

## Director's Notes

During the first week of rehearsals for Romeo and Juliet, director Gadi Roll shared his thoughts on the play with the cast. The following are excerpts of notes taken during those rehearsals.

### Violence and the Social Context

We live in a frame that society, motivated by fear, constructs to create order in the world. Who we are is our reaction to that frame. So if the frame is flawed, so are we. Think of a dolphin. A dolphin has sonar that it bounces off objects in the open water to sense their size, contour, distance and texture. Put the dolphin between the contained, concrete walls of an aquarium – trap it within a frame – and its sonar will drive it crazy. It stops being a dolphin and turns into a mutation of one. It won't reproduce. It can't be itself within the frame.

Humans are affected in a similar way to the frame placed around us. We are mutations of the human form because of the social frame we exist in. We have built the frame to protect ourselves, but we are destroying ourselves within it. In his introduction to his play Lear, Edward Bond says that in trying to defend itself, society is bringing about its own destruction. That's what's happening in Romeo and Juliet.

Everyone in this play has been affected by the social frame – by the feud and the context of violence. And the trigger-happy rage is a reaction to their existence, to the frame that twists and deforms them.

Some of the characters may be aware of how the frame has shaped

them. And being aware of the frame means they live with one leg outside it. Hamlet, for instance, lives entirely outside the frame. Romeo is like Hamlet in many ways. Romeo is aware – he has one leg outside the frame and observes society from a distance. At the beginning of the play Benvolio describes him wandering alone, outside the city walls. Romeo cannot stand life within the frame unless he has Juliet and love, which make life meaningful and bearable. Juliet is also aware of the frame. And so are Benvolio, Mercutio, and possibly Friar Lawrence.

### Fearlessness

Fear is the biggest motivating force driving society to establish the frame, but nothing motivated by fear has ended in good. Romeo and Juliet are fearless. Unlike most people in society, they are not motivated by fear. The rules and laws imposed upon them by the frame are a suggestion of how to live. They reject that suggestion. They choose not to abide by those rules.

When Romeo overhears Juliet speaking on her balcony, he knows for certain that she is a person who is not motivated by fear. He knows he has found the right woman for him this time. The previous object of his desire, Rosaline, was the wrong one because she chose to live chaste – which was a way of surviving life, not living it. What Romeo and Juliet signal to each other in the balcony scene is that they're both willing to break out of the frame society places around them.

Society doesn't leave room for the wonderful. Human society has eliminated it because whatever is wonderful is full of wonder, and wonder implies what is unknown, inexplicable, and therefore fearful. Romeo and Juliet are both full of wonder.

## Life and Death for Romeo and Juliet

Human society is life-preventing rather than life-enabling. Life for Romeo and Juliet exists only if they are together. When they're apart, they're like the walking-dead. And a living-death is meaningless for both of them. They want either life or, if they can't have life, death. For Juliet to marry Paris – as society wills her to – she would have to accept a living-death. Juliet is found "dead" the morning of her wedding to Paris – because the prescribed life within the social frame is not life at all for her.

Romeo and Juliet want to live fully or die – there is no middle ground, no compromise, for either of them. And the lovers know from the very beginning that life together might bring about their deaths. Juliet is connected to death from the first time she lays eyes on Romeo. "Go ask his name. – If he be married/ My grave is like to be my wedding bed," she says to the Nurse after meeting Romeo at her father's banquet. Romeo senses the end is near when he's going to Capulet's feast: " ... my mind misgives/ Some consequence yet hanging in the stars/ Shall bitterly begin his fearful date/ With this night's revels, and expire the term/ Of a despisèd life closed in my breast/ By some vile forfeit of untimely death," he says to Benvolio and Mercutio right before he sees Juliet.

Romeo and Juliet accept death as part of life. This means they fully live life. They are constantly putting the potentially lethal consequences of their relationship before each other. And they go to their ends open-eyed and soberly embrace death. It takes no time at all for Romeo to purchase the poison. And when Juliet sees the poison in her dead lover's hand, she reaches for it immediately and then, finding the vial empty, doesn't hesitate for even a second

before taking the dagger.

## The Set

The set is very fascistic. It is nature contained by a metal frame – a kind of cage – that's made out of expanded steel. And that frame is very cold, hard, and unnatural. It is as rigid as the society that refuses to let individuals live outside the frame. The geometry and blocking of the production are also part of the fascist element. The characters walk in straight lines that suggest the prescribed, ordered existence of life within the frame.

## Friar Lawrence

He is not a spiritual man. He sees religion as power, and is motivated by the fear of death. He senses the outcome of what he is trying to do with Romeo and Juliet, and yet he continues to do it. He assumes responsibility for things that he cannot possibly deliver. His ambition and his fear drive him. Why doesn't he go to Mantua himself to inform Romeo of what's happened? Why trust the delivery of the letter to another friar and not impress upon him the life-or-death import of its contents? Why doesn't he go straight to Juliet's tomb? He waits too long and arrives too late, only to abandon Juliet once she awakes.

## Mercutio

Is everything nothing or is nothing everything? Is everything meaningless or is everything meaningful? Human society tends to look at nothing as everything – as if everything has a meaning and as if there is a reason for everything. Romeo and Juliet are aware of the possibility that both truths exist simultaneously – that

everything is nothing and nothing is everything. Mercutio, however, has realized that everything is absolutely nothing. For him there is no possibility of nothing being everything within the frame of human society. The breaking point in the relationship between Mercutio and Romeo is when Romeo discovers that if he has love, then nothing will be everything. Mercutio has already been through that. In her play *Crave*, Sarah Kane wrote, "Only love can save me and love has destroyed me." Love has already destroyed Mercutio. Mercutio knows that love is just a dream and that it cannot last.

### Prince Escalus

Capulet and Montague are the ruling power of this society. The Prince is a puppet who's manipulated mainly by the Capulets but somewhat by the Montagues as well. So he's not really powerful. He's rather weak, and he doesn't rise up to the challenge of his post. Therefore he bears a great deal of guilt about what happens in the play.

### The Ending

The families finally share pain together, because they have lost their children. It takes this loss to make them promise to stop the feud. But how many other parents have lost their children in their war? That thought never stopped them before. They don't stop until it happens to their own kids.

The reconciliation shows just how arbitrary their feud was in the first place. People died for nothing. And it is easier for them to deal with martyrs rather than with the hearts of their living children. The reconciliation is just as arbitrary, and perhaps they haven't learned a thing. It still boils down to erecting statues and monuments, and

trying to outdo the other's promise.

Notes compiled by Ryan McKittrick and Rachael Rayment.