



The English Notebook



Romeo and Juliet

A Study Guide

Assessment Objectives and Allocation of Marks

AO 1 – Interpretation of Text (AQA: 12 Marks) (Edexcel: 15 Marks)

Interpret and explain the **Behaviours, Attitudes and Feelings and Motives** of the characters and the effect on the audience/ reader.

AO 2 – Explain Language, Form and Structure (AQA: 12 Marks) (Edexcel: 20 Marks)

Explain how effectively the **Form, Structure and Language** portray the character's behaviours, attitudes and feelings and motives in the extract? What does it reveal about the characters? Look for and explain the effect of:

Language : Religious Imagery, Time Imagery, Imagery, Repetition, Pronouns, Symbolism, Direct Address, Metaphor, Sibilance, Assonance, Pathetic Fallacy, humour, Oxymorons, Irony, Personification, Foreshadowing

Structure: Where does the extract come from? What does it mean in the context of the play? How is the text Organised and ordered?

Look for and explain the effect of:

- Foreshadowing
- Parallels (Mirroring of words and events)
- Contrasts
- Repetition
- Twists and Unexpected Events

Form: What is the type of text in the extract?

- Free Verse
- Monologue
- Soliloquy
- Rhyme-scheme
- Sonnet
- Prologue
- Chorus
- Prose
- Stage directions

AO3: Text and Context (AQA: 6 Marks) (Edexcel: 5 Marks)

Explain the ideas about and attitudes to Women, Love, Patriarchy, Catholicism, Morality and Sin, Ideas about Religion, Status, Race, Mercy, Political power, Location, Prejudice, Social structures, Cultural contexts

Contextual factors (AO3)

1. **Concept of feud / vendetta** – key social force in Italian society at the time. Confrontations between rival households give rise to revenge attacks if wronged. Revenge was a powerful threat to stability in Elizabethan society.
2. **Role of parents in society**- protective and responsible for ensuring that the marriage was advantageous – arranged.
3. **Religion** - Catholic society – strong belief in damnation for sin (suicide and bigamy).
4. **Patriarchy** – Father was considered the undisputed head of the household, Women had no rights, authority in law- could not own property or money, but could influence their husbands. Children were regarded as property. Parents and children did not share a close emotional bond.
5. **Arranged Marriages** - were arranged to secure and retain wealth. Marriage was a political or financial transaction. Getting married young was common.
6. **Love** – Courtly love – behaviour at court – ceremonious, formal, polite, restrained, Intellectual. Real Love – passionate, emotional, physical, deep.
7. **Honour** – Sense of family honour is often misplaced, belief that any wrongs or insults must be avenged because of family pride and reputation – leads to revenge, violence, tragedy.
8. **Fate and Astrological Influences** – People of the time believed in the power of stars and astrology

KEY CHARACTERS

Romeo



Fickle and inconsistent at first - he is unable to stop himself from falling in love. Then matures and becomes a passionate and complex character. Falls deeply in love and displays intense feelings. Experiences an authentic and unique love for Juliet. He displays extreme emotions like anger, dismay, aggression, passion. He is impulsive, intelligent, quick – witted. He is loyal and daring. He is presented as a novice in love and naïve. He is ruled by passion, rather than reason' My life is my foe's debt'. He is spontaneous, innocent, unrestrained. Worships Juliet as a deity.

Juliet



Juliet is young and in between maturity and immaturity. At first she is presented as obedient, naïve and obedient child. She is also immature and does not have her own opinion initially. However, she also displays, determination, courage, strength and logic – she accepts her mother's choice of marriage partner, but does not go out of her to fall in love with Paris. Her first meeting with Romeo brings on maturity and adulthood. She is logical and sensible, loyal and display intense love and sadness. Deceitful to her mother, can conceal feelings very well. Quite frank wither mother, Secretive, she's aware of her social position and acts naively when it serves her. Takes her fate in her own hands. Undergoes the greatest amount of development in the play. Quite intelligent and rational and her suicide enables her to escape from the shackles that prevent her from making her choices.

Friar Lawrence



Ambiguous role in the play. Most scheming and political character of the play – he is kind hearted and compassionate, yet he orchestrates the whole turn of events in Romeo and Juliet’s lives. He reflects and symbolises religion and Catholicism, yet Shakespeare presents Friar Lawrence as going against the traditions of the Catholic church, illustrating that the religious structures were oppressive and in conflict with the natural order of romantic and physical love as depicted by Romeo and Juliet. Does he meddle with Fate and destiny? His plan to marry the couple comes from his desire to unite the Capulets and Montagues in Verona and end the civil disorder.

His influence in Romeo and Juliet’s lives (marrying them, visit to Juliet’s room, devising of the potion) was in conflict with the traditions of Catholicism in Verona and this portrays Shakespeare’s protest of the religious institutions. He has noble and kind intentions, however, Shakespeare presents him as the principle character who plays a significant role in changing the destiny of the lovers which lead to their inevitable death and tragic ending.

Tybalt(Prince of Cats’)



Presented as aggressive, arrogant, angry, temperamental and irrational. Loyal to the Capulets and aims to protect their honour and pride. He is the antagonist of the play. Responsible for the struggle and suffering and death of the lovers. Reflects and represents the strong generation of the Capulets. Symbolic of the hatred and animosity between the Capulets and Montagues. He is swift, agile, proud and territorial, sly and unreasonable, like a cat. Tybalt’s uncontrollable aggression and his huge ego has led to his downfall and the deaths of the lovers too. Speaks in rhyming couplets- Why? Is it serious or menacing perhaps? Does it reflect his inflexible attitude and outlook?

KEY THEMES

Patriarchal Society

During Elizabethan times, men had power and influence over women. Juliet had no autonomy as a female and daughter. Like her mother and the rest of the women of her time, she was a commodity and property of her parents. It was Lord Capulet's responsibility as a good father to ensure that she married a man who was wealthy, well-connected and noble; this could be to strengthen their financial position or for a political alliance. Certainly not for the sole purpose of love. When Capulet asks Paris to 'wait for two more summers' the Path of Juliet's destiny changes.

The woman's role was that of mother and wife and to serve their families and husbands – no freedom of choice, no freedom to choose a marriage partner. Juliet protests against her lack of choice and autonomy by choosing suicide. This is her escape from being a commodity in a patriarchal society.

Through Romeo's feelings of unworthiness in 'I have lost myself,' Shakespeare also portrays Romeo as displaying characteristics that are not congruous with the typical patriarchal male of the Elizabethan era. His 'griefs' are 'heavy in my breast', is an appropriate metaphor suggesting that he has become quite weak due to weight of his intense woes. He is also depicted as effeminate as he has become 'nourished with loving tears' as he is severely

Gender and Masculinity

Masculinity is revered and celebrated as it reflects male superiority and patriarchy. Romeo's masculinity is constantly doubted due to his mildness of character and his love – sick attitude. Romeo is afraid that his love for Juliet has made him milder in character "Thy beauty hath made me effeminate/And in my temper soften'd valour's steel" (III.i.116-117).

Shakespeare presents masculinity through the violence in the play and this clearly seems to indicate that violence is not the solution.

Love

Their love for each other is instantaneous. Romeo is at first in love with the idea of being in love. However, he progresses to falling deeply in love with Juliet. Romeo and Juliet have an emotional bond that is spiritual or Godly – they make spiritual references, ‘ holy shrine’ , ‘pilgrim’ suggesting a love that’s divine- he is the worshipper and she the deity. The extended metaphor and religious imagery suggests that their love is holy and sacred. The sonnet is appropriate as it captures their intense feelings of love and the iambic pentameter depicts their passion, through the syllables symbolises their heartbeats and perfect relationship based on true love. True love transcends the conventions of society in the play. Both physical, spiritual and romantic love is explored in the play through the characters.

The couple are perfect for each as illustrated through the use of the sonnet form, which portrays and captures the intense feelings they have for each other. The dialogue between them depicts their togetherness and union which creates the perfect relationship, like the sonnet. Love is an overpowering force that supersedes family values and traditions, loyalty, friendship and religious beliefs. Their love is described in supernatural and religious terms, which depict something bigger than themselves.

Society versus the Individual

Both Romeo and Juliet are subjected to the societal structures and family traditions of their time. Their choices and decisions are governed by the expectations of society and their parents. Their love is opposed and denounced throughout. Through the brutal aggression displayed by characters, Romeo and Juliet’s love is condemned as it is perceived as dishonourable and disloyal to their families and to the public. They are indeed ‘ star crossed’ and destined for tragedy as all the odds are against them due to the obstacles that face them. The societal pressure on Romeo to demonstrate masculine honour compels him to commit actions that are incongruent with his nature eg killing Tybalt was not his intention. Their privacy is invaded and their relationship is violated, resulting in public banishment and deception. The couple’s personal needs and desires are in conflict with the dictates of social institutions.

Hatred and Revenge

Central theme and main reason for the tragedy. Hatred fuels their desire for revenge. The hatred is reciprocal. Romeo and Juliet's love for each other is set within a context of hate generated by the feud. This contrasts with their love.

Some characters want to keep the feud alive 'Now seeming sweet. Convert to the bitterest gall' Revenge has serious consequences – Romeo is banished after Mercutio's death 'O, I am fortune's fool' Revenge drives the actions of most characters. Revenge leads to the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet – Friar Lawrence manipulates the natural order to unite the families but all goes horribly wrong. The language of conflict eg. 'Bite my thumb' arises very often in the play to reinforce the hatred and foreshadow the gloomy end. Through the bawdy banter of the servants, the feud is revealed at the beginning of the play.

Religion

In the play, often religious imagery is used to present the love between Romeo and Juliet. This seems to suggest that their relationship and love has transcended the physical and has now become a deep spiritual connection between them. Shakespeare illustrates that their love has become a pure, divine expression of intimacy that connects both their hearts against all odds. Juliet is referred to as the 'deity' and is worshipped by Romeo as a Goddess, suggesting how overwhelmed he is with her beauty. Juliet is presented as having the divine quality of having 'purged' Romeo of his sins, suggesting that romantic love has transformed the lovers into spiritual beings with divine powers, like God.

The play seems to be an anti – Catholic play. Friar Lawrence goes against the Catholic tradition when he agrees to secretly marry Romeo and Juliet – risky move – which illustrates Shakespeare's ideas about Catholicism. The play is an attack on Catholic society. It is also within the revenge drama genre – which was common with Catholic families. The play serves as a satire against the Catholic traditions. The irrational behaviour and extreme behaviour was a common trait of Catholic families during Elizabethan times.

Death and Violence

The main characters in the play display and experience intense passionate emotions which eventually lead to violence and death. The play starts off with violence and ends in tragedy – the feelings of love and hate underpin the plot and Romeo and Juliet are subjected to these emotions through their familial and social circumstances. The willingness by the lovers to commit suicide is an extreme and powerful expression of their love for each. This love is intertwined with violence, hate and death throughout the play. Their tragic and violent deaths at the end attest to their attempt to cherish and protect their love and happiness from being destroyed by their families. In Act 5, Death is personified and it is clear that the death of the lovers have brought an end to the feud and ‘ancient grudge’ between the families.

Fate and Destiny

From the beginning of the play, The Prologue, Romeo and Juliet’s relationship was ill – fated, meaning that they were ‘star – crossed lovers’ whose destiny was underpinned by tragic timing and death. Their lives were controlled by fate and they were therefore destined to suffer tragic consequences. Furthermore, the structure of the play unfolds to produce a feeling of inevitability about the tragic ending.

How does Fate and Destiny reveal its impact on the lovers’ lives?

- The Prologue prepares the audience for the inevitability of tragedy in their lives – ‘new mutiny’
- The feuding families – ‘ancient grudge’
 - The accidental death of Mercutio, when Romeo steps in front of him, is a catalyst which sparks a chain of events leading to the death of Tybalt
- Romeo’s fate is sealed when he is banished to Mantua.
- Pressure on Juliet to marry Paris forces her to find a way out
- The failed delivery of Friar’s letter leads to the misunderstanding
- Romeo gets incorrect information from his servant about Juliet’s ‘death’
- Romeo drinks the poison moments before Juliet opens her eyes
- Friar’s late arrival at the tomb seals their fate

It is clear that their tragic end comes as a result of their fate and not any flaws in their character. The tragic events in the play are foreshadowed by key moments and incidents in the play eg the herbs that Friar speaks about. The constant references to ‘Fortune,’ ‘stars,’ ‘Star – crossed’ illustrates that their lives are governed by factors beyond their control and choice, making them victims of fate, through the hatred of their families.

Dramatic Devices used to present Characters and their Feelings

1. **Prologues** – Foreshadows the ill- fated destiny of the lovers and the tragedy that results
2. Passionate **dramatic monologues** (Form) -
3. **Soliloquys** – reveals the dilemmas, frustration and anxiety that main characters experience due to circumstances they find themselves in.
4. **Sonnet (Form)** – Intense love, passion
5. **Dramatic Irony** – Through Disguises and the use of a Narrator
6. **Comic Relief and Humour:**
 - highlights serious issues of race and prejudice through the minor characters
 - Reveals attitudes of ordinary people
 - Lightens the tone and provides comedy
 - Keeps the audience waiting and engaged whilst controlling the tension
7. **Symbolism** - Might foreshadow a change of circumstances or tone or atmosphere
Eg.The move from the darkness to dawn is a powerful symbol, representing the move from **confusion, uncertainty, and loss** to **knowledge, faithfulness, and the restoration of fortune.**
8. **Tension** – Built up and relaxed through comic relief and asides. Also heightened when the audience waits for the plot to move on at an important point/ event/ scene.
9. **Linguistic devices** - explores and reveals villainy, love, power, hatred, envy, foolishness, strength
10. **Prose** – Normal, everyday speech of characters. Normally used :
 - By insignificant characters
 - When there is no tension and characters are relaxed and talking about unimportant matters
11. **Classical Imagery** – used to announce and describe their love and often their foolishness is also revealed as well.
12. **Courtly Love** – described through the use of love poetry – Elizabethan audiences were very familiar with this language. Using imagery and exaggeration to express love and devotion .
13. **Blank Verse** – Formal speech – used when speaking about serious issues – has rhythm and pattern.
14. **Rhyming couplets** – suggests close bond or relationship OR anger and inflexible attitude
15. **Cross Dressing** – Device used attribute the power and authority to women as they were denied this in Elizabethan society.
16. **Hyperbole** – ‘ Love at first’ ‘ Star – crossed lovers’ – doomed to fail – stars / astrology works against the lovers, to emphasise the love that they share and to foreshadow their demise and struggle and death.

MOTIFS AND SYMBOLS

Light and Darkness

Juliet is compared to light throughout the play by Romeo. As indicated in 'the torches to turn bright', 'the sun' who can 'kill the envious moon.' Her eyes are like 'fairest stars in all heaven'. Romeo is also described with imagery related to light and is compared to light which illuminates the darkness. Their love is associated with darkness – full of mystery and emotion. The night time becomes their time to pledge their love, elope and commit suicide – the night conceals their desires and activities. They become brave and bold at night and their love is shrouded in mystery. The night provides a haven and offers them the privacy they require to nurture their love and demonstrate their affection.

Poison

Poison is a symbol in the play for the toxic relationship between the Capulets and the Montagues. Poison becomes a powerful tool of change. Romeo and Juliet's future was irrevocably changed by the poison which was meant to assist them to be together. The poison potion brings fatal consequences to both lovers. Like the Capulets and Montagues, poison is not deadly in itself, but becomes dangerous, when human beings interfere with it. Similarly, both Romeo and Juliet's love is not unnatural, but due to familial, social and public pressure and interference, their love is turned into an unnecessary fatal tragedy. Furthermore, the ego, pride and honour of the two families prevent them from being civil and compassionate and therefore hostile and aggressive.

Exam Type Questions

1. How far do you think Shakespeare presents Lord Capulet as a responsible father? How is he presented in the extract and the rest of the novel?
2. How does Shakespeare present Romeo as a tragic hero in the play? How is the tragedy developed in the rest of the play and explain the effect of it?
3. Explore how Shakespeare presents Romeo's emotions in the extract? How is love or his emotions presented in the rest of the novel?
4. How does Shakespeare present the relationship between Juliet and Romeo in the play? How is Romantic love presented in the extract and in the rest of the novel?
5. How does Shakespeare present Friar Lawrence in the extract. How is religion presented in the extract and in the rest of the novel? What is the effect of it ?
6. How does Shakespeare present Tybalt in the extract and in the rest of the play? Explain the effect of violence and revenge throughout the play?

Acknowledgements

These notes have been compiled after an analysis of the examination requirements for both the AQA and Edexcel Literature examinations. The material has been sourced from various literary resources and has been adapted for the Assessment Objectives for the new spec GCSE Literature examinations.

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