***Romeo and Juliet***

1. To start with, the prologue tells us of their love and their deaths, and the play hastens to begin the one and foreshadow the other. By the end of scene i, we know that Romeo thinks himself in love with Rosaline, that Rosaline isn’t interested, and that Benvolio plans to cure Romeo by introducing him to other women. By the end of scene ii, we know they will attend the Capulet party for that purpose. By the end of iii, we know Juliet is supposed to fall in love with Paris at that party. And in iv, Romeo and Juliet fall in love with each other during the party.
2. We move from love at first sight to marriage in the course of this act, with Friar Laurence and Juliet’s Nurse as additional characters to aid the young lovers; they are married by the Friar in the last scene of this act.
3. The play now turns to from love to death. Mercutio’s death, Tybalt’s death, and Romeo’s banishment all occur in scene i. In the following four scenes, Juliet threatens to commit suicide, Romeo does likewise, the Capulets plan to marry Juliet to Paris, and the newlywed Romeo and Juliet separate, in a scene complete with her foreboding and second suicide threat.
4. Again in rapid succession, one scene per action, the Friar makes his plans; the Capulets make their plans; Juliet drinks the potion but fears awakening in the grave and committing suicide there; the Capulets prepare for the wedding; and Juliet is discovered to be apparently dead.
5. Balthasar’s message, the Friar’s missed message, and the graveyard scene occupy the three scenes of the last act. If we wonder, on first reading or seeing this play, what could go wrong with the Friar’s plans, Juliet’s fears tell us half the answer and the messages Romeo does and does not receive tell us the other half.

In short, we have seen them fall in love, marry, separate, pretend to die (in Juliet’s case), and actually die (in both cases). Despite any tendency to hope on the part of the audience, we are permitted to do so very briefly, if at all.

Imagery

Romeo’s first description of Juliet (I.v.44-47), the balcony scene (II.ii.2-22 and 118-120), Juliet’s description of Romeo (III.ii.1-31), and Romeo’s last speech (V.iii.84-86) all feature images of light and darkness, including day/night, sun/moon/stars, and lightning/explosion images. There are more of these in the play, used by other characters, but this list includes the times when one of the lovers uses these images to describe the other one. We are meant to see them burning brightly before us, then going out.