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The Tragedy of

# Romeo and Juliet

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## Introduction

This volume of William Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet* consists of two versions of the play. The first is the original, based on the *Globe* edition of 1860, which was in turn based on the Folio of 1623. And this, further, was a reprint of a still earlier edition. The second version is a translation of the original into contemporary English. In both versions spelling and punctuation have been updated, and the names of the characters have been spelled out in full for easier reading. Insights from modern scholars have been included in both versions.

The translation of *Romeo and Juliet* is not meant to take the place of the original. Instead, it is an alternative to the notes usually included in modern editions. In many editions these notes interfere with the reading of the play. Whether alongside or below the original text, the notes break the rhythm of reading and frequently force the reader to turn back to an earlier page or jump ahead to a later one. Having a translation that runs parallel to the original, line for line, allows the reader to move easily from Elizabethan to contemporary English and back again. It's simply a better way to introduce Shakespeare.

Also, this translation is suitable for performance, where notes are not available to the audience. Admittedly, a well-directed and well-acted production can do much to clarify Shakespeare's language. And yet, there will be numerous references and lines whose meanings are not accessible to many on a first hearing. What, for instance, does Juliet mean when she says, "I'll stay the circumstance"?

### Shakespeare's Language

Shakespeare's language does present problems for modern readers. After all, four centuries separate us from him. During this time words have acquired new meanings or have dropped from the language altogether, and sentence structures have become less fluid. But these are solvable problems.

First of all, most of the words that Shakespeare used are still current. For those words whose meanings have changed and for those words no longer in the language, modern equivalents are found in this translation. For a small number of words—chiefly names of places, biblical and mythological characters—a glossary can be found on page 247.

The meaning of words is one problem. The position of words is another. Today, the order of words in declarative sentences is almost fixed. The subject comes first, then the verb, and finally, if there is one, the object. In

Shakespeare's time, the order of words, particularly in poetic drama, was more fluid. Shakespeare has Juliet say,

But all this I did know before.

Whereas we would usually arrange the words in this order,

But I knew all this before.

Earlier in the play, Paris says,

Of honorable reckoning are you both.

We would probably say,

You are both of honorable reckoning.

This does not mean that Shakespeare never uses words in what we consider normal order. As often as not, he does. Here, for instance, are Romeo and a servant in conversation,

Servant But, I pray, can you read anything you see?

Romeo Ay, if I know the letters and the language.

When Shakespeare does invert the order of words, he does so for a reason or for a variety of reasons—to create a rhythm, to emphasize a word, to achieve a rhyme. Whether a play is in verse, as most of this play is, or in prose, it is still written in sentences. And that means that, despite the order, all the words needed to make complete sentences are there. If you are puzzled by a sentence, first look for the subject and then try rearranging the words in the order that you would normally use. It takes a little practice, but you will be surprised how quickly you acquire the skill.

Shakespeare sometimes separates sentence parts—subject and verb, for example—that would normally be run together. Here are some lines spoken by Benvolio, describing the encounter between Romeo and Tybalt,

All this uttered

With gentle breath, calm look, knees humbly bowed,

Could not take truce with the unruly spleen

Of Tybalt, deaf to peace,

Between the subject *this* and the verb *could not take* comes a compound prepositional phrase that interrupts the normal sequence. Again, look for the subject and then the verb and put the two together. You'll find, however, that your rearranged sentence, while clear, is not as rhythmical as Shakespeare's.

## PROLOGUE

*Enter* CHORUS

Two households, both alike in dignity,

(In fair Verona, where we lay our scene),

From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,

Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.

From forth the fatal loins of these two foes

5

A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life;

Whose misadventured piteous overthrows

Doth with their death bury their parents' strife.

The fearful passage of their death-marked love,

And the continuance of their parents' rage,

10

Which, but their children's end, nought could remove,

Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage;

The which if you with patient ears attend,

What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.

*Exeunt*

## PROLOGUE

*Enter* SPEAKER

Two families, both of the nobility,

(In fair Verona, where our play takes place)

From an ancient grudge, erupt in new hostility,

And the blood of one with the blood of the other is shed.

From the ill-fated loins of these two foes

5

A pair of star-crossed lovers are born;

Whose unfortunate and pitiful woes

Do only with death bury their parents' scorn.

The fearful course of this foredoomed love

And of the parents' continuing rage,

10

Which nothing but their children's death could move,

Is for two hours the subject of our stage;

And, if you listen with patience and with care,

What's unsaid here, our acting will then make clear.

*Exit*

## Act One

### Scene 1 [*Verona. A public place*]

*Enter SAMPSON and GREGORY, servants of the House of Capulet, with swords and bucklers*

SAMPSON Gregory, upon my word, we'll not carry coals.

GREGORY No, for then we should be colliers.

SAMPSON I mean, an we be in choler, we'll draw.

GREGORY Ay, while you live, draw your neck out of collar.

SAMPSON I strike quickly, being moved. 5

GREGORY But thou art not quickly moved to strike.

SAMPSON A dog of the house of Montague moves me.

GREGORY To move is to stir; and to be valiant is to stand. Therefore,  
if thou art moved, thou runnest away.

SAMPSON A dog of that house shall move me to stand. I will take the 10  
wall of any man or maid of Montague's.

GREGORY That shows thee a weak slave, for the weakest goes to the  
wall.

SAMPSON 'Tis true, and therefore women being the weaker vessels  
are ever thrust to the wall. Therefore, I will push Montague's men  
from the wall, and thrust his maids to the wall. 15

GREGORY The quarrel is between our masters and us their men.

SAMPSON 'Tis all one. I will show myself a tyrant. When I have  
fought with the men, I will be civil with the maids—I will  
cut off their heads.

GREGORY The heads of the maids? 20

SAMPSON Ay, the heads of the maids, or their maidenheads—take it  
in what sense thou wilt.

GREGORY They must take it in the sense that feel it.

## Act One

### Scene 1 [*Verona. A public place*]

*Enter SAMPSON and GREGORY, servants of the House of Capulet, with swords and small shields*

SAMPSON Gregory, upon my word, we'll not stoop to carrying out coals.

GREGORY No, for then we should be coal miners.

SAMPSON I mean, if we're in a choler, we'll draw our swords.

GREGORY Yes, if your neck's in a collar, you'll have to withdraw.

SAMPSON I strike quickly once I'm provoked. 5

GREGORY But you are not easily provoked.

SAMPSON A dog from the house of Montague provokes me.

GREGORY To be provoked is to arouse; and to be virile is to stand tall; therefore, if you are provoked, you run off.

SAMPSON A dog of that house shall provoke me to stand tall. I will 10  
push to the wall any man or maid of Montague's.

GREGORY That shows you to be a weakling, for the weakest goes to the wall.

SAMPSON That's true, and because they're weaker, women are always thrust to the wall. Therefore, I will push Montague's men from the wall and thrust his maids against the wall. 15

GREGORY The quarrel is between our masters and us, their men.

SAMPSON It's all the same. I will show myself to be a tyrant. After I have fought the men, I will be courteous to the maids—I will cut off their heads.

GREGORY The heads of the maids? 20

SAMPSON Yes, the heads of the maids, or their maidenheads—take it in whatever sense you will.

GREGORY They will surely take it in one sense—those who feel it.



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SAMPSON Me they shall feel while I am able to stand, and 'tis  
known I am a pretty piece of flesh. 25

GREGORY 'Tis well thou are not fish; if thou hadst, thou hadst been  
poor-john. Draw thy tool, here comes two of the house of  
Montagues.

*Enter ABRAHAM and another SERVANT*

SAMPSON My naked weapon is out. Quarrel, I will back thee.

GREGORY How, turn thy back and run? 30

SAMPSON Fear me not.

GREGORY No, marry, I fear thee!

SAMPSON Let us take the law of our sides; let them begin.

GREGORY I will frown as I pass by, and let them take it as they list.

SAMPSON Nay, as they dare. I will bite my thumb at them, which is 35  
a disgrace if they bear it.

ABRAHAM Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?

SAMPSON I do bite my thumb, sir.

ABRAHAM Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?

SAMPSON [*Aside to GREGORY*] Is the law on our side if I say "Ay"? 40

GREGORY [*Aside to SAMPSON*] No.

SAMPSON No, sir, I do not bite my thumb at you, sir, but I bite my  
thumb, sir.

GREGORY Do you quarrel, sir?

ABRAHAM Quarrel, sir? No, sir. 45

SAMPSON But if you do, sir, I am for you. I serve as good a man  
as you.

ABRAHAM No better.

SAMPSON Well, sir.

*Enter BENVOLIO*

Act One, Scene 1

SAMPSON They shall feel it as long as I am erect, and it's well known  
that I am a very manly person. 25

GREGORY It's a good thing you're not a fish; if you were, you would  
have been a piker. Draw your weapon; here come two of the house  
of Montague.

*Enter ABRAHAM and another SERVANT*

SAMPSON My naked weapon is out. Start a quarrel, and I'll back you.

GREGORY How? Turn your back and run? 30

SAMPSON Don't be afraid for me.

GREGORY No, indeed, I'm afraid of you.

SAMPSON Let us keep the law on our side; let them begin.

GREGORY I will frown as I go by, and let them take it as they wish.

SAMPSON No, as they dare. I will thumb my nose at them, which is 35  
an insult if they stand for it.

ABRAHAM Do you thumb your nose at us, sir?

SAMPSON I do thumb my nose, sir.

ABRAHAM Do you thumb your nose at us, sir?

SAMPSON [*Aside to GREGORY*] Is the law on our side if I say "Yes"? 40

GREGORY [*Aside to SAMPSON*] No.

SAMPSON No, sir, I do not thumb my nose at you, sir, but I thumb  
my nose, sir.

GREGORY Do you want to start a fight, sir?

ABRAHAM Start a fight, sir? No, sir. 45

SAMPSON Because if you do, sir, I am ready. My master is as  
good as yours.

ABRAHAM But no better.

SAMPSON Well, sir.

*Enter BENVOLIO*

## PROLOGUE

*Enter* CHORUS

Now old desire doth in his deathbed lie,

And young affection gapes to be his heir;

That fair for which love groaned for and would die,

With tender Juliet matched, is now not fair.

Now Romeo is beloved, and loves again,

5

Alike bewitched by the charm of looks;

But to his foe supposed he must complain,

And she steal love's sweet bait from fearful hooks.

Being held a foe, he may not have access

To breathe such vows as lovers use to swear;

10

And she, as much in love, her means much less

To meet her new beloved anywhere.

But passion lends them power, time means to meet,

Tempering extremities with extreme sweet.

*Exeunt*

## PROLOGUE

*Enter* SPEAKER

The old love does now on its deathbed lie,

And new desire longs to be its heir;

That fair maid, whom love sighed for, and would die,

Compared to Juliet, she is now not fair.

Now Romeo is beloved, and loves again,

5

Both alike are bewitched by charming looks.

But to his supposed foe he must explain,

And she steal love's sweet bait from fearful hooks.

Being a foe, he cannot have access

To breathe such vows as lovers make and swear;

10

And she, as much in love, has even less

A chance to meet her new love anywhere.

But passion gives them power and time the means to meet,

Tempering woes with things extremely sweet.

*Exit*

## Act Two

**Scene 1** [*A lane by the wall of Capulet's orchard*]

*Enter* ROMEO

ROMEO Can I go forward when my heart is here?

Turn back, dull earth, and find thy center out.

[*He withdraws*]

*Enter* BENVOLIO and MERCUTIO

BENVOLIO Romeo! My cousin Romeo! Romeo!

MERCUTIO He is wise,

And on my life, hath stolen him home to bed. 5

BENVOLIO He ran this way, and leapt this orchard wall.

Call, good Mercutio.

MERCUTIO Nay, I'll conjure too.

Romeo! Humors! Madman! Passion! Lover!

Appear thou in the likeness of a sigh, 10

Speak but one rhyme and I am satisfied.

Cry but "Ay, me!" Pronounce but "love" and "dove,"

Speak to my gossip Venus one fair word,

One nickname for her purblind son and heir,

Young Adam Cupid, he that shot so trim 15

When King Cophetua loved the beggar maid.

He heareth not, he stirreth not, he moveth not!

The ape is dead, and I must conjure him.

I conjure thee by Rosaline's bright eyes,

By her high forehead and her scarlet lip, 20

By her fine foot, straight leg, and quivering thigh,

And the demesnes that there adjacent lie,

That in thy likeness thou appear to us!

## Act Two

**Scene 1** [*A lane by the wall of Capulet's orchard*]

*Enter* ROMEO

ROMEO How can I walk on, now that my heart is here?

Turn back, dull clod, and find the center of your world.

[*He withdraws*]

*Enter* BENVOLIO and MERCUTIO

BENVOLIO Romeo! My cousin Romeo! Romeo!

MERCUTIO He is wise.

I am willing to bet he's stolen home to bed. 5

BENVOLIO He ran this way and climbed this orchard wall.

Call him, good Mercutio.

MERCUTIO No, I'll say the magic words:

Romeo, moody madman, passionate lover!

Appear now in the likeness of a sigh. 10

Speak just one rhyme, and I'll be satisfied.

Cry just one "I'm here," pronounce just one "love" and "dove";

Speak to my friend Venus just one kind word,

One nickname for her blindfolded son and heir,

Young Adam Cupid, who shot so true 15

He caused a king to love a beggar maid.

He must not hear us, he has not stirred, he has not moved.

He's playing possum, but I'll rouse him.

I call upon you by Rosaline's bright eyes,

By her high forehead and her scarlet lips, 20

By her dainty feet, straight legs and quivering thighs,

And by all the surrounding areas.

Come out of hiding and appear as yourself.

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- BENVOLIO And if he hear thee, thou wilt anger him.
- MERCUTIO This cannot anger him. 'Twould anger him 25  
To raise a spirit in his mistress' circle  
Of some strange nature, letting it there stand  
Till she had laid it and conjured it down;  
That were some spite. My invocation  
Is fair and honest: in his mistress' name, 30  
I conjure only but to raise up him.
- BENVOLIO Come, he hath hid himself among these trees  
To be consorted with the humorous night.  
Blind is his love, and best befits the dark.
- MERCUTIO If love be blind, love cannot hit the mark. 35  
Now will he sit under a medlar tree  
And wish his mistress were that kind of fruit  
As maids call medlars when they laugh alone.  
O Romeo, that she were, O that she were  
An open, and thou a poperin pear! 40  
Romeo, good night. I'll to my truckle-bed.  
This field-bed is too cold for me to sleep.  
Come, shall we go?
- BENVOLIO Go then, for 'tis in vain  
To seek him here that means not to be found. 45

*Exeunt BENVOLIO and MERCUTIO*

Act Two, Scene 1

BENVOLIO And if he hears you, you will anger him.

MERCUTIO This cannot anger him. It would anger him 25

If I raised a spirit in his beloved's presence,

Some strange spirit that stood there

Until she cast a spell to remove it.

Now that would be spiteful, but my conjuring

Is fair and honest: in his beloved's name, 30

I conjured only but to raise him up.

BENVOLIO Come, he has hid himself among these trees

To be alone in the damp and dewy night.

His love is blind, so it suits the dark.

MERCUTIO But if love is blind, it cannot hit the mark. 35

Now he'll sit under an apple tree

And wish his beloved were that kind of fruit

Girls call "apples" when they joke in private.

Oh, Romeo, if she were, if only she were

A ripe apple and you a long, thick pear. 40

Good night Romeo. I'm off to my trundle bed.

This field's too cold for me to sleep in.

Come, shall we go?

BENVOLIO Let us go. It is useless to look

For one who refuses to be found. 45

*Exit BENVOLIO and MERCUTIO*



Romeo and Juliet

**NOTES**

## Glossary

The following terms are taken from the translation of *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*. The scene and line numbers are given in parentheses after the terms, which are listed in the order they first occur.

### ACT ONE

**Verona** (Prologue, line 2): a town in northeastern Italy

**star-crossed** (Prologue, line 6): born under the unfavorable influence of the stars and destined for unhappiness

**Cupid** (scene 1, line 207): god of love. He is often pictured as a child, blindfolded, carrying a bow and arrows

**Diana** (scene 1, line 207): the moon goddess, who chose to remain a virgin

**plantain leaf** (scene 2, line 52): broad leaf used to staunch the flow of blood

**Lammastide** (scene 3, line 17): a religious festival, beginning August 1, giving thanks for the harvest by blessing the loaves of bread made from the new crop

**Mantua** (scene 3, line 31): a town in northern Italy, about 25 miles from Verona

**Queen Mab** (scene 4, line 57): this mythological creature has no known earlier reference, so she is probably Shakespeare's invention

**Pentecost** (scene 5, line 36): a religious feast occurring fifty days after Easter, celebrating the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles of Christ

**palmer** (scene 5, line 104): a religious pilgrim who carried palm branches to show they had visited the Holy Land