Romeo and Juliet

by William Shakespeare

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# Romeo and Juliet
## Shmoop Literature Guide

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Before young William Shakespeare wrote his play about two poetry speaking, hormone-driven teenagers who defy their families' long-standing feud and risk everything to be together, love wasn't even considered a suitable subject for a "tragedy." Written at the beginning of Shakespeare's career as a playwright (around the time he wrote *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet* (c. 1595) is now considered to be the greatest love story of all time. According to famous literary critic Harold Bloom, *Romeo and Juliet* "is unmatched, in Shakespeare and in the world's literature, as a vision of uncompromising mutual love that perishes of its own idealism and intensity" (*Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, 197). The balcony scene alone (Act 2, Scene 2 in most editions of the play) is one of the most memorable and recognizable moments in all of Western literature – it's right up there with Hamlet holding Yorick's skull in the graveyard.

The play was wildly popular in its own time – it was published twice during Shakespeare's life (1597 and 1599), which was kind of a big deal, given that the printing press was nothing like our current technology. Shakespeare adapted the storyline from Arthur Brooke's popular *Tragicall History of Romeus and Juliet* (1562), a loooong English poem based on a story that dates back to a *novella* by Masuccio Salernitano called "Mariotto and Giannozza" (1476).

Despite its fancy pedigree, *Romeo and Juliet* is also considered to be one of Shakespeare's most accessible works. Along with *Julius Caesar*, it's typically one of the first Shakespeare plays studied by Western students, who are introduced to the conventions of Elizabethan theater and also get a healthy dose of love poetry, which Shakespeare peppers throughout *Romeo and Juliet*.

Some critics, like famous seventeenth-century journaler Samuel Pepys, have refused to take *Romeo and Juliet* seriously. (Let's face it, the play is often dismissed as Shakespeare's trashy blockbuster.) Despite Pepys's assertion that *Romeo and Juliet* "is a play of itself the worst that ever [he] heard in [his] life, and the worst acted that ever [he] saw these people do" (source), *Romeo and Juliet* has been performed countless times by world renowned theater companies and remains an audience favorite. It is also one of the most adapted plays of all time – Franco Zeffirelli made it into an Oscar winning film in 1968 and the play was also adapted into a Tony Award winning musical, *West Side Story* (1957). *Romeo and Juliet* has inspired countless pop lyrics, like Taylor Swift's "Love Story," Dire Straits' "Romeo and Juliet," and The Reflections' doo-wap style "(Just Like) Romeo and Juliet."

Of course, *Romeo and Juliet* is the template for all literary stories about socially "forbidden" love, including *The Great Gatsby*, *Wuthering Heights*, and, more recently (and controversially), Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* saga.
Why Should I Care

A lot of people think the balcony scene is about as deep as a twelve-year-old interpretation of true love. Boy meets girl, cue sappy music. They stare into each other's eyes and say a lot of poetic things. Anybody who makes it past the age of fourteen, of course, realizes that's not what love is about. Romeo and Juliet's interaction can seem pretty shallow. They're swearing that they love each other fifteen minutes after they've met. That's not love – it's infatuation.

But *Romeo and Juliet* is not just about what happens when two hormonal teenagers collide. It's clear to anyone that's watched Engaged and Underaged that getting what you want out of young love isn't always all it's cracked up to be. The real moral of the story here is that sometimes love is doomed to fail, and that applies no matter how old you are and what time you're living in.

This story is relevant as a cautionary tale to anyone that's ever been in love – next time you're fresh out of a breakup and see some young couple kissing at the bus stop, you can take solace in the thought that they're likely to break up soon via text message. At the end of the day, young love isn't worth killing yourself over. Love like Romeo and Juliet's just doesn't happen in real life. If you fall into the mythical half of society that is happily married, you might take away the good feeling that passion is delightful but is useless without communication. Shakespeare reminds us that lack of communication, or communicating through your church representatives, might end up in badly timed double suicide.

It's also important to remember that *Romeo and Juliet* is a tragedy, not a romance. Fine, love hits our two young heroes hard, but they act rashly, and it costs them their lives. They live in a time fraught with tension, and as there's no omnipotent Bono-figure to call in for conflict resolution, all the odds are against them. In Shakespeare, as in life, everything is tragic when times are tragic, and even love can't be expected to solve every problem. You can't buy the world a Coke, and you can't blaze through your own life living only on love. *Romeo and Juliet* moves us because we hope to feel the love that these two feel, but it stays with us because we're jarred by the poignancy of their failure and loss. For all the good strategizing, great sex, and poignant speeches, *Romeo and Juliet* is a simple lesson that love doesn't conquer all. But it has the potential to conquer each of us. We can take solace in our shared misery or delight here, but the most important thing is that, whatever we feel, we're all feeling it. Cold comfort, but comfort nonetheless.
Summary

Brief Summary

We meet our hero, Romeo, after a duel between the servants of two enemy families of Verona: the Montagues and the Capulets. Romeo Montague is pining away for Rosaline, a girl we never see. Juliet Capulet, age thirteen, has just heard that Paris, Verona's attractive young bachelor, would like to marry her. The two will meet that night at a masquerade ball at the Capulets' house. Romeo and his friends have decided to crash the Capulet ball— in costume— because Rosaline is on the guest list. Romeo meets Juliet there instead, and they fall madly in love. Afterwards, they discover they are members of rival families, but they are still in love. Romeo stays after the party under Juliet's balcony, and the two use this romantic meeting to plan their marriage. Hasty, but genuine.

This is where things get sticky. Romeo meets with Friar Laurence to arrange the marriage, and Juliet confides in her nurse, who has basically raised her, to act on her behalf and meet Romeo. The Nurse meets Romeo and his friend Mercutio (who thinks the whole situation is hilarious). Romeo tells her to get Juliet to Friar Laurence's, where the two will be married.

Meanwhile, Benvolio, another member of the Montague posse, runs into Tybalt Capulet, who is angry about the Montagues crashing his family party the other night. Romeo, freshly married, strolls into the middle of a tense situation, and as things escalate, Tybalt kills Mercutio. Stricken by grief, Romeo promptly challenges Tybalt to a duel and kills him. Romeo runs away before all of Verona shows up. The Prince of Verona rules that Romeo won't be killed, but banished from Verona. This all puts a damper on the new marriage.

Juliet hears from the Nurse that her new husband has murdered her cousin. She is doubly sad about the death and murder. Mostly Juliet just wants to see her banished husband. The Nurse finds Romeo hiding at Friar Laurence's, and the Friar hatches a plan. Romeo can spend his wedding night with Juliet, but then he must run away, while the Friar finds some way to get the Prince of Verona to pardon Romeo. The marriage will be made public upon his return.

Meanwhile, back at the Capulet house, Paris is working even harder to wed Juliet, who is stricken by grief. Lord Capulet decides a wedding (to Paris) is just the thing to distract her, as he does not know she's already a bride. Juliet spends her wedding night with Romeo, and as he leaves in the morning, she finds out she is to be married to Paris in two days. She refuses and has a violent fight with her parents. Even her nurse thinks she should marry Paris, since Romeo is "as good as dead" to her.

Juliet, trying to figure out what to do, runs over to Friar Laurence's, where she has a weird kiss with Paris. After Paris leaves, she threatens to kill herself. The Friar adds another bit to his
plan, and gives her an herbal concoction that will make her appear to be dead for 42 hours. Yes, exactly 42. She goes home, agrees to marry Paris, and takes the poison with the intention of looking dead on the morning of her wedding and being taken to the Capulet tomb where Romeo can find her and everyone can live happily ever after.

Sadly, Romeo is hiding in Mantua, out of the loop, and the news of Juliet's "death" makes it to Romeo before word of the Friar's plan. He buys some poison so he can go to Juliet's grave and kill himself. At her grave, he finds Paris, whom he murders, and then breaks into Juliet's tomb, where he spends some time with Juliet's "dead" body.

He drinks the poison and dies just in time for Juliet to wake up and find him dead. The Friar, who apparently shows up at some point, also finds Romeo dead, and tries to convince Juliet to run away. She refuses (she's been doing a lot of that lately) and kisses Romeo (a lot of that, too) to find that his lips are still warm – she just missed him. He doesn't have enough poison on his lips to kill her, too, so she takes her own life with a dagger. Capulets, Montagues, and the Prince of Verona show up to the tomb and find the dead lovers. Friar Laurence is dragged in to confess everything. The two lords of the rival houses are moved by their dead children's love story and agree to end the feud.
The Chorus (kind of like a narrator) appears on stage and gives us the low-down on the play we're about to watch (or read).

The setting is "fair Verona," a town in Italy where two rival upper-crust families (the Capulets and the Montagues) have been feuding for as long as anyone can remember.

We're also told how the children of these two families (that would be Romeo Montague and Juliet Capulet) will fall in love, but the story's not going to be a happy one. Before the play is over, our infamous "star-crossed lovers [will] take their life" (commit suicide), which will put an end to their parents' feud.

Finally, the Chorus invites us to sit back and relax while we enjoy the "two-hours' traffic of [the] stage," which is sixteenth-century theater speak for "the two hours it's going to take for the play to be performed."

Brain Snack: In director Baz Luhrmann's 1996 film adaptation of the play (Romeo + Juliet), the Chorus is replaced by a T.V. anchorwoman who delivers the lines as an evening news story.
Act 1, Scene 1

- On the streets of Verona, two young Capulet servants, Sampson and Gregory, are hanging out and trash-talking the Montagues.
- Then some young Montague servants (including Abraham) show up. Sampson and Gregory want to put their money where their mouths are, but the Prince of Verona has laid out strict laws against starting fights. And we mean strict.
- So, instead, they try to get the Montagues to start the fight.
- Sampson gives the Montagues the Elizabethan finger – he bites his thumb at them.
- In about 0.5 seconds everyone is fighting.
- Benvolio, the resident nice guy, shows up with a "why can't we all just get along?"
- But Tybalt, resident Capulet pugilist (guy who fights a lot), shows up saying something like "I'm going to get medieval on your...personage."
- All hell, which has been bursting at the seams up until now, breaks loose.
- Adding fuel to the fire, the remaining members of each of the families come out to join the fight, or "fray," as they called it back then.
- Like any good schoolyard brawl, some authority figure shows up and puts an end to the fun. In this case, it is the Prince of Verona. And he's furious.
- He orders the Montagues and the Capulets to cease and desist. (Except it takes him a lot longer to say it, and he adds a supplement that anyone breaking his rule will be put to death.)
- Lord and Lady Montague ask Benvolio if he has seen their son, Romeo.
- Romeo, we find out, has been moping around in a "grove of sycamore," which, by the way, is Shakespeare's way of hinting that Romeo is love sick or "sick amour." (Get it?) Not only that, says Sampson, but Romeo has been shunning the company of his friends in favor of solitary moping.
- Montague chimes in, complaining that all Romeo ever does (when he's not skulking around in sycamore groves) is lock himself up in his dark "chamber" (bedroom). Yep, sounds like a lovesick teenager to us.
- Benvolio, like any good friend, decides to spy for Romeo's parents.
- Romeo wanders in and willingly tells Benvolio that he's in love with a girl who doesn't love him back. Cue Romeo's sighing, lamenting, and poetic musings.
- Romeo reveals that his unavailable crush has taken a vow of chastity and he boo-hoos about the fact that the still unnamed beautiful girl will never have any beautiful children. (It also means that Romeo will never get to make out with her in the back seat of his car, if you know what we mean.)
- We interrupt this program for a tasty brain snack: Romeo has been acting like a typical "Petrarchan lover" in this scene. Petrarch, by the way, was a fourteenth-century Italian poet whose sonnets were all the rage in Renaissance England. In fact, Shakespeare's own collection of Sonnets is, in part, inspired by Petrarch's love poetry, which was written about "Laura," a figure who was as unavailable...
and unattainable as Romeo's current crush. Now back to our program.

- Benvolio tells his friend to get over it and to find someone new.
Meanwhile, Lord Capulet is hanging out with County (a.k.a. Count) Paris, the most eligible bachelor in Verona.

Capulet says something like "I'm getting too old for this whole family feud thing and so is Lord Montague – I'm sure we can work something out to keep the peace." (Get your highlighters out because this is pretty important. The whole Montague/Capulet feud may not be as big a deal to the older generation as it is to the younger generation.)

Paris, Verona's most-eligible-bachelor, is all "Hmm...that's nice. Hey, can I marry your thirteen-year-old daughter, Juliet?"

Capulet says that his daughter's a little young – better wait until she's fifteen. Plus, he'd like Juliet to be on board with all this. But he says Paris can talk to his daughter at the annual Capulet bash that they're holding tonight at his house – maybe Juliet will fall in love with Paris.

We interrupt this program for a history snack: In Shakespeare's day, the legal age of marriage was twelve for girls and fourteen for boys. It was also pretty typical for fathers to broker marriage deals without any input from their daughters, kind of like Montague is doing right now. We see this kind of bargaining in plays like The Merchant of Venice, where Portia's dead father manages to arrange his daughter's marriage from the grave (we're not kidding) and in The Taming of the Shrew, where Baptista Minola gives Katherine away in marriage without her consent. Yikes.

Capulet gives one of his servants, Peter, a list of people to invite to the party. Unfortunately, the servant can't read. The illiterate servant decides to look for some people who can read.

Romeo and Benvolio come in, still arguing about Romeo's unnamed love interest. (Don't worry, we'll find out this mystery girl's name soon enough.)

The Capulets' servant asks them to read the guest list for the party. Guess who's on it? Capulet's "fair niece Rosaline." (Yep, that's Romeo's dream girl all right. She also happens to be a Capulet but Romeo doesn't seem to be worried that the big family feud will be a problem. What's up with that?)

Romeo and Benvolio decide to crash the Capulet party. Romeo wants to see Rosaline and Benvolio wants to convince Romeo that she's not so special.
Act 1, Scene 3

- At the Capulet house, Juliet's mother, Lady Capulet, comes in to tell her daughter about Paris's proposal.
- But Juliet's nurse (whose name, conveniently enough, is "Nurse") first delivers a long, semi-bawdy speech about Juliet's infancy and toddler years. Her rambling, tangent of a speech reveals the following information: the Nurse had a baby named Susan who was about Juliet's age but, sadly, she died. The Nurse is not only Juliet's nanny but she was also her wet-nurse. When it was time to "wean" (stop breastfeeding) Juliet, the Nurse put "wormwood" on her breast. (Wormwood is a disgustingly bitter plant extract.) Also, Juliet once fell down and cut her forehead when she was little, which the Nurse's late husband thought was hilarious – so hilarious that he turned the accident into a dirty joke about how Juliet would eventually grow up and then fall down (on her back) and have sex with a guy.
- Lady Capulet eventually cuts her off and tells her to "hold her peace." [Apparently, Lady Capulet doesn't think the Nurse is as fabulous as literary scholar Harold Bloom does. Bloom once wrote that this "exuberantly realized" character is one of the main reasons why "Romeo and Juliet matters, as a play" ("An Essay by Harold Bloom," in Romeo and Juliet, 2004).]
- Lady Capulet unloads the news that Paris has been sniffing around for Juliet's hand in marriage.
- Juliet is unimpressed.
- Lady Capulet tells Juliet to check out Paris at the party that night. He'll be the oh-so-dreamy guy all the other girls are swooning over.
- Peter, the servant, enters to announce that guests are beginning to arrive for the big bash.
Romeo and his posse (i.e., Benvolio and Mercutio) are getting ready to sneak into the Capulets' party. Luckily, it's a costume party, so they can wear masks.

[We should point out that Mercutio's name was on the invite list, because he's *not* a Montague, but he feels the need to wear a mask anyway. What's up with that?]

Romeo and Mercutio trade insults and there's some naughty talk about love, in particular, what to do to when "love pricks [hurts] like a thorn." Mercutio's solution? "If love be rough with you, be rough with love. Prick love for pricking, and you beat love down." Translation: The solution to heartache is to go out and have sex.

Romeo continues to boo-hoo about the unavailable Rosaline and then he announces that he had a dream the night before. Before he can go into the details, Mercutio interrupts and delivers a long, crazy speech about "Queen Mab," a tiny fairy who visits people in their dreams. (You can read more about it in "Symbols.")

Romeo says Mercutio is talking nonsense and Mercutio, our resident skeptic, retorts that *dreams* are for idiots.

Before entering the party, Romeo says he has a feeling that "fate" may have something bad in store for him.
Act 1, Scene 5

- At the shindig, Capulet welcomes his guests to the party and invites everyone to get their groove on. He also threatens that if any young girl refuses to dance, he’ll tell everyone she “hath corns” on her feet. (We’re not kidding.)
- Now, for the moment we've all been waiting for. Romeo sees Juliet dancing and…falls in love at first sight. (Rosaline who?)
- Meanwhile, Tybalt, a.k.a. that dude who did all the fighting before, a.k.a. Juliet's easily-angered cousin, recognizes Romeo. Blood boils right about…now.
- Tybalt tells Lord Capulet that he’s going to beat up Romeo for crashing their party.
- Lord Capulet orders him to relax and leave Romeo alone – Romeo seems to be a nice enough kid. Plus, Lord Capulet wisely reasons that parties tend to get ruined by open brawls.
- Tybalt, furious, swears he'll make Romeo pay for this supposed insult later. Cue the dramatic and ominous music.
- Romeo approaches Juliet and delivers one of the coolest pickup lines to ever come out of the 16th century: "If I profane with my unworthiest hand this holy shrine, the gentle sin is this: My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand to smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss." Translation: Kissing you would be a religious experience. (You can read more about this in "Symbols.")
- Instead of getting annoyed and walking away, Juliet is a little impressed but, being the clever girl she is, Juliet also teases him about his cheesy pick-up line. A few lines of verbal banter later, Romeo kisses her. (Count it: he says a total of 67 words to her before the lip-lock.)
- Then they kiss again. Meanwhile, their dialogue has formed a perfect Shakespearean love sonnet, rhymes and all. Amazing!
- Juliet's nurse interrupts them and sends Juliet away. Romeo asks her the name of the girl he's been kissing.
- She’s a Capulet, which is pretty upsetting to Romeo who thinks the feud will interfere with his new love.
- The party starts breaking up.
- Juliet, who is already completely in love, asks her nurse to find out the identity of the first guy she has ever kissed. The answer: "His name is Romeo, and a Montague, the only son of your great enemy."
- Juliet becomes incredibly upset: "My only love sprung from my only hate?"
- [Thought: Romeo and Juliet are pretty stressed out about the Montague/Capulet family feud but, earlier, we learned that Rosaline, like Juliet, is also a Capulet. The thing is. Romeo didn't seem too worried about it back when he was infatuated with Rosaline. What's up with that?]
Act 2, Prologue

- The Chorus enters the stage and delivers a rather redundant speech about what the audience already knows: Romeo has forgotten all about Rosaline and is now in love with the daughter of his enemy – Juliet Capulet. Juliet, of course, is also smitten.
Act 2, Scene 1

- Romeo doesn't want to leave the Capulet's property so, he ditches his friends and hides out in the orchard behind the Capulet house.
- Benvolio and Mercutio try to find him. Unaware that Romeo now has the hots for Juliet, they shout lots of filthy things about Rosaline in hopes that Romeo will emerge to curse them out and defend Rosaline's honor. No such luck.
- Benvolio says "Go then, for tis in vain / To seek him here that means not be found" and they head home.
- We interrupt this program for a helpful reading tip: Worried that your copy of the play divides scenes differently than we do here? Don't trip. The division of acts and scenes from Romeo and Juliet varies depending on which edition of the play you're reading. Some editions of the play (like the Folger edition, the Riverside Shakespeare, and the MIT online edition) cut off Act 2, Scene 1 at the end of Benvolio's line (quoted above) and give the famous balcony scene its own section (Act 2, Scene 2). Some other editions (like the Norton Shakespeare) include Romeo and Juliet's famous balcony scene in Act 2, Scene 1. Now back to our program.
Act 2, Scene 2

- Romeo is wandering aimlessly around the Capulet backyard when guess-who appears on the balcony. "What light through yonder window breaks?" he asks. He then answers his own question. "It is the East, and Juliet is the sun!"
- Soon Juliet is talking to herself, too. "O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?" she asks.
- You might wonder, "why is she asking where Romeo is?" Well, as it turns out, "Wherefore" doesn't mean "where." It means "why." Juliet is saying, "Why does the guy I love have to be a Montague?"
- Juliet goes on talking to herself about how amazing Romeo is.
- Romeo is smart enough to keep his mouth shut and listen. Finally, he can't resist anymore, and he calls out to her. Juliet is embarrassed that someone heard her.
- Of course, in another minute she realizes that it's actually Romeo who's been hiding in the bushes.
- Juliet says that if her family finds Romeo, they'll kill him.
- Luckily, she gets over her shock fast enough to enjoy the most romantic love scene in the history of Western literature. There's lots of poetry, vows of love that sound a lot like religious worship, baffling language, and teenage melodrama.
- Then Juliet basically proposes to Romeo when she says "If that thy bent of love be honourable, / Thy purpose marriage, send me word tomorrow." Translation: "If you love me and want to marry me, let me know ASAP."
- Romeo is game. They end up setting up a way to send messages the next day so they can plan the wedding.
- Eventually, Romeo and Juliet run out of things to talk about and start babbling just so they don't have to leave each other – kind of a "You hang up," "No, you hang up," deal. But, in Shakespearian terms, "You hang up" is actually "Parting is such sweet sorrow / That I shall say goodnight till it be morrow."
- If this went down 400 years later, these kids would be running off to Vegas together but, this being a Shakespeare play, Juliet finally drags herself away to bed and Romeo hightails it off to Friar Laurence, his favorite priest, to figure out the wedding plans.
- Brain Snack: In a famous book called Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare, literary scholar Stephen Greenblatt describes the balcony scene as "the most passionate love scene Shakespeare ever wrote" (122).
Act 2, Scene 3

- That Romeo sure is fast because the next thing we know, Romeo tracks down Friar Laurence, who has been out foraging for medicinal plants and herbs for one of his concoctions. (Note: What we now refer to as "holistic" medicine seems to be one of Friar Laurence's favorite hobbies but, historians (like Andrew Crislip) also tell us that it wasn't uncommon for clergymen to practice or dabble in medicine – after all, a visit to the physician was an expense that many people couldn't afford and priests often needed to supplement their income.)
- Friar Laurence delivers a speech about how herbs and plants have the potential to be healing and medicinal, but if they're misused, they can be deadly poison. [Get your highlighters out, because this is important. Check out "Symbols" if you want to know more.]
- Friar Laurence looks at Romeo and notices that loverboy hasn't "been in bed tonight" and assumes that he must have finally hooked up with Rosaline. He also notices that Romeo is suddenly cheerful after weeks of moping around.
- Romeo announces that he's over Rosaline and wants to marry Juliet. Will Friar Laurence perform the ceremony?
- The Friar's response: "Holy Saint Francis!"
- Friar Laurence provides a much-needed reality check. Romeo has been switching girls like highway lanes. Why, just the other day Romeo was crying over Rosaline. His tears haven't even dried yet and now he's talking about Juliet.
- Finally, the Friar decides to help Romeo out but not because he's a romantic. Friar Laurence flat out tells us that he's got political motives – a marriage between Romeo and Juliet might reconcile the two warring families.
- So, in the name of reducing the yearly street-brawl-murder rate in Verona, Friar Laurence skips the lecture on fidelity and commitment and goes right to agreeing with the marriage.

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Mercutio and Benvolio still haven't figured out where Romeo is.
It turns out that Tybalt has sent Romeo a message that goes something like this: "I'm going to beat you up with my sword."
Mercutio is convinced that lovelorn Romeo is in no condition to face Tybalt in a duel.
History Snack: Many Elizabethans believed that love (between a man and a woman that is) basically turned men into sissies. The same idea appears in plays like *Henry IV Part 1*, where Hotspur refuses to have sex with his wife before heading into battle because he doesn't want to be soft, so to speak.
Mercutio uses the opportunity to mock Tybalt, who takes himself and his sword fighting skills way too seriously.
Romeo finally shows up. Mercutio and Benvolio notice that he's dropped the depressed "Rosaline doesn't love me" act. He's back to his old energetic, joking self.
The fellas engage in one of their favorite past-times, talking trash and telling some of the dirtiest jokes in Western literature.
As planned, the Nurse shows up to meet with Romeo. She looks ridiculous, as nurses sometimes did back then, and Mercutio can't resist flirting with her, mocking her, and talking dirty to her. (When the Nurse questions him about the time of day, Mercutio manages to turn a description of a clock into a graphic portrayal of masturbation.)
In between all these antics, Romeo manages to take the Nurse aside and tell her that Juliet should find an excuse to come to Friar Laurence's church – where she will be married. [FYI: Romeo's keeping his wedding plans from everyone (except the Nurse and Juliet), including his best friends.]
Act 2, Scene 5

- In an orchard at the Capulet place, Juliet waits for the Nurse to come back with a message from Romeo. She worries that they might somehow have missed each other.
- When the Nurse comes back, she refuses to tell Juliet anything and complains about her aching back. This is an old game between the Nurse and Juliet: they love teasing each other.
- The Nurse keeps refusing to tell Juliet what Romeo said until Juliet can't stand it anymore.
- Finally, the Nurse gives in and tells Juliet to run to Friar Laurence's cell (a "cell" is just a room) where Romeo is waiting so they can get hitched.
- Before the scene ends, the Nurse says she'll "fetch a ladder" for Romeo to climb up so the lovers can spend their wedding night together. She also manages to turn her description of Romeo "climbing" the ladder into Juliet's "bird's nest" into an image of the kind of sex the couple is going to have later that night.
Act 2, Scene 6

- Back at Friar Laurence’s place, the priest tries to convince Romeo to calm down a little; marriage is for the long term. "These violent delights have violent ends," he warns.
- Unfortunately, it goes in one ear and out the other.
- Brain Snack: If you're a Twilight fan, you're probably thinking that Friar Laurence's "These violent delights" line sounds familiar. That's because Stephenie Meyer uses the quote as an epigraph for the novel New Moon.
- Juliet runs in. The room's hormonal level skyrockets. Romeo and Juliet can barely keep their hands off each other, even in the presence of a priest.
- Friar Laurence takes them off to marry them so they can move on to the highly anticipated honeymoon phase.
Act 3, Scene 1

- As often happens in third acts, we find that it is a hot afternoon. Benvolio and Mercutio are hanging out as usual, trading insults and mocking the Capulets. Trouble materializes in the form of Tybalt, who is trying to find Romeo so he can get back at him for crashing the Capulet party.
- Tybalt provokes Mercutio by saying "Mercutio, thou consortest with Romeo," which means "You're a known associate/friend of Romeo." It also implies that Romeo and Mercutio are sleeping together.
- Mercutio responds that he's going to make Tybalt "dance" with his "fiddlestick" (his sword) and yes, there's a sexual innuendo at work here, swords being phallic symbols and all.
- Benvolio, who wants everyone to be friends, warns the guys not to fight in public.
- Romeo, just married, walks obliviously into the middle of this tense situation. Tybalt calls Romeo a villain, which was a HUGE insult back then.
- But Romeo remembers that Tybalt is his new wife's cousin, so he turns the other cheek. Well, not literally, but he does refuse to fight.
- Mercutio is shocked by Romeo's behavior – Romeo has totally dishonored himself by taking that insult sitting down.
- Mercutio is so upset at Romeo's cowardice that he offers to fight Tybalt instead.
- Romeo tries to stop them, but Mercutio and Tybalt ignore him.
- As they are fighting, Romeo rushes in and tries to hold Mercutio back.
- Bad move. While he's doing so, Tybalt stabs Mercutio and runs away.
- Romeo and Benvolio assume that Mercutio hasn't been badly hurt because he starts joking about his wound.
- But as is often the case, Mercutio uses humor to lessen pain.
- Mercutio, as it turns out, is dying. "A plague on both your houses," he cries out. Then he turns to Romeo, his best friend, and says, "Why the devil came you between us? I was hurt under your arm," he says. A minute later, he is dead.
- Romeo thinks he is to blame for Mercutio's death and laments that his love for "sweet Juliet" "hath made [him] effeminate" [a girly wimp].
- Crazy with grief, Romeo challenges Tybalt to a duel and kills him. His best friend dead, and his wife's cousin murdered, Romeo cries out, "O, I am fortune's fool."
- Benvolio tells him to run away before the Prince captures him. Romeo takes his friend's advice.
- All the citizens of Verona miraculously show up at the scene of the duel.
- The Prince arrives and is understandably angry. Remember his declaration that those caught fighting would die?
- The Prince commands Benvolio to explain what happened.
- Lady Capulet, weeping over Tybalt's body, demands that Romeo be put to death for Tybalt's murder.
- Lord Montague argues that Tybalt got what was coming to him for killing Mercutio.
• The Prince decides that, because Tybalt started the fight, he will spare Romeo’s life. But he rules that Romeo must be banished from Verona.
Act 3, Scene 2

- Juliet is impatiently awaiting nightfall, when Romeo is supposed to sneak into her room. She’s hasn't heard about the fray yet.
- When the Nurse enters, her behavior makes it clear that something has gone wrong. First, Juliet thinks Romeo has been killed. Then she realizes that her husband has just murdered her cousin.
- Juliet's first reaction is to reject Romeo. She starts cursing Romeo, and the Nurse joins in.
- Juliet turns on the Nurse and tells her she can't criticize Romeo.
- "Will you speak well of him that killed your cousin?" the Nurse says. "Shall I speak ill of him that is my husband?" Juliet asks in reply.
- Juliet realizes that if Romeo hadn't killed Tybalt, then Tybalt would have killed Romeo. Forced to choose between the cousin she has loved all her life and her new husband, she chooses Romeo.
- But then she remembers that the Nurse also said that Romeo has been banished from Verona. She could deal with the fact that her cousin was dead, but not the thought that she can't see Romeo anymore.
- Seeing her despair, the Nurse promises to find Romeo so that Juliet can at least say good-bye to him.
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Act 3, Scene 3

- Romeo has gone into hiding at Friar Laurence's. The Friar updates him on the Tybalt situation.
- The Friar wants him to see this as good news (primarily because Romeo will not be executed), but Romeo is devastated. He can't stand the thought of being away from Juliet.
- As such, he claims that banishment is worse than death.
- There's a knock at the door. It may be the Prince's men.
- The Friar tells Romeo to hide.
- Romeo refuses.
- Luckily, it's only the Nurse at the door. She and the Friar try to deal with Romeo, who's such a mess that he threatens to stab himself out of guilt for hurting Juliet.
- The Friar comes up with a plan that's better because it doesn't involve suicide: Romeo and Juliet can have one night together before Romeo leaves Verona. Later, he promises, they'll be able to figure out a way to get Romeo pardoned by the Prince so he can come back to Verona and make his marriage to Juliet public knowledge.
- Hearing this plan, Romeo recovers and runs off to see Juliet.
Act 3, Scene 4

- Paris is still hanging around hoping he can marry Juliet. Unfortunately, he hasn't had much of a chance to impress her – she's been too busy mourning for her cousin (and for her husband). "These times of woe afford no time to woo," Paris says.
- Juliet's grief for Tybalt seemed so extreme to her father that he's changed his mind about waiting a few years before she is married. What better way to alleviate her grief than to force her into a marriage with a man she's just not that into?
- Feeling that there's no way Juliet could not be in love with a great guy like Paris, Lord Capulet decides to go forward full speed ahead. He asks Paris if he would be willing to marry Juliet later that week. Paris agrees.
- Neither of them knows, of course, that Juliet is already married. The stage is set for a disastrous confrontation.
Act 3, Scene 5

- Romeo and Juliet wake after their first and only night together.
- They don't want to say good-bye, but they know Romeo will be killed if he gets caught in Verona. Not to mention in Juliet's bed.
- "O think'st thou we shall ever meet again?" Juliet asks him as he leaves for Mantua, a nearby city. "I doubt it not," he replies.
- Before Juliet has time to get herself together after saying good-bye to her husband, her mother comes in. They manage to have a conversation about "that villain Romeo" in which Lady Capulet misinterprets 99.9% of everything that Juliet says.
- Lady Capulet announces her big, exciting news: in two days, Juliet will be marrying Paris!
- Juliet responds fiercely that she will not marry Paris under any conditions. Her mother can't understand what's going on with her thirteen-year-old daughter. Juliet didn't used to be so stubborn and headstrong. Lady Capulet throws up her hands and decides to let her husband handle this. "Wait 'til your father gets home."
- Lord Capulet walks, beaming that he set up his daughter for a marriage without consulting her first. In his mind, Juliet should be grateful.
- Instead, she rains on his paternal-control parade. She tells him that she won't marry Paris, "and you can't make me!"
- Lord Capulet blows up. When verbally abusing Juliet doesn't work, he tries a different tactic. If she doesn't marry Paris, he says, he'll throw her out in the street; she can beg for food or starve.
- After Lord Capulet storms out, Juliet turns to her mother for help. How could a mother turn her own daughter out of the house? Juliet begs her mother to find a way even to delay the marriage with Paris.
- Lady Capulet replies coldly, "Do as thou wilt, for I have done with thee" and leaves.
- Juliet turns to the Nurse for advice (because she's the only left).
- Juliet makes a case for not abandoning the hubby: She is already married, so marrying Paris would be a sin against God, as well as an unthinkable betrayal of Romeo.
- The Nurse tells her, marrying Paris would be a step up on the social ladder. He's better looking and a much better catch. In addition, he's not a hated enemy, and besides, there's no other option. Unless you count starving on the street which, clearly, the Nurse does not.
- Juliet cannot believe this is happening. Even the nurse isn't on her side anymore.
- Juliet has only one ally left: Friar Laurence. If he can't help her, she will be completely alone. Suicide, she thinks, may be her only option.
Act 4, Scene 1

- Paris has stopped by Friar Laurence's church to make plans for his upcoming marriage to Juliet. The Friar is quietly freaking out; he's not a big fan of enabling bigamy.
- Juliet rushes in, thinking the Friar will be able to help her. Instead, he is talking with the last person on earth she wants to see: Paris.
- "Happily met, my lady and my wife," Paris says to Juliet as she enters. It's pretty much downhill from there.
- Eventually, Paris takes the hint that Juliet needs to make confession to the Friar, and he leaves – but not before giving Juliet an unwanted and uninspiring kiss.
- Pushed to the breaking point, Juliet whips out a dagger and tells the Friar she will kill herself if he can't think of a way for her to avoid marrying Paris. Confronted with his second suicidal teen in under 24 hours, Friar Laurence remains calm.
- Once again, he has a better plan that doesn't involve suicide.
- He tells Juliet his idea. He knows of a weird potion that will make Juliet appear as if she is dead for "two and forty hours." That's Shakespeare for 42 hours.
- Conveniently, the Capulets don't bury their dead, which otherwise would kind of screw up the plan. Instead, they stick them in a big tomb. If everyone thinks Juliet is dead, the Friar explains, she won't have to marry Paris. Then he and Romeo can come to the tomb and wait for her to wake up, and then she and Romeo can go to Mantua together. The Friar promises to send a letter to Romeo so he knows what's going on.
- Juliet thinks this is a great idea. She takes the potion, thanks the Friar, and heads home.
Act 4, Scene 2

- Juliet comes home, humble and repentant. She apologizes to her father for her disobedience and says she will marry Paris.
- Lord Capulet is overjoyed and decides the marriage will take place the next day, even if he has to stay up all night making preparations.
Act 4, Scene 3

- Juliet convinces the Nurse and Lady Capulet to leave her alone. Then she takes out the potion the Friar gave her. She worries for a brief moment that it might be real poison.
- She freaks herself out by imagining what it will be like to awake surrounded by a bunch of dead bodies, including the fresh corpse of her cousin Tybalt.
- She drinks the potion, but makes sure to fall on to the bed instead of dropping awkwardly onto the floor.
Act 4, Scene 4

• Everyone is bustling around cheerfully trying to get things ready for the wedding that morning. No one has realized yet that the bride has stopped breathing.
Act 4, Scene 5

- When the Nurse comes to wake Juliet up in the morning, she discovers the girl dead. Everyone is very sad.
- Then the Friar shows up and takes action, telling them to take Juliet to the tomb. Posthaste.
Act 5, Scene 1

- In exile in Mantua, Romeo wakes up feeling good. He has just had a dream in which Juliet found him dead, but then kissed him back to life. (Foreshadowing…)
- Romeo's servant Balthasar (ironically the name of a wise man in the New Testament) arrives with the news from Verona. There's no good way to say this: Juliet's dead.
- Romeo asks him if there's any message from Friar Laurence, but Balthasar says, "No."
- Romeo immediately decides that the only thing he can do is go to Juliet's grave and commit suicide there. He knows a poor apothecary who sells illegal drugs, including poisons.
- ("Apothecaries" are basically pharmacists – they sell medicine, some of it prescription and some not.)
- He goes to said "poor apothecary," whose sunken cheeks and hollow looking eyes suggest that he is starving to death, and Romeo convinces him to sell him a dram of poison (even though selling poison is illegal). Then Romeo heads for Verona.
Why didn't Romeo get the message Friar Laurence sent him? Because Friar Laurence sent the letter with his friend, Friar John, who was delayed due to an unfortunate mix-up. (Someone accidentally thought he had the plague).

Friar John comes back without having delivered the letter. Friar Laurence has a bad feeling about this.

Friar Laurence goes off to the tomb thinking he'll have to wake Juliet alone.
Act 5, Scene 3

- The Capulet tomb seems to be a popular locale. When Romeo arrives, Paris is already there, sadly tossing flowers.
- Paris sees Romeo and assumes he’s there to somehow dishonor the Capulets. To be fair, Romeo looks pretty suspicious – he’s carrying a bunch of tomb-breaking-in tools.
- Paris tries to do a citizen's arrest on Romeo, who is, after all, an outlaw.
- Paris says, "I am slain!"
- Romeo feels guilty for killing yet another one of Juliet's male associates, but he's so lost in his grief over Juliet that he can't really concentrate on anything else.
- He breaks into the tomb and embraces Juliet's "corpse." (Juliet, by the way, is still out cold from the potion she drank.)
- Then, after a final kiss, Romeo chugs the poison and dies beside his wife.
- About thirty seconds too late, the Friar comes in and sees Romeo lying there dead.
- Then, an agonizing minute too late, Juliet wakes up to find her husband dead at her side.
- (Remember how she was afraid about waking up near dead bodies?)
- Brain Snack: In the 1996 film Romeo + Juliet, director Baz Luhrmann makes an interesting decision when staging this scene. His Juliet (played by the lovely Claire Danes) wakes up before Romeo (played by the oh-so dreamy Leo DiCaprio) drinks the poison and dies. Why do you think Luhrmann does this? You can check it out here.
- The Friar tries to convince her to run away – the noise of the fighting has attracted attention, and Verona's citizens are about to do what they do best in Romeo and Juliet – show up at the scene.
- Juliet refuses to run away.
- Juliet proceeds to spend some time looking at Romeo and the empty vial of poison clutched in his hand.
- When she kisses him, his lips are warm – and she realizes that she missed him by a matter of moments. This knowledge is unbearable. She tries to drink the rest of the poison so she can die with him, but none is left. So she pulls out her dagger and stabs herself, saying "Let me die."
- (Psst. If you want to know what Shakespeare scholar Marjorie Garber has to say about Juliet and Romeo dying by means of a dagger and goblet of poison, respectively, then check out "Symbols.")
- The Prince, the Capulets, and the Montagues crowd into the tomb to see the Romeo and Juliet, both dead, lying beside each other.
- The Prince’s guards drag in the Friar, who apparently left Juliet alone in the tomb at some point. He tells the whole story.
- Lord Capulet and Lord Montague, both grief-stricken, swear to end their feud and to build statues to commemorate each other's child.
The Prince says that some of those involved in Romeo and Juliet's death will be pardoned, and some will be punished. "For never was a story of more woe," the Prince says, "Than this of Juliet and her Romeo."
Romeo and Juliet
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Themes

Love

Romeo and Juliet are two of the most famous lovers in history, but some people doubt that their historic love lives up to its reputation. Romeo starts the play infatuated with Rosaline, a gorgeous girl with no interest in him. His “true-love-at-first-sight” encounter with Juliet seems like it could be just another case of puppy love. The two lovers come from warring families, but their love overcomes their families' hatred. Their whirlwind romance, however, ends in tragedy when each thinks the other is dead and chooses to commit suicide rather than live alone. While Romeo and Juliet never doubt the power of love, other characters criticize love and reject it as simply infatuation or lust. Some people interpret the play as a cautionary tale on the dangers of young love. Others argue that Romeo and Juliet's love develops throughout the play from a giddy flirtation to something deeper, and that the play charts the path of a relationship from infatuation to real love.

Questions About Women and Femininity

1. *Romeo and Juliet* is a play about love, a word that means many things to many people. Compare and contrast how various characters (like Romeo, Juliet, Mercutio, and Friar Laurence) talk about love.
2. How might a given character's view of love be affected by his or her age, social status, or relationship to other characters in the play?
3. Does Romeo's attitude toward love change or develop throughout the play? (Is there any difference between his desire for Rosaline and his passion for Juliet, for example?)
4. What is the difference between love and infatuation in *Romeo and Juliet*? Does the play even make a distinction?
5. Do you think the play ever critiques the intensity of Romeo and Juliet's love? Why or why not?

Chew On This

Juliet’s transformation from girl to woman is reflected in the changing language she uses to talk about love.

Romeo’s passion for Rosaline is unauthentic but his love for Juliet is true.
Romeo's so-called "love" for Juliet is no different than his passion for Rosaline because Romeo is merely in love with the idea of being in love.

Juliet and her mother cannot understand each other because Lady Capulet interprets love in terms of money and social status, while Juliet understands love as the product of her innermost feelings. This is the source of their miscommunication.

By reducing love to mere sexuality, the Nurse is unable to understand the strength of Juliet's feeling for Romeo. It is in this misunderstanding that her betrayal is rooted.
Hate

Love and hate are usually thought of as opposites, but in *Romeo and Juliet*, love and hate are two sides of the same coin, as two children from warring families (the Capulets and the Montagues) turn their hatred of each other into an insatiable passion. Ultimately, the hatred between their two families propels the lovers towards their tragic deaths. When their parents discover Romeo and Juliet dead in each others’ arms, they vow to end the feud between their two families. At last, love triumphs over hatred – but the cost of two young lives is too heavy to bear.

Questions About Women and Femininity

1. Why do the Montagues hate the Capulets? What do we know about the family feud?
2. How do Romeo and Juliet each respond when they realize they have fallen in love with the "enemy"?
3. Rosaline, like Juliet, is a member of the Capulet family, but when Romeo crushes on Rosaline, he never worries about the family feud getting in the way of his love. Why is that?
4. Does the older generation (the parents of Romeo and Juliet) have the same attitude toward the family feud as the younger generation (Romeo, Juliet, Tybalt, Mercutio)?
5. How does the Montague/Capulet feud impact the lives of Romeo and Juliet?

Chew On This

Love as passionate as Romeo and Juliet's could only be born out of hatred; their love is made more intense because of their families’ feud.

In the play, love and hate are both intense. The language Shakespeare uses to depict love and hate shows that the two passions are deeply similar.
Sex

In the hormone-charged atmosphere of *Romeo and Juliet*, it seems that pretty much everything is about sex. A boy and girl from warring families fall in love, and their relationship is marked by both intense chemistry and the constant threat of violence. Romeo and Juliet live in Verona, a city where the dirty jokes are constant, violence becomes eroticized, and even asking the time of day acquires a sexual connotation. ("The bawdy hand of the dial is now upon the prick of noon," quips Mercutio.) In this hyper-sexual atmosphere, it can be tempting to interpret the protagonists' young love as primarily physical. Their relationship, however, delineates a relationship between sex and love that eludes the stereotypes other characters try to project on them.

Questions About Women and Femininity

1. What is the relationship between love and sex in the play? Are they synonymous or, is there a difference between them?
2. How do different characters characterize sexuality — as disgusting, funny, or violent? Or some other adjective we failed to mention?
3. What is the interplay between Romeo and Juliet's sexual attraction and their emotional attraction?

Chew On This

Romeo and Juliet's relationship doesn't fit the stereotype that men are interested in sex and women are interested in emotional fulfillment: sexuality is an important part of their relationship for both Romeo and Juliet.

Mercutio's characterization of sex as violent or laughable shows that he is an enemy to love.
Art and Culture

Romeo and Juliet is chock full of poetry, especially love poetry. The first time the couple meets, their dialogue forms a perfect Shakespearean sonnet. The famous balcony scene? Well, it's full of great lines that have since made their way into Hallmark cards and pop music lyrics. Shakespeare's not just showing off his skills – the play takes a pretty self-conscious look at the conventions of popular sixteenth-century poetry even as it participates in the art form. The clearest example of this is Romeo's role (at the play's beginning) as the kind of cliché lover that frequently appears in Petrarchan sonnets (love poetry inspired by fourteenth-century writer, Francesco Petrarch), which was all the rage when Shakespeare wrote Romeo and Juliet (c. 1595).

Questions About Women and Femininity

1. What are some examples of the sonnet form that appear in the play? Why do you think Shakespeare uses this poetic form in Romeo and Juliet?
2. Does the play ever make fun of love poetry? If so, when? Why would Shakespeare, who is also a poet, make fun of his own craft?
3. What does Juliet mean when she tells Romeo that he "kiss[es]" by the book" (1.5.2)?
4. Why does Lady Capulet compare Paris's face to a book of love poetry when she instructs Juliet to "read over the volume of [his] face" at the Capulet ball (1.3.9)? What are the implications of such a comparison?

Chew On This

Although Romeo's love musings are cliché and unauthentic at the play's beginning, his poetry improves over the course of the play as he grows deeper in love with Juliet.

Shakespeare makes fun of cheesy love poetry in Romeo and Juliet, but he also suggests that, when love poetry is sincere, it's the most powerful and authentic mode of human expression.
Youth

"Youth in this play is a separate nation," writes literary critic Frank Kermode. In the play, Romeo and Juliet's youthful passion conflicts with the values of their feuding parents and their more mature advisors. Juliet ignores her Nurse, who advises her to marry Paris after Romeo is banished. Romeo and Juliet ignore Friar Laurence's warning to slow down and to stop rushing into love and, consequently, their youthful passion propels them towards their tragic end. Thinking Juliet is dead, Romeo immediately commits suicide. But Juliet has only been feigning death to escape her parents' anger. She, too, commits suicide when she realizes that Romeo is dead. Whether the values of the old or the young (or the tension between them) are most to blame for the lovers' tragic deaths is a question the play poses to audiences and readers.

Questions About Women and Femininity

1. What values do the young characters emphasize in the play? What about the older generation?
2. When do young and old characters come into conflict? Over what?
3. Both the Friar and the Nurse are old, yet they make Romeo and Juliet's hasty young marriage possible. Are the Friar and the Nurse on the side of the old or the young?
4. Is Romeo and Juliet's tragedy the fault of the old people or the young people? The values of the old or the values of the young?

Chew On This

Romeo and Juliet's tragedy is the result of the inability of the older generation to understand the passion and commitment of the younger.

Romeo and Juliet are doomed by their own youthful impulsiveness, which their wiser mentors are not able to restrain.
Transience

Romeo and Juliet's love gains its power from the play's constant reminders that life, love and beauty are ultimately fleeting. Romeo and thirteen-year-old Juliet fall in love at first sight, marry within twenty-four hours of their first meeting, and die in each others' arms only days later. Their passion for each other is so all-consuming that it seems impossible that it could have been sustained any longer. The lovers' awareness of their own transience is crucial to the intensity of their passion. In one of their early scenes, Juliet confesses she is afraid of the swiftness of their relationship. "It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden," she tells Romeo, "Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be ere one can say, 'It lightens.'" Her words are prescient: their love is just as brilliant, and as brief, as a flash of lightning.

Questions About Women and Femininity

1. How do the motifs of light and darkness in the play support the theme of transience?
2. How does the play's awareness of time (and its passage) impact the way we interpret Romeo and Juliet's youthful love?
3. Does the transient nature of Romeo and Juliet's love make it more precious?
4. Do you think Romeo and Juliet's love is ultimately conquered by death, or does their love become immortal when they die together?

Chew On This

Romeo and Juliet's love lacks power because it is so transient. Their love ends with their death.

Romeo and Juliet make their love immortal by dying together.
Mortality

Freud argued that human love was propelled by two opposing drives: eros, the desire for love, and thanatos, the desire for death. But centuries before Freud, Romeo and Juliet provided a very different view of the relationship between love and death. Despite – or perhaps because of – the passion and joy of the play's young lovers, death is never far in the background of Romeo and Juliet. Because their families have been feuding for as long as anyone can remember, they believe their "forbidden" relationship puts them in constant danger. Consequently, the seeming threat of death adds a spark of excitement to their secret meetings. Shakespeare links death and sex throughout the play and, to some degree, portrays suicide as an erotic act that both consummates the lovers' passion and (re)unites them in death.

Questions About Women and Femininity

1. Is death presented as glamorous or even desirable in Romeo and Juliet?
2. Which characters, if any, are to blame for other characters' deaths?
3. What parallels are drawn between love/sex and death in Romeo and Juliet? Why do Romeo and Juliet's descriptions of love so often refer to death?
4. Does a love as passionate as Romeo and Juliet's necessarily have to end in death? Is death an integral component of their relationship?

Chew On This

The passions of love and hate that prevail in the play doom all those who are passionate to an early death.

Romeo and Juliet's love is so over-powering that death, not sex, is the only way they can fully consummate their relationship.
Gender

Machismo rules the day in Verona, the city where *Romeo and Juliet* takes place. Male honor—and male sexual posturing—are sources of both the play's humor and its final tragedy. The rivalry between Verona's two warring families, the Montagues and the Capulets, is driven by the testosterone-charged fighting between the young men of each family. Romeo Montague, the play's protagonist, is constantly torn between the male bonds he shares with his friends, especially his friend Mercutio, and his love for Juliet, a Capulet. Juliet, the only daughter of a well-to-do family, also faces some gender challenges that are pretty typical for young women in Shakespeare's literature—her parents choose a husband for her and threaten to disown her if she disobeys.

Questions About Women and Femininity

1. How do the young (and old) men of Verona prove their masculinity?
2. What is the relationship between honor and masculinity in *Romeo and Juliet*?
3. Do the values of masculinity come in conflict with other values in the play?
4. Often in literature, male friendship is threatened by the intrusion of a woman. What are the tensions between love and friendship in *Romeo and Juliet*? How are they resolved?
5. What kinds of challenges do Juliet face as a young daughter? How does her gender shape her experiences with her family?

Chew On This

In *Romeo and Juliet*, the pressure to be a "man" leads Romeo to kill Tybalt in a duel and causes much of the play's tragedy.

Romantic love triumphs over male friendship in *Romeo and Juliet*—but not before love is seriously threatened by the conflict.
Fate and Free Will

The play goes out of its way to suggest that Romeo and Juliet are destined for tragedy. After all, the Chorus tells us in the opening Prologue that the "star-cross'd lovers" will "take their life" and Shakespeare foreshadows the lovers' deaths throughout the play. At the same time, however, the play seems to remind us that Romeo and Juliet decide to commit suicide of their own volition. There are also plenty of players (the meddling Friar and Nurse, Romeo and Juliet's warring parents, etc.) that contribute to the play's tragic events. This may suggest, in the words of W.H. Auden, that, in tragedy, "fate is not an arbitrary person – it is we who are responsible and we bring our fate upon ourselves" (Lectures on Shakespeare, 24).

Questions About Women and Femininity

1. What role does fate play in Romeo and Juliet? Is fate alone responsible for the deaths of Romeo and Juliet, or should certain characters be held accountable?
2. Is fate friendly or unfriendly to Romeo and Juliet? Does fate seem like a threatening force or simply an inevitable one?
3. How are Romeo and Juliet's deaths foreshadowed throughout the play?
4. Read the opening Prologue and discuss how the Chorus treats the topic of "fate."

Chew On This

Romeo and Juliet have no control over their tragic destinies – they are the victims of fate.

In Romeo and Juliet, human beings cause all of the problems in the play and bring about their own fates.
Marriage

Romeo and Juliet marry for love, a choice that is standard today. But in the world of the play, marriage for love, rather than money or social position, was a radical and dangerous choice. Romeo and Juliet, the children of rival families, fall in love against their parents' wishes and marry in secret. Their union reflects a new focus on individual passion and inner conviction – and in the play, it comes dangerously in conflict with social and familial expectations. Romeo and Juliet pay a heavy price for marrying for love – their clandestine union propels the lovers towards their tragic deaths.

Questions About Women and Femininity

1. How does Juliet's dad (Capulet) first react when Paris asks to marry Juliet at the beginning of Act 1, Scene 2?
2. When and why does Lord Capulet decide Juliet should marry Paris?
3. Friar Laurence doesn't think Romeo's love for Juliet is any more genuine than his former crush on Rosaline but he agrees to marry Romeo and Juliet anyway (2.3.9). What explanation does the Friar offer? What does this suggest about the nature of his character?
4. Explain why Romeo and Juliet marry in secret. What are the consequences of such secrecy?
5. How would you characterize the Capulets' marriage?

Chew On This

Juliet's conflict with her parents about whether or not she should marry Paris reveals that, for Juliet, marriage is a way of formally recognizing a shared emotional bond (love). For her parents, however, marriage is a means of securing wealth, status, and stability.

When Romeo and Juliet marry for love, they redefine what marriage is all about in the 16th century (social status, economic security, and pedigree).
Family

The conflict between family and the individual is played out in the most extreme fashion possible in the play, as two children from warring families fall in love and have to choose between their families' expectations and their passion for each other. Romeo and Juliet choose passion. They abandon their loyalty to their parents and kinsman and lie to their relatives in order to protect their love. Ultimately, though, Romeo and Juliet can't escape the conflict that divides their families. Bad luck is partially responsible for Romeo and Juliet's deaths, but so is Romeo's obligation to avenge his friend's murder and defend his masculinity and family name. Juliet's father and mother, who try to push her into an unwanted marriage, are also to blame. Though we often think of family as a refuge and a place of security, in *Romeo and Juliet*, kinship is more often a source of danger and battle.

Questions About Women and Femininity

1. Why do the Capulets hate the Montagues?
2. How does the Capulet/Montague family feud impact Romeo and Juliet's love affair and marriage?
3. Why does Juliet face greater family conflict than Romeo? Is it because she is a woman and he is a man?
4. Explain how the prince's kinship bonds influence his decision to exile (rather than execute) Romeo.

Chew On This

Romeo and Juliet discover their identities as individuals separate from their families through their passion for each other.

Romantic love wins out over familial love in *Romeo and Juliet*. 
Foolishness and Folly

"Wisely and slow – they stumble that run fast," a priest warns an impetuous young lover in *Romeo and Juliet*. But nobody spends much time pausing to think in *Romeo and Juliet*. Passionate love and passionate hatred propel the characters to immediate action. Fate may have a hand in the deaths of Romeo and Juliet – who both commit suicide rather than live without each other – but so does rashness and haste. Thinking his love is dead, Romeo kills himself to be with Juliet. If he had waited only a few minutes longer, he would have discovered that Juliet was actually alive. Youthful foolishness leads to Romeo and Juliet's tragic end, but so does the foolishness of those older and supposedly wiser – including Friar Laurence, who comes up with the disastrous plan to fake Juliet's death.

Questions About Women and Femininity

1. Which characters are guilty of acting hastily or foolishly in the play? What are the consequences of refusing to act "wisely and slow"?
2. Does the play ever critique the Capulet/Montague feud?
3. Why does Romeo commit suicide, exactly? What happens just moments after he takes his life?
4. In the last lines of the play, the Prince says, "Some shall be pardon'd, and some punished" for their roles in the tragedy. To which characters do you think he refers?

Chew On This

The play suggests that the long-standing Capulet/Montague feud is completely ridiculous – it's not clear what caused the feud to begin with and its consequences (the deaths of Romeo and Juliet) are senseless.

Although the Friar warns against rash and foolish behavior on more than one occasion in the play, he too is guilty of folly in *Romeo and Juliet*. 
Exile

*Romeo and Juliet* is not necessarily a political work, and so, in the play, exile is a purely personal matter. Romeo and Juliet, the children of warring families, carry out a clandestine love affair. They have just been secretly married when Romeo is banished from Verona, their home city, for violating an order of the Prince. The prospect of Romeo's exile is unbearable to both of the lovers. Exile, for them, is no less than death, simply because exile means separation from each other. "Heaven is here, / Where Juliet lives; and every cat and dog / And little mouse, every unworthy thing, / Live here in heaven and may look on her; / But Romeo may not," Romeo says in frustration. Romeo and Juliet's passionate interpretation of exile as separation from a loved one would make an interesting contrast to political accounts of exile.

Questions About Women and Femininity

1. Why is Romeo banished from Verona, exactly? Is it his fault?
2. Lord Capulet threatens to disown Juliet and throw her out on the street. Why does he do this?
3. Does Romeo's exile have a symbolic function in *Romeo and Juliet*?
4. In what way is Juliet herself metaphorically exiled while Romeo is literally exiled?
5. For Romeo, is exile indeed worse than death?

Chew On This

Death and exile are synonymous for Romeo and Juliet because they cannot bear to live apart. Juliet risks being exiled from her family, who threaten to disown her when she refuses to marry Paris.
Love Quotes

Quote:

BENVOLIO
[...] What sadness lengthens Romeo's hours?
ROMEO
Not having that, which, having, makes them short.
BENVOLIO
In love?
ROMEO
Out–
BENVOLIO
Of love?
ROMEO
Out of her favour, where I am in love.
(1.1.10)

Thought:

At the beginning of the play, Romeo is completely infatuated with Rosaline. We learn from his friends and family that, when he's not daydreaming about Rosaline in his room, Romeo mopes around in a grove of "sycamore" trees, where those who are sick amour tend to hang out (1.1.4). The thing is, Rosaline has absolutely no interest in Romeo, but he pursues her anyway. This suggests that Romeo isn't so much in love with Rosaline as he is obsessed with the idea of being in love.

Quote:

ROMEO Love is a smoke raised with the fume of sighs;
Being purged, a fire sparkling in lovers' eyes;
Being vex'd a sea nourish'd with lovers' tears:
What is it else? a madness most discreet,
A choking gall and a preserving sweet.
(1.1.7)

Thought:

At the beginning of the play, Romeo describes love in abstract extremes.
Quote:

ROMEΩ Well, in that hit you miss: she'll not be hit
With Cupid's arrow; she hath Dian's wit;
And, in strong proof of chastity well arm'd,
From love's weak childish bow she lives unarm'd.
She will not stay the siege of loving terms,
Nor bide the encounter of assailing eyes,
Nor ope her lap to saint-seducing gold:
[…]
BENVOLIO
Then she hath sworn that she will still live chaste?
(1.1.13)

Thought:

Romeo admits that Rosaline has vowed to remain "chaste" like "Diana," the goddess of virginity and hunting. In other words, Rosaline has sworn off boys and sex, which means that Romeo has no chance of winning her heart. What's interesting about this passage is that Romeo sounds a whole lot like a typical "Petrarchan lover." Petrarch, by the way, was a fourteenth-century Italian poet whose sonnets were all the rage in Renaissance England. In fact, Shakespeare's own collection of Sonnets are, in part, inspired by Petrarch's love poetry, which was written about "Laura," a figure who was as unavailable and unattainable as Romeo's current crush (Rosaline). Petrarchan poetry happens to contain a lot of metaphors that equate the pursuit of love with hunting and/or battle. In this passage, Romeo says that Rosaline is well "arm'd" against the "siege" of his love and "Cupid's arrow," which is an elaborate way to say that Rosaline is physically and emotionally impenetrable.

Quote:

ROMEΩ [talking about Rosaline]
When the devout religion of mine eye
Maintains such falsehood, then turn tears to fires;
And these, who often drown'd could never die,
Transparent heretics, be burnt for liars!
One fairer than my love! the all-seeing sun
Ne'er saw her match since first the world begun.
(1.2.10)

Thought:

Romeo uses religious language to talk about Rosaline
Quote:

MERCUTIO
You are a lover; borrow Cupid's wings,
And soar with them above a common bound.

ROMEO
I am too sore enpierced with his shaft
To soar with his light feathers, and so bound,
I cannot bound a pitch above dull woe:
Under love's heavy burden do I sink.

MERCUTIO
And, to sink in it, should you burden love;
Too great oppression for a tender thing.

ROMEO
Is love a tender thing? it is too rough,
Too rude, too boisterous, and it pricks like thorn.

MERCUTIO
If love be rough with you, be rough with love;
Prick love for pricking, and you beat love down.

(1.4.2)

Thought:

Romeo and Mercutio describe love in violent and painful terms.

Quote:

ROMEO
O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!
It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
Like a rich jewel in an Ethiope'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.

(1.5.1)

Thought:

Now this is interesting. Romeo forgets all about his "love" for Rosaline the VERY moment he
sees Juliet, which seems to suggest that Romeo was never really in love with Rosaline to begin with. The question is, does this also mean that Romeo's desire for Juliet is nothing more than meaningless infatuation?

Quote:

**ROMEO**

If I profane with my unworthiest hand  
This holy shrine, the gentle fine is this:  
My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand  
To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.

**JULIET**

Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,  
Which mannerly devotion shows in this;  
For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,  
And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.

**ROMEO**

Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?  
**JULIET**

Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.

**ROMEO**

O, then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do;  
They pray, grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.

**JULIET**

Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake.

**ROMEO**

Then move not, while my prayer's effect I take.  
[He kisses her.]

Thus from my lips, by yours, my sin is purged.

**JULIET**

Then have my lips the sin that they have took.

**ROMEO**

Sin from thy lips? O trespass sweetly urged!  
Give me my sin again.

**JULIET**

You kiss by the book.

(1.5.2)

**Thought:**

This is one of the most famous passages in the entire play, so let's take a close look, shall we? When Romeo and Juliet talk for the first time at the Capulet ball, Romeo uses his best pickup line: touching Juliet's hands and lips, he says, would be a kind of
religious experience. (We've heard that before, haven't we? He used to say this kind of stuff about Rosaline.) Angling for a kiss, Romeo refers to his lips as a two "pilgrims" that would worship at a holy "shrine" (that would be Juliet's lips). A pilgrim, by the way, is a person on a religious pilgrimage to a holy place. Pilgrims were also called "palmers" because they often carried palm leaves on their journeys.

In response, Juliet teasingly puns on the word "palmer" to suggest that touching hands, "palm to palm," is like kissing (so Romeo, presumably, should be content with touching her hands instead of making out). But Romeo refuses to be shot down. Instead of walking away with his tail between his legs, he uses Juliet's hands=lips logic to argue that kissing the lips of Juliet (who has reached "saint" status by this point) would be just like praying, which involves placing one's palms together. Juliet seems playfully willing to go along with all this and allows Romeo to kiss her.

What's interesting is that, before Romeo can lock lips for a second time, Juliet says "you kiss by the book," which suggests that all of Romeo's moves (his pickup lines and even the way he kisses) are a bit scripted and cliché. So, Juliet's clearly smitten with Romeo but she also recognizes that Romeo isn't exactly original.

At the same time, however, the dialogue between Romeo and Juliet takes the form of a sonnet (up to the point where they kiss), which is incredibly romantic. So, while Romeo's moves are a bit predictable, we can also recognize that Romeo and Juliet's romance has the potential to be anything but conventional.

Quote:

ROMEO
But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.
Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,
Who is already sick and pale with grief,
That thou her maid art far more fair than she:
Be not her maid, since she is envious;
Her vestal livery is but sick and green
And none but fools do wear it; cast it off.
It is my lady, O, it is my love!
O, that she knew she were!
She speaks yet she says nothing: what of that?
Her eye discourses; I will answer it.
I am too bold, 'tis not to me she speaks:
Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,
Having some business, do entreat her eyes
To twinkle in their spheres till they return.
What if her eyes were there, they in her head?
The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars,
As daylight doth a lamp; her eyes in heaven
Would through the airy region stream so bright
That birds would sing and think it were not night.
See, how she leans her cheek upon her hand!
O, that I were a glove upon that hand,
That I might touch that cheek!
(2.2.1)

**Thought:**

In this monologue, Romeo elevates Juliet to heavenly status by aligning her with the "sun" and the "stars." At this point, Romeo's language of love has become slightly less abstract and begins to focus more tangibly on Juliet herself.

**Quote:**

ROMEO
She speaks:
O, speak again, bright angel! for thou art
As glorious to this night, being o'er my head
As is a winged messenger of heaven
Unto the white-upturned wondering eyes
Of mortals that fall back to gaze on him
When he bestrides the lazy-pacing clouds
And sails upon the bosom of the air.
(2.2.2)

**Thought:**

Again, Romeo uses over-the-top religious language to describe the experience of looking at Juliet but we get the sense that he's sincere and deeply in love.

**Quote:**

JULIET
How camest thou hither, tell me, and wherfore?
The orchard walls are high and hard to climb,
And the place death, considering who thou art,
If any of my kinsmen find thee here.
ROMEO
With love's light wings did I o'er-perch these walls;
For stony limits cannot hold love out,
And what love can do that dares love attempt;
Therefore thy kinsmen are no let to me.

JULIET
If they do see thee, they will murder thee.

ROMEO
Alack, there lies more peril in thine eye
Than twenty of their swords: look thou but sweet,
And I am proof against their enmity.

JULIET
I would not for the world they saw thee here.

ROMEO
I have night’s cloak to hide me from their sight;
And but thou love me, let them find me here:
My life were better ended by their hate,
Than death prorogued, wanting of thy love.

JULIET
By whose direction found’st thou out this place?

ROMEO
By love, who first did prompt me to inquire;
He lent me counsel and I lent him eyes.
I am no pilot; yet, wert thou as far
As that vast shore wash’d with the farthest sea,
I would adventure for such merchandise.

(2.2.6)

Thought:

Romeo is eager to prove to Juliet that he loves her, while Juliet – despite the confession that Romeo overhears – is hesitant to reveal that she likes him right away.

Quote:

Well, do not swear: although I joy in thee,
I have no joy of this contract to-night:
It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden;
Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be
Ere one can say ‘It lightens.’ Sweet, good night!
This bud of love, by summer’s ripening breath,
May prove a beauteous flower when next we meet.
Good night, good night! as sweet repose and rest
Come to thy heart as that within my breast! (2.2.13)
Thought:

Juliet is certain that she loves Romeo but she's also a bit cautious because her love seems "too rash, too unadvised, too sudden." So, while Juliet is clearly a very passionate girl, she's also pretty smart and realizes that head-over-heels passion can be dangerous.

Quote:

JULIET
I have forgot why I did call thee back.
ROMEO
Let me stand here till thou remember it.
JULIET
I shall forget, to have thee still stand there,
Remembering how I love thy company.
ROMEO
And I'll still stay, to have thee still forget,
Forgetting any other home but this.
(2.2.24)

Thought:

Reluctant to part company, Romeo and Juliet have kind of a "You hang up," "No you hang up" kind of moment. They have also abandoned the flowery language of love and are content simply to stare at each other and say whatever comes into their heads.

Quote:

ROMEO
Ah, Juliet, if the measure of thy joy
Be heap'd like mine and that thy skill be more
To blazon it, then sweeten with thy breath
This neighbour air, and let rich music's tongue
Unfold the imagined happiness that both
Receive in either by this dear encounter.
JULIET
Conceit, more rich in matter than in words,
Brag of his substance, not of ornament:
They are but beggars that can count their worth;
But my true love is grown to such excess
I cannot sum up sum of half my wealth.
(2.6.2)
Thought:

Romeo asks Juliet to use language to express the love that they feel for each other, but Juliet tells him that's the wrong approach. The love they share has grown so great that they can no longer express it. (A similar idea occurs in *King Lear*, when Cordelia refuses to quantify her love for her father and says that language is not capable of expressing her devotion.)

Quote:

> ROMEO
> How oft when men are at the point of death
> Have they been merry! which their keepers call
> A lightning before death: O, how may I
> Call this a lightning? O my love! my wife!
> Death, that hath suck'd the honey of thy breath,
> Hath had no power yet upon thy beauty:
> Thou art not conquer'd; beauty's ensign yet
> Is crimson in thy lips and in thy cheeks,
> And death's pale flag is not advanced there.
> Tybalt, liest thou there in thy bloody sheet?
> O, what more favour can I do to thee,
> Than with that hand that cut thy youth in twain
> To sunder his that was thine enemy?
> Forgive me, cousin! Ah, dear Juliet,
> Why art thou yet so fair? shall I believe
> That unsubstantial death is amorous,
> And that the lean abhorred monster keeps
> Thee here in dark to be his paramour?
> For fear of that, I still will stay with thee;
> And never from this palace of dim night
> Depart again: here, here will I remain
> With worms that are thy chamber-maids; O, here
> Will I set up my everlasting rest,
> And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars
> From this world-wearied flesh. Eyes, look your last!
> Arms, take your last embrace! and, lips, O you
> The doors of breath, seal with a righteous kiss
> A dateless bargain to engrossing death!
> Come, bitter conduct, come, unsavoury guide!
> Thou desperate pilot, now at once run on
> The dashing rocks thy sea-sick weary bark!
> Here's to my love!
**Thought:**

Death becomes an act of love for Romeo, because he thinks that suicide will enable him to be with Juliet (he thinks she's dead). Check out "Symbols" for more on this.

**Quote:**

**JULIET**

*My only love sprung from my only hate!*

*Too early seen unknown, and known too late!*

*Prodigious birth of love it is to me,*

*That I must love a loathed enemy.*

(1.5.10)

**Thought:**

Juliet never considers not loving Romeo because he is a Montague. She loves him, and even the fact that he is her enemy cannot change her feelings.

**Quote:**

**JULIET**

*Do not swear at all;*

*Or, if thou wilt, swear by thy gracious self,*

*Which is the god of my idolatry,*

*And I'll believe thee.*

(2.2.12)

**Thought:**

Is it just us or is Juliet beginning to sound like Romeo. Here, she uses the language of religion to describe her love for Romeo. Check out "Symbols" for more on this.

**Quote:**

**JULIET**

*Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds,*

*Towards Phoebus' lodging: such a wagoner*

*As Phaethon would whip you to the west,*
And bring in cloudy night immediately.
Spread thy close curtain, love-performing night,
That runaway's eyes may wink and Romeo
Leap to these arms, untalk'd of and unseen.
Lovers can see to do their amorous rites
By their own beauties; or, if love be blind,
It best agrees with night. Come, civil night,
Thou sober-suited matron, all in black,
And learn me how to lose a winning match,
Play'd for a pair of stainless maidenhoods:
Hood my unmann'd blood, bating in my cheeks,
With thy black mantle; till strange love, grown bold,
Think true love acted simple modesty.
Come, night; come, Romeo; come, thou day in night;
For thou wilt lie upon the wings of night
Whiter than new snow on a raven's back.
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.
O, I have bought the mansion of a love,
But not possess'd it, and, though I am sold,
Not yet enjoy'd: so tedious is this day
As is the night before some festival
To an impatient child that hath new robes
And may not wear them.
(3.2.1)

Thought:

Juliet is both excited and nervous about losing her virginity. She feels that her love for Romeo is so strong that it could overpower the sun.

Quote:

LADY CAPULET
Well, girl, thou weep'st not so much for his death,
As that the villain lives which slaughter'd him.
JULIET
What villain madam?
LADY CAPULET
That same villain, Romeo.

JULIET

[Aside] Villain and he be many miles asunder.--

God Pardon him! I do, with all my heart;

And yet no man like he doth grieve my heart.

LADY CAPULET

That is, because the traitor murderer lives.

JULIET

Ay, madam, from the reach of these my hands:

Would none but I might venge my cousin's death!

LADY CAPULET

We will have vengeance for it, fear thou not:

Then weep no more. I'll send to one in Mantua,

Where that same banish'd runagate doth live,

Shall give him such an unaccustom'd dram,

That he shall soon keep Tybalt company:

And then, I hope, thou wilt be satisfied.

JULIET

Indeed, I never shall be satisfied

With Romeo, till I behold him--dead--

Is my poor heart for a kinsman vex'd.

Madam, if you could find out but a man

To bear a poison, I would temper it;

That Romeo should, upon receipt thereof,

Soon sleep in quiet. O, how my heart abhors

To hear him named, and cannot come to him.

To wreak the love I bore my cousin

Upon his body that slaughter'd him!

(3.5.4)

Thought:

Juliet cannot tell her mother about her true feelings for Romeo, so she expresses her feelings in veiled language that makes her mother believe she hates him.

Quote:

JULIET

O, bid me leap, rather than marry Paris,

From off the battlements of yonder tower;

Or walk in thievish ways; or bid me lurk

Where serpents are; chain me with roaring bears;

Or shut me nightly in a charnel-house,
O'er-cover'd quite with dead men's rattling bones,
With reeky shanks and yellow chapless skulls;
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.
(4.1.11)

Thought:
All the things that used to frighten Juliet are now unimportant compared to the horror of betraying Romeo and marrying another man.

Quote:

MERCUTIO

Why, is not this better now than groaning for love?
now art thou sociable, now art thou Romeo; now art
thou what thou art, by art as well as by nature:
for this drivelling love is like a great natural,
that runs lolling up and down to hide his bauble in a hole.
(2.4.20)

Thought:
To Mercutio, love is ridiculous and gets in the way of real life. Not only that, but Romeo's passion for Rosaline has alienated him from his friends.

Quote:

PARIS

These times of woe afford no time to woo.
(3.4.2)

Thought:
In the face of Tybalt's death, Paris can mourn only his lost opportunity to court Juliet, rather than mourning the dead man.

Quote:

Holy Saint Francis, what a change is here!
Is Rosaline, whom thou didst love so dear,  
So soon forsaken? young men's love then lies  
Not truly in their hearts, but in their eyes.  
Jesu Maria, what a deal of brine  
Hath wash'd thy sallow cheeks for Rosaline!  
How much salt water thrown away in waste,  
To season love, that of it doth not taste!  
The sun not yet thy sighs from heaven clears,  
Thy old groans ring yet in my ancient ears;  
Lo, here upon thy cheek the stain doth sit  
Of an old tear that is not wash'd off yet:  
If e'er thou wast thyself and these woes thine,  
Thou and these woes were all for Rosaline:  
And art thou changed? pronounce this sentence then,  
Women may fall, when there's no strength in men. (2.2.6)

Thought:

Friar Laurence makes a convincing argument that Romeo's love for Juliet could be mere infatuation, don't you think? Mere days ago Romeo was crying his eyes out over another woman, the unattainable Rosaline. What's more, the "salt water" tears Romeo shed for Rosaline haven't even dried yet and he's now talking about a new love interest, Juliet.

OK, Friar Laurence has good reason to be skeptical of Romeo's newfound "love." But, if he's so skeptical of the relationship, why the heck does he agree to secretly marry the young couple? For that answer, we'll have to turn to Friar Laurence, who has this to say a few lines later:

But come, young waverer, come go with me.  
In one respect I'll thy assistant be;  
For this alliance may so happy prove  
To turn your households' rancour to pure love. (2.2.9)

In other words, Friar Laurence is hoping that a union between Romeo and Juliet will force the feuding families to reconcile. It seems like the Friar has good intentions but, as we know, his meddling has disastrous consequences for the couple. There's also some irony at work here – Romeo and Juliet's love will eventually bring the two families together (as the Friar predicts) but only after the two misguided lovers commit suicide in Act 5, Scene 3.

Quote:

CAPULET  
O brother Montague, give me thy hand:
This is my daughter's jointure, for no more
Can I demand.
MONTAGUE
But I can give thee more:
For I will raise her statue in pure gold;
That while Verona by that name is known,
There shall no figure at such rate be set
As that of true and faithful Juliet.
CAPULET
As rich shall Romeo's by his lady's lie;
Poor sacrifices of our enmity! (5.3.3)

Thought:

After Romeo and Juliet are found dead, Montague offers to erect a "statue" of "pure gold" in Juliet's honor and Capulet promise to do the same for his dead son-in-law, Romeo. Although the young lovers' deaths unite the warring families and put an end to the feud (just as the Chorus promised back in the first Prologue), the efforts of the Capulets and the Montagues are a day late and a dollar short.
Hate Quotes

Quote:

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;
Whole misadventured piteous overthrows
Do 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; (Prologue)

Thought:

OK, we know from the play's beginning that love and hatred are intertwined throughout Romeo and Juliet. Here, the Chorus (kind of like a narrator) tells us up front that, over the course of the play, "two households," or families in Verona, are going to get caught up (again) in a long standing feud, or "ancient grudge." Not only that, but things are going to get "blood[y]" when their children (the kids who came from their parents' "fatal loins") fall in love and then later "take their life." We also know that the deaths of the two "star-crossed lovers" will put an end to their families' hatred.

Quote:

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
[Aside 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. (1.1.1)
Thought:

You might be wondering what the heck Sampson's up to when he spots the Montague's servants on the streets and announces "I will bite my thumb at them, which is disgrace to them if they bear it" (1.1.13). Basically, thumb biting, which involves biting and then flicking one's thumb from behind the upper teeth, is a Shakespearean version of flipping someone the bird. Now, Sampson (a Capulet servant) doesn't have a good reason to insult the Montagues' servants – he's basically looking to stir up trouble because his masters are feuding with the Montagues. Plus, Sampson's too much of a coward to own up to his silly gesture because the "law" won't be on his "side" if his thumb biting causes a big old brawl (he doesn't want to get busted for causing a fracas). What's the point of all this? Well, the Capulet/Montague feud, which has obviously trickled down to involve their servants, is completely absurd. Just like Sampson's thumb biting.

Quote:

PRINCE
What, ho! you men, you beasts,
That quench the fire of your pernicious rage
With purple fountains issuing from your veins,
On pain of torture, from those bloody hands
Throw your mistemper'd weapons to the ground […]
Three civil brawls, bred of an airy word,
By thee, old Capulet, and Montague,
Have thrice disturb'd the quiet of our streets,
And made Verona's ancient citizens
Cast by their grave beseeing ornaments,
To wield old partisans, in hands as old,
Canker'd with peace, to part your canker'd hate
(1.1.1)

Thought:

When the Prince calls the Capulets and Montagues a bunch of "beasts," he implies that their hatred doesn't seem to have any rational cause – it is simply the result of passions they refuse to restrain. We also notice that there's never any real explanation of what caused the feud or why it even continues. The only thing we know is that there have been three big street fights that have "disturb'd the quiet of [the] streets" in Verona. The Prince's solution to all of this violence? Any man caught brawling in the future will be sentenced to "death."

Brain Snack: In West Side Story, an award winning musical adaptation of Shakespeare's play, the Capulet/Montague feud is turned into a racially motivated rivalry between two 1950s street gangs, the Jets and the Sharks.
Quote:

TYBALT
This, by his voice, should be a Montague.
Fetch me my rapier, boy. What dares the slave
Come hither, cover'd with an antic face,
To fleer and scorn at our solemnity?
Now, by the stock and honour of my kin,
To strike him dead, I hold it not a sin.
(1.5.1)

Thought:

When Tybalt discovers that Romeo has crashed the Capulet's party, his first response is to start a sword fight. Tybalt, who is easily provoked, hates the Montagues so much that he thinks that any insult by them should be punished by death. Are all the Capulet men so rash? Keep reading…

Quote:

CAPULET
Content thee, gentle coz, let him alone;
He bears him like a portly gentleman;
And, to say truth, Verona brags of him
To be a virtuous and well-govern'd youth:
I would not for the wealth of all the town
Here in my house do him disparagement:
Therefore be patient, take no note of him:
It is my will, the which if thou respect,
Show a fair presence and put off these frowns,
And ill-beseeming semblance for a feast. (1.5.6)

Thought:

Now this is interesting. Tybalt's first response to seeing Romeo at the Capulet party is to kill him. But, here we see that Capulet (Juliet's dad) doesn't seem to mind that a Montague is in his home. In fact, Capulet says that Romeo is basically a nice kid so Tybalt should just calm down and leave him alone. Hmm. Does this mean that the big Capulet/Montague feud isn't as big a deal as everybody thinks it is? It seems like the family drama is much more important to the younger generation (Tybalt, Romeo, Juliet) than it is to the older generation.

Quote:
ROMEO

O me! What fray was here?
Yet tell me not, for I have heard it all.
Here's much to do with hate, but more with love.
Why, then, O brawling love! O loving hate!
O any thing, of nothing first create!
O heavy lightness! serious vanity!
Mis-shapen chaos of well-seeming forms!
Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire,
sick health!
Still-waking sleep, that is not what it is!
This love feel I, that feel no love in this.
Dost thou not laugh?
(1.1.5)

Thought:

Romeo is a bit of a drama queen when he spots blood from the recent street brawl between the Capulet and Montague servants. He dizzies himself here by relating the extremes of hate and love. We should also point out that the phrases, "O brawling love! O loving hate!", are perfect examples of "oxymoron." An "oxymoron," by the way, is the combination of two terms ordinarily seen as opposites. Keep your eyes open for these because Shakespeare uses a lot of them in the play.

Quote:

TYBALT

Uncle, this is a Montague, our foe,
A villain that is hither come in spite,
To scorn at our solemnity this night.
(1.5.2)

Thought:

Hatred makes Tybalt's enemies appear as one-dimensional Montagues. He cannot see them as individual people or imagine them outside the context of the feud.

Quote:

JULIET

My only love sprung from my only hate!
Too early seen unknown, and known too late!
Prodigious birth of love it is to me,
That I must love a loathed enemy.
(1.5.10)

Thought:

Juliet is devastated when she learns that her "only love" (that would be Romeo) has "sprung from [her] only hate" (is the son of her family's only enemies, the Montagues). Romeo's response to the news that Juliet is a Capulet is pretty similar. He says "O dear account! My life is my foe's debt!" (1.5.8). As we know, Romeo and Juliet both go to great lengths to keep their romance from their parents because they believe their families won't approve of their love. What's more, the consequences of their secrecy are disastrous – Romeo and Juliet eventually kill themselves.

The thing is, we wonder if Romeo and Juliet overreact about how their parents would feel about their union. In an earlier passage, we heard Juliet's dad say that Romeo is a nice kid. Early on in the play, Capulet also says that he's too old too keep on feuding with the Montagues (1.2.1).

Quote:

FRIAR LAURENCE
But come, young waverer, come, go with me,
In one respect I'll thy assistant be;
For this alliance may so happy prove,
To turn your households' rancour to pure love.
(2.3.9)

Thought:

Friar Laurence doesn't believe that Romeo's love for Juliet is authentic (especially since Romeo was "in love" with Rosaline about two seconds ago), but he agrees to marry them anyway. What gives? Well, the Friar believes that a marriage between a young Capulet and a young Montague might be able to put an end to the long standing family feud. Pretty conniving, don't you think?

Quote:

BENVOLIO
I pray thee, good Mercutio, let's retire:
The day is hot, the Capulets abroad,
And, if we meet, we shall not scape a brawl;
For now, these hot days, is the mad blood stirring.
(3.1.1)
Thought:

Benvolio, who always seems to play the role of peacekeeper in the play, wisely notes that a "brawl" will be inevitable if they meet up with the Capulets. According to Benvolio, violence is always inflamed by the summer's heat.

We interrupt this program for a brain snack: According to a 2006 *Washington Post* article, rates of violence increase during periods of hot weather source. Looks like Shakespeare was onto something.

Quote:

TYBALT

Romeo, the love I bear thee can afford
No better term than this,--thou art a villain.

ROMEO

Tybalt, the reason that I have to love thee
Doth much excuse the appertaining rage
To such a greeting: villain am I none;
Therefore farewell; I see thou know'st me not.

TYBALT

Boy, this shall not excuse the injuries
That thou hast done me; therefore turn and draw.

ROMEO

I do protest, I never injured thee,
But love thee better than thou canst devise,
Till thou shalt know the reason of my love:
And so, good Capulet,--which name I tender
As dearly as my own,--be satisfied.

MERCUTIO

O calm, dishonourable, vile submission!

(3.1.5)

Thought:

Romeo refuses to fight Tybalt because he's just married to Juliet, Tybalt's cousin. According to Tybalt, Romeo has "dishonour[ed]" himself by refusing to fight. Basically, Tybalt is calling Romeo a sissy. You can read more about how the play associates violence with masculinity by checking out our "Character Analysis" of Romeo, or by reading "Quotes" for "Gender."

Quote:

ROMEO
Spakest thou of Juliet? how is it with her?
Doth she not think me an old murderer,
Now I have stain'd the childhood of our joy
With blood removed but little from her own?
Where is she? and how doth she? and what says
My conceal'd lady to our cancell'd love?
(3.3.11)

Thought:

Romeo worries that his murder of Tybalt, an act of hatred, may have destroyed Juliet's love for him.

Quote:

PRINCE
Where be these enemies? Capulet! Montague!
See, what a scourge is laid upon your hate,
That heaven finds means to kill your joys with love.
And I for winking at your discords too
Have lost a brace of kinsmen: all are punish'd.
(5.3.10)

Thought:

The feuding families are punished (with grief) when they realize that their hatred caused the death of a pair of innocent lovers.
Sex Quotes

Quote:

SAMPSON
True; and therefore women, being the weaker vessels, are ever thrust to the wall: therefore I will push Montague’s men from the wall, and thrust his maids to the wall.

GREGORY
The quarrel is between our masters and us their men.

SAMPSON
’Tis all one, I will show myself a tyrant: when I have fought with the men, I will be cruel with the maids, and cut off their heads.

GREGORY
The heads of the maids?

SAMPSON
Ay, the heads of the maids, or their maidenheads, take it in what sense thou wilt.

(1.1.7)

Thought:

Sampson and Gregory equate sex with violence and aggression. Here, Sampson crudely puns on the term "maidenhead" (virginity) when he equates sword fighting with men with raping women.

Quote:

ROMEO
O, she is rich in beauty, only poor,
That when she dies with beauty dies her store.

BENVOLIO
Then she hath sworn that she will still live chaste?

ROMEO
She hath, and in that sparing makes huge waste,
For beauty starved with her severity
Cuts beauty off from all posterity.
She is too fair, too wise, wisely too fair,
To merit bliss by making me despair:
She hath forsworn to love, and in that vow
Do I live dead that live to tell it now.

(1.1.13)

Thought:
When Romeo says that Rosaline has "forsworn to love," he means that she has vowed to remain a virgin. What's interesting about this passage is the way Romeo uses a metaphor of wealth and spending to suggest that Rosaline's vow of chastity is akin to hoarding ("sparing") her "rich[es]" (her "beauty"). By refusing to have sex and, therefore, children who might carry on her legacy, Rosaline is basically "wast[ing]" her "beauty," which will "die" with her instead of living on in her children.

We see the same kind of metaphor at work in Shakespeare's "procreation" sonnets (Sonnets 1-17), where the poet urges his friend to have children instead of being miserly with his beauty.

Compare Romeo's speech above to Sonnet #4, below:

Unthrifty loveliness, why dost thou spend
Upon thyself thy beauty's legacy?
Nature's bequest gives nothing but doth lend,
And being frank she lends to those are free.
Then, beauteous niggard, why dost thou abuse
The bounteous largess given thee to give?
Profitless usurer, why dost thou use
So great a sum of sums, yet canst not live?
For having traffic with thyself alone,
Thou of thyself thy sweet self dost deceive.
Then how, when nature calls thee to be gone,
What acceptable audit canst thou leave?
Thy unused beauty must be tomb'd with thee,
Which, used, lives th' executor to be. (Sonnet #4)

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Thought:
The Nurse thinks sexuality is primarily humorous.
MERCUTIO
O, then, I see Queen Mab hath been with you.
She is the fairies' midwife, and she comes
In shape no bigger than an agate-stone
On the fore-finger of an alderman [...] 
[...] And in this state she gallops night by night
Through lovers' brains, and then they dream of love [...] 
[...] O'er ladies ' lips, who straight on kisses dream,
Which oft the angry Mab with blisters plagues,
Because their breaths with sweetmeats tainted are [...] 
[...] This is the hag, when maids lie on their backs,
That presses them and learns them first to bear,
Making them women of good carriage:
This is she—
(1.4.11)

Thought:
Mercutio equates sexuality with a madness that visits people in dreams. Sexuality is also interpreted as oppressive, with Queen Mab – the love-fairy – weighing down virgins while they sleep.

Quote:
MERCUTIO
Romeo! humours! madman! passion! lover!
Appear thou in the likeness of a sigh:
Speak but one rhyme, and I am satisfied;
Cry but 'Ay me!' pronounce but 'love' and 'dove,'
Speak to my gossip Venus one fair word,
One nick-name for her purblind son and heir,
Young Adam Cupid, he that shot so trim,
When King Cophetua loved the beggar-maid!
He heareth not, he stirreth not, he moveth not;
The ape is dead, and I must conjure him.
I conjure thee by Rosaline's bright eyes,
By her high forehead and her scarlet lip,
By her fine foot, straight leg and quivering thigh
And the demesnes that there adjacent lie,
That in thy likeness thou appear to us!
(2.1.2)

Thought:
Mercutio mocks love, reducing Romeo's supposed love for Rosaline to mere lust.

Quote:

ROMEO
Blind is his love and best befits the dark.
MERCUTIO
If love be blind, love cannot hit the mark.
Now will he sit under a medlar tree,
And wish his mistress were that kind of fruit
As maids call medlars, when they laugh alone.
Romeo, that she were, O, that she were
An open et caetera, thou a poperin pear!
(2.1.4)

Thought:

Mercutio reduces love to sex, using a crude fruit metaphor to show that sex itself is ridiculous.

Quote:

ROMEO
And stay, good nurse, behind the abbey wall:
Within this hour my man shall be with thee
And bring thee cords made like a tackled stair;
Which to the high top-gallant of my joy
Must be my convoy in the secret night.
(2.4.22)

Thought:

Romeo plans his wedding night with Juliet at the same time he plans the wedding itself. Sex and marriage go hand in hand for him.

Quote:

NURSE
Hie you to church; I must another way,
To fetch a ladder, by the which your love
Must climb a bird's nest soon when it is dark:
I am the drudge and toil in your delight,
But you shall bear the burden soon at night.
(2.4.9)
Thought:

The Nurse says she'll "fetch a ladder" for Romeo to climb up so the lovers can spend their wedding night together. She also manages to turn her description of Romeo "climbing" the ladder into Juliet's "bird's nest" into an image of the kind of sex the couple is going to have later that night.

Quote:

JULIET
Spread thy close curtain, love-performing night,
That runaway's eyes may wink and Romeo
Leap to these arms, untalk'd of and unseen.
Lovers can see to do their amorous rites
By their own beauties; or, if love be blind,
It best agrees with night. Come, civil night,
Thou sober-suited matron, all in black,
And learn me how to lose a winning match,
Play'd for a pair of stainless maidenhoods:
Hood my unmann'd blood, bating in my cheeks,
With thy black mantle; till strange love, grown bold,
Think true love acted simple modesty.
(3.2.1)

Thought:

Juliet is really looking forward to her honeymoon night with Romeo and she's not afraid to say so. Although she anticipates that night's darkness will hide her blushing "cheeks" (as well as the physical evidence – "blood" – of her virginity), she doesn't seem shy about spending the night with her husband.

Quote:

JULIET
Take up those cords: poor ropes, you are beguiled,
Both you and I; for Romeo is exiled:
He made you for a highway to my bed;
But I, a maid, die maiden-widowed.
Come, cords, come, nurse; I'll to my wedding-bed;
And death, not Romeo, take my maidenhead!
(3.2.11)

Thought:
Denied her wedding night with Romeo, Juliet eroticizes death. Check out "Symbols" for more on this.
Art and Culture Quotes

Quote:

BENVOLIO
Why, Romeo, art thou mad?

ROMEO
Not mad, but bound more than a mad-man is; Shut up in prison, kept without my food, Whipp'd and tormented and--God-den, good fellow. (1.2.3)

Thought:

When Romeo talks about his love for Rosaline, he acts and sounds like a typical "Petrarchan lover," one who is "imprisoned" and tormented by his unrequited love for an unavailable woman. Petrarch, by the way, was a fourteenth-century Italian poet whose sonnets were all the rage in Renaissance England. Much of Petrarch's love poetry was written about "Laura," a figure as unavailable and unattainable as Romeo's.

Quote:

Well, in that hit you miss: she'll not be hit With Cupid's arrow; she hath Dian's wit; And, in strong proof of chastity well arm'd, From love's weak childish bow she lives unharm'd. She will not stay the siege of loving terms, Nor bide the encounter of assailing eyes, (1.1.12)

Thought:

Here, Romeo explains that Rosaline has taken a vow of celibacy. What's interesting is the way he goes about describing love and sex with the language of hunting and battle. Rosaline, he says, won't be "hit with Cupid's arrow" because she's "well arm'd" against his romantic advances. (Romeo also compares Rosaline to Diana, goddess of hunting and of chastity.) Romeo's sexual advances ("loving terms") are also likened to a "siege" (an attack). This conceit (elaborate metaphor) is pretty typical of romantic poetry. Compare Romeo's lines to the following love poem from Edmund Spenser's Amoretti, a collection of poems first published in 1595. (Psst. It's NOT about deer hunting.)

Like as a huntsman after weary chase, Seeing the game from him escap'd away, Sits down to rest him in some shady place, With panting hounds beguiled of their prey:
So after long pursuit and vain assay,
When I all weary had the chase forsook,
The gentle deer return'd the self-same way,
Thinking to quench her thirst at the next brook.
There she beholding me with milder look,
Sought not to fly, but fearless still did bide:
Till I in hand her yet half trembling took,
And with her own goodwill her firmly tied.
Strange thing, me seem'd, to see a beast so wild,
So goodly won, with her own will beguil'd. (Amoretti LXVII)

Quote:

What say you? can you love the gentleman?
This night you shall behold him at our feast;
Read o'er the volume of young Paris' face,
And find delight writ there with beauty's pen;
Examine every married lineament,
And see how one another lends content
And what obscured in this fair volume lies
Find written in the margent of his eyes.
This precious book of love, this unbound lover,
To beautify him, only lacks a cover:
The fish lives in the sea, and 'tis much pride
For fair without the fair within to hide:
That book in many's eyes doth share the glory,
That in gold clasps locks in the golden story;
So shall you share all that he doth possess,
By having him, making yourself no less. (1.3.9)

Thought:

Here, Lady Capulet instructs Juliet to check out Paris when she's at the Capulet's ball later that evening so she can decide whether or not she likes what she sees. What's interesting about this passage is the way Lady Capulet compares Paris's face to the cover of a book of love poetry that Juliet can "read." When she calls Paris an "unbound" lover, she puns on Paris's status as an unbound, or unmarried, man who "lacks a cover," or a wife, to "bind" him and enrich his beauty.

Brain Snack: In the 1996 film Romeo + Juliet, director Baz Luhrmann makes Lady Capulet's metaphor literal by placing a picture of Paris's face on the cover of a popular magazine that Juliet is expected to read.
Quote:

O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!
It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
Like a rich jewel in an Ethiope'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. (1.5.2)

Thought:

Do you think this passage where Romeo compares Juliet to a "rich jewel" is good enough to stand on its own as a piece of poetry? So did John Gaugh, the author of a seventeenth-century version of "Dating for Dummies." In his 1639 book, The Academy of Compliments, Gough "borrows" Romeo's lines and places them in a poem he calls "Encomiums on the Beauty of his Mistress." You can compare Romeo's lines (above) to Gough's poem (courtesy of the Folger Shakespeare Library).

Quote:

ROMEO [1st Quatrain (4 lines)]
If I profane with my unworthiest hand
This holy shrine, the gentle fine is this:
My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.

JULIET [2nd Quatrain (4 lines)]
Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,
Which mannerly devotion shows in this;
For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,
And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.

ROMEO 3rd [Quatrain (4 lines)]
Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?
JULIET
Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.
ROMEO
O, then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do;
They pray, grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.
JULIET [Rhymed Couplet (2 lines)]
Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake.
ROMEO
Then move not, while my prayer's effect I take.
(1.5.2)

Thought:

We talk about this famous passage in "Quotes" for "Love," but it's worth mentioning here because the dialogue between Romeo and Juliet forms a near perfect Shakespearean sonnet (a popular poetic form). A Shakespearean sonnet (a.k.a. an English sonnet) has fourteen lines in iambic pentameter. There are three quatrains (groups of four lines), followed by a rhyming couplet (two lines) that wraps the poem up. Sonnets also feature a "turn" somewhere in the middle or in the final two lines, where the poem takes a new direction or changes its argument in some way. This change can be subtle or really obvious. Typically, the rhyme scheme of a Shakespearean sonnet is ABAB CDCD EFEF GG but, you'll notice that Shakespeare does something a bit more unusual here by repeating the rhyme "this" and "kiss" in the first and the second quatrains. So the rhyme scheme here is ABAB CBCB EFEF GG.

Although we English-speaking folks would love to take credit for this amazing form, it was actually developed by the Italians and didn't arrive in England until the 16th century.

If you want to learn more about Shakespeare's sonnets, check out our discussion of Sonnet 18 and then come back.

Quote:

Nay, I'll conjure too.
Romeo! humours! madman! passion! lover!
Appear thou in the likeness of a sigh:
Speak but one rhyme, and I am satisfied;
Cry but 'Ay me!' pronounce but 'love' and 'dove;'
[...]
I must conjure him.
I conjure thee by Rosaline's bright eyes,
By her high forehead and her scarlet lip,
By her fine foot, straight leg and quivering thigh
And the demesnes that there adjacent lie,
That in thy likeness thou appear to us! (2.1.1)

Thought:
Here, Mercutio tries to flush Romeo out of his hiding spot in the Capulet's yard by mocking his crush on Rosaline. (Mercutio has no idea that Romeo has just fallen in love with Juliet.) When Mercutio pretends to be Rosaline calling to her "lover" Romeo and begging him to recite some love poetry ("speak but one rhyme"), he sounds like a typical schoolboy giving his buddy a hard time.

But then, Mercutio's teasing turns ugly as he proceeds to list Rosaline's body parts – her "bright eyes," "high forehead," "straight leg," "quivering thigh," and, finally, the genitals that are "adjacent" to her thigh. Basically, Mercutio's description of Rosaline is a dirty version of what's called a "blazon," a poetic technique that catalogues a woman's body parts (and often makes comparisons between said body parts and yummy things in nature – lips like cherries, breasts like melons, etc.). Shakespeare has a tendency to mock this poetic convention. Compare Mercutio's lines (above) to his Sonnet 130 (below):

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound;
I grant I never saw a goddess go;
My mistress when she walks treads on the ground.
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.

Quote:

It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.
Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,
Who is already sick and pale with grief,
That thou her maid art far more fair than she:
[…]
It is my lady, O, it is my love!
O, that she knew she were!
She speaks yet she says nothing: what of that?
Her eye discourses; I will answer it.
I am too bold, 'tis not to me she speaks:
Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,
Having some business, do entreat her eyes
To twinkle in their spheres till they return.
What if her eyes were there, they in her head?
The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars,
As daylight doth a lamp; her eyes in heaven
Would through the airy region stream so bright
That birds would sing and think it were not night.
See, how she leans her cheek upon her hand!
O, that I were a glove upon that hand,
That I might touch that cheek! (2.2.1)

Thought:
When Romeo waxes poetic about Juliet here, he elevates her to heavenly status by first equating her with the "sun" and then by comparing her eyes to stars that "twinkle" in the skies.

Quote:

My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
My love as deep; the more I give to thee,
The more I have, for both are infinite. (2.2.16)

Thought:
We know that Juliet is sincere when she says her love is "as deep" as the ocean, but, for those of us living in the 21st century, the expression has become a cliché. We're pretty sure we've read this on a Valentine's Day greeting card.

Quote:

ROMEO
I pray thee, chide not; she whom I love now
Doth grace for grace and love for love allow;
The other did not so.
FRIAR LAURENCE
O, she knew well
Thy love did read by rote and could not spell.
But come, young waverer, come, go with me, (2.2.9)

Thought:
Friar Laurence is pretty skeptical when he hears that Romeo has forgotten all about Rosaline and is now in love with Juliet. Not only that, but the Friar makes fun of Romeo, for reciting ("by rote") cheesy and meaningless love poetry to Rosaline.
Quote:

ROMEO
O, she is rich in beauty, only poor,
That when she dies with beauty dies her store.
BENVOLIO
Then she hath sworn that she will still live chaste?
ROMEO
She hath, and in that sparing makes huge waste,
For beauty starved with her severity
Cuts beauty off from all posterity. (1.1.12)

Thought:

According to Romeo, Rosaline is beautiful, and therefore "rich" in beauty. But, because she refuses to get married and have kids, she'll die "poor" because her riches (her "beauty") will be buried with her and will therefore, "waste[d]." A similar idea occurs in Shakespeare's Sonnet 4, where Shakespeare uses a monetary metaphor to convince a good-looking young man who hoards his beauty (by not having kids) that, if he dies without producing children, his "unus'd beauty must be tomb'd with [him]."
Youth Quotes

Quote:

LORD CAPULET
What noise is this? Give me my long sword, ho!
LADY CAPULET [holding her husband back]
A crutch, a crutch! why call you for a sword?
LORD CAPULET
My sword, I say! Old Montague is come,
And flourishes his blade in spite of me.
LORD MONTAGUE [his wife is also holding him back]
Thou villain Capulet,--Hold me not, let me go.
LADY MONTAGUE
Thou shalt not stir a foot to seek a foe.
(1.1.1)

Thought:

Although Lord Montague and Lord Capulet are too old to fight, they want to join the young men in the big brawl on the streets of Verona. Good thing Lady Capulet and Lady Montague hold their husband's back – these guys are way too old to be mixing it up like a couple of heady teenagers.

Quote:

LORD CAPULET
But Montague is bound as well as I,
In penalty alike; and 'tis not hard, I think,
For men so old as we to keep the peace.
(1.2.1)

Thought:

Now this is more like it. After being chided by the Prince of Verona, Lord Capulet comes to his senses and acknowledges that he's too old to be caught up in the long-standing family feud. From here on out, Capulet is pretty peaceful. He even stops Tybalt from beating up Romeo at the Capulet ball (1.5.6).

Quote:

CAPULET
But saying o'er what I have said before:
My child is yet a stranger in the world;
She hath not seen the change of fourteen years,
Let two more summers wither in their pride,
Ere we may think her ripe to be a bride.
PARIS
Younger than she are happy mothers made.
CAPULET
And too soon marr'd are those so early made. (1.2.2)

Thought:

When Paris asks for thirteen-year-old Juliet's hand in marriage, Capulet responds (pretty sensibly) that she's far too young to be a "bride." (He also talks about Juliet as though she's a piece of fruit that isn't yet "ripe," which is not so sensible.) The conversation gets even creepier when Paris points out that there are twelve-year-olds who are already mothers. Capulet's reply seems to carry on the Juliet=a piece of unripe fruit metaphor because he implies that Juliet would be "marr'd" (bruised, tainted, ruined, etc.) if she were to have sex with Paris and give birth to children at such a young age. Yikes!

Quote:

LORD CAPULET
Welcome, gentlemen! I have seen the day
That I have worn a visor and could tell
A whispering tale in a fair lady's ear,
Such as would please: 'tis gone, 'tis gone, 'tis gone:
(1.5.1)

Thought:

As Lord Capulet entertains his guests at the ball, he muses about his youth, which he apparently spent chasing after the "fair" ladies. He realizes that he is past his prime.

Quote:

LORD CAPULET
Nay, sit, nay, sit, good cousin Capulet;
For you and I are past our dancing days:
How long is't now since last yourself and I
Were in a mask?
SECOND CAPULET
By'r lady, thirty years.
CAPULET
What, man! 'tis not so much, 'tis not so much
(1.5.1)

Thought:

Lord Capulet isn't finished reminiscing about "the good old days." As he chats it up with his cousin at the ball and watches the younger generation have a good time, he seems to struggle with his age.

Quote:

JULIET
The clock struck nine when I did send the Nurse;
In half an hour she promised to return.
Perchance she cannot meet him: that's not so.
O, she is lame! love's heralds should be thoughts,
Which ten times faster glide than the sun's beams,
Driving back shadows over louring hills:
Therefore do nimble-pinion'd doves draw love,
And therefore hath the wind-swift Cupid wings.
Now is the sun upon the highmost hill
Of this day's journey, and from nine till twelve
Is three long hours, yet she is not come.
Had she affections and warm youthful blood,
She would be as swift in motion as a ball;
My words would bandy her to my sweet love,
And his to me:
But old folks, many feign as they were dead;
Unwieldy, slow, heavy and pale as lead.
(2.5.1)

Thought:

According to Juliet, the older generation (including the "lame" Nurse) is too slow to understand the swift passion of love. It's seems pretty clear that love belongs to the young in Romeo and Juliet.

Quote:

Thou canst not speak of that thou dost not feel:
Wert thou as young as I, Juliet thy love,
An hour but married, Tybalt murdered,
Doting like me and like me banished,
Then mightst thou speak, then mightst thou tear thy hair,
And fall upon the ground, as I do now,
Taking the measure of an unmade grave.
(3.3.9)

Thought:

When the Romeo learns from Friar Laurence that he's been banished from Verona, he flips out and accuses Friar Laurence of being too old to understand this passionate situation. According to Romeo, if Friar Laurence were "young" and in the same situation as Romeo, he'd be "tear[ing] out [his] hair."

Quote:

CAPULET
God's bread! it makes me mad:
Day, night, hour, tide, time, work, play,
Alone, in company, still my care hath been
To have her match'd: and having now provided
A gentleman of noble parentage,
Of fair demesnes, youthful, and nobly train'd,
Stuff'd, as they say, with honourable parts,
Proportion'd as one's thought would wish a man;
And then to have a wretched puling fool,
A whining mammet, in her fortune's tender,
To answer 'I'll not wed; I cannot love,
I am too young; I pray you, pardon me.'
But, as you will not wed, I'll pardon you:
Graze where you will you shall not house with me
(3.5.8)

Thought:

When Juliet refuses to marry Paris, Lord Capulet becomes enraged. Here, he suggests that young Juliet is a whiny ingrate before threatening to throw her out of the house. He also mocks her for pleading that she is "too young" to wed Paris. (Juliet's only 13 but the legal age for marriage, with parental consent, was 12). The funny thing is. When Paris first approached Capulet with a proposal to marry Juliet back in Act 1, Capulet admitted that Juliet is a little young to be a bride (1.2.2). We should also point out that, by this point, Juliet is already married to Romeo (secretly) so, she doesn't really think she's too young to be a wife – she just uses it as an excuse not to get hitched to Paris.

Quote:
CAPULET
An you be mine, I'll give you to my friend;
And you be not, hang, beg, starve, die in the streets,
For, by my soul, I'll ne'er acknowledge thee,
Nor what is mine shall never do thee good:
Trust to't, bethink you; I'll not be forsworn.
(3.5.8)

Thought:

In Shakespeare's day, children (especially girls) had very little control over their lives. Daughters were expected to be silent, chaste, and obedient, which is why Capulet treats Juliet like a piece of property that he can just throw out onto "the streets" when she doesn't follow his orders.

Quote:

CAPULET
How now, my headstrong! where have you been gadding?
JULIET
Where I have learn'd me to repent the sin
Of disobedient opposition
To you and your behests, and am enjoin'd
By holy Laurence to fall prostrate here,
And beg your pardon: pardon, I beseech you!
Henceforward I am ever ruled by you.
(4.2.1)

Thought:

Juliet pretends that she was visiting Friar Laurence so she could confess and "repent" for being such a "disobedient" daughter. But, we know that she was off making plans to be with Romeo. Here, Juliet lies and tells her father what he wants to hear: that she believes she should listen to him and that she will do what he says.
Transience Quotes

Quote:

LORD CAPULET Welcome, gentlemen! I have seen the day
That I have worn a visor and could tell
A whispering tale in a fair lady's ear,
Such as would please: 'tis gone, 'tis gone, 'tis gone
(1.5.1)

Thought:

Juliet's father remembers the flirtations of his youth. Lord Capulet's musings about the good ol' days reminds us that youth and love are fleeting. This occurs just before Romeo and Juliet's first meeting, where they fall head over heels in love (at first sight). It seems like Lord Capulet's reminiscence is Shakespeare's way of preparing us for the short-lived (no pun intended) romance between Romeo and Juliet.

Quote:

LORD CAPULET
Nay, sit, nay, sit, good cousin Capulet;
For you and I are past our dancing days:
How long is't now since last yourself and I
Were in a mask?
SECOND CAPULET
By'r lady, thirty years.
CAPULET
What, man! 'tis not so much, 'tis not so much
(1.5.1)

Thought:

Lord Capulet reminds everyone that time passes quickly, and that young lovers (like Romeo and Juliet) quickly become parents and grow old.

Quote:

ROMEO
Lady, by yonder blessed moon I swear
That tips with silver all these fruit-tree tops--
JULIET
O, swear not by the moon, the inconstant moon,
That monthly changes in her circled orb,  
Lest that thy love prove likewise variable.  
(2.2.11)

Thought:

Juliet does not want to associate her and Romeo's love with "the inconstant [changeable] moon" –she wants it to endure.

Quote:

JULIET  
[...] Although I joy in thee,  
I have no joy of this contract to-night:  
It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden;  
Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be  
Ere one can say 'It lightens.' Sweet, good night!  
This bud of love, by summer's ripening breath,  
May prove a beauteous flower when next we meet.  
(2.2.13)

Thought:

Juliet is frightened by the sudden power of her and Romeo's love, and she is worried that it will burn itself out. She decides to say goodnight to him to prolong their love until their next meeting.

Quote:

FRIAR LAURENCE  
Holy Saint Francis, what a change is here!  
Is Rosaline, whom thou didst love so dear,  
So soon forsaken? young men's love then lies  
Not truly in their hearts, but in their eyes.  
Jesu Maria, what a deal of brine  
Hath wash'd thy sallow cheeks for Rosaline!  
How much salt water thrown away in waste,  
To season love, that of it doth not taste!  
The sun not yet thy sighs from heaven clears,  
Thy old groans ring yet in my ancient ears;  
Lo, here upon thy cheek the stain doth sit  
Of an old tear that is not wash'd off yet:  
If e'er thou wast thyself and these woes thine,
Thou and these woes were all for Rosaline:
And art thou changed? pronounce this sentence then,
Women may fall, when there's no strength in men.
(2.3.6)

Thought:
The Friar deems Romeo's love to be meaningless because it is so changeable – mere days ago, Romeo was supposedly in love with Rosaline but now he wants to marry Juliet.

Quote:
FRIAR LAURENCE
These violent delights have violent ends
And in their triumph die, like fire and powder,
Which as they kiss consume: the sweetest honey
Is loathsome in his own deliciousness
And in the taste confounds the appetite:
Therefore love moderately; long love doth so;
Too swift arrives as tardy as too slow.
(2.6.1)

Thought:
The Friar, who is worried about the long-term consequences of Romeo and Juliet's marriage, warns Romeo that his and Juliet's intense passion may end suddenly and violently, like the flash of gunpowder.

Most Shakespeare critics read Friar Laurence's words as a passage that sums up the nature of Romeo and Juliet's love affair. Caroline Spurgeon writes the following: "There can be no question, I think, that Shakespeare saw the story, in its swift and tragic beauty, as an almost blinding flash of light, suddenly ignited, and swiftly quenched" (Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us).

Quote:

Here comes the lady: O, so light a foot
Will ne'er wear out the everlasting flint:
A lover may bestride the gossamer
That idles in the wanton summer air,
And yet not fall; so light is vanity. (2.6.1)

Thought:
When Juliet rushes into Friar Laurence's cell to marry Romeo, the Friar makes a big deal about the fragility and fleetingness of worldly pleasure (a young lover's "vanity"). Stephen Greenblatt tells us that, when Friar Laurence says Juliet's "light" foot won't "wear out the everlasting flint," he means that she will never "endure or subdue the hard road of life."

**Quote:**

> What's here? a cup, closed in my true love's hand?  
> Poison, I see, hath been his timeless end:  
> O churl! drunk all, and left no friendly drop  
> To help me after? I will kiss thy lips;  
> Haply some poison yet doth hang on them,  
> To make die with a restorative. (5.3.2)

**Thought:**

Juliet believes that ingesting poison by kissing Romeo's lips would "make [her] die with a restorative." She believes that the kiss and the poison would heal or "restore" her by reuniting her with her husband. But, since poison isn't a viable option for her, she chooses to unsheathe Romeo's sword and then thrusts it into her own body because she believes that suicide will allow her to be with Romeo forever.

**Quote:**

> JULIET  
> Wilt thou be gone? it is not yet near day:  
> It was the nightingale, and not the lark,  
> That pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear;  
> Nightly she sings on yon pomegranate-tree:  
> Believe me, love, it was the nightingale.  
> ROMEO  
> It was the lark, the herald of the morn,  
> No nightingale: look, love, what envious streaks  
> Do lace the severing clouds in yonder east:  
> Night’s candles are burnt out, and jocund day  
> Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops.  
> I must be gone and live, or stay and die.  
> JULIET  
> Yon light is not day-light, I know it, I:  
> It is some meteor that the sun exhales,  
> To be to thee this night a torch-bearer,  
> And light thee on thy way to Mantua:  
> Therefore stay yet; thou need'st not to be gone.
ROMEO
Let me be ta'en, let me be put to death;
I am content, so thou wilt have it so.
I'll say yon grey is not the morning's eye,
'Tis but the pale reflex of Cynthia's brow;
Nor that is not the lark, whose notes do beat
The vaulty heaven so high above our heads:
I have more care to stay than will to go:
Come, death, and welcome! Juliet wills it so.
How is't, my soul? let's talk; it is not day.

JULIET
It is, it is: hie hence, be gone, away!
It is the lark that sings so out of tune,
Straining harsh discords and unpleasing sharps.
Some say the lark makes sweet division;
This doth not so, for she divideth us:
Some say the lark and loathed toad change eyes,
O, now I would they had changed voices too!
Since arm from arm that voice doth us affray,
Hunting thee hence with hunt's-up to the day,
O, now be gone; more light and light it grows.

ROMEO
More light and light; more dark and dark our woes!
(3.5.1)

Thought:
Juliet denies the passing of time (made evident by the sunrise and the sound of the morning birds twittering) because she knows that the passing of time means that Romeo must leave her.
Mortality Quotes

Quote:

*The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love [...] Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage*"  
(Prologue)

Thought:

Romeo and Juliet's love is marked by death from the beginning.

Quote:

**MERCUTIO**

I am hurt.
A plague o' both your houses! I am sped.
Is he gone, and hath nothing?
**BENVOLIO**

What, art thou hurt?
**MERCUTIO**

Ay, ay, a scratch, a scratch; marry, 'tis enough.
Where is my page? Go, villain, fetch a surgeon.
**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 to-morrow, and you shall find me a grave man. I am peppered, I warrant, for this world. A plague o' both your houses! 'Zounds, a dog, a rat, a mouse, a cat, to scratch a man to death! a braggart, a rogue, a villain, that fights by the book of arithmetic! Why the devil came you between us? I was hurt under your arm.
**ROMEO**

I thought all for the best.
**MERCUTIO**

Help me into some house, Benvolio,
Or I shall faint. A plague o' both your houses! They have made worms' meat of me: I have it, And soundly too: your houses!

(3.1.14)
Thought:

Mercutio blames both the Montagues and the Capulets for his death.

Quote:

JULIET
What if it be a poison, which the friar
Subtly hath minister’d to have me dead,
Lest in this marriage he should be dishonour’d,
Because he married me before to Romeo?
I fear it is: and yet, methinks, it should not,
For he hath still been tried a holy man.
How if, when I am laid into the tomb,
I wake before the time that Romeo
Come to redeem me? there’s a fearful point!
Shall I not, then, be stifled in the vault,
To whose foul mouth no healthsome air breathes in,
And there die strangled ere my Romeo comes?
Or, if I live, is it not very like,
The horrible conceit of death and night,
Together with the terror of the place,—
As in a vault, an ancient receptacle,
Where, for these many hundred years, the bones
Of all my buried ancestors are packed:
Where bloody Tybalt, yet but green in earth,
Lies festering in his shroud; where, as they say,
At some hours in the night spirits resort;—
Alack, alack, is it not like that I,
So early waking, what with loathsome smells,
And shrieks like mandrakes’ torn out of the earth,
That living mortals, hearing them, run mad:—
O, if I wake, shall I not be distraught,
Environed with all these hideous fears?
And madly play with my forefather’s joints?
And pluck the mangled Tybalt from his shroud?
And, in this rage, with some great kinsman’s bone,
As with a club, dash out my desperate brains?
O, look! methinks I see my cousin’s ghost
Seeking out Romeo, that did spit his body
Upon a rapier’s point: stay, Tybalt, stay!
Romeo, I come! this do I drink to thee.
(4.3.3)
Thought:

Juliet understands the horrors of death – rotting bodies, terrible smells – but a world where she is forced to marry someone other than Romeo, in her mind, is worse than the world of death.

Quote:

*NURSE* She's dead, deceased, she's dead; alack the day!
*LADY CAPULET*
Alack the day, she's dead, she's dead, she's dead!
*CAPULET*
Ha! let me see her: out, alas! she's cold:
Her blood is settled, and her joints are stiff;
Life and these lips have long been separated:
Death lies on her like an untimely frost
Upon the sweetest flower of all the field.
*Nurse*
O lamentable day!
*LADY CAPULET*
O woful time!
*CAPULET*
Death, that hath ta'en her hence to make me wail,
Ties up my tongue, and will not let me speak.
(4.4.7)

Thought:

Juliet's family tries to describe her death in gentle terms – "an untimely frost" – to make her loss less horrific to them.

Quote:

*CAPULET*
All things that we ordained festival,
Turn from their office to black funeral;
Our instruments to melancholy bells,
Our wedding cheer to a sad burial feast,
Our solemn hymns to sullen dirges change,
Our bridal flowers serve for a buried corse,
And all things change them to the contrary.
(4.5.11)

Thought:
Lord Capulet describes death as a kind of marriage, and a funeral as a kind of wedding. This echoes the way in which Romeo and Juliet believe that suicide is a means by which they can be together forever.

Quote:

ROMEO
Come hither, man. I see that thou art poor:
Hold, there is forty ducats: let me have
A dram of poison, such soon-speeding gear
As will disperse itself through all the veins
That the life-weary taker may fall dead
And that the trunk may be discharged of breath
As violently as hasty powder fired
Doth hurry from the fatal cannon's womb.

APOTHECARY
Such mortal drugs I have; but Mantua's law
Is death to any he that utters them.

ROMEO
Art thou so bare and full of wretchedness,
And fear'st to die? famine is in thy cheeks,
Need and oppression starveth in thine eyes,
Contempt and beggary hangs upon thy back;
The world is not thy friend nor the world's law;
The world affords no law to make thee rich;
Then be not poor, but break it, and take this.
(5.1.5)

Thought:

Romeo wants a swift and instantaneous demise. He is already so prepared for death that he sees it all around him, even personified in the character of the sickly looking Apothecary.

Quote:

ROMEO
Thou detestable maw, thou womb of death,
Gorged with the dearest morsel of the earth,
Thus I enforce thy rotten jaws to open,
And, in despite, I'll cram thee with more food!
(5.3.3)

Thought:
Romeo describes the Capulet family tomb as a "womb" that has swallowed Juliet's dead body.

Quote:

JULIET
'Tis almost morning; I would have thee gone:
And yet no further than a wanton's bird;
Who lets it hop a little from her hand,
Like a poor prisoner in his twisted gyves,
And with a silk thread plucks it back again,
So loving-jealous of his liberty.
ROMEO
I would I were thy bird.
JULIET
Sweet, so would I:
Yet I should kill thee with much cherishing.
(2.2.26)

Thought:

Juliet seems to sense that the intensity of her love for Romeo is so great it has the potential to be destructive.

Quote:

JULIET
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.
(3.2.1)

Thought:

Juliet's vision of loving Romeo is so intense that she thinks it will break the boundaries of mortality and convince all the world to be in love with Romeo. (In some versions of the play, it is "and when he shall die," while in others, it is, "when shall die.")

Quote:

NURSE
Ah, well-a-day! he's dead, he's dead, he's dead!
We are undone, lady, we are undone!
Alack the day! he's gone, he's kill'd, he's dead!

JULIET
Can heaven be so envious?

NURSE
Romeo can,
Though heaven cannot: O Romeo, Romeo!
Who ever would have thought it? Romeo!

JULIET
What devil art thou, that dost torment me thus?
This torture should be roar'd in dismal hell.
Hath Romeo slain himself? say thou but 'I,'
And that bare vowel 'I' shall poison more
Than the death-darting eye of cockatrice:
I am not I, if there be such an I;
Or those eyes shut, that make thee answer 'I.'
If he be slain, say 'I'; or if not, no:
Brief sounds determine of my weal or woe.

NURSE
I saw the wound, I saw it with mine eyes,--
God save the mark!--here on his manly breast:
A piteous corse, a bloody piteous corse;
Pale, pale as ashes, all bedaub'd in blood,
All in gore-blood; I swounded at the sight.

JULIET
O, break, my heart! poor bankrupt, break at once!
To prison, eyes, ne'er look on liberty!
Vile earth, to earth resign; end motion here;
And thou and Romeo press one heavy bier!

(3.2.2)

Thought:

Without Romeo, Juliet thinks her only option is death. She is no longer herself without him.

Quote:

JULIET
Is Romeo slaughter'd, and is Tybalt dead?
My dear-loved cousin, and my dearer lord?
Then, dreadful trumpet, sound the general doom!
For who is living, if those two are gone?
Thought:

For Juliet, the loss of both Tybalt and Romeo seems like the Apocalypse; she expects to hear the trumpet sounding that marks the Day of Judgment.

Quote:

JULIET
Some word there was, worser than Tybalt's death,
That murder'd me: I would forget it fain;
But, O, it presses to my memory,
Like damned guilty deeds to sinners' minds:
'Tybalt is dead, and Romeo--banished,'
That 'banished,' that one word 'banished,'
Hath slain ten thousand Tybalts. Tybalt's death
Was woe enough, if it had ended there:
Or, if sour woe delights in fellowship
And needly will be rank'd with other griefs,
Why follow'd not, when she said 'Tybalt's dead,'
Thy father, or thy mother, nay, or both,
Which modern lamentations might have moved?
But with a rear-ward following Tybalt's death,
'Romeo is banished,' to speak that word,
Is father, mother, Tybalt, Romeo, Juliet,
All slain, all dead. 'Romeo is banished!
There is no end, no limit, measure, bound,
In that word's death; no words can that woe sound.

Thought:

For Juliet, being separated from Romeo is the same as being dead.

Quote:

ROMEO
What less than dooms-day is the prince's doom?
FRIAR LAURENCE
A gentler judgment vanish'd from his lips,
Not body's death, but body's banishment.

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Ha, banishment! be merciful, say 'death;'
For exile hath more terror in his look,
Much more than death: do not say 'banishment.'

FRIAR LAURENCE
Hence from Verona art thou banished:
Be patient, for the world is broad and wide.

ROMEO
There is no world without Verona walls,
But purgatory, torture, hell itself.
Hence-banished is banish'd from the world,
And world's exile is death: then banished,
Is death mis-term'd: calling death banishment,
Thou cutt'st my head off with a golden axe,
And smilest upon the stroke that murders me.
(3.3.2)

Thought:

For Romeo, being separated from Juliet is like death, because Juliet is his entire world. Check out "Quotes" for "Exile" for more on this.

Quote:

ROMEO
Well, Juliet, I will lie with thee tonight.
(5.1.4)

Thought:

Romeo wants to physically unite himself with Juliet in death, since he cannot physically unite himself with her in life. People lying together having sex or lying together in death – Romeo makes the two synonymous.

Quote:

JULIET
What's here? a cup, closed in my true love's hand?
Poison, I see, hath been his timeless end:
O churl! drunk all, and left no friendly drop
To help me after? I will kiss thy lips;
Haply some poison yet doth hang on them,
To make die with a restorative.
[Kisses him]
Thy lips are warm.
[Noise from outside]
Yea, noise? then I'll be brief. O happy dagger!
This is thy sheath;
there rust, and let me die.
(5.3.2)

Thought:

Juliet does not hesitate to follow Romeo into death. Poison, to her, is like a medicine, a "restorative" that could bring her back together with Romeo. The thing is, there's not enough poison on Romeo's lips so Juliet uses her husband's sword.
Gender Quotes

Quote:

SAMSON
True; and therefore women, being the weaker vessels, are ever thrust to the wall: therefore I will push Montague's men from the wall, and thrust his maids to the wall.

GREGORY
The quarrel is between our masters and us their men.

SAMSON
'Tis all one, I will show myself a tyrant: when I have fought with the men, I will be cruel with the maids, and cut off their heads.

GREGORY
The heads of the maids?

SAMSON
Ay, the heads of the maids, or their maidenheads, take it in what sense thou wilt

(1.1.6)

Thought:

Sampson and Gregory assert their manliness through physical and sexual violence.

Quote:

SAMSON
My naked weapon is out: quarrel, I will back thee.

(1.1.10)

Thought:

Physical violence is equated with forceful sexuality, and both are proof of manliness.

Quote:

GREGORY
I will frown as I pass by, and let them take it as they list.

SAMSON
Nay, as they dare. I will bite my thumb at them; which is a disgrace to them, if they bear it.

(1.1.12)

Thought:
Manly honor in Verona means never putting up with any insult against you.

Quote:

GREGORY [House of Montague]  
Do you quarrel, sir?  
ABRAHAM [House of Capulet]  
Quarrel sir! no, sir.  
SAMPSON [House of Montague]  
If you do, sir, I am for you: I serve as good a man as you.  
ABRAHAM [House of Capulet]  
No better.  
SAMPSON [House of Montague]  
Well, sir.  
GREGORY [House of Montague]  
Say 'better:' here comes one of my master's kinsmen.  
SAMPSON [House of Montague]  
Yes, better, sir.  
ABRAHAM [House of Capulet]  
You lie.  
SAMPSON [House of Montague]  
Draw, if you be men. Gregory, remember thy swashing blow.  
(1.1.14)

Thought:

Status is very important to the men of Verona – and a claim that one person's employer is a "better man" than another is enough to start a fight.

Quote:

CAPULET  
[...]  
My child is yet a stranger in the world;  
She hath not seen the change of fourteen years,  
Let two more summers wither in their pride,  
Ere we may think her ripe to be a bride.  
PARIS  
Younger than she are happy mothers made.  
CAPULET  
And too soon marr'd are those so early made.  
The earth hath swallow'd all my hopes but she,  
She is the hopeful lady of my earth:
But woo her, gentle Paris, get her heart,
My will to her consent is but a part;
An she agree, within her scope of choice
Lies my consent and fair according voice.
(1.2.2)

Thought:

When Paris first proposes the idea of marrying 13-year-old Juliet, Lord Capulet says he wants Juliet to marry a man that she loves and would choose for herself. He also says she's too young, although, as we know, the legal age for marriage in Shakespeare's day was 12 for girls and 14 for boys. While it seems strange to us that Paris would talk to Capulet about marriage without even consulting Juliet (they've never even formally met), marriages were typically brokered between men (a girl's father and her potential husband).

Quote:

TYBALT
This, by his voice, should be a Montague.
Fetch me my rapier, boy. What dares the slave
Come hither, cover'd with an antic face,
To fleer and scorn at our solemnity?
Now, by the stock and honour of my kin,
To strike him dead, I hold it not a sin.
(1.5.2)

Thought:

Tybalt believes that the "honor" of his family depends on him revenging even the smallest insult from a Montague.

Quote:

MERCUTIO
Why, is not this better now than groaning for love?
now art thou sociable, now art thou Romeo; now art
thou what thou art, by art as well as by nature:
for this drivelling love is like a great natural,
that runs lolling up and down to hide his bauble in a hole.
(2.4.20)

Thought:
Mercutio is glad that Romeo has stopped moping around and going on and on about his love for Rosaline; he feels like he has his friend back again. Mercutio's seeming jealousy reminds us of the relationship between Bassanio and Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice*. Antonio is just a smidge jealous when Bassanio pursues Portia.

**Quote:**

*ROMEO*

This gentleman, the prince's near ally,
My very friend, hath got his mortal hurt
In my behalf; my reputation stain'd
With Tybalt's slander,--Tybalt, that an hour
Hath been my kinsman! O sweet Juliet,
Thy beauty hath made me effeminate
And in my temper soften'd valour's steel!

(3.1.7)

**Thought:**

Romeo believes that his love for Juliet has made him less manly. Here, he says that he dishonored himself as a man by choosing not to fight with Tybalt for Juliet's sake.

**Quote:**

*ROMEO*

Alive, in triumph! and Mercutio slain!
Away to heaven, respective lenity,
And fire-eyed fury be my conduct now!
Now, Tybalt, take the villain back again,
That late thou gavest me; for Mercutio's soul
Is but a little way above our heads,
Staying for thine to keep him company:
Either thou, or I, or both, must go with him.

(3.1.9)

**Thought:**

Romeo reasserts his masculinity by fighting Tybalt. He also avenges the death of his best friend, which makes us wonder whether or not Juliet is the most important person in Romeo's life.

**Quote:**
NURSE
O, he is even in my mistress’ case,
Just in her case! O woful sympathy!
Piteous predicament! Even so lies she,
Blubbering and weeping, weeping and blubbering.
Stand up, stand up; stand, and you be a man:
For Juliet's sake, for her sake, rise and stand;
\[3.3.3\]

Thought:
According to the Nurse, Romeo's excessive emotion is unmanly.

Quote:

FRIAR LAURENCE
Hold thy desperate hand:
Art thou a man? thy form cries out thou art:
Thy tears are womanish; thy wild acts denote
The unreasonable fury of a beast:
Unseemly woman in a seeming man!
Or ill-beseeming beast in seeming both!
\[3.3.14\]

Thought:
In *Romeo and Juliet*, boys don't cry. Here, the Friar calls Romeo a "womanish" wimp for crying and threatening suicide. We hear something similar in *Hamlet*, when Hamlet's step-father calls him a sissy for grieving over the death of his father.

Quote:

Hang thee, young baggage! disobedient wretch!
I tell thee what: get thee to church o' Thursday,
Or never after look me in the face:
Speak not, reply not, do not answer me; \(3.5.3\)

Thought:
Juliet's father flips out and becomes verbally abusive when Juliet refuses to marry Paris. What the heck happened to his earlier stance that Juliet should marry for love, when she's ready? Here, Lord Capulet treats his daughter like a piece of property that he can just give away to another man (Paris).
Fate and Free Will Quotes

Quote:

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;
Whole misadventured piteous overthrows
Do 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. (Prologue)

Thought:

In the Prologue, the Chorus (kind of like a narrator) suggests that "fate" will play a huge role in Romeo and Juliet's tragedy. According to the Chorus, Romeo and Juliet are "star-crossed" (as if stars control their destinies) and their love is "mark'd" by "death." The Chorus also suggests that Romeo and Juliet were destined for tragedy the moment they sprang from their parents' "fatal loins" (our emphasis), or from the moment they were born. In other words, we're led to believe that these poor kids don't have a chance.

Quote:

ROMEO
I fear, too early: for my mind misgives
Some consequence yet hanging in the stars
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date
With this night's revels and expire the term
Of a despised life closed in my breast
By some vile forfeit of untimely death.
(1.4.13)

Thought:

Just before Romeo heads over to the Capulet ball, where he falls in love with and meets (in that order) Juliet, he tells us that he has a funny felling – he fears that something "hanging in
the stars” (something destined to happen) will be set in motion that night. Romeo’s premonition seems to be in keeping with what the Chorus tells us in the Prologue (see above quote).

**Quote:**

**JULIET (gesturing towards Romeo)**

*What’s he that follows there, that would not dance?*

**NURSE**

*I know not.*

**JULIET**

*Go ask his name: if he be married. My grave is like to be my wedding bed.*

(1.5.9)

**Thought:**

Juliet foreshadows her own death – her grave does become her wedding bed.

**Quote:**

**ROMEO**

*O, I am fortune’s fool!*  

(3.1.11)

**Thought:**

Immediately after he kills Tybalt in a duel, Romeo declares he is "fortune's fool." This seems to suggest that fate or "fortune" is responsible for Tybalt's death, not Romeo. We can't help but wonder if we (the audience) are meant to agree with Romeo's assessment of the situation. Should we let Romeo off the hook for fighting and killing Tybalt, or should we hold Romeo responsible for his actions?

**Quote:**

**JULIET**

*O think'st thou we shall ever meet again?*

**ROMEO**

*I doubt it not; and all these woes shall serve For sweet discourses in our time to come.*

**JULIET**

*O God, I have an ill-divining soul! Methinks I see thee, now thou art below, As one dead in the bottom of a tomb:*
Either my eyesight fails, or thou look'st pale.
ROMEO
And trust me, love, in my eye so do you:
Dry sorrow drinks our blood. Adieu, adieu!
(3.5.8)

Thought:
When Juliet says she has "an ill-diving soul," she means that she has a premonition of Romeo's death. This, of course, foreshadows how she will see Romeo for the last time: with her in her tomb (5.3). You may have noticed there's a whole lot of foreshadowing in the play, much of it having to do with the lovers' deaths. It seems like all the foreshadowing emphasizes the Prologue's assertion that Romeo and Juliet are "fated" to die, don't you think?

Quote:

JULIET
O fortune, fortune! all men call thee fickle:
If thou art fickle, what dost thou with him.
That is renown'd for faith? Be fickle, fortune;
For then, I hope, thou wilt not keep him long,
But send him back.
(3.5.9)

Thought:
Juliet feels pretty helpless when she says goodbye to her new husband, Romeo, after the couple's one and only night together. (Romeo has been banished from Verona for killing Tybalt and Juliet's not sure she'll ever see him again.) Fortune (or Dame Fortuna, goddess of fortune and fate) is often portrayed as a "fickle" (unpredictable and unreliable) goddess because she could raise men up to great heights or cast them down at any moment with the spin of her wheel (a.k.a. the wheel of fortune). Juliet begs "fortune" to be kind to Romeo and reasons that since Romeo is so "faith[ful]" (as in not fickle or unreliable), then "fickle" fortune should want nothing to do with him.

Quote:

ROMEO
Is it even so? then I defy you, stars!
(5.1.24)

Thought:
When Romeo hears from Balthasar that Juliet is dead (she's not but everyone thinks she is because she drank Friar Laurence's sleepy-time concoction), he declares "I defy you, stars!" Is he suggesting that Juliet's death was fated to happen? If so, how is he going to "defy" the stars, exactly?

Romeo rejects the stars that have decided to separate Juliet and him. He will be with Juliet despite their plans.

Quote:

FRIAR LAURENCE
Who bare my letter, then, to Romeo?
FRIAR JOHN
I could not send it,--here it is again,--
Nor get a messenger to bring it thee,
So fearful were they of infection.
FRIAR LAURENCE
Unhappy fortune!
(5.2.2)

Thought:

Friar Laurence blames "unhappy fortune" for preventing Romeo from receiving a letter explaining that Juliet isn't really dead.

Quote:

ROMEO (to Juliet in the tomb)
I still will stay with thee;
And never from this palace of dim night
Depart again: here, here will I remain
With worms that are thy chamber-maids; O, here
Will I set up my everlasting rest,
And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars
From this world-wearied flesh.
(5.3.6)

Thought:

Misguided Romeo is convinced that he will defy the "stars" by committing suicide. The idea is that fate is responsible for separating the lovers but Romeo is going to one-up the stars by killing himself, which he believes will reunite him with Juliet.
If you're looking for textual evidence that Romeo brings about his own "fate" (by making a decision (of his own free will) to kill himself, then this is the passage for you.

**Quote:**

*FRIAR LAURENCE*

Romeo! O, pale! Who else? what, Paris too?  
And steep'd in blood? Ah, what an unkind hour  
Is guilty of this lamentable chance!  
(5.3.7)

**Thought:**

Friar Laurence blames "chance," not himself, for the deaths of Romeo and Paris.

**Quote:**

*FRIAR LAURENCE*

I hear some noise. Lady, come from that nest  
Of death, contagion, and unnatural sleep:  
A greater power than we can contradict  
Hath thwarted our intents.  
(5.3.8)

**Thought:**

When Juliet awakens and finds Romeo dead, the Friar tells Juliet that a "higher power" – either God or fate – has ruined their plans. Gosh. It seems like the Friar doesn't want to take any responsibility for the part he played in the couple's tragedy. After all, Friar Laurence (a grown man who ought to know better) is the one who came up with the idea for Juliet to drink the sleeping potion that would make everyone think she was dead. He's also the guy who helped facilitate the couple's secret marriage.
Marriage Quotes

Quote:

CAPULET [...] 
My child is yet a stranger in the world;  
She hath not seen the change of fourteen years,  
Let two more summers wither in their pride,  
Ere we may think her ripe to be a bride.  
PARIS  
Younger than she are happy mothers made.  
CAPULET  
And too soon marr'd are those so early made.  
The earth hath swallow'd all my hopes but she,  
She is the hopeful lady of my earth:  
But woo her, gentle Paris, get her heart,  
My will to her consent is but a part;  
An she agree, within her scope of choice  
Lies my consent and fair according voice.  
(1.2.2)

Thought:

When Paris first proposes the idea of marrying 13-year-old Juliet, Lord Capulet says he wants Juliet to marry a man that she loves and would choose for herself. He also says she's too young, although, as we know, the legal age for marriage in Shakespeare's day was 12 for girls and 14 for boys.

While it seems strange to us that Paris would talk to Capulet about marriage without even consulting Juliet (they've never even formally met), marriages were typically brokered between men (a girl's father and her potential husband).

Quote:

LADY CAPULET  
Marry, that 'marry' is the very theme  
I came to talk of. Tell me, daughter Juliet,  
How stands your disposition to be married?  
JULIET  
It is an honour that I dream not of.  
(1.3.4)

Thought:
At the beginning of the play, we learn that young Juliet has never even considered the idea of marriage.

**Quote:**

*Lady Capulet*

> What say you? Can you like the gentleman?

*Juliet*

> I'll look to like, if looking liking move:  
> But no more deep will I endart mine eye  
> Than your consent gives strength to make it fly.  
> (1.3.5)

**Thought:**

When Lady Capulet asks Juliet to think about whether or not she could marry Paris, Juliet promises to obey, although, she pretty much warns her mom not to hold her breath. As we know, when Juliet falls in love with Romeo, she will rebel against her parents' wishes.

**Quote:**

*Juliet*

> If he be married  
> My grave is like to be my wedding bed.  
> (1.5.9)

**Thought:**

Before Juliet even knows Romeo's name, she's head over heels in love and worries that he may already be married to someone else, in which case, she says (rather dramatically) that she'll die. Teenage melodrama aside, Shakespeare is foreshadowing the way Juliet will die shortly after her marriage to Romeo. (She will literally kill herself and she will also have sex with Romeo – to "die," means to have an orgasm in Elizabethan slang.) Check out "Symbols" if you're interested in how Shakespeare links sex and death throughout the play.

**Quote:**

*Juliet*

> Three words, dear Romeo, and good night indeed.  
> If that thy bent of love be honourable,  
> Thy purpose marriage, send me word to-morrow,  
> By one that I'll procure to come to thee,  
> Where and what time thou wilt perform the rite;
And all my fortunes at thy foot I'll lay
And follow thee my lord throughout the world.
(2.2.17)

Thought:

Juliet sure does know what she wants. Here, she basically proposes to Romeo, which was unheard of in Shakespeare’s day. As soon as Juliet knows that she and Romeo love each other, she immediately asks him when they can be married. Love and marriage are inseparable for Juliet.

Quote:

ROMEO

[...]  
I have been feasting with mine enemy,  
Where on a sudden one hath wounded me,  
That's by me wounded: both our remedies  
Within thy help and holy physic lies:  
(2.3.4)

Thought:

When Friar Laurence asks Romeo where he's been, Romeo, who has been hanging out with Juliet, uses a familiar metaphor to describe how he and Juliet fell in love. 16th century lovers were always running around saying things like "Oh, I've been wounded" to describe their passion. (You can learn more about this by going to "Quotes" for "Art and Culture, where we talk about the conventions of love poetry.)

What's interesting about this passage is the way Romeo suggests that marriage is the thing that can heal or "remed[y]"a love "wound." When he says that Friar Laurence (who just so happens to dabble in herbal medicine) can use his "holy physic [medicine]" to heal him, he means that he wants Friar Laurence to perform the marriage ceremony.

Quote:

FRIAR LAURENCE
So smile the heavens upon this holy act,  
That after hours with sorrow chide us not!  
ROMEO
Amen, amen! but come what sorrow can,  
It cannot countervail the exchange of joy  
That one short minute gives me in her sight:
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Do thou but close our hands with holy words,
Then love-devouring death do what he dare;
It is enough I may but call her mine. (2.6.1)

Thought:

Did we mention that Romeo and Juliet are really, really excited about getting hitched? Here, Romeo can hardly contain himself as he declares that he doesn't care what happens to him after he's married to Juliet (even death), so long as he can "call her mine." (Yep, Shakespeare is foreshadowing the young couple's deaths here.)

We think literary critic Stephen Greenblatt says it best when he notes that "Romeo and Juliet's depiction of the frantic haste of the rash lovers blends together humor, irony, poignancy, and disapproval, but Shakespeare conveys above all a deep inward understanding of what it feels like to be young, desperate to wed, and tormented by delay" (Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare, 122).

Quote:

Nurse
Marry, bachelor,
Her mother is the lady of the house,
And a good lady, and a wise and virtuous
I nursed her daughter, that you talk'd withal;
I tell you, he that can lay hold of her
Shall have the chinks. (1.5.2)

Thought:

When Juliet's Nurse says that any man lucky enough to marry Juliet "shall have the chinks," she means that he'll make a lot of money. Juliet's parents have plenty of dough and Juliet, an only child, will have a large dowry. In the 16th century, marriage was often seen as an economic transaction. But, as we soon learn, Romeo and Juliet don't feel this way. Keep reading...

Quote:

JULIET
[…]
They are but beggars that can count their worth;
But my true love is grown to such excess
I cannot sum up some of half my wealth.(2.6.2)
Thought:

When Juliet rushes into Friar Laurence's cell (room) to get hitched to Romeo, she expresses her devotion to Romeo in one the sweetest and most passionate ways possible – by declaring that her love is so great that she "cannot sum up" (express or count) even "half" of her love for Romeo.

It seems like Juliet's use of an economic metaphor (her love=wealth) is Shakespeare's way of drawing our attention to the fact that Romeo and Juliet are NOT marrying for money. While many of the play's characters (the Nurse, the Capulets, Paris) see marriage as a means of securing wealth and status, Romeo and Juliet marry because they're madly in love.

Quote:

FRIAR LAURENCE

Come, come with me, and we will make short work;
For, by your leaves, you shall not stay alone
Till holy church incorporate two in one.
(2.6.4)

Thought:

You might be wondering what Friar Laurence means when he says the church will "incorporate two in one." He's talking about how the marriage of Romeo and Juliet will be performed in and by the "church." He's also referring to the biblical idea that a marriage between a man and woman unites them into "one flesh" (Genesis 2:2). Friar Laurence is also hinting at the way marriage makes sex acceptable in the eyes of God – Romeo and Juliet are really excited about moving on to the honeymoon phase of their relationship.

Quote:

LADY CAPULET

Marry, my child, early next Thursday morn,
The gallant, young and noble gentleman,
The County Paris, at Saint Peter's Church,
Shall happily make thee there a joyful bride.

JULIET

Now, by Saint Peter's Church and Peter too,
He shall not make me there a joyful bride.
I wonder at this haste; that I must wed
Ere he, that should be husband, comes to woo.
I pray you, tell my lord and father, madam,
I will not marry yet; and, when I do, I swear,
It shall be Romeo, whom you know I hate,  
Rather than Paris. These are news indeed!  
(3.5.10)

Thought:

Lady Capulet emphasizes that Paris's good looks and social status make him an appropriate husband. Juliet sees things differently. We also notice that the obedient Juliet we saw at the play's beginning is long gone. Here, she stands up to her mother and father by insisting that she, not them, will choose a husband.

Quote:

CAPULET
How now, how now, chop-logic! What is this?  
'Proud,' and 'I thank you,' and 'I thank you not;'  
And yet 'not proud,' mistress minion, you,  
Thank me no thankings, nor, proud me no prouds,  
But fettle your fine joints 'gainst Thursday next,  
To go with Paris to Saint Peter's Church,  
Or I will drag thee on a hurdle thither.  
Out, you green-sickness carrion! out, you baggage!  
You tallow-face!  
[...]  
Hang thee, young baggage! disobedient wretch!  
I tell thee what: get thee to church o' Thursday,  
Or never after look me in the face:  
Speak not, reply not, do not answer me; (3.5.3)

Thought:

Juliet's father flips out and becomes verbally abusive when Juliet refuses to marry Paris. What the heck happened to his earlier stance that Juliet should marry for love, when she's ready? Here, Lord Capulet treats his daughter like a piece of property that he can just give away to another man (Paris).

Quote:

CAPULET
God's bread! it makes me mad:  
Day, night, hour, tide, time, work, play,  
Alone, in company, still my care hath been  
To have her match'd: and having now provided
A gentleman of noble parentage,
Of fair demesnes, youthful, and nobly train'd,
Stuff'd, as they say, with honourable parts,
Proportion'd as one's thought would wish a man; (3.5.8)

Thought:

Lord Capulet thinks he's doing Juliet a favor by engaging her to Paris, a young and good looking guy from a "noble" family. In other words, he believes he's being a loving father and is taking care of his daughter by ensuring a stable future with Paris.

Quote:

PARIS
Immoderately she weeps for Tybalt's death,
And therefore have I little talk'd of love;
For Venus smiles not in a house of tears.
Now, sir, her father counts it dangerous
That she doth give her sorrow so much sway,
And in his wisdom hastes our marriage,
To stop the inundation of her tears;
Which, too much minded by herself alone,
May be put from her by society:
(4.1.2)

Thought:

Paris say that Lord Capulet sees marriage as a way of distracting Juliet from her grief over Tybalt's death. Is he right?

Quote:

JULIET
God join'd my heart and Romeo's, thou our hands;
And ere this hand, by thee to Romeo seal'd,
Shall be the label to another deed,
Or my true heart with treacherous revolt
Turn to another, this shall slay them both:
(4.1.10)

Thought:

A misguided Juliet tries to justify her suicide (which she thinks will reunite her with her dead
husband) by pointing out that her marriage to Romeo is a holy bond sanctioned by God.
Family Quotes

Quote:

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. (Prologue)

Thought:

In the Prologue, the Chorus tells us that Romeo and Juliet is a play about domestic conflict. "Two households" (that would be the Montagues and the Capulets), "both alike in dignity" (of the same social standing) are going to be involved in a rather messy, and uncivil family feud. Keep reading…

Quote:

[…] From forth the fatal loins of these two foes  
A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;  
Whole misadventured piteous overthrows  
Do 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. (Prologue)

Thought:

As the Chorus continues the Prologue, we also learn that the children of the feuding families will meet and fall in love. Ironically, the love will turn tragic and their deaths will put an end to their "parents' strife."

Quote:

JULIET  
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.  
ROMEO
[Aside] Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?

JULIET
'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 name 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 that name which is no part of thee
Take all myself.

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

JULIET
What man art thou that thus bescreen'd in night
So stumblest on my counsel?

ROMEO
By a name
I know not how to tell thee who I am:
My name, dear saint, is hateful to myself,
Because it is an enemy to thee;
Had I it written, I would tear the word.

Thought:
Juliet struggles with the conflict between her feelings for Romeo and her knowledge that he is an enemy of her family. She tries to separate Romeo from his identity as a Montague, and contemplates deserting her family for him. She does not imagine that their love and their families' opposition can be reconciled.

Reading tip: When Juliet asks "wherefore art thou Romeo," she's not wondering about Romeo's physical location. "Wherefore" means "why" so, Juliet is basically asking why the love of her life has to be Romeo Montague, the son of her family's enemy.

Quote:
How camest thou hither, tell me, and wherefore?
The orchard walls are high and hard to climb,
And the place death, considering who thou art,
If any of my kinsmen find thee here. (2.2.6)

Thought:

When Juliet learns that Romeo has climbed the orchard walls to see her, she worries that her "kinsmen" will break Romeo's legs for sneaking onto the property. Now, we know that this is probably true of Tybalt, Juliet's testosterone-driven cousin who has already threatened to beat up Romeo for showing up at the Capulet ball. But, we wonder if Juliet's dad would be as angry as Juliet seems to think. Earlier, when Tybalt wanted to fight Romeo (1.5.1), Lord Capulet stopped him and pointed out that Romeo is a pretty good kid. In fact, "Verona brags of him / To be a virtuous and well-governed youth" (1.5.6).

Quote:

[…] Pray you, sir, a word:
and as I told you, my young lady bade me inquire you out; what she bade me say, I will keep to myself:
but first let me tell ye, if ye should lead her into a fool's paradise, as they say, it were a very gross kind of behavior, as they say: for the gentlewoman is young; and, therefore, if you should deal double with her, truly it were an ill thing to be offered to any gentlewoman, and very weak dealing. (2.4.11)

Thought:

Because Romeo and Juliet feel as though they can't share their love with their feuding families, they turn to their mentors (Juliet's Nurse and Friar Laurence) for help. Here, the Nurse makes arrangements that help facilitate the young lovers' union. The Nurse seems to be on Juliet's side but, later, when Romeo is banished from Verona, the Nurse callously urges her to forget about and move on.

Quote:

ROMEO
Tybalt, the reason that I have to love thee
Doth much excuse the appertaining rage
To such a greeting: villain am I none;
Therefore farewell; I see thou know'st me not.
TYBALT
Boy, this shall not excuse the injuries
That thou hast done me; therefore turn and draw.

ROMEO
I do protest, I never injured thee,
But love thee better than thou canst devise,
Till thou shalt know the reason of my love:
And so, good Capulet,—which name I tender
As dearly as my own,—be satisfied. (3.1.1)

Thought:

When Tybalt challenges Romeo to a duel, Romeo refuses to fight because he's secretly married to Tybalt's cousin, Juliet. Here, it seems that Romeo's love for his new wife is the most important thing to him. But, after Tybalt kills Romeo's best friend later in the scene, all bets are off.

Quote:

NURSE
Shame come to Romeo!
JULIET
Blister'd be thy tongue
For such a wish! he was not born to shame:
Upon his brow shame is ashamed to sit;
For 'tis a throne where honour may be crown'd
Sole monarch of the universal earth.
O, what a beast was I to chide at him!
NURSE
Will you speak well of him that kill'd your cousin?
JULIET
Shall I speak ill of him that is my husband?
Ah, poor my lord, what tongue shall smooth thy name,
When I, thy three-hours wife, have mangled it?
But, wherefore, villain, didst thou kill my cousin?
That villain cousin would have kill'd my husband:
Back, foolish tears, back to your native spring;
Your tributary drops belong to woe,
Which you, mistaking, offer up to joy.
My husband lives, that Tybalt would have slain;
And Tybalt's dead, that would have slain my husband:
All this is comfort.
(3.2.8)

Thought:
After (initially) rejecting Romeo for killing her cousin, Juliet is caught between her loyalty to her family and her loyalty to her new husband. She eventually chooses Romeo and confesses that she's relieved her husband wasn't killed in the duel. If Romeo hadn't killed Tybalt, Tybalt surely would have killed Romeo.

Quote:

CAPULET
Hang thee, young baggage! disobedient wretch!
I tell thee what: get thee to church o' Thursday,
Or never after look me in the face:
Speak not, reply not, do not answer me;
My fingers itch. Wife, we scarce thought us blest
That God had lent us but this only child;
But now I see this one is one too much,
And that we have a curse in having her:
Out on her, hilding!
(3.5.4)

Thought:

In the 16th century, daughters were expected to be obedient to all of their parents' wishes. When Juliet refuses to marry Paris, Juliet's father is outraged at his daughter's refusal to marry the man of his choosing.

Quote:

CAPULET
God's bread! it makes me mad:
Day, night, hour, tide, time, work, play,
Alone, in company, still my care hath been
To have her match'd: and having now provided
A gentleman of noble parentage,
Of fair demesnes, youthful, and nobly train'd,
Stuff'd, as they say, with honourable parts,
Proportion'd as one's thought would wish a man;
And then to have a wretched puling fool,
A whining mammet, in her fortune's tender,
To answer 'I'll not wed; I cannot love,
I am too young; I pray you, pardon me.'
But, as you will not wed, I'll pardon you:
Graze where you will you shall not house with me:
Look to't, think on't, I do not use to jest.
Thursday is near; lay hand on heart, advise:
An you be mine, I'll give you to my friend;
And you be not, hang, beg, starve, die in
the streets,
For, by my soul, I'll ne'er acknowledge thee,
Nor what is mine shall never do thee good:
Trust to't, bethink you; I'll not be forsworn.
(3.5.8)

Thought:

According to Lord Capulet, obedience to the head of the household is a prerequisite for even remaining part of the family.

Quote:

CAPULET
How now, my headstrong! where have you been gadding?
JULIET
Where I have learn'd me to repent the sin
Of disobedient opposition
To you and your behests, and am enjoin'd
By holy Laurence to fall prostrate here,
And beg your pardon: pardon, I beseech you!
Henceforward I am ever ruled by you.
(4.2.5)

Thought:

Juliet tells her father what he wants to hear: that she will be obedient and do what he wants her to do. She even fibs that she's been off at Friar Laurence's cell, confessing her sins (being a disobedient daughter).
Foolishness and Folly Quotes

Quote:

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
[Aside 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. (1.1.1)

Thought:

Sampson doesn't have a good reason to insult the Montagues' servants – he's basically looking to stir up trouble because his masters (the Capulets) are feuding with the Montagues. The funny thing is, Sampson's too much of a coward to own up to his silly gesture because the "law" won't be on his "side" if his thumb biting causes a big old brawl (he doesn't want to get busted for causing a fracas).

It doesn't get any more ridiculous than this, folks, which seems to be Shakespeare's point. The Capulet/Montague feud, which has obviously trickled down to involve their servants, is completely absurd. Just like Sampson's thumb biting.

Quote:

MERCUTIO
O, then, I see Queen Mab hath been with you.
She is the fairies' midwife, and she comes
In shape no bigger than an agate-stone
On the fore-finger of an alderman,
[…]
This is the hag, when maids lie on their backs,
That presses them and learns them first to bear,
Making them women of good carriage:
This is she--
ROMEO
Peace, peace, Mercutio, peace!
Thou talk'st of nothing.

MERCUTIO
True, I talk of dreams,
Which are the children of an idle brain (1.4.13)

Thought:
Fed up with Romeo's lovesick moping for Rosaline and his claim that he had a steamy "dream" the night before, Mercutio taunts his buddy by saying that Queen Mab must have paid him a visit. (Queen Mab is a tiny fairy that brings dreams to lovers like Romeo and you can read more about her in "Symbols.") Mercutio also informs Romeo that dreams "are the children of an idle brain," which is another way of saying that Romeo is an idiot and his dreams about Rosaline are ridiculous (1.4.12). Given the context of the speech, it seems like Mercutio is suggesting that, like Queen Mab, dreams (especially Romeo's) are small and insignificant.

But Mercutio isn't the only one to point out when his pal is behaving foolishly. Romeo criticizes Mercutio's crazy rant when he yells "Peace, peace, Mercutio, peace! Thou talk'st of nothing."

Quote:

TYBALT
This, by his voice, should be a Montague.
Fetch me my rapier, boy. What dares the slave
Come hither, cover'd with an antic face,
To fleer and scorn at our solemnity?
Now, by the stock and honour of my kin,
To strike him dead, I hold it not a sin.
CAPULET
Why, how now, kinsman! wherefore storm you so? (1.5.1)

Thought:
Tybalt is quite the bully, don't you think? He's also incredibly rash – after spotting Romeo and the Capulet ball, he calls for his sword and is about to pummel Romeo, until Lord Capulet steps in and calms him down, that is.

Quote:

Holy Saint Francis, what a change is here!
Is Rosaline, whom thou didst love so dear,
So soon forsaken? young men's love then lies
Not truly in their hearts, but in their eyes.
Jesu Maria, what a deal of brine  
Hath wash'd thy sallow cheeks for Rosaline!  
How much salt water thrown away in waste,  
To season love, that of it doth not taste!  
The sun not yet thy sighs from heaven clears,  
Thy old groans ring yet in my ancient ears;  
Lo, here upon thy cheek the stain doth sit  
Of an old tear that is not wash'd off yet: (2.3.6)

Thought:

When Romeo bursts into Friar Laurence's chamber and declares his love for Juliet, the Friar points out that Romeo was all hot for Rosaline just the other day and now he says he's into Juliet. The Friar's skeptical attitude toward Romeo's impetuous love seems pretty wise. Yet, this same Friar agrees to help Romeo and Juliet get hitched just a few lines later. What's up with that?

Quote:

ROMEO  
O, let us hence; I stand on sudden haste.  
FRIAR LAURENCE  
Wisely and slow; they stumble that run fast  
(2.3.10)

Thought:

When Romeo wants to rush off to marry Juliet, the Friar warns him to slow down emotionally, as well as physically.

Quote:

FRIAR LAURENCE  
These violent delights have violent ends  
And in their triumph die, like fire and powder,  
Which as they kiss consume: the sweetest honey  
Is loathsome in his own deliciousness  
And in the taste confounds the appetite:  
Therefore love moderately; long love doth so;  
Too swift arrives as tardy as too slow  
(2.6.2)

Thought:
The Friar tries (and fails) to convince Romeo to love more calmly.

Quote:

_Hold thy desperate hand:  
Art thou a man? thy form cries out thou art:  
Thy tears are womanish; thy wild acts denote  
The unreasonable fury of a beast:  
Unseemly woman in a seeming man!  
Or ill-beseeming beast in seeming both!  
Thou hast amazed me: by my holy order,  
I thought thy disposition better temper'd.  
Hast thou slain Tybalt? wilt thou slay thyself?  
And stay thy lady too that lives in thee,  
By doing damned hate upon thyself? (3.3.14)_

Thought:

Here, Friar Laurence and Juliet's Nurse prevent Romeo from committing suicide (because he's afraid Juliet hates him for killing her cousin, Tybalt). The Friar's critique of Romeo's rash and foolish behavior is successful (here anyway), but we're not sure which is more foolish – Romeo's desire to stab himself with his sword or Friar Laurence's insinuation that Romeo's emotions are "womanish" and unmanly.

Quote:

_CAPULET_  
Monday! ha, ha! Well, Wednesday is too soon,  
O' Thursday let it be: o' Thursday, tell her,  
She shall be married to this noble earl.  
Will you be ready? do you like this haste?  
[...]  
_PARIS_  
My lord, I would that Thursday were tomorrow.  
(3.4.3)

Thought:

It's not just the young who are hasty; Juliet's father makes hasty decisions, too. Here, he argues that Juliet and Paris can't be married fast enough.

Quote:
FRIAR LAURENCE
On Thursday, sir? the time is very short.
PARIS
My father Capulet will have it so;
And I am nothing slow to slack his haste.
(4.1.1)

Thought:
Supposedly wiser and calmer than Romeo and Juliet, Lord Capulet and Paris also make a hasty decision that results in tragedy.

Quote:
FRIAR LAURENCE
Saint Francis be my speed! how oft to-night
Have my old feet stumbled at graves!
(5.3.1)

Thought:
Friar Laurence does not moving fast enough to save Romeo and Juliet. Still, despite his slowness, he stumbles (literally and symbolically) as much as those who move with more hast, like Romeo and Juliet.
Exile Quotes

Quote:

LADY CAPULET
I beg for justice, which thou, prince, must give;
Romeo slew Tybalt, Romeo must not live.
PRINCE
Romeo slew him, he slew Mercutio;
Who now the price of his dear blood doth owe?
MONTAGUE
Not Romeo, prince, he was Mercutio's friend;
His fault concludes but what the law should end,
The life of Tybalt.
PRINCE
And for that offence
Immediately we do exile him hence:
I have an interest in your hate's proceeding,
My blood for your rude brawls doth lie a-bleeding;
But I'll amerce you with so strong a fine
That you shall all repent the loss of mine:
I will be deaf to pleading and excuses;
Nor tears nor prayers shall purchase out abuses:
Therefore use none: let Romeo hence in haste,
Else, when he's found, that hour is his last.
Bear hence this body and attend our will:
Mercy but murders, pardoning those that kill. (3.1.1)

Thought:

After listening to the Capulets and Montagues bicker about whether or not Romeo should be punished for killing Tybalt in a duel, the Prince decides that Romeo should be "exile[d]" instead of put to death (ostensibly because Tybalt killed Mercutio before Romeo killed Tybalt). We also learn here that, if Romeo is caught within the city walls, he'll be killed. Questions: Do you think the Prince's punishment is fair? Does the Prince's own sense of loss over his dead kinsman (Mercutio is the prince's cousin) influence his judgment?

Quote:

JULIET
What storm is this that blows so contrary?
Is Romeo slaughter'd, and is Tybalt dead?
My dear-loved cousin, and my dearer lord?
Then, dreadful trumpet, sound the general doom!
For who is living, if those two are gone?
Nurse
Tybalt is gone, and Romeo banished;
Romeo that kill’d him, he is banished.
JULIET
O God! did Romeo's hand shed Tybalt's blood?
Nurse
It did, it did; alas the day, it did!
JULIET
O serpent heart, hid with a flowering face!
Did ever dragon keep so fair a cave?
Beautiful tyrant! fiend angelical!
Dove-feather'd raven! wolvish-ravening lamb!
Despised substance of divinest show!
Just opposite to what thou justly seem'st,
A damned saint, an honourable villain!
O nature, what hadst thou to do in hell,
When thou didst bower the spirit of a fiend
In moral paradise of such sweet flesh?
Was ever book containing such vile matter
So fairly bound? O that deceit should dwell
In such a gorgeous palace! (3.2.8)

Thought:

Juliet's initial response to the news that Romeo has been banished for killing Tybalt (Juliet's cousin) is pretty intense, don't you think? Clearly, Juliet is experiencing some mixed emotions – she wonders how the love of her life, the guy she thought was so wonderful, could be a killer. On the one hand, she seems to recoil in disgust at Romeo's heinous act. Yet, at the same time, it's also pretty clear that Juliet still adores Romeo. Her use of oxymoron here gives expression to her turmoil. An "oxymoron," by the way, is the combination of two terms ordinarily seen as opposites. As in, Romeo is a "beautiful tyrant," a "fiend angelical," a "dove-feather'd raven," wolvish-ravening lamb," a "damned saint," and an "honourable villain."

There are also some great examples of paradox in this passage. A "paradox" is a statement that contradicts itself and nonetheless seems true. Example: Juliet asks "Was ever a book containing such vile matter so fairly bound?" We know what you're wondering – how the heck do you tell the difference between an "oxymoron" and a "paradox"? Well, a paradox is different from an oxymoron because it contains contradictory words that are separated by one or more intervening words.

Quote:
Nurse
There's no trust,
No faith, no honesty in men; all perjured,
All forsworn, all naught, all dissemblers.
Ah, where's my man? give me some aqua vitae:
These griefs, these woes, these sorrows make me old.
Shame come to Romeo!
JULIET
Blister'd be thy tongue
For such a wish! he was not born to shame:
Upon his brow shame is ashamed to sit;
For 'tis a throne where honour may be crown'd
Sole monarch of the universal earth.
O, what a beast was I to chide at him!
Nurse
Will you speak well of him that kill'd your cousin?
JULIET
Shall I speak ill of him that is my husband?
Ah, poor my lord, what tongue shall smooth thy name,
When I, thy three-hours wife, have mangled it?
But, wherefore, villain, didst thou kill my cousin?
That villain cousin would have kill'd my husband:
Back, foolish tears, back to your native spring;
Your tributary drops belong to woe,
Which you, mistaking, offer up to joy.
My husband lives, that Tybalt would have slain;
And Tybalt's dead, that would have slain my husband:
All this is comfort; wherefore weep I then?
Some word there was, worser than Tybalt's death,
That murder'd me: I would forget it fain;
But, O, it presses to my memory,
Like damned guilty deeds to sinners' minds:
'Tybalt is dead, and Romeo--banished,'
That 'banished,' that one word 'banished,'
Hath slain ten thousand Tybalts. (3.2.8)

Thought:

Juliet's anger at Romeo and horror over Tybalt's death (see previous passage) quickly turns to horror over Romeo's banishment. Juliet feels guilty about "mangl[ing]" Romeo's name (speaking ill of him) and she's also not too pleased with the Nurse, who criticizes her new husband. What interests us most about this passage, however, is the way Juliet says that Romeo's exile from Verona is "ten thousand" times worse than her cousin's death. She also
suggests that, if she had heard "some word" that Romeo had been killed, it would have "murder'd" her.

Quote:

'Romeo is banished,' to speak that word,
Is father, mother, Tybalt, Romeo, Juliet,
All slain, all dead. 'Romeo is banished!'
There is no end, no limit, measure, bound,
In that word's death; no words can that woe sound.
Where is my father, and my mother, nurse? (3.2.10)

Thought:

This passage tells us that Romeo has become Juliet's entire world. His banishment, according to Juliet, is tantamount to her entire family ("father, mother, Tybalt, Romeo, Juliet") being "slain." For Juliet, Romeo's exile is synonymous with death. Okay, so we know how Juliet feels about Romeo's punishment for killing Tybalt, but how does Romeo feel about being banished from the city? Keep reading...

Quote:

ROMEO
What less than dooms-day is the prince's doom?
FRIAR LAURENCE
A gentler judgment vanish'd from his lips,
Not body's death, but body's banishment.
ROMEO
Ha, banishment! be merciful, say 'death,'
For exile hath more terror in his look,
Much more than death: do not say 'banishment.'
FRIAR LAURENCE
Hence from Verona art thou banished:
Be patient, for the world is broad and wide.
ROMEO
There is no world without Verona walls,
But purgatory, torture, hell itself.
Hence-banished is banish'd from the world,
And world's exile is death: then banished,
Is death mis-term'd: calling death banishment,
Thou cutt'st my head off with a golden axe,
And smilest upon the stroke that murders me.
(3.3.3)
Thought:

Romeo's reaction to the news that he's been exiled (per the Prince's orders) from Verona is similar to Juliet's response (see passage above). Romeo says "there is no world without [outside] Verona's walls" because Juliet, his entire world, is inside the walls of Verona. While the Friar sees Romeo's exile as a good thing (he's glad Romeo hasn't been sentenced to be executed), banishment, for Romeo, is tantamount to death.

Quote:

FRIAR LAURENCE
O deadly sin! O rude unthankfulness!
Thy fault our law calls death; but the kind prince,
Taking thy part, hath rush'd aside the law,
And turn'd that black word death to banishment:
This is dear mercy, and thou seest it not.
ROMEO
'Tis torture, and not mercy: heaven is here,
Where Juliet lives; and every cat and dog
And little mouse, every unworthy thing,
Live here in heaven and may look on her;
But Romeo may not: more validity,
More honourable state, more courtship lives
In carrion-flies than Romeo: they my seize
On the white wonder of dear Juliet's hand
And steal immortal blessing from her lips,
Who even in pure and vestal modesty,
Still blush, as thinking their own kisses sin;
But Romeo may not; he is banished:
Flies may do this, but I from this must fly:
They are free men, but I am banished.
And say'st thou yet that exile is not death?
Hadst thou no poison mix'd, no sharp-ground knife,
No sudden mean of death, though ne'er so mean,
But 'banished' to kill me?--"banished"?
O friar, the damned use that word in hell;
Howlings attend it: how hast thou the heart,
Being a divine, a ghostly confessor,
A sin-absolver, and my friend profess'd,
To mangle me with that word 'banished'?
(3.3.5)

Thought:
Friar Laurence says that Romeo is an ingrate for not appreciating the fact that he's been exiled, not executed. But, as we know, Romeo and Juliet equate Romeo's banishment with death. Romeo accuses the old Friar of not being able to understand the implications of his forced separation from Juliet. Like Juliet's old Nurse (see 3.5.24 below) the Friar can't see things from the younger generation's perspective. (Psst. Check out the theme of "Youth" if you want to think about this generation gap some more.)

Quote:

ROMEO
This gentleman, the prince's near ally,
My very friend, hath got his mortal hurt
In my behalf; my reputation stain'd
With Tybalt's slander;--Tybalt, that an hour
Hath been my kinsman! O sweet Juliet,
Thy beauty hath made me effeminate
And in my temper soften'd valour's steel! (3.1.7)

Thought:

In previous passages, we've seen that Romeo feels like his banishment is equal to death because it means he can't be with Juliet. Here, we want to back up and take a look at the scene where Romeo decides to fight Tybalt, which results in Tybalt's death. Clearly, Romeo is upset that Tybalt has killed his best friend, Mercutio. He also feels as though his love for Juliet is the cause of Mercutio's death. Romeo thinks Juliet has made him "effeminate" (a girly wimp), which has prevented him from putting an end to Tybalt's aggressiveness. So, it seems that Romeo wasn't exactly worried about being separated from Juliet when he decided to kill Tybalt. After all, Romeo knew what would happen if he got into a fight. Just a few lines earlier, he issued this warning: "Tybalt, Mercutio, the prince expressly hath/ Forbidden bandying in Verona streets" (3.1.4).

Quote:

CAPULET
But, as you will not wed, I'll pardon you:
Graze where you will you shall not house with me:
Look to't, think on't, I do not use to jest.
Thursday is near; lay hand on heart, advise:
An you be mine, I'll give you to my friend;
And you be not, hang, beg, starve, die in the streets,
For, by my soul, I'll ne'er acknowledge thee,
Nor what is mine shall never do thee good:
Trust to't, bethink you; I'll not be forsworn. (3.5.8)

Thought:

Juliet's refusal to marry Paris has some disastrous consequences. Her father becomes enraged here and threatens to banish her from her family and home if she doesn't obey his orders.

Quote:

JULIET
O God!--O nurse, how shall this be prevented?
My husband is on earth, my faith in heaven;
How shall that faith return again to earth,
Unless that husband send it me from heaven
By leaving earth? comfort me, counsel me.
Alack, alack, that heaven should practise stratagems
Upon so soft a subject as myself!
What say'st thou? hast thou not a word of joy?
Some comfort, nurse.

Nurse
Faith, here it is.
Romeo is banish'd; and all the world to nothing,
That he dares ne'er come back to challenge you;
Or, if he do, it needs must be by stealth.
Then, since the case so stands as now it doth,
I think it best you married with the county.
O, he's a lovely gentleman!
Romeo's a dishclout to him: an eagle, madam,
Hath not so green, so quick, so fair an eye
As Paris hath. Beshrew my very heart,
I think you are happy in this second match,
For it excels your first: or if it did not,
Your first is dead; or 'twere as good he were,
As living here and you no use of him. (3.5.24)

Thought:

After her parents threaten to turn her out on the streets for refusing to marry Paris, Juliet turns to her Nurse for guidance. The Nurse's advice to Juliet (who is already married to and in love with Romeo) is pretty callous — she recommends that Juliet forget about Romeo, who has been banished from Verona, and go ahead with a marriage to Paris. After all, the Nurse reasons, Romeo can't exactly come back to Verona to challenge the wedding. But, Juliet, as we know,
has no intention of getting hitched to Paris.

**Quote:**

**FRIAR LAURENCE**

_i will be brief, for my short date of breath_

Is not so long as is a tedious tale.

_Romeo, there dead, was husband to that Juliet;
And she, there dead, that Romeo's faithful wife:_

_I married them; and their stol'n marriage-day_

_Was Tybalt's dooms-day, whose untimely death_

_Banish'd the new-made bridegroom from the city,_

_For whom, and not for Tybalt, Juliet pined._

[Speaking to Lord Capulet] You, to remove that siege of grief from her,

_Betroth'd and would have married her perforce_

_To County Paris: then comes she to me,_

_And, with wild looks, bid me devise some mean_

_To rid her from this second marriage,_

_Or in my cell there would she kill herself._

_Then gave I her, so tutor'd by my art,_

_A sleeping potion; which so took effect_

_As I intended, for it wrought on her_

_The form of death: (5.3.10)_

**Thought:**

When the Prince arrives at the Capulet family tomb, where Romeo and Juliet have just taken their lives, he demands that Friar Laurence explain what happened. What, according to the Friar's long speech, is the cause of the young lovers' deaths? What role does Romeo's banishment play in the tragedy?
Characters

Character Roles (Protagonist, Antagonist...)

Protagonist

Romeo

Romeo's name is in the title, a pretty good hint that he's important. His name is also the final word in the play. So it's definitely arguable that the play is the story of Romeo's relationship with Juliet.

Juliet

Some scholars and directors like to argue that the play is really all about Juliet. Romeo's around, true, but it's Juliet who undergoes the most dramatic transformation. She starts the play as a little girl and ends as a woman, and the audience gets to see her change every step of the way. After the opening scenes, Juliet also gets some of the play's best lines. And she's the one most often soliloquizing all alone in front of the audience – something done, in most Shakespeare plays, primarily by the protagonist. If you want to get down to it, some people think that Romeo is cute but kind of annoying, and that the real dramatic strength and sophistication of the play is in Juliet's character. After all, the Prince ends the play with the lines, "For never was there story of more woe / than that of Juliet, and her Romeo." So, the story is either about Juliet or Shakespeare just wrote that line for the snazzy poetic meter and the rhyme scheme...

Antagonist

It's not just one person.

Plenty of people are responsible for Romeo and Juliet's path towards tragedy – in fact, pretty much the entire community contributes in some way or another, from the Prince to Mercutio to Juliet's parents to even the Friar and the Nurse. But fate – or simply bad luck – also gets in the couple's way. They are "star-crossed lovers," after all.

Guide/Mentor

Friar Laurence

Friar Laurence counsels, and fails to calm down, both Romeo and Juliet at different points in
the play. He clearly cares about both of the lovers. But his role is complicated: his choices lead to Romeo and Juliet's deaths. No matter how many times he warns Romeo not to be too hasty, Friar Laurence fails to take into account just how hastily Romeo might respond to the news of Juliet's death. This is not his only big mistake. Even more disturbing, Friar Laurence runs out on Juliet at the end of the play when she refuses to leave Romeo's side. In his haste not to get caught with the mess he's just made, he abandons Juliet at the moment when she needs him most.

Guide/Mentor

The Nurse

The Nurse is Juliet's mentor, and she is one of the people who help facilitate Juliet's marriage to Romeo. As a mother figure, the Nurse also tells Juliet dirty jokes and shows her the path to sexuality. But as Juliet grows into a woman over the course of the play, the Nurse's guidance becomes more and more inadequate. By the end of the play, she betrays Juliet completely when she tells her to forget Romeo and marry Paris. Juliet rejects her as a counselor and is left painfully alone. The Nurse's ultimate failure as a mentor helps lead to the play's final tragedy.

Foil

Rosaline to Juliet

It's not Juliet that Romeo loves at the start of the play—it's Rosaline. This makes Rosaline an obvious foil for Juliet, so that Romeo's relationship to Juliet (the way he describes her and acts towards her) can be contrasted with his puppy love for Rosaline.

Rosaline has no lines in the play and never appears on stage (according to the stage directions) but we hear a lot about her, specifically, how much Romeo loves her and how she doesn't love him back. In fact, Rosaline has made a pledge to remain "chaste" (1.1.13). This makes her a good foil for Juliet, who is an individual in her own right and has a lot to say. She's also very responsive to Romeo's passion and she makes no apologies for her sexual desire. Over the years, directors have made some interesting choices in casting the roles of Rosaline and Juliet to play up the differences between the two women. In Zeffirelli's 1968 film adaptation of Romeo and Juliet, Rosaline is lovely but she's also very stiff and at least a decade older than Romeo. Zeffirelli's Juliet, in contrast, is a young, lively, mischievous beauty who can't keep her hands off of Romeo.

Foil

Paris to Romeo

Juliet is originally supposed to marry Paris, and whatever Romeo's faults may be, Paris serves as a foil to make Romeo look pretty good. It's hard to question Juliet's judgment in preferring
Romeo to Paris. After all, Paris is always "convention" personified. He asks for Juliet's hand in marriage because he is friends with her father and because she's from a respected family with money. Paris's behavior at the end – putting flowers on Juliet's grave like a conventional grieving lover – is totally consistent with his attitude toward Juliet throughout the play. Although Romeo has a few moments where he acts like a cliché lover, his desire for Juliet is authentic and passionate and he falls for Juliet before he even knows that she's a Capulet.

Director Baz Luhrmann goes out of his way to play up the differences between Paris and Romeo in his 1996 film, *Romeo + Juliet*. In the film, Paris (played by Paul Rudd) is the cheesy and buffoonish suitor that acts as a foil to the earnest and passionate Romeo (played by Leonardo DiCaprio.) Check out Paul Rudd ham it up as Paris in this clip of the costume ball scene. FYI: In the play's script (the thing you read in class) Paris never actually shows up at the ball, even though Juliet's mom tells her daughter she should check him out at the party.
Tools of Characterization

Actions

Paris goes to Juliet's father when he decides he wants to marry her, which shows he's not very passionate and pretty conventional. Romeo, in contrast, goes right to Juliet herself; he stands beneath her balcony and convinces her to love him (not that she needs any convincing). Then, when Juliet dies, Paris goes to her grave to scatter flowers and cry. In contrast, Romeo goes to her grave to commit suicide because he can't live without her.

Habits

Paris seems to hang out a lot with Juliet's father, and he never gets into trouble fighting on the streets. This makes him seem boring in contrast to Romeo, who hangs out with a posse of rowdy friends who are always getting into huge public brawls.

Sex and Love

Paris asks politely to marry Juliet but never really explains why. He assumes that Juliet must be in love with him. Romeo can't stop gushing about Juliet's many perfections, but he's nervous and never assumes that Juliet loves him until she tells him so. Paris kisses Juliet only once, in front of the Friar, and then he gives her only a "holy kiss," probably on her cheek. Romeo kisses Juliet within a minute of meeting her. Paris never has sex with Juliet; Romeo does.

Speech and Dialogue

Speech Content

It's all in the language. Contrast Paris and Romeo's reactions at Juliet's tomb, as scholar Marjorie Garber does, and it's painfully obvious that Paris is lacking in passion. "The obsequies that I for thee will keep / Nightly shall be to strew thy grave and weep," he says (5.3.2). It's like a nursery rhyme, and about as romantic. Romeo, in contrast, is furious over Juliet's death, and eloquent in his fury. "The time and my intents are savage-wild / More fierce and more inexorable far / Than empty tigers or the roaring sea," he says (5.3.1). There's just no competition. Romeo has all the good lines; nothing Paris says is remotely memorable.

Blank Verse

Many of Romeo and Juliet's most romantic lines are spoken in "blank verse," which, ironically, is not blank so much as very structured: 10 syllables, 5 beats, with the emphasis falling on
every second syllable. (It's called iambic pentameter.) As Juliet says, “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.” Of course, actors reading these lines shouldn't talk in a singsong voice. But the rhythm underlies what they're saying and makes it more poetic. It also means that Romeo and Juliet can literally finish each other's lines, which shows how in tune they are with each other. You can tell when characters are speaking in blank verse because the lines on the page will often be in a long skinny column (one line = 10 syllables). Prose is in normal paragraphs that go all across the page.

Prose

Not everyone in the play speaks in blank verse, which is the elegant, high-class way of talking. People lower on the social scale – like the Montague and Capulet servants who open the play – don't talk in a special poetic rhythm. They just talk. Contrast some of the Nurse's speeches or Mercutio's dirty jokes – normal language – with the passages of Romeo and Juliet's romantic blank verse.
Romeo

Romeo is the young son of the affluent Montague family. He lusts after the unavailable, but oh-so gorgeous Rosaline until he sets eyes on Juliet Capulet (the only daughter of his family's arch enemies) and falls in love at first sight.

Romeo as a Petrarchan Lover

If you find yourself occasionally annoyed by Romeo, you’re in good company. You can’t spell "Romeo" without "emo" (he’s so emotional and angsty), and that drives some people crazy. His over-the-top infatuation with Rosaline at the beginning of the play, immediately followed by his… completely forgetting about Rosaline, can make Romeo seem shallow and foolish.

The thing to know is that Shakespeare makes lovesick Romeo (the Romeo that crushes on Rosaline anyway) shallow and foolish on purpose. In fact, at the beginning of the play, his character is made to resemble a typical "Petrarchan lover," which had become a cliché by the time Shakespeare wrote Romeo and Juliet (around 1595). Petrarch, by the way, was a fourteenth-century Italian poet whose sonnets were all the rage in Renaissance England. Petrarch's love poetry features "Laura," a figure who was as unavailable and unattainable as Rosaline. So, a “Petrarchan lover” is the kind of guy who mopes around sighing dramatically, moaning about the fact that his crush wants nothing to do with him, and reciting cheesy poetry about some angelic girl who's got eyes like stars, lips like luscious cherries, and who fills men with icy-fire (passion). It's no wonder that the name "Romeo" has become synonymous with the term "male lover."

Rosaline Schmazaline: Romeo Meets Juliet

So, Romeo may seem pretty annoying, that is, until you remember the last time you switched women (or men) like pairs of shoes. Then you remember that he isn't so much shallow as he is a person. A teenage person, to be more specific. That sort of gets us liking him again, especially when he meets Juliet and begins to figure out what true love is really all about. Even though Romeo breaks out a conventional pick-up line when he first chats it up with Juliet (he basically says that hooking up with Juliet would be a holy experience), it seems like his love for Juliet is pretty genuine. (We should note that some skeptics think the only difference between Romeo's desire for Rosaline and his passion for Juliet is the fact that Juliet, unlike Rosaline, loves Romeo back. What do you think?)

Does Romeo Evolve or Grow as a Character?

But, does Romeo's seemingly more authentic love for Juliet mean that Romeo evolves and matures as a character over the course of the play? On the one hand, we could say that yes, Romeo's puppy love for Rosaline gives way to a more grown up relationship with Juliet. On the other hand, we could say that Romeo doesn't really change all that much –
he's rash and impetuous throughout the entire play, whether he's trespassing on Capulet property to see Rosaline, running off to elope with Juliet, or chugging a vial of poison when he mistakenly believes Juliet is dead. To be fair, Romeo does show restraint when Tybalt challenges him, which is a big deal, since Romeo damages his reputation when he refuses to fight. But, Romeo winds up killing Tybalt after Mercutio is murdered and he follows up this act of murder, by the way, with a bout of hysterics on the floor of Friar Laurence's cell (room).

Some critics argue that Juliet deserves someone better than Romeo. According to Shakespeare scholar Harold Bloom, Romeo can't quite keep up with Juliet. But never mind the literary critics. What do you think about Romeo?

A Lover, Not a Fighter?

We just made a really big deal about how Romeo may be acting a teensy bit rash when he kills Tybalt in Act 3, Scene 1. But, now we want to switch gears a bit and argue that, for the most part, Romeo's a lover, not a fighter. Let's recap a bit. When the Capulet and Montague servants start a big brawl in the opening scene, Shakespeare goes out of his way to let us know that Romeo is NOT out on the streets of Verona like all the other young men. In fact, his mom asks, "O, where is Romeo? Saw you him to-day? / Right glad I am he was not at this fray" (1.1.2). Romeo, as it turns out, has been off doing what Romeo does best…daydreaming about a girl. It seems that love has a whole lot to do with Romeo's disinterest in fighting.

Later, when Tybalt wants to rumble (because Romeo crashed the Capulet party earlier), Romeo flat out refuses to fight because he doesn't want to hurt his new wife, who happens to be related to Tybalt (3.1).

So why does Romeo kill Tybalt? Excellent question. We're glad you asked. First, Tybalt kills Romeo's BFF, Mercutio, and Romeo feels responsible. Plus, Tybalt comes back to gloat about it. (Does this mean Romeo's friendship with Mercutio is more important to him than his marriage to Juliet? What do you think? If your answer is "yes," then you should also know that Romeo wouldn't be the only Shakespeare character to prioritize bromance over marriage. Think about Antonio and Bassanio in The Merchant of Venice, for example.) Second, and perhaps more importantly, Romeo is feeling pretty ashamed that he didn't fight Tybalt earlier and he blames it all on his love for Juliet:

_O sweet Juliet,
Thy beauty hath made me effeminate
And in my temper soften'd valour's steel!_ (3.1.7)

Translation: Romeo thinks that loving Juliet has made him into a "soften'd" wimp. Turns out, many Elizabethans believed that love (between a man and a woman, that is) could turn a man into a wimp. The same idea appears in plays like _Henry IV Part 1_, where Hotspur refuses to have sex with his wife before heading into battle because he doesn't want to be
"soft" on the battlefield.

The point we're trying to make about Romeo's relationship to violence is this: the pressure to be a "man" (which involves a lot of sword fighting in this play) eventually gets to Romeo and he caves in to the idea that masculinity and violence go hand in hand. And, we all know that when Romeo kills Tybalt his actions have some major consequences – Romeo is banned from Verona, which leads to him to seek out some pretty bad advice and guidance from Friar Laurence, which basically leads to the deaths of both Romeo and Juliet. So, we're thinking that social pressure plays a huge part in Romeo's tragedy.

Romeo Timeline

- 1.1: Romeo is moping around and philosophizing about love and hate because he's infatuated with this girl Rosaline and she's not interested in him.
- Benvolio, his cousin and friend, tries to convince him to find somebody else. Romeo says that's impossible: there's no woman more beautiful than Rosaline in the whole world.
- 1.2: Romeo and Benvolio decide to crash a Capulet party after they find out Rosaline will be there.
- 1.4: Romeo, Mercutio and Benvolio tease each other as they head towards the party. Romeo has a weird premonition of death, but ignores it.
- 1.5: At the party, Romeo sees Juliet from across the room and forgets all about Rosaline. "O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!" he says. Romeo approaches Juliet and they have an instant connection. Banter turns to kissing. Afterwards, Romeo finds out that the girl he's been smooching is a Capulet.
- 2.1: Unable to tear himself away from Juliet's home, Romeo ditches his friends and hangs out in the orchard behind the Capulet house.
- 2.2: Romeo sees Juliet on her balcony and hears her confess her love for him. He reveals himself and swears his love for her. Juliet asks if he wants to marry her, and the two of them plan to arrange a wedding right away.
- 2.3: Romeo heads straight from the Capulet's house to the home of his mentor and favorite priest, Friar Laurence. He asks Friar Laurence to secretly marry him and Juliet. The Friar agrees.
- 2.4: Romeo meets up with Benvolio and Mercutio. Juliet's nurse arrives on scene and Romeo tells her the plan: Friar Laurence has agreed to marry Romeo and Juliet that afternoon.
- 2.6: Romeo and Juliet meet at Friar Laurence's cell and get married.
- 3.1: Later that day Tybalt insults Romeo. Romeo responds calmly and refuses to fight his wife's cousin. Mercutio, furious at Romeo's seeming cowardice, decides to fight Tybalt instead. In trying to stop Mercutio and Tybalt from fighting, Romeo gets in Mercutio's way and Tybalt takes advantage of the moment to wound Mercutio. Mercutio dies blaming
Romeo and Juliet

Romeo for interfering in the fight. To avenge his friend's death, Romeo fights and kills Tybalt. Then he flees.

- **3.3:** Romeo hides himself in Friar Laurence's cell. The Friar tells him the news: the Prince has ordered that Romeo be banished from Verona as punishment for killing Tybalt. Romeo tells the Friar that banishment is worse than death. When the Nurse arrives, Romeo threatens to kill himself for causing Juliet so much pain. The Friar and the Nurse convince Romeo to calm down and tell him he will be able to see Juliet that night.
- **3.5:** After spending the night with Juliet, Romeo says good-bye to her and sneaks out of her house. Banished from Verona, he heads to the nearby city of Mantua.
- **5.1:** In Mantua, Romeo waits for news from Verona. Balthasar tells him that Juliet is dead. Romeo immediately decides to commit suicide. He goes to an apothecary and forces him to sell illegal poison. Then he heads back to Verona so he can die next to Juliet's body.
- **5.3:** Paris tries to stop Romeo from entering Juliet's tomb, so Romeo kills him. Romeo embraces Juliet's dead body, drinks the poison, and dies giving her a final kiss.

**Juliet**

Juliet is the beautiful (and only) daughter of the Capulets. In the play, she falls in love with Romeo Montague, the son of her family's mortal enemies.

**More Than Just a Pretty Face**

Juliet is much more than just a pretty face. She's smart, witty, and determined. She knows what she wants, and she gets it. It's Juliet, after all, who proposes to Romeo, not the other way around: "If that thy bent of love be honourable, / Thy purpose marriage, send me word tomorrow," she says (2.2.17). Some literary critics argue that Juliet alone is the play's real protagonist: she is the one who speaks to the audience most frequently (often a good indicator of who is important in a Shakespeare play) and her character undergoes the greatest evolution during the course of the play. She also gets to speak some of Shakespeare's most poetically beautiful lines.

**Juliet's Maturation**

Juliet matures over the course of the play. She begins as a naïve girl who's dependent on her family and ends up a woman willing to desert that family to be with the man she loves. Where does this maturation takes place? We see something going on when Juliet meets Romeo. Every time Juliet comes onstage after this transformative scene, her love continues to change and deepen. Let's look at the balcony scene. The Juliet who sighs at the beginning of the balcony scene that Romeo would be perfect if only he weren't a Montague (2.2.2) is not the same Juliet who tells Romeo, wonderingly, "My bounty is as boundless as the sea / My love as deep. The more I give to you / the more I have, for both are infinite" (2.2.16).
The most intense moments of Juliet's transformation take place in the course of a single scene: Act 3, Scene 2, where Juliet completes years' worth of maturation in a matter of a few minutes – by the end of the scene, Juliet has become a woman. Check out this excerpt from her show stopping monologue, which opens the scene:

*Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds,*  
*Towards Phoebus' lodging: such a wagoner*  
*As Phaethon would whip you to the west,*  
*And bring in cloudy night immediately.*  
*Spread thy close curtain, love-performing night,*  
*That runaway's eyes may wink and Romeo*  
*Leap to these arms, untalk'd of and unseen.*  
*Lovers can see to do their amorous rites*  
*By their own beauties; (3.2.1)*

Juliet's impatience for the night to come and for Romeo to arrive shifts into excitement and apprehension as she anticipates being intimate with her husband. She is both joyous and jittery but never apologetic about her sexual desire for her husband. (In this way, she reminds us of the decidedly *un*bashful Desdemona, in Shakespeare's play *Othello.*) When the Nurse breaks the hopeful mood of the scene with the news that Romeo has killed Tybalt, Juliet's first reaction is to grieve over her cousin and reject Romeo as just another heartless Montague. But Juliet has just married Romeo, and she takes her wedding vows seriously. In a single monologue (3.2.10), Juliet decides to choose loyalty to her new husband over love of her family. Then she has to struggle with the realization that the man she loves has been banished, and that the life she expected to lead with him will no longer be possible.

The point we're trying to make is this: Juliet is faced with hard, *adult* choices, and she doesn't flinch. When she asks the Nurse to find Romeo for her, she faces the facts: Romeo is coming to take his "last farewell," and she may never see him again (3.2.12). It's an interesting way of portraying a rite of passage. It's often assumed (especially in literature) that girls become women the first time they have an intimate experience. But Juliet seems to become a woman before she has matures sexually.

**Juliet's Vulnerability**

It's also important to realize that Juliet's path to suicide is different than Romeo's. Romeo has been banished from his home city, but he still has contact with his family and friends. Juliet, on the other hand, has been systematically stripped of the support of everyone around her. She has to undergo a brutal series of scenes that take her from saying good-bye to Romeo after their wedding night, to the news that she is supposed to marry Paris, to her father's rage when she refuses, to a meeting with Paris himself. Some might claim that Juliet has little choice *other* than suicide. Her father threatens to throw her out of the
house onto the streets if she doesn't marry Paris. Her mother nearly disowns her. Even the Nurse turns against her. Juliet, for all the emotional maturity she gained throughout the play, is still incredibly sheltered. As far as we can tell, she hasn't really been anywhere besides her home and Friar Laurence's. She has no idea how to survive in the outside world, especially in the Elizabethan world where women couldn't really function without husbands and fathers, unless they were prostitutes. AND, in case you forgot, she's thirteen years old.

Juliet Timeline

- 1.2: Thirteen-year-old Juliet speaks only a few lines in her first scene; she is overpowered by both her mother and her nurse. Lady Capulet announces a possible arranged marriage between Juliet and Paris. Juliet responds uncertainly to the idea of love and marriage.
- 1.3: Juliet's mother announces that Paris, one of Verona's most-eligible bachelors, wants to marry her. Juliet promises to talk to him at the party her parents are holding that night.
- 1.5: Juliet is enjoying the party when Romeo approaches her. It's love at first sight, and Romeo gives Juliet her first kiss. Juliet is called away before she can ask Romeo's name, but she has her nurse find out his identity before the party ends. Only then does she realize the guy she's fallen for is a Montague.
- 2.2: Juliet is out on her balcony talking to herself about Romeo when he suddenly appears below her. Surprised and embarrassed at first, she soon confesses her love and asks if Romeo is willing to marry her.
- 2.5: Juliet waits impatiently for the Nurse to return with Romeo's message. The Nurse teases her and refuses to reveal what Romeo said about their wedding. Juliet sweetens up the Nurse with a backrub and gets the information she's been waiting for: Friar Laurence has agreed to marry them that very day.
- 2.6: Romeo and Juliet meet at Friar Laurence's cell and get married.
- 3.2: Juliet is excitedly awaiting her wedding night when the Nurse enters with bad news. Romeo has killed Tybalt, and been banished from Verona as punishment. At first, Juliet is furious at Romeo for slaughtering her cousin. But then she realizes she is glad that Romeo won the duel and lived. But Juliet cannot cope with the knowledge that Romeo is banished. To her, his banishment is worse than death. The Nurse promises to find Romeo to comfort her.
- 3.5: Romeo and Juliet have one night together, but as soon as morning comes, Romeo has to leave for Mantua. Juliet tries to delay his departure as long as possible, but she knows that it is dangerous for him to stay. As soon as Romeo has left, her mother comes in and announces that she will be marrying Paris later that week. When Juliet refuses to marry Paris, her father tells her that he will disown her and throw her out of the house if she doesn't obey him. Juliet's mother ignores her pleas for help. The Nurse tells Juliet that, given her situation, she should forget about Romeo and marry Paris. Abandoned by her family and betrayed by her Nurse, Juliet has only one person left who can help her:
Friar Laurence.

- 4.1: Juliet finds Paris at Friar Laurence’s cell and has to endure listening to him talk about their wedding. Once Paris leaves, Juliet threatens to stab herself if the Friar can’t find a way for her to avoid marrying Paris. The Friar gives her a potion that will make her appear as if she is dead, and promises that he and Romeo will retrieve her from the tomb when she wakes up.
- 4.2: Potion in hand, Juliet returns home, apologizes to her father for her disobedience, and acts willing to marry Paris.
- 4.3: Once alone, Juliet drinks the Friar’s potion and falls into a death-like sleep.
- 5.3: Juliet wakes in her family’s tomb and finds Romeo dead beside her. The Friar tries to convince her to leave and promises that he will find a place for her in a convent. Juliet refuses. Juliet has rejected her family, her nurse, and her eligible fiancé Paris in favor of Romeo. When she realizes her husband is dead, she kills herself rather than live without him.

Rosaline

Rosaline is the gorgeous and aloof woman Romeo crushes on until he meets the love of his life, Juliet. Rosaline has no speaking part, never appears on stage (according to the stage directions), and isn't even listed in the *dramatis personae* (the cast list). So, why the heck are we talking about Rosaline in our "Character Analysis" when it's quite possible that she doesn't even exist? Well, we may not hear directly from Rosaline (or even see her unless we watch, say, Zeffirelli’s 1968 film adaptation of the play), but we do hear a lot about her from one of the play's major characters, Romeo.

Rosaline and Love Poetry

According to Romeo, Rosaline is beautiful and completely unavailable – Romeo tells us she's sworn off boys by taking a vow of chastity (1.1.13). In this way, she resembles the unattainable "Laura," a figure in Petrarch's popular 14th-century love poetry who never gives the poet (Petrarch) the time of day.

Rosaline also seems to resemble the "Youth" in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*. (In Sonnets #1-17, the Poet spends a lot of time trying to convince the Youth, a young man who refuses to marry and have children, that he should get hitched so he can "bless" the world with a bunch of gorgeous kids.) In Sonnet # 4, for example, Shakespeare writes that if the good looking young man dies without having any kids, his "unus'd beauty must be tomb'd with [him]." Compare this with Romeo's complaint about Rosaline's vow of celibacy:

*O, she is rich in beauty, only poor,*  
*That when she dies with beauty dies her store.*  
(1.1.12)
A Foil to Juliet

Rosaline's aloofness and commitment to remaining "chaste" makes her a pretty good foil for Juliet, who is very responsive to Romeo's passion and makes no apologies for her sexual desire. (Juliet also has an actual speaking role in the play and she happens to be a fully developed character.)

Over the years, directors have made some interesting choices in casting the roles of Rosaline and Juliet to play up the differences between the two women. In Zeffirelli's 1968 film adaptation of Romeo and Juliet, Rosaline is lovely but she's also very stiff and at least a decade older than Romeo. Zeffirelli's Juliet, in contrast, is a young, lively, mischievous beauty who can't keep her hands off of Romeo.

Mercutio

Mercutio (whose name is derived from the word "mercurial," meaning "volatile") is Romeo's sword-fight loving BFF. He never backs down from a duel and, although he's neither a Montague nor a Capulet, he gets involved in the long-standing family feud on the side of the Montagues and is killed by Tybalt in Act 3, Scene 1.

Why Audiences Love Mercutio

In almost every performance, Mercutio steals the show. Audiences love him – he's dirty and funny and out of control. Compared to him, Romeo and Juliet can seem whiny and repetitive. There are some productions of Romeo and Juliet that never recover after Mercutio dies; the whole show can go downhill without him. Mercutio is technically a minor character, but his personality has such a disproportionate impact that some critics argue he has to die or he would take over the play. There's an old story that Shakespeare himself admitted that he had to kill Mercutio – or else, he said, Mercutio would have killed him.

Mercutio and Love

Mercutio is also famous for his staunch opposition to the idea of love (between a man and a woman, that is). When Romeo complains about the heartache of his unrequited love for Rosaline, Mercutio tells him to stop whining about it:

*If love be rough with you, be rough with love;*  
*Prick love for pricking, and you beat love down.* (1.4.4)

It's not just "love" that Mercutio has a problem with. He's also pretty hostile toward women and female sexuality in general. The clearest example of this is when he lists Rosaline's body parts in a crude monologue that makes fun of Romeo and a popular poetic convention (the "blazon,"
a poetic technique that catalogues a woman's body parts and compares them to things in nature):

\[ I \text{ must conjure him.} \]
\[ I \text{ conjure thee by Rosaline's bright eyes,} \]
\[ By her high forehead and her scarlet lip, \]
\[ By her fine foot, straight leg and quivering thigh \]
\[ And the demesnes that there adjacent lie, \]
\[ That in thy likeness thou appear to us! \] (2.1.1)

Some literary critics and actors interpret Mercutio's hostility toward women and heterosexual love as an indication of homosexuality (or bisexuality). For these scholars, Mercutio's blatantly homoerotic jokes (they're all over the play) and Tybalt's accusation that Mercutio "consortest with Romeo" (3.1.3) are further evidence that Mercutio is gay. Mercutio's sexuality is up for debate, but the thing we know for sure about Shakespeare's work is that it's full of men who value male friendship and comradery over male-female relationships. (Think, for example, of Antonio and Bassanio in *The Merchant of Venice*.)

**Mercutio's Queen Mab**

Other interpretations put a psychological spin on Mercutio's strange, imaginative rants.

The Queen Mab speech is, of course, one of Mercutio's big moments and a challenge to interpret. In the 1996 Baz Luhrmann film, *Romeo + Juliet*, a cross-dressing Mercutio takes drugs just before the Queen Mab speech. In the Franco Zeffirelli 1968 film version, Mercutio seems manic-depressive; the Queen Mab speech starts out as an energetic manic episode but soon crumbles into a dark depression. Check out "Symbols" if you want to know more.

**Mercutio Timeline**

- 1.4: On their way to crashing the Capulet party, Mercutio mocks his best friend Romeo for being infatuated with Rosaline. Then he starts riffing on Queen Mab, a strange fairy who visits people in their dreams. Romeo and Benvolio finally drag him off to the party.
- 1.5: Mercutio attends the Capulet bash, but has no lines.
- 2.1: Mercutio and Benvolio can't find Romeo after the party. Mercutio tries to conjure Romeo by saying dirty things about Rosaline, the girl Romeo was infatuated with. The attempt fails, so Mercutio heads home.
- 2.4: Mercutio and Benvolio still haven't figured out where Romeo disappeared to the night before. They discuss Tybalt, who has sent a letter to Romeo's house challenging him to a duel. Mercutio mocks Tybalt and calls him the "prince of cats." When Romeo finally shows
up, Mercutio is glad to see he’s moved on from Rosaline. Juliet's nurse marches in and demands to speak with Romeo. Mercutio teases her with inappropriate jokes and pretends to flirt with her.

- 3.1: Mercutio is chilling with Benvolio when Tybalt shows up looking for Romeo. Mercutio and Tybalt trade insults. Romeo appears, but he refuses to fight with Tybalt, even when Tybalt provokes him. Furious at his best friend's cowardice, Mercutio challenges Tybalt to a duel. He and Tybalt fight. When Romeo tries to stop them from dueling, Tybalt wounds Mercutio. Although he jokes about his wound, Mercutio is seriously hurt.
- 3.1: Mercutio dies cursing the Montagues and Capulets for dragging him into their quarrel. "A plague o’both your houses – they have made worm's meat of me," he says.

### Benvolio Montague

Benvolio, whose name literally means "good will," is a classic nice guy. Benvolio often gets stuck playing the straight man to Romeo and Mercutio, but he occasionally manages to stick in his own funny lines. Despite the fact that he is constantly telling everyone else to chill and stop fighting, duels always seem to happen around him. Sometimes he gets drawn in. Benvolio is regarded as the trusted go-to guy. Romeo's parents turn to him when their son is acting weird (1.1) and the Prince always asks him to explain what went down in the most recent street fight.

### Benvolio Montague Timeline

- 1.1: Benvolio tries to stop a fight in the streets, but ends up taking part in it. Afterwards, he talks to Romeo's parents, and promises to find out why Romeo has been acting depressed. He meets up with Romeo, who tells him the problem is that he's in love with a girl who isn't interested in him.
- 1.2: In hopes of helping Romeo get over Rosaline, (the recipient of Romeo's unrequited love), Benvolio convinces Romeo to crash the Capulet party. They'll compare Rosaline to the other women there and will see that she's not all that.
- 1.4: He chills with Romeo and Mercutio
- 1.5: Benvolio has fun at the Capulet party, then tries to drag Romeo away once it's clear that the party's breaking up. Romeo, smitten with Juliet, refuses to leave.
- 2.1: Benvolio and Mercutio try to figure out where Romeo disappeared to. They soon give up and head home.
- 2.4: The next day Benvolio and Mercutio still don't know where Romeo is. They know that Tybalt has challenged their friend to a duel. Benvolio says he is sure Romeo will uphold his honor and fight Tybalt. When the Nurse shows up, Benvolio joins Romeo and Mercutio
in the general mockery of this poor woman.

- 3.1: As usual, Benvolio tries to avoid fighting with the Capulets, but gets drawn in anyway. When Tybalt strolls in, Benvolio tries to get everybody to calm down. He tells Mercutio and Tybalt either to chill or to continue their argument in private. As usual, nobody listens. Benvolio witnesses Tybalt and Mercutio’s duel, and he is with Mercutio when he dies. Then he watches Romeo and Tybalt fight. When Tybalt dies, Benvolio tells Romeo he has to run away or the Prince will put him to death. When the Prince arrives at the scene of the slaughter, Benvolio explains what has happened.

**Tybalt Capulet**

Tybalt is Juliet's cousin, which makes him a Capulet. After he kills Romeo's BFF, Mercutio, in a street brawl, Romeo mortally stabs him, which causes Romeo to be banished from Verona.

Tybalt is a captivating, testosterone-driven character and almost always completely over-the-top. He's not particularly deep, but he's a lot of fun for the actor who gets to deliver his snappy one-liners and show off some impressive sword fighting skills. Mercutio, who hates Tybalt, gives him the "catty" nickname the "Prince of Cats" and it totally suits Tybalt. While Romeo can sometimes remind you of a bouncy and overeager puppy, Tybalt tends to stalk around proudly looking for fights. When his uncle Capulet prevents him from beating up Romeo for crashing the Capulet's masked ball, he's not too pleased and promises to bash in Romeo's skull at a later date: "I will withdraw but this intrusion shall / Now seeming sweet, convert to bitt'rest gall" (1.5.6). Clearly, Tybalt, likes to speak in rhymed couplets ("shall" and "gall" rhyme here), which makes him sound kind of ridiculous. Plus, he doesn't speak a single line that can't be delivered in a snarl.

Aside from the vendetta between the Capulets and Montagues, there's no real explanation for Tybalt's aggressive behavior. It seems possible that he's eager to fight because he wants to defend his reputation as the toughest of the Capulets. It's also likely that Tybalt just likes to fight, which brings us to our next point. If there's a personification of hate in the play, it's Tybalt. Think, for example, of the fact that while super macho Tybalt is storming around the Capulet ball threatening to beat Romeo to a pulp (just for being a Montague), Romeo and Juliet are a few feet away being all sappy sweet and professing their love for each other (1.5). In fact, Romeo and Juliet's first encounter occurs on the heels of Tybalt's thwarted rampage.

**Tybalt Capulet Timeline**
1.2: Tybalt enters the stage during fight between the servants of the Capulets and Montagues. Benvolio, a friend of the Montagues, is trying to stop the fight. Instead, Tybalt starts fighting with Benvolio. The situation gets so out of control that the Prince of Verona arrives to break it up.

1.5: Tybalt spots Romeo at a Capulet party. Furious at this invasion of Capulet territory, he wants to fight with Romeo right then and there. Lord Capulet intervenes before Tybalt can do anything and angrily orders him not to ruin the party. Tybalt has to obey Lord Capulet, but he swears to punish Romeo at the earliest opportunity.

3.1: Tybalt looks for Romeo and finds Benvolio and Mercutio. He trades some insults with them before Romeo shows up. Tybalt purposely tries to provoke Romeo into a fight. Romeo responds mildly to his abuse and refuses to fight. Mercutio challenges Tybalt to a duel instead. Romeo tries to stop them from fighting, and Tybalt wounds Mercutio while he is distracted by Romeo's interference. When Mercutio falls, seriously wounded, Tybalt exits. But he comes back in time for Romeo to challenge him to a duel to avenge Mercutio's death. Romeo kills Tybalt.

The Nurse

The Nurse is one of the funniest characters in the play and one of the most disturbing. She and Juliet have what seems to be a gossiping, pillow-fighting sort of relationship at the beginning of the play. The Nurse, along with Friar Laurence, is one of the facilitators of Juliet's relationship with Romeo. She plays the role of messenger and it is her idea to bring Romeo to Juliet even after he has been banished. But when Juliet needs her most – after her parents order her to marry Paris – the Nurse betrays her. Romeo is as good as dead, the Nurse tells Juliet, and she had better forget him and marry Paris. Is the nurse as responsible for Juliet's death? Maybe. Or, as one oh-so-subtle production suggested, definitely: in this production, at the final scene, when the Prince says that some will be punished, a noose dropped from the ceiling and swung in front of the Nurse.

But why does the Nurse betray Juliet? There are two basic arguments. The first is that the Nurse really believes everything that she says when she tells Juliet:

Romeo is banish'd; and all the world to nothing,
That he dares ne'er come back to challenge you;
Or, if he do, it needs must be by stealth.
Then, since the case so stands as now it doth,
I think it best you married with the county.
O, he's a lovely gentleman!
Romeo's a dishclout to him: an eagle, madam,
Hath not so green, so quick, so fair an eye
As Paris hath. Beshrew my very heart,
I think you are happy in this second match,
For it excels your first: or if it did not,
Your first is dead; or 'twere as good he were,
As living here and you no use of him. (3.5.5)

As this argument goes, the Nurse simply does not understand that Juliet's love for Romeo is the real thing, and not some childish infatuation. She thinks Juliet can easily move on. If you're feeling a little judgmental, you could say this attitude is both callous and unperceptive. Her dirty-minded way of looking at love cannot comprehend a love like Juliet's. There's also the possibility that the Nurse doesn't want to lose Juliet to an uncertain future with Romeo in Mantua. Selfishness might play a role in wanting her beloved Juliet to stay in Verona and marry Paris – and doubtlessly bring the Nurse with her when she moves to Paris's house. Regardless, the Nurse's comic character becomes almost monstrous in the way she treats Juliet's love. Telling Juliet that Romeo is as good as dead is pretty mean.

OK, so that's camp #1. Camp #2 is a little more sympathetic. It might be that the Nurse understands Juliet's love for Romeo, but is a wizened woman of the world. She has a pretty good idea of how difficult it would be for a woman to survive alone in the world during this time period. It's important to recognize that the Nurse does try to stand up to Lord Capulet when he is yelling at his daughter, a bold move – he's her boss, after all. "You are to blame, my lord, to rate her so," the Nurse tells him (3.5.3). In response, Lord Capulet attacks her verbally – and perhaps physically as well. So the Nurse just gives up, which may have something to do with Lord Capulet's violent thrashings. The Nurse then decides that Juliet has no choice but to marry Paris. In this interpretation, the Nurse's praise of Paris is not sincere, but helpless. She knows Juliet's love for Romeo is real, but in order to save Juliet from the disastrous consequences of her secret marriage, she tries to make a second marriage to Paris seem acceptable.

Aside from this "Big Question," there are many smaller nuances to explore in the Nurse's character. The first is the complicated relationship between the Nurse, Juliet, and Lady Capulet. The Nurse has essentially been Juliet's mother – she nursed Juliet as a baby and has been with Juliet her whole life (1.3.5). Juliet's bond with the Nurse is clear. At the same time, Lady Capulet is technically Juliet's mother, and she is in charge of her daughter's future. The Nurse is also, for all her importance to Juliet, ultimately a servant, which puts a mighty big class distinction in between the two of them. That can complicate things.

The Nurse's interactions with Mercutio in Act 2, Scene 4 give us a glimpse into her comic potential. Some actresses playing the Nurse act completely offended and prim when Mercutio busts out the sexual innuendoes. What's more comic is when the nurse enjoys Mercutio's dirty language and over-the-top flirtations. It also seems more accurate and in keeping with her character too. The Nurse, after all, makes plenty of dirty jokes in the play. Here's an example:
I must another way,  
To fetch a ladder, by the which your love  
Must climb a bird's nest soon when its dark. (2.5.9)

Here, she's literally talking about getting a ladder for Romeo to climb up so he can spend the night in Juliet's bedroom. To "climb a bird's nest" is also slang for having sex.

The Nurse Timeline

- 1.3: The Nurse makes it clear that she, not Lady Capulet, is the one who has really raised Juliet, as well as the one who knows her best. Lady Capulet is trying to tell Juliet about a marriage proposal, but the Nurse hijacks the conversation with her memories of Juliet's childhood antics. Sounds like an under-the-table power struggle.
- 1.5: The Nurse watches over Juliet at the party. She breaks up the Romeo-Juliet kissing scene when she comes to tell Juliet her mother is looking for her. The Nurse starts her role as Romeo and Juliet's go-between when she informs Romeo of Juliet's identity and later learns Romeo's name. She's a regular ol' matchmaker.
- 2.2: The Nurse adds both comedy and tension to the balcony scene by calling to Juliet from offstage and forcing her to go back inside repeatedly.
- 2.4: Juliet sends the Nurse to meet with Romeo and find out the plans for their wedding. When the Nurse tries to find Romeo alone, the Nurse talks a mile a minute and barely allows Romeo a word in edgewise. Miraculously, he somehow gets his message across.
- 2.5: The Nurse loves teasing Juliet, so when she returns with a message from Romeo, she refuses to tell Juliet what Romeo has said. Instead she complains about her aching back and how tired she is. When Juliet can't stand it anymore, the Nurse tells her that Romeo is waiting to marry her in Friar Laurence's cell.
- 3.2: The Nurse has gone out to get a rope ladder to allow Romeo to sneak into Juliet's room that night. She brings back the ladder – but she has also just seen Tybalt's dead body and heard that it was Romeo who killed him. The Nurse tells Juliet the terrible news and bitterly denounces Romeo. Juliet yells at the Nurse for criticizing her husband. When she sees how desperate Juliet feels at the news of Romeo's banishment, the Nurse promises to find Romeo so Juliet can say good-bye to him.
- 3.3: As the Nurse suspects, Romeo is hiding in Friar Laurence's cell. Romeo is a total mess, and the Nurse tells him to get his act together for Juliet's sake. Then she lets Romeo know that Juliet still loves him, even though he has killed her cousin.
- 3.5: After Romeo and Juliet have spent their wedding night together in secret, the Nurse comes in to warn them that Juliet's mother is coming and that Romeo had better peace
out. Lady Capulet announces that Juliet will be marrying Paris later that week. When Juliet hysterically refuses to marry Paris, her father is furious at her disobedience. The Nurse tries to intervene and tells Lord Capulet that he is being too harsh on his daughter. In response, Lord Capulet attacks the Nurse verbally – and maybe physically. He tells Juliet that she can either marry Paris or be thrown out onto the streets. After her parents leave, Juliet asks the Nurse for advice on what to do. The Nurse tells her she should forget Romeo and marry Paris.

- **4.2**: Juliet comes back from her visit to Friar Laurence, and the Nurse thinks she looks more cheerful. Juliet says she will marry Paris and asks the Nurse to help her figure out what clothes she should wear on her wedding day.
- **4.3**: Juliet asks the Nurse to leave her alone, telling Lady Capulet that the Nurse should help with the wedding preparations.
- **4.4**: The Nurse bustles around excitedly with Lord and Lady Capulet as they prepare for the wedding.
- **4.5**: The Nurse tries to wake Juliet for her wedding with Paris. At first, she teases Juliet about sleeping now since Paris will keep her up all night during their honeymoon. Then she realizes Juliet is no longer breathing. Along with the rest of Juliet's family, the Nurse mourns over the body of her beloved girl.
- **5.3**: The Friar confesses to the Prince that the Nurse was involved in Romeo and Juliet's secret marriage. It's unclear if the Nurse will be pardoned or punished for her role in the tragedy.

**Friar Laurence**

A mentor to both Romeo and Juliet, Friar Laurence constantly advises them to act with more caution and moderation. But Friar Laurence's own plans to help Romeo and Juliet end in tragedy. He's the guy, after all, who gives Juliet the concoction that puts her in a deep, slumber that fools her family (and Romeo) into thinking she's dead. This makes Friar Laurence one of the most complex and interesting characters in the play: we don't know if he should be blamed or not. The 1968 Zeffirelli film version of *Romeo and Juliet* highlights the irony of the Friar's role in the play. When the Friar tells Romeo, "Wisely and slow. They stumble that run fast," it is the Friar, not Romeo, who trips over his feet immediately afterwards (2.3.10). Zeffirelli also makes the Friar look like a coward when he runs out of the Capulet tomb in 5.3, leaving Juliet alone with Romeo's corpse. We also think the Friar is running a little too fast in his haste to use these kids (that would be Romeo and Juliet) as tools to patch up a hopeless family feud (2.2.9).

If you want to think about Friar Laurence some more, you might look at his relationship with Romeo and Juliet. How long has he known Romeo? Is he actually like a second father to him? Are they more like buddies? What is his relationship to Juliet? How long has he been her confessor? Does he also seem like a father to her?
Friar Laurence Timeline

- 2.3: Friar Laurence is up at dawn gardening when Romeo rushes in and asks if the Friar will marry him to a girl he met the night before. Friar Laurence is dubious, but agrees to the marriage in the hopes that it will reconcile the warring Montagues and Capulets.
- 2.6: Friar Laurence tries to convince Romeo to calm down and "love moderately." Romeo doesn't listen. When Juliet shows up he decides he better marry them ASAP.
- 3.3: After Romeo kills Tybalt, Friar Laurence hides the banished young man in his cell. He tries to convince Romeo that he should be grateful that the Prince has sentenced him to banishment, not death. Romeo rejects this reasoning: to him, being apart from Juliet is worse than death. Someone knocks on the door, and the Friar worries that it's someone who has come to arrest Romeo. Instead, it's Juliet's nurse, who helps the Friar convince Romeo to stop Sobbing on the floor. The Friar promises Romeo that they will work out a plan to get Romeo a pardon from the Prince and bring him back. Meanwhile, he tells Romeo to say good-bye to Juliet and then speedily leave Verona.
- 4.1: Friar Laurence finds himself in a real pickle when Paris shows up at his cell and informs him that he has talked with Juliet's father and he will be marrying Juliet later that week. Then Juliet arrives and threatens to stab herself if the Friar doesn't find a way for her to get out of marrying Paris. The Friar gives her a potion that will make her appear as if she is dead and tells her that he and Romeo will be waiting for her when she wakes up in her family's tomb. Then Romeo and Juliet can go to Mantua together, with no one the wiser. The Friar promises to send a letter to Romeo to tell him the plan.
- 4.5: Friar Laurence arrives at the Capulet's house to find everyone in mourning for Juliet, who has just been discovered "dead." Friar Laurence is the only one who knows the truth. He tells her grieving relatives that they should be glad that Juliet is in heaven, and tells them to prepare her body and bring it to her family's tomb.
- 5.2: Only a few hours before Juliet is due to wake up, Friar Laurence finds out that Romeo never received the letter explaining that Juliet's death is actually a sham.
- 5.3: Friar Laurence arrives at Juliet's tomb too late to prevent Romeo's suicide. Hearing noise outside the tomb, the Friar tries to take Juliet away. But when she refuses to go, the Friar leaves without her, and she commits suicide. The Prince's guards capture the Friar outside the tomb, and he confesses the whole story to the Prince. The Prince suggests that he will pardon the Friar, telling him, "We still have known thee for a holy man" (5.3.279).

Lord Capulet

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Lord Capulet (a.k.a. Capulet) is the father of Juliet. At first, he seems like a pretty good dad. When Paris comes sniffing around for thirteen-year-old Juliet's hand in marriage, Capulet puts him off, citing Juliet's young age and even suggesting that he'd like his daughter to marry for "love" (1.2.2-3). This, by the way, is pretty uncommon in Shakespeare's plays. Most fathers (like Baptista Minola in *The Taming of the Shrew*) broker marriages like business deals, without ever consulting their daughters.

But Lord Capulet doesn't play the good father for long. Paris eventually wears him down and convinces him that he and Juliet should wed (3.4.2). (By this point, Juliet is already be secretly married to Romeo.) The thing is, Juliet's not exactly down with marrying Paris and things get ugly when she tells her father as much.

Lord Capulet's response to Juliet's "disobedience" is so violently harsh that we begin to see him as a bit of a tyrant. We see the physical aggression most prominently in the big, confrontational scene with Juliet over whether or not she will marry Paris. When Juliet refuses, Capulet screams, "Out you baggage, / you tallow face" (3.5.3) and says, "My fingers itch" when Juliet stands up, which may suggest that he's prone to physical violence (3.5.4). He also lashes out against the Nurse and his wife.

Lord Capulet's relationship with his wife is also up for debate. Lady Capulet is probably much younger than he, since she was married to him when she was about twelve years old. Needless to say, this age difference seems to have caused some *tension* in their marriage. "Too soon marred are those so early made [wives]," he tells Paris, clearly referencing his own wife (1.2.3).

**Lord Capulet Timeline**

- **1.1:** Lord Capulet runs out into the street and tries to join in the brawl between the servants of the Capulets and Montagues. His wife holds him back. At the end of the scene, the Prince reprimands Lord Capulet and orders him to come talk about ending the violence in the streets.
- **1.2:** When Paris asks for Juliet's hand in marriage, Lord Capulet tells him that Juliet is too young to get married. ("Too soon marred are those so early made," he says, clearly referencing his own wife, whom he married when she was younger than Juliet. In retrospect, Lord Capulet seems to think that marrying her when she was so young was a bad idea.) He also says he will not agree to let anyone marry Juliet unless his daughter consents to the match. He suggests that Paris start to get to know Juliet at the party the Capulets are holding that night.
- **1.5:** Lord Capulet is in host mode at the party. But when Tybalt wants to fight Romeo for daring to crash the party, Lord Capulet reveals a violent side. He furiously orders Tybalt to
ignore Romeo and not to ruin the party.

- 3.1: Here he has no lines, but Lord Capulet is probably with his wife when they discover that Tybalt has been killed by Romeo. Shakespeare leaves all the verbal grieving to the women.

- 3.4: Paris, with classic bad timing, arrives to discuss wedding plans while the family is in mourning for Tybalt's death. Lord Capulet, worried by his daughter's frantic grief over her cousin's death, decides that marriage might help her recover. He decides that Juliet and Paris should be married later that week.

- 3.5: Lord Capulet expects that Juliet will be grateful that he has found her a handsome and eligible husband. Instead, she refuses to marry Paris and can give no clear explanation why. Lord Capulet is furious at his daughter's rejection of his plan. He tells her that she can either obey him and marry his friend Paris, or that she can leave his house and live in the streets.

- 4.2: Lord Capulet is going on with his preparations for the wedding, whether or not Juliet likes it. Happily for him, she comes back from a visit to Friar Laurence and apologizes for her behavior. Lord Capulet rejoices at her agreement to marry Paris and decides to move the wedding to the very next day. He doesn't care if he has to stay up all night – he wants to make it happen immediately.

- 4.4: Lord Capulet is bustling around happily making all the last minute arrangements for the wedding. He orders the Nurse to wake up Juliet. Paris is about to arrive at the house.

- 4.5: The Nurse discovers Juliet dead. Lord Capulet mourns over the loss of his only child. "Death is my son-in-law," he laments.

- 5.3: Lord Capulet thought his daughter was already dead, and then he discovers her bleeding on the floor of the family tomb. In grief at their children's death, both Lord Capulet and Lord Montague vow to end the fighting between their families and to raise a golden statue in memory of each other's child.

Lady Capulet

Like many other mothers of teens, Lady Capulet and her daughter clearly have a troubled relationship. The interactions between Lady Capulet and Juliet are strained and distant. Lady Capulet does make an effort to reach out to her daughter now that she's of an age to be married. But it's obvious that Juliet's closest bond is with the Nurse; Lady Capulet never even comes close to challenging that.

As a result, Lady Capulet doesn't come across as a particularly great mom. The big question with her character is why. Why isn't she close to her daughter? Why isn't she supportive when Juliet needs her most? Just when Juliet needs her mom's support, Lady Capulet coldly ignore her daughter's pleas to help her avoid marrying Paris. After Lord Capulet storms out, Juliet turns to her mother to soften her father's punishment. Juliet begs her even to delay the marriage. Lady Capulet responds, "Talk not to me, for I'll not say a word / Do as thou wilt, for I
have done with thee" (3.5.15). That's pretty cold. What's up with that?

There could be a few different things going on here. It seems very likely that Lady Capulet herself had an arranged marriage with Juliet's father, and it seems she went along with it obediently. When Juliet rebels against the planned marriage with Paris, she is rebelling against her mother's way of life, and against the kind of marriage that Lady Capulet learned to suffer through. If Lord Capulet is an abusive husband, that gives Lady Capulet further reason to refuse to defy his wishes, even for the sake of her daughter. Also, in Shakespeare's day, women were expected to be "obedient" to their husbands. We should also mention that some rather edgy modern interpretations of the play go so far as to say that Lady Capulet is having an affair; or at least actively pursuing one. We're guessing these productions of the play are picking up on Lady Capulet's over-the-top praise of Paris's manly virtues (1.3.9) and her excessive grief over Tybalt's death (3.5.7).

**Lady Capulet Timeline**

- 1.1: Lord Capulet calls for a sword so he can take part in the fight that's going down on the street between the Montagues and Capulets. Lady Capulet holds him back. "A crutch, a crutch – why call you for a sword?" she tells him, reminding him he's too old to fight.
- 1.2: Lady Capulet may be on stage so Lord Capulet can gesture to her on his line, "Too soon marred are those so early made," which clearly references her (1.2.13). In retrospect, Lord Capulet seems to think that marrying her when she was so young was a bad idea.
- 1.3: Lady Capulet wants to tell her daughter the exciting news: Juliet has received her first proposal of marriage! Unfortunately, the Nurse is chattering on. Finally, Lady Capulet gets the Nurse to shut up so she can tell Juliet all about handsome, eligible Paris.
- 1.5: Lady Capulet has no lines at the party, but she is there as the hostess.
- 3.1: Lady Capulet enters with the rest of Verona's citizens to find Tybalt dead. Her grief at his death is the loudest and most furious. She argues that Benvolio's account of the fight must be biased, since Benvolio is related to the Montagues. Then she demands that Romeo die as punishment for killing Tybalt.
- 3.4: When Lord Capulet decides that Juliet will marry Paris immediately, Lady Capulet promises to tell her daughter the news early the next morning.
- 3.5: Coming in on Juliet just after Romeo has left, Lady Capulet finds her daughter weeping yet again. She assumes Juliet is still grieving for Tybalt, and tells her that too much mourning is foolish. Then she promises her daughter that they will have vengeance on Tybalt's killer, Romeo. This does not help the weeping. Lady Capulet suggests they could find someone to poison Romeo in Mantua. Juliet's replies to all of these suggestions are loaded with double-meanings that reveal her love for Romeo, but Lady Capulet misses the subtext. In hopes of cheering her daughter up, Lady Capulet shares the joyful
news: Juliet will marry Paris later that week! This, too, does not help the weeping. Juliet furiously swears that she would rather marry Romeo, her cousin's killer, than Paris. Surprised at this behavior, Lady Capulet tells Juliet, "Wait 'till your father hears this!" Lord Capulet becomes so enraged at Juliet's refusal that Lady Capulet eventually tries to calm him down. After Lord Capulet tells Juliet she can either marry Paris or be thrown out of the house, Juliet begs her mother to help her delay the wedding. Lady Capulet refuses coldly.

- 4.2: When Juliet comes back seemingly repentant from her visit to Friar Laurence, Lord Capulet decides he wants her to marry Paris the very next day. Lady Capulet argues that they won't have time to prepare, but her husband overrules her.
- 4.3: Lady Capulet comes in to ask her daughter if she needs any help preparing for her wedding day. Juliet says she's all set and asks to be left alone.
- 4.4: Lord and Lady Capulet tease each other happily as they prepare for their daughter's wedding.
- 4.5: The Nurse tries to wake Juliet and discovers that she is "dead." Lady Capulet calls for help to revive her daughter, but it's too late. She, the Nurse, her husband, and Paris grieve around Juliet's "corpse."
- 5.3: Lady Capulet hears the rumors in the streets about strange happenings at the Capulet family tomb, and arrives to find her daughter, newly dead, lying beside a Montague. The Friar's tomb-side confession reveals that Juliet's parents had no idea what was going on with their daughter. The discovery of Juliet's star-crossed-love with the son of his enemy convinces Lady Capulet's husband to end the feud with the Montagues.

Paris

As much as we hate to start our sentences with "as so-and-so said," we're breaking our rule here because this one is just too good. Here we go.

As scholar Marjorie Garber points out, all you have to do to see why Paris (the guy who wears down Juliet's dad until he agrees to let him marry Juliet) is such a good foil for Romeo – and why Juliet chose Romeo over him – is to contrast what Paris and Romeo each say outside Juliet's grave.

PARIS

The obsequies that I for thee will keep
Nightly shall be to strew thy grave and weep. (5.3.2)

Paris's language says: "I'm a stiff and lacking in passion." There's no way that Paris would die for Juliet. He'll probably make other marriage plans as soon as the appropriate mourning time has passed.
ROMEO
The time and my intents are savage-wild
More fierce and more inexorable far
Than empty tigers or the roaring sea. (5.3.1)

Romeo, in contrast, is furious over Juliet's death, and eloquent in his fury. He won't drip a few tears on Juliet's grave and then go home to bed. Unlike Paris, this guy is a passionate lover.

An actor can make Paris seem like a total jerk, or like a sympathetic nice guy who happened to get caught in somebody else's love story. In Baz Luhrmann's 1996 film Romeo + Juliet, Paul Rudd plays Paris as a handsome but undeniably dorky guy. His dance with Juliet at the Capulet ball is very awkward – he starts swing dancing a little – and Juliet keeps looking at Romeo and making "this is awkward" faces. (We should point out that in Shakespeare's text, Paris doesn't actually show up to the Capulet ball as expected.) Check out Paul Rudd ham it up as Paris in this clip of the costume ball scene.

Paris's dialogue with Juliet in Friar Laurence's church can make him seem either a little clueless or a complete fool. Paris thinks Juliet is upset over Tybalt's death – he has no idea that she's already married to Romeo and that the prospect of marrying him makes her physically ill. It's easy to make some of Paris's lines seem overbearing and arrogant. He greets her with total confidence, "Happily met, my lady and my wife," he calls to her (4.1.3). Juliet and the audience cringe at this, but Paris keeps going. "Do not deny to him that you love me," Paris tells her (4.1.6). Later, when he looks at Juliet more closely, he tells her, "Poor soul, thy face is much abused with tears" (4.1.8). When she tells him that her face was bad enough to begin with, he reprimands her, "Thy face is mine, and thou hast slandered it," which hints at Paris's sense of ownership toward his fiancée (4.1.10). All of these lines together can make Paris come off as a spoiled boy who is used to getting everything he wants. His possessive attitude towards Juliet – especially laying claim to her face as his own – could come across as creepy and chauvinistic. It can seem like he's treating Juliet like another piece of property rather than a person.

But these same lines can also be spoken as very earnest and well-meaning. Paris, after all, has no reason to believe that Juliet doesn't love him and isn't excited about their marriage. This is the impression that he gets from Juliet's parents, after all. In this interpretation, Paris's confidence in their marriage comes across as pathetic rather than obnoxious. Either way, though, the "holy kiss" that Paris gives Juliet at the end of the scene is painful for everybody. It's so formal and stiff – a complete contrast to Romeo's kisses.

Paris Timeline
• 1.2: Paris asks Lord Capulet if he can marry the thirteen-year-old Juliet.
• 1.5: Though he has no lines, Paris dances with Juliet at the Capulet's party. Somehow, though, Romeo gets to kiss Juliet and he doesn't. (Paris doesn't realize this, of course.)
• 3.4: Even though the Capulets are mourning for Tybalt's death, Paris shows up hoping for news that Juliet wants to marry him. Lord Capulet is worried that his daughter's grief over her cousin's death is out of control, so he asks Paris if he would be willing to marry Juliet right away, that very week. Paris agrees.
• 4.1: Paris goes to Friar Laurence to arrange the details of the wedding. Friar Laurence is not too thrilled about the idea of Paris marrying Juliet. Then Juliet shows up, and Paris greets her enthusiastically. She seems to still be very upset over her cousin's death, and she answers his questions strangely. Friar Laurence suggests Paris should leave so Juliet can have confession. So Paris gives her a chaste kiss and tells her he'll see her at the altar.
• 4.5: Paris arrives at the Capulet's house fresh-faced and excited. It's the morning of his wedding, and finally, he gets to marry Juliet, the girl of his dreams. Instead, he finds everyone grieving at her bedside. Juliet is dead.
• 5.2: Paris, shocked that Juliet had the nerve to die the night before they are supposed to be married, grieves quietly by Juliet's tomb. Outlaw Romeo shows up, and Paris assumes he's there to cause trouble for the Capulets. He and Romeo fight, and Romeo kills him. Afterwards Romeo feels bad, since Paris was basically a nice guy.

The Prince of Verona

The Prince of Verona does the best he can to keep the peace, but he can't restrain the violence between the Montagues and the Capulets. If the Prince can't do anything about the feud, it means that the law (which the Prince embodies) is powerless against the passions of hate and of love.

The Prince of Verona Timeline

• 1.2: Furious at yet another Montague-Capulet brawl disturbing the peace, the Prince orders that from now on, anyone who fights in public will be put to death.
• 3.1: Despite his warning, the Prince discovers that the Montagues and Capulets have been fighting again. This time, two young men are dead – and one of them is the Prince's cousin, Mercutio. "My blood for your rude brawls doth lie a-bleeding," he says (3.1.199). The Prince rules that, since Tybalt started the fight and killed Mercutio, there are extenuating circumstances for Romeo's killing Tybalt. So the Prince condemns Romeo to
banishment rather than death.

- 5.2: The Prince comes into the Capulet tomb and finds Romeo and Juliet lying dead in each other's arms. He pronounces that the tragic deaths of the two lovers are a punishment for the hatred that the Montague and Capulet families have allowed to flourish. In the matter of Romeo and Juliet's death, the Prince rules, "Some shall be pardoned and some punished" (5.3.319). He suggests that the Friar will be pardoned; the fate of the Nurse and other participants is unclear. At the same time, the Prince says, the pitiful deaths of Romeo and Juliet are themselves a heavy burden that everyone must bear. In that sense, he says, "All are punished" (5.3.305).
Plot Analysis

Initial Situation

Montagues vs. Capulets. GRRRR!

The prologue says it all. "Two households both alike in dignity"—the Capulets and the Montagues—are battling it out in the streets of Verona. The play opens with a public brawl. A simple hand-gesture from a Capulet servant to a group of Montague servants spirals into a full-out fight. The Prince arrives to break it up. He's gotten sick of the Montagues and Capulets disturbing the peace, so he decides he's going to lay down the law. From this point onwards, he announces, anyone who fights in public will be put to death. Obviously, this is setting up a big confrontation later in the play. Meanwhile, we're introduced to the two young lovers. On the Capulet side, thirteen-year-old Juliet has just gotten her first proposal. Paris, one of her father's friends and one of Verona's most-eligible bachelors, has asked to marry her. Juliet's never met him, but it seems like a sure thing. On the other side of Verona, Romeo, the only son of Lord and Lady Montague, is supposedly head over heels in love with a girl named Rosaline. Romeo is totally infatuated with her, but Rosaline is not into him. As a result, Romeo is depressed.

Conflict

"My only love sprung from my only hate"

Romeo crashes a Capulet party in hopes of seeing Rosaline. Juliet is there dancing with Paris, her maybe-husband-to-be. When Romeo sees Juliet from across the room, he completely forgets about Rosaline. "O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!" he sighs.

Romeo manages to get Juliet away from Paris, and he compares her to a saint. Juliet likes this, and she really likes Romeo. They have such incredible chemistry that their witty banter turns to kissing in about two minutes. Juliet's nurse interrupts the kissing session. Then comes the bad news: Romeo finds out that Juliet is a Capulet. Then Juliet finds out that Romeo is a Montague.

Complication

So much for the feud—we're getting married.

On her balcony after the party, Juliet wrestles with the big problem. "O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?" she asks. In other words, why does Romeo have to be Romeo
Montague, a guy she's supposed to hate?

Romeo pops out of the bushes and promises to change his name if only Juliet will love him. This is obviously a little bit of a shock to Juliet. But she quickly gets over her surprise, and the two lovers decide that the family feud doesn't matter – they have to be together.

The two of them enlist the help of Juliet's nurse and Romeo's confessor, a priest named Friar Laurence. The Friar agrees to marry the two of them in hopes of resolving their families' feud. Less than twenty-four hours after they've met, Romeo and Juliet are tying the knot in secret at Friar Laurence's church.

Meanwhile, Tybalt is so furious at Romeo's invasion of Capulet territory (the party; he doesn't even know about Juliet) that he's decided he has to challenge Romeo to a duel. This is going to be a problem.

**Climax**

**Murder! Sex!**

Romeo enters with a big just-married smile on his face – and finds Tybalt waiting for him. Tybalt insults him to his face, which would ordinarily make Romeo whip out his sword and get ready to fight. But Romeo knows that Tybalt is his wife's cousin, so he tries to ignore the insult and avoid fighting. To Romeo's friends, this looks like Romeo is being a coward. So Romeo's best friend Mercutio says he'll fight Tybalt instead. When Romeo tries to break up the fight, he only succeeds in getting in Mercutio's way at a crucial moment. Tybalt stabs Mercutio and runs away. Mercutio realizes he's dying, and he blames Romeo for interfering. Then he lashes out at both the Capulets and the Montagues for the whole situation. "A plague on both your houses!" he curses (3.1.111).

Romeo feels like he is to blame for his best friend's death, and he goes crazy. When Tybalt comes back, Romeo challenges him to a duel and kills him. Romeo blames his love for Juliet for making him refuse to fight Tybalt – which led to Mercutio's death. Juliet, meanwhile, finds out that her husband has just killed her cousin. For a while, it looks like the feud is going to pull the lovers apart.

But Juliet's loyalty to her new husband wins out over her feelings for her cousin. The lovers have another problem, though: as punishment for killing Tybalt, Romeo has been banished from Verona. Both Romeo and Juliet cannot cope with the idea that they will not be able to see each other. Death, they argue, is better than living separated from each other. Faced with two hysterical lovers, the Friar and the Nurse figure out a way for Romeo and Juliet to spend one night together before Romeo leaves for Mantua, a nearby city.

**Suspense**
Romeo is banished and Juliet is being forced into marriage.

Romeo and Juliet have one amazing night together. But Romeo has barely climbed out the window before Juliet's mother sweeps in with the worst possible news: Lord Capulet has decided that Juliet is going to marry Paris right away. Juliet flips out and refuses to marry him. This makes her father so angry that he lays out an ultimatum: either Juliet marries Paris, or he will throw her out of the house.

Juliet turns to her mother for help, but her mother won't do anything. Even worse, Juliet's Nurse tells her that she should forget Romeo and marry Paris. The Friar is Juliet's last hope. She threatens to commit suicide if he can't figure a way out of the mess that she's in. He comes up with a crazy plan: Juliet will drink a weird potion that will make her appear as if she's dead. In fact, she'll only be sleeping, and when she wakes up in her family tomb, he and Romeo will be there waiting for her. Juliet is so desperate that she thinks this is a good idea. So she drinks the potion, and the next morning her family finds her "dead."

Denouement

The lovers die.

Everything would still be fine – except that the letter the Friar sends to Romeo (the one explaining the whole fake death situation) never reaches Mantua. So when Romeo hears the news from Verona, he thinks Juliet is actually dead. He immediately decides to kill himself rather than live without her. He finds a poor apothecary and bullies him into illegally selling him some poison. Then Romeo immediately leaves for Verona.

When Romeo arrives at the Capulet tomb, Paris is there, mourning over his dead almost-wife. Paris gets in the way, so Romeo kills him. Then he breaks into the tomb and embraces his dead wife. She still looks as if she's alive, Romeo says, which almost kills the audience. But he has no way of knowing the truth, so he kisses Juliet farewell and drinks the poison.

The Friar shows up about one minute too late, just in time to watch Juliet wake up from her drugged sleep. She immediately looks for Romeo – and finds him lying dead next to her. The Friar hears noise from outside, and tries to convince Juliet to run away. But Juliet refuses to leave Romeo's side. The Friar exits, and Juliet takes Romeo's dagger and stabs herself.

Conclusion

Lots of people are dead, but the Montague-Capulet feud is over.

When the citizens of Verona – including Romeo and Juliet's parents – come in, the two lovers are lying side by side, both dead. "See what a scourge is laid upon your hate / that heaven finds means to kill your joys with love," the Prince tells the Montagues and Capulets. The
families realize what their hate has caused and end the feud.

Booker's Seven Basic Plots Analysis: Tragedy

Anticipation Stage

Act 1 – the first half

Both Romeo and Juliet have potential romantic partners, but neither one is really satisfied.

Dream Stage

Act 1 – the second half

Romeo and Juliet meet each other, and they have instant and mutual butterflies. They both believe they have found true love.

Frustration Stage

Act 2

Romeo and Juliet realize that the person they just fell in love with is one of their greatest enemies. They want to be together, but everything they've ever known tells them not to trust each other. Their families are constantly fighting: how can their relationship ever work?

Nightmare Stage

Acts 3 & 4

Romeo and Juliet decide to get married despite the conflict between their families. But less than an hour after they say their vows, the feud between their families also rips them apart. Tybalt, a Capulet, kills Romeo's best friend, Mercutio. As revenge, Romeo kills Tybalt – who is Juliet's cousin. This violent betrayal challenges both Romeo and Juliet's love for each other. They manage to forgive each other, but as punishment for killing Tybalt, Romeo is banished from Verona. Then things get even worse – Juliet's parents decide they want her to get married to Paris that very week.

Destruction Stage

Acts 4 & 5

Being forced to marry Paris is a fate worse than death, as far as Juliet is concerned. In order to
avoid this marriage, Juliet (with the Friar's help) fakes her own death. But this pretend death becomes reality when Romeo hears the news of Juliet's death and believes that she is really gone. Minutes before Juliet is due to wake from her drugged sleep, Romeo comes to her tomb, kisses her good-bye, and kills himself. Juliet regains consciousness to find her husband lying dead beside her. When she kisses him, she discovers his lips are warm. She has missed him by a matter of minutes. In despair, she takes his dagger and stabs herself.

Three Act Plot Analysis

Act I

Romeo and Juliet fall in love, only to realize that they are on opposite sides of an ongoing war between their families. Act I ends with the lovers pursuing their affair (the famous balcony scene).

Act II

Romeo is banished from Verona, so the Friar has Juliet fake her death so she can join Romeo in Mantua. However, Romeo does not receive word she is actually still alive.

Act III

Romeo kills himself next to Juliet's comatose body; when she awakes, she kills herself in response to finding his corpse. The families finally end their cycle of hate.
Study Questions

1. Romeo and Juliet are the most famous pair of lovers in Western literature, but is their love real, or is it just infatuation? Some people claim that Romeo and Juliet are just melodramatic teenagers. Others argue that the Romeo and Juliet's love is the kind of love everyone should aspire to find. What proof does the play provide that their love is "real love," not just infatuation?

2. What would have happened to Romeo and Juliet if they hadn't died? Is their relationship sustainable over time? Do they have anything to offer each other once the initial burst of passion calmed down? Would Romeo move on from Juliet as quickly as he moved on from Rosaline?

3. "Youth in this play is a separate nation," scholar Frank Kermode writes of Romeo and Juliet. How is the world of the young people in the play – Romeo and Juliet, Mercutio, Benvolio, and Tybalt – different from the world of their parents and mentors? In what ways do the young adopt the beliefs of the old, and in what ways do they ignore them or fight against them? Should Romeo and Juliet's relationship be viewed as a rebellion of the young against the old? Should the world of the young, and its values, or the world of the old, and its values, bear more of the blame for their tragedy?

4. The motifs of light and darkness run through the play. How do these references to day and night, sun, moon and stars, torches and lightning provide metaphors for what happens in the play? What kind of feelings do these images arouse in the reader?

5. "The Nurse and Mercutio, both of them audience favorites, are nevertheless bad news, in different but complementary ways," Shakespeare scholar Harold Bloom writes. Do you agree with this assessment? What is similar or different about Mercutio and the Nurse's attitudes towards love, sex, and marriage?

6. Mercutio "does not believe in the religion of love," scholar Harold Bloom writes. To what extent is there a "religion of love" in Romeo and Juliet? Who creates this religion of love, and who opposes it? What might explain Mercutio's critical attitude towards love and his tendency to reduce love to sex?

7. What responsibility should the Nurse and the Friar bear for the play's tragic ending? The Prince announces that "some shall be pardoned and some punished." Do either the Nurse or the Friar deserve punishment? Who else, in your opinion, might bear some responsibility for the two lovers' deaths?

8. Why do the Nurse and the Friar ultimately fail in their attempts to help Romeo and Juliet? Scholar Marjorie Garber writes, "The Friar is all authority and no experience, the Nurse all experience and no authority. Once again the older generation...is inadequate to the tragic world of reality, of love and circumstance." Do you agree with this assessment?

9. The fact that Romeo and Juliet have sex is what makes it impossible for Juliet to marry Paris – and it is what leads to the play's final tragedy. Why do the Friar and the Nurse decide to help Romeo and Juliet spend the night together, even after he has killed Tybalt?
Could the play still have unfolded in a similar way without this night of lovemaking?
Symbolism, Imagery, Allegory

Love as Religious Worship

"Call me but love and I'll be new baptized" (2.2.4). That's what our smooth-talking Romeo says to Juliet as a way to suggest that Juliet's love has the potential to make him "reborn." Jeez. It seems like every time we turn around Romeo compares his love for Juliet to a religious experience. When the pair first meets, Romeo calls Juliet a "saint" and implies that he'd really like to "worship" her body (1.5.2). Not only that, but Romeo's "hand" would be "blessed" if it touched the divine Juliet's (1.5.1). Eventually, Juliet picks up on this "religion of love" conceit (a conceit is just an elaborate metaphor) and declares that Romeo is "the god of [her] idolatry" (2.2.12). (We're guessing this is why director Baz Luhrmann fills his 1996 film version of Romeo + Juliet with religions icons, namely crosses. He also makes Romeo's love baptism literal by dunking Claire Danes and Leonardo DiCaprio in a swimming pool.

So, what's up with all this over-the-top talk about religion and love? Have these two kids gone off the deep end? Well, the first thing to note is that Romeo and Juliet didn't invent the idea that love is a holy experience – it's been around forever and was especially popular in medieval (roughly 400s – early 1500s) courtly love poetry. (Note, Shakespeare wrote Romeo and Juliet in the late sixteenth century.)

We should also point out that, as cheesy or cliché as it may seem to us, all of this erotic talk about "worshipping" does a pretty good job of capturing the intensity of the young lovers' passion for one another. Let's face it. Sometimes head-over-heels love does seem to be rapturous, earth-shattering, and even holy. (Ever heard the song "Just Like Heaven" by The Cure?) At the same time, however, Shakespeare also seems to hint at the potential dangers of such an extreme relationship.

Thumb Biting

Unless you're fluent in childish Elizabethan gestures, you might be wondering what the heck Sampson's up to when he spots the Montague's servants on the streets and announces, "I will bite my thumb at them, which is disgrace to them if they bear it" (1.1.13).

Basically, thumb biting, which involves biting and then flicking one's thumb from behind the upper teeth, is a Shakespearean version of flipping someone the bird and saying "nanny nanny boo boo." It's an insulting gesture that, more often than not, ends up coming across as wildly immature. Here's how it all goes down in the play:
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
[Aside 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. (1.1.1)

Sampson doesn't have a good reason to insult the Montagues' servants – he's basically looking to stir up trouble because his masters (the Capulets) are feuding with the Montagues. The funny thing is, Sampson's too much of a coward to own up to his silly gesture because the "law" won't be on his "side" if his thumb biting causes a big old brawl (he doesn't want to get busted for causing a fracas).

It doesn't get any more ridiculous than this, folks, which seems to be Shakespeare's point. The Capulet/Montague feud, which has obviously trickled down to involve their servants, is completely absurd. Just like Sampson's thumb biting

Sex and Death

You've probably noticed that sex and death seem to go hand in hand in this play. In the very first scene, Sampson crudely puns on the term "maidenhead" (virginity) when he equates sword fighting against men with raping women: "When I have fought with the men I will be civil with the maids – I will cut off their heads [...] the heads ofmaids or their maidenheads" (1.1.7). Even Juliet links sex and death – she puns on the word "die" (Shakespearean slang for orgasm) when, day-dreaming about her impending wedding night with Romeo, she imagines Romeo being transformed into a bunch of "little stars" lighting up the night sky: "Give me my Romeo, and when I shall die / Take him and cut him out in little stars, / And he will make the face of heaven so fine" (3.2.1).

The most obvious example of the sex/death connection in the play is when Capulet sees his daughter's lifeless body and says that "death" has "lain with" (slept with) Juliet: "See, there she lies, / Flower as she was, deflowered by him. Death is my son-in-law, death is my heir" (4.4.9). (By the way, Capulet has no idea at this point that Juliet is married to Romeo – he still thinks she was all set to marry Paris and is still a virgin.)
Shakespeare scholar Marjorie Garber offers one of the most interesting insights when she notes that even the way that Romeo and Juliet each literally die carries symbolic sexual meaning. Romeo drinks his poison from a goblet, a traditional symbol of female sexuality. (This same symbolism is used in the Da Vinci Code, where the Grail, a big V-shaped goblet, symbolizes, well, a woman's vagina.) Juliet, in contrast, stabs herself with Romeo's dagger – a traditional symbol of male sexuality. What's this all about, you ask? Symbolically, Romeo and Juliet combine physical death and sexual climax. It's all pretty ironic, really. Typically, sex acts between men and women are supposed to result in the creation of life (making babies, that is). Yet, in the play, that's just not the case.

Oxymoron and Paradox

When Shakespeare wrote Romeo and Juliet, he seems to have been going through his "I heart oxymora" phase because the play is chock full of them. An "oxymoron," by the way, is the combination of two terms ordinarily seen as opposites. For example, at the end of the famous balcony scene, when Romeo is leaving, Juliet says "parting is such sweet sorrow" (2.2.27). "Sweet sorrow" is an oxymoron.

Think that's impressive? Get a load of Juliet's use of 6 oxymora when she finds out that lover boy (that would be Romeo) has killed her cousin, Tybalt:

O serpent heart, hid with a flowering face!
Did ever dragon keep so fair a cave?
Beautiful tyrant! fiend angelical!
Dove-feather'd raven! wolvish-ravening lamb!
Despised substance of divinest show!
Just opposite to what thou justly seem'st,
A damned saint, an honourable villain!
O nature, what hadst thou to do in hell,
When thou didst bower the spirit of a fiend
In moral paradise of such sweet flesh?
Was ever book containing such vile matter
So fairly bound? O that deceit should dwell
In such a gorgeous palace! (3.2.8)

Clearly, Juliet is experiencing some mixed emotions – she wonders how the love of her life, the guy she thought was so wonderful, could be a killer. Juliet's use of oxymoron here gives expression to her turmoil.

There are also some great examples of paradox in this passage. A "paradox" is a statement that contradicts itself and nonetheless seems true. Example: Juliet asks "Was ever a book containing such vile matter so fairly bound?"
We know what you're wondering – how the heck do you tell the difference between an "oxymoron" and a "paradox"? Well, a paradox is different from an oxymoron because it contains contradictory words that are separated by one or more intervening words.

Plants and Poison

Poison is a big deal in *Romeo and Juliet*. Romeo dies by it when he guzzles a concoction he purchased (illegally) from the sickly Apothecary in Act 5, Scene 3. Poison is also Juliet's first choice of "weapon" for suicide. When she figures out what Romeo has done, she tries to lick the poison from his lips but there's not enough left to kill her (5.3.2). Of course, all of this is foreshadowed when Juliet drinks a concoction (whipped up by Friar Laurence) that causes a deep, deep sleep that simulates death (4.3.3).

Before Romeo and Juliet take their lives, Friar Laurence, who's big into herbal medicine, shows Romeo a flower and makes a cryptic statement that seems to echo throughout the play:

*Within the infant rind of this weak flower*
*Poison hath residence and medicine power:*
*For this, being smelt, with that part cheers each part;*
*Being tasted, slays all senses with the heart.*
*Two such opposed kings encamp them still*
*In man as well as herbs, grace and rude will;*
*And where the worser is predominant,*
*Full soon the canker death eats up that plant.* (2.2.1)

Friar Laurence suggests that, depending on how it's used, a flower can be healing (because it's aromatic) or poisonous (if it's orally ingested). The Friar also muses that people are a lot like the flower he holds in his hand – being full of both "grace" and "rude will," human beings also have the capacity to be good or deadly, depending on whether or not "rude will" takes over. We can't help but notice that Friar Laurence's observations speak directly to the play's tragedy – Romeo and Juliet's love turns deadly when it's "poisoned" by their family's hateful feud. At the same time, their love also has the capacity to heal, which becomes evident when their parents decide to reconcile at the play's end.

Queen Mab

Studying Mercutio's famous "Queen Mab" speech has become a rite of passage for students, but we've got to admit that the fantastical speech is a bit baffling to us (though, it's baffling in a fun, we want to know more about it kind of way).

Let's start with the basics. Who the heck is Queen Mab? According to Mercutio's vivid description, Queen Mab is a tiny fairy that rides around in a coach made out of an "empty
hazelnut" with spider's "legs" for wheel spokes (1.4.11). The coach is driven by an even tinier "grey-coated gnat" and drawn by a "team of little atomi" (tiny atoms).

Queen Mab spends her time galloping over the noses and lips of sleepers, filling their dreams with wild fantasies (lovers dream of love, soldiers dream of slitting throats, lawyers dream of winning lawsuits, etc.). Mab (whose name is also a slang word for "whore") is also kind of scary. When she's in a bad mood, she plagues women who dream of "kisses" with nasty cold sores ("blisters") and she's fond of making young, virginal girls have naughty dreams.

We know what you're thinking. Why is everything about Queen Mab so tiny and sexual? Well, in order to answer that question we need to think about what it is that prompts Mercutio's wild rant in the first place. Fed up with Romeo's lovesick moping for Rosaline and his claim that he had a steamy "dream" the night before, Mercutio taunts his buddy by saying that Queen Mab must have paid him a visit. Mercutio also informs Romeo that dreams "are the children of an idle brain," which is another way of saying that Romeo is an idiot and his dreams about Rosaline are ridiculous (1.4.12). Given the context of the speech, it seems like Mercutio is suggesting that, like Queen Mab, dreams (especially Romeo's) are small and insignificant.

Pretty wild stuff, don't you think? It's easy to see why, in Baz Luhrmann's 1996 film, Romeo + Juliet, Mercutio takes a hit of ecstasy before delivering his "Queen Mab" speech – the whole thing can seem like drug-induced nonsense. Romeo all but says so when he yells, "Peace, peace, Mercutio, peace! Thou talk'st of nothing" (1.4.12).

**Light in Darkness**

Light in darkness – this is the imagery that constantly recurs in Romeo and Juliet. "O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright," Romeo says when he first sees Juliet. "It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night / Like a rich jewel in an Ethiope's ear" (1.5.1). Variations on this imagery are repeated again and again – images of Juliet as a sun rising in the darkness, of Juliet's eyes shining in the sky, images of Romeo's body cut out in little stars, of Romeo and Juliet's love as a bright furious lightning flash. At times, the image of a flash of light disappearing into the dusk seems to symbolize both the brilliant strength of Romeo and Juliet's love, as well as its transience. The imagery of light and darkness also picks up the play's emphasis on the contrasts between love and hate, passion and death.

**Night**

Night is a pretty important time in the play. It's when all the passionate love scenes occur so, night seems to shelter and protects the lovers, while the glare of day threatens to reveal them. In contrast, the heat of the sun makes the young men of Verona irritable and prone to violence and the street brawls occur during the day time.

We often think of night as both a time for romance and liberation, as well as a time of
danger, and the imagery of night and darkness in *Romeo and Juliet* carries both night's promises and its threats. Hidden in darkness, Romeo and Juliet's love is free from the social rules that would divide them. But danger also lurks in the darkness, and the secrecy of Romeo and Juliet's marriage will prove fatal to them.

**Death and Premonitions Thereof**

Both lovers have intimations of coming death – Romeo before he even arrives at the Capulet's party, and Juliet when she sees Romeo climbing from her window on his way to exile in Mantua. "Oh god, I have an ill-divining soul," she calls down to him. "Methinks I see thee, now thou art so low, / as one dead in the bottom of a tomb" (3.5.8). In the most literal possible way, Juliet's drug-induced deathlike state foreshadows her own death. And the apothecary from whom Romeo buys the poison is described as looking like death – thin, starving, with hollow eyes. Romeo buys his suicide weapon from a man that symbolizes death.

**Setting**

**Verona, Italy**

Many of the scenes take place in the streets of Verona, Italy where the young men of the upper-class Capulet and Montague families hang out and get into fights with one another.

Within Verona, Romeo and Juliet have very different worlds. Romeo is always seen in the streets, never in his own house; although, we do hear that he likes to spend a fair amount of time moping in his bedroom or in a sycamore grove when he's crushing on Rosaline at the beginning of the play (1.1.4).

For the most part, Romeo is part of a freewheeling and *masculine* world. Juliet, in contrast, is very much a sheltered daughter, almost never allowed outside the walls of her father's house. Romeo must invade that world in order to meet Juliet by crashing the Capulet's party and then climbing up to her balcony (1.3).

A neutral place where Romeo and Juliet's worlds overlap is at Friar Laurence's church. This seems to be the only place Juliet is allowed to go outside of her home, (for purposes of confessing sins…presumably not to commit them). Friar Laurence is Romeo's confessor as well. Verona, then, is a setting with a religious – specifically Catholic – dimension.

Theatrical and film interpretations of the play have reset the play in many different cities, from *West Side Story*'s 1950s New York City, which is divided by ethnic tensions, to the futuristic "Verona Beach" of Baz Luhrmann's film version of *Romeo + Juliet*. What most interpretations keep is the sense of a hot climate that provokes the passions, something Benvolio refers to directly when he says, "For, now, these hot days, is the mad blood stirring"
Genre

Tragedy

You probably guessed that The Most Excellent and Lamentable Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet is, well, a tragedy. (And yes, that's the full title on the 1599 version of the play.) But for the first two acts, it doesn't seem like a tragedy at all. In fact, it unfolds like a classic "comedy," complete with dirty jokes, slapstick humor, and lovers struggling to be together. We think that Shakespeare Theater Company director David Muse puts it best when he says that Romeo and Juliet "waits as long as it can to be a tragedy" (source).

So, where does the play become a "tragedy," exactly? It seems like Mercutio's death in Act 3, Scene 1 is the turning point of the play. It's a tough transition for the audience – we've gotten used to laughing at the bawdy Nurse and the antics of Romeo's friends, and then suddenly the play stops being funny. Does this mean the play is flawed? We don't think so. The initial comedic nature of the play ultimately makes the tragic ending even more painful.

But don't just take our word for it. Check out this list of common conventions typical of Shakespearean tragedy. (We dare you to compare this list to our discussions of "Genre" for Hamlet and Macbeth.)

Dramatic work: Check. Romeo and Juliet is definitely a play.

Serious or somber theme: Check. Despite all the humor that dominates the first half of the play, teenage suicide and deadly street brawls are no laughing matter.

Hero's got a major flaw of character or conflict with some overpowering force: Check. If Romeo and Juliet share the distinction of being the play's "heroes" or "protagonists," then we can definitely say that they're in "conflict with some overpowering force": their youthful and passionate love affair flies in the face of a long-standing family feud.

If we want to single out Romeo as our hero/protagonist, then we could also say that he's got a "major flaw of character." The kid is pretty rash and he's definitely reckless (sneaking up to Juliet's window when he knows her family will break his legs if he's caught, running off to elope, committing suicide moments before Juliet awakens from a deep slumber, and so on). In other words, Romeo's impetuousness causes a whole lot of trouble in the play.

Hero is destined for destruction and downfall: Check. If you've been paying attention, then you already know what we're going say here. The play drops several hints that our "star-crossed" lovers are fated to die. Reread the opening Prologue for the evidence and then
check out our discussion of the theme of "Fate."

Now, if you're not buying into this whole "fate" is responsible for Romeo and Juliet's tragedy thing, then you're not alone. Poet W.H. Auden argues that everything is Romeo and Juliet's fault – they're too passionate and their love is far too excessive. Critic John Lawlor also weighs in that fate is pretty powerful in the play, but Romeo and Juliet ultimately commit suicide of their own "free will."

Not all tragedies end in death but all of Shakespeare's tragedies do: Check. This one's easy. Romeo and Juliet commit suicide in the play's final scene (5.3). Plus, Romeo manages to stab Paris (5.3) and also Tybalt, who killed his BFF Mercutio, along the way (3.1). We should also point out how the Prince promises us that some heads will definitely roll in the play's final lines when he says "Some shall be pardoned, and some punished" for the part they've played in the tragic events (5.3.4).

Despite the death of individuals at the end, the plays' conclusions also seem to promise the restoration of political order: After Romeo's and Juliet's lifeless bodies are discovered, the Prince shows up to hand out a little justice and to restore social order in Verona. It hardly seems necessary, though, because the parents of Romeo and Juliet promise to end the feud and erect statues in honor of each other's children (5.3.3). So, check.

Tone

Romantic, Passionate, Violent

"Here's much to do with hate, but more with love," Romeo says at the play's beginning, and the dynamics of extreme emotion define the tone of the play (1.1.7). Romeo and Juliet deals in extremes that overlap or transform into each other. The Friar attempts to provide a lone voice of moderation, but he is drowned out by storms of passion and violence. The insults tossed back and forth between the Montagues and Capulets alternate with Romeo and Juliet's loving exchanges of vows.

The language of the play is also highly sexualized, but sexuality is as often discussed in violent terms (in the play's opening scene, for instance) as it is in romantic terms. Violence and death emerge even out of Romeo and Juliet's talk of love. The strength of Romeo and Juliet's passion for each other conjures up the threat of death almost immediately. "If he be married, / my grave is like to be my wedding bed," Juliet says before she learns Romeo's identity (1.5.9). Later she says to Romeo, "I should kill thee with much cherishing" (2.2.27). Romeo and Juliet is marked by an excess of strong emotion that demands resolution – whether in a duel or in a kiss.
Writing Style

Epic, Passionate, Poetic

From the Prologue we know Shakespeare wants to make this play a big deal. Besides the fact that he employs the Greek tragedy-esque Chorus, check out how epic his language is, right from the beginning:

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-crossed lovers take their life…

We've got some mighty words here: ancient grudge, civil blood, fatal loins, star-crossed lovers. This language continues through the play. While such language could seem melodramatic, Shakespeare makes it work. The plot lives up to the hype, so to speak.

Besides choosing epic-sounding words, Shakespeare pens a slew of passionate exchanges. In addition to Romeo and Juliet's romantic moments, Shakespeare gives many other characters some passionate dialogue. We're thinking of Mercutio's repetition of "A plague a'both your houses!" (3.1), and Friar Laurence's "Ah, what an unkind hour, is guilty of this lamentable chance!" (5.3). A lot of serious stuff goes down during the play, so the passion seems appropriate.

While decidedly passionate, much of Shakespeare's language sounds downright poetic. That's because it's written in poetic verse. Expect for exchanges between servants and some bawdy jokes, Romeo and Juliet is written in iambic pentameter, Shakespeare's meter of choice. You may be thinking, "Iambic pentameter, with all those stresses and syllable counts… for an entire play? However many hundreds of lines that is?!" And to that we say, "Uh huh. Isn't Shakespeare a lyrical genius?"

So let's break down what iambic pentameter means. Let's start with the "pentameter" part. "Penta-" means five, so we know we've got five of whatever a "meter" is. A meter is a group of two syllables, or "feet." The two feet are either stressed or unstressed, in some sort of pattern, which gives the line that certain rhythm that makes the line sound "poetic." So let's see – if each meter has two feet (a.k.a. syllables), and we have five meters, then each of Romeo and Juliet's lines will have ten feet, or ten syllables. We got the pentameter part covered. Now, "iambic" is a stress pattern – actually, the most popular stress pattern. It dictates that the first foot in each meter must be unstressed, and the second must be stressed. You might wonder how you can tell an unstressed foot from a stressed one? The official explanation is that a stressed syllable gets the emphasis in a word – or, as the linguists say, the syllable takes
"phonetic prominence."

The easiest way to explain this is to just sound it out. Let's look one of the Friar's early lines. He says, "Holy Saint Francis! What a change is here!" (2.3) Shakespeare chooses his words carefully, so if you pay close attention to what words you naturally put emphasis on, the lines come out sounding pretty good. Look at what syllables we hear ourselves naturally putting stress on (capital letters = stress):

hoLY | saint FRAN|cis! WHAT | a CHANGE | is HERE!

Iambic pentameter can get tricky, but always bring it back to the basics: five meters of two feet each that follow the stressed/unstressed pattern.

What's Up With the Title?

This title is pretty much as self-explanatory as titles get. You might be interested to know that the full title of the 1599 version of the play reads The Most Excellent and Lamentable Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet. We happen to think "excellent and lamentable" is a pretty accurate description of the play.

What's Up With the Ending?

In the play's final scene, Romeo finds Juliet's seemingly "dead" body and, rather than face life without her, he swallows a vial of poison moments before Juliet wakes up. When Juliet realizes her husband is dead, she tries to kill herself by kissing Romeo. Since there's not enough poison left on his lips, she stabs herself with Romeo's "happy dagger" (5.3.3).

The Tragedy Comes Full Circle

As tragic as it is, the ending of Romeo and Juliet shouldn't surprise anyone. We're told from the get-go that our "star-crossed lovers [will] take their life" (Prologue). We also know that Romeo and Juliet belongs to the genre of "tragedy," and Shakespeare's tragedies always, always, always end in death. (You can read more about this by going to "Genre," but then come right back, or else.)

Too Little, Too Late

In the Prologue, the Chorus also tells us that "their death [will] bury their parents' strife," and it does. In one of the most ironic moments of the play, the couple's parents are so devastated by the deaths of their children that they kiss and make up, each father promising to erect an
elaborate statue to commemorate the other's child (5.3.3). Hmm. Do we detect a bit of competition here? When Montague announces his plans to "raise [Juliet's] statue in pure gold," he basically tells Capulet he's going to outdo him. "But I can give thee more," he brags (5.3.3). Of course, if Montague and Capulet had put an end to the long-standing family feud earlier, Romeo and Juliet would still be alive, which is why the prince calls the parents' reconciliation a "glooming peace" (5.3.11).

**Death as Sexual Fulfillment**

Shakespeare scholar Marjorie Garber offers some interesting insight about the specific way that Romeo and Juliet end their lives. Romeo drinks poison from a "cup," a traditional symbol of female sexuality. (This same symbolism is used in the *Da Vinci Code*, where the Grail, a big V-shaped goblet, represents the eternal feminine.) Juliet, in contrast, stabs herself with Romeo's dagger – a traditional image of male sexuality. Garber argues that, symbolically, Romeo and Juliet combine physical death and sexual climax.

The way Romeo's and Juliet's deaths resemble acts of sexual fulfillment doesn't really surprise us. Death and sex are linked throughout the entire play (which you can read more about in "Symbols") and Juliet does say that ingesting poison by kissing Romeo's lips would "make [her] die with a restorative" (5.3.2). In other words, she's suggesting that the kiss and the poison would heal or "restore" her by reuniting her with her husband. But, since poison isn't a viable option for her, she chooses to unsheathe Romeo's sword and then thrusts it into her own body.

**The Ending on Film**

After you read the ending of Shakespeare's play, we recommend watching the following film clips: 1) The ending of Franco Zeffirelli's 1968 film version of the play and 2) the final scene in Baz Luhrmann's 1996 film adaptation, *Romeo + Juliet*. 
Trivia

- Think Romeo’s “O she doth teach the torches to burn bright” speech is an awesome pick-up line? So did John Gaugh, the author of a 17th century version of “Dating for Dummies.” In his 1639 book, *The Academy of Compliments*, Gough “borrows” Romeo’s lines and places them in a poem he calls “Encomiums on the Beauty of his Mistress.” You can compare Romeo’s lines to Gough’s poem (courtesy of the Folger Shakespeare Library). We should note that plagiarism wasn’t really a big deal back then. Even Shakespeare did it.

- In Elizabethan England, the legal age for marriage (with parental permission) was twelve-years-old for girls and fourteen-years-old for boys. Nowadays, we tend to think of Juliet as just a tad young for nuptials (she’s only thirteen in the play). (Source)

- In the movie *Shakespeare in Love* (1998), Will Shakespeare (played by Joseph Fiennes) is in the middle of writing an awful play, *Romeo and Ethel the Pirate’s Daughter*, when he falls in love with "Viola" (played by Oscar winner, Gwyneth Paltrow), who inspires him to pen *Romeo and Juliet* as we now know it. Check out this movie clip, where fellow playwright Christopher ("Kit") Marlowe gives Will Shakespeare some advice about his project.

- Author Stephenie Meyer says that, in *New Moon*, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is "really the theme of the novel." (Source)

- Since women weren't allowed to perform on the Elizabethan stage, *Romeo and Juliet* was originally played by an all-male cast. Female roles were most often played by young, pre-pubescent boys with high-pitched, "feminine" voices. Juliet would have been played by a boy until the late 1600s, when it first became acceptable for women to appear on the stage.
In 2008, Washington D.C.'s Shakespeare Theater Company staged a historically accurate, all-male performance of *Romeo and Juliet* (source). In response, D.C.'s Taffety Punk Theater Company staged an *all-female* production of the play and boasted that their version was "an hour shorter, a fraction of the cost, and [had] 100 percent more women" (source).

It's often hard for a modern audience to picture Juliet as a thirteen-year-old girl. Actresses who play Juliet are usually much older. But one of the most successful productions of *Romeo and Juliet* ever – Franco Zeffirelli's 1968 film – cast fifteen-year-old Olivia Hussey as Juliet. Hussey won awards for her portrayal of Juliet, and her age was crucial to the role. At times, the actress looked like a little girl – way too young to attract Romeo's notice. At other moments, she looked like an incredibly attractive woman. Hussey captured the sense of Juliet's being right on the edge of maturity, and growing up through the experience of first love.

Disney's 2006 *High School Musical*, a film that features two teenage lovebirds who belong to feuding high school cliques, is considered a loose adaptation of Romeo and Juliet's forbidden love story. (Source)

**Steaminess Rating**

**R for sex, sexual language, brief nudity, and bawdy jokes**

There's very little in *Romeo and Juliet* that can't be interpreted as some kind of dirty joke. Even the most serious moments in the play have sexual puns lurking under the surface. Here's a guide to some of the play's bawdy bits (the Elizabethan term for dirty jokes). It's not definitive, since that would mean reprinting most of the play, so here are two rules you should follow when looking for the sexual parts of *Romeo and Juliet*:

1. If it seems like a line might be a sex joke, it's probably a sex joke.
2. If it seems like there's no way a line could be a sex joke, there's still a high probability that it's a sex joke.
Some general guidelines:

- Watch out for references to death. In Elizabethan slang, "to die" means to have an orgasm. (Compare to the French slang for orgasm, "la petite mort," the little death.)
- Any reference to weapon/sword/dagger/tool/rrow/shaft/thrust can be interpreted not just in the literal sense (all the men in the play do carry swords) but also as a reference to their metaphorical "swords." This should become clear pretty early in the play, when Sampson says, "My naked weapon is out" (1.1.10). Also, any reference to Cupid's shafts in particular is not just talking about the naked baby's cute little arrows.
- "To stand" is used as a metaphor for having an erection.
- References to falling, sinking, or bearing burdens are all supposed to conjure the image of women with men lying on top of them. (Or, occasionally, men with adventurous women on top of them.)

A sampling of dirty jokes in the play:

1. The opening pages of the play are basically one long dirty joke. Two Capulets are talking about "thrusting" Montague women to the wall. Gregory boasts about his "naked weapon" and describes how he will use his "sword" to "cut off" the "maid's heads" or "maidenheads" (their virginity).

2. Even Juliet's Nurse's speech is full of double entendre:

   I must another way,
   To fetch a ladder, by the which your love
   Must climb a bird's nest soon when its dark. (2.5.9)

   Here, she's literally talking about getting a ladder for Romeo to climb up so he can spend the night in Juliet's bedroom. To "climb a bird's nest" is also slang for having sex.

3. Almost everything Mercutio says is dirty. He and Romeo have an epic back-and-forth in 1.4 that involves cupid's "shafts," sinking underneath the burden of love, and Mercutio's command, "If love be rough with you, be rough with love / prick love for pricking and you beat love down" (1.4.4).

4. Even Juliet has her moments. In the balcony scene, as she's talking to herself about how amazing Romeo is, she's not just thinking about his dreamy eyes and great personality. "Tis but thy name that is my enemy," she argues to herself. "Thou art thyself, though not a Montague./ What's Montague? It is nor hand, nor foot, nor arm..."
nor face, nor [pause, grin] any other part belonging to a man" (2.2.3). In the 1996 film *Romeo + Juliet*, Claire Danes does a great reading of this line.