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FACOLTÀ DI SCIENZE LINGUISTICHE E LETTERATURE STRANIERE
UNIVERSITÀ CATTOLICA DEL SACRO CUORE

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INDICE

Articulations of the Economic Motif in Shakespeare's <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> <i>Luisa Camaiora</i>	7
Charity, Melancholy, and the Protestant Ethic in Herman Melville's <i>Bartleby</i> and <i>Cock-A-Doodle-Do!</i> <i>Federico Bellini</i>	29
La lingua di Internet in Russia: stato della ricerca <i>Laila Paracchini</i>	45
Come fare le cose con i testi: <i>A Modell of Christian Charity</i> di John Winthrop <i>Carla Vergaro</i>	99
'Écologie' et 'environnement' dans l'espace dictionnaire français <i>Michela Murano</i>	117
Forme di espressione della causalità nel confronto francese-tedesco <i>Sibilla Cantarini e Gaston Gross</i>	131
Estrazione del 'che' polivalente da un corpus POS-tagato: limiti e possibilità <i>Marco Budassi</i>	147
Definitional Arguments in Children's Speech <i>Rebecca Schär</i>	173
Tra stabilità sociale e pornografia: giochi di parole sovversivi e armonizzazione su Internet nell'era Hu Jintao <i>Nazarena Fazzari</i>	193
Recensioni e Rassegne	
Recensioni	217
Rassegna di Linguistica generale e di Glottodidattica a cura di Giovanni Gobber	231

Rassegna di Linguistica francese a cura di Enrica Galazzi e Chiara Molinari	241
Rassegna di Linguistica inglese a cura di Amanda Murphy e Margherita Ulrych	249
Rassegna di Linguistica russa a cura di Anna Bonola	257
Rassegna di Linguistica tedesca a cura di Federica Missaglia	261
Rassegna di Tradizione della cultura classica a cura di Guido Milanese	267
Indice degli Autori	273

NOTA INTRODUTTIVA

Siamo lieti di inaugurare in questo fascicolo la nuova Rassegna di Tradizione della cultura classica, dedicata alla segnalazione di opere recenti relative al rapporto tra la cultura classica e tardoantica e la cultura moderna e contemporanea. Le schede saranno redatte preferibilmente in inglese, ma saranno accolti i contributi nelle più diffuse lingue europee. Ci si augura che questa Rassegna possa costituire un momento di contatto tra studiosi che, muovendo da specializzazioni diverse, si riconoscono nella tradizione della cultura europea.

I Direttori con Guido Milanese

ARTICULATIONS OF THE ECONOMIC MOTIF IN SHAKESPEARE'S *ROMEO AND JULIET*

LUISA CAMAIORA

The article analyzes the economic motif in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, and examines its articulation in such facets as money and wealth, property and legal procedures, contracts and inheritance, mercantilism and navigation and the significance and relevance of gold. The monetary aspect is retained to contribute to the creation of a web of explicit and implicit appraisals which involve the concept of value and which have the purpose of determining and maintaining a constant dimension of evaluative awareness.

L'articolo analizza la presenza dell'aspetto economico nel *Romeo and Juliet* di Shakespeare, esaminando alcune tematiche quali il denaro e la ricchezza, la proprietà e le procedure legali, i contratti e l'eredità, il mercantilismo e la navigazione, il significato e la rilevanza dell'oro. L'aspetto monetario è ritenuto contribuire alla creazione di un'intelaiatura di stime esplicite o implicite che riguardano il concetto di valore e sono funzionali al mantenimento di una consapevolezza valutativa.

Keywords: Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, money, economic motifs

Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is generally acknowledged as one of the most well-known love stories of the Western world. However, besides the obvious and dominant amorous theme, there is present in the play a less immediately perceptible and apparent motif: the economic one, with its pecuniary and financial traits, and its related estimative dimension. References to and imagery of such features as wealth, property, contracts, inheritance, mercantilism and gold on the part of the different characters have the effect of maintaining a constant awareness of the concept of value and of creating a web of explicit and implicit appraisals.

More than once the play proposes some object as possessing a preciousness, a material worth or a monetary price, and suggests some specific element or commodity as having an importance, utility, or validity. The evaluation of the entities concerned may be gauged by the status attributed to them, by the estimation with which they are considered, by the desirability that they engender and by the force and effort with which they are pursued. As John Keats observed in a letter to his philosopher friend Benjamin Bailey: "As Tradesmen say, everything is worth what it will fetch, so probably every mental pursuit takes its reality

and worth from the ardour of the pursuer – being in itself a nothing”¹. The facets derived from the economic context in *Romeo and Juliet* already carry within them an intrinsic, external worth and to this is conferred the added value of the way with which they are proposed and pursued in the play.

Five different areas which regard the presence of the monetary and financial dimensions and the legal use of assets may be identified. The first deals with the association of love with money and wealth, and of beauty with richness, productivity and waste, and it also involves allusions to calculations and reckonings and references to payments and debts. The second concerns the connection of love with property and its utilization and enjoyment, as also the presence of financial topics involving specifically legal procedures and their technicalities. The third area is related to the marriage contract and its implications, with the related motifs of inheritance and the preservation of possessions for posterity. The fourth is the context of navigation and mercantilism, and includes the many examples of nautical imagery in the play. The fifth is concerned with the theme of gold.

The general social background of the play is of importance with regard to the economic motif. Shakespeare has deliberately collocated the two families, the Montagues and the Capulets, as also the action of the drama, in a bourgeois context. Brian Gibbons has rightly pointed out that the domestic life of the Capulets and Montagues “resembles that of English merchants rather than Renaissance Italian nobility”², and that, differently from the sources of the play in William Painter and Arthur Brooke, Shakespeare visualizes the Capulets as living in a merchant’s house rather than in a castle³. The richness of the Capulets is particularly stressed, in that twice there are references to the wealth of the head of the family. The servant who is sent to invite the guests to Capulet’s feast asserts: “My master is the great rich Capulet” (I.ii.80-81), and Romeo informs Friar Laurence that his heart is set: “On the fair daughter of rich Capulet” (II.iii.54). This explains Capulet’s anxiety to make Juliet rise from this rich but bourgeois condition into the class of the nobility through her marriage to the Count Paris.

The allusions to the themes of money⁴, payments and debts, as also of accounts, calculations and reckonings, usually in the context of the topic of love, are recurrent in the play. Though not always immediately perceptible, their presence nonetheless builds up a web of suggestions that underscores the reality of riches and wealth and the status of the two feuding families. Moreover, the tendency of characters to associate love and money serves to anchor the love situation to a context of monetary reality and to balance the idealization of the love itself. It is not casual that the first instance of this motif should occur at the beginning of the play and with reference to Romeo’s love for Rosaline. Before Romeo meets

¹ G.F. Scott ed., *Selected Letters of John Keats* [Based on the texts of Hyder Edward Rollins], Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 2002, p. 100.

² B. Gibbons ed., *Romeo and Juliet*, The Arden Shakespeare, Thomson Learning, London, 2006⁷, p. 38. This is the edition used for the quotations from the play.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 87.

⁴ On the theme of money in the play, see G. Bentley, *Poetics of Power: Money as Sign and Substance in Romeo and Juliet*, “Explorations in Renaissance Culture”, 17, 1991, pp. 145-166.

Juliet, he narrates to Benvolio how he cannot persuade Rosaline to “ope her lap to saint-seducing gold” (I.i.212)⁵, and he continues: “O she is rich in beauty, only poor / That when she dies, with beauty dies her store” (I.i.213-214). The argumentation is that the woman possesses a commodity, consisting in her beauty, that constitutes her wealth, and that she is only poor when she dies without any offspring to whom she can transmit this richness. In this identification of beauty with wealth, there is the suggestion that beauty is an asset, a stock, which has a specific value that, if it is not invested, is lost with the intervention of death. Immediately after this, in reply to Benvolio’s question as to whether Rosaline has sworn to continue to live chaste, Romeo answers: “She hath, and in that sparing makes huge waste. / For beauty starv’d with her severity / Cuts beauty off from all posterity” (I.i.216-218). These words are a confirmation of what Romeo has just asserted, with the further addition of the paradox that the preserving and saving of beauty, without its transmission, is in effect a squandering of it⁶, given that something precious is wasted and not allowed to yield fruits. The implication is that beauty, like other categories of merchandise, should be rendered productive; in the specific case, through procreation. Not to do so, namely, to leave no heir, is to deprive future generations of the asset itself.

In the conclusion of this scene, in which Benvolio has been trying to convince Romeo that he should direct his attention to other beauties, Romeo affirms that Benvolio cannot teach him to forget Rosaline, to which Benvolio replies: “I’ll pay that doctrine or else die in debt” (I.i.236). Here Benvolio asserts that he will continue to make Romeo the object of his endeavours, satisfying the obligation of friendship, and that only death will prevent him from carrying out the commitment that he has undertaken, in which case he would remain debtor towards Romeo of what he has promised. The situation is presented in terms of the payment of something owed, whereby the failure to operate a change of direction in the love of Romeo is articulated in terms of a liability, of an insolvency, that constitutes a debit, anticipating Romeo’s adoption of this same motif later in the play.

The conceits of calculation and reckoning emerge more subtly in the scene in which Capulet and Paris discuss the question of Juliet’s marriage with the latter. Capulet informs Paris that he and Montague have been bound over by the Prince to keep the peace, and Paris comments: “Of honourable reckoning are you both, / And pity ’tis you lived at odds so long” (I.ii.4-5). The underlying context here is that of accountancy. The term “reckoning” has the principal sense of consideration, estimation and repute, of the way of regarding a question, but the use of the word in the situation on hand constitutes a pun on the meaning of the word as a bill or invoice, and in this there emerges not just the general sense of the money to the paid, but also the specifically commercial one of the amount of value involved, and of the estimation of a price⁷. Furthermore, there is an analogous double

⁵ The specific significance of gold will be dealt with further on in the text.

⁶ With regard to the use of paradox in the play, see J.S.M.J. Chang, *The Language of Paradox in Romeo and Juliet*, “Shakespeare Studies”, 3, 1967, pp. 22-42.

⁷ An ulterior meaning of the term ‘reckoning’ may be documented, the one in the nautical context, indicating the calculation of a ship’s movements from the account of the ship’s course and progress in a log-book or through the observation of the position of the sun and stars.

meaning in the term “odds”. The primary meaning of ‘to be at odds’ is to be in conflict, at variance, with someone or something, but the ‘odds’ are also, in calculation, the probabilities in favour of something, or the balance of chances. As a result, an apparently casual and neutral remark associates Paris with the concept of reckoning and computing⁸, and suggests the presence of parameters of evaluation and of computation of value.

Analogous features characterize the reaction of Romeo to the sight of Juliet. Having already given proof of his strong tendency to associate beauty with possessions and resources in the first scene of the play, it is not surprising that Romeo should express his perception of Juliet in similar terms, using the imagery of jewels, and re-proposing the association of beauty and riches that he had previously employed for Rosaline. His immediate reaction to Juliet is formulated as follows: “It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night / As a rich jewel in an Ethiop’s ear – / Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear” (I.v.44-46)⁹. M.M. Mahood suggests a possible pun on “beauty” and “booty”¹⁰, which would therefore anticipate Romeo’s subsequent idea of venturing for such merchandise. It is interesting to note that while before he had asserted that beauty had to be employed and not wasted, now he sustains that it is too precious to be used. The similarity in the imagery underlines the analogy between this experience and the earlier one, while the contrast of evaluation stresses the difference between this new love and the previous infatuation. Furthermore, the term “use” also has the more specifically commercial meaning of interest on money lent, so that Romeo is implying that Juliet is an expensive item, something whose acquisition is so costly as to require the activation of a loan, a suggestion which anticipates his later idea of his involvement with her in terms of a mortgage. What remains constant is the identification of beauty with the concept of a chattel¹¹.

This association of love with a situation of debit is re-proposed when Romeo discovers the identity of Juliet. His reaction is the exclamation: “Is she a Capulet? / O dear account. My life is my foe’s debt” (I.v.116-117). Given that Romeo retains that his very existence is now owed to and owned by Juliet, the knowledge of her identity assumes the connotations of an emotional liability, an obligation of payment towards a member of a rival family. It may be observed that Romeo expresses himself in terms of commodities, both in the previous happy discovery of Juliet’s beauty, which he had compared to a precious jewel and richness, and in the present tragic perception of her appertaining to a rival family, which he renders manifest in the concept of the activation of a debit account. Edward Snow, comparing the language of the two lovers at this moment of their reciprocal discovery of

⁸ B. Gibbons, *Romeo and Juliet*, p. 94, points out that “Paris is made to reveal his interest in Capulet’s wealth while elaborating a compliment to the long-established dignity of the family”.

⁹ C. Watts, *Romeo and Juliet*, Harvester New Critical Introductions to Shakespeare, Harvester Wheatsheaf, New York and London 1991, pp. 67-68, explains: “Romeo’s statement, ‘too rich for use’ connotes ‘too splendid for mere utility’ (with a hint of ‘mere sexual practice’) and ‘too dear’ can mean (among other possibilities) ‘too costly to be purchased on earth’ and ‘too endearing for the world.’” M.M. Mahood, *Shakespeare’s Wordplay*, Methuen, London 1968, pp. 62-63, places these words of Romeo concerning the pricelessness of Juliet in connection with “her family’s evaluation of her as sound stock in the marriage market”.

¹⁰ M.M. Mahood, *Wordplay*, p. 62.

¹¹ Not by chance will Romeo later refer to Juliet as a “commodity”.

the other's identity, notes that "His [Romeo's] language of reckoning counterpoints her generative imagery; she speaks of imperatives springing from within while he refers to a life held in thrall"¹². With regard to the specific monetary context, the word "account", here used by Romeo, echoes previous terms of evaluation and reckoning, while the phrase "foe's debt" not only recalls Benvolio's "die in debt", thus once more emphasizing the association of the experience of love with the context of death, but it also confirms the notion that this meeting gives rise to a relationship that will carry within itself, among many other features, the connotations of a commercial transaction.

The sophisticated language of Romeo finds its contrast in the rough and ready vocabulary of the Nurse, who, after replying to Romeo's question regarding Juliet's identity, adds: "he that can lay hold of her / Shall have the chinks" (I.v.115-116). The allusion to Juliet's wealth has a double function: it documents how Juliet is not only rich in beauty but also rich in the much more mundane context of money, and it alludes to her status as marriageable heiress, consequently recalling the previous marriage suit of Paris, here at this moment when he has already been substituted in Juliet's heart by Romeo.

Another reference to money occurs when Romeo joins his friends on the morning after the feast. Mercutio upbraids him for having abandoned them the night before with the words: "You gave us the counterfeit fairly last night" (II.iv.46-47), and he explains this as "The slip, sir, the slip" (II.iv.50). Mercutio is punning on the two meanings of "to give the slip": the first regards the sense of 'to escape from' or 'to elude' someone, and refers to the fact that Romeo has avoided his friends the night before; the second presents the sense of slip as a counterfeit coin, a false brass coin covered with silver, and so alludes metaphorically to Romeo's having played false with his friends – just as if he had paid them with false money – in order to follow his love for Juliet.

In this same scene the payment that Romeo offers the Nurse who has come to be informed of his marriage plans is a further example of the presence of the monetary topic and of the connection between love and money in the play. Romeo says: "Here is for thy pains" (II.iv.179)¹³, and the Nurse replies: "No truly, sir; not a penny" (II.iv.180). However, when he insists: "Go to, I say you shall" (II.iv.181), she does not refuse again, and this may be taken to suggest an acceptance on her part, confirming her as a down-to-earth character not averse to making money out of a love affair.

The concept of excess is discernible in Juliet's declaration of her love at the cell of Friar Laurence, when she affirms: "They are but beggars that can count their worth, / But my

¹² E. Snow, *Language and Sexual Difference in Romeo and Juliet*, in *Romeo and Juliet: Critical Essays*, J.F. Andrews ed., Garland Publishing, New York and London 1993, p. 378. In fact, Juliet uses the expression: "Prodigious birth of love it is to me / That I must love a loathed enemy" (I.v.139-140). On the asymmetrical use of financial imagery on the part of the two lovers, see M. Novy, *Love's Argument: Gender Relations in Shakespeare*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill 1984, pp. 99-109.

¹³ G. Blakemore Evans ed., *Romeo and Juliet*, The New Shakespeare, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2008⁷, p. 127, informs that "In Brooke (667) Romeus gives the nurse 'vi. crownes of gold' and she makes not even a token resistance as in Shakespeare".

true love is grown to such excess / I cannot sum up sum of half my wealth" (II.vi.33-35)¹⁴. As previously in the play, the computation of love is voiced in terms of the reckoning and calculation of riches. Juliet affirms that only those with little money are able to count it, suggesting that the really rich cannot gauge the enormous entity of their wealth. The latter situation is however precisely her case, since her love has grown to such a disproportionate magnitude as to render her incapable of estimating it.

To the concepts of the quantity and calculations of wealth, another passage adds that of bankruptcy. When Juliet thinks that Romeo is dead, she exclaims: "O break, my heart. Poor bankrupt, break at once" (III.ii.57). Once again the language of economics and finance serves the necessities of the language of emotion. In this case Juliet implies that without Romeo, who is her entire wealth, her heart has lost all the riches that it possessed and is therefore bankrupt.

As the last two examples well show, the use of imagery of estimation and computation serves to assert the preciousness of the love of the two protagonists, but it must be pointed out that it also has the function of reminding the reader of the possibility and thus, ultimately, of the necessity, of assessment and evaluation. It thus constitutes an invitation to assume a different perspective from that of the two lovers and to engage in a detached and realistic appraisal of their love, so as not to estimate it a-critically solely as positive and idealistic. It is true that Juliet's use of monetary images privileges her propensity to give, while Romeo's is characterized by his tendency to possess, but the fact nevertheless remains that Juliet too gives voice to her love in the terminology of computation and calculation.

The concepts of miserliness and usury are ulterior aspects to be found collocated in the context of the question of assets and their too great or too little use. When Friar Laurence upbraids Romeo for his despair at being banished, he exclaims: "Fie, fie, thou sham'st thy shape, thy love, thy wit, / Which, like usurer, abound'st in all, / And usest none in that true use indeed / Which should bedeck thy shape, thy love, thy wit" (III.iii.121-124). The Friar is accusing Romeo of behaving as a miserly usurer: Romeo, like an accumulator, has an abundance of positive traits – in his case, all the features that render him attractive as a man – but, like a hoarder, he makes no use of these advantages available to him. Furthermore, the term "use", besides the evident meaning of employment, contains the more specifically financial meaning of 'interest on something lent', so that with this signification what is implied is that the qualities of Romeo have been given to him on loan, so as to be rendered productive, whereas instead he allows these assets to stagnate. A further monetary interpretation is furnished by G. Blakemore Evans, who provides the following reading of the passage: "a usurer 'misused' his money by making it breed interest ('use') against nature...; Romeo is misusing his natural wealth (shape, love, wit), like a usurer, making it breed un-

¹⁴ M.M. Mahood, *Wordplay*, p. 14, sustains that Juliet here proposes "a monetary conceit as hyperbolic as Romeo's", and D. Traversi, *An Approach to Shakespeare*, in *Critical Essays*, J.F. Andrews ed., pp. 25-26, comments Juliet's words as follows: "Here we have a familiar cluster of ideas associated with love and indicating its essential value. The refusal to consider emotion in terms of mere accountancy [...] saves the lovers, in the moment of their mutual engagement, from being "beggars," gives to their "true" emotion such "excess" [...] that it escapes all temporal estimates of value and asserts, however dangerously and precariously, its own valuation".

naturally, instead of putting it to a natural productive and beneficial use ('true use')¹⁵. With their richness of possible meanings, the Friar's words call to mind the real world in which the two lovers exist, even if they act as if their love sets them beyond the normal parameters of everyday life.

The area of the monetary dimension here under examination offers a wide array of significant attitudes on the part of an ample range of characters. Regarding the two protagonists of the play, it may be noted how Romeo essentially privileges expressions that assert the possibility of evaluation or of the attribution of value, whereas Juliet prefers to state the concept of the incalculability and inestimableness of her love. For the other characters too, the nature of their monetary estimations coincide with their personalities and attitudes: Benvolio, devoted companion of Romeo, uses the terminology to express his sense of debt towards his friend; Mercutio, the brilliant conversationist, who considers himself a privileged companion of Romeo, reproaches the latter for "playing him false" both in terms of money and of friendship; the moralizing Friar Laurence compares Romeo's psychological devastation to the evil usury of money; Paris, with the tact and politeness that distinguishes him, communicates consciousness of Capulet's social and financial standing; and the Nurse, with her typical directness and coarseness, gives voice to her awareness of serving an heiress and pockets Romeo's monetary gift for her work as intermediary. These are all small touches but they represent details of the typification of character achieved through the language and terminology of the economic motif.

The presence of the theme of property and of legal terminology and procedures may be retained to be introduced in Mercutio's Queen Mab speech, in which there is a reference to the fairy queen galloping "O'er lawyers' fingers who straight dream on fees" (I.iv.73)¹⁶. It may well be that it is this allusion to the law that stimulates the terminology that Romeo adopts soon after to describe his misgivings regarding his participation at Capulet's feast: "my mind misgives / Some consequence yet hanging in the stars / Shall bitterly begin his fearful date / With this night's revels, and expire the term / Of a despised life clos'd in my breast / By some vile forfeit of untimely death" (I.iv.106-111)¹⁷. This is the legal language of mortgages, that are drawn up with a date of commencement, a date of expiry, and the specification of the penalties involved, particularly those determining the loss of the property if the conditions indicated are not respected. Romeo applies all these elements to his existence, which he imagines mortgaged in a contract that will end with the forfeiture of his life, and thus his death.

¹⁵ G. Blakemore Evans ed., *Romeo and Juliet*, p. 155.

¹⁶ It may be noted that R.O. Evans, *The Osier Cage: Rhetorical Devices in Romeo and Juliet*, University of Kentucky Press, Lexington 1966, p. 79, retains that "The Queen Mab speech [...] presents what were the main reasons for marriage – money, place, and love –".

¹⁷ B. Gibbons ed., *Romeo and Juliet*, p. 112, explains: "Romeo has mortgaged his life from a date set as that evening, the mortgage will be forfeit because by the end of the period (*term*) agreed, he will not be able to pay and will lose his life", and J.A. Bryant ed., *William Shakespeare: The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*, The Signet Classic Shakespeare, Penguin Putnam, New York 1998⁴, p. 26, observes that "the event is personified here as one who deliberately lends in expectation that the borrower will have to forfeit at great loss".

Property is alluded to in an expression used by Benvolio to describe the hot-headedness of Mercutio. Benvolio tells him that “And I were so apt to quarrel as thou art, any man should buy the fee simple of my life for an hour and a quarter” (III.i.31-33). The term “fee-simple” indicates an estate owned by a person in his own right, and belonging completely to a proprietor and his heirs for ever. It therefore indicates a freehold, an absolute ownership and possession. In this way Benvolio expresses his conviction that if he had Mercutio’s propensity to engage in squabbles any person buying his complete life would have tenure of it only for a mere brief moment of time, in that Mercutio would quickly lose it in a duel – an anticipation of what is about to happen.

The concept of the possession of a property is taken up by Juliet when she waits for Romeo to reach her for their first night together: “O, I have bought the mansion of a love / But not possess’d it, and though I am sold, / Not yet enjoy’d” (III.ii.26-28). Juliet gives voice to a technicality, that distinguishes the legal proprietorship of real estate from the actual and effective use of it. This is precisely Juliet’s perception of her own situation. She has ‘acquired’ Romeo legally through marriage but has not yet possessed him; she in turn has offered herself to him but has not been enjoyed by him. It follows that she sees herself and Romeo as property and this conception acts as parallel to Romeo’s awareness of her as “merchandise”¹⁸. Indeed, Juliet, like Romeo, has the surprising capacity of referring to love in financial terms. It may well be that this ability can be retained to have been inherited from her father, and thus constitutes part of the theme of inheritance in the play. What is certain is that both Romeo and Juliet are familiar with the language of property and ownership.

Another example of the presence of legal terminology in connection with the concept of possession is that used by Juliet when she tells the Friar: “And ere this hand, by thee to Romeo seal’d, / Shall be the label to another deed, / Or my true heart with treacherous revolt / Turn to another, this shall slay them both” (IV.i.56-59). The language used is that of a contract. The seal is a device, stamped on wax or on other material, by means of an engraved die, and attached to documents, in order to prove their authenticity. The word “label” here has a meaning, now obsolete, but current at the time of Shakespeare, of a small piece of paper or parchment attached to a document to provide an integration to the document itself, and so, by extension, the term assumes the sense of a clause or codicil providing supplementary annotations to a legal text. Finally, “deed” in this context has the legal meaning of a sealed document embodying the terms of an agreement, settlement or possession. The deed in question is Juliet’s marriage, which has sanctioned her and Romeo’s love promise and has conceded to each of the lovers the possession of the other; the seal is the authority given to the marriage by the Friar¹⁹; the label is an eventual legal cavil that would

¹⁸ M. Novy, *Love’s Argument*, p. 104, sustains that “financial imagery turns Juliet into property more directly than it does Romeo: when she speaks of herself as possessing, the object is less Romeo than love”.

¹⁹ On the complex question of the legitimacy of the Friar’s celebration of the marriage, see J.C. Bryant, *The Problematic Friar in Romeo and Juliet*, “English Studies”, 55, 1974, pp. 340-350, who reports R. Stevenson, *Shakespeare’s Religious Frontier*, Mouton, The Hague 1958, pp. 31-32, on Anglican and Roman Catholic canons forbidding the clergy to perform secret marriages, and G. Brenner, *Shakespeare’s Politically Ambitious*

modify or repeal the validity of the original legal contract, thus permitting a new marriage. What Juliet is saying is that rather than use her hand as extensor of this substitutive legal contract, namely, a marriage with Paris, she would prefer to turn that same hand against her own self and commit suicide.

The concept of a legal transaction is also present in Romeo's last soliloquy: "Eyes, look your last. / Arms, take your last embrace! And lips, O you / The doors of breath, seal with a righteous kiss / A dateless bargain to engrossing Death" (V.iii.112-115)²⁰. In legal terminology a bargain is an agreement entered into by two entities, usually concerning the buying and selling of property or objects on terms mutually acceptable or advantageous for both parties. Here the two parties involved are Romeo and Death, and the bargain concerns Romeo's own demise. It is an agreement that is sealed with a kiss. The choice of the term "seal", analogously to its use by Juliet, is rich in suggestions: a seal was placed on a document as authoritative sign of approval or ratification; its presence rendered the document binding, and was the expression of a solemn pledge; it was an attestation of assent, approval, of an unequivocal and irrevocable decision; it was the symbol itself of a contract. Here this contract has been undertaken with a party characterized as "engrossing", that is, someone who buys and sells in bulk, in large amounts. Through this imagery Romeo expresses his awareness of his having reached the conclusion of his legally drafted bargain with the monopolizer, Death, whereby the latter is about to claim complete ownership of Romeo himself, in a possession that, being without a date of expiry ("dateless"), is thus for ever. The situation recalls the words of Romeo before going to the Capulet's feast, where he had expressed his sensation of the instauration of a legal commitment, namely, the mortgaging of the property of his life in a contract anticipated as terminating with his death, a legal situation that is in fact brought to completion here. In this way Romeo's perception of his tragic fate comes full circle, from his intimation of his destiny at the beginning of the play to the accomplishment of this destiny in his suicide.

This second theme of property and legal procedures concerns more specifically than the motif of monetary estimations the interaction between one character and another character or entity. This is evident in Benvolio's conversation with Mercutio regarding the latter's quarrelsomeness, where Benvolio's use of the legal context accruing around the term "fee simple" serves, on the one hand, implicitly, to contrast Benvolio's own placid character with the violent one of Mercutio, and, on the other hand, explicitly, to assert that an investment in the life of Mercutio would be a bad one. The two other characters that employ the

Friar, "Shakespeare Studies", 13, 1980, p. 53, who retains, of the Friar, that "he continually oversteps his ecclesiastical functions. By marrying Romeo and Juliet secretly and without parental consent, he knowingly violates strict canon law". See also C. Watts, *Romeo and Juliet*, p. 90, for the legal age for consent in Elizabethan England, and his statement (*ibid.*, p. 101) that "A relevant sociological factor is that in Shakespeare's day both church and state recognised as legal and binding a clandestine marriage lacking parental consent".

²⁰ L. Hunter – P. Lichenfels, *Negotiating Shakespeare's Language in Romeo and Juliet: Reading Strategies from Criticism, Editing and the Theatre*, Ashgate, Farnham/Surrey/Burlington VT 2009, p. 194, point out how "the ambiguity of 'dateless' as a guarantee of either or both 'forever' and 'never' faces off against the 'engrossing' or capitalizing and monopolizing power of Death [...] in this last example the law protects exploitative, commercial action".

legal language of possession are, as has been seen, the two lovers. The distinguishing feature in Juliet's use of this terminology is the presence of a reciprocal dimension that involves Romeo. Instead, when Romeo uses analogous concepts he is concentrated on himself or on such abstractions as Death. Particularly revealing is the use of the concept of "seal" for the options of suicide of the two lovers: for Juliet it binds her to Romeo, for Romeo it ties him to Death. In particular, with regard to Romeo, the imagery of legal bonds and possession documents how Shakespeare attributes to him, from the beginning of the play to the end, a marked sense of tragic foreboding.

The third motif that has an economic dimension is that regarding marriage and inheritance²¹. Like any careful and attentive father of Shakespeare's day, Capulet is concerned with arranging a good marriage for Juliet²². In Act I, scene ii, Capulet and Paris converse

²¹ On questions regarding marriage and patriarchy in the play, see T. Moisan, 'O Any Thing, Of Nothing, First Create!': *Gender, Patriarchy, and the Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*, in *In Another Country: Feminist Perspectives on Renaissance Drama*, D. Kehler – S. Baker ed., Scarecrow Press, Metuchen NJ 1991, pp. 113-136; K. Farrell, *Love, Death, and Patriarchy in Romeo and Juliet*, in *Shakespeare's Personality*, N.N. Holland – S. Homan – B.J. Paris ed., University of California Press, Berkeley 1989, pp. 86-102; B.W. Young, *Haste, Consent, and Age at Marriage: Some Implications of Social History in Romeo and Juliet*, "Iowa State Journal of Research", 62, 1988, pp. 459-474; R. Houlbrooke, *The English Family 1450-1700*, Routledge, London and New York 1984, p. 71. On some of the social and judicial aspects of marriage, see also B.J. – M. Sokol, *Shakespeare, Law, and Marriage*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2003; M. Garber, *Coming of Age in Shakespeare*, Methuen, London 1981, pp. 116-118; M.B. Rose, *The Expense of Spirit: Love and Sexuality in English Renaissance Drama*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca NY 1988, p. 4; L. Hunter – P. Lichenfels, *Negotiating*, pp. 86-89. L. Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London 1977, p. 187, points out: "To an Elizabethan audience the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet [...] lay not so much in their ill-starred romance as in the way they brought destruction upon themselves by violating the norms of the society in which they lived, which [...] meant strict filial obedience and loyalty to the traditional friendship and enmities of the lineage".

²² Various evaluations have been furnished regarding the desire of the Capulets to find a husband for Juliet. S. Quilliam, *William Shakespeare: Romeo and Juliet*, Penguin Books, London 1999², p. 74, for example, observes that "Juliet's parents wish her to marry Paris – and the Nurse hints at one point, suitors may wish to marry Juliet – for all too realistic reasons, material ones. The match between Juliet and Paris is seen by her parents in the hardest financial terms", and she also points out that "in such a world, a safe financial marriage was essentially a woman's only protection". M.M. Mahood, *Wordplay*, p. 61, notes how "Love in Verona may be a cult, a quest, or a madness. Marriage is a business arrangement ... Juliet is an heiress, and her father does not intend to enrich any but a husband of his own choosing". G.B. Harrison, *Shakespeare's Tragedies*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1951, p. 51, retains, of the first meeting of Capulet and Paris, that "At this stage of the story Capulet is the careful amiable father anxious to do his best to arrange a happy marriage for his only much-loved daughter", and that "It is a good picture of Elizabethan family life with the parents completely dominant and unsentimentally concerned with doing the best for their child". Elsewhere, G.B. Harrison, *Introducing Shakespeare*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth 1991³, p. 95, informs how "The father was the head of the family and its ruler. His absolute right to dispose of his daughters in marriage was indeed questioned but the picture of the Capulet family is not far from the fact. In his own eyes Old Capulet was a considerate father. When the question of Juliet marrying Paris is first discussed, he is willing at least to let the girl have the choice of refusing: it is not until she becomes impudent that he issues commands". For D.R.C. Marsh, *Passion Lends Them Power: A Study of Shakespeare's Love Tragedies*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 1976, p. 55: "Juliet is old Capulet's only surviving child and he sees her very much as a possession".

together about Paris's marriage proposal. It is obvious that they have already spoken of the subject and Paris is gently insisting on fixing the marriage and trying to contrast Capulet's idea that Juliet is too young²³. The marriage would bring about, for Juliet, an entry into the class of the nobility, and the fusing of the property and riches of Capulet with the aristocratic title of Paris. It is interesting that it is Capulet who introduces the theme of inheritance when he tells Paris: "Earth hath swallow'd all my hopes but she; / She is the hopeful lady of my earth" (I.ii.14-15), thus informing him that his other children have died and that Juliet is his only heir and descendant so that she will inherit his lands and property. It is probably this idea that leads Capulet to employ the specific term "inherit" when immediately after he invites Paris to the feast in the evening: "even such delight / Among fresh female buds shall you this night / Inherit at my house" (I.ii.28-30). The unusual use of the word "inherit", meaning to receive or obtain, may be explained by the fact that Capulet still has in mind the concept of inheritance. Consequently, Capulet's phrase not only implies that Paris will enjoy hospitality at his home, but also suggests the concept of "inherit my house". It would thus intimate that Capulet is thinking of Paris as inheriting his property and becoming his heir through the acquisition of the status of son-in law by marriage²⁴.

The play proposes a second scene in which Capulet confronts the question of Juliet's marriage with Paris. This time Capulet is more anxious to urge wedding on his daughter, and so he tells Paris that he will perorate on his behalf with Juliet: "Sir Paris, I will make a desperate tender / Of my child's love" (III.iv.12-13)²⁵. The term "tender" signifies something offered, particularly in payment, so that Capulet hopes that he will be able to succeed in offering Paris the hand of Juliet. Once again the language of commercial transactions intervenes. Indeed, given Capulet's conviction that he has chosen in Paris the best possible husband for Juliet, and given too that Juliet cannot reveal the real reason for her refusal of this suitor, it is not surprising that her father loses control of himself when she refuses the proposal. It is clear from Capulet's words that he feels himself unjustly treated by Juliet after all his efforts: "Day, night, work, play, / Alone, in company, still my care hath been / To have her match'd" (III.v.176-182). Capulet goes on to defend his choice of Paris as husband for Juliet by pointing out all the advantages that his choice involves: Paris is of noble origin and lineage, he possesses good lands and estates, he is handsome and honourable, and he has all the qualities that one could wish for. For Capulet, Paris is therefore the ideal husband both from a social and from a personal point of view. Indeed Friar Laurence

²³ C. Kahn, *Coming of Age in Verona*, in *Critical Essays*, J.F. Andrews ed., p. 346, observes that Capulet's description of Juliet as "lady of my earth" echoes the expression "fille de terre" which is "the French term for heiress, and Capulet wants to make sure that his daughter will not only survive motherhood, but produce healthy heirs for him as well".

²⁴ In the context of the monetary dimension associated with marriage and betrothal, this scene is paralleled by the one in which Lady Capulet extols Paris as suitor of Juliet, describing him as the "golden book", full of positive qualities, that is merely in need of the cover of a wife to render it perfect, and which will be discussed further on.

²⁵ C. Kahn, *Coming of Age*, in *Critical Essays*, J.F. Andrews ed., p. 346, argues that after the death of Tybalt, Capulet develops a more acute sense of mortality, so that he wishes "Better to ensure the safe passage of his property to an heir now, while he lives, than in an uncertain future".

alludes to these aspirations of advancement in the marital projects of the Capulets when he offers his consolation to the grieving family after the discovery of the apparently dead Juliet: "The most you sought was her promotion, / For 'twas your heaven she should be advanc'd, / And weep ye now, seeing she is advanc'd / Above the clouds, as high as heaven itself? (IV.v.71-74)²⁶. As John F. Andrews has commented: "The Capulets have sought to rise in worldly status, using their daughter as an unwilling instrument to that end"²⁷, and Brian Gibbons has observed how "The fact that Paris is a highly suitable match in terms of family and social position is consistently stressed in the play"²⁸.

It may be noted that Juliet is as conscious of the monetary and hereditary consequences of marriage as her father, since, at the very moment when she proposes the wedding to Romeo, she asserts: "And all my fortunes at thy foot I'll lay, / And follow thee my lord throughout the world" (II.ii.147-148). Here Juliet gives voice to her complete dedication to Romeo not only in terms of love but also in terms of her awareness of laying all her fortunes, and so also her future inheritance, completely at his disposal.

The degree of presence of the question of inheritance in the play may be gauged from the way in which Capulet breaks the news of Juliet's death to Paris: "O son, the night before thy wedding day / Hath Death lain with thy wife. There she lies, / Flower as she was, deflowered by him. / Death is my son-in-law, Death is my heir. / My daughter he hath wedded" (IV.v.35-39). The theme of this passage is Capulet's fixed idea of Juliet as his heir and of the status of her future husband. Given that he now perceives her as married to Death, it is Death and not Paris who has become his inheritor.

The theme of marriage and inheritance persists in the final scene of the play. After the discovery of the bodies of the two lovers and the Prince's censure of the heads of the two feuding families, Capulet says to Montague: "O brother Montague, give me thy hand. / This is my daughter's jointure, for no more / Can I demand" (V.iii.295-297). "Jointure" is the estate settled on a married woman for her lifetime at the moment of marriage²⁹, and thus, in a general sense, the term can indicate the wife's dowry, but, in its more specific legal

²⁶ On this scene, see T. Moisan, *Rhetoric and Rehearsal of Death: the 'Lamentations' Scene in Romeo and Juliet*, "Shakespeare Quarterly", 34, 1983, pp. 389-404.

²⁷ J.F. Andrews, *Falling in Love: The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*, in *Critical Essays*, J.F. Andrews ed., p. 415.

²⁸ B. Gibbons ed., *Romeo and Juliet*, p. 193.

²⁹ This jointure has been variously commented upon by critics. A.J. Cook, *Social Restrictions Against Illicit Unions in Romeo and Juliet*, in *Readings on Romeo and Juliet*, D. Nardo ed., The Greenhaven Press Literary Companion to British Literature, Greenhaven Press, San Diego CA 1998, p. 105, writes: "In a final touch of pathos, their fathers tender belated offers of dower and dowry over the bodies of two dead children [...] With equal offers and clasped hands, the parents enact the spousal agreement between families that should have preceded the marriage of the young lovers, were it not for the feud. As the momentarily widowed wife of Romeo, Juliet will have from the Montagues a golden jointure equal to the golden dowry she brings from the Capulets". G. Whittier, *The Sonnet's Body and the Body Sonnetized in Romeo and Juliet*, in *Critical Essays on Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet*, J.A. Porter ed., G.K. Hall, New York 1997, p. 60, writes: "The play concludes [...] in a marriage contract decreed between the households, though there is no dowry but only a jointure, or widow's portion, to distribute". For a reading that interprets this episode as a parody of the bargaining over marriage settlements that would normally have been carried out for a wedding, see L.E. Boose, *The Father and the Bride in Shakespeare*, "PMLA", 97, 1982, p. 329.

import, it refers to the holding of property in the event of a widowhood and to the wife's freehold possession of property on the death of her husband. In this way, at the end of the play, the marriage/inheritance theme comes full circle, as Capulet returns to the idea of the marriage compact that had constituted the endeavour and purpose of his appearances in the play. In the absence of the living lovers, but in the presence of their dead bodies, Capulet proposes himself as substitute of Romeo, and Montague as substitute of Juliet. The marriage agreement, so ardently pursued by Capulet, is now sealed, with different conditions and different protagonists.

The third motif of marriage and inheritance involves the microcosm of the family, of family relationships and of the responsibilities involved. Capulet is the active protagonist in the choice of Paris, though Lady Capulet sustains her husband in perorating this candidature³⁰. The unexpected event of the demise of both Mercutio and Tybalt, two healthy young men who pass from life to death in a moment, leads Capulet to pose himself the problem of his own more probable decease, which would leave Juliet alone, a young heiress with no guide or protection, without social or financial security. The conviction that his parental responsibility consists in choosing a suitable husband for his daughter is further motivated by his awareness that the dowry of his daughter and, after his own death, her inheritance of his property, will pass under the control of whoever is her husband. Capulet retains that the microcosm of the family is the territory within which it is his right and duty to exert his authority, and in this perspective he first does his utmost to choose a suitable husband of Juliet, then he tries to impose what he considers is his perfect solution, next he actively organizes what he thinks will be a marriage feast that instead turns out to be a funeral wake, and finally, after her death, he assumes the responsibility for the disposition of her inheritance by taking the initiative in broaching the question of jointure with Montague, his daughter's father-in-law, and proposing the construction of the gold statue. In this way, to the very end of the play he defends the lawful entitlements of his daughter even after her demise, given that, since she dies after Romeo, she legally enters into all the property rights connected with widowhood.

An important feature of the play is the use of nautical imagery. The presence of ships and navigation is tied to the economic importance of these at the time of Shakespeare³¹. The

³⁰ Indeed, D. Callaghan, *The Ideology of Romantic Love: The Case of Romeo and Juliet*, in *Romeo and Juliet*, R.S. White ed., New Casebooks, Palgrave, Basingstoke and New York 2001, p. 102, sustains that "Lady Capulet's statement that 'Thou hast a careful father, child' – suggests that he is not only solicitous but perhaps penurious", so that "Capulet's concern with financial gain and social status is thoroughly apparent", and (*ibid.*, p. 103), "Financial metaphors reconfigure patriarchal economic transactions".

³¹ K. Muir, *Shakespeare's Tragic Sequence*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool 1972, p. 38, evidences, among the groups of images in the play, "Those relating to voyages, suggested perhaps by Brooke's poem, and concerned with the love-quest and with the voyage of life", and elsewhere, in his *The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays*, Methuen, London 1977, p. 43, he points out how "Some of the imagery of the play, particularly that relating to voyages, seems to have been suggested by Brooke, who has many images derived from his experience of seafaring". R. Nevo, *Tragic Form in Romeo and Juliet*, in *William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet*, H. Bloom ed., Modern Critical Interpretations, Chelsea House Publishers, Philadelphia 2000, pp. 77-78, observes that

voyages carried out by sea were a source of continual interest, and mercantilism was a fundamental characteristic of the period³². Outgoing voyages of adventure and exploration to discover new lands and territories were balanced by incoming voyages that brought back to the mother country the assets of colonization, territorial possessions and the treasures and gold of the New World. Mercantilism and the mercantile spirit were very much present in Shakespeare's London, in whose port ships continually came and went. The language and terminology of the nautical world were well-known to the inhabitants of the time, and texts and plays were often characterized by their presence, as is the case also for *Romeo and Juliet*.

A good example of how this nautical imagery is woven into the fabric of ordinary speech is constituted by Montague's description of his son as being "so secret and so close, / So far from sounding and discovery, / As is the bud bit with an envious worm" (I.i.147-149). Romeo's love sickness, and specifically his tendency to shut himself up in his room, away from the light of the sun, avoiding contact and conversation with others, is conveyed by the images of "sounding", namely, the plumbing the hidden depths of something, and of "discovery", the revelation of the unknown³³.

A nautical image that is repeated more than once is that of the pilot, the person responsible for the governance of the ship. Before proceeding to Capulet's feast, Romeo expresses his premonition of some tragic consequence, and asserts "he that hath the steerage of my course / Direct my suit" (I.iv.112-113)³⁴. The "he" here referred to is more probably Cupid rather than Providence, and this is the first of Romeo's allusions to himself as a ship, under the control of another³⁵, and steering a dangerous course. The idea of the pilot and the concept of himself as vessel engaged on a voyage of exploration is used by Romeo to express to Juliet his willingness to hazard all for her: "I am no pilot, yet wert thou as far / As that vast shore wash'd with the farthest sea, / I should adventure for such merchandise" (II.ii.82-84). Romeo conceives his love for Juliet in terms of a maritime adventure that has as its purpose that of obtaining her, referred to as "merchandise", that is, the prize for mercantile venturing. The risk factor in Romeo's words should be noted, the idea that though incapable

"the sea metaphor is an archetypal metaphor for life precisely for the reason that seamanship pits will and skill against that part of nature – ocean – most challenging, and menacing, to man in its inextricable comingling of immutable stellar law and wild waves' chaos".

³² C. Knight, *Studies in Shakespeare*, Charles Knight, London 1849, p. 218, points out the literary and artistic treasures of the Italian Renaissance and asserts that "All these were the growth of the freedom which prevailed in the Italian republics, and of the wealth which had been acquired by commercial enterprise".

³³ B. Gibbons ed., *Romeo and Juliet*, p. 89, commenting on the "nautical images of sounding, of gauging the depth, and sailing, in uncharted waters", notes how "the image of the *unsounded self* is an important and recurrent one in Shakespeare".

³⁴ It may be underlined that there is here also an allusion to the legal meaning of "suit" as entreaty, petition, or prosecution of legal proceedings.

³⁵ E. Snow, *Language and Sexual Difference in Romeo and Juliet*, in *Critical Essays*, J.F. Andrews ed., p. 375, has observed, of Romeo, that "His favourite metaphor is the sea-journey, with himself more often the ship than the pilot"; while D.L. Peterson, *Romeo and Juliet and the Art of Moral Navigation*, in *Critical Essays*, J.F. Andrews ed., p. 312, notes of the hero that "Having initially rejected Providence as a guide, he now entrusts himself to the guidance of a blind pilot".

of guiding a ship he still intends to hazard the journey. This suggests a notable degree of recklessness and anticipates the tragic conclusion of his venture.

Maritime terms and imagery are used humorously in the meeting between the Nurse and Romeo. When the Nurse is spied by Romeo, he greets her jokingly alluding to her billowing skirts by comparing them to sails and thus herself to a ship: "A sail! A sail!" (II. iv.101). The exclamation is a variation of the cry used to announce the sighting of a ship at sea. In turn the Nurse takes up the nautical imagery when, after Mercutio has gone³⁶, she asks Romeo: "I pray you, sir, what saucy merchant was this, that was so full of his ropery?" (II.iv.142-143). The term "ropery" signifies knavery, trickery, but the term obviously recalls the ropes on vessels. Furthermore, the use of "merchant" to characterize Mercutio maintains the imagery within the mercantile context. As Brian Gibbons points out "*merchant* as opposed to 'gentleman' was a term of disrespect used in this way"³⁷. In this same scene, the imagery of ships continues in the plan that Romeo arranges with the Nurse for that night: "Within this hour my man shall be with thee, / And bring thee cords made like a tackled stair, / Which to the high topgallant of my joy / Must be my convoy in the secret night" (II.iv.184-187). The ropes suggested in the previous quotation now become the cords of the ladder that will allow Romeo to reach Juliet and the anticipation of this joy is expressed in maritime terms: the topgallant is the platform at the head of the top mast, reached by stairs of rope in the tackle of the ship; it is consequently the highest point of the ship. This represents the zenith of joy that Romeo anticipates he will attain, and once again Juliet is collocated in a nautical context, as the highest point of arrival in a maritime venture. A further reference to the nautical world is present in the Nurse's subsequent mention of "one Paris, that would fain lay knife aboard" (II.iv.197-198). The expression "to lay knife abroad" refers to the Elizabethan custom of marking one's place at table by placing one's knife when one wished to sit. This meaning indicates the assertion of a claim, and reminds the audience that Paris wishes to lay claim to the hand of Juliet. In nautical terms, however, the expression "to lay aboard" refers to the technique of putting a ship alongside another to assault or board it, and so again alludes to Paris's courtship for the hand of Juliet and his desire to possess her.

Juliet herself is compared to a vessel when Capulet comments on her continual crying, employing imagery of tempest and navigation: "In one little body / Thou counterfeitest a bark, a sea, a wind. / For still thy eyes, which I may call the sea, / Do ebb and flow with tears. Thy bark thy body is, / Sailing in this salt flood, the winds thy sighs, / Who ... / Without a sudden calm will overset / Thy tempest-tossed body" (III.v.130-137). Just as Romeo had been previously perceived in maritime terms by his father, so here analogously Juliet is apprehended in a navigational context by her father. A further parallel to Capulet's use of the imagery of a vessel heading for destruction is found in the final words of Romeo

³⁶ J.A. Porter, *Shakespeare's Mercutio: His History and Drama*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill & London 1988, p. 125, commenting on Mercutio's teasing of the Nurse in this scene, sustains that "the liminal society of fraternal equality Mercutio participates in ... allows Mercutio's misogyny to adopt an economic guise".

³⁷ B. Gibbons ed., *Romeo and Juliet*, p. 150.

in the play: “Come, bitter conduct, come unsavoury guide, / Thou desperate pilot now at once run on / The dashing rocks thy seasick weary bark” (V.iii.116-118). As in Capulet’s description of Juliet, there is here the same anticipation of a final shipwreck. Kenneth Muir has pointed out how, in Romeo’s final soliloquy (V.iii.92-3, 109-18), there are echoes of his speech in Act I (I.iv.106-113)³⁸, and specifically, how the notion of a pilot returns. Here the pilot is the poison, even though one could also continue to conceive the pilot as being simultaneously, as initially, Cupid, given that it is Romeo’s love that leads him to death. In any case, a now desperate Romeo consigns his weary bark, that is, his body tired of life, to its tragic destiny.

The use of nautical imagery in the play collocates the economic motif in the context of the macrocosm represented by the voyages of exploration and exploitation of the time. It is interesting to note how both the fathers of the play, Montague and Capulet make use of sea-faring terms to describe their children, while the association of the love of Romeo and Juliet with ships and vessels, maritime voyages and journeys of exploration, mercantile adventures and economic ventures runs all through the play. In particular, Romeo’s love for Juliet involves a perception of it as a maritime adventure, with Juliet as the treasure for which all is to be hazarded. As has been seen, the final culminating nautical image occurs in Romeo’s last words in the play, which also have the function of recalling previous allusions: his apostrophe to the poison as a desperate pilot recalls his initial dedication of his destiny to the pilot Love, as also his previous recognition of himself as being no pilot; his vision of himself as driven to death against destructive rocks recalls Capulet’s fear that the storm of Juliet’s tears would wreck her “tempest-tossed body” (III.v.137); his reference to himself as being a “seasick weary bark” (V.iii.118) recalls the previous assertion of his existence as “a despised life clos’d in my breast” (I. iv.110). It may be argued that the function of these intimations and echoes is to convey the message that the love of Romeo and Juliet is the story of the wreckage of many hopes and expectations.

The theme of gold is extremely important in the play. It is mentioned for the first time by Romeo who, speaking of Rosaline’s attitude towards him, expresses her resistance to his courtship in these terms: “She will not stay the siege of loving terms / Nor bide th’encounter of assailing eyes / Nor ope her lap to saint-seducing gold” (I.i.210-212). Brian Gibbons rightly notes that “Romeo’s phrasing contrives to suggest a commercial transaction *and* an erotic act”³⁹, but the fundamental idea is that gold constitutes a temptation even for saints.

Particularly elaborate is Lady Capulet’s presentation of Paris as the golden book⁴⁰, which must be read and appreciated and furnished with the necessary cover of a wife:

³⁸ K. Muir, *Sources of Shakespeare’s Plays*, p. 44, indicates how: “In both we have stars, bitter(ly), date(less), and death; sail and steerage correspond to pilot and bark; and the legal expressions of term and forfeit correspond to seal and bargain”.

³⁹ B. Gibbons ed., *Romeo and Juliet*, p. 93.

⁴⁰ S.S. Hussey, *The Literary Language of Shakespeare*, Longman, Harlow 1982, pp. 77-78, comments: “This precious book of love [...] conceals his love just as a bound volume conceals its contents [...] Here, for instance, *content* is both the content(s) of the book and also satisfaction: Paris is *unbound* (like a book) but also not yet

“That book in many’s eyes doth share the glory / That in gold clasps locks in the golden story” (I.iii.91-92). Her description of Paris as “This precious book of love, this unbound lover, / To beautify him only lacks a cover” (I.iii.87-88) contains various innuendoes: the invitation to Juliet to exercise a correct monetary evaluation of Paris and of the social and financial security that he can offer; the idea that it is important to bind and tie up at once an ideal potential husband, given that his “unbound” status makes him an available prey for another’s taking; the conceit that marriage is the necessary and perfect wrapping up and cover of an already perfect suitor; and the contention, proposed by Lynette Hunter and Peter Lichenfels, that “Also hidden in this is the legal term to describe a woman during the late sixteenth century as ‘covert’ to the man, therefore taken care of but also unseen”⁴¹. Furthermore, in the assertion “So shall you share all that he doth possess” (I.ii.93) Lady Capulet explicitly broaches the question of inheritance and possession. Moreover, the gold of the book serves to document, through the notion of the preciousness of the metal, the possible actual wealth of Paris, and the richness of the personal evaluation and value that the Capulets attribute to him. Paris is the perfect golden book, but it is interesting to remember that at the end the golden story will be that of Romeo and Juliet.

The episode of the musicians introduces again the idea of gold, this time in a comic context and in contraposition to that of silver. Marjorie Garber has observed that while the associations of the word silver in the play are pleasant, “By contrast the play’s references to gold are negative and debasing, connected with things that appear to be of questionable value”⁴². Peter and his companions, commenting on the phrase “silver sound” in a poem⁴³, pose themselves the problem of why it is used. The first musician suggests it is because music has a sweet sound; the second, because musicians play for silver, while Peter affirms that “It is ‘music with her silver sound’ because musicians have no gold for sounding” (IV.v.35-36). The episode introduces the idea of payment for labour and the concept that the utmost that artists can earn is silver and not gold, thus implying that they are paid little for their art and efforts. This is in contrast to the wealth and riches of the Capulets so that the episode anticipates, through disparity, the final expenditure of gold to construct the statues of the two lovers.

A further mention of gold occurs, in a context of the contraposition of gold and poverty, when Romeo goes to the apothecary’s shop to buy the poison with which he intends to commit suicide. Romeo’s presentation of the shop and its contents (V.i.37-60) underlines the utter penury of the apothecary, through the choice of such words as: “tatter’d”; “Meagre”; “Sharp misery”; “worn ... to the bones”; “needy shop”; “beggarly account”; “empty”; “thinly scatter’d”; “penury”; “needy man”. James H. Seward, commenting on this descrip-

bound by marriage ties”, and G. Whittier, *Sonnet’s Body*, in *Critical Essays*, J.A. Porter ed., p. 50, observes, of Lady Capulet, that “Unlike Romeo, she believes a virgin not only may, but must open her lap to gold”.

⁴¹ L. Hunter – P. Lichenfels, *Negotiating*, p. 130, who also, *ibid.*, remark that Lady Capulet has “a sense of absolute economic reality”.

⁴² M. Garber, *Romeo and Juliet: Patterns and Paradigms*, in *Critical Essays*, J.F. Andrews ed., p. 130.

⁴³ B. Gibbons ed., *Romeo and Juliet*, p. 215, informs that the three verses quoted by Peter are “The opening of a poem ‘In commendation of Musick’ by Richard Edwardes (1523-66) which appears in *The Paradise of Daynty Deuises* (1576)”.

tion, argues that Shakespeare “wishes to suggest, besides the poverty of the Apothecary, something about the state of mind of the man who is describing it. The drabness of the shop merely reflects the bleakness of his [Romeo’s] own outlook”⁴⁴. Romeo, aware of the extreme poverty of the apothecary: “I see that thou art poor” (V.i.58), offers him forty ducats to buy the poison⁴⁵. When the apothecary points out that such a sale entails the penalty of death in Mantua, Romeo marvels that he should fear to die, wretched and miserable as he is, and he tempts the poor man with gold: “There is thy gold – worse poison to men’s souls, / Doing more murder in this loathsome world / Than these poor compounds that thou mayst not sell. / I sell thee poison, thou hast sold me none” (V.i.80-184). The theme of the corrupting effect of gold is here made evident. Clifford Leech has noted that “Romeo’s recognition that the gold he gives is a worse poison than the one he buys is largely a Renaissance common-place”⁴⁶, and Joan Ozark Holmer, has observed that “gold ... in this play does not celebrate life but rather commemorates death as the figurative poison to men’s souls”⁴⁷.

The final and most important appearance of gold is at the end of the play, in the final gathering together of the various survivors at the tomb of the Capulets⁴⁸. It is here, after Capulet’s offer to Montague of his hand as jointure, which has already been commented on, that the two bereaved fathers promise to raise two statues of gold representing the lovers. This is a conclusive moment for the economic and commercial motif that, as James L. Calderwood has argued, culminates in the statues⁴⁹. In reply to Capulet’s offer to Montague of his hand as jointure, Montague replies: “But I can give thee more, / For I will raise her statue in pure gold” (V.iii.297-298), to which Capulet returns: “As rich shall Romeo’s by his lady’s lie, / Poor sacrifices to our enmity” (V.iii.302-303).

⁴⁴ J.H. Seward, *Tragic Vision in Romeo and Juliet*, Consortium Press, Washington DC 1973, p. 183.

⁴⁵ B. Gibbons ed., *Romeo and Juliet*, p. 220: “The ducat was a gold coin, so called in several European countries though originally Venetian”.

⁴⁶ C. Leech, *The Moral Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*, in *Critical Essays*, J.A. Porter ed., pp. 14-15.

⁴⁷ J.O. Holmer, *No “Vain Fantasy”: Shakespeare’s Refashioning of Nashe for Dreams and Queen Mab*, in *Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet: Texts, Contexts, and Interpretation*, J.L. Halio ed., University of Delaware Press/Associated University Presses, Newark and London 1995, p. 62.

⁴⁸ G.K. Hunter, *Shakespeare’s Earliest Tragedies: Titus Andronicus and Romeo and Juliet*, in *Shakespeare’s Early Tragedies: Richard III, Titus Andronicus and Romeo and Juliet*, N. Taylor – B. Loughrey ed., Casebook Series, Macmillan, Basingstoke and London 1990, p. 124, sustains that “It is entirely appropriate that the ‘public’ wedding-bed of Romeo and Juliet (as against their previous private bedding) should be placed in the Capulet tomb, for it is there that Romeo may be most effectively seen to have joined his wife’s clan, there where their corporate identity is most unequivocally established”; and K. Ryan, ‘*The Murdering Word*’, in *Romeo and Juliet*, R.S. White ed., p. 125, retains, of the play, that “Its denouement is aptly staged in the Capulet crypt, repository of the dead generations and symbol of the patriarchal family, whose legacy of repression had gripped Romeo and Juliet from the start”. See also A. Leggatt, *Shakespeare’s Tragedies: Violation and Identity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2005, p. 53; C. Kahn, *Man’s Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1981, p. 85; M. Neill, *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1997, p. 312; A. Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England: Modes of Reproduction 1300-1840*, Basil Blackmore, Oxford 1986, pp. 315-316.

⁴⁹ J.L. Calderwood, *Romeo and Juliet: A Formal Dwelling*, in *Critical Essays*, J.F. Andrews ed., p. 105.

Before commenting on this episode, it is useful to present a brief panorama of some different critical opinions regarding the meaning of the construction of these statues. Joan Ozark Holmer points out how, "As the feuding patriarchs attempt to bury their hate by binding themselves together through a too-late betrothal of their dead heirs, their golden memorials stand as a tragically barren fusion of posterity and prosperity"⁵⁰. Gayle Whittier hypothesizes: "Perhaps these effigies symbolize "gods of idolatry" in a love religion; certainly they are false, ungenerative bodies. [...] the lovers' bodies and the metaphors of light through which the lovers beheld them are conjoined, stilled, in the medium of public, solid gold"⁵¹. For Brian Gibbons "the exchange of promises that each father shall erect a statue of the other's child, in gold, symbolizes the alchemical transmutation of worldly wealth, property, earth, into the spiritual riches of the heart and the imagination"⁵². Robert O. Evans retains that "There is in the monument to be erected to them in purest gold the hint that great passion, even though it ends in death, has its own glories"⁵³, and that "If the intention to immortalize the lovers in gold ...symbolizes the eternal victory of love over death, it comes almost as an afterthought. But of course the primary purpose of the monuments was to signify peace brought about by the union of the feuding families"⁵⁴. Peter Holding affirms that "The promise to construct a golden monument in the lover's memory should not be seen as the shallow opportunism of two old men who cannot feel deeply enough to grieve"⁵⁵, and he continues: "The time and care with which Shakespeare arranges for each party to be brought centre stage before the assembled citizenry to be questioned, and the final hand-clasp of reconciliation between the two old men, all provide an appropriate conclusion to a tragedy that has consistently acknowledged the tension between the public demands of birth and blood and the private impulses of the heart"⁵⁶. James L. Calderwood, referring to Montague's raising of the statue to Juliet, argues that "The effect of doing so will be on the one hand to reduce Juliet to the base metal of public commerce but on the other hand to cast that metal in an unnegotiable form. As pure gold statuary the lovers retain a pricelessness that transcends commercial distribution even while their value is "sold" in the sense of being shared"⁵⁷. The critic also observes how "The gold that was so much the object of commercial voyages in Shakespeare's time and that once discovered and minted went its endless voyage from pocket to pocket finds in the shape of the statues a permanent rest"⁵⁸. François Laroque expresses the opinion that "The golden statues raised by the parents to commemorate the two eponymous heroes in the end are a sad and painful tribute, a mourning monument built to remind future generations of the dangers of civil strife and of the triumph of tradition over individual desire with its

⁵⁰ J.O. Holmer, "Vain Fantasy", in *Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet*, J.L. Halio ed., p. 62.

⁵¹ G. Whittier, *Sonnet's Body*, in *Critical Essays*, J.A. Porter ed., p. 60.

⁵² B. Gibbons ed., *Romeo and Juliet*, p. 76.

⁵³ G. Blakemore Evans ed., *Romeo and Juliet*, p. 66.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 95.

⁵⁵ P. Holding, *Romeo and Juliet: Text and Performance*, Macmillan, Basingstoke and London 1992, pp. 35-36.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 36.

⁵⁷ J.L. Calderwood, *A Formal Dwelling*, in *Critical Essays*, J.F. Andrews ed., p. 106.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*.

subversive potential"⁵⁹. Catherine Belsey sustains that "Romeo and Juliet are immortalized as signifiers. The promised golden statues are, of course, a metamorphosis, effigies of their bodies, beautiful, precious, and lifeless ... Verona will recognize the effigies of Romeo and Juliet, but the effigies will signify concord, not desire"⁶⁰. According to Lynette Hunter and Peter Lichenfels, "The links between the law and power and money are encapsulated in the legally binding reconciliation of the Fathers Capulet and Montague ... the former offering his daughter's 'jointure' ... and each pledging to erect a golden statue to the other's child"⁶¹.

It is indicative that the means upon which the two fathers agree to honour the memory of their children is the creation of statues in gold, gold being retained to be the symbol of preciousness and one of the most refined metals, so that although there is an intimation of one father wanting to outdo the other in expenditure, in both parents there is an obvious desire to do something for their lost children by which to remember them: for this they are willing to spare no expense. The choice of gold also points back to the economic motif in the play and especially to the mentality of Capulet, who has always been extremely sensitive with regard to this dimension. It is moreover pertinent to reflect on the words of Montague, who asserts that he will raise the statue of Juliet: "That whiles Verona by that name be known, / There shall no figure at such rate be set / As that of true and faithful Juliet" (V.iii.299-301). The statues will be erected to collocate the two lovers at the highest level in the memory of future generations and to endow them with the trait of incomparability for as long as Verona exists, and so, implicitly, to bestow on them the quality of permanence. This choice, besides documenting, as has been suggested, the wealth of the two fathers, may be retained to imply a certain measure of possessiveness, given that the two men will have control over how the statues are to be built, so that the completed artefacts will stand as monuments not only to the lovers themselves but also to the families to which they belonged and thus to the Capulet and Montague dynasties.

The fifth motif of gold comprises and englobes various themes. In Romeo's annoyance at Rosaline's resistance to gold there emerges the idea of the temptation constituted by gold, as also the price and value that Romeo continually attributes to love and beauty. In Lady Capulet's presentation of Paris as the golden book and in her appeal to Juliet to examine him/it carefully, there accrue such economic motifs as the relevance of riches, the benefits of affluence, the importance of prosperity, the inherent advantage of a solid financial position, and the awareness of the monetary and social benefits furnished by wealth. In the episode of the musicians, the idea of the poor remuneration attributed to art is presented in terms of the silver, and not the gold, with which it is repaid. In the apothecary episode the danger and menace that gold can represent is communicated in the death penalty that its sale entails, and in Romeo's assertion that it is worse poison than poison itself. Finally, in the decision of the two fathers to erect gold effigies, diverse interpretations, indicative of

⁵⁹ F. Laroque, *Tradition and Subversion in Romeo and Juliet*, in *Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet*, J.L. Halio ed., p. 33.

⁶⁰ C. Belsey, *The Name of the Rose in Romeo and Juliet*, in *Critical Essays*, Porter ed., pp. 78, 79.

⁶¹ L. Hunter – P. Lichenfels, *Negotiating Shakespeare's Language*, p. 194.

different evaluations of the signification of gold, can be attributed to this choice of metal and to this form of remembrance.

One further observation is worth proposing. The fathers intend to build statues in memory of their children employing a metal traditionally associated with durability and permanence. Shakespeare has endowed the lovers with a different form of timelessness, that constituted by the writing of the play. Through his imaginative endeavour, with his play Shakespeare fashions forth an edifice that defies time, an artistic monument that attains to the status of eternity. After the hint, in the musicians' scene, of the limited compensation attributed to music, the narration of the story of Romeo and Juliet may be retained to stand as vindication and exaltation of the intrinsic preciousness – the gold value – of a different form of art: literary creation.

Cedric Watts has sustained how “The mundane practicalities of earning a living flatteringly accentuate, while yet placing in a partly-critical perspective, the raptures and poignancies of the lovers”⁶², and he points out that “as economic changes encouraged the free market and consumer choice, as materialistic demands prevailed against religious duties, so romantic love both celebrated the power of free choice and offered a private enclave of spiritualized emotion within the larger environment of commercial appetite”⁶³. The economic motif collocates itself precisely in this larger environment, to which it contributes various articulations: it promotes a reflection and appraisal of the value and worth of the love story and of the passions therein involved; it aids in the perception of character portrayal and in the presentation of interpersonal relations; it favours an evaluation of the applicative performance of monetary concerns in the microcosm of the family and furnishes evidence of the dynamic economic repercussions of the macrocosm of navigational exploration on conceptual and communicative processes; and it furnishes metatheatrical validation of the functionality of gold both as recognized parameter for the calculation of wealth and as specific and distinguishing metaphor for the operation and productivity of the creative imagination.

⁶² C. Watts, *Romeo and Juliet*, p. 70.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, p. 114.

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