



# Edexcel GCSE English Literature



Your notes

## Romeo & Juliet

### Contents

- \* Romeo & Juliet: Plot Summary
- \* Romeo & Juliet: Themes
- \* Romeo & Juliet: Characters
- \* Romeo & Juliet: Context
- \* Romeo & Juliet: Writer's Methods and Techniques
- \* Romeo & Juliet: Key Quotations



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## Romeo & Juliet: Plot Summary

### Plot Summary

Examiners always praise students who clearly know the plot of the texts they are studying, as having this base of knowledge leads to the best exam responses. Below you will find:

- [a storyboard of the plot](#)
- [a general overview of the whole play](#)
- [detailed summaries by act](#)

### Plot Storyboard



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## ROMEO & JULIET

### PLOT STORYBOARD



A street fight breaks out between the Montagues and Capulets: Tybalt Capulet threatens Benvolio Montague



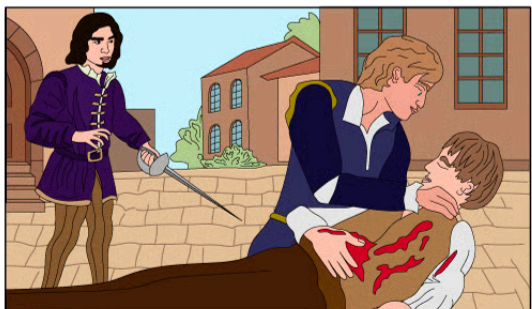
Romeo and Juliet fall in love and find out they are from enemy families



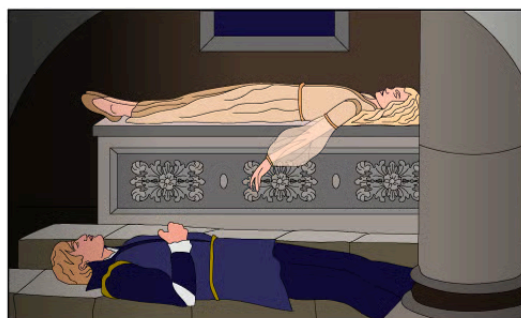
Romeo hears Juliet talking on a balcony. They make plans to defy their families and marry



Romeo and Juliet are married by Friar Laurence in secret



Tybalt kills Mercutio by mistake. Romeo seeks revenge and murders Tybalt



Romeo, thinking Juliet is dead, poisons himself. Juliet, waking and finding him dead, stabs herself

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## Overview of Romeo and Juliet

Romeo and Juliet is a five-act tragedy written by William Shakespeare in 1597. Set in Renaissance Italy, it takes place in a city called Verona and its eponymous protagonist, Romeo and Juliet, are two teenagers who belong to two rival families.

The play begins with a street fight between the servants of the two feuding families, the Capulets and the Montagues. Romeo Montague, absent at the fight, is introduced as a loner, a young heartbroken boy uninterested in the family feud. His friends encourage him to forget about love and party at the Capulet Ball. Here, his fateful journey begins, as he meets Juliet, his enemy, and they embark on a forbidden love affair. Finding themselves at odds with their families and friends, they marry in secret in a bid to avoid Juliet Capulet's arranged marriage to Paris. Tybalt Capulet insists on fighting Romeo to avenge his family's honour. This leads to Tybalt's death and Romeo's exile.

The lovers, isolated and desperate, take their lives into their own hands. Juliet asks a local religious man, Friar Laurence, to help her and he instructs Juliet to take a potion which will make her family think she is dead. Once in the tomb, however, she will awaken, meet Romeo and flee the town. By a twist of fate, Romeo does not receive the friar's message and believes, like her family and friends, that she is dead. Acting in defiance of the stars, Romeo decides to return to Verona despite the danger. His fatal flaw, his impulsiveness, leads to his rash suicide. Juliet wakes, sees Romeo dead beside her and takes her own life as well. Shakespeare's **tragedy** ends with a gloomy peace between the two families as they grieve over their children.



### Examiner Tip

Because you will not have access to the text of Romeo and Juliet during your exam, there is no expectation that you learn dozens of quotations by heart. Although examiners do reward the use of memorised quotations in your essay, you will also be rewarded for your ability to mention plot points from various points of the play. These are called "textual references", and do not have to include direct quotations, but, for the highest marks, must be "precise". A good example of a precise textual reference would be: "In Act I, Scene I, Romeo is shown as opposed to the feud, preferring to ponder the complexities of love."

In order to make these precise textual references, therefore, it is vital that you know the plot of Romeo and Juliet inside-out.

## Act-By-Act Plot Summary

### Act I

- An old **feud** between the Capulets and the Montagues breaks out on the streets of Verona between the servants of the families
- Benvolio Montague tries to stop the fight but Tybalt Capulet is keen to fight for his family name
- Both sides are warned by Prince Escalus that they must not disturb the peace again on pain of death
- Paris asks Lord Capulet for Juliet's hand in marriage and Capulet tells him to woo her at the party



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- Juliet is not as happy as her mother about the prospect of marriage and tells her mother, Lady Capulet, she will see what she thinks of Paris at the ball
- Lord and Lady Montague ask Benvolio where Romeo is, showing concern about his mental state
- Benvolio, on behalf of Lord and Lady Montague, seeks out a troubled Romeo
- Benvolio finds Romeo alone, opposed to the **feud**, burdened by his Unrequited Love for Rosaline
- Benvolio tells Romeo to attend the Capulet Ball and find someone new
- Mercutio's light-hearted attempts to encourage Romeo to be less serious about love lead Romeo into the danger of the Capulet house
- Romeo and Juliet meet and learn they are from enemy families

## Act II

- Romeo hides from his friends instead of joining them after the party
- Romeo sees Juliet on the balcony and overhears her concerns over their family names
- When Romeo interrupts and declares his love, Juliet asks him to be less sudden with his vows
- Juliet asks him to meet her nurse the next day if he is serious about marriage
- Romeo visits Friar Laurence and asks him to marry them
- The friar accepts in a bid to end the grudge between the families
- Romeo and Mercutio tease each other about love and Mercutio forgives Romeo
- Romeo leaves his friends again. First, to speak to Juliet's nurse, and then, to the church for his secret wedding
- The friar, in attendance with the nurse, marries Romeo and Juliet, although audiences do not see the wedding



### Examiner Tip

In your exam, you could receive an extract from any part of the play. Again, for the highest marks, examiners want to see that you can contextualise the extract: to know what part of the play it comes from. If you know what comes before and after the extract, you can better explain its wider significance, and what important developments have happened, or will happen. Therefore, alongside knowing the plot accurately, it is just as important to revise what order things happen in, especially for Romeo and Juliet, in which multiple impactful events take place over just a few days.

It is crucial to analyse structure, in order to see how Shakespeare contrasts scenes and creates tension across the plot.

## Act III

- A Pivotal moment in the play, Benvolio and Mercutio gather on a hot day in the streets
- Benvolio, aware of the Prince's warning about further public fights, warns of a potential fight with the Capulets
- Tybalt arrives looking for Romeo. In Romeo's absence, he and Mercutio begin to quarrel
- When Romeo arrives back from his secret wedding, his friends are confused about his refusal to fight Tybalt, who is now his cousin
- Mercutio is angry with Romeo and turns to fight Tybalt himself



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- Romeo stops Mercutio and Tybalt stabs Mercutio instead of Romeo
- As he is dying, Mercutio places a curse on both families
- In a violent rage, Romeo rushes after Tybalt and kills him in revenge
- Juliet awaits Romeo's return, unaware of the violence
- Romeo seeks help from the friar when he learns the Prince has exiled him to Mantua
- Friar Laurence is angry at Romeo's impulsiveness, his hamartia, when Romeo wishes himself dead rather than accept **exile**
- After a forbidden night together, Romeo leaves Juliet at dawn to escape death
- Lady Capulet tells Juliet she is to be married to Paris in two days
- Juliet refuses and her parents disown her after an aggressive argument

#### Act IV

- Juliet tells her nurse she is going to confession but, instead, asks the friar to help her avoid the wedding to Paris
- Friar Laurence offers a solution in the form of a poison which will mimic death
- Juliet is told by her father that the wedding day has been moved forward and would take place the next day
- That night, and after some hesitation, Juliet takes the potion
- The next morning, the nurse finds Juliet 'dead' and the family grieves
- Friar Laurence says the wedding will now become a funeral

#### Act V

- Romeo, in Mantua, receives a message from his friend, Balthasar, that Juliet is dead
- Romeo asks if there is a word from the friar but Balthasar says there is not
- In defiance of his punishment, Romeo decides to return to Verona to be with Juliet, whom he believes is dead
- Aware he will be killed if he is found, Romeo convinces an apothecary to sell him poison so he can die alongside Juliet
- Friar Laurence learns that his message was not delivered due to a plague preventing people from leaving the city, bringing Mercutio's curse to fruition
- Paris meets Romeo at Juliet's tomb, aware only that they are from enemy families
- Paris challenges Romeo and, again, Romeo tries to avoid a fight
- Paris, like Tybalt, rejects his peaceful greeting, they fight, and Paris is killed
- Romeo, believing Juliet to be dead, drinks the poison, kisses Juliet and dies
- Friar Laurence enters the tomb but hearing some noise he leaves
- Juliet awakes and finds Romeo next to her, dead
- Juliet attempts to drink some of the poison from the vial and from Romeo's lips
- Unable to find any, she stabs herself with his dagger
- Upon finding the pair dead, Friar Laurence tells the tragic story to the Prince and the families
- Audiences learn that Lady Montague has died from a broken heart at Romeo's **exile**
- The grieving families make an uneasy and gloomy peace



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## Romeo & Juliet: Themes

### Themes

Having a thorough grasp of the following themes, and crucially, how and why Shakespeare explores these themes will enable you to produce a “conceptualised response” in your exam. Linking carefully to the structure of the plot and what we know about the attitudes of the time period will give you access to the very highest marks on the mark scheme.

- Love
- Conflict
- Honour
- Fate

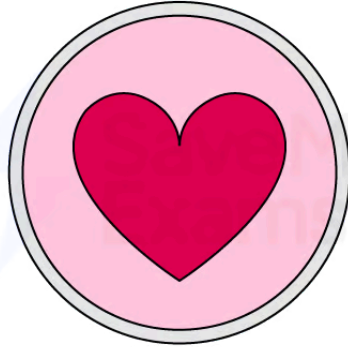
#### Examiner Tip

Examiners want to see students connecting themes to the plot structure: how the theme is presented in the beginning, how it develops and how it is shown at the end. This will ensure you are analysing structure as well as theme. By considering the plot as a story arc driving home the messages within the themes, your analysis should explore how the characters and themes develop, and, especially, why Shakespeare chose to end the play as a **tragedy**. Using structural terms, such as **foreshadowing** and **juxtaposition**, will strengthen your analysis of the way the themes develop.

## Love



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In the play, *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare presents the challenges faced by two young people in love due to societal attitudes and family pressures. Shakespeare's play shows how closely related love is to hate and how this throws obstacles in love's path.

### Romeo and Juliet as a tragedy

#### Knowledge and evidence:

- The play is in the form of a Tragedy:
  - In this play, Shakespeare shows the deaths of both Romeo and Juliet as a **tragedy** for their families
- According to conventions of Ancient Greek tragedy, the tragic hero is punished by the gods for actions resulting from their hamartia :
  - The protagonist's death often ends a **tragedy**
  - The characters of both Romeo and Juliet are the play's tragic heroes
  - Their tragic flaw is confusion and impulsiveness in familial and romantic love
- A sonnet is shared by Romeo and Juliet when they meet:
  - Sharing the lines connotes equality in their love
  - Religious imagery within the **sonnet** suggests purity
- Friar Laurence marries the pair in secret in a bid to bring peace to the families
  - Friar Laurence foreshadows the **tragedy**: "these violent delights have violent ends"
- The play ends in a double **tragedy** as the "star-cross'd" lovers die together to seal their love

### Patriarchal structures in Renaissance England

#### Knowledge and evidence:

- The patriarchal system in Renaissance families meant the father controlled all other family members:
  - Juliet is obligated to marry the man chosen by her father, Lord Capulet
  - Lord Capulet disowns Juliet when she refuses to marry a man she does not love
- Societal values for males within this structure prioritised family love over romantic love:
  - Romeo's friends and family sway him away from thoughts about love and force him into the family feud

- Romeo attempts to avoid conflict. He tells Tybalt, "The reason I have to love thee does much excuse the appertaining rage with which you greet me"

**What is Shakespeare's intention?**

- Shakespeare challenges societal norms in Renaissance culture that prioritise marriage for social advancement over love
- Shakespeare shows how discrimination and hatred in the name of family love leads to violence and tragedy
- Shakespeare presents ideas about expectations of gender roles by presenting the external pressures placed upon Romeo and Juliet when they fall in love
- By closely aligning love and hate in the play, he shows them as opposites which are inextricably linked
- Shakespeare challenges patriarchal expectations regarding masculinity which encourage conflict rather than love

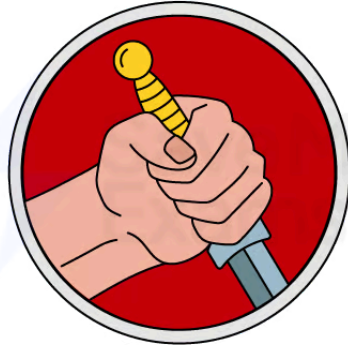


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## Conflict



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As much as the play is about love, it is equally about conflict. Conflicts are shown between friends, within families and between families. Shakespeare's characters are unaware of the reason behind the **feud**, suggesting it is emotional rather than logical.

### Parental conflict

#### Knowledge and evidence:

- Juliet's conflict with her parents lies in her refusal to marry Paris:
  - Disowned and isolated, she is driven to extreme measures: "O, bid me leap, rather than marry Paris, From off the battlements of any tower"
  - Juliet seeks advice and comfort from her nurse
- Romeo's conflict is shown by his inability to communicate with his parents:
  - Lord Montague knows his son is struggling with confusing feelings, but directs Romeo's friend, Benvolio, to comfort him
  - Lady Montague shows concern about Romeo brawling in the streets but knows little of her son's whereabouts
  - Romeo seeks a paternal figure in Friar Laurence

#### What is Shakespeare's intention?

- Shakespeare questions the role of indiscriminate hatred by showing two families at war with no idea why
- Shakespeare presents the possible outcomes of family conflict by showing Juliet's despair at being disowned
- Shakespeare challenges conflict and violence brought about by peer pressure between friends
- Shakespeare shows how conflicts between friends, families and feuding factions bring about even more conflict, violence and, ultimately, tragedy

## Honour



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The conflict between the house of Montagues and the house of Capulets is presented as a **feud** based upon family honour. The characters in the play believe very strongly in upholding their family honour; part of that meant hating the enemy family.

### Knowledge and evidence:

- The first scene shows the families willing to start a petty fight over an “ancient grudge”:
  - The servants from each house bite thumbs at each other in insult
- Tybalt Capulet presents family honour explicitly in the play:
  - He tells Benvolio that he hates peace, hell and all Montagues
  - When Romeo is identified at the Capulet party he states, “By the stock and honour of my kin, to strike him dead I hold it not a sin”
- Romeo attempts to avoid the feud and does not abide by family honour:
  - He tells Tybalt that he holds the Capulet name as dearly as his own
  - Shakespeare employs dramatic irony so that only the audience, Romeo, Juliet, the nurse and the friar know about the secret marriage
  - Romeo’s friend, Mercutio, believes his refusal to fight Tybalt is, a “vile, dishonourable submission”
  - Romeo’s murder of Tybalt as revenge for Mercutio’s death leads to his exile
- Juliet asks Romeo to deny his father and refuse his name so they can be together:
  - In a soliloquy, she asks, “What’s in a name?” questioning the family **feud** over honour

### What is Shakespeare’s intention?

- Shakespeare challenges ideas about family duty and honour by presenting them as potentially damaging forces
- Shakespeare points out how the Capulets and Montagues prioritise their desires for social status and how their love of their family name leads them to abandon their children’s desires and concerns
- Shakespeare shows how peer pressure related to honour can lead to violence
- Shakespeare presents two young people who are confused by the way their families hate indiscriminately in the name of family honour

## Fate



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Romeo and Juliet are doomed from the start, we learn from the prologue. But throughout the play, Shakespeare presents Romeo and Juliet trying to master their free will and overcome powers of destiny which are tied up in external pressures around them.

### Knowledge and evidence:

- In the absence of scientific knowledge, most Elizabethans believed in the ideas of fate and astrology and would consult or blame the stars for their luck and misfortune:
  - Many people would submit free will and look to the stars, believing the gods had 'predestined' their fortunes
- Shakespeare's **tragedy** begins with the chorus telling the audience that the two lovers are "star-cross'd" and their destiny is set
- The **Prologue** shows Shakespeare's clear choice to let audiences watch events unfold:
  - Romeo and Juliet battle with their own free will within turbulent relationships
  - Audiences witness how external events affected their future
- By using juxtaposition to show contrasting scenes next to each other, Shakespeare shows the "passage of their death-mark'd love" with dramatic tension
- Romeo represents the most fateful character in the play:
  - He begins by accepting fate, asking it to "Direct my sails". This leads him to his fated encounter with Juliet
  - Shakespeare foreshadows this with Romeo's premonition just before the Capulet ball where he sees his "untimely death" ahead of him
  - By the climax of the play, Romeo reluctantly accepts he is "fortune's fool!" having been exiled to Mantua for murdering Tybalt
  - In a twist of fate Romeo receives the wrong message and learns that Juliet is dead
  - In a defiant act of free will, Romeo goes back to Verona: "I defy you, Stars!"
- Juliet believes fate to be fickle and unpredictable:
  - She senses impending doom when she meets Romeo and likens her marriage bed to a grave
  - In a premonition she sees Romeo as one "dead at the bottom of a tomb"
- The play ends with a morbid twist of fate, as Romeo and Juliet's fateful timing leads to their deaths, thus confirming the chorus predictions in the **Prologue**

**What is Shakespeare's intention?**

- Shakespeare challenges ideas about autonomy over our lives
- Shakespeare asks audiences to question whether coincidence or destiny is at work in the story
- Shakespeare presents the possibilities that fate can be connected closely to the environment by showing how conflicts and pressures impact choices
- Shakespeare challenges an Elizabethan audience who believed that the stars and planets impacted their fortunes



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## Romeo & Juliet: Characters

### Characters

It is useful to consider each character as representing a function in the play. Understanding Shakespeare's purpose for each character will help produce a sophisticated analysis. Interpreting the play's ideas by considering how each character may represent an idea, and how characters oppose each other or react to each other, is crucial.

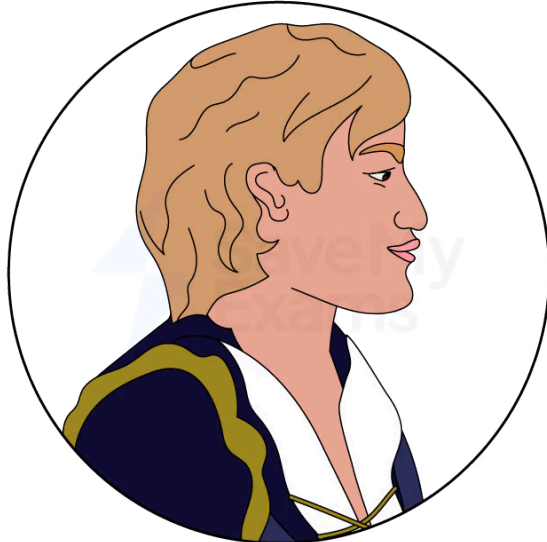
Below you will find character profiles of:

- [Romeo](#)
- [Juliet](#)
- [Tybalt](#)
- [Benvolio](#)
- [Mercutio](#)
- [Friar Laurence](#)

## Romeo Montague



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- The eponymous protagonist, an **heir** to the Montagues, is the **tragic hero**. This means:
  - He displays heroic characteristics
  - He has a fatal character flaw (hamartia): his impulsiveness
  - Despite his **hamartia**, the audience does feel sympathy for him
  - He is doomed to die at the end of the play
- At the beginning of the play, Romeo is presented as:
  - **Introvert**: he is alone and uninterested in the family battles
  - **Brooding**: Romeo considers the links between love and hate
  - Sensitive: Romeo ponders the complex feelings unrequited love brings
  - Obsessive: Shakespeare shows his obsession with a superficial courtly love
- For Romeo, there is tension between the heroic and tragic aspects of his character. He lurches from love to obsessive love and from one reckless action to another
- In the Rising action of the play, Romeo's fatal flaw is exposed at the Capulet ball
  - Romeo is fateful and **impulsive**, telling **fate** to, "Direct my sails"
  - He is shown to be reckless about danger: "Stony limits cannot hold love out"
  - Romeo is admonished for being **impulsive** and **obsessive**: swearing his undying love to Juliet so "rash, so sudden"
- Despite his **hamartia**, the audience feels sympathy for him:
  - He shares a romantic, religious sonnet with Juliet, suggesting purity in their love
  - He prefers peace to violence, endearing him to a war-weary Elizabethan audience
  - He is presented as autonomous in his relationships with friends and family
- By the climax, Romeo acknowledges his **fatalistic** attitude: "I am fortune's fool!"
  - He is forced to fight for family honour, despite his protests about loving the Capulets
  - His **impulsive** actions, murdering Tybalt in revenge, lead to his downfall

- At the end of the play, Romeo takes his fate into his own hands and defies the stars
  - Romeo is shown as desperate, implying his isolation due to his **impulsive** actions
  - Romeo is presented as obsessed with love, even in death: "Thus with a kiss, I die"
  - His fatal flaw results in Juliet's death as well as his own

 **Examiner Tip**

Your exam paper will contain an extract that will hold some significance to the play as a whole. Examiners will always award the highest marks to those students who refer to the plot and character beyond just the extract. Think of the extract as a springboard to the rest of the play, and take a whole-text approach to writing your essay.

In practice, this means it is very successful to reference other parts of the play that relate to the extract, and even better if they contrast with the ideas or characterisation that Shakespeare is presenting in the chosen extract. So think: does Shakespeare present this character differently in other parts of the play? Do we see any character development? What ideas is he exploring when showing this contrast? You don't always need to use quotations to show these changes, with the exam board suggesting that "looking at contrasts and parallels in characters and situations at different points in the text" is just as successful.

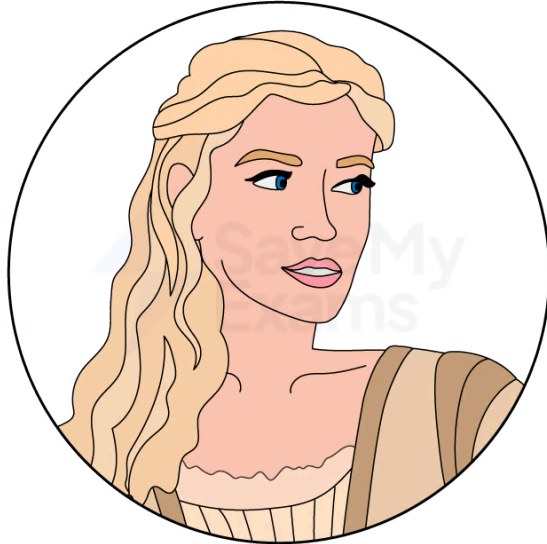


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## Juliet Capulet



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- The **eponymous** character, daughter of Lord and Lady Capulet could be seen as a second tragic hero
  - One of Juliet's fatal character flaws (**hamartia**) is her defiance of family duty
  - Her tragic death, however, is presented as an act of desperation and powerlessness, challenging audience perceptions of gender roles and traditions
- Juliet is presented as autonomous, willing to defy her family duties
  - She tells her mother marriage is an honour she "dreams not of"
  - She tells Romeo she will no longer be a Capulet if he swears his love for her
- Juliet is presented as sensible and cautious about the dangers of the feud
  - Juliet advises Romeo to be more constant and less rash
  - She warns him of the dangers associated with their love
  - She understands her love for Romeo is a love "sprung from hate"
- By the climax of the play, Juliet is presented as desperate and powerless due to societal norms
  - Her nurse forsakes her and she is isolated from her family, showing the impact of family conflict
  - Juliet's anguish and will to avoid marriage to Paris is made clear: "if all else fail, myself have power to die", suggesting her need for **autonomy**
  - She welcomes her fated, tragic suicide ("Happy dagger") as her best choice
- Shakespeare presents her as a character who subverts the typical attributes of women of that time:
  - She is not dutiful: she does not do what her father tells her and is not loyal to her family
  - She is not **submissive**: she asks Romeo to be sure of his promises
  - She is strong: she refuses to resist the mounting pressures
  - She is **autonomous**: she chooses her own **fate**

## Tybalt Capulet



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- Tybalt acts as a contrast to the character of Romeo. In literature, this is known as being a **foil**:
  - A foil (Tybalt) is used to contrast with the characteristics of a **protagonist** (Romeo)
  - A **foil, therefore**, highlights character traits that are very particular to the protagonist, that an author wants to explore
- Tybalt is shown as having typical masculine traits
  - His attitudes contrast Romeo's
  - He is a passionate fighter for his family's honour, unlike Romeo
  - In the first scene, he is eager to kill Benvolio and all Montagues, while Romeo is absent
  - Unlike Romeo, Tybalt is often the instigator of battles, seeking it out repeatedly
  - Unlike Romeo, he is not interested in love, preferring the company of males
- Tybalt represents **societal norms**, challenging audience perceptions of masculinity
  - Tybalt's hatred of Romeo is presented as meaningless, and based on a desire for aggression
  - He does not understand Romeo's **submissive** nature
  - He tells audiences Romeo creates the "bitterest gall" in him
  - His desire for revenge is shown as obsessive and violent
  - His death is a catalyst for Romeo's downfall and Mercutio's curse
  - Shakespeare punishes his hatred when Romeo murders him in revenge
- Shakespeare shows through Tybalt the violence and hatred inherent in the family **feud**
- Shakespeare uses his character, Tybalt, to address the conflicts in the Elizabethan religious war

## Benvolio Montague



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- In the play, Benvolio acts as Romeo's confidante and ally, representing male friendship and support
  - He is Romeo's friend and cousin
  - Lord Capulet relies on him to console Romeo
  - He represents, through his name, goodness and benevolence
  - He advises Romeo away from his unrequited love
  - He hurries Romeo into the Capulet ball and away from deep thought
- Shakespeare's function for Benvolio is to act as a contrast to the more aggressive male characters
  - He highlights contrasts between aggression and peace
  - In the first scene, he is a peaceful character, the **foil** to Tybalt: "I do but keep the peace"
  - Instead of revenge, Benvolio prefers forgiveness: "Father forgive them; for they know not what they do"
- Benvolio is presented as a level-headed and sensible young man, questioning the **feud**
  - He identifies that the quarrel is "between our masters", presenting the young males as innocent victims
  - He warns Mercutio of the "mad blood stirring" before the fight leading to Mercutio's death



### Examiner Tip

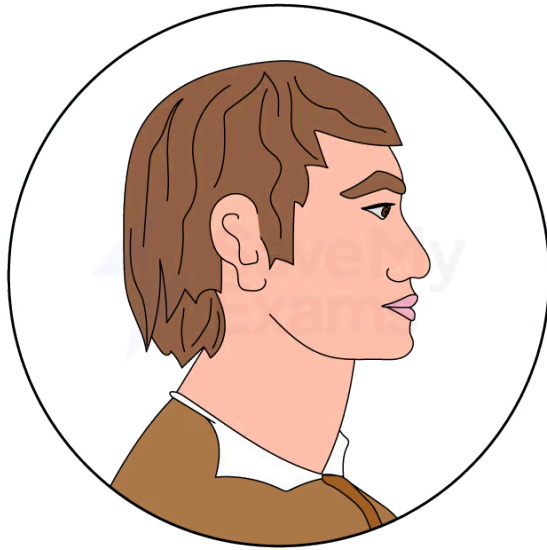
Consider the character as serving independent functions which drive the themes of the plot. Shakespeare uses characters to highlight different elements of society, and, particularly in *Romeo and Juliet*, the characters have a huge influence on each other's progression throughout the play.

## Other characters

### Mercutio



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- Mercutio functions to provide comedic relief against the intense characters of Romeo and Tybalt
  - Mercutio's dialogue is dramatic and humorous, mocking seriousness
  - He lures Tybalt into a witty, playful argument
  - His name represents mercury or 'quicksilver', known for its unpredictability
  - His actions change from playful to serious very quickly
  - Mercury is also the name of the Winged Messenger in Greek mythology
  - Mercutio's final lines curse the houses of Capulet and Montague
  - His final curse presents a darker side to his flippant nature
- Mercutio's views on love are cynical, representing attitudes often present in courtly love
  - He suggests he is heart-broken, telling Romeo that love is not a tender thing
  - He sarcastically advises Romeo to soar above love
  - He delivers a soliloquy about a troublesome love fairy, Queen Mab
- Mercutio represents the typically likable masculine character traits of **Elizabethan** England
  - He is reckless and aggressive, quick to seek out conflict
  - He believes in fighting for family honour
  - He believes murder for family or revenge is holy and justified
  - He believes Romeo's desire for peace is **submissive** and dishonourable
  - He casually picks a fight with Tybalt Capulet despite his friend's warning and the Prince's law against public brawls
  - This scene mirrors the first scene of the play, suggesting the cycle of violence in **Elizabethan** England

## Friar Laurence



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- Friar Laurence, a father figure to Romeo and aid to Juliet, represents the importance of religion in **Elizabethan** society
  - He advises Romeo to “go wisely and slowly” with his love affairs
  - Friar Laurence helps Juliet be with Romeo, linking true love with religious values
- Friar Laurence symbolises peace brought about by religion
  - He marries the lovers in secret in a bid to turn “rancour into pure love”
  - The friar’s character promotes an end to fighting and hatred
- The friar is presented as opposed to the Great Chain of Being
  - He allies himself with the children of the two noble families
  - He opposes the natural Hierarchy : parents are placed above children
  - He opposes the patriarchy by defying Lord Capulet
- The friar **subverts Elizabethan** attitudes about religion and witchcraft
  - He refers to the good and evil inherent in all things as the natural state
  - He contrasts virtue with vice, flowers with poison, delights with violence, graves and wombs
  - He concocts potions and poisons from herbs and plants, traditionally linked to witchcraft
  - His potion is ultimately the reason for the tragic deaths of Romeo and Juliet
  - Shakespeare presents ambiguity with the friar’s character
  - He is often considered to blame for the **tragedy**, suggesting Shakespeare’s reference to religion as dangerous



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## Romeo & Juliet: Context

### Context

Understanding the influences of Renaissance culture and the values inherent in 16th Century Elizabethan life will allow insightful interpretation of Shakespeare's ideas. A perceptive and conceptualised response considers how Elizabethan audiences are challenged while noting the popularity of the play, and how this may suggest themes which are timeless.

Each of the below topics links directly to Shakespeare's ideas in Romeo and Juliet:

- [Love and marriage](#)
- [Gender roles](#)
- [Religion and the Great Chain of Being](#)
- [Elizabethan life](#)



Your notes

## Love and marriage

- **Courtly love** (romance occurring in the **Elizabethan** court) was intense, melodramatic and often fleeting
  - Romeo's obsessive, impulsive attitude to love is presented as his **fatal flaw**", suggesting Shakespeare's criticism of fickle love
  - Within the culture of **courtly love** and arranged marriages, Unrequited Love was common
  - Romeo's melodramatic grief over his **unrequited love** for Rosaline would be familiar and entertaining for Elizabethan audiences
  - Shakespeare shows **courtly love** as superficial and fleeting when Romeo falls instantly in love with Juliet on the same day
  - Within the culture of **courtly love**, secret and forbidden affairs were common
  - It is said that Queen Elizabeth I had a secret affair with the Earl of Leicester
  - Romeo and Juliet is a play predominantly about a forbidden and secret love
  - As the play was written for **Queen Elizabeth I**, Shakespeare could be mirroring her own challenges within forbidden relationships
- The marriage occurred at a much younger age in the **Elizabethan** era
  - The average age of death was 40 years old and marriage would occur at around 13
  - Wealthy fathers would arrange marriage once a daughter was able to bear children
  - Lord Capulet tells Paris to wait two more summers, until Juliet is "ripe to be a bride", suggesting her duty to become a mother and bear fruit (have children)
  - A daughter like Juliet would function to provide an **heir** for the family, a crucial part of progressing bloodlines
  - Shakespeare shows Lord Capulet referring to the importance of Juliet's marriage when he calls her the "hopeful lady of my earth"
- **Renaissance** marriages were arranged by the father to improve the family's Social mobility
  - For many daughters like Juliet, marriage would be a duty, a diplomatic exchange
  - Shakespeare shows a daughter, Juliet, disobeying these wishes with tragic consequences
  - When Juliet is disowned for defying the **social norms**, Shakespeare shows the impact of family conflict in **Renaissance** culture
  - The final scene instructs audiences to consider the role societal pressures played in the tragedy
- **Renaissance** aristocrats believed it foolish to marry for love
  - Romeo and Juliet challenge this idea, defying their families and duties for love
  - Juliet tells audiences she would rather die than be forced to marry Paris, presenting the strength of her emotions to marry on her own terms
  - Shakespeare's work often advocates for pure and lasting love
  - His use of religious imagery in the shared sonnet between Romeo and Juliet suggests a purity in their love which challenges **social norms**
  - This tragic ending, the pair choosing to die together, symbolises everlasting love
  - The play has been very popular, since its production in 1597, for its themes of pure and infinite love



Your notes

## Gender Roles

- In the **patriarchal** system of **Elizabethan** England, women's status and security depended on the status of their fathers or husbands
  - Women had no right to own property or wealth, even in marriage
  - Single women and relationships outside of marriage were harshly judged
  - **Elizabethan** audiences would understand the sacrifice Juliet makes when she denies a secure and honourable future with Paris
  - Shakespeare presents her decision to defy her father as fatal for her
  - Shakespeare criticises the **patriarchal** system, showing audiences Juliet's limited autonomy when she claims death is her only choice
- Within marriage, **Elizabethan** women were expected to obey their husbands
  - Shakespeare depicts the obedience of Lady Capulet to her husband as negatively impacting Juliet
  - Shakespeare presents a daughter, Juliet, who defies her father
  - Shakespeare shows how Juliet's isolation leads to drastic reactions and, ultimately, her death
  - His play criticises traditional gender roles in **Elizabethan** families
- Conventional **Elizabethan** males were expected to be strong, aggressive and loyal to their family
  - The first scene presents Lord Montague and Lord Capulet, heads of the feuding families, eager to fight
  - Shakespeare suggests the feud is encouraged by those in power
  - Benvolio raises this issue when he says the battle is between "our masters"
  - In the first scene, male servants of the two families begin a petty fight for sheer amusement, suggesting the prevalence of male conflict in **Elizabethan** life
  - Shakespeare symbolises masculine aggression through Tybalt Capulet, who is violent and passionately loyal to his family
  - Shakespeare punishes Tybalt for his traditional attitudes: he is killed by Romeo
- Shakespeare's tragic hero, Romeo, does not conform to male stereotypes
  - Mercutio criticises Romeo's peaceful behaviour as dishonourable and submissive
  - Romeo recognises his love for Juliet as making him "effeminate" and weak
  - Romeo's later reckless and vengeful violence leads to his downfall and death, as well as Juliet's
  - Shakespeare's tragedy challenges traditional gender roles and societal pressures
  - Mercutio acknowledges the meaningless violence of the **feud** upon his death
  - Shakespeare depicts society's expectations of **Elizabethan** males as dangerous
  - Shakespeare shows the tragic consequences of young men caught up in the **feud** to challenge **social norms**
- **Elizabethan** society was **patriarchal**; it expected women to be obedient and **submissive**
  - Women were viewed as emotionally and mentally frail and their opinions were invalid
  - The servants discuss women as "weaker vessels" in the first scene, alluding to their low status in **Elizabethan** society
  - Juliet's strength of will and autonomous actions oppose traditional gender norms
  - Juliet is dominant, not **submissive**: she proposes to Romeo, insisting he take the marriage seriously
  - Juliet is rational and sensible: she questions the discrimination inherent in the **feud**
  - Juliet defies **patriarchal** attitudes: she refuses to do her duty as a daughter

- Shakespeare's presentation of Juliet suggests her tragic death is the result of societal norms and gender expectations which limit **autonomy**

 **Examiner Tip**

It is important to remember that the idea is not to add isolated biographical or historical detail to your essays but to use contextual knowledge to enrich your interpretation of the play. To produce a more conceptual answer it will be necessary to connect how Shakespeare challenges the traditions and values of the time through his structural and language choices.



Your notes



Your notes

## Religion and the Great Chain of Being

### Religion

- Religion was a dominant part of **Elizabethan** life
  - The vast majority of Elizabethans would have been Christian, and the Church played a central role in a family's life
  - For Shakespeare's young protagonist, religion plays an important role
  - Friar Laurence is Romeo's father figure and comfort, presenting the dominance of religion in **Elizabethan** life
  - Romeo and Juliet's love is supported by the friar, prioritising love over hate
  - The friar sees the alliance as a way to end the **feud**, suggesting links between religion and peace
  - Shakespeare could be criticising conflict based on religious differences, and instead promoting peace
- In the absence of scientific knowledge, many Elizabethans believed in astrology and fate
  - A predominant belief was that human lives were predetermined and affected by decisions made by the gods, stars and planets
  - The **Prologue** dooms the "star-cross'd lovers", asking audiences to watch events unfold and question the role of **fate** in the **tragedy**
  - Romeo and Juliet rely on **fate** at first, but by the end, the pair choose death on their own terms
  - Shakespeare's plays often question audiences about attitudes to **fate** and whether people determine their own futures by their actions

### The Great Chain of Being

- The Great Chain of Being was a Hierarchical system in the 16th Century which organised society into a fixed order of worth and power
  - This system placed God at the top, followed by angels, noble-men, men, women and then animals and plants
- Shakespeare subverts this system with his characterisation of Friar Laurence
  - He presents the religious friar's character as connected closely to nature, possessing deep respect for plants and herbs
  - The friar's dialogue refers to nature as opposing forces present in all things: good and evil, light and dark, love and hate, religion and magic, old and young
  - This suggests the **hierarchical** system is flawed
- The **hierarchical** system is challenged further as the children, Romeo and Juliet, defy their parents and authorities
  - The play's tragic ending could suggest the children are punished for disrupting the **Great Chain of Being**
  - In the final scene, the Prince declares that all of the towns is punished: "See what a scourge is laid upon your hate"
  - Lord Capulet mourns the young deaths as a sacrifice for their feud
  - Shakespeare challenges the **hierarchical** system presenting the older generation as acknowledging their mistakes

## Elizabethan life

- **Queen Elizabeth I** was the monarch at the time *Romeo and Juliet* was written in 1597
  - She reigned during a bloody religious war, which divided the country
  - The **feud** brought violent conflict between Catholics and Protestants for many years
  - In the **Prologue**, the chorus describes a **feud**, where “civil blood makes civil hands unclean”, connoting the impurity of violence
  - *Romeo and Juliet* would have been performed for **Queen Elizabeth I** during the wars between the Catholic and Protestant religions
  - Shakespeare’s presentation of a petty **feud** could be controversial and dangerous
  - The controversial ideas are veiled carefully in a tragic tale of young love
  - Shakespeare sets his play in Verona, Italy, perhaps to create Ambiguity and distance between the parallels of the Capulet and Montague **feud** and the one raging in England between Catholics and Protestants
  - Shakespeare challenges his audience to consider the impact of violence in the name of love and honour
- Wealthy **Elizabethans** often employed nurses who would raise the family’s children until the age of marriage
  - A Wet nurse would often be employed to breastfeed babies, forming close bonds between the nurse and child, closer even than the mother
  - The nurse serves as comedic relief in the play as a bawdy and unsophisticated character, representing the class divisions of the time
  - Lady Capulet is shown as alienated from her daughter in her traditional role as a mother
  - Juliet’s nurse represents this bond as she is Juliet’s first source of advice and comfort rather than her mother
  - Shakespeare presents the isolation Juliet faces due to **Renaissance** family traditions



Your notes

## Romeo & Juliet: Writer's Methods and Techniques



Your notes

### Writer's Methods and Techniques

The best responses at GCSE don't limit their analysis to individual words and phrases. Examiners are really looking for analysis of Shakespeare's overall aims, so try to take a "whole-text" approach to the writer's methods and techniques. Each of the below topics does just that:

- [Form](#)
- [Structure](#)
- [Language](#)



Your notes

## Form

Romeo and Juliet is a Shakespearean tragedy. It is important that the examiner knows from your essays that you understand the conventions of tragedy. This produces a more conceptualised answer that takes into account the methods and purpose of Shakespeare as a playwright.

### Shakespearean tragedies usually consist of:

- **A tragic hero:** a sympathetic heroic figure (in this case Romeo) who is destined to die because of his fatal flaw
- **Fatal flaw ( hamartia ):** a character trait that leads to the tragic hero's downfall. For Romeo, it is his fatalistic impulsiveness
- **A foil:** a character who stands in contrast to the **tragic hero**, who conforms to the typical societal expectations of the era. Here it is Tybalt as he is aggressive and, unlike Romeo, keen to fight for his family's honour
- **Fate:** all tragic heroes cannot escape their **fate** or destiny. In Romeo and Juliet, this idea is shown as questionable, asking audiences whether fortunes are determined by our own actions, social pressures or written in the stars
- **Catharsis:** a moment of shared expression for the audience. In Romeo and Juliet, it is the tragic deaths of the lovers at the play's end, foretold by the Prologue. This is sometimes known as a technique called the tragic waste
- **Conflict:** in Romeo and Juliet there is external conflict (the family feud and the vengeful violence it brings, as well as the arranged marriage which Juliet defies) and internal (the mental decline of Romeo and Juliet)
- **Final restoration of the status quo:** this means, essentially, that things go back to normal after the death of the tragic hero. Here, the two families reach an uneasy peace after the deaths of their two children

### Examiner Tip

An **Elizabethan** audience member would have been well acquainted with **tragedy**, and Shakespearean tragedy in particular. This means a contemporary audience member would be expecting these plays to conform to the **conventions of tragedy**, as listed above.

When the audience knows something that a character in a play doesn't, it's called **dramatic irony**. We see moments where Shakespeare uses the **chorus** or a **soliloquy** as a method of creating dramatic irony, but this technique applies to tragedy as a form of theatre as a whole. Because audience members knew tragic conventions well, they would, for example, understand that the tragic hero is destined to die from the very start of the play.

Try to show the examiner that you understand that the audience would sometimes feel satisfied, amused, judgmental, or pity for characters as each scene is shown, and that drives home the messages Shakespeare wishes to convey. And make sure you highlight that Shakespeare uses this dynamic for dramatic effect too.



Your notes

## Structure

### The structure of a tragedy

Many of Shakespeare's tragedies follow the same five-part structure:

1. **Exposition:** this is the introduction to the play for the audience, and an introduction to the themes and atmosphere. In *Romeo and Juliet*, it is very significant that we are introduced to the tragic ending of the play in the Prologue. This creates dramatic irony and **tension** as audiences are instructed to watch events unfold and question the role of **fate** in the tragedy. Audiences are also shown a battle erupting between the servants of the two families, which foreshadows further conflict. Shakespeare emphasises this effect by having the Prince decree that further fighting will be punished with death. **Foreshadowing** often occurs in the **exposition**
2. **Rising Action:** here is when the tragic hero's **fatal flaw** is exposed and an inevitable chain of events begins the downfall of the protagonist. In the play, it could be said that Romeo's premonition about his untimely death prior to his reckless decision to attend the Capulet Ball represents this stage
3. **Climax:** this is the turning point in the play where the tragic hero comes face to face with their problems. In the language of tragedy, this is called peripeteia. In *Romeo and Juliet*, it is the moment a fight inevitably breaks out between Tybalt and Romeo. Mercutio is killed in error, which results in Romeo's impulsive vengeful murder of Tybalt
4. **Falling Action:** The tragic hero acknowledges his flaws and his potential defeat. Romeo realises he is "Fortune's Fool" and decides to act upon his own free will. This moment of realisation is called the anagnorisis.
5. **Denouement:** normality and the natural order is restored. Romeo and Juliet take their own lives, fulfilling the **Prologue's** fateful message. The feud between the families ends because of the sacrifices made

### Examiner Tip

It is always good to refer to other parts of the play in your answer to gain the highest marks. Even better than just a reference or a quotation is to refer to the section of the play from the perspective of a tragedy: 'in the exposition of the tragedy in Act I Scene I, Shakespeare has the servants of both families break into a petty fight...'

It is good to trace the development of themes and messages through the methods used at each point of the play. Analysing the way dramatic methods or techniques represent Shakespeare's messages adds marks for analysis of the writer's craft because you are referring to Shakespeare's use of conventions of tragedy to present his ideas.



Your notes

## Language

It is of course important to analyse Shakespeare's use of language in any essay on Romeo and Juliet. However, try to see 'language' in a broader sense than just the words that Shakespeare uses: it also includes the form and patterns of his language. Moreover, try to take a whole-text approach and consider why Shakespeare presents - through his use of language - the ideas he wants to explore in the play. Below you will find revision materials on:

- Poetry and Prose
- Symbolism

### Poetry and Prose

- Shakespeare used three forms of poetic language when he wrote his plays:
  - Blank verse
  - Rhymed verse
  - Prose
- Each of the three forms is used throughout Romeo and Juliet
- Shakespeare used these different forms of language for dramatic purposes; they performed different functions:
  - To distinguish characters from one another
  - To reveal the psychology of characters
  - To show character development

### Blank verse

- The blank verse consists of unrhymed lines of ten syllables, although it does not always exactly fit that pattern
- Typically in Shakespeare's plays, the blank verse represents human feelings in intimate speeches and soliloquies and the more serious themes. It represents the character's true feelings. It is the form used the most by Shakespeare
- In Romeo and Juliet, blank verse is used by characters trapped by fate or social rules
- Often used to signify a character with high statuses, such as in the dialogue between Tybalt and Benvolio



Your notes

## Romeo & Juliet: Key Quotations

### Key Quotations

The best way to revise quotations is to group them by character, or theme. Below you will find definitions and analysis of the best quotations, arranged by the following themes:

- [Love](#)
- [Conflict](#)
- [Honour](#)
- [Fate](#)



#### Examiner Tip

Examiners reward answers which link ideas and themes in the given extract to the rest of the play. A convincing way to do this is to include short quotations or references from elsewhere in *Romeo and Juliet* which show a connection, contrast, or illustrate thematic or character development. The trick is to show how Shakespeare develops these themes and how they are shown by the end.

It is equally valuable to include “paired quotations”: two quotations that might not feature in the extract but show these connections, or changes. These paired quotations are marked below and are great when analysed together.

## Love

Romeo and Juliet are known for its theme of love. However, as the play's ending suggests, it is a tragic tale of woe and conflict, a tale about a love that was forbidden because of a family grudge.

### Paired quotations:



Romeo



"Here's much to do with hate,  
but more with love"



Romeo



"O brawling love, o loving hate"

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***"Here's much to do with hate, but more with love" Romeo Montague, Act I, Scene I***

***"O brawling love, o loving hate" Romeo Montague, Act I, Scene I***

### Meaning and context

- In the first scene when Benvolio informs Romeo there has been a fight, Romeo tells Benvolio he believes the **feud** is fueled by hatred stemming from love



Your notes

- Shortly after discussing the feud, Romeo confides in Benvolio about his deep thoughts that love is painful and difficult

### Analysis

- Audiences are introduced to Romeo as a character who understands the connections between love and hate
- This scene, focusing on Romeo's heartbreak, juxtaposes the preceding fight scene, showing love and hate side by side
- Romeo uses an oxymoron ("loving hate") to show the contrasting feelings love and hate to bring
- The parallels drawn by Romeo at the start of the play foreshadow the violence of the love between Romeo and Juliet



Your notes



Romeo



"Did my heart love till now?  
Forswear it, sight! For I ne'er  
saw true beauty till this night"



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***"Did my heart love till now? forswear it, sight! For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night" Romeo Montague, Act I, Scene V***

### Meaning and context

- When Romeo sees Juliet at the masked Capulet ball he believes her to be the most beautiful girl he has seen
- He suggests any previous love, such as his love for Rosaline which the audience has just seen him troubled over, was not true love

### Analysis

- Here, Shakespeare shows Romeo as a character obsessed with courtly love
- Audiences have just seen Romeo profess a broken heart over Rosaline's unrequited Love and will judge him for his change of heart
- Shakespeare presents Romeo's fatal flaw, his fickle impulsiveness
- Friar Laurence and Juliet both criticise Romeo for his inconstant and rash actions which lead to his (and Juliet's) downfall

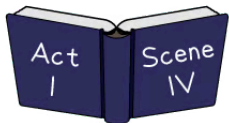
- Shakespeare suggests that **courtly love** was superficial and fleeting
- Shakespeare comments here, and in much of his writing, on pure love being constant love



Your notes



Romeo



“Under love’s heavy burden do I sink”



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### ***“Under love’s heavy burden do I sink” Romeo Montague, Act I, Scene IV***

#### **Meaning and context**

- Romeo tells Mercutio he is unable to go to the Capulet Ball as he is heartbroken
- As seen earlier in the scene, Romeo believes love to be a heavy burden to carry

#### **Analysis**

- Romeo alludes to the dark moods the audience has seen he is prone to in Act I, Scene I
- Romeo uses metaphor to show the pain associated with love: he likens his heartbreak to a pressure weighing him down
- Shakespeare shows Romeo as sensitive and prone to depression, subverting gender stereotypes and commenting on pressures for young men



Your notes



Mercutio



“If love be rough with you, be rough with love; prick love for pricking, and you beat love down”



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***“If love be rough with you, be rough with love; prick love for pricking, and you beat love down”*** Mercutio, Act I, Scene V

### Meaning and context

- Here, Mercutio is trying to lighten Romeo's mood before the Capulet ball
- He advises Romeo to beat love's pain by being casual with it, by fighting back

### Analysis

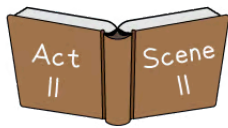
- Here, Mercutio advises Romeo to be less sensitive about love, using the **metaphor** of a thorny rose
- Shakespeare uses Mercutio's dialogue to provide comedic and light relief from the intensity of other scenes
- Mercutio often uses puns in his bawdy, humorous dialogue to play on the double meanings of words
- Here, Mercutio uses the double meaning of the word 'prick' to connote thorns and sex, suggesting Romeo uses sex to overcome painful love
- Later, Mercutio delivers a soliloquy about Queen Mab; the speech suggests daydreams and fantasies about love are a waste of time
- Mercutio advises Romeo repeatedly to avoid dreams of idealised love
- Audiences see characters' contrasting attitudes to love in this conversation between the love-sick Romeo and the flippant Mercutio



Your notes



Juliet



"O, swear not by the moon,  
th' inconstant moon"



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**"O, swear not by the moon, th' inconstant moon"** Juliet Capulet, Act II, Scene II

### Meaning and context

- Juliet replies to Romeo's sudden declarations of love in the Capulet garden, asking Romeo to be constant and committed to his love
- Juliet is connecting Romeo's sudden promises to the changing moon

### Analysis

- Juliet uses Celestial imagery here and throughout the play when she refers to Romeo
- Her request that Romeo swears his love by something more constant connotes the changing nature of the stars and planets
- Juliet is shown as rational and sensible, not leaving her fate to the stars and planets
- This **Imagery** challenges Elizabethan audiences who regularly made decisions based on the stars and planets

## Conflict

The conflict within the play originates from an ancient grudge which neither family can remember. Shakespeare presents the discrimination the families show toward each other, hating without reason, as violent and tragic, punishing the town at the end of the play. It could be argued that Shakespeare mirrors this in the play, *Romeo and Juliet*. Written for Queen Elizabeth I, a Protestant, Shakespeare, a Catholic, veils messages about conflict in a dramatic love story.



Your notes



Chorus



“Whose misadventured piteous  
overthrows do with their death bury  
their parents' strife”



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**“Whose misadventured piteous overthrows do with their death bury their  
parent's strife”** *The chorus, The Prologue*

### Meaning and context

- The Chorus delivers this line in the Prologue before the play begins
- The **chorus** tells audiences that Romeo and Juliet will rebel attempting to overthrow the authority and that their deaths will end their parents' "strife" or war

### Analysis

- The **chorus** is a device used in Greek tragedy, often to narrate key ideas to audiences
- A **Prologue** provides the audience with information about the play's themes, here the themes are rebellion, death and war
- Here, the **chorus** tells the audience the outcome of events to build **dramatic irony** and create tension
- **Dramatic irony** allows audiences to watch events unfold with the ending in mind
- This line, taken from the **Prologue**, warns audiences that the young lovers will defy the **status quo**
- The Adjective describing this rebellion ("misadventured piteous") suggest it will fail and the audience will feel pity for the young lovers
- It also lets the audience know, immediately, that their sacrifice will bury their parent's **feud**. The use of the word "bury" **foreshadows** the deaths of Romeo and Juliet

- Shakespeare's **Prologue** challenges audiences to consider the violence that comes from civil war and the sacrifices children may have to make for it



Your notes



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## ***“My only love sprung from my only hate” Juliet Capulet, Act I, Scene V***

### **Meaning and context**

- Juliet speaks this line at the Capulet ball when she is told by her nurse that Romeo is a Montague and therefore her enemy
- She realises that she is bound by her family to hate the only person she loves

### **Analysis**

- Juliet's **oxymoron**, reflected in other lines that liken her marriage to a grave, suggests an awareness of the danger of loving her enemy
- Juliet's dialogue presents the close relationship between love and hate, **foreshadowing** the impact the **feud** will have on their future
- Audiences, aware of the **tragedy** to come, are challenged to watch how conflict affects love
- The verb “sprung” suggests her love originates from hate springing from family conflict
- The repetition of “only” emphasises the huge significance the **feud** has in her life
- In the midst of religious civil war in **Elizabethan** England, this line reflects the impact of division on innocent citizens, in particular, young people

### **Paired quotations:**



Your notes



Benvolio

"I do but keep the peace"



Benvolio

"For now, these hot days is the mad blood stirring"



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***"I do but keep the peace"*** Benvolio Montague, Act I, Scene I

***"For now, these hot days is the mad blood stirring"*** Benvolio Montague, Act III, Scene I

### Meaning and context

- In Act I, Scene I, when a fight erupts between the Capulets and Montagues, Benvolio tells Tybalt he wants to keep the peace instead of fighting
- Benvolio again tries to keep the peace in Act III, Scene I when he and Mercutio meet in a public place, warning Mercutio that if the Capulets see them there will be a fight

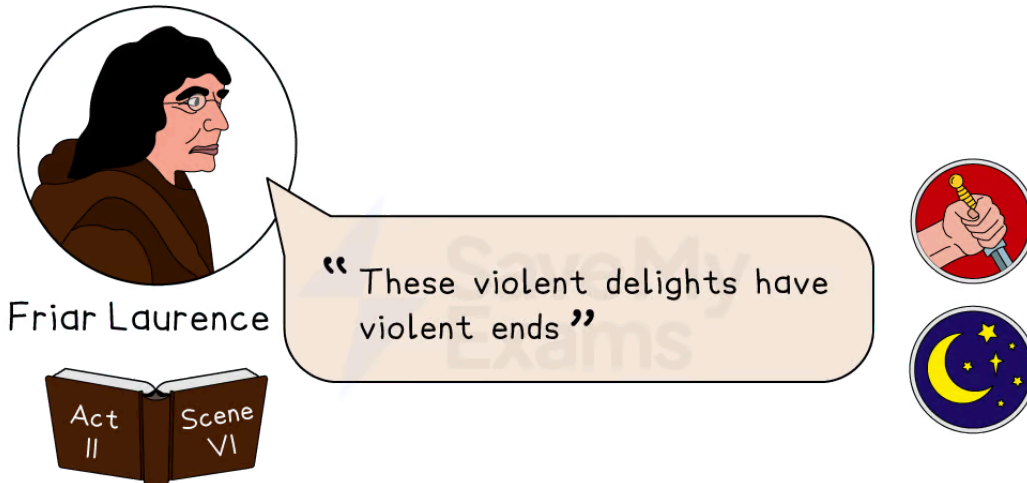
### Analysis

- Audiences are introduced to Benvolio as a kind character who promotes peace
- This line has religious connotations, as Benvolio's dialogue mimics Jesus Christ's
- His dialogue is used to contrast Mercutio and Tybalt's fiery nature
- Benvolio uses **metaphor** to equate the temper of the Capulets to the hot day

- In a dramatic and climactic scene in the middle of the play, Benvolio's dialogue acts as **foreshadowing**, preceding a fight



Your notes



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### ***“These violent delights have violent ends”*** Friar Laurence, Act II, Scene VI

#### Meaning and context

- As the friar marries Romeo and Juliet he warns them that passion can be violent
- The secret and forbidden marriage is described here as having a tragic ending

#### Analysis

- The friar uses **oxymorons** here, and throughout the play, to show the relationship between opposites
- This line alludes to the opposing forces in all things: “violent” opposes the idea of “delight”
- The **repetition** of “violence” emphasises the tragic consequences of the **feud**
- The dark imagery **foreshadows** the marriage's tragic outcome
- Shakespeare uses the friar's character to present opposing forces in nature, a theme prevalent in the play

## Honour

Romeo and Juliet's love is forbidden due to the "ancient grudge", or feud, between the houses of Capulet and Montague. The lovers are bound to their family name and the hatred as a result of it. The play explores, as many of Shakespeare's plays do, the challenges young people face when disagreeing with their families and the cultural values of the time.



Chorus



"From ancient grudge break to new  
mutiny,  
Where civil blood makes civil hands  
unclean"



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***"From ancient grudge break to new mutiny, Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean" The chorus, The Prologue***

### Meaning and context

- The Chorus tells audiences in the prologue, before the play begins, that there will be conflict in the town
- The **chorus** tells audiences that something the town is holding on to from the past will lead to the spilling of blood

### Analysis

- The **Prologue** is a sonnet which introduces the play's theme of honour, subverting the tradition of sonnets as Italian poems about courtly love
- By using the form of a **sonnet**, traditionally a love poem, to introduce the feuding families Shakespeare shows a close connection between conflict, honour and love
- The "ancient grudge" remains unknown throughout the play, suggesting the families do not know the real reason for their feud
- This challenges **Elizabethan** perspectives on family honour, related to the religious battles at the time and the patriarchal hierarchy
- Here, the contrast of "ancient" and "new" represents old and young, meaning the young will attempt a mutiny on the old
- The metaphor "civil blood" refers to the violence between the town's civilians



Your notes

- The ambiguous meaning of “unclean” suggests to audiences that the violence is impure
- Shakespeare often uses the **metaphor** of blood on hands to symbolise guilt



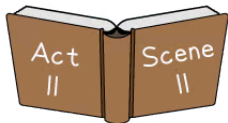
Your notes

**Paired quotations:**



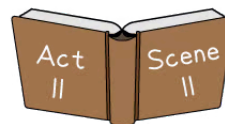
Juliet

“What’s in a name?”



Juliet

“Deny thy father and refuse thy name;  
Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn  
my love, And I’ll no longer be a Capulet”



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**“What’s in a name?” Juliet Capulet, Act II, Scene II**

**“Deny thy father and refuse thy name; Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,**

**And I’ll no longer be a Capulet” Juliet Capulet, Act II, Scene II**

**Meaning and context**

- In Act II, Scene II, Juliet is alone on the balcony after the Capulet ball
- Later in the scene, Romeo appears from hiding and declares his love

- Juliet asks Romeo to turn his back on his family, and if he does not she will do it instead

### Analysis

- Juliet's soliloquy is spoken alone, making this scene dramatic and highlighting its serious themes
- A **soliloquy** is used in drama to represent the character revealing their true feelings, adding authenticity to Juliet's controversial dialogue
- Juliet's **rhetorical question** in this **soliloquy** asks **Elizabethan** audiences to challenge values about family honour
- In the **soliloquy**, Juliet uses metaphorical language to consider the irrelevance of names in love
- Her use of **imperative verbs** ("deny" and "refuse") suggests the strength of her feelings
- As Elizabethans held their family name in high esteem, here, Juliet is attempting to overthrow the status quo
- Shakespeare often presents characters in ways that subvert the stereotype
- Juliet, a young girl, delivers the most significant message in the play about hatred and discrimination
- Shakespeare shows the young couple finding it necessary to turn their backs on their families to be together, suggesting the impact of forced marriage and family **feud**

### Paired quotations:



Your notes



Your notes



Tybalt



“What, drawn and talk of peace?  
I hate the word, as I hate hell,  
all Montagues, and thee”



Tybalt



“By the stock and honour of my kin,  
to strike him dead I hold it not a sin”

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***“What, drawn and talk of peace? I hate the word, as I hate hell, all Montagues, and thee” Tybalt Capulet, Act I, Scene I***

***“By the stock and honour of my kin, to strike him dead I hold it not a sin” Tybalt Capulet, Act I, Scene V***

### Meaning and context

- In the opening scene, Tybalt asks Benvolio why he would talk about peace instead of fighting for his family name
- Later, in Act I, Scene V, Tybalt is offended by Romeo's attendance at the Capulet ball
- He asks his servant for a sword, claiming that murder is not a sin if you do it for family honour

### Analysis



Your notes

- The opening scene shows the constant threat of fighting between the two families
- Tybalt's character is introduced as fiercely passionate about avenging his family's honour
- Tybalt's dialogue is dramatic, using Rhetorical Question to show his shock and offence at the suggestion of peace
- His triple, in a list which emphasises his hatred, links religion to violence and stresses that these ideas are opposed to peace
- In Act I, Scene V, Tybalt **foreshadows** further conflict by showing his bitterness towards Romeo, his enemy
- His rhyming couplet ("kin"/"sin") stresses the connection between sin and family honour
- The verb "strike" suggests the violence inherent in Tybalt
- His dialogue is dramatic and intense, to represent the intensity of the hatred in the **feud**
- Tybalt's dialogue is presented as bitter and angry, representing the strong feelings associated with honour



Mercutio



"A plague on both your houses!"



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## "A plague on both your houses!" Mercutio, Act III, Scene I

### Meaning and context

- In this climactic scene, Mercutio curses the Capulet and Montague families as he dies
- Despite being Romeo's friend, Mercutio is not involved in the feud until this scene

### Analysis

- Shakespeare's climactic scene of a public fight between Romeo and Tybalt creates a plot twist for audiences
- Mercutio, neither a Montague nor a Capulet, is killed in the feud, alluding to the deaths of innocent bystanders in the name of family honour
- The plague Mercutio delivers could be a biblical reference, suggesting a holy punishment for the meaningless violence

- It could likely refer to the disruptions of **Elizabethan** life by contagious diseases, mentioned later in the play
- Mercutio's curse comes true at the end of the play when a plague prevents the friar's important message from getting to Romeo
- Mercutio's curse comes from frustration at being killed by mistake, caught between Romeo and Tybalt
- Mercutio's earlier flippant dialogue changes quickly to an ominous curse, suggestive of his name "Mercury" – both a mythical winged messenger and a quick-changing metal



Your notes

 **Examiner Tip**

Don't include quotations that have nothing to do with the question. As tempting as it might be if you have them memorised, examiners really dislike when students "shoe-horn in irrelevant quotations".

This can affect your overall mark since your response can become less focused. Use the evidence to support your argument. Evidence can be a reference to language, as well as dramatic devices.

## Fate

From the very beginning and throughout the play, Romeo and Juliet's relationship is thwarted by pressures linked to cultural values and traditions, something that could be described as an "outside force". However, Shakespeare presents these forces as fateful, showing Romeo and Juliet giving in to fate until it is too late, in a bid to challenge contemporary belief systems.



Your notes



Chorus



"The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love"



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### **"The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love"** The chorus, The Prologue

#### Meaning and context

- In the prologue, the chorus invites audiences to watch the "fearful passage" of the unfolding tragic love story
- The **chorus** refers to the "death-mark'd love" of Romeo and Juliet, suggesting the fate of the "star-cross'd lovers" is already marked, predetermined by the stars

#### Analysis

- Shakespeare employs dramatic Irony by telling audiences the protagonist's **fate**
- The **adjectives** "fearful" and "death-mark'd" connect the idea of destiny and fear
- By telling **Elizabethan** audiences that the tragedy is already predetermined, Shakespeare links **fate** to tragedy, challenging prevalent superstitious beliefs about fate

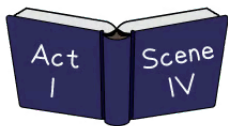
#### Paired quotations



Your notes



Romeo



"He who hath steerage of course,  
Direct my sail"



Romeo



"O I am Fortune's Fool!"



Romeo



"Then I defy you, Stars!"



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**"He who hath steerage of course, Direct my sail"** Romeo Montague, Act I,  
Scene IV



Your notes

***“O I am Fortune’s Fool!”*** Romeo Montague, Act III, Scene I

***“Then I defy you, Stars!”*** Romeo Montague, Act V, Scene I

### Meaning and context

- In Act I, Romeo’s fateful journey begins with a premonition of the consequences of his night at the Capulet Ball. Here, he addresses fate, asking whoever it is who decides his future to lead the way
- By Act III, Romeo has killed Tybalt and lost his friend, Mercutio, and acknowledges he has become a fool to fate/fortune
- By Act V, Romeo learns (mistakenly) that Juliet is dead and he turns against fate

### Analysis

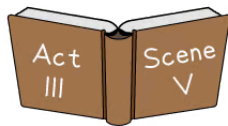
- At first, Shakespeare shows Romeo giving in to **fate**, a dominant ideology of the time
- Romeo’s direct address speaks directly to Fate, personifying it as if it is a person who decides his future
- Audiences have been shown Romeo as an impulsive and fickle boy as he begins his fateful journey, and here again as he ignores a premonition and leaves his future in the hands of **fate**
- The **imperative verbs**, “Direct”, suggests reckless confidence in his tone
- The metaphor of being on a boat and allowing nature to direct his way symbolises a fatalistic attitude which audiences know will be punished
- In Act III, Romeo addresses Fate once again, after the deaths of Mercutio and Tybalt
- This time, he shouts his frustration at Fate’s decision to make him “Fortune’s fool”, again implying he has little autonomy over his life
- The Elizabethans believed that the stars, planets and gods were powerful over human lives, and this line begins to question the influence of **fate** in the violence
- By Act V, Romeo turns his back on the decisions the stars and fate have made for him
- In grief, Romeo angrily addresses the stars and exclaims his defiance
- This line emphasises the desperation Romeo feels about his circumstances, and his decision to create some **autonomy** by returning to die with Juliet



Your notes



Juliet



“Methinks I see thee now,  
thou art so low  
As one dead in the bottom  
of a tomb”



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***“Methinks I see thee now, thou art so low As one dead in the bottom of a tomb” Juliet Capulet, Act III, Scene V***

### Meaning and context

- In this scene, Juliet has a premonition about Romeo's future
- She sees him dead, sunk low down at the bottom of a tomb

### Analysis

- Here, Juliet foreshadows the death of Romeo, suggesting his fate is sealed
- The explicit message is a stark message about Romeo's dark future
- Juliet's dialogue often refers to death. Earlier in Act II, she likens her marriage to a grave
- Juliet's premonitions build tension through the **dramatic irony** created in the **Prologue**
- Shakespeare challenges the audience's perceptions about **fate** and free will by showing both Romeo and Juliet instinctively knowing their doomed future



### Examiner Tip

For your exam, you are not expected to learn dozens of quotations by heart. Although examiners do reward the use of memorised quotations in your essay, you will also be rewarded for your ability to mention plot points from various points of the play. These are called “textual references”, and do not have to include direct quotations. Try to remember keywords from the quotations to embed the most significant words in your answer.

Therefore, it is better to learn a few quotations and their wider significance, really well, than lots of random quotations: you will not be awarded more marks for more quotations.

The quotations above have all been chosen as they cover a good range of themes that Shakespeare explores in Romeo and Juliet.