



# *ROMEO & JULIET*

Thematic Analysis

Year 10 English

May 2011

# KEY THEMES:

- ◉ Love: the many manifestations or forms of love: courtly, physical, passionate, spiritual, platonic.
- ◉ Hate: death and violence permeate the play but are always connected with passion
- ◉ Fate: "a greater power than we can contradict" - how we are not always or fully in control of our own lives
- ◉ Authority - of parents · of the law; · of the Prince, of society.
- ◉ Youth and age - the folly of youth vs the wisdom of adulthood



LOVE



# THEME OF LOVE:

- ◉ First and foremost it is a play about LOVE
- ◉ Romeo initially portrays courtly love with his pining for Rosaline (Act 1 scene 1) - a superficial, childish form of love
- ◉ This quickly changes to passionate, irrational adolescent love when he first meets Juliet (1.5)
- ◉ Love becomes a violent, ecstatic, overpowering force that supersedes values, loyalties to family and rational thought.
  - “Deny thy father and refuse thy name” (2.2.)
  - “My only love sprung from my only hate!” (1.5.)

# LOVE:

- ◉ Love causes R & J to act irrationally:
  - Examples: Romeo abandons Mercutio & Benvolio to go to Juliet's Garden; Romeo returns to Verona after his exile by the Prince for Juliet's sake
- ◉ The love between R&J is a spiritual, romantic love as indicated by the use of religious imagery when they first meet (1.5.)
- ◉ It is also described as a type of magic:
  - 'Alike bewitched by the charm of looks' (Prologue, 2.1.)

# LOVE:

- ◉ Love between R&J is too powerful for words or definition:
  - ‘But my true love is grown to such excess/I cannot sum up some of half my wealth’ (2.6.33-34)
- ◉ Death and violence are inextricably linked with the theme of love
- ◉ Love is blinding and is as overwhelming as hate can be.
- ◉ The passion between R & J is linked from the beginning with the inevitability of death as the outcome. Example: Tybalt is determined to kill Romeo at the feast at the same instance as Romeo falls in love with Juliet.
- ◉ R & J are constantly consumed with thoughts of death:
  - ‘If all else fail, myself have power to die’ (3.5.242)
  - ‘By some vile forfeit of untimely death’ (1.4.112)
- ◉ Friar Lawrence:
  - These violent delights have violent ends  
And in their triumph die, like fire and powder,  
Which, as they kiss, consume. (2.6.9-11)

# ROMEO & JULIET-

## “I’M KISSING YOU”

- Music clip

## OTHER TYPES OF LOVE:

- ◉ Nurse and Mercutio - vulgar, physical love- sexual puns and tawdry images (Act I.4.)
- ◉ Paris represents a contractual love based on familial connections only. He has a platonic love for Juliet and is marrying her 'name' only.
- ◉ Ultimately, love is a transforming factor in the play. Both hero and heroine undergo a clear change and an awakening. Romeo moves from the fickleness of courtly love to a profound and deep passion. Juliet is introduced to love and becomes resolute about her future - emerging as a strong and practical personality.



Here's much to do with hate, but more with love  
(1.1.166)

**Hate** - the two families hate each other and are constantly feuding causing many deaths. No one really knows why they are fighting as they fell out so long ago. Are they right to continue to hate even though they don't know why?



# THEME OF HATE:

- ◉ R&J's love is threatened constantly by a society full of hate
- ◉ The honour code that governs the feuding families sees the destruction of Romeo, Juliet, Mercutio, Tybalt and Paris.
- ◉ The selfless love between R&J is a strong contrast to the hate that fills Verona.



# FATE

*'A pair of star-crossed lovers'*

A common belief that your future was mapped out by the stars and that Fate determined your life.

# THEME OF FATE:

- ◉ Mechanism of fate works in all of the events surrounding R&J:
  - The family feud
  - The encounter with the servant who cannot read
  - Romeo's arm coming between Tybalt and Mercutio in the fight scene
  - Friar Lawrence's letter being waylaid
  - The timing of Romeo's suicide and Juliet's awakening
- ◉ These events are not merely coincidences but manifestations of fate that bring about the unavoidable outcome of R&J's deaths.

# QUOTATIONS ON FATE:

- ◉ O God, I have an ill-divining soul!  
Methinks I see thee, now thou art so low,  
As one dead in the bottom of a tomb.  
(Juliet, 3.5,54-56)
- ◉ Or if you do not, make the bridal bed  
In that dim monument where Tybalt lies.  
(Juliet, 3.5,202-203)
- ◉ This day's black fate on more days doth depend  
This but begins the woe others must end (Romeo, 3.1,110-111)
- ◉ I dreamt my lady came and found me dead (Romeo,5.1,6)
- ◉ Then I defy you, stars! (Romeo,5.1,24)
- ◉ A greater power than we can contradict  
Hath thwarted our intents (Friar Lawrence, 5.3,153-154)

# DEATH VS LIFE:

- ◉ Death is never far away in the divided world of Verona
- ◉ Images of death: ‘death-marked’, ‘untimely death’, ‘death-bed’, ‘canker death’, ‘Cold death’, ‘death-darting eye’, ‘cruel Death’, ‘present death’
- ◉ Death is personified throughout as a powerful connection between hate and violence and ultimately, passion.
- ◉ A vivid metaphor of Death as Juliet’s bridegroom is spoken by Capulet:
  - ‘Death is my son-in-law, Death is my heir’ (4.5.38-39)

# YOUTH VS AGE:

- ◉ There are contrasts throughout between the cautious, mature wisdom and the impetuous emotions of youth.
- ◉ Example: Romeo's passion 'I stand on sudden haste' is contrasted with the Friar's advice to 'love moderately, long love doth so'.
- ◉ The influence of each of the adult characters on the fate of R&J is important.
- ◉ Question: Is the fate of Romeo and Juliet a result of irresponsible actions undertaken by adults such as the Nurse and Friar Lawrence?

# INDIVIDUAL VS SOCIETY:

- ◉ Lord Capulet represents the familial power held by the father with importance placed on family honour.
- ◉ R&J struggle against public and social institutions that oppose their love e.g. families, law and order, religion, masculine honour.
- ◉ They renounce their “names” and resort to the cover of night (darkness and privacy) in order to escape the public world.
  - O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?  
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.
- ◉ Their suicide is a result of their realisation that they cannot escape their public world and their family names.





## Minor Themes:

**Loyalty** - Some characters have certain loyalties, like the Nurse to Juliet, the Friar to Romeo and The Montagues and Capulets to their own blood relatives. These loyalties become hard to maintain when certain decisions have to be made.



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**Honesty** - Many of the characters lie and deceive to get what they want such as The Friar, Romeo and Juliet. How far would you go to get what you wanted in life?  
Do a few lies here and there matter?

# ACTIVITY:

- ◉ Look at each quote on the handout.
- ◉ Note any literary devices used such as metaphor, personification, simile, allusion, alliteration etc.
- ◉ Does this quote reflect any of the play's themes?
- ◉ Use this quote bank for your exam preparation.