

# Religious language and concepts in romeo and juliet

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



The epistle of Saint John unequivocally states, " Love comes from God" (1 John 4: 7). This statement not only explains the source of love but it also provides a means to understand both love and God. If love is from God, then an understanding of love can be derived from knowing God. Thus, the converse, knowing love provides a level of knowledge concerning God, is true. In light of this conclusion, it only seems natural that the two should intersect when trying to describe one another. William Shakespeare employs Christian language and concepts in the play Romeo and Juliet to not only effectively conveys the gravity of love but also to provide metaphorical undertones to the play's conclusion. It is apparent that Shakespeare intentionally used religious language and concepts in order to elicit the implications that are attached with the words. By glossing over these words as two-dimensional adjectives much of Shakespeare's beauty and genius is lost and the intrinsic harmony connecting love and God is unknown to the reader. The play Romeo and Juliet is steeped in religious language and constructions. The possible examples are numerous and wide ranging, but some are used to convey love while others are used to drive the thematic plot. For organizational purposes, the usages of religious language that help convey the meaning of love will be addressed first followed by an explication of the thematic usages or religious language. An excellent example of how Shakespeare implements religious language and concepts in order to describe the transcendent emotion of Love is in Romeo and Juliet's first meeting. While courting Juliet, Romeo says, " My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand, To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss." (1: 5: 97-98) Prior to this statement Romeo had equated Juliet with a holy shrine and he

then employs the religious concept of pilgrimage in the following lines. On a very surface level, this makes sense considering that a holy shrine is an end goal and pilgrims, like lips moving in for a kiss, travel to the end goal.

However, it seems rather evident that Shakespeare meant much more than simply making a comparison for movement in this statement. The term pilgrim calls to mind the departure from a known place into an unknown, holy land for the sake of obtaining salvation. By using ' pilgrim' to describe the kiss shared between the two lovers implies that Romeo and Juliet are going to depart from their current love-starved world and move into a holy world of love. Another example of where Shakespeare implements religious language is when Romeo says, " I take thee at thy word: Call me but love, and I'll be new baptized; henceforth I never will be Romeo." (2: 2: 49-51)

Again, as in the previous statement, Shakespeare implemented religious language in order to describe how love is a transcendent and unearthly entity. In the realm of Christianity, Baptism is the sacramental shedding of earthly imperfections and wedding of the soul to Heaven's dominion.

Romeo's statement uses the word and concept of baptism to express that by being called Juliet's lover, Romeo would shed his earthly self and enter the world of love where his name would no longer matter. Both of these statements allow Shakespeare to describe the transcendence of love, and logically the only way to describe the transcendence of love is by implementing religious words and concepts that are themselves transcendent. It is rather evident why Shakespeare employed religious language instead of using secular or earthly language and concepts. As stated previously, both love and God are entities that find their origin outside

of earthly confines. The fact that both love and God manifest themselves on earth creates a dilemma when one attempts to describe their essence. Trying to describe God or love with words that are limited to earth's confines is similar to the proverbial square peg in a round hole. This is why it would not be conducive for Shakespeare to describe love with secular or earthly words. The inadequate secular language would lose much of love's weight and Shakespeare's genius would be repressed. Shakespeare's usage of religious language not only allows for better description of love itself but Shakespeare also uses it as a vehicle for metaphor. The central message of Christianity is the redemptive sacrifice of the 'unblemished lamb', Jesus Christ, known as the Gospel. When Romeo kisses Juliet and says, "Thus from my lips, by yours, my sins are purged." (1: 5: 109) The purging of sins inevitably draws up thoughts about the Gospel within the reader's mind and although the metaphor is not brought to dénouement within just this one line, the groundwork is set out. Later in the play, Juliet says in regards to performing her mock-death, "Things that, to hear them told, have made me tremble; And I will do it with out fear or doubt, To live an unstained wife to my sweet love." (4: 1: 86-88) This line again is drenched in Gospel metaphor. The word 'unstained' is a queue for the reader that this line is not merely a secular, two-dimensional statement and with this in mind, Juliet seems to share much of Jesus Christ's emotions in the biblical account of Him praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. Both Jesus and Juliet are apprehensive of their looming deaths, both admit that they are afraid, and both choose to confront their fears with confidence. With both this line and the previously stated line it is relatively clear that Shakespeare created certain parallels between Juliet

and Jesus Christ. These parallels come to an ultimate conclusion at the play's conclusion. At the end of scene five, when both Romeo and Juliet are dead, it becomes evident that Shakespeare's metaphor of Christ has come to conclusion. After both of the families realize that their respective children are dead they give up their long held resentment towards each other. This reconciliation seems to echo the reconciliation found after Jesus Christ's death. Obviously, in no way is Juliet an airtight allegory for the Gospel. However, these statements and constructions are undeniable in their intentional resemblance to Christ and the Gospel story. Shakespeare manipulating his plot to facilitate the Gospel metaphor implies that he felt strongly about the need to use God to describe love. Jesus Christ came from heaven and through His death brought salvation for the sinful world. Juliet embodied love and through her death brought reconciliation to the town of Verona. Shakespeare, through his metaphors, is attempting to convey a very weighty assessment on love. The metaphor conveys that love is not of this world but instead from God and thus to know either God or love is to know something of both. It also suggests that love has a very real salvation within it, the ability to reconcile relationships and transcend earthly pettiness. It seems ironic that despite the fact that God created the world, worldly terms fall short of describing His essence. Likewise, it is equally ironic that love, an entity that seemingly controls the vast majority of all human interactions in one way or another, is not readily described by commonplace terms. Juxtaposing these two ironies makes it evident as to why William Shakespeare implemented religious terminology and metaphors in order to fully convey the essence of love. Romeo and Juliet were undoubtedly in love

with each other and it is fitting that their holy love could not be constrained by either the unholy confines of Verona or of secular diction.