

Romeo

Key Themes

- **Chance/ fate**
- **Youth**
- **Individual vs society**
- **Family + duty**
- **Violence**
- **Love**

Key Words/Phrases

- **Defiance of societal and familial boundaries**
- **Eponymous character (name is in the title of the play)**
- **Love transcend (goes beyond) mortal limitations**
- **Unrequited (one sided) love**
- **Violence (closely linked) with masculinity**
- **Folly of youth (foolishness of the young)**
- **Impulsive**
- **Rash (reckless)**
- **Impetuous (impulsive)**

Shakespeare's Intentions

- Shakespeare shows the consequences of **violating societal, religious and familial constructs**. These foundational constructs in society are **insurmountable** (can't overcome), even in the face of true love. Thus, he makes Romeo's **hamartia** (fatal flaw) his **impetuosity** (impulsiveness) – his inability to navigate social expectations reinforces the **folly (foolishness) in the youth**.
- Through **dramatic irony**, Shakespeare's crafting of an inevitable tragedy shows how love and violence are **inextricably linked**. He utilises Romeo as an example of this entwined duality, portraying him as the embodiment of the conflicts of love and violence within a single individual.
- Shakespeare's tragic portrayal of Romeo and Juliet reinforces that even the seemingly **boundless power of love** is ultimately constrained by forces beyond human control. He reinforces Elizabethan ideas of **determinism** (everything is pre-set out) showing **celestial bodies** (stars/moon/planets) were powerful forces on human life.

“There lie more peril in [her] eye/ Than twenty of their swords” act 2

Translation: there is more danger in her eyes than twenty swords

Link to main key themes:

- Youth
- Individual vs society
- Violence
- Family
- Love

Analysis

- **Violent image:** A violent image is crafted through “swords” suggestive of Romeo's **subconscious recognition** of the violence intertwined with his love for Juliet. Their **defiance of societal and familial** boundaries positions their love as a violating act, filled with “peril.”
- Romeo acknowledges this peril of love goes beyond the threat of physical harm from the “swords” of enemies, but doesn't realise it has the potential for **societal isolation and familial bloodshed** – the young **eponymous** (names are the title of the play) characters are blinded by passion and are ignorant to the perils (dangers) of this **prohibited love**.
- **Other violent allusions:** The association of death and violence with their love is further emphasised by Tybalt's demand for Romeo to “draw his sword.” This seemingly **innocuous** (not harmful) challenge becomes a **grim foreboding** (something bad will happen) of the **inevitable tragedy** as it simultaneously marks the moment Romeo falls in love with Juliet.
- Thus, Romeo's love for Juliet, from its very **inception**, is tarnished by the shadow of death and violence, hinting at the “star-cross-d” nature of their romance.

"But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks? It is the east, and Juliet is the sun." act 2

Translation: What light is that shining through the window over there? It's coming from the east, and Juliet is the one illuminating it like the sun.

Link to main key themes:

- Love
- Individual vs society
- Youth
- chance/ fate (celestial bodies)

Analysis

- **Celestial (stars, planet, moon) metaphor:** Romeo constructs a **celestial metaphor** likening Juliet to "*the sun*," an act of **aggrandisement** (increase the status of) that elevates Juliet's position by suggesting she possesses the ability to illuminate the sky. This portrayal not only **compounds** Juliet's significance but also emphasises Romeo's belief that both his love for her **transcends** (go beyond) **mortal limitations**, akin to **celestial bodies**.
- Given the Elizabethan fascination with fate and astrology, Shakespeare's audience is prompted to **scrutinise** (examine) **the naive idealism** of the youthful lovers – they tragically perceive their love as **boundless**.
- **Semantic field of light: A semantic field** (group of words linked by an overall topic) centred on light is created through "*light*" and "*sun*," symbolising how the love shared between Romeo and Juliet has **metaphorically illuminated** his existence.
- This enlightenment may stem from Romeo's newfound understanding of love, contrasting it with the **unrequited** (one-sided) love/lust he had for Rosaline. Moreover, it has illuminated the **futility** (pointlessness) in the longstanding familial feuds that had previously kept them apart.

*“With love’s wings did [he] o’erperch these walls, for stony limits
cannot hold love out” act 2*

*Translation: With love as his wings, he soared over these walls.
Walls of stone can't keep love out.*

Link to main key themes:

- Youth
- Individual vs society
- Family vs duty
- Love

Analysis

- **Metaphor:** Romeo's metaphor, "love's wings," has a **classical allusion** to Cupid, the **Roman God of love**, often depicted with wings. This shows that for Romeo love is a **transcendent** (beyond human) force capable of defying **physical limitations and boundaries**.
- The term "wings" also carries a classical allusion to the **wings of Icarus**, the figure from mythology who met his downfall when his wings, made of wax, melted as he flew too close to the sun. Thus, the wings, **once a symbol of liberation and soaring passion, have a morbid (dark) undertone**.
- **Speaks in verse:** Romeo speaks in verse, in **iambic pentameter** in fact, and this characterises him to be romantic and decorative in his language showing love to take **precedence** (priority) over the pettiness of familial feuds.
- In this scene, Shakespeare creates a **haven** (place of safety) of romantic hope, momentarily separate from the play's **undertones** of violence.

“Thy beauty hath made me effeminate” act 3

Translation: “Your beauty has made me unmanly”

Link to main key themes:

- Individual vs society
- Love
- Violence

Analysis

- **Patriarchal norms:** Within a patriarchal (male-dominated) Elizabethan society, violence was **synonymous** (closely linked) masculinity.
- Romeo's initial reluctance to fight, fueled by his love for Juliet, shows how he prioritises **love's tenderness** over the expected norms of aggression.
- **Effeminate image:** However, Mercutio's death acts as a **catalyst** (produces) for a dramatic shift in Romeo's character. As '*effeminate*' creates a **womanly image**, he becomes aware of the potentially devastating consequences of his reluctant **propensity (inclination) towards violence**.
- His vow to avenge (get revenge) Mercutio through violence can be seen as a desperate attempt to reclaim his masculine identity he lost to love.

Links To Other Key Themes

- **Youth:** Romeo personifies the **folly of youth** (foolishness of the young), he is **impulsive and rash** (reckless) in his pursuit of love. Yet, his **impulsivity** does not extend to violence and aggression. He therefore conflicts with this **impetuous** (impulsive) presentation of youth in terms of patriarchal violence.

"Then I defy you, stars!". Act 5

Link to main key themes:

- Chance/ fate
- Youth
- Individual vs society
- Love
- Violence (become as one)

Analysis

- **Apostrophe (address something that is absent/dead/ abstract concept):** The **apostrophe**, where Romeo directly addresses the stars, personifies them as **tangible** (can touch) forces capable of replying to him.
- This shows both Romeo's **deteriorating mental state**, and also illuminates the immense power he gives to these **celestial bodies** (stars/moon/planets).
- **Exclamative sentence:** The **exclamative sentence** emphasises Romeo's **descent into despair** and his recognition of the **tragic fate that awaits him**.
- Despite his youthful defiance against **societal, religious, and familial boundaries**, his defiance proves **futile** (pointless). The stars, once symbols of destiny, now feel like a **malevolent** (evil) force actively working against him