

Themes and Motifs in *Romeo and Juliet*

- the nature of love: its basis and causes
 - love can happen at first sight
 - sometimes fickle, sometimes apparently superficial, but powerful and quick to take control
 - often a source of misery and conflict, but also a source of beauty, goodness, transcendence
- passion vs. reason:
 - the young tend to be passionate; older people tend to be more rational and prudent
 - reason leads to peace; passion often leads to conflict, chaos, tragedy
 - however, passion is beautiful and enriches our lives
- grudges and feuds: irrational in nature and a source of conflict, chaos, tragedy
 - their original cause has often been forgotten, yet people still indulge in hatred
- fate: people are driven by powerful forces to their destiny
 - R&J and “star-crossed” lovers who meet their end through a confluence of extraordinary circumstances, suggesting that fate is at work (and their attempts to escape it fail); however, the decisions of individuals are also responsible
 - Is fate determined by irresistible external forces or by internal forces that may be subject to the control of reason?
 - Do premonitions and dreams truly reflect advance knowledge of one’s fate, or do they merely become self-fulfilling prophecies because we believe them?
- youthful rebelliousness: Does Shakespeare approve or disapprove of Romeo and Juliet’s rebellion against their families’ commands?
 - perhaps he approves:
 - the ultimate cause of tragedy in the play is not their love but the forbidding of it by unreasonable people
 - Romeo and Juliet are portrayed as good and intelligent people
 - those who deny their love are portrayed as selfish and narrow-minded