

AQA English Literature GCSE

Romeo and Juliet: Character Profile

Romeo

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Romeo Montague

INTRODUCTION

Romeo Montague is the **eponymous character** of the play, who is initially portrayed as an **archetypal Petrarchan lover**. He is the **self-conscious sufferer**, driven by his **unrequited love** for Rosaline. This causes him to isolate himself from his family, relatives and friends, which is a common trope of Petrarchan poetry.



His meeting with **Juliet Capulet ignites** a major shift in both the trajectory of the play as well as Romeo's narrative. Coming from opposing houses, the couple are deemed as **"star-crossed lovers"**, as their love is challenged by arbitrary fate. Their story allegorically questions whether tragedies are created by **individual choices** or by **fate**.

In the play, Romeo's development is an important cursor for the **transition** from comedy to tragedy. Romeo's narrative echoes tropes of **Aristotelian Tragedy**; the character's **hamartia (fatal flaw)** is the inability to think rationally, choosing instead to make quick **impulsive decisions**, which ultimately results in his downfall.

CHARACTER IN CONTEXT

- **Folklore** - Romeo was based on a folktale, which was translated into English for the first time in **1562 by Arthur Brooke**. Brooke's **"The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet,"** mainly functions as a **cautionary tale** of how lust, one of the seven deadly sins, leads to an **"unhappy death"**. Shakespeare's Romeo, on the contrary, questions love in soliloquies and develops as a character through his relationship with Juliet.
- **Petrarchan love** - Shakespeare is also conversing with **Petrarchan definitions** of love. Petrarch was a poet in Italy, where the **sonnet form** originated. Petrarch's poems often **objectified women** as Romeo does with Rosaline and Juliet. The poems also presented men as **tormented lovers**, as Romeo is at the beginning of the play. Petrarch's trope of **unrequited and unattainable** love is undermined by Romeo, this hints at Shakespeare's own theories about love.
- **Homosociality** - Romeo's bond with Mercutio and Benvolio echoes the **homosociality** typical of Elizabethan England. Men were **often educated** together, versed in drama, poetry, and the classics, occupying the public domain. They were exclusively in each other's company, causing them to be more **emotionally and psychologically** attuned to



one another. This can be seen in Romeo's relationship with his friends: Benvolio is asked to reach out to Romeo, and Mercutio's death **instigates his retaliation** against Tybalt. The **intimacy** between men was often reinforced through theatre. All the players were men- the female characters such as Juliet would have been played by adolescent teenagers. Therefore, Romeo's friendship in the text not only alludes to **Elizabethan gender rules** but also homosociality- an extremely close relationship between men that cannot be **translated into modern society**.

- **Elizabethan Society** - Romeo is presented, to an extent, as a **dissident** of the society that **Shakespeare inhibited**. Although the play is set in Verona, this city is a **mere model** of **Elizabethan England** as Italian society was seen through works of literature. The protagonist is **unable to assimilate** to the **rules and customs** of this society: Romeo breaks the law and returns from exile, and Romeo abandons expected behaviour of a man by denying Tybalt in a duel. It was **common practice** in England for men to duel one another - there was a growing fashion of **Italian fencing**, which features in the play (the fencing manoeuvres such as the "passado" and the "punto reverso").
- **Romeo's purpose** - Shakespeare is **engaging with the idiosyncrasies** of his time, with the portrayal of Romeo. However, it can be left up to debate whether the **playwright's purpose** was **didactic and confrontational**, or if it was simply to put forward a **mirror reflection** of his **society**.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS & CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

- **LOVING:** Romeo encourages the audience to explore **different types of love** and question the **effect love can have on a person**. Initially, he is preoccupied by the **concept of love**, which is embodied by his infatuation with Rosaline. As Rosaline doesn't physically appear anywhere in the play Shakespeare allows her to represent love as an idea, a thought, an abstract concept. This kind of love makes Romeos **despondent** and he seeks solace in **isolation**. In contrast, Juliet, who is the **personification** of real and tangible love, causes Romeo to **transcend boundaries** and **societal expectations**. Therefore, Romeo becomes the audience's **proxy** for Shakespeare's exploration of this **universal theme**.
- **FATEFUL:** The protagonists are ultimately unable to defy the **powers of fortune** and **fate**, however, they do signify a level of **self-autonomy** and an **assertion** of the **individual self**. Therefore, Romeo's **trials and tribulations** in the play stimulate a reading into the battle between the **microcosmic individual** and the **macrocosmic higher powers**.



- **RELIGIOUS:** Romeo's dialogue is imbued with **religious allusions**, which echoes the religious society of Shakespeare's time. The playwright investigates the role of religion as a **moral epicentre**, and how love is intrinsically linked to a religious relationship, which is dictated by blind **faith and devotion**.
- **ISOLATED:** The hero of this text indicates isolation in various scenes, which refer to **Petrarchan suffering**, but also a **detachment** from the world and his individual "self". Shakespeare attempts to question the **nature of loneliness**, and to what extent it is self-inflicted. Predominantly, Romeo's scenes are with other characters such as Juliet, Benvolio, Mercutio and Friar Lawrence, which shows the conflict between **external companionship**, and **internal solitude**.
- **MASCULINE:** Romeo navigates the realm of **masculinity** in the play. He is contrasted with **hyper-masculine** characters such as Mercutio, who is violent and uses **misogynistic bawdy humour** to make fun of love. Romeo's refusal to accept Tybalt's duel also **subverts** the characteristics of **stereotypical masculinity**. Thus, Shakespeare presents characters who **conform or confront** the gender rules of their society in order to emphasise the **constraints** of gender.

- **VIOLENT:** This theme is **antithetical** to love. Violence is hindered by love, as Romeo refuses Tybalt due to his **new maturity** brought upon by his relationship with Juliet. After Juliet's purported death, Romeo reverts to the typical masculine behaviour, by indulging in violent acts, such as **threatening Balthasar** and **killing Paris**. Juliet is the **antidote to the violence** presented within the text. Romeo



exclaims that her love makes him **"effeminate"**, thus he is unable to duel Tybalt. This means that Juliet functions as the **antithesis to violence**. This is mainly to do with **societal structures** and **gender constructs**. Sword fighting was mainly associated with males who would **take part in duels** in the Elizabethan era. However, at the end of the play, Juliet is forced to take violent action against herself. It could mean that violence may be the only answer at times. Juliet's choice to use violence **ends the feud**, thus technically ending all of the violence of play. To this extent, Juliet is the **cure to violence**.



RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN OTHER CHARACTERS

Juliet | The two eponymous characters are immediately established as possessing the central relationship of the play; their relationship **develops quickly** which makes it incredibly **passionate**. Juliet is extremely young in comparison to Romeo and so it is highly possible that this is her first real relationship. Their initial interaction is incredibly flirtatious, which **juxtaposes** the terrible and debilitating tension it goes on to cause, but is also evidently **pure** and **passionate**. Their love for each other is potentially strong, obviously demonstrated by how they both end of committing suicide as a result.



Rosaline | Although we never see Rosaline within the play, she plays an important role as she serves to show the audience the difference between lust and love. It is due to Rosaline that the audience is introduced to Romeo acting as a **Petrarchan lover**.

Lord Montague | The Lord is Romeo's father, and he clearly has a lot of love and respect for his son. He is a minor character in the plot and mainly serves to **further the tension** between the Montagues and Capulets - however, he is also the character who **resolves this conflict** at the end of the play as he learns about the fate of his son.

Lady Montague | Also a minor character, Lady Montague also has a lot of love and affection for her son; upon finding out about his death, she eventually dies from grief.

Mercutio | This is Romeo's best friend, it is important to note that Mercutio is also a **foil** for Romeo. While Romeo is an **emotional romantic**, Mercutio is a **cynical** man focused on the physical parts of love. It is clear that they deeply care for each other, at first when Romeo is heartbroken after Rosaline Mercutio makes jokes making his long 'Queen Mab' speech in attempts to make Romeo feel better. Later in Act 3 when Mercutio dies Romeo is overcome with a murderous rage. The reaction that the audience sees from Romeo illustrates the extent of love that Romeo had for Mercutio. The only other time that the audiences see a similar reaction from Romeo is when he finds out about Juliet's 'death'.

Tybalt | Tybalt is a Capulet, and has a fight with Romeo in the third act, which results in Romeo killing Tybalt in revenge for Mercutio's death. He is Romeo's main rival.

The Friar | The Friar acts as a father figure for Romeo.



ROMEO QUOTE BANK

Quote	Analysis
Montague: <i>“Shuts up his windows, locks fair daylight out,/And makes himself an artificial night:”</i> (I.i.133-34)	Action of making “himself” an “artificial night” implies self-inflicted isolation . The dichotomy set up between “daylight” and “night” , reflects Romeo’s conflicting emotions .
Romeo: <i>“...Why then, O brawling love, O loving hate,/ O any thing of nothing first create!...”</i> (I.i.165-77)	Use of oxymorons in this section highlights the ineffable quality of love: it is full of contradictions and does not make sense. This speech is 13 lines , which is arguably an imperfect sonnet . This reflects the idea that Romeo’s experience with love is incomplete and flawed . Irregular rhyming couplets in the section indicates the unpredictable nature of love. This section highlights Romeo’s role as the Petrarchan lover , who suffers from unrequited love. In Baz Luhrmann’s directorial interpretation, the poetry is personified - it is made more visible, as Romeo is shown writing his dialogue. This emphasises Petrarchan self-conscious suffering .
Romeo: <i>“O, she is rich in beauty, only poor/ That when she dies, with beauty dies her store”</i> . (I.i.209-210)	Caesura interjects the line, much like how death interrupts her “beauty” . The repetition of the verb “dies” , emphasises the indomitable transience of her “beauty” and “store” , which are semantically linked to the body. Use of adjectives concerning wealth “rich” and “poor” implies that women are commodities measured by their beauty and fertility .
Romeo: <i>“Transparent heretics, be burnt for liars./One fairer than my love! The all-seeing sun/ Ne’er saw her match since first the world began”</i> . (I.ii.93-95)	“heretics” were individuals with unorthodox religious beliefs , who were often burned to death in the Elizabethan era. Romeo’s infatuation is analogous to faith and religion: Rosaline is portrayed as the perfect being , like God, and Romeo as a devout follower. If his eyes should stray and become “heretics” , Romeo demands biblical punishment , conveyed by the action of being “burnt” . The “sun” and “light” is a lexically cohesive motif associated with beauty and love.
Romeo: <i>“Some consequence yet hanging in</i>	Shakespeare continues to form his image of Romeo as someone who is lacking control of his own life. “...the stars” , indicate the heavens, and the idea that life on earth is dictated



<p><i>the stars...But He hath the steerage of my course."</i> (I.iv.106-113)</p>	<p>by that macrocosm. This, additionally, foreshadows fate's interference in the text. In line 112, Shakespeare allegorically represents Romeo as a ship and God as the captain- "...He hath steerage of [Romeo's] course". Thus, signifying lack of self-autonomy and the character's passivity to higher power.</p>
<p>Romeo: <i>"O she doth teach the torches to burn bright!...As a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear-"</i> (I.v.43-52)</p>	<p>Regular rhyming couplets add energy to the dialogue, reinforcing the excitement and intense emotions of Romeo. In addition, couplets heighten the feeling of love - they are two lines fit together as a singular unit/ anatomy.</p> <p>Juliet is metaphorically portrayed as transcendental in this extract, as she "teaches the torches," is a "snowy dove" amongst "crows", and her beauty is "for earth too dear".</p> <p>Shakespeare establishes the lexically cohesive conflict between light and dark in this extract. This alludes to the "artificial night" in scene 1, which emphasises the weight of Juliet's presence in the character's narrative arc.</p> <p>Shakespeare also portrays the objectification of Juliet, with the metaphor "As a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear-".</p>
<p>Juliet: <i>"Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake/ Romeo: Then move not while my prayer's effect I take."</i> (I.v.92-105)</p>	<p>First 14 lines of dialogue between the two protagonists form a Shakespearean sonnet - indicates romance and love. The call and response in the sonnet rhyme scheme, finished by a rhyming couplet echoes the characters' compatibility; it also implies the reciprocation of love. Romance is also expressed as a religious experience, conveyed by the allegory of saints praying.</p>
<p>Romeo: <i>"But Soft, what light through yonder window breaks?/ It is the east and Juliet is the sun./ Arise fair sun, and kill the envious moon."</i> (II.ii.2-5)</p>	<p>Juliet being described metaphorically as the "fair sun", illustrates Romeo's growing obsession and infatuation, as the sun is the source of all life; Juliet vitalises Romeo. Modern interpretation may allude to the helio-centric model of the solar system, thus Juliet becomes the centre of Romeo's world.</p> <p>Antithesis constructed between the "sun" and "moon". The "moon" refers to Diana, the patroness of virgins, which Romeo wishes to "kill", suggesting his carnal desires to have Juliet.</p>
<p>Romeo: <i>"With love's light wings did I o'erperch these walls,/ For stony limits cannot hold love out"</i> (II.ii.66-67)</p>	<p>Dichotomy between the abstract noun "love" with concrete nouns such as "walls" and "stony limits".</p> <p>Highlights that love transcends borders, with the allegory of flying over the walls with "love's light wings". Use of alliterative sounds "Love" "light" "walls" "limits", draw attention to the word "love", which is repeated twice.</p>



	Demonstrates a form of enlightenment achieved through love, as Romeo figuratively overcomes physical boundaries .
Romeo: <i>“Tybalt, the reason that I have to love thee/ Doth much excuse the appertaining rage/ To such a greeting.”</i> (III.i.59-61)	Shakespeare contrasts fighting with Romeo’s newfound love for Tybalt. This effectively detaches Romeo emotionally from his contemporary crowd , highlighting his character development; the idea that love transcends societal conventions and expectations .
<i>“...O sweet Juliet,/ Thy beauty hath made me effeminate,/ And in my temper soften’d valour’s steel!”</i> . (III.i.109-111)	Analogy is with the hardness imparted to steel by the process of tempering; Romeo is presented as a blunt sword , which symbolises his emasculatation . Swords are typically associated with violence and bravery. The inability to conform to violent behaviour is considered feminine. The quote shows how Juliet has caused Romeo to change. Alliterative “t” sounds heighten the tension.
Romeo: <i>Away to heaven, respective lenity, / And fire-ey’d fury be my conduct now!</i> ” (III.i.119-120)	Fricatives of “fire-eye’d fury” accentuate the harshness of the dialogue . Shakespeare juxtaposes “heaven” with descriptions of hell , “fire-ey’d fury” to emphasise the conflict between mercy and revenge .
Romeo: <i>O, I am fortune’s fool.</i> ” (III.i.132)	Simple sentence underline’s Romeo’s subjugation to “fortune” ; Romeo’s language proress have been diminished to an unimpressive syntax . Romeo makes himself the object , “fortune’s fool” , which communicates his passive stance on life and his inability to accept responsibility for his actions. “Fortune” , was perceived as a woman during the Elizabethan era, thus “fortune” may also refer to Juliet in this instance.
<i>“For exile hath more terror in his look,/ Much more than death. Do not say ‘banishment!’”</i> (III.iii.13-14)	Shakespeare personifies “exile” to accentuate Romeo’s fear. Half internal rhymes “more” and “terror” draws attention to these words to signify fear. Imperative “Do not say...” shows Romeo’s violent reaction to his punishment.



<p>“Romeo: There is no world without Verona walls,/ But purgatory, torture, hell itself.”. (III.iii.17-18)</p>	<p>Shakespeare shows Romeo’s hyperbolic manner of thought and over exaggerated view of the world as he says, “there is no world without Verona walls”.</p> <p>“...purgatory, torture, hell...” is an auxesis, as the words ascend in intensity.</p> <p>The religious semantic field illustrates how Romeo views the external world as biblical damnation.</p> <p>“Purgatory”, quickly escalates into “torture” then “hell” which implies that banishment does not mean atonement but rather eternal punishment.</p>
<p>“Friar Lawrence: Thy tears are womanish, thy wild acts denote/ The unreasonable fury of a beast.” (III.iii.110-111)</p>	<p>“unreasonable fury of a beast”, is a metaphor used to describe Romeo’s irrational nature.</p> <p>“Womanish” conveys the patriarchal society in which the text is set and written, as</p> <p>Friar Lawrence exposes Romeo’s loss of self, by describing him as “womanish”, describing his actions as “wild”, and drawing an analogy to a beast, implying a level of dehumanisation.</p>
<p>“I must be gone and live, or stay and die”. (III.v.11)</p>	<p>Monosyllabic phrasing which is not for Romeo. This shows character development, as it signifies a new maturity and understanding, unlike oxymoronic turmoil.</p> <p>Compound patterning of “gone and live”, and “stay and die”, emphasise the conflict that Romeo is faced with.</p> <p>Internal rhyme between first person pronoun “I” and “die”, foreshadows Romeo’s death. The self represented by “I” is inextricably linked to death. Shown by the verb “die”.</p> <p>Iambic pentameter effectively stresses the key words of the line, “must”, “gone”, “live”, “stay” and “die”.</p>
<p>“Is it e’en so? Then I defy you, stars!” (V.i.24)</p>	<p>Caesura “...so? Then I...” indicates an assertion of agency and self-autonomy, in order to defy the will of the heavens, which is symbolised by the “stars”. Therefore, Shakespeare creates the conflict between the individual and fate.</p> <p>Romeo’s belief that he can “defy the stars” suggests a self-assured hubris. In Greek Mythology hubris is followed by</p>



	<p>nemesis, fate and destruction. This echoes the structure of the play as Romeo's defiance against the stars, leads to his destruction. The use of broken syntax in the line elucidates his internal turmoil.</p>
<p><i>"By heaven, I will tear thee joint by joint,/ And strew this hungry churchyard with thy limbs./ The time and my intents are savage-wild,"</i> (V.iii.35-37)</p>	<p>The "graveyard" is anthropomorphised, as it is described as "hungry".</p> <p>"Intents" being "savage-wild", denotes Romeo's detachment from his humanity, which results in isolation.</p> <p>Violent images of breaking down the human body, connotes a displacement of Romeo's psyche.</p>
<p><i>"Thou detestable maw, thou womb of death,/ Gorg'd with the dearest morsel of the earth,/ Thus I enforce thy rotten jaws to open,/ And in despite I'll cram thee with more food."</i> (V.iii.45-49)</p>	<p>Paradoxical image of the "womb of death", as "womb" is associated with life. Therefore, this image acts as an inversion- there is no life, only death.</p> <p>"I enforce..." is a powerful command, that seems to be violating the body of the tomb.</p> <p>Semantic field of the dismembered body, "maw", "womb", "death", is a subversion of Petrarchan love poetry, which focuses on body parts of the object of desire.</p>
<p><i>"... O here/ will I set up my everlasting rest,/And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars/ From this world-wearied flesh..."</i> (V.iii.109-112)</p>	<p>"...shake the yoke" means to "resist the domination"- Romeo once again attempts to defy fate.</p> <p>The enjambment of this quotation hints at the speed of Romeo's thought, which is arguably rash and irrational. It suggests the inevitability of ending this soliloquy, which finishes with Romeo's death.</p>

