

Juliet

Romeo and Juliet

Act 2 Scene 2

Romeo Montague and Juliet Capulet, children of two feuding families, meet at a party and fall instantly in love. Later that night, Romeo sneaks into the Capulet orchard and overhears Juliet declaring her love for him. Here, Juliet speaks to Romeo and struggles to deal with the consequences of being overheard.

Thou know'st the mask of night is on my face,
Else would a maiden blush bepaint my cheek
For that which thou hast heard me speak tonight.
Fain would I dwell on form, fain, fain deny
What I have spoke, but farewell compliment.
Dost thou love me? I know thou wilt say 'Ay'
And I will take thy word; yet if thou swear'st,
Thou mayst prove false: at lovers' perjuries
They say Jove laughs. O gentle Romeo,
If thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully;
Or if thou think'st I am too quickly won,
I'll frown and be perverse and say thee nay,
So thou wilt woo, but else not for the world.
In truth, fair Montague, I am too fond,
And therefore thou mayst think my 'haviour light.
But trust me, gentleman, I'll prove more true
Than those that have more cunning to be strange.
I should have been more strange, I must confess,
But that thou overheard'st, ere I was ware,
My true-love passion; therefore pardon me,
And not impute this yielding to light love,
Which the dark night hath so discovered.

BELL SHAKESPEARE.

Phebe

As You Like It

Act 3 Scene 5

Phebe, a shepherdess, has just fallen in love with a beautiful young man called Ganymede. However, Ganymede is actually a girl in disguise. Here Phebe tries to convince Silvius, who loves her, that she's not interested in Ganymede.

Think not I love him though I ask for him.
'Tis but a peevish boy – yet he talks well.
But what care I for words? Yet words do well
When he that speaks them pleases those that hear.
It is a pretty youth – not very pretty –
But sure he's proud, and yet his pride becomes him.
He'll make a proper man. The best thing in him
Is his complexion; and faster than his tongue
Did make offence, his eye did heal it up.
He is not very tall, yet for his years he's tall.
His leg is but so-so, and yet 'tis well.
There was a pretty redness in his lip,
A little riper and more lusty red
Than that mixed in his cheek; 'twas just the difference
Between the constant red and mingled damask.
There be some women, Silvius, had they marked him
In parcels as I did, would have gone near
To fall in love with him; but for my part
I love him not – nor hate him not. And yet
I have more cause to hate him than to love him,
For what had he to do to chide at me?
He said mine eyes were black and my hair black,
And now I am remembered, scorned at me.
I marvel why I answered not again.
But that's all one – omittance is no quittance.
I'll write to him a very taunting letter
And thou shalt bear it. Wilt thou, Silvius?

Viola

Twelfth Night

Act 2 Scene 2

Viola disguises herself as a boy, calling herself Cesario, in order to enter the service of the Duke. The Duke, who is trying to woo Olivia, sends Viola with a message to her. However, Olivia falls in love with Cesario (who is really Viola) and insists that her steward give Cesario a ring, to ensure 'he' returns to see her. Viola is confused.

I left no ring with her: what means this lady?
Fortune forbid my outside have not charmed her!
She made good view of me, indeed so much
That methought her eyes had lost her tongue,
For she did speak in starts distractedly.
She loves me, sure; the cunning of her passion
Invites me in this churlish messenger.
None of my lord's ring? Why, he sent her none.
I am the man. If it be so, as 'tis,
Poor lady, she were better love a dream.
Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness,
Wherein the pregnant enemy does much.
How easy is it for the proper-false
In women's waxen hearts to set their forms!
Alas, our frailty is the cause, not we,
For such as we are made of, such we be.
How will this fadge? My master loves her dearly,
And I, poor monster, fond as much on him,
And she, mistaken, seems to dote on me.
What will become of this? As I am man,
My state is desperate for my master's love;
As I am woman – now alas the day! –
What thriftless sighs shall poor Olivia breathe?
O time, thou must untangle this, not I;
It is too hard a knot for me t'untie.

BELL SHAKESPEARE.

Helena

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Act 1 Scene 2

Helena is in love with Demetrius, but he has dumped her and is now pursuing Hermia. Meanwhile, Hermia is in love with Lysander and plans to run away with him to the woods tomorrow night. Hermia and Lysander have just told Helena about their secret plan.

How happy some o'er other some can be!
Through Athens I am thought as fair as she,
But what of that? Demetrius thinks not so;
He will not know what all but he do know.
And as he errs, doting on Hermia's eyes,
So I, admiring of his qualities.
Things base and vile, holding no quantity,
Love can transpose to form and dignity.
Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind,
And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind;
Nor hath Love's mind of any judgement taste:
Wings and no eyes figure unheedy haste.
And therefore is Love said to be a child,
Because in choice he is so oft beguiled.
As waggish boys in game themselves forswear,
So the boy Love is perjured everywhere.
For ere Demetrius looked on Hermia's eyne,
He hailed down oaths that he was only mine;
And when this hail some heat from Hermia felt,
So he dissolved and showers of oaths did melt.
I will go tell him of fair Hermia's flight:
Then to the wood will he, tomorrow night,
Pursue her; and for this intelligence
If I have thanks, it is a dear expense.
But herein mean I to enrich my pain,
To have his sight thither and back again.

BELL SHAKESPEARE.

Emilia

Othello

Act 4 Scene 3

Emilia, Iago's wife, is the waiting-gentlewoman to Othello's wife, Desdemona. Othello has just abused Desdemona, accusing her of being unfaithful. As the shaken Desdemona gets ready for bed, Emilia shares her thoughts on faithfulness.

But I do think it is their husbands' faults
If wives do fall. Say that they slack their duties
And pour our treasures into foreign laps,
Or else break out in peevish jealousies,
Throwing restraint upon us; or say they strike us,
Or scant our former having in despite,
Why, we have galls, and though we have some grace,
Yet have we some revenge. Let husbands know
Their wives have sense like them: they see and smell
And have their palates both for sweet and sour
As husbands have. What is it that they do
When they change us for others? Is it sport?
I think it is. And doth affection breed it?
I think it doth. Is't frailty that thus errs?
It is so too. And have not we affections,
Desires for sport, and frailty, as men have?
Then let them use us well, else let them know,
The ills we do, their ills instruct us so.

Ariel

The Tempest

Act 1 Scene 2 (edited)

Prospero's enemies, including his brother Antonio, who usurped Prospero's position as Duke of Milan, are sailing past the island. Ariel, a spirit of the island, has, at the behest of Prospero, created a massive storm and shipwrecked the travellers. Ariel describes the scene to Prospero.

I boarded the king's ship. Now on the beak,
Now in the waist, the deck, in every cabin
I flamed amazement. Sometime I'd divide
And burn in many places; on the topmast,
The yards and bowsprit, would I flame distinctly,
Then meet and join. Jove's lightning, the precursors
O'th'dreadful thunder-claps, more momentary
And sight-outrunning were not; the fire and cracks
Of sulphurous roaring the most mighty Neptune
Seem to besiege and make his bold waves tremble,
Yea, his dread trident shake.

Not a soul

But felt a fever of the mad, and played
Some tricks of desperation. All but mariners
Plunged in the foaming brine and quit the vessel,
Then all a-fire with me. The king's son, Ferdinand,
With hair up-staring – then like reeds, not hair –
Was the first man that leaped, cried 'Hell is empty,
And all the devils are here.'

But they are, master, safe. Not a hair perished;
On their sustaining garments not a blemish,
But fresher than before. And, as thou bad'st me,
In troops I have dispersed them 'bout the isle.

The king's son have I landed by himself,
Whom I left cooling of the air with sighs
In an odd angle of the isle, and sitting,
His arms in this sad knot.

Ophelia

Hamlet

Act 2 Scene 1 (edited)

Ophelia's father, Polonius, has warned her to cut off all contact with Hamlet. Here she describes to Polonius her most recent encounter with the prince.

O my lord, my lord, I have been so affrighted.
My lord, as I was sewing in my closet,
Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced,
No hat upon his head, his stockings fouled,
Ungartered and down-gyved to his ankle,
Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,
And with a look so piteous in purport
As if he had been loosèd out of hell
To speak of horrors, he comes before me.
He took me by the wrist and held me hard,
Then goes he to the length of all his arm
And with his other hand thus o'er his brow
He falls to such perusal of my face
As he would draw it. Long stayed he so.
At last, a little shaking of mine arm
And thrice his head thus waving up and down,
He raised a sigh so piteous and profound
As it did seem to shatter all his bulk
And end his being. That done, he lets me go
And with his head over his shoulder turned
He seemed to find his way without his eyes,
For out o' doors he went without their help,
And to the last bended their light on me.

Portia

The Merchant of Venice

Act 4 Scene 1

Portia has disguised herself as a legal expert called Balthazar and arrived at court, purportedly as a neutral party, to intervene in the dispute between Antonio and Shylock. She is actually supporting Antonio's case and here, in the courtroom, she argues that Shylock should show mercy.

The quality of mercy is not strained:
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes,
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes
The thronèd monarch better than his crown.
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings.
But mercy is above this sceptred sway;
It is enthronèd in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute to God himself,
And earthly power doth then show likest God's
When mercy seasons justice. Therefore, Jew,
Though justice be thy plea, consider this:
That in the course of justice none of us
Should see salvation. We do pray for mercy,
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy. I have spoke thus much
To mitigate the justice of thy plea,
Which, if thou follow, this strict court of Venice
Must needs give sentence 'gainst the merchant there.