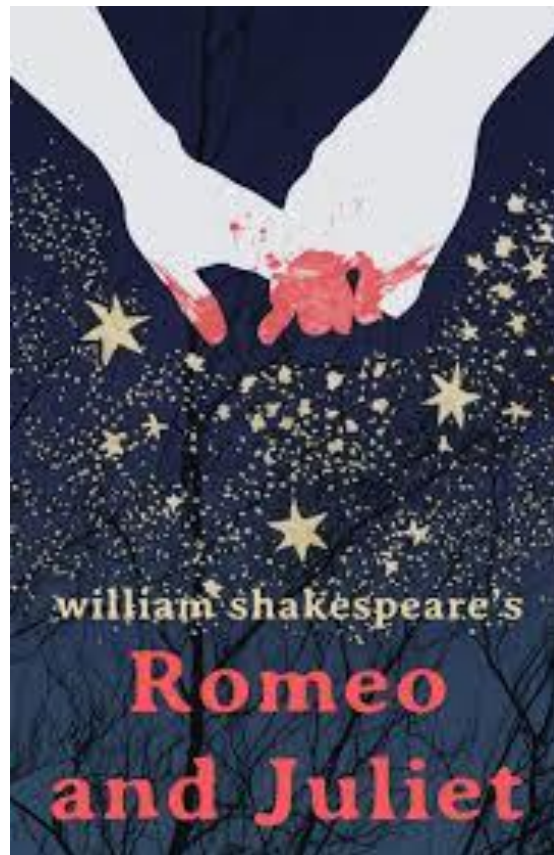


# Romeo & Juliet

## Aim Higher



Name:

Teacher:

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## **How to use this booklet**

**As you read each article, use the discussion questions at the end to consider:**

- **How is this relevant to the play?**
- **How could I apply what I have just read to particular characters or themes?**
- **Which particular scene within the play could be used as an example to explore these ideas?**
- **How might Shakespeare have reacted to this interpretation of his famous tragedy?**

## Shakespeare's Insults: A Pragmatic Dictionary, Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin (extracts)

**earth** (A) The material out of which the ground is made; worthless matter. Bright (1588) has for 'earth': 'Chalke Claye Clodde Duste Grauell Ground Lande Lime Lome Morter Moulde Sande Turfe'. It is often opposed to water and air and often associated and contrasted with heaven. The word also refers to the material of the human body, considered as derived from the ground, as is evoked in the 1549's *Book of Common Prayer* (Buriall f. xxiiii\*v): 'Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust'.

(B) Romeo deprecates himself when he realizes that he should go back to find Juliet, his 'heart':

Can I go forward when my heart is here?  
Turn back, dull earth, and find thy centre out.

(2.1.1-2)

The expression 'as dull as earth' was proverbial (Dent, E27.2; see *TGI*, 4.2.51). Romeo's words describe him as a material body whose centre, whose heart is Juliet, and Juliet echoes his words when she thinks Romeo is dead and exclaims: 'Vile earth to earth resign, end motion here, / And thou and Romeo press one heavy bier!' (3.2.59-60). When they are separated, Romeo is 'dull earth' and Juliet 'vile earth'. Ironically, the image is echoed later when Romeo refers to Juliet as 'the dearest morsel of the earth' (5.3.46).

**damn(ation)** (A) Derived from Latin *damnāre, dampnāre*, 'to inflict damage or loss upon, to condemn, doom to punishment' (*OED*): Condemnation, the fact of being doomed to hell, sin deserving damnation.

(B) In *Rom*, once the nurse has left the stage, after having incited Juliet to marry Paris, Juliet expostulates against her: 'Ancient damnation! O most wicked fiend!' (3.5.236). The nurse is described as an allegorical figure of damnation and sin (3.5.237). As Touchstone says in *ATL*, 'wickedness is sin and sin is damnation' (*ATL* 3.2.41). Juliet's exclamation expresses her fury and incarnates the object of her anger and despair in the nurse. Weis (*Rom*, 287) glosses 'ancient damnation' as 'Wicked old creature!'. 'O most wicked fiend' elucidates the insult, providing a footnote in effect. 'Ancient damnation' prolongs the fiend-angel motif that is present throughout the play. Earlier, Juliet amorously insults Romeo *in absentia* by calling him 'fiend angelical' (3.2.75) and 'damned saint' (3.2.79). She asks:

O nature, what hadst thou to do in hell  
When thou didst bower the spirit of a fiend  
In mortal paradise of such sweet flesh?

(3.2.80-2)

Yet, when insulting the nurse, Juliet abandons the ambivalent oxymoron. Williams (1, 363) glosses 'damnation' as 'whore or bawd', convincingly quoting three 1603-1604 plays by Marston (*Dutch Courtesan*) and Dekker (*Honest Whore* and *Westward Ho*) as evidence of this use. Williams does not quote *Rom*, but it is tempting to take this meaning into account as it corresponds to the nurse's bawdy nature and to Mercutio's taunting her when he sees her and exclaims: 'A bawd, a bawd, a bawd!' (2.4.126). By offering Juliet to Romeo and then to Paris, the nurse proves indeed to be the epitome of sexual sin: the bawd. As Bertram says about Parolles in *AW*, for Juliet, the nurse is a 'damnable both-sides rogue' (*AW* 4.3.218). Levenson (*Rom*, 300) notes that the word 'damnation' refers both to perdition and the cause of perdition while 'ancient' means 'aged' and 'hoary' and echoes 'Mercutio's insult to the nurse'. The echo between the two scenes includes their sexual content.

**mammet** (A) Derived from Anglo-Norman *maumet*, reduced form of *mauhoumet*, Old French *mahomet*, *mahoumet*, the word refers to a false image or idol but also may mean 'doll' or 'puppet' (*OED* 2). Palsgrave has 'Maument, marmoset, poupee.' It can also refer to a contemptible or hateful person, a weakling, a physically or mentally feeble person (*OED* 4).

(B) In *Rom*, **Capulet** calls his daughter Juliet a 'whining mammet' (3.5.185), because she refuses to marry Paris. Weis, following *OED*, glosses 'mere weakling' (*Rom*, 284) but the figure of the puppet is more in keeping with Capulet's calling Juliet a 'wretched puling fool' (3.5.184) and better suits the image of a daughter who is precisely *not* a weakling as she stubbornly rebels against her father's wish. What **Capulet** here means is that his daughter is playing the headstrong child. Findlay (2010, 248) notes that **Capulet** 'uses it to trivialize Juliet's distress at the prospect of marrying Paris. He ventriloquizes her as a spoilt child'. She suggests that the word may 'prefigure the *OED*'s examples of "mammet" as a regional word meaning "child". Ironically, for Romeo, Juliet is a 'mammet', an idol, indeed and the word is in keeping with the religious imagery of

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mammet

idolatry that pervades the play. For Shershow (28–9), 'Juliet is a "mammet" both because she is resisting the father's patriarchal right to give her in marriage to whomever he chooses, and because her father alleges her tears to be merely a deceptive and manipulative histrionic performance'.

## **AO1 AO2 Interpretation and analysis**

**How has figurative language been used as an insult within each of the three examples?**

**What does this suggest about each of the characters using such insults?**

**How does this demonstrate the power of language during Shakespeare's time of writing?**

### **Friar Laurence, Verona's Resident Philosopher**

As a part of Veronese society, Friar Laurence is not totally removed from the impulses that control it. In line with his society's competitive nature, he readily overrides the lovers' parents' decisions and makes himself Romeo's and Juliet's primary confidant. However, his intentions toward the lovers are always charitable. When considering his course of action, Friar Laurence wisely advises the lovers to beware the sin of overindulgence. While marrying them, he warns them: "love moderately: long love doth so; / Too swift arrives as tardy as too slow" (2.5.9-15).

In a later warning to Romeo after Tybalt's death, the friar clearly expresses his disappointment at Romeo's shameful attempt to kill himself, stating, "Fie, fie, thou shamest thy shape, thy love, thy wit."

Here Friar Laurence uses economic language to express his disgust for Romeo's concern for the physical love rather than spiritual love. As a Catholic priest, he speaks against sex before marriage. Friar Laurence understands that Romeo thinks in terms of the physical primarily, but he certainly does not approve. The explanation of his work that introduces him to the action in 2.2 serves to simultaneously place him within and alienate him from the material world of Verona. Friar Laurence is the only true philosopher in the play. Immediately upon his entrance, Friar Laurence displays his philosophy that equally considers the spiritual and the physical worlds. His speech, partly meant for running commentary on the play's themes of love and death, also introduces the audience to his interest in divine love.

This friar is not a university educated social climber; he is interested only in the welfare of Romeo and Juliet's souls, in raising their love beyond the material culture it is trapped in, and keeping the peace in Verona.

Thus, when he enters the play, Friar Laurence speaks beyond the level of simple medical commentary. He asserts that it is his duty to understand the helpful and harmful uses of his herbs, a duty that assists him in understanding both the physical body and the spiritual state of man. With words like "grace," "true qualities," "virtue," and "vice," the friar makes a clear distinction between heavenly and earthly states of being.

This passage, however, introduces the motif of double use that Shakespeare uses to comment on the medical profession. It is no coincidence that mankind has been given a choice in the use of his herbs. Things that live on earth have dual purposes: they may be "vile," but they may also be used for good. This is the mark of God. But Shakespeare takes the metaphor further here; In *Romeo and Juliet*, medical practitioners must choose which substances to use and how to apply those uses. The friar chooses to concern himself with the health of the body and mind, so he chooses to use only those herbs which are not harmful. The apothecary, on the other hand, does not worry about Romeo's spiritual or physical health, and so he chooses to use his herbs for the sale of all substances, including poisons.

Friar Laurence, intent upon preserving their spiritual and physical purity, will not rest until "holy church incorporate two in one" because he is constantly trying to prevent their love

from harming their spiritual health. In addition, he is concerned for everyone who participates in the feud, for he is most hopeful that “this alliance may so happy prove, / To turn your households’ rancour to pure love.”

There is no question that the friar cares very much for them. He is keenly aware of the dangers of indulgence, delivering warnings at every turn. But here again Shakespeare recalls the two possible uses of all things, commenting that even romantic love can have negative effects.

The tragedy is that as an idealistic clergyman who wants to recognize the spiritual goodness in all things, the friar looks too much for goodness in the face of this particular feud. He underestimates Tybalt’s intense hatred and Mercutio’s tendency to pick fights, as well as the overwhelming territoriality and ownership that pervade the action of the play. His Christian idealism, the belief that love will unite all parties, makes the friar the weakest agent in this tragedy.

### **AO1 Interpretation and evaluation**

**Where does the writer show an awareness of the Friar’s catholic beliefs?**

**How does the Friar then challenge those beliefs?**

**Where does the character of the Friar act as a giver of warnings throughout the play?**

**To what extent do you agree that the Friar is ‘idealistic’?**

- **Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England, Ben-Amos (extract)**

to disobedience, riot and rebelliousness. As Bede had explained long before, 'red cholers make [young] people . . . bold, irritable, and active'.<sup>38</sup> In the seventeenth century, young years were associated with a quarrelsome and vengeful spirit, and the natural heat of youth was linked with immoderate temper and rashness. The 'humour' of most young people, as William Fleetwood put it, made them 'grow wanton, insolent and head-strong'.<sup>39</sup>

The emphasis on the rashness of the young and their propensity to disobedience and insubordination was, like conceptions of sin, also well within the tradition of Christian morality and medieval preaching, which took it for granted that young people were proud and insubordinate.<sup>40</sup> Protestant and Puritan writers associated youthful instincts (or 'diseases', as Daniel Williams called them), with rashness, lack of restraint, and insubordination.<sup>41</sup> Young apprentices were suspected of 'poisonous weeds of pride and arrogance', which could easily lead to subversion of the social order; and all servants were accused of being 'bold, nasty, and ignorant', easily drawn to impudence and licentiousness.<sup>42</sup> Catholic preachers explained the spread of Protestantism in the early decades of the sixteenth century as a result of youthful predilections, and blamed Protestant subversiveness on the 'conceits of these younglings', who found in Protestantism an appropriate expression of their tendency to disobedience.<sup>43</sup> A century later, Richard Baxter, who grew weary of the strife and disorder of the Civil War, thought that young people were responsible for the great animosities and schism he had witnessed during that period.<sup>44</sup>

Disobedience, insubordination, reckless and riotous living were encapsulated in the traditional theme of the Prodigal Son. Based on St Luke and well utilised in medieval morality and preaching, the story was used by humanists and dramatists who by the mid-sixteenth century were staging plays for performance by pupils and professional actors.<sup>45</sup> Thereafter it appeared in numerous forms: in dramatic works and plays, in ballads, pictures and prints, in stories about insubordinate children and misspent youth,<sup>46</sup> and in sermons on the youth who 'grew weary' of his parents, 'resolves to stay no longer', and goes to a remote

### **AO1 Interpretation and evaluation**

**According to Bede, what were young years associated with?**

**What assumption did Christian faith make of young people as a result?**

**Which characters might this concept apply to within the play?**

**How might such characters be used as a scapegoat for particular events?**

**Baz Luhrmann's "Romeo + Juliet" compared with Shakespeare's Original Work**  
**By Tori E. Godfree (edited)**

Baz Luhrmann's kaleidoscopic film adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, while often leaving much to be desired from the two main actors in the way of delivery, presents a fascinating modern interpretation of the 16th century drama. David Ansen, film critic, describes it as "alternately enrapturing and exhausting, brilliant and glib...a *"Romeo and Juliet"* more for the eyes than the ears" (Newsweek).

Sir Philip Sidney states in his *Apology for Poetry* that poetry should both delight and teach, and both the text and the film serve this purpose well—each suited to the time in which they were presented. Shakespeare incorporated jokes of the time, mentions of royalty, and allusions to historical events in his plays. Luhrmann does this as well, pulling in numerous references to recent pop culture. Both Shakespeare and Luhrmann endeavoured to delight their audiences with beautiful costumes and familiar music, and to teach them with the basic moral precepts inherent in the story.

A mere glance at the film will show anyone with even the slightest knowledge of the play that the two are ferociously different in terms of setting, costume, casting, music, and props. A closer reading, however, will also illuminate significant deviations in verse.

The differences between these two works are distinctly illustrated in Act One, Scene One of the text and its matching film scene. The Shakespeare text shows Samson and Gregory of the house of Capulet exchanging in witty banter. They continue their repartee until Abraham and another servingman of the Montagues arrive. Gregory advises, "Draw thy tool. Here comes of the house of Montagues" (1.1 29). Samson responds, "Quarrel, I will back thee" (1.1 30). Gregory suggests that frowning in their general direction will suffice initially. They proceed to argue about whose master is better, and fight until Benvolio arrives and tells them to put up their swords. Tybalt shows up and further provokes the fight.

Curiously enough, the corresponding scene from the film shows instead Benvolio and the "Montague boys" cruising along the freeway in a bright yellow convertible, laughing raucously, with one of them turning around to face the camera and yelling: "A dog of the house of Capulet moves me!" They pull up to a gas station, Benvolio goes inside, and immediately afterward arrive Tybalt and the "Capulet boys," Abraham (here abbreviated to Abra) and another. Tybalt goes inside, but Abra remains next to the car, sees the Montague boys, and faces them with an intimidating glare. The Montague boys quake with fear, and jump when Abra yells, "Boo!" Abra, of course, laughs hysterically and gets back into his car; ready to drive away until he sees one of the Montague boys bite his thumb.

The ensuing fight scene provides an excellent example of the difference in choreography and props. In the text, the characters all fight with swords, on a stage empty of all but citizens of the watch. In the ultra-modernized film, the characters are all possessed of pistols bearing the name of their respective houses, and they make use of the surrounding cars, film extras, and various architectural trappings of the gas station where the fight is staged. Interestingly enough, though, when Benvolio entreats the Capulets and his fellow Montagues to lower their weapons, the wording does not exchange swords for guns, but remains as it reads in the original text (1.1 57).

The film's setting is a cunning twist on the original: instead of Verona, Italy, events take place in a teeming seaside metropolis called Verona Beach (bearing a striking resemblance to modern day Miami) that has been ravaged by the ongoing feud between Capulet and Montague. Verona Beach is a modern-day city, with cars, high-rise buildings, gas stations, and hot dogs stands, none of which were even conceived (or much less, available) during the time that Romeo and Juliet was written or performed.

Luhrmann's costumes are also highly modernized. This opening scene finds the Montague boys parading around in Hawaiian shirts and sporting unnaturally coloured hair, while the Capulet boys favour leather and metal-heeled boots. These are some drastic changes from the traditional Elizabethan wear of the time. In addition, the film makes no pretence at any English or Italian (to fit the original setting) accent from its characters. Luhrmann explains that this is because he considers the American language as better attuned to Shakespearian text: "When Shakespeare wrote these plays, they were written for an accent that was much more like an American sound, and when you do Shakespeare with an American accent it makes the language very strong, very alive"

Musically in this act, the audience is provided with modern hip-hop, electric guitar sound effects, a nod to musical themes from spaghetti Western showdowns, and a chorus chanting a direct Latin translation of the play's prologue. Luhrmann explains in an interview on the Music Edition of Romeo and Juliet that Shakespeare used all varieties of music to reach the highly varied audience in the Globe Theatre: church music, folk music, and popular music of the times. Luhrmann echoes this in his version of the drama.

Sidney explains that poetry is the most effective means of instruction, as poetry can "teach...not only by delivering forth his very being, his causes and effects, but also by making known his enemy, vice, which must be destroyed, and his cumbersome servant, passion, which much be mastered". Luhrmann takes Shakespeare's task of instructing the masses against the folly of absurd family feuds and artfully updates it for the 20th century, retaining its essential moral argument while making it something to which modern audiences can more easily relate.

### **AO1 Interpretation and Evaluation**

**Name three ways that Luhrmann deviates from the original ideas of Shakespeare's text.**

**How might the term, 'dog' be insulting and cause humour for both the Montague boys and the audience?**

**How is the fight scene designed by Shakespeare to provide both intensity and drama but also humour and comic relief?**

**To what extent do you agree with Luhrmann's comment regarding an American accent being more suited to the Shakespeare text?**

## **General Characteristics of the Renaissance**

"Renaissance" literally means "rebirth." It refers especially to the rebirth of learning that began in Italy in the fourteenth century, spread to the north, including England, by the sixteenth century, and ended in the north in the mid-seventeenth century (earlier in Italy). During this period, there was an enormous renewal of interest in and study of classical antiquity.

Yet the Renaissance was more than a "rebirth." It was also an age of new discoveries, both geographical (exploration of the New World) and intellectual. Both kinds of discovery resulted in changes of tremendous import for Western civilization. In science, for example, Copernicus (1473-1543) attempted to prove that the sun rather than the earth was at the centre of the planetary system, thus radically altering the cosmic world view that had dominated antiquity and the Middle Ages. In religion, Martin Luther (1483-1546) challenged and ultimately caused the division of one of the major institutions that had united Europe throughout the Middle Ages--the Church. In fact, Renaissance thinkers often thought of themselves as ushering in the modern age, as distinct from the ancient and medieval eras.

Study of the Renaissance might well centre on five interrelated issues. First, although Renaissance thinkers often tried to associate themselves with classical antiquity and to dissociate themselves from the Middle Ages, important continuities with their recent past, such as belief in the Great Chain of Being, were still much in evidence. Second, during this period, certain significant political changes were taking place. Third, some of the noblest ideals of the period were best expressed by the movement known as Humanism. Fourth, and connected to Humanist ideals, was the literary doctrine of "imitation," important for its ideas about how literary works should be created. Finally, what later probably became an even more far-reaching influence, both on literary creation and on modern life in general, was the religious movement known as the Reformation.

Renaissance thinkers strongly associated themselves with the values of classical antiquity, particularly as expressed in the newly rediscovered classics of literature, history, and moral philosophy. Conversely, they tended to dissociate themselves from works written in the Middle Ages, a historical period they looked upon rather negatively. According to them, the Middle Ages were set in the "middle" of two much more valuable historical periods, antiquity and their own. Nevertheless, as modern scholars have noted, extremely important continuities with the previous age still existed.

### **AO1 Interpretation and evaluation**

**Define Renaissance in your own words; give two examples of how this applies to the play.**

**The Great Chain of Being referred to a Hierarchy; an order based on a series of higher and lower ranking.) An object's "place" depended on the relative proportion of "spirit" and "matter" it contained--the less "spirit" and the more "matter," the lower down it stood. E.g, stone- plant- humans-angels-God. Where do we see evidence of this idea being followed within the play?**

**To what extent is Romeo and Juliet truly a Renaissance text (use the final paragraph to explore your ideas)?**

## Transcript - Shakespeare's Restless World - Programme 5

### Swordplay and Swagger: Rapier and Dagger

To be fashionable, to be cool, in 16th century London you needed to carry a sword. Only a gentleman was entitled to and a true gentleman was expected to. So it comes as no surprise that the earliest use of the word 'blade' to refer to a stylish young man appears in Shakespeare, and the play *Romeo and Juliet*. If the scenes between those young blades Tybalt and Mercutio are still so vivid today, it's because such fights were not a fanciful invention but the rough stuff of daily life. In 1596 one William Wayte was attacked by four assailants outside The Swan theatre. He swore before the Court of Queen's Bench that he had been in real danger of death or serious injury. One of his quartet of attackers was William Shakespeare.

By the standards of the day it was a run of the mill kind of brawl, the only remarkable thing about it is that we know Shakespeare was involved. Brought before a judge, the Shakespeare Four had to post bail and promise to keep the peace. They eventually settled out of court.

Here in Leeds I am looking at the essential accompaniment to an Elizabethan dagger, the rapier, and this one too was found in the Thames - another casualty of a young man's night out on the South Bank perhaps. Dropped maybe as its drunken owner stumbled back into the rowing boat to take him home north of the river. It's an impressive weapon, the blade alone is well over a metre long and it's sharp on both sides and at the end, you can slash and pierce. This is in every sense cutting edge fashion. The owner must have been very sorry to lose this rapier because it was clearly a very expensive weapon. When you come to the handle it looks as though a long thin metal snake has coiled itself around the end of the blade to protect your hand while you're fighting. You'd have worn a rapier like this in what Elizabethans called a hanger or a girdle, a sort of sling, and you'd have needed it because it's certainly not light in the hand. Toby Capwell again:

'We always think of rapiers as a kind of feather-light flashing blade, the weapon of Errol Flynn and Douglas Fairbanks and actually it is a misconception. We often think of medieval swords for example as being heavy and cumbersome while we think of rapiers as being feather-light and rapier-fast as it were. But actually it is just the reverse, medieval swords tend to be very light and real rapiers tend to be quite heavy and to an untutored hand quite ungainly.'

Yet when rapiers and daggers found themselves in tutored hands, the result was, in the words of Mercutio, a kind of musical performance:

Mercutio: 'He fights as you sing prick-song: keeps time, distance, and proportion. He rests his minim rests, one, two, and the third in your bosom. The very butcher of a silk button. A duellist, a duellist. A gentleman of the very first house, of the first and second cause. Ah, the immortal passado! the punto reverse! the hay!' (*Romeo and Juliet* 2.4.20-26)

Mercutio's description of Tybalt's skills with a rapier and dagger captures a new fashion in fighting. Tybalt is not just deadly, he's chic. Alison de Burgh:

A de Burgh: 'Shakespeare was picking up on the fact that there were the English school of fighting and the Italian school of fighting, and that they were arguing with each other. So you have Romeo's family are fighting in the old English style of sword play, whereas Tybalt's ...

N MacGregor: How do you know that?

A de Burgh: 'Because of the terminology that they are using. When Mercutio is making fun of Tybalt and the way that he fights he talks about the passado, the punto reverse and he makes up one called the hay, and I think that one of the reasons he's using these terms, and also making fun of them, is he is echoing a gentleman who wrote a manual on sword play, saying how bad the Italian style was. We had the famous Italian master Saviolo set up a school in London. He wrote a manual on sword fighting. Then the Englishman, George Silver, also wrote a manual advocating the English style of sword play and saying how rubbish the Italian style was.'

N MacGregor: So Mercutio is actually picking up on all that.

A de Burgh: 'Mercutio is actually using some of the words that George Silver uses in his manual.'

Rapiers and daggers went together and the quality of a rapier and dagger set marked out the man of fashion.

### **AO1 Interpretation AO2 Analysis**

**How are the fight scenes within the play a realistic view of Elizabethan England?**

**What metaphor does Mercutio use to describe sword-fighting?**

**What modern day debate might you link to the English/Italian fighting style argument?**

**Why was the particular choice of weapon or fighting style important for a young male?**

## Mercutio and Romeo: An Analysis of Friendship in the Renaissance, Christian Bacchiocchi

Throughout Shakespeare's play and Edwards' production, Mercutio is a character who cares for Romeo and attempts to influence him down the right path. Since the beginning of the play, Romeo is in love. Initially it is not with Juliet, but with another, Rosaline. Romeo does not stop and think about his romantic actions, but instead follows his heart wherever it leads him. By now, all of his kinsmen are aware of this, and have grown restless. When he cannot be found, all assume that Romeo chases a maiden of some kind. Mercutio, though skeptical, is always conscious of Romeo's wellbeing, saying, "Why, that same pale-hearted wench, that Rosaline, / Torments him so that he will sure run mad" (2.3.4-5). Romeo returns daily, lost in a trance of emotion that no one can seem to pull him out of by any normal means. Because of his romantic interests, Romeo is often not able to be there for his kin or help them in any way. The night that the Capulet Tybalt sends a letter to the house of Romeo's father, Romeo cannot be found to answer it. Mercutio is happy when one of their own decides to abandon them for someone of the opposite gender, and they do not let him go without some sort of confrontation. This is what Mercutio attempts to do. He knows the kind of man Romeo is, and does not want Romeo's emotions blocking his logic again. Mercutio says,

If love be blind, love cannot hit the mark.

Now will he sit under a medlar tree

And wish his mistress were that kind of fruit

As maids call medlars when they laugh alone. (2.1.34-37)

### Analysis of Text

In the text, Mercutio's words appear to maintain the tone of one who opposes love. Yet, a further analysis of his lines reveal that he is not so much an opponent of love as he is a proponent of Romeo's happiness. As Romeo sulks about, distressed over Rosaline, Mercutio implores him, "If love be rough with you, be rough with love; / Prick love for pricking, and you beat love down" (1.4.25-26). In this passage, Mercutio is not saying to run away from love or avoid it. He acknowledges that love can deal a mighty blow, but one should not sit idle and receive such attacks without retaliation. For every cut given to Romeo by love, he should in turn deal a cut upon love. Mercutio encourages Romeo to stand up for himself and not be controlled by love. The purpose of the phrase "beat love down" is to imply the containment of sexual arousal. If Romeo can be the master of his own emotions, he can be in love without emotional torment. These words are not pushing Romeo away from love, but rather presenting a strategy so that Romeo can be in love and be happy. ■■■■■

### AO1 Interpretation and Evaluation

**What is the purpose of Mercutio's character according to the writer?**

**How are Mercutio and the Friar similar in their beliefs that they try to bestow upon Romeo?**

**To what extent is Mercutio a more fitting advice giver than the Friar?**

## Lexical Ambiguity and Wordplay in Shakespeare Isabel de la Cruz Cabanillas (edited extract)

I will concentrate mainly on the last type of ambiguity, lexical ambiguity, and highlight how Shakespeare uses this device to play on words.

### **REASONS FOR PUNNING**

Before attempting a classification of the linguistic mechanisms used by Shakespeare to achieve a humorous effect, I would like to focus on the reasons that can explain the use of this kind of playing upon words. Why did writers like Shakespeare wish to pun, what are the reason for it? There are different factors that can account for this desire:

1) First of all, it was a common procedure in Elizabethan writers. From his very first plays Shakespeare exhibits a close knowledge of rhetorical devices, which were usually included in the textbooks of the period, even if this type of humour was despised later by scholars like Samuel Johnson who claimed a quibble was to Shakespeare 'the fatal Cleopatra for which he lost the world and was content to lose it'. Despite these opinions, it is nowadays recognised as a major poetic device, which is comparable in its effectiveness with the use of recurrent or clustered images (Mahood 1988: 11).

Other reasons adduced by Mahood for the use of punning are:

2) The fact that 'Shakespeare plays with verbal meanings, not because the rhetoricians approve of wordplay, but because his imagination as a poet works through puns, or because his characters are placed in situations where it is natural for them to pun, or because puns help to clarify the particular view of life that he seeks to present in a particular play. Shakespeare quibbles as a poet, as a dramatist, and as a dramatic poet; and these divisions, though in part arbitrary, give us three means of approaching to the functions of his word play' (Mahood 1988: 20-21).

3) Thirdly, 'another psychological function of word play which everyone has witnessed or experienced is its use to gain relief from a state of emotional tension' (Mahood 1988: 32). The same view has been followed by other scholars like Hussey (1982: 140-141), who comments on the momentary relief from tension which is provided by punning in the play scene. In this respect Shakespeare notoriously puns in the gravest circumstances. Thus when Mercutio is bleeding to death and says. 'Ask for me tomorrow and you shall find me a grave man,' the author is playing upon grave meaning meaning 'important' or more recently 'serious', and grave as a noun, a synonym for tomb.

### **AO1 Interpretation and Evaluation**

Summarise the three reasons for punning within a play text such as Romeo and Juliet.

What do you believe was the fundamental purpose of puns within the play?

Do you think that the play would be less effective in delivering its message if it attempted an alternative approach to incorporating humour? Give an example from the text to explore your ideas.

## What's in a Name? The Significance of names in Literature

### **Escalus, Prince of Verona**

Escalus is probably an Anglicization of "della Scala", who were the ruling noble family of Verona. His name is similar in the source material which Shakespeare adapted his play from, like many of these characters below, so Shakespeare probably didn't actually name many of these characters himself. The source material was Arthur Brooke's *The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet*, an English verse adaptation of an Italian folk story.

### **Paris, a young nobleman**

Paris, from the *Odyssey*, is portrayed as a weak warrior who is awarded the hand of Helen of Troy by Aphrodite and essentially abducts her, beginning the legendary Trojan wars. A not so subtle parallel to the violence and love which is contained in the play.

Also in the text he is often referred to as "County Paris", which is a title of minor nobility.

### **Montague, Capulet, heads of warring households**

Capuleti and Montecchi were political factions of 13th Century Italy. Dante made reference to their struggles in *Purgatorio*, which made its way into Luigi Da Porto's version of the *Romeo and Juliet* story.

### **Romeo, son to Montague**

Romeo can be translated as "wanderer", "roamer", or "palmer" (similar to pilgrim, as in the line "For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,/And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.") Left roaming at the start of the play with his unrequited love for Rosaline, he finds his love and purpose of life in Juliet.

### **Mercutio, kinsman to the prince, and friend to Romeo**

Mercutio seems to be derived from the word *mercurial*, meaning volatile, lively, flighty, and fickle.

### **Benvolio, nephew to Montague, and friend to Romeo**

Benvolio is an invented name, derived from Italian, loosely translating to "good will". This reflects his role of peacemaker in the play, and can be compared to *Twelfth Night's* Malvolio ("ill-will").

### **Tybalt, nephew to Lady Capulet**

Tybalt is the Prince of Cats in a European cycle of folk tales called *Reynard the Fox*. Mercutio teases him about this.

### **Juliet, daughter to Capulet**

Translates to mean either "youthful" or "Jove's Child", this is probably chosen to evoke Juliet's youth and beauty.

## AO1 Interpretation and Evaluation

Who named the characters for Shakespeare's play?

Whose name for those discussed fits the meaning to the greatest extent? Give reasons for your decision.

Look up a character of your choice from another piece of literature. To what extent has the author moulded the character to fit their name?

## Biblical and mythological allusions within Romeo and Juliet (edited extract)

This page explores allusions in *Romeo and Juliet*, William Shakespeare's tragedy about the fate of two star-crossed lovers. This drama is densely allusive, containing references to historical figures, Biblical passages, and Greek and Roman mythology. Shakespeare borrowed the basic outline of his play from Ovid, a Roman poet of the Augustan age in the 1st century BC. Considering that Shakespeare was building on an ancient plot, we should not be surprised to find numerous mythological allusions in Shakespeare's version.

### Weaker vessel: Biblical allusion in Act I, Scene I

*Romeo and Juliet* opens with banter between two Capulets, Sampson and Gregory, that establishes the rivalry of the Capulets with the Montagues. In jesting about who will push whom around, Sampson says, women, being the weaker vessels, / are ever thrust to the wall.' Sampson is making a Biblical allusion, referring to the New Testament book of First Peter. After recommending that slaves serve their masters without complaint, and wives submit themselves to their husbands, Peter addresses married men (1 Peter 3:7, in the King James translation, emphasis added):

### Cupid, Diana, Danaë: mythological allusions in Act I, Scene I

Romeo is moping around and his cousin Benvolio has guessed correctly that the reason is unrequited love. (Benvolio's correct guess is a "hit," not a miss.)

However, Benvolio hasn't been able to guess who it is that Romeo loves. Romeo explains his love interest's preference for chastity (emphasis added):

*Well, in that hit you miss: she'll not be hit  
With **Cupid's** arrow; she hath **Dian's** wit;  
And, in strong proof of chastity well arm'd,  
From love's weak childish bow she lives unharm'd.  
She will not stay the siege of loving terms,  
Nor bide the encounter of assailing eyes,  
Nor **ope her lap to saint-seducing gold**:  
O, she is rich in beauty, only poor,  
That when she dies with beauty dies her store.*

### **In these lines, Romeo makes three allusions to Greek mythology:**

- **Cupid**, son of Venus, is the god of love. He's often depicted as a blindfolded, pudgy infant, armed with a bow and arrow, as for example in Botticelli's famous painting "Allegory of Spring."
- **Diana's wit**: wit here means "knowledge" or "skill." Diana was the huntress of the gods, but she was elusive; one could never seem to find her in the woods, though she was always out there hunting. One unlucky hunter who did find her met a gruesome end. He spied Diana as she bathed, and Diana then turned him into a stag (a male deer). He was

then killed by his own hunting hounds. Another important fact about Diana is that she is a virgin goddess. Thus Cupid's arrows have not struck her.

- **Danaë** was a young woman whose father Acrisius had received an oracle that he would be killed by Danaë's son. Acrisius tried to avoid this fate by shutting Danaë away so that she would not meet any lovers and not have a son. Zeus took a liking to Danaë, and "visited" her as a golden shower — what Shakespeare styles "saint-seducing gold." Danaë became pregnant by Zeus and gave birth to Perseus, the hero who would later kill Medusa, and eventually (accidentally and unknowingly) kill Acrisius in an accident in a javelin-throwing competition.

### Diana, Vestal virgins: mythological and historical allusions in Act II, Scene II

Romeo hops over the wall of the Capulet garden to try to catch sight of Juliet. He sees her on her balcony, and compares her to the sun: But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks? / It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.

Romeo then commands the sun (that is, Juliet) to kill the moon (emphasis added): Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious **moon**, / Who is already sick and pale with grief, / That thou her maid art far more fair than she. The moon is a symbol of Diana, the goddess of the hunt noted for her chastity, as discussed above. Romeo wants Juliet not to serve Diana; since he loves Juliet, he wants her to love him back. Finally, Romeo works in yet another allusion to virginity (emphasis added): Be not her maid, since she is envious; / Her **vestal** livery is but sick and green / And none but fools do wear it; cast it off.

In ancient Rome, priestesses of the goddess Vesta were called "Vestal virgins." Vesta was goddess of the hearth. One of the Vestal virgins most important task was keeping a flame lit on the sacred hearth of Vesta in Rome. As their name implies, these priestesses were also required to remain virgins. Punishment for failing to live up to this requirement could result in being buried alive. When Romeo says that the moon's (i.e. Diana's) *vestal* livery is "sick and green," he suggests that Diana's mode of life, virginity, is not fitting for Juliet.

### Jove: Act II, Scene II

Later in the dialogue between Romeo and Juliet, with he in the orchard and she on the balcony, Juliet wants to hear Romeo tell her that he loves her. But she recognizes that words mean only so much:

*at lovers' perjuries / They say, **Jove** laughs*

Jove, also called Jupiter, is the king of the gods for the ancient Romans. One of his duties is to enforce contracts that people enter in to. If you break a promise, you've offended Jove. However, Jove does not care about the promises that lovers make to each other. If your **lover professes his love today, and next week changes his mind, Jove will take no action.**

### **Cynthia: Act III, Scene V**

Romeo speaks with Juliet in the orchard, though night is giving way to day, and Romeo must flee to save his life. Juliet is in denial that day is approaching, leading Romeo to declare that if Juliet wants it still to be night, then he will believe the same: *I'll say yon grey is not the morning's eye, 'Tis but the pale reflex of Cynthia's brow*. In Greek myth, Cynthia is the moon. Romeo means that he is seeing moonlight, not daylight, since Juliet wishes it so.

### **AO1 Interpretation AO2 Language analysis**

**Which themes could be linked to Shakespeare's use of allusion?**

**Why is it interesting that Shakespeare used both biblical and mythological allusions?**

**Select one example of allusion and write a short response to the question: how does Shakespeare use allusion to present a particular idea to the audience at that point in the play?**

## Questions for Further Discussion

- Why did Shakespeare feel the use of bawdy language necessary?
- Who is ultimately to blame for Mercutio's death?
- How believable is the character of the Friar and how credible are his schemes?
- What is the effect of intercutting the story of Romeo and Juliet with scenes that remind the audience of every day life and conventions?
- Is the use of unfortunate coincidence a strength or a weakness as a device within the play?
- What would be lost were Paris dropped from the play?
- Is the Nurse comical or exasperating?
- Are we meant to approve of Romeo and Juliet's love despite the consequences and disapproval of their families?
- Is the end of the feud at the end of the play an irrelevant anti climax, or a necessary addition to the plot?
- Was Romeo truly in love with Juliet?
- Does justice feature within the play?
- Is this a play to celebrate the vivacious love and passion of the young, or a moral tale from the elders to warn of what happens as a result of impulsion?