

The Tragedy of Romeo & Juliet

by

William Shakespeare

Foreword and Annotations By
Erica Abbett



Romeo and Juliet: Annotated Edition
William Shakespeare

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Foreword
by Erica Abbett

There's something so delightful how unabashedly dramatic *Romeo and Juliet* is. Very few characters act with anything resembling common sense. It's all, "This is how I *feel*! Hang the consequences!"

Most of us have probably been tempted to act that way, but we subsume[1] those instincts so we don't die of our own stupidity.

Romeo and Juliet is under no such obligation, giving us a glimpse of what happens when an entire town has the self-control of a child and the impulses of an adult.

Spoiler alert: there is some fantastic dialogue, and a lot of people die.

Romeo and Juliet: Annotated Edition

There are a few things you should know before you dive into the Vocabbett Classics annotated edition of *Romeo and Juliet:*

1) I, Erica Abbett, wrote the annotations. I'm an author and former English teacher, so you're in good hands.

---

[1] Subsume - Suppress; absorb into something else

2) If the annotation follows a word, it's usually a definition. If it follows a punctuation mark, it usually explains the preceding phrase or passage.

3) The annotations are designed to reflect what a good English teacher might explain. Therefore, it's not a mere "translation" of Shakespeare. It's a deeper discussion where I'll point out, among other things, all the ways Shakespeare made his writing more memorable, from alliteration to dramatic irony and paronomasia. (Don't worry, I'll explain that last one, and everything else!).

If you already have a strong grasp of literary devices, feel free to skip or skim the rest of this foreword. However, don't complain when I reference these words in the footnotes!

Alliteration

One of Shakespeare's favorite tricks for making a line more memorable is alliteration, or using the same sound at the beginning of consecutive (or near-consecutive) words.

As I wrote in the introduction to *Macbeth: Annotated Edition*, advertisers are well aware of this trick. That's why you often find alliterative brand names like Coca-Cola, PayPal, Lululemon, American Airlines, Best Buy, Dunkin' Donuts, Krispy Kreme, TikTok, Range Rover, Burt's Bees, Kit Kat, M&M's…You get my point.

Once you start noticing alliteration, you can't unsee it, and Shakespeare uses it from the very beginning of *Romeo and Juliet*. In the first passage, the Chorus explains that "from forth the fatal loins of these two foes" two lovers will take their lives.

Why not just say, "there were two families that hated each other, but their kids fell in love," and it ended in tragedy?

Because, dear reader, it would not have four words beginning with "f," so it's far less memorable.

Paronomasia/Polyptoton/Wordplay

Most of the characters in *Romeo and Juliet* are utterly incapable of having a straightforward conversation. If a woman told them the sun was hot, they'd wink and say, "so are you." In any given sentence, they simply must seize upon a word and start spinning off in a new direction.

The technical terms for this are "paronomasia" and "polyptoton," but since nobody can remember such polysyllabic monstrosities, I usually describe it as "wordplay." You might also call it a pun or double entendre.

However you choose to characterize it, *Romeo and Juliet* would be utterly incomprehensible if you didn't realize that words are prone to changing their definition mid-sentence for the sake of witty repartee[1].

Simile and Metaphor

You probably already know that a simile is a comparison using "like" or "as." When Romeo says love "pricks like a thorn," that's a simile.

When the comparison becomes more direct, dropping the "like" or "as," it becomes a metaphor. If Romeo said love *is* a thorn, that would be a metaphor.[2]

Similes and metaphors are everywhere in *Romeo and Juliet*, and they often begin with the wordplay mentioned above.

Let's look at Mercutio's passage below, which begins with the group worrying that Romeo is dead:

> *"Alas poor Romeo, he is already dead…*
> *run through the ear with a love song, the very pin of his heart cleft with the blind bow-boy's butt-shaft."*

---

[1] Repartee - Quick, witty conversation

[2] Without getting too into the weeds, the comparison also needs to be between dissimilar objects or concepts. For instance, "my shirt is smaller than yours" is a comparison, but it is not a metaphor. "My shirt is an ant," however, creates a comparison between dissimilar objects, and therefore *is* a metaphor.

If you were annotating this passage, you'd probably notice that Mercutio is playing on the word "dead" to create an extended metaphor in which Romeo was actually killed by love. But was Romeo literally run through the ear with a love song? Was his heart literally pierced with Cupid's arrow, a.k.a. a "blind bow-boy's butt-shaft"? No and no, but that's metaphor for you.

And just like wordplay often lends itself to similes and metaphors, you probably also noticed the alliteration in Shakespeare's colorful description of Cupid. Shakespeare packs as many literary devices into each line as he can!

Paradox/Oxymoron

The central conflict of *Romeo and Juliet* is that love has sprung from hate, an inherently paradoxical—or seemingly self-contradictory—concept. Shakespeare delights in exploring paradoxical predicaments throughout the play with statements like:

"Mercy but murders, pardoning those that kill."

Though seemingly self-contradictory—how could mercy be a murderer?—this line is packed with wisdom. Someone who has killed once is likely to do so again, and therefore pardoning him is likely to lead to more death.

When the contradiction is just two words, like "cold fire" or "true lies," that's an oxymoron. When annotating, you'll often find oxymorons within larger paradoxical passages.

Dramatic Irony

Scary movies were all the rage when I was growing up, and there was always a scene in which you found yourself wanting to tell some hapless[1] character, "Don't go in there! The killer is in the closet!"

That's dramatic irony—a situation in which the audience knows something the characters do not. It's a great tool for

[1] Hapless - Unfortunate

keeping the audience engaged, and it propels almost the entire third act of *Romeo and Juliet.*

Whenever you find yourself internally (or perhaps externally) shouting, "Don't do it, Romeo!" because you know something he doesn't, that's dramatic irony.

Apostrophe

Apostrophe may not be a well-known literary device, but Shakespeare utilizes it to great effect in *Romeo and Juliet*.

When a character is speaking to someone (real or personified) who isn't actually there, that's an example of apostrophe.

"Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou, Romeo?" is a perfect example. So is Romeo's line, "O mischief, thou art swift." Is he *actually* talking to mischief? No, it's a conversation with someone (mischief personified) who isn't actually there.

In grammatical terms, an apostrophe may look like a "flying comma," but when it comes to literary devices, it's one of those rambling speeches to someone (real or personified) who isn't actually participating in the conversation.

Repetition

Last one, I promise! Repetition is also used to great effect in *Romeo and Juliet*. It's a literary technique as self-explanatory as it is effective.

Why do you think, "Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou, Romeo?" is so memorable? I count three literary devices in six words—repetition, alliteration, and apostrophe.

Repetition is frequently found in the characters' forays into wordplay, as the same word is repeated in different contexts.

Conclusion

Shakespeare loved literary devices, which are also known as the "elements of eloquence." You're likely to encounter *at least* one in any given line. Challenge yourself to identify them in the

margins!

All that being said, I'll see you in the footnotes! If you don't see a definition at the bottom of the page, don't forget to check the glossary at the back of the book.

-Erica Abbett
Dallas, TX
2025



The Tragedy of Romeo & Juliet



DRAMATIS PERSONÆ[1]

ESCALUS, Prince of Verona

CHORUS

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
MERCUTIO, kinsman to the Prince, and friend to Romeo
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

APOTHECARY

---

[1] Dramatis Personae - Characters in the play (Latin, lit: "people of the drama")

THREE MUSICIANS

OFFICER

CITIZENS OF VERONA; SEVERAL MEN AND WOMEN, RELATIONS TO BOTH HOUSES; MASKERS, GUARDS, WATCHMEN AND ATTENDANTS

The Prologue

Enter CHORUS[1].

CHORUS

Two households, both alike in dignity,[2]
In fair Verona[3], where we lay our scene,
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,[4]
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes[5]
A pair of star-cross'd[6] lovers take their life;
Whose misadventur'd piteous overthrows
Doth with their death bury their parents' strife.[7]
The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love,[8]
And the continuance of their parents' rage,
Which, but their children's end, nought could remove,[9]

---

[1] Chorus - Characters who provide additional information to the crowd

[2] "Two families of similar rank and wealth…"

[3] Verona - A city in northern Italy

[4] "From old fights, a new one is born…"

[5] Note the alliterative nature of this line: "forth…fatal…foes…"

[6] Star-cross'd - Unlucky; doomed

[7] The children of these enemies will fall in love, and when the young lovers die, the families will bury their grievances.

[8] Note the inherent tension in the "death-mark'd love"!

[9] Nothing except Romeo and Juliet's death could convince these two families to stop hating one another.

Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage;[1]
The which, if you with patient ears attend,
What here shall miss, our toil[2] shall strive to mend.[3]

[*Exit.*]

[1] The speaker is breaking the fourth wall, speaking directly to the audience.

[2] Toil - Hard work; labor

[3] "Listen up, and we'll give you all the details…"

Act One

Act 1, Scene 1

Enter Sampson and Gregory armed with swords and bucklers.

Sampson
Gregory, on my word, we'll not carry coals.[1]

Gregory
No, for then we should be colliers[2].[3]

Sampson
I mean, if we be in choler[4], we'll draw.[5]

Gregory

---

[1] "Carry coals" was a figure of speech that roughly meant "take their garbage"

[2] Colliers - Coal miners

[3] Opening lines are worth a little extra analysis. We immediately get the sense that Sampson is frustrated; he won't take insults from somebody. But then Gregory, the more lighthearted of the two, makes a play on the words "coals" and "colliers."A modern equivalent would be (pardon the vulgarity), "We won't take their crap," the other person responding, "No, then we'd be plumbers!"

[4] Choler - Anger; a fight

[5] Gregory is like, "Stop joking. If it comes to it, we're fighting with swords."

Ay, while you live, draw your neck out o' the collar.[1]

SAMPSON

I strike quickly, being moved.[2]

GREGORY

But thou art not quickly moved to strike.[3]

SAMPSON

A dog of the house of Montague moves me.[4]

GREGORY

To move is to stir; and to be valiant is to stand: therefore, if thou art moved, thou runn'st away.[5]

SAMPSON

A dog of that house shall move me to stand.
I will take the wall of any man or maid of Montague's.[6]

GREGORY

That shows thee a weak slave, for the weakest goes to the wall.[7]

---

[1] More wordplay from Gregory, who's conflating "choler" (anger) and "collar" (the hangman's noose).

[2] Sampson tries a third time to convey his vexation, saying he'll lash out as soon as he's provoked.

[3] "Conveniently, it's hard to provoke you when there's an actual fight nearby." Gregory is calling Sampson's bluff—Sampson is a big talker, but Gregory isn't taking him seriously.

[4] We're zeroing in on the cause of Sampson's frustration: the house of Montague (pronounced *MON-tuh-gyoo)*

[5] Gregory never met a word he didn't want to play with. After Sampson says he's "moved" by anger, Gregory agrees: "Yes, you're moved so much you're halfway out of town, running away!"

[6] If he sees any servants from the house of Montague, he'll take the clean path and make the Montagues walk in the filth.

[7] "Go to the wall" was a figure of speech that meant "fail" (more wordplay from Gregory…)

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.[1]

GREGORY

The quarrel is between our masters and us their men.[2]

SAMPSON

'Tis all one,[3] 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.[4]

GREGORY

They must take it in sense that feel it.[5]

SAMPSON

Me they shall feel while I am able to stand: and 'tis known I

---

[1] Sampson has an evil mind. While Gregory sees funny jokes in the words, Sampson sees an opportunity for a rape joke.

[2] Gregory is alarmed by this turn of events, reminding Sampson not to touch any women from the house of Montague.

[3] "They're all the same"

[4] Sampson continues his evil analogy, as "maidenhead" was a euphemism for "virginity." Once he's killed the Montague men, he'll either rape the women or cut off their heads; he hasn't decided yet.

[5] Gregory is linguistically amused, noting that the "sense" of decapitation and rape are both horrible, but distinct.

am a pretty piece of flesh.[1]

GREGORY

'Tis well thou art not fish; if thou hadst, thou hadst been poor John.[2] Draw thy tool; here comes of the house of Montagues.[3]

Enter ABRAM and BALTHASAR.

SAMPSON

My naked weapon is out: quarrel, I will back thee.[4]

GREGORY

How? Turn thy back and run?[5]

SAMPSON

Fear me not.

GREGORY

No, marry; I fear thee![6]

SAMPSON

Let us take the law of our sides; let them begin.

GREGORY

---

[1] I hate this vulgar, violent aspiring rapist.

[2] Playing on "flesh" and "fish," Gregory says that if Sampson *were* a fish, he'd be a dried, salted fish of low quality (a "poor John").

[3] GREGORY! After all that wry wordplay, trying to calm Sampson down, you tell him to draw his sword when the Montague men approach!? I'm disappointed in you.

[4] Ha! Gregory was right; Sampson is a coward when the moment actually arrives. In saying he has Gregory's back, he's staying behind.

[5] Gregory's not falling for it.

[6] "On the contrary! I do fear you! You're going to push me into a fight with our enemies, then run away! You're going to get me killed!"

I will frown as I pass by,[1] and let them take it as they list[2].

SAMPSON

Nay, as they dare. I will bite my thumb at them, which is disgrace to them if they bear it.[3]

[He bites his thumb]

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

[Aside to Gregory] Is the law of our side if I say ay[4]?

GREGORY

[Aside to Sampson] No.

SAMPSON

No sir, I do not bite my thumb at you, sir; but I bite my thumb, sir.[5]

GREGORY

---

[1] He's trying to walk a tightrope—the frown might satisfy Sampson while not escalating matters with the Montague servants.

[2] List - Want; like

[3] Biting one's thumb was roughly the equivalent of flipping the middle finger.

[4] Ay - Yes

[5] I'm rolling my eyes. "I'm not flipping you off. Just flipping off the world in general!" Right.

Do you quarrel[1], sir?

ABRAM
Quarrel, sir? No, sir.[2]

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

ABRAM
No better.[3]

SAMPSON
Well, sir.

Enter BENVOLIO.[4]

GREGORY
[Aside to Sampson] Say 'better'; here comes one of my master's kinsmen.[5]

SAMPSON
Yes, better, sir.

ABRAM
You lie.

SAMPSON

---

[1] Quarrel - Fight

[2] Note the false sense of politeness. "Quarrel, SIR? No, SIR!"

[3] Abram can't resist a little dig.

[4] Benvolio's name translates to something like, "I want good," which helps the audience remember that he's a decent guy. Even if you don't know the Latin/Italian word "volere," you probably know all the "ben" words associated with goodness in English.

[5] Gregory is not referring to Benvolio, who just entered, but Tybalt (whom he can see in the distance). Benvolio is not on their side—he's on team Montague.

Draw, if you be men. Gregory, remember thy washing blow.[1]

[*They fight.*]

BENVOLIO

Part, fools! Put up your swords, you know not what you do.[2]

[*Beats down their swords.*]

Enter TYBALT.[3]

TYBALT

What, art thou drawn among these heartless hinds[4]?
Turn thee Benvolio, look upon thy death.[5]

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?[6] 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.

---

[1] A "washing blow" was the equivalent of a knockout punch. "Don't forget to hit them with your haymaker."

[2] True to his name, Benvolio's first instinct is to break up the fight between the Capulet and Montague servants.

[3] Pronounced "TIH-bult."

[4] Hinds was an insult more beloved for its alliterative value ("heartless hinds") than its specificity. It means anything from "butt" to "peasant."

[5] Benvolio is on team Montague, but he didn't want anyone to get hurt. Tybalt, on team Capulet, is more hot-headed.

[6] "You have your sword drawn and talk of peace, hypocrite?"

FIRST CITIZEN
Clubs, bills and partisans![1] Strike! Beat them down!
Down with the Capulets! Down with the Montagues![2]

[Enter CAPULET in his gown, and LADY CAPULET.]

CAPULET
What noise is this? Give me my long sword, ho![3]

LADY CAPULET
A crutch, a crutch! Why call you for a sword?[4]

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.[5]

Enter PRINCE ESCALUS, with ATTENDANTS.

---

[1] Clubs, bills, and partisans are all club and spear-like weapons.

[2] The citizens are taking advantage of the skirmish to land a few blows of their own. From this, we can infer that both sides are equally at fault in whatever they're feuding over. There isn't one family that is the clear villain, reviled by all.

[3] "Capulet" refers to Mr. Capulet, the head of the family.

[4] Lady Capulet is like, "What are you talking about! You're old! You need a cane, not a sword!"

[5] The women are trying to hold their husbands back.

PRINCE

Rebellious subjects, enemies to peace,
Profaners of this neighbour-stained steel,—[1]
Will they not hear? What, ho! You men, you beasts,
That quench the fire of your pernicious[2] rage
With purple fountains issuing from your veins,[3]
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,[4]
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.[5]
If ever you disturb our streets again,
Your lives shall pay the forfeit of the peace.[6]
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,[7]
To old Free-town, our common judgement-place.
Once more, on pain of death, all men depart.

[Exeunt PRINCE and ATTENDANTS; CAPULET, LADY CAPULET, TY-

---

[1] "Neighbor-stained steel" is a nice way of adding weight to "bloodstained"…Your blades haven't just killed people. You're attacking your neighbors!

[2] Pernicious - Having a harmful effect, usually in a gradual and subtle way

[3] You satisfy your rage with these bloody fights…

[4] There have been three bloody brawls because of a stupid disagreement between Montague and Capulet.

[5] Note the wordplay. "Canker'd" means something like "old and gnarled." These gnarled hands are having to fight for your gnarled hearts.

[6] Translation: "If you cause another brawl, you will be executed. I don't care how noble you are."

[7] "Our farther pleasure" meaning, "what else I have to say about this."

BALT, 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[1] 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.[2]

LADY MONTAGUE

O where is Romeo, saw you him today?
Right glad I am he was not at this fray.[3]

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.[4]

---

[1] Ere - Before

[2] More wordplay—the prince parted both parts of the fight.

[3] Rhyme.

[4] "Romeo saw me and ran into the woods."

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.[1] [2]

MONTAGUE

Many a morning hath he there been seen,
With tears augmenting[3] the fresh morning's dew,
Adding to clouds more clouds with his deep sighs;[4]
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.[5]
Black and portentous[6] must this humour prove,
Unless good counsel may the cause remove.[7]

BENVOLIO

My noble uncle, do you know the cause?

MONTAGUE

I neither know it nor can learn of him.

BENVOLIO

---

[1] Benvolio also wanted to be alone, so he didn't follow Romeo.

[2] Again, note the wordplay. "Pursued" is doubled in the line above, and "gladly" is doubled here.

[3] Augmenting - Adding to; supplementing

[4] Romeo often cries in the woods in the morning…

[5] Come daybreak, Romeo steals back home and locks himself in his room. What a moody loser.

[6] Portentous - Boding poorly of things to come

[7] "Things won't end well for my Romeo unless someone puts him on a better path."

Have you importun'd[1] 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,[2]
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.[3]

MONTAGUE

I would thou wert so happy by thy stay
To hear true shrift.[4] Come, madam, let's away,

[Exeunt Montague and Lady Montague.]

BENVOLIO

Good morrow, cousin.

ROMEO

---

[1] Importun'd - Short for "importuned" (asked repeatedly, to the point of being annoying)

[2] He's like a diseased flower that won't bloom.

[3] Benvolio is asking Romeo's parents, Lord and Lady Montague, to make themselves scarce so he can have a private word with Romeo.

[4] "I hope he finally tells you what's bothering him."

Is the day so young?[1]

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.[2]

BENVOLIO
In love?

ROMEO
Out.

BENVOLIO
Of love?

ROMEO
Out of her favour where I am in love.[3]

BENVOLIO
Alas that love so gentle in his view,

---

[1] If time flies when you're having fun, it drags when you're miserable. For Romeo, it's clearly dragging.

[2] "I'm sad because I don't have the thing that would make me happy." Yeah, Romeo, we know. WHAT is it that's making you unhappy?

[3] He's pining over some lost love.

Should be so tyrannous and rough in proof.[1]

ROMEO

Alas that love, whose view is muffled still,
Should, without eyes, see pathways to his will![2]
Where shall we dine? —O me! What fray was here?[3]
Yet tell me not, for I have heard it all.[4]
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![5]
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.[6]
Dost thou not laugh?[7]

BENVOLIO

No coz[8], I rather weep.

ROMEO

Good heart, at what?

BENVOLIO

At thy good heart's oppression.

---

[1] Benvolio is philosophizing on the nature of love, which seems so sweet in theory but is often brutal in reality.

[2] "They say 'love is blind,' but it always get what it wants." (Note how Romeo is personifying "Love" as the cause of his problems, not the girl who presumably rejected him.)

[3] Romeo is seeing the aftermath of the morning's fight.

[4] "Never mind. I don't care."

[5] Note the paradoxical nature of his lamentations.

[6] In the typically self-centered approach of a lovesick teenager, Romeo is viewing the conflict through the lens of his own emotions.

[7] "Are you laughing at me?"

[8] Coz - Short for "cousin"

ROMEO

Why such is love's transgression[1].[2]
Griefs of mine own lie heavy in my breast,
Which thou wilt propagate to have it prest
With more of thine.[3] 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.[4]
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.

---

[1] Transgression - Offense; breaking of rules

[2] Great rhyme

[3] "I'm sad enough already! Don't make me feel bad for you!"

[4] More contradictions…Romeo is the epitome of a frustrated romantic.

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.[1]

ROMEO

A right good markman,[2] and she's fair[3] I love.

BENVOLIO

A right fair mark, fair coz, is soonest hit.[4]

ROMEO

Well, in that hit you miss: she'll not be hit
With Cupid's arrow, she hath Dian's wit;[5]
And in strong proof of chastity[6] well arm'd,
From love's weak childish bow she lives uncharm'd.[7]
She will not stay the siege of loving terms[8]
Nor bide th'encounter of assailing eyes,[9]
Nor ope her lap to saint-seducing gold:[10]

---

[1] Benvolio is like, "Yeah, we know. You're not heartbroken over a leaf. WHICH GIRL are you in love with, though?"

[2] "Your guess was correct."

[3] Fair - Beautiful

[4] "A beautiful mark is soonest hit," a.k.a. "It's easy to fall in love with a beautiful woman."

[5] Continuing the analogy of archers, Romeo corrects Benvolio to say that his feelings aren't reciprocated. She hasn't been hit with Cupid's arrow; she's more like Diana, the goddess of the hunt, who swore a vow of chastity and was more likely to kill a man than love him.

[6] Chastity - Committed to remaining single

[7] She's totally unaffected by Cupid's childish arrows.

[8] "She doesn't like it when I tell her how beautiful she is…"

[9] "She can't stand when I make doe eyes at her…"

[10] "She won't even accept my gifts…"

O she's rich in beauty, only poor
That when she dies, with beauty dies her store.[1]

BENVOLIO
Then she hath sworn that she will still live chaste?[2]

ROMEO
She hath, and in that sparing makes huge waste;
For beauty starv'd with her severity,
Cuts beauty off from all posterity.[3]
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.[4]

ROMEO
O teach me how I should forget to think.

BENVOLIO
By giving liberty unto thine eyes;
Examine other beauties.[5]

ROMEO
'Tis the way

---

[1] After his "love is war" analogy, Romeo laments that this woman's beauty will die with her if she stays single, as she'll never have children.

[2] Benvolio is like, "Wait, she's *actually* sworn an oath of celibacy, or she's just not interested in you?"

[3] In a lovely AABBCC rhyme, Romeo reiterates that a beautiful woman committed to celibacy commits a double crime, as she won't pass that beauty on to future generations.

[4] "Listen, forget her."

[5] "Look at other women."

To call hers, exquisite, in question more.[1]
These happy masks that kiss fair ladies' brows,
Being black, puts us in mind they hide the fair;[2]
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?[3]
Farewell, thou canst not teach me to forget.

BENVOLIO
I'll pay that doctrine, or else die in debt.[4]

[*Exeunt.*]

Act 1, Scene 2

Enter CAPULET, PARIS and SERVANT.

CAPULET
But Montague is bound as well as I,
In penalty alike;[5] and 'tis not hard, I think,
For men so old as we to keep the peace.[6]

PARIS
Of honourable reckoning are you both,
And pity 'tis you liv'd at odds so long.
But now my lord, what say you to my suit?

---

[1] "If I do that, it will only make me think more of my beloved's beauty."

[2] "If a woman wears a mask, we only think of the beauty beneath it."

[3] "Even if I see a really beautiful woman, it will only make me think of that *most* beautiful woman who rejected me."

[4] "I'll help you forget this woman, or I'll die trying."

[5] This is another instance where *seeing* the play is helpful. Capulet (Juliet's father) is clearly mid-conversation with Paris.

[6] "Montague and I are bound by the same rules, and we're both old men. It shouldn't be this hard to keep the peace."

THE PREVIEW ENDS HERE.
THE STORY DOESN'T.

Get the full text of *Romeo and Juliet: Annotated Edition* at https://www.vocabbett.com/romeo-and-juliet-annotated-edition.

I'll be with you in the footnotes for the whole journey, defining difficult words, explaining esoteric references, and generally keeping you company for Shakespeare's incredible classic.

-Erica Abbett