It is pure, exhilarating, and transformative, and they are willing to give everything to it. But it is also chaotic and destructive, bringing death to friends, family, and to themselves. Over and over in the play, Romeo and Juliet's love is mentioned in connection with death and violence, and finds its greatest expression in their suicide.

The theme of love in *Romeo and Juliet* also extends beyond the love that Romeo and Juliet feel for each other. All the characters in the play constantly talk about love. Mercutio thinks love is little more than an excuse to pursue sexual pleasure and that it makes a man weak and dumb. Lady Capulet thinks love is based on material things: Paris is handsome and wealthy; therefore Lady Capulet believes Juliet will love him. Lord Capulet sees love as obedience and duty. Friar Laurence knows that love may be passionate, but argues that it's also a responsibility. Paris seems to think that love is at his command, since he tells Juliet that she loves him. In short, love is everywhere in *Romeo and Juliet*, and everyone sees it differently.



FATE

From the opening prologue when the Chorus summarizes *Romeo and Juliet* and says that the "star-crossed lovers" will die, Romeo and Juliet are trapped by fate. No matter what the lovers do, what plans they make, or how much they love each other, their struggles against fate only help fulfill it. But defeating or escaping fate is not the point. No one escapes fate. It is Romeo and Juliet's determination to struggle against fate in order to be together, whether in life or death, that shows the fiery passion of their love, and which makes that love eternal.

Fate is not just a force felt by the characters in *Romeo and Juliet*. The audience also senses it through Shakespeare's use of foreshadowing. Time and again, both Romeo and Juliet unknowingly reference their imminent deaths, as when Juliet says after first meeting Romeo: "If he be married / My grave is like to be my wedding bed." She means that if Romeo is already married she'll be miserable. But the audience knows that Juliet's grave actually *will* be her wedding bed. In *Romeo and Juliet*, fate is a force that neither the characters nor the audience can escape, and so every word and gesture gains in power, becomes fateful.



INDIVIDUALS VS. SOCIETY

Because of their forbidden love, Romeo and Juliet are forced into conflict with the social world around them: family, friends, political authority, and



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

even religion. The lovers try to avoid this conflict by hiding, by escaping from it. They prefer the privacy of nighttime to the public world of day. They volunteer to give up their names, their social identities, in order to be together. They begin to keep secrets and speak in puns so that they can publicly say one thing while meaning another. On the morning after their marriage, they even go so far as to pretend that day is night so they won't have to part.

But no one can stop day from dawning, and in the end Romeo and Juliet can't escape the responsibilities of the public world. Romeo tries to stop being a Montague and avoid fighting Tybalt, but fails. Juliet tries to stop being a Capulet and to stand up to her father when he tries to marry her off to Paris, but is abandoned by her mother and the Nurse. Romeo is banished from Verona by Prince Escalus, who embodies political law. Finally, to preserve their love, Romeo and Juliet are forced to the ultimate act of independence and privacy: suicide.



LANGUAGE AND WORD PLAY

Romeo and Juliet constantly play with language. They pun, rhyme, and speak in double entendres. All these word games may seem like mere fun, and

they are fun. The characters that pun and play with language have fun doing it. But word play in *Romeo and Juliet* has a deeper purpose: rebellion. Romeo and Juliet play with language to escape the world. They claim they are not a Montague and a Capulet; they use words to try to transform day, for a moment, into night; they hide their love even while secretly admitting it. Other characters play with language too. In particular, Mercutio and the Nurse make constant sexual puns implying that while everyone is running around talking about high ideals like honor and love, sex and other base desires are at the root of human existence.

So language in *Romeo and Juliet* serves two opposing purposes. It allows some characters to escape the world into intense love, while it allows other characters to reveal that the world of love, honor, and high ideals are just masks people use to cover their animal instincts.



SERVANTS

For a play about the two noble teenagers struggling to preserve their forbidden love, *Romeo and Juliet* sure has a lot of scenes focused on servants and non-nobles. Shakespeare did this by design. The recurring presence of servants in the play, from Peter, the Capulet servant who can't read, to the apothecary who's so poor he's willing to sell poison, Shakespeare in *Romeo and Juliet* goes to great efforts to show that the poor and downtrodden have lives of their own, and that to them Romeo and Juliet's love and death mean absolutely nothing. After all, why would the death of two noble teenagers mean anything to servants just trying to

make it through the day and scrounge up something to eat for dinner?



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in [blue text](#) throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



LIGHT/DARK AND DAY/NIGHT

Romeo and Juliet is filled with imagery of light and dark. But while light is traditionally connected with "good" and dark with "evil," in *Romeo and Juliet* the relationship is more complex. Romeo and Juliet constantly see each other as forms of light. In the balcony scene, Romeo describes Juliet as the sun, while Juliet describes Romeo as stars. But the relationship between light and dark is complicated by the lover's need for the privacy of darkness in order to be together. As Romeo says when the sun dawns on the morning when he is to be banished from Verona, "More light and light, more dark and dark our woes!" So while Romeo and Juliet see each other as light, in order for their light to shine brightly it needs the contrast of darkness, of night, to make it powerful.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Simon & Schuster edition of *Romeo and Juliet* published in 2004.

Prologue Quotes

☞☞ Two households, both alike in dignity,
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes,
A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;
Whose misadventured piteous overthrows,
Doth with their death bury their parents' strife.
The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love,
And the continuance of their parents' rage,
Which, but their children's end, nought could remove,
Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage;
The which if you with patient ears attend,
What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.

Related Characters: The Chorus (speaker), Romeo, Juliet

Related Themes:   

Page Number: Prol.1-14

Explanation and Analysis

The chorus which opens *Romeo and Juliet* echoes the chorus of ancient Greek tragedies, a troupe of masked performers who explained, summarized, or contextualized aspects of the play. In the case of *Romeo and Juliet*, the chorus first places the action in Verona at a particular time (after an “ancient grudge” and during a “new mutiny” between two noble families). In the next sentence, this chorus narrows its scope to the play’s protagonists – the “star-cross’d lovers” who will die because of the play’s events. Finally, it tells the audience that the play, the “two hours’ traffic of our stage,” focuses on these lovers’ deaths “and their parents’ rage,” which could only be quenched by the deaths of their children. By framing their summary this way, and placing their description of *Romeo and Juliet* in the middle of descriptions of their parents, the chorus emphasizes that *Romeo and Juliet* live within a social context that precedes and succeeds them. This Prologue also informs us that these “lovers” are “star-cross’d” and their “love” is “death-mark’d”; amorphous forces – fate, love, and death – will control the action as much as the characters and actors.

Act 1, scene 1 Quotes

☛☛ Abraham: Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?
 Sampson: I do bite my thumb, sir.
 Abraham: Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?
 Sampson (to Gregory): Is the law of our side if I say ay?
 Gregory: No.
 Sampson: No, sir, I do not bite my thumb at you sir; but I bite my thumb, sir.

Related Characters: Sampson and Gregory, Abraham (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 1.1.47-52

Explanation and Analysis

The play opens with Sampson and Gregory, two armed servants of the Capulet noble family, walking on the public streets of Verona. They come into contact with two other citizens of Verona: Abraham and Balthasar. As a servant of the Montague household, Abraham confronts Sampson and begins a quarrel that will escalate into physical fighting and swordplay. This scene is somewhat humorous (“biting one’s thumb at someone was considered what flipping someone

the bird is today), as the characters awkwardly insult each other while trying to stay on the right side of the law. Yet even in the first scene of the play, we witness how these two households’ feud affects the rest of Verona. It does not merely occur within these households’ residences, but it even influences the atmosphere of Verona’s most public spaces. The most private disagreements will turn public in the drama.

☛☛ Why then, O brawling love! O loving hate!
 O any thing, of nothing first created;
 O heavy lightness! serious vanity!
 Mis-shapen chaos of well-seeming forms!

Related Characters: Romeo (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 1.1.181-184

Explanation and Analysis

The first scene seems to obey the same order as the Prologue: first, a fight breaks out on the street between members of the rival households, and then we see our star-cross’d lover on the stage. Romeo’s metaphors echo the contradictory language of the typical Petrarchan lover – a lover who echoes the paradoxical phrases of the Italian poet Francesco Petrararch. Romeo is not yet pining after Juliet, however; here, he longs for the woman Rosaline, whom he feels is the most beautiful woman in the world. Since Romeo begins the play so ardently in love with another woman, we will certainly see his entire love story with Juliet, as the Chorus promised us. Yet, Romeo’s professed love for Rosaline does incite a bit of doubt over the validity of his true feelings for Juliet later, discoloring what has entered popular culture as a famous story of true love—it’s important to remember that the protagonists are only young teenagers, experiencing throes of passion that could easily change or disappear.

In this scene, as Romeo is expressing this passion, he shares it with his friend Benvolio—he can’t seem to keep it to himself. This introduces the notion that love does not merely occur between two individuals; others can and will mediate the expressions and feelings of love.

Act 1, scene 4 Quotes

☝☝ Romeo: I dream'd a dream to-night.
 Mercutio: And so did I.
 Romeo: Well, what was yours?
 Mercutio: That dreamers often lie.

Related Characters: Romeo, Mercutio (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 1.4.53-56

Explanation and Analysis

Romeo, Benvolio, Mercutio, and several other maskers and torch-bearers are walking through the streets to the Capulet's household, in order to attend their feast tonight. As they travel, they engage in witty banter that still informs us about the characters' emotional states – particularly because Romeo seems determined to remain somber and refuse to join in the others' revelry. Romeo, for instance, divulges that he had a dream which makes him harbor trepidations about attending this feast at all. Romeo's friend Mercutio, who was actually invited to the feast because he is unrelated to Romeo and the other Montagues, wittily refuses to tolerate Romeo's attitude. After claiming that he, too, had a dream, Mercutio wittingly says that he learned "that dreamers often lie" in this dream itself. Yet, Mercutio is not merely mocking Romeo here; this comment also alludes to his larger skepticism about love.

Act 1, scene 5 Quotes

☝☝ Oh, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!
 It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
 Like a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear,
 Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear.
 So shows a snowy dove trooping with crows
 As yonder lady o'er her fellows shows.
 The measure done, I'll watch her place of stand,
 And, touching hers, make blessed my rude hand.
 Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight!
 For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night.

Related Characters: Romeo (speaker), Juliet

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 1.5.51-60

Explanation and Analysis

Before Romeo learns Juliet's name, he is amazed by her beauty and begins to use the analogy of light to describe her particular radiance. Juliet has immediately replaced Rosaline in Juliet's mind—a fact that Romeo alludes to directly and indirectly. Directly, he claims that Juliet surpasses all other women; she is a "snowy dove" in comparison to the "crows." Indirectly, he neglects to mention even Rosaline's name in referring to his past loves—indeed, he does not say Rosaline's name again until the Friar Laurence reminds him of it in a later scene (after which Romeo claims that he "forgot" that name and the emotions associated with it).

☝☝ You kiss by th'book.

Related Characters: Juliet (speaker), Romeo

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 1.5.121

Explanation and Analysis

At Lord Capulet's feast, Romeo is drawn to Juliet's beauty, and he professes that she is the most beautiful woman he has ever seen. Without knowing who she is, he comes to her and asks to kiss her. When he asks, he (somewhat sacrilegiously) uses religious lexicon – comparing her hand to a "holy shrine," describing his lips as "two blushing pilgrims" – as he creates metaphors to describe the physical actions he is proposing (such as holding hands and kissing). Juliet parallels this, using such spiritual terminology as well. After they kiss twice, though, she tells Romeo that he kisses "by the book," or by the rules. Here, she implies that Romeo kisses her just as he ought to, bringing their conversation down to worldly rules and away from the spiritual realm that Romeo was creating with his words.

☝☝ My only love sprung from my only hate!
 Too early seen unknown, and known too late!

Related Characters: Juliet (speaker), Romeo

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 1.5.152-153

Explanation and Analysis

As the guests are leaving her house's feast, Juliet decides to find out who Romeo is. She first asks her nurse who two other gentlemen are and then finally asks her one of the most significant questions of the play, the question of Romeo's identity. The notion of fate is at play even in Juliet's question; right after she requests that her nurse ask for Romeo's name, she says that, if Romeo is married, her "grave" will likely be her "wedding bed." The nurse never mentions if Romeo is married, but his identity as a Montague, "the only son of your great enemy," is evil enough, spurring Juliet to give this eloquent exclamation. With these lines, Juliet arrives at the emotional contradiction at the heart of the play: she loves a man whom her parents hate. This play will juxtapose such opposites, manifesting the tumultuous, contradictory feelings of the jilted Petrarchan lover.

Act 2, scene 2 Quotes

☛☛ But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun!

Related Characters: Romeo (speaker), Juliet

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 2.2.1-2

Explanation and Analysis

After the feast ends, Romeo does not journey away from the Capulet's house along with his friends; instead he climbs and leaps down a wall, in order to seek out and rejoin Juliet. He exclaims that his "heart" is somewhere else now, with her. When he sees her, he is again struck by her beauty, as he declares that she is "the sun." These lines are thematically significant as well as beautiful (and extremely famous), and they illustrate yet another contradiction at work. It is undoubtedly night at the moment when Romeo claims that the "light" through the "window" is the light of daybreak, which comes from the East. Romeo is not merely engaging in eloquent, fictitious language; he is also introducing another duality for the strength of their love to overturn. Juliet is so beautiful that she can transform the night into the day.

☛☛ O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?
Deny thy father and refuse thy name;
Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,
And I'll no longer be a Capulet.

Related Characters: Juliet (speaker), Romeo, Montague

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 2.2.36-39

Explanation and Analysis

It seems that Juliet cannot forget Romeo either; she begins to speak to herself about him, while he watches from below. As Juliet ponders aloud, she does not only ask why her love is a Montague, her family's rival household; she asks why ("wherefore" means "why") he is "Romeo," inviting us into a broader discussion about the power and purpose of naming and language in general. Can verbal expression truly rearrange bonds between individuals? Juliet claims that Romeo could "deny thy father and refuse thy name"; in other words, Romeo could genuinely separate himself from his family through spoken words and through refusing to own the name they gave him. Through marriage, Juliet could certainly do this; if she marries Romeo (and he is "sworn my love"), then she will legally as well as emotionally "no longer be a Capulet." Juliet will continue to reflect on this theme as this scene, one of the most famous love scenes in all of drama, continues. This reminds us that much of love comes from words and wordplay.

☛☛ 'Tis but thy name that is my enemy; —
Thou art thyself though, not a Montague.
What's Montague? It is nor hand, nor foot,
Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part
Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!
What's in a name? That which we call a rose,
By any other word would smell as sweet;
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd,
Retain that dear perfection which he owes
Without that title: — Romeo, doff thy name;
And for thy name, which is no part of thee,
Take all myself.

Related Characters: Juliet (speaker), Romeo

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 2.2.41-52

Explanation and Analysis

As Juliet continues to dwell upon this theme of love and language, the audience can realize the extent of her emotional upset. She presses further, even saying that Romeo “art thyself” and is “not a Montague.” Although Romeo may be embedded within the societal network of the Montague family, his physical body is his own; his identity as a Montague is not a “hand, nor foot, / Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part / Belonging to a man.” Juliet starts to repeat herself, again urging Romeo to refuse his name: “O, be some other name!”; “Retain that dear perfection ... without that title”; “Romeo, doff thy name.” Such repetition must come from a tumultuous state of mind. Despite her emotional furor, through, Juliet inspires a larger conversation about naming, language, and societal identity in general with her famous “What’s in a name? That which we call a rose, / By any other word would smell as sweet” observation. (i.e. does language affect even our senses? Science suggests it actually does, but that’s another question.) She closes this soliloquy by wholly giving herself to her lover: “Take all myself.”

☝ I take thee at thy word:
 Call me but love, and I'll be new baptis'd;
 Henceforth I never will be Romeo.

Related Characters: Romeo (speaker), Juliet

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 2.2.53-55

Explanation and Analysis

Romeo finally reveals his presence, after Juliet has declared her love for him on her balcony. His reply echoes the same themes which Juliet mentioned: love and language, individual and society. Romeo claims that he can “be new baptis’d,” if Juliet will “call me but love.” Of course, he cannot truly baptize himself, as this ceremony is performed by a social figure—a priest who is invested with authority by human society and by the Christian God, who himself expresses his love in covenants: solemn agreements which can be delivered through language. Romeo himself provides the first possible solution to the two lovers’ difficult situation; it is not surprising that, for “star-cross’d” individuals with “death-mark’d” love, such an idealized solution is an impossibility.

☝ O, swear not by the moon, the inconstant moon,
 That monthly changes in her circled orb,
 Lest that thy love prove likewise variable.

Related Characters: Juliet (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 2.2.114-116

Explanation and Analysis

Before Romeo and Juliet end their famous exchange of sweet nothings during the balcony scene, Juliet urges Romeo to not swear “by the moon,” which has a varying shape that depends on the time of the month (and “monthly changes in her circles orb”). This is part of a larger series of Juliet romantically urging Romeo to “swear” or not “swear” -- not by the moon, by his name, and then not at all. It functions as a romantic saying, which has more meaning because it is said than because of its actual content, but it also suggests a thought which Juliet will explicitly say: she longs for a lasting love, not one that is so immediate and only fleeting.

☝ Good-night, good-night! Parting is such sweet sorrow
 That I shall say good-night till it be morrow.

Related Characters: Juliet (speaker), Romeo

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 2.2.199-201

Explanation and Analysis

Another one of the play’s famous phrases (“Parting is such sweet sorrow”) is here delivered by Juliet as she and Romeo slowly end the “balcony scene.” Juliet describes parting as an oxymoron, an event which is sweet (because it allows her to speak to her lover) and sorrowful (because it heralds a separation from him). To deal with this contradiction, Juliet puts in place another: she will continue to say “goodbye” (a word that, by definition, necessitates a subsequent parting and silence) until the night turns into day. Her actions will thus contradict her words. The day and night motif appears here as well, as Juliet acknowledges the separation between

day and night, although later scenes in the play will further play with this binary.

Act 2, scene 3 Quotes

☝☝ For naught so vile that on the earth doth live
But to the earth some special good doth give;
Nor aught so good but, strain'd from that fair use,
Revolts from true birth, stumbling on the abuse:
Virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied;
And vice sometimes by action dignified.

Related Characters: Friar Laurence (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 2.3.17-22

Explanation and Analysis

Friar Lawrence, the wise and aged priest who nevertheless harbors a dedication to helping these intemperate “star-cross’d” lovers, is gathering herbs in the early morning, shortly before Romeo comes to him for guidance. For the friar, elements of nature (“herbs plants stones, and their true qualities”) inspire reflection about the nature of good and evil: no natural creation wholly belongs to one of those two categories, and a substance’s relative goodness or evilness depends on the way it is used. This echoes the moral ambiguity of the play; did Romeo and Juliet die because of their own actions or were their parents culpable for their suicides? It also reminds us that any one individual cannot fully belong to such an explicit moral category. Even the Capulets and Montagues cannot wholly hate each other, because two of their individuals love each other.

Act 3, scene 1 Quotes

☝☝ Romeo, the hate I bear thee can afford
No better term than this: thou art a villain.

Related Characters: Tybalt (speaker), Romeo

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 3.1.61-62

Explanation and Analysis

When Tybalt, Juliet’s cousin, sees Romeo in a public place, he does not deny or weaken his feelings as he expresses his hatred. The strength of Tybalt’s declaration reminds us of

Juliet’s words; Tybalt’s hatred impels him to name Romeo (as “a villain”), just as Juliet’s love drove her to name him (as her lover). Yet, Romeo next gives us a sense for how hatred and love can intertwine; he responds that he will refuse to acknowledge Tybalt’s hatred because he has reasons to love Tybalt. For Romeo in this scene, love overpowers hatred; this demonstrates that love and hatred are not merely opposing phenomenon in this play, but rather are engaged in interplay.

☝☝ Romeo: Courage, man; the hurt cannot be much.
Mercutio: No, 'tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church-door; but 'tis enough, 'twill serve: ask for me tomorrow, and you shall find me a grave man.

Related Characters: Romeo, Mercutio (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 3.1.99-102

Explanation and Analysis

Mercutio receives a wound from Tybalt during their fight, and it is indeed mortal, although Romeo claims it isn't as he attempts to inspire courage in his friend. Mercutio is under no such delusion; his dark pun that he will be a “grave man” tomorrow (a man who is somber or a man who is in a grave) demonstrates his acknowledgment of his true condition. Mercutio is ever the realist, about his own life and about others’ lives. Mercutio will die, and he will become a victim of the feud between the Capulets and Montagues, although he does not belong to either family. This indicates the extent to which these two households’ rivalry affects the larger society of Verona.

☝☝ O, I am fortune's fool!

Related Characters: Romeo (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 3.1.142

Explanation and Analysis

Romeo exclaims that he is “fortune's fool” after two deaths occur -- the death of his friend Mercutio and the death of Juliet's cousin Tybalt. Of course, we know from the play's Prologue that Romeo is indeed “fortune's fool,” as he is one

of two "star-cross'd" lovers who will die because of the drama's events. Yet, Romeo ironically utters this statement after he himself kills Tybalt, with his own sword and hands, during a combat which he immediately incited because of his passion over Mercutio's death. This inspires a degree of uncertainty about whether Romeo is indeed "fortune's fool," or whether he cooperates with fortune of his own free will, thus partially causing his own death as well.

Act 3, scene 2 Quotes

☛☛ Come, gentle night, — come, loving black brow'd night,
Give me my Romeo; and when he shall die,
Take him and cut him out in little stars,
And he will make the face of Heaven so fine
That all the world will be in love with night,
And pay no worship to the garish sun.

Related Characters: Juliet (speaker), Romeo

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 3.2.21-27

Explanation and Analysis

Before the Nurse enters and informs Juliet that Tybalt has died, Juliet speaks alone in the Capulets' courtyard about her desire for Romeo. She urges the night to "come" so that she can meet Romeo under the cover of darkness, as forbidden lovers do. As she passionately continues speaking, Juliet visually imagines Romeo's head existing in the night sky, illuminating the world with his fairness. Juliet's vision of Romeo serving as an image for the whole world to behold is imaginative, and it also suggests an inner longing to make their love less secretive. She dreams that night could become a force which allows the world to view her love, instead of the only time when it is safe enough to seek out her lover's company.

Act 3, scene 5 Quotes

☛☛ Wilt thou be gone? it is not yet near day.
It was the nightingale, and not the lark,
That pierc'd the fearful hollow of thine ear;
Nightly she sings on yond pomegranate tree.
Believe me love, it was the nightingale.

Related Characters: Juliet (speaker), Romeo

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 3.5.1-5

Explanation and Analysis

The nightingale has a rich tradition as a symbol in medieval romances, and it is fitting that Juliet references this creature when she attempts to convince Romeo that it is not yet day and their night of love-making is not over. Although Juliet was earlier willing to acknowledge the separation between day and night (when she said she would say good-bye until night became day), here she conflates the two. It is now day, but Juliet situates herself and Romeo within a fictitious night. This indicates how the lovers' situation has grown more desperate, which Juliet also suggests herself, with her description of "the fearful hollow of thine ear"—both lovers are afraid of the coming day, and what it may bring.

☛☛ Is there no pity sitting in the clouds
That sees into the bottom of my grief?
O sweet my mother, cast me not away!
Delay this marriage for a month, a week,
Or if you do not, make the bridal bed
In that dim monument where Tybalt lies.

Related Characters: Juliet (speaker), Lady Capulet, Tybalt

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 3.5.208-213

Explanation and Analysis

Romeo finally leaves Juliet's room when her Nurse warns her that Lady Capulet is coming. Lady Capulet arrives with "joyful tidings" that will hopefully ease the woe that Juliet (supposedly) feels for Tybalt's death: Juliet is to marry County Paris next Thursday. Of course, to Juliet, this news is the opposite of joyful. She reveals her love for Romeo to her mother and father, who refuse to acknowledge her desire to marry him. Her father swiftly leaves, and Juliet here appeals to her mother. She begs her mother to not cast her away, although Juliet has already figuratively cast herself away from her household during conversations with Romeo. Juliet practically suggests that her mother might merely delay this marriage to County Paris, before more

ardently and imaginatively asking her mother to make her bridal bed with County Paris a tomb—reflecting her earlier phrase, upon first seeing Romeo, that the grave should be her wedding-bed.

Act 4, scene 1 Quotes

☝☝ Or bid me go into a new-made grave,
And hide me with a dead man in his shroud -
Things that, to hear them told, have made me tremble -
And I will do it without fear or doubt,
To live an unstain'd wife to my sweet love.

Related Characters: Juliet (speaker), Romeo

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 4.1.85-90

Explanation and Analysis

After Juliet suggests that her bridal bed with County Paris and her tomb should be conflated, she finds herself making a similar suggestion as she pleads with her ally the Friar Laurence for assistance. Shortly before she makes this exclamation, Juliet was forced to discuss her impending marriage with both Paris and Friar Laurence, and this encounter has likely added to her constant emotional tumult, to produce the desperation she describes here. Yet Juliet also expresses a sort of strength through her desperation; she will do what she must “without fear or doubt” because she fosters such a passionate regard for Romeo. It is moments such as these that have made Romeo and Juliet two of the most famous lovers in history, as they are so renowned for their ability to resist their surrounding society.

Act 5, scene 1 Quotes

☝☝ Then I defy you, stars!

Related Characters: Romeo (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 5.1.25

Explanation and Analysis

Balthasar has brought word to Romeo that Juliet is dead and lies in the Capulet’s tomb vaults. Romeo’s immediate response is the question “Is it even so?,” a momentary

refusal to recognize the death of Juliet, which only briefly precedes his exclamation “then I defy you, stars!” Here, we witness how these lovers are “star-cross’d”: fate causes Romeo to hear that Juliet is dead, which will soon lead to his own death and her actual death. We see our lovers strive against the more amorphous forces which oppose them. The stars do not only “defy” Romeo’s wishes; through his use of language, Romeo is able to “defy” them, as well.

Act 5, scene 3 Quotes

☝☝ O true apothecary! Thy drugs are quick. — Thus with a kiss I die.

Related Characters: Romeo (speaker), Juliet, The Apothecary

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 5.3.119-120

Explanation and Analysis

In Juliet’s tomb, Romeo believes that his lover is dead, along with Tybalt, and near to Paris, whom he has just killed and lays in this grave as well. Romeo delivers a lengthy soliloquy, beginning by describing Juliet’s beauty (her quality which first attracted his notice) and claiming that death has not slighted her appearance in any way. Romeo also makes peace with Tybalt; even his last declaration of love to Juliet is contextualized by others, and by the greater society in which they exist. Finally, Romeo drinks the poison, which swiftly begins to kill him, urging him to say that the apothecary was “true” in selling him an effective poison. The natural substances – which, as Friar Laurence earlier reminded us, can either work for good or for evil – here are fulfilling the purpose which Romeo hopes they will fulfill.

☝☝ Yea, noise, then I'll be brief;
O, happy dagger!
This is thy sheath; there rest, and let me die.

Related Characters: Juliet (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 5.3.174-175

Explanation and Analysis

Romeo's drugs were "quick" to kill him, and Juliet decides to make her last moments "brief" as well, because she hears "noise" from the broader society outside the tomb. She makes her own body the dagger's "sheath" for the dagger, stabbing herself. Like Romeo, she kills herself because she believes that her lover is dead. However, here Romeo is truly dead; earlier, Romeo falsely believed that Juliet had died. This unfortunate accident of fate places a harsh dramatic irony over the tragedy. Morbidly, though, the two lovers' similar deaths connects them for the audience. And they even share the same last word – "die" – which affirms the power of death to connect the two lovers.

☛ For never was a story of more woe
Than this of Juliet and her Romeo.

Related Characters: Prince Escalus (speaker), Romeo, Juliet

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 5.3.320-321

Explanation and Analysis

As Prince Escalus ends the play, another figure finally acknowledges the intimate association between the two lovers; he refers to Romeo as "her Romeo," thus belonging to Juliet. Yet he also recapitulates their story as a story with the most woe, and thus language allows him to circumscribe the lovers' narrative with his own words. The broader society of Verona, which is led and symbolized by Prince Escalus, is personified in the play both after and before Romeo and Juliet appear. This places the play's love story within the sphere of broader forces – of human society, of spiritual dominion, of secular fate – that conspire to form the final outcome.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PROLOGUE

The Chorus delivers a fourteen line sonnet, in which it states the topic of the play. In the city of Verona, there are two noble houses that hold an "ancient grudge" against each other, resulting in bloody clashes. From these two houses will emerge two "star-crossed" lovers (1.p.3-6). The lovers will heal the rift between their families by dying.

The Prologue introduces themes of love and death and individual vs. society. And by revealing that R and J will die, the Prologue goes further with fate: it literally creates their fate. R and J are fated to die because the Prologue says they will.



ACT 1, SCENE 1

Two Capulet servants, Gregory and Samson, enter. They brag about what they would do if they saw a Montague.

The Montague-Capulet feud is immediately established as a social force in Verona.



Suddenly they see Abraham, a Montague servant. They want to fight, but don't want to start the fight so that the law is on their side. Samson insults Abraham by biting his thumb. Abraham draws his sword.

Law and honor introduced as additional social forces at play in Verona.



Benvolio arrives and tries to stop the fighting. Tybalt arrives and insults Benvolio and all Montagues. Soon they're all battling. Montague and Capulet also try to join the fight, but their wives hold them back.

The Montague-Capulet feud is as passionate among the nobles as among the servants. Tybalt established as a hothead.



The brawl halts only when Prince Escalus arrives with members of the Civil Watch. Escalus proclaims that any Montague or Capulet who disturbs the peace in the future will be put to death.

As the only government official in the play, Prince Escalus comes to symbolize the law.



As Benvolio and Montague discuss the fight a little later, Lady Montague says she's glad that Romeo, her son, wasn't involved. Benvolio says that just before dawn he saw Romeo looking melancholy in a grove of sycamore trees. None of them know why Romeo has seemed so sad recently. Just then they see Romeo approaching. Montague and Lady Montague exit, to let Benvolio speak with Romeo alone.

Love makes Romeo a loner—out of the social world. Love also makes Romeo frequent the pre-dawn darkness. Though his family doesn't know why Romeo's sad, the play gives a clue through a bad pun. Sycamore = sick amour (or "sick love").



Benvolio learns from Romeo that he is in love with Rosaline, a woman who has taken an oath of chastity. Romeo makes poetic pronouncements about love, and speaks in clichés about its paradoxes: "feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health" (1.1.174).

Romeo's clichéd talk of love mimics Petrarchan poems about unrequited love. Romeo isn't actually in love—he's trying to be an unrequited lover.



Benvolio advises Romeo to find someone else to love. Romeo walks off, saying that he can't forget Rosaline. Benvolio vows to help him forget her.

Of course, the audience knows Romeo is wrong: the play's title makes it clear Juliet is his fate.



ACT 1, SCENE 2

Capulet and Paris, a kinsmen of Prince Escalus, discuss Paris's wish to marry Capulet's daughter, Juliet. Capulet says Juliet is too young to marry—she's not yet fourteen. Still, he urges Paris to woo her and win her heart. After all, Capulet says, while *he* wants Juliet to marry Paris, it's more important that *she* want to marry him. Capulet invites Paris to the annual Capulet masquerade being held that night.

Capulet says he'll give Juliet the chance to accept or refuse Paris' marriage suit. Yet this generosity from Capulet suggests a deeper truth: if Capulet can give Juliet this power, he can also take it away.



As they exit, Capulet sends a servant, Peter, to deliver the rest of the invitations. But Peter can't read. Just then, Romeo and Benvolio happen along. Peter asks them if they'll read the list of invitations aloud for him. Romeo reads the list. In thanks, Peter invites them to the masquerade, as long as they aren't Montagues, of course. Peter exits.

The illiterate servant Peter is treated as a second-class citizen. First, he's given a task by his master that he can't accomplish, then he's tricked by Romeo and Benvolio. It's funny, but also shows how powerless Peter is.



Benvolio notes that Rosaline was one of the names on the list. He suggests they crash the party so Romeo can see his love isn't anything special compared to the other beauties there. Romeo agrees to go just to prove Benvolio wrong.

Again, the audience knows Romeo is wrong, and has probably already realized that Romeo will meet Juliet at the party. The audience has a fate's-eye view of the play.



ACT 1, SCENE 3

Just before the masquerade, Lady Capulet asks the Nurse to find Juliet. Juliet enters. Lady Capulet dismisses the Nurse, then immediately calls her back. The Nurse then tells a story about Juliet as a baby, in which the Nurse's now dead husband implicated an unknowing Juliet in a sexual joke. Lady Capulet can't quiet the Nurse, but Juliet finally does.

Lady Capulet's fear of talking to Juliet without the Nurse present establishes her as an ineffectual mother. The Nurse's story implies that women, even as infants, are seen as sexual objects. Juliet's ability to quiet the Nurse shows her strength.



Lady Capulet asks Juliet what she thinks about marriage. Juliet says she hasn't thought about it. Lady Capulet responds that at Juliet's age she had already given birth to Juliet. She reveals that Paris seeks to marry Juliet and says that if Juliet marries him she will "share all that he doth possess" (1.3.95).

Juliet's innocence is visible in her lack of thought about love. Lady Capulet sees marriage in material terms. That Lady Capulet married at age 13 shows societal standards.



Juliet says she'll look at Paris to see if she could love him, but won't look any more deeply than her mother instructs.

Juliet uses word play to make resistance sound like obedience: she'll do what her mother asks, but not a jot more.



ACT 1, SCENE 4

Romeo, Benvolio, and their friend Mercutio (a kinsmen of Prince Escalus), walk toward the Capulet's ball. Romeo, still melancholy, says he won't dance at the party. Mercutio makes fun of Romeo, twisting all his comments about love into sexual metaphors.

Romeo says he dreamed that going to the feast was a bad idea.

Mercutio launches into a speech about dreams and Queen Mab, the Queen of Fairies. The speech begins as a kind of fairy-tale, with Queen Mab bringing dreams in her carriage made from a walnut. But the dreams become more and more nightmarish, revealing men's greed, violence, and sexual desire. Mercutio works himself into a fervor. Romeo breaks in and calms him down.

Benvolio breaks in to say they'll be late if they don't hurry. Romeo again says he has a bad feeling. He senses that the events of the night will set fate in motion and result in his untimely death. But he shrugs it off and follows his friends.

Mercutio thinks little of love. He uses puns to show love is nothing more than a pretty excuse to chase sex. Mercutio's banter also shows how friends exert social pressure.



Fate and foreshadowing.



In the famous Queen Mab speech, Mercutio reveals the dark desires that hide behind mankind's pretty ideals, and his own revulsion at this subterfuge. He also shows his wit with words and a tendency to get carried furiously away.



Romeo gives himself to fate.



ACT 1, SCENE 5

At the masquerade, servants bustle, complain, and save a little marzipan for themselves.

Romeo catches sight of Juliet. He doesn't know who she is, but immediately forgets Rosaline. He says that Juliet teaches the "torches to [burn bright!](#)" (1.5.41). At the same time, Tybalt recognizes Romeo and prepares to attack this party-crashing Montague.

Capulet, furious that Tybalt would ruin the party, stops him. Once Capulet is gone, Tybalt secretly vows revenge, and exits.

Romeo approaches Juliet. Their entire first conversation is an intertwined fourteen line sonnet, in which they develop a complicated religious metaphor that Romeo guides into a first kiss, and which Juliet guides toward a second. Juliet comments that Romeo kisses "by the book" (1.5.107).

Servant's view of the party: work.



Romeo's first sight of Juliet is linked to Tybalt's noticing Romeo. Love can't escape the society surrounding it.



Romeo and Juliet's meeting sets in motion Tybalt's part in their fate.



The prologue and this first meeting between R and J are both in sonnet form. The play links the prologue's theme of fate with R and J's love from the first instant through this stylistic echo.



The Nurse interrupts, calling Juliet to her mother. Romeo learns from the Nurse that Juliet's a Capulet. Moments later, Juliet says about Romeo, as the Nurse goes to find out who he is, "If he be married, my grave is like to be my wedding bed" (1.5.131-132). The Nurse reports Romeo's a Montague.

Just as they fall in love, R and J discover the main social forces—their families—opposing them. Juliet simultaneously foreshadows her fate: when Romeo gets married, Juliet's grave does become her wedding bed.



ACT 2, PROLOGUE

In another sonnet, the Chorus describes the obstacles facing the new love between Romeo and Juliet, but also says that "passion lends them power" (2.p.13).

This prologue emphasizes how passion can move people to struggle against social realities.



ACT 2, SCENE 1

Instead of leaving the party with Benvolio and Mercutio, Romeo jumps the wall into the Capulet garden to try to find Juliet. Benvolio and Mercutio call after him, and Mercutio laughingly mocks Romeo's passion and love for Rosaline. Finally, they give up and leave.

Another social pressure that Romeo must face: his friends. For the rest of the play, by the way, Romeo's friends continue to think Romeo loves Rosaline.



ACT 2, SCENE 2

Just then, Romeo sees Juliet walk out onto a balcony. In a whisper he compares her to the [sun](#), and hides beneath her balcony.

Light/dark imagery. Juliet is a sun, lighting up the night.



Juliet speaks: she asks why Romeo must be Romeo. She asks him to forswear his name, to give up being a Montague, then offers to give up being a Capulet if Romeo will love her.

Juliet tries to use language, name-changing, to escape from the social world in order to love freely.



Romeo emerges from his hiding place, startling Juliet. She says that if Romeo is noticed he'll be killed, but Romeo responds that he would rather die than live without her love.

Romeo's passion for Juliet is so great it is almost violent, and makes him think nothing of death.



As the Nurse calls from Juliet's room, Juliet hurriedly asks Romeo, if his "love be honorable" (2.1.185), to send her word tomorrow whether he will marry her. He tells her to send the Nurse to him at nine. They exchange more hurried words of love, then exit.

Even head over heels in love, Juliet, as a woman, must protect her honor. Society demands it.



ACT 2, SCENE 3

As dawn breaks, Friar Laurence collects herbs outside his cell. He muses on the fact that everything on Earth, from herbs to virtues, has some special good, but that any of those things, if misapplied or used in excess, can cause disaster.

The Friar's thoughts on the importance of moderation prove fateful, given the destruction that R and J's passion causes.



Romeo rushes into Friar Laurence's cell. Friar Laurence immediately sees that Romeo did not sleep that night, and is alarmed that Romeo might have slept in sin with Rosaline. But Romeo says he has forgotten Rosaline, and describes his love for Juliet and his desire to marry her.

The Friar's comments on moderation contrast with Romeo's youthful insistence on speed and extreme emotion above all else.



The Friar is suspicious of Romeo's sudden switch from Rosaline to Juliet. Romeo responds that Juliet, unlike Rosaline, returns his love. The Friar comments that Rosaline knew Romeo's "love did read by rote, that could not spell" (2.2.86).

Another clue that before Juliet, Romeo's "love" came from copying romantic poetry rather than experience.



But Friar Laurence also sees an opportunity to end the feud between the Montagues and Capulets, and agrees to marry Romeo and Juliet.

Though he preaches moderation, Friar Laurence gets caught up in his own big dreams of creating peace.



ACT 2, SCENE 4

Benvolio and Mercutio wonder what happened to Romeo the previous night. Benvolio mentions that Tybalt has challenged Romeo to a duel. In a display of verbal wit, Mercutio mocks Tybalt as a "Prince of Cats" (2.3.17) who follows honor to a ridiculous degree. But he admits Tybalt is a good swordsmen.

Mercutio's mockery shows similarities between Tybalt and Romeo: Romeo loves love, Tybalt loves honor. Mercutio thinks they're both fools, though he likes Romeo and hates Tybalt.



Romeo appears. Mercutio mockingly compares Rosaline to all the great heroines of classical literature. Romeo and Mercutio then engage in an epic banter match, throwing back and forth their wit and sexual double entendres. Finally, Mercutio breaks off and says in great joy, "Now art thou sociable, now art thou Romeo" (2.3.77).

This is a glimpse of who Romeo was before he became obsessed with love: a kid with a wit as quick and wicked as Mercutio's. Mercutio believes this bantering Romeo is the "true" Romeo



The Nurse appears, looking for Romeo. For fun, Mercutio compares the Nurse to a prostitute for a while, then goes off with Benvolio to get lunch.

Here's an example of casual verbal abuse of lower-classes by nobles, even if in good fun.



The Nurse threatens some dire response if Romeo means to mislead Juliet. But Romeo says that if Juliet can get to Friar Laurence's cell that afternoon, they will be married. He also plans with the Nurse to set a rope ladder to Juliet's room, so he can climb to her room for their wedding night.

The Nurse is determined to protect both Juliet's honor and her heart. Romeo shows he is honorable.



ACT 2, SCENE 5

Juliet waits impatiently for the Nurse to return, and maligns "old folks" as "unwieldy, slow, heavy, and pale as lead" (2.4.14–15). Finally, the Nurse arrives. At first, the Nurse pretends she's too tired to talk in order to extort a back rub from Juliet. Then she relents and tells an ecstatic Juliet to get to Friar Laurence's cell to be married.

Romeo, as a man, can go out into the world and act. Juliet, as a woman, must wait at home.



ACT 2, SCENE 6

Friar Laurence and Romeo wait for Juliet. Romeo is so excited he says that no matter what sorrow might come, it cannot compare to his joy. The Friar counsels moderation in everything, including love, saying "These violent delights have violent ends" (2.5.9).

Contrast between Romeo's passions and the Friar's moderation. And the Friar is right: Romeo's end is violent. But Romeo wouldn't have it any other way.



Juliet arrives, and Romeo asks her to describe her love for him. But Juliet refuses. She comments that "They are but beggars that can count their worth" (2.5.32). She says her love is too large to describe.

Juliet calls Romeo on his overly-poetic love. She makes him see that love is bigger than just saying the words.



ACT 3, SCENE 1

The following day is boiling hot. Benvolio tells Mercutio they should get off the streets: the hot weather is bound to cause hot tempers. Just then, Tybalt enters with some other Capulets. Tybalt and Mercutio quickly start insulting each other and seem close to drawing swords. Benvolio tries to calm them.

Scene shifts from the privacy of Friar Laurence's cell where Romeo and Juliet were married to a public square where friends, honor, and family ties hold sway.



Romeo appears. Tybalt calls Romeo a "villain," but Romeo refuses to duel, saying that he loves Tybalt, and that the name Capulet is as dear as his own.

Romeo tries to avoid or deny obligations of the social world with love...



Mercutio, furious that Romeo refuses to stand up for himself, challenges Tybalt. They draw their swords and begin to fight. Romeo steps between them to stop the fighting, but Tybalt stabs Mercutio under Romeo's arm. Tybalt and the Capulets rush off. Mercutio dies, cursing both Montagues and Capulets: "A plague o' both your houses" (3.1.86).

...but Romeo's love becomes warped by the social world, and results in the death of his friend. Mercutio's dying curse on the Capulets and Montagues can be seen as both foreshadowing and fate.



Romeo says to himself that love for Juliet has made him "effeminate." Tybalt returns. Romeo avenges Mercutio by fighting and killing Tybalt. As the Watch and Prince Escalus approach, Romeo flees.

Romeo realizes he can't live by love in the social world of men. He avenges Mercutio's death, as honor dictates he must.



Benvolio tells Prince Escalus what happened. The Capulets demand that Romeo be executed, while the Montagues argue that Tybalt was to blame. Escalus banishes Romeo from Verona.

The law, though neutral, does not consider private matters such as love, and so the law becomes R and J's enemy.



ACT 3, SCENE 2

Juliet begs [nightfall](#) to hurry in its coming, and to bring Romeo with it. She imagines that when she dies Romeo will be immortalized as stars in heaven.

Night and privacy are here linked with love.



The Nurse runs in crying and shouting "He's dead!" (3.2.36). Juliet thinks Romeo has killed himself, and threatens to kill herself.

Juliet demonstrates her own willingness to die for love.



The Nurse in her grief starts calling out Tybalt's name. Juliet realizes there's been a mistake. The Nurse tells her Romeo killed Tybalt and has been banished. Juliet laments that Romeo could seem such an angel and be such a devil. The Nurse curses him. But Juliet cuts the Nurse off, and chides herself for speaking ill of Romeo. Romeo is her husband, and her loyalty and love are with him.

Juliet chooses Romeo over her family. In the balcony scene she offered to give up her name. Her decision here to support Romeo shows that she now really has given it up. She supports her husband, a Montague, over her cousin, a Capulet.



Juliet tells the Nurse to find Romeo and bid him come that [night](#) to her room so that they can consummate their marriage. The Nurse knows Romeo is hiding at Friar Laurence's cell.

Even as the social world seems to conspire against them, night gives R and J the privacy they need to love.



ACT 3, SCENE 3

Romeo, hiding in Friar Laurence's cell, learns he has been banished. He says banishment is worse than death because it means life without Juliet. Friar Laurence tells him to be patient and scolds him for being ungrateful that his life has been spared. Romeo says if the Friar felt what he feels, the Friar would understand Romeo's despair. Romeo throws himself to the floor.

Romeo's argument about love with Friar Laurence boils down to youth and passion vs. age and moderation.



There is a knock on the door. Romeo hides. Friar Laurence lets in the Nurse. Romeo believes Juliet must think him a murderer and tries to stab himself. The Nurse stops him. Friar Laurence scolds him for his crying and counts all the ways that Romeo is lucky.

Romeo continues to link his passionate love to violence and suicide. It is, of course, another instance of foreshadowing. But it makes the point that Romeo's character drives his fate...



The Friar tells Romeo to go spend the [night](#) with Juliet and then before [dawn](#) to flee Verona for Mantua. There he should wait until some time has passed and the marriage can be made public knowledge and the prince begged to pardon him.

...so no matter how reasonable the Friar's plan might be, it's bound to not work out.



ACT 3, SCENE 4

It is just before **dawn**. Capulet, Lady Capulet, and Paris have stayed up late, discussing Juliet and the tragedy of Tybalt's death. Paris turns to go, but Capulet suddenly calls him back. Capulet says he wants Paris and Juliet to marry, and thinks her heart "will be ruled in all respects by me" (3.4.14). He suggests the marriage be held on Wednesday. Then, realizing its Monday, he says Wednesday's too soon and moves the Wedding back to Thursday. Paris is overjoyed. Capulet instructs Lady Capulet to tell Juliet about her imminent wedding.

Juliet's apparent grief at Tybalt's death (which is really grief at Romeo's banishment) moves Capulet to decide to marry her to Paris. Capulet is trying to make Juliet happy, but this is a decision he's making for her. As her father, he has that right, and expects total obedience. Interesting that all this is happening at dawn—the moment when night shifts to day.



ACT 3, SCENE 5

The call of a bird wakes Romeo and Juliet just before **dawn**, but Juliet claims the bird is a nightingale rather than the lark greeting the day. Romeo says he's willing to pretend it's **night** and die, just to be with Juliet.

Earlier Romeo and Juliet tried to rename each other. Now they try to rename things in the world to stop the day from dawning.



Juliet stops pretending. She says it's **day** and Romeo must go.

Juliet is willing to die for love. Romeo wants to die for love.



The Nurse enters and warns that Lady Capulet is approaching Juliet's room. Romeo hurries down the rope ladder. To Juliet, standing on her balcony, it looks as if Romeo is descending into a tomb.

Perfect example of the social world interfering in Romeo and Juliet's love, leading to a foreshadowing of their fate.



Lady Capulet enters, and soon begins to curse Romeo as the "traitor murderer" (3.5.84) of Tybalt. Juliet speaks so cunningly that it seems like she's agreeing with her mother, but in reality she is expressing her love for Romeo.

Juliet uses language to hide her meaning from her mother. Word play can keep private thoughts safe from the public world.



Lady Capulet reveals the plan for Juliet to marry Paris on Thursday. Juliet refuses to marry Paris just as Capulet enters. He is furious at her ingratitude. Capulet says she'll marry Paris on Thursday even if he has to drag her to the church. And if she still refuses to marry, he will disown her. Juliet begs her mother to step in, but Lady Capulet follows Capulet out the door.

Yet Juliet can only hide from the public world; she can't overcome it. As a daughter, she has no right or ability to stand up to her father. Note how furious Capulet gets at the mere suggestion of disobedience.



Juliet asks the Nurse for advice. The Nurse says that Romeo is banished and unlikely to return, so she should marry Paris. The Nurse tries to ease the blow by saying that Paris is better looking than Romeo anyway. Juliet privately vows never to trust the Nurse again. She comes up with a lie in order to go see Friar Laurence, telling the Nurse that because she displeased her father she needs to go to confession.

Just as Friar Laurence can't understand Romeo's passion, the Nurse can't understand Juliet's. The Nurse thinks one handsome man is as good as another. Juliet, in contrast, insists on the uniqueness of her love with Romeo.



ACT 4, SCENE 1

Paris is talking with Father Laurence, to prepare for the wedding on Thursday. Friar Laurence says it's all happening too fast and that he's concerned that Paris doesn't even know if Juliet wants to marry him.

Of course, Friar Laurence does know what Juliet wants. He's lying—trying to affect the world through language without revealing what he knows.



Juliet arrives. Paris greets her as his wife. Paris is loving, but condescending, assuming that she loves him. Juliet is evasive and mocks Paris without his realizing it. Friar Laurence steps in saying it is time for Juliet's confession.

Bland Paris takes love for granted. Juliet masks the meaning of her words with word play.



Once they're alone, Juliet draws a dagger and threatens to kill herself unless the Friar can help her.

Love is here linked to violence, and suicide brought up as a way to escape society.



Friar Laurence quickly comes up with a plan: he gives Juliet a potion that, for forty-two hours, will put her into a sleep so deep it will appear as if she has died. He tells her to agree to marry Paris Thursday, but to take the potion Wednesday night. Instead of a wedding, the Capulets will hold a funeral, and inter Juliet in their family tomb. Meanwhile, the friar will get word to Romeo, who will come to the tomb in time to be there when she wakes, and the two of them will together go to Mantua.

To save her love with Romeo, Juliet must make it look like she killed herself, which foreshadows her actual suicide for love at the play's end. Incidentally, death can be seen as the ultimate night, the ultimate privacy; and it is privacy from the social world that Juliet needs in order to share her love with Romeo in peace.



ACT 4, SCENE 2

At the Capulet's home, preparations for the wedding are in full swing. Juliet returns from Friar Laurence's cell with a smile on her face. She "repent[s] of the sin of disobedient opposition" (4.2.17) and begs for her father to forgive her.

Earlier, Juliet had been using language to make one thing sound like another. Now she's lying outright to her parents.



Capulet is overjoyed. In fact, he's so happy that over his wife's objections he decides to move the wedding up a day to Wednesday, which is tomorrow. Juliet and Nurse go to Juliet's room to pick out clothes for Juliet to wear.

It is ironic, and fateful, that Juliet's fake joy convinces Capulet to move the wedding forward a day.



ACT 4, SCENE 3

After selecting clothes for the wedding, Juliet asks the Nurse and Lady Capulet to let her spend the night before her wedding alone.

Juliet needs privacy to take her stand against society.



Once they leave, she picks up the vial of potion that Friar Laurence gave her. Suddenly nervous, she thinks about what might go wrong with Friar Laurence's plan: what if the Friar means to murder her to hide his participation in her marriage to Romeo? What if she wakes up in the vault before Romeo arrives, and goes insane because she is surrounded by death and skeletons?

Juliet sees a vision of Tybalt chasing Romeo, yet lifts the vial, toasts to Romeo, and drinks.

The depth of Juliet's love for Romeo is visible in her willingness to drink the potion despite her profound fears.



Juliet's vision symbolizes fate battling love. Juliet, steeled by love, stares down fate and drinks.



ACT 4, SCENE 4

As the Capulet household readies for the wedding the following morning, Capulet sends the Nurse to wake Juliet. But Juliet is dead. The Nurse, Lady Capulet, and Capulet cry out in grief. Just then, Paris and Friar Laurence arrive with musicians. Paris joins in the mourning. But Friar Laurence chides them. He says that Juliet is now happy in heaven, and says they must prepare the funeral. The Capulets, Paris, the Nurse, and Friar Laurence all exit.

The sudden exit of the Capulets leaves the musicians all alone. Peter requests that they play a happy song to lessen his sadness, but they refuse because Peter has no money to pay them. This leads to a confrontation with a furious Peter, but the musicians don't give in. After Peter leaves, the musicians decide to stick around for a while to see if they can get a free lunch at the funeral reception.

The Friar's chiding of the Capulets for immoderate grief mirrors his advice to Romeo about immoderate passion. But now Friar Laurence is using his advice to lie. Even if he's doing it to help Juliet, it seems a pretty un-friarlike thing to do.



A noblewoman has apparently died on her wedding day, and musicians are wondering if it means they won't get lunch. The musicians, who work for their living, have to care about their own well-being.



ACT 5, SCENE 1

Romeo, in Mantua, contemplates a happy dream he's had: Juliet found him dead, and brought him back to life by kissing him. As Romeo muses on love, Balthasar, Romeo's servant, arrives with news: Juliet is dead. Balthasar saw her laid to rest in the Capulet tomb.

Romeo shouts, "Then I defy you, stars" (5.1.24). He orders Balthasar to get him paper and ink for a note, and to hire some horses. Balthasar asks Romeo to calm down and be patient—he says that Romeo's "pale and wild" looks signify that Romeo is about to do something rash. Romeo assures Balthasar that he won't do anything crazy. Balthasar exits to get the paper and the horses.

Romeo's dream is the opposite of what happens. Rather than bring him back to life, in act 5, scene 3 Juliet kisses his lips to try to join him in death.



Romeo seeks to deny fate by joining Juliet in death, but is actually playing into fate's hands. Part of the genius of Romeo and Juliet is how its characters' personalities determine their fates. Also, note how Romeo, like Juliet did before, has now started to lie to protect his privacy.



Romeo addresses Juliet, telling her "I will lie with thee tonight" (5.1.34). He finds a poor apothecary, and asks the man to sell him poison. The apothecary says Mantua has a death penalty against anyone who sells poison. Romeo says the apothecary should not pay any attention to the law, since there is no law that protects the apothecary from his poverty. The apothecary sells Romeo poison, saying "My poverty but not my will consents" (5.1.75). Romeo takes the poison and heads off to Verona and the Capulet tomb.

Romeo tells the apothecary to break the law because the law doesn't do anything to help the apothecary out of his poverty. But Romeo is also unwittingly describing his own situation: the law cares nothing about his love, and so he's breaking it. By buying poison, Romeo throws off the last of the social bonds constricting him.



ACT 5, SCENE 2

Friar John, who Friar Laurence had sent to tell Romeo the plan about Juliet's fake death, returns. He explains that he never made it to Mantua because an outbreak of the plague put him in quarantine. Friar Laurence writes another letter to Romeo, then rushes off to free Juliet from the Capulet tomb.

Fate can be a bummer.



ACT 5, SCENE 3

Outside the Capulet tomb, Paris mourns. He sends his servant away to wait for him nearby, and tells the boy to whistle if anyone approaches. While Paris strews the ground with flowers, the page whistles. Paris hides.

Though Paris is little more than a good-looking bore, his love for Juliet is real.



Romeo enters bearing a torch, with Balthasar following him. Romeo gives Balthasar a letter and instructs him to give it to his father (Montague) the next morning. He says he wants to see Juliet one last time, and to take a ring from her as a remembrance, and sends Balthasar away. But Balthasar doesn't leave, and instead hides nearby.

Romeo lies to Balthasar about his plans—once again he uses deceiving language as a way to gain privacy from the social world.



Paris recognizes Romeo and thinks he has come to desecrate Tybalt's or Juliet's grave, or both. He draws his sword and confronts Romeo. Romeo begs Paris not to try to stop him, but Paris refuses. They fight. Paris's page runs to call the Watch. Romeo kills Paris, but promises to grant Paris's dying request to be laid to rest near Juliet.

Paris throws flowers on his love's grave, while Romeo has come to kill himself—Romeo vs. Paris pits passionate love against a more "proper" love. It's no surprise who wins their duel.



Romeo opens the tomb and carries the body of Paris inside. He sees Juliet, and is amazed that her beauty is unaffected by death. He thinks it seems almost as if death has fallen in love with her. He kisses Juliet, drinks the poison, kisses her once more, and dies.

Romeo fulfills both fate and love, and removes himself from the social world—he kills himself to be with Juliet. Note also that the dark tomb provides a kind of permanent night.



Friar Laurence arrives at the churchyard and is greeted by Balthasar, who tells him that Romeo has returned to see Juliet. The Friar, sensing disaster, rushes to the tomb and sees the blood and weapons from Romeo's fight with Paris. Just as he enters the tomb, Juliet stirs and wakes. Friar Laurence hears the approaching Watch. He tells her what happened, and begs Juliet to flee with him. Juliet refuses. Friar Laurence runs.

Juliet sees the vial clutched in Romeo's dead hand and realizes he killed himself by poison. She kisses his lips, hoping to poison herself. But there is none left. She hears the Watch approaching, pulls Romeo's dagger from its sheath, stabs herself, and dies.

The Watchmen enter and see the dead bodies. They send men to rouse Prince Escalus, the Capulets, and the Montagues, and search the area. They find Balthasar and Friar Laurence.

Prince Escalus enters, followed first by the Capulets, and then by Montague, who says his wife has died of grief over Romeo's banishment. Friar Laurence explains to them everything that happened. Balthasar hands over the letter from Romeo to his father, which corroborates Friar Laurence's story. The Prince turns to the Montagues and Capulets and tells them that their hate is so terrible that "heaven finds means to kill your joys with love" (5.2.292). Montague and Capulet take each other's hands, promising to bury their grudge and to erect golden statues of Juliet and Romeo. Prince Escalus, mourning his own dead relatives, leads the group away.

By fleeing, the Friar shows that his moderation, while usually the wiser course than passion, is often not as honorable, pure, or courageous as passion can be.



Juliet kills herself, fulfilling her fate, when she hears the approaching watch—a symbolic playing out of death as a form of privacy from encroaching society.



The social world discovers what has been going on in the private world.



Romeo and Juliet's love is so passionate that it has to be everything or nothing, and in a world of families, friendships, and civil law, love can't be everything. So their love demanded that they die. In other words, their love was their fate. And by killing themselves, Romeo and Juliet change the world in a way their word play and lies couldn't:—they end the feud that made their love impossible. Fate may have ended their lives, but it also made their love powerful.



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