

KEY WORDS

Condescending, Jest, Deterministic, Cupid, Ruled by chance, Pessimism, Juxtaposition, Queen Mab, Personifies, Slanders, Taboo, Vilified, Confrontation, Zoomorphism, Provocative, Unfiltered, Impulsivity, Folly of youth

Mercutio

MERCUTIO THINKS LOVE IS SUPERFICIAL (ACT 1 SCENE 4)

COMPARISON

Mercutio is also far more **violent** and **expressive** with his language compared to Romeo which furthers his role as Romeo's **foil** in the play. He is also far **bawdier** (sexual) than Romeo which can be linked to his view of **love being superficial**.

COMPARISON

Mercutio's view on love seems more **objective** (unbiased) because we never seem him have any love interest in the play. Thus, he is not blinded by love and can speak about it with far more **objectivity** than Romeo can.

COMPARISON

Mercutio is the opposite to Romeo, who is direct and open with his emotions. Mercutio is more complex and secretive, often blending his true feelings into his jokes.

COMPARISON

Mercutio dying because of his **impulsive nature** is, as mentioned above, similar to the death of the plays protagonists, which was also due to their **hastiness**, which shows a criticism from Shakespeare of young people and their **rashness**. Tybalt is also killed and is also extremely **impulsive and rash**, reinforcing this idea.

COMPARISON

Mercutio, while he is the **comic relief** for the play, says **notably insightful** lines, which is similar to a lot of comic relief characters in other Shakespeare plays. **The Porter** in Macbeth is an example, **Feste** in **Twelfth Night** is also one. These are all characters who are **humorous** but have moments where they show they are wiser than they might seem.

- Mercutio addresses Romeo as **"gentle Romeo"** at the beginning of Act 1 Scene 4 and his use of the **adjective "gentle"** almost sounds **condescending** (belittling), which would make sense given how he is often **prone** (often does) to **jest** (joke) at Romeo's expense.
- He says to Romeo that he is **"a lover [and he should] borrow Cupid's wings"**. His tone is **deterministic** (people's actions are determined) in the way that he labels Romeo as a **"lover"** which sounds rather **cynical** (pessimistic), as though people are set and have no free will to be something else.
- Furthermore, **Cupid** was actually blind in Roman mythology, making the arrows of love that he shoots seem **random** and **ruled by chance** which is a pessimistic view of something traditionally romantic. **"Borrow"** also diminishes Cupid's power, as though anyone might **"borrow Cupid's wings"**. We can **deduce** (infer) from Mercutio's language that he is **pessimistic about love**.
- Mercutio advises Romeo should **"be rough with love"** and **"prick love for pricking"**. He sees love as something to be conquered, something that is not worth being gentle with. There is a huge **juxtaposition** between the words **"love"** and **"rough"**, especially as, up to this point in the play we have only seen Romeo, who is so **gentle** and **tender**, speak of love.
- He personifies the **chauvinistic male view** of the era. Romeo juxtaposes this in his tenderness, yet his ceaseless **objectification and oppression** of women in his speech shows he is the epitome of **an egotistical man of the patriarchy**.
- Mercutio is **a foil** (opposite) to Romeo. He represents all that Romeo is not and his **Queen Mab** speech demonstrates this.
- He **personifies** love through the character of Queen Mab who he says, **"when maids lie on their backs [she] / Presses them and learns them first to bear"**. He speaks of love as a **corrupting influence**, he **slanders** (vilifies) Queen Mab and turns her into a villain, doing so of love by extension.
- Sex was a very **taboo** (controversial) topic during this period and thus Queen Mab, who introduces **"maids"** to it is thus **villainous**.
- Mercutio speaks of **cynically** labelling it to be **superficial** and **corrupting** which, given the play's ending, doesn't seem all that inaccurate.
- It may be that Shakespeare uses Mercutio as a **mouthpiece** (spokesperson), through which he could **provide a criticism of love**.



MERCUTIO'S DEATH AND HIS IMPULSIVITY

- Mercutio, in his **confrontation** with Tybalt, calls Juliet's cousin **"King of Cats"**, labelling him as **swift** and **nimble**, but also **referring** to the Tybalt in the tale of **'Reynard the Fox'** who is also quick to **brawl** (fight) and impulsive.
- In his comment he both compliments Tybalt, but also insults him, comparing him to **frequently** mocked fictional character. This shows Mercutio to be **unfiltered** and **impulsive** in what he says.
- He claims that he will **"dry-beat the rest of the eight"** lives that Tybalt has after he takes one, making reference to cats and their supposed nine lives. He uses zoomorphism (giving a human animal qualities), giving Tybalt the **qualities** of a Cat and at the same time uses **provocative** language, **enticing** (luring) Tybalt in for a **brawl**.
- After the two men fight, Mercutio is injured and cries out **"I am hurt."** He uses a simple sentence, is straight to the point. No more, is he using **flowery, descriptive** language.
- But after this, he calls his wound **"a scratch"**, he often **contradicts** himself which demonstrates him to be **rash**, both in his words and his actions, saying and doing things without thought.
- **"A plague o' both/ your houses"** he cries as dies, his final few lines demonstrating, again, his **unfiltered nature**.
- The **infectious image** of a **"plague"** shows how Mercutio is likening the feud to that of an infectious disease- it has metaphorically plagued both the families and has resulted in his tragic death.
- His death also represents the **consequences of family feuds**, in that often-innocent people are hurt by long-lasting **grudges**. But it was his **impulsivity** that led, ultimately to his death and Shakespeare uses this **quality** to demonstrate the consequences of the **folly of youth**, that being **hastiness**.
- Romeo and Juliet, too, are **hasty** and that quality ultimate leads them to their death as well.

THE DUALITY OF MERCUTIO (ACT 2 SCENE 1)

- Mercutio, in the first scene of Act 2, mocks Romeo, calling out to him with the names **"madman, passion, lover!"**. His grouping of these words makes them sound as though they are **semantics**, he speaks as though "madman" and **"lover"** are synonymous (mean the same thing). In this way he is **mocking** Romeo and shows his **distaste for love**.
- He is joking and yet **deadly serious** at the same time
- He addresses him, saying **"speak to my gossip Venus one fair word"**. He **evokes** the **Goddess of love** using the **personal pronoun "my"**, as though he knows her personally, and calls her a **"gossip"**. With that he somehow manages to **diminish** (reduce) her power and the power of love by extension.
- He attempts to **lure** Romeo out by speaking of Rosaline in a **bawdy** (sexual) and **objectifying** way. He **reduces** Rosaline to her **"foot"**, her **"straight leg"** and her **"quivering thigh[s]"** listing only the parts of her body that might be considered sexual.
- He **jests** (jokes) and yet there is something quite serious about his tone, in the way that he **paints her in a sexual light**, so **vividly**, with his **bawdy imagery**.
- Benvolio warns that he will anger Romeo and he responds that to **"raise a spirit in his mistress' circle"** would really anger him.
- His language **boards offensive** now, conjuring an image of a spirit having intercourse with a Romeo's previous love. It seems his language has **melted** from **comical**, into **offensive**.
- Mercutio always seems to **ride the line** between being **humorous** and being **serious, such is his dichotomy**. Perhaps, Shakespeare uses him to demonstrate that **humans are complex** and contain multitudes and **often there is a battle between appearance vs reality**.

TOPIC SENTENCES

- Mercutio is **pessimistic** and **cynical** about love, and he mocks Romeo for feeling the emotion so deeply. In this way he is a **foil** to Romeo.
- Mercutio is a **complex** character who provides **comic relief**, but often his comedy has **serious undertones**, and his lines go from **humorous** (funny) to **sobering** (serious) rapidly.
- Mercutio is punished for his **impulsive** (rash) nature and Shakespeare uses his death to demonstrate the **folly of youth** (flaw of young people), which is their **impetuosity** (hastiness / impulsivity).

TOP TIP



Using words such as *perhaps*, allows you to make an assertion without assuming too much on the part of the author. It allows you to put forward an idea in a way that shows you will never fully be sure what the author intended but that is what you have deduced (AO4).

Writing about **literary allusions** (references to related texts) in the play such as 'Reynard the Fox' shows wider knowledge of texts related to the play (AO3).