***Romeo & Juliet* – Themes & Motifs**

**Love vs. Hate**

*The many forms love takes; its power to challenge hate; the impetuosity of young love; the irrationality of hate and its capacity to destroy love.*

Act I, Scene 1: The Capulets and Montagues fight in Verona's marketplace; Romeo tells Benvolio of his unrequited love for Rosaline.

Act I, Scene 5: Forgetting Rosaline, Romeo falls in love with Juliet at first sight.

Act II, Scene 2: In Juliet's orchard the two lovers agree to marry.

Act III, Scene 1: Tybalt fatally wounds Mercutio under the newly-wed Romeo's arm.

Act III, Scene 5: Romeo and Juliet prepare to part after their wedding night.

Act V, Scene 3: Romeo and Juliet commit suicide; the Prince asks the two families to reconcile.

**Parents & Children**

*The struggle of young people to make their own choices in the face of parents' vested interests.*

Act I, Prologue: the Chorus describes the parents' 'ancient grudge' which is the catalyst for the death of their children.

Act I, Scene 1: Lord Capulet approves Paris's request to ask Juliet to marry him.

Act III, Scene 5: Lord and Lady Capulet tell Juliet of their arrangements for her to marry Paris.

Act V, Scene 3: Romeo and Juliet commit suicide; the parents are faced with the consequences of their ancient feud.

**Chance vs. Choice**

*The inevitability and the fickleness of fate; the mixture of chance and choice in determining outcomes.*

Act I, Prologue: the Chorus describes the lovers as 'star-crossed.'

Act I, Scene 4: As he goes to the Capulets' ball, Romeo tells of a dream he has had.

Act III, Scene 3: Romeo happens upon the sword fight between Tybalt and Mercutio; his intervention results in Mercutio's death for which he kills Tybalt; calls himself 'fortune's fool'.

Act V, Scene 1: Balthasar tells Romeo of Juliet's death and Friar Laurence learns that Brother John has been unable to travel to Mantua to tell Romeo that Juliet still lives.

**Light & Dark**

*Light representing the lovers as they see one another in the darkness of their troubles; darkness also as the shroud of secrecy; also light as lightning and so transitory, easily burnt out.*

Act II, Scene 2:

'But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?/It is the east, and Juliet is the sun'

Act II, Scene 3:

'The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars,/As daylight doth a lamp'

'It is too rash, too unadivsed, too sudden;/Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be/Ere one can say “It lightens”'

Act III, Scene 5:

'Take him and cut him out in little stars,/And he will make the face of heaven so fine/That all the world will be in love with night/And pay no worship to the garish sun'

'More light and light; more dark and dark our woes!'

Act V, Scene 3:

 'For here lies Juliet, and her beauty makes/This vault a feasting presence full of light'

'A glooming peace this morning with it brings./The sun for sorrow will not show his head'

**Celestial Imagery**

*Representing the power of fate; also heaven and heavenly as descriptive of the lovers' view of one another.*

Act I, Prologue: 'A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life'

Act I, Scene 4: 'my mind misgives/Some consequence yet hanging in the stars'

Act II, Scene 6: 'so smile the heavens upon this holy act,/ That after hours with sorrow chide us not!'

Act III, Scene 2: 'Can heaven be so envious'

Act IV, Scene 5: 'The heavens do lour upon you for some ill'

Act V, Scene 1: 'Is it even so? then I defy you, stars!

Act V, Scene 3: 'See, what a scourge is laid upon your hate,/That heaven finds means to kill your joys with love'

**Nature**

*Representing beauty, value, youth and potential.*

Act I, Scene 2: 'fresh female buds shall you see this night'

Act I, Scene 3: 'Verona's summer hath not such a flower'

Act I, Scene 5: 'So shows a snowy dove trooping with crows. '

Act II, Scene 2: 'This bud of love, by summer's ripening breath,/May prove a beauteous flower when next we meet'

Act II, Scene 2: 'O mickle is the powerful grace that lies/In plants, herbs, stones, and their true qualities./For naught so vile that on the earth doth live/But to the earth some special good doth give'

Act III, Scene 6: 'An eagle, madam,/Hath not so green, so quick, so far an eye/As Paris hath

Act V, Scene 3: 'sweet flower, with flowers thy bridal bed I strew'

**Fate**





**Individuals vs. Society**



**Language & Word Play**



**Servants & Masters**



**LOVE**



Over and over in the play, Romeo and Juliet’s love is mentioned in connection with death and violence, and finds its greatest expression in their suicide. The theme of love in *Romeo and Juliet* also extends beyond the love that Romeo and Juliet feel for each other. *All* the characters in the play constantly talk about love. **Mercutio** thinks love is little more than an excuse to pursue sexual pleasure and that it makes a man weak and dumb. **Lady Capulet** thinks love is based on material things: Paris is handsome and wealthy; therefore Lady Capulet believes Juliet will love him. **Lord Capulet** sees love as obedience and duty. **Friar Laurence** knows that love may be passionate, but argues that it’s also a responsibility. **Paris** seems to think that love is at his command, since he tells Juliet that she loves him. In short, love is everywhere in *Romeo* *and Juliet*, and everyone sees it differently.

Fate

From the opening prologue when the **Chorus** summarizes *Romeo and Juliet* and says that the “star-crossed lovers” will die, **Romeo** and **Juliet** are trapped by fate. No matter what the lovers do, what plans they make, or how much they love each other, their struggles against fate only help fulfill it. But defeating or escaping fate is not the point. No one escapes fate. It is Romeo and Juliet’s determination to struggle against fate in order to be together, whether in life or death, that shows the fiery passion of their love, and which makes that love eternal. Fate is not just a force felt by the characters in *Romeo* *and Juliet*. The audience also senses it through

Shakespeare’s use of foreshadowing. Time and again, both Romeo and Juliet unknowingly reference their imminent deaths, as when Juliet says after first meeting Romeo: “If he be married / My grave is like to be my wedding bed.” She means that if Romeo is already married she’ll be miserable. But the audience knows that Juliet’s grave actually *will* be her wedding bed. In *Romeo* *and Juliet*, fate is a force that neither the characters nor the audience can escape, and so every word and gesture gains in power, becomes fateful.

Because of their forbidden love, **Romeo** and **Juliet** are forced into conflict with the social world around them: family, friends, political authority, and even religion. The lovers try to avoid this conflict by hiding, by escaping from it. They prefer the privacy of nighttime to the public world of day. They volunteer to give up their names, their social identities, in order to be together. They begin to keep secrets and speak in puns so that they can publicly say one thing while meaning another. On the morning after their marriage, they even go so far as to pretend that day is night so they won’t have to part. But no one can stop day from dawning, and in the end Romeo and Juliet can’t escape the responsibilities of the public world. Romeo tries to stop being a Montague and avoid fighting **Tybalt**, but fails. Juliet tries to stop being a Capulet and to stand up to her father when he tries to marry her off to **Paris**, but is abandoned by her mother and the **Nurse**. Romeo is banished from Verona by **Prince Escalus**, who embodies political law. Finally, to preserve their love, Romeo and Juliet are forced to the ultimate act of independence and privacy: suicide.

Word Play

**Romeo** and **Juliet** constantly play with language. They pun, rhyme, and speak in double entendres. All these word games may seem like mere fun, and they are fun. The characters that pun and play with language have fun doing it. But word play in *Romeo and Juliet* has a deeper purpose: rebellion. Romeo and Juliet play with language to escape the world. They claim they are not a Montague and a Capulet; they use words to try to transform day, for a moment, into night; they hide their love even while secretly admitting it. Other characters play with language too. In particular, **Mercutio** and the **Nurse** make constant sexual puns implying that while everyone is running around talking about high ideals like honor and love, sex and other base desires are at the root of human existence. So language in *Romeo and Juliet* serves two opposing purposes. It allows some characters to escape the world into intense love, while it allows other characters to reveal that the world of love, honor, and high ideals are just masks people use to cover their animal instincts.ervant

For a play about the two noble teenagers struggling to preserve their forbidden love, *Romeo and Juliet* sure has a lot of scenes focused on servants and non-nobles. Shakespeare did this by design. The recurring presence of servants in the play, from **Peter**, the Capulet servant who can’t read, to the **apothecary** who’s so poor he’s willing to sell poison, Shakespeare in *Romeo and Juliet* goes to great efforts to show that the poor and downtrodden have lives of their own, and that to them **Romeo** and **Juliet**’s love and death mean absolutely nothing. After all, why would the death of two noble teenagers mean anything to servants just trying to make it through the day and scrounge up something to eat for dinner?