

# Romeo and Juliet essay: Act 2 Scene 2 analysis

**Full title:** *How does Shakespeare make 2.2.1-60 such a powerful moment in the play?*

The balcony scene of *Romeo and Juliet* is one of Shakespeare's most famous<sup>1</sup> expressions of love. The soliloquy that opens Act 2, Scene 2 of the play demonstrates the youthful passion and vibrant love that Romeo has for Juliet. Shakespeare explores the positive, joyful and romantic aspects of love, and as Romeo describes and compliments Juliet's beauty, she hints at her love for him too. Romeo's speech is saturated with comparisons of Juliet to the light, alluding to her cosmic and radiant beauty. Having stolen into the orchard, he proclaims Juliet's permanent radiance: "Juliet is the sun", as he equates her beauty to the eastern horizon at dawn. At this point, Juliet has not yet appeared on stage, and in the same way that the sky brightens before the sunrise, the light heralds the arrival of Juliet. Romeo's phrase "kill the envious moon" is a double entendre.<sup>2</sup> Although quite literally, the rising sun outshines the moon, thereby 'killing' it, this sentence allows him to draw an analogy of Juliet being the maid of Diana, the goddess of the moon and patroness of virgins, making use of the association of the moon and virginity. Romeo continues the moon metaphor, noting the weak and faint light of the moon, stating that it is "pale with grief". The reason that the moon is sad is because Juliet's beauty is far brighter than her own, shown in the line "her maid, art far more fair than she", suggesting that Juliet's image transcends natural beauty as he places it on a level even higher than that of the beauty of a goddess. Romeo concludes the metaphor and his thoughts about her chastity with a line that echoes the initial killing of the moon: "cast it off", he asks. This can be interpreted either as a simple, blunt request for her to take off her dress or in a figurative sense, the "vestal livery" could represent Juliet's virginity, showing that his love is still underlined with sexual frustration. Once Juliet enters the scene, Romeo returns to the theme of light, comparing her eyes to "two of the fairest stars", showing how he believes her beauty and radiance is on a truly cosmic scale. Furthermore, he indulges in some hyperbole, reasoning that if Juliet's eyes switched places with the stars, then "her cheek would shame those stars", showing how brightly shining he considers her to be. As Romeo's comparisons become ever more powerful, he claims that her eyes would shine "so bright" that they would turn the night into day, causing the birds to sing. This shows how he believes Juliet transcends celestial magnificence, however, at the same time, perhaps unintentionally, he suggests that her beauty is something unnatural and warping, as it disrupts the order of nature. Finally, he compares her to a "bright angel", once again using the theme of light in "bright" to make Juliet seem heavenly perfect with the added connotations of innocence and virginity. In conclusion, Romeo's persistent associations of natural beauty and light in this scene enhance and amplify Juliet's glamour.<sup>3</sup>

Juliet, wise beyond her years, meditates on the deeply philosophical topic of the significance that we give a name. She says that for love she will "no longer be a Capulet", showing how love transcends the bounds of family. Her phrase "Thou art thyself" displays how she detaches Romeo from his name and examines the superficial nature of a name. She considers the feud between the two families so futile and inane, even though her statements would be scandalous in those times<sup>4</sup> if overheard. Juliet contemplates the importance we impose upon words, choosing a rose, a flower that is conventionally associated with love, but at the same time like all other plants, it is ephemeral. If a rose was called by another name, she reasons from a

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<sup>1</sup>stating that it is famous is unnecessary

<sup>2</sup>integrate this sentence into the paragraph

<sup>3</sup>is that the right word, would "radiance" be better, perhaps?

<sup>4</sup>what do you mean?

very sophisticated standpoint, it “would smell as sweet”, in the same way that if Romeo was not born a Montague, there would be no danger to their love, therefore she believes the family conflict must be trivial. Romeo, having heard Juliet’s soliloquy, agrees in the name of love, to be “baptised”, the Christian tradition symbolising the death of the old self and the birth of the new. He tells her that if she gives him her love, he will come to her reborn, without the history and lineage of his family. All in all, Shakespeare uses Juliet’s soliloquy to demonstrate what the two young lovers would do for one another as they are even willing to give up their family name, clearly showing the power of true love.<sup>5</sup>

Shakespeare makes it clear how powerful the connection is between Romeo and Juliet in several different ways. From the moment Juliet appears, Romeo provides her with proper respect and love: “It is my love”, in direct contrast to Mercutio’s bawdy humour and obscene jokes from the previous scene. In addition, the alliteration of “lady” and “love” reinforce Romeo’s emotion. During his soliloquy, he exclaims “O” three times; this repetition is typical of Romeo’s language of love-sickness, but more simply, it is an outburst of emotion and love for Juliet. To indicate the reciprocal nature of their love, she shares this language with Romeo, also exclaiming “O”. In the very first scene of the play, when Romeo was all love-sick for Rosaline, he exclaimed “Ay me! Sad hours seem long” and in this moment of the play, Juliet echoes that with her “Ay me”. This repetition of each other’s lines perhaps indicates how the two of these young lovers have found a match, and that she loves Romeo too. In one of the most famous lines of the entire play, Juliet laments the fact that Romeo belongs to the Montague family. Her love and deep emotion in “O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?” is enhanced by the tricolon repetition of Romeo’s name, while her awe is further emphasised by the long vowel sounds of the line. Juliet speaks in apostrophe here, addressing Romeo, who is supposedly absent, however, both of them would be on stage, creating an effect of dramatic irony for the audience. In Juliet’s lines “So Romeo ... name” her triple repetition of Romeo’s name shows her love, and her use of hyperbole in “Retain that dear perfection” implies how she loves him and considers him to be perfectly beautiful. Romeo, in response, returns to the religious language of love that he used when they first met, calling Juliet “dear saint”, thus presenting her as someone to worship. In general, although the two lovers have not yet vowed for one another at this moment in the play, Shakespeare makes their love apparent through their language.

To conclude, Shakespeare uses a theme of light and positivity to express Romeo’s love, while Juliet’s philosophical soliloquy shows her deep love for him. Literary techniques such as alliteration and repetition make this romantic moment in the play arguably one of the most memorable. After the two young lovers give their soliloquies and Juliet realises Romeo’s presence, the two continue their fervid protestations of love, and by the end of the scene, they will have agreed to marry the very next day.

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### Teacher’s comments

Mark: 20/25. *Good analysis—but link more explicitly throughout the essay as to how this is a powerful moment in the play*

In general, avoid summaries and vagueness, strive for precise analysis. See footnotes for specific remarks.

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<sup>5</sup>link this to being a powerful moment in the play