Features of Shakespeare's Use of Language – Close Reading Notes (Not to be lost!!)

Characterized by <u>Contrast</u>:
1. Lyric, beautiful language is seen in such scenes as the first meeting between Romeo and
Juliet at the party—in which they converse in sonnet form—and the balcony Scene.

From Act I, Scene V:
Upon first seeing Juliet, Romeo's language shift from **blank verse (unrhymed iambic pentameter)**
to **couplets:**

ROMEO: O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!
It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
Like a rich jewel in an Ethiope's ear;
Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear!
So shows a snowy dove trooping with crows,
As yonder lady o'er her fellows shows.
The measure done, I'll watch her place of stand,
And, touching hers, make blessed my rude hand.
Did my heart love till now? forswear it, <u>sight!</u>   (couplet)
For I ne'er saw true beauty till this <u>night.</u>   (couplet)

Notice that Romeo and Juliet's first conversation is structured like a **Shakespearean sonnet**:
 - ■   A poem consisting of 14 lines.
 - ■   Typical rhyme scheme is abab cdcd efef gg
 - ■   Iambic pentameter

ROMEO: *[To JULIET]* If I profane with my unworthiest hand **a**
This holy shrine, the gentle fine is this: **b**
My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand **a**
To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss. **b**
JULIET: Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much, **c**
Which mannerly devotion shows in this; **d**
For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch, **c**
And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss. **d**
ROMEO: Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too? **e**
JULIET: Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer. **f**
ROMEO: O, then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do; **e**
They pray, grant thou, lest faith turn to despair. **f**
JULIET: Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake. **g**
ROMEO: Then move not, while my prayer's effect I take. **g**

From Act II, Scene II:
Notice the **metaphors** and the **images** Shakespeare uses to have Romeo and Juliet speak about
one another.

ROMEO: But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.
Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,
. . .
Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,
Having some business, do entreat her eyes
To twinkle in their spheres till they return.
. . .
The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars,
As daylight doth a lamp; her eyes in heaven
Would through the airy region stream so bright
That birds would sing and think it were not night.
JULIET: ... that which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet;

2. <u>Colloquial</u>, sometimes vulgar, speech sets common characters apart from those of a higher station, such as the bawdy jesting of the Capulet servants in Act I, Scene i, or the nurse's vulgar description of Juliet.

From Act II, Scene V:
The Nurse's message to Juliet that Romeo is waiting to marry her at Friar Laurence's cell is full of crude sexual innuendo.
Nurse: Then hie you hence to Friar Laurence' cell;
There stays a husband to make you a wife:
Now comes the wanton blood up in your cheeks,
They'll be in scarlet straight at any news.
Hie you to church; I must another way,
To fetch a ladder, by the which your love
Must climb a bird's nest soon when it is dark.
I am the drudge and toil in your delight,
But you shall bear the burden soon at night.

Characterized by <u>Ambiguity</u>:
1. Shakespeare uses double entendres freely, letting the audience interpret the words in one way while the characters interpret them differently. A key example of this would be the conversation between Juliet and her mother in Act III, Scene V, in which Juliet expresses her love for Romeo and her desire for his safety while outwardly seeming to hate him and wish him harm.
JULIET: Would none but I might venge my cousin's death!
. . .
O, how my heart abhors
To hear him named, and cannot come to him.
To wreak the love I bore my cousin
Upon his body that slaughter'd him!

2. <u>Puns</u> A play on words based on the similarity of sound between the two words with different meanings ("son" and "sun" or "I" and "eye")and are utilized for the sake of witty wordplay and comic relief, such as in the first Scene and the ribald jests of the Capulet servants, or Mercutio's dying jest, "Ask for me to-morrow, / and you shall find me a grave man," (Act III, Scene I). The entire opening Scene is a series of puns playing on words like collier, coal-carrier, choler, and collar.

Characterized by <u>Structured Verse</u>:
1. Shakespeare uses an essential pattern of blank verse, or unrhymed iambic pentameter, throughout the play. Usually important or aristocratic characters speak in blank verse, while lesser characters do not.
2. When the pattern changes, it is for a reason—as demonstrated above, note the times a character's speech shifts from blank verse to couplets. Note the rhyme schemes in dialogues between certain pairs of characters. Notice how servants speak in prose while the "higher born" characters speak in verse.. . .

Characterized by <u>Figurative Language</u>:
Shakespeare's characters often use figurative language to elaborate upon ideas and amplify imagery.
1. <u>Simile:</u> a comparison between two different things using either *like* or *as*.
In Act III, Scene II, Juliet describes her state of suspense by saying, "So tedious is this day / As is the night before some festival/To an impatient child…" (lines 29 – 31).

2. **Metaphor:** a comparison of two things that are basically dissimilar in which one is described in terms of the other.
In Act II, Scene II, Romeo describes his affection for Juliet by saying, "I am no pilot; yet, wert thou as far / As that vast shore wash'd with the farthest sea, / I would adventure₁ for such merchandise."

3. **Personification:** a figure of speech in which an object, abstract idea, or animal is given human characteristics.
In Act II, Scene II, Romeo says that he has "night's cloak to hide [him]."

4. **Hyperbole:** exaggeration for emphasis; overstatement.
In Act III, Scene III, Romeo remarks that "every cat and dog / And little mouse, every unworthy thing, Live here in heaven and may look upon / her."

5. **Understatement:** the opposite of hyperbole, to make little of something important.
Mercutio tells Romeo that his wound is "a scratch, a scratch" in Act III, Scene i.

Dramatic Conventions and Literary Devices

A. A **soliloquy** is a speech in which a character reveals his or her thoughts to the audience, but not to the other characters; it is usually longer than an aside and not directed at the audience. Shakespeare uses soliloquies to reveal the conflicts various characters struggle with, such as Romeo's lovelorn state, or Juliet's conflict over whether or not to "kill" herself.

The **aside** is spoken by an actor in order to be heard by the audience but supposedly not by the other actors. These lines—much shorter than the soliloquy—usually represent the inner thoughts of the speaker. An example of Shakespeare's use of the aside can be found in Juliet's conversation with her mother about Romeo in Act III, Scene V. When Lady Capulet remarks that Romeo is a villain, Juliet replies in an aside, "Villain and he be many miles asunder" (line 84).

C. A **foil** is a character whose qualities or actions usually serve to emphasize the actions or qualities of the main character, the protagonist, by providing a strong contrast. On occasion, the foil is used as a contrast to a character other than the main one. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare uses Benvolio as a foil for both Mercutio and Tybalt. Benvolio has a steady, peaceable nature, whereas both Mercutio and Tybalt are impulsive, rash, and hotheaded.

D. **Allusions** are indirect references to a person, place, poem, book, event, etc., which is not part of the story, that the author expects the reader will recognize. Shakespeare alludes to Greek and Roman mythology and general folklore in *Romeo and Juliet*, such as with his references to Aurora, Queen Mab, and the Prince of Cats.

E. **Irony**—many different types are found in *Romeo and Juliet*, among them:
1. **Verbal Irony**: a difference between what is literally stated and what is implied
2. **Dramatic Irony**: a contradiction between what a character thinks or says and what the audience knows to be true
3. **Cosmic Irony**: the suggestion that a god or fate controls and meddles with human lives.
    Cosmic irony, in particular, can be seen quite frequently throughout *Romeo and Juliet* in Romeo's continued belief that his life is being dictated by the forces of fate. Upon learning of Juliet's "death," for example in Act V, Scene IV, his reaction is, "I defy you, stars!" (line 24).
F. **Apostrophe** is an address to someone who is absent and cannot hear the speaker, or to something nonhuman that cannot understand. An apostrophe allows the speaker to think aloud, and reveals those thoughts to the audience.

An example of apostrophe from *Romeo and Juliet* occurs when Juliet adjures "Come, night; come, Romeo; come, thou day in night" (Act III, Scene II, line 18).

G. **Oxymoron**
   - Two concepts that do not go together but are used together.
   - For example, "loving hate" and "heavy lightness" from Romeo's dialogue with Benvolio in Act I scene I

H. **Paradox**

   - A statement that contradicts itself. There are more words in a Paradox than an Oxymoron. An Oxymoron is only two words, and a Paradox is similar but has other words separating the Oxymoron.
   - For example, Juliet is upset after she hears that Romeo has killed her cousin Tybalt. She describes Romeo as a, "Book containing such vile matter so fairly bound ."

Other Features of Language to define:

Foreshadowing

Conceit

Metonymy

Alliteration

Repetition

Polysyndeton

Asyndeton

Epistrophe

Inversion

Parallelism

Antithesis