

Romeo and juliet –
why is cosmic and
celestial imagery
used in act 2, scene
2? es...



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William Shakespeare's tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet*, set in 15th century Verona, tells the story of two star-crossed lovers, who find each other in the midst of violence and rivalry fuelled by an ancient feud between their families. Within the well-known balcony scene in Act 2, Scene 2, both characters use a variety of imagery, including cosmic and celestial, that which relates to objects and scenery outside of our planet, in the sky and universe. These choices of imagery tell us about the ideas and perspectives that Shakespeare is trying to portray about the characters as well as the emotions surrounding their relationship. Despite both Romeo and Juliet using a lot of imagery in their responses to each other, Romeo tends to be the one that uses far more cosmic and celestial imagery, while Juliet tends to have more natural, Earth related imagery - botanical imagery. This in itself shows the reader the difference between the character's opinions of the relationship at this moment of time as well as their personality. Romeo often chooses to compare both his love and Juliet's beauty to wonders of the universe - the heavens, the sun, stars, etc..

These items would've been, at least in Shakespeare's time, still not completely understood and seen as mysterious and magical; large than life objects, full of beauty and wonder far out of bounds from the mundane Earth life. In addition, in contrary to what we now know, they believed that the sun was the centre of the universe. The fact that Shakespeare chooses for Romeo to use these types of comparisons therefore leads the audience to infer that Romeo sees his and Juliet's love as boundless, "written in the stars" and meant to be. His comparisons to the out of this world objects portrays Romeo's boldness as well as forwardness and eagerness when it comes to

his feeling and love as he has no hesitation in voicing his definite views in his poetic and flamboyant language with the imagery. On the other hand, Juliet has a far more down to Earth approach to the situation and with this uses more botanical imagery. As Romeo tells her of his love, their love, she describes it to him as a "...bud of love, by summer's ripening breath, May prove to be a beautiful flower when next we meet.", comparing it to a bud, a start, something with potential; something which, with love and care and time, will grow into something beautiful. This key comparison allows us to see that despite her eagerness, the imagery displayed in the text reminds the audience of her different state of mind.

Her more cautious approach to the situation illustrates that yes, she may be as in love as Romeo but due to her different upbringing, surroundings and experiences, she is more thoughtful and due to this chooses to have less dramatic imagery in comparison to Romeo. Nevertheless, she is still just as in love with Romeo as he is with her; she doesn't fail to express her love to him poetically either as she tells him "My bounty is as boundless as the sea,". This also shows that Juliet has just an expressive and passionate nature and the natural imagery leads one to visualise the never-ending, flowing sea as her love, filling every empty space. Additionally, Juliet does use some celestial imagery as she moves to describe their love as "Too like the lightning,". Yet, this is in a very different way from Romeo as his cosmic/celestial imagery has always talked of the beauty and brightness of the object of which he compares her or their love to. Juliet's imagery uses the harsh, "now you see it, now you don't" association with lightning to define her desire for their love not to be like that.

She is almost cleverly, using Romeo's own speciality of the cosmic and celestial imagery to remind him that pronouncing his love in lovely poetic words does not mean it will be that way. This highlights the difference in their characters and personality as, regardless of both of them being as head over heels in love with each other, Romeo has a far more flamboyant and beautifying way of expressing himself; whereas Juliet is still just really a cautious young girl. When Romeo decides to promise his love by swearing upon the moon, beginning "Lady, by yonder blessed moon I vow," Juliet is quick to cut him off; instead, she argues: "O swear not by the moon, th'inconstant moon, That monthly changes in her circled orb," which further shows her contrast to Romeo as she does not see the cosmic and celestial connection in the same light as Romeo. The scene itself opens with Romeo, love struck after first meeting Juliet, Romeo speaks of her, remarking "It is the East, and Juliet is the sun! Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,". This celestial imagery allows us to visualise, through Romeo's eyes, Juliet as the sun; an enlightening presence that fills his darkness with light and warmth.

The comparison of Juliet being the sun in his eyes shows that Romeo feels that life wouldn't be possible without her, as life wouldn't be possible without the sun; Juliet is the centre of his world. Furthermore, the fact that he says, "...and kill the envious moon," hints that Juliet, as the sun, the true source of light, is replacing the moon, possibly in this case Rosaline; a, by this point long forgotten second place to his heart. When Romeo then goes on to describe her eyes as "Two of the fairest stars in all of the heaven," which "...twinkle in their spheres till they return.", it is yet another example of his

cosmic/celestial imagery. It shows to the audience that all he can see is her beauty and does not see anything fitter to describe it than the shining stars in the sky. This also relates back to where Romeo questions whether his hand is worthy of touching hers, as well as when he says she speaks yet says nothing, hinting on her unavailability and distance; this all also relates back to the stars, as beautiful as they may be, they are still high above him, clear and close but just out of reach.

All in all, the use of cosmic and celestial imagery in Act 2, Scene 2 allows the audience to view in depth both main characters' approach to the situation that they have found themselves in. The imagery is a clever and interesting technique which highlights to the audience the various personality traits in each of the characters such as Romeo's boldness and outgoingness, and Juliet's passion as well as caution, all shown through imagery, all through the images that we visualise in our heads. The cosmic and celestial imagery can be interpreted in different ways and is therefore a very effective tool when showing both the similarities and differences between Romeo and Juliet. Overall, it illustrates just how big their love for each other is, or at least how big they intend for their love to be - as high as the skies above them, as big and long lasting as the ever-blazing sun and as boundless as the extends of the universe.