Shakespearean Tragedy

The elements below can be found in Shakespearean tragedies. How well do they match the play or plays you know? Try putting them in rank order.

- They end with the death of the tragic heroes.
- The deaths of the heroes have a big impact on the people around them, and the larger community.
- Other people die as part of the tragic chain of events (e.g. Duncan and Banquo in Macbeth; Tybalt, Paris and Mercutio in Romeo and Juliet).
- The heroes reach a ‘peak’ in the play - of happiness, or achievement (e.g. Macbeth becomes king, Romeo and Juliet get married). This usually happens about half-way through.
- After this peak, there is a peripateia, where events take a terrible turn for the worse.
- The heroes are in some part responsible for this change of fortunes.
- There is also an element of fate - something that, combined with the heroes’ actions - seems to make the tragedy inevitable.
- However, the final denouement of the tragedies can still seem like a terrible accident.