ROMEO AND JULIET *(20% of whole English Lit GCSE)* - Context

Duelling and the concept of honour: Maintaining the honour of your family name was hugely important at the time. If you were challenged to a duel and you refused, you would be deemed a coward, thus damaging your honour and the status of your family. Most Elizabethan gentlemen carried swords in public and many did fight in the streets.

Courtly Love & cures for lovesickness: common in medieval literature where a knight was consumed with passion for an unattainable noblewoman; Romeo fits this perfectly. Elizabethan doctors saw unrequited love or desire as a disease, a type of melancholy sometimes called lovesickness. They tried various cures and sometimes sent patients to church to confess to a priest. They believed that if lovesickness was left untreated, it could lead to madness.

Role of women in a patriarchal society: Elizabethan England was a society controlled by men. Women were seen as the weaker sex & were expected to be meek & mild, and most importantly, obedient to their fathers & later their husbands.

Arranged marriages: Marriages amongst the wealthy were arranged by parents in order to match or improve social standing. However, in practice, parents did try to choose someone their child liked and was happy to marry. Secret marriages such as that between the young Romeo and Juliet would have been both illegal and shocking.

The Italian setting of the play: The play is set in Italy, which was known for its warring states. It is also a Catholic country; religion was extremely important and marriage vows were seen as sacred – once made, they could not be broken.

Plot

ACT 1	In Italy, two noble families (the Montagues & Capulets) are feuding yet again. Romeo is in love with Rosaline, who rejects his love. As a result, he is depressed. To cure Romeo of his lovesickness, Benvolio persuades him to attend a masked ball at the Capulets, where he might see prettier girls and therefore forget about Rosaline. Romeo meets Juliet and they instantly fall in love with one another. Tybalt hears Romeo's voice at the ball and is furious that a Montague has dared to attend.
ACT 2	Romeo stands beneath Juliet's balcony. He sees Juliet leaning over the railing, hears her calling out his name & wishes that he wasn't a Montague. He reveals his presence & they resolve, after a passionate exchange, to be married secretly.
ACT 3	Romeo returns from his recent marriage to Juliet and encounters Tybalt, who challenges Romeo to a duel. Unbeknownst to all present, Tybalt is now Romeo's kinsman by marriage so Romeo refuses. Mercutio is livid with Romeo's refusal and fights with Tybalt who underhandedly kills Mercutio. Furious by the death of his friend, Romeo kills Tybalt and takes shelter in the Friar's cell. The Prince exiles Romeo for his part in the fray.
ACT 4	In despair, Juliet seeks Friar Lawrence's advice. He gives her a sleeping potion, which for a time will cause her to appear dead. Thus, on the day of her supposed marriage to Paris, she will be carried to the family vault. By the time she awakens, Romeo will be summoned to the vault and take her away to Mantua.
ACT 5	The Friar's letter fails to reach Romeo. When he hears of Juliet's death, Romeo procures a deadly poison from an apothecary and secretly returns to Verona to say his last farewell to his deceased wife and die by her side. When Juliet awakens from her deep sleep, she realises Romeo's error and kills herself with his dagger. The Capulets and Montague decide to reconcile as a result of the deaths of their children.

Significant characters

Romeo	A young Montague. Not interested in violence, only love. He's passionate and sensitive yet also impulsive.
Juliet	A young Capulet. Naïve and sheltered at the beginning, develops into a strong character. Grounded.
Friar Lawrence	Friend to both Romeo and Juliet. Civic-minded. Also expert with potions & herbs.
Nurse	Like a mother to Juliet / confidante. Earthy/sexual. Often says inappropriate things.
Capulet	Juliet's father. Prudent and caring but can fly into rage if respect is lacking.
Mercutio	Romeo's close friend. Witty, bawdy, cynical and a hot-headed character.
Benvolio	Romeo's cousin. Tries to keep the peace and keep Romeo's mind off of Rosaline.
Prince	Leader of Verona, concerned with keeping order between the warring families.
Tybalt	Juliet's cousin. Obsessed by family honour; quick to draw his sword. Hates Montagues.

Key themes

CONFLICT: Conflict is one of the key driving forces in the play and it occurs between a range of characters: between warring households; within families; within friendship groups; and between members of the communities. This conflict results in violence; violence opens the play in scene one and it also concludes the play with the deaths of the two lovers. It is worth noting that the motif of light vs dark is also linked to many of these themes.

- violence & hate
- death,
- secrecy
- family
- youth vs age
- individual vs society/religion
- order vs chaos
- appearance vs reality

LOVE: The love Romeo and Juliet share is beautiful, passionate, exhilarating, transformative and they are willing to give everything for it. But it is also chaotic and destructive, bringing death to friends, family and to themselves. It is worth noting that the motif of light vs dark is also linked to many of these themes.

- conflict
- courtly love
- marriage
- sex
- youth.

FATE: No matter how much they love each other or what plans they make, their struggles against fate only help fulfil it. But defeating or escaping fate is not the point. No one escapes fate. It is Romeo and Juliet's determination to struggle against fate in order to be together, whether in life or death, that shows the fiery passion of their love and which makes that love eternal.

Assessment objectives

AO1 (40%)	Make an informed personal response using a critical style. Use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.
AO2 (40%)	Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.
AO3 (20%)	Show understanding of the relationships between texts & the contexts in which they were written.
AO4 (4 marks)	*Use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation.*

The exam

- Firstly, **highlight** the key words in the question
- Now **read the extract and highlight good evidence** to answer the 1st bullet point of your question (5 min)
- **Write response** to both bullet points:
  - Intro: discuss the extract's place in the play then go straight into **analysing the extract** (20 mins)
  - Write **2 or 3 detailed PEELs** for the second part of your question. (20 mins)
  - **Sum up** how the writer presents…whatever the question asks. (5 mins)
- *Note: If you're struggling with one of the bullet points, spend <u>some</u> more time on the bullet point you're happy with.*
- **Check** spellings, punctuation and vocab (5 mins)

Sample answer

Starting with this moment in the play (Act 3, Scene1), write about how Shakespeare presents conflict.

Through the use of dramatic irony, Shakespeare allows his audience to understand why Romeo "love[s]" Tybalt, whom Romeo now regards as family following his clandestine marriage to Juliet. However, an Elizabethan audience would be aware of the dishonour of refusing a challenge and would not be surprised at the hot-headed Mercutio's desire to join the "fray" due to what he sees as Romeo's "vile submission". The sudden death of Mercutio's lively character would come as a shock and his final pun when he refers to himself as a "grave man" would actually reinforce that shock rather than add humour; it illustrates the brutal reality of Romeo's world, which is in stark contrast to the romantic world of the preceding marriage scene. The audience would now expect "grave" consequences and indeed there are: Mercutio's death becomes the pivotal point in the play as a series of tragic events ensues, leading to the tragic climax. Mercutio's repeated curse on "both [their] houses" would also remind the audience that it is the families' "ancient grudge" that has ultimately led to his death. Such a dramatic scene could be staged in such a way as to convey its importance with perhaps the actors frozen in horror as Mercutio looks to the audience while delivering his final lines.

Key Terms

- Tragedy
- Protagonist
- Antagonist
- Prologue
- Monologue
- Soliloquy
- Sonnet form
- Dramatic irony
- Foreshadowing
- Juxtaposition
- Oxymoron
- Iambic pentameter
- Prose
- Religious imagery
- Metaphor
- Simile
- Plosives
- Sibilance
- Pun
- Bawdy humour
- Patriarchy

Stretch yourself

- Whilst analysing the extract, quickly refer out to other parts of the play.
- Watch <u>different</u> performances of key scenes to provide you with 'ammunition' when discussing form.