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Act 1, Prologue The play begins in Verona, a city that has had its peace shattered by the feud between two prominent families, the house of Montague and the house of Capulet. The Chorus tells us that amidst this ancient grudge, a "pair of star-cross'd lovers" will take their lives and that their deaths will extinguish their parents' rage. Act 1, Scene 1 On a street in Verona, two servants from the house of Capulet, Sampson and Gregory, deliberately initiate a fight with two servants from the Montague house, Abram and Balthasar. Benvolio, a close friend to Romeo and nephew of Lord Montague, arrives and tries to stop the fight: "Part fools!/Put up your swords; you know not what you do" (1.1.56-7). But as he attempts to keep the peace, Tybalt, nephew to Lord Capulet, comes upon the scene and demands to duel with the passive young Benvolio. Reluctantly, Benvolio draws his sword and they fight. The fiery citizens of Verona become involved and a vicious brawl ensues. Capulet and Montague arrive, and immediately join in the clash, while their wives look on in fear. Prince Escalus happens upon the scene and he is shocked and outraged at such behaviour from his subjects. His guards break up the fight and he chastises all those involved, exclaiming "You men, you beasts!" (1.1.74-5). He declares that any further public disorder will result in the execution of the participants. The crowd disperses along with Lord Capulet and his family, leaving behind Montague, Lady Montague, and Benvolio. Their attention turns to their son Romeo, who has been depressed of late. Benvolio asks Lord Montague if he knows what is troubling his son, but he has no answer. All he knows is that Romeo has been seen walking the streets in the early mornings, "With tears augmenting the fresh morning's dew/Adding to clouds more clouds with his deep sighs" (1.1.124-5). Benvolio sees Romeo coming and requests that Montague and his Lady step aside so he can talk to Romeo alone and uncover the reason for his melancholy. After asking many questions Benvolio finally learns that Romeo is sad because he is in love with a woman, Rosaline, who has taken a vow of chastity and refuses to return his affection. Benvolio suggests to Romeo that he should forget Rosaline and look for romance elsewhere. Romeo insists that no woman could ever compare to Rosaline, for she is a ravishing beauty. He insists that to forget Rosaline would be impossible, "Thou canst not teach me to forget" (1.1.229), as the scene comes to a close. Act 1, Scene 2 Scene 2 opens with Paris, a noble young kinsmen of the Prince, asking Capulet for his daughter's hand in marriage. Capulet tells Paris that Juliet has "not seen the change of fourteen years" (1.2.10) and is probably too young to marry. However, if Paris can woo her and win her heart, Capulet will grant him consent to wed Juliet. Capulet is preparing for a grand party at his house that evening, and he gives a servant a guest list and instructs him to go forth into the streets to invite them all. The servant meets Romeo and Benvolio on the road and he begs Romeo to help him, for he is illiterate and cannot complete the task given to him by his master. Romeo obligingly reads aloud the names on the invitation list, and to his delight, comes upon the name Rosaline. Benvolio challenges Romeo to sneak into the party with hopes that Romeo will see many other women to distract his attention away from Rosaline. Romeo agrees that going to the party is a splendid idea, for he longs to catch a glimpse of his darling Rosaline. Act 1, Scene 3 Back at Capulet's house, Lady Capulet visits her daughter's chamber to tell her about Paris. Juliet's nurse is in the room and she begins to ramble, recounting Juliet as a young child: For then she could stand high-alone; nay, by the rood, She could have run and waddled all about; For even the day before, she broke her brow.... (1.3.35-8) Lady Capulet asks Juliet how she feels about marriage and Juliet politely and honestly responds, "It is an honour that I dream not of" (I.iii.46). Lady Capulet tells Juliet that it is time she start thinking of becoming a bride and a mother, for there are girls in Verona even younger than Juliet who have children of their own. She adds that a suitable mate has already been found for Juliet: "The valiant Paris seeks you for his love" (1.3.54). Juliet has little choice but to respectfully agree to consider Paris as a husband. She tells her mother, "I'll look to like" (1.3.76). Their conversation ends abruptly when a servant calls Lady Capulet, announcing that supper is ready and the guests have arrived for the party. Act 1, Scene 4 The festivities are about to commence at the house of Capulet and, concealed amidst the Masquers, Romeo and Benvolio arrive with their close friend, Mercutio. Stifled by "love's heavy burden", Romeo refuses to dance with his friends. He reveals that he has had an ominous dream, but will not be any more specific. Mercutio tries to lighten Romeo's mood, and muses that Romeo must have been visited in sleep by Queen Mab, the "fairies midwife"... "In shape no bigger than an agate stone/On the fore-finger of an alderman" (1.4.52-4). She races over peoples noses as they slumber, riding in a chariot steered by a gray-coated gnat and made from an empty hazelnut. Romeo is not as amused as Mercutio himself is by his inventive tale, and Romeo implores him to be silent. He cannot shake the feeling that Some consequence yet hanging in the stars Shall bitterly begin this fearful date With this night's revels, and expire the term Of a despised life clos'd in my breast By some vile forfeit of untimely death. (1.4.104-8) Act 1, Scene 5 In the hallway of Capulet's house four servingmen clear away the dinner dishes. Lord Capulet comes out to greet his guests, asking them to dance and make merry. He admits that his "dancing days" have long since past, but he loves to watch others enjoy themselves. Romeo, seeking Rosaline through the crowd, sees Juliet instead. He is awe-struck by her grace and beauty, and he completely forgets Rosaline. Romeo's heart is racing as he exclaims, "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" (1.5.46-9). Tybalt, a cousin to Capulet, recognizes Romeo's voice and shouts for his sword. Tybalt is prepared to slay Romeo in front of the guests, but Lord Capulet stops him, knowing that any fighting will ruin the festivities. It appears that Lord Capulet is not as hostile towards his perceived enemy as is his violent and head-strong kinsman, Tybalt, as we can see in the following passage: 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-govern'd youth. I would not for the wealth of all this town Here in my house do him disparagement... (I.v.68-72) Tybalt is disgusted by Capulet's weakness, and leaves the party in a rage. Romeo decides he should leave as well, but first he stops to speak at least a word to Juliet. Dressed as a pilgrim to the Holy Land, Romeo addresses Juliet in character, pretending that he has just come upon a most holy shrine. They exchange pleasantries and Juliet, equally smitten with the handsome Romeo, grants him a kiss. Juliet is promptly called away by her mother, and Romeo learns from the Nurse that she is the daughter of his father's enemy, Capulet. Deeply troubled by this knowledge, Romeo exits the hall with Benvolio and Capulet's other guests. When everyone has left, Juliet probes the Nurse for information about the stranger with whom she has fallen madly in love. The Nurse tells her that his name is Romeo and he is a Montague. Like Romeo, Juliet is grieved to hear such news and she cries "My only love sprung from my only hate!/Too early seen unknown, and known too late!" (1.5.140-1) as the first act draws to a close. Act 2, Prologue The Chorus opens Act II by announcing that Romeo is madly in love with the bewitching Juliet. But he warns that Romeo will not be able to court his Juliet in the proper manner befitting a fair lady because she is his father's enemy. And he adds that Juliet will not be able to meet Romeo as she pleases, but will be forced to see her darling only in secret. Despite the obstacles the lovers must overcome, the Chorus reassures us that their "passion lends them power", and that they will find a way to be together. Act 2, Scene 1 Romeo leaves the house of Capulet and wanders into a lane behind their family orchard. Longing to be with Juliet, he sorrowfully asks "Can I go forward when my heart is here?" He realizes that he cannot go any further from Juliet and he leaps over the orchard wall onto Capulet's grounds. Mercutio and Benvolio, who have been looking for Romeo, see him disappear behind the wall and they laugh at his silly behaviour, still thinking that he is chasing after Rosaline. They decide not to follow him on his quest for love and they both go home to bed. Act 2, Scene 2 Romeo is hidden amongst the shadows outside Capulet's house, content simply to be close to Juliet. Looking up, Romeo catches sight of a figure emerging from an overhead window. He rejoices when he realizes who has come out upon the balcony: "It is my Lady! O it is my love" (2.2.11). Juliet, believing that she is alone, professes her love for Romeo and her profound sorrow that he is a Montague. Romeo reveals himself and, with words as moving as any in literature, the lovers speak to each other, exchanging their vows of absolute and undying devotion. The glorious meeting is interrupted by a cry coming from inside the house. It is Juliet's nurse, who has been searching the house for her mistress. Before they part, the lovers hatch a cunning plan. Romeo will find a way for them to be married and, when he does, he will give the details to the messenger Juliet sends to him. The scene comes to a close as they say their tender farewells for the evening: Juliet: Good-night, good-night! Parting is such sweet sorrow That I shall say good-night till it be morrow. Romeo: Sleep dwell upon thine eyes, peace in thy breast Would I were sleep and peace, so sweet to rest! Hence will I to my ghostly father's cell, His help to crave, and my dear hap to tell. (2.2.184-90) Act 2, Scene 3 Romeo travels to the cell of Friar Laurence, who has been out in the fields all morning gathering herbs. He ponders the dual nature of these "baleful weeds and precious juiced flowers" that have the power to kill and the power to heal. Cheerful and excited, Romeo greets the Friar and tells him of his new love and plans for marriage. Friar Laurence, who has been Romeo's friend and confessor for sometime, is confused and concerned about Romeo's sudden change of heart. He exclaims "Holy Saint Francis, what a change is here!/Is Rosaline, that thou didst love so dear/So soon forsaken?" (II.iii.65-8). But Romeo persuades the Friar that this time he has found true love and that he is ready to enter immediately into the serious bond of holy matrimony. Friar Laurence agrees to help Romeo, hoping that their union will finally end the feud between the houses of Montague and Capulet. In one respect I'll thy assistance be/For this aliance may so happy prove/To turn your households' rancour to pure love" (2.3.90-3). Act 2, Scene 4 Mercutio and Benvolio are again wandering about the streets of Verona, wondering what happened to the love-struck Romeo. Their conversation turns to Tybalt, who Mercutio calls "the courageous captain of compliments" (2.4.21). Tybalt has left a note for Romeo at the house of Montague, challenging him to a duel. Mercutio is afraid that the fierce Tybalt will surely kill Romeo, who is too preoccupied to fight his best. Benvolio sees Romeo approach, seemingly in a light-hearted mood. Mercutio, overjoyed to see Romeo back to his happy and carefree self, teases him about his recent foolish behaviour. The two banter as good friends should and Mercutio quips, "Why, is this not better now than groaning for love? Now art thou sociable, now art thou Romeo, now art thou what thou art, by art as well as by nature; for tis drivelling love is like a great natural..." (2.4.90-4). But Benvolio and Romeo are tired of his ramblings and cut him off in mid-sentence. Romeo directs Mercutio to Juliet's nurse who is coming down the road, and Mercutio continues his musings with her as his new audience. It does not take long for Mercutio to lose interest in his own pontificating and he and Benvolio leave for supper at Montague's house. Romeo and the Nurse are left alone and Romeo makes excuses for Mercutio's talkative and saucy behaviour, which has greatly offended her. Romeo asks the Nurse to give Juliet the information about his plan of marriage, and she agrees. The wedding, he tells the Nurse, will be performed that afternoon by Friar Laurence. Juliet is to go to the Friar's cell and Romeo will arrange for a rope ladder to be placed at Juliet's window within the hour to facilitate her escape. The Nurse runs off with the message as the curtain closes. Act 2, Scene 5 Scene 5 opens in Capulet's orchard. Juliet is frantically awaiting the news about Romeo. The Nurse comes in, preoccupied with her own troubles. She wants to discuss her aching bones, but Juliet pleads with her not to withhold Romeo's plan any longer. Slowly, the Nurse begins to speak of Romeo. She says that she doesn't much care for the boy, but she approves of his handsome face and gentle nature. She finally tells Juliet all that Romeo has told her, and Juliet leaves at once for Friar Laurence's cell. Act 2, Scene 6 Friar Laurence and Romeo are anxiously awaiting Juliet's arrival. The Friar gives Romeo some advice before the wedding, cautioning him to 'love moderately'. Juliet appears and Friar Laurence comments on her delicacy. He starts the marriage proceedings at once, "For, by your leaves you shall not stay alone/Till Holy Church incorporate two in one" (2.6.36-7). Continue to Act 3 Summary How to cite this article: Mabillard, Amanda. Romeo and Juliet Plot Summary. Shakespeare Online. 18 Sept. 2008. < >. ______ Even more... Daily Life in Shakespeare's London Life in Stratford (structures and guilds) Life in Stratford (trades, laws, furniture, hygiene) Stratford School Days: What Did Shakespeare Read? Games in Shakespeare's England [A-L] Games in Shakespeare's England [M-Z] An Elizabethan Christmas Clothing in Elizabethan England Queen Elizabeth: Shakespeare's Patron King James I of England: Shakespeare's Patron The Earl of Southampton: Shakespeare's Patron Going to a Play in Elizabethan London Ben Jonson and the Decline of the Drama Publishing in Elizabethan England Shakespeare's Audience Religion in Shakespeare's England Alchemy and Astrology in Shakespeare's Day Entertainment in Elizabethan England London's First Public Playhouse Shakespeare Hits the Big Time "The thread of the feud action is here introduced with the peace-making Benvolio on the side of the Montagues and the fiery Tybalt on the Capulet side. The quarrel is suppressed when the Prince enters and, in the presence of the heads of the two houses which have thrice disturbed Verona's streets with broils, declares that death will be the penalty if civil peace is again threatened by their hatred. This warning is a preparation for the tragic climax. The love action is suggested. The strangeness of Romeo's new mood is discussed by his parents and Benvolio. When Romeo enters, it is soon discovered that the cause is unrequited love. Benvolio's determination to teach Romeo to forget this lady prepares the way for the change in the hero's feelings in the masquerade scene." Henry Norman Hudson. Read on... ____ Romeo and Juliet: Complete Play with Explanatory Notes Romeo and Juliet Plot Summary (Acts 3, 4 and 5) Mercutio's Mab Speech in Plain English Themes and Motifs in Romeo and Juliet Stage History of Romeo and Juliet Romeo and Juliet: Examination Questions and Answers Romeo, Rosaline, and Juliet The Importance of Romeo and Rosaline Romeo and Juliet and the Rules of Dramatic Tragedy Romeo and Juliet: Teacher's Notes and Classroom Discussion Stage History of Romeo and Juliet What Is Accomplished in Act I? _____ Thoughts on Mercutio... "Mercutio is the very antithesis to Romeo. "The brooding nature of Romeo," says Dowden, "which cherishes emotion, and lives in it, is made salient by contrast with Mercutio, who is all wit, and intellect, and vivacity, an uncontrollable play of gleaming and glancing life. Upon the morning after the betrothal with Juliet, a meeting happens between Romeo and Mercutio. Previously, while a lover of Rosaline, Romeo had cultivated a lover-like melancholy. But now, partly because his blood runs gladly, partly because the union of soul with Juliet has made the whole world more real and substantial, and things have grown too solid and lasting to be disturbed by a laugh, Romeo can contend in jest with Mercutio himself, and stretch his wit of cheveril 'from an inch narrow to an ell broad.'" K. Deighton. Read on... _____ The Purpose of Romeo's witticisms in 2.1. Friar Laurence's First Soliloquy The Dramatic Function of Mercutio's Queen Mab Speech Mercutio's Death and its Role in the Play Shakespeare's Taste for Death (Tomb Scene) Costume Design for a Production of Romeo and Juliet Shakespeare's Treatment of Love Shakespeare on Fate Sources for Romeo and Juliet The Five Stages of Plot Development in Romeo and Juliet Annotated Balcony Scene, Act 2 Blank Verse and Rhyme in Romeo and Juliet How to Pronounce the Names in Romeo and Juliet Introduction to Juliet Introduction to Romeo Introduction to Mercutio Introduction to The Nurse Shakespeare probably began his education at the age of six or seven at the Stratford grammar school, which is still standing only a short distance from his house on Henley Street. Although we have no record of Shakespeare attending the school, due to the official position held by John Shakespeare it seems likely that he would have decided to educate young William at the school which was under the care of Stratford's governing body. Read on... ____ Shakespeare acquired substantial wealth thanks to his acting and writing abilities, and his shares in London theatres. The going rate was ï¿½10 per play at the turn of the sixteenth century. So how much money did Shakespeare make? Read on... Shakespeare was familiar with seven foreign languages and often quoted them directly in his plays. His vocabulary was the largest of any writer, at over twenty-four thousand words. Read on... ____ Known to the Elizabethans as ague, Malaria was a common malady spread by the mosquitoes in the marshy Thames. The swampy theatre district of Southwark was always at risk. King James I had it; so too did Shakespeareï¿½s friend, Michael Drayton. Read on... ____ Introduction to The Montagues and the Capulets Famous Quotations from Romeo and Juliet Why Shakespeare is so Important Shakespeare's Language Shakespeare's Boss: The Master of Revels What is Tragic Irony? Seneca's Tragedies and the Elizabethan Drama Characteristics of Elizabethan Drama In a sonnet, the Chorus reveals to the audience that Romeo has fallen out of love with Rosaline and is in love with Juliet. It talks about the challenges this new couple will face; however, the lovers, the audience is told, are going to brave it for their love. The prologue reminds the audience of the pivotal events that have already occurred in the play. By doing so, it aims to evoke dramatic suspense in the audience. After the masquerade, Romeo feels he cannot go home. Hence, he crosses over a wall to enter the Capulets' garden. Meanwhile, Mercutio and Benvolio enter the stage looking for Romeo. Romeo hides from his friends and does not answer to their calls. Mercutio mocks Romeo about his love for Rosaline using obscene language, and both Mercutio and Benvolio leave. As Romeo's love for Juliet grows, he withdraws from his friends. Romeo is seen waiting in the Capulets' garden to catch a glimpse of Juliet. As he hears Mercutio and Benvolio approaching, Romeo avoids them by hiding behind a wall. Romeo overhears Mercutio teasing him about Rosaline. He also uses crass, sexual language to tease Romeo, who does not retaliate. The wall here signifies the growing distance between Romeo and the Montagues, as well as between Romeo and his friends. Romeo presently finds himself more drawn to Juliet. As a symbol, the wall also accentuates the contrast between Romeo's pure and spiritual love for Juliet and Mercutio's seemingly baser conception of love, signified also by the latter's use of foul language. In her balcony, unaware of Romeo's presence in the garden, Juliet launches into a soliloquy, lamenting the fact that Romeo is a Montague. Romeo, who overhears this, is assured by Juliet's feelings. He interrupts Juliet, thereby startling her in the process. Romeo and Juliet then confess their love for each other, only to be interrupted by the Nurse. Juliet disappears momentarily. When she reappears, Juliet asks Romeo to propose marriage to her to prove his love. Romeo is happy to oblige, and Juliet asks him to plan their wedding. She disappears once more, but the lovers meet again and spend the rest of the night together, in what is perhaps the play's most famous scene. The garden, in this scene, is more than a secret meeting place; it symbolizes the garden of Eden, and thus the love that blossoms here between Romeo and Juliet is to be seen as pure and spiritual, a love that transcends hatred. In fact, the language Romeo and Juliet use with one another also suggests as much; it also shows their willingness to conclude the feud. Although initially unsure, they both grow confident of overcoming all odds. Early in the morning, in his chapel garden, Friar Lawrence is seen collecting herbs and flowers. Romeo enters just as the Friar finds himself contemplating the power of these herbs, which, incidentally, can be used for healing as well as poisoning people. Friar Lawrence only knows about Romeo's affection for Rosaline, so he is surprised when Romeo confesses his love for Juliet and asks him to perform the wedding. Friar Lawrence considers this as an opportunity to put an end to the feud between the Montagues and the Capulets. This scene sheds light on the bond between Romeo and Friar Lawrence. It is indeed telling that Romeo confesses his love for Juliet to the Friar, and not to his friends or family. The scene also hints at the tragedy that will befall these young lovers; it indicates to the audience that the Friar's herb concoction will spell trouble for Romeo and Juliet. Mercutio and Benvolio are looking for Romeo. They assume he must be preoccupied with thoughts of Juliet. They discuss Tybalt's decision to challenge Romeo to a duel. Mercutio thinks Tybalt and Romeo are incapable of partaking in a duel, and thus does not take Tybalt's challenge seriously. When they do find Romeo, Mercutio, unaware of Romeo's change of heart, is all too pleased to taunt him again. Mercutio and Benvolio leave, as Juliet's nurse and Peter, a servant at the Capulet household, enter. Romeo asks the Nurse if she can inform Juliet to meet him at the Friar's cell in the afternoon for their wedding. He also asks her to keep a ladder outside Juliet's room, so he can climb up to her room and spend their wedding night together. The first two acts are set up to provide the audience a vision of the disaster that will eventually befall the couple. It is worth noting that although Mercutio dismisses the possibility of a duel, ironically enough, he will be killed by Tybalt in a duel. Tybalt, in turn, will be killed by Romeo. The scene also sheds light on Romeo's myopic romanticism: though he is hellbent on marrying Juliet for love, he does not plan for their future together. Juliet awaits the Nurse's return, who comes bearing news about Romeo. The Nurse is three hours late, and she teases Juliet by saying she is too tired to give her any news of Romeo. The Nurse relents, but only after getting a back rub from Juliet. After much deliberation, she informs Juliet about the wedding at Friar Lawrence's chapel. She then leaves to collect a ladder from Romeo's servant, so Romeo can climb up to Juliet's chamber at night to consummate their marriage. Though this is a short scene, it is pivotal in advancing the plot. Friar Lawrence and Romeo are at the cell, awaiting Juliet. Romeo is ecstatic to get married to Juliet, and in his euphoric state, he says he does not particularly care about any misfortune that might befall him and Juliet. The much-experienced Friar Lawrence urges Romeo to love moderately. Juliet enters, and Friar Lawrence escorts the young couple to the chapel to get them married. This scene focuses on the couple's euphoric state. Nonetheless, it also foreshadows the couple's tragic fate. In particular, the Friar's remark—"these violent delights have violent ends"—serves as a profound premonition. His words also reinforce the power of fate. Skip to main content or search all Shakespeare texts Characters in the Play Entire Play The prologue of Romeo and Juliet calls the title characters "star-crossed lovers"—and the stars do seem to conspire against these young lovers.Romeo is a Montague, and Juliet a Capulet. Their families are enmeshed in a feud, but the moment they meet—when Romeo and his friends attend a party at Juliet's house in disguise—the two fall in love and quickly decide that they want to be married.A friar secretly marries them, hoping to end the feud. Romeo and his companions almost immediately encounter Juliet's cousin Tybalt, who challenges Romeo. When Romeo refuses to fight, Romeo's friend Mercutio accepts the challenge and is killed. Romeo then kills Tybalt and is banished. He spends that night with Juliet and then leaves for Mantua.Juliet's father forces her into a marriage with Count Paris. To avoid this marriage, Juliet takes a potion, given her by the friar, that makes her appear dead. The friar will send Romeo word to be at her family tomb when she awakes. The plan goes awry, and Romeo learns instead that she is dead. In the tomb, Romeo kills himself. Juliet wakes, sees his body, and commits suicide. Their deaths appear finally to end the feud. Prologue Act 1, scene 1 A street fight breaks out between the Montagues and the Capulets, which is broken up by the ruler of Verona, Prince Escalus. He threatens the Montagues and Capulets with death if they fight again. A melancholy Romeo enters and is questioned by his cousin Benvolio, who learns that the cause of Romeo's sadness is unrequited love. Act 1, scene 2 In conversation with Capulet, Count Paris declares his wish to marry Juliet. Capulet invites him to a party that night.Capulet gives a servant the guest list for the party and orders him off to issue invitations. The servant cannot read the list and asks for help from Romeo and Benvolio. When they find out that Rosaline, on whom Romeo dotes, is invited to the party, they decide to go too. Act 1, scene 3 Lady Capulet informs Juliet of Paris's marriage proposal and praises him extravagantly. Juliet says that she has not even dreamed of marrying, but that she will consider Paris as a possible husband if her parents wish her to. Act 1, scene 4 Romeo and Benvolio approach the Capulets' party with their friend Mercutio and others, wearing the disguises customarily donned by "maskers." Romeo is anxious because of an ominous dream. Mercutio mocks him with a speech about a dream-giving queen of fairies. Act 1, scene 5 Capulet welcomes the disguised Romeo and his friends. Romeo, watching the dance, is caught by the beauty of Juliet. Overhearing Romeo ask about her, Tybalt recognizes his voice and is enraged at the intrusion.Romeo then meets Juliet, and they fall in love. Not until they are separated do they discover that they belong to enemy houses. Act 2, Chorus Again the Chorus's speech is in the form of a sonnet. Act 2, scene 1 Romeo finds himself so in love with Juliet that he cannot leave her. He scales a wall and enters Capulet's garden. Meanwhile Benvolio and Mercutio look for him in vain. Act 2, scene 2 From Capulet's garden Romeo overhears Juliet express her love for him. When he answers her, they acknowledge their love and their desire to be married. Act 2, scene 3 Determined to marry Juliet, Romeo hurries to Friar Lawrence. The Friar agrees to marry them, expressing the hope that the marriage may end the feud between their families. Act 2, scene 4 Mercutio and Benvolio meet the newly enthusiastic Romeo in the street. Romeo defeats Mercutio in a battle of wits. The Nurse finds Romeo, and he gives her a message for Juliet: meet me at Friar Lawrence's cell this afternoon, and we will there be married. Act 2, scene 5 Juliet waits impatiently for the Nurse to return. Her impatience grows when the Nurse, having returned, is slow to deliver Romeo's message. Finally Juliet learns that if she wants to marry Romeo, she need only go to Friar Lawrence's cell that afternoon. Act 2, scene 6 Juliet meets Romeo at Friar Lawrence's cell. After expressing their mutual love, they exit with the Friar to be married. Act 3, scene 1 Mercutio and Benvolio encounter Tybalt on the street. As soon as Romeo arrives, Tybalt tries to provoke him to fight. When Romeo refuses, Mercutio answers Tybalt's challenge. They duel and Mercutio is fatally wounded. Romeo then avenges Mercutio's death by killing Tybalt in a duel. Benvolio tries to persuade the Prince to excuse Romeo's slaying of Tybalt; however, the Capulets demand that Romeo pay with his life; the Prince instead banishes Romeo from Verona. Act 3, scene 2 Juliet longs for Romeo to come to her. The Nurse arrives with the news that Romeo has killed Tybalt and has been banished. Juliet at first feels grief for the loss of her cousin Tybalt and verbally attacks Romeo, but then renounces these feelings and devotes herself to grief for Romeo's banishment. The Nurse promises to bring Romeo to Juliet that night. Act 3, scene 3 Friar Lawrence tells Romeo that his punishment for killing Tybalt is banishment, not death. Romeo responds that death is preferable to banishment from Juliet. When the Nurse enters and tells Romeo that Juliet is grief-stricken, Romeo attempts suicide. Friar Lawrence then says that Romeo may spend the night with Juliet and leave for exile in Mantua next morning. The Friar promises that Balthasar will bring Romeo news of Verona and suggests that Romeo can expect in time that the Prince may relent and allow him to return to Verona. Act 3, scene 4 Paris again approaches Capulet about marrying Juliet. Capulet, saying that Juliet will do as she is told, promises Paris that she will marry him in three days. Act 3, scene 5 Romeo and Juliet separate at the first light of day. Almost immediately her mother comes to announce that Juliet must marry Paris. When Juliet refuses, her father becomes enraged and vows to put her out on the streets. The Nurse recommends that Juliet forget the banished Romeo and regard Paris as a more desirable husband. Juliet is secretly outraged at the Nurse's advice and decides to seek Friar Lawrence's help. Act 4, scene 1 Paris is talking with Friar Lawrence about the coming wedding when Juliet arrives. After Paris leaves, she threatens suicide if Friar Lawrence cannot save her from marrying Paris. Friar Lawrence gives her a potion that will make her appear as if dead the morning of the wedding. He assures her that when she awakes in the vault, Romeo will be there to take her away. Act 4, scene 2 Capulet energetically directs preparations for the wedding. When Juliet returns from Friar Lawrence and pretends to have learned obedience, Capulet is so delighted that he moves the wedding up to the next day and goes off to tell Paris the new date. Act 4, scene 3 Juliet sends the Nurse away for the night. After facing her terror at the prospect of awaking in her family's burial vault, Juliet drinks the potion that Friar Lawrence has given her. Act 4, scene 4 The Capulets and the Nurse stay up all night to get ready for the wedding. Capulet, hearing Paris approach with musicians, orders the Nurse to wake Juliet. Act 4, scene 5 The Nurse finds Juliet in the deathlike trance caused by the Friar's potion and announces Juliet's death. Juliet's parents and Paris join the Nurse in lamentation. Friar Lawrence interrupts them and begins to arrange Juliet's funeral. The scene closes with an exchange of wordplay between Capulet's servant Peter and Paris's musicians. Act 5, scene 1 Romeo's man, Balthasar, arrives in Mantua with news of Juliet's death. Romeo sends him to hire horses for their immediate return to Verona. Romeo then buys poison so that he can join Juliet in death in the Capulets' burial vault. Act 5, scene 2 Friar John enters, bringing with him the letter that he was to have delivered to Romeo. He tells why he was unable to deliver the letter. Friar Lawrence anxiously goes to the tomb to be there when Juliet comes out of her trance. Act 5, scene 3 Paris visits Juliet's tomb and, when Romeo arrives, challenges him. Romeo and Paris fight and Paris is killed. Romeo, in the tomb, takes poison, dying as he kisses Juliet. As Friar Lawrence enters the tomb, Juliet awakes to find Romeo lying dead. Frightened by a noise, the Friar flees the tomb. Juliet kills herself with Romeo's dagger. Alerted by Paris's page, the watch arrives and finds the bodies. When the Prince, the Capulets, and Montague arrive, Friar Lawrence gives an account of the marriage of Romeo and Juliet. Their deaths lead Montague and Capulet to declare that the families' hostility is at an end. Synopsis:From Capulet's garden Romeo overhears Juliet express her love for him. When he answers her, they acknowledge their love and their desire to be married.⌜Romeo comes forward.⌝ ROMEO 0824 He jests at scars that never felt a wound.⌜Enter Juliet above.⌝ 0825 But soft, what light through yonder window breaks? 0826 It is the East, and Juliet is the sun. 0827 Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon, 0828 5 Who is already sick and pale with grief 0829 That thou, her maid, art far more fair than she. 0830 Be not her maid since she is envious. 0831 Her vestal livery is but sick and green, 0832 And none but fools do wear it. Cast it off. 0833 10 It is my lady. O, it is my love! 0834 O, that she knew she were! 0835 She speaks, yet she says nothing. What of that? 0836 Her eye discourses; I will answer it. 0837 I am too bold. 'Tis not to me she speaks. 0838 15 Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven, 0839 Having some business, ⌜do⌝ entreat her eyes 0840 To twinkle in their spheres till they return. 0841 What if her eyes were there, they in her head? 0842 The brightness of her cheek would shame those 0843 20 stars 0844 As daylight doth a lamp; her eye in heaven 0845 Would through the airy region stream so bright 0846 That birds would sing and think it were not night. 0847 See how she leans her cheek upon her hand. 0848 25 O, that I were a glove upon that hand, 0849 That I might touch that cheek! JULIET 0850 Ay me. ROMEO, ⌜aside⌝ 0851 She speaks. 0852 O, speak again, bright angel, for thou art 0853 30 As glorious to this night, being o'er my head, 0854 As is a wingèd messenger of heaven 0855 Unto the white-upturnèd wond'ring eyes 0856 Of mortals that fall back to gaze on him 0857 When he bestrides the lazy puffing clouds 0858 35 And sails upon the bosom of the air. JULIET 0859 O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo? 0860 Deny thy father and refuse thy name, 0861 Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love, 0862 And I'll no longer be a Capulet. ROMEO, ⌜aside⌝ 0863 40 Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this? JULIET 0864 'Tis but thy name that is my enemy. 0865 Thou art thyself, though not a Montague. 0866 What's Montague? It is nor hand, nor foot, 0867 Nor arm, nor face. O, be some other name 0868 45 Belonging to a man. 0869 What's in a name? That which we call a rose 0870 By any other word would smell as sweet. 0871 So Romeo would, were he not Romeo called, 0872 Retain that dear perfection which he owes 0873 50 Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name, 0874 And, for thy name, which is no part of thee, 0875 Take all myself. ROMEO 0876 I take thee at thy word. 0877 Call me but love, and I'll be new baptized. 0878 55 Henceforth I never will be Romeo. JULIET 0879 What man art thou that, thus bescreened in night, 0880 So stumblest on my counsel? ROMEO 0881 By a name 0882 I know not how to tell thee who I am. 0883 60 My name, dear saint, is hateful to myself 0884 Because it is an enemy to thee. 0885 Had I it written, I would tear the word. JULIET 0886 My ears have yet not drunk a hundred words 0887 Of thy tongue's uttering, yet I know the sound. 0888 65 Art thou not Romeo, and a Montague? ROMEO 0889 Neither, fair maid, if either thee dislike. JULIET 0890 How camest thou hither, tell me, and wherefore? 0891 The orchard walls are high and hard to climb, 0892 And the place death, considering who thou art, 0893 70 If any of my kinsmen find thee here. ROMEO 0894 With love's light wings did I o'erperch these walls, 0895 For stony limits cannot hold love out, 0896 And what love can do, that dares love attempt. 0897 Therefore thy kinsmen are no stop to me. JULIET 0898 75 If they do see thee, they will murder thee. ROMEO 0899 Alack, there lies more peril in thine eye 0900 Than twenty of their swords. Look thou but sweet, 0901 And I am proof against their enmity. JULIET 0902 I would not for the world they saw thee here. ROMEO 0903 80 I have night's cloak to hide me from their eyes, 0904 And, but thou love me, let them find me here. 0905 My life were better ended by their hate 0906 Than death proroguèd, wanting of thy love. JULIET 0907 By whose direction found'st thou out this place? ROMEO 0908 85 By love, that first did prompt me to inquire. 0909 He lent me counsel, and I lent him eyes. 0910 I am no pilot; yet, wert thou as far 0911 As that vast shore ⌜washed⌝ with the farthest sea, 0912 I should adventure for such merchandise. JULIET 0913 90 Thou knowest the mask of night is on my face, 0914 Else would a maiden blush bepaint my cheek 0915 For that which thou hast heard me speak tonight. 0916 Fain would I dwell on form; fain, fain deny 0917 What I have spoke. But farewell compliment. 0918 95 Dost thou love me? I know thou wilt say "Ay," 0919 And I will take thy word. Yet, if thou swear'st, 0920 Thou mayst prove false. At lovers' perjuries, 0921 They say, Jove laughs. O gentle Romeo, 0922 If thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully. 0923 100 Or, if thou thinkest I am too quickly won, 0924 I'll frown and be perverse and say thee nay, 0925 So thou wilt woo, but else not for the world. 0926 In truth, fair Montague, I am too fond, 0927 And therefore thou mayst think my ⌜havior⌝ light. 0928 105 But trust me, gentleman, I'll prove more true 0929 Than those that have ⌜more⌝ coying to be strange. 0930 I should have been more strange, I must confess, 0931 But that thou overheard'st ere I was ware 0932 My true-love passion. Therefore pardon me, 0933 110 And not impute this yielding to light love, 0934 Which the dark night hath so discoverèd. ROMEO 0935 Lady, by yonder blessèd moon I vow, 0936 That tips with silver all these fruit-tree tops— JULIET 0937 O, swear not by the moon, th' inconstant moon, 0938 115 That monthly changes in her ⌜circled⌝ orb, 0939 Lest that thy love prove likewise variable. ROMEO 0940 What shall I swear by? JULIET 0941 Do not swear at all. 0942 Or, if thou wilt, swear by thy gracious self, 0943 120 Which is the god of my idolatry, 0944 And I'll believe thee. ROMEO 0945 If my heart's dear love— JULIET 0946 Well, do not swear. Although I joy in thee, 0947 I have no joy of this contract tonight. 0948 125 It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden, 0949 Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be 0950 Ere one can say "It lightens." Sweet, good night. 0951 This bud of love, by summer's ripening breath, 0952 May prove a beauteous flower when next we meet. 0953 130 Good night, good night. As sweet repose and rest 0954 Come to thy heart as that within my breast. ROMEO 0955 O, wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied? JULIET 0956 What satisfaction canst thou have tonight? ROMEO 0957 Th' exchange of thy love's faithful vow for mine. JULIET 0958 135 I gave thee mine before thou didst request it, 0959 And yet I would it were to give again. ROMEO 0960 Wouldst thou withdraw it? For what purpose, love? JULIET 0961 But to be frank and give it thee again. 0962 And yet I wish but for the thing I have. 0963 140 My bounty is as boundless as the sea, 0964 My love as deep. The more I give to thee, 0965 The more I have, for both are infinite.⌜Nurse calls from within.⌝ 0966 I hear some noise within. Dear love, adieu.— 0967 Anon, good nurse.— Sweet Montague, be true. 0968 145 Stay but a little; I will come again.⌜She exits.⌝ ROMEO 0969 O blessèd, blessèd night! I am afeard, 0970 Being in night, all this is but a dream, 0971 Too flattering sweet to be substantial.⌜Reenter Juliet above.⌝ JULIET 0972 Three words, dear Romeo, and good night indeed. 0973 150 If that thy bent of love be honorable, 0974 Thy purpose marriage, send me word tomorrow, 0975 By one that I'll procure to come to thee, 0976 Where and what time thou wilt perform the rite, 0977 And all my fortunes at thy foot I'll lay 0978 155 And follow thee my ⌜lord⌝ throughout the world. ⌜NURSE, within⌝ 0979 Madam. JULIET 0980 I come anon.—But if thou meanest not well, 0981 I do beseech thee— ⌜NURSE, within⌝ 0982 Madam. JULIET 0983 160By and by, I come.— 0984 To cease thy strife and leave me to my grief. 0985 Tomorrow will I send. ROMEO 0986 So thrive my soul— JULIET 0987 A thousand times good night.⌜She exits.⌝ ROMEO 0988 165 A thousand times the worse to want thy light. 0989 Love goes toward love as schoolboys from their 0990 books, 0991 But love from love, toward school with heavy looks.⌜Going.⌝Enter Juliet ⌜above⌝ again. JULIET 0992 Hist, Romeo, hist! O, for a falc'ner's voice 0993 170 To lure this tassel-gentle back again! 0994 Bondage is hoarse and may not speak aloud, 0995 Else would I tear the cave where Echo lies 0996 And make her airy tongue more hoarse than ⌜mine⌝ 0997 With repetition of "My Romeo!" ROMEO 0998 175 It is my soul that calls upon my name. 0999 How silver-sweet sound lovers' tongues by night, 1000 Like softest music to attending ears. JULIET 1001 Romeo. ROMEO 1002 My ⌜dear.⌝ JULIET 1003 180 What o'clock tomorrow 1004 Shall I send to thee? ROMEO 1005 By the hour of nine. JULIET 1006 I will not fail. 'Tis twenty year till then. 1007 I have forgot why I did call thee back. ROMEO 1008 185 Let me stand here till thou remember it. JULIET 1009 I shall forget, to have thee still stand there, 1010 Rememb'ring how I love thy company. ROMEO 1011 And I'll still stay, to have thee still forget, 1012 Forgetting any other home but this. JULIET 1013 190 'Tis almost morning. I would have thee gone, 1014 And yet no farther than a wanton's bird, 1015 That lets it hop a little from his hand, 1016 Like a poor prisoner in his twisted gyves, 1017 And with a silken thread plucks it back again, 1018 195 So loving-jealous of his liberty. ROMEO 1019 I would I were thy bird. JULIET 1020 Sweet, so would I. 1021 Yet I should kill thee with much cherishing. 1022 Good night, good night. Parting is such sweet 1023 200 sorrow 1024 That I shall say "Good night" till it be morrow.⌜She exits.⌝ ⌜ROMEO⌝ 1025 Sleep dwell upon thine eyes, peace in thy breast. 1026 Would I were sleep and peace so sweet to rest. 1027 Hence will I to my ghostly friar's close cell, 1028 205 His help to crave, and my dear hap to tell.He exits. Find out what's on, read our latest stories, and learn how you can get involved. Sign up Summary Act Two, IntroductionThe Chorus explains that Romeo has traded his old desire for a new affection, and that Juliet has also fallen in love. Though their secret romance puts Romeo and Juliet at risk, their passion drives them to meet, regardless of the danger. Act Two, Scene OneOut in the street, Romeo escapes from Mercutio and Benvolio. Mercutio calls to him, using lots of obscene wordplay. Benvolio finally gets tired of searching for Romeo, and they leave. (Please note that some editions of Romeo and Juliet end Scene One here to begin a new one. Others, including the Norton Shakespeare, which this note is based on, continue the scene as follows.)Meanwhile, Romeo has succeeded in leaping over the Capulets' garden wall and is hiding beneath Juliet's balcony. He wants to determine whether her attraction is equal to his own. She soon appears and delivers her famous soliloquy, asking "Oh Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?" (2.1.75). She wishes that Romeo's name were different, so that they would not be enemies. Romeo overhears her speech, which confirms his own feelings. He interrupts Juliet to confess his own love.Juliet warns Romeo to speak truthfully, since she has fallen in love with him and does not want to be hurt. Romeo swears his feelings are genuine, and Juliet laments the fact that she cannot fall in love with him again. The Nurse calls to Juliet, who disappears momentarily. She comes back out and insists that if Romeo truly loves her, he should propose marriage and plan a meeting place for them. The Nurse calls Juliet a second time, and she exits. Romeo is about to leave when his love emerges yet a third time, and calls him back for some final words of parting.Act Two, Scene TwoAt the chapel, Friar Laurence is collecting herbs. Romeo arrives and confesses his new love for Juliet. He asks the Friar to marry them. Though the Friar is surprised that Romeo has forgotten Rosaline so quickly, he is nonetheless delighted, because Romeo and Juliet's union presents an opportunity to quell the raging feud between the Montagues and Capulets.Act Two, Scene ThreeOut in the street the next day, Benvolio tells Mercutio that Romeo has not yet returned home. He also reveals that Tybalt has sent Romeo a threatening message. When Romeo joins them, Mercutio mocks him, but Romeo matches his wit. Impressed, Mercutio notes,"Now art thou sociable, now art thou Romeo" (2.3.77). Juliet's Nurse and Peter arrive and ask to speak with Romeo. Mercutio makes sexual jokes about the Nurse, but eventually exits with Benvolio. The Nurse explains that Juliet will meet Romeo and marry him. Romeo proposes they meet that afternoon at Friar Laurence's chapel.Act Two, Scene FourBack in the Capulet orchard, Juliet eagerly awaits news from the Nurse. When the Nurse eventually arrives, she comically refuses to give Juliet any information about Romeo until she has received a back rub. Finally, the Nurse tells Juliet about the plan for her to meet Romeo at Friar Laurence's chapel.Act Two, Scene FiveAt the chapel, Romeo and Friar Laurence await Juliet's arrival. The Friar cautions Romeo to "love moderately" (2.5.9). Juliet soon appears, and Friar Laurence brings them into the church to be married.AnalysisAct 2 is more focused than Act 1, in that it mostly serves to establish the marriage which will become the root of the play's dramatic conflict. However, within the the streamlined plot, Shakespeare explores the complications of love. The theme of love is central to Act 2 of Romeo and Juliet. Romeo and Juliet fall in love instantly, and marry one day later, sealing their future. The balcony scene is crucial to understanding their relationship because it allows Romeo and Juliet to test their initial passion and gain the courage to move forward with a marriage plan.The love that Romeo and Juliet share is the opposite of the selfish love that Shakespeare references in the opening acts of the play. Shakespeare compares Juliet to the sun, and she is one of the most generous characters in the play. She reveals her selflessness when she declares, "My bounty is as boundless as the sea, / My love as deep. The more I give thee / The more I have, for both are infinite" (2.1.175-177). Rosaline, on the other hand, prefers to keep her beauty to herself. Shakespeare heightens this contrast when Romeo describes Rosaline as a Diana (the goddess of the moon) and tells Juliet, "Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon" (2.1.46). In the balcony scene, Romeo and Juliet recognize this selfish brand of love and then transcend it. The garden setting is more than just a secretive meeting place – it invokes images of a pastoral Eden, which symbolizes both purity and virginity. Romeo and Juliet's connection is simultaneously rooted in pure love and unbridled passion. At the beginning of the balcony scene, Romeo invades Juliet's privacy without her invitation, which becomes doubly apparent when he overhears her soliloquy. Here, Shakespeare breaks the convention of the soliloquy, which is traditionally a speech where a character shares his or her inner thoughts only with the audience. That Romeo overhears Juliet's soliloquy is an invasion, on one hand, but also serves as a reminder of the cost of intimacy. That Juliet both allows and cherishes Romeo's interruption reminds the audience that true love requires two people to open their hearts to one another. Shakespeare underscores the idea that lovers must abandon their selfishness by having Romeo and Juliet swear to themselves, rather than to other bodies. For instance, when Romeo tries to swear by the moon, Juliet remarks that the moon waxes and wanes, and is too variable. Instead, she says, "Or if thou wilt, swear by thy gracious self" (2.1.155). Shakespeare often has characters encourage one another to be true to themselves first, and only then can they be true to others. In the case of Romeo and Juliet, the characters must accept their unique identities (and transcend their family names) in order to experience the purest kind of love. Shakespeare also implies that when people fall in love, they can grow. Juliet's behavior changes after she meets Romeo. She is used to obeying the Nurse's authority, and during the balcony scene, she disappears twice. However, she also defies authority twice in order to reappear and continue her conversation with Romeo. This is a sure sign of her emerging independence, which explains her quick decision to marry Romeo and defy her parents. Juliet also reveals her practical intelligence by understanding the need for a plan for them to meet and by insisting on marriage, which is a reversal of Elizabethan gender roles. Romeo, while less active than Juliet, also becomes more confident after their meeting, eschewing his juvenile melancholy for a more gregarious personality that impresses Mercutio.Shakespeare introduces the theme of identity in Act 2. In her soliloquy, Juliet wishes that Romeo could transcend his name. Her famous declaration – "What's in a name? that which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet" – expresses the idea that people can be more than their societal roles. Juliet understands that if she and Romeo are to be together, they must defy the limitations of society and follow their individual passions.In this act, Shakespeare also introduces Friar Laurence a multifaceted character who understands the need for personal autonomy. Because of his underlying motivations, however, the Friar is an imperfect religious figure. He is willing to compromise the religious sanctity of marriage for the sake of a political goal. He clearly finds Romeo's new passion suspect, but agrees to perform the marriage ceremony so that he can end the feud between the Montagues and Capulets. Friar Laurence's actions represent the dichotomy between societal convention and individual desire. Finally, Shakespeare continues to explore the contrasts that he introduced in Act I, particularly the disparity between night and day (or darkness and light). Benvolio states, "Blind is his love, and best befits the dark," in reference to Romeo's newfound passion (2.1.32). When Romeo finally sees Juliet at her balcony, he wonders, "But soft, what light through yonder window breaks? / It is the east, and Juliet is the sun. / Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon" (2.1.44-46). Romeo then invokes the darkness as a form of protection from harm: "I have night's cloak to hide me from their eyes" (2.1.117). Unfortunately, the disorder of the day eventually overcomes the passionate and protective night - destroying both lovers in the process. Shakespeare also underlines the contrast between youth and old age. Friar Laurence acts as Romeo's confidante, and the Nurse advises Juliet. However, both these adults offer advice that seems strangely out of place given the circumstances of the play. For instance, Friar Laurence says to Romeo, "Wisely and slow. They stumble that run fast" (2.2.94). He also advises Romeo to "Therefore love moderately" (2.5.9). The Friar's advice for Romeo to love "moderately", however, comes too late. In fact, by the end of the play we even see Friar Laurence rejecting his own advice and stumbling to reach Juliet's grave before Romeo can find her. "How oft tonight have my old feet stumbled at graves?" (5.3.123).Finally, Shakespeare introduces the contrast between silver and gold in this act through his use of imagery. Romeo says, "How silver-sweet sound lovers' tongues by night" and "Lady, by yonder blessed moon I vow, / That tips with silver all these fruit-tree tops" (2.1.210, 149-50). Shakespeare often employs silver as a symbol of love and beauty. On the other hand, he uses gold as a sign of greed or desire. Rosaline is immune to showers of gold, an image that evokes the selfishness of bribery. Later, when Romeo is banished, he comments that banishment is a "golden axe," meaning that his punishment is merely a glossed- over equivalent of death. And finally, the erection of the golden statues at the end a sign of the fact that neither Capulet nor Montague has really learned anything from Romeo and Juliet's deaths. 1 In what way do Romeo and Juliet break gender conventions? How do these roles fluctuate throughout the play?At the beginning of the play, the young lovers' behavior reverses common gender conventions – Romeo acts in a way that his friends call feminine, while Juliet exhibits masculine qualities. Romeo is by no means an archetypal Elizabethan man; he is disinterested in asserting his physical power like the other male characters in the play. Instead, Romeo chooses to stew in his pensive melancholy. On several instances, Romeo's companions suggest that his introspective behavior is effeminate. On the other hand, Juliet exhibits a more pronounced sense of agency than most female characters in Shakespeare's time. While the women around her, like her mother, blindly act in accordance with Lord Capulet's wishes, Juliet proudly expresses her opinion. Even when she has lost a battle (like when Lord Capulet insists she consider marrying Paris), she demonstrates a shrewd ability to deflect attention without committing to anything. In her relationship with Romeo, Juliet clearly takes the lead by insisting on marriage and proposing the plan to unite them. As the play progresses, Romeo starts to break out of his pensive inaction to the point that Mercutio notices this change. Romeo also makes a great shift from his cowardly attempt at suicide in Act III to his willful decision in Act V. Overall, Romeo and Juliet are arguably a good match because they are so distinct. Juliet is headstrong, while Romeo is passive until passion strikes and inspires him to action. 2 Contrast Romeo's attempted suicide in Act 3 with his actual suicide in Act 5. How do these two events reveal changes in his character and an evolving view of death?Romeo considers suicide in both Act 3 and Act 5. In Act 3, Romeo's desire to take his own life is a cowardly response to his grief over killing Tybalt. He is afraid of the consequences of his actions and would rather escape the world entirely than face losing Juliet. Both Friar Laurence and the Nurse criticize Romeo for his weakness and lack of responsibility - taking the knife from his hands. In contrast, Romeo actually does commit suicide in Act V because he sees no other option. He plans for it, seeking out the Apothecary before leaving Mantua, and kills himself out of solidarity with Juliet, not because he is afraid. While suicide is hardly a defensible action, Romeo's dual attempts to take his life reveal his growing maturity and his strengthened moral resolve. 3 Several characters criticize Romeo for falling in love too quickly. Do you believe this is true? Does his tendency towards infatuation give the audience occasion to question Romeo's affection for Juliet?This question obviously asks for a student opinion, but there is evidence to support both sides of the argument. In Act 2, Friar Laurence states his opinion that Romeo does indeed fall in love too quickly. Romeo is arguably in love with being in love more than he is in love with any particular woman. The speed with which his affections shift from Rosaline to Juliet – all before he ever exchanges a word with the latter – suggests that Romeo's feelings of 'love' are closer to lust than commitment. This interpretation is supported by the numerous sexual references in the play, which are even interwoven with religious imagery in Romeo and Juliet's first conversation. However, it is also possible to argue that Romeo's lust does not invalidate the purity of his love. Romeo and Juliet celebrates young, passionate love, which includes physical lust. Furthermore, whereas Romeo was content to pine for Rosaline from afar, his love for Juliet forces him to spring into action. He is melancholy over Rosaline, but he is willing to die for Juliet. Therefore, a possible reading is that Romeo and Juliet's relationship might have been sparked by physical attraction, but it grew into a deep, spiritual connection. 4 Examine the contrast between order and disorder in Romeo and Juliet. How does Shakespeare express this dichotomy through symbols, and how do those motifs help to underline the other major themes in the play?The contrast between order and disorder appears from the Prologue, where the Chorus tells a tragic story using the ordered sonnet form. From that point onwards, the separation between order and disorder is a common theme. Ironically, violence and disorder occurs in bright daylight, while the serenity of love emerges at night. The relationship between Romeo and Juliet is uncomplicated without the disorderly feud between their families, which has taken over the streets of Verona. The contrast between order and disorder underscores the way that Shakespeare presents love - a safe cocoon in which the lovers can separate themselves from the unpredictable world around them. At the end of the play, it becomes clear that a relationship based on pure love cannot co-exist with human weaknesses like greed and jealousy. 5 Many critics note a tonal inconsistency in Romeo and Juliet. Do you find the shift in tone that occurs after Mercutio's death to be problematic? Does this shift correspond to an established structural tradition or is it simply one of Shakespeare's whims?After the Prologue until the point where Mercutio dies in Act III, Romeo and Juliet is mostly a comic romance. After Mercutio dies, the nature of the play suddenly shifts into tragedy. It is possible that this extreme shift is merely the product of Shakespeare's whims, especially because the play has many other asides that are uncharacteristic of either comedy or tragedy. For example, Mercutio's Queen Mab speech is dreamy and poetic, while the Nurse's colorful personality gives her more dimension than functional characters generally require. However, it is also possible to see the parallels between this tonal shift and the play's thematic contrast between order and disorder. Shakespeare frequently explored the human potential for both comedy and tragedy in his plays, and it is possible that in Romeo and Juliet, he wanted to explore the transition from youthful whimsy into the complications of adulthood. From this perspective, the play's unusual structure could represent a journey to maturity. Romeo grows from a petulant teenager who believes he can ignore the world around him to a man who accepts the fact that his actions have consequences. 6 Eminent literary critic Harold Bloom considers Mercutio to be one of Shakespeare's greatest inventions in Romeo and Juliet. Why do you agree or disagree with him? What sets Mercutio apart?One of Shakespeare's great dramatic talents is his ability to portray functional characters as multi-faceted individuals. Mercutio, for example, could have served a simple dramatic function, helping the audience get to know Romeo in the early acts. Then, his death in Act 3 is a crucial plot point in the play, heightening the stakes and forcing Romeo to make a life-changing decision. Mercutio barely appears in Arthur Brooke's Romeus and Juliet, which Romeo and Juliet is based on. Therefore, Shakespeare made a point of fleshing out the character. In Mercutio's Queen Mab speech, Shakespeare has the opportunity to truly delve into the bizarre and often dangerous sexual nature of love. Further, Mercutio's insight as he dies truly expresses the horrors of revenge, as he declares a plague on both the Montague and Capulet families. He is the first casualty of their feud - and because he transcends functionality, the audience mourns his untimely death and can relate to Romeo's capricious revenge. 7 How does Shakespeare use symbols of gold and silver throughout the play? What does each element represent?Shakespeare uses gold and silver as symbols to criticize human folly. He often invokes the image of silver to symbolize pure love and innocent beauty. On the other hand, he uses gold as a sign of greed or desire. For example, Shakespeare describes Rosaline as immune to showers of gold, an image that symbolizes the selfishness of bribery. Later, when Romeo is banished, he comments that banishment is a "golden axe," meaning that banishment is merely a shiny euphemism for death. Finally, the erection of the golden statues at the end of the play is a sign of the fact that neither Lord Capulet nor Lord Montague has really learned anything from the loss of their children. They are still competing to claim the higher level of grief. Romeo, however, recognizes the power of gold and rejects it - through him, Shakespeare suggests a distinction between a world governed by wealth and the cocoon of true love. 8 Do a character analysis of Friar Laurence. What motivates him? In what ways does this motivation complicate his character?Friar Laurence is yet another character who transcends his functional purpose. When Romeo first approaches the Friar to plan his marriage to Juliet, the older man questions the young man's sincerity, since Romeo openly pined for Rosaline only a few days before. However, the Friar shows a willingness to compromise by agreeing to marry the young lovers nevertheless. What ultimately motivates Friar Laurence is his desire to end the feud between the Capulets and the Montagues, and he sees Romeo and Juliet's marriage as a means to that end. While his peaceful intentions are admirable, his devious actions to achieve them – conducting a marriage that he explicitly questions – suggests he is more driven by politics than by an internal moral compass. The fact that a religious figure would compromise one of the Church's sacraments (marriage) further suggests that the Friar wants his power to extend beyond the confines of his Chapel. He also displays his hubris by helping Juliet to fake her death, rather than simply helping her get to Mantua to be with Romeo. While Friar Laurence is not an explicit villain, his internal contradictions speak to Shakespeare's ability to create multi-faceted characters. 9 Should Romeo and Juliet be considered a classical tragedy (in which fate destroys individuals)? Or is it more a tragedy of circumstance and personality? Moreover, could the tragic ending of Romeo and Juliet have been avoided?In classical tragedy, an individual is defeated by Fate, despite his or her best efforts to change a pre-determined course of events. A classical tragedy both celebrates an individual's willpower while lamenting the fact that the universe cannot be bested by mankind. The tragic elements in Romeo and Juliet are undeniable - two young lovers want nothing more than to be together and fall victim to an ancient feud and rigid societal conventions. However, while Romeo and Juliet's deaths result from human folly, the immovable power of fate also has a hand in sealing their destinies. For instance, Romeo and Juliet had many opportunities to simply run away together instead of being separated after Romeo is banished from Verona. Furthermore, many of the tragic occurrences are contingent on antagonistic characters running into one another, and then choosing to pursue vengeance rather than simply walk away. Based on this evidence, it is possible to read Shakespeare's intent as suggesting that behavioral adjustment can often prevent tragic events. 10 How is Romeo and Juliet a criticism of organized religion? Examine the play's secularism to develop your answer.While Romeo and Juliet does not present explicit attacks against religion, Shakespeare reveals his skepticism of Christianity in subtle ways. In many ways, Romeo and Juliet must reject the tenets of Christianity in order to be together. In their first meeting, they banter, using religious imagery to share their sexual feelings. In this exchange, the lovers acknowledge the omnipresence of Christianity, but cheekily use religious images in an unexpected context. Further, Christian tradition would have required Juliet to submit to her father's desire, but instead, she manipulates his expectations to distract him from her real agenda. Even Friar Laurence, an explicitly religious figure, uses Christianity as a tool towards his own ends. In this way, the play implicitly suggests that the rigid rules of religion often work in opposition to the desires of the heart - and to pursue true happiness, one must throw off the shackles of organized faith.