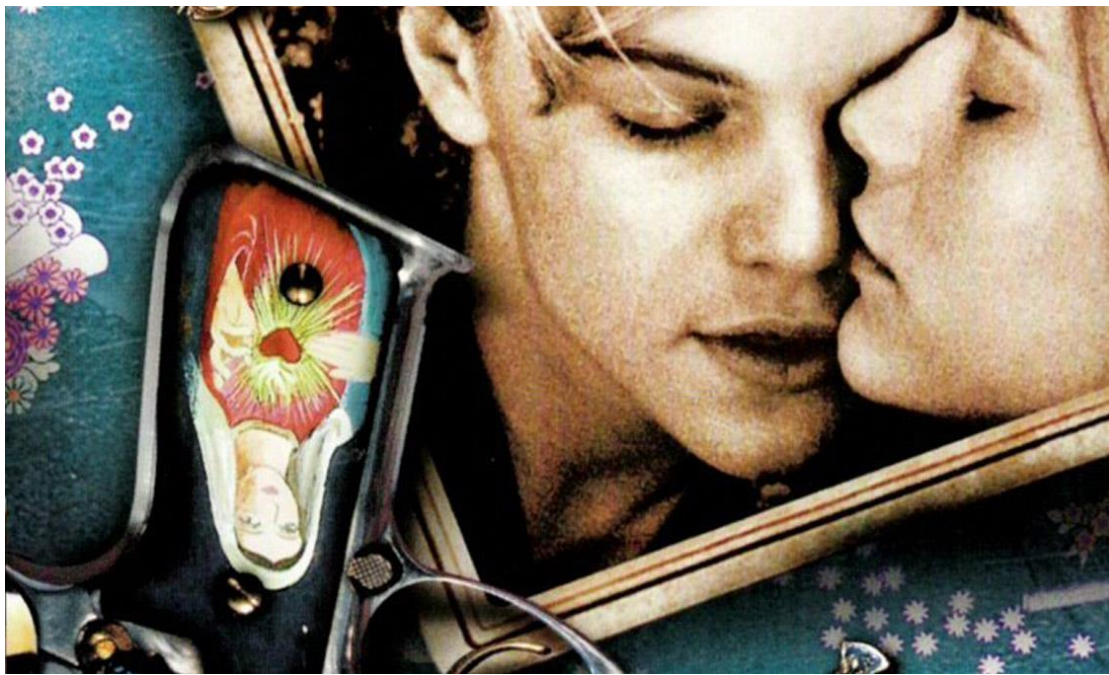


Romeo and Juliet

by

William Shakespeare



## Act One

### Scene i

1. Shakespeare immediately introduces the audience to conflict. What form does this conflict take?
2. What does the audience find out about Tybalt in this scene?
3. The Prince represents justice. What is his threat to the Montagues and Capulets?
4. What are your first impressions of Benvolio?
5. What are your first impressions of Romeo?

### Scene ii

6. What are Paris and Capulet discussing?
7. What age is Juliet?
8. Explain Capulet's advice to Paris.
9. Describe Capulet's attitude towards his daughter?
10. What is Capulet planning?
11. What advice does Benvolio give to Romeo?
12. What are Benvolio and Romeo planning to do?
13. Quote to show how Romeo feels about Rosaline.

### Scene iii

14. Comment on the relationship between Juliet and the nurse.
15. Comment on the relationship between Juliet and her mother, Lady Capulet.
16. What is Juliet's response to the suggestion of marriage?
17. How does Juliet react when her mother asks her if she could love Paris and what does this tell you about Juliet?

### Scene iv

18. Where and when is this scene set?
19. Describe Romeo's mood at the beginning of this scene and show how his language reflects his mood.
20. How do Romeo and Mercutio compare?
21. 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 clos'd in my breast  
By some vile forfeit of untimely death.

Explain what these words relate to and what they mean.

### Scene v

22. What is the temperature in the hall and why is it significant?
23. Look closely at lines 43-52. Make a list of all the things Romeo compares Juliet to. What does he think of her? Why does he speak in rhyming couplets?
24. How does Tybalt react when he discovers there are intruders at the masque and how does Capulet respond to him?
25. Romeo has quickly forgotten Rosaline. How do you respond to this?
26. How does Romeo flatter Juliet and how does she respond?
27. What does Romeo say when he discovers Juliet is a Capulet?
28. What does Juliet say when she discovers Romeo is a Montague?
29. Does Juliet tell the nurse? How is Juliet's behaviour different?
30. Make a list of what you think the themes of the play will be.

## Act II

### Scene One

While returning from the feast Romeo gives Mercutio and Benvolio the slip in order to climb the wall into Capulet's garden; Mercutio uses the opportunity to make a series of bawdy jokes about Romeo's love, but soon gives up and goes home.

This scene shows Mercutio once more as the prime mover; Benvolio has little to say. The light-hearted, teasing mood is similar to that of the last scene, in which we saw them together, on the way to the Capulet feast. There, however, Romeo was present to act as something of a restraining influence on Mercutio; here, he is not. The result is that Mercutio is given speeches which are parodies of Elizabethan rhetoric: 'He heareth not, he stirreth not, he moveth not' but they are also exceedingly bawdy, alluding to Romeo's attraction to Rosaline which Mercutio thinks Romeo is about to act on. The dramatic reason for this is to set Mercutio's concept of love, which is based on sex, against the transformed and purified version experienced by Romeo which is to emerge so fully in the next scene.

### Scene Two

As Mercutio and Benvolio depart, Romeo comes out of hiding and sees Juliet at a window. Totally ignorant of his presence she starts to speak and reveals that she is as obsessed with the thought of Romeo as he is with her. Romeo then reveals himself; at first she is frightened and then embarrassed that he has heard so frank a confession of her true feelings. They exchange 'love's faithful vow' and express their intention of getting married as soon as possible.

Love has a transforming effect on Juliet. Compared to Romeo she is never so false, elaborate, or verbose with her expression of feeling. At first she is

modest, subdued and quiet. She is prepared to be guided by her parents; when she meets Romeo she is awakened to the fact that love is much more than simply obeying others' wishes. She reminds us of the stupidity of the feud, which is based on hatred of a name only, which in itself means nothing.

'Tis but thy name that is my enemy;  
Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.'

She is strong and practical, addresses Romeo directly and plainly and rejects his elaborate courtship. She dismisses convention and eventually it is she who introduces the notion of marriage.

This is one of the most memorable scenes in the play. It uses that most flexible feature of Elizabethan stage, the balcony, to notable effect; it is full of effective light imagery to contrast with the darkness against which the scene is set and the ever-present threat of discovery by the Capulets before the affair has had a chance to develop. The other effectively used contrast is that between the bawdy adolescent humour of the newly-departed Mercutio and Romeo's painfully felt sincerity.

### **Scene Three**

Friar Lawrence is introduced gathering the herbs which he uses for medicinal purposes; and this interest in herbs prepares the audience for the profound influence he will have on the later action of the play when he concocts a potion to make Juliet appear dead. Romeo enters and asks him to consent to marrying him that day. The Friar at first supposes that Rosaline is still the object of his affections but on learning that these have now been transferred to Juliet, the Friar agrees to perform the marriage in the hope that it will bury the feud between the two families.

The scene carries the action forward swiftly and shows the Friar as good-humoured and well-intentioned. However, he is naive, and by the readiness with which he consents to the proposed marriage shows that he takes little account of the problems that it will raise. His simplistic advice is badly flawed, and we are made aware again of the inadequacies of adult characters who fail to act responsibly.

' In one respect I'll thy assistant be.  
For this alliance may so happy prove,  
To turn your household's rancour to pure love.'

The Friar's advice at the end of the scene is ironic - he says to Romeo, who is rushing to arrange the marriage,

'Wisely and slow: they stumble that run fast.'

He suggests that things will go wrong if they are rushed into and yet he fails to take his own advice.

#### **Scene Four**

Later that morning, Mercutio and Benvolio lament the loss of Romeo to love and, as they think, Rosaline. They know he has not been home that night. They discuss Tybalt's challenge via letter to Old Montague because of Romeo's presence at the Capulet ball.

Mercutio:                   A challenge, on my life.

This anticipates Mercutio's fight with Tybalt. Tybalt's dangerous nature is described by Mercutio when he refers to his skilful fighting style. Romeo arrives and Mercutio and Benvolio think he's still in love with Rosaline. They tease him about his disappearance at the ball. Romeo proves himself such a match for Mercutio's witticisms that they consider him restored to the person they knew before he fell in love.

'Now art thou sociable, now art thou Romeo;'

The Nurse arrives. They all tease her in a bawdy manner. Eventually Romeo speaks alone with the nurse. She is anxious that Romeo may be trying to take advantage of her young mistress' innocence, but he tells her to inform Juliet to make an excuse to go to confession at Friar Lawrence's cell the same afternoon where they will be married. The Nurse tells Romeo about Paris' intention to marry Juliet but that Juliet is not interested.

This scene is full of comedy: bawdy jokes from Mercutio and the nurse although the nurse fails to see the funny side of it. However, she sharply reprimands her servant, Peter, when, in her opinion, he fails to defend her.

#### **Scene Five**

Juliet is impatiently waiting for the return of the nurse from her meeting with Romeo. When the Nurse eventually arrives it takes Juliet some time to wring the essential information out of her. Dramatically the scene emphasises Juliet's desperate anxiety and her powerlessness to do anything about it and further develops the nurse's character. When the nurse arrives home to tell Juliet of the plan, we see again how naïve and essentially flawed she is. Like the Friar, she colludes in the marriage of Romeo and Juliet without taking due care to consider the realities of the bitter feud between the Capulets and Montagues, and how dangerous a secret marriage actually is.

#### **Scene Six**

Friar Lawrence marries Romeo and Juliet. Again, he speaks in images which reflect the danger of the situation and suggest that things will end disastrously.

'These violent delights have violent ends,  
And in their triumph die, like fire and powder  
Which as they kiss consume.'

The image of a violent explosion caused by the hasty passion of love is an effective one, but the Friar quickly forgets his warning when Juliet enters and he is overwhelmed by her youthful beauty and innocence.

### Act III

#### Scene One

The opening of scene one is deliberately structured to follow the marriage of Romeo and Juliet. By doing this, Shakespeare undercuts any feelings of hope that the audience may have felt at the lovers' union. Tension is created from the start of the scene when Benvolio says that the day is hot and that the Capulets are out and about, looking for trouble.

The opening scene develops our ideas about some of the key characters. Mercutio, too, is looking for a fight and deliberately provokes Tybalt.

By my heel, I care not. (1.34)

And but one word with one of us? Couple it with  
Something; make it a word and a blow. (1.38-39)

Again we can see that Benvolio adopts the role of peacemaker - he is well aware of the danger of the families fighting in public and urges Mercutio to:

...reason coldly of your grievances. (1.49)

Mercutio refuses and we see the showman side of his character. He is keen to fight in public and show off his skill.

Romeo does not rise to Tybalt's challenge. He cannot fight with Tybalt because he is now, through marriage, a member of his family. This moment is a good example of dramatic irony because Tybalt, of course, does not know what has happened. Romeo says

I do protest I never injur'd 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 mine own, be satisfied. (I.65-69)

Mercutio is not prepared to see Romeo back down. He sees it as a dishonourable act,

O calm, dishonourable, vile submission! (I.70),

revealing how misplaced family loyalty has sustained the feud for so long. Mercutio would have been better to demonstrate his loyalty to Romeo by supporting him in his attempts to diffuse the situation.

When Mercutio is fatally wounded, he curses the Capulet and Montague families, predicting the misfortune that will affect them later in the play. He also blames the feud for his death but is perhaps too willing to forget his part in it.

...A plague o' both your houses!  
They have made worms' meat of me. (I.102-3)

Romeo's reaction shows his guilt and anguish.

...O sweet Juliet!  
Thy beauty hath made me effeminate  
And in my temper soften'd valour's steel. (I.109-111)

Romeo thinks his love for Juliet has affected his manliness and made him weak. If he did not love Juliet, he would have fought Tybalt instead of declining. Romeo's impulsive nature is seen shortly after:

Away to heaven respective lenity,  
And fire-ey'd fury be my conduct now! (I.119-120)

'Fire-ey'd fury' is a metaphor for Romeo's anger and hate for Tybalt. It also represents the fact that Romeo could make some rash decisions with his heart and not with his head. Note the light and dark imagery used here, contrasting with its use by Romeo earlier in the play when he described Juliet. Before he kills Tybalt, Romeo says

This day's black fate on no days doth depend:  
This but begins the woe others must end. (I.121-122)

The use of words such as 'black' and 'woe' reflects the disastrous events which will follow as a consequence of Romeo's actions, and suggests the unalterable path which Romeo and Juliet have been on since their first meeting. This is reinforced when Romeo has fought and killed Tybalt, and he laments

O, I am fortune's fool! (I.132)

By acting so rashly, Romeo has played right into the hands of fate and sealed his destiny.

The Prince makes the decision that Romeo will be banished from Verona.

### Scene Two

In Scene Two, Shakespeare again changes the mood of the play. Juliet's opening speech is full of joyful hope and sexual imagery. Although this is positive, it illustrates that she does not really know Romeo. This idea is developed when she finds out about Tybalt's death.

O serpent heart, hid with a flowering face.  
Did ever dragon keep so fair a cave?  
Beautiful tyrant, fiend angelical,  
Dove-feather'd raven, wolfish-ravens lamb! (I.73-76)

Juliet makes extensive use of the oxymoron in this verse. It tells us that she is confused as to who Romeo really is. The nurse's attitude prompts Juliet to remember that her duty is to Romeo as she is his wife:

Nurse: Shame come to Romeo (I.89)

Juliet: Blister'd be thy tongue  
For such a wish. (I.90)

Juliet: O, what a beast was I to chide at him. (I.95)

Juliet is loyal to Romeo and takes comfort in the fact that he is still alive, when Tybalt was so set on killing him. She is more upset about Romeo's impending banishment,

'That 'banished', that one word 'banished',  
Hath slain ten thousand Tybalts.'

There is a further reference to Juliet being death's partner:

'Take up those cords...  
I'll to my wedding-bed;  
And death, not Romeo, take my maidenhead!'

Death is personified as the lover who will take Juliet's virginity. Her references to the cords intended to allow Romeo to ascend her room



strengthens the idea of her impending death, recalling the cords used to lower a coffin into a grave.

### Scene Three

Romeo has taken refuge in Friar Laurence's cell, and there he discusses his banishment.

Ha! Banishment! Be merciful, say 'death'.  
For exile hath more terror in his look,  
Much more than death. Do not say 'banishment'. (I.12-14)

Romeo considers banishment to be the same as death. He would rather die than live in banishment away from Juliet. The Friar is frustrated by Romeo's self-indulgent attitude:

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. (I.24-28)

Friar Lawrence is giving Romeo sensible advice, saying that he has at least avoided death and the prince has been merciful. Romeo, however, disagrees,

And say'st thou yet that exile is not death?  
Hadst thou no poison mix'd, no sharp-ground knife.. (I.43-44)

Romeo laments his own loss, reminding us of the Romeo in the earlier scenes in the play when he was so self-absorbed that he could not reason sensibly. The Friar becomes angry with him,

Art thou a man? Thy form cries out thou art.  
Thy tears are womanish, thy wild acts denote  
The unreasonable fury of a beast. (I.108-110)

Friar Lawrence thinks that Romeo is following his heart, not thinking with his head. Shakespeare uses the metaphor of the angry beast to show his actions have not been thought out but taken by impulse. Again, we see Romeo's impulsive nature, where his emotions rule his head. The Friar's solution is for Romeo to agree to his banishment, during which time the Friar will attempt to sort out the problem. He says

.....we can find a time  
To blaze your marriage, reconcile your friends,

Beg pardon of the Prince and call thee back,  
With twenty hundred thousand times more joy (l.149-152)

Again, we see how naïve the Friar is, believing that the increased tension caused by the deaths of Tybalt and Mercutio will soon be forgotten.

## Act IV

### Scene One

In this scene, Juliet goes to see Friar Lawrence in the hope that he will have a way of helping her out of her predicament. Juliet's desperation is such that she is prepared to take her own life, rather than marry Paris. We believe this because Juliet is seen as a practical, determined character.

If, in thy wisdom, thou canst give no help,  
Do thou but call my resolution wise,  
And with this knife I'll help it presently. (l.52-54)

The Friar's plan is for Juliet to take a sleeping drug. This will make her appear lifeless for 42 hours, enough time for Paris and the rest of her family to believe that she is dead and for Romeo to be summoned from Mantua.

### Scene Two

Capulet's impulsive decision to bring the wedding forward sets the disastrous chain of events in motion - there is now not enough time for Romeo to be alerted to the situation.

### Scene Three

The main part of this scene is Juliet's speech outlining her concerns about taking the sleeping drug. We are reminded of her isolation when she says:

I'll call them back again to comfort me.  
Nurse! - What should she do here?  
My dismal scene I needs must act alone. (l.17-19)

She is concerned about a number of things - that the Friar has deceived her in an effort to save himself; that she will wake up and suffocate in the tomb before Romeo gets there; and that she will lose her mind at the site of Tybalt's ghost.

### Scene Four

A short scene showing the wedding preparations.

### Scene Five

In this scene, Juliet's body is discovered. The discovery of Juliet's death illustrates Capulet and Lady Capulet's hypocrisy and self-absorption.

But one, poor one, one poor and loving child,  
But one thing to rejoice and solace in,  
And cruel Death hath caught it from my sight! (l. 46-48)

The irony of Lady Capulet's word-choice - 'rejoice' and 'solace' underlines her hypocrisy given that she had previously rejected her daughter in such a cold and emotionless way.

O child! O child! My soul, and not my child!  
Dead are thou. Alack, my child is dead,  
And with my child my joys are buried. (l.62-64)

A similar reaction can be seen here from Capulet. The repetition of 'my' underlines his selfish absorption and the melodramatic short sentences with the repeated use of the exclamation mark reminds us that his love for Juliet is not genuine.

It has been suggested that Shakespeare did not write the last 40 lines.

### Act V

#### Scene One

Romeo hears the news of Juliet's death from the misinformed Balthasar. The end of the play is predicted by Romeo when he describes the dream he had.

I dreamt my lady came and found me dead -  
Strange dream, that gives a dead man leave to think! (l.6/7)

Again Shakespeare uses the technique of dramatic irony to alert the audience to events to come which the characters have no knowledge of. This reference is supported by Romeo's proclamation: 'Then I defy you, stars!' This is another reference to the idea that fate has controlled Romeo's and Juliet's situation. However, Romeo decides that he will take control of his destiny and defy what fate has mapped out for him.

Romeo's conversation with the apothecary reveals a couple of important things. The apothecary is clearly very poor:

.....Meagre were his looks,  
Sharp misery had worn him to the bones. (l.40-41)

The division in society between the rich and the poor is illustrated here. Because the apothecary is so poor, he has no choice but to sell his illegal compounds to Romeo.

My poverty, but not my will, consents. (1.75)

There is new found plainness to Romeo - his words are direct and emotionless and he coldly recognises the situation he is in and the inequality of the times in which he lives.

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. (1.72-74)

There is thy gold - worse poison to men's souls.  
Doing more murder in this loathsome world  
Than these poor compounds that thou mayst not sell. (1.80-82)

### Scene Two

The bad luck that prevented Romeo from receiving the letter from Friar Lawrence is explained in this scene. His messenger, Friar John, while looking for a brother who would accompany him on his errand finds himself confined to a house where the plague is suspected, and is unable to deliver the letter. Friar Lawrence is deeply disturbed and asks Friar John to obtain a crowbar for him so that he may be in the Capulet tomb when the time comes for Juliet to awake. This short scene is functional in carrying the plot forward.

### Scene Three

Paris' death is the first of the four to take place in the final scene of the play.

For here lies Juliet, and her beauty makes  
This vault a feasting presence full of light. (1.85-86)

Shakespeare uses light imagery to show that Juliet's beauty, even in death lights the room up. It transforms the room with her beauty.

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 thy cheeks. (1.93-95)

The use of the extended metaphor with words such as 'power', 'conquer'd', 'death's pale flag is not advanced there' shows that death has not conquer'd Juliet's beauty. Death has had the power to kill her but not to take away her beauty even in death. Death is personified by saying that he has sucked the life out of her.

That unsubstantial Death is amorous,  
And that the lean abhorred monster keeps

Thee here in dark to be his paramour? (I.103-105)

Romeo personifies Death as a monster that hides in the shadows. He says that Death has stolen Juliet away from him to be his lover.

Will I set up my everlasting rest  
And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars  
From this world-wearied flesh. (I.110-112)

Romeo again refers to fate and his unfavourable fortune that weighs down on him and leads him to take his life. He is controlled by fate.

Come, bitter conduct, come unsavoury guide,  
Thou desperate pilot now at once run on  
The dashing rocks thy seasick weary bark. (I.116-118)

Fate is personified as the pilot who guides Romeo's ship and to his death. It shows Romeo has given up on life.

Romeo's reference to his life having been controlled by a 'desperate pilot' links to his idea at the end of Act I, Scene 4. There we see that fate has run its course and that Romeo's 'ship' - his life - is about to run aground.

When the Friar finds Juliet in the vault, he advises her to leave with him and to be put into the care of a convent. He also hints at the power of fate and his inability to find any satisfactory resolution to the situation.

A greater power than we can contradict  
Hath thwarted our intents. (I.153/154)

His cowardly decision to run off at the point when Juliet needs him most is another good example of how an adult character lacks the strength to support a younger one. His disappearance means that Juliet is free to follow Romeo and take her own life.

O happy dagger!  
This is thy sheath! - There rust, and  
Let me die. (I.168-170)

The play ends on a distasteful note. The grief expressed by Capulet and Montague is less that convincing and the decision to commemorate Romeo and Juliet by erecting pure gold statues seems a gesture intended to make a show of wealth, rather than true feeling. The competition between the two families seems set to continue and the audience is left wondering whether any good will come of the lover's deaths. One of Shakespeare's major themes is brought to a

conclusion when the adults are conveyed as being the ones to blame for the tragedy.

I am the greatest - able to do least. (1.223)

Capulet! Montague!

See what a scourge is laid upon your hate,

That heaven finds means to kill your joys with love! (1.291-293)

## Other revision notes

### The Prologue

The Chorus tells the audience that the play will be about two lovers whose deaths will end the feud between the two families.

The Prologue features a device from ancient Greek drama (The Chorus) which Shakespeare uses rarely. The Greek Chorus was used to comment on the events in the play; here it gives the audience the facts of the feud and how the deaths of the lovers will end it. The audience is deliberately told the ending so that it can judge the actions of the characters as the play progresses. The Chorus emphasises that the lovers are fated. They are 'star-crossed', their love is 'death-marked' and they are born of their parents' 'fatal loins'.

### Act I

The action of the play is fast-moving and takes place in less than five days, each day starting with a dramatic daybreak. Act I deals with the first day and we learn that Romeo has been wandering alone at dawn, love-sick for Rosaline. Time accelerates as the play progresses. At the start Romeo complains that his sad hours seem long, later, as they approach the Capulet's feast, Mercutio says that time is wasting away, then Capulet complains that he is feeling old and time is flying passed too quickly. Finally, at the end of Act I Capulet says that it has grown late.

You should now be clear about the large part **fate** plays in the story. The Prologue tells the audience the story in advance because the play is about not only what happens but the way in which it happens. The lovers are 'star-crossed' from the beginning.

The play is also full of confused opposites and extremes, contrasting atmospheres and emotions, it is about the love of Romeo and Juliet and the feuding hate of their two families. It is about youth and old age and the way the habits of the past cut off the hopes of the future. The play opens with the noble poetry of the Prologue set in contrast to the often vulgar prose of Gregory and Sampson. The style and content of the different kinds of language used by different characters are an important part of the way the play explores

the play explores the main ideas. Just as Sampson's view of life is warped by his hate, so Romeo's early infatuation with Rosaline distorts his vision of the world around him.

Many characters stand in contrast to the lovers, the bawdy nurse, the pugnacious Tybalt, the formal and proper Paris, the petulant Capulet and his scheming matchmaker wife, and the intense and volatile Mercutio. The language of the lovers is also set apart from that of the other characters, being filled with poetic images and exaggerated comparisons more suited to love lyrics than drama.

**Prince Escalus** is a symbol of order in the play and warns both families that he will deal firmly with any further public fighting, yet seems to have little success in maintaining order. All the other main symbols and images have been introduced and you have met all the main characters except the friar.

**Romeo** has now fallen out of false love for Rosaline and in to real love with Juliet. **Paris** has asked for Juliet's hand in marriage and, whilst Capulet is thinking it over, his wife is urging Juliet to accept it at once. The lovers have discovered each other's true identity and the stage is now set for the tragedy to unfold.

## Act II

Romeo and Juliet meet again and vow to marry. The imagery of light reaches a climax here as their love is associated with the beautiful heavens. The last scene of Act I prepared for this, when the meeting of Romeo and Juliet featured imagery of pilgrims, saints, worshipping and holiness. Ominous clouds are gathering around the lovers: Romeo talks about 'stony limits' not being able to keep him out. And says he would rather die than be without Juliet, she is afraid that their love is too sudden and rash. As dawn breaks, Romeo tells Friar Lawrence that he no longer loves Rosaline but he is now in love with Juliet. The Friar agrees to marry the lovers in secret. Romeo, now feeling wonderfully happy, meets his friends again and has a witty conversation with Mercutio, who is happy to see him cheerful again. They meet Juliet's nurse and have fun at her expense. Romeo tells her about the arrangement for their marriage. The slow and talkative Nurse gives this news to the impatient Juliet. At the end of the Act, Romeo and Juliet are about to be married in the Friar's cell.

## Act III

Mercutio and the Nurse rival Romeo and Juliet as leading characters in the early part of the play. Mercutio dies in the first scene of this Act and the Nurse betrays Juliet's trust in its last scene. After Mercutio's death and the Nurse's betrayal, events move more and more rapidly as the emphasis shifts totally to



Romeo and Juliet. There is only one scene between now and the end of the play when neither Romeo nor Juliet is on stage and there is never any real relaxing of tension or speed from now on.

Benvolio has been used again as a character who gives a faithful account of events. After his speech in this scene he vanishes from the play. In the scene he acts rather like the Chorus to clarify matters. Benvolio is a contrast to two other characters, Tybalt and Mercutio. With their deaths the contrast and balance of Benvolio's character is no longer needed, so his removal is a good example of Shakespeare, the dramatist, at work. **You need always to keep in mind that the characters in the play are not real people, but with are dramatic devises with a job to do in the action.** A good playwright uses characters only when they are needed and in a good play there should be nothing that is not required as part of what the dramatist is trying to convey to the audience, either in the story, the imagery, the themes, the ideas or in the poetry.

Act III, Sc ii opens with the attention once again focused upon Juliet and it is around her that these four scenes actually revolve. She reintroduces the imagery of swiftness and 'galloping' and the idea of death as her fatal lover coming to claim her. She summons the night so that she and Romeo can be together again. Her speeches are full of omens of tragedy, death and darkness as she tries to come to terms with the news of Tybalt's death and Romeo's banishment. Several times the imagery suggests that Romeo and Juliet are already marked for death. Romeo says he will die for her love and she has a prophetic vision of him dead in a tomb.

The other characters in these scenes seem less mature and of smaller moral stature than Juliet - this is even true of Romeo, who is reduced to flinging himself on the floor in a helpless tantrum of tears. Juliet's mother seems hard and cruel, her father authoritarian and heartless. The friar has ideas of how the lovers can escape their predicament but he is a man of book learning whose plans have yet to be put to the test. The Nurse reveals herself to be weak in a crisis. The end of this Act marks the dawn of the third day of the play.

#### Act IV

Again the imagery of drinking appears, the time connected to death in Juliet's **soliloquy**, and quickly follows her image of being laid in a new made grave. The images of mouths, drinking and death have now combined in to one, the taking of poison.

Juliet's haste to take the friar's potion reveals her desperate state and re-emphasises the speed of the dramatic action. All the other characters, except the friar, have now rejected Juliet. The Friar also lets her down by failing to

get the letter through. The Friar is also tragically late at arriving at the tomb. The last failing is particularly serious. He is very precise about how long the potion will work, he tells Juliet that it will work for forty-two hours, so he of all people knows how long the potion will take effect and when Juliet should therefore awaken.

You will notice many changes of atmosphere, pace and scene between the start and end of the play. In Act IV, Sc iv, for example, Capulet makes much mention of the time and how they must hurry, the second cock has crowed, the curfew bell has rung, it is three o'clock in the morning. The continual emphasis on the speed of events underlines the feeling of inevitability. The sense of events moving inexorably to their climax is built up steadily through the play and you should now be able to look back across the different changes of scene and atmosphere and appreciate the reasons why the play has been constructed this way.

Again and again in the play, events happen and things are said that mean different things for different characters. This is because more of the characters are aware of the whole story and we in the audience know more than any of them. This last point is not only true because we, the audience, have seen all of the story, but because Shakespeare uses the Chorus to tell us the story at the start and reminds us of it from time to time. There are also chorus-like characters (especially Benvolio) who do this and soliloquies, to allow us to hear what different characters are thinking.

The Friar's speech is cleverly conducted to underline the unreality of Juliet's death, although what he says and what is understood by the other characters and by the audience will not be the same. The Friar concludes his speech with a list of opposites; 'wedding cheer to sad feast', 'solemn hymns to sullen dirges'. These take up a central theme to the play - **the contrast between surface appearance / 'all things change them to the contrary'**. You should now be clear about the use of the device and aware of the many occasions when it has been used before in the play.

## Act V

The language in this Act is full of subtle echoes of many of the themes in the play: food, drink, the colour of the face, the light in someone's eyes, the support of friends, the laws of the world, the essence of real wealth and real happiness. The apothecary and the Friar are related to the world of men by the world of plants, with good and evil seen in both. Both characters are, in their different ways, agents of death for the lovers, although, ironically, both are innocent of any malice.

You should be able to come to a view of your own about the cause of the lovers' tragedy. A number of opinions could be advanced with equal strength and there is no right answer. Make sure, though, that you can support your view by what is in the play. Was the tragedy caused because the lovers were 'star-crossed' and fate had doomed them to die? Or were they, like the Nurse's daughter, Susan, just 'too good for the world'? Or was it that you could say to them, as Romeo said to the apothecary, 'the world is not thy friend, nor the world's law'?

Of all the characters who die in the play, only the loving Lady Montague is not young. This underlines how the play concentrates on the passionate world of the young and the way in which it is they who must pay the price for the mischievous and quarrelsome folly of the old.

Romeo struck a 'dateless bargain' with death because of the love of Romeo and Juliet will never die in this play, in which contrasting paradoxical images abound, and in which everything seems to be its opposite, it seems appropriate that the price the lovers pay for their immortality is death. As with saints - with whom they are often compared with in the play - the love of Romeo and Juliet finally overthrows death.

## Themes

### Disorder

The play is full of examples of different types of disorder: brawls and fights, the violence of angry passion, the unnaturalness of infatuation or false love. The Prince threatens death at the start of the play; later Romeo dreams about his own death: death is constantly being predicted and five people die violently in the play. Dreams seem to be sent to torment us, as Mercutio says in Act I, Sc iv (his 'Queen Mab' speech). **Imagery** is used throughout the play to emphasise the danger of disorder. Look to see how images of the sea are used to suggest unpredictable danger. The disorder of life in Verona is also emphasised by the use of **imagery** to do with disease and sickness. This society is said to be filled with 'cankered hate', Romeo's sadness at the beginning is a 'madness' and a 'sickness' and his later love for Juliet needs the 'holy physic' (holy medicine) of the Friar. Images of sickness and disease in the play are often connected with the world of plants and nature.

### Fate

Fate is an important theme in the play. From the very start Romeo and Juliet are described as 'star-crossed lovers', or fated to disaster. Romeo says he feels his future is 'hanging in the stars' and that he is 'fortune's fool'. The overall structure of the play and the way the story unfolds produces the effect of inevitability about the ending. Neither Romeo nor Juliet can ever really escape

because, just when things look as though they might improve, some new disaster strikes. However, Shakespeare was a skilful writer so these misfortunes never seem artificial and unbelievable.

### Light and Darkness

Images of darkness in the play stand for death, violence, sadness and secrecy. At the start of the play Romeo seeks out darkness because he is sad and depressed. Later he and Juliet welcome the night because then they can be safely alone in secret. At the end of the play the blackness of the tomb and the dark night outside emphasise the sadness and tragedy of the lovers' deaths.

Images of light, whiteness or paleness in the play often appear in connection with ideas of love, life and hope. Romeo describes Juliet as being like the sun, brighter than the lights of a torch or the stars. Juliet talks about Romeo's love as pure - whiter than snow. Even in the darkness of the tomb at the end of the play Romeo says that Juliet's beauty makes the darkness light. Often the images of darkness and light appear closely connected with images to do with the eyes, or with looking, sight or seeing.

### Love and Passion

The play is full of overflowing passions. At the beginning the servants seem to feel it is their duty to fight each other, so they fight for no other reason. Tybalt is always bursting with aggression and seems always determined to pick a fight. Even Romeo feels obliged to fight when his friend is killed. Capulet is violent in his language, as is Mercutio, except that in Mercutio's case the violence is a product of wild imagination rather than anger. The violence in the play is set against the peacefulness of the lovers when they are together.

Love is an important theme in the play and appears in many forms. Different characters talk about love from very different points of view. At the start the servants Sampson and Gregory see love as brutish and cruel. Romeo's early sadness is a kind of intellectual love - he is in love with the idea of being in love. Mercutio and the nurse talk about love from a very crude and physical, bawdy point of view. At the other extreme, Lord and Lady Capulet see love merely as a financial transaction to do with securing and retaining wealth. The love between Romeo and Juliet is deep and passionate and is more powerful than hatred and even death.

### Nature

At the time when Shakespeare wrote this play most people worked the land and gardens, orchards and woods figured more largely in their lives than today. Language and thoughts would revolve more around plants, animals and the

seasons than today. The play is full of images drawn from nature, which reinforce or explain ideas about beauty and ugliness, health and sickness, things beneficial or things harmful. The Friar's speeches are full of such images but they also appear widely elsewhere. Images about animals are used in a similar way to those about plants. Beautiful or noble animals are like attractive or honourable people, while worms or reptiles suggest ideas about foul things in human life.

### Time

Time and the sense of time passing too quickly are ideas that are often repeated in the play. The speed with which events happen is an important factor in the tragedy.

At first time passes slowly, as Romeo frets about Rosaline and complains that the hours are long. Later Capulet complains that the years rush by too quickly. Romeo compares Juliet to a winged messenger of heaven, but Juliet worries that their love is too sudden and rash. The Friar complains that the lovers are in too much of a hurry. The message about the friar's plan is delayed, and Friar Lawrence himself arrives at the end just seconds too late to stop the final tragedy. The whole play seems hurried. Characters rush in to marriage, Romeo is banished for an impulsive action, Capulet cannot wait to get Juliet married to Paris. The play is filled with speed - speed to kill whoever is in the way and speed to commit suicide when life seems empty. Everywhere there is angry feuding, surging passion and sudden death.