



A Closer Look at

"O hateful hands, to tear such loving words..."

This speech is spoken by Julia in Act 1, Scene 2 of *Two Gentlemen of Verona*.

Who's Julia?

This speech appears near the beginning of the play, when we don't yet know much about Julia.

In the play's opening scene, close friends Proteus and Valentine are saying farewell to one another. We learn that Proteus has decided to stay in Verona for love of Julia, while Valentine is off to Milan for adventures at court. In the next scene we meet Julia, who is thinking about various suitors and asking Lucetta for advice on love.

What's happening when this speech is spoken?

After sharing opinions about Julia's other suitors, Lucetta praises Proteus as the one who loves Julia best. Julia doesn't think Proteus has been very expressive, but Lucetta produces a love letter that Proteus has sent to Julia, and apologizes for intercepting it. Julia chides Lucetta for meddling, and when Lucetta begins to joke about the letter, Julia tears it into pieces before sending Lucetta away. Julia is alone with the audience and the pieces of the torn-up love letter for the following speech.

JULIA:

O hateful hands, to tear such loving words;
Injurious wasps, to feed on such sweet honey
And kill the bees that yield it with your stings;
I'll kiss each several paper for amends:
Look, here is writ 'kind Julia:' Unkind Julia,
As in revenge of thy ingratitude,
I throw thy name against the bruising stones,
Trampling contemptuously on thy disdain.
And here is writ 'love-wounded Proteus.'
Poor wounded name: my bosom as a bed
Shall lodge thee till thy wound be thoroughly heal'd;
And thus I search it with a sovereign kiss.
But twice or thrice was 'Proteus' written down:
Be calm, good wind, blow not a word away
Till I have found each letter in the letter,
Except mine own name: that some whirlwind bear
Unto a ragged, fearful, hanging rock
And throw it thence into the raging sea!
Lo, here in one line is his name twice writ,
'Poor forlorn Proteus, passionate Proteus,
To the sweet Julia:' that I'll tear away.
And yet I will not, sith so prettily
He couples it to his complaining names.
Thus will I fold them one upon another:
Now kiss, embrace, contend, do what you will.

The speech: thought by thought

Shakespeare's language can be overwhelming, so it helps to break it down, thought by thought. Look at the speech again below, taking your time to make sense of each thought. This is a subjective process, so this example is just one way to break the speech down into thoughts. Would you do it differently?

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Words and phrases that might be new or have an unexpected meaning

- **injurious** – causing harm or injuries
- **yield** – here it means to produce or bring forth
- **several** – here it means separate, or individual
- **amends** – originally a legal term for a fine paid in compensation for an injury
- **writ** – written
- **contemptuously** – with dislike or hostility towards someone or something perceived as inferior
- **disdain** – contempt or scorn
- **bosom** – the human breast or chest
- **lodge** – to provide a guest with a place to sleep
- **thoroughly** – thoroughly or completely
- **search** – explore or examine
- **sovereign** – excellent, better than all others
- **thrice** – three times
- **thence** – from there
- **lo** – look, as a sudden command
- **forlorn** – left alone, desolate
- **sith** – since
- **couples** – joins or connects
- **contend** – this word can mean 'to fight', but here it seems to mean a different type of struggle

Explore the language

- Are the words short and simple, or long and complex?
- If you're a hearing person, what do the words sound like? Are there any sounds that repeat?
- What's the effect of this language?
- Are the thoughts short and direct, or long and complex? Do they ever change? What might this tell you about what's happening for the character?

Explore the ideas

- Why do you think Julia tears up the letter?
- How might this scenario have played out differently if Julia had received the letter directly and in private?
- Why do you think Julia didn't want Lucetta to know about the letter or joke around about it?
- How might you have responded in this situation?

Explore the character

- What type of love letter do you imagine Julia would like to receive?
- How does it feel to express these thoughts and feelings? What does your interpretation of Julia's way of speaking tell you about this character?
- What do you imagine Julia is feeling in response to this letter? What in the speech makes you think that?
- How would you describe Julia's experience with and attitudes towards love?
- What do you imagine the future of this relationship might be? What inspires your answer?

Explore the staging

- How does it change your experience of the speech if your Julia actually has a letter?
- What does it feel like to tear up a letter? Look at the text to find the actions Julia takes in dealing with the letter. What does it feel like to perform these actions while delivering the speech?
- How do the qualities of your prop (such as the type of paper, the words written on it, and so on) inform your experience? How might it be different if you ask someone to actually write you a letter that you tear it up before reading it and use that for your prop?

Make it your own

Performance

Learn some or all of the speech by heart and perform it. Discover what it all means, and what it means to you, so you can truly make it your own. If you like, think about staging, costuming, props (especially the letter), lighting, etc. Share your work with an audience of family and/or friends.

Ask someone to film your performance so you have a record of it. They can either film your live performance, or you can create a special opportunity for filming. Collaborate to find the best location, lighting, camera angles, sound, titles, etc. for what you'd like to create.

Art

Create a drawing, painting, sculpture, still life, photograph, or film that expresses what the speech means to you. Decide how you would like to share your creation.

Music

Express what the speech means to you through music. Choose a song or piece of music, build a playlist, or even compose an original piece that conveys your feelings about the speech. Decide how you'd like to share what you've created.

Creative Writing

What might the letter say? What kind of love letter might someone like Julia inspire? Write the letter, paying attention to your choice of paper, ink, layout, decoration, how it's sealed, etc.

Compose your own poem, speech, or story inspired by the speech. Imagine a similar situation of having mixed feelings about receiving a love letter. How would you convey the feelings the situation would inspire?