

How is Benvolio presented in the play? (25)

Throughout Shakespeare's works, he aims to not only educate society through entertainment in the form of a play, but to criticise the flawed society on the restrictions that have been enforced upon the individuals. Benvolio is portrayed as an intelligent, responsible character who serves as a peacemaker in chaotic environments. The name 'Benvolio' is derived from the word benevolent which means good will. He aims to bring people together as he tells the 'fools' to 'part' to prevent a brawl. This essay critically explores Benvolio's character and nature throughout the play.

Initially, Benvolio attempts to undermine Tybalt's movement as he described how 'he hiss'd him in scorn' and 'hurt withal' suggesting that he believes Tybalt only results to violence and Benvolio wants to impress Lord Montague even though he still withdraws his sword to defend his household. The verb 'hiss'd' indicates disapproval from Benvolio about Tybalt. This is theorised by the concept of toxic masculinity, where a man feels the need to assert his dominance by resorting to violence, a stereotypical view held by society. We observe this by Tybalt and Benvolio who are foil characters but share similar opinions which makes them more similar than we perceive them to be. Tybalt is the reckless side of man who seeks for instant gratification, whereas Benvolio is the optimistic side of a man, theorised by Freud and the idea of id, ego and superego. As a result, this causes an imbalance between the two as one constantly strives to aim to do good and one resorts to evil, highlighting the fact that an individual will never live up to be their true self, the ego which Shakespeare conceivably does. Although audiences at the time wouldn't praise Benvolio for his cowardice actions, contemporary audiences would praise Benvolio for his aim to achieve peace.

In addition, Benvolio boldly describes his 'troubled mind' and how his thoughts consume him the most when he is 'alone'. He also portrays 'love' as 'tyrannous', indicating that there is an emotional side to him that is only unveiled to Romeo. The adjective 'tyrannous' means cruel, arbitrary use of power and this explains how love is controlling and how it focuses on the manipulative attributes of a person which Benvolio has seemed to have experienced. His empathetic nature highlights his loyalty to Romeo and to the people he cares about, as he has the ability to understand Romeo's unrequited feelings towards Rosaline. Also, he uses an arrogant tone as he remarks that Romeo should 'go to the ball' to help his confused feelings associated with Rosaline. This indicates his controlling nature that is repressed as he doesn't want to expose his true self, supported by the theory of individuation. He believes that if he exposes his true colours he will despise himself as he wants to only find positivity in every situation he is exposed to. Perhaps Shakespeare uses imperatives to describe Benvolio's controlling nature but his compassion and emotional attachment to Romeo to add a sense of value to him as it makes him more likeable and therefore support his ideas even if they are not the most beneficial. Audiences feel astonished to notice Benvolio creating the wrong decisions which leads to Romeo's ultimate demise.

Moreover, Benvolio is fearful of Romeo, which the writer subtly exposes this, (in act two) as Mercutio remarks something and Benvolio describes that it 'will anger him'. This highlights his dedication towards Romeo that he refrains from speaking bad about him when he is not there. He later on mocks the nurse by calling her 'two two' and a 'shirt' and a 'smock' and how the nurse should be 'indited' to 'some supper', highlighting the fact that he joined in as Mercutio was ridiculing her. The verb 'indite' suggests that he jokes about inviting her to

supper, indirectly commenting about her weight and appearance. Benvolio has the need for acceptance- it is a basic human instinct. He wants to fit in, belong. It doesn't matter to him if it's the correct and moral choice but he seeks validation from the people around him to help him feel superior. Perhaps Shakespeare does this to criticise the human mind and how we do not always need to desire someone else's approval or agreement ; we thrive off validation which can result in consequences. Audiences feel not as surprised as deep down Benvolio is not as good of a person as he flaunts.

Similarly, Shakespeare cleverly describes Benvolio as he attempts to stop the fighting in act three as he has a 'vested interest' as he describes to the citizens of Verona to not 'scrape a brawl' and 'reason coldly' about their 'grievances', indicating that his response is biased as he is a representative of the Montague compound. The juxtaposition of Benvolio's coolness and Tybalt's fiery wrath indicates how Benvolio is taking control of the situation and calming down the tense atmosphere caused by the 'ancient grudge'. The adverb 'coldly' means a lack of kindness and affection which connotes the impression that Benvolio believes to find solutions to problems without any compassion to obtain the result you want. Also, he encourages Romeo to unleash his anger as he describes Mercutio as 'brave' and 'dead' as he acted as a sacrifice for the victory of the Montagues. He uses others to seek his vengeance which is quite selfish as he doesn't want to confess his wrongdoings as he physically did not commit anything but influenced others to do it for him. Perhaps Shakespeare has used this technique to enlighten us on the fact that Benvolio places a facade on to help sustain his high reputation within society and therefore exploits his friends, Romeo, into committing crimes which causes him to be inadequate. Audiences at the time feel Benvolio is a moral compass for his relatives as he provides them with advice, but is his advice always necessary and morally correct?

Finally, in the last scene that Benvolio appears in, Shakespeare boldly connotes the impression that Benvolio admits to his attitudes. He recounts to the prince the events of the peripeteia, in act three, scene one and describes how Romeo has 'slain' Tybalt and how he 'pierce[d]' 'steel' at Mercutio, showing us that Benvolio speaks truthfully to the Prince, even if it was his dearest friend, causing us to rely on him as he is an honest person. He also says how if it is not the truth he would 'die' indicating his own life is placed on the line, further exemplifying his nature of being morally correct. However this undermines his message as he has influenced Romeo and Mercutio to act out in a certain manner suitable for his liking as all of their actions are based on the principles Benvolio stands by. Perhaps Shakespeare uses Benvolio to convey a source of moral authority and how he constantly tries to be a better person, unlike other characters, which highlights his benevolence but the way he perceives resolutions to complications is not the best way to go about things. Shakespeare chooses to remove Benvolio from the play which makes us question his faithfulness to Romeo, why is Balthasar with Romeo in act 5, which contributes to his ultimate downfall and death?

After all the arguments surrounding Benvolio, is he really a courageous person? To conclude, Shakespeare has cleverly catalysed Benvolio as a dramatic vehicle to reduce tension added to the plotline. He is described as a responsible person but to what extent? Shakespeare's intentions have been successful as he makes an audience ponder on the fact if they are also a good person and how their actions can influence others, like Benvolio does to Romeo.