



HONOUR IN ROMEO AND JULIET 2022

Obsessions and Fears

notes taken from *RENAISSANCE DRAMA: ARDEN SHAKESPEARE* – BRINDA CHARRY

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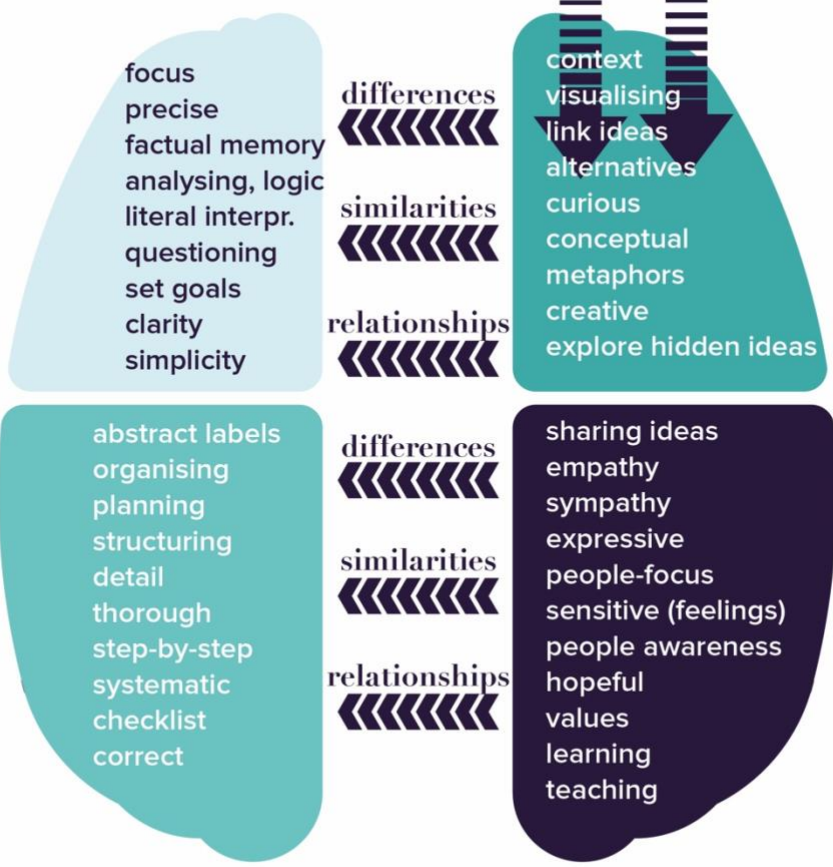




A

stored information

B



D

new information

C

RIGHT-BRAIN QUESTIONS FOR THINKING ABOUT CONTEXT

Whenever you read about context, you should try to ask the following questions

- Is this similar to something in the text(s) I'm reading?
 - What is it similar to?
 - Themes
 - Ideas
 - Characters
 - Symbols
 - Scenes
 - Incidents
 - What's the relationship between the context and my text?
 - In what way(s) is it similar?





- Why might the author have made that connection?

TEXT COLOUR CODE

- Background information
- Important information that links to text
- Examples

THE RENAISSANCE AND THE MODERN WORLD

Renaissance Europe represents one of the strongest influences on contemporary cultural heritage, however, it also constituted some profoundly antagonistic moral, social and political assumptions.

- In particular, an elaborate cult of honour had exerted a powerful grip on Early Modern Society and this is often highlighted in Shakespeare's plays.
 - Shakespeare highlights this in the first line of the prologue,
 - before the play has actually started
 - Two households, both alike in dignity, (honour/status)
 - Then in act 1, scene 1, Samson of the Capulet house starts a fight with Abraham of the Montague house by biting his thumb which somehow dishonours the Montague house:
 - I will bite my thumb at them; which is a disgrace to them, if they bear it. (SAMSON: 1.1)
 - This sets in motion a comedic fight in the streets of Verona that ultimately has tragic consequences

WHAT WAS THE RENAISSANCE?

The Renaissance was a fervent (passionate, intense) period

- 'Renaissance' is a French word meaning 'rebirth'
 - It was known for European cultural, artistic, political and economic "rebirth" following the 'dark' Middle Ages
 - Generally described as taking place from the 14th century to the 17th century, the Renaissance promoted the rediscovery of
 - Classical philosophy
 - literature
 - and art
 - from the Ancient Romans and Greeks,
 - Some of the greatest thinkers, authors, statesmen, scientists and artists in human history thrived during this era





- while global exploration opened up new lands and cultures to European commerce
 - The Renaissance is credited with bridging the gap between the Middle Ages and modern-day civilisation.

WHAT WAS THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD?

The beginning of the early modern is considered to be the end of the medieval period (also called the Middle Ages)

- this period is associated with a group of fundamental changes that occurred in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.
 - There was also a decline in the number of people holding land under the feudal system
 - Instead of getting access to land in return for military service or unpaid labour, farmers paid rent in goods or money

RELEVANT PERIODS IN ROMEO AND JULIET SIMPLIFIED

- Middle Ages (medieval period): 5th century (year 400)– 13th/14th/15th (years 1200/1300/1400) centuries
- Renaissance: 14th century (year 1500) - 17th century (year 1700)
- Early Modern period: 13th/14th/15th (years 1200/1300/1400) centuries – late 18th century (around 1780)

THE ORIGINS OF HONOUR

Historians such as Keith Thomas and Mervyn James have discussed the distinctive features of the Renaissance concept of honour.

- A notable change of emphasis took place between the medieval period and the early modern era.
 - The nobility in the Middle Ages were under the sway of the chivalric movement, in which the feudal notion of military honour played an important role.

WHAT WAS THE CHIVALRIC MOVEMENT?

Chivalry, or the chivalric code, is an informal and varying code of conduct developed between 1170 and 1220

- It was associated with knights' and gentlemen's behaviours
 - The chivalric ideal, the behavior of knights, and how they were to employ these qualities, was somewhat more distinctive
 - Chivalric knights were expected to be
 - Courteous





- speak well
- and exhibit good manners
 - they were expected to use these qualities to
 - protect those who could not protect themselves
 - use their prowess, loyalty, and generosity to defend
 - clerics
 - peasants
 - widows
 - virgins
 - orphans
 - or people who were any combination of the above
 - The more defenseless, the better
 - Presented with the opportunity to leap to someone's defense, the chivalric knight seized the opportunity gladly.

WHAT WAS HONOUR? (PART 1)

Honour, in one of its meanings, is an exclusively social virtue

- It refers to one's reputation in the community
- To one's credit as a man of integrity
- To the honours or rewards which are bestowed publicly as a testimony to one's virtue
- To glory and fame which one acquires as the result of exceptional or heroic accomplishments
- Or to the good name which is gained when one consistently behaves in a fashion which wins the respect and esteem of one's fellows

WHAT WAS HONOUR? (PART 2)

Honour also refers to one's private and personal judgment of one's own...

- Inner convictions
- And actions
 - In other words, it relates to self-esteem as much as to public approbation
 - It is this sense of self-esteem that Capulet feels is threatened when Juliet refuses to marry Paris...
 - Thank me no thankings, nor, proud me no prouds, CAPULET 3.4
 - At this point, it is easy to see Capulet as the archetypal despotic father-figure
 - However, moments later, Shakespeare asks us to have some sympathy for him when he explains his anger in a monologue:
 - God's bread! it makes me mad:
Day, night, hour, tide, time, work, play,
Alone, in company, still my care hath been
To have her match'd: and having now provided
A gentleman of noble parentage,





Of fair demesnes, youthful, and nobly train'd,
Stuff'd, as they say, with honourable parts, CAPULET 3.4

- His sense of dishonour comes from the Juliet not appreciating his efforts in finding a 'perfect husband'
 - According to the norms of their time and culture, it was the father's duty to ensure that his daughter marries someone of respectable lineage

'GIVE ME MY SWORD'

This clause, uttered by Lord Capulet in act 1, scene 1 appears to allude strongly to Renaissance ideals of masculine honour

- The sword appears to symbolize masculine bravery, a key 'virtue' of masculine honour
 - 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,
 - desirous of knowledge'.
 - The Italian author Baldassare Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* (1528) has been translated into English and outlined the skills every courtier ought to possess:
 - he had to be a soldier
 - and a horseman
 - and possess numerous other skills
 - Both Elyot and Castiglione include bravery as a necessary criterion of masculine honour and the implication is that bravery indicates a man's ability to act, in spite of fear and often violently in order to achieve honour

THE INNER vs OUTER CONFLICT OF HONOUR

Because this second meaning can be distinct from the first, it is possible that a man may paradoxically risk the loss of honour by failing to conform to the norms established by a given society which will win him the praise and esteem of his fellows in order to preserve his honor, i.e. avoid becoming dishonoured in his own eyes.

HONOUR AND NOBILITY

'Honour or nobility which the Grecians does call Eugenia, and signifieth liberal and good Birth, is nothing else but Gentrie, or the true title of Gentleman'

- Renaissance notions of nobility was complex and even contradictory, but it could be viewed from three essential perspectives





- The first of these is based on the idea of virtue and moral worth
 - It places emphasis particularly on
 - outstanding and preeminent virtue
 - superior moral excellence
 - these are manifested by undertaking lofty enterprises,
 - civil or military, in the service of the state
 - This could be one of the reasons why many of the male characters in the play resort to violent behaviour
 - In essence, it reflects the idea that men had to seek honour through lofty military enterprises, which naturally involves undertaking acts of violence
 - Symbolically, these characters may be re-enacting acts of the battlefield but within a more domestic setting, which creates a recipe for tragedy
- The second results from the inheritance of noble blood from a long line of aristocratic ancestors
 - The Prologue informs us that the play is about
 - Two households, both alike in dignity,
- Finally, there is 'nobility dative'
 - The particular titles of nobility which could be acquired by the accomplishment of deeds of outstanding public service

HIERARCHY OF HONOUR INTRO

Renaissance moralists had a hierarchical view of degrees of social superiority in the social body

- They believed that those who belonged to the highest political ranks were the exalted elite of...
 - Heroic men
 - Most of the male characters in *Romeo and Juliet* try to display heroism and bravery
 - And magnanimous men of outstanding virtue
 - 'Verona brags of him/To be a virtuous and well-governed youth.' (Capulet I.5.67–8)
 - Ironically, despite the 'ancient grudge' between the Capulets and Montagues, Capulets confesses to hearing about Romeo's virtuous qualities
 - Yet, because of the ancient grudge between the two families, which ironically appears to be about the honour of their family names, he does not approve of Romeo marrying his daughter, even though Romeo's reputation in the community suggests that he is the type of man that Capulet would like to Juliet to marry
 - In many ways, Romeo and Paris are mirror images of each other, however, Paris' family is not involved in the ancient grudge
 - Yet at the same time, he is not someone whom Juliet would like to marry

HIERARCHY OF HONOUR STRUCTURE

1. The monarch





- a. Politically and morally supreme
 - i. For example, Prince Escalus
2. The great lords
 - a. They were presumed to be...
 - i. High-minded
 - ii. Great-hearted
 - iii. Possess preeminent virtue which made them the heroes of the age
 1. For example
 - a. Lord Capulet
 - b. Lord Montague
 - c. Paris
 - i. There is a sense of irony here, because the people who were meant to be the ones that others looked up to, were in fact the ones who helped to instigate violence within their communities

HONOUR IN A MODERN VIEW

Honour, in modernity, is often seen as...

- trivial
- giving unreliable rewards
- requiring too high a price to be paid for glory
- or that glory may, particularly on the battle field, be won for actions not really laudable

HONOUR AND RANK

In a social world rigidly divided by rank, the well-born were assumed to possess virtues such as a distinctive sense of honour, magnanimity, wisdom and courage simply by dint of their noble birth.

MEDIEVAL NOTIONS OF TRAGEDY

What is the relationship between the theme and context of early modern obsessions with honour and the tragic structure that Shakespeare chose for this play?

- To try and figure this out, it helps to try and define what tragedy is
 - Medieval notions of tragedy are often not applied to drama but to narratives in general.
 1. Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* offers a definition of tragedy that primarily emphasises a fall from greatness to wretchedness.
 2. This medieval definition suggests a Christian moral: the reader is encouraged to scorn transient, earthly pleasures and glories.





- a. Perhaps, from this view, we can see Shakespeare's use of the tragic plot structure as a criticism of Romeo and Juliet's infatuation with each other
- b. However, we can also see it as a criticism of their society's obsession with honour
 - i. Whether you think that Romeo and Juliet are responsible for their own downfall or whether it is actually their parents' obsession with honour is up to you to interpret

RENAISSANCE CONVENTIONS OF TRAGEDY

Renaissance conventions of tragedy are as follows:

1. More often than not, Renaissance tragedy centred around a single figure, that of the tragic protagonist, usually male.
 - a. The tragic hero was high born, a prince or nobleman.
 - b. His high station and outstanding personality meant that his fall was all the more poignant and dramatic.
 - i. However, and more interestingly perhaps, the hero was often a conflicted figure, caught between opposing social roles and identities.
 1. Romeo is caught between his loyalty to his family's self-identity and his love for Juliet
 2. Macbeth is caught between his ambition and his political loyalty.
 2. The convention of Renaissance tragedy did require that the plays end in the death of the usually high-born protagonist.
 3. In his book *Defence of Poetry*, Sir Phillip Sidney suggests that tragedy is a didactic form, meaning it teaches morals
 - a. In the case of tragedy, from his view, it lays bare the corruption that rulers and statesmen may attempt to conceal.
 - i. From this point of view, it appears that Shakespeare is laying more of the blame at the feet of the societies in which the protagonists live
 1. In this case, we can see Shakespeare's choice of the tragic plot structure as a way of pointing the finger directly at the values of the society in which the protagonists live;
 - a. In particular, Shakespeare may be making a criticism of early modern society's obsession with honour – he appears to point this out in Friar Lawrence's monologue in act 4, scene 3 where he talks about the
 - i. The earth that's nature's mother is her tomb;
What is her burying grave that is her womb,
And from her womb children of divers kind
We sucking on her natural bosom find,
Many for many virtues excellent,
None but for some and yet all different.
O, mickle is the powerful grace that lies
In herbs, plants, stones, and their true qualities:
For nought so vile that on the earth doth live
But to the earth some special good doth give,
Nor aught so good but strain'd from that fair use
Revolts from true birth, stumbling on abuse:
Virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied;
And vice sometimes by action dignified.
 - ii.
4. Sidney argues that art, in mirroring nature, can move people to virtuous action with its stirring or admonitory examples.





5. Although Sidney's discussion of tragedy uses quasiAristotelian notions of the particular effects it can create, it also echoes the medieval notion that tragedy shows the fragility of earthly splendors.

QUOTES ABOUT HONOUR IN ROMEO AND JULIET

- Prologue
 - Two households, both alike in dignity (honour/status)
- Paris to Montague and Capulet
 - Of honourable reckoning are you both;
And pity 'tis you lived at odds so long.
But now, my lord, what say you to my suit? (1.2)
- Lady Capulet, Juliet and Nurse
 - LADY CAPULET
Marry, that 'marry' is the very theme
I came to talk of. Tell me, daughter Juliet,
How stands your disposition to be married?
 - JULIET
It is an honour that I dream not of.
 - Nurse
An honour! were not I thine only nurse,
I would say thou hadst suck'd wisdom from thy teat. (1.3)
- Romeo and Tybalt
 - ROMEO
...
Did my heart love till now? forswear it, sight!
For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night.
 - TYBALT
This, by his voice, should be a Montague.
...
Now, by the stock and honour of my kin,
To strike him dead, I hold it not a sin. (1.5)
- Juliet to Romeo
 - JULIET
Three words, dear Romeo, and good night indeed.
If that thy bent of love be honourable,
Thy purpose marriage, send me word to-morrow, (2.2)
- Mercutio to Tybalt
 - MERCUTIO
O calm, dishonourable, vile submission!
Alla stoccata carries it away.
Draws
Tybalt, you rat-catcher, will you walk? (2.3)
- Juliet and Nurse





- JULIET
O God! did Romeo's hand shed Tybalt's blood?
Nurse
It did, it did; alas the day, it did!
JULIET
...
A damned saint, an honourable villain!
O nature, what hadst thou to do in hell, (3.2)
- Juliet and Nurse
 - Nurse
There's no trust,
No faith, no honesty in men; all perjured,
...
Shame come to Romeo!
JULIET
Blister'd be thy tongue
For such a wish! he was not born to shame:
Upon his brow shame is ashamed to sit;
For 'tis a throne where honour may be crown'd
Sole monarch of the universal earth.
O, what a beast was I to chide at him! (3.2)
- Capulet
 - God's bread! it makes me mad:
Day, night, hour, tide, time, work, play,
Alone, in company, still my care hath been
To have her match'd: and having now provided
A gentleman of noble parentage,
Of fair demesnes, youthful, and nobly train'd,
Stuff'd, as they say, with honourable parts, CAPULET 3.4
- Juliet to Friar Lawrence
 - Tell me not, friar, that thou hear'st of this,
Unless thou tell me how I may prevent it:
If, in thy wisdom, thou canst give no help,
Do thou but call my resolution wise,
And with this knife I'll help it presently.
God join'd my heart and Romeo's, thou our hands;
And ere this hand, by thee to Romeo seal'd,
Shall be the label to another deed,
Or my true heart with treacherous revolt
Turn to another, this shall slay them both:
Therefore, out of thy long-experienced time,
Give me some present counsel, or, behold,
'Twixt my extremes and me this bloody knife
Shall play the umpire, arbitrating that
Which the commission of thy years and art
Could to no issue of true honour bring.
Be not so long to speak; I long to die,
If what thou speak'st speak not of remedy. (4.1)





- Juliet
 - Exeunt LADY CAPULET and Nurse
JULIET
Farewell! God knows when we shall meet again.
I have a faint cold fear thrills through my veins,
That almost freezes up the heat of life:
I'll call them back again to comfort me:
Nurse! What should she do here?
My dismal scene I needs must act alone.
Come, vial.
What if this mixture do not work at all?
Shall I be married then to-morrow morning?
No, no: this shall forbid it: lie thou there.
Laying down her dagger
What if it be a poison, which the friar
Subtly hath minister'd to have me dead,
Lest in this marriage he should be dishonour'd,
Because he married me before to Romeo?
I fear it is: and yet, methinks, it should not, (4.4)
-

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