A Handbook on Shakespearean Plays

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By

K. Thomas Baby

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PREFACE

Many EFL/ESL (English as a Foreign/Second Language) students often find it difficult to understand the archaic language and the complicated literary and historical allusions found in Shakespearean plays. This handbook on three important plays of Shakespeare namely ***Romeo and Juliet, The Merchant of Venice and Julius Caesar*** is designed specifically to address the above challenges faced by average EFL/ESL students. Therefore, the book provides explanations of important historical and literary references found in the above plays in simple and clear language that can be easily understood by students. Moreover, this book adopts a logical and systematic method of presenting the core themes, character analysis, plotlines and critical summaries of each of these plays along with linguistic and literary analysis. This approach will certainly help average students to understand the various critical aspects of these plays at deeper levels without being confounded by the complicated allusions and archaic language used in them. Moreover, the engaging comprehension exercises provided at the end of each play will not only enhance knowledge and foster critical thinking skills in students but also help them to prepare adequately for their university examinations. In short, this book can be used as an excellent handbook on the selected Shakespearean plays by both students and teachers around the world.

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UNIT I

INTRODUCTION

Life and Works

William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon in England in 1564. His birthday is typically observed on April 23, which is also thought to be the day of his death in 1616. His father John Shakespeare was a prosperous glove-maker and alderman. His wife Mary Arden was the daughter of an affluent landowner. His early life remains largely undocumented but he is likely to have attended the local grammar school, where he would have studied Latin, rhetoric, and classical literature. At the age of 18, Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, who was eight years his senior. They had three children namely Susanna, and the twins called Hamnet and Judith. Hamnet died at an early age which affected Shakespeare negatively. Not much is known about Shakespeare's life after the birth of his children until he emerged as a playwright in London.

The London Theatre Scene

Shakespeare's career as a playwright and actor began in London in the late 1580s or early 1590s, but it was by the early 1590s that he gained recognition. He became part-owner of the acting company known as the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, which became the King’s Men after James I ascended the throne in 1603. This royal patronage helped elevate his status, as the company performed regularly for the royal court. After his death, the actors from his theatre company collected the available manuscripts of his plays and published them which came to be known as the first folio edition of Shakespeare.

By the early 1590s, Shakespeare had joined the Lord Chamberlain's Men, a prominent acting company in London. The company enjoyed the patronage of Henry Carey, the Lord Chamberlain, which ensured its success and influence. Shakespeare's role in the company was multifaceted. He was an actor, a playwright, as well as a shareholder. This involvement provided him with financial stability and a platform to showcase his plays. During this

period, Shakespeare wrote some of his earliest and most popular works, including comedies such as "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and "The Merchant of Venice," histories like "Henry IV" and "Richard III," and tragedies such as "Titus Andronicus" and "Romeo and Juliet."

His plays were performed at various venues, including the Theatre, the Curtain, and eventually the Globe Theatre, which was built by the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1599. Shakespeare's influence on the English language is immense. He coined and popularized hundreds of words and phrases still in use today, such as "break the ice," "wild-goose chase," and "heart of gold." His works have been translated into every major language and are performed more frequently than those of any other playwright. His exploration of human nature, universal emotions, and social issues has ensured that his work remains timeless, relevant, and studied by students in several universities even today, centuries after his death.

Literary Legacy

Shakespeare's body of work includes 38 plays, 154 sonnets, and 2 long narrative poems. The timeline of Shakespeare's plays is still debated by scholars. The generally accepted estimates are based on various pieces of evidence, such as the first folio edition, known performance dates, and details from diaries and records of the time. The generally accepted time frame and the original titles of his plays are given below in chronological order.

1. "Henry VI Part I" (1589–1590)
2. "Henry VI Part II" (1590–1591)
3. "Henry VI Part III" (1590–1591)
4. "Richard III" (1592–1593)
5. "The Comedy of Errors" (1592–1593)
6. "Titus Andronicus" (1593–1594)
7. "The Taming of the Shrew" (1593–1594)
8. "The Two Gentlemen of Verona" (1594–1595)
9. "Love's Labour's Lost" (1594–1595)
10. **"Romeo and Juliet" (1594–1595)**
11. "Richard II" (1595–1596)
12. "A Midsummer Night's Dream" (1595–1596)
13. "King John" (1596–1597)
14. **"The Merchant of Venice" (1596–1597)**
15. "Henry IV Part I" (1597–1598)
16. "Henry IV Part II" (1597–1598)

17. "Much Ado About Nothing" (1598–1599)
18. "Henry V" (1598–1599)
19. **"Julius Caesar" (1599–1600)**
20. "As You Like It" (1599–1600)
21. "Twelfth Night" (1599–1600)
22. "Hamlet" (1600–1601)
23. "The Merry Wives of Windsor" (1600–1601)
24. "Troilus and Cressida" (1601–1602)
25. "All's Well That Ends Well" (1602–1603)
26. "Measure for Measure" (1604–1605)
27. "Othello" (1604–1605)
28. "King Lear" (1605–1606)
29. "Macbeth" (1605–1606)
30. "Antony and Cleopatra" (1606–1607)
31. "Coriolanus" (1607–1608)
32. "Timon of Athens" (1607–1608)
33. "Pericles" (1608–1609)
34. "Cymbeline" (1609–1610)
35. "The Winter's Tale" (1610–1611)
36. "The Tempest" (1611–1612)
37. "Henry VIII" (1612–1613)
38. "The Two Noble Kinsmen" (1612–1613)

Classification of Shakespearean Plays

Shakespeare's plays are traditionally categorized into comedies, tragedies, histories and romances. His comedies often explore themes of love, mistaken identities, and the complexities of human relationships. Notable comedies include "Twelfth Night," "As You Like It," "Much Ado About Nothing," and "The Taming of the Shrew." These plays are characterized by their witty dialogue, complex plots, and humorous situations, often concluding with a happy resolution. Shakespearean tragedies delve into the darker aspects of human nature, such as ambition, jealousy, revenge, and madness. His most famous tragedies include "Hamlet," "Othello," "King Lear," and "Macbeth." These plays are marked by their profound psychological insight, intricate character development, and exploration of moral and philosophical themes. They often end in catastrophic circumstances, reflecting the tragic flaws of their protagonists.

Shakespeare's historical plays dramatize the lives of English kings and the nation's history. They are a blend of fact and fiction, highlighting themes of

power, legitimacy, and political intrigue. Prominent historical plays include "Richard II," "Henry V," and the "Henry VI" trilogy. These works not only entertained audiences but also offered commentary on the nature of leadership and governance. His final plays, often referred to as the romances or tragicomedies. They include "The Tempest," "The Winter's Tale," and "Cymbeline." These works reflect a mature perspective on life, blending elements of tragedy and comedy with themes of forgiveness, redemption, and reconciliation.

Evolution of Shakespeare as a Dramatist

Shakespeare wrote a wide variety of plays that can be broadly categorized into comedies, tragedies, histories and romances. Each genre showcases his evolution as a playwright, as well as his mastery of dramatic techniques that continue to influence theatre to this day. Shakespeare's development across different genres highlights the distinctive characteristics of his comedies, tragedies, histories, and romances revealing his excellent dramatic techniques. His early career is marked by the creation of several comedies that display his burgeoning talent for crafting witty dialogue, complex plots, and engaging characters. For example, "The Comedy of Errors," "The Taming of the Shrew," and "Love's Labour's Lost," are characterized by their exploration of themes like mistaken identity, the battle of the sexes, and the folly of human behaviour.

In "The Comedy of Errors," Shakespeare employs the device of mistaken identity to create a farce that hinges on the confusion between two sets of identical twins. This play showcases his ability to construct intricate plots and use comedic timing to generate laughter. Similarly, "The Taming of the Shrew" explores gender roles and the dynamics of marriage through the contentious relationship between Petruchio and Katherina. While some aspects of this play are controversial by modern standards, it demonstrates Shakespeare's willingness to tackle complex social issues through humour.

Shakespeare's early comedies also reveal his talent for wordplay and verbal music. "Love's Labour's Lost" is a prime example of this, featuring characters who engage in elaborate linguistic games and witty exchanges. These early works set the stage for Shakespeare's later comedies, where his command of language and comedic devices would reach new heights. As Shakespeare's career progressed, his comedies grew in depth and nuance, reflecting his maturation as a dramatist. Plays like "A Midsummer Night's Dream," "Much Ado About Nothing," and "As You Like It" are emblematic of this period. These works combine the light-hearted elements of his early

comedies with more profound explorations of love, identity, and the human condition.

"A Midsummer Night's Dream" is a masterful blend of reality and fantasy, intertwining the lives of Athenian lovers, rustic characters, and supernatural fairies. The play's exploration of love's irrationality and the transformative power of imagination is both enchanting and insightful. Shakespeare's use of the play-within-a-play device in this work adds a layer of meta-theatrical commentary, highlighting the artificiality of theatrical illusion.

In "Much Ado About Nothing," Shakespeare delves into the themes of honour, deception, and reconciliation. The sparring between Beatrice and Benedick showcases his ability to create complex, multi-dimensional characters whose wit masks deeper emotional truths. The play's exploration of mistaken identity and public versus private selves underscores Shakespeare's fascination with the dualities of human nature. "As You Like It" is another mature comedy that combines humour with philosophical reflection. Set in the idyllic Forest of Arden, the play explores themes of exile, transformation, and the contrast between courtly and pastoral life. Shakespeare's use of disguise and gender-swapping in this play, particularly through the character of Rosalind is an excellent example dramatic craftsmanship.

Shakespeare's development as a dramatist is perhaps most evident in his tragedies, where he delves into the darkest aspects of human experience. His tragedies are characterized by their exploration of complex psychological states, moral dilemmas, and the consequences of human actions as illustrated through his plays like Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth. For example, "Hamlet" is an excellent exploration of human grief, madness, and revenge. The protagonist of the play is a deeply introspective character whose soliloquies reveal his inner turmoil and existential questioning. Shakespeare's use of the play-within-a-play device in "Hamlet" serves to mirror the themes of appearance versus reality. The intricate structure and rich language of the play make it a touchstone for the study of Shakespearean tragedy.

In "Othello," Shakespeare tackles themes of jealousy, trust, and racial prejudice. The play's tragic hero, Othello, is manipulated by masterful villainy of Iago, leading to a devastating conclusion. Shakespeare's portrayal of Iago as a master manipulator and his exploration of Othello's internal conflict highlight his skill in creating psychologically complex characters. The play's exploration of the destructive power of jealousy remains relevant

even today. Similarly, "King Lear" explores the amazing complexities of power, betrayal, and madness. The play's portrayal of Lear's descent into madness and the cruelty of his daughters, Goneril and Regan, is both heartbreaking and profound. Shakespeare's use of the subplot involving Gloucester and his sons, Edgar and Edmund, mirrors and amplifies the themes of familial betrayal and the consequences of blind ambition.

The play Macbeth is an excellent study of ambition, guilt, and the corrupting influence of power. The protagonist of the play is driven by the strange prophecy of the witches and his own unchecked ambition, commits regicide and descends into tyranny and madness. Shakespeare's use of supernatural elements, such as the witches and their prophecies, adds a layer of foreboding and inevitability to the play's tragic events. The play's bleak vision of human suffering is a testament to Shakespeare's ability to confront the darkest aspects of the human condition. Moreover, the play moves forward dramatically with its compelling exploration of the psychological effects of guilt and the moral consequences of one's actions.

Shakespeare's history plays dramatize the lives of English monarchs and the nation's political history. These plays, including Richard II, Henry IV Parts 1 and 2, and Henry V, offer a blend of historical fact and dramatic fiction, exploring themes of leadership, legitimacy, and national identity. "Richard II" examines the nature of kingship and the conflict between the divine right of kings and the realities of political power. The play's portrayal of Richard's fall from grace and the rise of Henry Bolingbroke (later Henry IV) underscores the fragility of political authority and the complexities of legitimacy. Shakespeare's use of poetic language and soliloquies in "Richard II" highlights the introspective and philosophical nature of the play.

The story of political upheaval, focusing on the character of Prince Hal (later Henry V) and his journey from wayward youth to responsible monarch juxtapose the world of the court with the world of the common people, represented by the comedic figure of Sir John Falstaff. The play Henry V is essentially a patriotic celebration of English nationalism and military prowess. The play's portrayal of the Battle of Agincourt and Henry's rousing speeches, such as the famous St. Crispin's Day speech, highlight themes of honour, courage, and the burdens of leadership. Shakespeare's portrayal of Henry V as both a heroic figure and a shrewd political leader adds depth to the play's exploration of national identity and the responsibilities of kingship.

Finally, Shakespeare’s evolution as a dramatist culminated in the romances written in the final phase of his career known as The Tempest, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, and Pericles. These plays are an excellent combination of the elements of tragedy and comedy that blend with the themes of loss, reconciliation, and redemption. The dramatic devices and techniques employed in these plays result in a fine blend of supernatural elements, and time manipulation, that can create a sense of wonder in the audience. For example, Prospero's magical powers in “The Tempest” shape the entire narrative that can control both the characters and events. Similarly, Shakespeare often uses dramatic irony where the audience is aware of information which the characters do not know. This will certainly heighten the emotional impact of the play. Furthermore, Shakespeare blends comic relief with serious themes, creating tonal shifts that emphasize life's unpredictability. In short, the singular hallmark of his romances is the use of idealized pastoral settings in contrast to the corrupt courtly life which gives an opportunity for reflection and growth.

Innovative Language and Dramatic Techniques

Shakespeare's innovative use of dramatic techniques, his mastery of language, and keen sense of theatrical experimentation set his work apart and continue to influence playwrights and actors. His plays are renowned for their poetic richness, inventive wordplay, and rhythmic patterns. For example, his effective application of iambic pentameter creates a musical quality that enhances the emotional impact of his dialogue. Similarly, his use of prose for lower-status characters and for moments of comedic relief, create a dynamic contrast between different forms of speech. Shakespeare is credited with coining numerous words still in use today, such as "assassination," "bump," and "swagger." His ability to manipulate language to convey complex emotions and ideas is a hallmark of his genius.

Shakespeare's plays often feature intricate structures that enhance their thematic and dramatic impact. His use of subplots, as seen in "King Lear" and the "Henry IV" plays, adds depth and complexity to the main narrative. These subplots often mirror or contrast with the main plot, creating a rich tapestry of interwoven stories. In addition to subplots, Shakespeare frequently employs the play-within-a-play device to comment on the nature of theatre and illusion. This technique is used effectively in plays like "Hamlet" and "A Midsummer Night's Dream," where the performance of a play within the main play serves to underscore key themes and provide meta-theatrical commentary.

Shakespeare's keen sense of theatricality is evident in his use of stagecraft and dramatic effects. His plays often include elaborate stage directions and visual spectacles, such as the ghost in "Hamlet," the witches in "Macbeth," and the storm in "The Tempest." These elements not only enhance the dramatic impact of the plays but also showcase Shakespeare's understanding of the visual and sensory aspects of theatre. Shakespeare's use of soliloquies and asides allows characters to directly address the audience, providing insight into their inner thoughts and motivations. This technique creates a sense of intimacy and engagement, drawing the audience into the psychological and emotional world of the characters.

Soliloquies, such as Hamlet's "To be or not to be" speech and Macbeth's "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow" monologue, are some of the most iconic moments in Shakespearean drama. Such passages declare not only Shakespeare's literary skills and linguistic craftmanship but also an effective testament to his extraordinary talent, versatility, and deep understanding of the human nature. Through his comedies, tragedies, and histories, Shakespeare explored the myriad hues of human nature embodying a wide range of themes and emotions, creating works that continue to resonate with audiences around the world.

In terms of language, Shakespeare's romances feature poetic, figurative language, including metaphors and similes that explore themes of nature, time, and renewal. His blank verse allows for fluid, expressive dialogue, while lyrical songs and masques often break up the action, reflecting characters' inner states or marking transitions in the plot. Ultimately, the romances focus on forgiveness, reunion, and the power of time to heal. In short, Shakespeare’s plays have become popular primarily through his innovative dramatic techniques and his rich language filled with verbal melody and symbolic imagery.

The Elizabethan Theatre

The Elizabethan era, spanning the late 16th and early 17th centuries, was a golden age for English theatre. During the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, the cultural landscape of England flourished, leading to an unprecedented flowering of drama and the construction of iconic playhouses. Amidst this vibrant theatrical scene, William Shakespeare emerged as the most prominent dramatist of his time. His extraordinary talent and innovative techniques set him apart from his contemporaries, securing his enduring legacy. The Elizabethan era was a period of relative political stability and

economic growth in England. Queen Elizabeth I's patronage of the arts and her interest in theatre fostered a favourable environment for dramatic arts.

The rise of purpose-built playhouses was a significant factor in the development of Elizabethan theatre. Before this period, plays were often performed in inn courtyards, guildhalls, and other makeshift venues. However, the construction of dedicated playhouses, such as The Theatre (1576), The Curtain (1577), and the most famous of all, The Globe (1599), revolutionized the theatrical landscape. Theatrical companies, such as the Lord Chamberlain's Men (later the King's Men) and the Admiral's Men, played a crucial role in the success of Elizabethan theatre. These companies were often patronized by members of the nobility, which provided them with financial stability and prestige. Actors and playwrights were able to hone their craft within these companies, leading to a professionalization of the theatrical profession.

Elizabethan theatre was characterized by a diverse array of genres and themes. Tragedies, comedies, histories, and romances were all popular with audiences, reflecting the complex social and political landscape of the time. Themes of love, power, betrayal, and the supernatural were common, as playwrights sought to engage and entertain their audiences while also commenting on contemporary issues. One of the key reasons for Shakespeare's prominence was his innovative approach to drama. He transcended the conventions of the time, creating complex characters, intricate plots, and exploring profound themes with unparalleled depth and insight.

The Contemporaries of Shakespeare

Christopher Marlowe was one of Shakespeare's most significant contemporaries and a leading playwright of the Elizabethan era. Marlowe's plays, such as "Doctor Faustus," "Tamburlaine the Great," and "Edward II," were known for their bold themes and powerful characters. Marlowe's use of blank verse and his exploration of ambition and human potential influenced Shakespeare's own work. However, Marlowe's career was cut short by his untimely death in 1593, allowing Shakespeare to dominate the theatrical landscape.

Ben Jonson was another prominent playwright and a contemporary of Shakespeare. Known for his satirical comedies, such as "Volpone," "The Alchemist," and "Bartholomew Fair," Jonson's work was characterized by its sharp wit and social commentary. Jonson's approach to comedy, with its emphasis on the "humours" theory of personality, contrasted with

Shakespeare's more diverse and emotionally complex characters. Despite their differences, Jonson and Shakespeare respected each other's work, with Jonson famously referring to Shakespeare as the "Soul of the age" and "not of an age, but for all time."

Thomas Kyd was an influential playwright whose work, particularly "The Spanish Tragedy," helped popularize the revenge tragedy genre. Kyd's use of complex plots, sensational themes, and vivid imagery influenced Shakespeare's own tragedies, particularly "Hamlet." However, Kyd's career was marred by controversy and hardship, and he did not achieve the same level of lasting fame as Shakespeare.

One of the primary factors contributing to Shakespeare's pre-eminence was his versatility and range as a playwright. Unlike many of his contemporaries who specialized in specific genres, Shakespeare excelled across multiple genres. His ability to write compelling comedies, tragedies, histories, and romances demonstrated his unparalleled talent and ensured his broad appeal to diverse audiences. Shakespeare's characters are renowned for their psychological complexity and emotional depth. Unlike the more archetypal characters found in the works of some of his contemporaries, Shakespeare's characters are multifaceted and undergo significant development throughout the plays. Characters like Hamlet, Othello, and Lady Macbeth grapple with inner conflicts and moral dilemmas, making them profoundly human and relatable.

Shakespeare's mastery of language was another key factor in his success. His inventive use of iambic pentameter, rich imagery, and eloquent soliloquies set his work apart. Shakespeare's ability to convey complex emotions and ideas through language made his plays linguistically rich and emotionally resonant. His contributions to the English language, including the creation of new words and phrases, have left a lasting legacy. Shakespeare's willingness to experiment with dramatic structure and theatrical conventions contributed to his prominence. His use of the play-within-a-play device, as seen in "Hamlet" and "A Midsummer Night's Dream," added layers of meaning and meta-theatrical commentary. Shakespeare's blending of genres, such as the tragicomedy, demonstrated his innovation and creativity.

In terms of language, Shakespeare's final plays known as romances feature poetic, figurative language, including metaphors and similes that explore themes of nature, time, and renewal. His blank verse allows for fluid, expressive dialogue, while lyrical songs and masques often break up the

action, reflecting characters' inner states or marking transitions in the plot. Ultimately, the romances focus on forgiveness, reunion, and the power of time to heal. In short, Shakespeare's plays have become popular primarily through his innovative dramatic techniques and his rich language filled with verbal melody and symbolic imagery.

Shakespeare's Impact and Influence

Shakespeare's ability to capture the cultural and historical context of his time also played a role in his success. His history plays, for example, dramatized the political struggles and national identity of England during a period of political and social change. Shakespeare's keen observations of human behaviour and the relevance of the dynamics of social life made his work appealing to contemporary audiences. Shakespeare's ability to capture the universal aspects of the human experience ensures his continued relevance. His exploration of themes such as love, power, ambition, and the human condition resonates with audiences across cultures and generations.

Shakespeare's characters, with their psychological depth and emotional complexity, continue to captivate and inspire. The Elizabethan theatre was a vibrant and dynamic cultural phenomenon that gave rise to some of the greatest playwrights in history. Amidst this flourishing theatrical landscape, William Shakespeare emerged as the most prominent dramatist of his time. His versatility, mastery of language, depth of characterization, and innovative approach to drama set him apart from his contemporaries and secured his enduring legacy. To highlight the relevance of Shakespeare and to assist students of literature who study Shakespearean plays in universities, three popular plays (Romeo and Juliet, The Merchant of Venice and Julius Caesar) are taken up for detailed analysis in this book.

"Romeo and Juliet," is Shakespeare's famous romantic tragedy that tells the story of star-crossed lovers whose fate is sealed by their feuding families. The play's poetic dialogue and vivid imagery offer a rich resource for exploring literary devices and expressive language. Its universal themes of love, fate, and conflict can be strongly appealing to EFL students from diverse backgrounds.

"The Merchant of Venice" is a comedy that explores themes of mercy, justice, and the complexities of human relationships. Its memorable characters, like Shylock and Portia, provide rich material for language learning, character analysis, and discussions on cultural and social issues.

“Julius Caesar” is a historical tragedy that delves into themes of power, betrayal, and political intrigue. The play’s eloquent speeches, particularly those of Brutus and Mark Antony, are excellent materials for studying rhetorical techniques and persuasive language. Its exploration of moral and ethical dilemmas remains relevant today, encouraging critical thinking and debate.

UNIT II

ROMEO AND JULIET (1594–1595)

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

ACT IV

Scene I. Friar Lawrence's Cell.

Scene II. Hall in Capulet's House.

Scene III. Juliet's Chamber.

Scene IV. Hall in Capulet's House.

Scene V. Juliet's Chamber; Juliet on the bed.

ACT V

Scene I. Mantua. A Street.

Scene II. Friar Lawrence's Cell.

Scene III. A churchyard; in it a Monument belonging to the Capulets.

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.

The 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 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.*]

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.

GREGORY.
No, for then we should be colliers.

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

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

SAMPSON.
I strike quickly, being moved.

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 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.

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, 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?

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 washing blow.

[*They fight.*]

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?
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.

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, our common judgement-place.
Once more, on pain of death, all men depart.

[*Exeunt* PRINCE *and* ATTENDANTS; CAPULET, LADY CAPULET, TYBALT, CITIZENS *and Servants.*]

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.