R & J Intro to Shakespeare's Language 2022

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Intro to Romeo and Juliet

(The Tragedy Thereof)

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The title is actually:

The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet

Tragedy

A dramatic play that tells the story of a character, usually of a noble class, who meets an untimely and unhappy death or downfall, often because of a specific flaw or twist of fa

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SHAKESPEARE’S LANGUAGE

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Decoding Shakespeare’s Language:

It helps to know the techniques he uses:

1. Verse & Iambic pentameter

2. Inversion (AKA: Inverted syntax, AKA: Yoda speak)

3. Separation

4. Omission

5. Portmanteau

6. Syllable Stretching

7. Two forms of “you”

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Prose vs. Verse

Prose is everyday, normal language

Verse is poetry.

Shakespeare writes in verse.

He uses a very specific type of rhythm (meter)...

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Iambic Pentameter

Iamb

An “iamb” is simply a pattern of stressed/unstressed syllables. It’s an ever-so-simple pattern:

unstressed/stressed

Example: Tonight

Pentameter

“Pentameter” is the # of times the pattern is repeated in each line. “Penta” means 5, so pentameter means the pattern is repeated:

5 times

Example: Tonight, tonight, tonight, tonight, tonight

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Iambic Pentameter

Iambic Pentameter is thus:

* 5 iambs
* A line of iambic pentameter looks like this:

unstressed / stressed / unstressed / stressed / unstressed / stressed / unstressed / stressed

* Example:

Two households both alike in dignity

* Blank verse: unrhymed iambic pentameter
* Shakespeare wrote most of his plays mostly in blank verse. Yeah, that’s not easy to do.

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Inversion

INVERSION DEFINITION:

When the word order in a sentence is different than what it should be (Think Yoda!)

INVERSION EXAMPLE:

Powerful you have become.

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Steps to unscramble inverted syntax:

Rework the sentence so that it appears in this order:

1. subject (who / what performs the action) comes first in the sentence followed by the

2. verb and

3. whatever completes the sentence – the sentence complement (object, prepositional phrases, adjectives, adverbs, etc.)

You have become powerful.

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Inversion examples from Romeo and Juliet:

1. Steals home my heavy son.

Subject- My heavy son

Verb- steals

Object- home

(By the way, this is not about stealing home base, but rather that he I going back to his home.)

2. Even such delight /…shall you this night / Inherit at my house.

Sub- You

Verb- shall inherit such

Object- delight this night at my house

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Inversion examples continued...

1. “In the instant came / the fiery Tybalt”

A. The fiery Tybalt came this instant.

2. “Me they shall feel”

a. They shall feel me.

3. “Black and portentous must this humor prove”

a. This humor must prove black and portentous.

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Separation:

SEPARATION DEFINITION:

When ideas within a sentence are separated / interrupted

SEPARATION EXAMPLE:

“Three civil brawls bred to an airy word / By thee, old Capulet, and Montague, / Have thrice disturbed the quiet of our streets”

How to figure out what’s happening:

1) identify the subject

2) identify the verb

3) identify the object (what receives the action)

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Separation & Inversion Practice

Unscramble the words in these lines so that the words appear in the order they should:

A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life; / whose misadventured piteous overthrows / Doth with their death bury their parents strife = A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life and bury their parents’ strife with their death.

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Omission

OMISSION DEFINITION:

When words are omitted from a sentence

Modern Examples:

Hear anything?

Catch that?

Got it?

Shakespearean Example:

Were you by? (Were you nearby?)

What say you? (What do you say? Also inversion)

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Portmanteau

PORTMANTEAU DEFINITION:

A combination of two (or more) words or parts of words, and their definitions, into one new word

It was = ‘twas

They were = ‘twere

It is = ‘tis

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Syllable stretching

SYLLABLE STRETCHING DEFINITION:

Creating an extra syllable within a word by adding an apostrophe in order to create a break/pause in the pronunciation and keep the meter working.

Breathed = Breath’ed

Inspired = Inspir’ed

Believed = Believ’ed

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Two forms of 2nd person pronouns

FORMAL & INFORMAL VERSIONS OF “YOU”:

In Shakespeare’s time, English had two different pronouns for the 2nd person, one formal & one informal (much like Spanish “tú” & “usted” or French “tu” & “vous”).

Formal = You

Informal = Thou

Formal “you” used to address someone of higher status

Informal “thou” used to address a friend or someone of lower status

Each form had different ways to conjugate verbs

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Conjugations for 2nd person pronouns

PRONOUN FORMS (DECLENSION):

Form: Informal singular

Subject: thou

Object: thee

Possessive: thy/thine

Form: Formal singular or plural

Subject: ye/you

Object: you

Possessive: your/yours

Verb conjugation:

Form: Regular verbs

Pronoun: thou

Verb Ending: -est/ -st

Examples: lovest/ dost/ canst

Form: Regular verbs

Pronoun: you

Verb Ending: (same as today)

Examples: love/do/can

Form: Irregular verbs

Pronoun: thou

Verb Ending: (varies, but ends with “t”)

Examples: art/hast/wilt/shalt

Form: Irregular verbs

Pronoun: you

Verb Ending: (same as today)

Examples: are/have/will/shall

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Shakespeare meme- “Think he has no swag, invented the word”

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The Prologue

The Prologue is a sonnet that basically tells the whole plot of the play before the play even begins.

Sonnet: a 14-line lyric poem, usually written in iambic pentameter and following a strict pattern of rhyme: ABABCDCDEFEFGG

The Prologue would be addressed directly to the audience, usually by one member of the chorus (an actor). And then, the play would begin.

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-crossed lovers take their life;

Whose misadventured piteous overthrows

Do with their death bury their parents’ strife.

The fearful passage of their death-marked 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.

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The Prologue

\*Here’s what we get from the Prologue of Romeo and Juliet:

Two rich families in Verona, Italy hate each other due to an old feud.

Some sort of rebellion (“mutiny”) has caused their feud to become violent again and people are dying because of it.

The children of these families become “star-crossed” (they have very bad luck) lovers, and they end up killing themselves.

Their bad choices and attempts to change their families leads to their deaths, but it also ends their families’ feud. This is their fate.

Their love, which was always meant to lead to their deaths (“death-marked love”) and their parents’ feud, which could ONLY end with their own deaths, is now what this play will talk about (“The two hours’ traffic of our stage”).

And, if you will listen patiently, you will hear the whole story, including everything that we didn’t get to in the prologue.

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The Prologue

Let’s start by watching Baz Luhrmann’s version of the prologue.

Link- <https://youtu.be/beV56hp4T3w>

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The Prologue

And, if you want to watch me annotate the prologue and break it down, here is a little video I made for you!

Link- <https://youtu.be/4XFKwxQZbqw>