

IGCSE Edexcel (9-1) English Literature

Romeo and Juliet: Character Profile **Juliet**

Juliet Capulet

INTRODUCTION

Juliet is the **female protagonist** of the play. She makes up the “...**pair of star-crossed lovers**...” the **tragedy** is **centred around**.

Although Juliet is only 13, Capulet **arranges her marriage** to Paris in the first scene she is mentioned. Thus, Shakespeare presents her as an **object of desire** whose only function is to be married. Although she is seen in such a **reductive** way, the character displays **complexity and maturity** which **contrasts** with her **young age**.

The protagonist can be perceived as **an anomaly** in the play, as she is the only character who attempts to reject the **societal pressures** she faces: she insists on **marrying for love** and **takes action** against her **circumstances**. Juliet becomes the **catalyst** that causes the **metamorphosis of Romeo** from a **Petrarchan lover** to a **Shakespearean lover**. Ultimately, the two lovers meet a **tragic end**, but Juliet’s action at the end of the play signifies the lengths to which the character is able to go in order to **assert her freedom**.



CHARACTER IN CONTEXT

The Nurse

Juliet’s close relationship with her Nurse directly contrasts with how distant she is with her mother. This reflects how many upper-class mothers did not raise their own children. Instead, the Nurse carries out the **role** of the **traditional mother**; she gives Juliet advice, looks after her and even elaborates that she breastfed Juliet. This can be seen in the quote, “**For I had then laid wormwood to my dug,**” outlining how Juliet’s relationship with the Nurse is more **naturally maternal** than with Lady Capulet.

Furthermore, the Nurse has to sleep in the same room as Juliet as a way of **preserving Juliet’s chastity** (her **virginity**). This shows Elizabethan **patriarchal views** of **female sexuality**. Female sexuality was seen as **dangerous**, therefore it was important to **subdue** female sexuality.

Sonnet form

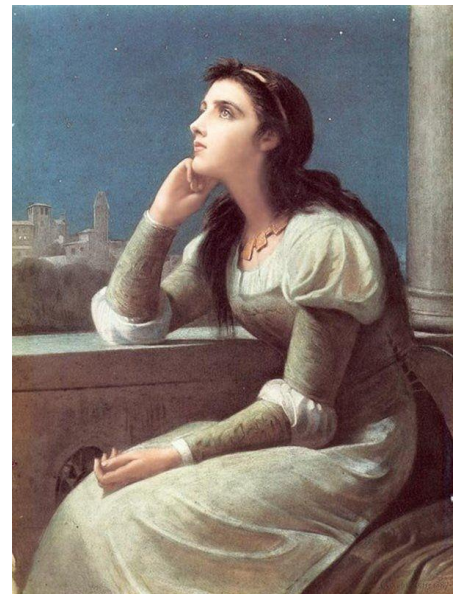
Traditionally, the **sonnet form** was used by men to write about women. The women were usually portrayed as **objects** within the poems and therefore had **no agency**. However, Shakespeare **subverts** the form as Juliet, a female character, speaks to Romeo in the sonnet form. Juliet’s ability to communicate with Romeo on an equal footing would have been unusual at the time which

would have shown the audience that she wasn't a stereotypical Elizabethan woman. In this play, although still written by Shakespeare himself, Juliet participates in **constructing** the Sonnet form, for example, the first 14 lines of dialogue between Romeo and Juliet is a sonnet.

Shakespeare thus allows a woman, who is seen as an object by the male characters within the play, to become the subject within this dynamic. Through giving his female character agency Shakespeare's use of the sonnet **subverts the patriarchal dominance** over the form. Through giving his female character a typically male voice Shakespeare has allowed female agency to take place within the play. (Shakespeare gives many of his female characters agency, can you think of other plays he has written where this is the case?)

Feminist messages

Shakespeare conveys a dynamic between men and women within the play which could be considered feminist. Although Mercutio finishes Romeo's rhymes with elaborate **misogynistic lines**, Juliet completes his rhymes with **wit and intelligence**, contrary to the sexist attitudes of the time. Therefore Juliet is an **atypical portrayal** of an Elizabethan woman, as she **transcends** the **cultural and societal boundaries** of her time. Refusing to be subjected or reduced to her circumstances, modern critics may even argue that Juliet is a **proto-feminist character**, that attempts to break down the patriarchy, and **reclaim her own fate**.



Religion

The theme of religion is **explored ambivalently** (meaning with mixed emotion) in the play: Juliet both **upholds religion and subverts it**.

- Juliet's presence in the play highlights how **worshipping** and **idolising** a person (i.e Rosaline) can be detrimental as it leads to isolation for Romeo.
- Juliet describes Romeo as **"the god of my idolatry"**. Her reference to **"god"** implies she **perpetuates love** as a **religious experience**. Whereas Shakespeare's use of the **noun "idolatry"** illuminates the dangers of such a love.
- Furthermore, Juliet preserves **religious ideals** as she makes it clear that she wants to be married before continuing her relationship with Romeo.
- However, she ultimately commits the most **sacrilegious act** by committing suicide which is considered a sin in the Bible. The Elizabethan audience, who was extremely religious, would have been shocked by this. Therefore, Juliet allows readings of both religious **conformism** and **dissidence**.

Gender Roles

The **feminine** and the **masculine** are contrasted greatly in the play. Most of the men have scenes set in **the outdoors** (such as the duel between Mercutio and Tybalt, Romeo hiding in the groves). However, Juliet's scenes often **take place indoors**. This is displayed in many productions of the play, as it demonstrates the **domesticity** Juliet is **subjected** to. Thus setting and spaces become a **physical representation** of the masculine and the feminine.

Despite being female, Juliet is a figure who can be considered equal to Romeo within the play. She is seen as being just as intelligent as she **finishes Romeo's rhymes** which only Mercutio and Benvolio are seen doing; this can be seen in **Act 1 Scene 5** when the lovers first meet. This indicates that Juliet is well educated, as she is able to keep up with men who would have been privileged with an education. Thus, Juliet can be seen as a **revolutionary character**, who **does not perpetuate** the **narrative archetype** she has been written into. Unlike most women of her status, she **rejects societal expectations** and **rules** in order to pursue her love with Romeo.

Violence

Juliet is the **antidote** to the violence presented within the play. 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** in the play.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS & CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

- **Love** - Juliet is the **epitome** of **Shakespearean love**. This form of love is not one of **unrequited self-conscious suffering**, but rather a **complete and romantic relationship**. Juliet is the foil to **"Rosaline"**, who symbolises the **abstract concept** of perfect love. This can be seen in how Juliet **reciprocates** love. The physical act of kissing when she meets Romeo means that the character embodies a **physical, tangible, real love**. The dialogue between Romeo and Juliet, where they finish each other's rhymes or complete the rhyme scheme of a **Shakespearean sonnet**, signifies their **compatibility** (look below to quote bank for a complete analysis). Thus, Juliet is the embodiment of a love that **undermines** the **tradition** of **Petrarchan courtly love**. **Modern feminists** would encourage a reading that Juliet is a **sexually liberated, self-autonomous lover**, who is **not subservient** to her male counterpart but is in fact his **equal**.
- **Fate** - Juliet is faced by the challenge of **arbitrary fate**: she is a Capulet and Romeo is a Montague, she has been arranged to marry Paris, and she is a woman who has very **little freedom** to make her own choices in life. Yet, Shakespeare has given Juliet **agency** within the play which allows her to confront and overcome these obstacles to be with her one true love, Romeo. She understands that Romeo is, **"[her] only love sprung from [her] only hate"**. She encourages him to **"deny thy father and refuse thy name"** showing how she **rejects** their **circumstance**. Juliet ignites the plot to avoid marrying Paris and instead persuades Friar Lawrence to help her marry Romeo. These acts show her as a strong woman who refuses to be **confined** by the **boundaries of gender rules**. Ultimately, her suicide can be interpreted as a **defiant act against fate and the society** she inhabits. She makes an active choice to establish arguably a form of freedom from a fate that has

destroyed her life- she takes charge of her own life. Juliet's **self-autonomous nature** is antithetical to **fate**, which is the **set of conditions** she is placed within.

- **Isolation** - In contrast to Romeo, Juliet is never alone; she is never left in isolation. This can be seen in how the Nurse constantly calls out for Juliet, or her scenes always have one other character present. To what extent this is intended is debatable, however, this does symbolise Juliet's **lack of freedom and privacy**. Being alone does not always mean isolation, however, it can be an indication of feeling isolated. Isolation can be seen as an attempt at **creating a place for oneself**, therefore a lack of this suggests that Juliet does not have the freedom to construct her own space. Her final act of taking action alone and detaching herself from her family and the Nurse connotes an **emotional maturity and growth**.
- **Opposition** - Juliet's journey within the play is full of opposing forces; **antithetical themes** such as **Hate and Love, Life and Death, become inextricably linked**. Juliet's love stems out of hate, Romeo, and her relationship with Romeo leads to her death. Thematically Juliet is **presented as liminal**, as she is caught between two states. The fact that she is in between **adulthood** and **childhood** is evidence for her liminality. Through this Shakespeare is able to develop a **complex character** which is four-dimensional and does not simply adhere to simple, superficial themes.

Relationships with other characters



Romeo | 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 potently strong, obviously demonstrated by how they both end of committing suicide as a result.

Lord Capulet | Throughout the course of the play their **father-daughter** relationship changes drastically. The first time the audience meets Juliet's father he acts as an **overprotective** father who is just trying to shield his daughter from the world. He calls her a **"stranger in this world"** and tells Paris that he will only give Paris his **blessing** if Juliet chooses to be with him. This suggests that Lord Capulet is a **progressive father**, not one that orders his family around even when the Elizabethan audience believed that he had the right to. However, this **drastically** changes after Tybalt's death and Lord Capulet demands that Juliet must marry Paris, saying that if she refuses he will **disown** her. It is clear that their relationship is **complicated** but it is also clear that Lord Capulet greatly cares for his daughter and only reacts when he is challenged.

Lady Capulet | Their relationship is essentially **non-existent**. The only time in which the audience sees an exchange between the mother and daughter is when Lady Capulet **must** talk to her daughter or is **sent by her husband** to talk to her. Lady Capulet and Juliet are also **opposites** of each other; everything that Lady Capulet wants, Juliet does not. While her mother was married and with a child at Juliet's age, Juliet is not even **"dream(ing)"** of it which suggests that Juliet is an independent woman. However, it could be argued that the way in which Juliet becomes **infatuated** with a man at a young age shows her to be **more like her mother** than previously thought.

The Nurse | The Nurse is the **maternal figure** for Juliet within the play. Their **strong bond** is a result of the fact that she has been Juliet's **'wet nurse'** meaning that she has been with Juliet since Juliet was breastfeeding as a baby. Throughout the play, the Nurse remains supportive of Juliet, even helping to make plans for Romeo and Juliet's **marriage ceremony**. It can be argued that the Nurse is an accomplice to fate as without her the lovers may have never been able to have the relationship they had for as long as they did.

The Friar | The Friar is always a point of contact for advice for the lovers. However, it is through his plan that the lovers die which is quite **ironic**. Like the Nurse, the Friar is a **tool for fate**. The Friar is instrumental in Juliet's life as she seeks him out for advice, he also comes up with the plan and gives her the potion which **ignites the sequence of events**.

Paris | They don't really have a relationship, and what they do have is incredibly **one-sided** on Paris' part. He represents the **duty** that is inevitably a part of a young Elizabethan's woman's life.

Tybalt | Tybalt is Juliet's cousin who is dedicated to protecting their **family honour**.

JULIET QUOTE BANK

| Quote | Analysis |
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| <p>Capulet: <i>“My child is yet a stranger in the world,/ She hath not seen the change of fourteen years;”</i> (1.ii.8-9)</p> | <p>Shakespeare emphasises how Juliet is stuck in a period between childhood and adulthood: Capulet describes her as a “stranger”, yet discusses her forthcoming marriage to Paris.</p> <p>This alludes to how Juliet is constantly caught between opposing forces. Juliet is only 13, which was still an uncommon age to get married in Shakespeare’s time.</p> |
| <p>Nurse: <i>“...Thou wilt fall backwards when thou hast more wit,/ Wilt thou not, Jule?”</i> (1.ii.43-44)</p> | <p>Shakespeare illustrates how patriarchal Verona is, as the Nurse and her husband had discussed Juliet reaching sexual maturity even when she was a child.</p> <p>This highlights how Juliet has always been seen as an object to be married off.</p> <p>The use of the rhetorical question is ironic, as Juliet is not being given a choice. It rather cements the inevitability of Juliet’s circumstance.</p> |
| <p>Lady Capulet: <i>“Speak briefly. Can you like of Paris, love?/ Juliet: I’ll look to like, if looking liking move./ But no more deep will I endart mine eye/ Than your consent gives strength to make it fly.”</i> (1.iii.97-100)</p> | <p>Dialogue indicates her emotional maturity and headstrong nature- she rejects the ideals that society propagates. Shakespeare uses half-rhyme to reply to Lady Capulet’s question, which illustrates Juliet’s dissidence. It also foreshadows her future rebellion against her family and society.</p> <p>Active verbs used with prominent first-person pronoun, “I’ll look to like...”, conveys an assertion of agency. Juliet makes her own decision, thus opposing the forces of oppression- her family, and the patriarchy.</p> <p>This means Juliet is atypical for her time, where women were conditioned into subjugation and submission.</p> |
| <p>Romeo: <i>“O she doth teach the torches to burn bright!...As a rich jewel in an Ethiop’s ear-”</i> (1.v.43-52)</p> | <p>Regular rhyming couplets heighten the feeling of love - they are two lines fit together as a singular unit/ anatomy. This suggests Juliet is able to reciprocate Romeo’s feelings. 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”. Furthermore “dove[s]” generally have biblical connotations of good luck and crows have connotations of bad luck.</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. Shakespeare also portrays the</p> |

objectification of Juliet, with the **metaphor** “As a rich jewel in an Ethiop’s ear-”.

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| <p>Romeo [To Juliet]: <i>“If I profane with my unworhiest hand. This holy shrine, the gentle fine is this: My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.”</i> (I.v.92-95)</p> | <p>Throughout this whole exchange, religious imagery and religious allusion are used which typifies Romeo and Juliet’s love as something sacred. Pilgrims were religious travellers who went on a pilgrimage which is a religious journey to a place of spiritual importance, for example, Christians in the Elizabethan time up until the present day still go to pilgrimages to Israel which is known as the Holy Land. Shakespeare uses an extended metaphor of pilgrims to suggest that Juliet’s body is the Holy land and that Romeo is the pilgrim trying to pursue Juliet.</p> |
| <p>Juliet: <i>“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.”</i> (I.v.96-98)</p> | <p>Juliet is saying here that when Pilgrims travel to the Holy land all the pilgrims need to do is touch the statues of the saints and that is enough for them. It can be suggested that Juliet is trying to follow the courtly lover rules of a woman as she tries to play ‘hard to get’ as it is what any self-respecting woman at the time would do.</p> |
| <p>Juliet: <i>“My grave is like to be my wedding bed”.</i> (I.v.134)</p> | <p>Shakespeare showcases a meta-theatrical foreshadowing of the play’s events. Freudian ideas of eros and thanatos can be identified in this quote; love and sex lead to death.</p> <p>Shakespeare allegorically links the “wedding bed”, a symbol of intimacy, sex and love, to a grave which is associated with death and decay. Demonstrates how oppositions are intertwined in the play.</p> |
| <p>Juliet: <i>“O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?/ Deny thy father and refuse thy name;”</i> (II.ii.33-34)</p> | <p>Juliet reveals the futile and trivial nature of the feud that separates them by acknowledging that is only due to a name. This demonstrates her wisdom and shows a more spiritual and wise understanding of the cogs of Veronian society.</p> <p>“Deny”, and “...refuse” are imperatives, which suggests a conflict with fate: she wants Romeo to take action. When she asks Romeo to “refuse [his] name”, it indicates a youthful sense of idealism and naivety. This highlights two sides of her character, her wisdom and her youthfulness; she is intelligent but naive.</p> |

Juliet: “If they do see thee, they will murder thee.”
(II.ii.70)

Shakespeare establishes Juliet’s character as a **reasoned** and **realistic** person.
Her transition to **simple one-liners** emphasises her cautious thinking. The use of the **dominant monosyllabic wording** adds **realism and steadfast nature** to her character.
“**Murder**” is the only word that is **not monosyllabic**, indicating it’s importance in the line. The **presence of violence** drives this line and unlike love, it is not poetic, but real and definite like the **simple syntax** of the line.

Juliet: “O swear not by the moon, th’inconstant moon.../ Do not swear at all/ Or if thou wilt, swear by thy gracious self”
(II.ii.109-113)

Shakespeare presents Juliet as **favouring actions** as she rejects the **ideas of traditional fake love** and encourages Romeo to follow a love **more spontaneous** and **unrehearsed**.
Juliet’s **half-line imperative riposte** “**Do not swear...**” emphasises her decisive nature.
Shakespeare’s **monosyllabic phrases** highlight how assertive she is; this is **antithetical to Romeo’s lyrical language**.
The **caesura** in line 13, puts more weight in the **imperative command** of Juliet’s. This means she is **not a passive participant** in this event.

Juliet: “O, I have bought the mansion of love,/ But not possess’d it, and though I am sold/ Not yet enjoy’d...”
(III.ii.26-28)

The **half-rhymes** “**possess’d**” and “**enjoy’d**” are placed in the **internal lines**, which means that Juliet’s **experience** has been **incomplete**. By describing herself as “**sold**”, the character is seen as **objectifying herself**.
The **mercantile lexicon** is delivered by Juliet. The character informs audiences that she is **self-aware of her commodification**. She is the “**mansion**”, a **transactional object** that can be “**bought**” and “**sold**”.
Spondaic substitution, “**O,I...**” puts stress on the **first-person pronoun “I”**, and this is dominant in the section.
This quote is one of the rare moments when Juliet is by herself; in this isolated soliloquy, she is able to **assert her “self”**- indicated by the prominent “**I**”.

Juliet: “Can heaven be so envious?”
(III.ii.40)

Shakespeare in this **rhetorical question** conveys the **dichotomy** between **fate** and the **individual**.
This shows how **physical matters** have no effect on love, but only spiritual alluded to by “**heaven**”. Echoes the idea of how the **macrocosm affects** and **impacts the microcosm**. The heavens dictate the events on earth.

Juliet: “What storm is this that blows so contrary/ Is Romeo slaughter’d? and is Tybalt dead? My dearest cousin, and my dearer lord?/ Then, dreadful trumpet, sound the general doom...”

Syntactical patterning “**Is Romeo...**”, “**...is Tybalt**”, sets up the two characters as oppositions. The **Low-frequency lexis** used to refer to Romeo, indicates that **Romeo is more significant** to Juliet. The **superlative “dearest cousin”**, is **negated by the comparative “dearer lord”**, highlighting Romeo means more to Juliet.
Shakespeare uses the **apocalyptic images** to **describe the death of Tybalt of Romeo**. Their supposed deaths signal the end of her two worlds - the **romantic** and the **familial**. The two characters referred to, allude to the **dichotomy between familial and romantic love**.

(III.ii.64-68)

Displays the **internal conflict** in Juliet's mind; she will have to choose one.

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| <p>Juliet: “Beautiful tyrant, fiend angelical!/ Dove-feather’d raven, wolvish-ravering lamb!/ Despised substance of divinest show!” (III.ii.75-77)</p> | <p>The sequential use of oxymorons for example “Beautiful tyrant”, “fiend angelical”, conveys the conflict that plagues Juliet. Echoes Romeo’s Petrarchan suffering; in this instance Juliet laments three opposing familial and romantic love.</p> <p>Revolutionary for the Elizabethan era- Juliet is a complex character like Romeo. She is able to use oxymorons attributed to Romeo, and is able to use language to invert Romeo’s imagery, “Dove-feather’d raven”.</p> <p>This shows her proficiency in language that educated men had. In order to purportedly hurt Romeo, she uses his language against him. Broken syntax evokes the violence of this turmoil- makes the dialogue more potent, and expresses her anger.</p> |
| <p>Juliet: “O Fortune, Fortune, all men call thee fickle;...Be fickle, Fortune:/ For then I hope thou wilt not keep him long...” (III.v.60-64)</p> | <p>Anthropomorphism of “Fortune”, makes fate’s presence more real. Fricatives of “Fortune” with “fickle”, draws attention to these words. The form of address “thou”, shows that Juliet is on equal footing with “Fortune”. This could be attributed to the fact that “Fortune” was personified as a female during the Elizabethan era. Indicates a relationship between Juliet and “Fortuna”, who are both women.</p> |
| <p>Juliet: “Good father, I beseech you on my knees,/ Hear me with patience but to speak a word./ She kneels down.” (III.v.158-59)</p> | <p>Stage direction of “kneel[ing]” makes this action religious- like praying.</p> <p>The word “father”, both literally means biological father, but also the religious holy “father”, who is God.</p> <p>This indicates that Capulet is in charge and dominates the family, whilst Juliet must be subservient.</p> |
| <p>Capulet: “Hang thee, young baggage, disobedient wretch!” (III.v.160)</p> | <p>The asyndetic listing of pejorative epithets, “young baggage,” “disobedient wretch” creates the effect of the torrent of insults.</p> <p>Ironic, as this is the only time the relationship resembles a normal family - whilst Capulet is chastising Juliet. Broken syntax emphasises Capulet’s fury.</p> |
| <p>Juliet: “...And what I spake, I spake it to my face.”/ Paris: Thy face is mine , and thou hast slander’d it.” (IV.i.22-36)</p> | <p>The use of stichomythia and riposte builds an intensity between Paris and Juliet, which is antithetical to Juliet’s interaction with Romeo.</p> <p>The clever evasion of Paris’ questions and comments from Juliet helps to show her maturity. It also conveys her highly moral nature as she doesn’t lie to Paris.</p> <p>The use of stichomythia also indicates her quick minded nature and wit.</p> |

Paris views Juliet as a possession, “*Thy face is mine*” shows **marriage for men meant ownership** of their wives.

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| <p>Juliet: “<i>I pray thee leave me to myself tonight.../To move the heavens to smile upon my state,/ Which, well thou knowest, is cross and full of sin.</i>” (IV.iii.2-5)</p> | <p>This shows her final detachment from the two maternal figures of her life. It indicates that she asserts her independence and growth into a new level of emotional maturity. Use of dramatic irony, “<i>thou knowest</i>”, exposes how Juliet is attempting to make the nurse feel guilty. Maidens had to sleep with Nurses as a symbol of preserving their virginity. This alludes to patriarchal pursuit of controlling female sexuality.</p> |
| <p>Juliet: “<i>...O happy dagger,/ Taking Romeo’s dagger/ This is thy sheath;/ Stabs herself/ there rust, and let me die.</i>” (V.iii.169-170)</p> | <p>Uses inverted metaphors; the dagger is personified as “<i>happy</i>”, whereas her body becomes its “<i>sheath</i>”. This shows the idea that love and death are inextricably linked. Shakespeare lexically cohesively phrases Juliet’s dialogue with monosyllables, which highlights her affirmative and assertive quality. In Roman tradition, stabbing was the most honourable and noble form of suicide. Thus, Shakespeare presents Juliet as a tragic hero. Tragedies are often linked with the conflict between individual action and arbitrary fate. This is her only act of violence, but is also the play’s final act of violence. Juliet’s action, thus exerts a change in society. Shakespeare therefore is promoting the idea that action is necessary to bring about a new order.</p> |