

## KEY WORDS

*Petrarchan Lover, Unrequited, Ornamental, Iambic Pentameter, Prophesised, Determinism, Celestial bodies, Dramatic Irony, Plethora.*

# Romeo Act 1

## COMPARISON

Romeo's capacity for such **deep love** is a contrast to his later revealed **capacity** for violence (his later slewing of Tybalt). It shows humans to be **complex multifaceted** creatures with sides that seem to contradict each other. This is also his **hamartia**, that he is too passionate, both in love and violence.

## COMPARISON

Comparing Rosaline to Juliet, two women who are enormously different to each other, exemplifies that Romeo is primarily drawn to beauty. Rosaline was a **chaste** (a virgin), **unattainable** woman who has very few defining traits other than being beautiful. By contrast Juliet is **fiery** and **defiant** and the two women's absolute lack of any common characteristics **proves Romeo to value beauty above all other traits**, since he professes love for both women to a similar extent

## COMPARISON

Mercutio acts a **foil** (a contrast) to Romeo in that he is not nearly so romantic and often **ridicules Romeo's lovesick rambles**. The two represent **two opposite ends of the spectrum of love**, two extremes. It characterises young people to be extreme in their emotions which often results in disaster. Romeo's rashness and passionate expressions of love provide an enormous contrast to the older characters in this act, for example **Lord Capulet, who is far more authoritative and mature**. This introduces the theme of young vs old in the play.

## ROMEO AS THE PETRARCHAN LOVER (ACT 1 SCENE 1)

- He is **forlorn and despondent**, and he **laments** (grieves) that **"for beauty, starved with her severity, / cuts beauty off from all posterity"**. The emphasis that Romeo places on Rosaline's aesthetics shows him to be **materialistic and vain**. His **depthless, ornamental view of women depicts him as childlike and overly romantic in his perception of love**.
- **The iambic pentameter and rhyming couplets** that Shakespeare employs establishes him to be self-involved both in his **disposition** (character) and his in his decorative language.
- Furthermore, his mention of **'posterity'** demonstrates that often women of this era were seen, by young men, as **simply vessels for childrearing**. Romeo has a **de-humanising, objectifying view of women**, valuing them purely for their physical and allure and their maternal capabilities.
- He comes across as self-centred when he says **"she hath foresworn to love, and in that vow / do I live dead that live to tell it now"**. **He makes her personal vow of chastity about himself**. The personal pronoun 'I' is hugely demonstrative of his self-absorbed, **narcissistic qualities**.
- He is the **exemplary Petrarchan lover in that he is in a constant state of self-involved melancholy**.
- Romeo's analogy of Rosaline to **"these happy masks that kiss fair ladies"** is illustrative of the notion that he doesn't see her as she is, rather **he sees an idolised, utopian-like version of her**. There's **dramatic irony** (audience know something that the characters do not) at play here in that, given the play's title, Rosaline is obviously not the other lover that is mentioned in the prologue.
- This characterises **Romeo's sorrowful disposition**, in regard to the idolised Rosaline, to be **almost worthy of ridicule**. It seems insignificant in the context of the play and ironic considering that there is worse sorrow to come.
- Romeo seems aware his sadness might be laughable as he questions **"are you laughing?"**, to his cousin.
- This also brings forth the notion that male expressions of emotion have long been **stigmatised and Romeo is unusually emotional for a man of his period**.

## TOP TIP



*A thorough understanding of 'the Petrarchan Lover' will give you marks for contextual knowledge (AO3). Their love is always unrequited, and the object of their love is oblivious that they are an object of love. Petrarch wrote a series of sonnets to his love 'Laura' which was unrequited and is where the Petrarchan sonnet originates from.*

## ROMEO BEING RULED BY CHANCE AND FATE (ACT 1 SCENE 5)

- When Romeo **fatefully** first catches sight of Juliet he poses aloud "did my heart love till now? Foreswear it, sight! / For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night". The idea that if Romeo had not seen Juliet at the Capulet ball, then he would have been deprived of true **"love"** is one that gives rise to theories of **free will and determinism**.
- The Elizabethans were particularly interested in ideas of fate and the stars and believed that **celestial** bodies could determine one's destiny (hence the term star-crossed lovers).
- Through the lens of **determinism (human actions are all determined and that humans don't have free will)**, the later assertion of "pray; grant thou, lest faith turn to despair" appears **ironic** in the sense that praying will do them no good if all their actions are pre-determined.
- The **prologue certainly amplifies this tone of determinism. The lovers' notion that they may alter their fate through prayer is dramatically ironic.**
- With the knowledge of the prologue, what should be a passionately romantic scene is rather **hauntingly ominous** as the events that were foretold in the opening begin to unfold.
- Romeo's "give me my sin again" **subverts the excitingly seductive connotations of a kiss, turning it into a grim enactment of Romeo's fate.** The way in which he extends
- Juliet's metaphor: "let my lips have the sin again", should be romantic, but the romance is unquestionably **dampened by the impending sense of doom.**
- His mention in the previous scene that 'some awful destiny that will result in [his] own untimely death' is **grimly foreboding** but it also shows the power of fate to be so vast that even the characters in the world of the play can feel its effects.
- It almost inspires a sort of **nihilistic** (meaningless of life) reaction on the part of the audience in the sense that if Romeo's actions are **pre-determined and doomed for death**, then to hope otherwise is foolish.
- The concept that Romeo has no free will, however, allows his actions to be viewed less as a **character flaw and rather objectively**. It allows his hamartia (fatal flaw that leads to his downfall), which is his **impulsivity and tendency towards violence**, rather than being a defect of his character is rather a narrative tool through which Shakespeare is able to communicate a **plethora** (many) **of morals.**

## TOPIC SENTENCES

- Romeo exemplifies the **quintessential Petrarchan lover**, who is desperately and **unrequitedly** (not returned) in love with a woman he cannot have (Rosaline who has taken a vow of chastity) and this causes him to have an idolised, objectifying view of her.
- Romeo's fateful sighting of Juliet at the Capulet ball marks the commencement of the events **prophesised (foretold) in the prologue**, showing that Romeo's fate is inescapable

