

Article of the Week #4

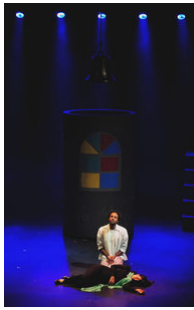
1. Read and Annotate both excerpts.
2. When annotating the Prologue of Romeo and Juliet you are going to need to look up some words in the dictionary or you will not understand it!! The Prologue is the opening to the play. It gives you a summary of what happens in the play and it is written in Shakespeare's famous sonnet form.

Excerpt 1: From "Romeo and Juliet": The Prologue



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-cross'd lovers take their life;
Whose misadventured piteous overthrows
Do with their death bury their parents' strife.
The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love,
And the continuance of their parents' rage,
Which, but their children's end, nought 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.

Excerpt 2: From “Montague and Capulet as Shiite and Sunni” by Tim Arango (April 28, 2012)



Rehearsals of “Romeo and Juliet in Baghdad,” an Iraqi adaptation of the play, performed in Baghdad in 2012. Credit Rui Vieira/Press Association, via Associated Press

BAGHDAD — It is not poison or a dagger that takes the lives of the young lovers, but a suicide bomb. The Montagues and Capulets are divided not just by family, but also by religious sect. And the dialogue in the Iraqi adaptation of “Romeo and Juliet” is sprinkled with references to Blackwater, Iranians and the American reconstruction effort.

After a recent performance here at the National Theater, where the dramatic arts were once degraded to serve as a dictator’s propaganda, the audience filed out buzzing over the return of serious art to the Iraqi capital. Cloaked as a Shakespearean classic was a lively rendering of their own lives over the past nine years.

“It was about our reality, the killing that happened between the Sunnis and Shias,” said Senan Saadi, a university student who was in the audience.

The killing, of course, still happens. The morning after the show, explosions were heard in Baghdad. By the end of the day, a string of attacks around the country had left nearly three dozen people dead. By then, the cast of the play, including veteran Iraqi actors and young up-and-comers, was preparing to leave for the World Shakespeare Festival in Stratford-upon-Avon, William Shakespeare’s birthplace.

“Romeo and Juliet in Baghdad” opened Thursday at the festival and runs for 10 days as part of the cultural program linked with the coming London Olympics. Its story line of a doomed cross-sectarian love affair manages to touch on nearly every element of the recent collective Iraqi experience.

That it garnered many laughs — especially over the buffoonish Qaeda character in an explosives-laden vest, who is Paris, Juliet’s failed suitor, in Shakespeare’s original — and plenty of tears, too, is perhaps a small sign that Iraqi society is beginning to reconcile with the trauma of the war.

“Romeo, he doesn’t see Juliet for nine years,” explained Monadhil Daood, a famous Iraqi actor and playwright who is directing the play and spent two years writing the script. “At their first meeting they talk about the conflict between Sunni and Shia.”

The words Sunni and Shia are not mentioned explicitly, but are symbolized in ways that are clearly recognizable to an Iraqi audience. Capulet, Juliet’s father, is denoted as a Sunni by his red-and-white checkered keffiyeh (not to mention that a Qaeda fighter seeks to marry his daughter). Romeo’s father, Montague, wears a black-and-white scarf more commonly worn by Shiites.

“My message is that love is better than the conflict between the families,” Mr. Daood said.

For Writing: Answer each of the following questions

1. How does Shakespeare emphasize conflict and contrast in the language of the prologue? Where do you see twosomes, pairings, repetition and opposites?
2. Shakespeare's prologue gives away the story of the play. Which lines mirror the situation between the Sunnis and Shias outlined in the article? What threads run between the two?
3. How does this production represent the "recent Iraqi collective experience"?
4. At the end of the play, Mr. Capulet asks for Mr. Montague's hand and Montague vows to erect a statue of Juliet so that all remember their children. What understanding have they come to after the death of their children? What does it say about human nature that it takes such grief and sacrifice to reach common ground? How is this production of "Romeo and Juliet" itself a means of helping to heal Iraq?
5. How have Shakespeare's plays been performed and received throughout recent history in Iraq? What do the various ways in which they have been used teach us about their universality?
6. If you were a director selecting a setting (time and place) for "Romeo and Juliet," what other modern day conflicts would lend themselves to its plots and themes? Why? Is it possible to find a fresh approach for a play performed so many times in so many ways already? Can you find something in this week's Times that echoes these themes or suggests a setting and potential characters?

Comparing Two Texts

Directions: Use the questions below to help you think about the relationship between two or more texts of any kind. Use the back of the sheet if you need more room to write.

Content: In your own words, what is each text saying?

Text 1: Prologue from Romeo and Juliet	Text 2: From “Montague and Capulet as Shiite and Sunni”

Similarities: How are these texts similar, connected or related? How are they alike, whether in terms of subject matter, theme, purpose, tone, etc.? What specific lines and details echo each other or connect?

Differences: How are the two different—again, in terms of subject matter, theme, purpose, tone or anything else? Where do they “disagree”?

The Two Texts Together: How does reading the two together make you see or understand things you might not if you read them separately? If the creators or subjects of these texts were to have a conversation, what is one thing they might say to each other?

Questions and Reactions: What questions do these texts and their content raise for you? What reactions do you have to them, either individually or together?