

Structural and Ideological Differences in

William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and His Later Tragedies

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Abstract

The present article attempts to trace the elements of change in the early and late Shakespearean tragedies from the viewpoint of style and the writer's ideological stance. Shakespeare's tragic writing undergoes certain modification as he moves further in his career. One aspect of this modification is the change in the protagonist's dynamism. Although *Romeo and Juliet* both show certain signs of development which separates them from comic characters, they still lack the psychological depth which is witnessed in Shakespeare's late tragic heroes. It is true they realize their tragic fate, yet they fail in gaining full consciousness of their situation and their contribution to their own destiny. Another aspect is the change of diction toward a more 'natural' employment of language and rhetorical devices. In Shakespeare's mature tragedies, we do not see the experimental lyricism we witness in *Romeo and Juliet*, as the playwright seems to adopt the classical notion of decorum, according to which each character should speak in accordance with its social status.

Keywords: Shakespeare; *Romeo and Juliet*; *Hamlet*; ideology; dynamism.

Introduction

Aristotle's *Poetics* is "perhaps the single most important work in the history of dramatic criticism" (Hochman 219). For centuries, critics have responded to it by either agreeing with or rejecting its arguments and the insights it yields into drama in general and tragedy in particular. No matter which side we end up on, we can never neglect it, nor can we turn a blind eye on its influence in the past two thousand years. One might go further and claim that *Poetics* is the safest ground whence one can approach every piece of tragic work. In fact, Aristotle introduced his key concepts as the criteria for measuring all tragedy. Regardless of the soundness of the criteria (that is, whether his concept *are* correct or not), we may still take them as the point of departure and analyze any given tragedy based on its conformity to, or diversion from, the Aristotelian formula. This has the benefit of freeing us from the confusion of relative criticism, in the sense that we can avoid being thrown into the circular structure of measuring a work with relation to another work which in its turn is measured against the former. This is the procedure followed in this study, where we have tried to trace the elements of change in the early and late Shakespearean tragedies from the viewpoint of style and the writer's ideological stance. However, we do not intend to *evaluate* any of these works in relation to Aristotelian criteria; rather, we have taken the concepts and dropped the conformity/diversion part of the process.

Aristotle defines tragedy thus:

Again, Tragedy is the imitation of an action; and an action implies personal agents, who *necessarily possess* certain distinctive qualities both of character and thought . . . and these – thought and character – are the two *natural causes* from which actions spring, and *on actions again all success or failure depends*. Every Tragedy, therefore, *must* have six parts, which parts determine its quality namely, Plot, Character, Diction, Thought, Spectacle, Song. (Emphasis added; 17-18)

Of the six parts we will exclude spectacle, since it falls out of the scope of this article. We will also refrain from dealing with Thought and Song due to the same reason. “The plot,” Aristotle tells us, “is the first principle, and, as it were, the soul of a tragedy; Character holds the second place” (Aristotle 19). Diction, Thought, and Spectacle hold the third, the fourth, and the fifth place, respectively (ibid 20). That Aristotle gives priority to plot over the other elements is a corollary of his philosophy which sees in everything a cause and effect relationship. In fact, his universe “is an ordered one, and tragedy for him operates by cause and effect: the tragic hero does and is something which brings about his tragedy” (Haupt 21-22). For Aristotle, tragedy is the *necessary* outcome of the character’s thought, not something which is imposed on him by ‘fate.’ Above, he directly mentions that the failure or success of a person depends on “actions,” which is the natural effect of two things: thought and character. Therefore, any ‘fatalistic’ dimension to tragedy is put out of the picture in the morally-oriented universe of Aristotle. After all, one of the most significant functions of tragedy is to evoke pity and fear in the audience, and “such an effect,” Aristotle maintains, “is best produced when the events come on us by surprise; and the effect is heightened when, at the same time, they follow as cause and effect. The tragic wonder will therefore be greater than *if they happened of themselves or by accident*” (emphasis added; 29-30).

Before moving from the present argument, it remains for us to clarify what Aristotle meant by Diction. The definition he gives of the term is terse but enough to carry us in our task: Diction is “the expression of the meaning in words” (21). Regardless of its philosophic overtones (that is, the precedence of meaning over language, or vice versa), Aristotle’s definition draws our attention to the importance of language in our evaluation of a literary work. Therefore, in what follows, we will try to focus on probable changes in Shakespeare’s early and late tragedies from the point of view of Character, Diction, and Plot.

Discussion

The first shock to the reader, who looks for the elements of tragedy in *Romeo and Juliet*, comes when analyzing the main characters. The main question is can we discern in Romeo and Juliet (after whom the play is titled) the characteristics of a tragic hero? In other words, are they qualified, from the viewpoint of tragic tradition, to be located at the center of a tragic world, or better suit a world governed by the rules of comedy? The answer can be again sought from *Poetics*. According to Aristotle, playwrights should “represent men either as better than in life, or as worse, or as they are,” and this difference in representation is responsible for the difference of tragedy and comedy, since “comedy aims at presenting men as worse, Tragedy as better than in actual life” (6). In another place, Aristotle’s often descriptive criticism takes the form of an injunction, where he declares that a tragic hero “*must* be one who is highly renowned and prosperous – a personage like Oedipus, Thyestes, or other illustrious men of such families” (my emphasis; 38). Although many disagree with Aristotle on this distinction, none can deny that the Elizabethan tragedy was heavily influenced by his so-called ‘rules.’ As Michelle Gellrich mentions: “If Aristotle’s ideas had a negligible impact on literary theory before 1500, they came to dominate the critical scene by 1550, and no discussion of poetry in general or tragedy in particular could respectfully proceed without reference to the Greek philosopher” (164).

Even before 1500, Aristotle’s critical insights had a more lasting impact than what Gellrich deems “negligible,” especially his distinction between tragedy and comedy. His theory of comedy, for instance, “persists,” according to Haskell Block, “in the Middle Ages, notably in the essays of Evanthius and Donatus” (Halio 20). In *De Fabula*, a commentary on Terence written in the fourth century, Evanthius follows the lead of Aristotle in separating comedy from tragedy:

In comedy the fortunes of men are middle-class, the dangers are slight, and the ends of the actions are happy; but in tragedy everything is the opposite – the characters are great men, the fears are intense, and the ends disastrous. In comedy the beginning is troubled, the end tranquil; in tragedy events follow the reverse order. And in tragedy the kind of life is shown that is to be shunned; while in comedy the kind is shown that is to be sought after. (Quoted in Halio 20)

Now, what is most certain is that neither Romeo nor Juliet is better than us, and none of them can have a claim to the prosperity, renown, and greatness which tradition has bestowed upon the tragic hero. “The characters are individualized, it is true, well beyond the usual comic types;” says Maynard Mack, “but they show nonetheless some recognizable blood-ties with the kinds of people we expect to meet with in stage and film comedy” (69). In other words, Shakespeare’s lovers stand somewhere between the conventional poles of tragedy and comedy. On the one hand, he neglects Aristotle’s reasoning that it is only the fall of men of prominence which excite pity and fear in the audience; on the other hand, he delves into the character’s individuality so much that his play surpasses the bounds of comedy.

What would well justify this dynamism of character (characteristic of tragedy rather than comedy) is the way the lovers’ personality changes through the course of the play. For instance, Juliet’s previous immature response to the question of marriage (“It is an honour that I dream not of” (1.3.66)) swiftly moves to the recognition of love in marriage, and finally to her mature acknowledgement of the marital responsibility of remaining faithful to her husband:

O, bid me leap, rather than marry Paris,
From off the battlements of any tower,
Or walk in thievish ways, or bid me lurk
Where serpents are; chain me with roaring bears,
Or hide me nightly in a charnel-house,
O’ercover’d quite with dead men’s rattling bones,
With reeky shanks and yellow chapless skulls;
Or bid me go into a new-made grave,

And hide me with a dead man in his shroud---
 Things that, to hear them told, have made me tremble---
 And I will do it without fear or doubt,
 To live an unstain'd wife to my sweet love. (4.1.78-88)

The tragic death of the lovers at the end of the play shows that these words are not mere bluffing. By the end of the play, Juliet's "If all else fail, myself have power to die" (3.5.244) and Romeo's "never from this palace of dim night / Depart again" (5.3) have fused speech and act in a marriage which for centuries have excited the most tragic responses from the audience and the reader alike. This tragic conclusion removes *Romeo and Juliet* from the domain of comedy beyond any possibility of retrieve. It is as remote from Aristotle's "no one slays or is slain" feature of comedy as it is from the "sought after" world of Evanthius. The dreadful, yet courageous, realization of the real face of life, where one has to come to terms with, accept, and stand against incidents that till now used to evoke fear and terror in the heart, is far beyond the scope of comedy.

This realization, however, is not as deep as it may sound at first. As Maynard Mack claims, "Shakespeare allows to neither of his protagonists in this play the full tragic realization of what has happened to them that he will allow such later figures as Hamlet and Othello, much less any anguished questioning about their own contribution to it" (74). Of what degree is this "realization" that separates *Romeo and Juliet* from Shakespeare's later tragedies? What is in Hamlet and Othello that makes them 'truer' tragic heroes than the lovers of Shakespeare's early play? Before answering the first question, it is better to linger a little bit on the second. First of all, both Hamlet and Othello come from a nobler and higher position. In Aristotelian terms, they are "better than us" and are men of extreme "renown and prosperity." Indeed, it seems Shakespeare has returned to the traditional lore regarding the nature of tragedy and the tragic hero. If we think so, then it is quite understandable why Hamlet and Othello can have 'deeper' insights than Romeo and Juliet:

they are better in nature therefore they can think better. Regardless of the truth of this claim, the self-consciousness which Mack believes characterizes the heroes of Shakespeare's late tragedies is well justified. We shall now turn to *Hamlet*.

From the moment Hamlet's father, the late king of Denmark, is murdered and his widow is wedded to his brother, Claudius, Hamlet becomes more conscious of what has happened and what continues to happen around him. Early in the play, Hamlet recognizes what he takes to be his mother's faithlessness and betrayal to the memory of his father "to post / With such dexterity to incestuous sheets," (1.2.156-157) firmly believing that "a beast that wants discourse of reason / Would have mourn'd longer" (1.2.150-151). This way of reasoning leads to his misogynistic remarks on women's moral weakness in his famous words "frailty, thy name is woman." (1.2.146) In other words, at this stage, Hamlet still believes that his uncle and his mother have deviated from the 'noble' and 'true' path of humanity, from a moral standard which he believes to be the logical separating line between man and the "beast that wants discourse of reason." However, the confrontation with his father's ghost marks the beginning of a wholesale change in Hamlet's philosophy. It is only seconds after the departure of the ghost that he declares: "How strange or odd so ere I beare my selfe." (1.5.171). Later when he meets Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, he puts into light a new line of thinking:

I have of late, but wherefore I knowe not, lost all my mirth, forgon all custome of exercises, and indeede it goes so heavily with my disposition, that this goodly frame the earth, seemes to me a sterill promontorie, this most excellent canopy the ayre, looke you, this brave orehanging firmament, this majesticall rooffe, fretted with golden fire, why, it appeareth nothing to me but a foule and pestilent congregation of vapoures. What a piece of worke is a man, how noble in reason, how infinit in faculties, in forme and moving, how expresse and admirable in action, how like an angell, in apprehension, how like a god: the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals; and yet to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me, nor woman neither... (2.2.288-301)

Hamlet has come to the consciousness that there is no 'ultimate' pattern or plan beyond the creation. Earlier, he believed in an ethical system which gave him the ability to measure the moral deviation of people according to it. However, he now negates the existence of such a system as he sees beyond the creation itself nothing but a "foule and pestilent congregation" of events. Hamlet is no longer entrapped in the dichotomy of man and woman: "Man delights not me, nor woman neither" He has lost faith in humanity.

The next phase in Hamlet's psychological movement is towards an uncertainty regarding the existence of a life after death, which is responsible, from one aspect, for his philosophical dilemma expressed in the famous "To be or not To be" soliloquy. Hamlet reaches a stage where he thinks his problems are all due to an existential uncertainty. "The undiscover'd country, from whose borne, / No traveler returns, puzzles the will," (3.1.79-80) so ponders Hamlet. His tragedy is the tragedy of one who leaps toward self-consciousness, in order to justify his being, but fails in the process, which Aristotle would have wanted us to believe was due to his *hamartia*. Later, when he learns about Ophelia's death, following his dialogue with the gravediggers and Horatio about death and fate, his psychological entourage reaches its terminal point. "Meditating on death's attack on the integrity of the body," Lourens Minnema points out, "Hamlet's realization that there is death after death, that death is one hell of a revenger, relieves the pressures on Hamlet's tormented state of mind in his struggles with intentionality" (396). In other words, Hamlet finally finds an answer to the question about what awaits him after this life, and it is only after this realization that he manages to act out the ghost's vendetta. Whether we agree with this interpretation or not, we still see a great deal happening to Hamlet throughout his psychological quest. What distinguishes Hamlet from Romeo and Juliet is the former's deeper realization of what

happens to him (so resonant in his philosophical musings) and of his contribution to that which befalls him. And this is characteristic of all Shakespeare's late tragic heroes.

If Hamlet's tragedy was in his desire to think first and act afterwards, Othello's would most definitely be in his "acting peremptorily instead of getting all the facts of a situation (Weidhorn 293-294) Of course, some think it is a mistake to relate all the tragic consequences to a simplistic account of a lack of judgment on the part of the protagonist (Haupt, 27); however, it is not in this *hamartia* that we are interested here. Whether it is the result of a single tragic flaw or of the synthesis of various flaws in the microscopic character or the macroscopic universe, the tragic conclusion and its realization by the protagonist is what we are after. Othello's consciousness of what happens to him and his stance toward his fate are what give his character the dynamism that *Romeo and Juliet* lack. His lines minutes before his death are exemplary:

I have seen the day
That with this little arm, and this good sword,
I have made my way through more impediments
Than twenty times your stop. But (O vain boast!)
Who can control his fate? 'Tis not so now. (5.2.261-265)

O cursed, cursed slave!
Whip me, ye devils,
From the possession of this heavenly sight!
Blow me about in winds, roast me in sulphur,
Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!
O Desdemona! Dead, Desdemona. Dead! O, O! (5.2.276-281)

I pray you, in your letters,
When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice. Then must you speak
Of one that lov'd not wisely but too well;
Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought,

Perplexed in the extreme; of one whose hand
 (Like the base Indian) threw a pearl away
 Richer than all his tribe; of one whose subdu'd eyes,
 Albeit unused to the melting mood,
 Drops tears as fast as the Arabian trees
 Their medicinable gum. Set you down this;
 And say besides, that in Aleppo once,
 Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk
 Beat a Venetian and traduc'd the state,
 I took by th' throat the circumcised dog,
 And smote him---thus. (5.2.346-363)

Othello looks at his life and sees in it the hands of Providence at work, shaping his destiny while he has no control over it. He realizes that all the glories he won in battles are of no use when it comes to fate and that he has to yield to its predicament. Moreover, he acknowledges his own contribution to his tragic fate where due to loving “too well” and entrapment in Iago’s scheme he has brought catastrophe to himself and his beloved Desdemona, and, therefore, he takes responsibility for his evil deed and kills himself. The psychological depth of Othello’s character surpasses that of Romeo and Juliet, in the same way that the depth of the latter surpassed that of Shakespeare’s comic characters. After all, there is a huge gap between realizing one’s fate and acknowledging one’s role in it.

Another element which distinguishes *Romeo and Juliet* from the late tragedies is diction. For R. F. Hill, it is a matter of instinct to agree with the claim that “the more intense the emotion, the more the poet will abhor ornament: he will counterfeit direct speech” (455). In other words, the proper language for tragedy, which involves emotion at its most intense, is the language of everyday speech. When the mind is disturbed emotionally, the “natural” expression expected of it is “quibbling,” not rich “rhetorical display” (Hill 456). This theory sees Quintilian as its forerunner, with whom it is mentioned Shakespeare had been closely familiar (Hill 455). Having talked about

the importance of decorum in his *Institutio Oratoria*, he thus concludes with a warning to the orators:

But when terror, hatred and pity are the weapons called for in the fray, who will endure the orator who expresses his anger, his sorrow or his entreaties in neat antithesis, balanced cadences and exact correspondences? Too much care for our words under such circumstances weakens the impression of emotional sincerity, and wherever the orator displays his art unveiled, the hearer says, "The truth is not in him." (Quoted in Hill 455)

What strikes the reader most is the highly poetical language of the lovers in *Romeo and Juliet*, which according to Quintilian's claim can never elicit a positive response from the audience. For instance, one may wonder how someone in the place of Juliet, with all that sentiment and emotion, can give vent to such a poetical passage:

Come, civil night,
 Thou sober-suited matron, all in black,
 And learn me how to lose a winning match
 Played for a pair of stainless maidenhoods.
 Hood my unmanned blood, bating in my cheeks,
 With thy black mantle, till strange love grow bold,
 Think true love acted simply modesty.
 Come night, come Romeo, come thou say in night.
 For thou wilt lie upon the wings of night
 Whiter than new snow upon a raven's back.
 Come gentle night, come loving black-browed night,
 Give me my Romeo; and when he shall die
 Take him and cut him out in little stars,
 And he will make the face of heaven so fine
 That all the world will be in love with night,
 And pay no worship to the garish sun. (3.2.10-25)

The passage abounds with antithetical language, which Quintilian believed weakens the emotional impact. This can partly be due to the fact that Shakespeare at the time of writing this play was still looking for the proper language of tragedy and tried to explore his ability in using

figurative language (McEachern 41). Being experimental in form, this view maintains, its linguistic structure could not last into Shakespeare's more mature tragedies, in which no such lyrical diversity or extravagance is discernible. Hill beautifully summarizes this view:

With *Romeo and Juliet* rhetorical tragedy is at an end. It had carried Shakespeare through his prentice years and enabled him to flex his muscles and fathom his own powers. It was, however, a form too narrow to contain his wide ranging imagination, too artificial for the expression of tragic ideas no longer merely traditional but afire with personal doubts and convictions. In his mature tragedies Shakespeare never entirely abandoned the early formality; with it he mingled an informality, creating a medium of immeasurable range. Ritual and realism were married. The poet could glance from heaven to earth, from philosophic abstractions to the lowest passion, without incongruity. (468)

In other words, Shakespeare through experience came to the understanding that he should not impose a rigid, inflexible, form upon content. Also, he did not follow blindly the teaching of Quintilian and other critics of rhetoric, who divorced tragedy from the language of poetry. Instead, he developed a new style by which "ritual and realism were married," a style which at the same met the need of tragedy for uncommon and heavenly language and the need of realism for common and earthly one. Thus, for instance, he never used the sonnet form in any of his late tragedies again as he had done in the lovers' first meeting (1.5.92-105), since it certainly negated the laws of realism. However, he never abandoned figurative language and continued to use rhetorical devices wherever the tragic action needed it. One of the most famous instances in which Shakespeare uses a highly elevated and rhetorical language in his late tragedies is in Macbeth's soliloquy upon his wife's death:

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more; it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing. (5.5.19-28)

Here, Shakespeare uses such ingenious metaphors that are completely alien to a mind perturbed by the incursion of hardy emotions and sentiments. Yet, the passage manages to excite the highest emotional response from the audience, in defiance of what Quintilian believed to be a point of weakness. Another example is in *Antony and Cleopatra*, where Cleopatra, having learnt about Antony's death and determined to commit suicide, addresses the asp which is supposed to bite her to her death:

Cleopatra: Come, thou mortal wretch,
With thy sharp teeth this knot intrinsicate
Of life at once untie. Poor venomous fool,
Be angry and dispatch. O, couldst thou speak,
That I might hear thee call great Caesar ass
Unpolicied!

Charmian: O eastern star!

Cleopatra: Peace, peace!

Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,
That sucks the nurse asleep? (5.2)

These lines are heavily colored by rhetorical devices, especially the last metaphor which likens the asp to the baby sucking milk out of the nurse's breast. To me, no one would deny that this is not the language that people used to hear in everyday speech during Shakespeare's lifetime. It need not. Tragedy requires a language higher than the one used by common people, since it is the language of nobler people: the king's diction *does* differ from that of the clown, no doubt about that. This is exactly what decorum means. If it is the king we want to represent, we have to choose a language proper and real to the king. From this perspective, the figurative language of *Macbeth*

and Cleopatra in no way defies the law of verisimilitude. The diction of a king or queen should not be similar to that of the inferior characters and where it does we immediately realize that something has gone amiss with them. Let us take as an example King Lear's famous speech on the heath:

Thou wert better in thy grave than to answer with thy uncovered body this extremity of skies. Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou owest the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. Ha? Here's three on's are sophisticated. Thou art the things itself; unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off, you lendings! Come, unbutton here. (3.4.98-105)

This sort of railing is no doubt the product of an unsettled mind. Immediately after this speech, the direction mentions that the king tears off his clothes, which proves that he has lost his mental and psychic equilibrium. If it were the word of the Fool, it could be well justified. Yet, coming out of a king's mouth, it defies all the rules of decorum and betrays reality, especially if we compare it with Lear's diction at the opening of the play, where he has not given away his kingdom and with it his kingship yet.

Then, Shakespeare's late tragedies return to the classical concept of decorum after his experimental beginning with *Romeo and Juliet*. Whereas the latter is dominated by a formal lyricism, the mature tragedies employ a diction which suits the grave subject matter they put on stage. In fact, *Romeo and Juliet* was experimental in its subject matter too, which has led some critics to claim that, despite the tragic elements employed by the playwright, it is in reality not a tragedy but a romance. As Maynard Mack deftly puts it:

The very fact that the tragedy depicted is a tragedy of lovers must have emphasized for its first audiences that its deepest roots lay in romance, not tragedy; for true tragedy, Elizabethan pundits never tired of declaring, should deal with greater matters than love – with the fall of princes or the errors and sufferings of actual historical men and women in high place. Shakespeare's venture in conceiving *Romeo and Juliet* as a tragedy was therefore in some degree an innovation, possibly

an experiment. Instead of personages on whom the fate of nations depended, it took for its hero and heroine a boy and a girl in love; and instead of events accredited by history, its incidents were culled from the familiar props of the romantic tall tale. (70-71)

When Shakespeare stopped playing with classical tragic conventions, he adopted a language different from that which he had formerly used. Graver characters required graver language, and graver language forbade the employment of cliché love-diction. Therefore, it is quite the case that it was a change in Shakespeare's outlook and view to what is tragic in human that led to the change in the linguistic structure of his tragedies.

Shakespeare's tragedies are so different from one another that it nearly becomes impossible for us to abstract a moral truth from them (Dean 128). However, the common element which we can trace in all of the tragedies is that "the meanings of a Shakespearian play are not static but dynamic, subject to frequent change and modification; the plays do not reveal the nature of moral truth, they debate it" (Dean 128). Of course, such a plurality of meaning would have seemed quite misleading and fallacious to Coleridge, for example, for whom "each play draws the audience into its world, and this is part of the unity of the play's effect and its moral truth" (Harter 165). Nevertheless, it is quite obvious that Shakespeare abandoned the clear-cut, univocal ending of a play like *Romeo and Juliet* for a more complicated, equivocal ending in his late tragedies. In fact, it is not in the ending only that Shakespeare draws our attention to the complicated, often oppositional, nature of truth; there are numerous instances where Shakespeare does so by avoiding taking sides with any of the characters, thus leaving it to the reader to decide. In the modern critical terminology, Shakespeare deconstructs the concept of truth and all the notions which draw on it for their validity, such as, love, honor, honesty, loyalty, etc. And he does this in his late tragedies more pervasively and more convincingly than in *Romeo and Juliet*.

Romeo and Juliet ends in a manner which leaves no reader perplexed as to the main bearing of the tragic event. The two rival families end the long-lasting enmity which led to the death of the lovers. Prince Escalus' final lines,

A glooming peace this morning with it brings,
The sun, for sorrow, will not show his head.
Go hence to have more talk of these sad things;
Some shall be pardon'd, and some punished:
For never was a story of more woe
Than this of Juliet and her Romeo (5.3)

summarize the redeeming effect of love in bringing to an end a family feud which had plagued the Houses of Capulet and Montague for years. Romeo and Juliet are sacrificed so that the social order can regain its lost equilibrium. When the curtain falls, we will probably be moved to tears for the tragic end of the lovers; however, it seems not probable that we question the nature of love. There is no *necessary* relation between love and death, that is, death is not the logical consequence of love. What leads to the lovers' death is the *specific* social condition in which the entire play takes place and which renders the union of the lovers in marriage impossible. Love turns out to be a disaster to the lovers, yet it saves many potential Romeos and Juliets from yielding to the same tragic fate. It is this *particularity* of the incident which, in my opinion, marks off *Romeo and Juliet* from Shakespeare's late tragedies. The play is not so much about love as it is about a controversial love affair. As a result, it might arouse in us a sense of pity for the dead lovers, but it will never kindle in us a sense of fear, if we accept, of course, Aristotle's claim that fear is aroused through witnessing the "misfortune of a man like ourselves" (38). For Romeo and Juliet resemble not *all* lovers, but only those who live in two families wrought with feud and rivalry. In this way, the play fails to excite full tragic effect in its audience and reader alike; a characteristic of Shakespeare's mature tragedies.

“In general, as [Shakespeare] goes forward in his career,” Bernard Beckerman points out, “he does seem to make his closing more contradictory, more complex, readier to produce divergent signals that are likely to arouse mixed response” (95). The closing of the play, one can argue, is the mirror of all the contradictions and complexities which lie dormant in the previous scenes. Let us, for a moment, turn to *Hamlet*. What is our response to the protagonist’s destiny? Of course, some of us might sympathize with him and praise him for his ‘courageous’ action in avenging his father’s death. Another group might still sympathize with him, but blame him for his rash judgment based on his illogical belief in the ghost and its honesty: after all, what if the ghost has been a demon intent on spreading death and bringing ruin and destruction to a noble family? When he sees the ghost for the first time, Hamlet cries:

Angels and ministers of grace defend us!
 Be thou a spirit of health, or goblin damn’d,
 Bring with thee airs from heaven, or blasts from hell,
 Be thy intents wicked, or charitable,
 Thou com’st in such a questionable shape
 That I will speak to thee: I’ll call thee Hamlet,
 King, father, royal Dane. O, answer me! (1.4.39-45)

It is strange that Hamlet should lay aside all the rules of caution, with his previous knowledge of the ability of the wicked spirits to take honest and charitable form, and blindly follow the orders of the ghost. It is tempting to point to this issue as Hamlet’s major tragic flaw; however, it is not so much in the *hamartia* itself that I am interested as in its universality. The issue is that of reality and appearance, of truth and seeming. The ghost is one aspect of this complex issue, one to which Hamlet here falls prey. And yet the significant thing is that the contradictory relation of reality and illusion exceeds the limits of the play and enters the personal world of the reader. Therefore, Hamlet’s inability to distinguish what is real and what is illusory kindles in us a sense of fear through striking an unharmonious cord at the core of our being. “What if the same fate

befalls me?” the audience might ask. “How can I know what is real and what is illusion?” Whatever the social background of the audience is, he shares with the tragic hero this deep fear, faces the same dilemmas that he faces, and looks for a solution to solve this existential puzzle the way he does. This is what we meant when we mentioned that *Romeo and Juliet* lacks universality.

Conclusion

Indeed, all of Shakespeare’s late tragedies exhibit such universality, regardless of their subject matter. Othello’s tragic reversal is the result of no external influence, but is caused by what is inherently human, that is, our inability to see through the masks that our intimates wear in order to deceive us for their own benefit. Again, we are presented with the issue of reality and appearance. The most significant question one can ask is: what gives Iago the power to control Othello and the other characters in the play? In a more general sense, what is it that renders us weak and defenseless in the face of vice and evil? Simply, it is our inability to distinguish reality from appearance, good from evil. Othello falls prey to Iago’s power to conceal his ‘true’ nature behind a ‘seeming’ honesty. It is only at the end of the play, when disaster has already enshrouded him, which Othello realizes Iago’s scheme and finds out his insidious intention. The mask has fallen too late. Who is he whose sense of fear is not aroused at this revelation? In other words, who is he that deems himself exempt from the reality vs. illusion conflict? It is this universal human concern which makes *Othello* the great tragedy it is. In one word, it is human, all too human.

Shakespeare’s tragic writing undergoes certain modification as he moves further in his career. One aspect of this modification is the change in the protagonist’s dynamism. Although *Romeo and Juliet* both show certain signs of development which separates them from comic characters, they still lack the psychological depth which is witnessed in Shakespeare’s late tragic

heroes. It is true they realize their tragic fate, yet they fail in gaining full consciousness of their situation and their contribution to their own destiny. Another aspect is the change of diction toward a more 'natural' employment of language and rhetorical devices. In Shakespeare's mature tragedies, we do not see the experimental lyricism we witness in *Romeo and Juliet*, as the playwright seems to adopt the classical notion of decorum, according to which each character should speak in accordance with its social status. The noble tragic hero should use a language higher than the common language of everyday speech. Consequently, it is no longer possible to use the cliché Petrarchan diction in tragedies, the subject of which goes beyond the childish love affair of a naïve couple. The last aspect dealt with in this article is the shift in Shakespeare's conception of what is tragic in human. The writers have argued that what distinguishes an early tragedy, such as *Romeo and Juliet*, from the great tragedies of the later period is the former's inability to appeal to what is universal in human being, that is, its inability to excite in the audience a noticeable sense of fear. Due to its particularity and belonging to a specific social condition (i.e. the family feuds), the play fails to deal with the human condition in its universal aspect. Thus, as we move toward the late tragedies, we are presented with more complex and more contradictory accounts of certain universal issues, which are shared by all the members of human society.

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