

# LANGUAGE OF THE PLAY

***Alas, that love, whose view is muffled still,  
Should, without eyes, see pathways to his will!***

- I, i, 169-170.

A reference to Cupid, the blindfolded Roman god of desire. "Will" in this case means "inclination", as you'd expect; it also carries the additional meaning of "sexual desire", as it often does in Shakespeare.

***Cousin (and the abbreviation "coz")***

- I, i, 181.

Cousin might refer to the same familial relationship as it does today. But it could also refer to any relative outside of the immediate family, or be a term of affection between social equals of any relationship.

***Soft! I will go along...***

- I, i, 193.

The word "soft", in this case is a "false friend" – a word whose meaning we think we know, but it's changed since Shakespeare's time. In this case, "soft" is a command with a meaning like the modern "wait a second!"

***She'll not be hit***

***With Cupid's arrow; she hath Dian's wit...***

- I, i, 206-207.

"Dian" is an abbreviation referring to Diana, the Roman goddess of the hunt and the moon, who swore never to marry and therefore was impervious to the arrows of love. A reference to Queen Elizabeth, famous as the Virgin Queen, also associated with the moon.

***Now, by my maidenhead, at twelve year old...***

- I, iii, 2.

The Nurse refers here to being a maid, or virgin, at the age of twelve – the joke being that by the time she was thirteen all bets were off. This is another reminder that Juliet herself is very young. Although it was legal in Elizabethan England for girls to marry at age 12, boys at age 14, evidence of marriage records suggests that most married in their 20s.

# LANGUAGE OF THE PLAY (CONT'D)

***Come Lammas Eve at night shall she be fourteen.***

- I, iii, 17.

Lammas, August 1, was the date of a harvest festival, celebrated by the making of bread from the first new grain. Given her name, it's appropriate that Juliet's birthday is apparently the last day of July.

***Why, he's a man of wax...***

- I, iii, 76.

The implication being that Paris is perfect, as though he'd been carved from wax, a statue.

***O, then, I see Queen Mab hath been with you.***

- I, iv, 53.

The Queen of the fairies, borrowed by Shakespeare from Irish or Welsh tradition – the idea that she helps sleepers give birth to their dreams seems to be Shakespeare's invention. Mercutio's rampant imagination takes care of the rest.

***Holy Saint Francis!***

- II, iii, 61.

Founder of the Franciscan Order, patron saint of animals. Francis was the son of a wealthy cloth merchant before taking his vow of poverty. In this he is similar to Romeo, son of a wealthy man who comes to describe gold as "poison to men's souls".

***If our wits run the wild-goose chase, I am done...***

- II, iv, 71.

An archaic reference to a kind of cross-country horse race, the phrase "wild goose chase" has gained common currency in English through its use in Romeo and Juliet. The meaning of the phrase has evolved over time; where it once meant a reckless chase, it now usually means a fruitless one.

***Good king of cats!***

- III, i, 76.

Tybalt's name is similar to the name of the character Tibert, a talking cat found in a series of fables and stories (Reynard the Fox) from the Middle Ages starring a tricky, fast-talking fox.

# LANGUAGE OF THE PLAY (CONT'D)

***Romeo that spoke him fair, bade him bethink***

***How nice the quarrel was...***

***- III, I, 155***

"Nice" in this instance is another "false friend" – one of the meanings of the word that's fallen out of use since Shakespeare's time is "trivial". Romeo was insisting that the fight was completely pointless and unimportant.

***Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds,***

***Towards Phoebus' lodging: such a wagoner***

***As Phaëthon would whip you to the west,***

***And bring in cloudy night immediately.***

***- III, ii, 1-4.***

In Greek mythology, Phoebus was the sun god – the sun was the chariot of fire that he drove across the sky each day. His son Phaeton, when trying to drive the chariot, lost control of it completely – Zeus stuck him with lightning to restore control, and Phaeton fell to his death. Juliet is basically saying "hurry up, already!"

