TRAGEDY OF LOVE AND LANGUAGE PAR EXCELLENCE: A POST-CLASSICAL AND POST-MODERN PSYCHOANALYTIC READING OF *ROMEO AND JULIET*

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Abstract

This article aims at analyzing William Shakespeare's *Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet* from a post-classical and post-modern psychoanalytic perspective. In the post-classical reading, we argue, applying Dorothy Tennov's and Julia Kristeva's conceptions of adolescent processes to the study of the play, that tragedy is materialized by a failed adolescent rebellion against parental and societal authority and a curtailed process of individuation. In the post-modern psychoanalytic reading, we posit, applying Jacques Derrida's and Jacques Lacan's post-structuralist conceptions, that *Romeo and Juliet* is the classic and universal tragedy of a desire that can never be satisfied due to the fundamental lack that results from the unsettling compromise between the linguistic and the organic. Language, not only, is the condition of love and desire, but also, is the ultimate impediment to their survival. Finally, in post-Lacanian forays, we provide feminist and cultural-materialist psychoanalytic readings which, despite some nuanced variations, reiterate the place of the play as *la tragédie du désir*.

Keywords: Romeo and Juliet, Limerence, crystallization, ideality syndrome, desire, jouissance

1. Introduction

Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* has often been interpreted by some critics as a tragedy gone amiss since it does not follow Aristotle's concept of the protagonist's hamartia which should bring about the tragic end: "The play has been criticized as not tragic in an Aristotelian sense on the grounds that the outcome does not grow out of flaws in the main characters but results from fortuitous happenings" (Cox 379). To such detractors, the plight of the star-crossed lovers of Verona is ascribed to mere external circumstances and fate rather than to any internal character flaws (Krims 77). However, a psychologically informed analysis can unveil intrinsic conflicts and unconscious processes which, in turn, contribute to the tragic outcome by catapulting the protagonists to a self-destructive path. In the post-classical psychoanalytic reading of *Romeo and Juliet*, the role adolescent processes play in shaping the tragic destinies of the fateful lovers is explored.

2. A Tragedy of Adolescence: Limerence, Crystallization, Ideality Syndrome and Adolescent Processes

The psychological term "limerence" was coined by the American psychologist Dorothy Tennov in her book *Love and Limerence: The Experience of Being in Love*. It refers to a state of mind resulting from an involuntary romantic infatuation with the love object and it is characterized by feelings and behaviors from euphoria to despair (contingent on

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perceived emotional mutuality), compulsive thoughts and fantasies, and an obsessive need for reciprocation of one's feelings but not primarily for a sexual relationship. Another psychological concept which is closely associated with the concept of limerence is "crystallization." Tennov, in her description of the perception of the limerent object, discusses how it was the 19th-century French novelist Stendhal, who is highly regarded for the in-depth exploration and analysis of his characters' psychology that first introduced the conceptualization of crystallization in his analytical collection of essays on love, *De l'Amour*:

> A branch of a tree, he said, if tossed into a salt mine and allowed to remain there for several months undergoes a metamorphosis. It remains a branch, or even just a twig, but the salt crystals transform it 'into an object of shimmering beauty.' In an analogous manner, although more quickly, the characteristics of the LO are crystallized by mental events in which LO's attractive characteristics are exaggerated and unattractive characteristics given little or no attention. According to Stendhal, you interpret LO in the most favorable light. You do not exactly misperceive, but rather focus your attention on the positive. You seem unconcerned about the defects in what appears to the concerned outsider–friends and family–to be quite an unsuitable individual. (Tennov 30)

Thus, Stendhal appropriated the phenomenon of salt crystallization and employed it as a metaphor for the mental process of crystallization; the object of new passionate love is metamorphosed into an idealized perfection: "I call crystallization the operation of the mind which, from everything which is presented to it, draws the conclusion that there are new perfections in the object of its love" (Stendhal 14).

One can observe that the dynamics of limerence and crystallization are very much at play in *Romeo and Juliet*. At the beginning of the play, Romeo is utterly preoccupied with thoughts of Rosaline which can be characterized as a classic example of what Tennov qualifies as the condition of limerence. In his limerence, Romeo has a state of cognitive obsession; the thoughts of the limerent object intrudes upon his psyche and he feels despair as his infatuation is not reciprocated by Rosaline. He exaggerates and crystallizes her attractive characteristics and overlooks her unattractive ones; to the outsiders like Benvolio, such characterization seems to be quite puzzling and irrational:

BENVOLIO. At this same ancient feast of Capulet's
Sups the fair Rosaline whom thou so lov'st,
With all the admired beauties of Verona.
Go thither, and with unattainted eye
Compare her face with some that I shall show,
And I will make thee think thy swan a crow.
ROMEO. When the devout religion of mine eye
Maintains such falsehood, then turn tears to fires,
And these who, often drowned, could never die,
Transparent heretics, be burnt for liars.
One fairer than my love? The all-seeing sun
Ne'er saw her match since first the world begun.
(1.2.83-94)

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But since Romeo's limerence remains hopelessly unrequited, he quickly redirects his attachment to a new limerent object as soon as he sets eyes on Juliet. This process by which the limerent re-routes his romantic infatuation to a new object, thereby ending the initial limerence, is called "transference." As a result of such cathectic transference, Romeo repeats his pattern of crystallizing the object of his limerence; this time, however, all roads, quite hyperbolically and ironically (when one considers his not-log-ago categorical eulogy of Rosaline), lead to Juliet:

> But soft. What light through yonder window breaks?
> It is the East, and Juliet is the sun.
> Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,
> Who is already sick and pale with grief
> That thou her maid art far more fair than she.
> Be not her maid, since she is envious.
> . . . . . .
> Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,
> Having some business, do entreat her eyes
> To twinkle in their spheres till they return.
> What if her eyes were there, they in her head?
> The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars
> As daylight doth a lamp. Her eyes in heaven
> Would through the airy region stream so bright
> That birds would sing and think it were not night. (2.2.2-7, 15-22)

Indubitably, the limerent experience is more than carnal desire and its main goal is to achieve emotional commitment rather than mere physical union. According to Tennov, that emotional experience can be colossally intensified by "externally imposed obstacle[s]" (26). One can, indeed argue, that the intensity of limerence shown in *Romeo and Juliet* is the direct consequence of the impediments the lovers face in the course of their limerent love. The hindrances of family and society amplify the degree of limerent intensity as the proverbial Shakespearean expression rings true: The course of true (limerent) love never did run smooth. As a matter of fact, the familial and societal obstacles are indispensable factors in creating a limerent-limerent bond in which both partners are limerent. Thus, external obstruction, in affairs of love, can lead to psychological intensification and reciprocity. In social psychology, the term "Romeo and Juliet effect," coined by Driscoll et al., refers to the heightening of the feelings of romantic love between members of the couple due to parental opposition and interference in a love relationship (1). Therefore, the barriers encountered by Romeo and Juliet are so seminal "to their mutual limerence that psychologists speak of 'the Romeo and Juliet effect,' in which parents who attempt to interfere in the romance of their children may in fact intensify it" (Tennov 57).

Limerent intensity is not the only ethos of adolescent love. Adolescence is also characterized by what Julia Kristeva formulates as "syndrome of ideality." According to her, the polymorphous sexuality of childhood is truncated by the adolescent's belief in the possibility of absolute satisfaction through an object of desire (Gozlan 37). The adolescent's wish for certainty instigates a quest for an idealized love object; however, his idealistic belief

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in total desire is met by the inevitable unattainability in reality. This shakes the adolescent psychic structure and "causes the structure to become permeable to transformation but sometimes, to disintegrate under the weight of desire and frustration" (37).

From a Freudian point of view, a child is dominated by a tumult of drives that are inexorably polymorphous as they are dependent upon the satisfaction of the erogenous zones. According to Kristeva, whereas a child is a seeker of knowledge and partial satisfaction, an adolescent is an uncompromising believer and on an adamant search for the ultimate gratifying object relation which must exist:

> Let us oppose the polymorphous perverse child dependent on partial pleasures, who "wants to know" and whose thought develops thanks to his sexual theorization with the adolescent who idealizes the object relation to the point of succumbing to what I call "the malady of ideality" which pushes him to relish both the fantasy of an absolute Object as well as of the fantasy of its vengeful destruction. *The polymorphous perverse theoretician* versus *The adolescent believer*: The dichotomy I'm proposing obviously obeys heuristic objectives for clarity but, most often, the two models overlap. (Kristeva, "Adolescence" 716)

Accordingly, Romeo and Juliet, both being adolescents (Juliet is thirteen years old and Romeo is about sixteen), are absolute believers. They both believe in the existence of an ultimate Ideal Object that can satisfy absolutely; however, because of their adolescent belief in the existence of such object relation, they suffer cruelly from its impossibility. Any kind of disappointment in their syndrome of ideality materializes in the form of punitive and self-destructive modes of behavior we witness in *Romeo and Juliet*. The adolescent subject, according to Kristeva, "whose statute is rooted in polymorphous perversity, separates from the parental couple by replacing it with a new model. In doing so, the *narcissism* of the ego, tied up with its ideals, overflows the object, giving way to the *amorous passion* specific to the *drive-ideality intrication*" (718). This idealization, though, as indicated by Melanie Klein, is defensive because it splits the "good" from the "bad" object, with the aim of defending "itself against the latter and the ego's aggression accompanying it" (719). To Kristeva, the adolescent idealization produces a perverse type of pleasure—a sadomasochistic satisfaction which draws its violence from the very intensity of the ideality syndrome itself: "Indeed, the growing dynamic of idealization stimulates and increases the pleasure the subject feels on both sides: 'you will take pleasure *in the good and the bad*', dictates the ideality syndrome" (719).

Both Romeo and Juliet desire to escape from childhood into a fantasy of absolute libidinal satisfaction derived from a new object on which they project their narcissism supported by the ego's ideal. They believe in the ideal other which is going to replace the parental other; in a revenge against the Oedipus complex, they construct their own ideal love couple in place and defiance of the parental couple:

> The mutual idealization that two adolescents share is experienced as a rejection of parental authority: Romeo and Juliet's love for one another is all the more fueled by the fact that they defy the Montague and Capulet clans who hate one another and engage in a merciless feud. This young couple's ideal is defiant and secret as all adolescent acts aspire to be. (Kristeva, "Adolescence" 722-23)

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However, that unconscious fantasy of an absolutely satisfying ideal other proves extremely fragile, and indeed impossible, as he or she disappoints in the test of reality. Thus, the adolescent's latent polymorphous perversity lingering from childhood resurfaces: a fall from paradise "into suffering when ideality is disillusioned or fails to stabilize the subject" (Britzman 279). This can be seen in Romeo and Juliet's sadomasochistic tendencies; Romeo, in a quite sadomasochistic fashion, stabs Tybalt and Paris while claiming and crying "O I am fortune's fool" (3.1.131) and Juliet, quite graphically, fantasizes about mincing Romeo's body into little stars:

> Come, night. Come, Romeo. Come, thou day 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 I shall die
> Take him and cut him out in little stars . . . (3.2.17-22)

Indeed, the suicidal tendencies of Romeo and Juliet can also be analyzed through the lens of the adolescent processes at work in the play. Psychologically, one can decipher the tragedy as a failed adolescent rebellion against parental authority and a failed process of individuation. As M. D. Faber points out the tragedy is "a spectacle of suicide—suicide brought about by the blocking or thwarting of the adolescent's attempt to transfer his libidinal energies to a nonincestuous object and to achieve thereby one of life's major separations, the separation of the sexually mature child from the parent" (169). At first, the mission of separating from the parent and attaching to a parental substitute seems accomplished as the lovers' union becomes a substitute/re-union for/with the lost/relinquished object. However, the fledgling non-incestuous seeds of renewal are doomed to be crushed under the heavy weight of the regressive and narcissistic intra-familial love. The family and the society as a whole fail to support our lovers in their attempt at individuation and separation from the incestuous objects:

> To speak of the bloody civil war that rages in Verona, to speak of the savage or uncivilized condition that prevails there, to bear in mind that this condition springs largely from narcissistic intrafamilial love that encourages intrafamilial libidinal cathexes, to recognize that Romeo and Juliet are attempting by their love to move away from unsatisfactory familial involvements that have already created within them an inordinate need for affection . . . (Faber 174)

After Romeo's banishment to Mantua and before he hears from Balthasar about Juliet's supposed death, Romeo recounts a nocturnal fantasy which can be interpreted as central to decoding the motivational dynamics of the lovers' suicidal tendencies:

> I dreamt my lady came and found me dead –
> Strange dream that gives a dead man leave to think! –
> And breathed such life with kisses in my lips

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That I revived and was an emperor. (5.1.6-9)

Romeo's dream of becoming an emperor can be analyzed as a wish-fulfilling fantasy. When he dreams of being an emperor, he is actually fantasizing about becoming an omnipotent authority figure with controlling command over his literal father and metaphorical fathers of his society who stand in the way of his transitioning from childhood into adulthood: a transition from the incestuous to the non-incestuous object. It is quite ironic that the "life" that Juliet breathes into Romeo's lips in the tomb scene is, in fact, the poison she sucks from his lips to induce her own suicide. So, in death perhaps, the lovers manage to be emperors: fathers themselves. After hearing about Juliet's assumed death, Romeo makes up his mind to commit suicide, crying, in one of the tragedy's most revealing lines, "Is it e'en so? Then I defy you, stars!" (5.1.24). And in his defiance, he truly surrenders: "In Shakespeare's play . . . there is no model against which the hero can strive, because Verona, with its tendency toward intrafamilial, narcissistic love, has itself become the arresting, castrating, oppositional force. Romeo cannot meaningfully rebel because he cannot see where to rebel" (Faber 178). As a result, the rebellion and aggression towards the parental and societal regressive and narcissistic culture do not find appropriate channels of expression and are, ultimately, turned back upon the self.

In his book *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, William Hazlitt, the 19th-century great English essayist and literary critic, astutely observed that "Romeo is Hamlet in love. . . . Both are absent and self-involved, both live out of themselves in a world of imagination. Hamlet is abstracted from every thing; Romeo is abstracted from every thing but his love, and lost in it." (114). But, what kind of love? Hamlet, an adult of about thirty years old is quite famous (or rather infamous) for his dithering and procrastination. Romeo, an adolescent of about half Hamlet's age, on the other hand, has an antithetical propensity to jump into action. So, is it the adolescent love that sets the two characters apart? One can argue that Romeo contributes to his own tragedy by exhibiting the classic tragic flaw of impetuosity; however, such impulsiveness can hardly be regarded as a pathology in him and part of his basic character structure. As a matter of fact, rashness is quite common in adolescence and is part of the normal adolescent process:

> But as it turns out, Romeo is merely in a phase of normal adolescence: He appears to be dealing with the upsurge of sexual feeling in himself by distancing himself from the incestuous objects of his childhood and directing his love impulses toward an object who is conveniently unattainable: the lady Rosaline, who won't have him. She is a sort of adolescent transition object to him—not quite his mother, but not yet his mature object choice. (Cox 381)

This phase of adolescence is characterized by two processes: "mourning" and "being in love." A sense of loss is created when the adolescent moves away from his oedipal parents bringing about "the inner emptiness, grief, and sadness which is part of all mourning" (Blos 100). The mechanism of mourning is quite seminal to the psychological enterprise during the period of adolescence. Of course, the mourning process which leads to the gradual liberation of the subject from the lost object requires time and repetition.

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The aspect of "being in love" is also a common feature of adolescence: "It signals the advance of the libido to new objects; this state is marked by a sense of completeness, coupled with a singular self-abandonment" (101). Thus, the main objective of adolescence is to move away from oedipal parents, move beyond transitional objects, and achieve a mature object choice. And Romeo seems to be going, exactly, through this phase: moving past his transitional object, Rosaline, to achieve wholeness and self-abandonment in the figure of Juliet—his mature object choice.

Another character worth analyzing here is Mercutio, Romeo's best friend. Unlike Romeo, who is already in adolescence proper and Juliet, who is just removed from latency, at the outset of the play, Mercutio seems to be fixated at a latency level of development. In a pre-adolescent mode of behavior, his loyalty and interest seem to be more in his male peer group rather than in such romantic adolescent infatuations Romeo is preoccupied with. In fact, he continually tries to win Romeo back to his side of the pre-adolescent male peer group by viciously mocking Romeo's new-found attachments: "If thou art Dun, we'll draw thee from the mire / Of – save your reverence – love, wherein thou stick'st / Up to the ears. . . ." (1.4.41-43). Consequently, when Romeo finds his mature object choice in the character of Juliet, he must, indeed, "leave behind Mercutio along with his primary loyalty to the preadolescent male peer group. In a double sense Mercutio is slain by Romeo" (Cox 385). And Romeo and Juliet are both slain by a family and society which tragically fail to understand and accommodate the adolescent processes of their individuating children.

A Tragedy of Language: Name, *Contretemps*, Desire, Lack, Ambivalence and *Jouissance*

A principal concern for Jacques Derrida, the Algerian-born French philosopher and the founder of the school of deconstruction which is closely associated with post-structuralism and post-modern philosophy, is the impossibility of the proper name: the way it both asserts identity and shatters it at the same time. In his essay "Aphorism Countertime," Derrida discusses the concept of "contretemps" and its curious relation to the proper name. *Contretemps* can be literally translated as "countertime" but can also mean "accident" or "mishap;" and the phrase "à contretemps" in the original French title "L'aphorisme à contretemps" suggests both "inopportunely" and, in a musical sense, "out of time," "offbeat" or "in counter-time." In his reading of *Romeo and Juliet*, a play known for love destroyed by accident and unfortunate mis-timings, Derrida takes note of the question of the name and how it relates to the force of *contretemps*: he investigates the very contradictory nature of naming and how it can bring about the fortuitous events. The names of Romeo and Juliet (Montague and Capulet) generate both the desire that drives the characters of the play and the tragic accidents that frustrate it. According to Derrida, proper names and aphorisms (which function like the name) are never far from *contretemps* and are structured by the possibility of death. As Harris observes,

> Derrida's reading of Romeo and Juliet takes as its starting point a close cousin of the signature: the aphorism—a pithy quote lent authority by its contexts (the text from which it is excerpted, the author who coined it), yet capable of being endlessly repeated and given a new life long after

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> its initial iteration. Shakespeare's plays provide a good case in point: . . . and Romeo and Juliet has supplied more than its share of aphoristic nuggets—'parting is such sweet sorrow' (2.1.229), 'violent delights have violent ends' (2.5.9), 'a plague o' both your houses' (3.1.87, 101). On the one hand, the aphorism presumes a specificity of context. But because it can be detached from that context and used elsewhere, Derrida also sees the aphorism as occasioning 'an exposure to contretemps' (Derrida 1992, 416). Like a letter that strays from its intended course—an appropriate analogy, given the mishaps occasioned by Romeo and Juliet's mislaid letter—the aphorism opens up to the possibility of accidental diversion and countersigning even as it seeks to deliver a fixed meaning. (54)

The proper name, like the aphorism, is both bound by context (it presumes a referent that belongs to a specific time and space) and suggests the possibility of its iteration in another time and space. Therefore, proper names and aphorisms both have the capacity to survive the deaths of their referents and are continually diverted from the contexts that supposedly ground them. This shows the *contretemps* that lurks in all proper names:

> Irony of the proper name, . . . Sentence of truth which carries death, aphorism separates, and in the first place separates me from my name. I am not my name. One might as well say that I should be able to survive it. But firstly it is destined to survive me. In this way it announces my death. Non-coincidence and contretemps between my name and me, between the experience according to which I am named or hear myself named and my "living present." Rendezvous with my name. Untimely, bad timing, at the wrong moment. (Derrida 432)

A close reading of the balcony scene—specifically Juliet's exploration of the nature of names—underscores the aphoristic properties of proper names. She vehemently argues for the detachability of names from actual things and beings; the thing one calls a rose would smell just as sweet if one called it by any other name—and the same goes for the being she adores who is "accidentally" called Romeo. Names, as suggested by her words, are impositions of linguistic and patriarchal conventions predetermined by the symbolic order of language and the masculine structure of society. Ironically however, her speech also reveals the ultimate paradox when she asks Romeo to take off his name like a hat and she does so in his name: "Romeo, doff thy name" (2.2.47). Romeo's "accident", his *contretemps*, is that he has no being prior to his name: "'Romeo' was written before and for him, by the patronymic order into which he was born. And his name, like an aphorism, lives on in his absence" (Harris 56-57). Romeo cannot abscond from his name as it is concurrently detachable and undetachable from him. According to Derrida, a person's proper name is a "machine" that presumes the absence/death of what it attaches to: "the machine of the proper name that obliges me to live through precisely that, in other words my name, of which I am dying" (Derrida 431-32). In such analysis, there can be seen an element of the "inhuman," of unconscious forces that are outside the characters' control: "Shakespeare decentres the self by tethering it to an inhuman element—the proper name—that is both separate from and intrinsic to it" (Harris 75). Thus, it can be argued that the *contretemps* (the untimely accident) of the tension between Romeo and "Romeo" and Juliet and "Juliet" ultimately brings about the inescapable, tragic deaths of our patronymic-crossed lovers.

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The question of the human body, and whether it exists inside or outside language and culture, is central to a post-modern psychoanalytic reading of *Romeo and Juliet*. There has always existed a dualism of mind vs. body which is associated with the 18th-century rationalistic movement of the Enlightenment. This dualistic model defines self as a binary opposition of mind on the one hand, and body on the other. When it comes to desire, according to this dualistic account, it is either a matter of the body, originating in the flesh, or a matter of the mind, motivated by the spirit. If it is the former, the romantic fantasies are but deceptions; and if it is the latter, sexual desire is just the bodily expression of a spiritual union. In the light of a post-modern paradigm, however, the desire of the human body is both subject to the imperatives of nature, and it does not exist outside language and culture. As Belsey observes:

> But in practice desire deconstructs the opposition between mind and body. Evidently it exists at the level of the signifier as it imagines, fantasizes, idealizes. Desire generates songs and poetry and stories. Talking about it is pleasurable. At the same time, however, desire palpably inhabits the flesh, and seeks satisfaction there. Desire undoes the dualism common sense seems so often to take for granted. ("Name" 126)

Jacques Lacan's concept of desire is quite pivotal to his psychoanalytic thought. To him, desire (the French "désir") signifies an unfulfillable longing, which is necessarily a sexual (libidinal) feeling. Desire, for Lacan, is "the result of the necessary splitting of the human mind into the ego and unconscious, into a notion of 'self' and 'other;' the fact of the split between the two (and the production of 'self' from the notion of 'otherness') can never be healed or reconciled" (Klages 22). Thus, the main goal of Lacanian psychoanalysis is to understand the truth and the nature of such desire which is the human condition: "the constant unattainable longing for a (re)union between self and other, or the deconstruction of the binary opposition conscious/unconscious and the complete dissolution of the ego" (22). However, we can only understand desire through the lens of the Symbolic Order of language: "It is only once it is formulated, named in the presence of the other, that desire, whatever it is, is recognised in the full sense of the term" (Evans 37). For Lacan, desire originates from the realm of the Other (the unconscious) and the subject's desire is not one's own desire but the desire of the Other: "The desire of man is the desire of the Other" (Lacan 129). Therefore, desire is not wholly private and personal as it seems to be, but it is more of a linguistic, cultural and social product. Desire is created by "the subjection of the human organism to the law of language" (Sims 172).

And Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is a tragedy about desire both created and frustrated by the Other and the Symbolic Order of language. The desiring bodies of our lovers are tragically inscribed and named by the language and culture from which they cannot abscond, no matter how much they try to do so. The aubade scene, perhaps most emblematically, discloses such tragic predicament of the fateful lovers. After their wedding night, as Romeo and Juliet watch the break of dawn that will part them, they

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recite an aubade (dawn-song), a lyric poem lamenting the coming of day to separate the two lovers:

JULIET. Wilt thou be gone? It is not yet near day.
It was the nightingale, and not the lark,
That pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear.
Nightly she sings on yond pom'granate tree.
Believe me, love, it was the nightingale.

ROMEO. It was the lark, the herald of the morn,
No nightingale. Look, love, what envious streaks
Do lace the severing clouds in yonder east.
Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops.
I must be gone and live, or stay and die. (3.5.1-11)

The issue here is not a matter of ornithology, but what those birdsongs signify; the same bird called by any other name would make the same sound, but it is the culture that inscribes the signifier with the meaning of dawn or night. Indeed, Romeo reaffirms the meaning of the signifier based on the presence of other signifiers like the streaks of light in the clouds: "The lark is already inscribed as 'the herald of the morn' . . . and while the time of day is also referential, a matter of fact, it too is in question here in its meaning, as the signifier of the moment when Romeo's banishment takes effect, separating, because of their names, the desiring bodies of the lovers" (Belsey, "Name" 137). It is impossible to locate the human body as exclusively a natural organism and Juliet's attempts to do so in the balcony scene (essential roses and beings independent of their names) are but imaginary: "The human body is already inscribed: it has no existence as pure organism, independent of the symbolic order in which desire makes sense" (131). While desire would like to escape and overflow the constraints imposed by the signifying chains (interlocking systems of signifiers) of the Symbolic Order of language, the signifier, however arbitrary, is not at the disposal of the subject but at the mercy of the Other. As desiring subjects, Romeo and Juliet aspire to immortally love; nevertheless, their love and desire are, tragically, not theirs to control. The signifying Other subjects them, in the event, to death itself; when the message of Romeo's exile is delivered by the Nurse, Juliet, quite prophetically, declares: "'Romeo is banishèd' – to speak that word / Is father, mother, Tybalt, Romeo, Juliet, / All slain, all dead" (3.2.122-24).

Therefore, the muddled dichotomy is between desire that gives life and the letter of the law and language that kills. Philosophically, love has been defined as the place where body and mind—physiology and metaphysics—meet; psychoanalytically, love can be defined as the place where sexual desire meets language and culture. And Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the most iconic of all love discourses, best epitomizes the impossibility of desire outside the signifying Other. Selfhood outside the signifier (essence beyond difference) and the individual's autonomy are eternally imaginary: "Even though his name is no part of the man Juliet loves, the play at once draws attention to the impossibility of discarding the name which differentiates him" (Belsey, "Name" 134). The

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essence is always differed and deferred (differentiated) and the delays and relays, ultimately, separate the people desire was designed to unite.

This brings us to Lacan's concept of lack. Lack (the French "manque") is always connected to the previously explored concept of desire: there exists a lack which causes desire. According to Lacan, desire is always founded on lack (absence) and can never be satisfied by any object/person, the lack of which constitutes desire. (Klages 22). The most fundamental from of lack is castration that happens upon entry into the Symbolic Order as "the term 'lack' tends to become synonymous with castration" (Evans 98). To Lacan, no individual is fully present, and he argues that everybody is constituted by lack in relation to the Phallus, which he also calls the Law of the Father or the Name of the Father. While the Freudian penis is a literal organ, the Lacanian Phallus is symbolic; and no one individual (male or female) has the Phallus or can occupy the position of the Phallus. The Phallus is the "center of the Symbolic Order, or consciousness. For Lacan, the Phallus is a transcendental signified, the ultimate place of power and control, which no human being inhabits or can attain. . . . [And] in order to speak, in order to have an identity, to say 'I', all subjects have to subject themselves to the Phallus" (Klages 46-47). Sims writes of the complex and imbricated relationship among the concepts of desire, Other, lack and Phallus:

> Desire comes from the 'Other', the place of speech, which is both outside and inside us. We internalize speech by learning it, but it never truly becomes 'ours' as its meanings are not generated by individual subjects but by the arbitrary differences between signifiers. Lack results from this awkward compromise between the general and the specific, the linguistic and the organic, in which something of the latter is consistently lost. Desire, which is not only sexual, relentlessly attempts to fill this lack, settling on various objects which seem to offer fulfilment: hence the appeal of a different lover or new car. The lack cannot be filled, and so desire keeps going, finding new objects, and making the grass appear greener on the other side of the fence. It is effectively the desire of nothing, of no thing that exists, which is why its sign is the phallus. (172)

In sum, there is a lack in the Other which can never be fulfilled. This lack causes desire which can never be satisfied. The only way desire could be satisfied is in death and this makes desire destructive as it can become "the desire for annihilation of self and other" (172).

Accordingly, *Romeo and Juliet* is the classic and universal tragedy of a desire that can never be satisfied due to the fundamental lack that results from the unsettling compromise between the linguistic and the organic, in which something of the latter is hopelessly lost. Language, not only, is the condition of love and desire, but also, is the obstacle to their survival: "Technically, perhaps Romeo could be called something else… just as the rose could, but that would not by itself exclude him from the Montague lineage he was born to and the hostility to the Capulets traditionally attached to it. The feud inherited with the names, the hatred that is not individual, will prove inescapable" (Belsey, *Language* 48). Besides, from a Lacanian point of view, the lovers' self-destructive behaviors can be analyzed through the prism of lack and desire. Language creates lack; lack creates desire, and desire demands absolute satisfaction in death: "As speaking subjects, we long for the unattainable verso of signifying practice — proximity, certainty, presence, the

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thing itself. Lovers long to make present the unspeakable residue which constitutes desire" (Belsey, "Name" 139). Ironically, to make the absent present, our lovers embrace the all-absence of death. And this, above all else, is the source of the tragedy in *Romeo and Juliet*.

In post-modern psychoanalytic theory, the tension between language's orderly differences and the disorderly slippages prompted by desire is the mainstay of Lacanian interpretations of literature. Whereas for Lacan, the tension is mainly the function of the Phallus and the Symbolic Order, for Julia Kristeva, au contraire, the tension between differentiation and disorder is more a function of the pre-linguistic relation to the mother. Kristeva, a post-Lacanian feminist psychoanalyst, theorizes about a pre-linguistic phase, which is closely associated with the body of the mother, and calls it the Semiotic, instead of Lacan's the Imaginary. In this phase, according to Kristeva, the infant is blissfully undifferentiated from the body of the mother and stays outside the realm of symbolization:

> In her influential study Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection, Kristeva developed her theorization of this pre-Symbolic phase in less idealizing fashion. Following Melanie Klein, she stressed the importance of the mother to the subject's formation. According to Kristeva, the pre-Symbolic infant's jouissance—Lacan's term for senseless pleasure—entails a bodily fusion with the mother. But this pleasure is matched and countermanded by a horror of the 'abject', Kristeva's term for the maternal object-that-is-not-quite-an-object (because it is pre-Symbolic, and hence prior to the differences of signification). Like Lacan's Phallus, the abject blurs the fragile boundary between the child's and the mother's identities. Kristeva follows Klein in seeing the infant's relation to the mother as torn between gratitude and envy, love and hate, pleasure and abjection; but these primal ambivalences clear space for the later linguistic processes of differentiation and identification that shape subjectivity and desire in the Symbolic. (Harris 100)

From a Kristevan point of view, the love of Romeo and Juliet—which is forbidden and outside the law—belongs to a space in the feminine (the Semiotic) rather than to a space in the masculine (the Symbolic). The clandestine nature of their love, indeed, creates a fantasy of absolute *jouissance* (pleasure stoked by the thrill of prohibition) which resists and defies the patriarchal symbolic order. Yet, any such transgression against *le Nom-du-Père* must be penalized by the destruction of the fantasy and the feminine: "Paradigmatic in Verona, male authority monopolizes . . . possibilities of active self-governance while affording no plausible access, by itself, to . . . pulsing, new, and wondrous feelings" (Schwaber 301). So, death (hate) is the price and punishment exacted by the patriarchal law against the pre-Symbolic and feminine *jouissance* (love): "Hate, in *Romeo and Juliet*, is associated with the men, while even in the opening scene Lady Montague and Lady Capulet act as peacemakers. Separating love from hate separates man from woman" (Holland 332-33). However, in a deconstructive Lacanian twist, hate is intrinsic to love, and not extrinsic. Belsey explores the origin and development of such paradox in psychoanalytic thought:

> Sigmund Freud struggled with the idea that two fundamental drives impelled human behaviour: on the one hand, the sexual impulse to pleasure and the creation of new life; on the other, the

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> death drive, projected outwards as hate. The more Freud looked into this idea, the more difficult he found it to keep the two drives apart. It was his successor Jacques Lacan who resolved the problem by combining the two imperatives in a single drive that might issue in either passionate love or deadly hate, the two sometimes inextricably entwined. Our strongest emotions may each include a trace of the other in whichever seems uppermost. (Language 58)

Accordingly, love, the most intense expression of the desire to life, is inescapably linked with the self-destructive yearning for death. In brief, love, psychoanalytically, can be qualified as a death wish. The ambivalence of the love-hatred paradox has roots in the process of differentiation of the subject from the other upon entry into the symbolic order: "More deeply, more passionately, we are dealing with the intrinsic presence of hatred in amatory feeling itself. In the object relation, the relation with an *other*, hatred, as Freud said, is more ancient than love. As soon as an other appears different from myself, it becomes alien, repelled, repugnant, abject – hated" (Kristeva, "Love-Hatred" 306). Hatred precedes and is integral to love as it is integral to all the subject's relations with others. For Kristeva, the ambivalence of romantic love echoes the primal ambivalence of a mother-child relation. Love fashions a transient fantasy of wholeness which is constantly in danger of differentiating rupture: "Love returns the lover to a 'mother' figure. Even as the lovers encounter the other they do so as a way of returning, like a child, to a fantasy of wholeness, of being connected with the mother" (Woods 115). Thus, primal self-love creates the hatred of the other in us, and throughout life, we look for an other to love in order to refigure the initial narcissism: "The man then finds a harbor of narcissistic satisfaction for the eternal child he has succeeded in remaining: an exquisite normalization of regression. The woman calms down temporarily within the restoring support furnished by the mother-husband" (Kristeva, "Love-Hatred" 307).Unconsciously however, one also hates the object of one's love as it poses a threat to the self itself: "hatred is a protection against the death of the self threatened by fusion with the mother. For a love relation to prosper and ward off the threat of undifferentiation, it needs to incorporate hatred" (Harris 102).

Consequently, from a Kristevan perspective, the paradox of love-hatred (amour-haine) and the proximity of love and death are central to a feminist post-Lacanian psychoanalytic reading of *Romeo and Juliet*. In its ambivalent force, romantic love is unstable and cannot last. So, by ending as it does, the tragedy preserves a fantasy of pure pre-Symbolic *jouissance* that is only attainable by death: Romeo and Juliet have to die as selves in order to achieve a complete and permanent re-union with the feminine Semiotic in an absolute defiance of the patriarchal Symbolic. As the Prince pertinently acknowledges, at the end, the masculine structure of family and society has been recalcitrantly punished by the heavenly ecstatic *jouissance* of feminine love: "See what a scourge is laid upon your hate, / That heaven finds means to kill your joys with love" (5.3.291-92).

Conclusion: Desire and Discourse

Such Kristevan psychoanalytic reading of *Romeo and Juliet*, views death as the ultimate goal of desire and presumes that the tragedy provides us with a paradigm of desire which is applicable to all ages and cultures. However, a contextualization and

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historicization of the Shakespearean text might render the universality of the psychoanalytic concept of death drive as more of an ideological condition of a particular society. Cultural-materialist critics like Lloyd Davis put psychoanalysis in conversation with other critical theories: Davis's thought-provoking account deftly "adapts psychoanalytical themes to a historicist understanding of the way the concept and representation of desire changes over time. Shakespeare does not create an entirely new or uniquely authentic expression of desire in the play, but rather writes with and against the discourses of his age" (Woods 119). According to him, different discourses of desire conceptualize the self differently at different times and places. And Shakespeare, while employing the earlier discourses of desire (and the related conceptions of selfhood), develops a relatively new discourse which validates none of the previous ones: "the play proceeds by exploring the limits of the Platonic, Ovidian and Petrarchan tropes. . . . the full consequence of desire is not realized in Platonic union but deferred to its aftermath. None of the conventional models can quite convey what is at stake in the lovers' story, and the discourse of desire must be revised" (Davis 63). In *Romeo and Juliet*, desire hallmarks the self as agent, and tragic desire exhibits the burden of agency. The tragedy's representation of desire is closely linked to representations of subjectivity that appear during the 16th century, whereby the self is defined by its interiority and agency in the emergent discourses of the time. The play manifests a transformation of the concepts of self and desire from the pre-modern world to the modern one:

> We move from a 'comic', 'pre-modern' world of harmony between the social and the natural, into a 'tragic'. . . , 'modern', and dissociated one. . . . the meaning of sex and death changes as we move from one era to the other, and Romeo and Juliet displays this change as a shift in genre halfway through its plot. The harmony between sex and death described by Friar Lawrence [These violent delights have violent ends (2.6.9)] becomes the rupture in the social fabric brought about first by Romeo and Juliet's transgressive, mutual passion, and then by the deaths Romeo becomes involved in. (Grady 214)

Thus, desire produces tragedy in an ideologically tragic society. Had it not been for the cultural context, *Romeo and Juliet* could have easily been a comedy; as a matter of fact, it begins with comedy but transitions and ends in tragedy because the particular ideological framework of the time dictates *la tragédie du désir*: "For never was a story of more woe / Than this of Juliet and her Romeo" (5.3.309-310).

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