

## 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**.

## TOP TIP



**Writing about how the playwright is critical of love makes you critical by extension for coming up with the point and this is a great way to maintain a critical style within your writing (AO1).**

## 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).