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Contents:

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1 and 2 won't refer to obvious plot content, so if you are unsure about these read plot summary first.

Major themes

Major theme: fate

- Fate is closely tied and dependent on the existence of some kind of foreshadowing.
 - This is because fate means something is already destined to happen, and it involves the **reader knowing about it to cultivate a sense of dramatic irony**.
 - This is why the prologue exists: essentially, the reader is **informed of what is about to happen beforehand**.
- Fate in *Romeo and Juliet* essentially delivers the message **that it is inescapable** rather than giving off the message that one should fight against it.
 - Romeo and Juliet desperately try to get together even though us as **readers know the ending tragedy**: fighting against fate is useless, ends how it's supposed to end anyhow.
 - Inevitability: **Romeo's impulsive characterization** is later proved to have a close relationship with the play's tragic ending, showing the inescapability of fate as it is established throughout the entirety of the play.
- Major symbol of the theme of fate is **stars**.

- Romeo often refers to the stars in his complaints of the unfavorable situation that he is in in terms of his relationship with Juliet.
- **Stars denote a heavenly and biblical connotation:** this is important as it resonates with the Elizabethan Catholic audience. Use this when supporting Romeo makes Juliet seem like a object, **a perfect ideal woman:** more on this in characterization.
- “Star crossed lovers” and “written in the stars” are some evidence.

Major theme: Love vs. Lust

- This is actually really closely tied with characterization, as the content characterized a lot of the characters in the play using their view to this theme as a characteristic.
- Love vs. lust: what is the difference?
 - Love can be roughly described as liking every part of the partner: their personality, physical traits etc., even if the partner is revealed as not as perfect later, **you are willing to accept those flaws and continue.**
 - **Lust is where one is purely feeling a strong desire** towards the other person physically, as in their beauty, body etc.. It is often considered more superficial than love.
- Love in *Romeo and Juliet* is mainly divided into 2 parts: **parental and romantic.**
- Romantic love is where we see it being compared to lust: Romantic love and lust is discussed in 2 major characters: Romeo and Paris.
 - Romeo is often argued that he is lustful as he is impulsive in declaring love for Rosaline and Juliet when he knows nothing about them, only finding that they are sexually appealing to him. **Romeo’s abrupt change in his “love”** can be used as evidence to easily support this.
 - **As for Paris, one must divide into modern and Elizabethan audience.** For the former, Paris bends more to being lustful: he, same as Romeo, is not familiar with Juliet as a person, and only knows of her looks and social status. However, for the Elizabethan audience, he is arguably going above and beyond to care about Juliet: he grieves Juliet, acts very enthusiastic of the marriage, and tries to defend Juliet from Romeo’s supposed and speculated “violations”.
- **Parental love isn’t compared to lust,** at least not in *Romeo and Juliet* as a major topic.
 - Mostly revolves around Capulet, Lady Capulet, and the Nurse’s viewpoints towards Juliet’s marriage problems.

- Capulet is more open towards Juliet and her opinion on her love and marriage: but of course, this choice is still under the range of Capulet's approval. BUT considering the audience at the time, this is giving Juliet a lot of freedom.
 - ◆ Capulet later has a tone and characterization shift: he goes from being more understanding to much more oppressive, even threatening to disown Juliet.
 - ◆ But one may also argue that this is just another representation of his fatherly love towards Juliet: he thinks that she needs to get over depression quickly and can't let that lose the chance of marrying Paris.
- Lady Capulet's attitude towards Juliet's own feelings is much more nonchalant, and is her thinking processes when it comes to Juliet's marriage is the norm of the Elizabethan
 - ◆ Meaning Lady Capulet cares more about the social status, financial power and looks rather than Juliet's feelings towards the marriage candidate in question.
- The Nurse also believes in the same values as Lady Capulet, but is much more supportive of Juliet's own feelings
 - This could be because of the fact that the Nurse is essentially the one who played the mother figure in Juliet's childhood.

*** note that more major themes exist, but these are the ones that were specifically discussed in class. It doesn't mean that these are the only themes you can discuss about: more are out there but that will be on your own to support & prove.

Characterization summary

Romeo

- Often characterized and identified as reckless, passionate lover boy.

- Reckless: Romeo is rather impulsive, and this is emphasized throughout the play: his fearless decisions to go to a party of an enemy house, his quick vows of love to Juliet, his killing of Tybalt, and his hasty decisions in taking his own life at the end.
- Passionate: Romeo uses iambic pentameter and sonnets in soliloquies **to emphasize not only his degree of education but also his passion for love**. Contrastingly to a lot of other characters, he talks in the aforementioned verses, poetically and never direct.
- View towards love: he is immature and his definition of love is essentially looks and external beauty, in other words, love at first sight.
 - This can be seen when Romeo so passionately declares his lovesickness concerning Rosaline but immediately switches to Juliet after one conversation.
 - Arguably lust, but this is strictly dependent on the cultural values of the audience.
- Essential question: “What effect does Romeo’s characterization have on the story’s eventual tragic ending?”

Juliet

- Juliet is an unexperienced person in terms of love and is more rational and realistic than Romeo but reflects his passion just as strongly.
 - Unexperienced: she is nonchalant when Lady Capulet brings up the matter of marriage to Juliet before the party.
- Rational & realistic: she is relatively calm in her advances for Romeo and her relationship.
 - Remember how she forbids Romeo from swearing upon the moon, because it is ever-changing? She is skeptical and wary, however little, of the progression in this relationship.
 - She is realistic because she dreads the fact that Romeo is a Montague, yet contrastingly Romeo doesn’t.
- Yet just as passionate: In the modern perspective: one can see how she is just as hasty, in terms of the time that R and J spent together, that she makes a vow of love towards Romeo. It is also she who suggested the secret marriage.
- Related question: “Prove that Juliet is a responsible/impulsive character”.

Friar Lawrence

- The friar plays a **father figure to Romeo**:

- This can be seen when Romeo goes to find him for advice, first on Rosaline, and later on the marriage with Juliet.
- Although the quality and the result of his advice isn't favorable, he still provides them and supports Romeo, something that Montague and Lady Montague fails to do.
- Is the friar responsible?
 - This is arguably the most important question concerning this man
 - On responsible: he offers Romeo advice and warns him of the consequences that his actions could bring.
 - He offers advice, something no one can do except him, and the friar is well aware of this.
 - He does make sure that Romeo knows of what could happen should this love go south.
 - Considering the Elizabethan audience, he is responsible because the friar does his duty as a donated church from Montague.
 - He also tries to resolve the feud by the marriage
 - On not responsible: as an adult, he fails to control two obviously adolescent and hormonal teens.
 - This means that friar failed to consider that as the adult being confidential in Romeo's actions, he should calm him down
 - Essentially gives Romeo bad advice and helps Romeo on something that eventually kills him.
 - He also runs away when he sees the tragic ending of the story.

Nurse

- The nurse is the motherly figure for Juliet: she is to her as Friar Lawrence is to Romeo.
 - She helps Juliet send the message to Romeo
 - She is supportive of Juliet, at least much more so compared to Lady Capulet, Juliet's biological mother
 - This is because she raised Juliet, and due to her own daughter's death, grew attached to Juliet as she kind of replaced her dead daughter's place.

- This can be seen when she speaks with a fond tone of Juliet's childhood stories.
- Earthly figure.
 - She is a much less educated and sophisticated compared to those of the two houses and royals, can be seen from the lack of iambic pentameter as well as no poetic and figurative language.
 - Yet not barbaric or uncivilized because she understands Mercutio's body shaming session. So earthly.
- Comedy figure.
 - She makes very inappropriate jokes and finds them entertaining: she doesn't see what's wrong about saying these in front of noble women. (Where she talks about Juliet falling on her back)
 - She acts too tired to talk about what Romeo said after coming back with his message and essentially teases Juliet.

Lady Capulet

- Lady Capulet's biggest significance in characterization is her view of love and marriage
- Lady Capulet thinks that love is something that can be coerced "find it in yourself to love him"
- Lady Capulet is also more appreciative of the power of the man rather than whether the woman likes him or not.
- Lady Capulet is rather cold to Juliet and vice versa: we never see Juliet speak in the same tone she does to nurse to Lady Capulet, showing how Juliet attempts to at least maintain a sense of formality with her mother
 - Consider that this is the social norm of the time.

Benvolio

- Is the most level-headed character in the story:
 - Stops the fight in act 1 scene 1
- Very honorable
 - He tells the absolute truth when questioned by the prince of Romeo, Tybalt and Mercutio's brawl.

Mercutio

- Mercutio has a very rational view towards the concept love and Romeo's lovesickness
 - When Romeo uses dreams to support his love for Rosaline, Mercutio gives Romeo the Queen Mab speech.
 - As Mercutio suggests that love is an illusion, showing Romeo that his love is worthless
- He is essentially the neutralizing agent to Romeo's passion in terms of his love
- But not at all to fighting: he is as hot headed as Tybalt, arguably.
 - He is the one who initiates the brawl that leads to his own demise.

Plot summary

Act 1: The Setup

- A street brawl erupts between the servants of the feuding Montague and Capulet families.
- The Prince of Verona declares the next person to start a fight will be executed.
- Romeo is lovesick over a woman named Rosaline who doesn't love him back.
- To cheer him up, his friends convince him to crash a Capulet party.
- At the party, Romeo sees Juliet, and it's love at first sight. They share a kiss.
- They each discover the other is the child of their family's greatest enemy.

Act 2: The Secret Plan

- Romeo sneaks into the Capulet orchard and hears Juliet professing her love for him from her balcony (the "Balcony Scene").
- They agree to marry in secret.
- Romeo enlists the help of Friar Laurence, who agrees to marry them in hopes of ending the family feud.
- With the help of Juliet's Nurse as a go-between, the wedding is arranged.
- The act ends with Romeo and Juliet being secretly married.

Act 3: The Turning Point

- Tybalt, Juliet's cousin, challenges Romeo to a duel for crashing the party.
- Romeo, now secretly related to Tybalt through marriage, refuses to fight.
- Romeo's friend Mercutio is outraged and fights Tybalt instead. Romeo intervenes, and Tybalt stabs and kills Mercutio.
- In a rage, Romeo kills Tybalt.
- The Prince banishes Romeo from Verona as punishment.
- Romeo and Juliet spend a secret, desperate wedding night together before he flees to Mantua.
- Lord Capulet, to console a supposedly grieving Juliet (who is actually mourning Romeo's banishment), arranges for her to marry Count Paris in just three days.

Act 4: The Desperate Gamble

- Juliet refuses to marry Paris and is threatened with disownment by her father.
- Friar Laurence devises a desperate plan: he gives Juliet a potion that will make her appear dead for 42 hours.
- The plan is for her to be placed in the family tomb, and for the Friar to send a message to Romeo to rescue her when she wakes up.
- Juliet takes the potion and is found "dead" on the morning of her wedding to Paris.

Act 5: The Tragedy

- The message to Romeo about the plan fails to reach him.
- Instead, his servant brings news that Juliet is dead.
- Heartbroken, Romeo buys poison and rushes back to Verona.
- At the Capulet tomb, he encounters Paris and kills him in a fight.
- Finding Juliet seemingly dead, Romeo drinks the poison and dies.
- Juliet awakens to find Romeo dead. She kisses his lips hoping for residual poison, then stabs herself with his dagger.
- The Friar explains the tragic sequence of events to the families.

- Seeing the terrible consequence of their feud, Montague and Capulet reconcile and agree to end their conflict.