

ROMEO AND JULIET - The plot

W. Shakespeare - Romeo and Juliet - Summary - 5 days / 5 acts

Act I Romeo is infatuated with Rosaline. In order to see her, he takes a risk and, on the Sunday evening, he goes to a party [the Masque] given by Lord Capulet, the enemy of his family, the Montagues. There he meets Juliet, Capulet's daughter. The two young people fall in love at first sight.

→ Whole day: **Sunday** - Courtly concept of love: melancholy / holy devotion → idealization of the object of desire

Act II After the party Romeo enters the Capulets' garden and, seeing Juliet at her balcony, admires her beauty. Juliet, not knowing Romeo is below, confesses that she loves him despite the fact that he is a Montague. Romeo speaks to her, they exchange vows of love and plan to be married. The following day, Monday, they are happily married by Friar Laurence, their confessor, who consents to celebrate the marriage in the hope that it will bring their families to a reconciliation.

→ **Sunday night – Monday** - Dialogues: theme of love: from courtly convention (in this context Juliet stands for innocence) to earthly, concrete, realistic love. This makes Juliet a REAL woman The same plot drives her towards this atypical attitude: being in love with Romeo creates obstacles because of the NAME which does not correspond to the REAL Romeo. Reflection on LANGUAGE and its symbolic value leads her to the REALITY of things.

Act III Later in the day Romeo is involved, against his will, in a fight in which Tybalt, Juliet's cousin, kills Mercutio, Romeo's best friend. To revenge him, Romeo kills Tybalt and is banished from the town by the Prince of Verona. After they have spent their wedding night together, on Tuesday morning Romeo has to leave Juliet and go to Mantua because he will be sentenced to death if he is found in Verona. Lady Capulet announces to Juliet that the noble Paris wants to marry her and that her father is arranging the wedding ceremony for Thursday. Juliet refuses to marry him on the ground that it is too soon after Tybalt's death. Her father is furious at her disobedience. Juliet decides to go to Friar Laurence for advice and help.

→ **Monday – Tuesday morning** - Public events (action and movement) vs private events: their (longing for their) wedding night together

Act IV Friar Laurence suggests that she should pretend to agree to the marriage. Then, in order to avoid the wedding, in the evening she should take a potion he will give her, which will make her fall into a deep sleep similar to death. Meanwhile the Friar will inform Romeo and both of them will be present in the Capulets' vault when she wakes up. Seeing no other way out, Juliet agrees to this desperate plan. She carefully follows the Friar's instructions, although she is frightened at drinking the potion. Everybody believes she has died of grief caused by Tybalt's death.

→ **Tuesday afternoon – Wednesday morning** - Ineffectual communication/deviated information - two groups living different stories – only Friar Laurence and Juliet share both

Act V The messenger sent to Romeo by Friar Laurence to inform him of his secret plan is held up by health officers because of a suspected outbreak of plague. So, on Thursday, Romeo, who is in Mantua, learns about Juliet's death from his servant without knowing the truth. He buys a poison and returns to Verona to kill himself near Juliet's body. When, in the evening of the same day, he arrives at the Capulets' vault he meets Paris who has come to grieve at Juliet's tomb. Paris believes that Romeo is responsible for Juliet's death and wants to fight him. In the fight Romeo kills him; then he kisses Juliet for the last time and drinks the poison. Friar Laurence arrives too late to stop him but in time to see Juliet waking up. Hearing a noise outside, he vainly tries to take Juliet away and then leaves her. Juliet sees Romeo dead and stabs herself with his knife. The Montagues and the Capulets are called to the vault. Friar Laurence explains what has happened and the two families get reconciled over the two bodies of their children.

→ **Wednesday afternoon – Thursday** - Breaking of the unity of place: from Verona to Mantua - Unlike most Shakespearian heroes, R. and J. will never know the truth about their death

The Masque* (page 123) - William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet

ROMEO

Essa insegna alle torce a splendere di luce viva!
Pare pendere dalla guancia della notte
come una gemma dall'orecchio di una etiope;
bellezza troppo grande per poterla possedere e troppo preziosa per questa terra;
come spicca una nivea colomba in mezzo (che si unisce) ad uno stormo di cornacchie.
Così quella fanciulla spicca fra le sue compagne
Finito questo ballo, osserverò dove s'andrà a posare
e, toccando la sua, farò beata questa mia rozza mano...
Il mio cuore ha già conosciuto l'amore? Smentitelo (Rinnegalo), occhi miei!
Perché io non ho mai visto una bellezza vera prima di stanotte. [...]

SONNET

**ROMEO [To JULIET] Se io profano con la mia mano indegna
questa tempio (luogo sacro / reliquario), questo è un dolce peccato:
le mie labbra, due pellegrini rossi di vergogna, sono pronte
ad attenuare (lisciare) con un tenero bacio quel contatto (tocco) rude.**

JULIET

**Buon pellegrino, voi fate troppo torto alla vostra mano,
che ha mostrato in ciò la devozione giusta (lett.: cortese, educata):
poiché i santi stessi hanno mani, che le mani dei pellegrini possono toccare,
e il giunger palma a palma è il bacio dei pii calmieri (pellegrini diretti in terra santa).**

ROMEO

Le sante non hanno labbra, ed i pii palmieri anche?

JULIET

Sì, pellegrino, labbra che debbono usare nella preghiera.

ROMEO

**Oh! allora, cara santa, lascia che le labbra facciano ciò che fanno le mani;
esse ti pregano, concedilo, per timore che la fede non si cambi in disperazione.**

JULIET

Le sante non si muovono, anche se esaudiscono le preghiere altrui.

ROMEO

Allora non muoverti, intanto che io raccolgo il frutto della mia preghiera.

Ecco, dalle tue stesse labbra io sono assolto dal peccato delle mie. (*La bacia.*)

WORK ON THE TEXT

CONTENTS

1. Answer the following questions.
1. When is the scene set? **It takes place at night after the ball.**
2. Who is Romeo speaking about in his monologue (lines 1-10)? **About Juliet.**
3. What happens when Romeo and Juliet meet? **Romeo touches Juliet's hand and then kisses her.**
4. What in the dialogue between Romeo and Juliet shows they are both very young? **Their wish to meet and love each other notwithstanding their belonging to two hostile families.**

STRUCTURE AND STYLE

2. What does Romeo's monologue make the audience or the reader aware of?
His love for Juliet.
3. Romeo embodies the Renaissance code of courtly love. Is this apparent from his monologue? Give reasons for your answer.
Romeo is linked to the code of courtly love since he starts to see thanks to Juliet, who embodies light, beauty and perfection to him.
4. Focus on Juliet.
 1. How does Juliet react to Romeo's words? **She returns his kiss.**
 2. What kind of girl is Juliet? **She is a concrete, passionate, unconventional woman.**

5. Now concentrate on lines 1-10 and answer the following questions.

1. Can you write down the rhyme scheme? AA BB CC DD AA

2. The use of rhyme brings forth an important antithesis: can you recognise it? **Light / Darkness**

6. Now focus on lines 11-25.

1. Analyse the rhyme scheme. Can you recognise a fixed poetic form? What words mark the beginning of the various sections? **The rhyme scheme is ABAB CBCB DEDE FF.**

It is an Elizabethan sonnet. The words are "I", "Good pilgrim", "Have not saints", "Saints".

2. Two metaphors are used in lines 11-13. Recognise them and decide what each conveys.

Juliet's hand is compared to a holy shrine in line 13 because it is pure; Romeo's lips are compared to blushing pilgrims (line 14) since they pursue an ideal.

3. A great deal of words appeal to the sense of 'touch'; what particular meaning do they suggest? Complete the sentences.

a) Sight is linked to **courtly** love;

b) Touch evokes an image of **physical** love.

The Balcony Scene (p. 124-125) - **William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet***

ROMEO

Ride delle cicatrici chi non ha mai provato il dolore di una ferita

Juliet appare a una finestra

Oh, che luce viene da quella finestra?

È l'oriente, e Giulietta è il sole!

Sorgi, bel sole, e uccidi l'invidiosa luna

Che è già pallida di rabbia ed ammalata,

perché tu, che sei sua ancella, sei di gran lunga più bella di lei.

Non restare sua ancella, se lei è invidiosa;

la sua veste verginale è d'un colore verde malato

e non l'indossano che le sciocche; gettala via!

Oh, è la mia dama, il mio amore.

Ah, se lei lo sapesse! (Se sapesse di esserlo!)

Mi parla, senza dire nulla: come mai?

È il suo sguardo a parlare per lei, ed io risponderò.

Sono troppo audace, non è a me che parla:

Due delle più belle stelle del cielo,

avendo da fare altrove, hanno pregato i suoi occhi

di brillare nelle loro sfere fino al loro ritorno.

E se quegli occhi fossero davvero stelle, (E se davvero i suoi occhi fossero al posto delle stelle e quelle nei suoi occhi?)

Lo splendore del suo viso farebbe vergognare (scomparire) quelle stelle,

come la luce del giorno (fa scomparire) la luce d'una lampada;

e tanto brillerebbero i suoi occhi in cielo,

che gli uccelli si metterebbero tutti a cantare credendo che fosse finita la notte.

Guarda come poggia la sua gota sulla mano.

Oh, se fossi il guanto di quella mano,

e potessi toccare quella guancia!

JULIET

Ahimè!...

ROMEO

She speaks: **Dice qualcosa...**

O, speak again, bright angel! for thou art

Parla ancora, angelo luminoso, perché sei

As glorious to this night, being o'er my head

così gloriosa in questa notte, da lassù

As is a winged messenger of heaven

quanto un alato celeste messaggero del cielo potrebbe esserlo

Unto the white-upturned wondering eyes

per le pupille volte verso il cielo degli sguardi stupiti

Of mortals that fall back to gaze on him

di mortali che cadono indietro nel guardarlo

When he bestrides the lazy-pacing clouds
cavalcare sopra pigre nuvole,
And sails upon the bosom of the air.
e veleggiare per l'infinito azzurro!

JULIET

O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?

Romeo, Romeo! Perché sei tu Romeo?

Deny thy father and refuse thy name;

Ah, rinnega tuo padre!... Rifiuta il tuo nome!...

Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,

O, se proprio non vuoi, giurami amore,

And I'll no longer be a Capulet.

ed io non sarò più una Capuleti!

ROMEO [Aside] (Sempre tra sé)

Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?

Che faccio, resto zitto ad ascoltarla, oppure le rispondo?...

JULIET

Il tuo nome soltanto m'è nemico;

ma tu saresti tu, sempre Romeo per me, quand'anche non fosti un Montecchi.

Che è infatti Montecchi?... Non è una mano, né un piede,

né un braccio, né una faccia, né nessun'altra parte

che possa dirsi appartenere a un uomo. Ah, perché tu non porti un altro nome!

Ma poi, che cos'è un nome?... Forse che quella che chiamiamo rosa

cesserebbe d'avere il suo profumo se la chiamassimo con altro nome?

Così s'anche Romeo non si dovesse più chiamar Romeo,

conserverebbe la cara perfezione ch'è la sua

Senza quel nome. Rinuncia dunque, Romeo, al tuo nome,

e in cambio di quell nome che non è parte della tua persona,

prenditi tutta me stessa.

ROMEO

Io ti prendo in parola!

tu chiamami "Amore", ed io sarò ribattezzato.

ed io non sarò più Romeo da questo momento in poi.

JULIET

Oh, qual uomo sei tu, che protetto dal buio della notte,

vieni a inciampar così sui miei pensieri?

ROMEO

Con un nome, non saprei come dirti chi sono;

il mio nome, cara santa, è odioso a me

perché è nemico a te.

Lo straccerei, se lo portassi scritto. [...]

CONTENTS

Where is the scene set? **The scene is set under Juliet's balcony.**

When does it take place? **At night.**

Where does Romeo stand? **He stands under Juliet's balcony.**

How does Romeo describe Juliet? **Romeo compares her to the sunlight.**

Why does Juliet ask Romeo to reject his name?

Juliet asks him to refuse his name because she is well aware of the difficulties that arise from their belonging to rival families.

Do the two lovers reveal their love to each other? **Yes, they do.**

STRUCTURE AND STYLE

Find words suggesting the distance between Romeo and Juliet. What does this situation symbolise?

"What light through yonder window breaks?" (line 2);

Romeo stands below in the garden and Juliet is above him at her window.

This situation symbolizes the distance existing between the families of the two lovers.

Remember that a monologue is a speech uttered by a single character with others on stage who do not speak.

1 Who utters this monologue and who else is present on stage?

Romeo utters this monologue while Juliet is at her balcony.

Focus on Romeo.

What are the main themes of Romeo's monologue? **The main themes of Romeo's monologue are:**

Beauty (lines 4-6)

4 Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,

5 Who is already sick and pale with grief,

6 That thou her maid art far more fair than she:

love (lines 10-11)

10 It is my lady, O, it is my love!

11 O, that she knew she were!

light referred to Juliet's beauty (line 2) But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?

1. Identify all the images having to do with light

2.. Explain them and state who they refer to.

Romeo compares Juliet to the sunlight in lines 2-9; then he imagines an exchange between her eyes and two stars in lines 14-22. All these images characterize Juliet's beauty.

What love does he embody? **Courtly love.**

What do we learn about Romeo's personality from his words? Choose the adjective/s you consider most suitable.

passionate impulsive shy tender rational spontaneous

In line 9 there is an expression that represents **a transition from elaborate rhetoric to ordinary language** Pick it out and state what it stands for

The expression is "cast it off"; it stands for Romeo's being impulsive and young.

In line 38 there is the **transition from monologue to dialogue**: what impact do you think it has on the audience?

It creates tension and curiosity.

Concentrate on Juliet.

1. What is her reaction to Romeo's speech?

She underlines the arbitrary relationship existing between a name and what it stands for.

2. What is her attitude to life?

She is realistic and unconventional since she tries to destroy the conventional behaviour of that time linked to the code of "appearances" and exalts the reality of "being".

Now analyse lines 26-47. I Fill in the table below.

Reality

Thyself (line 27) - hand, foot, arm, face (line 29) - Take all myself (line 37)

Appearance

name (line 26) - Montague (lines 27-28) - name (line 31) - rose (line 31) - Romeo (lines 33, 35) - title (line 35)
- word (line 38) - name (lines 43, 45)

How does Juliet's reflection upon language shake the medieval code?

Juliet's reflection upon the language shakes the medieval code since she tries to separate the name from the "thing".

3. Explain why Juliet's attitude reminds us of the character of Doctor Faustus (T21) as regards their behaviour and the language they use:

Both Juliet and Doctor Faustus try to shake the Medieval code linked to the order and those fixed rules they refuse.

4. Do you think Romeo shares Juliet's view and if so, is he conscious of it? (see lines 43-47):

even if Romeo's answer is uncertain, he has been influenced by Juliet and he is now ready to refuse his name.

Study Questions

1. What effect does the accelerated time scheme have on the play's development? Is it plausible that a love story of this magnitude could take place so quickly? Does the play seem to take place over as little time as it actually occupies?

Because of the **intensity of the relationship** between Romeo and Juliet and the **complex development of events** during the few days of the play's action, the **story can certainly seem to take place over a time span much longer than the one it actually occupies**. By **compressing all the events** of the love story into just a few days, **Shakespeare adds weight to every moment**, and gives the sense that the **action is happening so quickly that characters barely have time to react**, and, by the end, that **matters are careening out of control**. **This rush heightens the sense of pressure that hangs in the atmosphere of the play**. While it may not seem plausible for a story such as *Romeo and Juliet* to take place over a span of only four days in the real world, this **abbreviated time scheme makes sense in the universe of the play**.

2. Compare and contrast the characters of Romeo and Juliet. How do they develop throughout the play? What makes them fall in love with one another?

Romeo is a passionate, extreme, excitable, intelligent, and moody young man, well-liked and admired throughout Verona. He is **loyal** to his friends, but his behaviour is somewhat **unpredictable**. At the **beginning of the play**, he mopes over his **hopeless unrequited love for Rosaline**. In **Juliet**, Romeo finds a legitimate object for the extraordinary passion that he is capable of feeling, and his **unyielding love for her takes control of him**.

Juliet, on the other hand, is an **innocent girl, a child** at the beginning of the play, and is **startled** by the **sudden power of her love for Romeo**. **Guided by her feelings for him**, she **develops very quickly** into a **determined, capable, mature, and loyal woman** who tempers her extreme feelings of love with sober-mindedness.

The **attraction** between **Romeo and Juliet** is **immediate** and **overwhelming**, and **neither of the young lovers** comments on or **pretends to understand its cause**. Each mentions the other's beauty, but it seems that destiny, rather than any particular character trait, has drawn them together. Their love for one another is so undeniable that neither they nor the audience feel the need to question or explain it.

Other themes - The power of Love

Romeo and Juliet is the **most famous love story** in the **English literary tradition**. **Love** is naturally the play's **dominant** and most important **theme**. The play focuses on **romantic love**, specifically the **intense passion** that springs up at first sight between Romeo and Juliet.

In *Romeo and Juliet*, **love is a violent, ecstatic, overpowering force** that **supersedes all other values, loyalties, and emotions**. In the course of the play, the young **lovers** are **driven to defy** their **entire social world: families** ("Deny thy father and refuse thy name," Juliet asks, "Or if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love, / And I'll no longer be a Capulet"); **friends** (Romeo abandons Mercutio and Benvolio after the feast in order to go to Juliet's garden); and **ruler** (Romeo returns to Verona for Juliet's sake after being exiled by the Prince on pain of death in II.i.76–78).

Love in *Romeo and Juliet* is a **brutal, powerful emotion** that captures individuals and **catapults them against their world**, and, at times, **against themselves**. The **powerful nature of love** can be seen in the way **descriptions** of it so consistently fail to capture its entirety. At times love is **described** in the **terms of religion**, as in the fourteen lines **when** Romeo and Juliet **first meet**. At others it is described as a **sort of**

magic: “Alike bewitchèd by the charm of looks” (II.Prologue.6). Juliet, perhaps, most perfectly describes her love for Romeo by refusing to describe it: “But my true love is grown to such excess / I cannot sum up some of half my wealth” (III.i.33–34). Love, in other words, resists any single metaphor because it is too powerful to be so easily contained or understood. This is consistent with the impressionistic rush through careening images of love, violence, death, religion, and family, leading to the play’s tragic conclusion.

Love as a Cause of Violence

The themes of death and violence permeate *Romeo and Juliet*, and they are always connected to passion, whether that passion is love or hate. The connection between hate, violence, and death seems obvious. But the connection between love and violence requires further investigation. Love, in *Romeo and Juliet*, is a grand passion, and as such it is blinding; it can overwhelm a person as powerfully and completely as hate can. The passionate love between Romeo and Juliet is linked from the moment of its inception with death: Tybalt is enraged that a Montague would sneak into a Capulet feast and determines to kill him just as Romeo catches sight of Juliet and falls instantly in love with her. From that point on, love seems to push the lovers closer to violence, not farther from it. Romeo and Juliet are plagued with thoughts of suicide, and a willingness to experience it: in Act III, scene iii, Romeo brandishes a knife in Friar Lawrence’s cell and threatens to kill himself after he has been banished from Verona and his love. Juliet also pulls a knife in order to take her own life in Friar Lawrence’s presence just three scenes later. After Capulet decides that Juliet will marry Paris, Juliet says, “If all else fail, myself have power to die” (III.v.242). Finally, each imagines that the other looks dead the morning after their wedding night (“Methinks I see thee,” Juliet says, “. . . as one dead in the bottom of a tomb” (III.v.242; III.v.55–56). This theme continues until its inevitable conclusion: double suicide. This tragic choice is the highest, most potent expression of love that Romeo and Juliet can make. It is only through death that they can preserve their love, and their love is so profound that they are willing to end their lives in its defence.

The Inevitability of Fate

In its first address to the audience, the Chorus states that Romeo and Juliet are “star-crossed” that is to say that fate (a power often vested in the movements of the stars) controls them.

This sense of fate permeates the play, and not just for the audience. The characters also are quite aware of it: Romeo and Juliet constantly see omens. When Romeo believes that Juliet is dead, he cries out, “Then I defy you, stars,” completing the idea that the love between Romeo and Juliet is in opposition to the decrees of destiny. Of course, fate plays with Romeo’s defiance itself, and his determination to spend eternity with Juliet results in their deaths.

The mechanism of fate works in all of the events surrounding the lovers: the feud between their families (it is worth noting that this hatred is never explained; rather, the reader must accept it as an undeniable aspect of the world of the play); the horrible series of accidents that ruin Friar Lawrence’s seemingly well-intentioned plans at the end of the play; and the tragic timing of Romeo’s suicide and Juliet’s awakening. These events are not mere coincidences, but rather manifestations of fate that help bring about the unavoidable outcome of the young lovers’ deaths. The concept of fate described above is the most commonly accepted interpretation, but some readers feel that there’s a power beyond fate that has a role in the outcome of the story. Since the play takes place in a Christian context, this power can be thought of as God, or Providence. Romeo, Juliet, and Friar Lawrence all call on this higher power to help them; Friar Lawrence calls the deaths “a work of heaven”, implying that some benevolent power has worked to change the Montagues’ and Capulets’ hatred to love.

SCENES FROM “ROMEO AND JULIET” BY W. SHAKESPEARE (directed by F. Zeffirelli)

(the sonnet) *If I profane with my unworhiest hand || This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this...*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3PyGD1Yvy7c>

The Balcony Scene

http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xlkv2f_romeo-and-juliet-zeffirelli-the-balcony-scene_shortfilms#.UXfnBrW-3To

AUDIO FILES FROM “ROMEO + JULIET”

directed by Baz Luhrmann (stars: Leonardo Di Caprio, Claire Danes)

(the sonnet) *If I profane with my unworhiest hand || This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this...*

http://www.quia.com/files/quia/users/valoris/3/ROMEO_JULIET_-_THE_MASQUE.mp3

The Balcony Scene

http://www.quia.com/files/quia/users/valoris/3/ROMEO_JULIET_-_BALCONY_SCENE.mp3