**‘Romeo and Juliet’ by William Shakespeare: Dramatis Personae**

The House of Capulet

**Capulet Lady Capulet Juliet**

**Tybalt** (Cousin) **Nurse** (Juliet’s confidante)

**Peter** (Illiterate servant tasked with delivering invitations – instrument of Fate)

The House of Montague

**Montague Lady Montague Romeo**

**Benvolio** (Cousin) **Friar Lawrence** (Romeo’s confessor and ‘medical’ expert)

**Balthasar** (Romeo’s personal servant who misinforms him in Mantua that Juliet is really dead

– instrument of Fate)

**Prince Escalus** (Ruler of Verona)

**Mercutio** (A relative of the Prince, Romeo’s best friend, killed by Tybalt)

**Paris** (A relative of the Prince, Juliet’s suitor, promoted by the Capulets, killed by Romeo)

**Rosaline** (Because of whom Romeo suffers ‘love melancholia’ – instrument of Fate)

**Friar John** (Fails to deliver Friar Lawrence’s message to Romeo in Mantua – instrument of Fate)

**Apothecary** (Only because of his poverty, sells Romeo the illegal lethal poison – instrument of Fate)

**The Chorus** (Informs the audience right from the start that the houses of Montague and Capulet will only be united by Romeo and Juliet committing suicide)

**Context**

**Useful phrases:** contextually, the Elizabethan era, Shakespeare’s audience

**Culture of Machismo (male violence & aggression):**

* Capulet & Montague feud;
* Young, armed males;
* Heightened, exaggerated concern for respect, honour and reputation.

**Love Melancholia:**

* Romeo pining for Rosaline;
* Unrequited love;
* Romeo shows typical symptoms – solitude, sighing, writing poems.

**Marriage:**

* Arranged marriages amongst the ruling elite were the norm;
* Therefore Capulet a good not a bad father (at first) by not forcing Juliet to marry Paris;
* Love was not a primary consideration. Wealth and status were seen as more important;
* Juliet’s age (13) was not abnormal – she is the same age as when her mother gave birth to her.

**Religion:**

* Shakespeare’s audience was strictly Christian;
* R & J’s first words form a love Sonnet using ‘profane’ images of worship such as ‘shrine’, ‘palmer’, ‘saint’, ‘prayer’, ‘sin’ to talk about kissing;
* Puritans would have been shocked (not that they were theatre-goers).

**Suicide:**

* This was seen as a mortal sin by the Church. You would go straight to hell;
* It was not so much that it was against the Commandment “Thou shalt not kill” but more that you had lost hope and therefore trust in God;
* Friar Lawrence tries to restore Romeo’s hope.

**Banishment:**

* This was a much harsher punishment than it may appear to a modern audience – the Ancient Greeks, for example, saw exile as worse than death;
* Shakespeare emphasises the idea that Romeo would rather commit suicide than leave Juliet.

**Science / medicine:**

* The initial presentation of Friar Lawrence emphasises his scientific / medical knowledge;
* It becomes very important that we accept the fictitious narcotic that Juliet drinks;
* Coleridge says that audiences should not look for faults in Shakespeare – that it is necessary to allow ourselves “a willing suspension of disbelief”.

**Shakespearean Tragedy:**

* The protagonist(s) do something wrong;
* They do not realise their wrong-doing;
* Fate / Destiny / Fortune / The Stars take control of their lives (refer to the Chorus);
* They have a moment when they recognise their error;
* They suffer;
* Those around them suffer;
* They inevitably die.