Luisa Conti Camaiora

SHAKESPEARE'S USE OF THE PETRARCHAN CODE AND IDIOM IN *ROMEO AND JULIET*

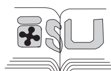
THE MOST
EXCELLENT
And Lamentable Tragedie
of Romeo and
Juliet.

As it hath been sundry times publikely Acted
by the Kings Majesties Servants
at the Globe.

Written by W. Shake-speare.

Newly corrected, augmented, and amended.

LONDON,
Printed by R. Young for John Smethwicke, and are to be solde



Pubblicazioni dell'I.S.U. Università Cattolica

EBOOK

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SHAKESPEARE'S USE OF THE PETRARCHAN CODE AND IDIOM IN *ROMEO AND JULIET*

Milano 2000

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http://editoriale.cjb.net
ISBN 88-8311-095-1

In her study, "'*Alla stoccado* carries it away': Codes of Violence in *Romeo and Juliet*"[1], Jill L. Levenson, examining the set of rules that are central to the play, identifies two codes. The first, which is the object of her concern, is the duelling code, with its related codes of honour and of violence, as evidenced in three manuals circulating in England in the mid-1590s when *Romeo and Juliet* was composed, and which dealt both with the code and with the art of personal defence: Sir William Segar's *The Book of Honor and Armes* (1590), Giacomo di Grassi's *His True Arte of Defence* (1594), and Vincentio Saviolo's *His Practise* (1595)[2]. Levenson investigates the way weapons and fighting occur not only in the play's action but also in its dialogue, showing how the play reflects the contemporary preoccupation with duelling, how verisimilitude characterises the many features of the fight scenes in *Romeo and Juliet*, and how, by the end of the play, the honour code

[1] Jill L. Levenson, "'*Alla stoccado* carries it away': Codes of Violence in *Romeo and Juliet*", in Jay L. Halio (ed.), *Shakespeare's* Romeo and Juliet: *Texts, Contexts, and Interpretation*, Newark, University of Delaware Press; London, Associated University Presses, 1995, pp. 83-96.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 86.

has virtually disappeared[3]. The thesis elaborated in Levenson's study is that "Replacing the pitched battles and trial by combat of the feudal system, dueling represented the appropriation of aristocratic power by the Crown"[4], that "Similar to other Tudor appropriations, this one took place indirectly"[5], and that the whole question reflects a reality of late sixteenth-century England, in that "The code that regulated violence in the late sixteenth-century determined the way the aristocracy, manipulated by the Tudors, tried to shore up its depleted power"[6].

The second code referred to by Levenson is the literary one. She observes that "violence in *Romeo and Juliet* complements the political implications of the sonnet idiom"[7], in that "mastery in each demanded skill and had as its purpose establishment of social position"[8], and she goes on to note how "every feature of the Petrarchan situation became a metaphor for something else: the unreachable lady stood for impossible goals; flattery of her charms disguised supplication for patronage; and desire itself represented ambition for advancement"[9]. Although Levenson does not

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 84-92.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 86.
[5] *Ibid.*
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 93.
[7] *Ibid.*, p. 92.
[8] *Ibid.*
[9] *Ibid.*, p. 93.

treat this second code in this context[10], she sustains that "Shakespeare voiced doubts about this medium in his own [sonnet] sequence, using the conventions not only to appeal for patronage but also to record the struggles of a poet writing within a system"[11], and she suggests that "In Verona he imagines a city where everyone speaks or enacts the Petrarchan idiom"[12], and further asserts that "The Elizabethan language fraught with political metaphor belongs to the city's regular discourse on love and rivalry, its two motifs"[13].

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[10] Jill L. Levenson has treated the play's use of the Petrarchan idiom in her "The Definition of Love: Shakespeare's Phrasing in *Romeo and Juliet*", *Shakespeare Studies*, 15 (1982), pp. 21-36, but has focused on the characteristics of the Petrarchan language and its permutations in the play, rather than on the functionality of the code with regard to character interaction, which is the aspect treated here, and she has argumented (p.22) that "the language of *Romeo and Juliet* derives in large part from Petrarchan imagery and stylistic devices". Ralph Berry, *The Shakespearean Metaphor*, London, Macmillan, 1978, here cited as reproduced in part as "*Romeo and Juliet*: The Sonnet-World of Verona", in John F. Andrews (ed.), Romeo and Juliet: *Critical Essays*, New York and London, Garland Publishing, 1993, p. 137, sustains that in the play, "we have ... an existential drama of sonnet-life", and that "the cliché, of which the sonnet is exemplar, is the dominant thought-form of Verona".

[11] Levenson, "Codes of Violence", *cit.*, p. 93. As example, Levenson, *ibid.*, p. 96, points to Shakespeare's Sonnet 76. On the use of sonnet sequences for social criticism, see Jill L. Levenson, "*Romeo and Juliet*: Tragical – Comical – Lyrical History", *Proceedings of the PMR Conference*, 12/13 (1987-88), pp. 31-46 and Arthur F. Marotti, "'Love is not love': Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences and the Social Order", *English Literary History*, 49, 1982, pp. 408ff.

[12] Levenson, "Codes of Violence", *cit.*, p. 93.

[13] *Ibid.*

The purpose of the present study is to examine Shakespeare's use of Petrarchism[14], in its manifestation as

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[14] On Petrarchism in England, see M. Praz, "Petrarca in Inghilterra", in his *Machiavelli in Inghilterra ed altri saggi sui rapporti letterari anglo-italiani*, Firenze, G.C. Sansoni, 1962; Anthony Mortimer, *Petrarch's Canzoniere in the English Renaissance*, Bergamo, Minerva Italica, 1975; Jack D'Amico, *Petrarch in England*, Ravenna, Longo, 1949; Leonard Forster, *The Icy Fire: Five Studies in European Petrarchism*, London, Cambridge University Press, 1961.

On the range of attitudes, situations, topoi and rhetorical figures that Petrarchan sonnets, taken directly from the Italian, or vehiculed by the French, had introduced into English, see E.C. Pettet, *Shakespeare and the Romance Tradition*, London, Staples Press, 1956; M.C. Bradbrook, *Shakespeare and Elizabethan Poetry*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1951; J.W. Lever, *The Elizabethan Love Sonnet*, London, Methuen, 1956; J.B. Leishman, *Themes and Variations in Shakespeare's Sonnets*, London, Hutchinson, 1961; Brian Vickers, *Classical Rhetoric in English Poetry*, London, Macmillan, 1970; Thomas O. Sloan and Raymond B. Waddington (eds.), *The Rhetoric of Renaissance Poetry*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1974; Daniel Javitch, *Poetry and Courtliness in Renaissance England*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1978; Patricia Ann Kennan, "Le forme e i motivi dell'amor cortese in *Romeo and Juliet"*, in Mariangela Tempera (ed.), *op. cit*., pp. 108-111. See also my *Sir Thomas Wyatt's Close Translations of Petrarch's Sonnets*, Milan, Europrint Publications, 1994.

On *Romeo and Juliet* seen in the context of the courtly love convention in drama, see Lu Emily Pearson, *Elizabethan Love Conventions*, New York, Barnes & Nobel, 1966; L.L. Brodwin, *Elizabethan Love Tragedy 1587-1625*, London, University of London Press, 1972; Derick R.C. Marsh, *Passion Lends Them Power: A Study of Shakespeare's Love Tragedies*, Manchester, Manchester University Press; New York, Barnes & Noble, 1976; Roger Stilling, *Love and Death in Renaissance Tragedy*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana University Press, 1976.

On the specific influence of Petrarchan sonnets on the play, see the following note.

literary idiom and linguistic code[15], in *Romeo and Juliet*, with specific reference to the character of Romeo, to show how

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[15] On the influence of the sonnet and specifically of Shakespeare's sonnet-poetry, as well as of other poetic forms, such as the epithalamium and the *aube,* on this play, see G.G. Gervinus, *Shakespeare Commentaries* (transl. by F.E. Bunnett), New York, Scribner, Welford & Armstrong, 1877 (new ed. rev.), pp. 205-208. On the influence of the sonnet tradition, see Giorgio Melchiori, *L'uomo e il potere*, Torino, Einaudi, 1973, pp. 39-40, and also his "*Romeo and Juliet* dal testo alla scena", in Tempera (ed.), *op. cit*., pp. 13-17; Katherine Wilson, *Shakespeare's Sugared Sonnets*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1974, pp. 62-80; A.J. Earle, "*Romeo and Juliet* and the Elizabethan Sonnets", *English*, 27 (1978), pp. 99-119, and also: George Rylands, "Shakespeare the Poet", in Harley Granville-Barker and G.B. Harrison (eds.), *op. cit*., p. 111, who points out the effect of Shakespeare's experience as sonneteer on the versification and paragraphing of plays such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Love Labour's Lost* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*; G.B. Harrison, *Shakespeare's Tragedies*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951, p. 47, who stresses how *Romeo and Juliet* "coincided with the sudden vogue for sonneteering, which was so fashionable in the early 1590's"; Winifred Nowottny, "Shakespeare's Tragedies", in J. Sutherland and J. Hurstfield (eds.), *Shakespeare's World*, London, Arnold, 1964, pp. 49-53, who evidences Shakespeare's debt to Petrarch which influences not only the language but the theme of the play; Brian Gibbons (ed.), "Introduction", in his *The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare*: Romeo and Juliet, London and New York, Routledge, 1983 [1980], p. 43, who indicates Shakespeare's achievement in creating, in the play, "a dramatic equivalent to the sonnet sequence as we find it in *Astrophil and Stella*", and who compares Sidney's sequence and the play (pp. 42-52); Nicholas Brook, *Shakespeare's Early Tragedies*, London, Methuen, 1968, p. 80, who stresses how "the play can partly be seen as a dramatic exploration of the world of the love sonnet" and holds (p. 87) that it depends "very much on formal patterning, like that of a sonnet"; Jill L. Levenson, "Definition of Love", *cit*., p. 21, who observes how "the play on the whole combines *mel* and *sal*, honey and salt, in a way similar to that of Shakespeare's sonnets". For a discussion of the transference of the

the doubts that Shakespeare manifested in his sonnet sequence with regard to the Petrarchan literary medium are also evidenced in the tragedy. Romeo appears a test case for this investigation in that he is the sole character in the play to wrestle with the idiom from beginning to end, in life as well as in death. All the other characters, instead, seem to have been endowed by the playwright with a *modus vivendi* with regard to the code, having adopted a basic attitude as regards it, seemingly aware of its function *qua co*de and so employing it for their particular ends. Thus Montague uses it to embody both his worried concern for a Romeo enmeshed in a Petrarchan attitude and for the deleterious effects which he thinks involvement in such an attitude may produce on his son's natural development and future prospects. Benvolio employs it to describe Romeo, to sound him out on his love situation (according to his promise to Romeo's father), and also to try to draw Romeo out of his love melancholy. The Capulets utilise it in the context of their social ambition for

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Petrarchan literary idiom into reality, with emphasis on the effects on the body/flesh, and thus from a different standpoint to that presented here, see Gayle Whittier, "The Sonnet's Body and the Body Sonnetized in *Romeo and Juliet*", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 40 (1989), pp. 27-41. It is interesting to note that the Petrarchan influence on the play had been noted, and condemned, as early as 1710: see Charles Gildon, "Remarks on the Plays of Shakespeare", in *The Works of Mr William Shakespeare*, vol. 2 (1710), reproduced in Neil Taylor and Bryan Loughrey (eds.), *Shakespeare's Early Tragedies*: Richard III, Titus Andronicus *and* Romeo and Juliet, London, Macmillan, 1990, p. 34, who had asserted of the play that "perhaps *Shakespeare* ... was a little corrupted by reading Petrarch, that modern Debaucher of Poetry into *Conceits* and *Conundrums*".

their daughter: paradigmatic is Lady Capulet's adoption of the code in her sonnet-description of Paris as "fair volume" (I, iii, 86)[16], aimed at convincing Juliet of the exigency of accepting Paris's suit[17]; but Capulet also uses the code, first to encourage Paris in his wooing of Juliet, then in his memories of his past youth in the feast scene, and further, in his comments on what he considers the exaggerated weeping, on Juliet's part, for Tybalt's death; finally, both Capulets employ the code to externalise their distraughtness for the loss of their daughter and for the forfeit of the expectations and ambitions invested in her, in the lamentation scene at Juliet's supposed death. Paris makes manifest the Petrarchan code in his obedient adherence to Capulet's wishes regarding his marriage with Juliet, in the description he provides Friar Lawrence of Juliet's sorrow for Tybalt's death, in the lamentation scene with the Capulets, cited above, and finally in his own speech of grief for Juliet's death, when he shrews her tomb with flowers. Friar Lawrence avails himself of the code to remind Romeo of his previous love for Rosaline and so to question the authenticity of his new love, then to deprecate the speed and violence of his love for Juliet, and next to characterize the lightness and

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[16] The text used for Shakespeare's play is Gibbons (ed.), *op. cit*.

[17] As M.M. Mahood, *Shakespeare's Wordplay*, London, Methuen, 1957, here cited as reproduced in part as "Wordplay in *Romeo and Juliet*", in Taylor and Loughrey (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 156-157, has observed: "Love in Verona may be a cult, a quest or a madness. Marriage is a business arrangement".

eagerness of Juliet's arrival for her marriage[18]. Even Prince Escalus has recourse to the same literary code to describe the feud and its effects at the beginning of the play and to encapsulate the ultimate consequences of that same feud in his final speech at the end of the play[19]. Juliet makes use of the code in her first encounter with Romeo, and subsequently and recurrently throughout the play to express her love for him; she further adopts it in her initial, instinctive revulsion from Romeo when she hears he has killed Tybalt, as also in her successive, immediate rehabilitation of him.

The code is also continually present in the parodies and subversions of it that Shakespeare makes emerge in the speech and behaviour of other characters. Thus it is constantly recalled, to be ironized upon, in Mercutio's bawdy jokes and obscene innuendoes on the topic of Romeo's love and of love in general. It emerges, by contra-position, in the coarse exchanges between Sampson and Gregory at the beginning of the play, as also, by implication, in the music-based exchanges between Peter and the musicians in the scene of Juliet's apparent death. It arises, by association, in many of the Nurse's speeches, either because her earthly and down-to-earth sexuality suggests it by contrast, as in her recollections of Juliet's childhood, or on account of her

[18] See *ibid.*, pp. 161, for the four possible meanings and interpretations of Friar Lawrence's comment on Juliet's entry.

[19] See John Russell Brown, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Style*, London, Heinemann, 1970, p. 68f., for a commentary on the play of words in Prince Escalus's final speech.

awkward and incompetent attempts to imitate the refined speech and attitudes characteristic of the code, as in her speech exchanges with Romeo when she seeks him on Juliet’s behalf, or else because of her parrot-like echoing of the code as used by others, as when she repeats the Capulets’ lamentations in Juliet’s ‘apparent’ death-scene.

From these few indications, which, however, a more detailed analysis, beyond the scope of this examination, would confirm, it may be observed that all the main characters (and also many of the minor ones) of the play may be defined with regard to the Petrarchan idiom code[20]. Thus there are characters, like Juliet, that utilise it, but that also attempt to modify it and to substitute for it a more spontaneous and natural form of expression; there are those, like Paris, who have instead completely absorbed its tenets, making the code itself the sole parameter for self-expression and self-definition[21]; there are others that manipulate it to their own advantage, such as Montague and the Capulets; there are those that continually underscore its limits and perils, such as Friar Lawrence; there are characters that employ it to embody and authenticate the substance of their

[20] Jill L. Levenson, “Definition of Love”, *cit.*, p. 26, sustains that “All the dramatis personae crucial to the plot ... express themselves in this idiom”, and she has analized this, but here it is argued not so much that all the personages speak the idiom but that they may be characterially defined with reference to it.

[21] Gibbons (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 41, observes of Paris that “he has public acceptability and observes the rules of conventional courtship, so contrasting with Romeo’s secret and conventional love”.

own authority, as Prince Escalus; there are others that dispassionately interact with it, aware of its potentials and limits, such as Benvolio; there are those that consciously parody and ridicule it, such as Mercutio; there are some that instead unconsciously suggest it by contrast, such as the Nurse; and finally, there is the only character who absolutely ignores it, Tybalt, given that he has made another code, that of violence, the sole module of his self-identity[22].

It may consequently be affirmed that, with regard to the Petrarchan idiom code, Shakespeare reveals how the characters of the play variously subvert, or embody, or ignore it, consciously parody or unconsciously recall it, manipulate or appropriate it for their particular purposes, objectively interact with it or critically deprecate it. All, however, elaborate within the play, or have already elaborated before the play begins, a specific attitude towards the code itself. In Romeo, instead, Shakespeare presents a

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[22] T.J.L. Cribb, "The Unity of *Romeo and Juliet*", in Taylor and Loughrey (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 188, argues that "Tybalt is the principle opposite to love: Tybalt is hate". It is thus apt that he should be alien to the love sonnet idiom. Interesting is the observation of Susan Snyder, *The Comic Matrix of Shakespeare's Tragedies*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1979, here cited as reproduced in part as "The Comic Matrix of *Romeo and Juliet*", in Taylor and Loughrey (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 171, that "Ironically, [Tybalt's] imperatives come to dominate the play's world only when he himself departs from it". For a revaluation of the behaviour of Tybalt, see Jerzy Limon, "*Romeo and Juliet* 3.1 – A Staging Alternative", *Studia Anglia Posnaniensa*, 15 (1982), pp. 153-160, re-proposed as "Rehabilitating Tybalt: A New Interpretation of the Duel Scene in *Romeo and Juliet*", in Halio (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 97-106.

character who continually has to measure his own employment of the Petrarchan idiom against the use made of that same idiom by others, and who constantly has recourse to the variations and modifications foreseen and provided for by the code itself to adapt it to his encounters with others[23]. It will here be sustained that this continual confrontation constitutes the basis of the play's tragic outcome and specifically of Romeo's own tragic destiny. In fact, it is not casual that all the characters that die in the action of the play perish in syntony with their use of the Petrarchan code: Mercutio parodying it, Tybalt ignoring it, Paris enacting it, Juliet re-defining it, and Romeo, most tragic of all[24], self-deceived by it.

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[23] The reading presented here obviously attributes to Romeo an importance and function that instead many critics deny. See, for example, Charles Williams, *The English Poetic Mind*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1932, here cited as reproduced in part as "*Romeo and Juliet* in the Cycle of Shakespeare", in Laurence Lerner (ed.), *Shakespeare's Tragedies: A Selection of Modern Criticism*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1963, p. 33, who asserts: "We know nothing more about Romeo at the end than at the beginning, nor do we want" and Barbara L. Parker, *A Precious Seeing: Love and Reason in Shakespeare's Plays*, New York and London, New York University Press, 1987, p. 142, who sustains that "Romeo's "invisibility" is his defining attribute". See further Romana Rutelli, "Giulietta sono io", in Tempera (ed.), *op. cit*., pp. 34-35, who argues that Romeo is crystallized in an immovable role and is thus inadequate to transmit messages not in syntony with that role, as also her "Romeo e Giulietta" *l'effabile: analisi di una reflessione sul linguaggio*, Milano, Il Formichiere, 1978, pp. 52-53, 168.

[24] Harold Bloom, "Introduction", in his *William Shakespeare's* Romeo and Juliet*: Bloom's Notes*, Broomall, PA, Chelsea House, 1996, p. 6, in fact, holds that "Juliet ... dies exalted. Romeo ... dies more pathetically".

Romeo and Juliet opens with a sonnet, spoken by the Chorus, that has given rise to a series of hypotheses regarding the motives for its insertion[25]. No doubt, however, may exist as regards its function, given that the purpose of these fourteen lines is clear: Shakespeare wishes to furnish information regarding the whole development of the action, and in particular, its tragic conclusion, so as to allow no possibility of illusion, especially during the first two acts when the action seems to be tending towards comedy instead of tragedy[26]. Indeed, the prescience thus acquired by the audience is functional to Shakespeare's use of Petrarchism for the delineation of Romeo's personality, in

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[25] Gibbons (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 42, for example, points out that the sonnet Prologue in part imitates the use of sonnets in the Brooke's poem that is the basic source of the play, and in part attunes the audience to the play's verbal music, "and, subliminally, to its sonnet-like symmetries and intensities of feeling and design"; Angela Locatelli, "Anticipazione e performance in *Romeo and Juliet*", in Tempera (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 40, sustains that the opening sonnet has a modelling function on the entire text, also opening up the metatheatrical problem in a pragmatic sense, and conditioning the global effect, of pity, that the spectator should derive from the performance; while Jill L. Levenson, "Definition of Love", *op. cit.*, p. 23, holds that "It stands at the beginning of the tragedy as a replica in little of the familiar story – the cliché clichéd". See also E. Pearlman, "Shakespeare at Work: *Romeo and Juliet*", in *English Literary Renaissance*, 24 (1994), here cited as reproduced in Joseph A. Porter (ed.), *Critical Essays on* Romeo and Juliet, New York, G.K. Hall, 1997, pp. 112-115, for comments on the function of the Prologue and the chorus in the play.

[26] The audience is also invited to confirm, or contradict, the evaluations of the Prologue itself, so that the sonnet implicitly solicits the passing of a judgement with regard both to the occurrence and the responsibilities of the events of the play.

that for Shakespeare's particular adoption and manipulation of the Petrarchan motif in a tragic sense, foreknowledge of what will happen is essential. In fact, the thesis that will be proposed in what follows is that Romeo's tragedy may be perceived as the outcome of his dramatic embodiment of the varying and mutable characteristics of the Petrarchan lover. These characteristics, when posed in problematic interaction with the use, abuse or absence of Petrarchan features in the personalities of the other characters, will be seen to constitute the basis of the play's tragic outcome and of Romeo's own tragic destiny. Here, therefore, Romeo's relationship with the other characters of the play will be examined.

Shakespeare's presentation of Romeo occurs before the character's actual appearance on the stage, when he is described and imaginatively evoked in the words of Benvolio and Montague. Their portrayal of Romeo immediately collocates the hero within the typology of the typical Petrarchan lover: he is described as crying and sighing, thus adding to the dew and the clouds, as seeking solitude, as shutting himself off from the sun and light. The places he is said to frequent are places where he can avoid contact with others: the sycamore wood outside Verona before dawn, where he seeks the cover and shelter of the trees, and his own chamber during the day. In both cases, solitude and isolation are accompanied by the avoidance of the sun: when Romeo is out in nature, he chooses moments of the day when the sun has not yet risen; during the day, he shuts out

sun and light by closing the windows of his chamber, thus making himself "an artificial night" (I, i, 138). Furthermore, Montague introduces the similitude of Romeo as bud, eaten by the worm before it can spread its petals, in this way suggesting a gnawing canker at work in his son, that prevents him from blossoming. The image is essential for the understanding of Montague's use of the Petrarchan code. Romeo is his only heir, sole fruit of Montague's genealogical tree, and the relevance of his vision of the canker at work is not merely pertinent to his fear that it may blight the blossoming of the flower of Romeo's youth, but to his apprehension that Romeo will not be able to "dedicate his beauty to the sun" (I, i, 151), namely, will not bear the fruit, matured by the sun, and subsequent to the spreading of the petals of the flower, which will permit the propagation of the Montague species. Montague's anxiety regarding Romeo's Petrarchism is thus not just an anxiety for his son's melancholy[27], but a concern for his own lineage. Hence the desire to know the reason for this melancholy, which in turn stimulates Benvolio's offer, as faithful member of the Montague faction, to discover the cause, which further prompts Montague's "blessing" on Benvolio's endeavour, in his augury to him that he may hear "true shift" (I, i, 157) from Romeo. It is not casual that Shakespeare's initial presentation of the interaction of Romeo's Petrarchism with

[27] Gibbons (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 53, noting how "Romeo's father ... laments Romeo's love of introspective solitude", observes how "to him that appears an alarming tendency".

the use of the Petrarchan code on the part of others should resolve itself in the fact that Romeo will be observed and controlled. In this way Montague's invitation to Benvolio is extended to the public, and the need to focus attention on Romeo's Petrarchism throughout the play becomes a fundamental tenet for the understanding of his destiny. It is also not casual that Shakespeare's initial presentation of Romeo should correspond exactly to his terminal one of him: the shutting out of the symbols of life, together with the two specific places within which Romeo buries himself (the covert in nature and the closed man-made space of his room, far from sun and light), anticipate the final tomb; furthermore, the image of the "worm" will be taken up by Romeo himself in his final soliloquy, when the implications of the image, its intimations of unfulfilled potential and early death, will be realized. What is 'grave-like' in this first presentation will become the actual grave, and the first variation in Shakespeare's use of the Petrarchan literary code for Romeo emerges: authentic love will render actual reality those traits, images and formalities of amour courtois that here appear merely as conventionality.

At Romeo's appearance, his Petrarchan situation is at once immediately characterized within five speech exchanges with Benvolio[28], given that the latter has assumed

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[28] Various critics have commented on the initial presentation of Romeo. Gibbons (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 47, sustains that "there is at first an element of parody in Shakespeare's presentation of him; his conventionality and bookishness are obvious from the first words he speaks, all absurdly stereotyped paradox and similitude"; Mahood, *op. cit.*, pp. 155-156, asserts:

the precise task of measuring his own use of the Petrarchan code against Romeo's, in order to draw out the hero's confession regarding his situation. Thus we immediately learn that for Romeo time never seems to pass, that he is out of favour with his love and that his love situation is an unhappy one. Being "Out of ... favour" (I, i, 166) in love, in accordance with the tenets of Petrarchism, is perceived to be a negative, painful state; but Shakespeare will demonstrate

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"Romeo himself appears and expresses, in the numbers that Petrarch flowed in, the contrary relationship of the sexes: man's courtly subjection to women's tyranny"; Irving Ribner, *Patterns in Shakespearean Tragedy*, London, Methuen, 1960, p. 29, notes how Romeo assumes "the conventional role of the melancholy lover", and comments: "This is the boy Romeo ... playing with a make-believe sorrow which he enjoys to the fullest"; Norman Rabkin, *Shakespeare and the Common Understanding*, New York, Free Press; London, Collier-Macmillan, 1967, p. 176, finds that Romeo is described "in terms that present him as comically acting out the clichés of Petrarchan sonnets", and that (p. 179) he is "Like a Renaissance schoolboy laying out a composition", as also like "the self-conscious rhetorician exploring his subject, creating his argument through ingenuity and exuberant inventiveness"; Pettet, *op. cit.*, p. 114, holds that "the Romeo of the opening act is a portrait and ... almost certainly a caricature of the typical romantic lover", and that (p. 115), "To deepen the lines of exaggeration and caricature Shakespeare invests Romeo's speech with all the conventional rhetoric of contemporary love-poetry. He habitually talks in oxymoron, hyperbole and extravagant conceit, and he is always close to the sonnet vein"; Marsh, *op. cit.*, p.54, affirms, of Romeo, "His speech is extravagant, his paradoxes on the nature of love utterly conventional ... His apostrophes to love carry very little conviction, and his eager readiness to enter into argument with his friends on the subject indicates how little his true sensibilities are engaged". See also Kiernan Ryan, "*Romeo and Juliet*: il desiderio nella prigione del linguaggio", in Tempera (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 191. For a commentary on the language and imagery of this scene, see Romana Rutelli, "Romeo e Giulietta", *cit.*, pp. 21-39.

how even the being ‘in favour’ in love will, in this play, produce the same sense of the non-passing of time and an equal quantity of suffering. Within these initial exchanges, the conventionality of Romeo’s situation is signalled by Shakespeare through the fact that, in the middle of Romeo’s lucubrations on love, he is still quick-witted enough to be able to perceive what is going on around him, such as the quick exit of his father. The love for Rosaline is thus a love that leaves him alert to the presence or absence of his family: that of Juliet, instead, will render him oblivious of their very existence.

The rest of the dialogue between Benvolio and Montague confirms Shakespeare’s continual anticipations of the later love-situation. Romeo’s first longer speech introduces the hackneyed theme of the love as the blindfolded child who nevertheless finds the way to strike the heart in spite of his blindness, and then love is apostrophised in a series of oxymora[29], the whole interlaced with questions that return to reality[30]: “Where shall we dine? ... What fray was here?” (I, i, 171). Shakespeare thus here posits Romeo’s Petrarchan

[29] Rabkin, *op. cit.*, pp. 179-180, finds that, in *Romeo and Juliet*, the oxymoron is basic, in that paradox is built into the situation of the lovers: “Oxymoron is not simply a rhetorical device; it is a definition of their lives”, and François Laroque, “Tradition and Subversion in *Romeo and Juliet*”, in Halio (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 22, pointing out that Puttenham calls the figure of the oxymoron “the Cross-couple”, suggests that in the play it “should indeed be regarded as the emblematic trope of the ‘pair of star-crossed lovers’”.

[30] According to Parker, *op. cit.*, p. 161, note 8, “The question constitutes a motif in the play”.

pose, as also, however, his basic hold on reality, and even his awareness of the ridiculousness of his stance, since he asks Benvolio: “Dost thou not laugh?” (I, i, 181). Furthermore, Romeo’s definitions of love, seemingly so excessive in this context, will ultimately be shown by Shakespeare to be no more than a reflection of reality. Romeo and Juliet’s love will concern both love and hate, will be “heavy lightness” (I, i, 176) and “serious vanity” (I, i, 176), will involve the “well-seeming forms” (I, i, 177) of the two lovers in “Misshapen chaos” (I, i, 177); in particular, it will produce a “sick health” (I, i, 178), and will result, for Juliet, in a “Still-waking sleep that is not what it is!” (I, i, 179)[31]. What here appears as verbal excess and hyperbole will later acquire consistence in reality in Shakespeare’s manipulation of the Petrarchan literary code.

Romeo’s successive speech, too, where he defines love, and its effects when fulfilled or thwarted, is a further Shakespearean anticipation of what the hero’s own experience will involve: love will thus indeed be smoke of sighs when stimulated, sparkling fire of eyes when fulfilled, a sea of tears when contrasted, a discerning madness, a gall that chokes and a sweetness that preserves. The definitions of love, that Romeo now proposes with such apparent

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[31] Parker, *ibid.*, p. 153, commenting on this speech of Romeo, finds in it an applicability to her idea of the parallel between the love plot and the war plot in the play: “Love and war are alike bred from “nothing” – from “well seeming forms” or appearances that are devoid of substance or belie the “misshapen chaos” beneath. In love as in war, the form – the “airy word” – elicits the sword”.

extravagance, take on the quality of transcriptions of reality if seen with respect to his future love for Juliet, so that Shakespeare shows how Romeo is potentially predisposed, by his involvement in the 'fiction' of his love for Rosaline, for the authenticity of his love for Juliet[32].

Another Petrarchan conceit that Shakespeare introduces into Romeo's conversation with Benvolio is that of the lover's sense of loss of identity, of his not being himself, of his living for and in the woman alone. With his words: "I have lost myself,/ I am not here./ This is not Romeo, he's some other where" (I, i, 195-196), Shakespeare makes Romeo effectively anticipate Juliet's request that he lose his identity.

The passage to the following Petrarchan motif elaborated by Shakespeare in this scene is Romeo's reply to Benvolio's request that he tell him whom he loves: "I do love a woman" (I, i, 202). This seems a teasing of Benvolio, a statement of the self-evident, but, as with all Romeo's replies throughout this scene, it is fraught with profounder implications than at first emerge: in effect, he appears more in love with love than with a real woman; later, when he hears of Juliet's death, he will be in love with death; Shakespeare thus

[32] Parker, *ibid.*, pp. 149-150, holds an analogous opinion, but with far more negative connotations: "Romeo's love for Rosaline precisely parallels that for Juliet, a fact conveyed by its like attributes ... His love for Rosaline is characterized by the same reliance on empty words".

suggests that it is always far from obvious that Romeo loves "a woman"[33].

In Romeo's next speech Shakespeare introduces the theme of chastity, again through the conventional imagery of Cupid's arrow by which the woman refuses to be hit. Further imagery, typical of the amour courtois tradition, is to be found in the comparison of the woman, in the way she protects and defends her chastity, with Diana, and in the use of images of assault and siege, employed in syntony with the Petrarchan convention according to which the male lover engages in a battle of love to which the woman remains impervious. The analogy, this time by contrast, with the future love situation is indicative: with Juliet there will be no need for attack and assault, because, by capitulating at once, she will render all the paraphernalia of Petrarchan wooing and courtship superfluous.

Another motif elaborated by Shakespeare in the words of Romeo is the conventional one of waste: the woman is rich in beauty, but it will be beauty wasted if not handed on to prosperity, and to emphasise the point, the woman is described in a series of hyperboles that conclude with the typical courtly love conceit of the lover living in death because of the woman's refusal. The theme of beauty wasted is abundantly used by Shakespeare in his sonnet sequence,

[33] Another implication is pointed out by Mahood, *op. cit.*, p. 156, namely, that "Love is a sickness as well as a cult", and that Romeo twists Benvolio's request to tell whom he loves into "an expression of *amour-maladie*".

especially in the first seventeen sonnets, but here it acquires a particular irony when read in connection with Romeo's future love for Juliet: the amour courtois convention hypothesizes a frustrated love and a state of living death; Shakespeare will evidence how the love in this play too will lead to an analogous frustrated love, namely, to one without offspring, and to a state of actual death. In both convention and reality there is no fruit of love.

The final motif introduced in this scene is that of comparison, or rather incomparableness: the beloved has no peer. Invited by Benvolio to examine other beauties, Romeo launches into a eulogy of Rosaline's beauty, a beauty so absolute that that of others is merely "a note" (I, i, 233) where he may read the surpassing loveliness of his lady. This speech further introduces two conceits of importance: the idea of the black mask hiding a fair face, that anticipates the mask-situation in which Romeo and Juliet will meet; and the conceit of the blind man who cannot forget the lost treasure of his sight, where the idea of the loss of a faculty is associated with the loss of treasure, so that when Romeo's eyes are captured (lost) at the sight of Juliet, he immediately thinks in terms of Juliet "enriching" her escort's hand, and of herself as a "rich jewel". Finally, Romeo's last words to Benvolio are "thou canst not teach me to forget" (I, i, 235); in fact, it will be Juliet who will teach him to do so and who will become, in more ways than one, his mentor.

This scene has the specific function of collocating Romeo in the dramatic space within which he will move: it is the

space of the Petrarchan code[34] and, outside this space, he will never stir. It also sets the pattern for the rest of the play, where Shakespeare will show Romeo continually measuring his use of the Petrarchan idiom against that of others. Here, Benvolio has admirably carried out his utilisation of the code to make Romeo confess his love situation; he has indeed, as Montague had hoped, obtained "true shrift" (I, i, 157) from Romeo. Furthermore, all the imagery, verbal conceits and hyperboles associated with Petrarchism, here so abundantly presented, are paradoxically intended to appear simultaneously as exaggerations, but also, when viewed in retrospect, as definitions of reality[35]. What here are mere words and conceits will later become lived experience, and Petrarchan formalism will be embodied in the flesh.

Shakespeare's use of the amour courtois convention in a simultaneously artificial and prophetic dimension is further evidenced in Scene ii. Here Romeo asserts that he is not actually mad, but subjected to more suffering than he would endure in a real madness: "Shut up in prison, kept without my food,/ Whipp'd and tormented" (I, ii, 55-56). The

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[34] As Mahood, *ibid.*, p. 156, has observed: "All the Petrarchan and anti-Petrarchan conventions are thus presented to us in this first scene: love as malady, as worship, as war, as conquest. They are presented, however, with an exaggeration that suggests Romeo is already aware of his own absurdity and is 'posing at posing'".

[35] Rosalie Colie, *Shakespeare's "Living Art"*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1974, p. 154, terms this procedure "the 'unmetaphoring' of literary devices", which she explains as Shakespeare's trick of persuading us that verbal convention is reality.

Petrarchan conceit of love as imprisonment, torture and suffering is a theme that Shakespeare will re-propose in Romeo's "banishment" speech, while the emphasis on slavish subjection to love anticipates Romeo's future analogous subjection to Juliet. A further Shakesperian use of a Petrarchan motif emerges when Romeo launches into religious imagery to express his love and fidelity. In harmony with the tenets of Petrarchism, Romeo's "devout religion" (I, ii, 88) is "of mine eye" (I, ii, 88), that is, all concentrated on the sight, so that any punishment for an eventual betrayal is augured on the eyes themselves: were they to betray and become "heretics" (I, ii, 93), they should, instead of being subject to tears, be subjected to fire, and "be burnt for liars" (I, ii, 93). Apart from the playing with the typical Petrarchan dichotomy of love as fire and water, this passage, with its emphasis on the importance of "seeing" in Romeo's conception of love, prepares the way for his future love-at-first-sight of Juliet.

What should be noted of these three initial scenes is Shakespeare's manipulation of all Romeo's Petrarchan stances in the direction of an anticipation of his future love for Juliet. It may be argued that there is, in Shakespeare's attribution to Romeo of the formality of Petrarchism, a prescriptiveness: these scenes with Romeo, ostensibly concerned with his love for Rosaline, are in reality the weaving of a web and the predisposing of a pattern that will be that of the future love situation of Romeo and Juliet in the play.

In Scene iv Shakespeare introduces the contra-position between Romeo's and Mercutio's uses of the Petrarchan literary code. The juxtaposition of Mercutio's teasing as against Romeo's more serious puns[36] serves to evidence, first, Romeo himself as heavy-hearted, unwilling to dance, and disposed to assume the mere function of torch-bearer: "Give me a torch" (I, iv, 11); "I will bear the light" (I, iv, 12); "I'll be a candle-holder" (I, iv, 38); next, to introduce Romeo's capacity for premonitional dreams[37]: "I dreamt a dream to-night" (I, iv, 50), a capacity that is here squashed by Mercutio's mockery and by his Queen Mab speech, but that anticipates Romeo's dream in Act V, Scene i; third, Romeo's feeling of foreboding and prescience, his awareness of "Some consequence" (I, iv, 107) that will begin that night and "expire the term/ Of a despised life clos'd in my breast" (I, iv, 109-110), by some "untimely death" (I, iv 111); and, finally, the intuition of disaster conceived as "yet hanging in the stars" (I, iv, 107), but that Romeo counters by entrusting the steering of his course to God. Here, besides Romeo's interaction with a different, ironic and superficial use of the Petrarchan code, as manifested in Mercutio's facetious

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[36] Mahood, *op. cit.*, p. 157, retains that here "Romeo's lumbering puns are the wordplay of courtly love".

[37] On the question of this dream, see Marjorie B. Garber, *Dream in Shakespeare: From Metaphor to Metamorphosis*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1974, pp. 35-47, and, on this and Mercutio's Queen Mab fantasy, see Joan Ozark Holmer, "No "Vain Fantasy": Shakespeare's Refashioning of Nashe for Dreams and Queen Mab", in Halio (ed.), *cit.*, pp. 49-82.

employment of it, Shakespeare elaborates, in Romeo's serious adoption of it, the variations typical of the Petrarchan lover: the heaviness, the world-weariness, the sentiments of adverse fate and destiny, the conceit of the lover as ship guided by chance and necessitating instead a sure steerage, the belief in portents, and the premonition of a negative future.

In the first comments assigned by Shakespeare to Romeo when he sees Juliet in Scene v, many of the Petrarchan conceits already encountered are re-proposed. First and foremost, there is the idea of beauty as preciousness: "What lady's that which doth enrich the hand/ Of yonder knight?" (I, v, 39-40), together with the image of Juliet as "a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear" (I, v, 44), and the assertion of her as being "Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear!" (I, i, 45)[38]. Then there is present the idea of Juliet teaching the torches to burn bright, which, by recalling Romeo's setting himself up as torch (I, iv, 11-12), and his previous assertion of Benvolio's incapacity to teach him to forget Rosaline, suggests, in one phrase, that in a single moment Juliet has taught Romeo both to burn for love for her and to forget Rosaline. Next there is the imagery of religion, present in Romeo's determination to "make blessed" (I, v, 49) his hand by touching Juliet's, and since, previously (I, ii, 90-95), this

[38] On the richness of meanings present in this verse, see John Lawlor, "*Romeo and Juliet*", in John Russell Brown and Bernard Harris (eds.), *Early Shakespeare*, London, Arnold, 1961, p. 142, and also Mahood, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

imagery had been used to give voice to Romeo's fidelity, and to his religion of love modulated by his sight, Shakespeare now in three words communicates Romeo's new religion, his betrayal of his previous one, and the mediation of the eyes in this shift of allegiance, with the words: "Forswear it, sight" (I, v, 50), concluding with a new certitude: "For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night" (I, v, 51). The variation Shakespeare operates here is that the Petrarchan literary code, used in the initial scene to document the conventionality of Romeo's then present love and to anticipate the characteristics of his future one, is here functional to the conveyance of the certitude of the authenticity of his change of heart.

The actual meeting of Romeo and Juliet is the only moment in which there is a perfect syntony between Romeo's use of the Petrarchan literary code and that of another character's, Juliet. Not by chance is the moment inscribed within the actual structure of a sonnet[39], with the two lovers contributing to it antiphonally. Here, in this meeting, Shakespeare elaborates the most spiritual motif in Petrarchism, that of love as a religious quest: Romeo sets up

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[39] Harley Granville-Barker, "Shakespeare's Dramatic Art", in Granville-Barker and Harrison (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 51, notes how Shakespeare "turns convention to dramatic account when he enshrines the first meeting of the lovers in a sonnet; it gives him the very touch of delicate shy formality that he needs". See Ryan, *op. cit.*, p. 195, for the idea that the artificial vision of the sonnet form here restricts the range of emotion of the two lovers. For a reading of the sonnet, see Kennan, *op. cit.*, pp. 118-119.

Juliet as the saint (the Anglican equivalent of the Catholic Madonna), and himself as pilgrim, seeking a grace from her, namely, the touching of hands and lips. Also involved in the colloquy, however, is the concept of sinning, and of the purging of sin. Thus the love of the two young people may be read in a double dimension: it is simultaneously spirituality and sensuality, sacrality and secularity, sin and the absolving from sin. In this episode, Shakespeare makes Petrarchism serve Romeo in good stead: it is he that takes the lead, introducing the various Petrarchan conceits, and Juliet follows, adapting herself to the imagery that he proposes. Not by chance does she tell Romeo: "You kiss by th'book" (I, v, 108)[40], given that the whole episode reveals Romeo's use of the Petrarchan code at its highest level of functionality and effectiveness.

The Prologue to Act II has the same function as that of Act I, namely, it serves to give information that will allow the public to better grasp the hidden significance in what will be said and done, and again to keep alive the tragic connotations in an action that is still fundamentally comic[41]. Consequently, just in case there could be any doubts, seeing Romeo's amorous precedents, Shakespeare imparts the information that the hero loves and is loved, and the feud situation is

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[40] For the specific book which may here be alluded to, see Giorgio Melchiori, "*Romeo and Juliet* dal testo alla scena", *cit.*, p. 23.

[41] On the reasons for the presence of this sonnet as prologue to Act II, see Giorgio Melchiori, *ibid.*, pp. 15-17.

brought to the fore in the indication that it imposes particular choices and modalities of behaviour on the lovers.

In Scene i Romeo, who has climbed into the Capulet orchard, is searched for, in vain, by his friends. Analogously to Act I, Scene i, he is summoned to mind by the other characters in his absence, and indeed, here he is jokingly evoked by Mercutio who calls on him using words that, it may be noted, define Romeo's identity in Petrarchan terms: "Romeo! Humours! Madman! Passion! Lover!" (II, i, 7). Mercutio then continues in his parodical use of the Petrarchan literary code, arguing, with typical and characteristically bawdy word-play, that Romeo is dead and that therefore his spirit must be conjured up by calling on Rosaline. The definitions of Romeo, the motif of his identity, that will immediately be taken up by Juliet, and the argumentation that Romeo is dead, are not only functional here to Mercutio's ironic adoption of the Petrarchan code, but also relevant to Shakespeare's anticipatory and premonitory use of Petrarchism in this part of the play.

The Romeo who could obviously not be conjured up by Rosaline in Scene i, given that she was no longer his love, is instead conjured up, out of the dark, by Juliet in Scene ii, where Shakespeare presents his hero immersed in the concettism of Petrarchism. Previously, Romeo had asserted that the sun could see no greater beauty than Rosaline; now, instead, Juliet is herself the sun and light, so that these two elements, that before the hero had avoided, are now asserted to exist incarnate before him. Romeo then introduces a

complex discourse on the moon, perceived in its double dimension of planet and of symbol of beauty and chastity. Essentially, what Romeo is doing is formulating an invitation to love, by suggesting that a continuance in fidelity to the moon (as chastity), is the behaviour of a fool. The Petrarchan dimension, however, emerges even more clearly in the series of conceits that follow: in the idea of silent discourse by means of the eyes; in the concept that there has been an exchange, so that two stars in heaven now twinkle in Juliet's face where they are shamed by the luminosity of her cheeks, while her eyes in heaven produce such light that they make day of night[42]; and in the conceit of Juliet as bright angel. The Petrarchan literary code to which Shakespeare allows Romeo to give free rein emerges here both in its more ethereal variation, with Juliet perceived as sun and star, as light in darkness, as angel, messenger of heaven, and in its more sexual variation, with the desire that Juliet should cast off her livery as servant of the moon, and thus her devotion to chastity, as also with his argumentation that only fools remain faithful to such ideals. Throughout these speeches of

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[42] See Caroline Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery and What it Tells us*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996 [1935], pp. 310-311, for a comment on this image. See also W.H. Clemen, "*Romeo and Juliet*", in *The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery*, London, Methuen, 1951, pp. 63-73, who argues that there is here in Romeo a change from "conventional" to "natural" speech, towards a greater adherence to the dramatic context. Cribb, *op. cit.*, p. 181, commenting on Romeo's words regarding Juliet, notes how "Romeo associates or actually identifies Juliet once with the moon, once with the stars, four times with the sun, and twice, climactically, with an angel".

Romeo the use of the Petrarchan convention has an informative function and acts as a means by which the hero gives vent to (and simultaneously informs of) his desires and aspirations; in fact, it should be noted that these speeches assume the form of a soliloquy, since they are unheard by Juliet. The apparent perfection and effectiveness of the mode may thus here be directly referable to the fact that it is being utilised by Romeo alone, without any interaction with others. The problems will emerge when he has to measure his use of the code with Juliet's.

At first, when Romeo and Juliet begin their conversation, Shakespeare shows how Romeo answers, still in typically Petrarchan terms, the series of questions and assertions formulated by Juliet: he has no identity; if his name is hateful to his lady it is hateful to himself; he is nothing she may dislike; love has given him wings and allowed him to dare everything; Juliet's eyes are more dangerous than his enemies' swords; he is ready to die for love; he has been guided to her by love. Romeo also introduces the imagery of himself as ship, which he had already presented at the end of Act I, Scene iv (verses 112-113): now he asserts that he is no pilot himself, but that he would venture to the farthest seas for "such merchandise" (II, i, 84) as Juliet represents, again introducing the idea of Juliet as precious goods to be ventured for.

However, when Shakespeare makes Juliet break with the Petrarchan code by acknowledging her love and refusing to play the part of the coy lady, he introduces no such analogous

change in Romeo, but rather shows how Romeo now has to measure his Petrarchism against Juliet's subversion of it. Thus Romeo is bewildered, but he continues to employ the known conventions of Petrarchism as if nothing had happened, and asserts that he wishes to swear his love by the moon, overlooking the fact that at the beginning of the scene he had termed any devotee of the moon a fool. Indeed, it is not casual that Juliet, immediately associating the moon with mutability, should first propose that Romeo swear on himself, and then, in the face of his continuing Petrarchan periphrases, should interrupt him brusquely and put an end to the whole question of vowing fidelity. At this point Shakespeare has effectively submitted Romeo to the unprecedented effects of the subversion of the conventions of amour courtois on the part of Juliet[43]: Romeo, apostrophised, interrogated and interrupted by this loquacious, explicit and un-Petrarchan lady, is rightly disconcerted, since he has been deprived, in a few brief moments, of his Petrarchan paraphernalia, the purpose of which is not merely to pay compliments but to also to prolong the courtship in time; Juliet, instead, has taken the love-game in hand and is playing it with new rules and with inconceivable swiftness, so that Romeo, referring to his discomposure, complains: "O, wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?" (II, i, 125), a question that Juliet interprets

[43] Mahood, *op. cit.*, p 159, sustains that "At first Romeo seems still to speak the language of idolatry", but "The worn commonplaces of courtship are swept aside by Juliet's frankness".

maliciously, asking what possible satisfaction Romeo could have had "tonight" (II, i, 126)[44]. To Romeo's Petrarchan reply, that he merely desired a vow of love from Juliet in exchange for his, Juliet retorts that she had already declared herself before he had requested it.

In the final part of the scene, with the calling of the Nurse from within the house, Shakespeare's presentation of Romeo as passive recipient of the reversal of the Petrarchan literary code becomes complete. Thus, in the following action, Juliet takes the full initiative: while replying to the Nurse, returning into the house, ordering Romeo to await her reappearance, continually interrupting Romeo's ornate and decorated attempts at speech, calling out to him to listen and simultaneously expatiating on her love for him, she proposes marriage and a future assignation. Romeo, by contrast, hovers in the night, replying in short prose-like phrases to Juliet's chatter: "My nyas?" (II, i, 167); "By the hour of nine" (II, i, 168); "Let me stand here till thou remember it" (II, i, 171); "I would I were thy bird" (II, i, 182), only succeeding in expressing himself when Juliet disappears, and then solely to

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[44] As Nicholas Brook, *op. cit.*, p. 97, has pointed out, in this scene Romeo's "ineptitude is finally felt in the ambiguity of his question ... The only 'satisfaction' he suggests is vows; Juliet has a franker thought". For a reading of this whole scene, as also the Parting and the Tomb Scenes, in the context of the Night Visit tradition, see Jill Colaco, "The Window Scenes in *Romeo and Juliet* and the Folk Songs of the Night Visit", in *Studies in Philology*, 83, n. 2 (1986), here cited as reproduced in part as "The Meaning of the Night Visit in the Balcony Scene", in Don Nardo (ed.), *Readings on* Romeo and Juliet, San Diego, CA, Greenhaven Press, 1998, pp. 84-91.

give voice either to platitudes that assert, for example, that his experience must be a dream as it is too flattering to be true, that lovers' voices are sweet and that he is happy to remain there indefinitely waiting for Juliet to remember what she wants to say, or else to complex Petrarchan turns of phrase of the type: "Love goes toward love as schoolboys from their books,/ But love from love, toward school with heavy looks" (II, i, 156-157)[45], where the play of conceits regarding love's direction exactly parallels Juliet's to and fro movements above him. Shakespeare evidences how the Petrarchan lover of Act I is here linguistically thwarted and psychologically disconcerted by Juliet's break with both the behaviour and the linguistic conventions of the Petrarchan lady. The inquisitive, inquisitorial Juliet corresponds to nothing in the amour courtois canon, and her loquaciousness silences the Petrarchan lover, just as effectively as, in the traditional convention, the Petrarchan lady's silence stimulates the lover's loquacity. Petrarchism is here shown to be displaced by a new modality in the expression of emotion, and the variation of a frustrated Petrarchan lover, and of a potentially tragic one, is here, in Romeo, revealed.

Scene iii of Act II shifts the action to Friar Lawrence's cell, where Romeo arrives to arrange his marriage. Shakespeare's coherence in proposing Romeo as Petrarchan

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[45] Ryan, *op. cit.*, p. 197, sees this image as implying that the lovers must throw away the prescribed texts of the oppressive school of love and learn instead what love can really be. On Romeo's use of language in this scene, see Anita Weston, "Iniziazione linguistica in *Romeo and Juliet*", in Tempera (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 181.

hero is evident in Romeo's playing on the love-enemy conceit: he has feasted with his enemy, who has wounded and been wounded, but he bears no hatred and instead is interceding for the good of his foe. This speech, however, though maintaining its characteristic of Petrarchan quibbling, becomes a description of the actual state of things, given the predictable future consequences of Romeo and Juliet's marriage in the context of the Montague-Capulet feud[46]. Paradoxically, it is now the Friar who adopts the modalities of the Petrarchan literary code to recall the previous tearful and artificial lover that Romeo once was, in this way obliging him to appraise himself in the light of his past use of the convention. Furthermore, the Friar reminds Romeo that, when he had bade him bury such a love, it was "Not in a grave/ To lay one in, another out to have" (II, iii, 79-80). Although Romeo's answer is clear – the situation is completely different, given that Juliet corresponds his love, while "The other did not so" (II, iii, 83) – the irony of the whole situation lies first, in the fact that the roles of the two characters have been reversed, with Friar Lawrence proposing the Petrarchan code, even if only to remind Romeo of his previous use of it, and Romeo denying any continuity between his past and present use of this same code; second, in the fact that the new love will not fare any the better for its being authentic: it will not be saved, for

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[46] As Forster, *op. cit.*, p. 51, has pointed out, "The enmity of Montague and Capulet makes the cliché of the 'dear enemy' into a concrete predicament; the whole drama is devoted to bringing this cliché to life".

Romeo, from the experience of tears, sighs, groans and graves, merely because it is real. Shakespeare will document, in the rest of the play, how the negative aspects of Petrarchism, that Romeo had, in the past, exploited for their conventionality, will recur as actuality.

Scene iv opens with Mercutio still looking for Romeo and with the information that Tybalt has sent a challenge in writing to Romeo's house. This allows Mercutio to assert that Romeo will take up the challenge, and then Shakespeare draws Mercutio into Petrarchan territory, attributing to him the playing on the concept that Romeo is already dead, stabbed by Rosaline's eye, run through by a love-song, cleft in the heart by Cupid's shaft, ending with an ironizing on Romeo's capacity to meet the challenge: "And is he a man to encounter Tybalt?" (II, iv, 16-17). To his mocking use of the Petrarchan concept of love striking through the eyes, through the ears and at the heart, thus killing the lover, Mercutio adds the suggestion that love renders a man inadequate for feuding and duelling, thus anticipating Romeo's later analogous assertion, and introducing the conviction that love makes a man less virile. Romeo's entry allows a complete contra-position between his and Mercutio's use of the Petrarchan literary code to emerge. Describing Romeo's arrival, Mercutio asserts that "Now is he for the numbers that Petrarch flowed in. Laura, to his lady, was a kitchen wench – marry, she had a better love to berhyme her" (II, iv, 39-42), and he goes on to elaborate his parodying of this code, teasing Romeo for his supposed love,

and indulging in quibbles, bawdy double-meanings and continuous jesting, becoming outrightly coarse and obscene when the Nurse appears. Romeo, instead, while answering Mercutio's teasing, shows himself to be less biting in his repartees, less bawdy in his language and more understanding towards the Nurse, an attitude that serves to confirm that love has apparently rendered him more tolerant and more courteous. In the context of Shakespeare's juxtapositions of the different manifestations of the Petrarchan literary code, this scene, as has been indicated, serves to counter-pose Romeo and Mercutio, on the one hand making manifest the gentilizing and etherealizing processes of Petrarchism, but also, on the other, through Mercutio, giving voice to the accusation levelled at the code in the English cultural context: that it rendered a man, not more considerate, but more effeminate[47].

In Scene vi, Romeo, waiting for the arrival of Juliet, observes, in answer to a comment of the Friar, that no

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[47] Madelon Gohlke, "I Wooed Thee with My Sword", in Carolyn R. Lenz, Gayle Green and Carol Thomas Neely (eds.), *The Woman's Part*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1980, pp. 1-16, argues that in this play, as in *Antony and Cleopatra*, love makes men effeminate. See Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 25-26, on the problem of "the fear of effeminazation" (p.26), during the Elizabethan period. According to Monique Le Corre, "Amore e comunicazione in *Romeo and Juliet*", in Tempera (ed), *op. cit.*, p. 151, for Romeo, until his death, "effeminate" means the loss of virility, instead of the creation of a communicative relationship in which masculinity and femininity would no longer be antagonistic.

matter what sorrow may come in the future, it will not be able to eclipse the joy of one short moment, and that, as long as he can marry Juliet and call her his own, death may do what it will. Shakespeare is here clearly manipulating what may superficially appear to be a mere Petrarchan hyperbole to render it adherent to potential reality, given what Romeo is about to do, namely, marry the daughter of the rival family, without the consent of either his own or her parents, in a feud situation. However, Shakespeare also shows how, once again, Romeo finds himself involved in a confrontation in the usage of the Petrarchan code, since the Friar now contributes his own reading of it, in the way he interprets, as an indication of Romeo's enduring Petrarchism, what is, instead, an emphatic, but basically objective, statement of a situation, launching into a speech of criticism and inviting Romeo to "love moderately" (II, vi, 14), in this way effectively proposing the negation of the essence of Petrarchism. When Juliet arrives, Shakespeare makes Romeo take up the imagery of the sweet sound of lovers' voices that he had already used in the balcony scene, and the hero invites her to "let rich music's tongue/ Unfold the imagin'd happiness that both/ Receive in either" (II, vi, 27-29). The diction is the typical language of amour courtois, but it contains a perturbing ambiguity, given that the word "imagin'd", referred to happiness, may mean either the happiness that emerges in the mind as reality or that which is created as illusion. Juliet's answer, that has usually been taken as a retort to Romeo, as her invitation to him to

indulge in less words and more matter, may also be taken as her reply to Romeo's double meaning. She answers: "Conceit more rich in matter than in words/ Brags of his substance, not of ornament" (II, vi, 30-31), which may be understood as meaning that whatever is conceived by the mind (e.g., the happiness of their love), is always more precious on account of the reality that is embodied in the thought, rather than on account of the words that give it expression, and that it is something to be proud of, because of its very existence, and not because of the verbal conventions that may decorate and ornament it to make it seem positive[48]. Whether Juliet's remark is read as a putting of Romeo in his place, or as a vindication of the validity of their happiness, no matter if ultimately destined to be real or ephemeral, it represents a counterpart to Romeo's more measured use of the Petrarchan literary code in this scene.

During the whole of Act II, through Romeo's interaction with Juliet, Mercutio and Friar Lawrence, his adoption of the Petrarchan code has been measured against theirs, allowing the observation that it now operates more realistically with

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[48] For a discussion of the passage, that argues that Juliet is saying that love is more substantial than mere words, see Catherine Belsey, "The Name of the Rose in *Romeo and Juliet*", *Yearbook of English Studies*, 23 (1993), here cited as reproduced in Porter (ed.), *op. cit.*, p.76; while Parker, *op. cit.*, p. 142, has expressed a point of view regarding the use of the word in the play that is particularly relevant here: "Verbal facade in the play characteristically entails the disjunction of word and matter, the word as form devoid of validating substance", and she sustains (p. 157) that "Every man, therefore, betrays a disjunction of word and matter indicative of the perceptual distortion he embodies".

regard to its new object, Juliet, and evidencing how the artificial, premonitory and functional modes of Romeo's use of the Petrarchan code in Act I have given way, first, to an informative, then to a discomfited, next to an etherealizing, and ultimately to an efficacious operation of the same convention in this act.

With Act III the comedy clearly veers to tragedy, and so there is no longer any need to keep the audience aware of the fact that this will happen. Consequently, the intervention of the Chorus at the beginning of the Act disappears and the dramatic action initiates at once in Scene i with Tybalt's challenge to Romeo, in which the hero's Petrarchan code is immediately collocated in the context of its contra-position to Tybalt's code of violence. In this way, Romeo comes into contact with a character completely alien to the Petrarchan literary code, a fact that not only places Romeo's use of the code into even clearer relief, but that, as will be seen, will provoke the crisis of the play. Regarding Romeo's interaction with Tybalt, while it is certainly true that Romeo shows a gentility and courteousness that may be associated with the etherealizing effects of Petrarchism, it is also possible to interpret Romeo's replies to Tybalt as not really so remissive as they seem. At Tybalt's taunt, "thou art a villain" (III, i, 60), Romeo alludes to, but does not explicate, the reason he has to love him and excuse him, adding, "I see thou knowest me not" (III, i, 64). Here a variety of meanings are at work, linking this scene to Act I, Scene ii: Romeo asserts that Tybalt does not know him, first, and most

obviously, because Tybalt does not know that he has become his cousin by marriage; next, because Romeo considers himself no villain; then – and here there is probably an allusion back to his assertion "Henceforth I never will be Romeo" (II, ii, 51) – because there is no longer any "old" Montague Romeo to whom to address the offence; furthermore, there is probably an ulterior allusion back to Romeo's "My name ... is hateful to myself" (II, ii, 55), whereby he cannot be offended by the same attitude in Tybalt. If these implications are deliberate on Shakespeare's part, they serve the purpose of showing how Romeo, rather than meekly submitting to Tybalt's taunt, is dissociating the word from himself, as its referent, and, by so doing, refusing the challenge. Mercutio, however, defines Romeo's attitude as "dishonourable, vile submission" (II, ii, 71), and is only too willing to indulge in the code of violence, provoking a conflict that, it should be remembered, he had already sought *before* Romeo's arrival[49].

The subsequent fatal wounding of Mercutio, due to Romeo's maldroit intervention, leads Romeo to change his attitude towards Tybalt, in a speech in which Shakespeare furnishes him with three reasons that, while typical of the punctiliousness of explanation characteristic of the Petrarchan rhetorician, are nonetheless specious. First, it is

[49] Gibbons (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 66-69, after examining the Mercutio-Romeo relationship, asserts (p. 69), of Mercutio, that "his diversion of the quarrel to himself is ironically comparable to a rival lover's act of seduction".

not really true, as Romeo says, that Mercutio received his wound "In my behalf" (III, ii, 113): rather, he received it on his own behalf, given that from the start Mercutio had been wanting to enter into conflict with Tybalt, and he only remembers to blame the feud when he has had the worse of the encounter[50]. Second, it is no more true now than before that Romeo's reputation is stained: if he had refused the encounter before without feeling dishonour, he could equally well refuse it now. Third, it is not true that love for Juliet has made him effeminate and softened his temper; rather, it has engendered a courtly (and, as will now be revealed, transitory) tolerance, in harmony with the basic tenets of the behaviour appropriate to the Petrarchan lover.

Romeo's own motivations for his intervention are thus contrary to good sense, logic and Petrarchan courtliness[51],

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[50] Raymond V. Utterback, "The Death of Mercutio", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 24 (1973), here cited as reproduced in part in Bloom (ed.), *Notes*, *cit.*, p. 53, points out that "Mercutio complains about the rival houses, but not his own rashness". Harold Goddard, "*Romeo and Juliet*", in Harold Bloom (ed.), *William Shakespeare: The Tragedies*, New York, Chelsea House, 1996, p. 35, says of the quarrel Tybalt-Mercutio, "Its cause he [Shakespeare] places squarely on the temperament and character of Mercutio". For a full study of the character of Mercutio, see Joseph A. Porter, *Shakespeare's Mercutio: His History and Drama*, Chapell Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1989.

[51] Gibbons (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 71, though not stating the question in the Petrarchan terms adopted here, nevertheless notes of Romeo that "The sudden crisis awakens primitive instincts which momentarily overwhelm his finer nature", and Parker, *op. cit.*, p. 161, note 9, sustains that "Even apart from Romeo's superficial motive, revenge under any circumstances would have been accounted a sin". Edward Snow, "Language and Sexual

but the real reasons for his action are his uncontrollable violence[52] and his uncontrolled relationship to the 'word'[53].

Difference in *Romeo and Juliet*", in Peter Erickson and Coppelia Kahn (eds.), *Shakespeare's "Rough Magic": Renaissance Essays in Honor of C.L. Barber*, Newark, University of Delaware Press; London, Associated University Presses, 1984, here cited as reproduced in part in Bloom (ed.), *Notes*, *cit.*, p. 63, furnishes a further reason for Romeo's intervention: "Shakespeare ... manages to make the presence of a bad conscience about sexual love that is endemic to masculinity felt in the background of Romeo's experience, and the one short moment that Romeo falls back into it plunges him and the entire play into tragedy".

[52] Various critics have commented on Romeo's violence. Jill L. Levenson, "Codes of Violence", *cit.*, p. 88, sustains that "the news of Mercutio's death turns Romeo into one of Saviolo's bestial men and fury prompts his attack of Tybalt as well as his response to Paris in 5.3."; Gibbons (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 71, retains that "Romeo allowed himself to be infected by the tragic disease of anger, giving new impetus to the blood-feud, betraying his own higher principles"; Snyder, *op. cit.*, p 170, argues that if in Tybalt "we recognise ... an irascible humour type, an alazon, we should also recognise that the tragic hero is an alazon transposed"; Murray J. Levith, *Shakespeare's Italian Settings and Plays*, London, Macmillan, 1989, p. 55, attributes Romeo's rage to "the supposed Italian temperament"; Marsh, *op. cit.*, p. 70, sustains that "Romeo ... is ... less impressive as a man when he storms back, with all the fury of the stock Revenger"; Pearlman, *op. cit.*, p. 120, retains that Romeo "temporarily surrenders himself to the violent and alien world exemplified by Mercutio". See also Maynard Mack, "Engagement and Detachment in Shakespeare's Plays", in Richard Hosley (ed.), *Essays on Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama in Honour of Hardin Graig*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963, pp. 287-291.

[53] Mariangela Tempera, "Romeo, Giulietta e il codice frainteso", in Tempera (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 214, notes how here language serves only to precipitate action, and she underlines (p. 218) how, in the play, the two lovers adapt their sentiments to their words, instead of using the word to keep emotion under control.

This is evident when he does not call Tybalt "villain", but asserts: "take the 'villain' back again/ That late thou gav'st me" (III, ii, 127-128), in this way contravening Juliet's previous warning, by behaving as if the word ("ornament", II, vi, 31) had acquired its own reality ("substance", II, vi, 31) and so had to be returned to the sender. As a result, the physicality that Juliet had denied the word is instead completely asserted by Romeo. In fact, when, after killing Tybalt, Romeo exclaims: "O, I am fortune's fool" (III, ii, 138), it may be affirmed that he is a fool of his own making, having opted for the word over and above objects and actions[54].

[54] The vexed question of whether Romeo is responsible for his own destiny has been variously commented. On the side of the reading adopted here, namely, that of Romeo's responsibility, may be cited the following: Gervius, *op. cit.*, p. 223, who comments on Romeo's "fatal propensity" that "urges him to rash deeds; he calls that fortune which is the work of his own nature"; Harold Bloom (ed.), *Notes*, *cit.*, p. 7, who sustains that "the tragic flaw is in Romeo himself, who yields too readily to many fierce emotions: anger, fear, grief, despair"; Alan C. Dessen, "Q1 *Romeo and Juliet* and Elizabethan Theatrical Vocabulary", in Halio (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 113, who speaks of Romeo as "the key chooser in the tragedy"; V.K. Whitaker, *The Mirror Up to Nature: The Technique of Shakespeare's Tragedies*, San Marino, Cal., Huntington Library, 1965, p. 116, who retains that "Romeo's responsibility for the tragic outcome of the play is absolutely clear"; D.A. Stauffer, "The School of Love: *Romeo and Juliet*", in Alfred Harbage (ed.), *Shakespeare: The Tragedies*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, 1964, p. 30, who sees the cause of the tragedy "in the sufferers", identifies their fault in "their extreme rashness", and comments (p. 31): "Man cannot evade his pilotage by proclaiming himself 'fortune's fool'"; Goddard, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-42, who emphasizes Romeo's responsibility in the duel scene and argues (pp. 48-49): "It is fear of the code of honour, not fate, that draws Romeo to seek vengeance on Tybalt"; Parker, *op. cit.*, p. 150, who retains that "Like Juliet ... Romeo is irrational, representing an equally fatal

Throughout this whole scene, Shakespeare evidences how the Petrarchan convention, ignored by Tybalt and flaunted by Romeo, nonetheless re-emerges in the importance Romeo gives to the speech act, and may thus be held responsible for Romeo's fatal choice, determining the tragic evolution of this moment of climax and crisis. For the hero of the play the

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extreme"; and Bert Cardullo, "The Friar's Flaw, the Play's Tragedy: The Experiment in *Romeo and Juliet*, in *College Language Association Journal*, 28, n. 4 (1985), here cited as reproduced in part as "The Characters' Impulsiveness is the Villain of the Play", in Nardo (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 61, who arguments that "Shakespeare ... emphasizes Romeo's own impulsiveness".

For critics who conceive of the tragedy as the result of pure chance, see J.W. Draper, *Stratford to Dogberry: Studies in Shakespeare's Earlier Plays*, Pittsburg, Pittsburg University Press, 1961, p. 88, who considers the lovers to be "puppets of the stars and planets"; L.S. Champion, *Shakespeare's Tragic Perspective*, Athens, Georgia, University of Georgia Press, 1976, p. 84, who sees the play as a "tragedy of bad luck", based "on chance"; and F.M. Dickey, *Not Wisely But Too Well: Shakespeare's Love Tragedies*, San Marino, Cal., 1957, p. 63, who argues the "fortuitous" character of the play, viewing the tragic outcome as "the accident of chance".

Finally, there critics that appear to assume a somewhat intermediate position: see, for example, A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, London, Macmillan, 1963 [1904], who holds that in *Romeo and Juliet*, as in *Richard III* and *Richard II*, "the hero contends with an outward force, but comparatively little with himself"; and Clifford Leech, "The Moral Tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*", in Standish Henning, Robert Kimbrough, and Richard Knowles (eds.), *English Renaissance Drama: Essays in Honor of Madeleine Doran and Mark Eccles*, Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1976, here cited as reproduced in Porter (ed.), *Critical Essays*, *cit.*, p.11, who asserts that the tragic events "all arise, by necessity or at least probability, out of the nature of the characters and their situation in Verona".

word as fiction becomes the word as Verb, by which to live and die.

The deleterious aspect of the Petrarchan literary code, in which the rhetorical dimension becomes a substitute for reality, and with which Shakespeare is here concerned, emerges in all its negativeness in Romeo's words and behaviour in Scene iii. Here, the Romeo presented by Shakespeare adheres to the most recurrent and typical patterns of thought and behaviour of the Petrarchan lover. Thus Romeo, even while awaiting news of his destiny, cannot forebear playing with words: "What less than doomsday is the Prince's doom?" (III, iii, 9); then, when he learns he has been banished, he immediately affirms that the word "banishment" should be substituted by the word "death", in this way revealing his obsession with the *word*, continuing in his manipulation of it, and persisting in his identification of the linguistic sign with reality; furthermore, his Petrarchism leads him to develop the argumentation that since the only world is Verona and all outside it is purgatory, torture and hell, to be banished from Verona means to be out of the world, in hell, and consequently, dead; continuing then with the Petrarchan conceit of heaven being where the woman is, Romeo further elaborates the idea that cats, dogs, mice and flies live in heaven with Juliet, while he cannot.

The authenticity of Romeo's despair, the strong, genuine feeling evidently present in his words, should not blur the fact that Shakespeare is adopting the literary convention of

desperation of the typical Petrarchan lover[55]: in the first part of his speech, Romeo does not even refer to himself in the first person as "I", but in the third, as "Romeo", and thus as a constructed entity outside himself. Furthermore, the Petrarchan imagery of religion, already used for Romeo's first meeting with Juliet, is now re-proposed to convey his separation from her: Romeo re-elaborates the motif of the touching of hands and of the kiss as simultaneous blessing and sin, to convey the awareness of the physical contact with Juliet that other creatures, but no longer himself, can have. In fact, Romeo only introduces himself as first person into his discourse with a Petrarchan play on words: "Flies may do this, but I from this must fly" (III, iii, 41), which in turn allows the introduction of the inversion of roles asserted in the following verse: "They [flies] are free men but I am banished" (III, iii, 42). Furthermore Romeo, by polemically asking the Friar if he has no weapon, other than the word "banished", with which to kill him, continues to reveal the same typical Petrarchan obsession with the word that he had shown in Scene i of this Act. This is evident in his assertion: "the damned use that word in hell./ Howling attends it" (III, iii, 47-48), where once again Romeo's association of a

[55] The exaggeration present in Romeo's grief has been underlined by critics. Gervinus, *op. cit.*, pp, 224-225, rightly emphasizes the very different way Juliet faces the news of the banishment even if received in direr circumstances; Ribner, *op. cit.*, p. 31, sustains that "This abject surrender to passion is the behaviour not of a rational man but of a beast"; and for Pettet, *op. cit.*, p. 120, "the impression is of an extravagant, pitiful, even ludicrous Romeo reduced to a state of emotional deliquescence".

linguistic sign with a reality is evident. Not by chance does Romeo's speech end with his accusing Friar Lawrence of doing what he has done instead to himself: "How hast thou the heart,/.../ To mangle me with that word 'banished'?" (III, iii, 48, 51).

That Shakespeare, in this scene, is exploring the speech dynamics of the self-centredness of the Petrarchan code, emerges from the fact that Romeo, so absorbed in a word, in his own outpouring of emotion in speech, in his narcissistic linguistic focusing on himself, should not concede the right of speech to others, pretending from them what he does not obverse for himself. Thus he discredits Friar Lawrence's mention of "philosophy" (III, iii, 55), because it has not the power *to do,* because it is unaccompanied by facts. *He* can juggle with words, but unless the words of others can create a positive actuality or dismantle a negative one, they are retained to be useless and speech is denied: "Talk no more" (III, iii, 60). Furthermore, besides refusing language that has not the magic-like property of transforming reality, Romeo also refuses language that does not derive from the same experiential source as his own. Shakespeare is evidencing how, by his attitude, Romeo effectively deprives everyone of speech but himself, not realizing, however, that by his exigency that language should have the power of modifying reality before it is justified, he is condemning his own Petrarchan use of words, and implicitly sentencing himself to silence.

The arrival of the Nurse marks the high-tide of Romeo's tragic Petrarchism. As the words of the Friar and the Nurse make clear, Shakespeare is here counter-posing, to their realistic use of the Petrarchan code, a Romeo who indulges in the typically exasperated Petrarchan recital of despair: flung on the ground, drunk with tears, "Blubbering and weeping, weeping and blubbering" (III, iii, 87). Indeed, the Nurse feels entitled to call on him to be a man for Juliet's sake, and it is only at this point that Romeo poses himself the question of Juliet's reactions. However, after having finally obtained, in a brief moment of forgetfulness of himself, the account of her grief, he immediately reverts to his own self-centredness, and to his tendency to identify name and self, and has recourse to the rhetorical argument that it is his *name* that has murdered Juliet, and to the rhetorical question of what part of his body it is in which his name lodges so as to kill it. In this way, the absolute dichotomy of this speech with Juliet's balcony-scene one is complete: she had separated name and identity, and had argued that the name was not collocated in any part of the body; Romeo asserts the exact opposite. Even when finally convinced to *do* something, to go to Juliet to comfort her, Romeo cannot carry this out without a return to Petrarchan word-play: "But that a joy past joy calls out on me,/ It were a grief so brief to part with thee" (III, iii, 173-174). Shakespeare has here replaced the formality of the conventionally despairing Petrarchan lover of Rosaline in Act I by the authenticity of the still conventionally despairing Petrarchan lover of Juliet,

demonstrating how the displacement from formal feeling to authentic emotion does not carry with it a corresponding displacement of the Petrarchan expressive code: Romeo constantly defines himself and his interiority, and consistently counter-poses himself to others, through the parameters of Petrarchism.

The tone and quality of the exchanges between Romeo and Juliet in the dawn parting scene appear very different from those of the previous balcony scene, and Romeo's tragic dimension more clearly emerges. It is as if Shakespeare wishes to experiment with a further Petrarchan module, so that Romeo, having given vent to all the more vociferous and histrionic manifestations of Petrarchism, now presents its other, more subtle and subdued dimensions: its passiveness, pessimism and fatalism. Once again, however, the scene proposes the contra-position of two different uses of the Petrarchan code. Thus to Juliet's imaginative creation of a non-existent nightingale, Romeo opposes his quiet but clear: "It was the lark, the herald of the morn,/ No nightingale" (III, v, 6-7), and Romeo's ability with words is now used to emphasise, in lyrical terms, the factuality of the swiftly advancing dawn, in order to conclude on the brief and effective: "I must be gone and live or stay and die" (III, v, 11)[56]. The Petrarchan conceits of life consisting in the

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[56] With regard to this passage, James L. Calderwood, *Shakespearian Metadrama*, Minneapolis, University of Minneapolis Press, 1971, p. 102, sustains that "Time, light, larks, and the usual terms for them remain intransigently themselves, answerable to their public definitions. The lover who withdraws entirely from the world into an artistic domain of

presence of the lady and death in her absence are here not only inverted by Shakespeare, but given a validation in the actual reality of Romeo's situation[57].

When Juliet insists in her use of the Petrarchan code for her illusion, Romeo merely shifts from an indicative mode of expression to an imperative one: "Let me be ta'en, let me be put to death" (III, v, 17), where the note of fatalism, of acceptance of destiny, is evident. It is a note that further emerges in the complete submission of his own will to that of Juliet: "I am content, so thou wilt have it so" (III, v, 18). Romeo, in fact, though willing to fall in with Juliet's fantasy, is not disposed to abdicate his own assertive use of the Petrarchan code to do so. Consequently, Shakespeare attributes to him his enduring trait as manipulator of linguistic expression: "I'll say yon grey is not the morning's eye" (III, v, 19). Furthermore, once he has decided to play Juliet's game of 'make-believe', fundamentally a game of *words*, he adds his typically Petrarchan contribution, conceiving the light of dawn as the light of Cynthia, and concluding by putting his will, and life, completely in Juliet's hands: "Juliet wills it so" (III, v, 24). The hysterical, self-centred Romeo of Act II, Scene iii, with Friar Lawrence, now questions Juliet on her feelings and proposes conversation at

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feeling must pay for his pleasure with his life", and Weston, *op. cit.*, p. 184, has noted how Romeo's monosyllables have the insistence of a death-knell, and how he will say one thing, but knows that reality is another.

[57] Rabkin, *op. cit.*, pp. 181-182, has rightly observed that "Having led us to reject wanton Petrarchism, Shakespeare brings us to affirm the existential antinomus from which Petrarch drew his true power".

the risk of his life: "How is't, my soul? Let's talk. It is not day" (III, v, 25). It is certainly not casual that Shakespeare should present what appears as the most mature version in the play of Romeo as Petrarchan lover[58], in this scene in which the hero is engaged in the Petrarchan sport *par excellence*: the play of words as substitute for the game of living. Paradoxically, also, it is precisely Romeo's ability with words that underscores, for Juliet, the discrepancy between words and reality, so that she at once veers round to actuality, telling Romeo to be gone.

The warning of the Nurse regarding the arrival of Juliet's mother produces a re-proposal of the previous balcony scene, but with different effects. Here, though Juliet still holds the stage with her flow of words, with her exclamations, with her gothic premonitions, Romeo's responses have neither the ecstatic nor the disconcerted characteristics of the previous scene. Now he replies with a new, strange formality, of the type: "I will omit no opportunity/ That may convey my greetings, love, to thee" (III, v, 49-50), and his words aim at calming and re-assuring Juliet, even furnishing an imaginative but peculiarly convincing response to Juliet's fantasies: "Dry sorrow drinks our blood" (II, v, 59)[59]. In this scene, in the face of Juliet's

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[58] Pettet, *op. cit.*, p. 117, instead, holds that the Romeo of the last four acts is no longer the lover of contemporary sonnets or of Petrarchan love-poetry, but "he is certainly a type, one of the supreme types, of the more modern ideal of the 'romantic' lover".

[59] Marsh, *op. cit.*, p. 76, observes, of this image, that "in another much more frightening way it looks forward to the dryness and deadness of the

use, first, of a conventional Petrarchan literary code and then of her more characteristic and innovative expressive module, Shakespeare shows Romeo transmuting his Petrarchism from submission to the will of his lady and fatalism in the face of destiny, to histrionic play with simulation and then to stoicism in the face of suffering and death.

Shakespeare re-proposes this final, more fatalistic Romeo in the soliloquy at the beginning of Act V, Scene i, centred on the dream in which Romeo envisages himself as dead and Juliet as kissing him into life. The dream is laden with dramatic irony[60], but the Romeo who narrates it is calm, reflective, even able to smile at himself: "Strange dream, that gives a dead man leave to think!" (V, i, 7). To this quieter Romeo is brought the news of Juliet's death, that provokes the brief "Is it e'en so?" (V, i, 24), followed by the affirmation: "Then I defy you, stars!" (V, i, 24), an assertion that indicates his decision to take his fate into his own hands. In particular, Shakespeare will reveal Romeo as endowing with tangible reality the Petrarchan conceit of the impossibility of life without the loved one, the Petrarchan preference for death rather than life without the presence of the lady.

Apothecary's shop, for what the grief of this parting is to extract in the end, is indeed the life's blood of the lovers".

[60] Stauffer, *op. cit.*, p. 33, however, sustains that "The dream is closer to truth than to dramatic irony. For the intensity of their [the lovers'] single-souled impulse has turned their passion into a death-devouring love". See, on this dream, Warren D. Smith, "Romeo's Final Dream", *Modern Language Review*, 62 (1967), pp. 579-583.

In Romeo's description of the apothecary's destitution and misery, as also in his presentation of the shop with its wretched contents of shrunken, dried-up and misshapen creatures[61], Shakespeare offers an effective objective correlative of Romeo's inner state. What, in the early scenes, Romeo had expressed through verbal brilliance, he now achieves through a symbolic use of the objects of reality. The passage, with its fact and details, evidences Romeo's cold determinism and his detached lucidity, and these same characteristics also emerge in Romeo's dealings with the apothecary. If it is true that Romeo here seems to have acquired an awareness of social injustice that goes beyond the parameters of Petrarchism, it cannot be denied that with his words and gold Romeo manipulates the apothecary, taking as much advantage of the miserable man's poverty and necessity as the "world" that he so soundly berates. In fact, the episode is indicative, for Shakespeare now presents a Romeo who, thinking he has lost Juliet, appears to have lost, with her, all his delicacy, sensitiveness and gentility. From this moment on he will think of nothing except his own will and how to attain it, and Shakespeare will document how

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[61] According to Rabkin, *op. cit.*, p. 176, Shakespeare's "apothecary is as powerful an allegorization of death as Spenser ever achieved; yet it is simultaneously a disciplined and economical description of the world that our eyes see"; and for Marsh, *op. cit.*, p. 81, the apothecary's shop "bedecked with its sparse and dusty images of death ... connects Romeo's indirect acknowledgement of his awareness of what death really means firmly to Juliet's"; furthermore, Marsh, *ibid.*, asserts that the negative argument for going on living is seen in the apothecary's destiny.

the narcissistic element that the Petrarchan lover devotes to the attainment of his love, Romeo now applies to his quest for death[62], allowing no one and nothing to stand in his way.

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[62] Rabkin, *op. cit.*, p. 151, sees *Romeo and Juliet*, as well as *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Venus and Adonis*, as works that link love to the urge for annihilation, or the death-wish; Stilling, *op. cit.*, p. 286, argues that in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra* death is made to serve rather than subvert love; Harry Levin, "Form and Formality in *Romeo and Juliet*", in Douglas Cale (ed.), *Twentieth Century Interpretations of* Romeo and Juliet, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice Hall, 1970, p. 90, perceives the love-death connection as the play's shaping principle; Christopher McCullough and Graham Holderness, "*Romeo and Juliet* e il teatro della poesia", in Tempera (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 277, argumenting that Romeo and Juliet find themselves literally in love with death, perceive this as the climax of a process that has transformed "love" into "literature"; Jacqueline Rose, "Shakespeare and the Death Drive", in Alessandro Serpieri and Keir Elam (eds.), *L'Eros in Shakespeare*, Parma, Pratiche Editrice, 1988, p. 29, has noted how often in Shakespeare death is "a fact of eroticism, that is, an eroticism tinged with an intrinsic violence and morbidity because it belongs to the realm of excess"; Ribner, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-34, comments on Romeo's choice of suicide, pointing out that Elizabethan drama carried on the Senecan tradition of suicide as noble and heroic, though he notes (p. 33) that in the new pattern Shakespeare imposed, "it must be seen as a symbolic act of acceptance of inevitable death"; and Leech, *op. cit.*, p. 15, points out that "Suicide ... was a mortal sin, yet many men of the Renaissance took a dissident view of it. In particular, Montaigne saw it is man's last available card to play". A different, wholly negative, evaluation is furnished by Parker, *op. cit.*, p. 161, note 11, who affirms that, at the time, "Any person who consciously chose suicide was deemed willfully guilty of murder – a sin rendered the more damaging by the fact that suicide precluded repentance", and she also points out (p. 150) that the death-in-life motif, "in which the lover is metaphorically slain", had already characterized Romeo's love for Rosaline. Brook, *op. cit.*, p. 105, instead, has noted how the whole atmosphere at the end of the play entails "a highly perceptive exploration of the love-death

Throughout the entire final scene at Juliet's tomb, Shakespeare reveals precisely this wilful Romeo, who imparts orders in a lucid and forceful language to Balthazar, but who reverts to the language of Petrarchan conceits once he is alone, when he breaks open the tomb. This action is conceived by him as the forcing open of the maw, of the rotten jaws of a wild beast, already packed full of food, in order to cram in more[63]. The imagery expresses Romeo's awareness that the tomb is more than sufficiently filled with Juliet's body, so that his own death is perceived as a surfeit, as a forcing of too much into enough. At the very moment of the acting out of his suicide, Shakespeare assigns to Romeo a choice of images that interestingly suggests not only that he is adding death to death by force, but that he is intruding upon a context that apparently has its own equilibrium.

The Romeo-Paris duel doubles and parallels the Romeo-Tybalt one. Even if, with Tybalt, Romeo had come up against the negation of the Petrarchan literary code, and now, instead, with Paris, he has to measure himself against its very incarnation, the procedure is disturbingly analogous to that of the preceding episode, as though Romeo had not

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embrace of the sonneteering tradition, which regards both its superiority and its inferiority to the world of common day". See also, for the evaluation of the suicide motif, Roland Mushat Frye, *The Renaissance Hamlet: Issues and Responses in 1600*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 301.

[63] Jean-Marie Maguin, "Shakespeare, Hypnos and Thanatos: *Romeo and Juliet* in the Space of Myth", in Halio (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 40, has commented on "the cannibalistic imagery" Romeo uses here.

changed at all. At first then, Romeo replies to Paris's assertion: "thou must die" (V, iii, 57), with a fatalistic, "I must indeed; and therefore came I hither" (V, iii, 58), and then he apostrophizes Paris emphasizing the latter's youth and, differently from the first duel, when the refusal to engage in conflict had been perceived as an expression of "effeminacy", here Romeo defines himself as man at the very moment in which he refuses to act: "Good gentle youth, tempt not a desperate man" (V, iii, 59)[64]. However, as with Tybalt, Romeo's words will prove ineffective, and this because, in spite of his intentions, a different, provocative message is received by Paris. In fact, by inviting Paris to look on the dead in the tomb so as to "Let them affright thee" (V, iii, 61), but still more, with his invitation to "hereafter say/ A mad man's mercy bid thee run away" (V, iii, 66-67), Romeo renders his own order impossible to be obeyed by prospecting, for Paris, the vision of a future of cowardice, to be lived in the memory of a retreat in the face of a patronising madman. The very language used to urge action thus impedes that same action, and Paris defies Romeo's entreaty and asserts that he will arrest him as "felon" (V, iii, 69). At this point, just as in the Tybalt episode the word "villain" had roused Romeo's rage, so now again a mere word, "felon" (V, iii, 69), provokes his reaction, leading him to kill instead of being killed, making him suspend his own

[64] Levith, *op. cit.*, p. 59, sustains that Romeo matures in the play and points (p.60) to this reference of the hero to himself as "man" to prove his thesis.

desire for death to seek the death of another. It is certainly not casual that Romeo, the tragic Petrarchan hero, should kill both the character who represents the absolute denial of the Petrarchan code and the one who completely and unproblematically incarnates it.

The final soliloquy of Romeo[65] begins with his recognition of the identity of Paris, whom he has just killed in the duel, and his assimilation of the young man to himself as "One writ with me in sour misfortune's book!" (V, iii, 82). The episode of the duel with Paris evidences how Shakespeare intends to suggest how Romeo desires, not simply death, but a ritual death; had he merely wanted to die, there were two possibilities offered him by Paris himself: he could have let himself be apprehended, and his return from banishment would have assured him a death-sentence; he could have let Paris kill him in the duel. In both cases, it should be noted, he would have achieved death but not suicide. Instead, it is precisely suicide, not death, that Romeo desires, and Shakespeare makes it clear that Romeo wishes to administer death to himself on his own terms, in the presence of Juliet, in the context of a final Petrarchan ritual in which he is celebrant and in which the Petrarchan conceits that postulate love as a living death on the deprived lover's part, are given actual tangibility in the enactment, by Romeo, of his love as dying life.

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[65] S.S. Hussey, *The Literary Language of Shakespeare*, London and New York, Longman, 1982, p. 187, finds Romeo's dying soliloquy not so convincing as Juliet's earlier fears.

In his final interaction with Juliet, Romeo focuses on her beauty, and recuperates his very first conceit of her in the balcony scene, that of her as light, that now illuminates the tomb. The language acquires the tones of desperation as Romeo realizes that he is unable to find anything in the actual moment he is living that will allow him to assimilate it to the experience called "lightning" (V, iii, 90), by means of which dying men enjoy a moment of relief or joy before death[66]. For Romeo, instead, all is despair and defeat. The despair, however, in particular, is vehiculed by Shakespeare's choice of a further variation of the Petrarchan tradition within which, for Romeo, death has now substituted love. Thus he registers how death has sucked the honey from Juliet's breath, and, using the typical Petrarchan imagery of warfare, how death has not yet advanced its flag to supplant the ensign of Juliet's beauty. Indeed, Romeo's rhetorical Petrarchan creation acquires consistency in its own creating, and the phantom-death in Romeo's mind, incarnated in the word, acquires that reality that for Romeo words have always had. Consequently, "unsubstantial Death" (V, iii, 103) becomes "the lean abhorred monster" (V, iii, 104), in love with Juliet, keeping her imprisoned in the tomb to be "his paramour" (V, iii, 105)[67]. In this way, the

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[66] Goddard, *op. cit.*, p. 49, sustains that the "lightning" is to be found in the passage on Romeo's dream at the opening of Act V: "Here is that lightning, and here, if we have one, is the happy ending of *Romeo and Juliet*".

[67] Cedric Watts, *Romeo and Juliet*, Boston, Twayne, 1991, here cited as reprinted in part in Bloom (ed.), *Notes*, *cit.*, p. 64, points out how "the ...

ultimate dread of the Petrarchan lover, the fear of a rival in love, that rival that for Romeo had never existed in life, is here evoked in death, to be defeated and laid to rest: Romeo will remain in the tomb with Juliet to preserve her from death's amorous advances.

Shakespeare conveys Romeo's awareness of things drawing to a close through his perception of the gradual restriction of surrounding space from the initial "triumphant grave" (V, iii, 83), to "This vault" (V, iii, 86), to "this palace of dim night" (V, iii, 107), and, in the final part of the soliloquy, merely to "here" (V, iii, 108). The "here" is where Romeo will remain with the worms, chambermaids of Juliet[68], where he will find his "everlasting rest" (V, iii, 110), and where he will "shake the yoke of inauspicious stars/ From this world-wearied flesh" (V, iii, 111-112). Eyes, arms, lips are then invoked to take their leave of Juliet, but now death is Romeo's real interlocutor and Romeo's kiss, as much as

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motifs of 'death as lover, tomb as bridal chamber' ... had appeared in Sophocles' *Antigone*, Petronius' *Satyricon*, Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, Achilles Talius' *Leucippe* and *Clitophon* and Helidorus' *Ethiopian Story*".

[68] David Hirst, "Dal balcone a Broadway: variazioni di *Romeo and Juliet*", in Tempera (ed.), *op. cit.*, p 283, points out that the worms are handmaids because they help Juliet to decompose, and notes how Romeo, in this most tragic moment, gives expression to his grief in fantastic images, inasmuch as that excess of emotion has provoked excess of cerebral activity. With regard to the "worm" imagery, Matthew N. Proser, *The Heroic Image in Five Shakespearean Tragedies*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1965, p. 238, sustains that, in *Antony and Cleopatra*, "the grave's worm and the worm as phallus" fuse symbolically in a kind of sexual act"; it is possible that the same suggestions may be at work here.

sealing his love for Juliet, seals the debt to be paid to triumphant death: "A dateless bargain to engrossing death" (V, iii, 115).

Still within the modules of the Petrarchan literary code, Shakespeare collocates the moment of Romeo's drinking of the poison as an invitation to love, with "come" (V, iii, 116) repeated twice, and the poison refracted into the images of "bitter conduct" (V, iii, 116) and "unsavoury guide" (V, iii, 117). The poison, however, is also the "desperate pilot" (V, iii, 117) that, with a further specific return to the Petrarchan convention, will lead Romeo's "seasick weary bark" (V, iii, 118) to the desired rocks of death. The image recalls Romeo's words to Juliet at the moment of their utmost happiness, when he had asserted that though he was no pilot he would have ventured to and for her as far as "that vast shore wash'd with the farthest sea" (II, ii, 83). That shore is now that of death: Juliet is – Romeo thinks – already there, and he, still no pilot himself, now has a "desperate" one that will lead him towards her.

Romeo's triumphant use of the Petrarchan code to encapsulate the motif of reaching and attaining the beloved is complete, and Romeo dies with a kiss[69]. However,

[69] Gibbons (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 52, commenting on this concluding speech of Romeo, asserts that "at last, the rote-learning sonneteering paradoxes are lived out actually ... To kiss is to die in earnest: the living moment and the poem coincide". What Agostino Lombardo, "*Antonio e Cleopatra*: l'Eros come arte", in Serpieri and Elam (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 61, so perceptively asserts about the later tragedy regarding the destiny of the artist, which is

Shakespeare intends a terrible double irony to be perceived behind the apparent exultation of this soliloquy. The first irony is linked, as so often with Romeo, with the question of words and language. Here, as many times before, and as Shakespeare has consistently demonstrated, Romeo's rhetoric is a mystification of reality: far from defending Juliet from the assaults of corrupting death, with his suicide he will succumb to what he instead says he will defeat. The second irony is inherent in the whole situation: all Romeo's lucubration on death is senseless, given that Juliet is alive. Romeo's rhetorical construction of exaltation is undermined by the fundamental fact that his words are in contrast with reality, that he is arguing on erroneous premises. It is this that perhaps, after the many continual defeats and failures with which Romeo's progress through the play has been starred, is his ultimate tragedy: the fact that when, in accordance with his Petrarchan vision, he thinks he is about to reach Juliet in death and achieve union in the tomb, he is actually doing the opposite. Paradoxically, it will be the realist Juliet who will procure that union in death that Romeo only effects through his words and his Petrarchan stance. In this way Romeo's Petrarchan tragedy is complete, and Shakespeare consigns Romeo to his death, leaving his hero to enact, not the reality, but the pseudo-reality, of the ultimate ritual of his Petrarchan code.

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inevitably tragic, may be applied here, and Romeo may be perceived as the Petrarchan lover-hero-artist who sublimates eros in death.

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Pubblicazioni dell'I.S.U. Università Cattolica
http://www.unicatt.it/librario
versione digitale 2007
ISBN 978-88-8311-095-5