
Three Ways to Love in Shakespeare's Tragedy

Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* explains love through the use of three different kinds of love: unrequited love between Romeo and Rosaline, true love between Romeo and Juliet, and cynical love from Mercutio and the Nurse. The use of common, era specific ideas on love helps to convey the message that it can take on many forms. Because Romeo and Juliet's sincere romance changes their views on love, the play suggests that true love is found beyond superficial attraction.

Unrequited love can be described as a situation in which a pretty girl does not return the favor of her admirer, a convention typical of chivalric love. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Rosaline does not return Romeo's love. This is conveyed through traditional Petrarchan sonnets spoken by Romeo, that drip with conceits:

For beauty, starved with her severity,

Cuts beauty off from all posterity.

She is too fair, too wise, wisely too fair,

To merit bliss by making me despair.

She hath forsworn to love, and in that vow

Do I live dead that live to tell it now. (1.1.22-27)

In these lines, Romeo illustrates the Petrarchan conceit of the melancholy tortured lover. He describes Rosaline as beautiful, yet, severe, noting first her fairness and second, her intelligence. He then puns on his own words saying that she is wise and fair, and, because of her wisdom, she is almost too beautiful. Romeo believes that Rosaline, although beautiful, will not use her beauty for sex, and is therefore wasting a perfectly functional and pleasurable body.

In true chivalric fashion, Romeo is forced to grieve for a love that is not returned. When speaking of Rosaline, Romeo's words are not true and honest. He speaks in rhyming couplets and uses contradictions, such as bliss causes despair. Both devices seem staged and unnatural. Romeo is flaunting his poetic diction, but fails to show any real signs of passion. Like the traditional Petrarchan lover, Romeo is in love with the idea of being in love, and he revels in the sadness that his love produces. His flowery language creates an image of love, but this

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image seems more imaginary than sincere. Even skeptical Mercutio notices the ornate language of Romeo: "Now is he for the numbers that Petrarch flowed in" (2.4.40-41). This contrasts sharply with the language Romeo later uses when speaking of Juliet. His love for Rosaline is used as a means of comparison between the adoration of the idea of love, and the actual experience of love. Romeo's love for Rosaline was not true; conversely, his love for Juliet shows genuine passion.

The main focus of the play is the true romantic love experienced by Romeo and Juliet. After falling in love with Juliet, Romeo completely transforms from an immature dreamer into a passionate lover. "Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight! / For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night" (1.5. 54-55). Romeo no longer uses flowery premeditated speech. He expresses exactly what he is feeling without all of the decorations of a Petrarchan conceit. He realizes that whatever he had felt before was entirely different, and as a result, he questions whether he had ever been in love before. When speaking of Juliet, Romeo does not use contradictions or ornate language. He calls her a "true beauty," as opposed to "wisely too fair".

Prior to meeting Romeo, Juliet has been arranged to marry Paris. Her views towards this marriage are anything but passionate. She refers to love and marriage as "an honor that I dream not of" (1.3.66). Juliet had never been in love and, therefore, had never let the idea of marriage occupy her thoughts. It is not until her meeting with Romeo that she realizes the potential depth of love. From her window, Juliet proclaims her love for Romeo: "My bounty is as boundless as the sea, / My love as deep; the more I give to thee, / The more I have, for both are infinite" (2.2.33-35). She is so enraptured with him that she tells him she is willing to denounce her name. This notion of what Juliet is willing to do for love is brought to a climax at the end of the play, when she performs the most dramatic act of love by killing herself. The superb poetry spoken in sonnet form between Romeo and Juliet gets to the play's moral core. Love transforms lovers. It is the incidental pairing of the unsuspecting lovers that makes this love match so timeless.

Romeo and Juliet illustrate a love that is pure and true; however, one must not forget the more cynical and lustful forms of love, as portrayed through Mercutio and the Nurse. Their views on love are very different from Romeo and Juliet's and seems to revolve only on the superficialities of the human body. Mercutio parodies love by equating it with sex. He brushes off Romeo's love sickness implying that Romeo is simply in need of sexual satisfaction. "For this driveling love is like a great natural that runs lolling up and down to hide his bauble in a hole" (2.4.95-97). Mercutio wants no emotional attachments with women; rather, he would like to experience the pleasures of the women. "This is the hag, when maids lie on their backs, / That presses them and learns them first to bear, / Making them women of good carriage" (1.4.92-94). Mercutio's bawdy speech about Queen Mab demonstrates his views that women are good only for pleasure and child bearing. This is the first time we see Mercutio's sexual side. It is obvious that

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Mercutio cannot comprehend the love that Romeo has for Juliet. He sees Romeo's relationship as just another notch to add to the bedpost. Mercutio believes that love "is as thin as the air" and "more inconstant than the wind" (1.4.99-100). This displays his lack of belief in eternal or sustainable happiness in love. If something is as thin as the wind, it is clearly weak and unable to withstand hardship.

By linking the Nurse to Mercutio, their similar lewd comments demonstrate how different conventions of love can unite seemingly dissimilar characters. Both characters view love primarily in physical terms. The Nurse conveys the physical and shameless perspective of love. It is interesting to note that the Nurse is responsible for protecting the virginity of Juliet; however, she is the one who blatantly expresses her promiscuous sexual ideas. For the Nurse, sex and love are one in the same. She parallels these two elements when she explains to Juliet that women "grow by men" through pregnancy (1.3.95). The Nurse thinks that Paris is the most handsome and wealthy man that she knows, and she encourages Juliet to marry him because of this.

Even though Romeo and Juliet is heralded because it is a timeless tale of romance, it should be noted that the play is important because of how it portrays true passion. True love transforms us. It frees us to look beyond the body to the soul. Conversely, when the treasures of intimacy are replaced by lust, whose allure is only skin deep, the quest for real romance will go unfulfilled. Shakespeare shows us true love is one of the few things worth dying for.

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