

Romeo and Juliet

SYNOPSIS

The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet

A prologue delivers a sonnet summarizing the plot of the play. A long-standing feud between the Montagues and Capulets flares up in a brawl in the streets of Verona, stopped by the arrival of Prince Escalus, who warns both families about their behaviour, threatening execution for anyone who disobeys.

Romeo, the only son of the Montagues, missed the fighting because he was wandering outside the town, sick with love for Rosaline, who does not return his love. Romeo and his friend Benvolio discover that there is to be a ball at the Capulets' house and decide to go in masks. Their friend Mercutio joins them, and Mercutio dismisses Romeo's premonitions in a speech about the power of the imagination. At the ball Romeo and Juliet, thirteen years old and the Capulets' only child, fall in love with each other instantly, in spite of the enmity of their families.

After the ball, Romeo escapes from his friends and climbs over the wall into the Capulets' orchard, where he overhears Juliet on her balcony talking about him. They swear love for each other and agree to marry as soon as possible. With the help of Juliet's nurse, the marriage is arranged and they are secretly married by Friar Laurence, who hopes in this way to end the families' feud.

However, Juliet's cousin Tybalt, annoyed by Romeo's presence at the ball, challenges him to a fight. When Romeo refuses to fight, saying there are reasons Tybalt and he should be friends, Mercutio challenges Tybalt instead. Mercutio is accidentally killed, and Romeo rushes after Tybalt and kills him in revenge. Because Romeo did not start the fight the Prince does not have Romeo executed but he is banished from Verona.

Juliet at first blames Romeo, but then sends the nurse to arrange for Romeo to spend the night with her before his escape to Mantua.

In the morning her father decides to cheer her up by announcing that he has arranged a marriage for her with Count Paris. When Juliet is not enthusiastic, her parents threaten to turn her out of the house. When even the nurse suggests she should accept the new husband she turns to Friar Laurence, who devises a plan. He gives her a drug which will make her appear dead. Her body will be laid in the family vault, and he will send for Romeo so that they will both be there when she wakes up and she and Romeo can escape together. The plan is carried out, but Romeo's servant Balthasar sees the funeral and hurries to Mantua to tell Romeo the news before Friar Laurence's letter can reach him.

Romeo, in despair, obtains poison and returns to Verona, where he kills Paris, who is trying to stop him entering the tomb. He poisons himself on her body. Friar Laurence arrives to late to stop him, and when Juliet wakes he is frightened by the sound of people coming and runs away. Juliet sees Romeo and kills herself with his dagger.

Friar Laurence tells the authorities the full story and the two families, united in grief, end their feud.

Media:

DVD:

- Romeo and Juliet* (1936), dir. George Cukor, with Marlon Brando and John Gielgud
- Romeo and Juliet* (1954), dir. Roberto Castellani
- Romeo, Juliet and Darkness* (1960), dir. Jiri Weiss (set in wartime Prague)
- West Side Story* by Laurents, Bernstein and Sondheim (1961) (musical version of the story set among rival gangs in New York)
- Romanoff and Juliet* (1961), dir. Peter Ustinov (set in rival embassies during the Cold War)
- Shakespeare Wallah* (1965), dir. James Ivory (English actors performing Shakespeare in India)
- Romeo and Juliet* (1968), dir. Franco Zeffirelli with Leonard Whiting and Olivia Hussey
- Romeo and Juliet* (BBC TV Shakespeare 1978), dir. Alan Rakoff
- China Girl* (1987), dir. Abel Ferrara (crime thriller based on the story, set in 1980s New York)
- William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996), dir. Baz Luhrmann with Leonardo DiCaprio and Claire Danes
- Tromeo and Juliet* (1996), dir. Lloyd Kaufman (from the Troma company, specializing in horror and farce)
- Shakespeare in Love* (1998), dir. John Madden, co-written by Tom Stoppard (witty entwining of Shakespeare's life and the writing of *Romeo and Juliet*)
- Romeo Must Die* (2000), dir. Andrzej Bartkowiak (hip hop meets kung fu, very loosely based on the story)
- A Village Romeo and Juliet* by Delius (2002), dir. Petr Weigl (English opera based on Gottfried Keller)
- Romeo and Juliet — Sealed with a Kiss* (2005), Phil Nibbelink (animated version with sea creatures)
- Shakespeare: The Animated Tales Act 5 (2007) *Romeo and Juliet* and *As You Like It*
- Romeo and Juliet* by Prokofiev (2009), dir. Ross McGibbon (Russian ballet based on the story)
- Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare's Globe 2010), dir. Dominic Dromgoole
- Romeo X Juliet* (2010) (Japanese anime series loosely based on the story)
- Gnomeo and Juliet* (2011), dir. Kelly Asbery (a lot of the most famous names in acting and entertainment were involved in this animated film about love between garden gnomes)

Not available:

- Romeo und Julia im Schnee* (1920), dir. Ernst Lubitsch
- Romeo.Juliet* (1990), dir. Armondo Acosta (involving a bag lady in Venice and stray cats)
- The Punk* (1993), dir. Michael Sarne (working-class Londoner falls in love with rich girl)
- Romeo and Juliet vs. the Living Dead* (2009), dir. Ryan Denmark (a Shakespeare zombie comedy)

CD Audio:

- Romeo and Juliet* (Naxos)
- Romeo and Juliet* (Arkangel Complete Shakespeare)
- Music by Berlioz, Tchaikovsky, Delius, Prokofiev based on Shakespeare's play
- "Romeo and Juliet", song by Dire Straits

[Michael Mitchell]