

Answers to *Romeo and Juliet* Act I Review Exercise

Characters

Romeo: romantic, initially lovelorn son of Montague

Juliet: beautiful daughter of Capulet

Mercutio: sharp-tongued, “mercurial” friend of Romeo and kinsman of Prince Escalus

Tybalt: young male member of the Capulet clan (nephew of Lady Capulet), quite rancorous toward the Montagues

Benvolio: concerned, soft-spoken cousin of Romeo who attempts to be a peacemaker

Montague: Romeo’s father and patriarch of a large family

Capulet: Juliet’s father and patriarch of a large family feuding with the Montagues

Prince Escalus: the ruler of Verona

Paris: Juliet’s suitor and kinsman of Prince Escalus

Nurse: Juliet’s caretaker and confidant

Lady Montague: Romeo’s mother

Lady Capulet: Juliet’s mother

Themes and Motifs

Although entire essays can easily be written about how these topics are introduced and developed in Act I alone, here are a few relevant notes:

- **the nature of love (its basis and causes):** Romeo is initially inconsolable but then quickly forgets his love for Rosaline after he sees Juliet (love can be fleeting, ephemeral, fickle); both of them essentially fall in love with the other “at first sight,” not knowing much of anything about each other
- **passion vs. reason:** Some characters are more inclined to let reason guide them (Old Capulet, for example, shows restraint in commanding Mercutio to leave Romeo and his friends alone); others are more inclined to let their passions control them (Romeo, in his love for Rosaline and then Juliet; Tybalt, in his hatred of the Montagues)
- **grudges and feuds:** In Act I, both the irrational nature of feuds and their tragic consequences are already apparent, as well as the need to quell them and the difficulty of doing so (due to the proclivity for violence and hatred inherent in human nature).
- **fate:** At the very beginning of the play, the chorus introduces Romeo and Juliet as “star-crossed lovers,” suggesting that their tragic fate is not simply the consequence of human actions but an inevitable occurrence determined in part by forces beyond the control of individuals. However, the forces of “fate” and human nature are clearly tied together in some fundamental way rather than completely separate. At the end of Scene IV, Romeo also makes a comment about his fear that “Some consequence, yet hanging in the stars, / Shall bitterly begin his fearful date / With this night’s revels.”
- **youthful rebelliousness:** Romeo in his undeterrable quest for love, Mercutio in his insistence on crashing the Capulets’ party, and Tybalt in his eagerness to attack the Montagues are all examples of youthful rebelliousness in Act I.

Quote ID

In addition to identifying the speaker and person(s) spoken to for each quotation below, identify any people, things, or places in boldface and include them in your discussion of the quotation's significance. (Page numbers in parentheses refer to the Signet Classic edition.)

1. "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" Montague 1.1 (9)

Speaker: Montague Person Spoken To: Benvolio (and Lady Montague)

Context: Romeo's parents are concerned about his emotional state—he's infatuated with Rosaline.

Significance: "He" refers to Romeo. This quote establishes Romeo's tendency to get caught up in his romantic feelings and reflects the theme of love as an emotional burden. (That's not all love is, of course, but it is one common effect of being in love.)

2. "What is it else? A madness most discreet,/A choking gall, and a preserving sweet." Romeo 1.1 (12)

Speaker: Romeo Person Spoken To: Benvolio

Context: Romeo is discussing his romantic troubles (regarding Rosaline) with Benvolio after Benvolio's conversation with Romeo's parents.

Significance: "It" refers to love; Romeo is commenting on the fact that love is an irrational and complex thing that causes both sadness and joy.

3. "From forth the fatal loins of **these two foes/A pair of star-crossed lovers** take their life;/Whose misadventured piteous overthrows/Doth with their death bury their parents' strife." Chorus Prologue (3)

Speaker: Chorus Person Spoken To: Audience

Context: The Chorus's words in the Prologue give the audience a summary of the story and tell them what to expect.

Significance: "These two foes" are the Montagues and Capulets; the "star-crossed lovers" are Romeo and Juliet. Born to two families who are bitter enemies, Romeo and Juliet have a rebellious romance that leads to their deaths but also leads to the end of the feud. A number of themes are reflected in this quote: fate, rebelliousness, and the tragic and irrational nature of feuds. Only a catastrophe can make those who hate each other realize the foolish nature of their hatred.

4. "**My only love**, sprung from **my only hate!**/Too early seen unknown, and known too late!/Prodigious birth of love it is to me/That I must love a loathèd enemy." Juliet 1.5 (32)

Speaker: Juliet Person Spoken To: her nurse

Context: Juliet has just been informed of the identity of the man she fell in love with at the masque.

Significance: The first line emphasizes the central irony of the play—that two people who are supposed to hate each other fall in love. "My only love" refers to Romeo; "my only hate" refers to the Montague family. Juliet is lamenting the troublesome fact that she has fallen in love with a Montague, but she seems helpless to change her feelings.

5. “Go **thither**, and with unattainted eye/Compare her face with some that I shall show,/And I will make thee think **thy swan** a crow.” Benvolio 1.2 (17)

Speaker: Benvolio Person Spoken To: Romeo

Context: Benvolio is trying to convince Romeo to go to the masque.

Significance: “Thither” refers to the masque; “thy swan” is Rosaline. Benvolio is telling Romeo that the women at the masque are so beautiful that they will make him forget Rosaline and put his heartbreak behind him. This quote touches on the fickleness and brevity of romantic passion and foreshadows Romeo’s love for Juliet.

6. “**You men**, you beasts,/That quench the fire of your pernicious rage/With purple fountains issuing from your veins!” Escalus 1.1 (8)

Speaker: Prince Escalus Person Spoken To: the Montagues and Capulets

Context: At the beginning of the play, the prince and the city authorities interrupt a developing street brawl between the Capulets and Montagues.

Significance: “You men” are specifically the two families, but the prince’s words are understood to apply to human beings in general; they reflect the animalistic violence inherent in human nature. Our irrational and destructive anger and desire for violence can only be satisfied by killing those we hate.

7. “And too soon marred are **those so early made**./Earth hath swallowed all my hopes but **she**;/She is the hopeful lady of my earth.” Capulet 1.2 (14)

Speaker: Capulet Person Spoken To: Paris

Context: Early in the play, before Juliet has fallen in love with Romeo, Capulet is discussing the possibility of his daughter Juliet marrying Paris.

Significance: “Those so early made” are people who marry too young; “she” is Juliet. Capulet has lost his other children to early deaths, and all his hopes for the future of his family rest in Juliet, so he wants to be sure that Paris truly loves her before he will allow him to marry her. The fact that Juliet is his only remaining child makes Capulet’s later refusal to let her be with Romeo more understandable.

8. “What say **you**? Can you love **the gentleman**?/This night you shall behold him at our feast.” Lady Capulet 1.3 (21)

Speaker: Lady Capulet Person Spoken To: Juliet

Context: Before the masque, Lady Capulet is proposing the possibility of marriage with Paris to Juliet.

Significance: “You” refers to Juliet; “the gentleman” refers to Paris. This quote reflects the fact that arranged marriage was a common practice in Italy at the time, but the way she is presenting the match implies that Juliet has the option to refuse it. It also suggests Lady Capulet’s conception of love: love is something that one can choose to feel—or perhaps it is not so much a feeling as a *decision to act* in a certain way.

9. “If I profane with my unworhiest hand/**This holy shrine**, the gentle sin is this:/My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand/To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.” Romeo 1.5 (30)

Speaker: Romeo Person Spoken To: Juliet

Context: Romeo has just met Juliet and is entranced by her beauty.

Significance: “This holy shrine” refers to Juliet (or more specifically, her hand which he is holding and is about to kiss). The “sin” of touching her soft hand with his rough one is only a minor sin, because he is about to kiss her hand as well, and his lips are much smoother and more tender. Romeo is charming Juliet with his poetic tribute to her beauty and acting as though he does not feel himself worthy of her—she is holy; he is dirty and low. Their exchange here suggests that they feel that their love is something beautiful and spiritual rather than merely sexual.

Interpretation Questions

Translate the following lines into contemporary prose. Answering the questions will help in translating them.

1. “I’ll look to like, if looking liking move;/But no more deep will I endart mine eye/Than your consent gives strength to make it fly.” Juliet 1.3

Identify the subject, verb, and object in the clause “if looking liking move.” The subject is “looking”; the verb is “move”; the object is “liking.”

What double meaning does the word “look / looking” have in the first line? “Look” conveys Juliet’s intentions, her effort to like what she sees; “looking” is simply the act of looking (at Paris).

What figurative comparison is being made in the last two lines, and what does it in the last line refer to? It is Juliet’s eye, which is directed toward Paris and is being compared to a dart—thus the verb “endart.”

Translation: “I intend to like him, if his appearance makes me like him (“moves my liking”);/But I will not let the feelings aroused by my looking go any deeper/Than your consent will allow.”

2. “And in this state she gallops night by night/[...]O’er ladies’ lips, who straight on kisses dream,/Which oft the angry Mab with blisters plagues,/Because their breath with sweetmeats tainted are.” Mercutio 1.4

What do the pronouns who, which, and their refer to? “Who” refers to the ladies; “which” refers to their lips; “their” refers to the ladies again.

Where would the phrases “with blisters” and “with sweetmeats” normally be placed? In contemporary English, they would be placed at the end of those clauses.

Identify the verbs in the last three lines. Which one of them is conjugated inappropriately according to contemporary rules about subject-verb agreement? The verbs are “dream,” “plagues,” and “are.” Since the singular “breath” is actually the subject of “are,” we would normally use the verb “is” instead.

Translation: “And with this appearance she gallops night after night/Over the lips of ladies, who dream only of kisses,/And the angry Mab often plagues their lips with blisters/Because they have bad breath from the sweets they’ve eaten.”