

Junior cert study



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Arthur Brooke's 3020 line narrative poem "The Tragicall Historie of Romeus and Juliet" (first published in 1562). Brooke was reported to have translated it from an Italian novella "Giulietta e Romeo", a novella by the Italian author Matteo Bandello, written in 1554. The poem's ending differs significantly from Shakespeare's play: the nurse is banished, the apothecary is hanged for his involvement in the deception while Friar Laurence leaves Verona to live in a hermitage until he dies.

Another notable plot difference is that the story takes place over nine months while Shakespeare's version takes place over 5 days. A key theme of Brooke's epic poem which permeates Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is: 2 - Love as a Religious Experience (or Love as a Form of Religious Worship). This idea of love is based on medieval courtly love poetry and was a strong influence on Brooke's version of *Romeo and Juliet*. Love in this sense is not just lust but is tempered by patience, romance, spirituality and heroism. The language used in this poetry was full of religious references.

This idea of love was borrowed by Shakespeare in his version of the tale. Here are a few examples which reflect this theme: "If I profane with my unworhiest hand this holy shrine" *Romeo*, Act I Scene 5 "Call me but love and I'll be new baptized." *Juliet*, Act II Scene 2 "Swear by the gracious self, which is the god of my idolatry." *Juliet*, Act II Scene 2 This theme of love as religious worship demonstrates the young couple's passion and devotion to one another. This return of affection from Juliet inflames the young Romeo as opposed to his advances towards the "unfeeling" Rosaline which were not reciprocated. - Synopsis of the Play: The extract below is the synopsis as staged in "The *Romeo and Juliet* Session": Day 1, Sunday: The star crossed

lovers meet and fall in love. Day 2, Monday: They secretly marry in Friar Lawrence's cell. Later, Romeo gets in a brawl with Tybalt and his best friend, Mercutio, is killed. Taking revenge, Romeo in turn kills Tybalt. For this murderous act The Prince banishes him. But before fleeing to Mantua Romeo has a passionate night with his new bride. Day 3, Tuesday: Mr. & Mrs. Capulet brutally force the rebellious Juliet to marry Paris.

A now desperate Juliet runs to Friar Lawrence begging for help. He gives her a potion that induces a death-like state. Later that day Capulet moves the day of the wedding from Thursday to Wednesday. Day 4, Wednesday: The nurse finds Juliet "dead". The wedding preparations now become funeral preparations. Romeo hears of Juliet's death and makes the journey to Verona. Day 5, Thursday: Romeo arrives in Capulet's tomb and takes his own life just before Juliet awakes. Seeing her dead lover by her side, the young Juliet takes Romeo's knife and ends it. – Benvolio, Romeo & Mercutio: The function of Benvolio's character is to provide a peaceful, passive personality in contrast to the lively and aggressive Mercutio. This is important as both characters have a significant influence on the young Romeo. Our hero demonstrates aspects of both characters at various points throughout the play. Benvolio's character foretells an end to the feud. He is only member of Romeo's generation to survive by the end of the play. We also know that Benvolio is trustworthy. After Mercutio has been slain, Benvolio recounts the events accurately and fairly to the Prince.

Even though he belongs to one of the families in the feud, the Prince does not see it necessary to doubt his word, further proving his sincerity and earnestness. It might prove useful to think of the characters of Romeo,

Mercutio and Benvolio as three brothers: Mercutio is the aggressive, jaded and, sometimes, mean eldest, Romeo is the youngest and most spoilt as he's allowed to indulge his feelings and cries a lot and Benvolio, the middle child, is a good mediator as he helps to dissolve tensions between the two (as middle children often do in real life).

However, in our Romeo and Juliet Session, the actor's confusion over how to play Benvolio is also a devised conflict point between the actor and Shakespeare which acts as a bridge to discuss: 5 - Elizabethan Attitudes to Homosexuality: Freedom of choice, in this sense, was not allowed in Shakespeare's day. Acceptance of Homosexuality as has been happening in today's Western society was non-existent, at least publicly. If such attitudes were expressed in public then it could have serious repercussions as it went against acceptable norms of society.

Practice of homosexuality was often punishable by death. 6 - Lack of Female Performers: In Shakespeare's day women were not allowed onstage, in fact it was illegal. Their place was in the home. Every female character in those days was performed by men. In this play for example, teenage boys would play the role of Juliet, and older (generally burly and heavy) men, would play the Nurse. It's interesting to notice that the character of the pantomime Dame, can be traced back to this type of roles. Women were only allowed on stage after 1660 (many years after Shakespeare's death). – Mercutio's Queen Mab Speech: What's the point of this monologue? Most productions of this play cut it out. Mercutio's cynical take on love serves as a counterpoint to Romeo's wistful one. Mercutio is warning Romeo that love is a trap that comes with many pitfalls and burdensome obligations. In addition to this

Shakespeare seems to have been making a bit of a pun with the name Queen Mab. Traditionally, Queen Mab is known as the queen of the fairies. But in his time the words “quean” and “mab” were also references to whores. Ultimately, Mercutio is trying to deflate Romeo’s illusion of love.

Ergo: life is not a lover’s fairytale. 8 - Medieval Tragedy: A common plot device in Medieval Tragedy is that of unseen, hostile forces determining the destiny of the lovers. Shakespeare uses this concept in the play. When Romeo says, “...expire the term of a despised life clos’d in my breast” (Act I Scene 4) he is foretelling his own death. This is not because he wants to die but more because he feels that it is in his fate. That’s the reason why Shakespeare call them “star crossed lovers” in the Prologue to the play: their fate’s written in the stars.

But they’re ill-fated too: conspiring against them are events, coincidences and accidents. For example: 1. Romeo’s bad timing in arriving too early to Juliet’s tomb. 2. Romeo not getting Friar Laurence’s letter explaining his scheme of Juliet’s pretended death. 3. The dark shadow of the feud influences the secretive actions of the hasty lovers. This hastiness is a tragic flaw that both characters share and it plays its part in the tragedy. In Juliet’s own words: “Too rash, too unadvised, too sudden.” (Act II Scene 2) In fact, Romeo and Juliet are fated to die.

This tragic device of impending doom was meant to make the audience pity the young and innocent lovers. In Romeo’s own words: “I am fortune’s fool”. (Act III Scene 1) 9 - Love vs. Lust: Is Romeo really in love with Juliet or is he just a boy with a strong libido? Wasn’t he hopelessly in love with Rosaline before? In his own words: “The all seeing sun ne’er saw her match since first

the world begun. ” (Act I Scene 2). Romeo was gutted after Rosaline rejected him. If Juliet rejected him, would he have just found someone new, pined longer for Juliet, returned to Rosaline or do something else?

Would it be fair to say that Romeo is in love with the idea of being in love? If we take the side of the argument that Romeo is really in love this time, then this harks back to the theme of Love as a Religious Experience. Romeo and Juliet’s relationship is spiritual, heroic & romantic but it also contains lust, as in any romantic relationship. The world of Romeo and Juliet’s love is so all-consuming that, to quote John Donne, “ Nothing else is”. (The Sun Rising, Stanza 3). This disregard for the outside world is the beauty of their pure love and the reason for their downfall.

This meeting of these two soul mates has awoken them to a new world of feeling and passion that goes beyond anything they’ve ever known before.

10 - Conflict: All the conflicts in the play are a result of the feud between the Montagues and Capulets which we are told in the play was “ Bred of an airy word” (Prince, Act I Scene 1). No one seems to know what started it in the first place. All we know is that the family’s of the Capulets and Montagues have born a grudge for a long period of time, passing on the hatred from one generation to the next, and they’re not even sure why.

However, the feud between the families has an historic basis. The period referred to in the play is between 1269 & 1387. This was a time when Verona was split between competing noble families. Italians at that time were divided. Some of them favored a government ruled by the German emperor while others were part of a congress of city-states under the moral leadership of the Pope in Rome. So noble Families would often fight

over the political high ground. But what's most important in this play is how the feud affects the young lovers and other characters.

The feud is responsible for the fiery Tybalt seeking out Romeo for daring to show his face at the Capulet's ball, it's responsible for the lovers secret marriage, Mercutio's and Tybalt's murders, Romeo's banishment and the Friar's scheme which eventually leads to Romeo and Juliet's death. 11 -

Realism vs. Telling the story: There are inconsistencies in the play: No one question why the young, 14 year old Juliet just suddenly dies. The vial of potion by her side is never found. Rosaline, was a Capulet too, a cousin of Juliet. But the feud between the families was never addressed in that case.

Was Shakespeare unaware of these inconsistencies? Why were they not addressed? This has a lot to do with how writing has changed over the years.

Realism as we know it was an invention of the novels of the XVIII & XIX centuries. In Shakespeare's day there wasn't an interest in depicting everyday life. Therefore consistency wasn't as important as telling a story.