Applied Practice

Shakespeare’s Tragedies

RESOURCE GUIDE
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Practice 1

Romeo and Juliet, Act II, scene ii

Background:

The play opens when the servants of the Montagues and the servants of the Capulets meet in the street. Because the two families have long been enemies, their servants trade insults and begin to brawl. Tybalt, a Capulet, and Benvolio, a Montague, arrive and, after insulting each other, prepare to fight. The elder Montague and the elder Capulet enter and are determined to enter the fray, despite the protests of their wives. The fighting is finally halted when Prince Escalus arrives and threatens them all with death if they do not stop the senseless violence.

After everyone else exits, Lord and Lady Montague ask Benvolio if he has seen his cousin, Romeo. Lord Montague says that lately Romeo has been sad, staying alone in his room and refusing to reveal what is bothering him. Benvolio vows to discover the cause of Romeo’s sadness. When he meets Romeo, he persuades his cousin to reveal that his distress is due to his unrequited love for the beautiful Rosaline. She has vowed to remain a maiden, and Romeo cannot believe that any other woman can match her beauty and thus cure him of his devotion to her.

Meanwhile, Lord Capulet is being asked for his daughter’s hand in marriage. Paris, a handsome gentleman, wants to marry Juliet. Capulet reminds him that Juliet is not yet fourteen years old, but Paris argues that many young girls of that age are married. Capulet agrees that he can marry Juliet but invites him to a ball he is giving that evening and encourages him to see if some other woman might catch his fancy.

Capulet’s servant is sent to invite the guests, but he is unable to read the guests’ names. Spying two gentlemen, Benvolio and Romeo, he asks for their assistance in reading the invitation. Having learned of the ball, and the fact that Rosaline is invited, Benvolio urges Romeo to accompany him to the ball in disguise so that Romeo can see how Rosaline’s beauty compares to that of other young ladies.

Lady Capulet informs Juliet of Paris’s intention to marry her, and Juliet replies that she will look for him at the ball and see if she would find him suitable for a husband.

Benvolio and Romeo arrive at the ball wearing masks, but Tybalt recognizes Romeo’s voice and declares that he will kill him. Lord Capulet forbids this, saying that Romeo has a good reputation and is a guest in his home. Tybalt grudgingly agrees not to start trouble but is determined to fight Romeo next time they meet.

Romeo spies Juliet across the dance floor and suddenly declares that he has never seen beauty before this time. Romeo approaches Juliet, and they engage in flirtatious wordplay and exchange a couple of kisses before the Nurse arrives and tells Juliet she is wanted by her mother. When Juliet leaves, Romeo asks the Nurse who Juliet’s mother is, and the Nurse informs him that she is Lady Capulet. Horrified, Romeo tells Benvolio they must leave. Juliet returns and asks the Nurse who Romeo is. When she learns that he is a Montague, she curses her fate but hides her feelings from the Nurse.

Benvolio and Mercutio have lost sight of Romeo, who has scaled the wall of the Capulets’ orchard. They give up trying to coax him to join them and turn to go home, leaving Romeo beneath Juliet’s window.
Performance:

The following link and QR Code will direct you to a Royal Shakespeare Company performance of the Act II balcony scene.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHoaPLO6Zd8
Enter Juliet above at her window.

_Rom._ But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.
_Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,
Who is already sick and pale with grief_ 

(5) That thou, her maid, art far more fair than she.
_Be not her maid, since she is envious;
Her vestal livery is but sick and green,
and none but fools do wear it; cast it off.
It is my lady, O, it is my love!_

(10) _O that she knew she were!
She speaks, yet she says nothing; what of that?_
_Her eye discourses, I will answer it._
_I am too bold, 'tis not to me she speaks._

(15) _Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,_
_Having some business, do entreat her eyes_
_To twinkle in their spheres till they return._
_What if her eyes were there, they in her head?_
_The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars,_
_As daylight doth a lamp; her eyes in heaven_ 

(20) _Would through the airy region stream so bright_
_That birds would sing and think it were not night._
_See how she leans her cheek upon her hand!_
_O that I were a glove upon that hand,_
_That I might touch that cheek!_

(25) _Jul._ Ay me!
_ROM._ She speaks!
_O, speak again, bright angel, for thou art_
_As glorious to this night, being o’er my head,_
_As is a winged messenger of heaven_ 

(30) _Unto the white-upturned wond’ring eyes_
_Of mortals that fall back to gaze on him,_
_When he bestrides the lazy puffing clouds,_
_And sails upon the bosom of the air._

_Jul._ O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?_

(35) _Deny thy father and refuse thy name;_
_Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,_
_And I’ll no longer be a Capulet._

_ROM._ [Aside.] Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?_

_Jul._ 'Tis but thy name that is my enemy;_

(40) _Thou art thyself, though not a Montague._
_What’s Montague? It is nor hand nor foot,_
_Nor arm nor face, nor any other part_
_Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!_
_What’s in a name? That which we call a rose_ 

(45) _By any other word would smell as sweet;_
_So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call’d,_
_Retain that dear perfection which he owes_
_Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name,_
_And for thy name, which is no part of thee,_

(50) _Take all myself._

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Rom. I take thee at thy word. 
Call me but love, and I’ll be new baptiz’d; 
Henceforth I never will be Romeo. 

Jul. What man art thou that thus bescreen’d in night 

(55) So stumblest on my counsel? 

Rom. By a name 
I know not how to tell thee who I am. 
My name, dear saint, is hateful to myself, 
Because it is an enemy to thee; 

(60) Had I it written, I would tear the word. 

Jul. My ears have yet not drunk a hundred words 
Of thy tongue’s uttering, yet I know the sound. 
Art thou not Romeo, and a Montague? 

Rom. Neither, fair maid, if either thee dislike. 

(65) Jul. How cam’st thou hither, tell me, and wherefore? 
The orchard walls are high and hard to climb, 
And the place death, considering who thou art, 
If any of my kinsmen find thee here. 

Rom. With love’s light wings did I o’erperch these walls, 

(70) For stony limits cannot hold love out, 
And what love can do, that dares love attempt; 
Therefore thy kinsmen are no stop to me. 

Jul. If they do see thee, they will murther thee. 

Rom. Alack, there lies more peril in thine eye 

(75) Than twenty of their swords! Look thou but sweet, 
And I am proof against their enmity. 

Jul. I would not for the world they saw thee here. 

Rom. I have night’s cloak to hide me from their eyes, 
And but thou love me, let them find me here; 

(80) My life were better ended by their hate, 
Than death prorogued, wanting of thy love. 

Jul. By whose direction foundst thou out this place? 

Rom. By love, that first did prompt me to inquire; 
He lent me counsel, and I lent him eyes. 

(85) I am no pilot, yet, wert thou as far 
As that vast shore wash’d with the farthest sea, 
I should adventure for such merchandise. 

Jul. Thou knowest the mask of night is on my face, 
Else would a maiden blush bepaint my cheek 

(90) For that which thou hast heard me speak tonight. 
Fain would I dwell on form, fain, fain deny 
What I have spoke, but farewell compliment! 
Dost thou love me? I know thou wilt say, “Ay,” 
And I will take thy word; yet, if thou swear’st 

(95) Thou mayest prove false: at lovers’ perjuries 
They say Jove laughs. O gentle Romeo, 
If thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully; 
Or if thou thinkest I am too quickly won, 
I’ll frown and be perverse, and say thee nay, 

(100) So thou wilt woo, but else not for the world. 
In truth, fair Montague, I am too fond, 
And therefore thou mayest think my behavior light, 
But trust me, gentleman, I’ll prove more true 
Than those that have more coying to be strange. 

(105) I should have been more strange, I must confess, 
But that thou overheardst, ere I was ware,
My true-love passion; therefore pardon me,
And not impute this yielding to light love,
Which the dark night hath so discovered.

(110)  
Rom. Lady, by yonder blessed moon I vow,
That tips with silver all these fruit-tree tops—
Jul. O, swear not by the moon, th’ inconstant moon,
That monthly changes in her circled orb,
Lest that thy love prove likewise variable.

(115)  
Rom. What shall I swear by?
Jul. Do not swear at all;
Or if thou wilt, swear by thy gracious self,
Which is the god of my idolatry,
And I’ll believe thee.

(120)  
Rom. If my heart’s dear love—
Jul. Well, do not swear. Although I joy in thee,
I have no joy of this contract to-night,
It is too rash, too unadvis’d, too sudden,
Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be

(125)  
Ere one can say it lightens. Sweet, good night!
This bud of love, by summer’s ripening breath,
May prove a beauteous flow’r when next we meet.
Good night, good night! as sweet repose and rest
Come to thy heart as that within my breast!

(130)  
Rom. O, wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?
Jul. What satisfaction canst thou have to-night?
Rom. Th’ exchange of thy love’s faithful vow for mine.
Jul. I gave thee mine before thou didst request it;
And yet I would it were to give again.

(135)  
Rom. Wouldst thou withdraw it? for what purpose love?
Jul. But to be frank and give it thee again,
And yet I wish but for the thing I have.
My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
My love as deep; the more I give to thee,

(140)  
The more I have, for both are infinite.

[Nurse calls within.]
I hear some noise within; dear love, adieu!
Anon, good nurse! Sweet Montague, be true.

1. Romeo’s words in lines 1-24 characterize Juliet primarily by means of

   (A) direct allusion to deities
   (B) analysis of her physical movements
   (C) contrasts between speech and silence
   (D) imagery involving light
   (E) repeated questions

2. The tone of Romeo’s words in lines 1-24 could best be described as

   (A) ironic
   (B) hyperbolic
   (C) respectful
   (D) ambivalent
   (E) tongue-in-cheek
3. In context, the “name” Juliet discusses in lines 35-50 is primarily meant to imply a(n)

(A) aspect of a person that is less central to their identity than an actual physical body part
(B) nature that is changeable
(C) self-identification with deep-seated roots
(D) way to ascertain that which truly characterizes a person
(E) symbol for that which makes Romeo and Juliet enemies

4. In line 49, “for” could most accurately be restated as

(A) because of
(B) concerning
(C) in exchange for
(D) to prepare for
(E) for the purpose of

5. In line 79, “but” is best understood to mean

(A) if only
(B) unless
(C) however
(D) though
(E) yet

6. Juliet says she will not play “hard-to-get” with Romeo primarily because she

(A) does not know how to do this
(B) is afraid Romeo will reject her
(C) thinks she could not compete with others
(D) knows Romeo has heard her declarations
(E) believes one should always be forthright

7. The repetition in Juliet’s words in lines 123-124 serves to

(A) emphasize the haste with which they have exchanged vows
(B) signal a shift in the conversation
(C) demonstrate Juliet’s ambivalent nature
(D) foreshadow the ultimate fate of their love
(E) reiterate a point Juliet believes is crucial

8. Juliet’s attitude in lines 93-96 is revealed to be one of

(A) jest
(B) presumption
(C) haughtiness
(D) insecurity
(E) cynicism
ANSWER EXPLANATIONS
PRACTICE 1

1. (D) *imagery involving light.* Romeo represents Juliet as a superior being by comparing her to various heavenly bodies. He declares that she is the sun and that the moon is “sick and pale with grief” that Juliet is “far more fair than she.” He then imagines a hypothetical situation in which two stars change places with Juliet’s eyes. The result, he says, would be that the “brightness of her cheek would shame those stars / As daylight doth a lamp.” Meanwhile, Juliet’s bright eyes shining from the sky would be “so bright / That birds would sing and think it were not night.”

2. (B) *hyperbolic.* Romeo’s statements that Juliet’s beauty makes the moon envious and that her eyes are brighter than the brightest stars in heaven are clearly exaggerations.

3. (E) *symbol for that which makes Romeo and Juliet enemies.* When Juliet declares that it is only Romeo’s name “that is my enemy,” she is referring to the long feud between her family, the Capulets, and his family, the Montagues. There is nothing objectionable in Romeo himself but only in his name, which represents the antagonistic relationship that will prevent them from becoming lovers.

4. (C) *in exchange for.* Juliet is asking Romeo to get rid of the Montague name and in exchange to “Take all myself.”

5. (B) *unless.* In response to Juliet’s fears that Romeo will be discovered by her kinsmen, Romeo answers that the dark will hide him. He adds that “but” (unless) Juliet loves him, he would rather them find him there and kill him than to let him live without her love.

6. (D) *knows Romeo has heard her declarations.* Juliet explicitly says that she would have been more coy “But that thou overheardst, ere I was ware,/My true-love passion.” Thus, under different circumstances, she might have played “hard-to-get.”

7. (A) *emphasize the haste with which they have exchanged vows.* The two lovers have exchanged declarations of love after knowing each other for a very brief time. Realizing this, Juliet repeats the word “too,” emphasizing her discomfort at having exchanged vows so quickly. She expresses her fear that their vows have been “too rash, too unadvis’d, too sudden, / Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be / Ere one can say it lightens.”

8. (E) *cynicism.* In these lines, Juliet reveals some cynicism about love. She says that even if Romeo swears his love for her, he may “prove false: at lovers’ perjuries / They say Jove laughs.” Her use of the plural (“lovers’ perjuries”), her generalization (“They say”), and her reference to a god who is amused by human beings’ foolishness (“Jove laughs”) show that she is not insecure about her particular relationship so much as she is skeptical about love in general.