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Romeo and Juliet

by William Shakespeare

Includes Strategies for Understanding Shakespeare's Language

UNABRIDGED WITH GLOSSARY AND NOTES

Romeo and Juliet

William Shakespeare

Prestwick House

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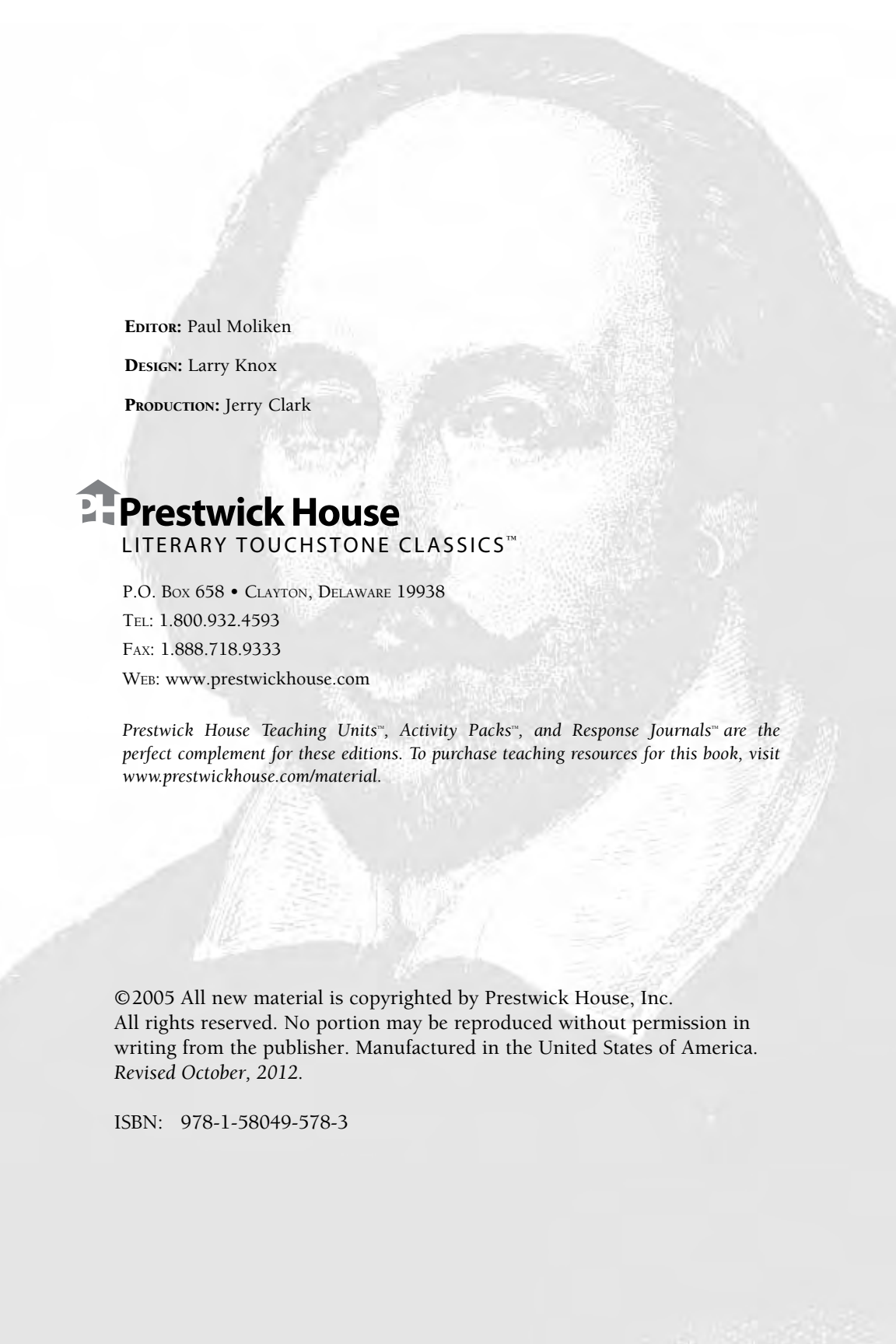

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Strategies for Understanding Shakespeare's Language

1. When reading verse, note the appropriate phrasing and intonation.

DO NOT PAUSE AT THE END OF A LINE unless there is a mark of punctuation. Shakespearean verse has a rhythm of its own, and once a reader gets used to it, the rhythm becomes very natural to speak in and read. Beginning readers often find it helpful to read a short pause at a comma and a long pause for a period, colon, semicolon, dash, or question mark.

Here's an example from *The Merchant of Venice*, Act IV, Scene i:

The quality of mercy is not strain'd, *(short pause)*
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath: *(long pause)* it is twice blest; *(long pause)*
It blesseth him that gives, *(short pause)* and him that takes; *(long pause)*
'Tis mightiest in the mighties; *(long pause)* it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown; *(long pause)*

2. Reading from punctuation mark to punctuation mark for meaning.

In addition to helping you read aloud, punctuation marks define units of thought. Try to understand each unit as you read, keeping in mind that periods, colons, semicolons, and question marks signal the end of a thought.
Here's an example from *The Taming of the Shrew:*

LUC. Tranio, I saw her coral lips to move,
And with her breath she did perfume the air;
Sacred, and sweet, was all I saw in her.
TRA. Nay, then, 't is time to stir him from his trance.
I pray, awake, sir: if you love the maid,
Bend thoughts and wits to achieve her. (I, i)

The first unit of thought is from "Tranio" to "air":
He saw her lips move, and her breath perfumed the air.

The second thought ("Sacred, and sweet…") re-emphasizes the first.

Tranio replies that Lucentio needs to awaken from his trance and try to win "the maid." These two sentences can be considered one unit of thought.

Reading Pointers for Sharper Insights

As you read, look for the themes and elements described below.

- **Courtly love:** This term describes a set of attitudes and rules, which began in the 11th century, that governed and controlled courtship among upper-class citizens of Europe. Certain patterns of courtly love lasted into the literature of the Renaissance; they appear in Shakespeare's sonnets as well as this play. Standard topics of courtly love include the following:

  1. The idealization of the beloved, especially through images of light and dark:

     ROMEO:
     But, soft! what light through yonder window 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…
     II.i.4-6

  2. The agony of the lover—he cannot live without his beloved:

     ROMEO:
     'Tis torture, and not mercy: heaven is here,
     Where Juliet lives; and every cat and dog
     And little mouse, every unworthy thing,
     Live here in heaven and may look on her;
     But Romeo may not…
     III.iii.29-33

  3. The emphasis on innocence and purity, especially when contrasted with more "worldly" love affairs. Unlike the Nurse, whose language is bold and suggestive, Juliet thinks of love as "holy," and discusses it in terms of saints and pilgrims in her conversations with Romeo.

  4. Rejection of the suitor by the chaste female:

     Romeo describes Rosaline, by saying,
     She'll not be hit
     With Cupid's arrow. She hath Dian's wit,
     And, in strong proof of chastity well arm'd,
     From Love's weak childish bow she lives unharm'd.
     I. i.210-213

- **Fate:** The Prologue tells the reader that in the play, "A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life." Fate is a powerful force in Romeo and Juliet, and the main characters are highly aware of it. Romeo, for instance, has premonitions of his own death several times. Despite Romeo's trying to avoid killing Tybalt, Fate intervenes, and the consequences are inevitable. Juliet should recover from the sleeping potion and all should be well, but Fate, in the form of the plague, has kept Friar John from delivering Friar Laurence's message; Romeo and Juliet's predetermined destiny thwarts every strategy that could have saved them from death.

ROMEO AND JULIET

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Chorus.
Escalus, Prince of Verona.
Paris, a young nobleman, kinsman to the Prince.
Montague, head of one house, at odds with Capulets.
Capulet, head of one house, at odds with Montagues.
An old Man, of the Capulet family.
Romeo, son to Montague.
Tybalt, nephew to Lady Capulet.
Mercutio, kinsman to the Prince and friend to Romeo.
Benvolio, nephew to Montague, and friend to Romeo
Tybalt, nephew to Lady Capulet.
Friar Laurence, a Franciscan.
Friar John, a Franciscan.
Balthasar, servant to Romeo.
Abram, servant to Montague.
Sampson, servant to Capulet.
Gregory, servant to Capulet.
Peter, servant to Juliet's Nurse.
An Apothecary.
Three Musicians.
An Officer.
Lady Montague, wife to Montague.
Lady Capulet, wife to Capulet.
Juliet, daughter to Capulet.
Nurse to Juliet.
Citizens of Verona; Gentlemen and Gentlewomen of both houses; Maskers, Torchbearers, Pages, Guards, Watchmen, Servants, and Attendants.

THE PROLOGUE

Enter Chorus.

CHOR: 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, naught 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
Verona. A public place.

Enter Sampson and Gregory with swords and bucklers of the house of Capulet.

SAMP: Gregory, on my word, we'll not carry coals.[1]
GREG: No, for then we should be colliers.
SAMP: I mean, an we be in choler, we'll draw.
GREG: Ay, while you live, draw your neck out of the collar.
SAMP: I strike quickly, being moved.
GREG: But thou art not quickly moved to strike.
SAMP: A dog of the house of Montague moves me.
GREG: To move is to stir, and to be valiant is to stand. Therefore, if thou art moved, thou runn'st away.
SAMP: A dog of that house shall move me to stand. I will take the wall of any man or maid of Montague's.
GREG: That shows thee a weak slave; for the weakest goes to the wall.
SAMP: 'Tis 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.
GREG: The quarrel is between our masters and us their men.
SAMP: 'Tis all one. I will show myself a tyrant. When I have fought with the men, I will be civil[2] with the maids; I will cut off their heads.
GREG: The heads of the maids?
SAMP: Ay, the heads of the maids, or their maidenheads. Take it in what sense thou wilt.
GREG: They must take it in sense that feel it.

[1] *tolerate insults [To carry coals was to perform the most menial household work that could be assigned to a servant; thus, it would be an insult or a source of humiliation.]*

[2] *"cruel" appears in some texts*

SAMP: Me they shall feel while I am able to stand; and 'tis known, I am a pretty piece of flesh.

GREG: 'Tis well thou art not fish; if thou hadst, thou hadst been poor-John.[3] Draw thy tool! Here comes two of the house of Montagues.

[3] *a cheap, salted fish*

Enter two other Servingmen, Abram and Balthasar.

SAMP: My naked weapon is out. Quarrel! I will back thee.

GREG: How? turn thy back and run?

SAMP: Fear me not.

GREG: No, marry. I fear thee!

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

GREG: I will frown as I pass by, and let them take it as they list.

SAMP: Nay, as they dare. I will bite my thumb at them; which is a disgrace to them, if they bear it.

ABR: Do you bite your thumb[4] at us, sir?

[4] *[a gesture of contempt]*

SAMP: I do bite my thumb, sir.

ABR: Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?

SAMP: *Aside to Gregory.* Is the law of our side, if I say ay?

GREG: *Aside to Sampson.* No.

SAMP: No, sir, I do not bite my thumb at you, sir; but I bite my thumb, sir.

GREG: Do you quarrel, sir?

ABR: Quarrel, sir? No, sir.

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

ABR: No better?

SAMP: Well, sir.

Enter Benvolio.

GREG: *Aside to Sampson.* Say 'better.' Here comes one of my master's kinsmen.

SAMP: Yes, better, sir.

ABR: You lie.

SAMP: Draw, if you be men. Gregory, remember thy swashing[5] blow. *They fight.*

[5] *smashing*

BEN: Part, fools! *He beats down their swords.* Put up your swords. You know not what you do.

Vocabulary and Glossary

Prologue
mutiny – strife, rivalry
piteous – passionate

Act I, Scene I
colliers – people who dig or sell coals
valiant – brave
fray – brawl
partisans – weapons
pernicious – vindictive, wicked
beseeming – becoming
adversary – enemy, nemesis
ere – before
drave – drove
covert – a thicket
augmenting – increasing
importuned – inquired, questioned
tyrannous – cruel, vicious
siege – the act of being encircled
ope – to open
posterity – future generations

Act I, Scene II
merit – deserve
sirrah – sir
holp – help
languish – a persistent disease
heretics – people whose opinions differ from the official faith (Christianity)
scant – barely, hardly

Act I, Scene III
dug – breast, nipple
tetchy – touchy, oversensitive, irritable
trow – to say
rood – a crucifix
perilous – dangerous, hazardous
lineament – aspect, characteristic
margent – a margin
endart – take flight and puncture like an arrow