

Sample Essay

Romeo and Juliet

Romeo and Juliet

Read the following extract from Act 1 Scene 5 of *Romeo and Juliet* and then answer the question that follows.

At this point in the play, Romeo and Juliet meet each other for the first time at the Capulet house.

ROMEO

If I profane with my unwortheiest hand
This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this,
My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.

JULIET

- 5 Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,
Which mannerly devotion shows in this,
For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,
And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.

ROMEO

Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?

JULIET

- 10 Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.

ROMEO

O then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do:
They pray, grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.

JULIET

Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake.

ROMEO

Then move not while my prayer's effect I take.

- 15 Thus from my lips, by thine, my sin is purged.

JULIET

Then have my lips the sin that they have took.

ROMEO

Sin from my lips? O trespass sweetly urged!

Give me my sin again.

JULIET

You kiss by th'book.

0 2

Starting with this conversation, explore how Shakespeare presents the relationship between Romeo and Juliet.

Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents their relationship in this conversation
- how Shakespeare presents the relationship between Romeo and Juliet in the play as a whole.

[30 marks]
AO4 [4 marks]

- **Intro:** their relationship is one of intense physical desire and but possibly it is too strong which is why it burns out.
- **Para 1:** their relationship is intense and hasty. They have a lot of physical desire
- **Para 2:** the extract foreshadows the downfall of their relationship.
- **Para 3:** their relationship is too intense, and it ends as quickly as it begins. They cannot escape their fate.

This scene establishes the immense physical desire that Romeo and Juliet feel for each other. Shakespeare demonstrates their relationship to be profoundly intense and in doing so he subtly foreshadows its dramatic end.

Hasty, intense and passionate are all words that one might use to describe the relationship that is shown between Romeo and Juliet in this scene. Shakespeare explores the two lovers' intense yet forbidden desire for one another through his use of an extended metaphor of religion he portrays it as such. Romeo names his lips to be "two blushing pilgrims", the juxtaposition between the word "blushing", which has sexual connotations, and "pilgrims" which has religious ones, represents the dichotomy between the lover's physical desire and their inability to openly be together due to social and familial stigma. Juliet extends Romeo's metaphor of pilgrims and talks of their "lips that they must use in prayer". The extended metaphor of religion for love is demonstrative of how the two must be obligated to hide their passion because of their feuding families, thus they must speak with religious imagery, as though it is their secret form of communication. This is compounded with the use of iambic pentameter which adds an element of wit to their conversation, showing them to be extremely compatible. Their relationship is presented as intensely intimate but also extremely hasty as well, given the short amount of time they have been acquainted for. It was conventional, during the Elizabethan era, for women to remain chaste until their wedding night. Thus, for Juliet to talk of and later kiss Romeo as she does so enthusiastically, would involve a huge amount of risk and vulnerability, which is demonstrative of the intense and intimate nature of their relationship.

The intensity of the lovers' passion in this extract, however, foreshadows their later tragic downfall. Romeo asserts "lest faith turn to despair", juxtaposing "faith" against "despair" and unknowingly foreshadowing the events of the play. Given the placement of the prologue, this moment is dramatically ironic; the audience know that faith will ultimately turn to despair for the lovers and thus this moment is tragic, and the play is true to its genre. Juliet declares "give me my sin again" which evokes themes of greed and overindulgence. Furthermore, the word "sin" as a metaphor for their kiss portrays it to be immoral and bad. It evokes religious imagery which reminds us that their kiss is an actual sin in the eyes of society, making the world a double entendre. The semantic field of religion that Shakespeare creates in this extract should be re-assuring for his audience, given the Elizabethan's religious nature, but rather it is ominous and foreboding which is perhaps intensified by the knowledge we receive in the prologue.

Indeed, the hastiness we see in this passage, eventually culminates in an intense, dramatic ending for the lovers and their relationship. Romeo maintains his tone of intense passion at the play's denouement. He exclaims "here lies Juliet, and her beauty makes this vault a feasting presence full of light", his tone intensely admiring of his love, even in death. The juxtaposition between "beauty" and "light" against the "vault" almost is a melancholic parody of his earlier witty flirting. After Romeo takes his life, Juliet follows with a parting quip "o happy dagger, this is thy sheath. There rust and let me die". Again, the contrast between "happy" and "dagger", combined with the personification of the dagger, shows Juliet to possess that same wit she did in their meeting scene. She sees the dagger as "happy" because it will unite her, in her eyes, with her love, which shows their relationship to possess the same intensity it did in the opening scenes of the play. His portrayal of Romeo and Juliet as dramatically intense linked to the English people's view of Italians. Italy was believed to be a romantic, wild country hence its relevance in the setting of the play.

Shakespeare shows the lovers relationship to be intense and intimate, almost too much so, in that they would both rather die than live without it. Thus, he cautions against such intense love, or rather warns his audience of its existence. He also demonstrates the folly of youth, which is often that they are too hasty in love.