

The use of literary devices to create humor in romeo and juliet

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



In dark and dire situations, humor is often needed to lighten the atmosphere in order to ensure sanity. This proves to be very true in William Shakespeare's tragic play, *Romeo and Juliet*. As the plot of the play continues to develop, tragic and unnecessary deaths start to occur one by one, leading to a strenuous atmosphere being created. This results in a bitter, depressing taste being left in the audience's mouth. The use of comedic characters and their witty plays on various literary devices, helps to relieve the tension that is created throughout the story, and makes the play more enjoyable, rather than somber. In *Romeo and Juliet*, humor is effectively created through diverse literary devices, and plays a large role in creating comic relief and characterizing important comedic characters.

Shakespeare effectively uses literary devices in a humorous fashion, to create comedic relief during scenes with overshadowing, dark and depressing content. A prevailing device to create humor in this play is the pun, and is often used by comedic characters to lighten the dark atmosphere of a scene. An example of this is when Romeo is on his way to the Capulets' party, accompanied by Benvolio and Mercutio, " And we mean well in going to this masque, But ' tis no wit to go. Why, may one ask? I dreamt a dream tonight. And so did I. Well, what was yours? That dreamers often lie" (1. 4. 49-55). Here, Romeo is seen sulking over his unrequited love for Rosaline, and is dreading the fact that he is being forced into attending the Capulets' party. This results in a gloomy atmosphere being created, but then Mercutio makes a pun on the word " lie", implying that not only do dreamers lie down, but lie about their dreams as well, therefore creating comic relief. Another literary device that is effectively used to establish comedic relief is anaphora.

When Juliet takes the potion on the day of her wedding, her family is utterly devastated at the thought of her being dead. However, the musicians that were hired could not care less about her, and then proceed to carry out a silly dispute with Peter, “ Why ‘ silver sound?’ Why ‘ music with her silver sound?’ What say you, Simon Catling? Marry, sir, because hath a sweet sound. Prates! What say you, Hugh Rebeck? I say ‘ silver sound’ because musicians sound for silver. Prates too! What say you, James Soundpost? Faith, I know not what to say” (4. 5. 125-131). Here, Peter is questioning the meaning of “ silver sound”, by asking each musician what they think of the phrase. He repeats the line “ What say you” multiple times, but ends up dissatisfied with each answer. This creates comedic relief, as it is humorous to see Peter become so worked up over something as insignificant as a song lyric. This helps to brighten the mournful mood of the scene. Therefore, comedic relief is effectively achieved through the use of various literary devices.

Many literary devices used in Romeo and Juliet create humor, and help to further characterize important comedic characters of the play. One of the principal comedic characters in this play is Mercutio, who acts as a foil to Romeo. Romeo sees love as a more serious and emotional matter, compared to Mercutio’s purely physical views of love. His careless views of love are proven when he is talking to Romeo about Rosaline, “ Is love a tender thing? It is too rough, Too rude, too boisterous, and it pricks like thorn. If love be rough with you, be rough with love. Prick love for pricking, and you beat love down” (1. 4. 25-28). Here, Mercutio makes a pun on the word “ prick”, and

turns Romeo's sentimental words into sexual wordplay. This not only indirectly characterizes Mercutio as an amusing and trivial person, but also as a quite intelligent one, as he is able to cleverly retort Romeo's sulking. Another extremely important character in *Romeo and Juliet* is the Nurse, as she acts as a messenger for Romeo and Juliet. Her character is a very comic one as well, and she potently uses literary devices to express her thoughts that are, more often than not, very comical and lighthearted. An example of this is when the Nurse returns to tell Juliet of Romeo's plan of marriage, "What says he of our marriage? What of that? Lord, how my head aches! What a head have I! It beats as it would fall in twenty pieces. My back, o't' other side. Ah, my back, my back!" (2. 5. 45-48). As Juliet is waiting in anticipation to hear of what Romeo has to say, the Nurse decides to tease her by using hyperbole to complain about her aches and pains, therefore delaying the delivery of Romeo's message, and leaves Juliet frustrated. This not only shows that the Nurse is a playful and comic character, but it proves to the audience how close of a relationship she and Juliet have, almost as if they were bound by blood. Therefore, comic effects created by literary devices help to develop important comedic characters of the play.

Romeo and Juliet uses its tragic nature to its advantage, using various literary devices to create humor, which adds important elements, such as comic relief and character development, to the story. Shakespeare effectively uses comic relief to relieve built-up tension in the atmosphere of the play, and skillfully incorporates literary devices to express these humorous moments. Furthermore, the humor that is created through literary

devices, contributes highly to the characterization and development of many significant characters. In Romeo and Juliet, humor allows the fun and lighthearted side of the play to show. After all, why so serious?