COLES NOTES TOTAL STUDY EDITION

ROMEO AND JULIET

ACT I

Prologue 27
Scene 1 28
Scene 2 40
Scene 3 45
Scene 4 51
Scene 5 57

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Romeo *If I profane with my unworthiest hand*
This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this;
My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.

Juliet *Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,*
Which mannerly devotion shows in this;
For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,
And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.

Act I, Prologue

This introduction to the play emphasizes the power of fate over the lives of Romeo and Juliet, who are to some extent the victims of their parents' strife. Their love is described as being "death-marked." As in Greek tragedy, fate hovers over all.

ACT I, PROLOGUE

[Enter Chorus]

Chorus Two households, both alike in dignity,
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life;
Whose misadventured piteous overthrows
Doth with their death bury their parents' strife.
The fearful passage of their death-marked love,
And the continuance of their parents' rage,
Which, but their children's end, naught could remove,
Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage;
The which if you with patient ears attend,
What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.
[Exeunt]

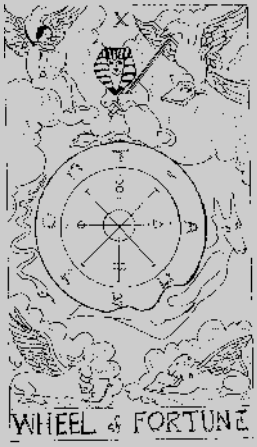
NOTES

1. *households:* the Capulets and the Montagues.
   alike: equal.
3. *mutiny:* disorder, tumult—between anyone, not just in the armed forces.
4. *civil blood makes civil hands unclean:* The blood of the citizens in civil war makes the hands of a civilized (well-mannered) people unclean.
5. *fatal:* fated for misfortune.
6. *star-crossed:* i.e., their fortunes were marred by the influence of the stars. That men's natures and fortunes were influenced by the star under which they were born was a widespread superstition of Elizabethan times.
7-8. *Whose . . . strife:* the cessation of whose unfortunate pitiful struggles makes an end to their parents' strife; "overthrows" is used as a noun, not a verb.
9. *death-marked:* destined (marked out) for death.
12. *traffic:* business, concern.
14. *miss:* fail, be missing, perhaps an implied metaphor, i.e., miss the mark.

COMMENTARY

Written in the form of a sonnet, the Prologue to Act I provides a clear summary of the play. From the beginning, we know that the story of Romeo and Juliet will end in tragedy. We also know that their tragic ends will result not from their own personality defects but from fate, which has marked them for sorrow. Emphasizing fate's control over their destinies, the Prologue tells us that the "star-crossed lovers'" relationship is "death-marked" (6,9).

The Prologue also sets up the juxtaposition of binary opposites that will be important throughout the play; for example, Romeo and Juliet's love contrasts the "ancient grudge" between their parents (3). Likewise, the Prologue suggests that the play includes an important message about social violence. Because "civil blood makes civil hands unclean," the entire Verona community has been soiled from the fighting between the Montagues and Capulets (4). The lovers' deaths serve the ritual, sacrificial function of purging unclean Verona.



The Wheel of Fortune

A rarity among Shakespeare's works, the Prologue is often considered superfluous and omitted from staged performances of the play. When included, the Prologue is usually spoken by the Prince (rather than a chorus as Shakespeare had intended).

Act I, Scene 1

Prompted by a fight between their servants, Benvolio (a Montague) and Tybalt (a Capulet) brawl in the public square of Verona. The Prince stops the fight and vows to execute any Capulet or Montague who disturbs the peace of Verona again. A melancholy Romeo tells Benvolio he is in love.

ACT I, SCENE 1
Verona, a public place.

[Enter SAMPSON and GREGORY, with swords and bucklers, of the house of Capulet]

Sampson Gregory, on my word, we'll not carry coals.

Gregory No, for then we should be colliers.

Sampson I mean, an we be in choler, we'll draw.

Gregory Ay, while you live, draw your neck out of collar.

Sampson I strike quickly, being moved.

Gregory But thou are not quickly moved to strike.

Sampson A dog of the house of Montague moves me.

Gregory To move is to stir, and to be valiant is to stand. Therefore, if thou art moved, thou runn'st away.

Sampson A dog of that house shall move me to stand. I will take the wall of any man or maid of Montague's.

Gregory That shows thee a weak slave; for the weakest goes to the wall.

Sampson 'Tis true; and therefore women, being the weaker vessels, are ever thrust to the wall. Therefore I will push Montague's men from the wall and thrust his maids to the wall.

Gregory The quarrel is between our masters, and us their men.

Sampson 'Tis all one. I will show myself a tyrant. When I have fought with the men, I will be cruel with the maids—I will cut off their heads.

Gregory The heads of the maids?

Sampson Ay, the heads of the maids, or their maidenheads. Take it in what sense thou wilt.

NOTES

1. *carry coals:* submit to insult, like servants.
2. *colliers:* workmen who carry and trade in coal.
3. *an we be in choler:* if we are angry, if our blood is up.

   draw: draw swords. (Note pun on carrying a collar equipped with buckets for drawing water from a well.)
6. *moved:* roused to anger, stirred.
7. *A dog:* i.e., any low-down fellow.
11. *take the wall of:* prove superiority by fighting with back to the wall.
13. *goes to the wall:* i.e., the other extreme, is pushed against the wall.
15. *thrust to the wall:* a sexual joke.
20. *'Tis all one:* i.e., 'tis all the same, it makes no difference to me.

Gregory They must take it in sense that feel it.

Sampson Me they shall feel while I am able to stand; and 'tis known I am a pretty piece of flesh.

Gregory 'Tis well thou art not fish; if thou hadst, thou hadst been poor-John. Draw thy tool! Here comes two of the house of Montagues.

[Enter two other Servingmen, ABRAM and BALTHASAR]

Sampson My naked weapon is out. Quarrel! I will back thee.

Gregory How? turn thy back and run?

Sampson Fear me not.

Gregory No, marry. I fear thee!

Sampson Let us take the law of our sides; let them begin.

Gregory I will frown as I pass by, and let them take it as they list.

Sampson Nay, as they dare. I will bite my thumb at them, which is disgrace to them if they bear it.

Abram Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?

Sampson I do bite my thumb, Sir.

Abram Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?

Sampson *[aside to GREGORY]* Is the law of our side if I say ay?

Gregory *[aside to SAMPSON]* No.

Sampson No, sir, I do not bite my thumb at you, sir; but I bite my thumb, sir.

Gregory Do you quarrel, sir?

Abram Quarrel, sir? No, sir.

Sampson But if you do, sir, I am for you. I serve as good a man as you.

Abram No better.

Sampson Well, sir.

[Enter BENVOLIO]

36. *marry:* an oath meaning "by the Virgin Mary," but in effect no stronger than "indeed."

37. *take the law of our sides:* make sure we have the law on our side.

39. *list:* choose, please.

40. *bite my thumb:* an insulting gesture in Shakespeare's time.

51. *I am for you:* I accept your challenge; I am ready to fight you.

54. *Well, sir:* Sampson cannot understand what Abram means by his noncommittal reply. He could mean that there was no better master than his own or that there was no better master than Sampson's.

Gregory *[aside to SAMPSON]* Say 'better.' Here comes one of my master's kinsmen.

56. *one of my master's kinsmen:* Tybalt; evidently he does not see Benvolio.

Sampson Yes, better, sir.

Abram You lie.

Sampson Draw, if you be men. Gregory remember thy swashing blow.

60. *swashing blow:* knock-out blow, a blow that comes down with a swishing noise.

[They fight]

Benvolio Part, fools!
Put up your swords. You know not what you do.

[Enter TYBALT]

Tybalt What, art thou drawn among these heartless hinds?
Turn thee, Benvolio! look upon thy death.

63. *heartless hinds:* cowardly servants (pun on hinds [deer] without a male leader, or hart).

Benvolio I do but keep the peace. Put up thy sword,
Or manage it to part these men with me.

66. *manage:* employ, use.

Tybalt What, drawn, and talk of peace? I hate the word,
As I hate hell, all Montagues, and thee.
Have at thee, coward!

69. *Have at thee:* on guard!

[They fight]

[Enter an Officer, and three or four Citizens with clubs or partisans]

Officer Clubs, bills, and partisans! Strike! beat them down!

70. *Clubs:* the cry of the London apprentices to call their fellows, sometimes to come with their clubs to keep the peace, as often as not to create a disturbance.

bills: long wooden staves with a blade or axe-head at one end.

partisans: long infantry spears.

Citizens Down with the Capulets! Down with the Montagues!

[Enter old CAPULET in his gown, and his Wife]

Capulet What noise is this? Give me my long sword, ho!

Wife A crutch, a crutch! Why call you for a sword?

73. *long sword:* i.e., sword for action, not one to be worn merely for fashion's sake.

Capulet My sword, I say! Old Montague is come
And flourishes his blade in spite of me.

76. *in spite of me:* to defy me.

[Enter old MONTAGUE and his Wife]

Montague Thou villain Capulet!—Hold me not, let me go.

Montague's Wife Thou shalt not stir one foot to seek a foe.

[Enter PRINCE ESCALUS, with his Train]

Prince Rebellious subjects, enemies to peace,
Profaners of this neighbour-stained steel—
Will they not bear? What, ho! you men, you beasts,
That quench the fire of your pernicious rage
With purple fountains issuing from your veins!
On pain of torture, from those bloody hands
Throw your mistempered weapons to the ground
And hear the sentence of your moved prince.
Three civil brawls, bred of an airy word
By thee, old Capulet, and Montague,
Have thrice disturbed the quiet of our streets
And made Verona's ancient citizens
Cast by their grave beseeming ornaments
To wield old partisans, in hands as old,
Cank'red with peace, to part your cank'red hate.
If ever you disturb our streets again,
Your lives shall pay the forfeit of the peace.
For this time all the rest depart away.
You, Capulet, shall go along with me;
And, Montague, come you this afternoon,
To know our farther pleasure in this case,
To old Freetown, our common judgment place.
Once more, on pain of death, all men depart.

[Exeunt all but MONTAGUE, his Wife, and BENVOLIO]

Montague Who set this ancient quarrel new abroach?
Speak, nephew, were you by when it began?

Benvolio Here were the servants of your adversary
And yours, close fighting ere I did approach.
I drew to part them. In the instant came
The fiery Tybalt, with his sword prepared;
Which, as he breathed defiance to my ears,
He swung about his head and cut the winds,
Who, nothing hurt withal, hissed him in scorn.
While we were interchanging thrusts and blows,
Came more and more, and fought on part and part,
Till the Prince came, who parted either part.

Montague's Wife O, where is Romeo? Saw you him today?
Right glad I am he was not at this fray.

80. *Profaners . . . steel:* i.e., you profane your weapons by staining them with the blood of your neighbours.

85. *mistempered:* tempered for an evil end.

86. *moved:* angry.

87. *bred . . . word:* arising out of words lightly spoken.

91. *beseeming ornaments:* weapons befitting them (i.e. walking sticks).

92. *To:* in order to.

93. *Cank'red . . . cankered:* rusty, malignant (a canker is a bud-destroying worm; hence cancer).

99. *our farther pleasure:* what also we wish to do. The "our" is the royal plural, used throughout the speech.

100. *Freetown:* the 'Villa Franca' of an old poem by Brooke, which in the poem was the name of Capulet's castle.

102. *new abroach:* newly afoot (newly under way).

105. *close:* i.e., in the thick of a fight.

110. *Who:* antecedent "the winds."

nothing hurt withal: not at all hurt thereby.

hissed him in scorn: refers to the swish of his sword through the air.

112. *on part:* on one side or the other.

113. *parted either part:* separated both sides.

Benvolio Madam, an hour before the worshipped sun
Peered forth the golden window of the East,
A troubled mind drave me to walk abroad;
Where, underneath the grove of sycamore
That westward rooteth from this city side,
So early walking did I see your son.
Towards him I made, but he was ware of me
And stole into the covert of the wood.
I, measuring his affections by my own,
Which then most sought where most might not be found,
Being one too many by my weary self,
Pursued my humour, not pursuing his,
And gladly shunned who gladly fled from me.

Montague Many a morning hath he there been seen,
With tears augmenting the fresh morning's dew,
Adding to clouds more clouds with his deep sighs;
But all so soon as the all-cheering sun
Should in the farthest East begin to draw
The shady curtains from Aurora's bed,
Away from light steals home my heavy son
And private in his chamber pens himself,
Shuts up his windows, locks fair daylight out,
And makes himself an artificial night.
Black and portentous must this humour prove
Unless good counsel may the cause remove.

Benvolio My noble uncle, do you know the cause?

Montague I neither know it nor can learn of him.

Benvolio Have you importuned him by any means?

Montague Both by myself and many other friends;
But he, his own affections' counsellor,
Is to himself—I will not say how true—
But to himself so secret and so close,
So far from sounding and discovery,
As is the bud bit with an envious worm
Ere he can spread his sweet leaves to the air
Or dedicate his beauty to the sun.

119. *sycamore:* traditionally associated with disappointed lovers.

120. *westward . . . side:* grows on the west side of the city.

127. *humour:* inclination of the title of Ben Jonson's play "Every Man in His Humour" (i.e., according to his mood, temperament, or disposition).

128. *shunned:* takes the object (understood) him.

134. *Aurora's:* goddess of dawn in classical mythology.

135. *heavy:* sad (note pun on "light").

139. *portentous:* boding evil, ominous, threatening.

143. *importuned:* persistently asked.

145. *his own . . . counsellor:* admitting to himself alone.

146. *true:* i.e.. true to himself.

148. *sounding:* being fathomed.

149. *bud . . . worm:* never opening to be overseen.

envious: malignant.

Could we but learn from whence his sorrows grow,
We would as willingly give cure as know.

[Enter ROMEO]

Benvolio See, where he comes. So please you step aside,
I'll know his grievance, or be much denied.

Montague I would thou wert so happy by thy stay
To hear true shrift. Come, madam, let's away.

[Exeunt MONTAGUE, and Wife]

Benvolio Good morrow, cousin.

Romeo Is the day so young?

Benvolio But new struck nine.

Romeo Ay me! sad hours seem long.
Was that my father that went hence so fast?

Benvolio It was. What sadness lengthens Romeo's hours?

Romeo Not having that which having makes them short.

Benvolio In love?

Romeo Out—

Benvolio Of love?

Romeo Out of her favour where I am in love.

Benvolio Alas that love, so gentle in his view,
Should be so tyrannous and rough in proof!

Romeo Alas that love, whose view is muffled still,
Should without eyes see pathways to his will!
Where shall we dine? O me! What fray was here?
Yet tell me not, for I have heard it all.
Here's much to do with hate, but more with love.
Why then, O brawling love, O loving hate,
O anything, of nothing first create!
O heavy lightness, serious vanity,
Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms,
Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health,
Still-waking sleep, that is not what it is!
This love feel I, that feel no love in this.
Dost thou not laugh?

Benvolio No, coz, I rather weep.

153. *know:* i.e., know what the trouble is.

enter Romeo: Dramatically it is much more effective to "lead up" to Romeo like this, in the conversation of minor characters, than to bring him on the stage at the outset. This method has the advantage of creating suspense, and when the main character appears, he appears in response to a longing of the audience to see him. Our imagination has been worked upon by the talk of Benvolio, Montague, and his Lady so that when Romeo appears he already has our interest. From a practical point of view it also means that the first speeches of the main character are not disturbed by the entry of latecomers: by the time he speaks, the audience has settled down.

155. *be much denied:* force him to give me a strong refusal.

157. *shrift:* confession.

166. *where:* with whom.

167. *in his view:* in appearance ("his" effects the personification).

168. *in proof:* in experience or reality.

170. *his will:* i.e., make people fall in love. Cupid, the god of love, was represented as blind in classical mythology.

173. *to do:* trouble.

more with love: perhaps because Rosaline belonged to the Capulet family (as we see from the list of invited guests), or he may mean that there is more in his heart to do with love.

174. *loving hate:* This and the following pairings of opposites are examples of the figure of speech known as oxymoron.

179. *Still-waking:* keeping awake all the time.

180. *no love:* i.e., no really satisfying love.

181. *coz:* cousin (any relative or close friend).

Romeo Good heart, at what?

Benvolio At thy good heart's oppression.

Romeo Why, such is love's transgression.
Griefs of mine own lie heavy in my breast,
Which thou wilt propagate, to have it prest
With more of thine. This love that thou hast shown
Doth add more grief to too much of mine own.
Love is a smoke raised with the fume of sighs;
Being purged, a fire sparkling in lovers' eyes;
Being vexed, a sea nourished with lovers' tears.
What is it else? A madness most discreet,
A choking gall, and a preserving sweet.
Farewell, my coz.

Benvolio Soft! I will go along.
An if you leave me so, you do me wrong.

Romeo Tut! I have lost myself; I am not here;
This is not Romeo, he's some other where.

Benvolio Tell me in sadness, who is that you love?

Romeo What, shall I groan and tell thee?

Benvolio Groan? Why, no;
But sadly tell me who.

Romeo Bid a sick man in sadness make his will.
Ah, word ill urged to one that is so ill!
In sadness, cousin, I do love a woman.

Benvolio I aimed so near when I supposed you loved.

Romeo A right good markman. And she's fair I love.

Benvolio A right fair mark, fair coz, is soonest hit.

Romeo Well, in that hit you miss. She'll not be hit
With Cupid's arrow. She hath Dian's wit,
And, in strong proof of chastity well armed,
From Love's weak childish bow she lives unharmed.

183. *transgression:* in making lovers suffer so.

185. *propagate:* increase.

to have it prest: by having it oppressed.

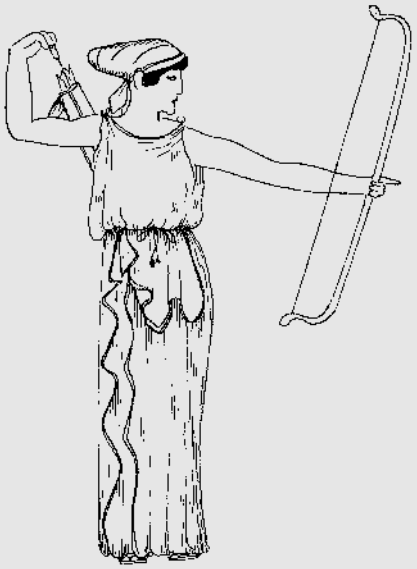
186. *thine:* i.e., thy griefs.

192. *A choking . . . sweet:* a substance bitter enough to choke (anyone) and sweet enough to preserve (something).

193. *Soft:* a common exclamation of Shakespeare's time, equivalent to "Wait a minute!"

197. *in sadness:* seriously.

198. *groan:* Romeo purposely misunderstands "sadness," as if used in its modern sense, "Shall I groan in sadness?"



The Roman goddess Diana

201. *ill urged:* a suggestion made at an inopportune time.

203. *aimed so near:* guessed as much (Benvolio wants to know which woman Romeo loves).

205. *fair mark:* clear target. Benvolio plays on the word "fair" in a different sense, as Romeo does with Benvolio's "hit," using it in the sense as "guess." There are many metaphors from archery in Shakespeare and in Elizabethan literature in general.

207. *Dian's wit:* the good sense of Diana, huntress and Roman goddess of chastity.

She will not stay the siege of loving terms,
Nor bide th' encounter of assailing eyes,
Nor ope her lap to saint-seducing gold.
O, she is rich in beauty; only poor
That, when she dies, with beauty dies her store.

Benvolio Then she hath sworn that she will live chaste?

Romeo She hath, and in that sparing makes huge waste;
For beauty, starved with her severity,
Cuts beauty off from all posterity.
She is too fair, too wise, wisely too fair,
To merit bliss by making me despair.
She hath forsworn to love, and in that vow
Do I live dead that live to tell it now.

Benvolio Be ruled by me; forget to think of her.

Romeo O, teach me how I should forget to think!

Benvolio By giving liberty unto thine eyes.
Examine other beauties.

Romeo 'Tis the way
To call hers (exquisite) in question more.
These happy masks that kiss fair ladies' brows,
Being black puts us in mind they hide the fair.
He that is strucken blind cannot forget
The precious treasure of his eyesight lost.
Show me a mistress that is passing fair,
What doth her beauty serve but as a note
Where I may read who passed that passing fair?
Farewell. Thou canst not teach me to forget.

Benvolio I'll pay that doctrine, or else die in debt.

[Exeunt]

210. *stay the siege of loving terms:* allow herself to be besieged with expressions of love.

211. *assailing:* i.e., with looks of love.

214. *her store:* i.e., her store of wealth, which consists of her beauty. She will leave no beauty behind her in her offspring. This is a continual thought in Shakespeare's sonnets.

220. *merit bliss:* deserve the blessings of chastity.

221. *forsworn to:* sworn not to.

222. *live dead:* so do we talk of a "living death" (oxymoron).

223. *ruled:* advised.

224. *how . . . think:* i.e., he can think of nothing else.

231. *his eyesight:* what he saw once.

233. *note:* memorandum.

234. *passed:* surpassed

236. *I'll pay that doctrine:* i.e., I will pay you back in your own coin and show you that you cannot teach me to forget. Romeo says that Benvolio cannot teach him to forget, and in effect Benvolio says that he will have a good try.

COMMENTARY

The setting of the opening scene is the market place in Verona, Italy in July. The play begins with two of the Capulets' servants, Sampson and Gregory, complaining about the house of Montague. From their conversation, we learn that the two families are involved in a long and bitter feud.

Sampson and Gregory's conversation is full of puns referring to fighting and love, two of the play's predominant themes. For example, Sampson claims that he will "take the wall of any man or maid of Montague's" (11). Initially, this phrase means that the Capulet servants are superior to the Montague servants, but the comment

quickly becomes bawdy. Sampson suggests that he'll "push Montague's men from the wall" while pushing the women toward it; in other words, he'll fight the Montague men and have sex with the Montague women (16). As is apparent from these opening remarks, despite the many tragic events it details, *Romeo and Juliet* is filled with wit, humour, and sexual innuendo, especially among the secondary characters.

Violence erupts in Verona

The comedy quickly turns to explosive violence when two Montague servants, Abram and Balthasar, enter the scene. *Romeo and Juliet* contains many such jarring juxtapositions of scenes that have opposite emotional tones. The fierce street fight following the entry of Abram and Balthasar shows that the feud between the Montagues and Capulets penetrates all levels of society, thus catching all of Verona in the violence. One of the play's goals is to purge this hatred so that a new, more peaceful society can emerge.

As the servants argue, Benvolio, a friend of Romeo's, enters the scene. Benvolio, whose name means "good-natured man," attempts to break up the fight, but the audience quickly learns how ineffective good intentions are in a world saturated with violence.

The violence becomes intense when Juliet's cousin (and Romeo's sworn enemy) Tybalt enters the fray. Tybalt misinterprets Benvolio's actions, assuming that Benvolio has drawn his sword on the servants. Tybalt wants to fight. Although Benvolio urges peace and asks Tybalt to put his sword away, the fiery Tybalt replies that he hates "the word [peace] / As I hate hell, all Montagues, and thee" (67–68) This statement paints an insightful picture of Tybalt's hot temper and unreasonable nature. His words show the extent of his hatred for the Montague family (although he never gives a reason for his hatred). Likewise, his words prove that Benvolio has no power over Tybalt's fiery temper. We see throughout the play that good men have little authority within Verona. Time after time, Benvolio will urge peace, but his message will be ignored.

As the scene continues, a number of citizens enter the fray, vowing to beat down both the Montagues and the Capulets. The feud between families seems to be little more than an excuse for violence. Lord Capulet, Juliet's father, enters the street in his dressing gown, which demonstrates that the feud has disrupted domestic peace; in Verona, no time or place is free from the possibility of violence.

We get a good look at Capulet's personality in this moment. Like his kinsman Tybalt, he is quick to anger and immediately wants to join the violence. His wife makes fun of him, calling his sword "A crutch, a crutch!," which alerts us to Capulet's advanced age (74). Lady Capulet's



A scene from Franco Zeffirelli's 1968 film version of Romeo and Juliet.
Everett Collection

statement highlights a division between youth and old age that continues throughout the play. The statement also makes us realize that as an old man, Capulet should break up the fight, retain order, and set a good example for the rest of the community. But Capulet, like the younger Tybalt, hasn't learned to control his temper. Ironically, as we see later, two youths will lose their lives because of the ancient feud fueled by old men like Capulet.

The prince orders peace

Prince Escalus—Verona's ruling authority—enters and calls the Montagues and Capulets "enemies to peace" and "beasts" (79, 81). According to the Prince, this is the third civil brawl "bred of an airy word" that has happened recently because of the feud between the two families (87).

The Prince's comment ritualizes the fights, because folk culture views three as a magical number. The number three has religious importance (for example, the holy trinity). But philosophers have also argued that the number three unites opposites, accepting both and leading to a new reality. For example, the famous German philosopher Hegel argued that one idea (a *thesis*) was always opposed by another equally valid idea (an *antithesis*), and the contradictions between these opposites were reconciled on a higher level of truth by a third idea (the *synthesis*).

By specifying that this brawl is the third, Prince Escalus implies that it will in some way lead to a balanced and functional society in Verona. By the end of the play, the arguments between the Montagues and Capulets *will* be resolved and a new society born.

The Prince begins this movement toward harmony by instituting a new rule: The next person caught disturbing the peace in Verona will be killed. In stating, "If ever you disturb our streets again / Your lives shall pay the forfeit of the peace," the Prince plays a prophetic role; his edict will result in several deaths by the play's end (94–95). As we will see, although neither Lord Montague nor Lord Capulet dies, each forfeits a child because of this ancient and meaningless feud.

The Prince's words in this scene are also important because they point out the contradictory impact of language on action. By suggesting that the fights between the Montagues and Capulets result from "airy" words, the Prince implies that the reasons for the feud are insubstantial; all of the violence is based on airy, light, trifling words. Yet words are also powerful, because they can lead to violent actions.

Romeo's seclusion

Following the Prince's pronouncement, Lady Montague wonders where her son Romeo has been. All talk of fighting now ends, and Benvolio employs images of the dawn (the "worshipped sun" and "the golden window of the East") and nature (the sycamore trees, which pun on the idea of "sick amour" or sick love)—two motifs associated with Romeo throughout the play (116–119). Benvolio reveals that Romeo has fled from him and the fighting in the city to the "covert of the wood," a natural world that's free from his family's feud (123).

Unlike his friends, who are generally eager to fight, Romeo seems to create his own secluded world. Romeo's is a natural world associated with the half-light of dawn rather than the full sunshine of the day. Montague expands the connection between Romeo and nature, arguing that Romeo's tears augment "the fresh morning's dew" and that his sighs add "to clouds more clouds" (130–131).

Romeo shuns sunlight. He prefers night and dawn—the realms of dreams, imagination, and fantasy—to day, the revealer of stark reality. Montague says that Romeo's beauty is not dedicated "to the sun" but is "secret" and "close" (151, 147). Romeo creates a private world that his inner visions can sustain. We learn in this scene that a strong opposition exists between the fiery, sun-loving Tybalt and the moody, moon-worshipping Romeo.

Petrarchan love

Along with imagination, Romeo is concerned with ideas of love—the many and often contradictory ways that a person can view love. Setting up this contrast,

Benvolio describes love as "gentle in his view" but also "tyrannous and rough in proof" (167–168). Based on his use of *oxymorons* (combinations of contradictory words) and his depiction of love as an infection or poison, Benvolio, like Romeo later in this scene, is presented as a Petrarchan lover.

The blind archer Cupid is a common Petrarchan image. In *Romeo and Juliet,* Shakespeare presents Cupid as an ambivalent figure—much like Fate—who symbolizes the fatal power of attraction that brings opposites together because of its blindness. For example, Cupid is to blame for Romeo's inability to distinguish Montague from Capulet when choosing a lover. (At this point in the play, Romeo is in love with Rosaline, the niece of Lord Capulet.) By upsetting traditional patterns of law and society, Cupid also has the power to bring new order and new life to a stale social system. Therefore, Cupid can work as a life-giving force that brings harmony to chaos. Blind to the importance of considering last names when choosing a lover, Romeo shows that he could be a catalyst for change in Verona.

Both the destructive and the creative impulses of love are recognized in this play. By loving Rosaline (who is as yet unnamed), for example, Romeo pursues a transgressive love that breaks all the barriers that society and his family create. By destroying boundaries, love can't be easily categorized because it quickly transforms itself. Romeo recognizes both the life-giving and death-dealing aspects of love in a series of oxymorons, describing love as both a "choking gall" and a "preserving sweet" (192). He also presents love as a battle: a "siege" that involves an "encounter" with "assailing eyes" (210–211). While love plays a serious role in the play, we might also wonder if Shakespeare is poking fun at Romeo here: Is Romeo's Petrarchanism excessive? Is he taking love too seriously?

Besides breaking social rules, love's battle also cracks the boundaries of the ego, making the lover lose his individual perception of the world. Romeo foreshadows the connection between love and death that will later define his relationship with Juliet by saying, "I have lost myself" (195).

Usually, this death of ego allows the lover to evolve toward a more communal view of life, but this doesn't happen to Romeo in his love for Rosaline because his love for her isn't true. Instead, Romeo's love for Rosaline is an intellectual exercise, based on the literary tradition of Petrarchan poetry. Romeo argues that chaos has grown out of "well-seeming forms" (177). In other words, the feud has flourished within the seemingly lawful, organized, and civil society of Verona, just as Romeo's unsatisfying love for Rosaline grows out of the seemingly organized forms created by the Petrarchan tradition of courtly love.

As a Petrarchan lover, Romeo is in love with the idea of love and enjoys the melancholy that his love produces. He revels in poetic language but has never felt real passion. It's significant, for example, that the chaste, aloof Rosaline never appears in the play but remains only an idea. As an idea, Rosaline (whose wit is as piercing as Cupid's arrow) is compared with Diana, the chaste goddess of hunting and the moon. This comparison suggests her inappropriateness as a lover. Moon imagery will be important later in the play; for example, Juliet critiques the "inconstancy" of the moon, which changes during its monthly orbit through the heavens. Keep an eye out for other references to the moon in the play to get a sense of whether it is used as a positive or negative image.

Romeo's language in this scene fits with the Petrarchan ideals that the introduction discusses. For example, Romeo speaks in couplets and uses oxymorons when defining love. Instead of presenting his love for Rosaline in a true or honest way, Romeo describes her in an overly intellectual fashion following the tradition of courtly love, which shows the shallowness of his feelings for her. Finding a new way of loving—one that literary tradition doesn't limit—will be one of Romeo's goals in the play. (As the play progresses, Romeo's language will become more natural and passionate, reflecting his deep love for Juliet.)

Themes introduced

This opening scene has many dramatic purposes that prepare the reader for the rest of the play. The introductory conversation between Sampson and Gregory shows the connections between love and violence, while also introducing a witty, comical, and bawdy language that interacts with the play's more serious discussions of love. As you read, consider the importance of the connection between language and feeling in the play. Note also what we learn about characters' personalities based on their manner of speech.

In his opening speeches, Romeo emphasizes the disconnection between appearance and reality. But Romeo's words lead us to question his love for Rosaline: Is the appearance of that relationship connected with its reality? Is the love itself based on appearances or something else? These questions lead to broader concerns about the nature of love. How can we distinguish true love from fake? Is real love based on physical appearance, spiritual bonding, or monetary possessions?

Shakespeare alerts us from the start that, at its best, life constantly transforms. In this scene, Verona is stale and violent. Because the Montague and Capulet feud has created a fragmented society, something needs to change to enable Verona's dismembered social body to reunite. While Shakespeare pokes fun at Romeo's fake love for Rosaline, the play later shows that true love (like Romeo's love for Juliet) can be powerful enough to mend the rifts in society: love, like death or violence, takes many forms in this play. From the beginning, Shakespeare breaks the distinctions between opposites such as love/hate and appearance/reality, leading to a synthesis on a higher level—one that will embrace these opposites in a new, more peaceful reality.

Act I, Scene 2

Paris, a young nobleman of Verona, asks Capulet for Juliet's hand in marriage. Capulet agrees (if Juliet will consent) and invites Paris to a feast. Romeo and Benvolio learn of the Capulet feast and decide to attend uninvited.

ACT I, SCENE 2
The same. A street.

[Enter CAPULET, COUNTY PARIS, and a Servant]

Capulet But Montague is bound as well as I,
In penalty alike; and 'tis not hard, I think,
For men so old as we to keep the peace.

Paris Of honourable reckoning are you both,
And pity 'tis you lived at odds so long.
But now, my lord, what say you to my suit?

Capulet But saying o'er what I have said before:
My child is yet a stranger in the world,
She hath not seen the change of fourteen years;
Let two more summers wither in their pride
Ere we may think her ripe to be a bride.

Paris Younger than she are happy mothers made.

Capulet And too soon marred are those so early made.
Earth hath swallowed all my hopes but she;
She is the hopeful lady of my earth.
But woo her, gentle Paris, get her heart;
My will to her consent is but a part.
An she agree, within her scope of choice
Lies my consent and fair according voice.
This night I hold an old accustomed feast,
Whereto I have invited many a guest,
Such as I love; and you among the store,
One more, most welcome, makes my number more.
At my poor house look to behold this night
Earth-treading stars that make dark heaven light.
Such comfort as do lusty young men feel
When well-apparelled April on the heel
Of limping Winter treads, even such delight
Among fresh fennel buds shall you this night

NOTES

1. *bound:* bound over to keep the peace.

4. *reckoning:* In view of Capulet's speech and the following line in Paris's speech, it would seem that Paris refers to the reckoning of their years, i.e., experience of life, not to their reputation in general.

5. *odds:* enmity.

9. *She hath not . . . years:* She is not fully fourteen.

10. *wither in their pride:* i.e., let their beautiful flowers wither.

13. *marred . . . made:* a thoroughly Shakespearean antithesis. This is a reference to the proverb, "Soon married, soon marred."

14. *earth . . . hopes:* i.e., all my other children are dead and buried.

15. *earth:* i.e., body, offspring. Capulet may mean that his daughter is the heiress of his land, but that interpretation does not seem likely because in this speech Capulet's mind is not on material things.

17. *My will . . . part:* My permission is but a part of her choice.

19. *fair according:* agreeing willingly.

25. *Earth-treading:* stars that make dark heaven light. Beauties are like stars come down to earth, sending rays of light upward.

27. *well-apparelled:* bringing foliage to clothe the trees.

28. *limping:* slowly retreating.

Inherit at my house. Hear all, all see,
And like her most whose merit most shall be;
Which, on more view of many, mine, being one,
May stand in number, though in reck'ning none.
Come, go with me.
[To Servant, giving him a paper]
Go, sirrah, trudge about
Through fair Verona; find those persons out
Whose names are written there, and to them say,
My house and welcome on their pleasure stay.

[Exit, with PARIS]

Servant Find them out whose names are written here? It is written that the shoemaker should meddle with his yard and the tailor with his last, the fisher with his pencil and the painter with his nets; but I am sent to find those persons whose names are here writ, and can never find what names the writing person hath here writ. I must to the learned. In good time!

[Enter BENVOLIO and ROMEO]

Benvolio Tut, man, one fire burns out another's burning;
One pain is less'ned by another's anguish;
Turn giddy, and be holp by backward turning;
One desperate grief cures with another's languish.
Take thou some new infection to thy eye,
And the rank poison of the old will die.

Romeo Your plantain leaf is excellent for that.

Benvolio For what, I pray thee?

Romeo For your broken shin.

Benvolio Why, Romeo, art thou mad?

Romeo Not mad, but bound more than a madman is;
Shut up in prison, kept without my food,
Whipped and tormented and—God-den, good fellow.

Servant God gi' go-den. I pray, sir, can you read?

Romeo Ay, mine own fortune in my misery.

Servant Perhaps you have learned it without book. But I pray, can you read anything you see?

32.–33. *Which . . . none:* This is differently punctuated in different editions, giving two different meanings. (1) When you have seen more of her whose merit is most (the antecedent of "which"), many—including my daughter—may be in the company, but none may be reckoned with her. (2) When you have seen many ladies, my daughter being one, she may be one of the company, but not one for whom you have any esteem. (1) has a comma at "of," and (2) at "many." The first seems more in character, in view of Capulet's words about what his daughter means to him, but if the second is accepted it could be said that he wants to save his daughter from an unhappy marriage, as well as to make sure that Paris's mind is made up and that his affection is not a passing fancy.

34. *sirrah:* a familiar (or contemptuous) form of "sir," generally used when speaking to inferiors.

39-41. The servant's confusion is deliberately contrived by Shakespeare: Shoemaker should be associated with last, tailor with yard, fisher with nets, and painter with pencil.

44. *I must to the learned:* I must go to someone who can read.

45. *one fire burns out another's burning:* i.e., a greater fire soon burns up the material of a lesser, or Benvolio may be referring to the superstition that the sun puts out a fire in a grate.

47. *holp:* archaic form of helped.

48. *cures with another's languish:* is cured when another grief appears.

51. *Your plantain leaf:* a dock-leaf. Romeo means that a dock-leaf is useful for minor ills—to stop bleeding from a scratch, for instance—but his ailment needs a more desperate remedy.

56. *God-den:* good evening, a contraction of the fuller "God give you a good even."

57. *gi':* give (you).

Romeo Ay, if I know the letters and the language.

Servant Ye say honestly. Rest you merry.

62. *Rest you merry:* a colloquial term of farewell, comparable to our "All the best!"

Romeo Stay, fellow; I can read.
[He reads the letter]
'Signior Martino and his wife and daughters;
County Anselmo and his beauteous sisters;
The lady widow of Vitruvio;
Signior Placentio and his lovely nieces;
Mercutio and his brother Valentine;
Mine uncle Capulet, his wife, and daughters;
My fair niece Rosaline and Livia;
Signior Valentio and his cousin Tybalt;
Lucio and the lively Helena.'
A fair assembly. Whither should they come?

65. *County:* another form of "count," often used by Shakespeare.

70. *Rosaline:* the first time Romeo's lady-love is named.

Servant Up.

Romeo Whither? To supper?

Servant To our house.

Romeo Whose house?

Servant My master's.

Romeo Indeed I should have asked you that before.

Servant Now I'll tell you without asking. My master is the great rich Capulet; and if you be not of the house of Montagues, I pray come and crush a cup of wine. Rest you merry.

82. *crush a cup:* a common colloquial expression in Elizabethan English comparable to "crack a bottle."

[Exit]

Benvolio At this same ancient feast of Capulet's
Sups the fair Rosaline whom thou so loves;
With all the admired beauties of Verona.
Go thither, and with unattainted eye
Compare her face with some that I shall show,
And I will make thee think thy swan a crow.

84. *ancient:* one which has been held annually for a long time.

87. *unattainted:* impartial.

Romeo When the devout religion of mine eye
Maintains such falsehood, then turn tears to fires;
And these, who, often drowned, could never die,
Transparent heretics, be burnt for liars!
One fairer than my love? The all-seeing sun
Ne'er saw her match since first the world begun.

90. *devout religion:* implying that he worships Rosaline.

92. *these:* i.e., these eyes of mine "drowned" in tears.

Benvolio Tut! you saw her fair, none else being by,
Herself poised with herself in either eye;
But in that crystal scales let there be weighed
Your lady's love against some other maid
That I will show you shining at this feast,
And she shall scant show well that now seems best.

Romeo I'll go along, no such sight to be shown,
But to rejoice in splendor of my own. *[Exeunt]*

97. *either eye:* i.e., in each of your eyes.

98. *scales:* Romeo's eyes.

99. *lady's love:* love for your lady. To interpret "the slight love of your lady for you" shifts the emphasis and is unlikely.

101. *scant show well:* scarcely appear attractive.

103. *splendor of mine own:* the splendid beauty of my own beloved.

COMMENTARY

In this scene, Lord Capulet speaks with Juliet's potential suitor, the County Paris, a young nobleman. Capulet tells Paris about the recent brawl and Prince Escalus's new decree. He claims, " 'tis not hard, I think / For men so old as we to keep the peace" (2–3). But, as we saw in Act I, Scene 1, age hasn't improved the tempers of either Montague or Capulet; even in old age, they're always ready for a fight.

Juliet's suitor

Paris isn't interested in the feud, however; he has come to seek Juliet's hand in marriage. Capulet initially claims that Juliet is not ready for marriage, because she is only 13 years old and "yet a stranger in the world" (8). (Note that Shakespeare's sources for the play depict an older Juliet—she is 18 in Painter's version and 16 in Brooke's version. Shakespeare's alteration emphasizes Juliet's youth and sets up an even starker contrast with her father's age.) When Paris replies, "Younger than she are happy mothers made," Capulet counters that women who marry too young are often scarred (12). All of Capulet's other children have died, so he plans to take special care of Juliet, "the hopeful lady of my earth" (15). His emphasis on "earth" suggests not only that Juliet is the sole inheritor of his lands, but also that her children will carry on his bloodline. Despite these valid reasons to oppose the marriage, Capulet eventually tells Paris that he'll agree to the marriage if Paris convinces Juliet.

Capulet's inconstancy in this scene prepares you for his later reckless, sometimes violent, mood shifts. Even in matters that concern his only daughter, whom he supposedly loves and wants to protect, Capulet's moods and opinions can't be trusted. For this reason, we should not be surprised at his participation in the bitter and longstanding feud with the Montagues. Capulet's temperament makes him seem more youthful in some ways than the younger characters in the play, such as Paris, who presents his case for marriage so rationally in this scene.

Capulet invites Paris to a feast at his home that evening and says that the guest list includes many "[e]arth-treading stars"—women who "make dark heaven light" (25). The comparison of women (and love) with stars is a motif that repeats throughout the play, particularly concerning Juliet. In this scene, Capulet also refers to women as "fresh fennel buds," a traditional poetic invocation of youth and freshness (29). (Romeo is later called a "bud" and Paris a "flower.")

Capulet seems to suspect that Paris may prefer another woman at the party and forget about Juliet—a suggestion similar to one that Benvolio made earlier to Romeo concerning Rosaline. We see later that Paris stays true in his affections, while Romeo transfers his attentions from Rosaline to Juliet. Because Paris is more constant, he seems to be an appropriate lover for Juliet. The manner in which Paris pursues Juliet emphasizes his potential as an ideal son-in-law. Rather than follow Romeo's impetuous courtship of Juliet, Paris maintains proper protocol, discussing the marriage proposal with Lord Capulet and asking his permission to woo Juliet.

At this point in the play, Romeo and Paris both play the game of love "by the book." Romeo's love for Rosaline is ruled by Petrarchan protocol, while Paris's feelings for Juliet are guided by social conventions. But we

will see later that Romeo leaves his books behind when he meets Juliet. By presenting a contrast between Paris and Romeo, the play asks us to consider the values of different types of love: Should Juliet choose a socially- and parentally-sanctioned (but reserved) lover like Paris? Or should she choose the passionate Romeo, whose secret and forbidden love for her transgresses the rules in feud-torn Verona? As you read, consider whether Shakespeare's depiction of Lord Capulet steers us in one direction or another on this question.

Preparing for the feast

Capulet's impetuous personality shines through again when he gives the guest list for that evening's feast to one of his servants, not realizing that the man can't read. The servant wittily remarks, "I am sent to / find those persons whose names are here writ, and can / never find what names the writing person hath here / writ" (41–44). The servant's playful manner of revealing that he can't read again emphasizes the importance *Romeo and Juliet* places on witticism and humour. To stress the different social status of characters in the play, Shakespeare has the servant speak entirely in prose while the upper-class characters speak in iambic pentameter (a form of rhythmic language explained in the "Introduction to William Shakespeare").

As the servant searches for someone who can read the guest list for him, Benvolio and Romeo enter the scene, still discussing Romeo's love problems. Benvolio argues that love is the cure for love—"one fire burns out another's burning" (45). Benvolio views love as an "infection," and he urges Romeo to accept a new infection so that the "rank poison of the old will die" (49–50). Romeo compares his love to madness and being shut up in prison, whipped, and tormented. Both Romeo and Benvolio continue to use Petrarchan devices in their discussion of love.

Fate intervenes

Completely by chance, Capulet's servant meets Romeo and Benvolio and asks if they know how to read. This accident emphasizes the importance of fate in the play. Shakespeare generally uses accidental meetings such as this more often in his comedies than in his tragedies. (Tragedy usually results from character flaws—such as Hamlet's inability to make a decision or Othello's blind faith in Iago—rather than from fate.) But the plot device works here because the play contains many other comic elements that interact with the tragedy, such as the bawdy language used by many of the secondary characters.

Romeo responds that it is his "fortune" to read—indeed, "fortune" or chance led Capulet's servant to him (58). This scene prepares us for the tragic inevitability of the events in the play. What eventually happens to Romeo and Juliet occurs not because of their own personal flaws but because fate works against them. Fate steps into this scene once more when the servant invites Romeo to Capulet's house to "crush a cup of wine" (82). (Ironically, the servant extends the invitation with the provision that Romeo can come as long as he isn't a Montague.) Only fate can manufacture this unlikely meeting with Capulet's illiterate servant, because only fate can devise a way for Romeo to trespass into the Capulet domain and meet Juliet.

Many questions emerge from the action in this scene. For example, why does Shakespeare accentuate Capulet's emotional volatility? What seem to be his true feelings for his daughter? Some of those questions again centre on the nature of true love: Does true love wrap itself in the protocol of proper courtship? Can true love only be described using poetic devices? And questions of fate emerge here as well; consider as you read if fate alone is responsible for what happens to Romeo and Juliet or if the personalities of the lovers contribute to their demise.

Act I, Scene 3

Capulet's wife informs Juliet that it is time for her to think about marriage, specifically with Paris. Juliet dutifully replies that she will be guided by her parents' choice. The Nurse reminisces about Juliet's childhood.

ACT I, SCENE 3
A room in Capulet's house.

[Enter CAPULET'S WIFE, and NURSE]

Wife Nurse, where's my daughter? Call her forth to me.

Nurse Now, by my maidenhead at twelve year old,
I bade her come. What, lamb! what, ladybird!
God forbid. where's this girl? What, Juliet!

[Enter JULIET]

Juliet How now? Who calls?

Nurse Your mother.

Juliet Madam, I am here. What is your will?

Wife This is the matter—Nurse, give leave awhile,
We must talk in secret. Nurse, come back again;
I have rememb'red me, thou 's hear our counsel.
Thou knowest my daughter's of a pretty age.

Nurse Faith, I can tell her age unto an hour.

Wife She's not fourteen.

Nurse I'll lay fourteen of my teeth—
And yet, to my teen be it spoken, I have but four—
She's not fourteen. How long is it now
To Lammastide?

Wife A fortnight and odd days.

Nurse Even or odd, of all days in the year,
Come Lammas Eve at night shall she be fourteen.
Susan and she (God rest all Christian souls!)
Were of an age. Well, Susan is with God;
She was too good for me. But, as I said,
On Lammas Eve at night shall she be fourteen;
That shall she, marry; I remember it well.

NOTES

2. *maidenhead:* virginity.

3. *ladybird:* a term of endearment, similar to "lamb."

4. *God forbid:* that Juliet should be harmed.

9. *rememb'red me:* the "me" can be ignored. This is a reflexive use of the word "me," translating literally to "reminded myself."

thou 's: thou shalt. The Elizabethan use of "thou" and "you" is clearly shown in this conversation. "Thou" was a sign of familiarity, "you" was a formal address used by servant to master. Compare also the conversation between Sampson and Gregory in the first scene and the conversation between Tybalt and Benvolio which follows (where Tybalt uses the second person contemptuously, as towards an inferior).

10. *pretty:* marriageable, ripe for marriage.

15. *Lammastide:* Lammas or Loaf Mass day (1 August) was a festival for the hallowing of bread.

22. *marry:* I swear (by Virgin Mary).

'Tis since the earthquake now eleven years;
And she was weaned (I never shall forget it),
Of all the days of the year, upon that day;
For I had then laid wormwood to my dug,
Sitting in the sun under the dovehouse wall.
My lord and you were then at Mantua.
Nay, I do bear a brain. But, as I said,
When it did taste the wormwood on the nipple
Of my dug and felt it bitter, pretty fool,
To see it tetchy and fall out with the dug!
Shake, quoth the dovehouse! 'Twas no need, I trow,
To bid me trudge.
And since that time it is eleven years,
For then she could stand high-lone; nay, by th' rood,
She could have run and waddled all about;
For even the day before, she broke her brow;
And then my husband (God be with his soul!
'A was a merry man) took up the child.
'Yea,' quoth he, 'dost thou fall upon thy face?
Thou wilt fall backward when thou hast more wit;
Wilt thou not, Jule?' and, by my holidam,
The pretty wretch left crying and said 'Ay.'
To see now how a jest shall come about!
I warrant, an I should live a thousand years,
I never should forget it. 'Wilt thou not, Jule?' quoth he,
And, pretty fool, it stinted and said 'Ay.'

Wife Enough of this. I pray thee hold thy peace.

Nurse Yes, madam. Yet I cannot choose but laugh
To think it should leave crying and say 'Ay.'
And yet, I warrant, it had upon it brow
A bump as big as a young cock'rel's stone;
A perilous knock; and it cried bitterly.
'Yea,' quoth my husband, 'fall'st upon thy face?
Thou wilt fall backward when thou comest to age;
Wilt thou not, Jule?' It stinted and said 'Ay.'

Juliet And stint thou too, I pray thee, nurse, say I.

Nurse Peace, I have done. God mark thee to his grace;
Thou wast the prettiest babe that e'er I nursed.
An I might live to see thee married once,
I have my wish.

23. *since the earthquake:* There was an earthquake in England in 1580 and a bad one in Verona in 1570. Some have taken the reference to be to the 1580 earthquake and have deduced from there that the play was written in 1591.

26. *wormwood:* a plant with a bitter juice to make the child stop drinking mother's milk.

29. *do bear a brain:* have a retentive memory.

31. *fool:* a term of endearment—darling or innocent.

32. *tetchy:* fretful, peevish.

33. *Shake, quoth the dovehouse:* The dovehouse began shaking.

34. *trudge:* walk away.

36. *high-lone:* quite alone.

rood: cross (of Christ).

38. *broke her brow:* cut her forehead.

43. *Jule:* affectionate diminutive for Juliet.

holidam: originally the holy relics upon which oaths were sworn; by the late sixteenth-century this word was used as a mild oath.

61. *live . . . once:* only live to see you married.

Wife Marry, that 'marry' is the very theme
I came to talk of. Tell me, daughter Juliet,
How stands your disposition to be married?

Juliet It is an honour that I dream not of.

Nurse An honour? Were not I thine only nurse,
I would say thou hadst sucked wisdom from thy teat.

Wife Well, think of marriage now. Younger than you,
Here in Verona, ladies of esteem,
Are made already mothers. By my count,
I was your mother much upon these years
That you are now a maid. Thus then in brief:
The valiant Paris seeks you for his love.

Nurse A man, young lady! lady, such a man
As all the world—why he's a man of wax.

Wife Verona's summer hath not such a flower.

Nurse Nay, he's a flower, in faith—a very flower.

Wife What say you? Can you love the gentleman?
This night you shall behold him at our feast.
Read o'er the volume of young Paris' face,
And find delight writ there with beauty's pen,
Examine every married lineament,
And see how one another lends content;
And what obscured in this fair volume lies
Find written in the margent of his eyes.
This precious book of love, this unbound lover,
To beautify him only lacks a cover.
The fish lives in the sea, and 'tis much pride
For fair without the fair within to hide.
That book in many's eyes doth share the glory,
That in gold clasps locks in the golden story;
So shall you share all that he doth possess,
By having him making yourself no less.

Nurse No less? Nay, bigger! Women grow by men.

Wife Speak briefly, can you like of Paris' love?

63. *Marry, that 'marry':* The first is a corruption of the oath "by Mary," the second is the verb to wed.

67. *Were not I thine only nurse:* but since she is, to say so would be to praise herself.

68. *from thy teat:* from me (the Nurse had been Juliet's wet-nurse).

76. *of wax:* i.e., as handsome as if he had been modeled in wax, finer than men usually are.

83. *married:* harmonious, symmetrical, well balanced.

lineament: part or feature of a face, with attention to outline.

84. *one another lends content:* one sets off another to advantage.

86. *margent:* margin; the general sense is that what you cannot find written in his face you will find out in his eyes.

87. *unbound:* unbounded, unmarried, free (pun on an unbound book).

88. *cover:* the binding (bonds) of marriage.

90. *fair without . . . hide:* i.e., for the beautiful sea to contain beautiful fish.

92. *That in . . . story:* i.e., is beautiful to look at on the outside as well as having a beautiful story within. The application is that Paris has a fair appearance "outside" and a good character "within."

94. *making yourself no less:* at the same time not lessening your own possessions.

Juliet I'll look to like, if looking liking move;
But no more deep will I endart mine eye
Than your consent gives strength to make it fly.

[Enter Servingman]

Servingman Madam, the guests are come, supper served up, you called, my young lady asked for, the nurse cursed in the pantry, and everything in extremity. I must hence to wait. I beseech you follow straight.

Wife We follow thee. *[Exit Servingman]*
Juliet, the County stays.

Nurse Go, girl, seek happy nights to happy days.

[Exeunt]

97. *look to:* expect to.

looking liking move: what I see makes me like him. "Looking" is the subject of "move," "liking" the object.

98. *But no . . . fly:* i.e., I will go no farther than you approve.

102. *extremity:* a muddle.

103. *wait:* i.e., upon the guests.

COMMENTARY

As this scene begins, Lady Capulet searches for Juliet. The Nurse calls to Juliet using loving diminutives such as "ladybird" and "lamb" (3). (Some critics claim that "ladybird" also means "loose woman," which explains the Nurse's apology—"God forbid"—in the next line.) The Nurse says to Lady Capulet, "Now, by my maidenhead at twelve year old, / I bade her come," reminding us once again of Juliet's youthfulness and the possibility that she may be too young for marriage (2–3).

The Nurse's comment contains an explicit sexual reference (the term *maidenhead* refers to Juliet's virginity), which is significant. As in the conversation between Sampson and Gregory in Act I, Scene 1, sexual language becomes mixed with the language of true love and poses still further questions about the nature of love. For the Nurse, love and sex are necessarily intertwined. Consider, as you read, whether that holds true for Romeo and Juliet as well.

The Nurse's devotion

Although the Nurse is primarily a comic creation who balances the play's tragedy, her frank earthiness makes her one of Shakespeare's richest characters. Her love for and devotion to Juliet are apparent in this scene, particularly when she tells the story of Juliet falling on her head. But the scene also emphasizes the Nurse's role as servant when Lady Capulet capriciously sends her out of the room and then calls her back. Consider, as you read, how the Nurse balances her roles as servant and friend to Juliet throughout the play. Note whether one role predominates over the other at different points in the action.

The Nurse reveals that Juliet is almost 14 and that her birthday is on Lammas Eve or August 1. Lammas was a festival in England in which clergy blessed the bread made from the first corn harvest. Lammas is, therefore, a ritual that emphasizes abundance, wealth, and fertility. (We can speculate that the Nurse may believe the word "Lammas" comes from the words "lamb" and "mass," which explains her pet name for Juliet: lamb.)

In this scene, the Nurse remembers her own daughter, Susan, who shared a birthday with Juliet. The Nurse ominously states that Susan died because she was "too good for me" (20). Juliet will also prove "too good" before the play ends. The dialogue in this scene throws a shadow on the play, suggesting that life does indeed have a dark side and reminding us that the play's conclusion will be tragic.

While reminiscing about Juliet's childhood, the Nurse alludes to an earthquake: "'Tis since the earthquake now eleven years, / And she was weaned" (23–24). Numerous critics have tried to identify which earthquake the Nurse refers to. Some argue that the lines refer to the English earthquake of 1580, which means that the play is set in the year 1591. But several other earthquakes occurred in England and Italy around this time period, so pinpointing the earthquake that Shakespeare refers to or discovering the exact year in which the play was written is difficult. The reference to an earthquake would have added an element of reality for the original spectators of the play, who would have recognized the accuracy of the Nurse's claim.

The marriage proposal

While the Nurse reminisces about Juliet's childhood, Lady Capulet wants to discuss Paris's marriage proposal. Lady Capulet seems to favour Juliet's young marriage, saying, "Younger than you / Here in Verona, ladies of esteem, / Are made already mothers" (69–71). Lady Capulet says that she was a mother at Juliet's age, suggesting that she is a young woman (under 30) married to an older man. (When Capulet suggested in the previous scene that women who marry young end up spoiled, he may have been referring to his own wife.)

Juliet doesn't seem enthralled with the idea of marriage. She replies to her mother, "It is an honour that I dream not of" (66). By saying that she does not dream of marriage, Juliet rejects her mother's notion that Juliet is old enough for marriage. Juliet's forthright response to her mother seems surprising, because absolute obedience was expected of young women in Shakespeare's day. Her statement provides insight into her character; although she is a good daughter, she is not blindly obedient to her parents' wishes. As the play progresses, the fractures between Juliet and her parents will widen.

In discussing Paris, the women refer to him as a "flower, in faith—a very flower," creating a connection to Act I, Scene 2 in which the women at the party were called "buds" (78). Although these flower references emphasize Paris's youth and good looks, they also suggest the fragility of love. Like flowers, love blooms magnificently and then withers.

Lady Capulet champions Paris

The imagery of reading is also important in Lady Capulet's discussion of Paris. Juliet should read the "volume" of Paris's face, finding "delight writ there with beauty's pen" (81–82). What isn't apparent in the volume of Paris's face may appear in the page margins: his eyes. Paris is a "precious book of love" that is currently "unbound" (87). To be beautified, Paris needs only a "cover," which Juliet would provide (88). A woman as a cover, binding the man in marriage, makes him complete. The book of marriage is indeed a "golden story" that's clasped in gold locks (the wedding bands) (92).

As you read, consider how Lady Capulet's depiction of marriage in this scene differs from Shakespeare's representation of the Capulets' own marriage. Do Juliet's parents seem united in the positive way Lady Capulet describes? After seeing her parents' relationship, why might Juliet be suspicious of her mother? Why might she not want to follow too closely in her mother's marital footsteps?

In arguing that "[t]he fish lives in the sea, and 'tis much pride / For fair without the fair within to hide," Lady Capulet suggests that marriage is the proper element for Juliet, just as water is for fish (89–90). She suggests that by remaining unmarried and hiding the "fair within," Juliet is selfish or filled with pride. Marriage helps women, in Lady Capulet's opinion. She emphasizes that Juliet will "share" all that Paris possesses while "making [herself] no less"; Paris is Juliet's equal, so their marriage will be one of equality (93–94).

The Nurse humorously reinterprets Lady Capulet's words, arguing that women actually "grow by men" through pregnancy (95). The Nurse again emphasizes that love and sex are intertwined, and she obviously enjoys both. The Nurse finds Paris one of the most handsome men she knows and strongly favours the marriage. Although the Nurse's statements may be vulgar, she is refreshingly natural and honest in comparison to Lady Capulet who seems somewhat artificial.

Juliet's hesitance

Juliet, however, doesn't accept either view of love. Rather than giving her mother a straightforward yes or

no answer about the proposed marriage to Paris, she cunningly promises to like Paris "if looking liking move" (97). Juliet undercuts even this ambiguous statement by claiming, "[N]o more deep will I endart mine eye / Than your consent gives strength to make it fly" (98–99). Implicitly, Juliet rejects her mother's advice and refuses to marry Paris. Although Paris may be a perfectly eligible man, she wants to marry a man of her own choosing. Juliet wants to create her own idea of love rather than accepting the views of others, including those of her parents and her Nurse. The conversation ends as a servant enters, calling the women to supper and claiming that everything is "in extremity" for the party (102).

Lady Capulet emphasizes the romantic aspects of marriage in this scene—the joining of two equal spirits in the golden book of love—but at the same time, she stresses that an equality of "possessions" in marriage is important. She is concerned not only with romance but with the material side of marriage, wanting her daughter to marry a man who is able to provide for her comfort. New questions arise: Does love depend on material wealth? Do we trust Lady Capulet? Does she seem genuinely concerned about her daughter's welfare?

The scene introduces us to the two most important women in this play: Juliet and her Nurse. Consider here what similarities and differences are apparent in their personalities. As the play progresses, note any changes in their characters. Do they grow and develop or do they remain static?

To understand how carefully Shakespeare crafted this drama, look back at this scene after reading Act IV, Scene 5. Echoing the opening of this scene, Act IV, Scene 5 will find Lady Capulet once again searching for Juliet and the Nurse once again calling her a "lamb," "lady," "love," and "sweetheart."

Act I, Scene 4

Romeo, Benvolio, Mercutio, and a group of other friends make their way to Capulet's house, where they plan to enter the masquerade unannounced and stay for a single dance. Romeo mourns his unrequited love, and Mercutio delivers an imaginative speech on Queen Mab, who brings strange dreams to mankind. As Romeo and his friends prepare to enter the Capulet's party, Romeo has a premonition of coming troubles.

ACT I, Scene 4
The same. A street.

[Enter ROMEO, MERCUTIO, BENVOLIO, with five or six other Maskers; Torchbearers]

Romeo What, shall this speech be spoke for our excuse?
Or shall we on without apology?

Benvolio The date is out of such prolixity.
We'll have no Cupid hoodwinked with a scarf,
Bearing a Tartar's painted bow of lath,
Scaring the ladies like a crowkeeper;
Nor no without-book prologue, faintly spoke
After the prompter, for our entrance;
But, let them measure us by what they will,
We'll measure them a measure and be gone.

Romeo Give me a torch. I am not for this ambling.
Being but heavy, I will bear the light.

Mercutio Nay, gentle Romeo, we must have you dance.

Romeo Not I, believe me. You have dancing shoes
With nimble soles; I have a soul of lead
So stakes me to the ground I cannot move.

Mercutio You are a lover. Borrow Cupid's wings
And soar with them above a common bound.

Romeo I am too sore enpierced with his shaft
To soar with his light feathers; and so bound
I cannot bound a pitch above dull woe.
Under love's heavy burden do I sink.

Mercutio And, to sink in it, should you burden love—
Too great oppression for a tender thing.

Romeo Is love a tender thing? It is too rough,
Too rude, too boist'rous, and it pricks like thorn.

NOTES

s.d. *Maskers:* men masked for a masquerade—a masked ball, not a masque (the elaborate entertainment which was coming into fashion among the nobility at the end of Shakespeare's career).

1. *this speech:* i.e., speech of apology (for coming to the ball without a formal invitation) as the next line shows.

3. *The date is out:* it is no longer the fashion.

such prolixity: such long-winded verbosity.

4. *Cupid:* a guest disguised as Cupid, as a spokesman to make their speech of apology.

hoodwinked: blindfolded (like a hawk).

5. *Tartar's painted bow of lath:* i.e., an imitation (painted and made of lath) of a Tartar bow such as Cupid is represented with.

6. *crowkeeper:* boy acting as a scarecrow.

7. *Nor no:* in Elizabethan English a double negative intensifies the idea instead of cancelling it.

without-book: impromptu, or perhaps from memory.

10. *measure them a measure:* dance a measure (a slow and stately dance).

11. *Give me a torch:* i.e., I do not want to dance, so I will be one of the torch bearers.

ambling: impolite term for rustic dancing.

12. *heavy . . . light:* Romeo is rather fond of this punning antithesis. In Act I, Scene 1, he spoke of "heavy lightness," and Montague too said, "Away from light steals home my heavy son." ("Heavy" indicates heavy of heart.)

21. *pitch:* a metaphor from falconry. The "pitch" was the technical word for the height to which a falcon soared before swooping on her prey.

23. *to sink in it, should you burden love:* You would be too heavy a burden for love if you should sink in it.

Mercutio If love be rough with you, be rough with love,
Prick love for pricking, and you beat love down.
Give me a case to put my visage in.
A visor for a visor! What care I
What curious eye doth quote deformities?
Here are the beetle brows shall blush for me.

Benvolio Come, knock and enter; and no sooner in
But every man betake him to his legs.

Romeo A torch for me! Let wantons light of heart
Tickle the senseless rushes with their heels;
For I am proverbed with a grandsire phrase,
I'll be a candle-holder and look on;
The game was ne'er so fair, and I am done.

Mercutio Tut! dun's the mouse, the constable's own word!
If thou art Dun, we'll draw thee from the mire
Of this sir-reverence love, within thou stickest
Up to the ears. Come, we burn daylight, ho!

Romeo Nay, that's not so.

Mercutio I mean, sir, in delay
We waste our lights in vain, like lamps by day.
Take our good meaning, for our judgment sits
Five times in that ere once in our five wits.

Romeo And we mean well in going to this masque,
But 'tis no wit to go.

Mercutio Why may one ask?

Romeo I dreamt a dream to-night.

Mercutio And so did I.

Romeo Well, what was yours?

Mercutio That dreamers often lie.

Romeo In bed asleep, while they do dream things true.

Mercutio O, then I see Queen Mab hath been with you.
She is the fairies' midwife, and she comes
In shape no bigger than an agate stone
On the forefinger of an alderman,
Drawn with a team of little atomies
Over men's noses as they lie asleep;
Her wagon spokes made of long spinners' legs,

28. *Prick love for pricking:* i.e., give love back as good (or as bad) as it gives you.

29. *case:* mask or visor.

30. *A visor for a visor!:* i.e., imagine putting a mask on my face, which is funny enough to be a mask by itself.

31. *quote:* note carefully for future malicious use.

32. *Here . . . me:* Mercutio means that he cares not what people think of him; if anyone blushes for him, it shall be himself.

34. *betake him to his legs:* i.e., in dancing. He infers that they will then be lost in the crowd and less likely to be noticed.

37. *proverbed with a grandsire phrase:* supported by an old man's proverb (that the candleholder, or looker-on, sees most of the game).

39. *The game . . . done:* This is the best part of the proceedings, so I am giving up before worse comes. A proverb recommends that people give up while things are at their best, before the good impression is lost.

40. *dun's the mouse:* a slang Elizabethan phrase meaning "keep quiet."

41. *If . . . mire:* "Dun is in the mire" is an old country game. Dun was a log that represented a cart horse in the mire. Moving the log was a source of fun and games, such as pushing one another down and trying to make the log fall on one another's toes.

42. *sir-reverence:* filth, dung (a special form of "mire"). "Sir-reverence" came to mean this because the word prefaced the mention of unpleasant things. The phrase is a corruption of "save your reverence" meaning "excuse my mentioning it."

43. *we burn daylight:* i.e., we are wasting time (just as burning candles in the daylight is a waste).

47. *in that:* i.e., in our "good meaning."

five wits: i.e., being clever in playing with words.

49. *to-night:* last night.

53. *Queen Mab:* spoken of here as the Queen of the Fairies.

55. *agate stone:* hard stone used for the engraved part of a seal ring.

57. *atomies:* miniature beings.

59. *spinners':* spiders'.

The cover, of the wings of grasshoppers;
Her traces, of the smallest spider web;
Her collars, of the moonshine's wat'ry beams;
Her whip, of cricket's bone; the lash, of film;
Her wagoner, a small grey-coated gnat,
Not half so big as a round little worm
Pricked from the lazy finger of a maid;
Her chariot is an empty hazelnut,
Made by the joiner squirrel or old grub,
Time out o' mind the fairies' coachmakers.
And in this state she gallops by night
Through lovers' brains, and then they dream of love;
O'er courtiers' knees, that dream on curtsies straight;
O'er lawyers' fingers, who straight dream on fees;
O'er ladies' lips, who straight on kisses dream,
Which oft the angry Mab with blisters plagues,
Because their breaths with sweetmeats tainted are
Sometimes she gallops o'er a courtier's nose,
And then dreams he of smelling out a suit;
And sometime comes she with a tithe-pig's tail
Tickling a parson's nose as 'a lies asleep,
Then dreams he of another benefice.
Sometimes she driveth o'er a soldier's neck,
And then dreams he of cutting foreign throats,
Of breaches, ambuscadoes, Spanish blades,
Of healths five fathom deep; and then anon
Drums in his ear, at which he starts and wakes,
And being thus frighted, swears a prayer or two
And sleeps again. This is that very Mab
That plats the manes of horses in the night
And bakes the elflocks in foul sluttish hairs,
Which once untangled much misfortune bodes.
This is the hag, when maids lie on their backs,
That presses them and learns them first to bear,
Making them women of good carriage.
This is she—

Romeo Peace, peace, Mercutio, peace!
Thou talk'st of nothing.

Mercutio True, I talk of dreams;
Which are the children of an idle brain,
Begot of nothing but vain fantasy;

60. *cover:* i.e., hood of the "wagon."

61. *traces:* straps joining the horses to the wagon.

62. *collars:* i.e., of the horses.

63. *film:* gossamer thread, like that spun by a spider.

64. *wagoner:* one who drives a wagon.

66. *lazy:* because laziness was thought to induce such growths.

68. *old grub:* The grub bores his way through nuts, as the squirrel cracks them.

joiner: carpenter (applied to the squirrel because of his chisel-sharp teeth).

76. *tainted:* presumably because their breaths are not naturally sweet and they use flavoured sweetmeats to smother the foulness.

79. *tithe-pig's:* a pig given as a tithe (tenth part) to a church; a payment of ecclesiastical tax.

84. *breaches:* gaps made (by the attackers) in fortifications.

ambuscadoes: ambushes.

85. *healths:* toasts.

anon: immediately, at once.

86. *Drums:* the signal for battle.

90. *elflocks:* When dirty hair became clotted together it was superstitiously attributed to elves. It happened only to filthy hair—"foul sluttish hairs."

91. *untangled:* entangled.

98. *fantasy:* fancy.

Which is as thin of substance as the air,
And more inconstant than the wind, who woos
Even now the frozen bosom of the North
And, being angered, puffs away from thence,
Turning his side to the dew-dropping South.

Benvolio This wind you talk of blows us from ourselves.
Supper is done, and we shall come too late.

Romeo I fear, too early; for my mind misgives
Some consequence, yet hanging in the stars,
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date
With this night's revels and expire the term
Of a despised life, closed in my breast,
By some vile forfeit of untimely death.
But he that hath the steerage of my course
Direct my sail! On, lusty gentlemen!

Benvolio Strike, drum.

100. *woos . . . North:* i.e., blows warmly on the northern wastes.

104. *This wind you talk of:* probably with the implication that Mercutio is a windbag.

from ourselves: away from our purpose.

108. *date:* season.

113. *lusty gentlemen:* corresponding to "my fine fellows."

114. *Strike, drum:* spoken to the drummer-boy, a sign that they shall march on.

COMMENTARY

The scene opens with Romeo and his friends dressed for the masquerade at the Capulet household, which they plan to attend uninvited. Suspense grows, because we know that something crucial will occur at the Capulets' party.

As Romeo and his friends get close to the Capulet mansion, they wonder if a speech is necessary before they enter the party. Traditionally, uninvited guests present a speech to their host to apologize for the intrusion, but Benvolio argues that such speeches are out of style and no longer necessary. Benvolio insists that their presence at the party will be brief, saying that the young men will "be gone" after one "measure," or dance (10).

Romeo's melancholy

Romeo continues his melancholy act in this scene, claiming that he'll not be able to dance because he is too "heavy" with his "soul of lead" (12, 15). Knowing that Rosaline will be there but probably won't dance with him, Romeo prefers to stand in the shadows watching, rather than dancing with another woman.

Just as we tire of Romeo's continued despondence, the jesting Mercutio lightens the mood. Mocking Romeo's Petrarchan excess, he suggests that his friend needs to borrow Cupid's wings and "soar with them above a common bound," above the boundaries that chain him to the ground (18). In contrast to the good "binding" that Lady Capulet thinks marriage will bring, for Romeo, love is a "heavy burden" under which he sinks (22). Mercutio jests that love is "a tender thing," but Romeo doesn't agree; for him, it is "too rough, / Too rude, too boist'rous" (24–26).

Mercutio responds to Romeo's complaint with vulgar humour, arguing that if love plays rough with Romeo, he should also "be rough with love" (27). But Romeo insists on nursing his mood, saying that he prefers to "be a candle-holder," watching the masquerade but not participating (38). Mercutio knows that because Romeo is stuck "[u]p to the ears" in the mire of love, he must be saved from melancholy by attending a party (43).

Mercutio's bawdy jesting links him with the Nurse. Both characters view love primarily in physical terms,

though Mercutio takes love less seriously than the Nurse; for him, love is something of a joke. The teasing between Mercutio and Romeo highlights the difference in their moods and personalities. While the rest of the group is ready to enjoy the party, Romeo is stuck in an isolating depression.

As they prepare to enter the party, Romeo reveals that he "dreamt a dream to-night" (49). The details of his dream are never disclosed, but it seems to have been ominous, telling him that he shouldn't attend the party. Critics argue that Romeo's mention of a dream in this scene implicitly links him with Juliet, who in Act I, Scene 3 had said of marriage, "It is an honour that I dream not of." For both characters, dreams seem prophetic.



A masquerador.

Queen Mab

Rather than pursuing the meaning of Romeo's dream, the text moves to Mercutio's richly textured speech about Queen Mab. Mercutio claims that Mab is the "fairies' midwife," a mischievous pixie who is responsible for bringing enticing dreams (54). As "fairy," Mab rules the airy world of dreams, fantasy, and love. As "midwife," she is more mundane, presiding over the realms of death and childbirth. Mercutio's depiction of Mab plays on these contradictions.

Although Mab brings pleasant dreams to some lovers, she plagues ladies' lips with blisters if they eat too many sweets, and she rides over soldiers' necks so they dream of "cutting foreign throats" (83). In fact, Mercutio spends more time discussing the effects that Mab has on soldiers than on lovers, which helps keep the violent, tragic, feud-ridden elements of the play in focus. This passage also shows that the jovial Mercutio has a more violent side, leading him to prefer war to love. His dream of Mab contains vulgar imagery, as do most of his conversations: Mab is a nightmarish incubus who teaches women "to bear, / Making them women of good carriage," meaning good childbearers or good in bed (93–94).

The importance of dreams

Although Romeo believes that dreams bring true prophecies, Mercutio claims that dreams are "the children of an idle brain, / Begot of nothing but vain fantasy" (97–98). Mercutio neither understands nor sympathizes with Romeo's dreaming ways. In fact, he implies that Romeo is a narcissistic poseur who is emotionally immature and idle. For Mercutio, Romeo's visionary world is founded on the dangerous indulgence of whims and escapist scenarios instead of anything substantial.

Mercutio also suggests that fantasy, which includes love, is thin as "air" and "more inconstant than the wind" (99–100). Mercutio's emphasis on the "airy" nature of dreams here reminds us of the Prince's representation in Act I, Scene 1 of words as equally airy. But we will learn that just as airy words have powerful effects (leading to violence, even war), so do dreams. Throughout the play, dreams prove to be potently prophetic.

Romeo is caught up in his romantic daydreams, while Mercutio is pragmatic (though also imaginative, as his Queen Mab speech indicates). Benvolio's name suggests that he's a "good man," while Mercutio's links him to both the god and planet Mercury. Mercutio is *mercurial*, meaning that he's active, volatile, changeable, and erratic. In fact, his wit and humour make him a much more exciting character than the moody Romeo, and actors often prefer to play his part.

Despite Mercutio's argument that dreams are illusory, Romeo's premonitions seem ominous. As Romeo and his friends prepare to enter the Capulets' party, Romeo fears "[s]ome consequence, yet hanging in the stars" (107). He correctly intuits that he'll forfeit his life to an "untimely death" because of this party, yet he isn't afraid (111). His life is now moving in a direction that can't be changed.

Discussing his fate, Romeo uses the terminology of finance ("expire the term" and "forfeit") and seafaring ("steerage") (109, 111, 112). He also asks that whomever has control over his destiny direct his "sail" (113). Many of these images reoccur throughout the play. Notice how carefully Shakespeare uses imagery in order to emphasize the multiplicity of language; each image carries many connotations, adding more and more layers of meaning to the play.

At this point in the play, Romeo passively gives in to fate, allowing it to control his life. However, by the end of the play, Romeo takes greater control of his life and refuses to give "the inconsequential stars'" power over him. Romeo's final words in this scene provide a strong contrast with the seemingly festive intention of this occasion; he reminds us of the tragedy that undercuts all delight. In this play, love is never far from hate, happiness never distant from despair. Notice how quickly the moods of the play change from scene to scene, moment to moment.

Act I, Scene 5

At the masquerade, Romeo sees Juliet and, struck by her beauty, falls in love immediately. Tybalt recognizes Romeo's voice and wants to fight him, but Capulet steps in to prevent a brawl. Romeo and Juliet talk, and he kisses her. The Nurse informs each young lover of the other's family name.

ACT I, SCENE 5
The same. A hall in Capulet's house.

[They march about the stage, and Servingmen come forth with napkins]

1st Servingman Where's Potpan, that he helps not to take away? He shift a trencher? he scrape a trencher!

2nd Servingman When good manners shall lie all in one or two men's hands, and they unwashed too, 'tis a foul thing.

1st Servingman Away with the joint-stools, remove the court-cupboard, look to the plate. Good thou, save me a piece of marchpane and, as thou loves me, let the porter let in Susan Grindstone and Nell. *[Exit second Servingman]*
Anthony, and Potpan!

[Enter two more Servingmen]

3rd Servingman Ay, boy, ready.

1st Servingman You are looked for and called for, asked for and sought for, in the great chamber.

4th Servingman We cannot be here and there too. Cheerly, boys! Be brisk awhile, and the longer liver take all.

[Exit third and fourth Servingmen. Enter CAPULET, his WIFE, JULIET, TYBALT, NURSE, and all the Guests and Gentlewomen to the Maskers]

Capulet Welcome, gentlemen! Ladies that have their toes
Unplagued with corns will walk a bout with you.
Ah ha, my mistresses! which of you all
Will now deny to dance? She that makes dainty,
She I'll swear hath corns. Am I come near ye now?
Welcome, gentlemen! I have seen the day
That I have worn a visor and could tell

NOTES

2. *trencher:* wooden plate, literally one to cut food upon.
4. *When . . . hands:* i.e., when only one or two men do their duty.
6. *joint-stools:* folding stools (not all in one piece).
7. *court-cupboard:* movable sideboard, on which the food was placed.
   plate: silver plate.
8. *marchpane:* confectionery made of almond paste, sugar, and marzipan.
15. *the longer liver to take all:* a proverb meaning that he who lives longest will get the most.
17. *walk a bout:* dance a round.
19. *makes dainty:* comes shyly.
20. *come near ye:* touched you on the raw—where it hurts.

A whispering tale in a fair lady's ear,
Such as would please. 'Tis gone, 'tis gone, 'tis gone!
You are welcome, gentlemen! Come, musicians, play.
[Music plays, and they dance]
A hall, a hall! give room! and foot it, girls.
More light, you knaves! and turn the tables up,
And quench the fire, the room is grown too hot.
Ah, sirrah, this unlooked-for sport comes well.
Nay, sit, nay, sit, good cousin Capulet,
For you and I are past our dancing days.
How long is't now since last yourself and I
Were in a mask?

2nd Capulet By'r Lady, thirty years.

Capulet What, man? 'Tis not so much, 'tis not so much;
'Tis since the nuptial of Lucentio,
Come Pentecost as quickly as it will,
Some five-and-twenty years, and then we masked.

2nd Capulet 'Tis more, 'tis more. His son is elder, sir;
His son is thirty.

Capulet Will you tell me that?
His son was but a ward two years ago.

Romeo *[to a Servingman]* What lady's that, which doth enrich the hand
Of yonder knight?

Servingman I know not, sir.

Romeo O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!
It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
As a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear—
Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear!
So shows a snowy dove trooping with crows
As yonder lady o'er her fellows shows.
The measure done, I'll watch her place of stand
And, touching hers, make blessed my rude hand.
Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight!
For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night.

Tybalt This, by his voice, should be a Montague.
Fetch me my rapier, boy. What, dares the slave
Come hither, covered with an antic face,

27. *turn the tables up:* pack away the trestles and boards that constituted the tables.

28. *quench the fire:* Shakespeare here forgets that the play is supposed to take place in July (I.3.16).

33. *By'r Lady:* by our Lady, i.e., the Virgin Mary.

36. *Pentecost:* the feast of Whitsunday.

38. *His son is elder:* His (Lucentio's) son is older.

41. *enrich the hand:* i.e., by dancing with him, he holds her hand.

46. *Ethiop's:* Negro's, as used by Shakespeare (here and elsewhere), not Ethiopian in its narrower sense.

49. *fellows:* i.e., fellow-dancers.

50. *place of stand:* Between dances, dancers stood up, just as people did in church, at parish meetings and so on.

51. *rude:* common.

52. *sight:* He appeals to his sight to foreswear his previous love on account of what follows in the next line.

56. *antic:* grotesque mask.

To fleer and scorn at our solemnity?
Now, by the stock and honour of my kin,
To strike him dead I hold it not a sin.

Capulet Why, how now, kinsman? Wherefore storm you so?

Tybalt Uncle, this is a Montague, our foe;
A villain, that is thither come in spite
To scorn at our solemnity this night.

Capulet Young Romeo is it?

Tybalt 'Tis he, that villain Romeo.

Capulet Content thee, gentle coz, let him alone.
'A bears him like a portly gentleman,
And, to say truth, Verona brags of him
To be a virtuous and well-governed youth.
I would not for the wealth of all this town
Here in my house do him disparagement.
Therefore be patient, take no note of him.
It is my will, the which if thou respect,
Show a fair presence and put off these frowns.
An ill-beseeming semblance for a feast.

Tybalt It fits when such a villain is a guest.
I'll not endure him.

Capulet He shall be endured.
What, goodman boy! I say he shall. Go to!
Am I the master here, or you? Go to!
You'll not endure him, God shall mend my soul!
You'll make a mutiny among my guests!
You will set cock-a-hoop, you'll be the man!

Tybalt Why, uncle, 'tis a shame.

Capulet Go to, go to!
You are a saucy boy. Is't so, indeed?
This trick may chance to scathe you, I know what.
You must contrary me! Marry, 'tis time—
Well said, my hearts!—You are a princox—go!
Be quiet, or—More light, more light!—For shame!
I'll make you quiet; what!—Cheerly, my hearts!

57. *fleer:* jeer.

solemnity: ceremonial festival.

66. *bears him:* carries himself.

portly: dignified, honourable, of good carriage or bearing.

70. *disparagement:* discourtesy.

71. *patient:* calm. Capulet does not mean, "Wait patiently for another opportunity."

77. *goodman boy:* my fine fellow, with the implication in "boy" that he is only an underling after all.

78. *Go to:* stop it, behave yourself.

79. *God . . . soul:* an oath meaning "God spare me if I will permit this!"

81. *set cock-a-hoop:* to drink without stint, make good cheer recklessly, cast off all restraint, give the rein to disorder.

84. *This trick may chance to scathe you:* I'll use this as an opportunity to injure you.

what: Capulet is obviously hinting that if Tybalt's behaviour does not improve it will affect his income, or his legacy in Capulet's will.

85. *contrary me:* go against my will.

86. *hearts:* good fellows. The rest of this speech is interspersed with remarks to the guests.

*princox: prin*ce of *cox*combs; a saucy boy or upstart.

Tybalt Patience perforce with willful choler meeting
Makes my flesh tremble in their different greeting.
I will withdraw; but this intrusion shall,
Now seeming sweet, convert to bitt'rest gall.
[Exit]

Romeo If I profane with my unworthiest hand
This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this;
My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.

Juliet Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,
Which mannerly devotion shows in this;
For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,
And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.

Romeo Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?

Juliet Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.

Romeo O, then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do!
They pray; grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.

Juliet Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake.

Romeo Then move not while my prayer's effect I take.
Thus from my lips, by thine my sin is purged.

[Kisses her]

Juliet Then have my lips the sin that they have took.

Romeo Sin from my lips? O trespass sweetly urged!
Give me my sin again *[Kisses her]*

Juliet You kiss by th' book.

Nurse Madam, your mother craves a word with you.

Romeo What is her mother?

Nurse Marry, bachelor,
Her mother is the lady of the house,
And a good lady, and a wise and virtuous.
I nursed her daughter that you talked withal.
I tell you, he that can lay hold of her
Shall have the chinks.

Romeo Is she a Capulet?
O dear account! my life is my foe's debt.

89. *Patience perforce:* compulsory (enforced) patience.

choler: anger.

90. *their different greeting:* meeting of opposites.

91. *intrusion:* i.e., of Romeo.

93. *hand:* Romeo takes her hand as he says this. The next few speeches are in the form of a Shakespearean sonnet. It is significant that the first words between Romeo and Juliet are in sonnet form, as the sonnet was the accepted form for the language of love.

94. *This holy shrine:* Juliet's body.

105. *move:* alter, stir from what they know to be right.

though grant: though they answer prayers.

106. *my prayer's effect:* what is granted in answer to my prayer.

109. *trespass:* i.e., accusation of sin.

111. *kiss by th' book:* kiss according to the rules and techniques described by the erotic books, which reduce the art to a science.

113. *What:* i.e., what position does she hold, what is her family and title.

Marry: an exclamation based on the oath "by Mary."

118. *chinks:* cash (from the clatter of the coins).

119. *dear account:* sad reckoning. In Elizabethan English, the word "dear" intensified the meaning—you could have a "dear friend" and a "dear enemy."

my foe's debt: at the mercy of my foe (because he loves his foe).

Benvolio Away, be gone; the sport is at the best.

Romeo Ay, so I fear; the more is my unrest.

Capulet Nay, gentlemen, prepare not to be gone;
We have a trifling foolish banquet towards.
Is it e'en so? Why then, I thank you all.
I thank you, honest gentlemen. Good night.
More torches here! Come on then, let's to bed.
Ali, sirrah, by my fay, it waxes late;
I'll to my rest.

[Exeunt all but JULIET and NURSE]

Juliet Come hither, Nurse. What is yond gentleman?

Nurse The son and heir of old Tiberio.

Juliet What's he that now is going out of door?

Nurse Marry, that, I think, be young Petruchio.

Juliet What's he that follows there, that would not dance?

Nurse I know not.

Juliet Go ask his name.—If he be married,
My grave is like to be my wedding bed.

Nurse His name is Romeo, and a Montague,
The only son of your great enemy.

Juliet My only love, sprung from my only hate!
Too early seen unknown, and known too late!
Prodigious birth of love it is to me
That I must love a loathed enemy.

Nurse What's this? what's this?

Juliet A rhyme I learnt even now
Of one I danced withal. *[One calls within, 'Juliet']*

Nurse Anon, anon!
Come, let's away; the strangers all are gone.

[Exeunt]

120. *the sport is at the best:* We have had the best of the fun.

121. *the more is my unrest:* Realizing what dangers there are in this sudden love for Juliet, Romeo applies Benvolio's comment to his own affairs.

123. *towards:* coming, at hand.

124. *Is it e'en so:* corresponding to the modern "Must you really go?"

127. *fay:* faith.

waxes: grows.

136. *My grave . . . bed:* i.e., I am not likely to marry anyone else.

140. *too late:* i.e., to make any difference—I cannot help loving him.

141.-142. *Prodigious . . . enemy:* (the fate) that I must love a loathed enemy is the portentous birth that love has given to me.

COMMENTARY

Romeo and his friends have finally arrived at the Capulet mansion for the masquerade. This scene begins with Capulet's witty servants clearing away the dinner dishes. Playing the happy host, Capulet welcomes the masked Romeo to the party and the dancing begins. The emphasis on the contrast between youth and age reappears

in this scene as Capulet and his cousin quibble about how long it's been since they last masqueraded. Although Capulet claims to be too old for dancing now, he was quite a ladies' man when he was younger. Watching the dancing, Capulet seems content, and we see a new, calmer side of his personality.

Capulet's emphasis on the quick passage of time at the opening of the scene—"'Tis gone, 'tis gone, 'tis gone"—is a motif that occurs throughout the play (24). Although his sources spread the action of the play over nine months, Shakespeare compresses it into less than five days. As the play progresses, time appears to move more and more quickly.

Juliet's beauty

As Capulet reminisces, the most important event in the play has happened: Romeo has spotted Juliet. The imagery that Romeo uses to describe her provides important insights into their relationship. He says that she teaches the torches to burn bright and "hangs upon the cheek of night / As a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear" (45 – 46). She is also "for earth too dear" (47). The association of Juliet and light is repeated throughout the play, but hers is not sunlit beauty; instead, it appears best when viewed against a dark background, because she is a jewel in the night's ear. Similarly, their blazing love, born at a candlelit party, is carried on primarily at night and rarely sees the light of day. Throughout the play, Juliet's bright happiness with her love for Romeo is shadowed by darkness; she always seems aware of the tragic direction they're heading in. Romeo's statement that her beauty is "for earth too dear" is sadly prophetic.

Although Romeo's enraptured description of Juliet seems sincere, the scene is almost comical after we have read four scenes full of Romeo's protestations of undying love for Rosaline. The speed with which he alters the object of his affections suggests the immaturity and superficiality of his love. Should we trust Romeo? How do we know that his love for Juliet is real? Based on the fickleness of his character, Shakespeare makes us wonder whether Romeo will be a true and faithful lover for the innocent, young Juliet. But he adds to Romeo's credibility later in the scene by showing Capulet's respect for him as an admired member of Verona's society.

Tybalt's fury

Overhearing Romeo's statements about Juliet's beauty, Tybalt recognizes a Montague voice. Love and violence collide as fiery Tybalt calls for his *rapier* (double-edged sword). Despite the families' feud, Capulet asks Tybalt to leave Romeo alone because "Verona brags of him / To be a virtuous and well-governed youth" (67–68). As the master of the house and host of the party, Capulet refuses to allow Tybalt to fight with Romeo. Capulet has again changed his tune; rather than the hotheaded man we see earlier in the play, he's now willing to forget temporarily about the feud, primarily because he doesn't want his party to be ruined. The festival spirit has levelled some of the familial differences; however, Tybalt wants the feud to take priority in all situations.

Rather than respecting Capulet's "will," Tybalt insists that he can't endure Romeo's presence. Faced with Tybalt's lack of respect for his authority, Capulet becomes hotheaded. He responds to Tybalt's insolence by calling him "goodman boy" and "saucy boy," belittling his kinsman and affirming his own status as the "master" of the house (77, 83). Capulet becomes so angry with Tybalt's insolence that he vows to "make [Tybalt] quiet," ironically showing that his personality is just as explosive as Tybalt's (88).

The religion of love

Following this angry exchange between two Capulets, Shakespeare abruptly shifts the mood of the scene, presenting Romeo and Juliet's first meeting. The quick change in mood reminds us that this play is about extremes: love versus hate, age versus youth, light versus dark, and ultimately, life versus death. Juxtaposed with the angry exchange between Tybalt and Capulet, the interaction between Romeo and Juliet seems calm and private, outside of the boundaries of the crowded ballroom.

The lovers' first conversation uses the intense language of lyrical poetry and is structured in the form of a sonnet in which Romeo and Juliet speak alternately. The conversation ends with a kiss. The sonnet is heavy with religious imagery including references to palmers, pilgrims, saints, and shrines. Juliet's body is transformed into a "holy shrine," and Romeo's lips are "two blushing pilgrims" waiting to offer a "tender kiss" (94–96). (Critics suggest that by using the pilgrim image,



Clare Danes and Leonardo DiCaprio in the 1998 film version of Romeo and Juliet. *Everett Collection*

Shakespeare may be playing upon the Italian meaning of Romeo's name, which is "roamer" or "wanderer.") Juliet is the "saint" who uses her lips for praying rather than kissing (103). The motif of the religious quest emphasizes Romeo's pilgrimage to find true love. Romeo wants their lips to "do what hands do"—pray (103). By kissing Juliet in prayer, Romeo claims that his sins are purged. As pilgrim and saint, Romeo and Juliet create a vision of the world that vies with the church in its power. In fact, romantic love appears to be its own religion.

The sonnet interchange emphasizes Juliet's modesty—she will allow Romeo to kiss her but will not return the kiss. In claiming that Romeo kisses "by th' book," Juliet suggests that he follows the traditional rules of love, and she urges him to create something new (111). The bodily focus of their interchange—the palming and kissing—shows that this is an erotically charged moment.

The imagery that Shakespeare used shows that their love has a spiritual component, which distinguishes it from the purely earthy pleasures advocated by the Nurse and the material pleasures that Lady Capulet recommends. Earlier in the play, Romeo was isolated in a Petrarchan world of melancholy and failed love; now he and Juliet create their own world of love, one that combines spiritual and physical pleasures. Although the lovers' first conversation is structured in the stylized form of a sonnet, their later conversations use blank verse, expressing the growth of their passion past the limits of literary form.

The importance of names

Sonnet-making is so intriguing to the lovers that they forget to ask one another's names before they are interrupted by the Nurse. Romeo discovers from the Nurse that Juliet is a Capulet. The Nurse assures him that Juliet's future husband will "have the chinks," meaning he will have a lot of money (118). But this statement figuratively plunges Romeo into debt. Continuing with the Nurse's monetary imagery, he says, "[M]y life is my foe's debt" (119). Romeo owes his new interest in life to his family's rivals.

Juliet asks the Nurse to find out Romeo's name and prophetically claims, "If he be married, / My grave is like to be my wedding bed" (135–136). Although Romeo is not married, Juliet's statement will prove true. Upon discovering that Romeo is a Montague, she cries, "My only love, sprung from my only hate!" (139). Again, love and hate mesh; they can't be separated in this play.

Act I, Scene 5 is important to the play because it clearly depicts the fiery natures of Capulet and Tybalt. However, the scene also shows an interesting juxtaposition of moods that heightens the dramatic tension. The scene begins comically with the servants and the conversation between Capulet and his cousin, and then moves to the fight between Tybalt and Capulet, which foreshadows danger for Romeo. How do these juxtapositions of moods within and between scenes influence our interpretation of Romeo and Juliet's love? Does their conversation seem more sincere when contrasted with Tybalt's irrational anger?

This scene creates a strong link between love and religion. Keep an eye out for this connection throughout the play. The scene raises further questions about love as well. Is the relationship between Romeo and Juliet simply an adolescent crush, or does it seem deeper? Is the play suggesting that love at first sight is the only true love? In Act I, Scene 3, Juliet said that she would love Paris if "looking liking move"; how much does her love for Romeo seem based on "looking" (physical attraction)? Is Romeo's love for Juliet motivated purely by her physical beauty?

Note that the lovers' meeting is interrupted by the Nurse; this will happen again later in the play, contributing to its structural unity.

Notes

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