

A Romeo & Juliet Fugue or Round

The pattern in the mourning language of four characters after Juliet appears to be dead is too striking to be an accident—note the patterns in each of the first lines, then each of the second lines, etc. If it's purposeful, what does Shakespeare want us to see in it? I suggest it can be heard as a musical dirge, a lament for the dead, sung as a sort of fugue or round, with each character speaking the first lines one after each other, then the second lines, one after each other, etc.

To hear the pattern most effectively, you need to read it in its iambic pentameter rhythm: ten syllables with a slight emphasis on the even syllables (second, fourth, etc.).

This means the words *miserable*, *lamentable*, *detestable*, and *uncomfortable* in the second lines all need *four* (five in *uncomfortable*) distinct syllables, all with the emphasis on the second and fourth syllables of the line. It will feel awkward at first, but you'll get used to it.

Really emphasize the beat on the even syllables at first, as in this line:

o WOE oh WOE ful DAY o HATE ful DAY

The word *cruel* is two syllables: CRU el.

And there are some missing syllables, where you see a caret: ^ . *Pause* for that beat.

An apostrophe where an *e* should be means you do *not* say the *-ed* sound; where there is an accent mark, you *do* say the *-ed* sound, as in *divorcèd*, three syllables. An apostrophe in

a word like *never/ne'er* indicates *ne'er* is spoken as only one syllable.

Got it? :-) Truly, it's worth the trouble.

Once you are comfortable hearing the iambic pattern by emphasizing it, pull it back into normal-sounding speech—and a song—that still contains the slight lilt of the meter. It's beautiful and amazing.

CAPULET'S WIFE

Accurs'd, unhappy, wretched, hateful day,
Most miserable hour that e'er Time saw
In lasting labor of his pilgrimage.
But one, poor one, one poor and loving child,
But one thing to rejoice and solace in,
And cruel Death hath catch'd it from my sight.

NURSE

O woe, O woeful, woeful, woeful day,
Most lamentable day, most woeful day
That ever, ever I did yet behold.
O day, O day, O day, O hateful day,
^ Ne'er was seen so black a day as this:
O woeful day, ^ ^ O woeful day!

PARIS

Beguil'd, divorcèd, wrongèd, spited, slain,
Most detestable Death, by thee beguil'd,
By cruel, cruel thee, quite overthrown:
O love, O life; not life, but love in death.

CAPULET

Despis'd, distressèd, hated, martyr'd, kill'd,
Uncomfortable time, why cam'st thou now
To murder, murder our solemnity?
O child, O child, my soul, and not my child:
^ Dead art thou, alack, my child is dead,
And with my child, my joys are buried.

THE DIRGE

Find three friends/family in your quarantined household or others online with whom you can video-conference. Help each other with the rhythm of the individual lines before you begin your collaborative reading or song. If you love what you've come up with, video it and send me a link that I can post on iReadShakespeare.org!

anon,

Robin

FIRST LINES (each Reader take one line)

Accurs'd, unhappy, wretched, hateful day,
O woe, O woeful, woeful, woeful day,
Beguil'd, divorcèd, wrongèd, spited, slain,
Despis'd, distressèd, hated, martyr'd, kill'd.

SECOND LINES

Most miserable hour that e'er Time saw
Most lamentable day, most woeful day
Most detestable Death, by thee beguil'd,
Uncomfortable time, why cam'st thou now.

THIRD LINES

In lasting labor of his pilgrimage
That ever, ever I did yet behold
By cruel, cruel thee, quite overthrown
To murder, murder our solemnity?

FOURTH LINES

But one, poor one, one poor and loving child,
O day, O day, O day, O hateful day,
O love, O life; not life, but love in death.
O child, O child, my soul, and not my child:

FIFTH LINES

But one thing to rejoice and solace in.
^ Ne'er was seen so black a day as this:
^ Dead art thou, alack, my child is dead,

SIXTH LINES

And cruel Death hath catch'd it from my sight.
O woeful day ^ ^ O woeful day!
And with my child, my joys are buried.