

Romeo and Juliet



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

William Shakespeare was born in 1564. His father was a glove-maker and assemblyman in Stratford-upon-Avon, and his mother was the daughter of a well-to-do landowner. At 18, Shakespeare wed a woman eight years his senior, Anne Hathaway; just six months after their marriage, Hathaway gave birth to a daughter. She later bore two more children—one of whom, Hamnet, died at the age of 11. There is a gap in the historical record between the birth of Shakespeare's twins and his first recorded appearance on the London theater scene in 1592. His theatrical career likely began in the mid-1580s, and between then and 1613, he composed such works as *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Hamlet*, the *Henriad*, *Julius Caesar*, *Othello*, and many more. In 1609, he published a book of sonnets, and released other long poems in the mid-1590s while London's theaters were closed due to the plague. Shakespeare died in 1616 of a rumored "fever" just a month after creating a will in which he declared himself to be in good health. His surviving works include nearly 40 plays and over 150 sonnets, and his body of work is widely performed, analyzed, studied, and reinterpreted to this day.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the early years of the Renaissance, Italy was divided up into several smaller city-states which often warred with one another. Rome was mostly ruins—but Padua and Verona came under Venetian control, and cities like Florence and Milan (sometimes called the "cradle of capitalism") flourished under early financial innovations spearheaded by the Medici clan of bankers and politicians. In the cities, politically powerful wealthy elites became patrons of the arts and a luxury class emerged quickly—but social inequality throughout the majority of the country was profound, and most of Italy belonged to the peasant class. *Romeo and Juliet* is a tragedy—but the play knowingly wags its finger at the warring Capulets and Montagues, wealthy families who can't look past their own insularity and haughty self-importance to be good to one another, or to allow their children the chance at real love. Shakespeare drew on many poems, novels, and myths in the construction of *Romeo and Juliet*—but the play also may very well have been a timely critique of Renaissance-era social inequality and the trivial concerns of the upwardly mobile elite.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Shakespeare drew on many sources—both ancient and

contemporaneous with his own era—in the writing of *Romeo and Juliet*. The tale of Pyramus and Thisbe from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* tells the story of two Babylonian lovers forbidden from marrying one another by their feuding parents. Pyramus and Thisbe, much like Romeo and Juliet, meet their tragic ends when a miscommunication leads them each to commit suicide upon believing (or realizing) the other is dead. Luigi da Porto, adapting the Pyramus and Thisbe myth while drawing on autobiographical elements of his own life, wrote the story of "Giulietta e Romeo" in 1524—his version of the tale includes warring Italian families whose strife prevents two young lovers from realizing their passion for one another. A 1592 poem by Arthur Brooke called *The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet*—reportedly translated from an Italian novella by Matteo Bandello—follows the same arc as Shakespeare's play, but the ending differs in that the nurse, apothecary, and friar are all punished for their involvement in the young lovers' deaths. Just as *Romeo and Juliet* represents Shakespeare's having drawn upon a mélange of previously written texts, the play itself has inspired many new adaptations and retellings of the star-crossed lovers' story throughout history. Some of the most notable contemporary reimaginings of the tale include young adult novels by Rachael Lippincott (*Five Feet Apart*) and Sharon M. Draper (*Romiette and Julio*), as well as *West Side Story*, a musical by Leonard Bernstein, Arthur Laurents, and Stephen Sondheim in which the Montagues and Capulets become the Sharks and the Jets, rival gangs on the Upper West Side of 1950s New York.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Romeo and Juliet
- **When Written:** Likely 1591-1595
- **Where Written:** London, England
- **When Published:** "Bad quarto" (incomplete manuscript) printed in 1597; Second, more complete quarto printed in 1599; First folio, with clarifications and corrections, printed in 1623
- **Literary Period:** Renaissance
- **Genre:** Tragic play
- **Setting:** Verona, Italy
- **Climax:** Mistakenly believing that Juliet is dead, Romeo kills himself on her funeral bier by drinking poison. Juliet wakes up, finds Romeo dead, and fatally stabs herself with his dagger.
- **Antagonist:** Capulet, Lady Capulet, Montague, Lady Montague, Tybalt

EXTRA CREDIT

Tourist Trap. Casa di Julietta, a 12-century villa in Verona, is located just off the Via Capello (the possible origin of the anglicized surname “Capulet”) and has become a major tourist attraction over the years because of its distinctive balcony. The house, purchased by the city of Verona in 1905 from private holdings, has been transformed into a kind of museum dedicated to the history of *Romeo and Juliet*, where tourists can view set pieces from some of the major film adaptations of the play and even leave letters to their loved ones. Never mind that “the balcony scene,” one of the most famous scenes in English literature, may never have existed—the word “balcony” never appears in the play, and balconies were not an architectural feature of Shakespeare’s England—tourists flock from all over to glimpse Juliet’s famous veranda.

Love Language. While much of Shakespeare’s later work is written in a combination of verse and prose (used mostly to offer distinction between social classes, with nobility speaking in verse and commoners speaking in prose), *Romeo and Juliet* is notable for its heady blend of poetic forms. The play’s prologue is written in the form of a sonnet, while most of the dialogue adheres strictly to the rhythm of iambic pentameter. Romeo and Juliet alter their cadences when speaking to each other, using more casual, naturalistic speech. When they talk about other potential lovers, such as Rosaline and Paris, their speech is much more formal (to reflect the emotional falsity of those dalliances.) Friar Laurence speaks largely in sermons and aphorisms, while the nurse speaks in blank verse.



PLOT SUMMARY

In Renaissance-era Verona, Italy, two noble families, the Montagues and Capulets, are locked in a bitter and ancient feud whose origin no one alive can recall. After a series of public brawls between both the nobles and the servants of the two families, which shed blood and disturb the peace in Verona’s city streets, 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 are, of course, not invited. As Capulet and Lady Capulet fuss over the arrangements for the party, ensuring that everything is perfect for their friends and guests, they hope that their daughter Juliet will fall in love with the handsome count Paris at the ball. At 13, Juliet is nearly of marriageable age, and the Capulets believe that marrying Paris would allow their daughter to ascend the social ladder in Verona. During the party, two Montagues, 16-year-old Romeo and his cousin Benvolio, along with their bawdy, quick-tongued friend Mercutio, a kinsmen of Prince Escalus, crash the affair. Romeo

attends the party reluctantly, and only because he is hoping to see Rosaline, a young woman he has been hopelessly in love with—and unsuccessfully pursuing—for quite some time. His lack of romantic success has made him noticeably forlorn as of late, much to the chagrin of his friends, who nonetheless poke fun at their lovesick friend’s melodramatic state. Tybalt, a hot-blooded member of House Capulet, notices the intrusion of the Montagues and recognizes them in spite of their masks—but when he draws his rapier and begins approaching them to provoke a fight, Capulet urges Tybalt not to embarrass their family.

When the masked Romeo spots Juliet from across the room, he instantly falls in love with her. Juliet is equally smitten. The two of them speak, exchanging suggestive jokes, and then kiss. As the party ends, Romeo and Juliet, pulled away from one another to attend to their friends and family, separately discover who the other truly is. Both are distraught—Juliet laments that her “only love [has] sprung from [her] only hate.” As the party winds down and Romeo’s friends prepare to leave, Romeo breaks off from them, jumps an orchard wall, and hides in the **dark** beneath Juliet’s bedroom window. She emerges onto her balcony and bemoans her forbidden love for Romeo, wishing aloud that he could “be some other name.” Romeo jumps out from his hiding place and tells Juliet that he’d do anything for her—he is determined to be with her in spite of the obstacles they face. Romeo and Juliet exchange vows of love, and Romeo promises to call upon Juliet tomorrow so they can hastily be married.

The next day, Romeo visits a kindly but philosophical friar, Friar Laurence, in his chambers. He begs Friar Laurence to marry him to his new love, Juliet. Friar Laurence urges Romeo to slow down and take his time when it comes to love: “these violent delights,” he predicts, “have violent ends.” But Romeo insists he and Juliet know what they’re doing. Friar Laurence comes around, realizing that a marriage between Romeo and Juliet could end their parents’ age-old feud. Later that day, Benvolio and Mercutio encounter Tybalt, who is furious that the Montagues crashed the Capulet party. Tybalt has, in a letter, challenged Romeo to a duel, and Mercutio and Benvolio are worried about the impulsive Romeo rising to the skilled Tybalt’s challenge. When Romeo shows up to find Tybalt, Benvolio, and Mercutio exchanging verbal barbs and teetering on the edge of a fight, Romeo does all he can to resist dueling with Tybalt. He and Juliet have just hastily visited Friar Laurence’s chambers together and are now married. Romeo doesn’t want to fight Tybalt, who is now technically his kinsman—but he knows he can’t reveal the truth to Tybalt, either. Before Romeo can explain his reasons for hesitating, Mercutio disgustedly steps in and challenges Tybalt to a duel himself. Romeo tries to separate them, but Tybalt stabs and kills Mercutio under Romeo’s arm. Mercutio dies from his wounds, cursing both the Montagues and the Capulets and invoking “a plague [on] both houses.” In a

miserable, mournful rage, Romeo kills Tybalt, then declares himself “fortune’s fool.” Benvolio urges him to hurry from the square. The prince and the citizens’ watch arrive, along with the elders of House Capulet and House Montague. Benvolio tells Prince Escalus what has unfolded, and the prince decides to banish Romeo to Mantua rather than sentence him to death.

Back at the Capulet manse, Juliet dreamily awaits the arrival of Romeo, whom she believes is hurrying from church so that they can spend their wedding night together. Juliet’s reveries are shattered with her nurse enters and informs her that Romeo has slain Tybalt and been banished from Verona. Juliet is furious with Romeo for killing Tybalt, but at the same time, her love for him is so profound that she admits she’d rather he lived than Tybalt. Juliet bids her nurse to go find Romeo and bring him to her, letting him know that she still wants to see him in spite of his actions. The nurse heads to Friar Laurence’s chambers, where the miserable, embarrassed, and angry Romeo is hiding. Though Romeo laments his fate to Friar Laurence, the friar urges Romeo to see that he is lucky to be alive, and promises to find a way to bring him back to Verona from exile in Mantua soon enough. The nurse arrives and summons Romeo to Juliet’s chambers—he happily follows her, and Friar Laurence urges Romeo to head straight to Mantua in the morning and await word from a messenger.

The death of Tybalt affects Capulet deeply. He decides to marry Juliet to Paris immediately, to cheer both Juliet and himself up. Juliet and Romeo bid each another farewell as the **dawn** breaks the next morning, and though Juliet says she has a terrible feeling she’ll never see Romeo again, she urges him to hurry on to Mantua. Lady Capulet enters Juliet’s chambers just after Romeo leaves to find her daughter weeping. Believing Juliet is still sad over Tybalt’s death, Lady Capulet delivers the news that Juliet will soon be married to Paris. Juliet refuses, and Lady Capulet urges Juliet to tell her father of her decision. Capulet enters, and, when Juliet stubbornly and angrily refutes the arrangement he’s made for her, 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 in a rage, threatening to kill herself if he cannot devise a plan to get her out of the marriage to Paris. Friar Laurence, sensing Juliet’s deep pain, quickly comes up with a scheme: he gives her a vial of **potion** that, once drunk, will make it seem like she’s dead—but will really only put her to sleep for about 40 hours. Juliet will be laid to rest in the Capulet tomb, and once she wakes up there, Friar Laurence will collect her and hide her until Romeo returns from Mantua. The friar promises to get news of the plan to Romeo so that he can hurry back home. Juliet takes the vial and returns home with it. Though she is afraid the potion might either kill her or not work at all, Juliet drinks it and immediately falls unconscious. The next morning the Capulet household wakes to discover that Juliet has seemingly died. As Capulet and Lady Capulet

dramatically mourn their daughter’s loss, Friar Laurence chides them for their tears—in life, he says, they sought Juliet’s social “promotion.” Now that she is in heaven, she has received the highest promotion of all.

In Mantua, Romeo’s servant Balthasar approaches and tells him that Juliet has died. Romeo is devastated—he plans to “deny [the] stars” and return to Verona. Before leaving Mantua, however, he visits the shop of a local apothecary who sells forbidden **poisons**. If Juliet really is dead, Romeo plans to drink the vial of poison and kill himself inside her tomb. Back in Verona, Friar Laurence learns that his brother in the cloth, Friar John, has failed to deliver the letter about Juliet’s feigned “death” to Romeo—Romeo has no idea that Juliet is really alive. Friar Laurence hurries to the Capulet crypt to try to head off any calamity. At the gravesite, however, trouble is brewing: Paris has arrived with his page, intending to scatter flowers around Juliet’s tomb. Romeo and Balthasar approach, and Paris hides to see who has come to the crypt. Romeo takes up some tools and begins to break open the Capulet tomb. The astonished, offended Paris steps forward to stop him. The two duel, and Romeo kills Paris. Romeo succeeds in opening Juliet’s tomb, and brings Paris’s corpse down into it with him.

As Romeo looks upon Juliet, he notes that her cheeks and lips still seem flushed with blood—but, believing she is dead, resolves to drink the poison after a final kiss. Romeo drinks the vial and dies. Friar Laurence arrives to find a terrible scene before him. Juliet wakes, and Friar Laurence urges her to follow him without looking at the bodies. As sounds of the citizens’ watch approach, however, Friar Laurence flees, begging Juliet to follow him so he can install her in a nunnery. Instead, Juliet stays behind with Romeo’s corpse. Seeing the poison in his hand, she tries to drink a drop from his lips, but Romeo has left none for her. Instead, she pulls Romeo’s dagger from his hip and uses it to kill herself. Several watchmen arrive and bring Friar Laurence, Balthasar, Prince Escalus, and Paris’s page to the crypt to investigate what has happened. As the truth unravels, the elders of House Montague and Capulet arrive. Prince Escalus tells them that their hatred has killed their children. “All,” the prince says, “are punished.” The Capulets and Montagues agree to end their feud and erect statues of each other’s children in the town square.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Romeo – One of the protagonists of the play, along with Juliet. He is the male heir to the dynasty of House Montague, which is in a long-standing feud with House Capulet. At the start of the play, Romeo is too busy pining over his unrequited love for a young woman named Rosaline to join his kinsman in the many petty fights and brawls they engage in with members of House

Capulet—Romeo would rather chase down love (or stand around sighing about how he’s failing to do so) than raise his sword against his family’s enemies. After Romeo is dragged to a masquerade at the Capulet house by Mercutio, his wild, fun-loving friend, and Benvolio, his cousin, Romeo falls in love with the beautiful Juliet—not realizing that she is a Capulet, and therefore his sworn enemy due to the feud between their families. Romeo quickly abandons his feelings for Rosaline and swears his eternal, undying love for Juliet, revealing his melodramatic and quickly changeable nature. After secretly marrying Juliet with the help of Friar Laurence, Romeo is even more resistant to being drawn into his kinsmen’s brawls. But after the hotheaded Tybalt, furious at the Montagues for crashing the Capulets’ party, kills Mercutio, Romeo takes a stand and kills Tybalt. This further confirms Romeo’s inconsistent and reactionary tendencies, and he is exiled to Mantua by Prince Escalus, where he pines for Juliet while awaiting news from Friar Laurence. Unbeknownst to Romeo, the friar helps Juliet avoid a forced marriage to the count Paris by devising a plan that will make her appear dead after she drinks a special **potion**. This way, she can be put to rest in her family tomb, excavated, and reunited with Romeo outside the walls of Verona. Romeo is unaware of this plan, however, and when his servant, Balthasar, brings him news that Juliet is dead, Romeo once again flies into a melodramatic rage, procuring poison from a local apothecary and rushing back to Verona—against the order of his exile—to kill himself inside Juliet’s tomb. Upon waking up from her staged death, Juliet is distraught over Romeo’s death and uses his dagger to commit suicide herself. Impulsive, dramatic, and obsessed with the pursuit of love, Romeo’s changeable, impulsive, childish personality has fascinated audiences for centuries. In popular culture, a “Romeo” is a young man so swept up in the grips of love he can focus on nothing else—in the play, Romeo’s emotions so obscure his sense of reason and calm that he takes his own life in the name of following his love interest into death.

Juliet – One of the protagonists of the play, along with Romeo. She is the female heir to the dynasty of House Capulet, which is in a long-standing feud with House Montague. At only 13, Juliet finds herself pulled from the cocoon of childhood when her mother, Lady Capulet, informs her that she’s of marriageable age and that the wealthy, handsome count Paris has set his sights on her. Juliet is reluctant to start thinking about love, and frequently clashes with her overbearing parents as they try to arrange a socially and monetarily fortuitous match for her. But when she meets Romeo, whom she does not realize is a member of House Montague, her family’s enemy, she is struck by desire. Even after she learns Romeo’s true identity, she continues pining for him, and when she realizes that he feels the same way, she demands he swear his love to her or leave her alone forever. Romeo suggests that the two of them marry hastily, and Juliet accepts his proposal—in spite of (or perhaps because of) the feud between their houses. Juliet is,

throughout the play, torn between her perceived duty to her family and her love for Romeo. Her burgeoning sexuality and desire for new experiences outside of the insular world of her family’s obsession with respectability and gentility drive her into Romeo’s arms, and lead her to take serious emotional and physical risks in pursuit of a life with him. In order to avoid marrying Paris, Friar Laurence helps Juliet come up with a plan to fake her own death using a special **potion** so that she will be buried in her family’s tomb and then excavated to be reunited with Romeo. However, the plan goes awry when, upon seeing Juliet’s “dead” body, Romeo kills himself in her tomb. As a young woman, Juliet knows she has limited options, and her choice to take her own life at the end of the play—often attributed to her desire to follow Romeo into death—may actually have more to do with her confusion, shame, and fear about her social standing in the wake of Romeo’s demise. When Friar Laurence suggests Juliet live out the rest of her days in a nunnery, she finds herself torn between facing the chaos and destruction she’s caused through her impulsiveness by dealing with the consequences outright, or living a life of shame and obfuscation, hidden away from the only world she’s ever known. Romantic yet grounded, introspective yet impulsive, and determined to be the master of her own destiny—even if that destiny is death—Juliet tests the limits of love, fate, duty, and independence throughout the play.

Friar Laurence – A kindly, philosophical friar of Verona who, as his community’s spiritual and intellectual center, keeps finding himself enmeshed in the dramas of House Montague and House Capulet. Romeo and Juliet like the friar and come to him separately on several occasions for advice about love, solutions to their problems, and favors small and large. Friar Laurence is clearly uncomfortable with his role as arbiter of the young lovers’ trials and tribulations—but at the same time, he longs to bring peace to his community, and believes that in uniting Romeo and Juliet he may be able to put to rest the ancient feud between their families. He marries Romeo and Juliet in secret in hopes of bringing all of Verona together, blind to what the larger consequences of his actions may be. In spite of his occasional shortsightedness, Friar Laurence is the play’s moral compass in many ways: he calls out Romeo for his melodrama and ungratefulness, Juliet for her rash responses to anger and frustration, and Capulet for his obsession with climbing Verona’s social ladder. In spite of all Friar Laurence’s efforts to help bring Romeo and Juliet together and bridge the gap between their two families, he ultimately fails—and Prince Escalus suggests the man may even be punished for his involvement in the whole affair. Levelheaded, righteous, hopeful, and resourceful, Friar Laurence tries hard to do what’s best for everyone—even if he’s unable, in the end, to bring peace to Verona in the way he envisioned.

The Nurse – Juliet’s nurse is the main source of comic relief throughout the play. Forgetful, long-winded, bawdy, and

seemingly immune to embarrassment, the nurse is happy to share cringe-worthy stories from her own past and Juliet's with anyone who will listen. The nurse has been caring for Juliet since Juliet was born, and even nursed her from her own breast. She loves Juliet deeply and, though employed by Juliet's parents, Capulet and Lady Capulet, often goes against them in order to do what Juliet wants or needs of her. The nurse has a romantic side, often languishing in rambling stories about her late husband, and so when Juliet asks her nurse to help her secretly meet with and marry Romeo, the nurse is all too happy to help. At a certain point, however, the nurse's age and pragmatism kick in—she stops helping Juliet pursue Romeo and starts encouraging her to make the safer choice of listening to her parents and marrying Paris. Juliet's relationship with her nurse is both complex and comical; though often treated like a friend and confidant, at the end of the day, the nurse is forced to realize that she's ultimately little more than hired help.

Mercutio – Romeo's best friend and kinsman to Prince Escalus. Mercutio is one of the play's most dynamic and complex characters. Wild, frenetic, easygoing, and fun-loving, Mercutio's manic energy, rambling stories, and razor-sharp wit masks a much darker core. Mercutio is quick with words and is one of the play's most skilled masters of puns and wordplay—he is always ready with a scandalous joke or a bawdy tale, but deep down, the play suggests that Mercutio is long past tired of his role as Romeo's jester. Mercutio's quickness to fight rivals Tybalt's hotheaded rage, and Mercutio often involves himself in brawls that shouldn't concern him, always fighting on behalf of the Montagues. When once such fight with Tybalt ends with Tybalt fatally stabbing Mercutio, he attempts to play the wound off as a "scratch"—but as he succumbs to his wounds, he rails against the forces that have killed him, wishing "a plague [on] both [the] houses" of Montague and Capulet and revealing in his dying moments his deep contempt, frustration, and anger for the petty, ancient feud between them.

Capulet – Juliet's father and the head of House Capulet, which is in a long-standing feud with House Montague. Capulet, like Montague, is dedicated to stoking the "ancient grudge" between their two houses and ensuring that their descendants continue it on between themselves. Capulet, however, unlike Montague, is obsessed with appearances and social standing, and is willing to put the grudge aside in order to create the illusion of calm. One such instance of this occurs when Tybalt suggests brawling with the Montagues in the middle of the Capulets' annual masquerade, and Capulet orders him to refrain in order to keep up appearances. Capulet plans to use his only daughter, Juliet, in order to advance their family's social capital by marrying her off to Paris. When she refuses, he threatens to disown her, ignoring her feelings and desires for his own purposes.

Lady Capulet – Juliet's mother. Like her husband, Capulet, Lady Capulet is obsessed with appearances and with advancing

Juliet's social station. She is ignorant of her daughter's true feelings most of the time, and, even when confronted with them, attempts to steamroll Juliet's emotions and urge her daughter to put on a brave face, accept fate, and comply with her family's plans for her.

Tybalt – Capulet's nephew and Juliet's cousin. Tybalt is a duelist whose skills with a rapier have gained him widespread renown—and whose temper is equally as famous as his talent. Hotheaded, brash, and devoutly loyal to his house, Tybalt hates all Montagues and longs to kill them on sight. His vitriol towards the Montague clan leads him to fight with Mercutio and Romeo—though he slays the former, the latter ends his life.

Prince Escalus – The Prince of Verona. An imposing man who nonetheless struggles to control the violent, unruly members of House Montague and House Capulet as they feud and brawl endlessly in Verona's streets, spilling blood and disturbing the peace. Prince Escalus warns both houses several times of the punishments they'll endure if they continue fighting. In the end, however, when Romeo and Juliet are found dead, the prince concedes that "all are punished"—no one has been spared from the senseless grief that the two warring houses have perpetuated. Level-headed and fair, the prince is concerned with keeping Verona safe for all its citizens.

Friar John – A Franciscan friar tasked with delivering a letter explaining Friar Laurence and Juliet's scheme of faking Juliet's death to Romeo. However, he is held up en route, and never manages to get the letter to Mantua. As a result, Romeo has no knowledge of the plan and commits suicide upon finding Juliet's "dead" body.

The Chorus – A chorus who introduces the action and sometimes comments upon it throughout the play. Adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* throughout the years have interpreted and portrayed the chorus's commentary in a wide variety of ways, including reports delivered by newscasters, narration offered by Prince Escalus, or dialogue between gossiping common citizens of Verona.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Benvolio – Montague's nephew and Romeo's cousin. Benvolio is more levelheaded, calm, and also more of a rule-follower than Romeo and Mercutio. He struggles to keep the peace and obey the law in the face of his kinsmen's hot-blooded temperaments.

Paris – A handsome count who is a kinsman of Prince Escalus. Paris is boring, pompous, and obsequious—but he is wealthy, and Capulet believes that if Juliet marries him, their family's fortunes and social standing will advance.

Montague – Romeo's father and the head of House Montague, which is in a long-standing feud with House Capulet. A stoic leader, Montague bitterly hates his rival, Capulet, and is insistent upon continuing the feud between them through his house's descendants, including Romeo and his kinsman

Benvolio.

Lady Montague – Montague’s wife and Romeo’s mother. She appears very little in the play, and, at the end, it is revealed that she died of grief after learning of Romeo’s exile to Mantua.

Petruchio – A friend of Tybalt who is also part of House Capulet.

Balthasar – Romeo’s servingman.

Sampson and Gregory – Two servingmen of House Capulet.

Abraham – Montague’s servant.

Peter – An illiterate servingman of House Capulet.

The Apothecary – A poor apothecary in Mantua who sells Romeo a vial of poison. Though selling poison is illegal, the apothecary is self-admittedly desperate for any money he can get his hands on.

Rosaline – Rosaline, who never appears onstage, is, at the start of the play, Romeo’s latest romantic obsession despite the fact that she has taken a vow of chastity. When Romeo meets Juliet, however, he forgets all about his unrequited love for Rosaline.

overhears Juliet say that she wishes he were not a Montague so that they could be together, he declares that his name is “hateful” and offers to write it down on a piece of paper just so he can rip it up and obliterate it—and, along with it, his very identity, and sense of self as part of the Montague family. When Juliet finds out that her parents, ignorant of her secret marriage to Romeo, have arranged for her to marry Paris, she goes to Friar Laurence’s chambers with a knife, threatening to kill herself if he is unable to come up with a plan that will allow her to escape her second marriage. All of these examples represent just a fraction of the instances in which language and action conspire to render love as a “violent delight” whose “violent ends” result in danger, injury, and even death. Feeling oneself in the throes of love, Shakespeare suggests, is tumultuous and destabilizing enough—but the real violence of love, he argues, emerges in the many ways of expressing love.

Emotional and verbal expressions of love are the ones most frequently deployed throughout the play. Romeo and Juliet wax poetic about their great love for each other—and the misery they feel as a result of that love—over and over again, and at great lengths. Often, one of their friends or servants must cut them off mid-speech—otherwise, Shakespeare seems to suggest, Romeo and Juliet would spend hours trying to wrestle their feelings into words. Though Romeo and Juliet say lovely things about one another, to be sure, their speeches about each other, or about love more broadly, are almost always tinged with violence, which illustrates their chaotic passion for each other and their desire to mow down anything that stands in its way. When Romeo, for instance, spots Juliet at her window in the famous “balcony scene” in Act 2, Scene 2, he wills her to come closer by whispering, “Arise, fair **sun**”—a beautiful metaphor of his love and desire for Juliet—and quickly follows his entreaty with the dangerous language “and kill the envious moon, Who is already sick and pale with grief.” Juliet’s “sun”-like radiance makes Romeo want her to “kill” the moon (or Rosaline,) his former love and her rival in beauty and glory, so that Juliet can reign supreme over his heart. Later on in the play, when the arrival of dawn brings an end to Romeo and Juliet’s first night together as man and wife, Juliet invokes the symbol of a lark’s song—traditionally a symbol of love and sweetness—as a violent, ill-meaning presence which seeks to pull Romeo and Juliet apart, “arm from arm,” and “hunt” Romeo out of Juliet’s chambers. Romeo calls love a “rough” thing which “pricks” him like a thorn; Juliet says that if she could love and possess Romeo in the way she wants to, as if he were her pet bird, she would “kill [him] with much cherishing.” The way the two young lovers at the heart of the play speak about love shows an enormously violent undercurrent to their emotions—as they attempt to name their feelings and express themselves, they resort to violence-tinged speech to convey the enormity of their emotions.

Physical expressions of love throughout the play also carry



THEMES

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LOVE AND VIOLENCE

“These violent delights have violent ends,” says Friar Laurence in an attempt to warn Romeo, early on in the play, of the dangers of falling in love too

hard or too fast. In the world of *Romeo and Juliet*, love is not pretty or idealized—it is chaotic and dangerous. Throughout the play, love is connected through word and action with violence, and Romeo and Juliet’s deepest mutual expression of love occurs when the “star-crossed lovers take their life.” By connecting love with pain and ultimately with suicide, Shakespeare suggests that there is an inherent sense of violence in many of the physical and emotional facets of expressing love—a chaotic and complex emotion very different from the serene, idealized sweetness it’s so often portrayed as being.

There are countless instances throughout *Romeo and Juliet* in which love and violence are connected. After their marriage, Juliet imagines in detail the passion she and Romeo will share on their wedding night, and invokes the Elizabethan characterization of orgasm as a small death or “petite mort”—she looks forward to the moment she will “die” and see Romeo’s face reflected in the stars above her. When Romeo

violent connotations. From Romeo and Juliet's first kiss, described by each of them as a "sin" and a "trespass," to their last, in which Juliet seeks to kill herself by sucking remnants of **poison** from the dead Romeo's lips, the way Romeo and Juliet conceive of the physical and sexual aspects of love are inextricable from how they conceive of violence. Juliet looks forward to "dying" in Romeo's arms—again, one Elizabethan meaning of the phrase "to die" is to orgasm—while Romeo, just after drinking a vial of poison so lethal a few drops could kill 20 men, chooses to kiss Juliet as his dying act. The violence associated with these acts of sensuality and physical touch furthers Shakespeare's argument that attempts to adequately express the chaotic, overwhelming, and confusing feelings of intense passion often lead to a commingling with violence.

Violent expressions of love are at the heart of *Romeo and Juliet*. In presenting and interrogating them, Shakespeare shows his audiences—in the Elizabethan area, the present day, and the centuries in-between—that love is not pleasant, reserved, cordial, or sweet. Rather, it is a violent and all-consuming force. As lovers especially those facing obstacles and uncertainties like the ones Romeo and Juliet encounter, struggle to express their love, there may be eruptions of violence both between the lovers themselves and within the communities of which they're a part.



FATE

Though much of *Romeo and Juliet* is driven by the choices its main characters make and the actions they take, there is a dark undercurrent running throughout the play: the suggestion that fate, not free will, is behind the entirety of the human experience. Repeated references to fate and fortune throughout the play underscore Shakespeare's suggestion that humans are merely pawns in a larger cosmic scheme—invisible but inescapable fates, Shakespeare argues throughout the play, steer the course of human lives, and any and all actions that attempt to subvert those fates are futile and doomed to fail.

In the world of *Romeo and Juliet*, fate and predetermined destinies are an accepted part of life and society. From the chorus that introduces the first two acts of the play, commenting upon the events that are about to take place, to the characters' own preoccupation with the unseen forces that control them, Shakespeare imbues the world of the play with the heavy atmosphere of a "black fate" sitting like a storm cloud just above the entirety of the action. Throughout the play, characters acknowledge—and make "misadventured" attempts to thwart—the invisible forces guiding their lives. Yet every attempt to outsmart, outwit, or dodge fate ends terribly. By having Romeo and Juliet verbally acknowledge—privately and to one another—their fears about their doomed fates, Shakespeare showcases how badly his characters want to believe that their desires and actions stand a chance in the face

of fate's wily hand. "Alack, alack, that heaven should practice stratagems / Upon so soft a subject as myself," Juliet laments after learning that her parents have arranged for her to marry Paris, not knowing that she is already married to Romeo. Juliet has, at this late point in the play, had to deal with the death of her cousin, the cruelty of her family, and the destruction of her previously held ideals about the nature of good and evil, friend and enemy. She has, she feels, been through enough—and is beginning to believe that fate is "practic[ing]" on her, striking her with terrible news and insurmountable problems for sport. Juliet acknowledges the role fate plays in her life—she knows she is a pawn of the "heaven[s]"—and yet her actions over the course of the rest of the play show that she longs to fly in the face of heaven's decrees.

"O, I am fortune's fool!" Romeo screams shortly after he kills Tybalt in a duel; "I deny you, **stars!**" he shouts when he learns of Juliet's "death" in the play's final act. In these two expressions of frustration with fate and fortune, Shakespeare uses Romeo's anger at fate's dominion to show that while he hates realizing he is on a predetermined path, he is nonetheless cognizant of his lack of autonomy in the face of fortune's plans for him. When Romeo calls himself "fortune's fool" after slaying Tybalt, he laments, perhaps, having committed the act he knew he'd have to commit all along: killing the man who killed his best friend. Now that he has committed murder, however, Romeo feels he has been a "fool" to play into fortune's hand, and to fail resisting harder the pull of fate's demands. When Romeo learns of Juliet's death, he cries out that he will "deny" the stars—in other words, he doesn't want to believe Juliet is dead, or possibly believes, deep down, that there is something he can do to reverse what the stars have ordained even if she is. As he prepares to ride from Mantua to Verona to investigate the truth of his servant Balthasar's news, he is admitting, full-out, that he plans to try to reverse his and Juliet's fortunes—even as, in the same breath, he tacitly admits that he knows their fates are already written in the stars.

Shakespeare's argument about fate is a bleak one. The insinuation that forces humans can neither comprehend nor control guide their words and actions is perhaps even more sinister in a contemporary context than it would have been in Shakespeare's own time. Though debates concerning free will versus determinism stretch back to antiquity, faith in humans' ability to steer their own destinies did not begin to emerge more widely throughout Western culture until well after Shakespeare's time. Whether or not Shakespeare himself believed in the total dominion of fate and fortune, he certainly used his plays as an arena to work out his frustrations with the mechanisms of individual destiny—and to suggest that to deny or defy one's fate is a fatal, calamitous choice.



INDIVIDUALS VS. SOCIETY

When Romeo and Juliet fall in love, their individual desire for each other—which flies in the face of their families’ “ancient grudge” and thus the social order of Verona, a city run by noble families like the Montagues and Capulets—places them in direct opposition with the society of which they’re both a part. As Romeo and Juliet fall deeper and deeper in love, they come up against their friends, their families, and the political and religious authorities which govern the city of Verona. Throughout the play, Shakespeare uses the tragedy which befalls Romeo and Juliet—both teenagers and effectively children—in order to argue that the sociopolitical constraints and demands of many societies ignore or actively agitate their most vulnerable members.

Shakespeare’s England—and the Europe of his day more largely—was a place of rampant and profound social inequity. *Romeo and Juliet* takes place in Italy during the High Middle Ages, during which time the nation was made up of several warring city-states in which a handful of noble families enjoyed luxury and refinement while the peasant class—the majority of the population—struggled and suffered in obscurity. In light of this historical context, many contemporary scholars look at Romeo and Juliet’s relatively trivial struggle—two pampered teenagers lamenting their wealthy parents’ petty feud, threatening suicide should anything stand in the way of their love, and ultimately winding up dead as a result of narrowly-missed communications—as being a difficult story to empathize with or relate to. However, when Romeo and Juliet are viewed as stand-ins for the members of society whose cries, shouts, threats, and pains are repeatedly ignored because of the squabbling and in-fighting of its wealthiest tier, the play takes on a new significance which examines the plight of put-upon individuals struggling to survive in a society which discounts their needs. Romeo and Juliet are, the play suggests, merely children. Juliet is said to be only 13, and though Romeo is of indeterminate age, he is not yet at university and cannot be too much older than his lady love. Romeo and his friends—all young men of noble standing—have been taught that it is their duty to defend the honor of their house against their enemies, the Capulets, even as the monarch of Verona, Prince Escalus, threatens both clans with execution every time their brawls spill into the streets. Juliet has been told that she must marry well in order to bring honor to her family—but the feelings of love and desire she develops independently are discounted and ignored as her parents push a union with the haughty, older Paris onto her. Thus, both Romeo and Juliet are, throughout the play, constant pulled between serving their individual desires and preserving the peace and status quo within the larger society of which they are a part.

A gentler, more compassionate reading of the play, then, allows for the possibility that Shakespeare *did* want his audiences to take Romeo and Juliet’s story—and the allegory it

represents—rather seriously. Their individual needs are steamrolled by pressure from their families, their governing bodies, and their society more largely. In order to keep up appearances and uphold a false idea of “peace,” they must sublimate their desires, seek secret answers to their problems, and thusly involve others in their problems, often to the endangerment of those from whom they beg help. Friar Laurence, Romeo’s servant Balthasar, Juliet’s nurse, Tybalt, Mercutio, and countless servingmen and citizens of Verona all find themselves swept up in the chaos Romeo and Juliet’s ill-fated romance creates—all because Romeo and Juliet are operating within a society more concerned with projecting civility and upholding outdated social codes than making concessions for its individual members.

Romeo and Juliet live in a society in which gentility, manners, and privacy are stringently enforced in the name of maintaining peace and calm for the larger collective. In reality, however, the illusion of Verona’s genteel, peaceful exterior only serves to cover up the chaos within—chaos created by a collection of unhappy individuals who long to change the status quo. In showing how societies at every level—governmental, religious, cultural, and interpersonal—seek to ignore the needs of the few to sate the demands of the many, Shakespeare suggests that individual success and happiness in such a society is impossible unless that society begins reckoning with the needs of its individual members.



LANGUAGE AND WORDPLAY

Shakespearean scholars have identified upwards of 175 instances of puns and wordplay throughout the text of *Romeo and Juliet*. Though the play is, perhaps, Shakespeare’s most famous tragedy, there is no shortage of comic relief throughout the action—and the play’s comedy often comes from Shakespeare’s free dispensation of double entendre, homonyms, puns, and sexually explicit twists of phrase. Throughout the play, Shakespeare uses language and wordplay to radical ends: language is a tool of rebellion, and in allowing his characters to rebel against formality, honor, and the status quo through the things they say to one another, he suggests that language is an eternal means of freedom. Even when one is trapped behind a high orchard wall, bound by the cloth of religion, or stuck in an immobile social station, Shakespeare argues, language is humanity’s great equalizer, and allows those constrained by circumstance to experience a different kind of freedom.

Language and wordplay are, in the world of *Romeo and Juliet*, not just for the wealthy leisure class—the servants, musicians, and other tertiary members of the noble clans of Montague and Capulet are the primary pun-makers throughout the play. Extended bouts of ribaldry, punning, and plays on words (often featuring sexually explicit double entendre) dominate the first half of the play. Gregory and Sampson, two men of the house of

Capulet, trade insults with Abraham and Benvolio, men of the house of Montague, leading the two clans to brawl in the street. Mercutio and Romeo trade sexually tinged barbs about being “rough with love.” Juliet’s nurse, in trying to remember Juliet’s age, launches into an inappropriate yet comical reverie about her late husband’s crude remarks concerning Juliet’s sexual coming-of-age. A Capulet servingman, Peter, jokes with a group of musicians who have come to play at Juliet and Paris’s wedding only to realize they’re out of a job when Juliet is found dead—until Peter suggests they play at her funeral instead. Mercutio’s rapid-fire, stream-of-consciousness pun-making is contrasted against the nurse’s rambling, embarrassing, and all-too-possibly accidental reminiscences, while the sneaky, sly insults traded by the younger, lesser members of the houses of Montague and Capulet are designed to offend while just barely toeing the line of what’s acceptable to say in order to transgress without causing actual bloodshed.

As Shakespeare revels in the plays countless twists of the tongue, designing verbal fencing-matches for his noble and common characters alike, his purpose in so doing becomes clear. Juliet’s nurse, a common woman who has been forced to give up her duties to her own family in order to serve the Capulets, has just as quick a tongue as a nobleman of house Montague. Peter, a lowly and put-upon servingman, uses his wits—unappreciated and overlooked by his haughty, self-concerned employers—to wheedle favors out of a group of musicians. Romeo and Benvolio, friends and kinsman since a time before they can even remember, make boyish quips in an attempt to keep up with their fleet-tongued friend Mercutio, whose rambling, dense, sexually provocative jokes and stories unite his friends and family even in times of danger and social tumult. Language, Shakespeare posits through all of these master jokesters, is a force for equality in places of unfairly stratified social orders—a way of creating joy and levity in times of darkness. It is the means by which men and women of all backgrounds, ages, and social, sexual, and political leanings can connect over a good laugh. Language is humanity’s equalizer, and a means of asserting one’s freedom, autonomy, and nonconformity even in the face of the most rigid, unforgiving social structures.

Ultimately, Shakespeare uses language and wordplay to even the playing field, so to speak, for his characters, and even out their disparate social backgrounds. In so doing, he suggests that language and humor are ways for individuals from every social stratum to come together. Though the nobility of Shakespeare’s day may have kept wealth and power consolidated amongst themselves, Shakespeare acknowledges that there are other kinds of social currency that are important, too—and argues that language is a means of honoring street-smarts, cunning, and wit, even if the tongue cracking the jokes is not a noble one at all.



FAMILY AND DUTY

Though the forbidden love between *Romeo and Juliet* lives at the heart of the play and drives much of its action, their love is only forbidden in the first place due to the “ancient grudge,” or feud, between the noble houses of Capulet and Montague. The source of the age-old fight between the two families is never explained or even hinted at—all that is clear is that these houses loathe each other and will leap at any chance to do violence unto each other, much to the dismay of Verona’s citizens. Romeo and Juliet are bound by duty to honor their respective families, but as their love for one another deepens and their families’ violence towards each other escalates, Shakespeare shows that parents owe their children the duties of respect, openness, and kindness—not exclusively, as the Capulets and Montagues demand, the other way around.

Many of Shakespeare’s works examine the duty children and younger generations within a family owe their parents, or the older generation—in *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and *The Merchant of Venice*, for example, Shakespeare interrogates filial duty, familial honor, and the difficulties of seeing a parent’s will through. In *Romeo and Juliet*, however, Shakespeare turns this interrogation on its head. While a child’s honor-bound duty to his or her parent is complex, to say the least, in the world of *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, in *Romeo and Juliet*, it is portrayed outrightly as an absurd, punitive, and even cruel demand. Romeo and Juliet are bound to honor their families’ hatred of one another—when each learns who the other is after falling in love at a party at the Capulets’ home, they are crestfallen to realize that they are enemies by default. Of course, Romeo and Juliet are not, as individuals, each other’s enemies—but the codes of honor their parents have thrust upon them demand that they hate one another simply out of duty. As Romeo and Juliet secretly conspire to shirk that duty, surrender to their love for each other, and marry in great haste, Shakespeare points out the ridiculousness of feuds and grudges like the one between the Capulets and Montagues—ancient resentments whose root cause no one alive can even remember. Shakespeare shows that it is the very fact that Romeo and Juliet’s love is forbidden which spurs their passion—as young teenagers, they long to get in trouble and defy their families, and marrying one another is the ultimate transgression against their parents’ wills.

Shakespeare also points out just how profoundly the Capulets and Montagues fail their children by honoring their desires for social climbing and political advancement. The Capulets are more concerned with throwing gaudy feasts that will draw the envy and attention of all their friends than they are with nurturing their own family. Though Capulet insists that Juliet is the most important thing in his life, it is clear from his behavior that he (and Lady Capulet, as well) are interested only in impressing their fellow citizens, marrying Juliet to a man who

will improve their family's social standing, and keeping under wraps the very scandals and brawls with the Montagues that they themselves stoke. When Juliet fakes her own death and Capulet mourns her loss in loud, ridiculous, florid terms, Friar Laurence chides him for his hypocrisy—while Juliet was alive, “the most [Capulet] sought was her promotion”—now that she is dead and in heaven, the friar points out, she has received the greatest social “promotion” of all. The Montagues, too, are guilty of shirking their duties to their son—Lady Montague is concerned about Romeo being seen brawling in the streets but doesn't actually bother to keep track of her son's wellbeing or whereabouts. Montague, too, seems deeply uninterested in learning about Romeo's inner emotional life—he knows his son is, at the start of the play, struggling with feelings of unrequited love, but has not bothered to get to the heart of his troubles. All of the parents in the play are shown to be more concerned with social appearances and their own petty problems than with honoring their duties to their children—even as they demand their children conform to arbitrary, outdated social mores and back their own feuds mindlessly.

Ultimately, Shakespeare uses the tale of Romeo and Juliet and their “star-crossed love” to show the chaos and devastation that can befall parents who do not listen to or respect their own children. “See what a scourge is laid upon your hate,” Prince Escalus orders the Capulets and Montagues at the end of the play. “All are punished.” In believing their children owed it to them to continue sowing the seeds of their own petty hatred, the adults in the play have done their offspring—and their community—a great disservice. Shakespeare clearly believes that familial duty runs both ways, and that in failing to acknowledge that fact, society's pompous elders will only bring endless woe upon themselves.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



LIGHT/DARK AND DAY/NIGHT

Romeo and Juliet complicates traditional notions of light versus dark and day versus night. Light is typically a symbol of openness, purity, hope, and good fortune, while dark often represents confusion, obscurity, and doom. Shakespeare, however, turns these commonplace associations on their heads and inverts both symbols. In the world of this play, dawn, day, and bright lights are, overwhelmingly, negative—night, the only time Romeo and Juliet can be together in secret, is the time of day they both long for, and together they grow to lament the arrival of the days that pull them apart. Though Romeo does proclaim, early on in the play, that “Juliet is the sun,” his personification of her as a bright,

solar force quickly turns dark and violent as he urges her to “kill the envious moon”—a quote that has two meanings. Romeo wants Juliet's light to blot out the “moon” of his old love, Rosaline. But given the moon's mythic association with Diana, Roman goddess of the moon and protectress of virgins, Romeo is also begging Juliet to cast off her virginity to be with him. Thus, Romeo portrays the light of Juliet, the “sun,” as an annihilating force which harshly reveals hidden things and leaves no room for old loves or old behaviors to hide. Juliet, on the other hand, sees Romeo as “stars.” She looks forward to the moment he brings her to climax—when she shall “die,” she says, invoking the Elizabethan meaning of the phrase “to die” as “to orgasm”—and she sees his face “cut [...] out in little stars” and spangled through the heavens. When that happens, she says, “all the world will be in love with night / And pay no worship to the garish sun.” Juliet knows that she and Romeo can only be together in the dead of night and wishes that it could be dark out forevermore so that their time together could be uninterrupted. Throughout the play, light is intrusive and unwelcome, powerful and frightening; darkness, however, is soothing and revealing, and allows the play's titular lovers to get to know one another, to act out their fantasies of love, and to discover their true selves away from the prying eyes of their families.



POTIONS AND POISONS

In *Romeo and Juliet*, potions represent emotional escape. Romeo and Juliet both find themselves, at crucial moments in the play, turning to potions and poisons to deaden themselves, temporarily or permanently, to the misery and desperation they're facing. When Juliet's parents inform her that they plan to marry her off to Paris against her will, she visits Friar Laurence and demands he find a way to get her out of the marriage. The friar procures a potion that will make Juliet appear dead for a period of 40 hours so that she can be buried, snuck away, and reunited with Romeo. Juliet agrees to the plan, and Friar Laurence promises to write Romeo, exiled in Mantua, to inform him of the scheme. However, the Friar's letter never makes it to Romeo—and after Juliet is buried, word reaches Romeo that she is truly dead. Desperate to be reunited with his love, Romeo purchases poison from a poor apothecary in Mantua, vowing to travel to Juliet's crypt, take the poison, and die by her side. For both Romeo and Juliet, then, potions and poison are a symbol of escape—a means of turning away from the pain of the present moment. The fact that Romeo and Juliet both seek chemical escape from their problems, creating a web of confusion which ends in their very real deaths, further symbolizes their youth, their privilege, and their inability to deal with the adult problems they've created for themselves. Rather than deal with the fallout of their choices, Romeo and Juliet separately decide to use tinctures, fatal and benign, to bring a swift end to their troubles. They believe themselves to be

adults and want to make adult choices—but ultimately, both of them are ill-equipped to claim responsibility for the consequences their actions have.

forces—fate, love, and death—will control the action as much as (or more than) the characters and actors do.



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), Juliet, Romeo

Related Themes:

Page Number: Prologue, Lines 1-14

Explanation and Analysis

The choral address which opens *Romeo and Juliet* echoes the chorus of ancient Greek tragedies, in which a troupe of masked performers explains, summarizes, and contextualizes some 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.” This suggests that amorphous

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: 1.1.45-52

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 the Elizabethan equivalent of today’s middle finger gesture), 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, the audience witnesses how these two houses’ 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), Juliet, Rosaline, Benvolio

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 the audience sees the star-cross'd lover on the stage. Romeo's metaphors echo the contradictory language of the typical Petrarchan lover—one who echoes the paradoxical phrases of the Italian poet Francesco Petrarch. 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, the audience will certainly see his entire love story with Juliet, as the chorus promised.

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 a relationship.

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, as 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), Rosaline, 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 both 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 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). This passage is significant because it demonstrates how mercurial and changeable Romeo is when it comes to love—mourning his unrequited feelings for Rosaline one moment while fawning over Juliet's beauty (and seemingly abandoning all former thoughts of Rosaline) the very next. It also speaks to the turbulent and overwhelming nature of love, as Romeo seemingly has no control over his emotions or affections once Juliet has entered the picture.

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: Mercutio, Romeo (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 1.4.53-56

Explanation and Analysis

Romeo, Benvolio, Mercutio, and several other maskers and torchbearers are walking through the streets to the Capulet's household, in order to attend the house's annual feast. As they travel, they engage in witty banter that still the audience about the characters' emotional states—particularly because Romeo seems determined to remain somber and refuses to join in the others' revelry. Furthermore, Romeo 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

☝ You kiss by th' book.

Related Characters: Juliet (speaker), Romeo

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 1.5.122

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 th' 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. Another reading of this line, however, implies that Juliet is referencing the holy book—the Bible—and cheekily suggesting that Romeo is such a good kisser that he has transformed the sinful act into a holy one.

☝ 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 pursuing one's desires in opposition to what one's family and community—or even fate itself—wants.

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: 2.2.2-3

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 high orchard 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. This quotation also introduces the profound—and sometimes overwhelming or even unwanted—power of light throughout the play. While Juliet is a welcome vision of daybreak in this passage, Romeo and Juliet both will soon come to crave nighttime, when they can be together, and lament the dawning of the “garish” sun.

☝ 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

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 2.2.36-39

Explanation and Analysis

Just as Romeo is fixated on Juliet after meeting her at the Capulets' feast, it seems that Juliet cannot forget Romeo either. She begins to speak to herself about him, while he eavesdrops 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 the audience 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 audience that much of human relations are based in language 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, though, 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. Does language affect even humans' most basic and primal senses? 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 brought to light: the power of language to shape relationships, individuals' struggles between their desire and society's expectations, and the burden of duty to one's house and family name. 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 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. Romeo's desire to shirk tradition, profane religion, and hastily remake himself to Juliet's liking reflects the self-destructive and obsessive patterns their relationship will follow as the play progresses and the lovers come up against more and more rigid familial, religious, and societal norms to shatter.

☞ 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), Romeo

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 circled orb"). This is part of a larger series of Juliet romantically urging Romeo to "swear" or "swear not"—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 aloud 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. Moments earlier in the play, while Romeo was still hidden, he urged Juliet, "the sun," to kill the envious moon in an allusion both to his former love for Rosaline and to Diana, the Roman goddess of virginity and the moon. Juliet, like Romeo, sees the moon as an "inconstant" and vaguely annoying presence—it is unpredictable and "variable," and Juliet, too, seems to long for some symbol other than the moon to represent their newfound love.

☞ 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 famous "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 "good-night" (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 play's light and dark motif appears here as well, as Juliet acknowledges the separation between day and night. Juliet longs for the next time she and Romeo can be together—she is impatient for another taste of the "sweet" connection she and Romeo have shared. The tension between sweetness and sorrow ties in with the play's theme of love, which suggests that expressions of love—such an enormous, chaotic emotion, especially for young people like the play's titular lovers—often beget violent speech or even violent action.

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:  

Related Symbols: 

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 which he uses in the potions and tinctures he enjoys making ("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 the audience 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 the houses' individual members 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 the audience 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 the audience a sense of how hatred and love can intertwine, responding that he will refuse to acknowledge Tybalt's hatred because he has reasons to love Tybalt. For Romeo in this scene, love overpowers hatred, which demonstrates that love and hatred are not merely opposing phenomenon in this play, but rather are engaged in interplay. This quotation also underscores Romeo and Tybalt's notions of family and duty. Though Tybalt doesn't know that Romeo and Juliet have been secretly wed—and that, as a result, he and Romeo are now kinsmen—Romeo insists that he bears Tybalt nothing but love simply by virtue of the fact that they are now related by marriage. While Tybalt carries the grudge of his elders unthinkingly, Romeo is willing to reconsider notions of family, duty, honor, and loyalty in order to make a better community for both their houses.

☞☞ 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: Mercutio, Romeo (speaker)

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 3.1.99-102

Explanation and Analysis

Mercutio is wounded by Tybalt during their fight, and it is indeed mortal, although Romeo claims it isn't as he attempts to inspire courage in his friend. Romeo is also, perhaps, trying to take the heat off of himself as the fight's unwilling

instigator, since Tybalt only rose to anger because of Romeo's presence at the Capulet ball. Mercutio, however, understands the gravity of his wound—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 those of others. 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. Mercutio goes on to rail against both Montagues and Capulets and wish for a plague over both their houses—Mercutio is not the first casualty of the bloody feud between the two warring families, but his death represents a new chapter in Romeo's perception of the houses' "ancient grudge."

☞☞ O, I am fortune's fool!

Related Characters: Romeo (speaker), Tybalt

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 3.1.142

Explanation and Analysis

Romeo exclaims that he is "fortune's fool" after two deaths occur: that of his friend Mercutio and that of Juliet's cousin Tybalt. Of course, the audience knows 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. Either way, it is clear that Romeo is cognizant, to some degree, of the futility inherent in resisting one's fate—but as the play continues, he will rail against his fortune, flying in the face of events he knows are bound to take place owing to the logic of some force larger than Romeo can comprehend.

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. It is about to be their wedding night, and Juliet is looking forward to having sex with Romeo for the first time—and she says so in no uncertain terms. 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 says she looks forward to the moment when Romeo dies (occasionally, the line is represented as "when I shall die" rather than "when he shall die"). Juliet is not looking forward to their literal deaths—rather, she is invoking the Elizabethan meaning of the phrase "to die," a slang term for orgasm. Juliet visually imagines Romeo's face scattered across the night sky at the moment of his climax, 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 that the night they've spent together is not over. Although Juliet was earlier willing to acknowledge the separation between day and night (when she said that she would say "good-night till it be morrow"), 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. Nighttime has been the only time that Romeo and Juliet have really been allowed to see one another—they've only met in the light of day within Friar Laurence's cloisters, and even that meeting was obscured by darkness. Thus, Juliet mourns the arrival of the daytime—while once the day brought new hope and new light, now it only means the separation of herself from her lover.

☞ 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), Tybalt, Lady Capulet

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 Paris on 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 Paris, before more ardently and imaginatively asking her mother to make her bridal bed with Paris a tomb. This reflects her earlier phrase, upon first seeing Romeo, that the grave should be her wedding-bed. Juliet is saying that she would rather be buried alive than married to Paris—or anyone other than Romeo—again entangling violence and death with strong emotions of love.

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), Paris, Friar Laurence

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 4.1.85-90

Explanation and Analysis

After Juliet suggests that her bridal bed with Paris and her tomb should be conflated, she finds herself making a similar suggestion as she pleads with her ally Friar Laurence for assistance in finding a way to delay or avoid her forced marriage to Paris. 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 in order to protect their relationship. Juliet is also learning to harbor new ideas about family and duty. Though just a few nights or weeks ago she might have seen going through with the marriage to Paris as part of her filial duty to her parents, she now sees Romeo as the one to whom she must be loyal—the “sweet love” to whom she owes the role of “unstain'd wife.”

Act 5, Scene 1 Quotes

☞ Then I defy you, stars!

Related Characters: Romeo (speaker), Juliet

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 5.1.25

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Balthasar has just brought word to Romeo—who is exiled in Mantua for his murder of Tybalt—that Juliet is dead and lies in the Capulet's tomb vaults. Romeo's immediate response is the question “Is it even so?” which is a momentary refusal to recognize the death of Juliet. This only briefly precedes his exclamation “then I defy you, stars!” Here, the audience witnesses 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. The audience sees the 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. Romeo will soon make his way to Verona, where he will demand to verify with his own eyes that Juliet is really dead. This line, sometimes written as “I deny you, stars!” shows that Romeo is willing to go head-to-head with fate in order to pursue his love for Juliet—even after being told she's dead, he's determined to be with her, and will defy (or deny) whatever the stars have in store for him to meet her in death.

Act 5, Scene 3 Quotes

☞ O true apothecary! Thy drugs are quick. – Thus with a kiss I die.

Related Characters: Romeo (speaker), The Apothecary

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

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 laid in this grave as well. Romeo delivers a lengthy soliloquy,

beginning by describing Juliet's beauty (the quality which first attracted his attention) 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 and prompts him to say that the apothecary was “true” in selling him an effective poison. The natural substance—which, as Friar Laurence earlier reminded the audience, can either work for good or for evil—are fulfilling the purpose which Romeo hoped it would fulfill. Romeo is using the apothecary's poison to escape the fate of a life without Juliet, rather than accept her death and soldier on without her—poison and potions are recurring symbols throughout the play for Romeo and Juliet's shared desire to escape or defy their fates rather than maturely deal with the consequences of their actions.

☞ Yea, noise; then I'll be brief;
O, happy dagger!

This is thy sheath; there rest, and let me die.

Related Characters: Juliet (speaker), Romeo

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 5.3.174-175

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Juliet decides to kill herself with Romeo's dagger. Upon waking from her drug-induced slumber and realizing that Romeo used poison to kill himself beside her tomb, Juliet realizes that just as Romeo didn't want to continue living without her, she does not want to go on without him. 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. While this version of the text shows Juliet saying, “there rest, and let me die,” some versions of the play interpret the word “rest” and “rust.” No doubt owing to conflicting transcriptions of the text based on the Elizabethan accents of Shakespeare's day (which

would have made the words “rust” and “rest” sound similar), this mistake also lends a sharper tinge of violence to the idea that Juliet is already imagining the dagger turning to rust in her chest as she lies, for years, in her family's crypt.

Like Romeo, Juliet kills herself because she believes that her lover is dead. However, here Romeo is truly dead; earlier, Romeo only 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 connect them for the audience. And they even share the same last word, “die,” which affirms the power of violence and 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), Juliet, Romeo

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 5.3.119-120

Explanation and Analysis

As Prince Escalus ends the play by admonishing the Montagues and Capulets for allowing their ancient, pointless feud to result in the deaths of their children, another figure finally acknowledges the intimate association between the two lovers. Prince Escalus refers to Romeo as “her Romeo,” thus belonging to Juliet. Yet he also summarizes their story as “a story of more woe,” and thus language allows him to circumscribe the lovers' narrative with his own words. The broader society of Verona, which is led and represented by Prince Escalus, is personified in the play both after and before Romeo and Juliet appear. Prince Escalus symbolizes societies which neglect or overlook its most vulnerable, needful members—which, in a sympathetic reading of the play, are symbolized by Romeo and Juliet. Thus, his ability to finally recognize the “woe” the two faced and his own inaction in solving it suggests that there is hope for the greater struggles between individuals and the societies of which they are a part.



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

A chorus enters and summarizes the action that is about to take place. They describe two families of equal nobility whose “ancient grudge” has reached new heights—the citizens of Verona are now, too, being roped into the families’ “new mutiny.” The chorus describes “a pair of **star**-crossed lovers,” one from each family, who will, in taking their own lives, mend their parents’ feud. The story of the young couple’s “death-marked love” is about to unfold on the stage, and the chorus promises that those who listen with “patient ears” will soon understand all the intricacies of the tale.

The chorus’s introductory monologue sets the scene and describes the action that is about to place—but it also sets up the notion that fate is inevitable. The chorus already knows what happens to Romeo and Juliet, and as their story unfolds, the two young lovers are helpless to escape the predestined events that will come to define their lives.



ACT 1, SCENE 1

Sampson and Gregory, two servingmen of House Capulet, enter with swords and bucklers. Sampson angrily says he doesn’t want to “carry coals”—in other words, he doesn’t want to put up with any of the Montagues’ nonsense. Gregory insists they will do no such thing. Sampson says he’s looking forward to drawing his sword should the Montagues try anything—he strikes quickly, he says, when he’s moved. Gregory accuses Sampson of often being too lazy to get moved in the first place. Sampson says that nothing moves him to a fight like “a dog of [the] house” of Montague. Gregory and Sampson continue bantering bawdily about killing, raping, and dominating the men and women of House Montague.

Gregory and Sampson are merely servingmen of House Capulet, yet it’s clear that they carry their masters’ grudges for them, even as they rail against the idea that they do too much for the nobles they serve in the first place. This introductory scene shows just how deep and angry the feud between the two houses really is—even their servants fantasize about harming and humiliating the members of the opposing clan.



Abraham and another servingman of the house of Montague enter. Sampson draws his weapon but urges Gregory to be the one to start the fight. When Gregory is hesitant to begin the quarrel, Sampson suggests they provoke the Montagues into a fight. Gregory says he’ll frown at the men, while Sampson says he’ll bite his thumb at them. Sampson bites his thumb, and Abraham immediately rises to the provocation. When Abraham asks Sampson if he is biting his thumb at him, Sampson says that while he’s not biting it *at* Abraham. Gregory asks if Abraham wants to fight. He says he doesn’t—but Gregory states that he’s ready to fight on his master’s behalf at any time.

Biting one’s thumb was an obscene gesture in Shakespeare’s time, which explains why Abraham is so quickly provoked. This comical scene shows, however, that though Gregory and Sampson privately claim to long for a fight so that they can stand up to the Montagues and prove the glory of House Capulet, they’re actually too nervous to confidently pick a fight with their professed enemies.



As a quarrel breaks out, Benvolio, a member of House Montague, enters onto the scene. Seeing the men swinging their swords at one another, Benvolio draws his own sword and orders the men to break up their fight. Tybalt, another Capulet man, enters. Seeing the fight, he assumes Benvolio is responsible, and threatens to kill him. Benvolio insists he's trying to keep the peace, but Tybalt scoffs and says he "hate[s]" peace—just as he hates "hell, all Montagues, and thee." Tybalt draws his sword and attacks Benvolio. A crowd of citizens, seeing the brawl, egg the men on as they fight.

Capulet and Lady Capulet enter. Capulet calls for his sword, but Lady Capulet chides him for trying to join in the violence at his old age. Montague and Lady Montague enter, as well—Capulet begins taunting Montague, who in turn calls Capulet a "villain" and tries to fight him. Prince Escalus enters, ordering his "rebellious subjects" to lay down their weapons and stop their dangerous, infectious, "pernicious rage." This is the third time a brawl between the Montagues and Capulets has disrupted the peace in Verona's streets. If it happens again, the prince says, Montague and Capulet will pay for the strife with their lives. Montague and Capulet, the prince says, must come with him to his villa to explain themselves. Capulet and his wife follow him off, and the citizen spectators quickly disperse after a final threat from the prince.

Montague and Lady Montague remain behind with Benvolio and order him to explain the reason for the fight. Benvolio explains that after he saw the Montagues' servants fighting the Capulets' servants, he was trying to step in when Tybalt arrived and escalated the dispute. Lady Montague says she's relieved that her son Romeo wasn't around for the fight and asks Benvolio if he's seen him. Benvolio says that he saw Romeo earlier that morning, just past **dawn** in a sycamore grove on the edge of town, but could tell that Romeo wanted to be alone. Montague says that Romeo has been walking around the groves crying many mornings lately—and when he's home, he stays shut up alone in his chambers. Benvolio asks Montague what's wrong with Romeo, but Montague says that Romeo won't tell anyone who asks what's troubling him.

This passage introduces two new major characters, one from each house—Benvolio and Tybalt. While Tybalt is quick to anger and desirous of the Montagues' destruction, Benvolio is calmer, meeker, and longs to keep the tenuous peace between the two houses. As the men brawl, it becomes clear that the Montagues' and Capulets' frequent fights are a central part of life in Verona—though they often disturb the peace, the citizens, too, are often involved in the fights.



As Prince Escalus arrives on the scene to try and defuse the violence and anger in the town square, his frustration with the ongoing feud between the two noble families becomes clear. The prince is at the end of his rope and is ready to take drastic measures to calm the incessant fighting between Montagues and Capulets. This passage also illustrates how though the seed of the feud seems to be between the two old men at the heads of their houses, their younger servants and kinsmen are often the ones who bear the burden of carrying on their grudge.



The way Romeo's parents and kinsman talk about him in this passage shows that he is a loner, closed off from the rest of them and isolated in his own emotions. This sets up Romeo as a rogue character and positions him as an individual either uncomfortable within or dismissive of the larger family and community to which he belongs.



Romeo approaches. Benvolio urges Montague and Lady Montague to go with the prince while he stays behind to find out what's the matter with Romeo. They wish him luck, then leave. Benvolio greets Romeo, bidding him good morning, and Romeo seems surprised that it's so early. Benvolio asks Romeo what's troubling him and making the hours seem so long, and Romeo retorts that he doesn't have the one thing which would "make them short." Benvolio asks Romeo if he is in love, but Romeo quips that he is "out" of it. Benvolio laments that there's nothing worse than a broken heart. Romeo notices drops of blood in the street and chastises Benvolio for fighting—all fights, he says, are more to do with love than hatred, as counterintuitive as it may seem.

Benvolio expresses his sadness for Romeo's "good heart's oppression," and Romeo continues waxing poetic about the "transgression[s]" of love. Benvolio begs Romeo to tell him who has broken his heart. Romeo says the woman he loves refuses to love him back and has sworn to remain chaste. Romeo laments about what a "waste" it is for such a beautiful woman to live her life as a virgin. Benvolio promises to help Romeo move on—or die trying.

ACT 1, SCENE 2

Capulet and Paris enter with a servant, Peter. Capulet is telling Paris that he and Montague have sworn to a peace agreement and expresses hope that they will be able to keep to its terms. Paris says he, too, hopes the men can stop living "at odds." He asks Capulet if the man has thought any more about his "suit"—Paris wants to marry Capulet's daughter, Juliet. Capulet, however, believes that 13-year-old Juliet is too young to be a bride. He tells Paris that the young man can only marry Juliet if she consents to marry him. Capulet invites Paris to a feast at his house that evening. Many beautiful young women will be there—if, after meeting them all, Paris still wants Juliet, Capulet will consider letting them marry.

Capulet gives Peter a list, telling him to go around Verona and invite everyone on it to the feast. After Capulet and Paris exit, Peter laments that he cannot read. Benvolio and Romeo enter, still talking about Romeo's broken heart. Benvolio urges Romeo to fall in love with a new girl, but Romeo insists he's too far gone—he is "shut up in [the] prison" of his love. Peter approaches the men and asks if either of them can read. After joking with the servant for a moment, Romeo offers to read the letter for him. He reads off a series of names and asks where the "fair assembly" is headed. Peter admits that his master is "the great rich Capulet," and, not knowing who Romeo and Benvolio are, invites them to the feast excitedly. He thanks them for helping with the letter, then leaves.

As Romeo tells Benvolio what's troubling him, he attempts to play off his own misery by couching his problems in wordplay. This passage also makes it clear that Romeo conceives of love as a powerful force, one which can even lead to bloodshed and death, setting up the play's theme of love (and expressions thereof) as being intertwined with violence.



Though Romeo seems despondent about his unrequited feelings for the woman he loves, Benvolio is quick to cheer him up—suggesting, perhaps, that Romeo is a serial hopeless romantic and that they've been through this song and dance many times before.



Though Capulet can barely keep an uneasy peace in his own life, he wants to interfere in the social and romantic life of his only daughter, Juliet. Though Capulet is initially hesitant to marry Juliet off to Paris right away, as the play progresses, his desire to use Paris for his own family's social advancement will steadily intensify.



This scene is emblematic of the play's concern with individuals versus society. Peter, an illiterate servingman, is put-upon by his master and ordered to carry out tasks with which he struggles greatly. As Romeo enters, lamenting his broken heart, he fails to realize that there are other members of his society with far greater problems than his. Romeo's violent descriptions of the feelings of being in love tie in with the play's suggestion that sometimes, the only way to talk about the strong feelings love engenders is to do so in violent terms.



Benvolio tells Romeo that the woman Romeo loves, Rosaline, will be at the party. He urges Romeo to go to the party, but not to confront Rosaline—he wants Romeo to find another girl there. Romeo accuses Benvolio of speaking blasphemy by suggesting that any woman could be more beautiful than Rosaline. “The all-seeing **sun**,” he declares, has never shone on anyone more perfect. Benvolio insists Romeo will be able to find someone new who shines more brightly than even Rosaline. Romeo begrudgingly agrees to go along.

Even though Romeo believes he'll never love again, Benvolio is determined to help his friend get out of his lovesick depression. As the wheels begin to turn, it does start to seem as if fate has had a hand in Romeo and Benvolio securing an unlikely invitation to the Capulet feast.



ACT 1, SCENE 3

At the Capulet house, Lady Capulet asks Juliet's nurse to call for Juliet. Juliet enters and asks her mother what she wants. Lady Capulet urges the nurse to leave them be, but then changes her mind and asks her to stay behind and offer advice on what she's about to say to Juliet. Lady Capulet tells the nurse that Juliet is “of a certain age.” Juliet's nurse says she's aware of Juliet's age, because her own daughter—now deceased—was born on the same day; Juliet is almost 14. The nurse recalls the day Juliet stopped nursing at her breast—it was the same day of a terrible earthquake, and Juliet had a cut on her forehead about which the nurse's husband (now also dead) made an off-color joke. Lady Capulet tells the nurse to hush up. The nurse continues with her story until Juliet, too, asks her to stop.

The nurse provides much of the comic relief throughout the play. Her rambling stories—often tinged with embarrassing or sad details from her own past—put those around her on edge, yet her immunity to recognizing their cringe-worthy content creates a humorous tension.



The nurse says one last thing—that if she lives long enough to see Juliet married, she will die a happy woman. Lady Capulet says that marriage is actually what she's planning on talking to Juliet about, and asks her daughter how she feels about the idea of getting married. Juliet says she hasn't even thought about it. Lady Capulet tells Juliet that it's time for her to start thinking about marriage, stating that she herself gave birth to Juliet when she was barely Juliet's age. Lady Capulet announces that Paris wants to marry Juliet, and the nurse excitedly states what a perfect man Paris is.

Juliet is not even 14, and yet her parents are pushing her toward adult decisions in order to further their own social capital. She's being told she's old enough to get married, and yet still being treated like a child by those around her.



Lady Capulet tells Juliet that Paris is coming to the feast tonight—Juliet will get to meet the handsome, much-desired bachelor and see if she likes him. Juliet says she'll take a look at Paris, but that she isn't so sure about the idea of love or marriage. Before Lady Capulet can press the issue any further, Peter enters and announces that the guests have arrived. Lady Capulet bids Juliet to follow her out to the feast, and the nurse encourages Juliet to go and “seek happy nights to happy days.”

Even though Juliet is clearly uncertain about the entire concept of love, her mother and nurse urge her to put love on the backburner and focus instead on what makes a sensible match. Juliet is skeptical of this, suggesting that when she does meet someone with whom she has real chemistry, she will be quick to brush off her elders' advice.



ACT 1, SCENE 4

Romeo, Mercutio, Benvolio, and several of their house's men enter wearing party masks and carrying torches. They are planning on sneaking into the Capulets' feast, and Romeo is worried about how to do so. Benvolio insists getting in won't be a problem and reminds Romeo that they aren't intending to stay that long after all. Romeo says he doesn't want to go in at all—he's too sad. Mercutio, his friend, urges him to dance and be merry by "borrow[ing] Cupid's wings" and soaring to new heights. Romeo says he's "too sore enpiercèd with [Cupid's] shaft to soar with his light feathers." He is sunk, he says, under love's heavy burden—love is a rough, rude thing. Mercutio tells Romeo that if love is rough with him, he should "be rough with love."

Benvolio says it's time to go inside. Romeo is still dragging his feet and Mercutio taunts him for being such a stick in the mud and accuses him of wasting the light from their friends' torches—as big a shame as wasting the **light of day**. Romeo says he's not just sad about going to the party, but actually frightened because he had a portentous dream last night.

Mercutio says he had a dream the night before, too—he and Romeo have both been visited by "Queen Mab." Benvolio asks who Queen Mab is, and Mercutio, in a lengthy speech, spins a fanciful tale about the "fairies' midwife" who comes to people while they sleep on her hazelnut chariot to make them dream of sweet things and to play little pranks on those who make her jealous or cross. As Mercutio's speech goes on and on and grows bawdier and bawdier, Romeo and Benvolio urge him to stop. Mercutio warns them, though, not to discount their dreams. Benvolio says it's time to go inside. Romeo admits that he has had a premonition that the "consequence" of attending the feast will be his own "untimely death." He pushes his fears aside, though, surrendering the course of the evening to the control of his "lusty" friends.

ACT 1, SCENE 5

Inside the Capulet house, Peter and several serving men are rushing around, clearing tables and making things nice for the hosts while, at the same time, trying to enjoy the party themselves by stealing bits of marzipan and sneaking their friends in through the kitchen. Capulet gives a speech to his many guests, urging them to have a good time, be merry, and dance all night. Spotting Romeo and his friends—but unable to recognize them through their masks—he remarks on his many unexpected but nonetheless welcome guests.

As Romeo's friends try to get him to go into the party, Mercutio uses sexually charged wordplay to entice Romeo into looking at love less seriously. Mercutio is a wildcard, a fun-loving rogue whose free-wheeling personality stands in direct contrast to Romeo's melancholy, brooding disposition. Mercutio wants to help his friend lighten up a little bit and enjoy his youth.



Romeo is sensitive to the undercurrents of fate that seem to be pulling him in new directions—but his friends' influence forces him to shove those feelings down and surrender to having a good time.



Mercutio's role as the bawdy jokester of his friend group means that he tries to take any bad feelings or sad moments and turn them around—he wants to make light of Romeo's fears about his portentous dream by spinning a grand tale that moves from the fanciful to the ridiculous to the risqué. Mercutio's wheels are constantly spinning—and though he surely tires of being the one to always smooth everything over for his friends, he keeps at it.



Capulet is so obsessed with keeping up appearances and making things nice and impressive for his guests that he ignores all sorts of hijinks taking place right under his nose—or notices them but doesn't make a scene for fear of damaging his reputation as a fun, generous, gracious host.



Romeo spots Juliet from across the room and asks a servant who she is. The servant says he doesn't know. Romeo remarks upon how beautiful she is and swears that he "ne'er saw true beauty till this night."

Romeo's almost comically swift pivot to romantic obsession with Juliet—after the hours he spent moping about Rosaline—shows just how easily moved he is by love.



Tybalt overhears Romeo talking, and says he knows him by his voice—he is a Montague. He orders his page to fetch him his rapier, announcing his intent to kill the young man, but Capulet, realizing who Romeo really is, urges Tybalt to calm down and enjoy the party. Capulet doesn't want any killing in his house—and he doesn't want to break the peace agreement between House Capulet and House Montague. Tybalt is still angry, but Capulet orders the "saucy" Tybalt to keep quiet and enjoy the party. As Capulet rejoins the dance, Tybalt quietly vows to make Romeo regret intruding on the Capulets' party.

Even though the Montague/Capulet feud is the most important thing to Tybalt, Capulet himself is more concerned with keeping up appearances—so much so that he's willing to let Romeo's presence at the feast slide in order to maintain peace and the illusion of order.



Romeo approaches Juliet and takes her hand, calling it a "holy shrine." He says that if his touch is too rough, he'll smooth it with a kiss. Juliet assures Romeo that his hands are soft—their meeting palms feel to her like a pilgrim's soft, chaste kiss. Romeo jokingly asks whether saints and pilgrims have lips as well as hands, and Juliet retorts that though they have lips, they must use them only in prayer. Romeo urges Juliet to "let lips do what hands do." He kisses her, and she states that he kisses "by th' book." Juliet's nurse catches them and tells Juliet her mother wants to speak to her—Juliet hurries away. Romeo asks the nurse who Juliet's mother is, and the nurse answers that Juliet's mother is the lady of the house.

Romeo and Juliet's flirtation is chaste and sweet, but tinged with intense desire. As they make puns back and forth, their jokes center around religion and holiness—thus, when Juliet says that Romeo kisses "by th' book," she's referencing the Bible, suggesting that he's such a good kisser that he's made the "sin" of kissing holy.



Romeo is shocked and dismayed to realize that he has fallen in love with the daughter of his family's foe. Benvolio approaches Romeo and tells him that they should leave before getting into any trouble. Capulet calls out to his guests, announcing that the evening is drawing to an end. Romeo and his kinsmen begin sneaking out of the party. Juliet asks her nurse who Romeo is. The nurse pretends she doesn't see Romeo, and when she does admit to seeing him, says she doesn't know who he is. Juliet urges the nurse to go ask his name. The nurse returns and reports Romeo's name—then adds that he is a Montague. Juliet laments that her "only love [has] sprung from [her] only hate."

As Romeo and Juliet realize each other's identity, they're both stricken with grief. They have fallen in love fast and hard but know that the feud between their families means that there will be serious obstacles to their desire to be together. They know it is their duty to hate each other, but are about to begin questioning what the meaning of filial duty even is, and what they truly owe their families.



ACT 2, PROLOGUE

The chorus enters. They describe how Romeo's "old desire" for Rosaline is now in its "deathbed." Love has found Romeo again—but because he and Juliet are supposed to be enemies, the chorus predicts that things will be complicated for them. In spite of the difficulties ahead of the young lovers, however, the chorus informs the audience that Romeo and Juliet will indeed meet as a combination of passion and opportunity create opportunities for them to explore their newfound love.

The chorus's second and final appearance sets the stage, yet again, for what's to come. Their lingering presence suggests, again, that Romeo and Juliet were bound by fate to fall in love—and are bound, still, to move through a series of actions and consequences neither can control.



ACT 2, SCENE 1

As he is leaving the Capulets' party, Romeo pauses in the house's courtyard—he doesn't want to leave when his "heart" is still inside. He hides himself against the orchard wall as Benvolio and Mercutio enter, searching for him. Mercutio calls out for Romeo, begging him to make himself seen, and even tries to tempt him out of hiding with talk of Rosaline. Benvolio warns Mercutio that he'll anger Romeo by mentioning Rosaline, but Mercutio continues loudly making sexual remarks about her, trying to lure Romeo out. At last, Benvolio urges Mercutio to stop, and tells him it's time to go—to seek Romeo for any longer would be in vain, because he "means not to be found." Together, they leave the Capulet grounds.

In separating from his friends and hiding out on the Capulet grounds, Romeo enacts his first instance of choosing loyalty to Juliet over duty to his kinsmen. As Romeo and Juliet's sense of duty fluctuates throughout the play, they will, time and time again, choose allegiance to each other over the ties to their friends and family. Romeo and Juliet's loyalty in the face of the families' feud suggests that parents' efforts to limit their children may, in fact, only push them to rebel.



ACT 2, SCENE 2

Romeo comes out of hiding just as a light in a nearby window flicks on and Juliet exits onto her balcony. "It is the east," Romeo says, regarding Juliet, "and Juliet is the **sun**." He urges the sun to rise and "kill the envious **moon**." He urges Juliet to take her "vestal livery" and "cast it off." He continues observing Juliet as she looks up at the stars, waxing poetic about her beauty and wishing he could hold and touch her.

Though the word balcony is never technically mentioned in the play, this is the iconic "balcony scene" that has been so heavily referenced in art and popular culture since Romeo and Juliet was first performed. Romeo's speech about Juliet here is poetic—but there is also a deeper sexual connotation, as "envious moon" is a reference to Diana, the Roman goddess of the moon and protectress of virgins. He wishes aloud for Juliet to surrender her virginity to him and "kill the envious moon," or erase her connection to the goddess of purity and virginity.



Juliet speaks, sighing "Ay me!" and Romeo, hearing her, remains hidden, but quietly says he wishes she would speak again. Juliet sighs again, wondering aloud why Romeo has to be who he is. She says he wishes he would "refuse [his] name." If he won't change his name, though, she says she would change hers if it meant they could be together. Romeo wonders aloud if he should speak up and let Juliet know he's below her window, or whether he should listen some more. Juliet continues speaking, meditating on the nature of names and how they define the things they describe. She wishes that Romeo could be called something else—he would be the same person he is if he were, just as "a rose by any other word would smell as sweet."

Juliet's love for Romeo is making her existential. She wants to be with him desperately—and if he simply had another name, there would be no impediment to their courtship. Juliet is wondering why fate, family, and duty seem to be conspiring against her, and wishes that Romeo would abandon his name, his allegiances, and his identity in order to be with her. The reader can see, then, that there is an unstable and subtly violent undertone to Romeo and Juliet's love, as Juliet is perfectly fine with the obliteration of Romeo's entire sense of self if it means she can be with him.



Romeo speaks up and says he'll take Juliet's advice and allow her to "baptize" him anew—if she wants, he says, he'll cease being Romeo. Juliet asks who is hiding in the darkness, and Romeo replies that he's loath to use his own name, which is now "hateful" to him "because it is an enemy to [her.]" Juliet asks if it is Romeo hiding in the garden, and he says that if she dislikes his name, he'll be anything she wants. Juliet warns Romeo that if any of her kinsmen find him, they'll kill him, but Romeo says that the things "love can do" make him invincible to harm. Juliet again warns Romeo of the danger he's put himself in, but he says he'd rather have his life ended abruptly by her kinsmen's hatred than go through life without her.

Juliet tells Romeo that normally she'd be embarrassed about all the things he's overheard her saying tonight—but now that he's heard them, she refuses to "dwell on form" or manners. Juliet asks Romeo outright if he loves her truly and urges him to "pronounce it faithfully" if he does. Romeo begins to tell Juliet about his feelings, swearing to them by the "blessed moon," but Juliet urges him not to swear by the changeable, "inconstant" moon and instead swear by himself, as he is "the god of [her] idolatry."

As Romeo begins to swear his love again, however, Juliet cuts him off, telling him that they are being "too rash." She tries to bid Romeo goodnight, but he claims that Juliet is leaving him "unsatisfied." Juliet asks Romeo what satisfaction he could have tonight, and Romeo replies that what he wants is the exchange of Juliet's vows of love for his. Juliet says that she gave it to him before he even asked for it, but now wishes she could take it back just so she could give it to him again. The more love Juliet gives to Romeo, she says, the more she has.

Juliet's nurse calls for her, and Juliet tells Romeo that she has to go inside but will come right back. She hurries in, and Romeo says that he can hardly believe what's happening to him tonight—it must be a dream, because it's too "sweet" to be real. Juliet returns to the window and tells Romeo that if he truly loves her and wants to marry her, he should send for her tomorrow. If she hears from him, she says, she'll send a messenger back to him to arrange the time and place of the marriage. Juliet's nurse continues calling for her and Juliet assures her that she'll be in soon, while begging Romeo not to call upon her tomorrow unless his intentions are truly honorable. As Juliet heads inside again, Romeo laments how hard it is to say goodbye to one's lover.

Though Romeo and Juliet have only just met, they are already making grand promises and demands of each another. Juliet wishes Romeo would sever his allegiances to his own family, and he happily complies—even adding that he'd rather perish than face another day without her love. This further portrays love as a chaotic state of being that is deeply entwined with self-destruction and violence.



Again, the wordplay surrounding the idea of the moon appears. Romeo wants to swear by the moon, given his experience with Rosaline and her commitment to her virginity—but Juliet insists the moon is "inconstant," suggesting that she is ready to lose her own virginity.



When Juliet asks Romeo what satisfaction he wants from her, she's perhaps expecting him to make a suggestive joke, given the tenor of their conversations so far. But he surprises her by insisting that all he wants is for her to profess her love, something she's all too happy to do.



Juliet really wants to believe that Romeo truly loves her, and that their vows of love have not been rash or false. She keeps setting up situations in which Romeo gets an out, or a chance to escape his vows—but he insists he's ready to commit to her no matter what. This passage highlights the tension between choice and fate—it's almost as if Romeo nor Juliet really has any say in what happens next.



Romeo turns to leave, but Juliet comes out to the balcony yet again and calls down to him, asking what time she should send a messenger to Romeo tomorrow. Romeo says 9:00. Juliet laments that time will drag between then and now as if “twenty year[s]” are passing. Juliet tells Romeo that he should probably leave—even though she wants him to stay, as if he is a small bird a child keeps in a cage. Romeo says he wishes he could be Juliet’s bird. Juliet says if Romeo were truly her pet, she would “kill [him] with too much cherishing.”

Juliet bids Romeo goodnight, and he says he hopes she sleeps peacefully. Juliet hurries inside, and Romeo says how badly he wishes he could stay and sleep with Juliet. He resolves to head to see his priest and seek the man’s help in arranging the marriage.

ACT 2, SCENE 3

Friar Laurence, alone on the grounds of his monastery, carries a basket as he combs the earth for herbs, weeds, and flowers in the **faint light of dawn**. Friar Laurence, who makes tinctures and **potions** from the plants he collects, knows that the earth is both nature’s tomb and its womb—one can reap “baleful,” poisonous roots just as one plucks flowers full of sweet nectar. Friar Laurence finds meaning and depth in nature’s lessons, seeing plants as a symbol of the duality of good and evil, virtue and vice. “In man as well as herbs,” poison and medicine exist side-by-side.

Romeo enters and greets Friar Laurence. The friar is surprised to see him, and remarks that something must have excited or troubled Romeo to bring him to the monastery so early in the morning. He asks if Romeo has even been to bed yet, and Romeo says that he’s spent the night doing something “sweeter” than resting. The scandalized friar asks if Romeo has been with Rosaline, but Romeo scoffs and says he’s forgotten Rosaline and all the “woe” she caused him. The friar again asks Romeo where he’s been, and Romeo replies that he has been “feasting with [his] enemy.” The friar, frustrated by Romeo’s refusal to answer his questions outright, urges Romeo to speak plain.

Romeo explains that his “heart’s dear love is set on the fair daughter of rich Capulet.” Romeo says that the friar must marry the two of them right away—and in secret. Friar Laurence is shocked by Romeo’s swift change of heart—his “ancient ears,” he says, are still ringing with Romeo’s groans and laments about Rosaline. Romeo points out that the friar used to scold him for loving Rosaline, but the friar insists he only ever scolded Romeo for “doting”—in other words, obsessing.

This instance is yet another in which Romeo and Juliet’s speech turns violent as they attempt to express the depths of their love for each other. Here, Juliet suggests that if Romeo really were her pet bird, she’d love him to death or crush him with her hands from trying to “cherish” him too closely. Juliet’s love is overwhelming and intense, and she doesn’t know how to express it other than to render it as a violent, unpredictable force.



Romeo is hasty in his intentions to marry Juliet—perhaps it is the very fact that she’s off-limits which makes him want to consecrate their love so quickly and formally.



Friar Laurence’s thoughtful meditation on his work as a potion-maker shows that he takes seriously the existence of good and evil forces, and their roles in the fates of men. He understands that there are two sides to every story—and just as much potential for joy in each moment as there is potential for sorrow.



Romeo’s insistence on wordplay in this scene shows his hesitance to admit outright what’s going on between him and Juliet. He knows how potentially incendiary the news of their love is and is perhaps nervous to tell the friar about it—even as he longs for the man’s wise counsel.



Romeo has, apparently, been complaining for a long time to the friar about his unrequited love for Rosaline. It makes sense, then, that the friar is so shocked by Romeo’s sudden and intense change of heart. If Romeo was so devoted to one woman just a day ago, the friar perhaps wonders how Romeo’s love for another can be so real. The friar is wary of Romeo’s intense emotions, and nervous of what will happen if he continues acting on them.



Friar Laurence, in spite of his reservations, admits that perhaps the marriage of Romeo and Juliet could serve “to turn [their] households’ rancor to pure love.” Romeo begs the friar to help him hastily marry Juliet—the friar says he’ll help the two young lovers but warns Romeo that those who run too fast always stumble.

Even in spite of his hesitations, Friar Laurence realizes that a union between the houses of Montague and Capulet could actually be a good thing not just for the young lovers, but for all Verona—and might even be fate. He resolves to help, believing he has the chance to make a difference in his society.



ACT 2, SCENE 4

Benvolio and Mercutio enter, discussing how Romeo did not come home the night before. They believe he is still out chasing after Rosaline. Benvolio reports that Tybalt has sent a letter to Montague’s house—Mercutio is certain it is a challenge to a duel, and Benvolio believes Romeo will accept Tybalt’s provocation. Mercutio says Romeo can’t face Tybalt in his depressed state—Tybalt is masterful and even artistic duelist who could “butcher [...] a silk button.” As Romeo approaches, Benvolio urges Mercutio to be quiet. Romeo comes near, and Mercutio laments to Benvolio how lovelorn he looks.

Benvolio and Mercutio pity Romeo. They know how intensely he feels things, and are aware of how profoundly those feelings affect his day-to-day life. They worry that in his strange, lovelorn state he’ll do something rash, like rise to Tybalt’s insult, and are determined to protect Romeo from himself.



Romeo greets Mercutio and Benvolio, and Mercutio accuses Romeo of giving them both “the slip” the night before. Romeo assures Mercutio that he had “business” to attend to and was forced to “strain courtesy” in pursuit of it. Mercutio makes a pun on Romeo’s response, suggesting that his business strained his “hams,” or legs—in other words, Mercutio suggests that Romeo went off to sleep with a woman. The two exchange sexual barbs, joking back and forth, until Mercutio accuses Romeo of wearing the “jest” out. Romeo continues joking and making puns, however, and Mercutio expresses his surprise at Romeo’s much-improved mood. Romeo is Romeo again, Mercutio says—and all because he has “hid his bauble in a hole.”

Mercutio really leans into his role as Romeo’s funny, almost jester-like friend in this passage. He has often, as of late, been preoccupied with how to cheer Romeo up—but now that he believes Romeo has taken the cheering-up into his own hands, he’s ready to rejoice in his friend’s having moved on from Rosaline and distracted himself with other things. At the same time, there’s clearly a limit to Mercutio’s ability to sustain his live-wire energy—a fact that foreshadows the darker side of his personality which will soon emerge.



Juliet’s nurse and Peter enter and greet the Montague men. The nurse wishes them good morning, but Mercutio tells her that “the bawdy hand of the dial is now upon the prick of noon.” The nurse chides Mercutio for making such a dirty joke, then tells Romeo she wants to have a private conversation with him. Benvolio and Mercutio make sexual jokes about the nurse desiring alone time with Romeo, then head back to Romeo’s father’s house for lunch, inviting Romeo to join them when he’s finished with the nurse.

Romeo’s friends engage in sexually-charged wordplay with the nurse—a woman who is below their social station and appears an easy target for humiliation and tomfoolery. Though language is often an equalizer among different social classes in the play, in this instance, it’s a way for the noble Montague men to condescendingly assert their dominance.



The nurse tells Romeo how little she cared for Mercutio's "saucy" jokes and chides Peter for remaining silent in the face of Mercutio's impropriety. Peter tries to make excuses for himself, but the nurse waves him off and pulls Romeo aside. She tells him that Juliet has sent her to talk with Romeo and receive a message from him—but before she does, she wants to warn the young man not to "lead her into a fool's paradise." Romeo insists that his love for Juliet is true and asks the nurse to tell Juliet to come up with an excuse to go to confession that afternoon so that Friar Laurence can marry the two of them.

The nurse is no-nonsense when it comes to Juliet—she loves her young charge and wants to make sure that her feelings are protected. Though the nurse can often give as good as she gets when it comes to bawdy jokes or ridiculous stories, in this moment she has no time for such jesting—she wants to get to the point, confront Romeo, and secure an answer for Juliet.



Romeo gives the nurse some money for her trouble, in spite of her protestations, and informs her that in an hour, behind the wall of a nearby abbey, one of Romeo's servants will meet the nurse and hand her a rope ladder. Romeo plans on using the ladder to climb up to Juliet's room later that night. The nurse asks Romeo if his servant can be trusted to keep the secret of Romeo and Juliet's marriage, and he insists his servant is "true as steel." Juliet's nurse says that Juliet, too, is trustworthy and good—she is even choosing to honor her love for Romeo in spite of a marriage proposal from Paris. Romeo bids the nurse goodbye and asks her to say good things about him to Juliet. She assures him she will, and then she and Peter hurry away.

The nurse knows that, technically, Paris would be a better match for Juliet—but at the same time, she can't help getting swept up in the excitement of making all these secret, romantic plans on Juliet's behalf. At the end of the day, it seems, the nurse's allegiance is not to the House of Capulet but to Juliet specifically—all she wants is for her lady to be happy.



ACT 2, SCENE 5

In the courtyard of the Capulet manor, Juliet paces nervously—her nurse is not yet back from meeting Romeo, and she is worried about what could have possibly delayed the woman for three long hours. In the midst of her worrying, however, Juliet sees her nurse return. The nurse approaches and greets her, but Juliet notes that the woman looks sad, and asks her what has happened. The nurse says she's just tired. Juliet says she wishes that the nurse had her bones, and that she had the nurse's news. She begs the nurse to tell her what Romeo said. The nurse is annoyed by Juliet's impatience, but Juliet continues demanding the news.

Juliet's impatience is seriously intense—she feels as if her entire future is hinging on this moment. She loves Romeo and wants to be with him—but there's a part of her that's nervous that the vows they exchanged last night were rash ones made in the heat of the moment, not long-lasting promises.



The nurse states that Juliet has made a "simple choice" in Romeo—though he's handsome and gentle, she says, he's nothing special. Juliet ignores all of the nurse's judgements and instead asks only what Romeo said about their marriage. The nurse says she has a headache and a backache, and curses Juliet for sending her out. Juliet quickly says she's sorry for the nurse's pain before yet again demanding news.

Though the nurse wants Juliet to be happy, she can't ignore the part of herself that knows Juliet's making a mistake. A common woman like the nurse would never be allowed to shirk social dictums and follow her heart blindly—that pragmatism, however, isn't part of the noble and privileged Juliet's life.



The nurse begs Juliet to calm down, then asks if she has permission to go to confession later. Juliet says that she does. The nurse tells her to hurry to Friar Laurence's chambers, where "a husband [waits to make [her] a wife." The nurse says that she's headed back out to fetch a ladder from Romeo's servant so that later, once it is dark, Romeo can climb up to Juliet's room to "burden" Juliet at night. Juliet, blushing and excited, bids her nurse farewell and hurries off to her "high fortune."

Juliet believes that fate is lighting her path forward towards a life with Romeo. She doesn't yet realize that fate has something darker in store for them both—she can't see beyond the heady joy of the moment.



ACT 2, SCENE 6

At Friar Laurence's cell, the friar and Romeo wait for Juliet. The friar says he hopes the heavens will smile upon the "holy act" of the young lovers' marriage and prays no sorrow will visit them. Romeo says that even if sorrow does come, it will not be able to usurp the joy he feels just in looking at Juliet. The friar warns Romeo that "violent delights have violent ends," and that even "the sweetest honey" becomes loathsome when indulged in too often. He urges Romeo to "love moderately"—if he does, he will love longer.

Even though the friar cautions Romeo against loving too "violent[ly]," his words fall on deaf ears. Romeo and Juliet are intensely in love and can't even begin to comprehend the power of the forces that threaten to tear them apart.



Juliet rushes into the friar's chambers and excitedly embraces Romeo. As Friar Laurence watches the two hold each other, he admires their love but wonders to himself in an aside whether it is too "light," heady, and "wanton" to last. Juliet greets the friar and thanks Romeo profusely for arranging the marriage so quickly. Romeo and Juliet begin imagining the love and happiness they'll soon enjoy, but the friar urges them to hurry and follow him so that they can make their vows.

The friar's doubt is palpable throughout this entire scene, and, in fact, the sight of Romeo and Juliet embracing each other doesn't comfort him. It only worries him further about whether he's doing the right thing in helping these young lovers to stoke their intense, furious passion in spite of the risks they're taking.



ACT 3, SCENE 1

Benvolio, Mercutio, and Mercutio's page are out walking around Verona, but Benvolio begs Mercutio to lead them home. It is a hot day, he says, and on such days "mad blood" often stirs—in other words, people get worked up more easily. Mercutio states that Benvolio is secretly hoping for a fight, or any other chance to use his sword. Benvolio is surprised to hear himself characterized this way, but Mercutio goes on and on about how hot-blooded Benvolio really is, making jokes about Benvolio's rampant sexual energy.

Even though Benvolio is actually worried about being seen around Verona given the instability in the air, Mercutio can't stop cracking jokes. Mercutio is fun-loving and carefree as always, even in the face of Benvolio's warnings that something bad may be about to happen.



Tybalt, Petruchio, and some other Capulets approach. Benvolio warns Mercutio, but Mercutio is unconcerned by their presence. Tybalt approaches them and says he wants a word with the two of them—Mercutio urges Tybalt to couple his “one word” with a blow. Tybalt says he will, if the men give him reason to. Tybalt addresses Mercutio and asks if he “consort’st with Romeo.” Benvolio, nervous, suggests they all go to some “private place” where they can resolve their grievances without getting the public involved. Mercutio insists he won’t move for anyone. Romeo approaches, and Tybalt says his “man” has arrived. Mercutio, offended, rises to Tybalt’s taunt.

Tybalt turns on Romeo, mocking him and calling him a villain. Romeo tries to defuse Tybalt’s anger by calmly suggesting he move on. Tybalt, though, tells Romeo it is time for him to answer for the “injuries” he has done to Tybalt. Romeo says he’s never injured Tybalt, and in fact loves the Capulet man, whose surname he loves “as dearly as [his] own.” Mercutio, angered by Romeo’s “vile submission,” draws his sword. Tybalt draws his, too, and though Romeo begs them to stop, Tybalt and Mercutio begin fighting. Romeo tries to break up the fight, but Tybalt stabs Mercutio, reaching under Romeo’s raised arm as he does so. Petruchio drags Tybalt away from the fight, and Mercutio angrily wishes “a plague” upon the houses of both Capulet and Montague.

After Tybalt and the other Capulets leave, Benvolio and Romeo ask Mercutio if he’s badly hurt. He insists at first that he’s suffered just “a scratch”—but moments later calls for a doctor. Romeo says the injury doesn’t look so bad, but Mercutio predicts that he’ll be dead by tomorrow. He calls again and again for a plague on both Romeo and Tybalt’s houses, then asks Benvolio to take him inside where he can die in peace. Alone on stage, Romeo laments that he has allowed Mercutio, his closest friend and kinsman, to be murdered by a man who’s only been related to him for an hour or so. Romeo blames Juliet for his misfortune, claiming that her “beauty hath made [him] effeminate.”

Benvolio enters and announces that Mercutio has died. Romeo, enraged, states that “this day’s black fate” will begin a great “woe” between the Capulets and Montagues. Tybalt returns to the square and Romeo angrily approaches him, stating that one or the other of them must go join Mercutio’s soul in heaven. Tybalt sneers that as Romeo “didst consort with him here” on Earth, he should “consort” with him in heaven. Both men draw their swords and begin to fight—Romeo fells Tybalt, who quickly dies.

Tybalt’s verbal attacks against Mercutio are designed to taunt and play upon Mercutio’s own proclivity for sexual jokes and puns. The Elizabethan meaning of “consort” is to associate with—but also to engage sexually with—another person, while “man” connotes a servant or someone otherwise submissive. By essentially calling Mercutio a homosexual and implying he is attracted to Romeo, then, Tybalt is insulting both their masculinities—and Mercutio can’t help but rise to the bait.



Romeo tries as hard as he can to defuse the tension between Tybalt and the Montagues, but his efforts are in vain. Though Romeo is willing to put aside their families’ grudge, he knows deep down that Tybalt would never do the same, even if he were to learn that the two of them were now legally kinsmen. Romeo’s desire to stop the fight is all in vain, and he may actually be responsible for Mercutio’s injury—had he not gotten in the way, Shakespeare seems to be suggesting, Mercutio might have been able to prevail. Mercutio, sick of always having to stand up for, comfort, and defend Romeo, shouts out that he is furious with both houses—their grudge has maimed him, and will soon be the cause of his death.



Mercutio’s death scene is famous because of its brutality. As he dies, he doesn’t forgive Romeo or declare any florid final wishes—all he has left is vitriol, anger, and bitterness over how his life has ended. Mercutio, like his kinsman Prince Escalus, is fed up with the ways in which the Montagues and Capulets disturb the peace of Verona and bring misery unto its citizens—so, with his dying breaths, he curses them with misery, woe, disease, and death.



Romeo falls for Tybalt’s provocation just as quickly as Mercutio did. The insinuation of homosexuality—an accusation which assaults both men’s masculinity and is an even further affront in light of Mercutio’s death—makes Romeo’s blood boil just as it did Mercutio’s. Romeo knows that his marriage to Juliet means that Tybalt is his kinsman now—but Mercutio was Romeo’s best friend, and he must draw the lines of his loyalty somewhere.



Benvolio warns Romeo that the citizens of Verona have heard the fight and are coming. Prince Escalus will kill Romeo if he hears of what he's done. Romeo, lamenting that he is "fortune's fool," quickly runs away. The citizens' watch enters, looking to arrest the man who slayed Mercutio, and Benvolio points out Tybalt's body on the ground. The prince enters with Montague, Capulet, and their wives. Lady Capulet screams and swoons over her dead kinsman, and the prince demands a detailed account of what has happened. Benvolio describes how Tybalt's anger would not be calmed in spite of Romeo's attempts to pacify him, then explains how the two brawls unfolded.

Lady Capulet accuses Benvolio of lying to protect the Montagues. Prince Escalus asks if Romeo is responsible for Tybalt's spilt blood. Montague begs the prince to spare his son's life, and the prince agrees to merely exile Romeo. However, if the boy returns to Verona, he will be executed on the spot. Showing mercy to killers, he says, only leads to more murders.

Benvolio knows that Romeo did not provoke the fight and even tried to stop it, so he urges his kinsman to flee before he can incur the prince's wrath. The prince, whose own kinsman Mercutio has been felled in this latest brawl, is furious and determined to find out what happened—and to punish whomever went against his last decree.



Prince Escalus issued a decree in the play's first act condemning anyone—Capulet or Montague—who disturbed Verona's peace to death. Now, he is determined to make good on his promise, even if he knows that he cannot use the full weight of the law on Romeo, who was swept up in violence for which he didn't ask.



ACT 3, SCENE 2

Juliet, in her chambers, begs night to fall so that Romeo can at last "leap" into her arms and perform the "amorous rites" of love. Juliet is excited to sleep with Romeo so that they can both cast off their "stainless maidenhoods." She wants Romeo—her "**day in night**"—to come to her on the "wings of night." She predicts that when she "die[s]," the constellations will cut Romeo's face into stars, arrange themselves in his image, and cause the whole world to fall in love with night while scorning the "**garish sun**." The day has grown terribly tedious as she waits, like an "impatient child," to wear her "new robes" and possess the "mansion of a love" she has recently bought.

The nurse enters with Romeo's rope ladder, and Juliet asks if she brings any news. The nurse calls out mournfully, "He's dead, he's dead," and Juliet of course believes she is speaking of Romeo. When Juliet asks if Romeo has died, the nurse will not answer, and continues talking about the bloody corpse she has just seen lying in the street. Juliet believes that Romeo is dead—but the nurse calls out that it is Tybalt who has died, while Romeo is banished for Tybalt's murder. Juliet, horrified that Romeo would kill one of her kinsmen, laments angrily "that deceit should dwell in such a gorgeous palace." The nurse agrees with her and states that all men are wicked liars, then wishes aloud for great shame to come to Romeo. Juliet instantly chides her nurse for speaking ill of Romeo.

Juliet's speech in this scene shows her desperately looking forward to consummating her marriage to Romeo and thus losing her virginity. The language she uses, however, as she attempts to express her feelings is inherently violent—she invokes the Elizabethan use of the phrase "die," a euphemism for orgasm. She also talks about cutting Romeo up, and scorns the traditionally welcoming light of the sun in favor of anticipating the dark, fathomless night.



Juliet seems almost relieved to realize that it is Tybalt, not Romeo, who has died in the street. Her alliances have begun to shift—she feels closer to Romeo than a family member she's known her entire life. Even though Juliet harbors some anger toward Romeo, as soon as her nurse speaks out against him, Juliet retaliates angrily.



The nurse points out that Romeo did kill Juliet's cousin. Juliet wrestles with the emotional and moral conundrum before her—Tybalt, she says, would have killed Romeo had Romeo not killed him first. She admits she is happy that Romeo is alive, but quickly grows anxious as she realizes that being banished from Verona is as good as being dead. Juliet asks where her parents are, and her nurse tells her they are crying over Tybalt's body. Juliet says she refuses to cry for Tybalt—her tears must only be for Romeo, who has condemned her to “die maiden-widowèd.” The nurse, seeing Juliet's pain, says she'll go out to find Romeo and bring him back to Juliet so that she may be comforted. Juliet begs her nurse to make haste.

As Juliet reckons with the fact that her great love has killed one of her kinsmen, she's forced to consider her alliances and decide where her loyalty lies. Juliet has been raised to believe that her only allegiance must be to her family and her house—but now that she has fallen in love with and married her enemy, Romeo is technically her family, as well. Juliet is undergoing an intellectual and moral shift which will inform her decisions throughout the rest of the play.



ACT 3, SCENE 3

Romeo goes to Friar Laurence's chambers. Friar Laurence feels pity for Romeo, who seems “wedded to calamity.” Romeo asks what punishment Prince Escalus has handed down, and the friar tells Romeo he is to be banished. Romeo states that death would be more merciful, but Friar Laurence assures Romeo that now he has the chance to see the world. Romeo insists that the world beyond Verona's walls is “hell itself”—all he wants is to be with Juliet. The friar warns Romeo that he's being ungrateful for the mercy the prince has shown him, but Romeo continues to wax poetic about how empty a world without Juliet would be. Exile, to Romeo, is death.

Friar Laurence has gotten himself involved in Romeo and Juliet's painful, dramatic saga. As a result, he must now help Romeo as he sorts through the wreckage of all he's wrought not just upon himself, but all of Verona. Even though Romeo and Juliet are both alive and well, Romeo insists that the consequences he's facing are as bad as death—he truly believes that if he can't be with Juliet, there's no point to living.



Friar Laurence says that he has some advice and comfort for Romeo—if only Romeo will hush up long enough to hear it. Romeo insists that the friar can't speak about the things he doesn't feel or understand, and that the things that have befallen him just in the last few hours are enough to make any man “tak[e] the measure of an unmade grave.” There is a knock at the friar's door, and the friar urges Romeo to hurry and hide in the study while he answers it, but Romeo lies prostrate on the ground, weeping and unable to move.

Romeo is so caught up in his emotions that he can't think clearly or take any logical actions. He's so miserable over all the chaos and destruction around him that he wants to die—but he won't necessarily admit that all his strife is, essentially, his own fault.



Friar Laurence asks who is knocking, and Juliet's nurse calls out, stating that she has brought a message from her lady. She enters, and, upon seeing Romeo, remarks that Juliet is back at home in a similar state. Romeo asks if it's really possible that Juliet still loves him, or whether she now sees him as a traitor and murderer. The nurse admits that Juliet mourns Tybalt—but still misses Romeo. Romeo says he wishes he could maim himself for causing Juliet pain.

Friar Laurence and the nurse are united in their shared difficulty of having to care for two young individuals whose outsized, melodramatic emotions are more than anyone can handle.



Friar Laurence orders Romeo to stop being so dramatic and start acting like a man. The friar demands Romeo pull himself together—nothing is as bad as it seems. Juliet is alive, and still in love with Romeo; Romeo is alive, while Tybalt, who would have killed him, is dead. On top of it all, Prince Escalus has spared Romeo's life. The friar tells Romeo to go visit Juliet and comfort her through the **night**—in the morning, he says, Romeo will go to Mantua, where he will live for a while until his friends and kinsmen back in Verona find a way to secure a pardon from the prince. The friar urges the nurse to return to Juliet and tell her that Romeo is coming for her. The nurse thanks the friar for his kind, measured words, then hurries off.

Romeo thanks Friar Laurence for lifting his mood. The friar tells Romeo to enjoy his night with Juliet, but not to forget that, come **morning's light**, he must be out of the city. The friar assures Romeo that everything will be all right—he should go onto Mantua without fear and await word from his servant, through whom the friar will send any important news. Romeo bids the friar an emotional farewell, then takes his leave.

ACT 3, SCENE 4

At the Capulet manor, Capulet laments to Paris that in the midst of all the chaos surrounding Tybalt's death, there has been no time to “move” Juliet to happy thoughts of marrying Paris. Paris assures Capulet and Lady Capulet that he understands. Lady Capulet promises Paris that, in the morning, she'll talk to Juliet about the marriage. Capulet insists Juliet will listen to her parents—today is Monday, and he promises Paris that the two of them will be married by Thursday—the earliest their family could possibly be excused for abandoning their grief over Tybalt and enjoying the festivities of a wedding. Paris says he wishes that tomorrow was Thursday. Capulet tells his wife to go visit Juliet on her way up to bed and get her ready for a wedding—it will take place as soon as possible.

ACT 3, SCENE 5

Romeo and Juliet walk out onto Juliet's balcony after having spent the night together. It is nearly morning, and Romeo is preparing to leave. Juliet insists that day has not yet broken, and Romeo should stay a while longer, but he insists that “night's candles are burnt out,” and it is time for him to make haste unless he wants to be killed. Juliet, realizing that what Romeo says is true, has a change of heart and begins urging him to hurry to Mantua before he's caught. Romeo looks out on the **dawn** and laments that as “more light” breaks, his and Juliet's troubles grow “dark[er.]” The nurse enters and announces that Lady Capulet is on her way to Juliet's room. Juliet states that as the window “let[s] day in,” it “let[s] life out.”

The friar is Romeo's friend and confidant, and indulges his intense mood swings and his amorous, sensitive side. But at the same time, he knows it's his responsibility to help Romeo reel himself in a little. There are many people much worse off than Romeo, and the friar tries to remind the privileged young nobleman that in spite of all the trouble he's facing, he's still pretty well-off.



Romeo trusts completely in the friar's plan, and, as he takes his leave from his friend and mentor, believes that the two of them will soon be reunited. Romeo doesn't yet see how the cruel designs of fate will come into play and cause the friar's plans to go awry.



In this brief scene, the Capulets scheme behind their daughter's back to marry Juliet off to Paris. Paris is somewhat hapless—he does really seem to like Juliet and earnestly want to marry her. He is seemingly unaware of the Capulets' baser instincts and desire for their own social advancement, believing only that they are supportive of his and Juliet's burgeoning love.



This passage represents Shakespeare's inversion of common preconceptions about day and night, light and dark. While day and light are usually purifying, happy symbols, within the world of the play, the dawning sun is garish, draining, and loathed because it represents the end of Romeo and Juliet's time together—and the threat of being discovered by their families in the harsh light of day.



After a kiss farewell, Romeo climbs down the rope ladder. Juliet calls after him, worried that it will be years before they see one another again. Romeo insists that he will send her greetings as often as he can, and says he believes in his heart they'll be together again soon. Juliet, looking down the ladder at Romeo, says she's having a terrible premonition—Romeo is so far below her it's as if he's "dead in the bottom of a tomb." Romeo begs Juliet not to worry, then takes his leave.

Lady Capulet calls out to Juliet and asks how she's doing. Juliet says she's feeling poorly. Lady Capulet tells Juliet that it's time to stop crying for Tybalt. Juliet says she can't help but weep, and Lady Capulet then suggests that Juliet weep not because Tybalt is dead—since her tears won't do him any good in the grave—but because the "villain" who killed him, Romeo, still lives. Juliet, putting on an act, says she wishes she could avenge Tybalt's death. Lady Capulet says that a plan to do just that is already in motion—she is planning on sending instructions and **poison** to a friend who lives in Mantua, ordering the man to kill Romeo on sight. Juliet says she wishes she could mix the poison herself.

Lady Capulet tells Juliet that it's time to talk of nicer things—she has some good news for her daughter. Juliet asks what the news is. Lady Capulet says that in order to help Juliet feel better, her father has "sorted out a sudden day of joy," and arranged for her to be married to Paris on Thursday morning. Juliet says she doesn't want to marry Paris—she would, she says, marry her sworn enemy Romeo before him. Capulet and the nurse enter, and Capulet asks why Juliet is still crying—surely, he says, her mother must have given her the happy news. Lady Capulet says the ungrateful Juliet isn't happy about her marriage, adding that she wishes her daughter "were married to her grave." Capulet, too, is enraged by Juliet's stoicism, and asks why she isn't "proud." Juliet screams that she can never be proud of something she hates.

Capulet screams at Juliet for her ungratefulness, and tells her that no matter what, she is going to marry Paris on Thursday—if she refuses, he will "drag" her to the church." Juliet begs her father to listen to her, but Capulet is so angry that he calls Juliet a "curse" upon their family. The nurse chides Capulet for speaking so coarsely of his daughter. Capulet orders the nurse, whom he calls a "fool," to "hold [her] tongue." He continues railing against Juliet, lamenting that he's worked hard to find her a good match and make sure she's taken care of, only to be rewarded with cruelty and ingratitude. He tells Juliet that if she doesn't agree to the marriage, he will disown her and never acknowledge her as his daughter again. Capulet storms out angrily.

Juliet's premonition as she looks down the ladder at Romeo hearkens back to Romeo's portentous dream the night before the Capulet ball. Both of them know, on some level, that they are pawns of fate—and perhaps even sense that their love is doomed—but choose to ignore their instincts.



Juliet knows that if her parents find out about her love for Romeo, her already-miserable situation will only get worse. She chooses to let her mother believe she's crying over Tybalt, and to play up her hatred of Romeo to throw her mother off. Her violent speech about Romeo belies her intense love for him.



Though Juliet once claimed that Romeo and his family were her "only hate," she's come a long way since making that characterization. What she hates now is not Romeo or any one of the Montagues—rather, it is her parents, Paris, and all that their sneaky attempts to conspire about her fate behind her back represent. Juliet's loyalties are shifting, and she is questioning the duty she owes to her parents when they so clearly seem to believe they have no duties or responsibilities to her happiness in return.



Capulet is so threatened by the idea that his plans to use his daughter for his own social advancement might not work out that he spews vitriol at anyone who questions him. Though there is certainly a "curse" or plague upon the House of Capulet, it's not Juliet—rather, it's her father's own shortsightedness and narcissism that corrupt everything in his path.



Juliet begs her mother to delay the marriage a while—otherwise, Juliet says, her parents might as well build the bridal bed inside of the Capulet crypt. Lady Capulet, furious as her husband, tells Juliet to do whatever she wants—her parents are “done” with her, then storms away Juliet, crying, asks her nurse what can possibly be done. The nurse urges Juliet to marry Paris, since Romeo is banished and may never come back, while Paris is a fine gentleman and a better match than Romeo ever was. Juliet asks her nurse if she’s speaking from the heart, and the nurse says she is. Juliet says her nurse has comforted her greatly and orders the woman to go tell Lady Capulet that Juliet has gone to Friar Laurence’s chambers to make confession and be absolved for having so offended her father. The nurse congratulates Juliet on her wise choice, then hurries off.

Alone, Juliet remarks what a “wicked fiend” the nurse is, and says she regrets having ever trusted her. Juliet resolves to go to Friar Laurence—not to confess, but to seek the man’s counsel and a “remedy” to her woes. If he can’t help her, she says, she will take her own life rather than insult Romeo by marrying Paris.

ACT 4, SCENE 1

Friar Laurence and Paris meet in the friar’s chamber. Paris is asking the friar’s advice on his upcoming marriage to Juliet, which Paris himself admits is hasty and possibly contrary to Juliet’s wishes. He’s noticed that she cannot seem to stop grieving Tybalt’s death—but Paris believes that in marrying quickly, he will be able to provide Juliet the love and understanding she needs to heal. The friar, however, says he doesn’t approve of the haste of the marriage—but before he can give Paris advice, Juliet enters the chambers. Paris greets Juliet as his “lady” and his “wife.” Juliet rebuffs his greeting. Paris tries to talk to Juliet, but she turns his own words around on him again and again, stonily icing him out.

Juliet asks Friar Laurence if she can speak with him alone, and the friar urges Paris to leave. Paris bids Juliet goodbye, kisses her, then leaves. Juliet urges the friar to close the door behind Paris so that they can talk frankly—she worries she is “past cure, past help.” The friar says he understands Juliet’s grief, but doesn’t know what to do to put a stop to the marriage. Juliet pulls out a knife and says that if the friar can’t help her, she will end her own life. The friar, panicked, says he knows of something that can be done, if Juliet dares to try it. Juliet says she would rather jump off a tower or sleep in a crypt each night than marry Paris—she will do anything for the chance to be with Romeo again.

Juliet is mad with rage and desperation as she threatens suicide should her parents force her to go through with the marriage to Paris. Again, her feelings—any feelings connected to her love for Romeo—are so intense that in trying to express them she resorts to violent thoughts and speech. Even though Juliet talks a big talk, once she realizes that her parents really mean to disown her, she gets busy with making false amends in order to buy herself more time to figure out a solution to her problems.



Juliet’s nurse has been her companion and ally for over a decade—and yet as soon as the woman speaks against Romeo, she is effectively dead to Juliet. Juliet will not suffer anyone who does not support her love for Romeo, and will sever herself from anyone who stands in its way.



Though Paris stands in the way of Romeo and Juliet’s love, he’s not evil, narcissistic, or self-interested. This conversation with the friar makes it seem like he really does care for Juliet and wants to marry her in order to help her move past her grief. Paris’s ignorance, however, makes him an easy target—he does not realize that he is, like Tybalt and Mercutio, destined to be yet another casualty of Romeo and Juliet’s chaotic, destructive love.



Juliet’s love for Romeo—and her desperation to see it through—has caused her to resort to violence as means of securing her desired ends. Juliet’s feelings of grief, betrayal, and confusion are so large that in expressing them, her thoughts and words are full of violent desires—a consequence of her overwhelming, disorienting love for Romeo and her fear of letting it go.



Friar Laurence, sensing Juliet's resolve, tells her of his plan. He urges her to go home, pretend that everything is all right, and consent to marrying Paris the day after tomorrow. Friar Laurence gives Juliet a vial and tells her that tomorrow night (the night before the wedding) she should ensure she is in her room alone, then drink the contents of the vial. The **potion** within, the friar explains, is designed to make whomever drinks it sleep deeply—and appear dead—for just over 40 hours. When Juliet's family discovers her dead, they will bring her to the Capulet crypt to be buried—while all this is happening, the friar says, he'll send word of the plan to Romeo, who will return to Verona, get Juliet from the crypt, and hurry her away to Mantua where the two of them can live in peace.

Juliet begs Friar Laurence to give her the vial of **potion**, determined to see the plan through. The friar gives it to her, then wishes her good luck. He promises to see his end of the plan through. Juliet bids the friar goodbye, praying that her love for Romeo will give her the strength she needs.

ACT 4, SCENE 2

At the Capulet home, Capulet is busy hastily sending his servingmen on errands in preparation for Juliet's wedding while Lady Capulet stands by. He sends one out to go around town inviting the guests and another to find a cook who will make the food. He asks Juliet's nurse where Juliet is, and the nurse tells him she's at Friar Laurence's. Capulet says he hopes the friar can "do some good" on the "peevish self-willed harlot."

Juliet enters. Capulet asks her where she's been, and she tells her father that she has been repenting for the sin of her disobedience. In obsequious, beseeching terms, she begs her father's forgiveness, even falling to her knees as she promises to be "ruled" by him forevermore. She tells her father that she saw Paris at Friar Laurence's cell and has promised herself to him. Capulet asks for one of his men to go fetch the friar and bring him to the mansion so that Capulet can give him proper thanks.

Juliet asks her nurse to come with her to her room and help her pick out adornments for the following day. Lady Capulet reminds her that the wedding is not for two days, but Capulet says there's no sense in waiting—the wedding should take place the following day. Juliet and her nurse hurry off. Capulet urges Lady Capulet to follow them and help while he goes off to tell Paris that the "wayward" Juliet has been "reclaimed."

Friar Laurence is truly dedicated to helping Romeo and Juliet find a way to be together. At first, he hoped bringing them together in marriage would bring peace to Verona and unite their houses. Now that this has failed to come to fruition, he feels, perhaps, that he at least owes it to the young lovers to help them find their way out of the terrible mess they've gotten themselves into (largely owing to the friar's involvement).



Even after having had the macabre effects of the potion described to her, Juliet is ready to do what must be done in order to secure a future with Romeo—no matter how violent or frightening it is.



Even as Capulet bustles about making arrangements for his daughter's wedding, he holds vile resentment and disrespect for her in his heart. The wedding is not really for Juliet's happiness—it's all for Capulet's personal advancement and gain.



Juliet knows that what her father wants is total loyalty and fealty. He doesn't respect Juliet, but Juliet is expected to respect him, and she preys upon this fact as she seeks to make things right with her family so that she can do what needs to be done right under their noses.



Juliet's ruse has worked. She is back in her parents' good graces—and, it seems, absolved of incurring any suspicion for her part in what's about to transpire.



ACT 4, SCENE 3

In Juliet's chambers, Juliet thanks the nurse for helping her to pick out clothes and jewels for the wedding, but asks the nurse to leave her be for the evening so that she might privately atone and prepare. Lady Capulet enters and asks if Juliet needs any help getting ready, but Juliet says everything is set and again reiterates that she wants to be left alone for the rest of the night. The nurse and Lady Capulet bid Juliet goodnight and leave. After they've gone, Juliet calls out a halfhearted farewell to them—she is not sure when she'll ever see them again.

As Juliet pulls out the vial and prepares to drink from it, she admits that she's afraid—she's worried about many possible kinks in the plan she and Friar Laurence have made. If the **potion** doesn't work, she'll have to marry Paris; on the other hand, if it works but lifts too soon, she'll wake up in the crypt where all her kinsmen are buried, and might go mad upon seeing the remains of Tybalt and countless generations of other dead Capulets. Worse still, Friar Laurence may, she fears, have given her **poison** in order to put an end to Juliet and cover up his involvement in the whole affair. Even though Juliet is terrified, she decides to go through with her plan. She lifts the vial and makes a toast to Romeo before drinking and falling, almost immediately, upon her bed.

Juliet doesn't even care about saying a proper farewell to her nurse or her mother—she simply wants them out of the way so that she can get on with her plan to be reunited with Romeo. Juliet's alliances have shifted—she no longer feels any duty to her family, instead viewing Romeo as the one to whom she owes her true loyalty.



Juliet is taking the potion as a way of expressing her love for and commitment to Romeo—but finds herself perturbed and distracted by violent thoughts as she considers doing what needs to be done in order to be reunited with her love. Ultimately, Juliet decides that any of the terrifying unknowns she's facing are better than losing the chance at a life with Romeo and swallows the potion as a way of escaping her real-life duties and obligations.



ACT 4, SCENE 4

Very early the next morning, the Capulet manor is bustling as Capulet, Lady Capulet, Juliet's nurse, and several servingmen rush about the house preparing food, lighting fires, and getting ready for the party. Capulet hasn't slept all night, and the nurse warns him he'll be sick on the day of his daughter's wedding. He assures the nurse he's spent nights awake for much less worthy reasons. As some music plays outside, Capulet realizes that Paris is approaching with his coterie. He urges the nurse to go wake Juliet up and get her ready for church—her groom has arrived.

Juliet's marriage to Paris is exactly what Capulet wants, so his mind should be at peace. His insomnia the night before Juliet's wedding, then, subtly foreshadows that something is amiss. Given fate's thwarting of people's free will thus far in the play, the reader can infer that the day will not go according to the Capulets' carefully crafted plan.



ACT 4, SCENE 5

The nurse enters Juliet's bedroom to find her sleeping soundly. She chides the girl for being lazy and tries to wake her by announcing that Paris has arrived, but is surprised when Juliet doesn't even stir. As she notices that Juliet is still dressed in her clothes from the day before, she begins to chide her further—but then sees that Juliet is, apparently, dead. The nurse calls out for help, and Lady Capulet hurries into the bedroom. Seeing that her daughter is dead, she laments the loss of her "only life" and says she herself may as well die, too. Capulet runs in, asking what is taking so long—when the nurse and Lady Capulet tell him that Juliet is dead, he, too laments his daughter's "untimely" death. The three of them loudly mourn Juliet, screaming and crying out until Friar Laurence and Paris come to the door.

As the friar, Paris, and a group of musicians enter Juliet's chambers asking if Juliet is ready to head to church, Capulet tells them that "death [has] lain" with Juliet, deflowering her on her wedding day. Death, now, is his son-in-law. Paris is shattered, and joins Capulet, Lady Capulet, and the nurse in loudly and dramatically lamenting Juliet's horrible death. Friar Laurence tries to mitigate their mourning by telling them that Juliet is in a better place. All her parents wanted for her after all, he points out, was her "promotion"—now, she has climbed to the highest heights of all. He urges them to dress her in finery, adorn her with herbs, and bring her to church.

Capulet laments that all of the marriage preparations were in vain—the wedding feast will become a funerary one, and Juliet's bridal flowers will now cover her corpse. Friar Laurence again urges the family to focus now on preparing for the funeral and trusting in the fact that Juliet is in a better place. They all exit, leaving the musicians alone to lament that they're out of a job. Peter, however, enters the chamber and urges the musicians to play something comforting. They insist now is not the time for music, and comically exchange verbal barbs with Peter as he tries to get them to play a dirge instead. Eventually, Peter gives up his crusade and leaves. The musicians remark upon how annoying he is, then decide to stay and eat their fill at the funeral feast.

The Capulets' melodramatic mourning of Juliet is overzealous to the point of farce. Shakespeare contrasts her parents' overdramatic reactions to her death, suggesting their falsity, against the melodrama that Romeo and Juliet themselves have exhibited throughout the play. While young love and the difficulty in expressing it can justify outsized and even violent responses, the Capulets' facsimile of these genuinely overwhelming emotions is false and offensive.



As Capulet, Lady Capulet, and Paris dramatically mourn Juliet's "death," Friar Laurence points out their melodrama and hypocrisy. When Juliet was alive, her parents plotted to use her for their own social advancement. Now that she is dead, he suggests, what they're really mourning is the death of their ability to use her for their own gains, as they never really knew—or cared about knowing—the person their daughter truly was in life.



As occurs often in the play, this scene shows a moment of great tragedy being punctuated by comic relief offered by the servant characters. While the Capulets farcically—and, the friar suggests, falsely—mourn their daughter's loss, the action shifts over to the servants—whom Shakespeare often renders as the only sane and relatable characters in the play, presenting them as real people struggling with everyday problems, like where to get their next meal when their planned gig falls through.



ACT 5, SCENE 1

Romeo is alone in Mantua. He wakes from sleep, proclaiming that his dreams have portended “some joyful news.” He dreamed that Juliet found him dead, but with a kiss, breathed life back into him, revived him, and made him an emperor. Romeo sees his servant Balthasar approach—knowing the man brings news from Verona, Romeo greets him excitedly, asking him how Juliet is doing. “Nothing can be ill,” he says, “if she be well.”

Balthasar tells Romeo that he has terrible news that he must nonetheless deliver, as is his duty: Juliet is dead and buried in the Capulet crypt. Romeo calls out, “I defy you, **stars**,” and then urges Balthasar to prepare some horses so that he can leave Mantua and return to Verona. Balthasar begs Romeo not to do something “wild” and dangerous, but Romeo orders Balthasar to do what he says. He asks if there are any letters from Friar Laurence, but Balthasar says there are none, then hurries away.

Alone, Romeo declares that one way or another, he will lie with Juliet later that night. He states that he has heard of an apothecary in Mantua who carries **poisons** in his shop. He hurries to the man’s shop and calls for him to open the door. The apothecary answers Romeo’s knock, but when Romeo offers the man coins in exchange for poison, the apothecary states that Mantua’s law threatens those who sell such things with death.

Romeo says he can see the desperation in the pale, thin apothecary’s eyes, and begs him to take the money—he bribes the man by giving him much more than the **poison** is worth. The apothecary takes the deal and offers up the poison, warning Romeo that it’s strong enough to kill 20 men. Romeo hands over the coins, stating that money is the truly dangerous poison. The apothecary hurriedly retreats into his shop, and Romeo heads for Verona—and for Juliet’s grave—where, he proclaims, he will use the contents of the vial upon himself.

Romeo has been dreaming of Juliet, imagining her abilities to restore his loneliness and put an end to his social exile. Romeo ignored his last dream, which portended death, but chooses to rejoice in this happy one, which predicts a return from—or life after—death itself.



Upon hearing of Juliet’s death, Romeo screams out that he wants to “defy” the “stars.” He knows, perhaps, that he and Juliet are pawns of fate’s greater design. Yet, in this moment, with nothing left to lose, he begs those very stars to reverse their judgements and plans.



Romeo’s desire to lie dead with Juliet in her grave rather than go through life without her shows just how desperately and dramatically devoted to love he is. His expression of grief is self-destructive and violent, just as many of his expressions of his love for Juliet have been frighteningly intense and tinged with violent thoughts and speech.



Romeo is just as desperate as the apothecary and realizes that he can extort the man with coins. Romeo wants to die quickly—he doesn’t want to face a life without Juliet, or, for that matter, the consequences of all the futile and destructive actions he’s taken to try to be with her.



ACT 5, SCENE 2

Another friar, Friar John, enters Friar Laurence's chambers and greets him. Friar Laurence happily welcomes the man, who has come from Mantua. Laurence asks if John has any news from Romeo—it is clear that Laurence sent John to Mantua to inform Romeo of Juliet's plan. Friar John, however, states that he was held up and unable to complete the mission because he was quarantined after coming into contact with the plague. Romeo has not received Friar Laurence's letter, and knows nothing of Juliet's plan. Friar Laurence orders Friar John to bring him a crowbar—he is going to rush to the Capulet crypt and break in, so that he can be there when Juliet awakes. He plans to keep Juliet hidden in his cloister and write to Romeo of the new plan.

Fate seems to be conspiring against not just Romeo and Juliet, but all involved in their orbit. Unlikely obstacles and dramatic twists are cropping up at every turn, confirming that Romeo and Juliet's "star-crossed" love was never meant to be actualized—they are only pawns in a larger scheme.



ACT 5, SCENE 3

In the graveyard outside the church, Paris sneaks close to the Capulet crypt to scatter flowers around Juliet's resting place while his page keeps watch nearby. Paris vows to come to Juliet's grave nightly. When his page whistles, indicating that someone is coming, Paris hides. Romeo and Balthasar enter with torches, a pickaxe, and a crowbar. Romeo takes the ax and crowbar and gives Balthasar a letter, which he orders him to bring to Montague early the next morning. Romeo tells Balthasar that he is going into the crypt, and orders Balthasar not to interrupt him no matter what—on pain of death. He pays Balthasar for his troubles, wishes him good luck, and bids him goodbye. Balthasar, however, resolves, in an aside, to hide nearby—he is nervous about Romeo's mental state and unsure of his master's intentions.

Paris is, in his grief, just as devoted a lover as Romeo, promising that he will visit Juliet every day to scatter flowers upon her grave and mourn her. This scene calls into question the nature of love, and raises the issue of whether Paris's overzealous, melodramatic grief over Juliet's death is any falsier or less worthy than Romeo's—which is just as outsized and ridiculous.



Romeo resolves to crack the crypt open with his tools and feed himself into death's "detestable maw." Paris watches, surprised and angry at the sight of the "villain" who murdered Tybalt desecrating the Capulet crypt. He approaches Romeo and orders him to stop—if Romeo doesn't accompany Paris to be turned over to the authorities, Paris says, he will kill him. Romeo warns Paris not to "tempt [...] a desperate man." He urges Paris to go away and forget what he's seen—otherwise, Romeo says, *he will kill Paris*. Paris says he will not obey Romeo, and the two begin to fight. As Romeo stabs Paris, Paris's page runs off to gather the citizens' watch. Paris falls and dies, begging to be laid to rest next to Juliet.

Paris is blindly allegiant to House Capulet to the end—he clearly has no idea about the truth of anything that's happened between the two warring clans over the last couple of days, and, like Tybalt, wants to kill Romeo on sight simply because of who he is.



As Romeo stands over Paris's body, he remembers a piece of gossip Balthasar told him on the ride from Mantua—that Paris was supposed to marry Juliet, or already had. He wonders if he misheard Balthasar, or if, in his madness over Juliet's death, simply imagined what Balthasar was telling him. Romeo, feeling badly for Paris's misfortune, opens the Capulet crypt and lays him inside.

Romeo doesn't feel angry or competitive with Paris—this shows that he is both secure in his love for Juliet and hers for him, but also demonstrates the deterioration of his mental state. Romeo is so wildly depressed that he can't even muster anger at the idea that another could love or marry Juliet.



As he descends into the crypt and lays eyes on Juliet, Romeo remarks that though death has taken Juliet's breath from her body, it has "had no power yet upon [her] beauty." Her cheeks and lips still appear flushed, and she looks as beautiful in death as she did in life. Romeo, afraid that death itself has claimed Juliet to be its own lover, resolves to kill himself near her so that he can stay by her and guard her forever. He embraces Juliet and kisses her one last time, then takes out the **poison**, drinks it, and dies, remarking how "quick" the apothecary's drugs are.

Romeo uses the poison—as he promised he would—to swiftly escape having to go through life without Juliet by his side. He has succumbed to his fate, and, tragically, missed discovering the truth about Juliet's staged "death" by mere minutes.



Friar Laurence enters the graveyard carrying a torch and crowbar of his own. Seeing a mess strewn about, he asks who is there. Balthasar answers, and tells him that Romeo went down into the crypt half an hour ago. Friar Laurence asks Balthasar to descend into the crypt with him, but Balthasar says he can't—Romeo threatened to kill him if he entered. Friar Laurence resolves to go alone into the crypt in spite of his fears. As he enters, he sees the corpses of Romeo and Paris, and laments both their deaths.

Friar Laurence has gotten in way over his head. He wanted to help Juliet and Romeo actualize their love for one another in hopes of mending Verona's ills, but instead, has found himself in the middle of a chaotic mess of his own making. He tried to control fate but has become yet another one of its victims—in his attempts to change his society for the better, he has only struggled in vain.



Juliet stirs, then wakes. She says hello to Friar Laurence and asks where Romeo is. There is a noise outside the crypt, and Friar Laurence urges Juliet to get up from her bier and follow him out of the tomb. He tells her that Paris and Romeo are both dead—their plan has been "thwarted" by forces beyond their control. Only then does Juliet notice the bodies around her. As the noise sounds again, Friar Laurence tells Juliet that he is leaving right away—and she should come, too, so that he can send her away to hide in a nunnery.

Juliet wakes up out of her potion-induced sleep to find a horrible massacre around her—her worst fears have come true. Given the option of running away with Friar Laurence to a nunnery or facing a life without Romeo, Juliet is stuck between two undesirable ends.



Friar Laurence leaves, and Juliet is left alone in the tomb. She looks upon Romeo's corpse and, seeing a cup in his hand, realizes he has poisoned himself. She checks the cup to see if there is any **poison** left, so that she can join him in death, but curses him for drinking it all. She kisses his lips, hoping to ingest even a drop, but there is none left in his mouth. As the sounds of the watch approach, Juliet grabs Romeo's dagger from his hip, stabs herself, and dies.

Juliet and Romeo have both used potions and poisons as a means of escaping the consequences of their actions. Now, with no way out, Juliet is torn between facing her family or hiding away in a nunnery for the rest of her life. She chooses to take her own life to be with Romeo, imagining, as she plunges the dagger into her heart, that it will slowly "rust" there over the years. Romeo and Juliet's "violent delights" have, as foretold, come to "violent ends."



Paris's page leads a group of watchmen down into the Capulet crypt. The chief watchman finds the "pitiful sight" of Paris, Romeo, and Juliet, all dead, in the bottom of the crypt—he realizes that Juliet was merely faking her death when she was buried two days ago but has now taken her own life for real. He orders his watchmen to go collect Prince Escalus, the Capulets, and the Montagues—he is determined to find out the cause of "all these piteous woes." Soon, a second watchman returns with Balthasar, while a third returns with Friar Laurence, who has been caught fleeing the graveyard with an ax and shovel.

Prince Escalus enters with his attendants, annoyed that he's been risen from bed so early. Capulet and Lady Capulet, too, arrive on the scene, desperate to know what's going on—in the streets, they've heard people crying the names of Romeo, Juliet, and Paris. The chief watchman tells them all that Romeo and Paris are dead, and that Juliet is "new killed." Montague enters and says that, at the news of Romeo's exile, Lady Montague fell ill and died. He asks what "further woe" he must endure, and the prince tells him to look inside the crypt. At the sight of his son's corpse, Montague chides Romeo for going to the grave before his father. The prince urges the Capulets and Montague to quiet down and stopper their sadness and rage until the investigation is complete and the truth is known. He orders his watchmen to bring forth the suspects.

Friar Laurence speaks up to clear the air. He admits that he married Romeo and Juliet in secret on the day of Tybalt's death—Juliet was, all along, pining for the exiled Romeo and not the deceased Tybalt. In trying to soothe her, he says, her parents married her to Paris—but only drove Juliet further into her grief. The friar admits to giving Juliet a **potion** which would make her appear dead so that she could run away with Romeo, then explains how the plan went awry. After realizing Romeo would not receive word of the scheme, Friar Laurence came to the crypt to retrieve Juliet—but when he arrived, he found Romeo and Paris dead, and could not convince Juliet to follow him away from the tomb. Friar Laurence says that if he's responsible for her death, he should be punished by the "rigor of severest law."

Prince Escalus brings forth Balthasar and asks him to say his peace. Balthasar says that after he brought Romeo news of Juliet's death, Romeo fled Mantua for Verona, gave Balthasar a letter for Montague, and threatened Balthasar with death if he followed Romeo into the crypt. The prince looks at the letter, then calls forth Paris's page, who says that Paris also ordered him to hide while he attended to business at the crypt. The prince announces that Romeo's letter confirms the truth of Friar Laurence's testimony.

The play doesn't end with Romeo and Juliet's deaths—Shakespeare extends the action in order to show that their deaths, tragic as they are, will indeed serve some purpose. Just as the chorus promised, their untimely ends may be the only things to put an end to the "mutiny" in Verona and the "ancient grudge" between the Capulets and Montagues—but only if swift action is taken to understand what happened to them.



Even though Romeo, Juliet, and Paris are dead, there is little time for mourning—Prince Escalus is determined to get to the bottom of what happened in hopes of rooting out the destruction of Verona at the hands of these two warring houses once and for all. Both families have had to reach the lowest points of their misery and pain in order to see the truth of what they've wrought on their city, their kinsmen, and indeed even their enemies.



Friar Laurence recounts the tale of Romeo and Juliet's ill-fated love and unlucky marriage, acknowledging that he is responsible for many of their story's tragic turns. He insists that he only wanted to help them—but his conscience cannot let him escape his complicity in their unhappy ends.



Prince Escalus is fed up with the violence and tragedy in his community and is determined to root it out through an investigation which lays bare who is responsible for what, and why.



Prince Escalus orders Montague and Capulet to “see what a scourge is laid upon [their] hate.” Because of their feud, he says, the prince, too, has lost noble and valued kinsmen. “All are punished,” he says, by the hatred Capulet and Montague have sown. Capulet calls Montague towards him, referring to him as “brother,” and asks for his hand. His forgiveness, he says, is Juliet’s dowry. Montague states that he will erect a pure gold statue in Juliet’s form—as long as Verona stands, so too will her monument. Capulet says he’ll erect a statue of Romeo, too, so that both victims of their feud are honored.

As **dawn** begins to spread across the sky, Prince Escalus announces the arrival of “a glooming peace.” The day will be cloudy, he predicts—the sun will not show his face on such a day. The proceedings are not yet finished, the prince says—he calls everyone gathered at the crypt to come with him so that some can be pardoned while others receive punishment. The prince concludes the play by stating that there “never was a story of more woe than this of Juliet and her Romeo.”

Prince Escalus, in pointing out that “all are punished,” shows that no good comes of senseless hate and cruelty. Romeo and Juliet are dead, and their parents will mourn them for the rest of their lives—all because of their silly feud. Just as the chorus predicted, Romeo and Juliet’s tragic deaths were the wake-up call their parents needed in order to at last put an end to their “ancient grudge.”



The prince of Verona genuinely laments all the misery and hardship his people have suffered, and he intends to try his best to set things right and ensure that something like Romeo and Juliet’s woeful tale never happens again. This ending, while tragic, hints at the idea that society’s most vulnerable individuals can affect change—but that, unfortunately, it may take great tragedy or loss of life in order to underscore society’s failings.





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