

ROMEO AND JULIET | FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Shakespeare's language can seem scary, but give it a try! *Go at your own pace, and have fun!*



SHAKESPEARE IN PRISON

DETROIT PUBLIC THEATRE'S
SIGNATURE COMMUNITY PROGRAM

Mercutio and Romeo are buddies, and they're headed to a dance. (Specifically, a masque, which is an extra exciting dance because everyone is in *masques!...masks...whatever.*) Romeo needs this dance: He's suuuuper bummed that the girl he likes doesn't like him back, so he's been all emo ever since he walked onstage in the first scene.

Little do they know that, at the masque, Romeo will meet...JULIET!

Meanwhile, Mercutio wants Romeo to stop moping (don't we all?). So, in this scene, Mercutio tries to distract his friend before things get all emo.



The Shakespeare

ROMEO
And we mean well in going to this masque,
But 'tis no wit to go.

MERCUTIO
Why, may one ask?

ROMEO
I dreamt a dream tonight.

MERCUTIO
And so did I.

ROMEO
Well, what was yours?

MERCUTIO
That dreamers often lie.

ROMEO
In bed asleep while they do dream things true.

MERCUTIO
O, then I see Queen Mab hath been with you.
She is the fairies' midwife, and she comes
In shape no bigger than an agate stone
On the forefinger of an alderman,
Drawn with a team of little atomies
Over men's noses as they lie asleep.
Her chariot is hazelnut
Made by a joiner squirrel or old grub,
Time out o'mind the fairies' coach makers;
Her wagon-spokes* made of long spinners' legs,
The cover* of the wings of grasshoppers,
Her traces* of the smallest spider web,
Her collars* of the moonshine's watery beams,
Her whip* of cricket's bone, the lash* of film,
Her wagoner a small grey-coated gnat,
Not half so big as a round little worm
Pricked from the lazy finger of a maid,
And in this state she gallops night by night

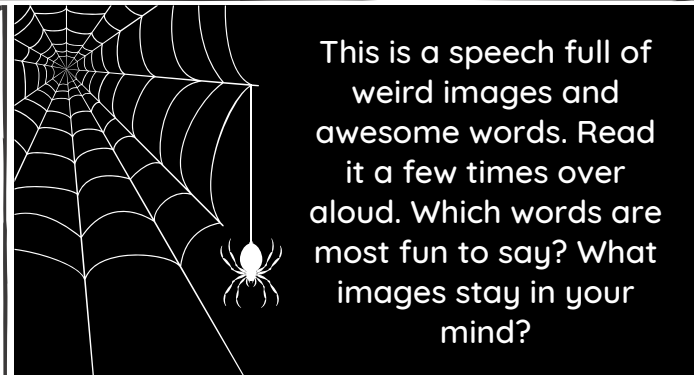
An emo dream, obviously

Through lovers' brains, and then they dream of love;
On courtiers* knees, that dream on curtsies straight;
O'er lawyers' fingers, who straight dream on fees;
O'er ladies' lips, who straight on kisses dream,
Which oft the angry Mab with blisters plagues,
Because their breaths with sweetmeats tainted are.
Sometime she gallops o'er a lawyer's nose,
And then dreams he of smelling out a suit;
And sometime comes she with a tithe-pig's tail,
Tickling a parson's nose as he lies asleep;
Then he dreams of another benefice.
Sometime she driveth o'er a soldier's neck,
And then dreams he of cutting foreign throats,
Of breaches, ambuscados, Spanish blades,*
Of healths five fathom deep; and then anon
Drums in his ear, at which he starts and walks,
And being thus frightened, swears a prayer or two
And sleeps again. This is that very Mab
That plaits the manes of horses in the night,
And bakes the elf-locks in foul sluttish hairs,
Which once untangled much misfortune bodes.
This is the hag, when maids lie on their backs,
That presses them and learns them first to bear,
Making them women of good carriage.
This is she—

ROMEO
Peace, peace, Mercutio, peace,
Thou talk'st of nothing.

MERCUTIO
True. I talk of dreams,
Which are the children of an idle brain,
Begot of nothing but vain fantasy,
Which is as thin of substance as the air,
And more inconstant than the wind who woos
Even now the frozen bosom of the north,
And, being angered, puffs away from thence,
Turning his side to the dew-dropping south.

BENVOLIO
This wind you talk of blows us from ourselves;
Supper is done, and we shall come too late.



This is a speech full of weird images and awesome words. Read it a few times over aloud. Which words are most fun to say? What images stay in your mind?



The Translation

ROMEO
We mean well by going to this masquerade ball, but it's not smart of us to go.

MERCUTIO
Why, may I ask?

ROMEO
I had a dream last night.

MERCUTIO
So did I.

ROMEO
Well, what was your dream?

MERCUTIO
My dream told me that dreamers often lie.

ROMEO
They lie in bed while they dream about the truth.

MERCUTIO
Oh, then I see you've been with Queen Mab.

BENVOLIO
Who's Queen Mab?

MERCUTIO
She's the fairies' midwife. She's no bigger than the stone on a city councilman's ring. She rides around in a wagon drawn by tiny little dust mites, and she rides over men's noses as they lie sleeping. The spokes of her wagon are made of

spiders' legs. The cover of her wagon is made of grasshoppers' wings. The reins are made of the smallest spiderwebs. The harnesses are made out of moonbeams. Her whip is a thread attached to a cricket's bone. Her wagon driver is a tiny bug in a gray coat; he's not half the size of a little round worm that comes from the finger of a lazy young girl. Her chariot is a hazelnut shell. It was made by a woodworking squirrel or an old worm; they've made wagons for the fairies as long as anyone can remember. In this royal wagon, she rides every night through the brains of lovers and makes them dream about love. She rides over courtiers' knees, and they dream about curtsying. She rides over lawyers' fingers, and right away, they dream about their fees. She rides over ladies' lips, and they immediately dream of kisses. Queen Mab often puts blisters on their lips because their breath smells like candy, which makes her mad. Sometimes she rides over a lawyer's nose, and he dreams of smelling out a lawsuit. Sometimes she tickles a priest's nose with a pig's tail, and he dreams of a large donation. Sometimes she rides over a soldier's neck, and he dreams of cutting the throats of foreign enemies, of breaking down walls, of ambushes, of Spanish swords, and of enormous cups of liquor. And then, drums beat in his ear and he wakes up. He's frightened, so he says a couple of prayers and goes back to sleep. She is the same Mab who tangles the hair in horses' manes at night and makes the tangles hard in the dirty hairs, which bring bad luck if they're untangled. Mab is the old hag who gives false love dreams to young women and teaches them how to love and have children. She's the one—

ROMEO
Enough, enough! Mercutio, be quiet. You're talking nonsense.

MERCUTIO
True. I'm talking about dreams, which are the products of a brain that's doing nothing. Dreams are nothing but silly imagination, as thin as air, and less predictable than the wind, which sometimes blows on the frozen north and then gets angry and blows south.

BENVOLIO
The wind you're talking about is blowing us off our course. Dinner is over, and we're going to get there too late.



ELF-LOCKS

According to legend, elves would tangle people's hair at night.



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You can respond to these in any way you choose:

Write

ACT IT OUT

Talk about it

Draw

THINK ABOUT IT

... up to you!



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This is a long, strange speech that doesn't have anything to do with the plot of the play. If you're the actor playing Mercutio, the challenge is to keep the audience interested.

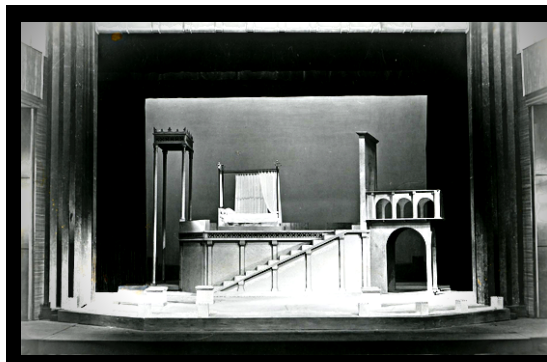
How will you do this?
Try it out!

Read the speech to someone and see when they start to lose interest. Then try that part again. How will you keep their attention?



**THIS SPEECH IS ALL ABOUT MOVEMENT.
HOW WOULD YOU REPRESENT THIS SPEECH IN MOTION?**

(A DANCE! A SERIES OF GESTURES! A PANTOMIME! A LIGHT SHOW! WHATEVER!)

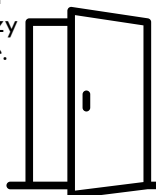


How would you *block** this speech on the example set to the left (which is from a production by the Royal Shakespeare Company)? Remember to think about both Mercutio and Romeo... and Benvolio, who is there but doesn't say anything.

* *blocking* is the movement of actors on stage



On some level, Mercutio is just distracting Romeo. But this crazy speech comes from somewhere. What is Mercutio's deal? Where is he getting all of this stuff? And what is his point? Does he have a point? Does it matter?



YOU CAN TELL A LOT ABOUT SOMEBODY BY LOOKING AT WHERE THEY LIVE. WHAT IS MERCUTIO'S ROOM LIKE? IS IT NEAT OR MESSY? WHAT COLORS DOES HE LIKE? WHAT'S IN HIS CLOSET? UNDER HIS BED?



This speech has inspired many artists over the years, including the authors of these two excerpts. Check them out! And maybe try writing some of your own fan fiction!

Percy Bysshe Shelley isn't as famous as his wife, Mary (she wrote *Frankenstein*), but he was a super-smart poet, and he wrote a long poem all about Queen Mab!

from
Queen Mab
Percy Bysshe Shelley
(1821)

*Hark! whence that rushing sound?
Behold the chariot of the Fairy Queen!
Celestial coursers paw the unyielding air;
Their filmy pennons at her word they furl,
And stop obedient to the reins of light:
These the Queen of Spells drew in,
She spread a charm around the spot,
And leaning graceful from the ethereal car,
Long did she gaze, and silently,
Upon the slumbering maid.*

You may not have heard of J.M. Barrie, but you've probably heard of Peter Pan! In the original story, it's Queen Mab who gives Peter the power to fly...

from
The Little White Bird
J.M. Barrie
(1902)

"I can give you the power to fly to your mother's house," Queen Mab said, "but I can't open the door for you."

"The window will be open," Peter said confidently. "Mother always keeps it open in the hope that I may fly back."

So as he persisted in his wish, the fairies had to grant it. The way they gave him power to fly was this: They all tickled him on the shoulder, and soon he felt a funny itching in that part and then up he rose higher and higher and flew away out of the Gardens and over the house-tops.