

## Courtly Love in the Balcony Scene *Romeo and Juliet*

**Prompt:** Study the Balcony Scene (*Romeo and Juliet*: Act II, Scene 2) and the notes below about courtly love. Write a multi-paragraph essay in which you answer this question: **How does the balcony scene illustrate some of the common conventions of courtly love?** Be sure to include all the standard elements of an academic essay and at least two pieces of well-reasoned textual evidence to support each claim you make.

### What is Courtly Love?

Love and romance in *Romeo and Juliet* is not the same as love and romance in modern culture. During the Renaissance, marriage for noble families like the Montagues and Capulets was still based on practicality, politics, and financial stability. Love wasn't a requirement for marriage, but that doesn't mean people during that era simply abandoned love and romance. In fact, love and romance became a kind of game or challenge for those who were in love, and this tradition was known as **courtly love**, which became a topic for drama, poetry, and literature. According to the ideal of courtly love, a knight or nobleman worshipped a woman of high birth, and his love for her inspired him to do great things on the battlefield and elsewhere. There was usually no physical relationship or marriage between them; however, the woman was often already married to another man.

Courtly love was...

- ...**aristocratic**: Courtly love was practiced by nobility.
- ...**ritualistic**: The lady was wooed with promises of love by a man who was seen as a "servant" who had to win her over. She was in control, and she only had to show a small hint of approval.
- ...**secret**: Courtly lovers were sworn to strict secrecy, and the rest of the world was excluded from their affair. They sometimes used secret languages or codes.
- ...**adulterous**: The women were often already married (or "promised to" another man) because marriage was an economic or political arrangement disconnected from love.
- ...**literary**: Over time, courtly love became part of the literary tradition, not actually reflective of real life.
- ...often portrayed using the **Petrarchan Conceit**: exaggerated comparisons, expressing in extravagant terms the beauty, charm, or cruelty of the beloved and the suffering, sorrow, and despair of the forlorn lover.



## The Rules of Courtly Love

The following set of rules is based on the *De Amore* of Andreas Capellanus, as adapted in Appendix 1 of Ann S. Haskell's *A Middle English Anthology* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1985).

1. Marriage should not be a deterrent to love.
2. Love cannot exist in the individual who cannot be jealous.
3. A double love cannot obligate an individual.
4. Love constantly waxes and wanes.
5. That which is not given freely by the object of one's love loses its savor.
6. It is necessary for a male to reach the age of maturity in order to love.
7. A lover must observe a two-year widowhood after his beloved's death.
8. Only the most urgent circumstances should deprive one of love.
9. Only the insistence of love can motivate one to love.
10. Love cannot coexist with avarice.
11. A lover should not love anyone who would be an embarrassing marriage choice.
12. True love excludes all from its embrace but the beloved.
13. Public revelation of love is deadly to love in most instances.
14. The value of love is commensurate with its difficulty of attainment.
15. The presence of one's beloved causes palpitation of the heart.
16. The sight of one's beloved causes palpitations of the heart.
17. A new love brings an old one to a finish.
18. Good character is the one real requirement for worthiness of love.
19. When love grows faint its demise is usually certain.
20. Apprehension is the constant companion of true love.
21. Love is reinforced by jealousy.
22. Suspicion of the beloved generates jealousy and therefore intensifies love.
23. Eating and sleeping diminish greatly when one is aggravated by love.
24. The lover's every deed is performed with the thought of his beloved in mind.
25. Unless it please his beloved, no act or thought is worthy to the lover.
26. Love is powerless to hold anything from love.
27. There is no such thing as too much of the pleasure of one's beloved.
28. Presumption on the part of the beloved causes suspicion in the lover.
29. Aggravation of excessive passion does not usually afflict the true lover.
30. Thought of the beloved never leaves the true lover.
31. Two men may love one woman or two women one man.

