

# Oxymoron

Juliet, bidding farewell to Romeo, says:

Parting is such sweet sorrow (2.2.184)

'Sweet sorrow' is an oxymoron: two incongruous or contradictory words brought together to make a striking expression. Much of *Romeo and Juliet* is about the clash of opposites: Montagues against Capulets, youth against age, life versus death, etc. Those oppositions are reflected in the oxymorons in the play:

ROMEO Here's much to do with hate, but more with love:  
Why then, O brawling love, O loving hate,  
O any thing of nothing first create!  
O heavy lightness, serious vanity,  
Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms,  
Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health,  
Still-waking sleep, that is not what it is! (1.1.166-172)

JULIET O serpent heart, hid with a flow'ring face!  
Did ever dragon keep so fair a cave?  
Beautiful tyrant, fiend angelical!  
Dove-feathered raven, wolvis-ravens lamb!  
Despisèd substance of divinest show!  
Just opposite to what thou justly seem'st,  
A damnèd saint, an honourable villain! (3.2.73-79)



'Loving hate'

- 1 Work with a partner or small group. Identify and underline Romeo's or Juliet's oxymorons (Romeo has a dozen oxymorons, Juliet has at least seven). Choose one oxymoron and portray it as a still photograph, or tableau. The class guesses which oxymoron has been chosen.
- 2 Make up oxymorons of your own and act them out for the class to guess. If you want a few 'starters', fill in the blanks:

slow .....

cowardly .....