

### Poetic Devices in Romeo & Juliet

Device	Example / Reference
oxymoron	loving hate (I, 1, 168)
sonnet	I,5, 92 ff
insults	
paradoxical image	play's basic motif—the passionate, interlocking wrestle of love and death. The 'lean abhorred monster' is the ultimate lover; the final wedding-bed is the grave
imagery of light and darkness	<p>O, she doth teach the torches to shine bright!  It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night  Like a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear ...  So shows a snowy dove trooping with crows.  [I. v. 44-8]</p> <p>Friar Lawrence:  The grey-eyed morn smiles on the frowning night,  Chequering the eastern clouds with streaks of light;  And flecked darkness like a drunkard reels  From forth day's path and Titan's fiery wheels.  [II. iii. 1-41]</p> <p>Juliet:  The central image of this passage, of dark-dispersing sunlight, is repeated a little later by Juliet:  Love's heralds should be thoughts.  Which ten times faster glide than the sun's beams  Driving back shadows over louring [gloomy] hills.  [II. v. 4-6]</p> <p>Juliet's images of darkness:  such a waggoner  As Phaethaon would whip you to the west,  And bring in cloudy night immediately.  Spread thy close curtain, love-performing night. ...  Come, civil night,  Thou sober-suited matron, all in black. ...  Hood my unmann'd blood, bating in my cheeks,  With thy black mantle. ...  Come, gentle night, come, loving, black-browed night.  [III. ii. 2-5, 10-11, 14-15, 20]</p>
image of Death returning as Juliet's partner in sex:	<p>my grotesque linking of what should be life-producing and exalting with its opposite, in mortuary decay. The foolish old father starts things up (and if you still believe that puns have to be entertaining and amusing, listen in), in such a way that not even the gentility could miss it. O son, the night before thy wedding day Hath Death lain with thy wife. There she lies, Flower as she was, deflowered by him.  Death is my son-in-law, Death is my heir; My daughter he hath wedded." (IV, 5, 34 ff)</p>
The term <b>sexual innuendo</b> has acquired a specific meaning, namely that of a "risque" <a href="#">double entendre</a> by playing on a possibly sexual interpretation of an otherwise innocent uttering.	<p>Mercutio's language, which is a constant stream of obscene puns, and which, in turn, you enjoy or not. One open arse more or less can't change that.:  Shakespeare (II, 2, 33ff):  <b>MERCUTIO</b>  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.—  O Romeo, that she were! Oh, that she were  An open arse, and thou a poperin pear.</p> <p>modern:  <b>MERCUTIO</b>  If love is blind, it can't hit the target. Now he'll sit under a <a href="#">medlar</a> tree and wish his mistress were one of those fruits that look like female genitalia. Oh Romeo, I wish</p>

		<p>she <i>were</i> an open-arse, and you a Popperin pear to “pop her in.”</p> <p>The medlar is a tree whose fruit was considered to look like a vulva or an anus. The fruits were often called “open-arses.” Popperins are Belgian pears; Mercutio uses the name in an obscene double entendre.</p>
	[limerick]	<p>There once were a couple of teens  Who aspired to commingle their genes  But, in trying to mate,  Were the victims of fate  And succumbed in the saddest of scenes.</p>
	The Role of Comic Characters in the Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet	<p>Shakespeare uses Mercutio and the Nurse to explore the relationship between comedy and tragedy in Romeo and Juliet. These characters, in their comic roles, serve as foils for Romeo and Juliet by highlighting the couple’s youth and innocence as well as the pure and vulnerable quality of their love.</p> <p>Mercutio, Romeo’s quick-tempered, witty friend, links the comic and violent action of the play. He is initially presented as a playful rogue who possesses both a brilliant comic capacity and an opportunistic, galvanized approach to love. Later, Mercutio’s death functions as a turning point for the action of the play. In death, he becomes a tragic figure, shifting the play’s direction from comedy to tragedy.</p> <p>When Mercutio delivers his Queen Mab speech (also in Act I, Scene 4), he again characterizes Romeo as a clueless romantic for believing that dreams portend future events. Dismissing Romeo’s Petrarchan outlook, Mercutio presents his vision of a fantasy world in which dreams are the products of people’s fleshly desires. The speech reflects both Mercutio’s eloquent wit and his aggressive disposition. In his speech, the comic activities of the mischievous fairies are juxtaposed with the violent images of a soldier’s dream: Sometime she driveth o’er a soldier’s neck And then dreams he of cutting foreign throats, Of breaches, ambuscados, Spanish blades . . . .(I.iv.82-84)</p> <p>(II.i.17-21)</p> <p>Mercutio’s coarse physical imagery and sexual jokes contrast sharply with Romeo’s religious imagery for love. Romeo describes Juliet as “bright angel” and “dear saint.” Shakespeare uses Mercutio’s cynical attitude to distinguish Romeo and Juliet’s love as innocent, spiritual, and intense. Because the audience is aware that Mercutio’s speech falls on deaf ears, Mercutio’s speech illustrates that the Romeo, the lovestruck youth, has begun to mature in his outlook on life and love.</p> <p>Like Mercutio, Juliet’s Nurse views love as a purely sexual and temporary relationship, as opposed to Romeo and Juliet’s love which is presented as fragile and eternal. The Nurse’s bawdy humor is less sophisticated than Mercutio’s. Her comedy comes from the Nurse’s misunderstanding of language and her habit of repeating herself, rather than clever wordplay. For example, in Act I, Scene 3, the Nurse exasperates Lady Capulet, who has come to talk to Juliet of the proposed marriage to Paris, with her repeated and unrelated assertions that Juliet is only 13 years old.</p> <p>Likewise, when the Nurse laughingly recounts the lewd joke her husband made when Juliet fell over learning to walk—“Thou wilt fall backward when thou hast more wit”—her earthy humor contrasts with Juliet’s adolescent innocence, while simultaneously pointing to Juliet’s sexual development from a girl to a woman. Reflecting on the sensual pleasures that await Juliet on her wedding night, the Nurse puns about the likely consequence of pregnancy for her young charge: “I am the drudge, and toil in your delight, / But you shall bear the burden soon at night.”</p> <p>The Nurse’s preoccupation with sexual love prevents her from understanding the nature of Juliet’s love for Romeo. Even though she fully understands that Juliet is being bartered like livestock, she cannot see that any other social fate could exist for women. So, in Act III, Scene 5, the Nurse advises Juliet to forget Romeo and</p>

		<p>marry Paris when Capulet demands it. This development of her character further isolates the couple and fuels the tragic consequences of their elevated love. Thus, while the Nurse drives some of the most comedic scenes in the play, within her comic commentaries are woven the subtler threads of tragedy created by enslavement to social conventions.</p>
	<p>soliloquy / monologue</p>	
		<p><b>The Art of Writing: Literary Devices</b></p> <p>Shakespeare's <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> has an edge-of-the-seat plot full of murder, love, feuding, and betrayal. Driving this tragic play forward is the fast-paced, witty, and convoluted dialogue of the script. Effectively capturing the audience's attention, Shakespeare has used a number of important literary devices, which serve to amuse, guide, and hypnotize the viewer of this production.</p> <p><b>Puns</b></p> <p>A pun is a joke based on the use of a word, or more than one word, that has more than one meaning but the same sound. Mercutio and Romeo often exchange puns with one another in the play:</p> <p>Mercutio: "Nay, gentle Romeo, we must have you dance."</p> <p>Romeo: "Not I, believe me. You have dancing shoes / With nimble soles; I have a soul of lead..." (I iv 13-5)</p> <p>Romeo has used the word "sole" when referring to Mercutio's shoes, then made a pun by referring to his own "soul."</p> <p><b>Foreshadowing</b></p> <p>Foreshadowing describes when a piece of dialogue or action in a work refers to events that will happen later in the story even though the characters have no prior knowledge such events will occur. In the following quote, Benvolio is consoling Romeo on his loss regarding Rosaline:</p> <p>Benvolio: "Take thou some new infection to thy eye, / And the rank poison of the old will die" (I ii 49-50)</p> <p>Here Benvolio unknowingly foreshadows the fact that as soon as Romeo sees Juliet, the "new infection," the "rank poison" of Rosaline dies and he can think only of his new Capulet love.</p> <p><b>Metaphor</b></p> <p>A metaphor is a comparison in which an object or person is directly likened to something else that could be completely unrelated. The most famous metaphor in <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> is Romeo's monologue outside the Capulet orchard:</p> <p>Romeo: "But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks? / It is the east, and Juliet is the sun." (II ii 2-3)</p> <p>Here, Juliet is metaphorically compared to the sun despite the fact that she has nothing physically in common with a glowing star hundreds of thousands of miles away.</p>

### **Personification**

Personification occurs when an inanimate object or concept is given the qualities of a person or animal. This is exemplified when Juliet is waiting for her lover, Romeo, to come to her windowsill in the Capulet orchard.

Juliet: "For thou wilt lie upon the wings of night / Whiter than new snow on a raven's back. / Come, gentle night, come, loving, black-brow'd night" (III ii 18-20)

Obviously, the night does not have wings, nor does it have a brow, but giving it these qualities adds a mystique to Juliet's monologue and a poetic quality to the language.

### **Oxymoron**

An oxymoron describes when two juxtaposed words have opposing or very diverse meanings. In the following quotation, Juliet has just learned that Romeo murdered her cousin, Tybalt, and she is venting her feelings of anger at her lover for hurting her family.

Juliet: "Beautiful tyrant! fiend angelical!" (III ii 77)

When Juliet refers to Romeo as a "beautiful tyrant," she is expressing an oxymoron because the acts of a tyrant will rarely be referred to as beautiful.

### **Paradox**

A paradox is a statement or situation with seemingly contradictory or incompatible components. On closer examination, however, the combination of these components is indeed appropriate. For example, see how Juliet describes Romeo in the following quote:

Juliet: "O serpent heart, hid with a flowering face!" (III ii 75)

While Juliet knows that Romeo is not a serpent nor does he have a face full of flowers, her use of these descriptions show how paradoxically he is her lover and the murderer of her cousin at the same time.

#### **Task:**

- Find three examples of each literary device. Explain their context and, in each case, the point of the literary device in the way it is used in the passage.

**Romeo and Juliet** kiss each other in this scene. However, it is a process. Point out the stages in physical contact until Juliet says: "*You kiss by the book.*" Quote the lines from the text.

Here is a modern version of the text in this section. Read this and the original Shakespeare. (Taken from <http://www.wsu.edu/~brians/love-in-the-arts/romeo.html>)

The speeches in Shakespeare are far too artificial for modern taste, but if read sympathetically they are revealing and even moving. However, the religious imagery used by the pair should not deceive you into thinking that this is a pious or even solemn exchange. This is a quick-witted bout of flirtation in which both sides are equally smitten, as is made clear by what follows, but in which Juliet plays the proper young girl's role of dissecting Romeo's "lines" as fast as he can think them up. The religious language is more blasphemous than pious. The following modern rewording may convey (feebly) the meaning of the exchange more clearly so that you can go back and enjoy Shakespeare's beautiful language as he intended it.

**Romeo** (holding her hand as they dance): "You are like a shrine enclosing a holy relic, and I would be unforgivably uncouth to touch it with my unworthy hand except that I am ready to "kiss away" the damage I have done." (In other words: "I love holding your hand; may I kiss it?")

**Juliet** (probably amused, but cautious, teases him): "There's nothing wrong with your hand (I *like* it!), and handholding while we dance is quite legitimate; but you're being a little too bold in wanting to kiss me. If you're really a pilgrim, you should greet me only with your hand, as 'palmers' do."

**Romeo**: "Hey, even holy pilgrims are human: they've got lips. *Please* let me kiss you."

**Juliet**: "Pilgrims use their lips for praying, not kissing."

**Romeo**: "Fine, so I'm praying to you to let me kiss you. If my prayer isn't answered I may lose my religious faith."

**Juliet**: "Well, if I were a statue of a saint you were praying to, I might just grant your prayer although I'd remain motionless." (In other words, "I won't kiss you; but yes, you can kiss me.")

**Romeo**: "Stand still while I kiss you." (He kisses her lips.) "Just as a pilgrim might kiss the statue of a saint in hopes of receiving forgiveness for sins, so your acceptance of my kiss undoes any sin I committed by holding your hand."

**Juliet** (thrilled and amused at the same time): "So you claim to have gotten rid of your sin by kissing my lips. Now I've got the sin. What are you going to do about *that?*"

**Romeo**: "You want me to kiss you again? *Great!*" (Kisses her again.)

**Juliet**: "You don't really need all this artificial argumentation to justify kissing me, you know. Let's get serious."

[http://hermes.hrc.ntu.edu.tw/lctd/comp/novel\\_film/zefirelli\\_romeo.htm](http://hermes.hrc.ntu.edu.tw/lctd/comp/novel_film/zefirelli_romeo.htm)

The Music of Romeo and Juliet 1968

Lyrics

"What is a Youth"

by Nino Rota, words by Eugene Walter

Song lyrics

Eugene Walter (1921-1998) should not be confused with the playwright Eugene Walter (1874-1941).

Eugene Walter (1921 - March 29, 1998) was an American screenwriter, poet, short-story author, actor, puppeteer, gourmet chef, cryptographer, translator, editor, costume designer and well-known raconteur. During his years in Paris, he was nicknamed Tum-te-tum. A friend once observed that Walter had lived a "pixilated wonderland of a life."

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The famous "Love Theme to Romeo and Juliet" actually has words, and the words very nicely fit the film:

What is a youth? Impetuous fire.

What is a maid? Ice and desire.

The world wags on.

A rose will bloom

It then will fade

So does a youth.

So do-o-o-oes the fairest maid.

Comes a time when one sweet smile

Has its season for a while...Then love's in love with me.

Some they think only to marry, Others will tease and tarry,

Mine is the very best parry. Cupid he rules us all.

Caper the cape, but sing me the song,

Death will come soon to hush us along.

Sweeter than honey and bitter as gall.

Love is a task and it never will pall.

Sweeter than honey...and bitter as gall

Cupid he rules us all

Source: