

Act 1, scene 1

*Servants of the Capulet household quarrel with a Montague servant in the street; Montague's nephew Benvolio and Capulet's nephew Tybalt become involved as well. Prince Escalus scolds everyone, promising death to anyone who violates the peace. When all but Benvolio have left the scene, Romeo enters and complains to his cousin about his unrequited love for Rosaline.*

- What do the servants reveal about the quarrel between the families as they open the scene? To what extent is their participation in the feud different from that of the actual family members?
- How effective is the prince in controlling the citizens of Verona? What might point to problems with his authority?
- How does Romeo express his lovelorn feelings? What kinds of images and metaphors does he use, and how are they significant to understanding his idea of love?

Act 1, scene 2

*Capulet and County Paris discuss a possible marriage between Paris and Juliet. The servant Peter comically attempts to deliver party invitations he cannot read; Romeo reads the guest list for him, and learns that Rosaline is invited. Benvolio urges Romeo to crash the party.*

- How does Capulet respond to the idea of Juliet's marriage? What does his response suggest about his relationship with his daughter?
- How does Benvolio think going to the party will help Romeo get over Rosaline? What does this suggest about Benvolio's ideas about love?

Act 1, scene 3

*Lady Capulet speaks to her daughter and the nurse about the potential marriage with Paris.*

- What sort of relationship do Juliet and her mother seem to have? What about Juliet and her nurse?
- What's the significance of the nurse's twice-told story about toddler Juliet's fall?
- How does Juliet respond to the news that Paris wants to marry her? What's the significance of the ways the nurse and Lady Capulet

Act 1, scene 4

*Romeo, Benvolio, and Mercutio are on their way to the Capulets' party, and Romeo continues to mope about Rosaline. Mercutio jovially mocks Romeo's melodramatic language, discoursing at length about the queen of the fairies bringing dreams to humans.*

- How does Mercutio satirize Romeo's poetic expressions of love-sickness?
- How does the Queen Mab speech relate to Mercutio's mockery of Romeo's behavior?
- What does Romeo's final speech in the scene suggest about fate and free will?

Act 1, scene 5

*At the Capulets' party, Romeo and Juliet meet and fall in love at first sight. After learning one another's names and families from the nurse, each bemoans the circumstances.*

- Why does Capulet restrain Tybalt's combative response to Romeo's presence at the party? What might this interchange indicate about the feud?
  - What is significant about the metaphors Romeo uses to describe his attraction to Juliet?
  - How do Juliet's responses to Romeo's poetic flirtations reveal her personality and her approach to love?
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Act 2, scene 1

*The Chorus to Act 2 reminds the audience of the constraints placed on the young lovers by the feud between their families. In the scene, Romeo avoids his friends to stay behind as they leave the party. Mercutio attempts to summon Romeo "magically" by calling on Rosaline's features to attract him (with much sexual innuendo).*

- What do Mercutio's comments here reveal about his opinions of love?

- To what extent are the sexual innuendos in this scene relevant to the highly romantic balcony scene that follows”?

#### Act 2, scene 2

*Romeo watches Juliet's windows after the party, talking to himself about her beauty. Juliet appears at the window and, without seeing him, mourns aloud that he belongs to her family's enemy. Romeo reveals himself and they pledge their love. When the nurse calls Juliet to bed, Juliet tells Romeo to arrange for them to be married as soon as possible.*

- How do Romeo's poetic remarks about Juliet compare to those he made about Rosaline?
- What do Juliet's comments about family names suggest about the role of social and familial identity to her love?
- Once they begin to speak to one another directly, how do the content and presentation of their comments compare to one another? In what ways do their approaches to this conversation overlap or diverge, and how are these comparisons significant?
- Why does Juliet propose that they marry?

#### Act 2, scene 3

*Romeo visits Friar Laurence, who is gathering medicinal herbs. Although the friar seems to have disapproved of Romeo's love for Rosaline, he agrees to perform a marriage ceremony for Romeo and Juliet in hopes of resolving the interfamilial animosity.*

- How is the friar's opening soliloquy about herbs relevant to the main story of the play?
- What distinctions does the friar draw between Romeo's love for Rosaline and for Juliet, respectively?
- What is significant about the many comments about time in 2.2 and 2.3?

#### Act 2, scene 4

*In a public area of the city, Benvolio and Mercutio reveal that Tybalt has sent a letter to the Montague house, possibly challenging Romeo to a duel. Mercutio simultaneously praises Tybalt's fencing and mocks anyone who would give so much attention to the sport. When Romeo arrives, Mercutio teases him again about his love-sickness, again with plenty of sexual innuendo. The nurse arrives seeking Romeo, and the various men in the scene direct sexual remarks at the nurse; eventually Romeo tells her where and when Juliet should meet him to be married.*

- Besides the comedic purposes, why is there so much sexual innuendo in this scene? Even the nurse contributes (intentionally as well as obliviously). What is the effect of surrounding the message about the marriage arrangements with so many sexual remarks?

#### Act 2, scene 5

*Juliet anxiously awaits the nurse's return, comparing the urgency of love to the slow passage of mundane time. Upon arriving, the nurse comically delays the message further by complaining of the physical activity, but eventually delivers the news.*

- How does the contrast between the nurse's age and weariness and Juliet's urgency comment on the play's representation of love?
- How does the nurse function as a parental figure in 2.4 and 2.5? What are the implications of her behavior for the play's representation of authority?

#### Act 2, scene 6

*Romeo and Juliet meet at the friar's cell to be married.*

- What is noteworthy about the figurative language Romeo and Juliet use to speak of their love in this scene?

#### Act 3, scene 1

*Mercutio and Benvolio are discussing the tendency of heat to make people bad-tempered when Tybalt comes looking for Romeo. When Romeo appears, Tybalt insults him; Romeo attempts to make peace, but Mercutio draws his sword on Tybalt, and they fight. Romeo steps between them, and Tybalt stabs Mercutio under Romeo's arm and then flees. Mercutio dies, and when Tybalt returns to the scene, Romeo attacks and kills him, then flees himself. The*

prince enters with the Montagues and Capulets, and Benvolio explains how the two men died. The prince orders that Romeo be banished from the city.

- What does the behavior of the young men in this scene suggest about the quarrel between the two families? How does their behavior compare with that of the older generation?
- To what extent is Romeo “fortune’s fool” (3.1.135)? Why?
- What does the prince’s final speech reveal about his method of governing his citizens?

#### Act 3, scene 2

Juliet delivers a soliloquy expressing her anticipation for nighttime and the consummation of her marriage. The nurse enters bemoaning the death of an unnamed man, and Juliet, in the belief that Romeo has been killed, imagines she will die herself. The nurse reveals that Romeo has killed Tybalt and has been banished, and Juliet alternately curses and defends Romeo. The nurse promises to find Romeo and bring him to comfort Juliet.

- How does Juliet characterize the night and its importance to lovers in her soliloquy?
- Why does Shakespeare delay Juliet’s learning who has been killed? What is the dramatic effect?
- How does Juliet compare Tybalt’s death and Romeo’s banishment? How does this development affect her identity in relation to these men?

#### Act 3, scene 3

In Friar Laurence’s cell, Romeo bemoans his exile from Juliet and ignores the friar’s attempts to give advice. The nurse arrives and describes Juliet’s similar woe, prompting Romeo toward suicide. The friar rebukes him for risking his soul and the vows he made to Juliet, instead offering some reasons to hope for a positive outcome. He advises Romeo to relocate to Mantua but first sends him off to his wedding night with Juliet.

- How does Romeo characterize his banishment and loss of Juliet?
- How does the friar scold and advise Romeo? On what concepts does he concentrate, and why are these ideas significant?

#### Act 3, scene 4

Capulet and Paris again discuss a potential marriage for Juliet, and Capulet decides they will be married in a few days.

- Why does Capulet change his mind about pushing the marriage, even though his nephew has just died?

#### Act 3, scene 5

In the morning, Romeo prepares to depart from Juliet’s bedroom window, and the two try to pretend that the night is not over yet. After Romeo leaves, Juliet’s mother enters the room and says Juliet’s mourning for Tybalt is useless and they should instead think of vengeance. Lady Capulet also brings the good news that Juliet is to marry Paris, but Juliet refuses, saying she is not ready for marriage and would rather marry the murderer Romeo than Paris. Capulet enters and, when Lady Capulet conveys Juliet’s rejection of the marriage, becomes enraged and threatens to drag Juliet to the church or disown her. The Capulets leave the room in anger, and the nurse advises Juliet to forget Romeo and marry Paris. Juliet privately rejects the nurse and resolves to seek Friar Laurence for better advice.

- How does Romeo and Juliet’s conversation at the beginning of the scene compare to the first “balcony scene” (2.2) in terms of language, structure, and content?
- How does Juliet both reveal and conceal her relationship with Romeo as she talks with her parents? What does this suggest about her personality?
- How does the Capulets’ behavior in 3.4 and 3.5 contribute to the play’s representation of parental authority?
- Why does the nurse encourage Juliet to marry Paris? What are some of the many problems with this advice, and what does it bring to the picture of parental authority?

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#### Act 4, scene 1

At the friar’s cell, Juliet meets Paris, who flirts with her and looks forward to their wedding before departing. Juliet pleads with the friar for an alternative to the suicide that she sees as her only way out of an untenable situation.

*The friar instead provides her with a potion that will send her into a forty-two-hour coma and prompt her parents to lay her in the family vault. Meanwhile, the friar will send a message to recall Romeo to meet her when she awakes and take her away to Mantua with him. Juliet eagerly agrees to this plan.*

- How does Paris's flirtatious language compare to Romeo's? What is his attitude toward Juliet and love?
- How does Juliet present her dilemma to the friar? What language and imagery demonstrates her resolve to avoid marrying Paris?
- Why is death or a convincing illusion of death the only possible solution to this problem? How might this be relevant to the play's thematic concerns?

#### Act 4, scene 2

*Juliet meets her parents and pretends to be repentant and willing to marry Paris.*

#### Act 4, scene 3

*Juliet asks her nurse and mother to leave her alone for prayer, and then delivers a soliloquy that reveals her doubts about the friar's potion and her fear of waking alone in the tomb near Tybalt's fresh corpse, which she thinks would drive her insane. She calls on Tybalt and Romeo, then drinks the potion.*

- How does Juliet's soliloquy demonstrate the conflicting forces that control Juliet's life (and death)? How much agency does she understand herself to have in this situation (both here and in earlier scenes of the act)?

#### Act 4, scene 4

*Amid late night /early morning wedding preparations, Capulet sends the nurse to wake Juliet to meet her bridegroom.*

#### Act 4, scene 5

*The nurse discovers Juliet "dead," and the family bewails the sudden tragedy. The friar offers spiritual comfort and suggests they prepare to entomb her. In a comic interlude, the servant Peter asks the wedding musicians for a cheerful tune and they argue about the propriety of this request. The musicians decide to stick around for the funeral in hopes of a free meal.*

- What is significant about the ways in which the Capulets, the nurse, and Paris react to Juliet's death?
- Why did Shakespeare include the comic episode at the end of the scene? What purpose does it serve?

#### Act 5, scene 1

*In Mantua, Romeo feels optimistic because of a dream, but when his servant arrives from Verona, he brings the news of Juliet's death. Romeo resolves to join her in death and remembers seeing a destitute apothecary's shop nearby. The apothecary cites a city law against selling strong poisons, but Romeo counters with reminders of the man's poverty and succeeds in buying the drug.*

- What is the significance of Romeo's cheerful dream? How does this compare with other mentions of portents or fate in the play?
- What does Romeo's conversation with the apothecary contribute to the play's themes?

#### Act 5, scene 2

*Friar Laurence learns that his letter to Romeo was never delivered because the friar carrying it was quarantined in a suspected plague-house.*

- Is this reason for the undelivered message significant in any way? How so?

#### Act 5, scene 3

*Paris, laying flowers at Juliet's tomb, sees Romeo approaching the tomb with tomb-breaking implements. Romeo tells his servant he plans to take a ring from Juliet's body and sends him away, then begins to open the tomb. Paris recognizes Romeo as Tybalt's killer and assumes he has come to defile the Capulets' bodies. Although Romeo tries to avoid a fight, Paris is mortally wounded and asks as he dies to be laid with Juliet. Romeo then recognizes him and carries him into the tomb, where he speaks to Juliet's body and drinks his poison. Friar Laurence arrives and*

*meets Romeo's servant in the graveyard, then finds Romeo and Paris dead in the tomb. Juliet awakes, and the friar attempts to hurry her away, but Juliet sends him away and stabs herself with Romeo's dagger. Watchmen arrive on the scene, followed by the prince, the Capulets, and eventually Montague (whose wife has just died of grief over Romeo's exile). The friar is apprehended and reveals the secret marriage and the ensuing events that ended with four dead young people in the Capulet tomb. The prince says that he and the feuding families have been punished, and Capulet and Montague resolve to build golden statues of each other's lost children.*

- How does Romeo represent himself when he sends Balthasar away? How does this self-description compare with Paris's impression of him?
- How does Romeo describe the tomb, Death, and Juliet's "corpse"? What imagery seems significant?
- How does the friar respond to the discovery of Romeo and Paris's bodies? How does he characterize the events he retells for the prince and the parents? How does he represent his own role in the story?
- To what extent do the survivors' responses to the deaths address the problems that contributed to the tragedy? How and why?