

## Is Love Dangerous? Shakespeare's Take on Love in *Romeo and Juliet*

Regardless of the person, everyone experiences love. At the same time, everyone makes mistakes. In the play *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare, the playwright uses similes and metaphors to tie these ideas together and convey that love's exceptional strength is the strong but hidden force behind people's actions.

Throughout the play, Shakespeare uses similes to emphasize how love is powerful enough to drive people into feeling, thinking, and doing the most irrational things. Just after meeting Juliet at a party for the first time, Romeo stands outside of her house looking up to her balcony to talk. In only their second meeting, the two profess their everlasting love for each other. During this encounter, Juliet proclaims, "My bounty is as boundless as the sea / My love as deep" (II.ii.134). Juliet relates the depth of her love to the sea, explaining that it is endless – and that she would do anything for it. Through similes that compare Juliet's love for Romeo to a bottomless sea, Shakespeare illustrates the strength of their love. Despite only knowing Romeo for a couple of minutes, Juliet has an immense sensation of love that she cannot waiver. It is almost impossible to fall madly in love when knowing nothing about the other person. However, what Juliet feels is so strong that the impossible is accomplished, and she naively falls in love with a stranger– a stranger whose family hates hers. Furthermore, her love is so strong that she has an irrational urge to overlook the consequences that this relationship would cause for her own family. This is not the only occasion when a character thinks irrationally because of love. When Romeo thinks that Juliet is dead, he proceeds to the Capulet's monument, stopping at the apothecary to make an extreme request. From the apothecary, he demands, "A dram of poison...And that the trunk may be discharged of breath as violently as hasty powder fired" (V.i.60). Wanting to kill himself, Romeo, a lovesick boy, requests a deadly poison that would be able to kill his body like a gunshot– violently and quickly. Romeo describes his wish to die to the 'violentness' and 'hastiness' of a gunshot, revealing the despondence and desolation he feels after the loss of Juliet, a girl whom he barely knows much about. In this moment, Romeo is ready to die an unthinkable brutal and rapid death solely because he lost Juliet. Without thinking of the grief his own death would cause his family, Romeo illogically asks for death because of his love for Juliet. Ultimately, the use of similes amplifies love's strength, demonstrating that there are consequences to irrational love.

Furthermore, Shakespeare uses metaphors, too, to emphasize the message that intense sensations of love can cause illogical decisions, which in turn have repercussions. Juliet's family has plans to marry her off to Paris, a man whom she despises. Out of the fear of being married to man she doesn't love, Juliet instructs Friar Lawrence, "And with this knife, I'll help it presently...And ere this hand, by thee to Romeo's sealed / Shall be the label to another deed / Or my true heart with treacherous revolt" (IV.i.54). At this moment, Juliet confesses that she would rather kill herself than marry Paris. She compares her own hand to a signature on Romeo's contract– through this, Shakespeare underlines that Juliet is willing to kill herself rather than lose

her loyalty— in this case, her devotion, marriage, and love for Romeo. What is interesting about this is that although Juliet barely knows Paris, she also barely knows Romeo. Yet, somehow she makes the choice to love Romeo over Paris— she chooses the man whom her family hates over the man whom her family loves. Her irrational love for Romeo leads her to make bad decisions that ultimately lead to the deaths of many characters including Romeo’s own mother, Lady Montague. Shakespeare also uses metaphors in another place in the text. In Capulet’s monument, as Romeo stands next to the supposedly dead Juliet, he decides to drink poison and die with her. Romeo speaks his last words, “Thou desperate pilot, now at once run on / The dashing rocks thy seasick, weary bark. / Here’s to my love!” (V.iii.117). As Romeo announces his wish to die, he also reveals several of his inner emotions. The comparison of Romeo to a seasick, weary ship that wants to crash demonstrates that Romeo’s sadness is so extreme that he wishes to end his life. By referring to himself as a ‘seasick’ ship, Romeo reveals that he feels sick due to his separation from Juliet due to her death. While this feeling of sadness may not be irrational in the case of a death, his grief is too extreme. These overwhelming, negative feelings and suicidal thoughts are implausible considering their love was very short-lived. In conclusion, Shakespeare’s use of metaphors warns readers against the extremity of consequences that can occur as result of irrational love.

In a world where dejection, death, and even violence are routine, Shakespeare allows readers to explore one of the major causes of this: love. Shakespeare’s use of sensory language in *Romeo and Juliet* helps convey his warning— which is to beware of love. Often, people make decisions that seem irrational to others because of love. A loving mother might sacrifice herself for her child’s wellbeing, a good friend could take the fall for one of their best friends' mistakes, and two star-crossed lovers would forget about their families' violent feud to be together. When one’s “bounty is as boundless as the sea,” and their love “as deep,” one will do whatever they must do to maintain their “infinite” love (II.ii.134).