



ROMEO AND JULIET DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT MODEL ANSWER

Table of Contents

<i>DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT QUESTION</i>	2
<i>DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT MODEL ANSWER</i>	3





DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT QUESTION

Read the following passage and, in a separate document such as Google Docs, answer the questions that follow.

Sampson. My naked weapon is out; quarrel, I will back thee.

Gregory. How? turn thy back and run? [35]

Sampson. Fear me not.

Gregory. No, marry; I fear thee!

Sampson. Let us take the law of our sides; let them begin.

Gregory. I will frown as I pass by, and let them take it as they list. [40]

Sampson. Nay, as they dare. I will bite my thumb at them, which is disgrace to them if they bear it.

Abraham. Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?

Sampson. I do bite my thumb, sir. [44]

Abraham. Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?

Sampson. [Aside to Gregory.] Is the law of our side, if I say ay?

Gregory. [Aside to Sampson.] No.

Sampson. No, sir, I do not bite my thumb at you, sir; but I bite my thumb, sir.

Gregory. Do you quarrel, sir? [50]

Abraham. Quarrel, sir! No, sir.

Sampson. But if you do, sir, I am for you. I serve as good a man as you.

How is male behaviour portrayed in this extract and the play as a whole?
Write a minimum of 400 to 450 words.





DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT MODEL ANSWER

There are a number of perspectives one can take when analysing Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet', however, for the purpose of this essay, we will evaluate the play as being a form of commentary on the relationship between the ideals of masculine behaviour, love and civil disorder. 'Romeo and Juliet' can be seen as a warning against extreme values and the play remains popular today, likely as a result of its contemporary relevance; a multitude of issues present during Shakespeare's time and stressed in his play, are still in existence today.

One theme, quite absent in Brooke's writing (Shakespeare's contemporary), that Shakespeare thought important enough to be brought in three times, at the beginning, the middle and the end of the play is the evil effects of civil strife and Shakespeare's structure appears to invite the audience to contemplate how Renaissance ideals of masculinity could have contributed to civil strife. The play is dominated by the incessant conflict between the families of the Montagues and the Capulets, which Shakespeare depicts as the obstacle between the protagonists' marriage. Shakespeare's exposition foregrounds this conflict through the minor characters of Sampson and Gregory, whose immature behaviours may serve to dramatically position the audience's response to the conflict by conveying it to be ridiculous. Sampson and Gregory, as representatives of the house of Capulet, are immediately presented as comedic through their excessive machismo, false bravado and crude puns; for example, Sampson's line, 'My naked weapon is out' is a crass pun that, perhaps, portrays Sampson as a character with little intelligence and sensitivity, but which also provides the audience with a, somewhat, light-hearted start to the play in contrast to the foreboding nature of the opening Prologue. The comic nature of their characterisation makes the conflict seem absurd and pointless, however, Sampson's childish behaviour, such as 'biting his thumb' at Abraham of the Montague household sets off a chain of events that sparks an equally comedic fight in the streets between the Montagues and Capulets. If it were not for the foreshadowing nature of the opening Prologue, an audience watching Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet' for the first time may have been forgiven for thinking that the play is a comedy. All the male members of the Montague and Capulet households join the fight without even knowing what the cause was, which Shakespeare likely designed to be symbolic of the entire feud between the two families, that is, nonsensical show of male bravado. In the Prologue, Shakespeare describes the feud as an 'ancient grudge' which suggests two ideas: that the feud is extremely old and that the cause of the feud has been lost over time. Capulet's entrance reflects this idea with his very first line: 'What noise is this?' However, without a response, he immediately orders, 'Give me my long sword, ho!', suggesting that the fighting between the two families is more of a masculine ritual than anything else. Lady Capulet's comedic response, 'A crutch, a crutch! Why call you for a sword?' in response to her husband's irresponsible show of bravado further highlights the foolish nature of the feud.

However, when Prince Escalus enters and threatens that 'If ever you disturb our streets again, / Your lives shall pay the forfeit of the peace', we are reminded that the play is not a comedy but, in fact, a tragedy which requires the death of the protagonist(s). Therefore, by opening the play with comic action, Shakespeare appears to be suggesting that the male characters' overly ambitious need to display their masculinity – although absurd and hilarious - is actually a prime source of the play's tragedy. In many ways, the play's opening scene reflects the crisis of masculine identity that was prevalent during the Renaissance; although we often hear about women's struggles, ideal manhood during the Early Modern Period was nearly as rigidly defined as ideal femininity and was often challenging for men to obtain and retain. Thomas Elyot (c. 1490 - 1546), an English diplomat and scholar wrote that 'a man in his natural perfection is, 'fierce, hardy, strong in opinion and covetous of glory', while at the same time, love, it was felt, could effeminise a man as reflected by Romeo's concern that Juliet's 'Beauty has made me effeminate / and in my temper softn'd valour's steel' (3.1.115–16). Additionally, when we are introduced to him, he is running around in the woods, moping over his unrequited love for Rosaline, qualities that were the complete antithesis of ideal Renaissance manhood but





were, contrarily, the exact qualities of the ideal lovelorn hero found in the fanciful poetry and fiction of the time. These contradictory criteria for masculinity were regularly dramatized on the Renaissance stage, which often pitched different kinds of manhood against each other; for example, the lovelorn Romeo is contrasted to the other men of Verona who are aggressive and belligerent, such as Capulet who tries force Juliet to marry Paris. In many of the tragedies of the period, the men struggle to live up to the standards of masculinity or carried them to the extreme and so destroy themselves and others, just as the feud between the two families results in the deaths of both Romeo and Juliet.

Ultimately, however, these conflicting extreme ideals of masculinity can be seen as symptoms of a deeper problem; an elaborate cult of honour that was in search of divine perfection but was failing to find a practical balance had exerted a powerful grip on Early Modern society, and its effects extended beyond gender roles to all other aspects of life, including identity. Juliet recognises this in her profound 'what's in a name?' soliloquy, which questions the true value of names, the object of Capulets and Montagues' feud. On the contrary, Juliet suggests that a name is simply a label to distinguish something from another. It does not create worth nor does it create true meaning. What is important is the worth of the individual or thing because 'that which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet.' Juliet likens the rose to Romeo - Romeo is still the man she loves had he a different name; Romeo's name does not define him as a man. Just as he does through Samson and Gregory, Shakespeare uses Juliet here to expose the ridiculousness of the feud between the two families over, simply, who they are. What the feud is about is, therefore, unknown and irrelevant. Juliet's soliloquy suggests that Shakespeare believed that a name means little - it is the worth of the individual that counts; however, he illustrates how even the most trivial of actions can result in tragedy and, perhaps, therefore, Shakespeare wants us to see the play as a criticism and warning about going to extremes in beliefs such as the Early Modern beliefs about honour. In essence, he suggests that obsessions with honour were meaningless, but ultimately result in violence and if powerful individuals fight each other, the whole state and the ordinary citizens will suffer. The reconciliation at the end between the two families, therefore, can be seen as the lesson of the play; peace is only achievable when we put our pride aside and see each other as family, not enemies.

