



**Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro**  
Centro de Educação e Humanidades  
Instituto de Letras

**Paulo Lúcio Scheffer Lima**

**Till death do us part:  
love and the representation of the individual in four tragedies by  
William Shakespeare**

Rio de Janeiro  
2008

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Dissertação apresentada como requisito parcial à obtenção do grau de Mestre, ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras, da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Área de concentração: Literaturas de Língua Inglesa.

Orientadora: Prof<sup>ª</sup>. Dr<sup>ª</sup>. Fernanda Teixeira de Medeiros

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To my wife Ana Lúcia, who teaches me a lot about myself, my potential and my limits, and to my children, Henrique and Lara, who have welcomed Shakespeare in our home as part of the family, learning from him and even fighting him sometimes, but always coming to terms.

To my parents, who always motivated me to study and to look for the sublime.

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Shakespeare became the greatest master at exploiting the void  
between persons and the personal ideal.

(Harold Bloom)

In: BLOOM, H. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, p.7.

That death's unnatural that kills for loving.

(William Shakespeare)

In: *Othello*, V.1.50

## RESUMO

SCHEFFER LIMA, Paulo Lúcio. *Till death do us part: love and the representation of the individual in four tragedies by William Shakespeare*. 2008. 93f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2008.

A presente pesquisa focaliza as maneiras através das quais a experiência amorosa faz parte da trama de quatro tragédias shakespearianas: *Romeu e Julieta*, *Otelo*, *Hamlet* e *Macbeth*. Trata do herói trágico como indivíduo autônomo, liberto da força do destino e do controle dos deuses, diferentemente do que acontecia na tragédia clássica. O herói – ou a heroína – é um ser que se considera livre para fazer escolhas, sendo porém responsável pelas decisões tomadas, principalmente ante os poderes superiores dos quais ainda não se encontra totalmente desvencilhado, como família e estado. Entre as escolhas feitas está a escolha amorosa que, devido ao seu caráter pessoal, torna-se obstáculo para o herói trágico, já que é normalmente um indivíduo de vida pública, cujos atos particulares tendem a ganhar uma dimensão ampliada. Suas escolhas tornam-se trágicas quando rompem com a convenção, na busca de um valor individual que ainda está em formação durante o Renascimento. Desta maneira, percebe-se o quanto a experiência amorosa virá a fazer parte da representação deste indivíduo. Embora o amor não possa ser considerado o tema central das quatro tragédias analisadas neste trabalho, elas têm em comum o fato de retratar heróis e heroínas envolvidos em relacionamentos amorosos inseparáveis da ação trágica. As análises de traços da tragédia clássica e do início do teatro inglês, além de possibilitarem uma investigação do comportamento das sociedades medieval e renascentista em relação a certos conceitos, tais como indivíduo, amor e casamento, fornecem um valioso embasamento para o entendimento das razões pelas quais Shakespeare usou o tema do amor para interagir com a noção de responsabilidade individual e para participar da marcha do protagonista rumo ao seu fim trágico. O estudo de cada uma das quatro tragédias mostra quão diferentemente o bardo inglês lidava com a imbricação entre amor e liberdade de forma a refletir, em vários contextos, os novos modos de pensamento – dentre eles, a própria noção de indivíduo – que começaram a se estabelecer durante o Renascimento.

Palavras-chave: Shakespeare. Tragédia. Indivíduo. Amor.

## ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the ways through which love/ erotic experience takes part in the plot of four Shakespearian tragedies: *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. It treats the tragic hero as an autonomous individual, free from the power of fate and the control of the gods, differently from what happened in the classical tragedy. The hero – or heroine – is a being who considers himself/ herself free to make choices, yet being responsible for the decisions made, especially before superior powers from which he or she has not been totally released, such as family and state. Among his or her choices is the choice of a spouse or partner which, due to its personal nature, becomes a hindrance to the tragic hero or heroine, once he or she is usually a public person, whose private acts tend to gain a magnified dimension. His or her choices become thus tragic when they break conventions in search of an individual value that is still being shaped during Renaissance. One can thus perceive the extent to which love/ erotic experience will take part in the representation of this individual. Even though love cannot be considered the central theme of all the four tragedies analyzed in this work, they share the fact that they all portray heroes and heroines who are involved in romantic relationships which are inseparable from the tragic action. Analyses of features from the classical tragedy and from the beginning of the English drama, besides enabling an investigation of the behavior of medieval and Renaissance societies toward certain concepts such as individual, love and marriage, provide an invaluable background for the understanding of the reasons why Shakespeare used such a theme as love to interact with the notion of individual responsibility and to take part in the protagonist's march towards his or her tragic end. The study of each one of the four tragedies shows how differently the English bard handled the imbricacy between love and freedom so as to reflect, in a variety of contexts, the new modes of thought – among which, the very notion of 'individual' – that started to be established during the Renaissance.

Keywords: Shakespeare. Tragedy. Individual. Love.

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## INTRODUCTION

William Shakespeare's tragedies have, for the past four centuries, attracted audiences of all backgrounds. The study of the representation of the individual in the bard's tragedies becomes feasible not only for their popularity, but also for one of the features that caused such a popularity: the treatment Shakespeare gave to what is now a reality we take for granted, but was a novelty during Renaissance – the human being as an individual.

Approaching a character as an individual corresponds to recognizing that he or she is the owner of specific characteristics that distinguish him or her from the group of which they are part. It also involves the acceptance that this person has a type of freedom that enables him or her to make choices, rather than follow family conventions or social rules. Among these choices is the choice of a partner in love, the involvement with another human being and the decision to share moments of one's life, or even the rest of one's existence, with another person.

It is due to my interest in human relationships that I have decided to choose couples, rather than lonely individuals, as the objects of my research. Having had a rather strict Roman Catholic education, I have always tried to love and to respect other human beings as individuals, regardless of ethnic or social differences, or any other barriers society sometimes imposes on us. It was only after I got married to another – practicing – Roman Catholic, however, that I started to get involved in church affairs and thus acquired a gradual interest in the human being and in the relations thereof, especially the relationship between husband and wife. This focus is due to the fact that my wife and I have for the past twelve years – almost as long as we have been married – devoted part of our time to marriage counseling groups, having helped many couples improve their quality of life, and wedding preparation courses, sharing with engaged youths our experience with marriage.

Perhaps this kind of service has sharpened in me the interest towards other couples, but the very belief in an association in which husband and wife complete each other and become one is already an initial motivation that has led me to plunge into this theme. On the other hand, the years I have been teaching and getting involved with teenagers and young adults have shown me that marriage is not always seen positively. From the formers' experiences with parents and the latters' expectations about love, I have noticed that many people question the seriousness of a stable liaison between a man and a woman in today's world. Marriage has thus become a controversial issue: looking for happiness, many individuals choose to define themselves in relation to someone else and may even devote their

lives to a loved one; many times, however, they end up breaking a relationship out of frustration, if the initial expectation is not fulfilled.

Such a personal experience has led me to an interest in every couple I have come across in literature and I have often tried to understand their relationship in connection with their actions, their problems and possible solutions, and their reactions to the development of their own stories. The same has happened in Shakespeare: whenever I read his plays I sympathize with the feelings his couples demonstrate and I try to understand their action based on their erotic/ marital choice and relationship.

The purpose of this dissertation is thus to analyze such relationships in four of Shakespeare's tragedies, namely *Romeo and Juliet* (1595-6), *Othello* (1604), *Hamlet* (1600-1) and *Macbeth* (1606). Even though love and marriage are not the main focus of all of them, a constant discussion that takes part in these works is the individual freedom to choose a partner and the consequences such a choice may bring. Based on this feature of the plays I have formulated the hypothesis that the choice of a spouse or partner, as an externalization of the individual's power of decision, is deeply related to the choice a tragic hero or heroine makes that will destroy him or her, inasmuch as it may challenge a long-standing feature of the institution of marriage. The protagonists of the plays studied can thus be said to define themselves by their choice of a partner in love rather than by conventions, family or society. In fact, they detach themselves from the groups to which they belong in order to build their identity, whose sense of uniqueness was becoming an important value during the Renaissance.

Before analyzing the Shakespearian hero or heroine as individuals and his or her choice of an erotic partner, however, it is necessary to investigate the literary genre that provides the background for the analysis of the protagonist as an individual who, despite officially standing for a group, as all tragic heroes have some noble or political representation, has a unique personality that gives him or her the right to choose and to make mistakes.

The first chapter will thus provide an outline of the tragedy, showing its trajectory from the Greek and Roman models to the representation the bard inherited more directly in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Aristotle's *Poetics* will be used as a foundation for the initial discussion on the Greek tragedy, not only because of the importance of this work as a seminal text for the study of Literature, but also because of its clear explanations on the structural elements that compose the tragedy. Romantic thinker Schiller will also provide an invaluable resource with his approach of the feelings this genre provokes, which will be seen next; after that, theoretical studies by a variety of authors will help develop the outline and the

aims of the tragedy. Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* will be used as a means to illustrate the information presented because of its popularity and elucidation of the elements. Next, Seneca's exploration of the classical model will be approached and its real importance as a source of inspiration for Shakespeare will be questioned. I will then present facts from Seneca's life, his style and his representation of the doctrine of Stoicism, and defy his influence on Shakespeare's works. Finally, I will discuss the recreation of the style during the Renaissance and Shakespeare's appropriation of the tragic model as well as the use he makes of the tragic genre. The works of Heliodora and Greenblatt will supply this section with the necessary historical background on medieval and early Renaissance writing.

In the discussion of the elements used in the tragedy, special attention will be given to such issues as moral, fate and the supernatural – as elements of the classical tragedy – and how these concepts were replaced or developed by the bard to fit in the Elizabethan and Jacobean Ages. The same will be done about the elements Shakespeare incorporated to his plays that came from medieval times or early Renaissance, such as the increase in action on stage and the theatrical conventions the bard inherited from these eras. With an even greater focus will be the treatment given to the additions made by him in order to make the tragedy more attractive to his audience.

The second chapter will approach the ideas of 'individual' and 'love' and the relationship between them. Shakespeare was no doubt a master in the use of these notions and this made the difference for him. He not only used this knowledge to make his works more comprehensible, but also more lasting. His analysis of the troubled individuals of a transitional age in world history proved to be very attractive to audiences of his time as well as ours.

Collin Morris and Georges Duby will give the necessary support in relation to the discovery of the individual in the medieval society and the patterns of marriage and love – including courtly love – that so influenced Shakespeare's time. Agnes Heller will provide the necessary link between medieval thought and Renaissance practice, but the analysis of Renaissance thought itself will be supported by W. R. Elton and applied to Shakespeare with the help of Harold Bloom.

Because marriage was a union prescribed by the Christian Church and this was widely followed during Renaissance, I will show important references to this institution from the Holy Bible, as well as related discussions such as chastity, adultery, fornication, divorce and marital love.

After the initial historical-theoretical chapters, which are the springboards to our

main discussion, the protagonists of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* will be analyzed according to their freedom to choose their spouses or erotic partners and the relationship they form will be examined. In *Romeo and Juliet*, this analysis will discuss the coincidence of the origin of the notion of 'individual' and the origin of a unified political power that will rule individuals, not factions. This analysis will attempt to show how an individual and his or her destiny can be defined by his or her choice of a partner. The discussion in *Othello* will focus on the lack of self-knowledge that leads an individual to move away from his love and from himself. This gap in Othello's knowledge of his own character prevents him from knowing his lover's personality and, consequently, her real feelings, judging her according to the conventions he has imposed on himself so as to become part of the society that surrounds him.

The focus given in *Hamlet* will be on his choice *not* to love, that is, how the disgusted Prince, after analyzing the repulsive attitudes of the other characters, decides to avoid loving. The presence of a potential wife in what should be a revenge tragedy will also be investigated, once the apparently incompatible possibility of a love affair only complicates the Prince's existing excess of problems. In *Macbeth*, I will investigate the happiness and harmony of the protagonizing couple, which takes them to their fatal destinies. Being a united couple, they have the same ambitions and fight to fulfill the greatness they are in search of. Thus, they complete each other in greed, in cruelty, in crime, in sleep and in death, giving each other mutual support.

All the tragedies explored can offer a wealth of instances that reflect the individual of Renaissance and of any time. The analysis proposed will aim at spotting in each protagonist the need or the possibility he or she has to be defined according to their amorous choices or, in the case of Prince Hamlet, according to the choice not to get involved erotically with anyone. Being an important element of each hero/ heroine's personality and at the same time a value that opposes society and convention, the choice of a partner in love proves to be a tragic feature that William Shakespeare mastered so well as to remain attracting audiences so far.

## 1. SHAKESPEARE'S INHERITANCE: AN OUTLINE OF THE TRAGEDY

William Shakespeare is usually taken as a genius in the elaboration of comedies, histories and tragedies, as well as in the composition of sonnets and narrative poems. It is true he had an unquestionable talent, but it is very important to investigate what elements influenced his writing and took him to such an outstanding position in English Literature and in the Literature of the world. The purpose of this chapter is to study the foundations of Shakespeare's tragic works in an attempt to find the different sources of inspiration for the kind of tragedy he eventually produced. This analysis will depart from the Greek and Latin models, go through the medieval works that shaped the English drama and arrive at the type of tragedy that was common during the Renaissance, including Shakespeare's use of the genre in his special way.

### 1.1. Delineating tragedy as a genre

In order to start a discussion on tragedy as a genre, it is important to describe what a tragic work really is, analyzing its role, its aims and its structure, as it was with the Greeks. In this section, Aristotle's definitions will be explored and compared to later developments of the ideas presented in his *Poetics*.

First of all, it is necessary to define the word 'tragedy'. In chapter VI of his fundamental work, Aristotle explains it as a formally defined kind of poetry showing the imitation of an important action without the use of narrative devices. Such an action is defined as "serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude" (2004:35). By provoking pity and fear it purges such emotions (cf. Aristóteles: 2004, 35).

Schiller describes 'tragedy' as an art and as an imitation of nature (1991:90). Its categorization as 'poetry' and 'art' implies a strict relationship with language – dealing with words beyond the level of communication and information. Being an imitation of nature in the shape of a dramatic presentation, it builds a bridge between the past and the present, as Schiller demonstrates when he explains the difference between narrative and dramatic forms (cf. Schiller: 1991, 104-5); the reader or spectator has thus the chance to revive the facts presented in the play from the writer's point of view and is exposed to the special moral he wants to point out or, especially in the case of Shakespeare, to the reflection on human nature and its struggle against a superior power. The manipulation of language in such an artistic way can then be said to have led readers and audiences to an unparalleled state of emotion

from the time the tragic genre was first used by the Greeks until now.

This art of manipulating language has in action its raw material. Schiller points out that ‘tragedy’ is the imitation of an action composed of a sequence of events, a genre that depicts not only the feelings and emotions of the tragic characters, but also, through imitation, the events that at the same time originate such feelings and that materialize from them (cf. Schiller: 1991, 105). The action being imitated is one that leads the so-called ‘tragic hero’ to suffering and the goal of the tragedy is emotion (id.109). Tragic art, for him, imitates nature in those actions that elicit a sympathizing passion (id.90). Not only should the quality of the imitation be convincing, but the way the poet arranges the facts should also be able to arouse in the audience or reader the feelings of pity and fear (Aristóteles, 2004:54). A good tragedy should, therefore, be able to get its public involved, sympathizing with the suffering hero.

The tragic hero in the classical tragedy always has a dilemma to solve and his decision normally involves going against a moral or a personal conviction in order to confront a difficult situation, usually imposed by a superior power. According to Schiller, the tragedy represents the suffering nature of this hero and only through such suffering can he attain his moral freedom; he must first prove his capacity to suffer and then the reader or audience will believe the strength of his soul (cf. Schiller: 1991, 114). Because he is a human being with the courage to defy a burden that comes from the implacable gods – or whatever ruthless superior force – we are led to admire him in his affliction, even if it means the transgression of a rule accepted by society.

Costa and Remédios mention the gods' punishment for transgression (1988:12). A law accepted by the community and sanctioned by the gods is broken by the tragic hero, who is a prince or belongs to the aristocracy (cf. Costa & Remédios: 1998, 20). An event – past or present – triggers the hero's action and makes him transgress. Bradley remarks that “[...] the story is one of human actions producing exceptional calamity and ending in the death of such a man” (1991:32).

This relationship between vulnerable man and the vindictive gods – as well as between what should be done by the central character and what he or she actually does, incurring punishment and disgrace – shows how the tragedy, from the beginning, establishes a dispute between the human being – with his or her opinions, needs, desires and choices – and the divine – with its rules, impositions, threats and punishments. For Costa and Remédios this is a conflict between the mythic and the rationalistic worlds (cf. Costa & Remédios: 1998, 8). The mythic world, with its divinities, is so much in control of man's life that sometimes the protagonist deserves punishment for a transgression he does not even know of, despite being

its author. In Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, the king knows he must fulfill the oracle's determination and gradually finds out that the punishment will fall upon himself. Neither the fact that he has defended the nation and taken its sufferings as his own nor the initial ignorance of the seriousness of his deeds erase his guilt. The more he tries to avoid killing his father and marrying his mother, the closer he comes to the fulfillment of such predictions. Defying the gods' words is of no use to the hero, since his fate is written by them, who represent the superior ruling forces of the world. According to Glenn Most, the word *tragikon*, in Old Greek, refers to someone or something that exceeds or is willing to exceed general human rules (In Rosenfield: 2001, 23). Oedipus, in this sense, is not willing to exceed any rules but does so when he kills his own father (even meeting him as a mere traveler and believing him a stranger) and weds his own mother (equally unaware of the misdemeanor). The difference, compared to other tragedies, is that both transgressions happen before the beginning of the play, but its tragic ending is out of the ordinary. Pulling out his own eyes is the punishment prescribed by Apollo (according to Oedipus himself), but having the courage to perform such a deed and to pray for death or exile only happens due to the anguish of finding out that disgrace has already come in the form of a terrible plague. Having become a widower just confirms what he gradually learns: that he is the evildoer and consequently harmful to society, which needs to be purged of guilt otherwise all its members will be punished for the bloodshed and for the incest.

The decision Oedipus is thus forced to make corresponds, at the same time, to the tragic action and to his own punishment. This need not always be so. The tragic hero's decision is always the most important one and corresponds to the turning point in the plot and consequently in his fate. This fateful decision will lead him to an unavoidable punishment. Vernant and Vidal-Naquet state that the hero in a tragedy is no longer a model, but represents a problem to himself and to others (cf. Vernant & Vidal-Naquet: 1999, 2). He is simultaneously an agent and a victim – he suffers and acts towards a relief or resolution of his problems, but he actually is punished for his behavior. Whether or not he is aware of his wrongdoing is a feature of the hero's personality. If he is, he could be too skeptical and not believe in punishment or simply forget it in the urge to live the here and now. This would characterize a villain in the status of a hero. If the hero is not aware – at least at first – of his transgression, this happens to show the straightness of his character and, as happens to Oedipus, the more he wants to avoid evil, the closer he gets to it.

On establishing the outlines of the tragedy, it is important to make sense of its goals. Once the language used in the tragedy, according to Aristotle, is “embellished”, composed of

“rhythm, ‘harmony’ and song” and is delivered through acting or a “spectacular equipment” (cf. Aristóteles: 2004, 35), one could undermine the importance of the genre, regarding it simply as an originator of leisure or relaxation, something to be read or heard and savored in its literary quality, word by word and no more. On the other hand, the tragic medium could be considered a repetition of historical facts through literature, having as its sole purpose the possibility to register past events of reasonable importance. But when the Greek philosopher compares history and poetry, he makes a distinction between the two discourses and mentions the higher, more philosophical status of the latter, whose purpose is to show “how a person of a certain type will on occasion speak or act, according to the law of probability or necessity” (id.43). The purpose of showing this human ‘specimen’ is to provide material for reflection which, according to Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, will make us question the social reality, which in the tragedy is shown lacerated (cf. Vernant and Vidal-Naquet: 1999, 10).

From its origin, the main concern of tragic authors was to expose such a questioning to the public, in order to produce learning. Anthony Burgess mentions the “instructive moral purpose” of the religious dramas written by the great Greek authors. The plots, which were seldom original, “were concerned with the moral relation between gods and men” and were seen more as a religious ceremony than as a leisure activity. The moral was a man’s fall from power, caused by an “unsuspected flaw in his character or by some specific sin” (Burgess, 1974:48).

The didactic role of the classical tragedy consists in showing moral values and the importance of focusing all one’s efforts on them. Being used to provoke thought on moral issues, once viewers identify with the hero and detect similarities between the hero's dilemma and their own problems (however smaller they may be), they are able to see the situation from another point of view and thus analyze it differently, being then capable of avoiding falling into the same traps as the hero does and of finding new solutions. When they identify their society with the society pictured they are able to make deeper reflections based on the situation they see; a better understanding of the social problems they face daily becomes possible and from their exposition to the ideas in the play they may gain the disposition to ponder their own actions so as to avoid catastrophic consequences for their lives and their peers’.

All these effects are possible on the reader or audience because of the tensions of the play which, according to Costa and Remédios, the spectator suffers until the final outcome. With the dissolution of such tensions, the audience reaches a state of catharsis and their emotions are consequently discharged (1998:6) or, as Glenn Most puts it, although the

tragedy offers the audience disturbing emotions, it eventually frees the audience from them (In Rosenfield: 2001, 28). The impression is that the viewer or reader takes part in the action, predicting or even knowing, in some cases, what will happen to the hero; in most cases there is at least a sense of following the protagonist and sympathizing with him, attempting to anticipate the consequences of his 'sin' while perhaps even hoping there could be a more fortunate solution to his problems.

This sympathy, according to Schiller, is aroused by the suffering of someone who is similar to us, being a sensitive and moral being (cf. Schiller: 1991, 108). The linguistic appeal of the 'tragic art' in such an 'imitation of [human] nature' (id.90) enables a shortening of distances between the characters and the audience. One can feel inserted in the action of the tragedy even with the several existing gaps, such as time, nationality and social class. In any case, the hero is a person facing a problem, which is a situation any human being can experience, however different his or her life may be from the one depicted in the play.

Even with the sympathy and involvement provoked by the plot and language used, Burgess remarks that "we do not protest at what seems an unfair trick played by the gods" (cf. Burgess: 1974, 48). What is done is done. We accept the hero's fate as the necessary consequences of his deeds and the pity and terror aroused during the time we are exposed to the play are purged, and by the time it is over we have feelings of conformity and quietness. The main aim of the tragedy could thus be said to be the preservation of order. Even when it leads the audience or reader to a questioning of the tragic hero's situation in relation to his social role, it still shows that the protagonist's decisions and actions, as well as the consequences he or she suffers, are part of a renewal process which would not take place in case no flaw were found in the main character.

### **1.1.1. The constitutive elements of the tragedy**

According to Aristotle's view of tragedy as a type of poetry, it does not have to depend on stage acting, but can stand by itself as a text. All the elements needed to fully understand the questions raised in a tragedy lie – explicitly or not – in the language used by the author. Pity and terror, as well as the purging of such emotions, are also already present in the text, which brings in itself the dramatic action. What follows is a presentation of the parts of the tragedy, that is, the dramatic and formal components present in the text of a tragic work.

As the first dramatic component of a tragedy, Aristotle names the **spectacle** produced

before our eyes, whether we are sitting in an audience watching the facts happen in front of us or reading the text and using the mind's eyes. The gathering of the suffering people outside the palace at the beginning of *Oedipus Rex* and the later appearance of the king with his face covered with blood are examples of such demonstration. The spectacle, however, must be produced within boundaries. These are defined by the **plot**, which is the story (real or imaginary) to be 'imitated', or performed, by the actors. Each actor has a defined role, corresponding to a certain quality, called character. **Diction** is the "expression of meaning in words" (cf. Aristóteles: 2004, 37), the poetic lines the characters use in order to convey the thought, which corresponds to the ideas or arguments exposed by the dramatist. **Song** is also a necessary part of the tragedy and the presence of the chorus contrasts with the articulation of the spoken text, which obeys poetic meter.

Aristotle also defines the divisions of a tragic play considering its form. The **prologue** is a self-contained part of a tragedy before the first choric song. In *Oedipus Rex* it is the first acknowledgement of the connection between the suffering of the people and the murder of the previous king. The **episode** is the complete part between the two complete choric songs and the **exode** is the ending of the play, after the last choric song. This last part shows the outcome of the tragic action with the respective catharsis.

The chorus plays a very important role in the tragedy. According to Schiller the chorus is responsible for keeping the balance of the tragedy, being similar to one of the plates of a pair of scales. It goes beyond the limits of the action and extends to the past and to the future in order to get results from life and to reveal principles of knowledge. The lyrical language of the chorus forces the poet to enhance the language of the whole tragedy and this enhances the power of the expression (cf. Schiller: 1991, 79-80). This balance between content and language makes the classical tragedy a serious discussion on man's life, behavior and fate. The gravity with which the problems are treated expands the feelings of pity and terror towards the hero.

The chorus eventually has the important task of directing the audience's attention to the hero's problems. Schiller remarks that the tragic characters represent at the same time an individual and the species, revealing the depths of humanity. The chorus, then, listens to them and acts both as their witness and as their judge, besides controlling their passionate outbursts (cf. Schiller: 1991, 81). It not only functions as a narrator of past events, but also as the voice of a conscience – maybe even the viewer's own voice – analyzing the situation, showing the new ways which will have to be taken and demonstrating awe and sympathy.

The plot of a tragedy must be the development of a combination of actions that will

result in the final catastrophe and offer the reader or audience the necessary material to judge the hero's deeds and sympathize with him. Aristotle designates this type of combination as complex action, which is a non-linear development of the plot composed by three elements – the 'reversal of the situation', the 'recognition' and the 'scene of suffering'. The 'reversal of the situation' happens when one action produces the opposite of the desired effect, when all the expectations are frustrated by a certain action that was supposed to be beneficial, but actually turns harmful; the 'recognition' is the moment a character finds out the truth about an important fact and is usually connected with the 'reversal of the situation', producing thus a stronger effect; the 'scene of suffering' consists of the representation of bodily injury and death (cf. Aristóteles: 2004, 47-8). These three elements are fundamental and are the basis for the action of the classical tragedy. All of them will eventually stir the feelings of the reader or audience. The 'reversal of the situation' and the 'recognition' are usually surprising elements that will lead the public to a state of acknowledgement and provide a further engagement in the presentation. The 'scene of suffering' may be equally surprising, but aims at provoking shock, horror and sympathy. The combination of these elements produces the pity and fear that will classify the play as a tragedy.

Another feature of the classical tragedy described by Aristotle is that the genre was at that time restricted to some rules taken as norms. Verisimilitude governed the unities of action and time. There should be only a single main tragic plot, not distracted by comedy or any secondary subplot. Besides, its dimension should correspond to the time designated to its presentation and not extend for longer than that. A third unity was that of place: all the action should happen in the city, and not be transferred from place to place. The historical background of a certain tragedy was an important element to guide the understanding of the action. For being situated outside the time scope of the presentation, as well as possibly in different places, it could be only mentioned by the characters or narrated by the chorus. Such a background also added more reality to the plot. There was no need, however, that all the actions were guided by the real historical events. The tragic action did not have to be thoroughly proved as historically correct and the poet was allowed to make up scenes and characters. His ability to imitate real life was proved when the audience took the spectacle as a possible sequence of actions in the life of a human being. In this sense, Aristotle states that a possible action is simply a credible one (cf. Aristóteles: 2004, 44).

If on the one hand verisimilitude implied a unity that enabled the viewer to believe the action could happen, on the other what created the conflict that gave rise to the tragic action was a kind of duplicity in the personality of the tragic hero, an inner feature that

contradicted his external appearance. From the beginning, thus, ambiguity became an essential characteristic of the classical tragedy justifying such a mismatch between personality and action. Costa and Remédios present this ambiguity as a conflict between the mythic and the rational forces that originate the tragic universe (cf. Costa & Remédios: 1988, 8). This conflict also reflects the disparity between man's aspirations and the will of the superior forces and is demonstrated in the spheres of language and action. Whereas the gods know the truth, Vernant and Vidal-Naquet acknowledge, they use dubious formulations to provide it to man. Being a mortal man, Oedipus unintentionally condemns himself to death when he promises to punish the murderer of King Laius. Vernant and Vidal-Naquet assert that King Oedipus is an enigma. He seems to be a decisive, intelligent, brave and flawless individual throughout the play, but proves to be the very opposite in the end (cf. Vernant and Vidal-Naquet: 1999, 77-9). Together with the elements of the complex action, ambiguity is fundamental to bring about the feelings of pity and terror.

For the tragic hero, whose problems are too hard to solve, his actions reverse toward himself and he needs to sacrifice something in order to make the tragedy reach its moral aim. Schiller states a tragic piece should arouse in the audience mixed feelings connected with the hero's pain and thus the audience will attain "moral pleasure", which is the purpose of the tragedy. The tragedy involves all cases in which any natural purpose is sacrificed to achieve a moral aim or even a lesser moral principle is sacrificed in the name of a major one (cf. Schiller: 1991, 22).

Even though many transformations occurred in the Greek model of tragedy so as to shape it according to the demands of a Renaissance audience, it is important to acknowledge that it originally aimed at provoking in the viewer or reader feelings of pity and fear, showing a situation in which the protagonist had a problem whose possible solution would involve an important decision by him or her. The reflection proposed implied that there was always a right and a wrong choice, made consciously or not, and that a wrong decision would be punished by the gods, who were considered the superior forces and controlled the world and human beings' actions.

The transformations the tragic genre went through in order to fit the demands of the Renaissance audience included the removal of the bias in the judgment of the protagonist's action. There was still a reflection on his or her behavior, but it was up to the reader or audience to draw any conclusions. 'Fate' and 'the gods' lost part of their importance as superior forces and the new controlling entities became the inner forces of the human being himself, besides the social group to which he belonged and the political power. Another

transformation involved a number of structural changes, which means that Renaissance playwrights did not follow the unities of action, time and place instituted by the Greeks or use all the constitutive elements named by Aristotle. An analysis will be carried out towards the end of this chapter showing which elements were eventually put in use by William Shakespeare.

## **1.2. Seneca's tragedy as a possible influence**

Among the authors of classical tragedies, one meant to Shakespeare much more than the Greek writers. Even though Hunter, in his "Shakespeare and the traditions of tragedy", denies the influences of this author's work – whose style he considers inappropriate to be acted by Elizabethan actors or admired by the then excitement-seeking audience (1986: 127) – we must admit that Seneca had some influence on Shakespeare's use of the genre. Burgess states that when tragedies started to be written in Elizabethan times the Greek model was not considered attractive. Despite inheriting the Greek model, Seneca (4B.C.-65A.D) improved man's reflections about himself and endowed him with the ability to question the gods' impositions (even though he knew he had to obey them) as well as their virtue. Man became then aware of his moral superiority to them, although before the divine entities he was powerless (1974:49).

Even though it was not Shakespeare's main goal to emphasize the presence of the Greek or Roman gods in his tragedies, there is still the idea that the individual can defy superior power, which can be represented by a divinity, a hierarchical entity or institution (such as the State), or even an uncontrollable force within himself. The struggle for an ideal with this certainty of being right represents a basic tenet of Shakespeare's tragic heroes' course of action. The bard often follows Seneca's scheme, in which the protagonist's passion leads him to obstinacy and revenge, resulting in crime and catastrophe. Even when this formula of revenge does not apply, at least the tragic hero carries within himself a passion that will trigger his actions and attract misfortune.

Because he believes he is right the hero believes in his passion. Such a belief makes him forget reason and resignation, and turns his actions into a tragic event. This is what happens when an individual does not respect the established order of the universe and its cycles. The observation of these rules, or the lack of it, is the main concern of the stoic philosophers and writers.

Pessanha explains that Greek stoicism is a philosophy that compares the 'body' of

the universe to the body of a living being. In this sense it has a 'soul' and is guided by reason, which predetermines the existence and occurrence of everything. In order to follow God and reason, the individual must surrender his passions. This act of resignation was what attracted the Roman stoics (cf. Pessanha: s.d., 97-100), and Seneca, according to Zambrano, was their best representative (cf. Zambrano: 1965, 27).

Having studied rhetoric in Rome and become a lawyer and politician there, Seneca is brought back from his eight-year exile in Corsica in order to educate the future emperor Nero. Upon the latter's ascension to the throne, in A.D.54, the former becomes his main advisor for eight years, until he retires. The emperor then goes in pursuit of the philosopher until Seneca's suicide sentence in A.D.65. (cf. Pessanha, s.d., p 101)

According to Giulio D. Leoni, Seneca's exile in a barbarian country enabled him to devote all his time to scientific studies and philosophic meditation. His grand personality was shaped when he was in Corsica exercising his resignation, courage and strength so as to overcome despair (In Sêneca: 198?, 17-8). When he retires from public life Seneca uses the resignation he had learned to deny the wealth he had gained from the emperor and to live in poverty (id.19).

Seneca thus takes a new cycle of his existence with resignation. Accepting life and its cycles and making use of reason to control one's passions are ways to acquire a kind of knowledge that is not, for Zambrano, self-directed, but one that allows the individual to be able to live and die (cf. Zambrano: 1965, 36). Dying is only part of the cycle of life, and abstaining from life, according to Zambrano, is only part of Seneca's idea of resignation, which goes beyond hope and despair (id.28-9), but involves the reasonable use of time. Such use involves one's observation of the cycles of life and the resignation of his or her own passions in order to act in conformity with those cycles and do only what is considered reasonable and morally correct.

Most people neglect the importance of using time reasonably. The ill use of it may lead a human being to dramatic consequences, which could otherwise be avoided. Zambrano quotes Seneca's reflections on the use of time in his *Letters to Lucilio*. He believes an individual wastes his life neglectfully, using a part of it doing harm, a great amount of it doing nothing and all of it doing what he should not do (Zambrano: 1965, 54).

She also mentions Seneca's 'strategic pessimism', which is an ability to expect the worst so that when the worst comes the individual will not be caught by surprise (Zambrano: 1965, 56). Such a strategy only adds to Seneca's code of life: the stoical procedures of acceptance, resignation and reasoning. The average Roman was invited to follow such a code

in order to be dignified, but it is the rejection of it that Seneca depicts in his tragedies: an individual who relies on his passions and pays for his transgressions.

In order to start a discussion on Seneca's tragedies, it is relevant to investigate the reason why Seneca wrote them. John Macy seems to see no motive for them: in addition to his harsh criticism on Roman theatrical literature in general, he attacks Seneca's tragedies and questions the respect they have attained despite his judgment of poor quality in them (cf. Macy: 1967,94).

Cardoso, however, defends them mentioning their didactic, moralist role illustrating the stoic doctrine. She states that reason is necessary for an individual's integration in the cosmos and that relying on passions, instincts and illegitimate love results in disruption and chaos (In Lopes, Lage & Flores Jr.: 1999, 104).

She also mentions the three passions used by Seneca in his tragedies, as quoted by Herrmann (1924): ambition, hatred and love. In an analysis of Seneca's works, she points out the love in *Phaedra*, jealousy in *Hercules* and *Medea* and infidelity in *Thyestes*. In all these, Seneca approaches the theme of marriage as it was seen in his time – a passionless union that would guarantee the stability of the State. Love was considered 'harmful and dangerous' (In Lopes, Lage & Flores Jr., 1999:92-102).

The passions depicted by Seneca are also common in Shakespeare's tragedies, as well as the individual's desire to question and defy the superior forces. The morality presented in his works, however, cannot be said to have influenced our bard so much. Judging what should – or should not – be done in order to avoid a future catastrophe, thus preaching the reasonable course of action for each moment of an individual's life, is not something that would involve the Elizabethan audience. Especially not so if we consider that Seneca's tragedies were designed for "static declamation" (Hunter, 1986:127), whereas Shakespeare's public was fond of action.

The stoical procedures of acceptance, resignation and reasoning preached by the Roman playwright were no longer popular in all levels of Shakespeare's society either, but we cannot deny the contributions in form and ideas the bard received from Seneca, who improved the human being's self reflection and gave him a new strength to believe himself despite what the 'superior forces' tried to force him to do. His idea of the individual's ill use of time is also present in the bard's works and may be in most cases what makes the protagonist err. Yet, the didactic and moralist tone of Seneca's tragedies is not present in Shakespeare's. Even Seneca's greatest contributions were not exclusively what turned the young poet from Stratford into the greatest dramatist of all times. Several other elements were gathered by him

from other, more contemporary models and put in his plays, as I will show next.

### **1.3. Shakespeare's more recent inheritance**

The Greek tragedy is undoubtedly a model that has been extensively used since its creation. It has certainly influenced many authors worldwide. Even though Hunter (op. cit.) claims that there is very little connection between the tragic works of Shakespeare and the Greek model in terms of source (1986:127), the English bard obviously assimilated its formal structure and mood in those aspects that would catch his audience's attention. The stoical attitude of Seneca seems to have left some elements with which the English bard identified as well. As Antony Burgess remarks, free will, suggesting activity – juxtaposed with the passivity implied by submitting to fate – “appealed to the Elizabethan dramatist,” (1974:50) with its “blood-thirstiness” (id.ib.) and violence “far more than the calm dignity of Euripides or Sophocles could have done” (cf. Burgess: 1974, 49-50).

Despite the suppositions – and even textual evidences – that the young William studied Greek and Latin texts when he went to grammar school in Stratford (cf. Holden, 2003:50-1), it was not the classical tragic texts that he used as a foundation for his tragedies. As he had not been in London for long when he wrote his first tragedy we can understand the novelty it was for him to see the large concentration of people who gathered in the playhouses to watch the plays by Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Kyd. As he was an opportunist, and a talented one, he decided to use the style that was current in England, enhancing it and eventually becoming a success.

English drama at the time of Shakespeare had been developing from a popular reality, without the aid of the Greek or Roman ideas and norms. The idea of drama in England started in the Catholic Church and, according to Burgess, the first “genuinely dramatic dialogue” (1974:51) can be traced to the ninth century – a conversation between the Angels who were at Jesus Christ's tomb and the three Maries, who went there to see His body and learn about His resurrection (cf. Burgess: 1974, 51). From then on, special Church holidays were more and more celebrated with role-plays of scenes from the Bible and started to be called ‘Miracles’ or ‘Miracle Plays’. When these presentations started to involve the trade guilds, they gradually left the Church space and went to the streets. The first cycle of so-called Mystery Plays (‘mystery’ denoting skill, craft or trade) was presented, according to Burgess, in the early fourteenth century when a Church Council ordered the due celebration of the feast of Corpus Christi (id.53), which was composed of a whole day of presentations of

biblical episodes, each staged by a different guild on a pageant, or decorated cart. According to Heliodora, the authors of the texts for these presentations were not poets, but professionals of various jobs, who wrote about the religious themes using their daily individual and social experience, consequently adding elements such as violence to the sacred episode. The lack of visual support was also a problem, but this motivated the creation of conventions that would later benefit the Elizabethans (cf. Heliodora: 1978, 71).

Shakespeare inherited these conventions and used them to make his ideas clear and through the pre-conceived symbols convey a link with reality, relying not only on the words delivered, but also on the visual elements that could give them support. One example of these conventions is what Dessen calls “theatrical shorthand” in his essay “Shakespeare and theatrical conventions”: it consisted of a shrinkage of the idealized image into a far simpler element, such as a nightgown representing night and the movement of small groups of soldiers running to and fro symbolizing a battle. The author had to count on the audience’s collaboration and imagination but, since the public became gradually aware of such representations, the writer counted on these artifices more and more (In Wells: 1986, 90).

Another very important contribution to the Elizabethan theater coming from the Miracles and not from the Mysteries, according to *Encyclopædia Britannica*, was the “variety of subjects derived from the liturgy of the saints” (1962:589), since it was the lives of saints that were now treated in the Miracle Plays, and no longer the biblical episodes controlled by the strict Church (cf. *Encyclopædia Britannica*: 1962, 589). As the saints represented were not so often the ones pictured in the Bible, but people held as true followers of the Christian doctrine, acting out their lives did not mean only representing the historical facts that made them saints; it also relied greatly on popular beliefs and on the tradition of the Church, which was not so accurate at the time. Heliodora reminds us that a miracle is an action and for this reason the icons whose lives were displayed would soon leave the sphere of the holy and reach the one of adventure. The focus gradually shifted then from the lives of saints to the lives of heroes and to their spectacular deeds; before long, a wealth of mythological elements would be included so as to enrich the protagonists’ feats (cf. Heliodora: 1978, 175).

With the growing professionalism of the groups of players, as Heliodora acknowledges, pageants were taken to inn courts and besides functioning as stages they were also used to carry the players, or actors, props and settings, however simple they still were. Setting the pageant right in front of one of the four walls of a square or rectangular court offered the Elizabethan playhouses their distinguished structure, consisting of a stage and, in front of it, a central unroofed yard around which the seats were disposed under a shelter edged

by the three remaining walls (id.171-2).

Professionalism in English drama also implied its secularization. When the early dramatic manifestations left the places of worship and gained the street the Church transmitted to the guilds the responsibility of rehearsing and staging the plays. When these plays started to be staged in inn courts their plot started to change, not focusing on biblical stories any longer, but on virtues, trying “to teach a moral lesson through allegory” (cf. Burgess: 1974, 58). Differently from the mystery plays, in which biblical texts were adapted to the taste of the public, this new trend, then called ‘morality plays’, aimed at preaching the strength of the soul. Although the moralizing, grave themes of moralities were often religious, the actors who performed them no longer had connections with the Church. They no longer belonged to guilds, either, but joined traveling companies of players, already professional, who performed in various places and made a living out of it. This secularization of the performances did not interfere so much in the plot yet. But to Antony Burgess English plays would quite soon be able to present “a moral theme in terms of *personal conflict*” (1974:59) involving “the moral struggle within a living human being” (id.ib.) rather disconnected from a religious doctrine. This would be the fuel of many Shakespeare’s tragic works (cf. Burgess: 1974, 59). Heliodora sees in the moralities the seriousness that prepared the Elizabethan public for the tragic pieces they would be exposed to and for the deep ideas and feelings contained in them (cf. Heliodora: 1978, 175).

The medieval and the early Elizabethan dramatic manifestations were not the only sources of inspiration for Shakespeare. As I mentioned before, it is easy to imagine the delight the newly arrived young man must have felt when he found out the success of playhouses in London. In 1587, the year of his arrival, two important tragedies were being presented in the city: Christopher Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine the Great* and Thomas Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy*. The triumph of the genre was due to the tradition of drama already established and to its development from the moralities. Kyd’s and Marlowe’s works were not the first ones, though. Authors such as Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville had been writing tragedies since 1562, when they produced *Gorboduc*. Burgess implies that these writers were direct followers of Seneca, reserving the horror and violence “for the language and never for the visible action” (1974:61). Nevertheless, the most common way of following Seneca in Elizabethan times was to read plays written in Italy that identified themselves as ‘Senecan’ but which had the overt representation of horrors in front of the audience (cf. Burgess: 1974, 61).

Marlowe and Shakespeare can be said to have followed the ‘Italian Senecan’ tradition in this sense. In fact, Marlowe came first and, according to Hunter, “broke the ice”

for Shakespeare to sail “his ship through”, which does not mean that Marlowe provided the bard with stylistic models (1986:127), but with many other devices that enabled the son of the glove maker to become a good writer of tragedies. Marlowe prepared the audiences for the even more progressive kind of tragedy they were about to receive among themselves with the advent of the bard. The type of action the public was on the brink of watching on stage – despite the fact that, due to the lack of special visual support already mentioned, people attended playhouses in order to ‘hear’ a play – would have caught the Elizabethans by surprise had it not been the ‘movement’ introduced by Marlowe. This ‘University Wit’, according to Greenblatt, “is drawn to the idea of physical movement” (1980:194-5) and he modernizes greatly such an idea expanding actions to spaces beyond the stage, requiring from the audience a great deal of imagination in order to fill in the blanks left by the unseen. The frequent change of scenes unfolds and stretches the space of the stage, but at the same time “all of those spaces seem curiously alike” (Greenblatt: 1980, 194-5), since they are not real or even suggested by visual aids, thus depending on the viewer’s imagination.

Another feature of Marlowe’s drama inherited by Shakespeare was the contemporaneity of his writing. What he wrote was aimed at the people who would attend his show. So much so that his *Tamburlaine* had a sequel. He seems to have discovered the formula to attract audiences and to involve them. Hunter considers his *Tamburlaine* “the breakthrough event of the Elizabethan popular stage, combining the lively variousness of popular entertainment with the dignity and coherence of elite drama” (1986:124). It was a breakthrough in the sense that it could gather under the same roof members of the Elizabethan society from various cultural backgrounds. Whereas displaying numerous actions and horrors on stage was a tactic to attract the lower class spectators, the strategy aimed at the more cultured members of his audience was the smart use of language. Greenblatt refers to the “incantatory power” (1980:216) of the language used by Marlowe’s protagonists to distort meanings in order to denote exactly what they wanted (cf. Greenblatt: 1980, 216). They confound and deceive other characters so as to accomplish their plans. In order to achieve their goals, these ‘heroes’ must murder, destroy and provoke great suffering along the way. All these deeds, without a clever use of language, would only become a pile of horrors without meaning and would not, therefore, reach all the social layers attending the show.

Marlowe understands the demanding society of Renaissance and is able to give them the relief they want and to supply their claims for entertainment and acquisition of information. Greenblatt describes the individual of the time:

Marlowe writes in the period in which European man embarked on his extraordinary career of

consumption, his eager pursuit of knowledge, with one intellectual model after another seized, squeezed dry, and discarded, and his frenzied exhaustion of the world's resources (id.199).

Another ordinary feature of the persons living in the English society of the time is that they were callous towards horror and violence. As Greenblatt explains, the individual lived in a society of limitlessness, a society in which time and space had been transformed into abstractions and in which boundaries were marked through violent behavior and killing people or burning a town did not mean much, especially as part of the process in the quest for power (cf. Greenblatt: 1980, 197). The performance of a play that was full of conquests, full of ideas, full of the desire for power combined with the display of raw violence and acts of horror, was an innovation for the Elizabethans and was very well accepted. But this was not all the preparation that Shakespeare needed. He also needed a public that had the habit to go to the theater and that could understand theatrical conventions.

Some of these conventions had already been introduced by the mystery and morality plays, and counting on the imagination of the audience is a procedure playwrights were already used to relying on. A different aspect of this request for public imagination introduced by Marlowe was time-consciousness. A society for which the eagerness to acquire knowledge and the need for consumption was a reality realized the demands of Marlowe's heroes for the urgency of action, for a voracity of conquest and for a renewal of goals resulting in self-assertion and awareness of the human being's life span. Most protagonists in Marlowe's tragedies struggle in vain against time in this way. The result, as Greenblatt puts it, is an ironical one, for "the rhythms intended to slow time only consume it" (1980:200) and Marlowe often gives his hero a strategic line in which "magnificent words are spoken and disappear into a void" (cf. Greenblatt: 1980, 200). The barren effort to freeze time in order to achieve more must have been an experience gone through by the nobility of the time, in their urge for social recognition and accumulation of wealth and consequently well heard of by the society in general.

Besides the ability to understand the urge to struggle against time in the plots presented on stage, Marlowe supplied his audience, according to Greenblatt, with a "time-consciousness" (id.ib.) about the theater itself and an awareness of the timing of a play. While the hero experiences his "struggle against extinction" (id.ib.) the audience is at the same time able to see – imagine – an individual fighting for his life and an actor struggling to perform many actions before the end of the play (cf. Greenblatt: 1980, 200). This treatment of time, added to the amount of action and movement displayed and the appealing use of language, in Hunter's words, "generated the expectations and the excitement that theatre need[ed]"

(1986:127), thus preparing the Elizabethan public for the bard's works.

#### 1.4. The final result: how Shakespeare used his inheritance

Shakespeare was a writer of talent and at the same time a man of his time, worried about his survival, concerned about getting the most he could from what he was offered. For this reason, he was very smart in the use of the tragedy. He had to create a style that would keep him in the theater business. With this purpose in mind, he became keen on detecting the demands of the theater-going public, he analyzed the corresponding elements already in use, he adapted these elements and added some of his own. The result was a type of tragedy that would attract crowds, thus motivating its author to write more and develop his style in such a way that he could, for a long time, gather people from diverse hierarchical layers of the Elizabethan and Jacobean society to watch his performances. Moreover, his tragedy outlived him and traveled abroad with the expansion of the English domination and trade, being acclaimed all over the world until the present date. In order to effectively approach the changes made by the bard I will first compare the mood and structure of his tragedy with the classical model and then analyze his themes in the light of the medieval and Elizabethan dramatic experiments.

A distinctive feature of Shakespeare's tragedy when contrasted with the Greek or Latin models is the flexibility of its boundaries. What was originally a dramatization of a moral issue with a deep religious content and grave mood, gained in most cases a historical treatment (e.g. in *Macbeth* one of the intentions is to justify the lineage of King James I) and even comic insertions, such as the gravediggers' scene in *Hamlet*. Shakespeare enhanced or duplicated the plot, adding more elements and adapting the language to make the play more attractive to a public developing the habit of going to the theater to 'hear' a play. A further and deeper adaptation concerns the conception of tragedy itself. Burgess mentions the fact that "the Shakespearian hero has the power of choice; he has free will" (Burgess, 1974:49). What makes his story a tragedy is not the decision of the gods, but his inability to solve his problems through resignation. By relying on his passions, the protagonist does not make use of resignation in the sense Zambrano defines it, as the way to get over a crisis (cf. Zambrano: 1965, 48).

The 'flexibility' added to the plot already breaks one of the unities of the Greek tragedy. Adding comic reliefs and comic subplots, or even comic characters goes against the unity of action. Besides expanding the possibilities in a play, this strategy suspends the

anxiety provoked in the viewer or reader, only to increase the feelings of pity and fear and eventually magnify the effect of the catharsis.

As had already been done by Marlowe before Shakespeare, the unity of time is also broken and so is the unity of place. Shakespeare's characters travel from city to city, from castle to castle, and the interval between one scene and the next may be anything from real time to days, months or years. Associated with the break in the unity of action, these new extensions in time and place bring a new energy to the play. Action and movement were demands of the Elizabethan public. Hunter undermines the direct influence of “the closet drama of Seneca, whose frozen horrors are designed for static declamation and can have offered little or nothing to professional actors or to the audiences who went along for the excitement of quick-fire action and surprise” (1986:127). The English society of the time was ready – and eager – to be exposed to a new, innovative kind of drama. And they were also willing to pay for it.

Along with the growing professionalism in the dramatic productions, the increasing sophistication in audiences and the new perceptions of their competence, Glenn Most claims that the breaking of the three classical units of action, time and place during the Renaissance was inevitable, since it became then established that those unities were a serious misinterpretation of the nature of theatrical illusion (In Rosenfield: 2001, 31). From this we may conclude that the changes made by Shakespeare and his contemporaries were an important step towards the growth of the dramatic arts.

The dramatic components described by Aristotle are all present in most Shakespeare's dramatic productions. It is clear from reading or watching any of his tragedies that, even though they have remained as texts, they were written chiefly to be presented. In that sense, one can feel the presence of what the Greek philosopher called spectacle. In the story we also spot a plot, which is shared by the characters who, in turn, use diction in order to produce the dialogues. The only element that may not be very clear to the reader of today is song, even though many editions bring hints, besides the bard's original stage directions or other indications in the text, showing that a passage is sung or accompanied by instrumental music. In the article entitled “Shakespeare and Music”, however, Sternfeld argues that “the tragedies of native dramatists were not lacking in sung lyrics or instrumental pieces” (1974:157) and that although “Shakespeare's characters speak naturally and predominantly in verbal cadences” (id.ib.), the bard employed music in his plays because, after all, “a wealth of dramatic music was available to him both in England and abroad” (In Muir & Schoenbaum, 1974:157).

Concerning the formal structure of the tragedy, Shakespeare's works diverge enormously from his Greek predecessors. The structure that involves a prologue, an episode between two choric songs and an exode no longer exists. There is a prologue or two in some of his plays (e.g. *Romeo and Juliet* and *Henry V*), and this can correspond to the appearance of a chorus or not. When there is a chorus it no longer has to sing, and the reflections it proposes are briefer than in classical tragedy, usually in the shape of a sonnet. Reversal, recognition and scene of suffering are the elements that have survived in the Shakespearian tragedy. Reversals are worked differently in each play and show how diverse the consequence of an action or a plan may turn out to be; what Friar Laurence considered a way to unite the families – Romeo and Juliet's wedding – reversed into thoughts of death for Juliet after Romeo killed Tybalt and the religious man's plan of escape for the lovers turned into their tragic deaths; the moment Hamlet chose to kill Claudius, judging the king to be behind the arras instead of Polonius, eventually destroyed his possibilities of being considered sane, of becoming a king and of getting married to Ophelia; when Othello knows the truth about Desdemona's handkerchief – that it had been planted in Cassio's room by Iago – and about his wife's chastity, his action (which he had so far been regarding a 'sacrifice') becomes a heinous murder. Recognition is present almost all the time in the bard's works and adds more significance to the tragic action; Hamlet meets the funeral procession and sees the dead Ophelia; Macduff goes into King Duncan's chamber in Macbeth's castle and sees the dead king; In the last scene Macduff tells Macbeth that he was born of a caesarian, being thus, according to the visions, able to kill Macbeth. Scenes of suffering are also widely used by Shakespeare. They sometimes come as a final slaughter with all main characters dead (such as in *Hamlet*) or as an individual murder in the middle or at the end of a tragedy. Physical suffering can also be the reason for, or the result of, a psychological affliction; Polonius's death (among other events), leads Ophelia to a state of madness that brings her to an alleged suicide; Juliet's suffering (due to Romeo's banishment, Tybalt's death and her father's pressures) leads her to a fake death which, in turn, leads her husband – and later herself – to suicide. Shakespeare thus provides a remarkable interweaving among the recognitions, reversals and scenes of suffering, as well as between the plot and subplots so as to add different layers of comprehension and improve the effects of the tragedy.

An innovation Shakespeare added to the tragedy was the imagery and metaphor. Hunter mentions "the castles and trees and darkness and light [that] exist more strongly in a metaphorical than a literal order" (1986:136). The impressions of claustrophobia in *Hamlet*, nakedness in *King Lear* and light and darkness in *Romeo and Juliet* are only a few examples

of an imagery that defines the mood of the entire play. This imagery takes the reader or audience from the visual, palpable sphere to the rational, reflective one. To the same extent that light and darkness represent day and night in *Romeo and Juliet*, these visual qualities (which in fact are only present in the text, for in Shakespeare's time all plays were presented in the daylight) stand for the young couple and their personalities, their actions and the impossibility of being together in life. Shakespeare creates thus a new level of understanding. Besides the factual level, in which what was said actually corresponded to what was seen, and the imaginary level, in which the viewer contributed and completed the scenes only from what was said or implied, there is now the reflexive level, which takes the audience to make at the same time a literal correspondence (as in the factual level) and an imaginary one, taking the spectacle, the actions and even the heroes also for what they symbolize.

Either as real human beings or as allegories of feelings or states of mind, Shakespeare's tragic heroes and heroines, as in Greek tragedies, are put in difficult situations and have to make decisions attempting to change their fate. But 'fate' for him is not the origin of misdeeds, but an individual choice. Sometimes supernatural forces are shown and predictions are made which remind us of the oracles in the Greek tragedies. The three Weïrd Sisters in *Macbeth* predict his future as a king – besides of course communicating his present title of Thane of Cawdor not yet known of by him. The 'vision' of Hamlet's deceased father tells the prince the real reason of his own death and shows his son what is going wrong in court, besides instructing the young man to kill Claudius. The presence of such supernatural elements does not aim at indicating the only possible end for the tragic hero, chosen by superior powers. Its purpose is to make a revelation in a feasible, understandable way, using aspects of popular Elizabethan and Jacobean culture. The use of the supernatural themes named above is justified by the fact that James I of England was a researcher on witchcraft and that many people at the time believed – or questioned – purgatory to be a stage in which the souls of the dead stayed among the living until their 'sentences' were over. If the influence of these elements was not strong on the hero's fate, it was on his behavior.

The hero had to make a decision. Even though Macbeth is compelled to kill Duncan in order to become the king, it is clear from Shakespeare's text, especially from the hero's soliloquies, that a future of disgrace will result from his actions. Hamlet has difficulty deciding the right time to kill his uncle, but when he is about to die in the final scene, he seems also ready to murder. All sins are then simultaneously cleansed and a brand new start can be made. Yet, the decision to kill or to delay a murder as well as the result of such a decision or the punishment for it cannot be entirely attributed to the appearance of those

supernatural entities, but rather to the protagonist's own personality and predisposition. What the insertion of mystical elements provides is the protagonist's acknowledgement of his/ her own pre-existing desire, triggering thus the tragic decision.

Whereas mysticism played an important role in the Greek tragedy, emphasizing the power of the gods, fate, oracles and prophecies, Shakespearian tragedy questions the reality of any power that goes beyond human limitations. The Weïrd Sisters seem to have supernatural powers of prediction, but since Macbeth and his wife are dominated by ambition, we are left to question if such powers are depicted as real or if they are inserted in the play just to trigger the couple's desire. Besides, as also happens in *Hamlet* concerning the ghost, we could even doubt the existence of such entities and attribute them to the hero's imagination. It is up to each reader or spectator to decide if the mysterious beings are real or imaginary. It is a question the bard leaves unanswered, magnifying thus the effect of suspense and the importance of the passions that they trigger in the tragic heroes and heroines, which bring the catastrophe.

The function of this relationship between action and result is not, in Shakespeare, to show a religious or a moralistic teaching. When Macbeth is fatally hurt and we consider what would have happened had he not trusted the witches' predictions (and acted in accordance with them), we sometimes wonder how else he could get to the throne. When all the major characters die in *Hamlet* we may wonder why he took so long, why he kept the intent to kill the king, or even why he did not just leave Claudius and his mother on their own and minded his own business. When we watch or read these plays we know that the hero had to make a choice and it is normal for us to judge it as right or wrong. This moral judgment, however, is not provided by Shakespeare, but only triggered by him, while he remains unbiased. As Hunter sees it, a tragic choice does not correspond to a weakness in the hero's capacity to choose. When Desdemona chooses Othello, he says, he should be considered the right choice for her, "for he totally fulfils the deepest impulses in her entirely admirable nature" (1986:130). As each protagonist has a singular personality, the choices he makes correspond to this personality Shakespeare has given him. Without the tragic choice of the play, the protagonist's heroism would be diminished and would not deserve the audience's sympathy.

An important additional element inserted in tragedy by Shakespeare was love. Originally a feeling only possible in comedies and romances, it comes into some of Shakespeare's tragic works as a constitutional element. Hunter says that "love, as an emotion uniquely variable in the judgments it evokes, seems particularly appropriate to the art of variation that Shakespeare practices" (id.128-9). Theater goes in Shakespeare's society were

already used to attending a tragedy expecting to feel the pity and fear that it provoked through its tragic plot. The bard's innovative insertion of the element 'love' triggered a reflection on the connection of the feeling with such concepts as 'personality', 'power', 'responsibility' and 'convention', besides an understanding that the tragic genre could embrace all such concepts and not lose its original aims, but rather through the involvement of such familiar elements enhance the audience's sympathy for the tragic hero/ heroine and his or her lot.

Love can be used diversely, sometimes being a disruptive element that will defy society and politics, and sometimes keeping an apparently peaceful tone, just to improve the catharsis at the end. Hunter mentions how the bard changes *Romeo and Juliet* from an extremely moralistic story – written about young lovers, but containing middle-aged prejudices expressed in its language – into a rephrasing of the “rashness” of the couple as “spontaneity”, “optimism” and “charm” (id.ib.). The introduction of love in the tragedy, paradoxically, is an innovation that has the purpose of disrupting the original peace of the characters. The young couple from Verona, for example, creates their own microcosm, a world totally detached from the reality they live in. They recognize they are from two brawling families but they cannot avoid staying together. Hunter affirms that love in this case “is a natural trigger for tragic conflict, making the repudiation of social and external norms appear an inevitable prerequisite for the intense realization of self” and that there is “a tragic limitation to love” (id.129) as if society were a tragic impediment to the accomplishment of the feeling. These lovers are seen then as innocents “in a world they did not ask for, which they do not endorse and which they cannot affect (in life, at any rate)” (id.ib.). Adding such an element as love to the tragic genre no doubt enriched the tragedy and showed new paths. The Elizabethan audience had now a totally modernized kind of tragedy that was more appealing to their demands.

In what follows, we shall not only look into this feeling more closely but also acknowledge how an individual can be defined through it, in a society that lived the transition from the medieval conventions to a more modern value given to individuality and autonomy. Love, as used in Shakespeare's tragedies, reflected such a transition, thus becoming a very important dramatic ingredient.

## 2. THE INDIVIDUAL AND LOVE: NOTIONS INHERITED BY THE ELIZABETHANS

As we have just seen, love turned out to be a productive device in Shakespearian tragedy and, according to Hunter, it was an issue that enabled Shakespeare to give his audience what they wanted: variety, dynamic action, surprise (1986:129). Yet, there is more to the use of the theme of love in the tragic genre than that. What I will discuss now is how the experience of love became an ingredient in the construction of the very notion of individual. Therefore, the exploration of the theme of love in tragedies helps sharpening the focus this genre aims at – the discussion of an individual's passions, desire, limitlessness, finiteness and last, but not least, his or her responsibility in making choices.

Also, as we shall see, the fact that love may fall into the scope of tragedy and even be the trigger of disaster shows us how subtly Shakespeare seems to have understood this feeling, which, as any other passion, denies us freedom right there where we think we are being free and making “choices”. The one we fall in love with is not a choice – desire dooms us to tragedy. What we do with this feeling is a choice. Love stands, then, on the borderline between freedom and slavery, being thus a very suitable element to represent the notion of individual – an *apparently* free creature.

In order to understand the notion of ‘love’ as it was used in the English Renaissance, it is first necessary to approach the idea of ‘individual’. This will lead us to the understanding of the choice of a partner in Elizabethan and Jacobean England, the relationship between husband and wife (as well as any man and woman in an erotic relationship but not necessarily united by wedding bonds) and the role a couple plays in society. All these themes will lead us to a reflection on the purpose of marriage as seen by the Renaissance man. Such observations represent the basis to the understanding of Shakespeare’s tragic heroes and heroines, their love/ erotic relationships and the imbricacies of those relationships with the tragic event in each play.

### 2.1. The ‘individual’: an idea shaped throughout centuries

The idea of ‘individual’ is a notion we take too much for granted nowadays. On the one hand, all human beings are considered equal before God and before the law. On the other, it is well known that each one is a unique being, having special features which make him/ hers unique. In a globalized world where the word *inclusion* reminds us to value what is different

in each living being, we are encouraged to respect one another's individuality, albeit we are still so far from practicing it.

This notion of a unique individual, however, has not always been seen as we see it today. Shakespeare inherited a world that had just started to become aware of the notion of individuality. Not long before him families were structured in a way that suffocated individual personality. In his book *The Discovery of the Individual 1050 – 1200*, Collin Morris explains that the idea of an 'individual' was not present in primitive societies and that the child was trained to follow the traditions cultivated by its tribe; its identity might be found "not in anything peculiar to himself, but in the common mind of his people" (1972:1). He also states that "The conventional account of the discovery of the individual attributes it to the Italian Renaissance of the fifteenth century", but he shows a more recent movement that contests such an idea, led by Walter Ullmann, who sees in his book *The Individual in Medieval Society* hints in the twelfth century, not in the fifteenth, to the "new modes of thinking" and in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries a "growing development towards the formulation of an idea of the individual" (id.5-6).

In his book *Idade Média, Idade dos Homens: do amor e outros ensaios*, Georges Duby describes this 'Renaissance' as part of the long materialistic progress of which Western Europe was the center. With an increase in the number of taxpayers and in the amounts charged, the aristocracy had to find ways to keep the wealth they acquired by means of birth control and other means of avoiding family ramification and consequent wealth fragmentation. Since all daughters carried their dowries away when they got married, women lost the right to any share in the inheritance. Because only the eldest son got married, all the others were – theoretically, at least – part of his family. The father's wealth was then in his sons' hands, who were supposed to take care of it and multiply it. Noble lineages, thus, prospered more and more (1989:144-5).

It was in this environment that the medieval man became aware of progress. Having to fulfill a task left by his previous generations, a man of noble birth ceased considering the difficulties of life and started marching towards perfection (id.146-7). Life, which had so far been an experience of incessant hardship without a real motivation, now had an aim: maintaining and increasing wealth in a way that would guarantee the survival of one's lineage and social status.

Duby states that this was a feudal atmosphere that enabled a growing number of princes to appropriate the power that had previously belonged to the king alone. Aiming at the power, the princes also desired the king's virtues. As early as in the eleventh century there

was the start of a search for sacred knowledge through which the princes aimed at replacing the king. When princes, following the king, became symbols of knowledge, all levels of the aristocratic society felt impelled to search for learning as well. Wishing to be noble in behavior, the knights, as well as all adults occupying military posts, desired to acquire high culture and even young men that did not belong to the high nobility and were not meant for religious consecration started to be taught at home or to be sent to schools (id.150-2). The consciousness of the individual was then starting to be formed and even men without a noble birth struggled for the right to acquire knowledge. This meant that they no longer had to conform with the fate of accepting poverty until the end of their lives only because they were born poor, but they could struggle for ascension and, in a way, become equal to the nobility. They became aware of the value of the individual.

Morris relates that the twelfth-century man, thus growing in awareness, but at the same time in need of guidance, turned to God and Christianity and to the classical past. The influence of Christianity came through his need to depend on clergymen for the acquisition of knowledge and through the perception of his dependence on God for the solution to his problems. Belief in this God who, as Morris points out, “has called each man by name, who has sought him out as a shepherd seeks his lost sheep” (1972:10) restores the believer’s individual value and his uniqueness. The Bible itself emphasizes the “value of the individual and the dignity of man” (id.11) and the liturgical year in the twelfth century was based on “the sacred history and the feasts of the saints” (id.ib.), thus valuing the history of man as “the key to the understanding of the world”. Were it based upon the cycle of seasons – as could be expected of an agricultural continent such as Europe – the understanding of nature and its order would lead to the understanding of everything else. The emphasis of the Church, however, was on God’s special creature: man (cf. Morris: 1972, 10-1). This emphasis on man, and not on nature, shows the concern of the Church with the value of the human being. In spite of his fallible and even sinful nature, this creature has a special treatment in the Scriptures and is put in an outstanding position, firstly as the greatest divine creation and then as God’s own child, so infinitely loved by his Creator that his offences may be forgiven and forgotten and that he may be rescued by God Himself coming to earth in the shape of Jesus Christ. By focusing on this importance, the Church taught its followers how to deserve Heaven through the imitation of Saints’ lives. The human being could even have made mistakes, but repentance would bring him back to God, who loved and valued him.

Besides the Bible, Collin Morris mentions the classical past as another important source of ideas supporting the notion of ‘individual’, which was developing in the medieval

age. Morris attests to a possible emergence of the notion during the Roman Empire:

For a great part of the history of the Ancient World, traditional institutions remained strong, and inhibited interest in the person as distinct from his social group. The family, the city-state, and the tradition of reverence for Rome, all had this effect. There was, however, another aspect. The growth of great cities and vast areas of imperial government dissolved many of these traditional units (id.13).

Morris states that with the advent of “thoughts and feelings” that were “individual and humanist” (id.14), the individual living in Rome from around 50 B.C. on was “freed from the conventional ethics which had formerly governed his actions [and] declared his desires in an outburst of lyric poetry” (id.ib.). Morris reports the instances that originated a release from the “shackles of the body” as the “religions of world-renunciation” (id.ib.) and the individual reactions that grew at the time of oppression by the imperial government. Tired of all the pressure from his rulers, the individual looked for a philosophy that would detach him from the world and so he found in some religions the opportunity to be linked with the divine and secretly escape from the confinement imposed by the empire. The consequence of this thirst for detachment from reality was a chain of individual and humanistic thoughts and feelings. This humanism, which influenced the man of the twelfth century, was found especially in the works of Cicero and Seneca available then. Despite the limited knowledge of his works, the twelfth-century man turned to Cicero because of his ideas of humanism and unity of mankind, unity of laws and equality among men. More inspiring than Seneca’s humanism, however, was his concern with self-examination and his pursuit of virtue through discipline (cf. Morris: 1972, 14-5).

The combination of Christian and classical thoughts was enabled by Saint Augustine in his *Confessions* (397) which, according to Morris, should be regarded as “the first autobiography ever written”, focusing on an individual’s personal experiences and their importance within God’s purposes for man. Despite being profoundly rooted in the Holy Scriptures, Augustine’s work cannot be fully understood with the aid of biblical knowledge alone. It should also be seen through the perspective of the late Greco-Roman world, with its general tradition of self-exploration. The philosophies that had once been part of the saint’s life are then criticized in this work (id.16-7). An autobiography such as the *Confessions* provided twelfth-century people with a view of an individual and his success in life. Only achieved after a great struggle, this success was the development of a new realization of the individual.

The notion of ‘individual’ started then to be shaped but, as Morris points out, it was so incipient at first that the closest relations that existed to the meaning of ‘individual’ nowadays were terms that did not refer to human relations, but rather to logics. The word

‘individual’ itself did not carry the connotation it does today. Morris quotes some of the terms used to express “the ideas of self-discovery and self-exploration”:

We hear a great deal of 'the self', not expressed indeed in that abstract way, but in such terms as 'knowing yourself', 'descending into oneself', or 'considering oneself'. Another common term was *anima*, which was used, ambiguously in our eyes, for both the spiritual identity ('soul') of a man and his directing intelligence ('mind'). Yet another was 'the inner man' [...]. Their vocabulary, while it was not the same as ours, was therefore rich in terms suited to express the ideas of self-discovery and self-exploration. (id. 65)

With the increasing circulation of these terms, the ideal of self-knowledge became popular – especially because it was considered a path to God – and started to be pursued by the twelfth-century individual. Self-expression was another widespread desire that was achieved through the writing both of sermons and of lyric poetry (id.64-8). The man of the time became thus aware of the possibilities of the individual to know himself better and to express his feelings, which did not always correspond to the feelings of the social group to which he belonged.

The Bible, the Church, the classical past and ideas such as humanism and self-knowledge all influenced the Elizabethan individual, but the awareness of one’s individuality took up new dimensions in the English Renaissance. The religiousness that had guided and helped the twelfth-century renaissance soon suffered with the Reformation in Europe and especially with the partition promoted in England. Therefore, the average Elizabethan could either be in search of explanations to the individual based on spirituality and faith or turn to skepticism. He could believe in Christianity, in God or gods, in nature and its forces or in nothing at all. Shakespeare was aware of these behaviors and the conventions governed by them and made use of all these features in his plays, so that he could attract all types of people in his audiences.

In his essay “Shakespeare and the thought of his age”, W. R. Elton shows the intellectual conventions that affected both the bard’s works and the attitude of his audience; he presents the English Renaissance as an analogical, transitional and dialectical age, pointing it out as both a continuance to, and a rupture with, the medieval past. First, he demonstrates that there was a level of analogy between man and God or between the human being and the universe. What had been in the Middle Ages a relation of likeness between man and God became, during the Renaissance, a correspondence between the human being and the universe. Man was at the same time a representative of the macrocosm, sharing the same features (obviously in a smaller proportion), and “the mediator between himself and the universe”. He was no longer generally seen as a representative of God, due to the recent re-emphasis on his fallen nature by the reformers. Yet, he was part of a very well structured

hierarchy of which God was at the top and stones or inanimate things were at the bottom. Man was one degree above woman, and they were lower than the angels and above animals and vegetation (In Wells: 1986, 17-8).

Elton mentions the reverberations of the macrocosm in the human being explaining the reflections of the natural elements in the human temperament: earth and water, the elements which tend to “fall to the center of the universe”, correspond respectively to melancholy and phlegmatic moods; air and fire, the elements that tend to rise, are linked to their respective sanguine and choleric ‘humors’. It was also believed that celestial bodies could control organs of the human body and evil spirits could lead man to sin (id.20-1). Once believed to be the image of God on earth, fallen man was now so distant from his Creator that he gave up following the teachings from the Holy Scriptures and judged himself independent from the omnipresent force. The farther from God, the closer to earth: in the need to believe something, Renaissance man found in these analogies the explanations to the behavior of the human body and soul.

After analyzing the analogical thoughts of the English Renaissance, Elton defines the age from the perspective of its transitions, implying that the distance between man and God was also caused by the disbelief man developed toward his Creator. Not that man ceased to believe in the existence of a God – he in fact started to believe that the Creator lacked in understanding and flexibility. In that sense, The Elizabethans’ concern about salvation was reduced to the idea of a prize given to a few elected only (id.25). Not being eligible to such a prize, the average Englishman of the time had the feeling of being left alone, without God’s favor to help him. Daily worries stopped him from struggling for a better life after death, since chances of going to Heaven seemed to have become smaller than in medieval times. Concentrating his thoughts and efforts on the mundane enjoyment of his own life provided him a more attainable target than focusing on a doctrine that was being constantly questioned and that would apparently bring no reward to the majority.

The spiritual loneliness experienced by the Renaissance individual owed much to the Protestant Reformation. The Catholic notion of the ‘communion of saints’, in which the souls of the living are united in prayer to the ones of the deceased – both in Heaven and in Purgatory – in a plea of collective salvation, is undermined. François Lebrun, in his essay on the religious reformations (In Ariès & Chartier: 1991, 109), mentions prayers for the dead, pilgrimages to holy shrines and the sacrifice of the holy mass as sensible actions towards one’s salvation. Besides depending on Jesus’ merits, a Christian could count on the intercession of the saints in Heaven as well as the prayers of other believers on earth (id. 111).

The Protestant, on the other hand, was responsible for his own salvation – his faith in Christ and the sole fact of being a Protestant already guaranteed his election by God (id. ib.). The individual became, thus, totally independent from his fellow human beings and, to a certain point, even independent from God, since he should fight for salvation, which was no longer seen solely as a divine grace.

The weakening of the analogy between man and God, according to Elton, reduced the importance of man's sin and lessened its effect on the corruption of the vast world. The God preached by the Reformation was a whimsical God, who apparently had no logical reason; the world was supposedly rational and man's "darkened faculties" were incapable of perceiving its rationality. The awareness of such human weakness conflicted with man's importance in the world's hierarchy. Man had so far been considered important, only one degree below the angels. Lacking similarity with the Creator he also lost his position in the hierarchy. Moreover, the new political possibility of ascension in the social scale gave him conditions to control his position according to his will (In Wells: 1986, 29). The skepticism that triggered the uncertainty of being elected by God or not often made the Renaissance individual curious and gave him a desire to expand his capabilities. An important discovery he made was that it was now possible to act according to his own desires. Even though Elton describes him as a "trivial plaything for the amusement of questionably benevolent higher powers" (id.32), not every Renaissance individual found use in struggling for a reward after death; not being allowed to count on God's help (an increasingly popular idea at the time), he decided to depend on human will.

Besides the transitions occurred at the spiritual level, Renaissance also proved transitional in the economic and political system. Agnes Heller, in her book *Renaissance Man*, points out that with the decline of feudalism and the transformation of the social and economic structures into capitalism, "everything became fluid" (1978:2) and "an entire system of values and way of life were shaken" (id.ib.). A new dynamics controlled the social scale, in which individuals no longer held fixed positions. All this made Renaissance a "problematic and contradictory" age (id.ib.).

If still during the feudal system the consciousness of the individual was starting to be formed when this individual acquired a growing interest in leaving home to study or to become a knight, thus denying the hardships of a strenuous struggle to survive, Heller states that during the Renaissance, with the new concept of man, the individual lost not only the natural connections with his or her home and family, but also with his or her community, social state and with a "ready-made' place in society" (1978:3) in a way that relations became

fluid (cf. Heller: 1978, 3-4). Besides a distance between the individual and his deity, Renaissance brought then a distance between the human relations already considered natural and essential. Values sometimes became totally reversed.

This ever-moving historical age, Heller later adds, demanded of its individual the capacity to follow the speed of changes and the desire to be the best. This enabled competition among individuals, who now could only see themselves against one another, thus very often developing feelings such as envy, jealousy and hatred towards others who achieved success, especially at work (cf. Heller: 1978, 199). In a way, this explains Iago's envy and hatred of Othello and even Othello's jealousy of Desdemona. Even though these were not considered positive feelings, they belonged to a predisposition of the society and anyone could be vulnerable to them.

W. R. Elton concludes his work analyzing Shakespeare's production as a response to the dialectical society he was part of. He was able to grasp the conflicting ideas of his time and explore them to an extent that he could engage the attention of a variety of spectators coming from diverse cultural and social backgrounds, having a number of different views on the world and belonging to controversial currents of thought. Elton shows how the society mirrored the relationship between acting (and whatever it involved, including the actors' professionalism) and reality, including the questions of identity-versus-role and "appearance-versus-reality" (In Wells: 1986, 32-3). Society was controversial, being composed of a variety of individuals and each individual, with the new possibilities that were being offered and with the new liberties that he or she was gaining, was in search of a distinctive identity. Abandoned to his or her own fate without a God to provide support, the individual's behavior and his exclusive character would be subject to one's own will. This generated a loss of inner coherence that made it no longer necessary to act uniformly in society.

Shakespeare was part of such a society made up of distinctive individuals, whose ideas, behaviors and beliefs affected his writing. He was eager to constantly fill the playhouse with those individuals. In order to make his stories attractive to such a varied audience he needed to add elements to his plays that were familiar to that society. We could thus consider his works as mere products of the society in which he lived. But the bard added to his characters a depth never seen before. Due to this depth and to the variety of his creations, Harold Bloom claims that Shakespeare invented the individual. In his book *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, he states that "no one, before or since Shakespeare, made so many separate selves" (1998:1). By saying this, the author expresses his belief in the extremely higher genius of the bard, with which the playwright was able to create an enormous variety

of characters, each one with a set of distinctive features. Because of such a prolific creation, Shakespeare may thus be said to have worked both extensively and intensively on his characters for, along with the diversity of personalities he invented, the bard was also able to plunge into the nature of each one of his heroes, heroines, villains and even some of his minor characters.

In order to produce so profusely, a writer must indeed possess a special aptitude. Bloom believes in the bard's "superiority of Intellect [sic]" (id.ib.) that led him to "invention" (id.2) and implies that through Shakespeare we can learn more about human nature (cf. Bloom: 1998, 1-2). Shakespeare's creations, as a source of such understanding, are considered by Bloom as not merely characters, but individuals. The depth with which the bard portrays them is outstanding to Bloom:

No other writer, before or since Shakespeare, has accomplished so well the virtual miracle of creating utterly different yet self-consistent voices for his more than one hundred major characters and many hundreds of highly distinctive minor personages (id.xix).

Due to the depth and pervasiveness of Shakespeare's creation Bloom raises Shakespeare to the status of a "mortal god", because he is very keen on representing the human character and personality, and this representation is considered "the supreme literary value". Bloom points out that if vitalistic or heroic gestures were not part of Shakespeare's daily life, he at least produced Hamlet and Falstaff, "as art's tribute to nature":

Falstaff and Hamlet are the invention of the human, the inauguration of personality as we have come to recognize it. [...] Personality, in our sense, is a Shakespearian invention, and is not only Shakespeare's greatest originality but also the authentic cause of his perpetual pervasiveness (id.3-4).

The knowledge of mankind displayed in the depth of his characters, added to the spreading of his works through time and place, endows Shakespeare with an appearance of omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence. To Bloom, Shakespeare's works are not an imitation of life, but rather the creation of life; the bard did not imitate the Bible or Chaucer, either, but he took hints from them, developing inwardness as "the heart of light and of darkness" in a way never done in literature before (id.6). Even his rival Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights, with their abilities to perceive the disjunctions between ideas of love, order, and the Eternal, were not able to create men and women, as Shakespeare did; the best that they could do was to display "eloquent caricatures". The bard, according to Bloom, was able to create men and women (id.7).

Combined with the distinctive personality of each Shakespearian character was a wide range of representations. Each of his creations is at the same time (paradoxically) deep in his or her individuality and emblematic not only of a possible individual from the

Elizabethan or Jacobean society, but also of mankind in general. The issues discussed in the playwright's works are universal, rather than confined to a particular time or place. On the universality of the Shakespearian human being, Bloom states that besides shaping modern English language in its beginning, Shakespeare still goes on shaping the human being of our own time, which is increasingly "postnational and postgender" (1998:10). Based on these features of the human being created by Shakespeare, Harold Bloom then attacks the pragmatism of some critics nowadays who tend to assimilate Shakespeare to historical or modern contexts. He justifies his position by stating that the technique of demystification is too weak "to exercise upon the one writer who truly seems to have become himself only by representing other selves" (id.11). Restricting Shakespeare's human beings to specific contexts confines his creations to biased interpretations, thus reducing the universality of his work. Jill Line, in her book *Shakespeare and the Ideal of Love*, agrees and reinforces this idea:

Whilst an academic deconstruction of his language may unearth a multiplicity of approaches, there is no need to tear Shakespeare apart in order to find a meaning for audiences today. The meaning is there, in his words, his themes and his poetry, a meaning that goes beyond current political issues, beyond gender and race, to the ideas, forms and universal laws that lie beyond the material world and have their roots in one source (Line, 2006:2).

Even though Shakespeare's survival depended on writing to his contemporaries in the most suitable way so as to attract their interest, due to his gifted use of language, he constructed meanings that have survived all times. He may have achieved this ability to promote this globalized understanding just by writing to his varied audience, which was composed of members of all social classes and which had a variety of interests and tastes.

Albeit diversified in behavior, Shakespeare's public was an incredulous society, often skeptical about the results of actions each one might perform, since going to heaven was no longer a goal in most individuals' lives. The idea of nothingness was widespread. The distance the average English person felt from the divine caused on the one hand the idea of an anarchic – sometimes beneficial – rule of human will, but on the other a negation of spirituality and a reduction in importance of the human being, once the connection with God was constantly questioned. This negation is seen in Bloom's supreme model of Shakespearian individual, Hamlet, who has the genius of an artist, "whose insight cannot fail, and who converts his mousetrap into Theater of the World". This Hamlet, who transcends "the hero-villain's role, has much to do with his rejection of the will, including the will to avenge, a project he evades by negation" (1998:12). The Danish prince sees the self as an abyss, or as "the chaos of virtual nothingness" (id.5). Nihilism, in Bloom's opinion, is present in nearly all Shakespearian plays. He argues that the bard knows everything, but carefully avoids

transcendence. For Bloom, his nihilism is appropriate to poetry, leaving within the reader or audience a feeling of emptiness at the end of the performance (cf. Bloom: 1998, 14).

Bloom states that Shakespeare's eminence owes a great deal to the language he used, reflecting the socio-political and economic aspects of the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras (id.16). Greenblatt agrees on the influence of the society on a playwright's works, saying that "the theater is manifestly the product of collective intentions" (1988:4). Yet, Bloom's justification for the bard's supremacy goes even further. He mentions a judgment that has been dominant since it emerged in the mid-eighteenth century, which shows that Shakespeare's ability to reflect the world turned him into a "more adequate representer of the universe of fact than anyone else" (Bloom, 1998:16). Because of the profound sense of individuality present in the bard's characters and the correspondence that exists between them and human beings from virtually any time or place, we could state that in his plays, Shakespeare depicted individuals who had the power to make decisions – or to avoid making them – demonstrating thus a kind of freedom not commonly experienced before the Elizabethan era. The conception of 'individual' was being shaped then, but Shakespeare exposed his audience to this novelty, thus perpetuating the notion.

## **2.2. Marriage and cohabitation in the Bible**

The Western individual, being thus considered unique and free, or at least *apparently* free, has the power to choose the course of his or her own life, provided that the limits enforced by law are respected. With the exception of the rules imposed on religious people of a few denominations, there are no social rules nowadays on such issues as someone's need to get married or stay single, the 'right' age to get married, the 'right' choice of a spouse, the couple's choice to have children or not or the number of children they should have. Even when there is the intention of following some social *conventions*, it is important to notice that the Western human being is freer now than in any other time in history in his or her choice of a mate and there is an (ever) increasing tolerance towards what in the past were considered transgressions, such as having sex and children without necessarily getting married.

Until one century ago, however, a certain code of behavior was demanded of the individual living in the Western world. Speaking of such a code nowadays may sound old-fashioned, even though a few societies still attempt to observe those demands, whose sources are as old as the creation of the world itself and are found in the Bible. The first couple recorded in the book of life is God's first human creation, Adam, and the female partner God

gave him, Eve. *Genesis* narrates how the first man, instructed by God, looks for a companion among all creatures and, finding none, is put to sleep by God, who creates the first woman out of the man's rib. The message left is that the man from then on shall “leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (*Genesis* 2,18-24). Companionship is one of the reasons for the creation of the woman, but not the only one. Procreation is also an important motive. Not only does it fulfill – even more – God’s desire to give the man company and not leave him alone, but also give man power, for God tells the first couple to “be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it” (*Genesis* 1,28). In this sense, man needs a wife and children so that he will not strive by himself, but together they will be able to dominate the earth.

In the New Testament Jesus Christ points out that when a man joins a woman and they become husband and wife they should not divorce because they have become “one flesh” and have been united by God. According to Him, therefore, when a man or a woman divorces and marries again they commit adultery. (*Matthew* 19,6.9; *Mark* 10, 8-12; *Luke*, 16,18) This does not mean that the Lord took the existing model and made a code of behavior based on it; much on the other hand, He wanted to show how important it was to struggle to accomplish the difficult tasks of respecting each other in marriage, of accepting each other’s differences and of acknowledging the ideal God proposes in which the family is the center of society.

Adultery is highly condemned in the Bible. Of the Ten Commandments Moses received from the Creator on Mount Horeb, the sixth and ninth – forbidding, respectively, adultery and covetousness – are totally against the idea of a sexual relation outside wedlock (*Exodus* 20,14.17). God’s attacks on these behaviors, however, are not an imposition on chastity founded on the need of human beings to control their natural impulses, but an attempt to make individuals respect marital relationships (their own as well as their neighbors’) and avoid a thrust towards the accumulation of wealth, given the connection among wealth, idolatry and covetousness (*Exodus* 20,17 – footnotes). In order to “put away evil from Israel”, death was the penalty when a man was found lying with a married woman (*Deuteronomy* 22,22), which reinforced the importance given to the preservation of the respectful relationship between husband and wife in marriage and therefore among members of society. Besides adultery, avoided by a couple when they decide to live in marital chastity, fornication is also considered a sin. Individual chastity is seen in the Bible as a way to devote one’s life entirely to God (*Matthew* 19,12). Denying his or her carnal desires, an individual acquires the possibility of detaching him or herself from the earthly worries in order to follow the divine. This could be a decision of someone who wished to dedicate his life to religion or simply live

respectfully until marriage. For holiness, not lust, is the purpose God has for each individual (I Thessalonians 4,7), being single or married.

Chastity and respect are thus shown in the Holy Bible as essential values of a married individual. The Holy Bible, however, does not tackle deeply the issue of love in marriage. In his first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul discusses the importance and the qualities of charity. Besides being used with regard to fraternal love among human beings, it can well refer to love among members of a family and particularly to love between husband and wife (no wonder it is still sung in wedding ceremonies of today!). This charity – or love – Paul refers to suffers and is kind, it does not envy or boast, it does not seek its own interests, it thinks no evil and never fails, it rejoices in the truth and endures everything. It should be the essence of all actions or gifts, otherwise they would be void (I Corinthians 13). Whether marriages are arranged or not, husband and wife should nevertheless be guided by this love which, according to the Holy Scripture, must be present not only inside marriage, but should be followed by any individual towards another, for all are children of the same God.

Love between spouses is advised by Peter but labeled “care”, “submission” or “respect”. Husband and wife are encouraged to love each other and thus be obedient to God and be in His divine favor (*I Peter* 1-7). Love as a desire between two individuals is not explored in the Bible except for perhaps only Solomon’s *Song of Songs*. It is possible that its content – a collection of love folk songs – was used in wedding festivities due to the way it promotes a celebration of love; even though the text may be read as a metaphor for God’s love towards mankind, it does not cease to be an incomparable expression of love between a man and a woman (*Song of Songs* 1,1 – Introduction). In this sense it is rightful to state that erotic love finds at least this manifestation in the Holy Scriptures. The beloved’s physical beauty and quality of voice are always highlighted by the lover in a way that shows a strong feeling of admiration added to the need to be together. Metaphors and comparisons with nature stress the positive qualities of the spouses, both of whom are given speech, thus establishing courtship. The language of desire and love between the members of the couple proves that – as long as care, submission and respect take part in this game – God is in favor of love and desire between a man and a woman who unite themselves before the Lord.

### **2.3. Love, marriage and the medieval society**

As time went by, although God’s law remained the same, society created new ways to interpret it. In his book *Idade Média, Idade dos Homens*, French medievalist Georges Duby

shows society's need to perpetuate its existence, not only through the replication of the individual, but also of the cultural system. In order to fulfill such a need, rules were established for the union of two individual beings, two social beings, two households. Establishing rules meant publicizing, socializing and legalizing a private act, which was at the same time secular and religious. It was secular with regard to the rites themselves and religious considering that sex leads to procreation, to a participation in the divine mystery of life. For this reason, there should be a regulation of marriage by legal and religious institutions. Despite the great difficulties in finding evidence about private life in medieval times, the author shows that discoveries have been made on the creation of social rules and laws, which may point to the fact that such laws were necessary to justify and/ or conceal certain actions. It should not be believed, however, that the generation of these regulations would form a homogeneous society, because transgressions always exist (1991:11-3).

As wedding was already considered the most important social act and at the same time its institutionalization and control was achieved by Christianity, Duby shows that the two systems, which diverge almost entirely, see in the wedding two different functions: for the lay, the union of a couple has the purpose of controlling property and for the Church, it was the sexual instinct that should be controlled, in order to avoid evil. Maidens would be negotiated by their families according to their procreative power (id.14-5). Even after some development in the idea of individual, the woman was still being considered something like an object. She was a child bearer and caretaker. These were her attributions and her price. Duby describes the ritual that takes place as the accomplishment of the negotiation as threefold: the wedding ceremony is the celebration of fidelity in which promises are made, guarantees are given and the contract is written; the banquet happens after the bride has been escorted to her new home and this is the newly married couple's first meal; at night the sexual intercourse is the groom's hope to initiate his functions of legitimate paternity (id.16). From the very beginning, then, the procreative function of marriage appears as the most important reason for the union of the couple. Love is not taken into account and mutual knowledge is not encouraged. Sex did not necessarily involve pleasure and contraception was not even cogitated.

In fact, according to Duby, the Church preached marriage as a device to discipline sexuality and to avoid fornication, since the immoderate use of sexual organs was considered the devil's trap. When spouses were together, their thoughts should be on procreation only. The Christian attitude toward sexuality prescribed by the Church valued virginity before marriage and continence during it. Salvation was promised to those who obeyed these

precepts (id.18-20). Even the cleanliness of the sexual contact within marriage was argued. This led lay people to express disapproval of the wedding of clergymen. This argument also censored sexual activity between husband and wife until sin was removed from the bodily act and wedding was recognized as a sacrament (id.23-4). The demonstration of love itself should be moderate, for according to Morris, the society of the time regarded passionate love as essentially sinful, and the ardent lover was considered “an adulterer with his own wife”. Not even lovers with “honorable intentions” had Church support (1972:107-8). The idea of the sinful sexual intercourse, especially outside the sacred bonds of marriage, was supposed to be accepted as a reason to hold back people’s lust and orientate them toward family and social matters, especially the preservation of property.

According to Duby, in order not to partition heritage destined to the firstborn son, younger men were not usually allowed to get married in the 12th century. Expelled from their father’s household, they usually became prostitute-seeking celibate knights. Conversely, there was a worry to find a husband to all the daughters. Due to the number of prospective wives, the firstborn son often had the chance of getting a good wife (1989:21-2). Despite the attempt to organize the society in families that would preserve their assets, the medieval knight provoked a certain disruption in the system.

This disruption, as Duby states, was due to the distance between what the Church prescribed and what was actually put into practice, as well as to the presence of a growing literature against the wedding ideal. This manifestation originated in the idea of free love, a right claimed by celibate knights, and in the reluctance to accept the institution that unites two households or two heritages and not two human beings (id.25-6). Deprived of the right to get married, many young men were frustrated; because wedding agreements were set without the couple’s appreciation, the consequence was a certain coldness of the husband-wife relationship (id.62-3). All this was added to the new ideal of love, which was at the same time forbidden and desired.

The origin of the so-called ‘courtly love’ corresponds to a literary model, slightly and progressively altered later in the 12th century, composed of a young unmarried man who approached a married lady in order to take her. Because she was involved by a society that valued marriage as a way to assure a heritage that was conveyed by male lineage, this woman was considered unattainable and inaccessible. In this context, adultery was the wife's worst subversion possible. If found out, her accomplice would be severely punished. To the young man, running such a risk was the same as taking part in a tournament. Courtly love was a game played by men in search of pleasure; the woman was the object they competed for

(id.60-1). Since an unmarried man was not allowed to fulfill his desire of getting married and having a wife and family, and women were not commonly very happily married, once their husbands had been chosen according to their parents' interests, the creation of a code of precepts became widely desired in order to improve the relationship between men and women (id.62-3). Courtly love would discipline men's desire, once the lady usually delayed an acceptance of the young man who was courting her, while gradually exciting the man, forcing his discipline. The lady, however, was not the main reason for this type of game, but an excuse for the man's exercise in self-control. The literary expressions of courtly love played an important role in the liberation of the feudal society from the turmoil and wildness which were part of this society and promoted individuality to those who could only see themselves as part of a group (id.61).

Historians have thus named 'courtly love' because the literature that demonstrates the regulation of its behavior was written in courts of the 12th century and, in such a moment of economic growth, "it was a way to reinforce the sovereign authority's domain on this social category, perhaps the most useful then to the reconstitution of the State, but the least gentle, chivalry" (id.63, my translation<sup>1</sup>). It was a game that taught the knight to be humble and loyal. This exercise of submission to a woman, considered then an inferior being, made the knight a good vassal (cf. Duby: 1989, 63-5). Obedience and submission to a woman would then lead a knight to obedience and submission to any authority, especially the king's. That is why this manifestation was encouraged by the nobility. Knights would thus be tamed so as to offer the king their service and loyalty.

According to Morris, the word 'obedience' was used to refer to "the amorous pursuit of ladies". The "service of love" became a conventional behavior centered on the knights' obedience to the ladies they chose. This hidden, adulterous love, which was "dominated by physical desire", (1972:112-3) involved "the service and adoration of the beloved" to the point of making a knight fight for his "lady's honor and renown" (id.108). This need to achieve fulfillment courting a person of the opposite sex in an attempt to find love in someone else represents the human being's necessity to find a partner and share his moments. However, this "pursuit of love and friendship" is "essentially an extension of that search for the self". Morris finds the center of the beloved's interest in himself and not in the friend or mistress. In an "assiduous attempt at self-understanding [...] men looked for a mirror in which they could see themselves clearly" (id.118-9). Jill Line complements this idea, stating

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<sup>1</sup> As no original text or English translation of Duby's text is available to me, all the quotes by Duby in this section are my own translation of the Portuguese version, by Jônatas Batista Neto.

that “when women first attract love through their beauty, they become personifications of men’s souls” (2006:10). In this pursuit of the self and in this effort to understand one’s own nature, both people involved in courtly love could be counted as individuals who made their own decisions and who wanted to act according to their needs. As it could also be considered a game of interest, Duby hypothesizes that courtly love was not really the love between a man and a woman, but between a man (a knight) and his lord (the prince), and the woman was only a mediator. Submitting himself to his lord's wife was an exercise of humbleness in which the knight would please the prince who would, in turn, guarantee the knight’s position. Once the ruler had faithful knights, his own power would be assured (1989:65).

Being 'courtly love' an element originated in a twelfth-century Renaissance poetic genre, Lu Emily Pearson, in her book *Elizabethan Love Conventions*, names Chrétien as its “greatest French poet” (1966:6) and points to the connections between his writings and Ovid's *Art of Loving*, in which love is “highly sensual” (id.ib.). In fact, such connections are possible among most writers of the genre (cf. Pearson: 1966, 6).

In Ovid’s text, the lady about to be seduced is considered a hunted animal or a desired object and is not very different from the medieval woman, who was used for procreation and negotiated according to her breeding capabilities, who was not treated as an equal to man, but rather was part of the household, who was devoted to her husband even if their relationship did not involve love or affection. This medieval woman had the role of organizer, child bearer and caretaker and had virtually no rights, no freedom and no voice. Because she could not express her feelings, she could find comfort in an extramarital affair, which was a situation that she could control. Even if she was not allowed to take the initiative in the art of seduction, she could still seduce a knight with her eyes and manners, as well as with her dressing style. Being married, she could also be in control of her affair, knowing the best time her lover could meet her in order to avoid being caught by her husband; she could even resist a knight’s endeavor either for lack of interest in him or for the pleasure of seeing his insistence. In the game Ovid proposes, a woman could refuse to get involved with her seducer, but the author encourages the man’s insistence because he believes in the achievement of love for its own sake, without connection with laws or obligations. Love is treated as a feeling that unites a man and a woman and can be developed through continuous interaction between them, when at least one of them has the purpose of attracting the other. Its aim is pleasure and it does not entail responsibility or commitment between the people involved.

This model of love affair took place both in Ovid's time and in the twelfth-century

Renaissance. Despite its extension to Shakespeare's time, it is not the dominant mode. Before moving to the objects of my study, I will discuss the possibilities of individual choice and realization of a love affair during the English Renaissance.

#### **2.4. Adjustments of the medieval modes of love to the Renaissance individual**

In first place it is necessary to note that marriage, as prescribed by the Church – which was now mostly Anglican – remained a respected institution and still widely practiced in Shakespeare's England. In most cases it happened similarly to the way it was conducted in the Middle Ages, with the woman being negotiated by her father and suitor, the latter's interest in the dowry he would get, the father's interest in marrying his daughter to someone of good financial perspectives and the lack of previous knowledge between bride and groom. Marriage, according to Heller (op.cit.), was still “regulated, down to the slightest details, by convention” (1978:264). This was not, however, the only model as the ever-changing Renaissance individual was still open to courtly love as well, besides other free manifestations of affection. The autonomous choice of a beloved, according to Heller, grew in the “Renaissance’s scale of values” (cf. Heller: 1978, 265), due to the freedom the individual had achieved.

Regarding the types of approaches to love which eventually reflected in the English Renaissance, Pearson points to Cardinal Bembo's definitions of the two kinds of love referred to in the literary writings prior to Shakespeare's time: love portrayed either “as a matter of sensual enjoyment” or “as a deep spiritual passion of the noblest kind” (1966:50). The former was the common description by “comic poets” (id.ib.) and novelists and depended more on human impulses and the latter, used chiefly by “lyric poets and writers of dialogues” (id.ib.), was considered more elevated, corresponding to “the ancient belief in an original unity of souls in the Divine being” (id.ib.). These different definitions of love were familiar to Shakespeare and his contemporaries and demonstrated two different ways in which the Renaissance individual faced love. In either case, when one found in another being what he or she judged to be love, it was easier then to make an acceptable choice; according to Heller, similarly to friendship, love was “placed above those emotional ties which sprang from blood relationship” (1978:260).

Romeo and Juliet loved each other and risked their lives for the sake of this love detaching themselves from their families; Desdemona's family was her father but, since she was quite sure that her choice of an erotic partner would not be acceptable for him, she decide

to abandon her 'family' and devote her life to the general. The choice of a partner, something that could separate an individual from his family, according to Heller, became more and more acceptable during Renaissance; “gradually, chosen ties, became individuals' sole support” (1978:262). Love, as well as friendship, detached itself from “natural bonds” (id.ib.) in which the persons involved attempted to exercise their autonomy. Family ceased to be “the unconditional support which it once had been” (cf. Heller: 1978,262). In an era in which autonomy was rising as a value, individual choice became more and more the norm.

In the next chapter I will explore the notions studied about the individual and love in Shakespeare's works. The bard used to a great extent the ideas that an individual could be autonomous and make his own choices regardless of the groups – such as family and society – of which he or she was part and that love could be the element that defined each person's individuality, leading him or her to choices that would define this individual's lot. Some Medieval ideas were still dominating, such as marriage to control sexuality and property, and others were assuming new dimensions, as the thought of Shakespeare's age tended to value autonomy and independence.

### 3. SHAKESPEARE'S TRAGIC HEROES AND HEROINES IN LOVE

Incorporating Renaissance thought in tragedies meant, for Shakespeare, inserting elements that belonged to his contemporary culture that would attract and delight the individuals in his audience. In a society with a growing consideration for freedom of choice, love and friendship over values such as family, tradition and convention, stage representations of the new ideas or ideals would get an interest that reinforced these new values.

Such values are present in the works chosen, however differently they are presented. The choice of the objects of analysis is based on the sole fact that the four tragedies studied – *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* – present a marital or erotic union – or at least the cogitation thereof, in the case of *Hamlet* – that may have a connection with the tragic fate of the protagonist(s). The criteria used to select the order in which the plays are presented has been thematic – love is the theme of the two plays worked in the first section, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*, and not in the second, *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*.

Specific critical texts have been chosen in the approach to the first two tragedies analyzed. *Romeo and Juliet* will be discussed taking into consideration the view of two anthropologists, E. B. Viveiros de Castro and Ricardo Benzaquén de Araújo, who demonstrate how the tragedy of the two young lovers inaugurates a new individual attitude, being considered a “myth of origin” and for this reason being the first work analyzed in this chapter. *Othello*, sharing the primary focus on the individual choice of a spouse or erotic partner and the implication of such a choice in the individuals' tragic end, will be analyzed with the help of Harold Bloom and Stephen Greenblatt.

The second section starts with *Hamlet* and will analyze his choices of not loving and not getting involved and the connection between these choices and his individuality. Coppélia Kahn, Peter Erickson, Stephen Greenblatt and Northrop Frye will help me develop this idea. *Macbeth* has been left to the end for picturing – even if ironically – a harmonious couple. The unity of Lord and Lady Macbeth will be investigated with the help of Harold Bloom.

All the analyses aim at showing how the individual portrayed by Shakespeare could make choices and risk everything, even his or her life, in the name of those choices. The individual became thus responsible for his or her actions.

#### 3.1. *Romeo and Juliet*: the individual and society

In order to apply to Shakespeare the ideas discussed on the individual and his choice

of a companion, I shall start by analyzing *Romeo and Juliet*, the bard's tragedy that touches this very theme, with its protagonists deciding to choose each other as husband and wife for love, and later facing the consequences of their choices. The article “Romeu e Julieta e as Origens do Estado” by E. B. Viveiros de Castro and Ricardo Benzaquen de Araújo will be a useful device to me in the reflection proposed in this dissertation – the relationship between the notion of love and the construction of the idea of individual. The two authors, renowned Brazilian anthropologists, consider *Romeo and Juliet* the “myth of origin” (1977:156) of the notion of love as it came to consolidate itself in the Western culture. Interestingly, such a conception of an individual who is free from the social order or opposed to this order coincides with the strengthening of the absolute political power, characterizing the change from a medieval world to a modern one.

The analysis of the way Romeo and Juliet represent this new notion of individual that will be established in the Western world does not aim at reflecting the discussion of the anthropological concepts presented by Castro and Araújo, but at reporting the core of their investigation, focusing strictly on the elements of the Shakespearian play.

Shakespeare's theatrical version of an already known story takes place in a Verona that is suffering from an apparently unreasoned discord between the two dominating families. Young Romeo, member of the Montagues but alien to the general mood imposed by the contending families, is suffering from unrequited love and is taken to a party to “examine other beauties” (I.1.221). He falls then in love with the masked young lady of the house, Juliet, daughter of the enemy family, the Capulets. Romeo finds in her the positive response he expects for his feeling and it is easy to see that the depth of their love – despite being at first sight – is unprecedented in their lives.

As the play shows the transition from the ideas of family and group to the one of individual, the social human being which is, according to Castro and Araújo, made up of rights and duties (cf. p.132), is incorporated by most of the characters and corresponds to the conventional, generally acceptable behavior. Romeo and Juliet present themselves as different individuals from those characters because they isolate themselves from the problems that involve the city and also because they see in their love and in their attitudes the chance to become autonomous and act according to their own beliefs and to their own characters.

Thirteen-year-old Juliet's right to exercise her autonomy and be independent is not taken into account by her family. It is rather her duties that start to show before she meets Romeo, when her father gives Paris, Prince Escalus's relative, permission to court her; her mother inquires her of her “dispositions to be married” and she boldly replies that “it is an

honour that I dream not of” (I.3.59), already showing her disposition to control her own life. Lady Capulet shows her daughter, then, that conventions should be followed:

LADY CAPULET: Well, think of marriage now. Younger than you,  
Here in Verona, ladies of esteem,  
Are made already mothers. By my count,  
I was your mother much upon these years  
That you are now a maid. Thus then in brief,  
The valiant Paris seeks you for his love. (I.3.63-8)

Were Juliet to follow the conventions – embodied in her mother's advice – she would persuade herself to get married and to accept Count Paris as her husband, to whom she would become an honest wife and of whom she would bear children. They would start a successful family if we consider that they would inherit money and assets from both Capulet and Paris's noble ancestors. Juliet's feelings, however, would not be taken into account and it could be said that their marriage would be arranged so as to guarantee a financial stability. The social role of the individual would thus be achieved in Juliet, but her psychological being would be neglected.

Viveiros de Castro and Benzaquén de Araújo's goal in their article is to analyze the extent to which love can be understood as a type of relation defined by the social role of the psychological individual and how it contrasts with relationships established by other social roles. They argue that the beginning of the modern conception of individual happened simultaneously with the definition of relatively autonomous dominating groups, such as the ones connected with politics, power, economy and religion (cf. Viveiros de Castro & Benzaquén de Araújo: 1977, 138-9).

The Verona of *Romeo and Juliet* is threatened by two such groups, the brawling Capulets and Montagues, who fight openly in the city streets despite Prince Escalus's attempts to keep peace (id. 145). Despite the lack of justification for the brawl in William Shakespeare's text, Viveiros de Castro and Benzaquén de Araújo state that, according to Onestaldo de Pennafort, translator and commentator of the edition used by them, these two Italian families were originally associated with 'parties' that represented opposing religious points of view. There is, however, a conflicting idea that families supporting such groups, which were common in Italy from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> century, were in fact manipulators of those parties and had no real ideological content to justify their differences, besides the desire to control the city in which they lived (id.145, footnote).

As enmity is installed in the city, a Capulet is by no means a match for a Montague, but Romeo is so excited about the feeling he has for Juliet that “with love's light wings” (II.1.108) he flies over the stone wall of her orchard, “stumbles” on her “counsel” (94) and

rebaptizes himself as “Love” in order to be able to stay with her. They exchange “love's faithful vow” (169) and plan to get married. When Romeo acquaints Friar Lawrence, his confessor, with his new love story, the priest at first wonders at the speedy replacement of the young man's former beloved, but agrees to perform the rites of marriage on the same day for one sole purpose, which is to establish peace between the families:

FRIAR LAWRENCE:                    (...)  
                                                   In one respect I'll thy assistant be,  
                                                   For this alliance may so happy prove  
                                                   To turn your households' rancour to pure love. (II.3.90-2)

By defying the situation established in the city with the intention to marry Juliet and Romeo, the friar defies fate. Viveiros de Castro and Benzaquén de Araújo argue that Friar Lawrence is an ambiguous figure, a mix of saint and alchemist, master of the science of life, death and liminality (1977:147). Being the guardian of both families' souls, he feels that he can easily establish the order of a society plunged into discord.

Moreover, as Romeo and Juliet create for themselves a world based on their love, they disconnect themselves from the real world because they do not want to take part in the hatred present in their environment. Viveiros de Castro and Benzaquén de Araújo argue that once the power of love is stronger than the power of hatred, as stated in the Prologue to Act I, Romeo and Juliet shift from the conventional, arbitrary loyalty to members of their families, to the laws of love, which is shown in the play associated with fate (cf. Viveiros de Castro & Benzaquén de Araújo: 1977, 158). Love becomes a trap that challenges what could be considered a rational choice, that is, the choice dictated by convention, in which one marries the appropriate suitor, elected by his or her family.

The trap set by love consists in trying to prevent an individual from selecting a partner that is suitable to his or her family's expectations by providing a more appealing alternative. It is up to each individual, then, to act according to his or her duty and be rational, choosing the conventional alternative, or surrender to the destiny offered by love.

Romeo and Juliet run to their destiny without saying a word to those who, according to convention, should not only be informed of their decision, but also – and especially – give them permission to get married – their parents. Besides the couple and the friar, the only people who know about the ceremony are Juliet's nurse, who becomes a messenger between her lady and the young groom, and Balthasar, Romeo's loyal servant who will give the nurse the “tackled stair” (II.3.169) to be hung from the young lady's window to enable her husband to get in unnoticed to their nuptials. The interesting thing is that all these steps, which seem carefully devised, are indeed instantly decided upon. Romeo and Juliet's choices prove thus to

be made regardless of the approval of any third party, given the power of the feeling that moves them.

This autonomy shown by the young tragic couple is mentioned by Viveiros de Castro and Benzaquén de Araújo. Analyzing Dumont's<sup>2</sup> work they conclude that there is an opposition between the society based on the cosmological man (the one which is part of the society and only exists as part of a whole) and the society based on individualism and on the existence of the individual, autonomous man. They consider, thus, *Romeo and Juliet* an example of the process of autonomization of affective control, inaugurating the individual as a value in a new view of the world (cf. p.140).

They treat the tragedy as a myth that inaugurates a new conception of the relationship between the individual and society. *Romeo and Juliet* shows the origin of the new modern psychological individual (id.142). In it, as in later literary works, phenomena are treated according to their repercussion on individual consciences, being the two protagonists symbols of such individuals. The love between Romeo and Juliet is a Western notion deeply connected with the modern conception of individual; such love can only reach its completeness in a society where the notion of individual is well developed (cf. p.144).

The inexistence of such a notion in Verona leads each person to consider him/herself primarily as a member of one of the brawling families. This means that, rather than particular features that would distinguish an individual from another, the value searched for in that society is the identification with a group; rather than individual feelings, each person is led to cherish feelings of loyalty and obedience to their families and to the groups to which their families adhere. Because the two groups are equally strong, their quarrel stands out from any other dominating force, making their power (representatively, yet not lawfully) stronger than the Prince's.

In order to have the loyalty and obedience of his subjects, a prince should thus inspire respect and devotion and in order to do this, as Viveiros de Castro and Benzaquén de Araújo state, based on Machiavelli's *The Prince*, the ruler should know how to behave taking into account his subjects' feelings, for subjects are fundamentally owners of feelings (id. 162). If the prince considers his subjects as groups or masses of people, these groups may gain force, as is the case with the families of *Romeo and Juliet*, and his power is consequently weakened.

The brawling families are called by Viveiros de Castro and Benzaquén de Araújo a "symmetric dualism", which consists of two similar groups with similar interests (especially

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<sup>2</sup> Louis Dumont was considered by English anthropologists one of the greatest critics of the value of the individual at the time the article was written.

dominating the city), but struggle against each other, thus taking opposed directions. The authors propose that this is one of the dualisms on which Shakespeare's play is based. The other dualism – the one that solves the first – is what they call the “complementary dualism” of the couple Romeo and Juliet who, aiming at completing and being completed by each other, become successful mediators of the first dualism, even though such mediation corresponds to their sacrifice (cf. p.146-7).

Such sacrifice – the protagonists' death – is the element that unites the families, instead of their marriage. Shakespeare reverses thus the functions of the facts in the play: the holy union of the couple (celebrated with the help of Friar Lawrence), which normally joins two families, ratifies the separation of Capulets and Montagues, who can only be united before the corpses of their two children (id.147-8). Death, in such a case, replaces birth if we consider that another opportunity to unite the two families could be the arrival of an heir (particularly in the case of Romeo and Juliet as only children of their families). The passing of the potential parents plays then the role of uniting element. The union achieved at the end of the play destroys the autonomy of the families and strengthens the central power of the Prince, who becomes the absolute lord of the city (id. 148). The dualism that starts taking place from this moment on (supposing that the story continues beyond the limit of the text) is the dualism between each individual and the supreme power of the Prince (cf.1977, 149).

The union of the couple of protagonists, enabled by love at first sight but devised by their youthful minds, is formally carried out in Friar Lawrence's chapel, but happens inside each lover from the very first moment they are together. Their excitement when they meet and their anxiety to be together when they are not already proves this. The very reaction to each other's words show that they are tuned in the same thoughts. When Juliet proposes marriage in the balcony scene, for example, Romeo never questions it – much on the contrary, as he craves to be with her, he looks forward to that moment.

It can be said then that Romeo and Juliet start to live every moment with the thought of each other and this does not only reflect upon their moments of happiness and of expectation, but also upon their suffering. Romeo thinks that the image of his lover's beauty, being constantly in his mind, has made him effeminate (III.1.110) and has thus weakened him, making him unable to fight well and prevent Mercutio's death. Guided by “fire-eyed fury” Romeo sets out to avenge his friend's execution and kills Tybalt.

Viveiros de Castro and Benzaquén de Araújo imply that in order for Romeo to perform this action, he firstly rejects the thought of having become a coward, because this would affect his manhood and he would thus not be able to love a woman; secondly, his

search for revenge is not based on a harm done to a member of his 'party', but to a friend. This is a private reason and he chooses friendship over family (being Tybalt his cousin at the time) and becomes, simultaneously, a manly and individual subject, able to love, to choose his romantic partner and to start a new family (1977:152).

Because Juliet also needs to see herself as an individual in order to realize her union with Romeo she has, according to the authors of the article, to reject the idea of being made an instrument of profitable liaisons between families and thus search for her individuality (id. 152). She starts the scene in which she argues with her father pretending – to Lady Capulet – that she has been crying for Tybalt's death, whereas in fact she is more concerned with Romeo's banishment. She pretends to be angry at Romeo and demonstrates a false desire to poison him. She rejects then the idea of getting married to Paris in two days and her father threatens to disinherit her. After talking to the Friar and getting from him some advice and a potion that would make her look dead, she pretends to yield to Lord Capulet, who then decides to anticipate the wedding proceedings. Such a decision gives rise to the fateful disencounters that cause the youths' deaths. All the acting performed by Juliet, her rebellion and the resulting plot to feign death are desperate attempts to guarantee her individuality and to get back to her love. She cannot marry Paris in first place because the only type of marriage in which she believes is the one in which husband and wife love each other, think alike and want to be together; Juliet hardly knows the suitor her father has arranged for her. Secondly, she has already made her individual choice of a husband and taken the necessary steps towards the accomplishment of her union, by getting married to Romeo. As a married woman she is consequently not allowed by the laws of the Church to wed a second time once her husband is alive.

The biblical concept that when two people get married they become “one flesh” (Matthew 19,6.9) – as if each one carries the other even when alone – contributes to the dualism present in *Romeo and Juliet*, disabling a definition of their personalities as separate beings, but one is defined according to the choice of the other.

Viveiros de Castro and Benzaquén de Araújo defend the idea that the notions of 'love' and 'family' are two opposed ideas in the play, as well as their unfolding into 'body' and 'name' and sometimes 'soul' and 'body', symbolizing the conflict between the “individual I” and the “social I” (id. 149). The relations between body and name, father and son, family and individual are considered by the authors as nominal, arbitrary ones, whereas the relations which are considered real and necessary are the ones between man and woman and between soul and body. As Juliet becomes Romeo's soul, she becomes a part of him (id. 151). This

mingling of personalities points out that love leads to a loss of identity: Romeo denies his name and even denies being himself, but defines himself as 'love' (id.150), that is, his self-definition does not correspond to himself only, but to the feeling he feels for Juliet.

According to the authors, *Romeo and Juliet* presents a fusion of individualities that results in the loss of personal identity of the protagonists, who become a “dual individual”. The notion of individual has two interpretations in the play: the first one indicates an idiosyncratic singularity expressing the Western notion of 'personality' and the second interpretation refers to the individual as member of the human species (id. 155). The two young lovers of Verona embody the first interpretation in their attitudes, in their choices, in their decisions, in their surrender to their feelings and their beliefs. Yet, this surrender leads them to the state of members of a larger sphere, which they cannot control. The very fact of falling in love with an enemy is an instance of this uncontrollable cosmic order. Other facts that fall into this perspective are Tybalt's provocation and Romeo's inability to defend Mercutio; Capulet's anticipation of Juliet and Paris's wedding and her consequent anticipation of a fake death; the Nurse's unreliability when she tries to persuade Juliet to marry Paris; the plague that prevents Friar John to get to Mantua before Balthasar, thus allowing Romeo to acknowledge his wife's death and not her plot of feigning death; Romeo's arrival at the vault before Friar Lawrence and the religious man's fear of being caught by the watchmen. All these contribute to the couple's union in life and death, which will unite their families and level the citizen's moods in such a way that the Prince will reestablish his power.

Love, for them, connects individuals who are free from a moral, social and religious order. Power and love are the categories that organize a world of individuals (id.ib.). Power and love are two faces of the same individual, to whom power is public and legal, whereas love is private, natural, presupposing a “personality” that singularizes and elevates him/ her (id.167). The impossibility of a happy marital life for Romeo and Juliet lies exactly in the fact that their power to make choices and decisions cannot be made public because it goes against the social power.

With the end of the brawl between Capulets and Montagues, peace is installed in Verona in the last scene of the play, their power is reduced and the Prince's authority is consolidated (cf. Viveiros de Castro & Benzaquén de Araújo: 1977, 145). If Juliet neglected her own desires and married Paris, the two families would have no reason to stop their fight. Consequently, the Prince's power would still be defied by the ever-strengthening brawling families. The peace brought by Romeo and Juliet's death reinforces the power of the individual autonomy and its imbricacy with superior absolute political power.

As Romeo and Juliet have to secretly assume their power and love, this secret couple is destined to disappear as a couple and as individuals living in a certain society. Shakespeare's word power, however, inaugurates the reflection on the relation between the individual choice of a spouse and political power. This reflection becomes essential in the development of a society whose values were changing and whose power shifted from the family or social group to the individual.

### **3.2. Othello, Desdemona and the problem of loving too well**

*Othello* is another Shakespearian tragedy that uses the theme of love as a central element in the development of its plot. It is relevant for this work to study the story of this important black general commanding the Venetian fleets in a war against the Turks, who gets involved with the daughter of a city councilman and elopes with her, only to be made suspicious of her honesty as a wife and consequently kill her. There are many aspects to be discussed besides prejudice and jealousy, which are easily recognized at the superficial level. Othello and Desdemona, as two individuals who make important decisions which may defy the conventions of the society they are part of, are two good examples of the new conception of individual and individual autonomy, being developed in Shakespeare's time.

Whether or not a feeling that unites two beings should be classified as love is one of the discussions proposed. Othello and Desdemona's relationship will then be analyzed and the reasons for their union will be discussed. We will also question the knowledge the Moor has of his wife, proposing the lack thereof as a possible cause of the tragic actions. Next, I will investigate the extent to which this new autonomous individual is allowed to love in a society that regards passionate love as a sin and not as the basis of a marital union.

In order to start an analysis of the couple constituted by the Moor of Venice and his wife, as well as of the flaws that caused their downfall, it is first necessary to discuss their personalities. Othello's personality is defined at first by his insertion, as a character, in the narration of his life. As an excellent storyteller, Othello attracts other people's admiration when he narrates his adventures, which are the part of his life that makes him proudest. The power of Othello's words seems to perpetuate the Moor's success, besides being what seduces Desdemona when he tells her his story and convinces the Duke of his love for her.

Besides this possibility to define Othello according to his discourse and to his narration, this individual may be defined according to his origin, to his character, to his marital status or to his feelings; but it is impossible to define Othello's personality without any



Because of the importance of his professional “services”, we may conclude that the state plays such an important role in Othello's life that it is a constitutive part of his personality. This sense of being defined as part of a public institution makes the Moor public as well, to the point of exposing features that could go on belonging to his private life only, such as his royal ascendance, his “demerits” and his “unlucky deeds”.

The grandiose and public qualities of the Moor make him an appropriate tragic hero, once he is a man of high standing and makes a difficult choice, which becomes tragic. In his case, this choice is connected with loving Desdemona. Sacrificing her is part of the accomplishment of his prediction of “chaos” (III.3.105) because it is based on his negative judgment of her faithfulness. Othello is too big to shift from the initial public chaos of war to an ideal private peace provided by love. He becomes then susceptible to ill judgments of his wife that will bring back the initial disorder to his life. The only difference is now in context: his private life becomes a turmoil.

Desdemona's character may be a bit harder to define. We hear her father's description of her as a shy daughter:

BRABANTIO: (...)
   
A maiden, never bold:
   
Of spirit so still, and quiet, that her motion
   
Blush'd at herself (I.3.114-6).

Such stillness and quietness observed by her father seem to indicate that the young maiden tries to fulfill her role as daughter, being expected to obey her father, to do the household chores and to behave herself in a ladylike manner, with discretion and coyness. We understand, however, that she is not so shy or naïve as Brabantio judged her to be, once we learn that she is so interested in listening to the Moor's stories that “she could with haste dispatch” (I.3.173) “the house affairs [that] would draw her hence” (172) and that she is the one who triggers her love affair with Othello, by indirectly stating her love for him:

OTHELLO: (...)
   
She wish'd she had not heard it, yet she wish'd
   
That heaven had made her such a man; she thank'd me,
   
And bade me, if I had a friend that loved her,
   
I should but teach him how to tell my story,
   
And that would woo her. (I.3.188-91)

In fact, her boldness and strength strike us when she declares her love for Othello before the Duke, her father and the senators:

DESDEMONA: (...)
   
But here's my husband,
   
And so much duty as my mother show'd
   
To you, preferring you before her father,
   
So much I challenge that I may profess
   
Due to the Moor, my lord. (I.3.209-13)

Desdemona also shows boldness and strength when she asks the Duke for permission to go to Cyprus with her husband. With this attitude, she once more shows a different behavior from what was expected of a woman in her society. She is so brave that Othello calls her his “fair warrior” (II.1.182) when they meet in Cyprus. According to Peter Erickson, the Moor recognizes his wife's power, showing simultaneously “devotion to heroic deeds and devotion to the lady who inspires them”, drawing “on the potential conflict between the[se] two elements in chivalric culture” (1985:90). Erickson sees this as the third of the “three images of Desdemona” presented in act II, scene 1 (id.89). The other two images are provided by Othello's (so-called) friends. The first one is Cassio's description of Desdemona, in which he calls her “a maid that paragons description” (II.1.59-60), “divine” (73), “our great Captain's Captain” (76), and “the riches of the ship” (85). All these positive attributes of her beauty and power contrast with the other image, provided by Iago, who does not believe in the existence of good women and is “incapable of fulfilling [Desdemona's] request” (1985:89) to praise her as a “deserving woman” (II.1.145). In his opinion, women are good “to suckle fools, and chronicle small beer” (II.1.160). However incompatible with Cassio's description (as Erickson argues), Iago's image corresponds to his generalization of women, which includes Desdemona. We could agree with Iago that Desdemona is a common woman were the third – Othello's – image of the lady not present. She may not be “divine” as Cassio sees her and her beauty may be a question of point of view, but she seems to be an unusual woman indeed. Being a “warrior” was a man's possibility, hence her special courage and “power”. Besides, one feature of Desdemona's personality makes her really special: her love.

Bloom states that Desdemona is at the same time “the most admirable image of love in all Shakespeare” and “the unluckiest of all wives” (1998:447). Her love is demonstrated when she gets involved with Othello – her father cannot understand how she could “fall in love, with what she fear'd to look on” (I.3.118). Her love is so pure that it breaks barriers of ethnicity and background. Another instance that testifies to the purity of her love and at the same time dubs her “unlucky” is the friendship she demonstrates to Michael Cassio, by trying to help him recover his position as Othello's lieutenant. Her naïveté would not allow her to suspect someone (especially not “honest” Iago) might plot against her and the deposed officer.

The purity of her behavior attests to her honesty to Othello, but may have been the cause of her father's misinterpretation of her personality. Not knowing that she was ready to fall in love with a special man, who would make her feel special as well, Brabantio accuses



that Othello cannot be changed by marriage because “his career fulfills him completely” (1998:448). Bloom believes that Othello and Desdemona’s affair pre-exists in himself, being a fruit of his vanity; what she falls in love with is his valor as a “pure warrior” whereas “he falls in love with her love for him, her mirroring of his legendary career” (cf. Bloom: 1998, 448). Bloom thus argues that the Moor and his lover believe that what they feel for each other is love, but it is in fact the act of loving Othello's career, which cannot guarantee the future of the couple.

Nevertheless, there are textual evidences that their personal involvement goes beyond an idealization of a career. When Othello meets Desdemona in Cyprus, he demonstrates his need to be with her:

OTHELLO: It gives me wonder, great as my content  
 To see you here before me.  
 Oh my soul's joy:  
 If after every tempest, come such calms,  
 May the winds blow, till they have waken'd death:  
 And let the labouring bark climb hills of seas  
 Olympus high: and duck again as low,  
 As hell's from Heaven. If it were now to die,  
 'Twere now to be most happy. (II.1.185-91)

Even if war is his life, he shows Desdemona by saying this that it is always pleasant to come back to her arms. Even if he loves her due to the love she has for his adventures, at least he wants to spend moments together with her, as he demonstrates in the following scene:

OTHELLO: (...) (...)  
 Come my dear Love,  
 The purchase made, the fruits are to ensue,  
 That profit's yet to come 'tween me, and you. (II.2.20-2)

Carol Thomas Neely implies that it is Desdemona who seduces the Moor, who uses a “disguise”, assuming “a pose of docility and indifference that conceals her passion from both her father and Othello”, in which case “she traps him into a proposal using indirection” (In Lenz, Greene & Neely: 1983, 219-20). Othello unintentionally searches for someone who can help him keep his story alive. By visiting Brabantio and telling the old man – and his daughter – his victorious deeds, Othello reinforces his own idea of himself and fills his time with his own successful war images. Besides attracting Desdemona in her apparent naïveté, he convinces himself that he needs to go on being that admirable hero. When she pretends that she is being seduced, he sees in her the possibility to embark in his adventures again, even in times of peace. Othello's narrative gains thus a new character, who will be decisive in its closure.

When Othello and Desdemona decide to stay together, they exercise a choice that was

not common in their time: sharing one's life with another individual without involving other family members. Othello is dependent on his story, but it would be an unfinished tale if he did not have a wife. He would not have the chance to be totally inserted in the society which he has chosen to be part of were he not married to a woman belonging to it. With Desdemona his success is complete and his personality gains an additional perspective.

Othello's occupation, however, still plays such an important role in his life that he does not fit in his private life. After the Turkish fleet sinks, because he finds himself without an occupation, he has plenty of time and disposition to listen to Iago's accusations of Desdemona. Similarly to Othello and Desdemona, Iago is a war lover. Bloom argues that because war means everything to Iago and because Othello represents the god of war to him, "Othello was everything to Iago" (1998:435). When the ancient is passed over and Cassio becomes the second-in-command, Iago becomes nothing (cf. Bloom: 1998, 435).

Greenblatt implies that even though it is Iago who says "I am not what I am" (I.1.65), it is Othello who ceases to be himself, once he becomes his own tale. But Iago is so clever that he knows that "an identity that has been fashioned as a story can be fashioned, refashioned, inscribed anew in a different narrative" (cf. Greenblatt: 1980, 238) and creates a new narrative which the Moor will protagonize. Iago decides to make Othello suspicious of Desdemona's cuckolding him with Cassio and little by little persuades the Moor of his wife's betrayal and of the need to do something about it. Bloom explains the interconnection between cuckoldry and death, pointing out the "male vanity and fear of female sexuality" (1998:448) that is most woundingly represented in *Othello*. Cuckoldry is thus the image of a man's vanishing and "the realization that the world will go on without" (id. 449) him. It is a "metaphorical death-in-life"(id.ib.) for Othello, especially if he is betrayed by his own wife – to whom he is not married for procreation or property, but due to their mutual love – and his subordinate. The fall of this highly capable professional, who is totally aware of his reputation, corresponds to a reduction comparable to death (cf. Bloom: 1998, 448-9). Cuckoldry is then of such importance that Neely argues that it "invalidates Othello's military glories, and only the murder of Desdemona and his own suicide restore his pride in his 'occupation'" (1983: 222).

Iago is a genius in the art of gossip and treachery. He uses ingenious and persuasive ways to make Othello trust him entirely and believe his honesty and friendship, and at the same time suspect Desdemona and Cassio's betrayal. The Moor, however, is vulnerable to Iago's machination because of his lack of knowledge of himself, of love and of his wife. Firstly, he has too high an opinion of himself as a professional and this makes it hard for him

to concentrate on his love affair. Secondly, his concept of love limits itself to the feeling he has for someone who sympathizes with the dangers he has passed, a sort of self-love reflected in someone else; his love for Desdemona expands his self-love, or rather, the love for the successful and honorable general he is. Thirdly, he is driven to love Brabantio's daughter by his desire to take part in the Venetian social circle and become an insider, for celibacy was not appropriate for a successful man in society. Fourthly, at the time he courts Desdemona, the only things he learns about her are her anxiety to listen to him – which leads her to hurry to finish her household chores – and her reactions to his story; he does not seem to allow her to speak much, for apparently he is always speaking. If he does not get to know his wife before their elopement, there is virtually no time for this afterwards, due to all the consecutive happenings in the play. Moreover, he may not equally have had the time to know her intimately. She becomes to him, then, an idealization rather than a real woman or a real wife.

Bloom hypothesizes that Othello's marriage may not have been consummated. He justifies his point of view in the busy life of the warrior. In his opinion, "an hour/ Of love" (I.3.301-2) would not be enough for the couple to enjoy their honeymoon before the voyage to Cyprus. The only other chance he sees for the Moor to have an intimate contact with his wife is interrupted by the riot schemed by Iago (1998:459).

The lack of knowledge – especially lack of sexual knowledge – between Othello and Desdemona, is interpreted by Bloom in two perspectives: first he implies that Othello is afraid or hesitant to spend the first night in Cyprus with Desdemona, due to his instant evasion in order to help Montano, who has been wounded; then he suggests that Iago needs the Moor to be doubtful about Desdemona's virginity, and thus he plans the turmoil that will "distract his general from consummation" (1998:460). Iago's manipulations can thus be fruitful (cf. Bloom: 1998, 460). If Bloom is right, besides filling Othello's senses with suspicions, Iago eliminates the Moor's chance to find out on his own.

Desdemona herself is eager to have her marriage consummated or, if it has already been, we can at least conclude that she wants to go to bed with her husband. According to Neely, when she is before the Duke and Senate she refuses to postpone their sexual act, expressing the need "to live with him" (I.3.248) and asking for permission to go to Cyprus to follow her husband. "The rites for which" she loves him (I.3.257) must come into effect, because she does not want to become an idealized wife, as she does not want to "romanticize Othello" (In Lenz, Greene & Neely: 1983, 220). She wants to be his real wife and to have a real marriage.

Greenblatt does not interpret Desdemona's excitement to share her intimacy with

Othello as a wish to be deflowered, but he sees her involvement with Othello as a relationship that already includes sex. Based on an ambiguity worded by Iago, “to abuse Othello's ear/ That he is too familiar with his wife” (I.3.393-4), Greenblatt states that even if the third person in the statement refers to Cassio, it can also be applied to Othello and in this case his sexual relations with his wife may be considered adulterous (cf. Greenblatt: 1980, 233). Their passion and desire are considered sinful in a society that preaches that a sexual intercourse only aims at procreating and avoiding fornication. In a time that a couple should adopt a Christian behavior towards sexuality, Othello may have concluded that Desdemona was not an appropriate wife because of the lust she demonstrates. Even if we do not consider “live with him” and “the rites for which I love him” as indications of a sexual intercourse itself, at least we can sense Desdemona's desire hidden in these phrases.

Supposing we agreed with Bloom and defended Desdemona's virginity, the foundations of Othello's jealousy would lie on his belief in Iago's gossip and on his inability to find out the truth by himself. On the other hand, if we believe as Stephen Greenblatt that she and Othello consummated their marriage at the Sagittary (cf. Greenblatt: 1980, 251), not even Cassio's interference would be necessary since, according to the thought of the time, the sexual ardor implied in her speech would accuse her of adultery with her husband. In either case, it is important to know that Othello already had a predisposition to believe in her adultery and the enchanted handkerchief was a symbol of it. It seems that he can never feel like a real insider in Venice: when things are settled and he has the chance to spend some time with his wife, he finds himself moving away from her. In his mind he mixes his love and the possibility of losing it, and of losing everything else: “But I do love thee! and when I love thee not,/ Chaos is come again!” (III.3.104-5)

If it can be said that Othello's story of adventures provides the starting point for his affair with Desdemona, it can equally be said that the loss of the handkerchief provides an excuse for the chaos that ends their lives. This happens because, rather than trusting his wife or even his own attributes that have seduced her, Othello actually trusts symbols such as the magic of the handkerchief. As the society of his time repulses adultery – both outside and inside marriage – the Moor needs to eliminate the sin from his life in order to remain an insider, which means he will have to kill Desdemona.

When Othello plans her death he says his intention is not to commit murder, but to eliminate the root of evil for the sake of the society in which he lives. In his own words, “she must die, else she'll betray more men” (V.1.6). In order to honorably execute the wife he judges a criminal, he must first get her confession. Not having it, Othello gets annoyed at her



well” (V.2.342). The attempt towards a fusion of two very different Renaissance individuals does not succeed, however involved they seem to be with each other at first. Bold Desdemona defies the conventions and becomes an active listener who wants to take part in the general's adventurous tale. Othello, however, gives in to Iago and lets him take over his narration. If a story defines Othello's personality, an even more appropriate definition of a successful warrior such as the Moor would be reached with the addition of a loving wife. The independence that seems to be reached attracts, in fact, such hindrances as envy, jealousy and individuality. Not being able to deal with all of these problems, the protagonist moves away from his own individuality until a “bloody period” (V.2.355) ends his story.

### **3.3. *Hamlet*: the Prince who does not match**

The tragedy of the Prince of Denmark is not based essentially on the effect of a marital and/ or erotic relationship on the hero's fate. Much on the contrary, Hamlet isolates himself in his thoughts practically all the time and denies any affection towards women. In fact, as Bloom puts it, we have “every reason to doubt his capacity to love anyone, including Ophelia” (2003:43). Even not having a couple in love throughout the play, it is important to analyze *Hamlet* not only because of the process of misogyny that he develops along the way, but also because of the protagonist's previous affection for a woman and change of attitude towards her, both important elements in the definition of the Prince's personality; the object of discussion will thus be the way Hamlet's change of attitude, from the possible prior affection to the rejection of his girlfriend, Ophelia, also constructs his character and influences his attitudes in the decisive moments of the play.

Throughout the play, the Prince suffers the effect of something “rotten in Denmark” (I.4.90) and all that is rotten involves his noble family: incest, fratricide, ghost apparitions, and even the suspicion of cuckoldry. All these elements would already seem more than enough in a good tragedy. But Shakespeare adds an involvement between the Prince and the daughter of the lord chamberlain, which is fundamental in the definition of Hamlet's personality. Their affair, however, is not realized and the hero faces one more problem to solve: controlling his affections.

In his chapter that analyzes “male bonds” and “maternal images” in Shakespeare, Erickson (op.cit.) implies that because Hamlet is looking for someone “that is not passion's slave” (II.2.72), an affair with Ophelia or any other woman would not be compatible with his disposition in the play (cf. Erickson:1985,67). The Prince's behavior is caused by the negative

experiences he has in the play: the King's death, the Queen's hasty marriage to her deceased husband's brother, her new husband's usurpation of the throne, the sight of King Hamlet as a ghost, Old Hamlet's spirit's revelation of the cause of his death and his demand that his son should avenge his murder, killing Claudius.

A young man suffering so much disillusionment would normally find comfort in the arms of a young lady of his liking, but Ophelia does not correspond to her suitor's expectations as she lacks dexterity to show him complicity. According to Northrop Frye, when Hamlet unexpectedly goes into Ophelia's room, stares at her and leaves, he is “wondering if he could possibly make Ophelia a friend and confidante in his situation, [...] and saw nothing but immaturity and weakness in her face” (cf. Frye: 1986, 91-2). If she inspired confidence, Hamlet could count on her as an ally and, because of what seems to have been a previous mutual affection between them, a strong bond could emerge. Were she mature enough to understand his pains and give him support, this alliance could become a love affair that would lead them to marriage. He would then be able to share his life with her and she would become a defining element of his personality.

The consequence of the incompatibility between the two youths is a separation – if not always physical, at least affective – throughout the play. The only instance in it in which the Danish Prince states how strongly he loved Ophelia is at her funeral, after jumping into her grave and almost being strangled by Laertes there. He states how strong his love for her has been:

HAMLET: I loved Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers  
 Could not with all their quantity of love  
 Make up my sum. What wilt thou do for her? (V.1.269-71)

However, rather than expressing the Prince's true feelings for Laertes's sister, Erickson argues that this utterance shows the competition between boyfriend and brother, when “the emotional intensity of [Hamlet's] misogynist rhetoric” (1985:78) has decreased and “his detachment from Ophelia has been completed” (id.ib.). At this point, the Prince's idealization of woman is lost. Besides, Hamlet boasts his love for the deceased young woman in an attempt to reconcile himself with her brother (cf. Erickson: 1985, 78-9). In any case, he speaks of a love that seems to have been present sometime in the past. If it is not part of Hamlet's personality any longer, the youth has at least kept some traces of it in his memory.

Even though during the play Hamlet and Ophelia never appear as sweethearts, going hand-in-hand or exchanging passionate looks, in a conversation with her father the maid attests to his courting of her:

OPHELIA: He hath, my lord, of late made many tenders  
 Of his affection to me.  
 (...)
   
 My lord, he hath importun'd me with love  
 In honourable fashion.  
 (...)
   
 And hath given countenance to his speech, my lord,  
 With almost all the holy vows of heaven. (I.3.92-113)

When he hears this, Polonius tells his daughter not to believe Hamlet's affection or his vows and to avoid meeting the Prince. Polonius implies that the Prince only wants to use her:

POLONIUS: (...)
   
 When the blood burns, how prodigal the soul  
 Lends the tongue vows. (I.3.115-6)
   
 (...)
   
 Do not believe his vows; for they are brokers,  
 Not of that dye which their investments show,  
 But mere implorators of unholy suits,  
 Breathing like sanctified and pious bawds,  
 The better to beguile. (I.3.126-30)

Polonius could be right in his advice to Ophelia: the Prince's interest in her could be caused by lust only, and he would thus need someone to satisfy his sexual desire. Yet, it seems that Hamlet has “importuned her with love” after not having seen the young lady for a length of time at Wittenberg, which implies that he has missed her. If he has, as she remarks, come near delivering her “all the holy vows of heaven”, this means that he has been serious in his will, as Laertes tells her.

Ophelia's brother believes it is possible that Hamlet loves his sister, but shows her, even before their father's admonitions, another reason for her not getting involved with the Prince:

LAERTES: (...)
   
 Perhaps he loves you now,  
 And now no soil nor cautel doth besmirch  
 The virtue of his will; but you must fear,  
 His greatness weigh'd, his will is not his own;  
 For he himself is subject to his birth.  
 He may not, as unvalued persons do,  
 Carve for himself, for on his choice depends  
 The safety and health of this whole state,  
 And therefore must his choice be circumscrib'd  
 Unto the voice and yielding of that body  
 Whereof he is the head. (I.3.14-24)
   
 (...)
   
 Fear it, Ophelia, fear it, my dear sister,  
 And keep you in the rear of your affection,  
 Out of the shot and danger of desire. (I.3.33-5)

The advice Ophelia receives from her father and brother makes her retreat from Hamlet and avoid the possibility of a future affair between them and the possibility of a romantic involvement that could define the Prince's personality as a lover and thus possibly



alienation from women, originated in his “alienation from Gertrude” (1985:76). Right after a conversation with his mother and uncle, Hamlet's disgust at their union is shown in the soliloquy as a desire to disappear, to die. He just regrets that suicide is against God's law:

HAMLET: O that this too too solid flesh would melt,  
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!  
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd  
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! God! (I.2.129-132)

The Prince goes on, regretting the deeds of the new royal couple and expanding his feeling of disgust to mankind and nature and to the uselessness of heedless actions:

HAMLET: (...)
   
How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
   
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
   
Fie on't! ah, fie! 'Tis an unweeded garden
   
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
   
Possess it merely. That it should come to this! (I.2.133-7)

Hamlet then considers the time his father has been dead and cherishes his good memories of his parents' presumably perfect marriage:

HAMLET: (...)
   
But two months dead! Nay, not so much, not two:
   
So excellent a king; that was, to this,
   
Hyperion to a satyr: so loving to my mother,
   
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
   
Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth!
   
Must I remember? why, she would hang on him,
   
As if increase of appetite had grown
   
By what it fed on: and yet, within a month – (I.2.138-45)

He then expands his mother's weakness of remarrying so shortly after having become a widow. This action is extremely painful to Hamlet, especially because of the difference between his father and uncle, being used to admiring the former and now despising the latter, and because of the relationship itself – it was considered incest in Shakespeare's time to marry a brother-in-law:

HAMLET: (...)
   
Let me not think on't – Frailty, thy name is woman! –
   
A little month, or ere those shoes were old
   
With which she follow'd my poor father's body,
   
Like Niobe, all tears: – why she, even she, –
   
O God! A beast that wants discourse of reason
   
Would have mourn'd longer, – married with my uncle,
   
My father's brother, but no more like my father
   
Than I to Hercules: within a month;
   
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
   
Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,
   
She married. O, most wicked speed, to post
   
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!
   
It is not, nor it cannot come to good.
   
But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue! (I.2.146-159)

As Gertrude's image contaminates women's image, as Erickson poses, Ophelia suffers such a contamination (1985:77). Therefore, Hamlet's disillusionment stops him from loving any woman, especially from loving Ophelia, who could have been the depository of his passion and of his future expectations.

Hamlet's mix of grief and disgust turns into a choice of not loving Ophelia when they are talking in the arras scene. When Polonius's daughter asks the Prince about his love for her, the prince starts by blaming himself and, as Erickson states, declaring that he is the one who fails to love, for "virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock" (III.1.116-7), implying that his love has come to an end (cf. Erickson: 1085, 77). It is hard to know whether he really means it, if he is forcing himself to repress his own feelings for someone who has already been rejecting him, or if it is just part of his plan to feign madness. In any case, he makes his rejection convincing by questioning Ophelia's honesty and beauty, by saying farewell to her and sending her to a "nunnery" so that she will not become "a breeder of sinners" (III.1.120-1) and by transferring his disgust of female betrayal to a disgust of women's attitudes in general, showing disapproval even to their attachment to cosmetic enhancement of their natural features: "I have heard of your paintings too, well enough. God hath given you one face, and you make yourselves another" (III.1.142-4).

Peter Erickson recognizes in this that Hamlet considers women "inherently two-faced" (1985:77) and attributes Hamlet's bitter accusations to his "need for purity" (id.ib.); the prince thus places responsibility solely on women (cf. Erickson: 1985, 77). Being the son of an 'incestuous' woman he is vulnerable to contamination – as if it were a hereditary feature – and his act of rejection of Ophelia can also be interpreted as a denial of his own love for her or for any woman, because subjecting himself to love would push him into the scope of passion and lust, and then because, as he extends his mother's contamination to all women, he needs to detach himself from Ophelia too, in order to avoid contaminating himself. When he rejects Ophelia, however, he is not only rejecting the woman who is, at least apparently, very fond of him, but he is also denying his feeling for her, denying the possibility of having affection for the young lady, and even the chance to become a different person, defined by a love affair.

According to Greenblatt, the "violence and despair" (1997:1665) in Hamlet's speech in the arras scene leads frail Ophelia "to crack under the strain of Hamlet's misogynistic revulsion" (id.ib.) . When he has the chance to talk to Ophelia about love, he expresses all his disgust for Gertrude's sexuality in a way that the young maid did not deserve to hear. The girl,



Too bad for “Old Jephthah” – when Hamlet so calls Polonius, the older man is proud of the knowledge that such a character, like himself, had a daughter; according to Frye, though, Polonius did not know that Old Jephthah had sacrificed his daughter (cf. Frye: 1986, 92). This is when, thus, Ophelia's sacrifice starts. The fair maid, who expected to devote her life to Hamlet after the sweet words he was expected to pronounce, is now bound to care for his mental illness after his harsh, humiliating speech.

Erickson states that the society that is represented in *Hamlet* is one in which a woman's destiny is controlled by men (cf. Erickson: 1985, 76). Besides the control Laertes and Polonius exert on Ophelia, Gertrude is also a target of men's domination. One instance of this is that she seems to be just a part of the Castle of Elsinore, similar to an item of furniture or decoration. When Old Hamlet dies and his brother takes over, she seems to be part of the pack that includes kingdom, castle and queen. Likewise, her appearances are often controlled by her new husband, who tells her when to come and go. Even if the ghost of her former husband attempts to distract Hamlet's focus from this, their son wants to persuade her in the closet scene not to lie with her new husband any longer. Sharing the marital bed in fleshly action is just a symbol of the integration and complicity between husband and wife. Hamlet asks his mother to avoid Claudius so that she would cease being his accomplice. The Prince believes, thus, in the unity of a couple that through bodily contact achieve a level of psychological and spiritual involvement.

Erickson argues that the Prince's disturbed attitude toward female sexuality is thus left unresolved (id.78). According to Greenblatt, he has got an “obsessive sense of rampant female sexuality” (1997:1665) and is aware of “his own corruption” (id.ib.). Hamlet's revulsion frightens both Ophelia and Gertrude and such disposition “casts Hamlet in the strange role of jester in the court in which he is the mourning son and the heir apparent” (cf. Greenblatt: 1997:1665).

Prince Hamlet tries to keep his consciousness – and succeeds in doing so – amidst the multiple treason he has to face. He takes his father's pains in the horrible act in which brother kills brother in search of power. Those pains extend simultaneously to his own replacement by Claudius, as Hamlet was the most direct heir to the Danish crown and to the incest committed when his uncle and mother get married. This incestuous deed leads him to his considerations on Gertrude's frivolous behavior, his central worry, which causes the misogyny that makes him reject Ophelia, based also on the fact that, in a way, she has abandoned him. Her father's frequent eavesdropping and the Prince's friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's royal mission of watching and controlling him also add to the stifling

atmosphere that surround the hero. All these make him more and more introspective, for none of such feats correspond to the consciousness he has not lost, a place in his mind where human relations are part of an individual's personality and his relation with the world around him. By isolating himself from his mother and uncle, Hamlet shows a rupture with family ties that have become artificial and based on self-interest. By feigning madness before Polonius, the Prince demonstrates that he believes in the fair correspondence between feelings and actions. By writing to Ophelia or visiting her, he searches for companionship to endure the turmoil his life has become. Not finding partnership in Ophelia, he chooses to deny his own feelings and redefine himself as someone incapable to love.

### **3.4. The Macbeths: shadows walking towards greatness**

The last tragedy to be discussed is, similarly to *Hamlet*, not based on the theme of erotic love. The action in *Macbeth*, however, is founded on what seems to be a strong marital relationship. Considering Glamis's achievements of the titles of Thane of Cawdor and King of Scotland, one may not deny that Macbeth struggled for ascent, despite using unorthodox, criminal and terrifying methods. Behind a great man stands a great woman, the saying goes; were it not for Macbeth's wife the thane would not have gotten so quickly to the throne, even though his ambition directed him towards that goal. He needed someone to help him swerve from his fears and to fill him with the necessary courage to commit murders, usurp the crown and try to keep it. In this section, I will approach the ironically “happiest couple” in all Shakespeare's work (Bloom:1998,518) aiming at an analysis of what makes them a fusion into almost one individual and why in a story full of supernatural elements, such as witches and apparitions – not to mention the amount of violence in the play – Shakespeare decided to choose a harmonious couple to protagonize the tragedy.

Lord and Lady Macbeth make up a strong couple, deeply united, who share thoughts and feelings, of which some converge into the same point and the ones that diverge from each other turn out to be mutually complementary, adding solidity to the couple's bond. Lady Macbeth could be considered a modern woman for her – and Shakespeare's – time, for in a society in which the woman was considered an object to be negotiated between father and suitor, this female protagonist acts together with her husband, supporting his feelings, ambitions and actions, and giving him strength when his courage fails, even telling him what to do, bringing out his deepest feelings and turning them into action.

A brave and successful sanguinary soldier as he is should not be afraid of killing



It is Lady Macbeth who shows him the importance of resuming their plan, not accepting the excuse to his fear. She idealizes a man who will have the courage to fulfill his promises and she defines herself as a wife to this man. When the hero does not correspond to her idealization, she fills in the gaps with her boldness and firmness. Using these attributes she persuades him of not quitting their goal. It is as if she inserts her ideas and feelings in him, leaving no space for weakness.

In this idealization, the Macbeths still complete each other, but playing reversed roles: while he lacks courage and his fear corresponds to feminine frailty, she has summoned spirits to “unsex” her (I.5.40) in a way that she has become the strong, dominant member of the couple, the one who takes initiative and who is not scared. The action of stabbing the king to death, however, is performed by her husband, following her instructions. Yet, what could be a crime performed by a single person becomes, with the Macbeths, a joint deed. As the future king does not have the courage to go back and smear the grooms with Duncan's blood, she decides to do it instead. Analyzing Macbeth's reference to his wife as his “dearest partner”, we see that he has affection for her and considers her an equal, the other half of an association whose purpose is to achieve “greatness” that they covet together.

Instead of such a shared greatness, however, they suffer the effects of their crimes – the murders of Duncan, Banquo and Macduff's family – which fall on both in a curiously complementary way. While Macbeth becomes sleepless, his lady turns into a sleepwalker. While he is awake and in the presence of other people, he has visions that almost make him reveal his crimes. His wife, on the other hand, talks in her sleep about the crimes and believes to be washing blood off her hands. While she cuts her life short by killing herself during her sleep, he interprets the visions he has while he is awake as signs of longevity, whereas they in fact denote his early death.

All these harmonious or symmetrical – but complementary – features seem to attest to the Macbeths' togetherness. But what seems at first to be only a balanced partnership of spouses who share dreams of “greatness” turns out to be, additionally, a relation of subordination, comparable to a relationship between mother and son, in which the latter has to surrender to the former's demands. Harold Bloom states that until Lady Macbeth goes mad, she seems as much Macbeth's mother as his wife” (1998:522). Playing the simultaneous roles of mother and wife, she demands his action and manliness. Bloom establishes a possible connection between the “baffled intensity” of their “sexual passion” to childlessness (id.528) and to the thane's consequent need to have his manliness restored “by his murder of the sleeping Duncan”, which is his wife's imposition (id.ib.). Throughout the play, “murder

increasingly becomes Macbeth's mode of sexual expression" (id. 529).

Lady Macbeth is the externalization of the couple's interests. Even if whatever she motivates in her husband already exists in him, she is the one who makes feelings visible. As most married couples want children, Lord and Lady Macbeth aim at procreation as well, but in a different way. As the couple's shared interest in power is their brainchild, she demands of Macbeth the manly actions that will give birth to fulfillment of their ambition. It is as if power were a substitute for the child they do not have.

However, it is this very quest for power in an unbridled way that opens the door to the couple's destruction. The actions of killing a king and blaming the princes raise the natural susceptibility to a counter movement from the sovereign's direct successors. Killing the man who has been unnaturally pronounced to father kings without killing his son opens a door to the fulfillment of the prophecy. Yet, these are not the only factors to the Macbeths' downfall. The path to their degradation also counts on the effects of those terrible deeds – as well as Macbeth's consequent visions – on their minds.

Lady Macbeth has so “poured [her] Spirits in [Macbeth's] ear” (I.5.24) that her husband plans by himself the execution of Banquo and his son, being this the first step taken individually. The vision the new king has of Banquo's spirit at his first banquet frightens him so much that it is up to his wife to give him support, providing the guests with an excuse for his weird behavior, while trying to call him back to his senses:

LADY MACBETH: Sit, worthy friends: my lord is often thus,  
 And hath been from his youth: pray you, keep seat;  
 The fit is momentary; upon a thought  
 He will again be well: if much you note him,  
 You shall offend him and extend his passion:  
 Feed, and regard him not. Are you a man?  
 MACBETH: Aye, and a bold one, that dare look on that  
 Which might appal the devil.  
 LADY MACBETH: O proper stuff!  
 This is the very painting of your fear:  
 This is the air-drawn dagger which, you said,  
 Led to Duncan. O, these flaws and starts,  
 Impostors to true fear, would well become  
 A woman's story at a winter's fire,  
 Authorized by her grandam. Shame itself!  
 (...)  
 My worthy lord,  
 Your noble friends do lack you. (III.4.53-67,84-5)

At the second appearance of the ghost, Lady Macbeth goes on defending her husband and his temporary state, but when the King comes near revealing his sight, and thus their secrets, she dismisses their guests and shows him the need to sleep. She plays the hostess at both apparitions and acts as her husband's spokeswoman, telling the guests when to stay and when to leave. She does for him, then, what he needs to do but is temporarily unable. She thus

defends her husband and her plans. Before she goes to her endless sleep, she instructs her husband in the firmness needed to go on and achieve their goal.

Macbeth acquires self-sufficiency as a reaction both to the visions – including the apparitions in the cavern – and to the rebukes and instructions from his wife. Apart from Fleance's escape and Macbeth's visions that afflict him, the couple's machination has been quite successful; if they remained a united couple that could offer each other mutual support, they could, if not avoid the loss of the crown, at least attempt a way out of sleepwalking, sleeplessness and death.

The Macbeths choose to believe in their freedom to do as they will. They never doubt the horror of their actions, but they see those actions as means to fulfill their desires. The sense of harmony we have of them is cut by Lady Macbeth's madness and sleep, but even so they remain as husband and wife who fulfill each other, each one contributing with a different amount to the other's actions. In the beginning, she is more active and willful whereas he is more dependent on her determination. As time goes by, his determination increases and she falls into a sleep that will only end when she dies. The king, on the other hand, cannot sleep – it is as if she is sleeping for him.

With his wife's inactivity, Macbeth goes on acting, as if he has learned from her to externalize his feelings. It is a shame that, due to the preparations to fight the English army, Macbeth does not have the chance to try to bring his wife back to her senses as she has brought him to his earlier. When he receives the news of her suicide, he utters his most famous speech which, according to Bloom, “concentrates his play and his world” (1998:540):

MACBETH. She should have died hereafter;  
 There would have been a time for such a word.  
 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. (V.5.17-28)

Harold Bloom points out that in this soliloquy King Macbeth does not express any grief and that “instead of an elegy for Queen Macbeth, we hear a nihilistic death march, or rather a creeping of fools, of universal victims” (1998:541). He realizes then the meaninglessness of his life and of his deeds. Because his personality is defined by his relation with his wife, there is not much to do after her death. Without his queen by his side, he can no longer plot, but only follow his interpretations of the predictions he searches for in the

witches' cave. Even though he still has her motivation to fight until his last moment, he lacks the ability to solve problems in a more effective way. He struggles to keep the throne, but meaningfulness – achieving “greatness” alone was not part of the original plan.

## CONCLUSION

Tragedy underwent enormous changes from the time it was produced in ancient Greece and Rome until its use by Shakespeare. A few original features were discarded, some were developed and others replaced. It is important to notice that all these modifications represented the progress that Shakespeare symbolized for his time. The additions made by him improved the possibility to gather a larger and more varied audience. Secondary plots, comic reliefs, changes in action and place, associated with a more extensive time span granted the tragedy more movement while keeping moral responsibility a fundamental issue to be analyzed.

In an attempt to respond to Hunter on his comment that “very little connective tissue has been found” between the Greek plays and the ones written by Shakespeare (1986: 127), we can only point to the remaining core of the tragedy, in which there is an individual struggling against a superior power. He was also right when he mentioned the lack of a direct Senecan influence on the bard’s work. The only influence he got from the Latin writer was indirect, and even so, questionable.

The growth of English drama, then, can be counted as a real influence in Shakespeare’s writing. The way drama started in church, and gradually left it, is a trajectory that made it possible for the bard to adapt it and use its conventions in his plays. The resulting Morality Plays rooted these conventions in a way that Elizabethan authors were able to construct a new tragic genre based on these conventions. When Shakespeare started using his talent to follow the already existing trend of tragedy writing, he did so for being part of his profession, of his choice of a career, with which he could profit and survive.

In his works, especially in his tragedies, William Shakespeare used the increasingly developing notion of individual that he inherited because, as it was growing in importance in his time and thus, in a way, symbolized the Renaissance ideals, the audience could identify with it and feel attracted to come to the theater. As the Renaissance was a time of transition, the general notion of the age incorporated the recent medieval developing ideas of individual personality and uniqueness, added to a reflection of how the human being was considered in antiquity.

During the feudal system, people were seen merely as parts of a group and not as individuals with unique characteristics. They were considered social beings only and their psychological, internal dimension was neglected. For this reason, man was seen basically through an indissociating sense of belonging to a group, especially belonging to a family. This denied the

individual the right to a personality and gave him, instead, features that belonged to all or most members of his group.

Home or school learning contributed to the weakening of such a notion of belonging, conferring princes and knights, who were in search of virtue, a consciousness that showed the value of the individual. This gradually provoked in the lower classes the wish to search for learning and to gain consciousness. When the medieval individual turned to Christianity and to the classical past for guidance, the senses of individual value, self-knowledge and uniqueness were restored through the wish to go to Heaven, trying to imitate Saints' lives, and through the ideas of humanism and unity of mankind.

The individual, as the new idea was passed on to the Renaissance human being, was gradually becoming independent from the “superior forces” that very recently exerted control over him or her. But these forces were no longer the power of the gods or fate, but rather family and State as institutions, prejudice, one's own view of oneself, or any other forces that were seen as limitations to the human being's expressions, which were always there, attempting to control the individual. This individual, during the Renaissance, was in shock with such forces and ever struggling to achieve a degree of distinction from the group that would define his personality.

In this process of individualization of the human being, the choice of a partner in love started to be one among other choices – strong difference with regard to the Middle Ages – now claimed by the individual. Marriage and erotic love had so far been two totally disconnected ideas. The union of a man and a woman, institutionalized by Christianity, was seen as a tool to control property and sexuality, in which the individual could not choose his or partner. The only well-known expression of love as an affection between a man and a woman that included sexual desire had been defined by literature as 'courtly love', a courting game that counted most of the time on an idealization of a love affair, rather than its realization. It usually involved a single man – especially a knight – and a married woman. Inside marriage, love was seen as respect and companionship, even if it was not rigidly followed by couples. Sexual attraction and desire were considered sinful and improper.

During the Renaissance, the conflicting domains of marriage and erotic love started to be envisioned as possibly joint. The inclusion of the theme of love in the *tragedy*, a novelty at the time, points to the conflict between such 'opposing ideas' now faced by the individual. The treatment of love in tragedies is an index of the new conception of a more autonomous individual gaining shape along Renaissance.

The notion of marriage itself did not change much in content during the Renaissance, but the

difference was that the autonomous choice of a beloved became gradually more popular. The ideas of passion and “sensual enjoyment” (Pearson: 1966, 50) started to be taken into account and chosen relationships, one of which is love, grew in importance when compared with natural relationships.

The autonomy the individual gained in his or her choices and this prominence of love as a chosen relationship were properly inserted by Shakespeare in his plays. Bringing love into the scope of tragedy, however, already shows that there is a fatality guiding this feeling, which psychoanalysis would later call 'desire' and which is at the source of other passions defining Shakespearean heroes – ambition, envy, jealousy. Shakespeare, unwittingly, showed something of the nature of love in which we believe until today.

*Romeo and Juliet* shows the origin of the relation between individual choice and political power. As analyzed by Viveiros de Castro and Benzaquén de Araújo, the play can be considered a “myth of origin”, the archetype of the individual defined by his or her choice of a marital or erotic partner. When the two youths decide to get married despite the family brawls in which they could be involved, they detach themselves from their families and create a small world of their own, which cannot go on in the society depicted and leads the protagonists to death. With the decline of family obedience as a value and the rise of the notion of autonomy, Shakespeare responds to the mood of an audience that was looking for transformations by presenting this tragedy. *Romeo and Juliet* shows how possible it is for two different beings to fall in love and decide by themselves how to transform their lives despite the attempts by society to stop them. By having protagonists who defy their families, autonomously choosing a partner in love, the play supports the growing value of individuality. Because the families depicted are the superior forces which, in practice, control the city of Verona, the play undermines the notion of strong groups in control and reinforces the vertical relation between State and individual. A great amount of courage is necessary in order to make such an important choice as marrying for love, due to the difficulties offered by family and society, but in the end the individual would not attain his or her definition without taking risks.

*Othello* also shows the development of values that were increasingly considered positive during the Renaissance. The identity of a Moor who faces intolerance, but decides to be incorporated in society until he achieves success in his professional life demonstrates that Renaissance values were desirable. The autonomy of Othello and Desdemona's decision to get married regardless of the approval of family and society shows mature, independent individuals, who are free from prejudice and from the strains of social conventions.

The problem is that Othello, who is a man of noble quality, decides to play a role and can only see himself through this role. His greatness as a warrior is what takes up his personality and prevents him from getting involved in a domestic environment. As much as he is open to love, he is also open to the plotting of someone whom he has considered honest, developing thus a jealousy that takes him and his mistress to death. The pattern of courtly love is used, with Desdemona taking up an unexpectedly active role and Othello submitting himself to her. This gender reversal of roles happens when the young lady shows an active way of listening to his story, devouring his words, and when she shows him her intention of being wooed. She is called his Captain (cf. II.1) by Cassio and she desires to love him ardently. The Christian idea coming from the Middle Ages but still widespread in Renaissance that condemned ardent lovers, defending that marriage aimed at procreation and not at pleasure, is possibly the reason for Othello's suspicion that led him to sacrifice her. Despite the possibility to be defined as independent, Othello still needed, because of his position, to fit the society he chose to take part of. Desdemona is thus the one who risks more and whose attitude is not yet totally acceptable.

In *Hamlet*, instead of a couple in love to investigate, we face an individual who will not get married due to the grief he has been going through. His father's death, his mother's hasty marriage to his uncle, his uncle's usurpation of the throne, the appearance of his father's ghost, and the acknowledgement of his father's death as a murder committed by his uncle are already a large number of problems for the Prince to deal with. Adding the possibility of a love affair – or rather, the impossibility of it – was a strategy Shakespeare used to show how dependent the notion of the individual was on the satisfaction of one's idealization of oneself in relation to others, especially in relation to a prospective partner in love. The choice Hamlet has of not marrying and of not loving, besides reflecting his inner state of mind due to the problems he has been going through, also shows that there should be a surrender to the feeling of love by both partners, and only an autonomous choice would define the personality of a person and the future of the couple. As Ophelia fails to have such an autonomy, Hamlet's is destined to be defined without the presence of love.

*Macbeth* shows us a deeply connected couple, who complete each other constantly. The crimes they commit, the way they plan the crimes, the way each one suffers the effects of their deeds, all these show their unity and the possibility of loving and doing things together in marriage. The play demonstrates that planning together, acting together and giving mutual support are necessary elements of the relationship between husband and wife. Ironically, all that Macbeth and his wife do are motivated by a passion that leads them to their doom:

ambition. From the moment the hero can no longer be defined according to his marital relationship – after Lady Macbeth goes to sleep and dies – until the time of his death, we see the protagonist losing his identity and meeting his fate.

In all cases analyzed we can conclude that the feeling of love, the erotic drive, despite able to lead to an institutional choice – marriage – indicates that at the root of this choice, which might be a sign of freedom, there is an absolute *lack* of freedom, symbolized by the blindness of love. When individuals decide to define themselves according to this feeling, even though they may achieve a degree of satisfaction, they risk their own autonomy – the right they have always been attempting to achieve. This is why, then, love can become a theme or an ingredient to tragedy – something William Shakespeare masterfully showed us pointing to the necessarily problematic constitution of the individual, a being in permanent conflict between freedom and constraint.

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