

Role of Rosaline in Romeo and Juliet

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



Would anything be lost (or gained) if Rosaline were never mentioned?

Rosaline is the niece of Lord Capulet whom Romeo falls in love with prior to the play, Romeo and Juliet; however, she doesn't reciprocate Romeo's feelings as she has chosen to remain celibate. In most film adaptations, she is usually omitted, yet Romeo is always grieving for his rejected love at the beginning of every adaptation. Now, this is rather paradoxical as Rosaline is not important enough to be portrayed by an actor, yet she is always mentioned by Romeo.

So would anything be gained or lost if Rosaline is removed from the original play? Theoretically, Rosaline is only important in this play for Romeo's past with her, but if she is removed, Romeo wouldn't have attended the party where he meets Juliet, and consequently he would appear less impulsive and passionate. To the audience, Romeo's love for Rosaline helps them to understand the depth and nature of Romeo's relationship with Juliet. When the audience first meet Romeo, he is seen moping around Verona because Rosaline cannot return his love as she chose to be chaste for life.

This affects him greatly as he becomes depressed and he alienates himself from his friends and families; indeed, all he can think of is his rejected love. Subsequently, Benvolio, cousin of Romeo, attempts to make Romeo forget about Rosaline by telling him to examine other beauties of Verona, which Romeo refuses to do. However, when a Capulet servant asks them to read the guest list for the Capulet's party, from which Romeo finds out that Rosaline, is expected to attend; Benvolio then suggests Romeo to crash the

party in order to look at other beauties of Verona, and Romeo reluctantly agrees.

While at the party, when he is looking for Rosaline, he sees Juliet for the first time and falls in love with her immediately. Therefore, Rosaline is often seen as a plot device as her presence at the Capulet party convinced Romeo to seek for her, where he would ultimately fall in love with Juliet. Romeo's love for Rosaline has been dismissed by literary critics as childish and many believe that Shakespeare uses Rosaline's unattainable love to contrast with Juliet's feelings.

Most characters use poetry to express their feelings, and Romeo is no exception to this, especially when declaring his feelings. There is a noticeable difference between the poems he writes for Rosaline and Juliet; the former focuses more on Rosaline's beauty while the latter focuses more on the love they share between them. Friar Lawrence remarked that Romeo's affection for Rosaline is not real as Romeo is repeating the poems that he memorised; however, the poems he makes for Juliet is spontaneous and far more affectionate.

The origin of Romeo's attention for Rosaline is questioned by critics and readers. There is no doubt that Romeo and Juliet are a pair of star-crossed lovers who are meant to be together, and in many ways, Juliet influences Romeo. However, Friar Lawrence remarks to Romeo that "Is Rosaline, whom thou didst love so dear, / So soon forsaken? Young men's love then lies / Not truly in their hearts, but in their eyes." Therefore, it is possible that Romeo

may have never conversed with Rosaline, thus the basis for his love would lie in her physical appearance.

Comparing with a pre-destined love, Romeo's reason for loving Rosaline appears childish and weak. Romeo's relationship with Rosaline also makes his love for Juliet more secretive and it helps to emphasize the feud between the two households. Most of Romeo's friends, including Benvolio and Mercutio, know of his love for Rosaline, as Mercutio is constantly making remarks about that "same pale hard-hearted wench" and Romeo could do nothing more than saying "he jests at scars that never felt a wound" when he is alone.

However, Romeo's love for Juliet is only known to two people; the Friar and the Nurse, and if it had been known by more people, the feud between the Capulets and Montagues would have ended. On the day Romeo got married to Juliet, he is challenged by Tybalt but he declines it they are kinsman now, through his marriage. However, Romeo is unable to explain to Tybalt as to why he can't duel him who then provokes Mercutio to duel Tybalt for Romeo, and it results in a death that leads to Romeo's banishment.

Lastly, Romeo's love for Rosaline contributes greatly to Romeo's characterization as a passionate and impulsive man. His passion is demonstrated by his willingness to be estranged from his family, as he tells no-one about his rejected love and he refuses to accept Benvolio's advice, which is to forget Rosaline. His impulsivity is demonstrated through how quickly he forgets about Rosaline; in Act 1, Scene 4, Romeo says to Mercutio

that “ I am too sore enpierced with his shaft...Under love’s heavy burden do I sink. It is evident that he is still lovesick for Rosaline. However, in Act 2, Scene 5, he proclaims that “ Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight! ” And in Act 2, Scene 3, Rosaline vanished from his memory altogether by his “ I have forgot that name, and that name’s woe. ” No-one can fall out of love in under a day, and thus, Rosaline helped to characterize Romeo as an impulsive man. In short, Rosaline is important to Romeo and Juliet not because that she is a major character; in fact, she isn’t portrayed in most film adaptations.

However, she is important as she is a plot device, essential to Romeo’s first meeting with Juliet. Her relationship with Romeo is often used to contrast with his love for Juliet. Their relationship emphasises the secrecy of his bond with Juliet as the former is publically known while the latter is only known to two people; this also helped to stress the enmity between the Capulets and the Montagues. Finally, Romeo’s short-lived love contributes greatly to Romeo’s characterization as a passionate and impulsive man. Therefore, without Rosaline, the story would lose a great amount of detail.