

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

At this point in the play, the male servants of the house of Capulet have seen the male servants from the house of Montague and a fight is about to start.

SAMPSON
My naked weapon is out. Quarrel, I will back thee.
GREGORY
How, turn thy back and run?
SAMPSON
Fear me not.
GREGORY
No, marry, I fear thee!
SAMPSON
5 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.
SAMPSON
Nay, as they dare. I will bite my thumb at them, which is disgrace to them if they bear it.
ABRAM
Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?
SAMPSON
10 I do bite my thumb, sir.
ABRAM
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.

Starting with this conversation, explore how Shakespeare presents aggressive male behaviour in *Romeo and Juliet*.

Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents aggressive male behaviour in this conversation
- how Shakespeare presents aggressive male behaviour in the play as a whole.

[30 marks]
AO4 [4 marks]

Indicative content:

Examiners are encouraged to reward any valid interpretations. Answers might, however, include some of the following:

AO1

- Men in the extract - looking to fight and defend their masculinity and continuation of fighting later on in the play – Act 3 scene 1 and the final scenes with Paris and Romeo
- Men seen as aggressive in the extract but also in other scenes
- Characters that could be discussed – the servants, Tybalt, Romeo, Mercutio, Capulet and Montague, Paris
- Link to the families - belonging to a family spurs the fighting

AO2

- Sexual imagery used to represent men and fighting = masculinity e.g. *“my naked weapon is out”*
- Language of insults *“do you bite your thumb”*
- Structure – this is the opening scene to the play – Shakespeare setting the scene for views on men
- Use of the word *“sir”* to imply mock civility
- Stage directions that add humour to the conflict

AO3

- Ideas about men and violence - stereotypical
- Contemporary reception to the opening scene and views of men fighting
- Ideas about men perhaps compared to women
- Rules and conformity to societal expectations
- Families and their expectations

Mark	AO	Typical features	How to arrive at a mark
Level 6 <i>Convincing, critical analysis and exploration</i> 26–30 marks	AO1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical, exploratory, conceptualised response to task and whole text • Judicious use of precise references to support interpretation(s) 	<p>At the top of the level, a candidate’s response is likely to be a critical, exploratory, well-structured argument. It takes a conceptualised approach to the full task supported by a range of judicious references. There will be a fine-grained and insightful analysis of language and form and structure supported by judicious use of subject terminology. Convincing exploration of one or more ideas/perspectives/contextual factors/interpretations.</p> <p>At the bottom of the level, a candidate will have Level 5 and be starting to demonstrate elements of exploratory thought and/or analysis of writer’s methods and /or contexts.</p>
	AO2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of writer’s methods with subject terminology used judiciously • Exploration of effects of writer’s methods on reader 	
	AO3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploration of ideas/perspectives/contextual factors shown by specific, detailed links between context/text/task 	
Level 5 <i>Thoughtful, developed consideration</i> 21–25 marks	AO1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thoughtful, developed response to task and whole text • Apt references integrated into interpretation(s) 	<p>At the top of the level, a candidate’s response is likely to be thoughtful, detailed and developed. It takes a considered approach to the full task with references integrated into interpretation; there will be a detailed examination of the effects of language and/or structure and/or form supported by apt use of subject terminology. Examination of ideas/perspectives/contextual factors, possibly including alternative interpretations/deeper meanings.</p> <p>At the bottom of the level, a candidate will have Level 4 and be starting to demonstrate elements of thoughtful consideration and/or examination of writer’s methods and/or contexts.</p>
	AO2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examination of writer’s methods with subject terminology used effectively to support consideration of methods • Examination of effects of writer’s methods on reader 	
	AO3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thoughtful consideration of ideas/perspectives/contextual factors shown by examination of detailed links between context/text/task 	

Level 4 <i>Clear understanding</i> 16–20 marks	AO1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear, explained response to task and whole text Effective use of references to support explanation 	<p>At the top of the level, a candidate's response is likely to be clear, sustained and consistent. It takes a focused response to the full task which demonstrates clear understanding. It uses a range of references effectively to illustrate and justify explanation; there will be clear explanation of the effects of a range of writer's methods supported by appropriate use of subject terminology. Clear understanding of ideas/perspectives/contextual factors.</p> <p>At the bottom of the level, a candidate will have Level 3 and be starting to demonstrate elements of understanding and/or explanation of writer's methods and/or contexts.</p>
	AO2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear explanation of writer's methods with appropriate use of relevant subject terminology Understanding of effects of writer's methods on reader 	
	AO3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear understanding of ideas/perspectives/ contextual factors shown by specific links between context/text/task 	
Level 3 <i>Explained, structured comments</i> 11–15 marks	AO1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some explained response to task and whole text References used to support a range of relevant comments 	<p>At the top of the level, a candidate's response is likely to be explanatory in parts. It focuses on the full task with a range of points exemplified by relevant references from the text; there will be identification of effects of a range of writer's methods supported by some relevant terminology. Explanation of some relevant contextual factors.</p> <p>At the bottom of the level, a candidate will have Level 2 and be starting to explain and/or make relevant comments on writer's methods and/or contexts.</p>
	AO2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explained/relevant comments on writer's methods with some relevant use of subject terminology Identification of effects of writer's methods on reader 	
	AO3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some understanding of implicit ideas/ perspectives/contextual factors shown by links between context/text/task 	
Level 2 <i>Supported, relevant comments</i> 6–10 marks	AO1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supported response to task and text Comments on references 	<p>At the top of the level, a candidate's response is likely to be relevant and supported by some explanation. It will include some focus on the task with relevant comments and some supporting references from the text. There will be identification of effects of deliberate choices made by writer with some reference to subject terminology. Awareness of some contextual factors.</p> <p>At the bottom of the level, a candidate's response will have Level 1 and be starting to focus on the task and/or starting to show awareness of the writer making choices and/or awareness of contexts.</p>
	AO2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identification of writers' methods Some reference to subject terminology 	
	AO3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some awareness of implicit ideas/contextual factors 	
Level 1 <i>Simple, explicit comments</i> 1–5 marks	AO1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simple comments relevant to task and text Reference to relevant details 	<p>At the top of the level, a candidate's response is likely to be narrative and/or descriptive in approach. It may include awareness of the task and provide appropriate reference to text; there will be simple identification of method with possible reference to subject terminology. Simple comments/responses to context, usually explicit.</p> <p>At the bottom of the level, a candidate's response will show some familiarity with the text.</p>
	AO2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness of writer making deliberate choices Possible reference to subject terminology 	
	AO3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simple comment on explicit ideas/contextual factors 	
0 marks	Nothing worthy of credit/nothing written		

Assessment of AO4

AO4 will be assessed on **Section A** only. The performance descriptors are provided below.

Performance descriptor	Marks awarded
<p>High performance: In the context of the level of demand of the question, learners spell and punctuate with consistent accuracy, and consistently use vocabulary and sentence structures to achieve effective control of meaning.</p>	4 marks
<p>Intermediate performance: In the context of the level of demand of the question, learners spell and punctuate with considerable accuracy, and use a considerable range of vocabulary and sentence structures to achieve general control of meaning.</p>	2–3 marks
<p>Threshold performance: In the context of the level of demand of the question, learners spell and punctuate with reasonable accuracy, and use a reasonable range of vocabulary and sentence structures; any errors do not hinder meaning in the response.</p>	1 mark

Where a candidate writes nothing or fails to meet threshold performance they should receive 0 marks.

Response 1

In Act 1 Scene 1 of *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare presents men as aggressive and arrogant. The metaphor of “My naked weapon is out” represents the inability to back down from a challenge if you were a man in the times of *Romeo and Juliet*. Also the use of the adjective “naked” suggests masculinity and is therefore effective at portraying a self confidence and hence makes a man more intimidating. This would have been no shock to the audience in Shakespearian times as men were also shivillous, if they were of higher status, and they too would have protected their honour and masculinity.

Furthermore Shakespeare explores the potential that masculinity and aggression are not possessed by all and that love is often stronger than those traits of personality. When Romeo is first introduced to the audience in a conversation between Montague and Benvolio, he is said to have “tears augmenting the clouds”. This suggests Romeo is sensitive and gentle of heart which gives him a feminine appearance; quite opposing the boystrous and testosterone fueled arguments between the servants of the opposing houses. This would have been shocking for the audience as they would be unused to having an eponymous hero that lacks courage and aggression, and is instead able to cry “tears” and be a lover.

Getting back to the extract, Shakespeare further enhances the idea that the male of the species is not to be trifled with and should not be imposed upon. The use of the quotation “turn thy back and run” allows Shakespeare to entertain the audience by building the tension between the arguing servants. By even more portraying them as violent people, when insulted, no matter how minor the remark. However “turn thy back and run” as well as being an insult used to challenge the masculinity of the opposing man, also suggests that the servant has honour and some restraint as he is willing to allow his opponent to escape, should he be in over his head.

Another example of when the restraint of a man is pinned against his aggression is when Lord Capulet is arguing with Juliet about her marrying Paris. Capulet exclaims “my fingers itch” which quite clearly displays a desire to physically punish Juliet to keep her in line. However previously in the play Capulet describes Juliet as his “child, a stranger to the world” which contrasts greatly with his anger at her as it presents him as a kind and protective father, willing to allow her to choose who she loves. This alone would show his love for his daughter as at the time a father was meant to choose whom his daughter was to marry and would have greatly shocked a Shakespearian audience. This juxtaposition in personalities of Capulet shows how by simply not getting his way; can change a mans outlook and make him aggressive and violent.

The theme of aggression in the extract is followed through as it proves stronger than the restraint. The servants trade insults and repeatedly say “I will bite my thumb” which is the upmost insult at that period of time and would have directly challenged the masculinity of a man. The repetition of the same insult (“I bite my thumb”) builds the tension between the two servants leading to the men becoming unpredictable and impulsive. Impulsiveness matched with aggression is a dangerous combination and

this shows how the ego and masculinity of a man are not crucial to be in tact. Shakespeare gives the audience a sense that male aggression can be triggered by even the slightest imperfection and can rapidly multiply into violent tendencies.

Later on in the play there is an example of how impulsiveness can lead to dire consequences. Juliet describes her love with Romeo as "too like the lightning" which is a foreshadowing of their unpleasant demise. However the use of "lightning" is the important part as it is a description of Romeo's fatal flaw: impulsiveness. This fatal flaw leads him to rash things an example being killing Tybalt. Someone so gentle shouldn't be capable of such a horrible thing, yet due to his impulsiveness he becomes aggressive and that aggression takes over. Shakespeare tells the audience, by this, that no matter how innocent at heart one is the aggression possessed by males can always arise.

[COMMENT] [MARK]

Response 2

Firstly, in this extract of Romeo and Juliet, writer William Shakespeare presents aggressive male behaviour as petty and foolish in this conversation. At this point in the play, the male servants of the house of Capulet have seen the male servants from the house of Montague and a fight is about to break out between the two houses. When this happens one of the Capulet servants, Sampson, says that he 'will bite my thumb at them' which back then probably meant something big back then but now in the modern world sounds like nothing. The writer's use of the verb 'bite' suggests that back then it was considered as a huge threat to bite a body part deliberately at someone because it must then you want to hurt them very bad. But in the modern world it sounds like men were very aggressive back then and even just the slightest remark towards your enemy would make them become very violent.

Next, in this extract of Romeo and Juliet, writer William Shakespeare presents aggressive male behaviour as not so aggressive but more cowardly. When the male Capulet servants first lay eyes on the male servants of the house of Montague one of the Capulet servants, Gregory, is quick to try run away and to not be seen by the Montagues. While he is attempting to make his fellow servant Sampson, leave too he says 'No, marry, I fear thee' suggests that he is incredibly afraid on the inside but on the outside he is attempting to still act all aggressive so he looks brave and fearless. The writer's use of the oxymoron 'naked weapon' suggests that even though a weapon is something dangerous and vicious the word 'naked' diminishes all of the scariness of the weapon.

Firstly, in the play of Romeo and Juliet, writer William Shakespeare presents aggressive male behaviour in the play as a whole as violent. At the point of the play where Benvolio Montague attempts to end the fight with the Montagues and Capulets, Tybalt Capulet enters and makes the fight even more out of hand. When Benvolio tries to make peace, Tybalt says 'peace! I hate the word' which suggests to the readers that in their time men were violent people who wanted to create anarchy. The writer use of the verb 'hate' suggests that men were very angry people who hated everything.

[COMMENT] [MARK]

Response 3

Romeo and Juliet is a play set in the sixteenth century, when attitudes towards masculinity were strongly felt. In this extract, the crude nature of Sampson and Gregory's language shows how their aggression is taken out both on their rivals and women. The implied meaning behind the line "my naked weapon is out" shows how the sexual implications that Shakespeare includes in this scene are strongly to do with the men's desire to seem masculine. "Naked weapon" refers to his sword, however Shakespeare clearly intended for it to be taken by the audience as a double meaning. This shows how by using the word "weapon" as a metaphor for his penis, Sampson exerts his aggression over women in this male-dominated society, implying that he is dangerous and careless with it, which rather crudely hints at his violent attitude towards sex. Earlier in this conversation, Sampson talks about how he 'would "thrust" maids to the wall, which is a violent and aggressive action, suggesting his disregard for women in his aggressive lust. He also says he will "cut off their heads", then "or their maidenheads". By relating taking someone's virginity to violence, Shakespeare shows how aggressive male behaviour in society at the time was prevalent in every aspect.

Shakespeare does, however, provide a contrast to this stereotypical male figure in the character of Romeo. Before we meet Romeo for the first time, we are told by Montague that he is often seen crying in the quote "with tears augmenting the fresh morning's dew". This suggests that Romeo is affected by love in a way that makes him less aggressive and more soft, which contrasts Sampson's violent male behaviour showing through when he references sex and women. Later in the play, Mercutio mocks Romeo for his lack of masculinity when he is in love by describing him in that state. He says "speak but one rhyme", "cry but ah me!" and "pronounce but 'love' and 'dove'" and he would be "satisfied" that this was Romeo. The fact that he could distinguish his friend by his dramatic approach to love highlights how unusual Romeo is, and how he does not show the typical male aggression of the time. When the play was set, sonnets were very popular in society, so perhaps Romeo had been influenced by this more than his peers, due to his melodramatic view and actions.

However, it is not only in attitudes towards women that Shakespeare presents aggressive male behaviour in the play. In this extract, when the Capulet servants meet the Montague servants, their rivalry is evident. Sampson says that he will "bite my thumb at them", which was considered a rude and offensive gesture in Shakespeare's day. This purposeful tormenting displays the almost childish attitudes towards aggression in the play, in their desperation to start a fight. Their desire to show their dominance is something that is shown throughout the play, and here Shakespeare introduces the theme with comedy to show the impact of the feud. By making this the first scene after the prologue, where we learn that there is an "ancient grudge"

between the two households, the audience is told how important this aggression will be to the story.

Another character who appears to relish the violence in the play is Tybalt. His name was a popular name for cats at the time, and even this may reference how animalistic and savage he could be. It also shows his desire to exert his power almost in the way of a primate. Tybalt seems to antagonise violence in the quote "This intrusion shall, now seeming sweet, convert to bitt' rest gall". The word "bitt' rest" shows how he maintains the grudge against the Montagues strongly, and the contrast between "sweet" and "gall" (poison) suggests how blatantly he makes his anger shown and is not afraid to display his aggression. He tells the audience his intentions outright in the quote "to strike him dead I hold it not a sin", clearly saying that his aggression would go as far as for him to commit a murder and think little of it, as he later does to Mercutio.

[COMMENT] [MARK]

Response 4

Firstly, Shakespeare presents aggressive male behavior as essential to withholding honour in the extract when Sampson "bites his thumb", he exclaims that it's a "disgrace" if a violent action isn't used in retaliation. As the quarrel is between Capulet and Montague slaves, to bring "disgrace" upon the name is unbearable as the houses are "both alike in dignity". Shakespeare uses the noun "disgrace" to imply that aggression from males is necessary to keep their 'dignity'. Shakespeare purposely uses the noun "disgrace" to resonate with the audience of the time as 'disgrace' contradicts honour which was a key attribute among richer families at the time. This further enforces that male aggression is necessary for respect and survival.

However, Shakespeare contradicts the dependence on aggression by using Lord Capulet to show aggression as barbaric. After Juliet refuses to marry Paris even though Lord Capulet demanded the ceremony, Capulet's "fingers itch." Shakespeare's use of the adjective 'itch' is used to symbolise that Lord Capulet would hit his own daughter if angered. This connotes that aggression is used as a tool to control the socially inferior. As Capulet threatens to "drag" Juliet into the streets, Shakespeare conveys that aggression in males is evil and barbaric.

Shakespeare's use of the assertive violent verb "drag" connotes that aggression is destructive. This is because Capulet doesn't even see his daughter as a person as he is blinded by his anger. Shakespeare does this to convey his message that anger is destructive and distracts us from the important things in life. He uses Capulet as an aggressive character towards Juliet as he would be relatable to the Elizabethan audience as daughters were seen as property of their father's until marriage.

Thirdly, Shakespeare further explores aggression as destructive and consuming through Mercutio's death. When Mercutio is about to die, Shakespeare explores the ideology that aggression is consuming as Mercutio states "A plague on both your houses". Shakespeare explores consumption as the aggression of Tybalt for Romeo kills Mercutio. The noun "plague" could imply that aggression is destroying the Elizabethan society. Shakespeare's use of foreshadowing of the death of both Romeo and Juliet is used to support that aggression is destructive. This is because the death of "both your joys" at the end of the play destroys both Lord Capulet and Montague. Shakespeare enforces the message of consumption to the Elizabethan audience as male aggression was being used to control women in Elizabethan times.

[COMMENT] [MARK]