

## ***Romeo and Juliet***

**William Shakespeare**

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Throughout history, the word “love” has never had a precise definition. Love has many meanings for different people, ranging from passionate affection to strong concerns for any object or person. For example, a mother’s love may be complete sacrifice and total protection for her child. Love between a wife and a husband may range from feelings of deep mutual connections and psychological symmetry to a sole route of sex, and love between two partners and lovers may range from committed relationships to means of fulfilling sexual desires. There are also people who do not believe in love whatsoever, thinking of it as, in the words of Jonas’ mother in the book *The Giver*, “a very generalized word, so meaningless that it’s become almost obsolete” (Lowry 127). In fact, on the website Dictionary.com, there are twenty-eight definitions of “love” listed. Also on Thesaurus.com’s “concept thesaurus”, a subunit of Dictionary.com, the word love has over three-hundred-thirty-three synonyms, all showing that the one word “love” is more of the name of an envelope that covers many wide and varying aspects of care and affection. With its ambiguity in transparent definitions leading to a wide array of interpretations, love has cemented itself as a favorite topic for many playwrights, authors, directors, and storytellers. In the play *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare, one of the most famous love stories of all time, love takes a turn for the worse through winding emotional pathways.

Romeo Montague and Juliet Capulet are the only offspring of the Capulet and Montague, two rival families. Romeo, the play’s main character, is extremely fond of Rosaline, a beautiful woman who decides to join a convent rather than marrying. Romeo, both love struck and saddened by this turn of event, heads towards depression until he intercepts a message coming from the Capulet house for an invitation to a ball, a ball that Rosaline will be attending. In the mean time Lord Capulet tells Count Paris to wait two years until Juliet wishes to be married, inviting him to the ball to get acquainted with his future wife. At the ball Tybalt, cousin of Juliet sees the Montague men and, though wishing to go and kill them then and there, does not on the beck of Lord Capulet. Romeo meets Juliet and immediately falls in love with her, later declaring his undying affection on the balcony of the Capulet mansion. Romeo and Juliet agree to marry and, under the watch of Friar Lawrence who believes the union of the two lovers will end the strife between the two families, wed the next day. Here Tybalt, still angered by the Montague’s attendance at the ball, challenges Romeo to a duel who, now seeing Tybalt as a kinsman, refuses to do so. Mercutio, friend of Romeo and relative of the Prince, accepts the duel on Romeo's behalf due to his anger at the insolence of both parties. Tybalt murders Mercutio during the duel and, stricken with grief and anger, Romeo slays Tybalt as well. Romeo’s father, Lord Montague, argues that Romeo simply enacted the law of the city by slaying Tybalt for the murder of Mercutio and the Prince, now having lost a kinsman in the families' feud, exiles Romeo from Verona as punishment. Romeo secretly spends the night in Juliet's chamber, where they consummate their marriage. Here Lord Capulet, misinterpreting his daughter’s grief as mourning over the death of her cousin, forces her to marry Count Paris even against her own wish. Here Juliet visits Friar Lawrence for help who offers her a drug that will put her into a death-like coma, giving Romeo the time to come and take her away. The Friar sends a messenger to inform Romeo of the plan, and on the night before the wedding, Juliet takes the drug and, when discovered is laid in the family crypt. Friar Lawrence’s message does not reach Romeo, who

learns of Juliet's "death" from his servant Balthazar. Heartbroken, Romeo buys poison from an apothecary and goes to the Capulet crypt encountering Paris who has come to mourn for Juliet. Paris confronts Romeo, considering him to be a vandal and in the ensuing battle is killed by Romeo. Believing Juliet to be dead, Romeo drinks the poison as Juliet is beginning to awake. Finding Romeo dead, she stabs herself with his dagger just as Friar Lawrence comes to try and take Juliet away from the crypt. Both the families, saddened by the deaths of their only offspring, reconcile and agree to enact statues of gold and silver in honor of the two lovers Romeo and Juliet.

Though written by the seemingly imposing author William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* is a thoroughly enjoyable read for any audience or group. Written at a time where plays were one of the sole routes of entertainment, William Shakespeare was forced to not only write a melodramatic play to entertain the well educated English society but to also include raunchy and racy comedy to entertain the common man. Beginning even with the opening scene of the Montague and Capulet servants brandishing their weapons including, references and puns of sex and "naked weapons" are included. The greatest example of Shakespeare's mastery of pun and comic relief is seen through Mercutio and his exchanges between his friends Romeo and Benvolio. The epic speech of "Queen Mab" for example or the passing remarks of men's "sizes" with Romeo serve as literal laugh-out-loud scenarios. Though on the same note, the play serves as one of the greatest samples of English mastery. Shakespeare takes heavy use of dramatic irony, puns, personification, metaphors, parables, and similes to make the story as twisty and crooked as real love. A recommended read for anyone, the old English in the book is easy avoidable if you buy a "Shakespeare Made Easy" copy where the Old English is placed directly side by side with modern translations. Buy it as a gift for yourself or others.

### **Recommended Titles**

Merchant of Venice- William Shakespeare

Julius Caser- William Shakespeare

Hamlet- William Shakespeare

The Giver- Louis Lowry

Othello- William Shakespeare