

Excerpts from Romeo and Juliet

The plot of this famous tragedy by William Shakespeare is a familiar one about love reaching across the barriers of family and convention. The setting is Verona, Italy, where we meet the young lovers, Romeo and Juliet, members of the two foremost and rivaling families of Verona, the Capulets and the Montagues.

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The following excerpt is set at the Capulets' masque ball where Romeo and Juliet meet each other for the first time without knowing each other's identity (Act I, scene 5):

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ROMEO

[To JULIET] If I profane with my unworthing hand
This holy shrine, the gentle pain is this:
My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
15 To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.

JULIET

Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,
Which mannerly devotion shows in this;
For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do
20 touch,

And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.

ROMEO

Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?

JULIET

25 Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.

ROMEO

O, then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do;
They pray, grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.

JULIET

30 Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake.

ROMEO

Then move not, while my prayer's effect I take.
Thus from my lips, by yours, my sin is purged.

JULIET

35 Then have my lips the sin that they have took.

ROMEO

Sin from thy lips? O trespass sweetly urged!
Give me my sin again.

JULIET

40 You kiss by the book.

45

The young lovers find a chance to meet in spite of their families' trying to prevent it.

50 *The following is an excerpt from the famous balcony scene (Act II, scene 2):*

(JULIET appears above at a window)

ROMEO

But, soft! what light through yonder window
55 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,
That thou her maid art far more fair than she:

60 Be not her maid, since she is envious;
Her vestal livery¹ is but sick and green
And none but fools do wear it; cast it off.
It is my lady, O, it is my love!

O, that she knew she were!

65 She speaks yet she says nothing: what of that?
Her eye discourses; I will answer it.

I am too bold, 'tis² not to me she speaks:
Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,
Having some business, do entreat her eyes

70 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 doth³ a lamp; her eyes in heaven

75 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 were⁴ a glove upon that hand,

80 That I might touch that cheek!

JULIET

Ay me!

ROMEO

She speaks:

85 O, speak again, bright angel! for thou art
As glorious to this night, being o'er⁵ my head
As is a winged messenger of heaven

¹ vestal livery - the uniform ("livery") worn by virgins ("vestal")

² 'tis - it is

³ doth - does

⁴ O, that I were - O, I wish I were

⁵ o'er - over

Unto the white-upturned wondering eyes
Of mortals that fall back to gaze on him
90 When he bestrides the lazy-pacing clouds
And sails upon the bosom of the air.
JULIET
O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore⁶ art⁷ thou
Romeo?
95 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.
ROMEO
[Aside] Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at
100 this?
JULIET
'Tis but thy name that is my enemy;
Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.
What's Montague? It is nor hand, nor foot,
105 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
By any other name would smell as sweet;
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd,
110 Retain that dear perfection which he owes⁸
Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name,
And for that name which is no part of thee
Take all myself.
115 **ROMEO**
I take thee at thy word:
Call me but love, and I'll be new baptized;
Henceforth I never will be Romeo.
JULIET
120 What man art thou that thus bescreen'd in
night
So stumblest on my counsel?
ROMEO
By a name
125 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;
Had I it written, I would tear the word.
JULIET
130 My ears have not yet drunk a hundred words
Of that tongue's utterance, yet I know the

sound:
Art thou not Romeo and a Montague?

ROMEO

135 Neither, fair saint, if either thee dislike.

JULIET

How camest thou hither, tell me, and
wherefore?

The orchard walls are high and hard to climb,

140 And the place death, considering who thou art,
If any of my kinsmen find thee here.

ROMEO

With love's light wings did I o'erperch⁹ these
walls;

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

At the end of the balcony scene, Romeo and Juliet agree to marry and succeed in doing so. They spend one blissful night in each other's arms, but their scandalous liaison causes a deadly quarrel in which members of both houses are killed. After an enforced parting a series of misunderstandings result in the suicides of both Romeo and Juliet. Their tragic deaths reconcile the Capulets and the Montagues, and peace is restored.

160 **Tasks:**

- How do Romeo and Juliet feel about each other? Give examples from the text.
- Comment on Shakespeare's imagery (use of pictures).
- 165 • According to the concept of the "chain of being" human beings contain both *passion and reason*. Find examples of this.
- Examine the quotation: "'Tis but thy name that is my enemy ... Take all myself" (act 2, scene 1, ll. 38-49). What does it say about *identity*?
- 170 • Characterize the language of the excerpts (with special attention to the use of blank verse, rhyme and rhythm).

⁶ wherefore - why

⁷ art - are

⁸ Owe - own

⁹ o'erperch (= overperch) - fly over