



Universidad de Valladolid

FACULTAD de FILOSOFÍA Y LETRAS

DEPARTAMENTO de FILOLOGÍA INGLESA

Grado en Estudios Ingleses

TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

Shakespeare's Heroines: Woman as the Main Character in William Shakespeare's double- named Tragedies *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Romeo and Juliet*

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2013 - 2014

ABSTRACT

My bachelor thesis focuses on the Shakespearean tragedies *Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, which represent a change of the understandings of the female character. The man loses importance to allow the female figure become the main one.

The background (state of the art) of my essay introduces Shakespeare as a playwright, his tragedies alongside the main motifs of the two analyzed dramas and a quick description of the stereotypical female role.

In the second section, both melodramas are analyzed separately: Cleopatra is illustrated through her role as a Queen and her facet of good *versus* evil woman. Juliet, on the contrary, is presented as a character of awakening: the girl who becomes a woman escaping the tyranny of her father.

The third part presents similarities between both tragedies and the conclusion states that Shakespeare managed to create a whole new way of characterizing female figures in literature.

Keywords:

Female, tragedy, love, death, features, patriarchal.

RESUMEN

Mi trabajo de fin de grado se centra en las tragedias de Shakespeare *Romeo y Julieta* y *Antonio y Cleopatra*, las cuales constituyen un cambio en la interpretación del personaje femenino en la literatura. El hombre pierde importancia para permitir que la figura femenina se convierta en la principal.

El contexto (estado de la cuestión) de mi ensayo introduce Shakespeare como dramaturgo, sus tragedias junto con los principales motivos de los dos dramas analizados y una breve descripción del estereotípico papel femenino.

En la segunda sección, los dos melodramas han sido analizados por separado: Cleopatra es descrita a través de su papel como reina y su faceta de una mujer que puede ser tanto buena como malvada. Julieta, por el contrario, es presentada como un personaje que despierta: una niña que se convierte en una mujer y escapa de la tiranía de su padre.

La tercera parte de mi ensayo presenta similitudes entre ambas tragedias y la conclusión afirma que Shakespeare logró crear una nueva forma de caracterizar la figura femenina en la literatura.

Palabras clave:

Mujer, tragedia, amor, muerte, características, patriarcal.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor, Marta Gutiérrez, for her kind guidance, patience and support throughout this bachelor thesis.

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INTRODUCTION

In my bachelor thesis I attempt to understand, explain and illustrate woman as the main character of a tragedy focusing on the heroines in the double-named tragedies of William Shakespeare: *Romeo and Juliet* (1595) and *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606). The object of this work is to analyze and describe in detail the characteristics that a female main character possesses.

The framework of my study comprehends Shakespeare as a dramatist and his tragedies, analyzing the three main motifs in the two double-named plays studied in this essay, as well as an introduction to the stereotypical characteristics of heroines.

Regarding the main analysis of the female character, the first part (2.1.) proposes a rethinking of Cleopatra – one of the most complex female characters created by Shakespeare. My study focuses on the way Shakespeare built the character taking into account the cultural background of his time and the idea society had of the woman in that era. The second part of the analysis (2.2.) centers on the way Shakespeare developed the character of Juliet and, also, on the different attributes assigned to her character. The tragedies have been studied, on the one hand, from a contemporary point of view, and, on the other hand, taking into account the notions about female characters in the Shakespearean era.

Both main sections in my essay (2.1.Cleopatra and 2.2.Juliet) explain and illustrate the female characters through a series of physical and psychological, emotional and moral elements which Shakespeare used for his purpose: make a main character out of a female one. My aim is to show that in both *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Romeo and Juliet* Shakespeare breaks with the traditional characterization of woman in melodramas.

In order to reach his peak in literature, Shakespeare spent on writing much time and effort. The two tragedies collected and explained in my work mark a period of Shakespeare's creative journey, covering part of his highest point in writing. What is more, William let himself be influenced by many ancient literary pieces and authors in order to create his own Shakespearean style. For instance, the Roman tragedies of Seneca or writings composed under the rule of the English drama.

The different features of the characterization of Cleopatra and Juliet mentioned throughout my analysis are carried out taking into account the main motifs of the Shakespearean drama. The choice of Shakespeare's tragic heroes is based on a variety of reasons, but the two most common motifs are: 1) the lust for power (*Antony and Cleopatra*) and 2) the desire of love (*Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*) – these motifs are directly related to the way Shakespeare describes his heroines.

1. STATE OF THE ART

1.1. William Shakespeare: A Renaissance Man

One of the greatest mysteries in the history of literature is the figure of the author of tragedies such as *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, etc. – William Shakespeare (1564-1616). The writer is widely considered to be the greatest dramatist of all time. However, he is not only a renowned playwright but a great poet and actor. The Shakespearean era falls within the reigns of Elizabeth I of England and James I which is often described as the golden era of English history.

Shakespeare belongs to the Renaissance period – a cultural movement that spans from the 14th century to the 17th century and represents a huge innovation. All forms of art began flourishing: culture, society ideals, religion, science, literature, etc. The Renaissance period brought many significant changes with the ideal of the importance of the human.

Taking into account the wide range of changes the Renaissance period brought to the English culture, it is a must to remark a very important and determining moment of change for the grammar and language of literature. English language advanced thanks to writers. They tended to *manipulate* and accommodate language in order to achieve the desired effect in writing. And William Shakespeare, never pushed to the background, was one of these writers trying to adjust the language of literature to express his brilliant ideas. Thus, he invented hundreds of words and phrases for his writings which we still use nowadays.

Furthermore, many literary men, such as A.C. Bradley (1991), T. S. Eliot (1932) or Kenneth Burke (2007), agree that the writing of Shakespeare is somehow very different from the style of other authors and that it could be used as a canon: "...Shakespeare is the Canon. He sets the standard and the limits of literature" (Bloom, 1994: 47). And that is in fact true, because Shakespeare was the one who wanted to create a more luxurious style, suitable to the society and culture of his era, however, something new and innovative.

1.2. The Tragedies of William Shakespeare

The finest achievement of Shakespeare's art is his tragedies, written in the first years of the 17th century. And even though the Renaissance period in England (late 15th to the early 17th century) was at its final stage, Shakespeare managed to include the Renaissance movement and its ideals in his theatre and tragedy was the most appropriate genre for that time. Analyzing tragedy in depth, the contemporary reader and/or spectator of Shakespeare's dramas admires, first of all, the feeling of sincerity they get when reading and/or watching a Shakespearean play; the playwright's anxiety over the features of his tragedy; and last but not least, the reader admires the precision of the psychological development of a character. In any case, the depth of his inspiration gives a universal idea of human experiences and concerns, and this brings the writing of Shakespeare closer to the reader. We must assume the fact that these tragedies, for the time they were written in, represent a level in literature that only William Shakespeare has reached. None of the predecessors of Shakespeare has shown such understanding of a real tragedy or at least little ability to build a strong yet varied intrigue. But, the main feature of the tragedies is not intrigue itself; the plot of Shakespeare's tragedies is influenced by history. Thus, the majestic achievement of Shakespeare when creating a story lies not on a *secret* plot (intriguing the reader and/or spectator) but on the ability the writer has to create a whole new and different story just by the remaking and rethinking of history: a good example of this is *Antony and Cleopatra*, a play in which the characters are modified to suit Shakespeare's point of view on literature and history.

The characters in Shakespeare's tragedies are characterized by their candor: Iago's words, for instance, may represent this idea: "For I am nothing, if not critical" (Shakespeare, 1996b: 67). In his tragedies the characters can decide by themselves "to be, or not to be" (Shakespeare, 1996a: 37). They are free in their choice. This feature of Shakespeare's dramaturgy comes from the Renaissance notion of the free will of men. Unfortunately, this freedom entails the character's doom (very characteristic in Shakespeare and which can be seen in the final scene of all his tragedies). Despite this tragic end, the author wanted to expand the borders of his tragedy and introduce a feeling of a final relief.

1.3. Motifs in Shakespeare's Tragedies

The two tragedies that I have analyzed in my essay can be considered to have three main motifs (these, in turn, leading to sub-motifs or sub-themes):

- (1) Life: good *versus* evil
- (2) Love
- (3) Death: tragic end and final relief

Life (1) is used as a symbol to represent and describe the way the main character(s) behaves depending on their surroundings: culture, society, family, etc; good examples of this are the patriarchal power over Juliet as a young girl, or the independence of Cleopatra as a powerful queen: these being credible representations of the personality a man/woman can have.

Shakespeare understands and meets the requirement of the time: Tragedy must have heroes, leaders and dignitaries as the main object. However, the dramatist goes beyond and penetrates to the essence of these seemingly quite conventional rules and understands that the greatness of the hero or heroine lies not only on their external complexion but, above all, on their inner nature. Once again, the humanistic view of the Renaissance is present: "The knowledge of our selves and our human condition" (Wells, 2005, 4).

On the other hand, *love* (2) is the main part of the tragedies, yet not the most important. In my essay, I attempt to prove that *love and death* are *cause and effect*. Love plays a huge role throughout the whole play; however *death* (3) is the essence of it: the love (cause) of the two main characters of both analyzed tragedies is what leads them to death (effect). And, at the end, when the hero and heroine commit suicide, the question that every tragedy puts in is – *Why must that person die?* And the answer is much more accurate when the reader and/or spectator feels that this character is irreplaceable. That is the moment of relief Shakespeare urged to find and express in his tragedies.

1.4. The Portrayal of the Female Character

History reveals that woman had a notable miserable position in society and the idea of women being inferior to men was a common belief (Das, 2012: 37). A woman was considered her husband's property; she was born to be at home, fulfilling her domestic duties, isolated from the world and depending on her father until she was married to a man to whom she was entrusted in order to make him happy. "True, she will often have *a tear in her eye*, but, like the bride of young Lochinvar, it must be accompanied with *a smile on her lips*" (Hardy, 1888: 42). The point of view in literature was substantially the same: "Most Women have no Characters at all" (Pope, 1743). Heroines were undefined and described less carefully than heroes, they were a mere accessory to male figures.

Shakespeare, nevertheless, shows a positive attitude toward his female characters in his writings (especially in dramas) (Das, 2012: 37). The playwright uses the idea of a patriarchal society not to create a traditional female character but to design a "new woman" as equivalent and equal to men: beautiful, strong, intelligent and independent.

2. FEMALE CHARACTER

2.1. CLEOPATRA from *ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA*

2.1.1. INTRODUCTION

Many critics, including Linda Bamber (1982) and Arthur Huntington Nason (1906) among others, agree that there is a truth in the statement that Shakespeare has a different attitude towards his female heroines depending on whether they belong to a comedy or a tragedy. Shakespeare is said to behave as a feminist in comedies while in tragedies, the privilege of being the central figure is assigned only to male characters:

In the comedies Shakespeare seems if not a feminist then at least a man who takes the woman's part. Often the women in the comedies are more brilliant than the man, more aware of themselves and their world, saner, livelier, more gay. In the tragedies, however, Shakespeare creates such nightmare female figures as Goneril, Regan, Lady Macbeth, and Volumnia. How are we to account for these terrible portraits, charged as they are with sexual antagonism? For these characters are not just women who happen to be evil; their evil is inseparable from their failures as women. Again and again Shakespeare darkens their cruelty by locating it on the very site of our expectations of a woman's kindness. (Bamber, 1982: 2)

It is curious that in most tragedies female characters act as catalysts for the disasters that happen, thus leading to the doom of the main character – a man. Women are described with a wide range of different characteristics: some may be visually repulsive as, to mark out one, Lady Macbeth, and others are beautiful infidel lovers as, for instance, Cressida. In other writings, the plot revolves around Mark Antony, as expected, and Cleopatra is only used as a reason for his doom: "If any spark of goodness or hope of rising were left in him, Cleopatra quenched it straight and made it worse than before" (Brooke, 2013: 37). The reader and/or spectator expects Antony to behave and be developed as the ordinary Shakespearean tragic hero: a man torn among conflicting forces; while Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, is expected to fulfil her role as a crushing force over Antony. Nevertheless, as the plot of the story develops, Cleopatra begins to draw more and more the attention of the audience upon herself – she gets angry and she only talks and feels sorry for herself while Mark Antony tries to justify himself in front

of his woman, Cleopatra. Antony is losing importance. He is a hero, indeed, but still a figure that is being defeated by the female *main* character.

The figure of Cleopatra is studied in the context of the traditional features of a tragedy, as well as in the context of other Shakespearean dramas in order to show that Cleopatra definitely shifts Antony from the centre of the story.

2.1.2. INFINITE VARIETY

In the construction of Cleopatra the playwright decided to distance the appearance of the character he creates from previous representations of the Egyptian Queen. Shakespeare decided to give more *life* and human complexity to his own version of Cleopatra, and he shaped the character to his own ideal. Cleopatra is considered one of Shakespeare's four most successful and beautiful characters (Bradley, 1991: 208).

In Act II, Scene II, the most splendid description ever made of the Egyptian Queen is given to the reader, which states that the charms of Cleopatra lie in "her infinite variety":

Enobarbus

Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety: other women cloy
The appetites they feed: but she makes hungry
Where most she satisfies; for vilest things
Become themselves in her: that the holy priests
Bless her when she is riggish.

(Shakespeare, 1954: 62. Act II-Scene II)

The playwright aims to include in just one quote the whole wide range of features he has given to the character of Cleopatra: physical beauty, intelligence, love, power, jealousy, manipulation, seduction, human side, insecurity, lust, etc.

Through all these features, analyzed in my essay and seen throughout the whole play of *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare describes the idea of the beauty of Cleopatra and creates a very magnetic, interesting and different female character that seems to change

and destroy the notion we previously had of drama. The playwright characterizes Cleopatra with many peculiarities of the female figure: physical attributes describing her beauty and behavioural and mental characteristics such as jealousy, vanity, manipulation, etc. To sum up, Cleopatra's infinite variety is in fact endless. Analyzing the play we come across many different sides of Cleopatra's personality.

2.1.3. POLISEMY

The judgment of "infinite variety" in the quote above unconditionally applies to the image of Cleopatra as a Shakespearean tragic heroine. In this part of my paper my aim is to show one of the many poetic and dramatic techniques involved in the orchestration of Cleopatra in order to achieve the desired effect: polysemy.

There is a moment in *Antony and Cleopatra* in which the complexity of the character of the Egyptian Queen is reflected in the ambiguity of a strategic word: "die". The polysemy appears the exact moment when Cleopatra is about to perform her ritual suicide: on the one hand, a tragic situation is presented and, on the other hand, the reader gets a comic notion when the clown speaks; the beautiful tragedy of the scene is broken by the appearance of that clown whose task is to bring the poisonous snakes, called "pretty worms":

Cleopatra

Hast thou the *pretty worm* of Nilus there,
That *kills* and *pains not*?

Clown

Truly, I have him: But I would not be the party
that should desire you to touch him, for his biting is
immortal; those that do *die* of it do seldom or never
recover.

Cleopatra

Remember'st thou any that have *died* on't? [...]

Clown

You must think this, look you, that the *worm* will do his kind.

Cleopatra

Ay, ay; farewell.

Clown

Look you, the *worm* is not to be trusted but in the keeping of wise people; for indeed there is no *goodness* in the *worm*.

Cleopatra

Take thou no care; it shall be heeded.

Clown

Very good. Give it nothing, I pray you, for it is not worth the feeding.

Cleopatra

Will it *eat* me?

Clown

You must not think I am so simple but I know the devil himself will not *eat* a woman. I know that a woman is a dish for the gods, if the devil dress her not. But truly, these same whoreson devils do the gods great harm in their women, for in every ten that they make the devils mar five.

Cleopatra

Well, get thee gone; farewell.

Clown

Yes, forsooth: I wish you *joy* o'the *worm*.

(Shakespeare, 1954: 212-213. Act V-Scene II. My emphasis.)

That is, the polysemy of "die" in the scene depicting the suicide of the Queen, peeps behind the ostentatious splendor of Cleopatra and contrasts two divergent cultural conventions that lead to a huge debate: (a) "the inferiority of a woman" facing (b) "the equality of women and men". These two conventions can be seen when we analyze Cleopatra as a woman who can be good and/or evil and her facet of Queen.

2.1.3.1. Good versus Evil

According to the first stereotype (a) women are born inferior to men, they are intellectually and morally unequal, with a wide range of defects, such as "licentiousness, instability, disloyalty, to God's express commands, drunkenness and gluttony, pride, vanity, avarice, greed, seditiousness, quarrelsomeness, vindictiveness, and evidently the most irritating of all, talkativeness" (Kelso 1956: 12). In the quote, a conception of the female character is being stereotyped once again: *good* woman would never have features such as the listed above, whereas, a woman becomes *evil* and *mad* when she acts under the influence of those defects.

In contrast, the second cultural convention (b) establishes a kind of "equality between hero and heroine" (Justman, 2006: 137). The essence of any thing cannot be more or less: for instance, just as a glass of water cannot be more perfect than another glass of water so is it that a person cannot be more perfect than another. That is, a man cannot be more perfect than a woman because they both represent the so called "human", they only differ in appearance, not in nature; thus, if a woman can be *good* or *evil*, a man also can be.

2.1.3.2. Queen of Egypt

Following the previous paragraph, regarding the body (physical appearance), men are usually considered stronger and more able to withstand pain and trouble. However, an example that proves this idea wrong is Antony himself: not always the strongest and most powerful men (the role of Antony as a Roman general) happen to be the best. On the contrary, Cleopatra withstands the difficulties. She refers to herself as a man when she has to deal with the problems of the Empire, but she is not less of a woman by doing that, she is merely acting as Queen of Egypt: "**Cleopatra:** And, as the president of my kingdom, will / Appear there for a *man*. Speak not against it: / I will not stay behind" (Shakespeare, 1954: 115. Act III-Scene VII). As for the mind (mentality), I can affirm that what a man can understand a woman also can and what cannot be known by men, escapes the mind of a woman as well: the idea of a woman being capable to rule an Empire, equally as a man would do, is reflected here.

2.1.4. SEXUAL REFERENCES

Looking at the context of the story, the interpretation of the play can easily jump into a sexual framework; there are parts in the text where sexual references are clearly visual but these are not single and isolated phenomena, because sexual allusions are present in segments all throughout the play, and the image and description of Cleopatra is carefully constructed by specific words which usually have more than one interpretation. For instance: "**Clown:** Yes, forsooth: I wish you *joy o'the worm*" (Shakespeare, 1954: 212-213. Act V-Scene II). Gordon Williams (2006: 344) suggests that "sex overrides death here; or rather, this is orgasmic death produced by the phallic

worm; and it is unnecessary to distinguish between meanings when the clown wishes Cleopatra 'joy of the worm'."

The following fragment develops the traditional conception of Cleopatra as the Egyptian harlot who actually captivates the strong Mark Antony and brings him to his doom; Pompey tells Cleopatra to keep Anthony by her side using her charms and prevent him from participating in the war:

Pompey

He dreams: I know they are in Rome together,
Looking for Antony. But all the charms of love,
Salt Cleopatra, soften thy wan'd lip!
Let witchcraft join with beauty, lust with both,
Tie up the libertine in a field of feasts,
Keep his brain fuming;
(Shakespeare, 1954: 44. Act II-Scene I)

This sexual side of Cleopatra is actually revealed through a word game:

Domitius Enobarbus

Cleopatra, catching but the least
noise of this, dies instantly; *I have seen her die
twenty times* upon far poorer moment: I do think
there is mettle in death, which commits some
loving act upon her, she hath such a celerity in dying.
(Shakespeare, 1954: 20. Act I-Scene II. My emphasis.)

Gordon Williams, in his book *Shakespeare's Sexual Language: A Glossary* (2006: 116), also makes a reference to a word-game that Shakespeare uses: Enobarbus puts Cleopatra's characteristic dramatic manners and her insatiable sexual appetite together: "**Cleopatra**: I take no pleasure in aught an eunuch has" (Shakespeare, 1954: 38. Act I-Scene V), referring to the fact that Cleopatra needs a man because an eunuch lacks "the requisite cue and balls".

It is important to note that the image of the Egyptian Queen extends beyond the concept of an ordinary harlot (because, in fact, she is not an ordinary woman) and includes a wide gallery of typical female weaknesses.

2.1.5. JEALOUSY

Agrippa

Thou hast a sister by the mother's side,
Admir'd Octavia? Great Mark Antony
Is now a widower.

Caesar

Say not so, Agrippa:
If Cleopatra heard you, your reproof
Were well deserv'd of rashness.
(Shakespeare, 1954: 54. Act II-Scene II)

The woman who loses her man becomes insane; not only mad for the fact that her man is with another woman but also "mentally sick" because of the loss of her "husband". A rivalry between two women is present in some parts of the drama. On the one hand, Cleopatra's first enemy is Fulvia (first wife of Antony); and, on the other hand, her second rival is Octavia (sister of Caesar, second wife of Antony (excluding Cleopatra)).

Cleopatra

Excellent falsehood!
Why did he marry Fulvia, and not love her?
I'll seem the fool I am not; Antony
Will be himself.
(Shakespeare, 1954: 6. Act I-Scene I)

Messenger

Madam, he's married to Octavia.

Cleopatra

The most infectious pestilence upon thee!

Messenger

Good madam, patience.

Cleopatra

What say you? Hence,
Horrible villain! or I'll spurn thine eyes
Like balls before me; I'll unhair thy head:
She hales him up and down
Thou shalt be whipp'd with wire, and stew'd in brine,
Smarting in lingering pickle.
(Shakespeare, 1954: 71. Act II-Scene V)

Cleopatra as woman wants to know everything. She is anxious to have knowledge of everything that happens around Antony (and his new woman Octavia). However, Cleopatra has no patience to wait for the messenger to give her all the news he brings. She acts impulsively, she does want to hear the message but because of her jealousy she is not able to concentrate and pay attention to the messenger. In the fragment above, the reader and/or the spectator can easily recognize a description that depicts Cleopatra as a jealous and violent woman (leaving apart her role as Queen of Egypt). She presents an irrepressible and misdirected anger. What is more, Cleopatra, in her facet of a jealous *wife* is immensely jealous of the other woman and does her best to discover everything about her opponent: "**Cleopatra**: Report the feature of Octavia, her years, / Her inclination, let him not leave out / The colour of her hair: bring me word quickly" (Shakespeare, 1954: 74. Act II-Scene V).

Linked to the above idea, two opposite yet related ideas are exposed in the following two fragments:

Agrippa

To hold you in perpetual amity,
To make you brothers, and to knit your hearts
With an unslipping knot, take Antony
Octavia to his wife; whose beauty claims
No worse a husband than the best of men;
(Shakespeare, 1954: 55. Act II-Scene II)

Cleopatra

Most kind messenger,
Say to great Caesar this: in deputation:
I kiss his conquering hand: tell him, *I am prompt*
To lay my crown a's feet, and there to kneel:
Tell him from his all-obeying breath I hear
The doom of Egypt.
(Shakespeare, 1954: 136. Act III-Scene XIII. My emphasis.)

The first quote is the representation of a scene where Caesar, Mark Antony and Agrippa discuss the possibility that Antony could marry Octavia, sister of Caesar, thus Caesar and Antony would become brothers, that is, an alliance of marriage that would unite them both and tie them together in an unbreakable knot.

The recurring idea of kings and queens marrying each other is a common sub-theme in writings which have historical figures as main characters. This is the case of the tragedy of *Antony and Cleopatra* and even though Shakespeare skips the convention and describes his characters in his own way (highlighting the outstanding characterization of Cleopatra) he still includes historical facts and features (e.g. Egypt, Rome, battles, Julius Caesar, etc.). A man would give up on his woman for power and wealth. He would hesitate not a second marrying another woman, killing a fellow or betraying a king if that meant a material success for him.

On the other hand (second quote) the reader and/or spectator of *Antony and Cleopatra* gets the notion of a woman that would do everything for her man. In her "infinite variety" we do not get many chances to see Cleopatra being completely sincere about the love she feels for Antony nor we see her as a modest woman and/or queen. However, the quote mentioned above represents a scene of a humble woman and queen who, after her man is defeated and dead, she wants nothing but her own death, she no more cares about her empire, her wealth or her glory. Death will be her salvation.

This fragment of the play shows the most visible representation of Cleopatra acting as a jealous woman. She commands Alexas, a servant, to "report the feature of Octavia" (Shakespeare, 1954:74. Act II-Scene V). However, Cleopatra is not interested in the overall appearance of Octavia but in little details in which she would find even the slightest imperfection; this interest on finding the defects of the other woman are the result of Cleopatra's jealousy.

Cleopatra

Is she as tall as me?

Messenger

She is not, madam.

Cleopatra

Didst hear her speak? is she shrill-tongued or low?

Messenger

Madam, I heard her speak; she is low-voic'd.

Cleopatra

That's not so good: he cannot like her long.

Charmian

Like her? O Isis! 'tis impossible.

[...]

Cleopatra

Bear'st thou her face in mind? is't long or round?

Messenger

Round even to faultiness.

Cleopatra

For the most part, too, they are foolish that are so.

Her hair, what colour?

Messenger

Brown, madam: and her forehead

As low as she would wish it.

(Shakespeare, 1954: 101-102. Act III-Scene III)

Besides jealousy, Cleopatra also demonstrates vanity and narcissism: "**Cleopatra**: If it be love indeed, tell me how much. [...] I'll set a bourn how far to be beloved" (Shakespeare, 1954: 4. Act I-Scene I).

This passage shows Cleopatra's own esteem on a very high level. She believes that she has the right to be loved, and does not have a single doubt about it. The reader may interpret her words as if she considers herself better than any other woman and that the love of Antony for her should be bigger. As a woman influenced by her figure of Queen of Egypt, powerful and dominant, she sees herself glorified by everyone around her.

2.1.6. MANIPULATION

Cleopatra

See where he is, who's with him, what he does:

I did not send you: if you find him sad,

Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report

That I am sudden sick: quick, and return.

(Shakespeare, 1954: 24. Act I-Scene III)

Manipulation can be seen as some kind of obsession. The woman is obsessed to know where her man is. Cleopatra keeps an eye on Antony on every moment. Even as a powerful, strong and independent woman, Cleopatra needs a man on her side. A

stereotypical description of a female character is presented here: the woman, at home, waits for her man to come back from the war, a woman only thinks of love, her children and her man. Even though Shakespeare wanted to characterize Cleopatra in an unconventional way he still included characteristic female features.

Again, infidelity and manipulation are displayed in other fragments: "**Cleopatra:** Mardian, go tell him I have slain myself; / Say, that the last I spoke was 'Antony,' [...] And bring me how he takes my death" (Shakespeare, 1954: 171. Act IV-Scene XIII).

What is more, this tragedy of *Antony and Cleopatra* has not been fully classified as a tragedy, being the main reason for that the fact that in many parts of the play the reader and/or spectator can come across comedic elements. In the following passage, Cleopatra mocks on Antony, while he is trying to justify himself and show his love for her. Again, the dependence of man on woman is what Shakespeare consciously wants:

Mark Antony

I go from hence
Thy soldier, servant; making peace or war,
As thou affects.

Cleopatra

Cut my lace, Charmian, come,
But let it be: I am quickly ill, and well,
So Antony loves.

Mark Antony

My precious queen, forbear,
And give true evidence to his love, which stands
An honourable trial.
(Shakespeare, 1954: 28. Act I.-Scene III)

2.1.7. DEATH OF ANTONY

The heroic figure of Mark Antony in the play breaks down completely in the fourth act when he fails to put a noble end to his life as it is proper of a Roman General of his rank who has lost everything:

Mark Antony

... But I will be a bridegroom in my death, and run into't

As to a lover's bed. ... *Falling on his sword*

I learn'd of thee. How! not dead? not dead?

The guard, ho! O, dispatch me!

[...]

Mark Antony

I have done my work in, friends: O, make an end

Of what I have begun.

(Shakespeare, 1954: 179. Act IV-Scene XIV. My emphasis.)

As the play goes on, Antony is forced to look for increasingly more impressive and great speech to express his love to the eternally provocative and incredulous Cleopatra. But after his death it is the Queen to whom the rhetorical power is given to express her feelings and to magnify them to gigantic proportions. Cleopatra wishes to be the wife of Antony on the basis of the courage and loyalty which he manifests with his self-sacrifice. This is associated with an earlier statement in the play: "**Cleopatra:** My resolution's plac'd, and I have nothing / Of woman in me: now from head to foot / I am marble-constant; now the fleeting moon / No planet is of mine" (Shakespeare, 1954: 212. Act V-Scene II).

It is important to note here that, traditionally, a wide number of female physical characteristics were explained through the changing phases of the moon (Crawford, 2004: 63). These theories explain the psychology and behavior of women, building an extremely strong theoretical link between the instability and volatility of the moon and this of the female nature. Thus, the spiritual metamorphosis of the Egyptian Queen after the death of her man transforms her fundamental structure – the determination to free her soul from her body helps her reach a level above human nature: she gets rid of the prototypical female features (jealousy, greed, manipulation, vanity, etc.) that had her bound to Earth and she can now plan her own suicide.

Also, the remarkable ability of strong women, when necessary, to abandon female roles and act as men is a recurring theme in Shakespeare: For example, Lady Macbeth: "That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here" (Shakespeare, 1979: 21). In tragedy it is used

to generate and give depth and complexity to the female image. Cleopatra, to give an example, is the one who sees Antony dying and even in his moment of death Cleopatra is strong. The Queen's words are everything but humble: "**Mark Antony:** O, quick, or I am gone. / **Cleopatra:** ... *And welcome, welcome! die where thou hast lived:* / Quicken with kissing: had my lips that power, / Thus would I wear them out" (Shakespeare, 1954:184. Act IV-Scene XV. My emphasis). The life of Mark Antony is compared here with the love of Cleopatra. That is, the life of Antony depends on the love of the Queen. And love is presented like a place or home where Antony has lived and where he *must* die – her lips.

Furthermore, Cleopatra not only survives and overcomes him, but she also has the chance to rethink and execute her own suicide in the most dramatic, eminent and spectacular possible way.

2.1.8. DEATH OF CLEOPATRA

Regardless of the comic taste that the reader and/or spectator can get before Cleopatra starts the superb speech about her "death", as soon as the countryman goes away the scene abruptly returns to a great tragedy. This scene is a carefully planned majestic suicide, and the immediate relevance and meaning of the word "die" draws the attention to itself and leads the spectator and/or reader to the tragic interpretation:

Cleopatra

... I have

Immortal longings in me. Now no more

The juice of Egypt's grape shall moist this lip.

Yare, yare, good Iras; quick. Methinks I hear

Antony call. I see him rouse himself

To praise my noble act. I hear him mock

The luck of Caesar, which the gods give men

To excuse their after wrath. Husband, I come.

Now to that name my courage prove my title!

I am fire and air; my other elements

I give to baser life.

(Shakespeare, 1954: 213-214. Act V-Scene II)

Even in her moment of death, Cleopatra still thinks of her man; the reference below to Antony is about his already idealized image. Cleopatra has left her vanity behind and she dreams of how she will meet Antony in the afterlife.

Cleopatra

I dreamt there was an Emperor Antony
O, such another sleep, that I might see
But such another man!
His face was as the heavens;
His legs bestrid the ocean; his rear'd arm
Crested the world. His voice was propertyed
As all the tuned spheres, and that to friends;
But when he meant to quail and shake the orb,
He was as rattling thunder. For his bounty,
There was no winter in't; an autumn 'twas
That grew the more by reaping. His delights
Were dolphin-like...

(Shakespeare, 1954: 199-201. Act V-Scene II)

2.1.9. CONCLUSION

To conclude, the heroic status of Cleopatra in the play is carefully divided between the tragic and comic of her image, both related to *death*. Cleopatra is described through "her infinite variety", which presents virtues (beauty, intelligence, love, human side, etc.) and defects (jealousy, manipulation, lust, etc.). These disadvantages of Cleopatra as a woman give more realism to the play and earn the sympathy and love of the reader and/or spectator; Shakespeare's aim was to thrill the audience at the very end. On the other hand, the audience is facing an extraordinary woman – queen and harlot, lover, soldier, politician, traitor and hero.

The purpose of Shakespeare has reached its highest point: The reader and/or spectator have laughed with the cynical jokes and have hold their breath at moments of magnificent monologues such as the one presented in the scene of Cleopatra's suicide; a very characteristic way of writing of William Shakespeare.

2.2. JULIET from *ROMEO AND JULIET*

2.2.1. INTRODUCTION

Now that the tragedy of *Antony and Cleopatra* has already been analyzed, it could be assumed that the analysis of *Romeo and Juliet* will not go far away from the main idea presented in the previous analyzed drama: the female character is the main one.

Juliet is the principal character of the play and Romeo is just the one who, being around Juliet and expressing his love for her, makes Juliet's figure even greater: "We know nothing more about Romeo at the end than at the beginning, nor do we want. It is perfect – for Romeo." (Lerner, 1968: 33)

The quote above supports the idea previously stated. The tragedy revolves all around Juliet: the reader and/or spectator of the drama have been familiarized with her personality, her beauty, her surroundings, her parents, her nurse, her house, etc. Whereas, Romeo is just presented as the lover of Juliet.

Romeo and Juliet may be classified as a love story with a tragic yet magnificently comforting end. The tragedy narrates the story of two young people, whose love is born in the blink of an eye, flourishes and lives for a brief second, but never dies.

The following analysis of Juliet is based on the different attributes Shakespeare assigned to the character.

2.2.2. JULIET'S DOUBLE PORTRAIT

2.2.2.1. Daughter

Many analyses of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* remark the idea of the patriarchal power. Juliet is living by the rule of her father, Lord Capulet. As a good daughter she follows every word the patriarch of the Capulet family says. And we should notice that it is not only Juliet (as younger than him) who obeys her father, but her mother as a wife and the nurse as a servant. Once again, we find the idea of a character representing the inferiority of a woman next to a man. However, we can assume that Shakespeare

created these secondary female characters in order to make the rebellion of Juliet more prominent with a more powerful effect on the reader and/or spectator:

Lady Capulet

Ay, sir; but she will none, she gives you thanks.
I would the fool were married to her grave.

Capulet

Soft! take me with you, take me with you, wife.
How! will she none? doth she not give us thanks?
Is she not proud? doth she not count her blest,
Unworthy as she is, that we have wrought
So worthy a gentleman to be her bride?

Juliet

Not proud, you have; but thankful, that you have:
Proud can I never be of what I hate;
But thankful even for hate, that is meant love. [...]

Juliet

Good father, I beseech you on my knees,
Hear me with patience but to speak a word.

Capulet

Hang thee, young baggage! disobedient wretch!
I tell thee what: get thee to church o' Thursday,
Or never after look me in the face:
Speak not, reply not, do not answer me; [...]

Nurse

God in heaven bless her!
You are to blame, my lord, to rate her so.

Capulet

And why, my lady wisdom? hold your tongue,
Good prudence; smatter with your gossips, go.
(Shakespeare, 1980: 191-192. Act III-Scene V)

The above fragment of the tragedy narrating the refusal of Juliet to marry a man she does not even know and who has been chosen by her father clearly represents the difference between the main female character and the secondary ones. Juliet, as daughter of Lord Capulet, respects and loves him; however, she maintains her point of view and tries to speak and give reasons to her angry father. On the other hand, Lord Capulet is angry and listens to no one. The secondary female characters, Lady Capulet

and the Nurse, do not even seem to be part of the scene as they speak but their *tiny* voice is immediately silenced by the *powerful yells* of the man. The stereotypical patriarchal power of a man is clearly visible in this scene.

In addition, Count Paris, the suitor of Juliet, has the same point of view as the old Lord Capulet. The two of them believe that Juliet is too young and naive to understand what is good or bad for her. Paris wants to prove Juliet that her beliefs are not the right ones and reminds her what her duties are:

Paris

Happily met, my lady and my wife!

Juliet

That may be, sir, when I may be a wife.

Paris

That may be must be, love, on Thursday next. [...]

Paris

Thy face is mine, and thou hast slander'd it.

Juliet

It may be so, for it is not mine own.

(Shakespeare, 1980: 197. Act IV-Scene I)

The last line of Juliet is a hostile answer to Paris. With her reply, Juliet reminds, at the beginning of this fourth act, that the only lord of her soul and body is Romeo.

However, these words of rebellion by Juliet and the oppression of her father lead to the idea about a forbidden love. And *Romeo and Juliet* is considered a tragedy because the image that is presented to the reader and/or spectator is the one of a repressed woman whose love for a man is forbidden and impossible. This leads us to the analysis of Juliet as Romeo's lover.

2.2.2.2. Lover

Romeo could be considered as the main character in regards of *love*, that is, he is the one who takes the initiative and, throughout the whole play, it is him to whom the rhetorical and more romantic speech is given. However, as stated before, Shakespeare uses Romeo as a mere instrument through whose speech the playwright makes Juliet even greater in her characterization. Moreover, Romeo talks about love but Juliet is love

itself. Romeo, now that he knows his love Juliet, lives because of her, and the moment he has knowledge of her "death" he does not want to live anymore.

I came to the conclusion that Romeo is the active lover, his mission is to love Juliet, and Juliet is the passive lover, her mission is to be loved by her Romeo. Juliet is the supreme lover. She represents love as an excellence. She is a tormented love but yet a magnificent passion: "The love of Juliet is more vehement; [...] the love of Juliet gives us the idea of infinitude. Juliet is a lovely and palpable creation" (Jameson, 2010: 107).

And this image of Juliet as lover cannot be reached. Romeo's *love* for Rosaline (Capulet's niece and first love of Romeo) is "a mere candle before the sun that breaks from Juliet's window" (Lerner, 1968: 27) and means nothing next to the splendour, richness and greatness of Juliet's deep affection and love. The moment Romeo takes a glance at Juliet, he forgets Rosaline:

Friar Laurence

God pardon sin! wast thou with Rosaline?

Romeo

With Rosaline, my ghostly father? no;
I have forgot that name, and that name's woe.
[...]

Romeo

Then plainly know my heart's dear love is set
On the fair daughter of rich Capulet:
As mine on hers, so hers is set on mine;
(Shakespeare, 1980: 139. Act II-Scene III)

The following lines of Act II support my previous idea: Romeo's love for Rosaline was a mere obsession and idolatry. Love that meant pain itself.

Friar Laurence

Holy Saint Francis, what a change is here!
Is Rosaline, whom thou didst love so dear,
So soon forsaken? young men's love then lies
Not truly in their hearts, but in their eyes.

Jesu Maria, what a deal of brine
Hath wash'd thy sallow cheeks for Rosaline!
How much salt water thrown away in waste,
To season love, that of it doth not taste!
The sun not yet thy sighs from heaven clears,
Thy old groans ring yet in my ancient ears;
Lo, here upon thy cheek the stain doth sit
Of an old tear that is not wash'd off yet:
If e'er thou wast thyself and these woes thine,
Thou and these woes were all for Rosaline:
And art thou changed? pronounce this sentence then,
Women may fall, when there's no strength in men.

Romeo

Thou chid'st me oft for loving Rosaline.

Friar laurence

For doting, not for loving, pupil mine. [...]

Romeo

I pray thee, chide not; she whom I love now
Doth grace for grace and love for love allow;
The other did not so.

(Shakespeare, 1980: 140. Act II-Scene III)

These last words of Romeo reinforce the idea of the cruel and unrequited love of Rosaline, and the superb amorous effect Juliet has on Romeo as if he did not know what love was before her.

All Shakespeare's women, being essentially women, either love or have loved, or are capable of loving; but Juliet is love itself. The passion is her state of being, and out of it she has no existence. It is the soul within her soul; the pulse within her heart; the life-blood along her veins, "blending with every atom of her frame." The love that is so chaste and dignified in Portia—so airy-delicate and fearless in Miranda so sweetly confiding in Perdita—so playfully fond in Rosalind—so constant in Imogen—so devoted in Desdemona—so fervent in Helen—so tender in Viola—is each and all of these in Juliet. All these remind us of her; but she reminds us of nothing but her own sweet self; (Jameson, 2010: 97)

2.2.3. JULIET'S BEAUTY

"Juliet is a lovely and palpable creation" (Jameson, 2010: 107). Before describing Juliet, Shakespeare did not forget to exhibit Rosaline's attributes: her beauty is described as appealing and fascinating. However, Rosaline could be any woman; she has no extraordinary or unusual qualities different to those known to womanhood. In the paragraph below, the fact that the description of the woman is made by using terms such as *swan* and *crow* reminds us that Shakespeare's idea was to depict human and natural characters, thus he compares woman with nature itself. Benvolio tries to convince his cousin Romeo that Rosaline has nothing special and that she cannot offer him anything else than the things another woman could. Rosaline does not return her love to Romeo thus, with her denial, she immediately becomes "ugly":

Benvolio

At this same ancient feast of Capulet's
Supps the fair Rosaline whom thou so lovest,
With all the admired beauties of Verona:
Go thither; and, with unattainted eye,
Compare her face with some that I shall show,
And I will make thee think thy swan a crow.
(Shakespeare, 1980: 98-99. Act I-Scene II. My emphasis.)

What is more, Rosaline's charms decline when put beside the beauty of Juliet. "Romeo's first appraisal of Juliet's beauty is rich not only in its unforgettable images but also in the subtlety of its wordplay" (Lerner, 1968: 23):

Romeo

Oh, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!
It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
Like a rich jewel in an Ethiope's ear,
Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear.
So shows a snowy dove trooping with crows
As yonder lady o'er her fellows shows.
The measure done, I'll watch her place of stand,
And, touching hers, make blessèd my rude hand.
Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight!
For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night.
(Shakespeare, 1980:116. Act I-Scene V. My emphasis.)

Lerner (1968: 23) affirms that for Romeo Juliet is "beyond all price". Time will not fade neither Juliet's love for Romeo nor her infinite beauty. A beauty brief in life but eternal in death. Compared to Rosaline, Juliet represents the sincere, sensible and lovely sentiment Romeo feels. All these scenes at the beginning of the play prepare the reader and/or spectator for the tragic end. An end as beautiful as Juliet herself.

"Juliet: ... I have no joy of this contract tonight. / It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden, / Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be / Ere one can say "It lightens." Sweet, goodnight" (Shakespeare, 1980: 132. Act II-Scene II). Juliet is light. Her beauty is clear, pure and crystal. There is neither evil nor darkness in her person. Unlike Cleopatra, Juliet does not have the feeling of jealousy. Even though another woman is involved, no rivalry is shown throughout the drama. Juliet does not even have knowledge of Rosaline, nor she appears anymore in the play after Romeo finds Juliet. Thus, I can conclude by saying that Rosaline may be seen as the preface of a great book (Juliet) that one is about to read. Although without exaggerated rhetoric Juliet's beauty is still visible in her speech:

With Juliet, imagination is, in the first instance, if not the source, the medium of passion; and passion again kindles her imagination. - It is through the power of imagination that the eloquence of Juliet is so vividly poetical: that every feeling, every sentiment comes to her, clothed in the richest imagery, and is thus reflected from her mind to ours. The poetry is not here the mere adornment, the outward garnishing of the character; but its result, or, rather, blended with its essence. (Jameson, 2010: 121)

2.2.4. INNOCENT GIRL

Shakespeare tends to present the younger generation as complainers. These young people are not happy with the world they live in. Many of the Shakespearean characters, the young ones, see the world in black colors. A good example in this drama is Romeo: the painful and unrequited love he feels for Rosaline is killing him. He is submitted to the tyranny of Rosaline and he deeply lives in his melancholy. And it turns out that the melancholy character can be used as an ideal way to express the frustration of that time.

Romeo

Ay me! sad hours seem long. [...]

Benvolio

It was. What sadness lengthens Romeo's hours?

Romeo

Not having that, which, having, makes them short.

Benvolio

In love?

Romeo

Out--

Benvolio

Of love?

Romeo

Out of her favour, where I am in love.

(Shakespeare, 1980: 90. Act I-Scene I)

And because Romeo used to have a good vision of the world and he lost it, he suffers much more than those who have never had such good vision. Juliet appears as a salvation for him. She is the one who changes the life of her Romeo and leads him to a better destiny. However, she has not known pain until she meets her lover; and this tragic love path they both choose will affect and destroy her much quicker than it will destroy Romeo.

The moment Juliet meets Romeo she experiences a self-development. She is not that innocent girl anymore in the sense that she has now been thrown into the imperfect real world which she once had heard about, a world of pain, evilness and falsehood. Juliet has a supreme expression of disappointment.

In Act IV, Scene I, Friar Laurence gives Juliet the "remedy" for her false death; the reader and/or spectator can see a girl grown into a woman: **Friar Laurence:** [...] If, rather than to marry County Paris, / Thou hast the strength of will to slay thyself, / Then is it likely thou wilt undertake / A thing like death to chide away this shame [...] (Shakespeare, 1980: 198. Act IV-Scene I). The feeling of fear that Juliet has is described in details. However, in this scene, she demonstrates that she is no more that reckless impulsive girl, who is ready to take the drug without even thinking of the consequences, but one surprisingly intelligent young woman.

2.2.5. JULIET'S REBELLION

The patriarchal code reflects the society's preoccupation with women living under the rule of men; William Shakespeare breaks this convention. He wanted to break down the patriarchal ideal and Juliet is the character par excellence that represents the idea of the playwright. Shakespeare tends to support the idea of a character reaching something on his own, that is, the responsibility of the heroes for their own destiny.

Juliet does not conform to the *unhappy* future her violent tyrannical father, who treats his daughter as a property, has chosen for her. Still, in her first scene, Juliet acts as a quiet and serene girl; she is polite and respectful to her father because of her position of a daughter in a society which expects women to behave under the rule of a male character. However, when Juliet meets Romeo she drastically changes. Her feelings awake. She swaps from the obedient girl to a mature and focused woman who knows her goals in life, that is, marrying Romeo.

Juliet's rebellion to this oppression is visible to the reader and/or spectator and to a reduced number of characters in the play yet, it is hidden from his father until the end. Juliet is brave enough to choose her own path but is scared to talk to her father, Lord Capulet. And this fact demonstrates that Shakespeare breaks the traditional patriarchal ideal but still he maintains some conventions, creating a blurry line between rebellion and obedience.

In this struggle, both young lovers, Juliet and Romeo, are just a stray bullet. Indeed, Juliet, alongside Romeo, chooses a noble but dangerous path to walk; she chooses it impulsively, without ever thinking of the idea of danger or something else. Hastily, as Juliet herself realizes later on, their choice will lead them to death. However, it is not only their choice which will make them get lost in life but a series of unfortunate coincidences as well, which have no direct connection with either their chosen path or the hatred between the two families.

Juliet is courageous but her tragic fate has already been drawn. The personality of the heroine disintegrates before our eyes as a result of a previous origin, implanted in their soul from outside.

2.2.6. ROMEO'S WEAKNESS

The major weakness of a man is woman. It could be agreed that weakness carries the idea of woman in itself. That is, Juliet represents Romeo's Achilles' heel.

Romeo is seen as a pure sentimental young man who cannot control the situation and gives freedom to his feelings which he will not be able to satisfy: "Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear" (Shakespeare, 1980: 116. Act I-Scene V). Again, there is a reference to Juliet's beauty (Romeo's weakness), which is too extraordinary to be among humans and has to inevitably die. Nevertheless, he is ready to fight for these feelings and for Juliet.

Following the previous idea, I have noticed that Shakespeare really tried to create the impression of inevitability. Romeo will live not a second more than his beloved Juliet, as if his life depended on hers. Totally wrecked, he blames nature for his unfortunate fate:

Balthasar

Then she is well, and nothing can be ill:
Her body sleeps in Capel's monument,
And her immortal part with angels lives...

Romeo

Is it even so? then I defy you, stars! [...]
Well, Juliet, I will lie with thee tonight.
(Shakespeare, 1980: 218-219. Act V-Scene I)

2.2.7. JULIET'S DEVOTION FOR ROMEO

The devotion of Juliet is Romeo. She has an unconditional love for him. It is impossible to separate the figure of Juliet from the word "love". Juliet is love. Everything around her is related to Romeo, and Romeo himself is Juliet's love.

In Act III, Scene I, Romeo kills Juliet's cousin, Tybalt. On the one hand, the Nurse tells the news of Tybalt's death to Juliet in such a way that we, the audience, understand the effect Shakespeare wanted to create. He wanted to demonstrate that Juliet's feeling and

affection (for both, Romeo and Tybalt) are real, that she, as a female character, has grown up from a girl to a woman; however, the innocence and virtue still remain in her.

Nurse

Ah, well-a-day! he's dead, he's dead, he's dead!
We are undone, lady, we are undone!
Alack the day! he's gone, he's kill'd, he's dead! [...]

Juliet

What devil art thou, that dost torment me thus?
This torture should be roar'd in dismal hell.
Hath Romeo slain himself? say thou but 'I,'
And that bare vowel 'I' shall poison more
Than the death-darting eye of cockatrice:
I am not I, if there be such an I;
Or those eyes shut, that make thee answer 'I.'
If he be slain, say 'I'; or if not, no:
Brief sounds determine of my weal or woe. [...]

Juliet

O, break, my heart! poor bankrupt, break at once!
To prison, eyes, ne'er look on liberty!
Vile earth, to earth resign; end motion here;
And thou and Romeo press one heavy bier!

Nurse

O Tybalt, Tybalt, the best friend I had!
O courteous Tybalt! honest gentleman!
That ever I should live to see thee dead!

Juliet

What storm is this that blows so contrary?
Is Romeo slaughter'd, and is Tybalt dead?
My dear-loved cousin, and my dearer lord?
Then, dreadful trumpet, sound the general doom!
For who is living, if those two are gone?

Nurse

Tybalt is gone, and Romeo banished;
Romeo that kill'd him, he is banished.
(Shakespeare, 1980: 170-172. Act III-Scene II)

On the other hand, Juliet later realizes that Romeo's banishment will be a huge pain for her and that she would rather suffer the death of "ten thousand Tybalts" (Shakespeare, 1980: 170-172. Act III-Scene II) than being away from her lover. Later on, Juliet includes her parents in the list of people who she would rather lose before losing the one man who won her soul. This touching self-sacrifice of Juliet, as wife of her beloved and faithful husband, is expressed with an impressive poetic speech, very common to the theater of Shakespeare:

Nurse

Will you speak well of him that kill'd your cousin?

Juliet

Shall I speak ill of him that is my husband?

Ah, poor my lord, what tongue shall smooth thy name,

When I, thy three-hours wife, have mangled it?

But, wherefore, villain, didst thou kill my cousin?

That villain cousin would have kill'd my husband. [...]

My husband lives, that Tybalt would have slain;

And Tybalt's dead, that would have slain my husband:

All this is comfort; wherefore weep I then? [...]

'Tybalt is dead, and Romeo--banished;'

That 'banished,' that one word 'banished,'

Hath slain ten thousand Tybalts. Tybalt's death

Was woe enough, if it had ended there: [...]

But with a rear-ward following Tybalt's death,

'Romeo is banished,' to speak that word,

Is father, mother, Tybalt, Romeo, Juliet,

All slain, all dead. 'Romeo is banished!'

(Shakespeare, 1980: 173-174. Act III-Scene II)

2.2.8. JOINT DEATH

Romeo's love is powerless to keep Juliet alive and Juliet is so powerful that Romeo dies for her. The love of Juliet and her Romeo makes them one. And death will not separate them but make the union between the two lovers even stronger, an eternal love in death.

Juliet's and Romeo's deaths are one; these cannot be separated like, for instance, the end of *Antony and Cleopatra*.

"Well, Juliet, I will lie with thee tonight" (Shakespeare, 1980: 218-219. Act V-Scene I). Juliet causes in Romeo a fusion of feelings. When he sees Juliet dead in the chapel, Shakespeare presents the audience a mixture of feelings that Romeo is experiencing at that moment: he is sad but he is euphoric at the same time. William Shakespeare is subtle, not all these facts are consciously visible to us.

Romeo soon overcomes his grief and the scene changes to a strange state of euphoria; and here, the reader and/or the spectator of the play may think that the playwright is using irony at its best, but this euphoria is, nevertheless, a symptom of Romeo's painful condition.

If we analyze the play from Act I, what immediately catches our attention is the circle of fortune. The fate of Juliet is presented in the following scenes: from a humble and uncomplaining daughter she becomes a strong and determined woman who always stands on the balcony to welcome her Romeo, during the night – and their fortuitous meetings always happen at night, when dark prevails, resembling the image of death.

As the story develops, when Romeo and Juliet are already married and Tybalt has already been killed by Romeo, the two lovers expect to see each other on their wedding night. The Nurse tells him that Juliet "says nothing, sir, but weeps and weeps; and now falls on her bed; and then starts up. And Tybalt calls; and then on Romeo cries" (Shakespeare, 1980: 179. Act III-Scene III) because of the banishment of her lover.

Later on, Juliet recurs again to the image of death, when she says goodbye to her beloved husband from the window of her room in the house of the Capulet family and has a bad feeling. This represents a common feature of the female character: the sixth sense of a woman, the ability of a woman to predict or feel the future:

Juliet

O God, I have an ill-divining soul!
Methinks I see thee, now thou art so low,
As one dead in the bottom of a tomb:
Either my eyesight fails, or thou look'st pale.

Romeo

And trust me, love, in my eye so do you.

Dry sorrow drinks our blood. Adieu, adieu!

(Shakespeare, 1980: 187. Act III-Scene V)

Juliet is fighting with an inner decay, without even understanding its roots, and which threatens to destroy her. It is unfortunate fate, which she herself speaks about in the above fragment.

This series of oppressive hints about death may be linked to the idea of prediction and inevitability, which Shakespeare used in his plays in order to express vague forebodings about the afterlife. The words of Lady Capulet against Romeo are a cruel threat to her daughter. Again, the patriarchal power is present here; Lady Capulet acts and speaks influenced and depending on her husband: "**Lady Capulet** ... I'll send to one in Mantua, / Where that same banish'd runagate doth live, / Shall give him such an unaccustom'd dram, / That he shall soon keep Tybalt company: / And then, I hope, thou wilt be satisfied" (Shakespeare, 1980: 188-189. Act III-Scene V).

The mother informs her grieving daughter about the decision of her father to marry her to Count Paris after which Juliet remains loyal to Romeo and firmly affirms that "Indeed, I never shall be satisfied / With Romeo, till I behold him –dead–" (Shakespeare, 1980: 189. Act III-Scene V). These lines predict that Juliet will not see Romeo again until she wakes and find him lying and dying next to her.

In this situation *death* involves the image of a *grave*. But even through death the character is looking for a better fate. Juliet, of course, does not speak consciously about herself. But her words are so closely related to the nucleus of the tragedy – the doom of the two lovers. Lady Capulet expresses an angry mother's oath: "**Lady Capulet:** I would the fool were married to her grave!" (Shakespeare, 1980: 191. Act III-Scene V).

And this ominous omen will very soon come true, when Juliet would be in her grave, but already married to Romeo.

The second half of the scene of the death of Romeo and Juliet gives the rhetorical speech to the female character. When Juliet opens her eyes she first thinks of Romeo:

"**Juliet:** Where is my Romeo?" (Shakespeare, 1980: 229. Act V-Scene III). She sees him lying by her side, almost dead and taking his last glimpse of her. Shakespeare shows Juliet's last emotions very quickly because "all that is left her is to die, and she dies" (Jameson, 2010: 129): "**Juliet:** Yea, noise? Then I'll be brief. O happy dagger! / This is thy sheath; / There rust, and let me die." (Shakespeare, 1980: 230. Act V-Scene III).

And there is no pain in this tragedy. The reader and/or spectator could only feel a relief after the two lovers are finally together in an afterlife's endless and eternal love. Juliet's desire to be with Romeo has already come true.

2.2.9. CONCLUSION

To sum up, I believe that we feel tragedy as something intense, because it moves us deeply; and it moves us with persuasion. The final monologue of Juliet, for example, moves us emotionally. But we also get the feeling that the character is a unique personality, carrying all these emotions; there is some degree of carelessness in her language when she speaks, sometimes, with a preference for non-literary words. And this fact is connected to the complex simplicity of Juliet. The pain, the grief, the terror, the agony present in Romeo and Juliet do not change the essence of Juliet, her delicate and genuine female heart is the core of the tragedy.

3. CONCLUSION

In virtue of my analysis of the Shakespearean female character in tragedies I have come to the following conclusion.

William Shakespeare (seemingly unintentionally) breaks the convention: Cleopatra and Juliet are not ordinary women. The Victorian ideal of a woman living in the shadows of a man is left behind and the awakening to the real world is what makes the heroine escape from the oppressive rules of that time.

Most playwrights use tragedies to convey some moral lesson. Shakespeare, however, prefers to give an assessment of the character he has created, as if it is not important to him what did the character do but what kind of human she was. The playwright presents an exceptional female figure which contrasts with the traditional portrayal of women. Although Shakespeare really tried to embed in Cleopatra and Juliet as many features of the female character as possible: beauty, innocence, obedience, goodness, etc. the playwright still built two unique characters depicted with attributes new to the world: undeniable beauty, strength, determination, power, domination, etc., a woman whose essence is above the restrictions of the patriarchal code.

Besides, the unfading charm of the female main character (Cleopatra and Juliet) over us is also one of the main secrets of these Shakespearean tragedies. While Cleopatra is characterized with magnificent speeches, Juliet's words stand out for their simplicity, and this demonstrates that Shakespeare is such a master of speech that he even uses the resources of poetry to create an impression of personality.

Shakespeare depicts his heroines in an innovative way in order to "further women's goals" (Peterson, 2009: 27). However, he also chooses to mention a number of previous conventions in literature (such as the patriarchal code) in order to maintain the realism in the story; consequently, the tragedy occurs when the female figure rebels against the conventions and stereotypes of the society.

The understanding of Shakespeare is not something fixed. My thesis presents a study of two of his most renowned tragedies based on my research and findings, as well as on my personal point of view. Shakespeare may have a different essence for each and

every one who reads him and we will be in a mistake to attach a huge value to one idea on Shakespeare and/or dismiss another. In addition, as it is pointless to put painting over sculpture or vice-versa, so it is pointless to overrate *Antony and Cleopatra* over *Romeo and Juliet*. Regardless of analyzing only one or all of the tragedies of the playwright we can conclude that Shakespeare represents a point in writing unreached by anyone and that he gives his female characters an essence that makes them not only important and essential to the drama but unique in literature.

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