

Romeo Montague

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### The Luminous Darkness of Romeo and Juliet

It is not too often someone gets the chance to read a romantic, tragic, unrealistic, twisted, and slightly confusing love story. In Romeo and Juliet, many emotions fill the air in about a week, as they are spread out and divided into light moments varied with dark days. Romeo, Lord and Lady Montague's heir, falls in love with Juliet, the only daughter of Lord and Lady Capulet. While they fall deeply into love, get married, and discuss plans of future life, a series of events occur to prevent these sins. William Shakespeare uses light and dark imagery in the play to show how the lovers' opposing worlds fatefully interfere with their star-crossed relationship.

Contrasting images of light and dark, from light-loving to dark deaths, convey that the two houses are against one another. The play's prologue states that Verona, where the story takes place, is "where civil blood makes civil hands unclean" throughout the tale (prologue.4). It also mentions that "[Romeo and Juliet's] misadventured piteous overthrows [lead to] their death, bury[ing] their parents' strife" (prologue.7-8). Shakespeare is telling the audience that this play is "the fearful passage of their death-marked love" (prologue.9). Technically speaking, "death-marked love" is a contrast of light and dark on its own. Love, being the light image in this term, is overpowered by death, creating a dark image to spice up this descriptive sentence.

He uses light to symbolize positive emotions of love and thankfulness. Romeo speaks of Juliet calling her "the sun" and tells her to "arise ... and kill the envious moon, [which] is already sick and pale with grief" because "[Juliet, its] maid, [is] far more [beautiful] than [it]" (II.ii.1-6). He describes Juliet's beauty as he says she is the sun, being much prettier than the moon; he loves her very much. Romeo goes as far as telling her to "call [him] but love, and [he'll] be new baptized," meaning he

would be a new, happy person if she were to say that she loves him (II.ii.51). However, Shakespeare also uses dark emotions to symbolize the pessimistic moments and memories in the play. For example, when Friar Lawrence is speaking to Romeo after he is banished from Verona, he is very upset, and criticizes Romeo's mindset by calling it "[a] deadly sin" because of Romeo's "rude unthankfulness" (III.iii.25).

In daylight, the lovers must not meet, but in night's darkest hours, they are united with light, happy emotions. After a sleepover at Juliet's place, the two lovers playfully quibble about it either being daylight or nighttime to decide on Romeo's departing. Juliet asks Romeo if he would "...be gone," mentioning that "it is not yet day" (III.iv.1). Romeo replies at some point telling her that "the lark, the herald of the morn, [was singing and not the] nightingale" and that " [he] must be gone and live or stay and die" (III.iv.6-7). Even the birds, which represent nature here, seem to be aware of light and dark's role in the play's ever-shifting tone. Towards the beginning of the play, in the balcony scene, Romeo and Juliet are speaking, and Romeo refers to the fact that it is nighttime when he is visiting her; "[Juliet knows that] the mask of night is on [her] face" (II.ii.85).

Whether it is fantasized, written about, acted out or experienced in reality, hatred has the power to paralyze, confuse and darken life; but with light encouragement, love releases, harmonizes and illuminates it. In this fiction, the children of opposing rulers lovingly melt each other's hearts as reality surrounds them with fighting, hatred, and death in its unrested times. Light signifies that they are both in love, and dark signifies fate's role in keeping them apart.

Shakespeare creatively uses light and dark imagery to explore these opposing worlds, characters, and emotions, to tell the poignant love story of Romeo and Juliet.