

# Contents

## **INTRODUCING SHAKESPEARE 1**

- About This Translation 2
- Line Counts 3
- Source of the Play 4
- Shakespeare's Life 4
- Shakespeare's Language 6
- Shakespeare's Theatre 7
- Stage Directions 9
- Transitions 10
- Solo Speeches 10
- Teaching Suggestions 10
- Additional Teaching Suggestions 11

## **SUMMARIES OF ACTS AND SCENES 13**

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION 21**

## **STAGING *ROMEO AND JULIET* 27**

## **SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY 31**

## **APPENDICES AND GLOSSARY 34**

- I. Guide to Pronouncing Proper Names in *Romeo and Juliet* 35
  - II. Shakespearean Time Line 37
  - III. A Brief Look at Shakespeare's Source 39
- Glossary 41

## INTRODUCING SHAKESPEARE

There is an aura of unreality about the plays of Shakespeare, and students feel this, although they may not be able to express their reactions precisely. They may say that Shakespeare's language is "too flowery" or that people in real life don't talk the way these characters do. And this is true. The people one meets in real life are not nearly as articulate as the characters in Shakespeare. It would probably be unbearable if the people one met at the bank and the supermarket, in school or during meetings spoke unrelievedly in the style of the great poets.

Shakespeare's characters lack the foggy-mindedness found in everyday life; they are concentrated and fully in command of their verbal resources. Shakespeare's is a world in which the brain and the heart and the tongue are directly connected. It's perhaps a world that doesn't exist, but what an interesting world it is, one in which people have fully realized their potential—for good and for evil. To have imagined such a world and to have put it on paper is Shakespeare's achievement. And it is why he is read and performed today.

Making Shakespeare's world accessible to students is the reason for this edition of *Romeo and Juliet*, a facing-pages translation with the original text on the left-hand side and a translation into contemporary English on the right. The translation of *Romeo and Juliet* is not meant to take the place of the original. After all, a translation is by its very nature a shadow of the original. This translation is an alternative to the notes usually included in modern editions. In many cases these notes interfere with the reading of the play. Whether alongside or below the original text, they 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 no notes are 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 on a first hearing. What, for instance, does Juliet mean when she says, "I'll stay the circumstance"?

## ABOUT THIS TRANSLATION

Since 1807, when Charles and Mary Lamb published *Tales from Shakespeare*, adaptations of Shakespeare's plays have attempted, more or less successfully, to broaden the audience for these plays—or perhaps, to restore to Shakespeare the full audience he had known in the seventeenth century. These days prose paraphrases of the original are offered to students. Insofar as they succeed, these paraphrases offer a kind of literal rendering of the original, largely stripped of metaphor and poetry. To read them by themselves, without reference to the original, would make you wonder why Shakespeare is still popular.

The translation in this edition aims to retain the feel and the rhythm of the original, but at the same time to be immediately comprehensible to modern audiences and readers, so that they can experience Shakespeare in much the same way the Elizabethans did. That means preserving the sound and the spirit of the original.

Here, for example is a passage taken from the first act of *Romeo and Juliet*. The Count Paris is asking to marry Juliet and is pressing Juliet's father for his consent. Capulet protests that his daughter is still too young to be married, but Paris insists many girls younger than Juliet are already married and happy mothers. Capulet responds:

And too soon marred are those so early made.  
 Earth hath swallowed all my hopes but she,  
 She is the hopeful lady of my earth.  
 But woo her, gentle Paris, get her heart;  
 My will to her consent is but a part.  
 An she agree, within her scope of choice  
 Lies my consent and fair according voice.

The first two lines are clear from what has gone before, but the trouble begins in line three with the word *hopeful*. It is not Juliet who is hopeful. It is Capulet, her father, for whom Juliet represents his hope for the future of his family. The word *fair* in the last line might be interpreted now as meaning Capulet is being fair-minded in the matter or even that his voice is *fair*, meaning “pleasant to hear.” However, Elizabethan audiences would take *fair* here to mean Capulet's full or complete agreement.

To be effective and authentic, a translation into contemporary English should not only be immediately clear, but should have the ring of Shakespeare. The original and the modified parts should meld so seamlessly that, if you did not have the original at hand, you might think you were reading it:

## 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. For example, a *competitor*, in Shakespeare's time, referred to a partner or to an associate. *To let* meant "to hinder," *passing* meant "surpassing," and *by and by* meant "immediately." Some words Shakespeare used have dropped from the language altogether, and sentence structures have become less fluid. But the problems represented by these changes can be resolved.

First of all, most of the words that Shakespeare used are still current. In this translation, for those words whose meanings have changed and for those no longer in the language, modern equivalents are used. For a small number of words—chiefly, names of places and biblical and mythological characters—a glossary, chronologically arranged, can be found on page 247 of the text of the play. Another glossary, alphabetically arranged, will be found in the manual on page 41.

The meaning of words is one problem. The position of words is another. Today, the order of words in declarative sentences is almost fixed. First comes the subject, 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 both are 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 inverts the order of words, he does so 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.

## TRANSITIONS

Abrupt transitions occur fairly frequently in Shakespeare. Often, they are used simply to advance the plot. However, they also frequently reveal a psychological interplay between the characters. For example, in conversation with Benvolio, Romeo says:

Oh me, sad hours seem long.  
Was that my father who left here so fast?

Benvolio responds to the second point first:

It was.

But then he pursues the first matter,

What sadness lengthens your hours, Romeo?

In this passage Benvolio shows the normal reaction of first responding to a question, but he then shows his concern for his friend by going back to Romeo's earlier statement about the sad hours.

## SOLO SPEECHES

There is another difference between the plays of Shakespeare and most modern ones—the solo speeches. These are the asides and the soliloquies in which a character reveals what is on his or her mind. Contemporary dramatists seem to feel that the solo speech is artificial and unrealistic. Oddly enough, modern novelists frequently use a variety of the solo speech. Some critics feel that this convention has given the novel extra power and depth, allowing writers to probe deeply into the motives of their characters. One thing is certain—Shakespeare's plays without the solo speeches would not be as powerful as they are.

## TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

There are several ways in which this edition of *Romeo and Juliet* can be used with students, but perhaps the most effective is to assign a long scene or several short scenes in the translation for reading as homework. Then, in going over this material in class, use the original. This way much valuable time can be saved. Students no longer have to struggle with understanding the basic story, and you can devote your time to providing insights and in-depth appreciation of the play.

For some students, of course, the original text will still represent a formidable obstacle. In those cases, you may want to use the translation as the basis of classroom presentation with carefully selected passages from the original to

# SUMMARIES OF ACTS AND SCENES

## PROLOGUE

A Speaker (Chorus) announces that this play concerns two lovers in Verona, who seem destined by fate and their feuding families to have their romance end tragically. The Speaker, who summarizes the story in a sonnet, also promises to make clear in the performance any detail that may puzzle the audience.

## ACT ONE

### Scene 1

Rather than gradually introduce the idea of two quarreling families, the action immediately plunges the audience into the problem, as we see even the servants of the two households are eager to pick a fight with the other side. Benvolio, a Montague, tries to calm things down, but Tybalt, a Capulet, wants to fight. (Benvolio's name in Italian means "I wish well.") The citizens of Verona protest the rioting, but the head of each household rushes into the argument, despite the protests of their wives. Prince Escalus restores order and warns that death will be the punishment for any more fighting between the Montagues and the Capulets. Romeo, a Montague, arrives, and he and Benvolio discuss Romeo's melancholy over his unrequited love for Rosaline.

### Scene 2

At the Capulet house, Count Paris is urging Juliet's father to permit him to marry his daughter. Capulet protests that she is too young and asks Paris to wait a while longer. Capulet plans a party for the evening and sends a servant out to invite the people on a list. The servant can't read and so asks a passerby, Romeo as fate would have it, to read the list to him. In gratitude, the servant invites Romeo to the party—providing he is not a Montague. Romeo and Benvolio decide to attend anyway, and Benvolio points out that the party will provide many lovely ladies to compare to Rosaline.

### Scene 3

Lady Capulet sends the Nurse, Juliet's attendant, to bring Juliet to her. The Nurse rambles on about Juliet when she was a girl, providing some exposition about Juliet before we meet her. Juliet's mother tells her of Paris' proposal, but Juliet

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

### ACT ONE

1. The Prologue gives away the story, even telling of the death of Romeo and Juliet. Do you think Shakespeare made a mistake by writing the Prologue?

COMMENT: The story of Romeo and Juliet was a familiar one to the Elizabethans. They did not attend the play to see how events turned out. Marchette Chute, in *Shakespeare of London*, has written, "The Elizabethan theatre was not based on the element of surprise but on the gratification of expectations." In staging the play today, the Prologue here and in Act Two are often omitted.

2. Why do you think Shakespeare never explains how the feud between the two families began?

COMMENT: The history is not important to our understanding of the feud because we have immediate evidence of it in the opening scene, with the brawl between the servants of the two households. The feud has infected everyone connected with the two families and now needs no more provocation than a look or a word to erupt into open fighting. It is the effect on the heirs of the original participants that concerns us in this play.

3. What irony is there in the chance encounter between Romeo and the Capulet servant?

COMMENT: Because the servant cannot read, he asks a passerby for help in reading the list of people he has been sent to invite to Capulet's party. The passerby is Romeo, and his kind action in reading the list for the servant earns him an invitation to the party. However, it also ironically earns him his death, as he is fatally attracted to Capulet's daughter at that party.

4. Why is so much importance attached to the fact that Juliet is still rather young to be married?

COMMENT: Her naivete helps to account for her quickness to fall in love at first sight, her haste in agreeing to marry Romeo, her gleeful participation in a secret marriage, and her quick change of mood from blaming Romeo for Tybalt's death to her defense of him.

5. Mercutio's name is close to "mercurial" and the characteristics of eloquence, shrewdness, and changeable temperament. How well does that describe him?

COMMENT: It fits him well. His wit is displayed in all the joking among his friends; even as he is dying he manages the pun, "Ask for me tomorrow and you shall find me a grave man." He is shrewd in judging Romeo's reason for

**APPENDIX I:  
A GUIDE TO PRONOUNCING PROPER NAMES  
IN *ROMEO AND JULIET***

Aurora	ä-RŌ-rŭ
Baltasar	bāl-TÄ-zär <i>or</i> bāl-THÄ-zär
Benvolio	bēn-VŌ-li-ō <i>or</i> bēn-VŌ-leō
Capulet	KĀP-ŭ-lēt
Cleopatra	klē-ō-PĀ-trŭ <i>or</i> klā-ō-PĀT-rŭ
Cupid	KIŪ-pīd
Diana	dī-ĀN-ŭ
Dido	DĪ-dō
Escalus	ĔS-ku-lŭs
Friar Lawrence	FRĪ-ēr LŌ-reŋs
Gregory	GRĔG-ō-rĭ <i>or</i> GRĔG-rĭ
Helen	HĔL-ĕn
Hero	HĒ-rō
Juliet	JĪŪL-yēt <i>or</i> JĪŪ-lĭ-ēt
Lammastide	LĀM-ŭs-TĪD
Laura	LŌ-rŭ
Mantua	MĀN-choo-ŭ <i>or</i> MĀN-tiu-ŭ