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Shakespeare's Language of Love:

textual analysis and critical appreciation of an extract from

The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet, Act II, Scene II

Capulet's orchard

analysis of use of the language, linked to the changes of the ideas, values and thoughts in the transition between the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet

William Shakespeare

ACT II. SCENE II. Capulet's orchard.

In the present work we are going to analyze an extract from *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet* written early in the career of William Shakespeare. Another our purpose is underlining the use of Shakespeare's language of love, finding out the different reasons of this use and the most relevant implications of new view of the life and the universe in the transition period between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

This extract comes from Act II, Scene II of the Tragedy. The scene is set in the Capulets' garden, under the window of Juliet's room, after the mask ball where they met and knew each other for the first time.

Denotative analysis

The extract starts with a stage direction: "*Enter ROMEO*", after that Romeo starts his soliloquy. Romeo's soliloquy is interrupted by Juliet's appearance at the window. From now on Romeo begins a long worship of his beloved. Here he conveys an idea of light through the frequent use of light elements (sun, stars, lamp etc.) to describe Juliet. Romeo uses a lot of metaphors and hyperboles conveying his worship to Juliet.

He admires the light that she makes, comparing her with the eastern sun. The moon, whose maid the sun is, feels envious and Romeo suggests Juliet not to be its maid. From now on he continues to praise her and then he wonders why she doesn't speak. After having described her eyes, comparing them with the most shining stars in the sky. At the end of soliloquy Romeo wonders what would happened if her eyes took the place of two stars in the sky and if the two stars were in her head. The brightness of her cheek would shame the two stars while her eyes would make the sky so brilliant that the birds would begin to sing thinking the sun has risen. Finally he admires how she leans her cheek on her hand and he dreams of being the glove of that hand to touch her cheek.

Then Juliet, sighing, says: "*Ay me!*", and we can understand that she is probably thinking. At first Romeo doesn't know if she has spoken or not. Then he uses a metaphor to describe Juliet. He compares her with a "*bright angel*" and he continues to make references to the light. He refers to a divine messenger who rides the slow clouds, moving in the sky.

Juliet starts to speak and she says one of the most famous sentences: "*O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?*". She puts in evidence the need for Romeo to deny his father's name. She is ready to deny her name too. Romeo does not know if he has to speak or not. Juliet continues to speak about their names. Juliet says that Romeo should reject his name because without that he would be the same person and that a name is not a part of the body. She makes a comparison with a rose which would smell sweetly even with another name. Finally she exhorts Romeo to refuse his name and to take all her. At this point Romeo starts to speak and he tells her to call him love and he will be newly baptized. At the end of the extract the dialogue between Romeo and Juliet becomes flowing. Romeo hates his name because it is enemy to Juliet, therefore if it were written, he would tear that piece of paper. Finally Juliet asks if he is Romeo or a Montague and Romeo answers that he can deny all two names if she doesn't like Romeo's names.

Connotative analysis

At the beginning of the extract Shakespeare uses a lot of light elements to describe Juliet. Indeed Romeo compares Juliet with the sun: in our opinion according to the Copernicus' view of the universe the sun is in the center of it therefore Juliet is in the center of Romeo's universe. In addition the sun is the "maid" of the moon (that is an exemplification of the night, and it is the symbol of Diana, goddess of the hunt) because after it the sun raises. Indeed Romeo makes a clear reference to Juliet's purity: he defines Juliet's virginity and youth through a comparison with the classical figure of the Vesta's priestess (correlated with the Diana's cult). Then Romeo describes Juliet's eyes with through a comparison with two stars that are elements of the sky and according to the Ptolemaic view of the universe the stars (like sun and other planets) are perfect and eternal elements therefore they are divine. In this part of the extract it is an evident union between the medieval and renaissance ideas.

An evident reference to the new way of thinking typical of the Renaissance is the expression of the glove. In this point Romeo dreams to be the Juliet's glove because he wants to touch the Juliet's cheek, therefore the body perception is emphasized by Shakespeare. In contrast in Romeo's second intervention there is a return to a medieval idea of the woman's role: according to this Romeo compares Juliet with the bright angel and with divine messenger, underlining the medieval idea of woman (as to which she had to be a divine creature who had to incite men to God and to salvation).

This extract is centered on the idea of distance presented between two lovers. They belong to rival families: Romeo belongs to Montagues' family and Juliet belongs to Capulets' family. The situation is dramatic for two lovers: they love each other but they cannot make public their love. They must meet each other on the sly, therefore Romeo goes under the window of Juliet's room in the evening. We can deduce the theme of distance from different passages. Romeo compares Juliet with distant natural elements from earth and from men's life (the moon, the stars, the sun, bright angel and divine messenger) because he wants to convey an idea of perfection of his beloved and an idea of distance between two lovers. Their distance is caused by the rivalry between two families.

The two lovers' name is the central argument of the Romeo and Juliet's dialogue. Juliet opens the discussion with the famous exclamation: *O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?*. She understands that the name of her beloved is Romeo Montague therefore he belongs from the rival family. Both the Juliet's name and Romeo's name are stumbling block for their love. This is a dramatic situation because they notice there is not anything hope for their love. But nevertheless they continue to love each other and they are forced to meet each other on the sly. At this point Romeo is uncertain: he doesn't know whether to answer or not. Hereinafter Juliet conceives the idea about the name. She affirms that the name is not a part of his body like a hand or an arm then she compares this situation with the situation of the rose: as to which a rose maintains the same fragrance even if it has another name therefore Romeo would be Romeo without his name anyway. Finally Juliet became convinced that Romeo is not Romeo Montague but he is her beloved.

In this extract we can notice that Juliet is more direct, spontaneous and pragmatic than Romeo because she addresses how she can love Romeo who is member of rival family. On the other hand Romeo is romantic, lost in thoughts because he thinks about only love for Juliet and her beauty. He tries to divert attention from Juliet's worries.