

Romeo and Juliet

Study Guide

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For

The Atlanta Shakespeare Company
at The New American Shakespeare
Tavern

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Original Practice and Playing Shakespeare

The Shakespeare Tavern on Peachtree Street is an Original Practice Playhouse. Original Practice is the active exploration and implementation of Elizabethan stagecraft and acting techniques.

For the Atlanta Shakespeare Company (ASC) at The New American Shakespeare Tavern this means every ASC production features hand-made period costumes, live, actor-generated sound effects, and live period music performed on period instruments in our Elizabethan playhouse. Our casts are trained to speak directly to the audience instead of ignoring the audience through the modern convention of acting with a “4th wall.”

You will experience all of this and more when you see ASC’s Romeo and Juliet

Who’s Who in R&J

Sampson and Gregory: Servants of the Capulet household. Biting your thumb is a vulgar gesture.

Abraham and Balthazar: These young men just happen to be on the wrong street at the wrong time! Balthazar goes to Mantua with Romeo.

Benvolio: Friend to Romeo, steady and true.

Tybalt: The “Prince of Cats.” Juliet’s cousin, temperamental and an excellent swordsman.

Capulet: Father of Juliet, a rich merchant. Wants only the best for his daughter.

Capulet’s Wife: She had Juliet when she was a teenager

Montague: Romeo’s father, very rich also.

Montague’s Lady: Romeo’s mother. She dies of grief after her son is banished from Verona.

Prince Escalus: The ruler of Verona, and very “moved” over the continued brawling of the families.

Romeo: A lovesick young man, who spouts some of the most glorious love poetry of all time!

Paris: In love with Juliet. He is “a man of wax” and “Verona’s summer hath not a flower.” A good catch.

Peter: Gullible servant to the Capulets, who cannot read.

Juliet: An only child and 14 years old. Romeo says “she doth teach the torches to burn bright.”

Juliet’s Nurse: Widowed nursemaid to Juliet. Juliet is her “lady, sweetheart, lamb.”

Mercutio: Close friend of Romeo. He has a way with words and likes to party.

Friar Lawrence: He marries Romeo and Juliet, hoping “this alliance may so happy prove to turn your households’ rancor to pure love.”

Friar John: Sent to Mantua with a letter.

The Watch: The night guard in Verona.

Page to Paris: He is left on guard at the Capulet tomb.

Guards, Servants, Citizens, Musicians

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The Story

“Two households, both alike in dignity, in fair Verona, where we lay our scene.” Servants of the houses of Montague and Capulet pick a fight, later broken up by Benvolio. Tybalt shows up and starts the fight again, proclaiming, “I hate the word (peace) as I hate hell, all Montagues, and thee!” This time the fight breaks up only after the Prince arrives and threatens to execute the next men to brawl in the street. He summons Capulet and Montague to his house, separately, to hear his further displeasure.

Romeo’s parents haven’t seen him for a while and Benvolio covers for him. When Romeo does appear, we find out he is in love with Rosaline, who couldn’t care less. Benvolio tries to cheer him up, but Romeo won’t play along.

Next we meet Capulet and Paris, discussing Paris’ proposal of marriage to Juliet. Capulet is hesitating because she is so young, but finally agrees, saying, “Woo her, gentle Paris, get her heart. My will to her consent is but a part.” He is throwing a party that night, and Paris can see her then. Capulet sends Peter out to invite the guests.

Romeo and Benvolio are loitering about the streets when they meet Peter with his list. He cannot read and asks Benvolio to read the names. They resolve to crash the party when they see Rosaline’s name on the list.

Juliet’s mother and her nurse are preparing her for the big party, and inform her that she will meet Paris, a possible suitor, that night. Juliet agrees, saying “I’ll look to like, if looking liking move.”

Romeo, Benvolio and Mercutio are on their way to the Capulet’s ball, when they stop for some poetical word play on dreams, Queen Mab (she of the Fairies) and Romeo’s inability to have fun. Once at the party the three try to blend in, since they are at the enemy’s house, but Tybalt recognizes Romeo as a Montague. Tybalt wants to fight, but Capulet loses his temper and demands Tybalt behave himself.

Romeo sees Juliet for the first time. They fall in love at first sight. Too late they each realize who the other is. Our scene shifts to the street outside Juliet’s home. Romeo is hiding from Benvolio and Mercutio. Eventually they depart, and Romeo seeks out what he imagines is Juliet’s window. Juliet appears on her balcony,

wondering why Romeo has to be a Montague. As she continues to talk about her love for him, he waits till the best moment to announce his love- “I take thee at thy word! Call me but love and I’ll be new baptized.” Nothing will do but that they must be married!

The next day Friar Lawrence is meditating on the power of flowers and herbs for good or ill, when Romeo shows up, wanting to get married. Friar Lawrence eventually agrees, hoping to heal the rift between the families.

Later in the day, Mercutio and Benvolio finally find Romeo. All 3 young men engage in some high-spirited antics and ribald word play. It becomes even bawdier when the Nurse shows up with Peter. Romeo sets the time and location for his secret marriage to Juliet.

When Juliet hears the news she flies to Friar Lawrence cell for a quick marriage, for “you shall not stay alone, till Holy Church incorporate two in one.”

Out on the street, it is hot and boring. Mercutio is itching for a fight and soon enough he gets his wish. Tybalt shows up and immediately taunts Mercutio. As the word play heats up, Romeo appears. Tybalt’s fight is with Romeo and he attempts to anger him with insults. Romeo says to Tybalt “The reason I have to love thee doth much excuse the appertaining rage to such a greeting.” Romeo will not fight with his new kinsman, but Mercutio has no such compunctions. Tybalt and Mercutio fight and in the melee, Tybalt gets a rapier thrust into Mercutio, under Romeo’s restraining arm. Mercutio dies and Tybalt comes back, looking for Romeo. Romeo cannot restrain himself and fights furiously with Tybalt. Tybalt is slain and Romeo becomes “fortunes fool!” Romeo is banished by the Prince.

Juliet is impatiently waiting for night to fall so her new husband can secretly visit her chamber and consummate their marriage. Instead, the Nurse appears to tell her of her cousin Tybalt’s death at her husband’s hands. Worst of all, Romeo has been banished. She asks the Nurse to take a ring to Romeo as token of their love. The Nurse says she will make sure Romeo visits Juliet one last time before he must leave Verona forever.

Romeo is hiding in Friar Lawrence cell, weeping and wailing. The Friar and the Nurse convince him to grow up, go to Juliet and comfort her.

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Meanwhile, Capulet and Paris decide that Tybalt's death notwithstanding, Juliet should be married soon, to cheer her up.

Romeo and Juliet spend one glorious night together and he flees to Mantua.

The next morning, Juliet's parents tell her about her speedy marriage to Paris. Juliet refuses and her father reacts angrily. In the end, he demands she obey. Even the Nurse thinks that Paris is a better man than Romeo, and tells Juliet to forget him. Juliet rushes to Friar Lawrence's cell, desperate for remedy. He gives her a sleeping potion to drink the night before her 2nd marriage. She will fall into a deathlike coma and her parents will place her body in the family tomb. Friar Lawrence will get word to Romeo in Mantua that she is not really dead.

Everything goes according to plan: Juliet returns to her parents and tells them she will marry Paris. She sleeps alone that night and amid horrible fantasies of entombment with the bodies of her ancestors, she drinks the sleeping potion. The next morning the Nurse finds her, apparently dead. The whole household is turned upside down with mourning.

We now move to Mantua. Romeo finds out from Balthazar that Juliet "sleeps in Capel's monument." Romeo resolves to join her in death.

Friar Lawrence's message to Romeo, sent via Friar John, never reached him. The Black Plague being suspected, Friar John was imprisoned for a time and never made it to Mantua. Now Friar Lawrence must rush to the Capulet tomb and remove Juliet before anyone finds out what he has done.

The play wraps up swiftly now, as Paris and Romeo both reach the tomb at the same time. Romeo doesn't want to fight Paris. He says, "Good gentle youth, tempt not a desp'rate man!" Paris is slain and Romeo lays him in the tomb. He speaks fondly to his dead wife for the last time and drinks the poison he has brought. "Thus with a kiss, I die." Friar Lawrence enters and tries to convince the waking Juliet to leave with him. Once she sees Romeo's body, she will not be moved and the Friar rushes away. There is no more poison left for Juliet to drink, so she uses her dagger to join her love in death. All the adults gather in the tomb and the Friar relates the whole sad story. The parents resolve to raise

monuments to their dead children and the play ends.

Before a Performance, Think About This:

That immortal poetry:

In your opinion, what has made this particular play so enduring, even among the rest of Shakespeare's plays? Is it special to you or not? What made it so? Think of your favorite/least favorite line and put it in your own words.

Physical Actions Revealed:

Suit the deed to the word, the word to the deed. Where are there examples of the text itself telling the reader what the physical action on stage should be? Example: "She speaks, yet she says nothing" Act II, sc. ii, or "Hold, daughter" Act IV, sc. i.

Theatergoing Then and Now:

Find out what the typical Elizabethan audience was like and imagine what a performance might have been like back then. What is different about theatre going nowadays? The answers may surprise you! Clue: What would this play be like to watch outside, in the light of day?

During a Performance, Watch And Listen For This:

Juliet's father says, "all my care has been to have her matched." and "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." Later, Capulet threatens to throw Juliet out into the street when she refuses to marry Paris. Why does his attitude change? Is it really a change? How has a women's choice in whom she marries evolved from early Renaissance Italy, to Shakespeare's England, to now?

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After a Performance, Talk About This:

Violence:

How does violence play a role in R&J?
How do the fights and bloodshed add to the telling of the story? Do you understand more of what happens on stage? How does stage violence compare to TV or movie violence? How does it compare to real life violence?

Original Practice Theatre:

Does directly addressing the audience affect what you think and feel about the characters? Does it affect your understanding of what is going on onstage? Does it interfere? Why do you think Shakespeare wrote his plays this way? What are the benefits to the actor and/or audience? What are the risks?

Words Invented by Shakespeare and Used for the First Time in this Play:

Alligator
Bump
Denote
Juiced
Wild goose chase

Find for yourself where they appear in the play! Can you spot them in performance? Do they mean what you thought they meant?

For Further Information/Exploration:

Websites:

Mr. William Shakespeare and The Internet:
<http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/>- this site contains excellent resources and is a great metasite.

Shakespeare's Globe website

www.shakespeares-globe.org

Books:

Romeo and Juliet Folger Edition

The Elizabethan World Picture by E.M.W. Tilyard

Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human by Harold Bloom

Asimov's Guide to Shakespeare by Isaac Asimov

Staging In Shakespeare's Theatres by Andrew Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa

Shakespeare A to Z by Charles Boyce

Our performance text is:

The Applause First Folio of Shakespeare in Modern Type, Neil Freeman

For more information on the First Folio of Shakespeare go to:

<http://web.uvic.ca/shakespeare/Annex/DraftTxt/index.html>

Movie Versions:

There are many, many movie versions of this play-

Franco Zeffereilli's Romeo and Juliet

Baz Lurhman's Romeo + Juliet

Jerome Robbin's West Side Story

Definitions of Words Invented for R&J:

Alligator- reptile closely related to the crocodile. Elizabethans spelled it Lagarto, until R&J.

Bump-Swelling or raised spot.

Denote- To define or designate; to indicate.

Juiced- Containing juice or fluids.

Wild goose chase-complicated and fruitless search.