

Act 1 Scene 1

In a public place, the servants of the house of Capulet quarrel with servants from the house of Montague. Young men from the two families join in the fighting, and even the old men (Capulet and Montague) try to draw their swords. The townspeople of Verona try to separate the enemies, and the Prince himself commands them to keep the peace.

When the fighting has stopped, Montague and his wife question Benvolio. They want to know who started the quarrels explanations for his strange conduct. Romeo is in love with a woman

1 carry coals: be insulted (a sixteenth-century slang phrase).

2 collier: a man who (literally) carries coal.

3 cholera: anger } these three words all sound alike.

4 collar: i.e. the hangmans noose.

3 and: if
draw: draw their swords (i.e. fight).

4 while: as long as.
draw: keep, hold back.

5 When I am angry (moved) I am quick to fight.

6 But you are not easily (quickly) made so angry (moved) that you will fight (Gregory implies that Sampson is really a coward).

8 stand: i.e. fight.

take the wall: In an Elizabethan street, the safest place to walk was close to the buildings
14-15 the weaker vessels: a biblical expression, meaning the weaker sex, derived from the First Epistle of Peter (3:7).

15 thrust to the wall: pushed aside (there is a proverb The weakest goes to the wall).

19 men: Gregory believes that only the men, not the women, are involved in the feud.

20 'Tis all one: it makes no difference.

24 maidenheads: virginity.
25 in what sense: with what meaning.
26 take it in sense: feel it.
27 stand: be erect.
28 a pretty piece of flesh: sexually active.
30 poor-john: dried fish (Gregory is insulting Sampsons virility).
 tool: sword.
32 back: support.
35 marry: by the Virgin Mary (a mild oath).
36 take . . . sides: act legally.
38 list: like.
39 bite my thumb: make a rude gesture.
40 bear: tolerate.
51 I am for you: I will join you.
60 swashing: slashing.
62 put up: sheathe.
63 art thou drawn: is your sword drawn?
 heartless hinds: (a) servants who lack courage (heart)hart).
65 but: only.
66 manage it: use it properly.
 part: separate
69 Have at thee: Tybalt warns Benvolio that he is about to attack.
70 bills: weapons with long handles and axe-heads.
 partisans: broad-headed spears.
71s.d. gown: dressing-gown
73 long sword: heavy, old-fashioned, sword.
76 in spite: in defiance.
80 The Capulets and the Montagues have used their swords (steel) dishonourably (profanely) by fighting against each other and staining the swords with the blood of neighbours.
84 On pain of torture: Escalus threatens to torture the fighters if they do not throw down their weapons.
85 mistemperd: (a) angrytempered by being hardened

so that it becomes tough and resilient).

86 moved: angry

87 bred of an airy word: caused by some trivial remark.

91 beseeming: suitable.

92 as old: i.e. as old as the weapons.

93 cankerd with peace: rusty because the citizens have been at peace, and are not accustomed to fighting.

cankerd hate: malignant hatred.

95 The penalty for breaking the peace will be death.

99 know: learn

our further pleasure: what else I decide to do.

100 common: public.

102 set . . . abroach: opened up (a cask of liquor or gunpowder is opened by being set abroach).

103 by: present.

105 close fighting: fighting hand to hand.

ere: before.

106 drew: drew my sword.

in the instant: at that moment.

107 prepard: already drawn.

110 nothing hurt withal: not injured by Tybalts flourishes.

112 on part and part: some on one side, some on the other.

113 parted either part: separated both sides.

115 Right: very.

fray: scuffle.

117 Peerd forth: looked out from.

118 abroad: out of doors.

119 sycamore: a species of tree (related to the fig-tree, and the maple), sometimes associated poetically with hopeless lovers.

120 That grows on the west of this city.

122 made: went.

ware: aware.

123 covert: shelter.

124 measuring: judging.

affections: desires.

125 Benvolio's own desire was most of all (most sought) to be alone (i.e. where other people--most--were not to be found).

126 His own company was too much for him.

127 humour: mood (in this case, desire for solitude).

128 I was glad to avoid (shun) a man who gladly escaped (fled) from me.

130 augmenting: adding to.

132 all so soon as: just as soon as.

134 curtains: The typical Elizabethan bed had a roof, supported by posts at each corner, and curtains could be drawn all round the bed.

Aurora: in Greek mythology, goddess of the dawn.

135 heavy:sad.

136 pens: shuts.

139 portentous: ominous.

142 of: from.

143 importund: asked.

145 his . . . counsellor: confiding his feelings to himself.

147 close: mysterious.

148 sounding: investigation.

discovery: exploration, understanding.

149 envious: malicious.

153 I would be as glad to cure his sorrow as to learn what it is.

154 So please you: if you please.

155 his grievance: what is worrying (grieving) him.

or be much denied: unless he is very firm in refusing to answer my questions.

156 I would thou wert so happy: I hope you will be so lucky.

by thy stay: by staying here.

157 true shrift: confession of the truth.

158 morrow: morning.

so young: Romeo has been up very early, and he is surprised to hear what time it is.

167 in his view: at first sight.
168 in proof: in fact, in
experience.
169 muffled: blindfolded. Cupid,
the god of love in classical
mythology, is usually portrayed as
a blind boy, with wings, who carries
a bow and arrows. He shoots at
human beings who, as soon as they
are wounded by an arrow, fall
passionately in love.
still: always.
173 The hate referred to is the
hatred of the Capulets and
Montagueslove is Romeos love for
his mistress. We learn later that her
name is Rosaline
174 brawling: quarrelling.
175 of nothing first create:
created out of nothing in the first
place.
177 well-seeming: apparently
beautiful.
179 Still-waking: always awake.
180 that feel no love in this: have
no love in return.
181 coz: cousin.
182 oppression: heavy burden.
183 This is where love (i.e.
Benvolios love) is at fault.
184-6 Griefs . . . thine: Romeo
now explains what he means by
loves transgression.
185 propagate: breed from.
it: i.e. Romeos heart.
186 more: i.e. griefs (this time,
Benvolios griefs).
189 purgd: purified.
192 gall: poison.
preserving: healing.
193 Soft: wait a moment.
go along: go with you.
194 And if: if.
196 some other where:
somewhere else.
197 in sadness: seriously.
199 sadly: seriously
203 I aimd so near: I was nearly
right.
supposd: guessed.
204 right good markman: very

good shot.

shes fair I love: the woman I love is beautiful.

205 a right fair mark: a very clear mark (

207 Cupids arrow: see note to line 167.

Dian: Diana, goddess of chastity in classical mythology.

wit: sense, intelligence.

208 proof: armour.

209 uncharmd: secure.

210 She will not wait to be besieged by the affectionate words (terms) of a lover.

212 She will not yield her honour for money (although gold would seduce a saint). In classical mythology the princess Danae was locked up in a tower made of brass--but she was seduced by Jove, who appeared in a shower of gold.

213-4 only . . . store: she is poor only that when she dies, her fertility (store) perishes with her beauty.

215 still: always.

216 sparing: economy.

217 starvd: killed.

218 Prevents generations to come (posterity) from inheriting any beauty.

219 fair: (a) lovely

220 The lady hopes to win heavenly happiness (bliss) by refusing human love (and this is what makes Romeo despair).

221 forsworn to love: sworn never to fall in love.

222 live dead: live as if I were dead.

226 Look at other beautiful women.

227 To make me think (call in question) even more about her beauty, which is exquisite.

228 happy: lucky. masks. Ladies very often covered part of their faces with black masks (see illustration) when they appeared in public, especially at grand balls

such as the Capulet ball in Act 1,
Scene 5.

232 passing fair: extremely
beautiful.

233 note: reminder (like a note
written in the margin of a book).

234 passd: surpassed, excelled.

236 Ill pay that doctrine: Ill make
you quite sure that my teaching
(doctrine) is right.

die in debt: die in the
attempt.