

e-Luminations: Romeo and Juliet

Two Hours' Traffic

In four short days, Romeo and Juliet meet, fall in love, marry and die. Shakespeare makes sure we notice how quickly things move—how “like the lightning which doth cease to be / Ere one can say it lightens.”

*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;*
(Prologue 9-12)

Romeo and Juliet runs longer than two hours—Shakespeare was poetically understating—but it does move “like the lightning which doth cease to be / Ere one can say it lightens” (2,1,161-162). As this timeline demonstrates.

Sunday morning

A brawl in the streets of Verona.

...civil blood makes civil hands unclean. (Prologue 4)

Capulet agrees to allow Paris to court Juliet.

...woo her, gentle Paris, get her heart. (1,2,14)

Benvolio and Romeo decide to attend the Capulet party.

I pray come and crush a cup of wine. (1,2,82)

Sunday night

Capulet's party

You are welcome, gentlemen. (1,5,25)

Romeo incurs Tybalt's wrath.

What, dares the slave

Come hither...

To flee and scorn at our solemnity? (1,5, 54-56)

Romeo and Juliet meet and fall in love.

My only love sprung from my only hate! (1,5,137)

Late Sunday night

The Balcony Scene

It is the east, and Juliet is the sun. (2,1,45)

Romeo and Juliet agree to be married the next day.

If that thy bent of love be honorable,

Thy purpose marriage, send me word tomorrow,

*By one that I'll procure to come to thee,
Where and what time thou wilt perform the rite...* (2,1,85-88)

Monday dawn

Romeo asks Friar Laurence to marry him and Juliet.

*...thou must combine
By holy marriage.* (2,2,60-61)

Monday morning

Romeo tells the Nurse about the marriage plans.

*...she shall at Friar Laurence' cell
Be shrived and married.* (2,3,171-172)

Romeo and Juliet are married.

Holy Church incorporate two in one. (2,5,36-37)

Monday mid-afternoon

Romeo, coming from his wedding, attempts to stop a street fight.

Gentlemen, for shame, forbear this outrage. (3,1,85)

Mercutio and Tybalt are killed.

A plague o' both your houses. (3,1,106)

The Prince banishes Romeo.

*Let Romeo hence in haste,
Else, when he is found, that hour is his last.* (3,1,193-194)

Monday night to Tuesday morning

Romeo and Juliet's wedding night

Wilt thou be gone? It is not yet near day. (3,5,1)

Tuesday dawn

Romeo goes to Mantua.

O, now be gone! More light and light it grows. (3,5,35)

Tuesday morning and afternoon

Juliet is ordered to marry Paris Thursday morning.

*...go with Paris to Saint Peter's Church,
Or I will drag thee on a hurdle thither.* (3,5,154-155)

Juliet begs Friar Laurence to save her from marrying Paris.

...tell me how I may prevent it. (4,1,51)

Friar Laurence hastily improvises a plan.

*I do spy a kind of hope
Which craves as desperate an execution
As that is desperate which we would prevent.* (4,1, 68-70)

He sends Friar John to Mantua to tell Romeo.

I writ to Romeo / That he should hither come. (5,3,245-246)

Friar John cannot take the message to Romeo.

*...the searchers of the town,
Suspecting that we both were in a house
Where the infectious pestilence did reign,
Sealed up the doors, and would not let us forth.* (5,2,9-11)

Capulet moves the wedding forward.

I'll have this knot knit up tomorrow morning. (4,2,24)

Tuesday night

Juliet takes a potion that will make her seem dead.

Romeo! Here's drink. I drink to thee. (4,3,57)

Wednesday dawn

Juliet is discovered, apparently dead.

Alack the day, she's dead, she's dead, she's dead! (4,4,51)

Wednesday

Juliet is buried in the Capulet monument

All in her best array bear her to church. (4,4,108)

Thursday

Balthazar brings Romeo word that Juliet is dead.

I saw her laid low in her kindred's vault. (5,1,20)

Romeo purchases poison and goes to Verona to die near her.

Come, cordial and not poison, go with me

To Juliet's grave, for there must I use thee. (5,1,85-86)

Thursday night

Romeo and Juliet die.

seal with a righteous kiss

A dateless bargain to engrossing death. (5,1,114-115) —Hilary Tate

The article above was excerpted from OSF's 2007 *Illuminations*, a 64-page guide to the plays in the 2007 season. For more information or to buy the full *Illuminations* [click here](#). Members at the Patron level and above and teachers who bring school groups to OSF receive a free copy of *Illuminations*.