ROMEO AND JULIET

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Romeo and Juliet

(Annotated)

Aevum Lectio

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William Shakespeare (1564–1616); Project Gutenberg no. 1513; English text checked against historical witnesses

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Editor's introduction

The first quarrel in *Romeo and Juliet* belongs to servants. Before the lovers meet, the language of household loyalty has already become a language of public threats. The play then lets a private attachment grow inside a city whose streets, celebrations and family obligations keep bringing private life into public view.

Romeo and Juliet do not speak in one unchanging poetic register. They try out the language of sonnets, religious devotion, bargaining and everyday conversation. Their first exchange makes a shared poem out of a meeting between strangers. Later, their questions become more urgent and their arrangements more practical. Reading aloud helps recover these changes of pace, especially when a sentence continues across the end of a verse.

The surrounding voices matter just as much. Mercutio turns a conversation into a performance; the Nurse interrupts the present with memories; Capulet shifts between hospitality and command. Their jokes and repetitions can make a scene feel expansive, but they can also reveal what a speaker refuses to hear. The notes in this edition explain selected words, allusions and verbal games without replacing the dialogue with a running interpretation.

This is a play about messages as well as meetings. Invitations, instructions, reports and promises travel through other people. A reader can watch who knows what at each point, and how long it takes information to arrive. The resulting tension depends on small practical arrangements as much as on the grand language of fortune announced by the Prologue.

This introduction is an editorial draft for Diego Ribeiro de Souza to review.

Dramatis Personæ

ESCALUS, Prince of Verona.
MERCUTIO, kinsman to the Prince, and friend to Romeo.
PARIS, a young Nobleman, kinsman to the Prince.
Page to Paris.

MONTAGUE, head of a Veronese family at feud with the Capulets.
LADY MONTAGUE, wife to Montague.
ROMEO, son to Montague.
BENVOLIO, nephew to Montague, and friend to Romeo.
ABRAM, servant to Montague.
BALTHASAR, servant to Romeo.

CAPULET, head of a Veronese family at feud with the Montagues.
LADY CAPULET, wife to Capulet.
JULIET, daughter to Capulet.
TYBALT, nephew to Lady Capulet.
CAPULET'S COUSIN, an old man.
NURSE to Juliet.
PETER, servant to Juliet's Nurse.
SAMPSON, servant to Capulet.
GREGORY, servant to Capulet.
Servants.

FRIAR LAWRENCE, a Franciscan.
FRIAR JOHN, of the same Order.
An Apothecary.
CHORUS.
Three Musicians.
An Officer.
Citizens of Verona; several Men and Women, relations to both houses; Maskers, Guards, Watchmen and Attendants.

Scene: During the greater part of the Play in Verona; once, in the Fifth Act, at Mantua.

Romeo and Juliet

PROLOGUE

Enter Chorus.

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
A pair of star-cross'd[1] lovers take their life;
Whose misadventur'd piteous overthrows
Doth with their death bury their parents' strife.
The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love,
And the continuance of their parents' rage,
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.

*[*Exit.*]*

1 The stars were believed to influence human destinies: the lovers are marked by an unfavourable conjunction.

ACT I

SCENE I

A public place.

Enter Sampson and Gregory armed with swords and bucklers.

SAMPSON
Gregory, on my word, we'll not carry coals.[2]

GREGORY
No, for then we should be colliers.[3]

SAMPSON
I mean, if we be in choler,[4] we'll draw.

GREGORY
Ay, while you live, draw your neck out o' the collar.

SAMPSON
I strike quickly, being moved.

2 To submit to insults. Gregory deliberately treats the expression as a literal reference to carrying fuel.
3 Coal workers or sellers; the answer continues the joke about coal.
4 Anger. The sound links choler with collier and collar in the servants' exchange.

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 runn'st away.

SAMPSON
A dog of that house shall move me to stand. I will take the wall[5] of any man or maid of Montague's.

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

SAMPSON
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.

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?

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

GREGORY
They must take it in sense that feel it.

5 To claim the safer or more honourable position beside the wall when passing someone in a narrow street.

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

GREGORY
'Tis well thou art not fish; if thou hadst, thou hadst been poor John. Draw thy tool; here comes of the house of Montagues.

Enter Abram and Balthasar.

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

GREGORY
How? Turn thy back and run?

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,[6] which is disgrace to them if they bear it.

ABRAM
Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?

SAMPSON
I do bite my thumb, sir.

ABRAM
Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?

6 A deliberately insulting gesture, not an accidental movement.

SAMPSON
Is the law of our side if I say ay?

GREGORY
No.

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

GREGORY
Do you quarrel, sir?

ABRAM
Quarrel, sir? No, sir.

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

ABRAM
No better.

SAMPSON
Well, sir.

Enter Benvolio.

GREGORY
Say better; here comes one of my master's kinsmen.

SAMPSON
Yes, better, sir.

ABRAM
You lie.

SAMPSON
Draw, if you be men. Gregory, remember thy swashing blow.[7]

*[*They fight.*]*

7 A forceful, sweeping blow. The transcription's washing has been corrected against the historical witnesses.

BENVOLIO

Part, fools! put up your swords, you know not what you do.

*[*Beats down their swords.*]*

Enter Tybalt.

TYBALT

What, art thou drawn among these heartless hinds?[8]
Turn thee Benvolio, look upon thy death.

BENVOLIO

I do but keep the peace, put up thy sword,
Or manage it to part these men with me.

TYBALT

What, drawn, and talk of peace? I hate the word
As I hate hell, all Montagues, and thee:
Have at thee, coward.

*[*They fight.*]*

Enter three or four Citizens with clubs.

FIRST CITIZEN

Clubs, bills and partisans! Strike! Beat them down!
Down with the Capulets! Down with the Montagues!

Enter Capulet in his gown, and Lady Capulet.

CAPULET

What noise is this? Give me my long sword, ho!

LADY CAPULET

A crutch, a crutch! Why call you for a sword?

CAPULET

My sword, I say! Old Montague is come,
And flourishes his blade in spite of me.

Enter Montague and his Lady Montague.

8 Cowardly servants: heartless means lacking courage, not lacking sympathy.

MONTAGUE

Thou villain Capulet! Hold me not, let me go.

LADY MONTAGUE

Thou shalt not stir one foot to seek a foe.

Enter Prince Escalus, with Attendants.

PRINCE

Rebellious subjects, enemies to peace,
Profaners of this neighbour-stained steel,—
Will they not hear? What, ho! You men, you beasts,
That quench the fire of your pernicious rage
With purple fountains issuing from your veins,
On pain of torture, from those bloody hands
Throw your mistemper'd weapons to the ground
And hear the sentence of your moved prince.
Three civil brawls, bred of an airy word,
By thee, old Capulet, and Montague,
Have thrice disturb'd the quiet of our streets,
And made Verona's ancient citizens
Cast by their grave beseeming ornaments,
To wield old partisans, in hands as old,
Canker'd with peace, to part your canker'd hate.
If ever you disturb our streets again,
Your lives shall pay the forfeit of the peace.
For this time all the rest depart away:
You, Capulet, shall go along with me,
And Montague, come you this afternoon,
To know our farther pleasure in this case,
To old Free-town,[9] our common judgement-place.
Once more, on pain of death, all men depart.

*[*Exeunt Prince and Attendants; Capulet, Lady Capulet, Tybalt, Citizens and Servants.*]*

9 The name corresponds to Villafranca, carried into the play through its narrative sources.

MONTAGUE

Who set this ancient quarrel new abroach?
Speak, nephew, were you by when it began?

BENVOLIO

Here were the servants of your adversary
And yours, close fighting ere I did approach.
I drew to part them, in the instant came
The fiery Tybalt, with his sword prepar'd,
Which, as he breath'd defiance to my ears,
He swung about his head, and cut the winds,
Who nothing hurt withal, hiss'd him in scorn.
While we were interchanging thrusts and blows
Came more and more, and fought on part and part,
Till the Prince came, who parted either part.

LADY MONTAGUE

O where is Romeo, saw you him today?
Right glad I am he was not at this fray.

BENVOLIO

Madam, an hour before the worshipp'd sun
Peer'd forth the golden window of the east,
A troubled mind drave me to walk abroad,
Where underneath the grove of sycamore
That westward rooteth from this city side,
So early walking did I see your son.
Towards him I made, but he was ware of me,
And stole into the covert of the wood.
I, measuring his affections by my own,
Which then most sought where most might not be found,
Being one too many by my weary self,
Pursu'd my humour, not pursuing his,
And gladly shunn'd who gladly fled from me.

MONTAGUE

Many a morning hath he there been seen,
With tears augmenting the fresh morning's dew,
Adding to clouds more clouds with his deep sighs;
But all so soon as the all-cheering sun
Should in the farthest east begin to draw
The shady curtains from Aurora's bed,
Away from light steals home my heavy son,
And private in his chamber pens himself,
Shuts up his windows, locks fair daylight out
And makes himself an artificial night.
Black and portentous must this humour prove,
Unless good counsel may the cause remove.

BENVOLIO

My noble uncle, do you know the cause?

MONTAGUE

I neither know it nor can learn of him.

BENVOLIO

Have you importun'd him by any means?

MONTAGUE

Both by myself and many other friends;
But he, his own affections' counsellor,
Is to himself—I will not say how true—
But to himself so secret and so close,
So far from sounding and discovery,
As is the bud bit with an envious worm
Ere he can spread his sweet leaves to the air,
Or dedicate his beauty to the sun.
Could we but learn from whence his sorrows grow,
We would as willingly give cure as know.

Enter Romeo.

BENVOLIO

See, where he comes. So please you step aside;
I'll know his grievance or be much denied.

MONTAGUE

I would thou wert so happy by thy stay
To hear true shrift. Come, madam, let's away,

*[*Exeunt Montague and Lady Montague.*]*

BENVOLIO

Good morrow, cousin.

ROMEO

Is the day so young?

BENVOLIO

But new struck nine.

ROMEO

Ay me, sad hours seem long.
Was that my father that went hence so fast?

BENVOLIO

It was. What sadness lengthens Romeo's hours?

ROMEO

Not having that which, having, makes them short.

BENVOLIO

In love?

ROMEO

Out.

BENVOLIO

Of love?

ROMEO

Out of her favour where I am in love.

BENVOLIO

Alas that love so gentle in his view,
Should be so tyrannous and rough in proof.

ROMEO

Alas that love, whose view is muffled still,
Should, without eyes, see pathways to his will!
Where shall we dine? O me! What fray was here?
Yet tell me not, for I have heard it all.
Here's much to do with hate, but more with love:
Why, then, O brawling love! O loving hate!
O anything, 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!
This love feel I, that feel no love in this.
Dost thou not laugh?

BENVOLIO

No coz, I rather weep.

ROMEO

Good heart, at what?

BENVOLIO

At thy good heart's oppression.

ROMEO

Why such is love's transgression.
Griefs of mine own lie heavy in my breast,
Which thou wilt propagate to have it prest
With more of thine. This love that thou hast shown
Doth add more grief to too much of mine own.
Love is a smoke made with the fume of sighs;
Being purg'd, a fire sparkling in lovers' eyes;
Being vex'd, a sea nourish'd with lovers' tears:
What is it else? A madness most discreet,
A choking gall, and a preserving sweet.
Farewell, my coz.

*[*Going.*]*

BENVOLIO
Soft! I will go along:
And if you leave me so, you do me wrong.

ROMEO
Tut! I have lost myself; I am not here.
This is not Romeo, he's some other where.

BENVOLIO
Tell me in sadness who is that you love?

ROMEO
What, shall I groan and tell thee?

BENVOLIO
Groan! Why, no; but sadly tell me who.

ROMEO
Bid a sick man in sadness make his will,
A word ill urg'd to one that is so ill.
In sadness, cousin, I do love a woman.

BENVOLIO
I aim'd so near when I suppos'd you lov'd.

ROMEO
A right good markman, and she's fair I love.

BENVOLIO
A right fair mark, fair coz, is soonest hit.

ROMEO
Well, in that hit you miss: she'll not be hit
With Cupid's arrow, she hath Dian's wit;[10]
And in strong proof of chastity well arm'd,
From love's weak childish bow she lives uncharm'd.
She will not stay the siege of loving terms
Nor bide th'encounter of assailing eyes,
Nor ope her lap to saint-seducing gold:
O she's rich in beauty, only poor

10 Diana is the goddess associated with chastity. Rosaline is being compared to her.

That when she dies, with beauty dies her store.

BENVOLIO

Then she hath sworn that she will still live chaste?

ROMEO

She hath, and in that sparing makes huge waste;
For beauty starv'd with her severity,
Cuts beauty off from all posterity.
She is too fair, too wise; wisely too fair,
To merit bliss by making me despair.
She hath forsworn to love, and in that vow
Do I live dead, that live to tell it now.

BENVOLIO

Be rul'd by me, forget to think of her.

ROMEO

O teach me how I should forget to think.

BENVOLIO

By giving liberty unto thine eyes;
Examine other beauties.

ROMEO

'Tis the way
To call hers, exquisite, in question more.
These happy masks that kiss fair ladies' brows,
Being black, puts us in mind they hide the fair;
He that is strucken blind cannot forget
The precious treasure of his eyesight lost.
Show me a mistress that is passing fair,
What doth her beauty serve but as a note
Where I may read who pass'd that passing fair?
Farewell, thou canst not teach me to forget.

BENVOLIO

I'll pay that doctrine, or else die in debt.

*[*Exeunt.*]*