



## ABSTRACT

This research looks at William Shakespeare's works (Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth) from a philosophical point of view, in order to find new interpretations of the characters of his works, and, thus, to get to know man by means of an interdisciplinary approach.

To carry out these aims, I developed six main chapters, which are subdivided into twenty- four parts. The first chapter covers Shakespeare's life, background, works, and the speculation about the authorship of his works. In the second chapter, the passionate love between Romeo and Juliet is interpreted from the point of view of philosophical voluntarism. The next chapter analyzes Hamlet's indecision from that of existentialism. The fourth chapter examines Othello's personality from that of psychoanalysis. The following chapter treats King Lear's tragedy from that of vitalism. Finally, the last chapter explores Macbeth's ambition, which is stained with nihilism.

The interdisciplinary cooperation between Literature and Philosophy displays the rational and irrational elements of human life in a dialectical relationship. Tragedy convulses human life, and at the same time, it calls for man to realize his emptiness. However, this same emptiness motivates man towards building his own being by using reason as a vital tool.



Reason gives order to chaos. This dialectical clash of the rational and irrational elements is a process that never ends, but it is always producing new problems that expand our knowledge about reality. These elements are performed in Shakespeare's theater.

**Keywords:** dialectical process, voluntarism, existentialism, psychoanalysis, vitalism, nihilism.



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**UNIVERSIDAD DE CUENCA**

**FACULTAD DE FILOSOFÍA, LETRAS Y  
CIENCIAS DE LA EDUCACIÓN**

**ESPECIALIDAD DE  
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**PHILOSOPHICAL ELEMENTS IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S  
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2013



## ***AUTHORSHIP***

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Thanks to the University of Cuenca and to the Faculty of Philosophy, that provided me with the necessary tools to complete this project.

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to Nature because in its lap I found multiple and amazing beings that have been the cornerstones of my life, and through their goodness I knew the benevolence of Being, so this paper is dedicated to them, especially to the memory of my deceased grandmother, Matilde, who was like a mom for me for many years; she was the best mother a kid could ask for; to my Mom, Rosario, for her unconditional support, friendship, and love; to my brother, Pablo, for instilling the importance of hard work and encouraging me to achieve my goals; to my mischievous and loving dogs and cats for awaking my soul and making my life whole; and to the reader; I hope you enjoy reading this inquiry.



## INTRODUCTION

Life is tragedy and comedy. Laughing and mourning spring from the very nature of man, who, to give expression to these potentials, prefers to embody them in tragedy or comedy, or also in drama that synthesizes these two expressions into one large affluent. Tragic and comic are not only aesthetic or artistic categories; they are expressions of the intimate reality of man.

Curiosity makes obvious a latent question: where was tragedy born? At first glance, it might seem that the absolute antipode of tragedy is health, but not only does tragedy presuppose health, but the tragic figure is only the one who is able to squander the exuberance of life, because knowing that we are healthy requires at the same time understanding ourselves as what we really are – quintessentially sick animals.

The exuberance of life can not erase pessimism and tragedy – the tragedy of that life that is destined in advance to fatal and necessary destruction. In short, disease, old age, suffering, and death are the inseparable comrades of life. There is perhaps a neurosis of health. This is what is hidden in all life, and what no human existence can avoid.

Pessimism, as the recognition of the existence of an irrational undertone in human life, is what we will find in Shakespeare's works (Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth).

This pessimism, or irrational element of tragedy, is treated according to different philosophical points of view.



In *Romeo and Juliet*, voluntarism sees love as an instinct whose essential purpose is to procreate, to preserve humanity, to continue living in another being. Love, also known as the spirit of species (humanity), is a metaphysical force that deceives man with illusion and happiness, and once the individual has satisfied his passion, the lover experiences a disappointment followed by a rapid disenchantment.

The spirit of species is the only one that can at first glance see the value of lovers, and how they can serve it for its purposes. *Romeo and Juliet*'s great passion was born at first glance. However, the loss of Juliet caused great pain in Romeo. This is precisely because this pain is of a transcendent nature; that is, the plans of the spirit of species were frustrated. Then, it is not Romeo who laments, but the spirit of species or humanity which laments; that is, Romeo's immortal part.

Hamlet's tragedy is that of a sensitive man who has an existential outlook on life. Hamlet is the modern man who struggles in a rotten world. He desires to find out the underlying reality behind the appearances. Once he has been disappointed by his mother, he wants to unmask men, to strip them of their fine appearances and to show them in their true colors. However, he realizes that this labor is not an easy thing to do, and for this reason he must speak ambiguously and hide his intentions. Hamlet's madness is not a mask, but his lack of masks.

Hamlet's "To be or not to be" speech expresses a feeling of "thrownness." He feels that he has been thrown into life with no purpose at all, and that there is no distinction between existence and non-existence unless the individual himself imposes his own subjective meaning onto life.



Psychoanalysis displays Othello as a narcissistic person. Othello's marriage to Desdemona symbolizes a gratifying triumph because it entails his entry into the highest level of Venetian society. He loves Desdemona because she feeds his pride and confirms his idealized image of himself. However, his jealousy, already embedded in his personality, radically disturbs his mind and, feeling betrayed, he, as a truly narcissistic individual, is forced to regain his honor by killing his spouse under the guise of righteous indignation. He will never admit his true motive – unfounded jealousy. Instead, he murders Desdemona for being responsible for his humiliation. However, when he discovers Desdemona's innocence, Othello is obligated to commit suicide, to render justice, this time upon himself.

The unconscious mind functions as an 'internal other' that opens its own way to a collapse of confidence in the self and radically disturbs the sense of control that man apparently wields.

The vitalistic perspective reveals the huge emptiness of King Lear. Lear divides his kingdom according to his daughters' professions of love. However, this decision will weave a series of misfortunes that ends up aggravating his tragedy. He was accustomed to enjoy absolute power and to be flattered. However, when he lost his power, by giving it to his two older daughters, he was shocked because he was being contradicted and challenged, and, worst of all, he was not being loved as he expected, according to his daughters' previous professions.

The greatness of Lear is in his intellectual dimension; that is, his uncomfortable situation and his relationship to it make him ask questions about



life and about himself, too. He realizes his emptiness, but he tries to use his reason, in relation to his circumstances, to build the being that is missing; that is, his own being. Lear is a vitalist because he uses reason as an instrument of life to overcome the chaos of existence.

Macbeth's nihilism is presented in the form of existential and moral nihilism. As an existential nihilist, Macbeth argues that life is without objective meaning, purpose, or intrinsic value. Why? Because all the actions he carries out are not for his own benefit. The whole show has not been mounted on his behalf. Each act promises to give him somewhat of pleasure; however, at the same time, these acts are inexorably stained with suffering and death, so he will immediately return to dissatisfaction, confusion, pain, and chaos.

Lady Macbeth plays the role of the moral nihilist because she believes that the highest values that man tries to attain are only helpful masks to deceive, and in the name of them the greatest atrocities are committed. Transcendental values are like garments that man wears or removes according to the circumstances. This is the mechanism that holds the world together, and this mechanism makes Macbeth end up by denying God's work, by saying that life is a walking shadow, a tale told by an idiot, that signifies nothing.

Art should not be seen as a mere reproduction or copy of nature, as the artistic philosophy proposed by Plato saw it, but rather art should be seen as a recreation of nature, as Aristotle considered it. Why? Because art has covered with its veil of beauty what is ugly, monstrous, and grief-stricken in human life. Only in this way can man endure and overcome, somehow, the pain of



existence. Art is a beautiful appearance that makes man's existence worth living and encourages him to live from instant to instant.

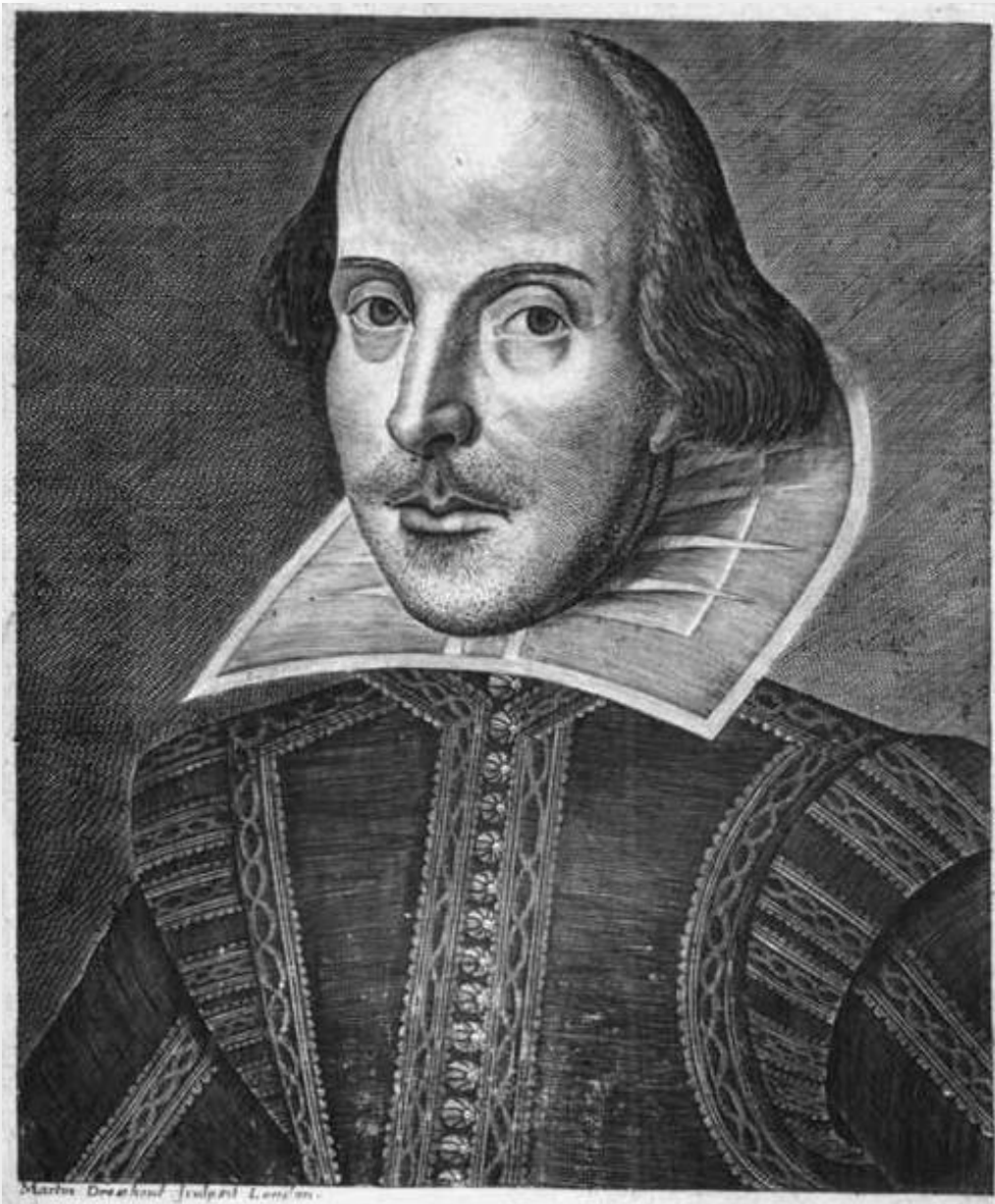


Fig.1. Martin Droeshout's engraving of Shakespeare, first published on the title-page of the First Folio (1623) (Wells and Taylor ii).

*To the Reader*

This figure that thou here seest put,  
It was for gentle Shakespeare cut,  
Wherein the graver had a strife  
With nature to outdo the life.  
O, could he but have drawn his wit  
As well in brass as he hath hit

His face, the print would then surpass  
All that was ever writ in brass!  
But since he cannot, reader, look  
Not on his picture, but his book.

BEN JOHNSON

## CHAPTER I

### LIFE AND WORKS

#### 1. The Author

##### 1.1. Shakespeare's early life

It is impossible to carry out a complete description of William Shakespeare's early life because there are a few substantiated facts that talk about his living. However, these facts provide key elements to portray an approximate image of the English poet.



Fig. 2. Shakespeare's Birthplace  
(<http://www.oldukphotos.com/warwickshire-stratford-upon-avon.htm>).

William Shakespeare was born on April 23, 1564, in the town of Stratford-on-Avon. His father, John Shakespeare, was a glover and a wool dealer. The records show that John Shakespeare as administrator of his father's estate had been fined for keeping a dung-heap

in front of his house in Henley Street.

This house is nowadays considered as Shakespeare's birthplace. In 1557, John married Mary Arden, daughter of a prosperous farmer. The marriage had



effectuated a few days before the coronation of Queen Elizabeth. Of their eight children, four sons and one daughter survived childhood. William was the third child and the eldest son. He was baptized in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon, on April 26, 1564.

Although John Shakespeare was illiterate, he played a prominent role in municipal affairs. His frequent appearances in records suggest that he was a keen man of business. He was named one of the chief burgesses of Stratford. Then he became a chamberlain, an office of responsibility that he held for two years. Then he became an alderman in 1565, and finally a High Bailiff (mayor) in 1568. John Shakespeare's position in Stratford would have brought certain privileges to his family. When William was four years old, he could have seen his father, dressed in furred scarlet robes and wearing the alderman's official thumb-ring, often accompanied by two sergeants.

A few years later, William would have attended a 'petty school'<sup>1</sup> to acquire the basic principles of an education that would be continued at the grammar school.

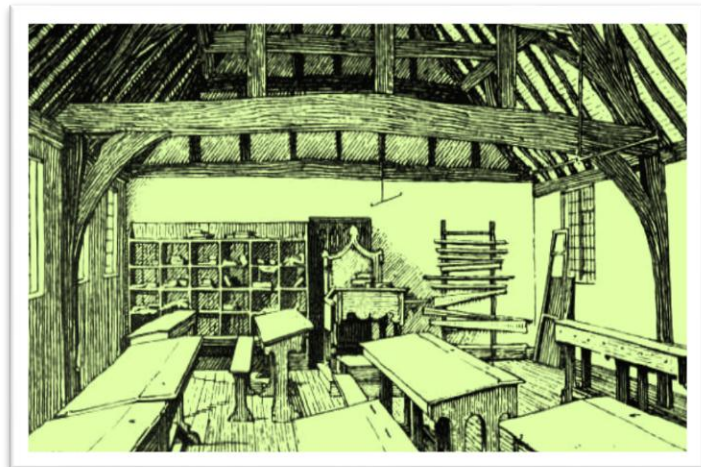


Fig. 3. Grammar School  
([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakespeare\\_authorship\\_question](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakespeare_authorship_question)).

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<sup>1</sup> The word 'petty' derives from the French word 'petit' meaning little or small.



This school had a well-qualified master, and it was assisted by an usher who helped the younger pupils.

Unfortunately, there are not lists of the school's pupils in Shakespeare's time, but since William was the son of an alderman, and therefore he was entitled to a free education, and "the school offered the kind of education that lies behind his plays" (Wells, and Taylor XVI), "he must have attended the Stratford grammar school" (Greer 3).

In the scene (4.1) in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, William Page, a schoolboy, appears in the famous 'Latin' scene, in which he is quizzed by his schoolmaster, Evans. William stumbles through the interview, until he finally admits he has forgotten the declensions of the pronouns. He is then excused from the unexpected lesson.

The scene was presumably written for the educated audience, but the episode may also reflect Shakespeare's childhood memories. He had himself learned Latin from Lily's *Grammar*<sup>2</sup> at school in Stratford.

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Elizabethan boys, from five to seven years old, were at first sent to a 'Petty School.' It was the most elementary level of education. The lessons and general education were conducted not in a school but in the house of the teacher. These Petty schools were often run by well educated housewives who were also considered as 'Dame Schools.' Children's education would have consisted in teaching to read and write in English, learn the catechism, and also learn lessons of behavior at the table.

<sup>2</sup> The boys first learnt the rudiments of Latin with the assistance of the Tudor text-book known as

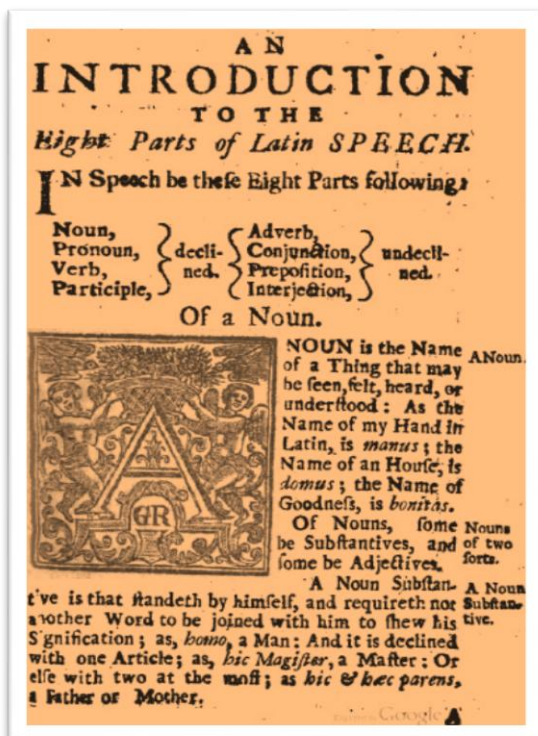


Fig.4. Introductory page from Lily's Grammar: "Of a Noun" (<http://shake-speares-bible.com/2011/06/15/eduardus-is-mv-proper-name/>).

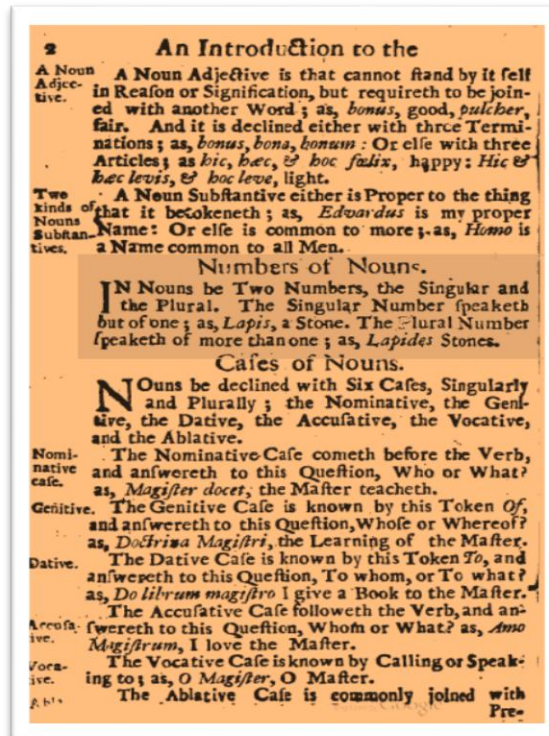


Fig.5. Page number 2 from Lily's Grammar: the content of this page is alluded in Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives Of Windsor* (<http://shake-speares-bible.com/2011/06/15/eduardus-is-my-proper-name/>).

Shakespeare's contact with Lily's Grammar may be proved by the scene (4.1) in *The Merry Wives Of Windsor*. Sir Hugh Evans asks the boy, William, some questions, and the answers to Evans' queries are found on the second page of Lily's Grammar.

Lily's Latin Grammar. This short introduction to grammar, compiled by William Lily, had been authorized by Henry VIII as the sole Latin grammar textbook to be used in schools.



EVANS ... What is '*lapis*', William?

WILLIAM A stone.

EVANS And what is 'a stone', William?

WILLIAM A pebble.

EVANS No, it is '*lapis*'. I pray you, remember in your prain. (4.1. 28-32)

At school, the pupils, from about eight to fifteen years old, endured an arduous routine. Classes began at six in the morning; holidays were infrequent. Education was based on Latin, and the speaking of English was forbidden.

From grammar the pupils moved on to studying works of classical and neo-classical literature. The school activities were to read anthologies of Latin sayings, Aesop's Fables<sup>3</sup>, and the plays of Terence<sup>4</sup> and Plautus<sup>5</sup> on whose *Menaechmi*<sup>6</sup> Shakespeare based his play *The Comedy of Errors*. The pupils had to study manuals of composition, the ancient rules of rhetoric, modern rules of letter-

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<sup>3</sup> Aesop was a Greek writer credited with a number of popular fables. Details of Aesop's life can be found in ancient sources, including Aristotle, Herodotus, and Plutarch.

<sup>4</sup> Terence was a playwright of the Roman Republic, of North African descent. His comedies were performed for the first time around 170–160 BC.

<sup>5</sup> Titus Maccius Plautus (254–184 BC), commonly known as "Plautus", was a Roman playwright. His comedies are the earliest surviving intact works in Latin literature.

<sup>6</sup> The *Menaechmi* is a comedy about mistaken identity, involving a set of twins, Menaechmus of Epidamnus and Menaechmus of Syracuse.



writing, and act scenes from Latin plays. Finally, in order to put their training in practice, they had to compose formal epistles, orations, and declamations which were stimulated by the reading of the most admired authors.

Those facts had a great influence on Shakespeare's mind because it helped him to develop a taste for books, both classical and modern, which would continue for the whole of his working life.

Beyond his school life, Shakespeare had the company of his brothers and sisters. They lived in a beautiful part of the country, with rivers and fields at hand. Each Sunday, his family would go to the parish church, as the law required, and his father, because of his status, would sit in the front pew. There Shakespeare would hear the phrases of the Bible, the Homilies, and the Book of Common Prayer.

Once in a while, travelling players, particularly the Queen's Company, would have visited Stratford, and his father would have had the duty of licensing them to perform. They would have received from John Shakespeare an official welcome. Probably, William saw plays professionally acted in the guildhall.

It is said that his father's financial difficulties grew steadily, and this would have caused Shakespeare to leave the school when he was about thirteen.

On November 27, 1582, it was noted in the Episcopal Register of the Diocese of Worcester an application for a special marriage license "inter Willelmum Shaxpere et Annam Whateley de Temple Grafton" (Greer 3). The groom was William Shakespeare, and the bride was Anne Hathway of Stratford. Anne was



about twenty-six; however, the special license was required for the following reasons: the groom was a minor; that is, William was not yet nineteen years old; marriages might not be solemnized during the penitential time of Advent; Anne's father was dead, and she was pregnant.

Later on, their children were born. Their first child, Susana, was baptized on May 26, 1583, and the twins, Hamnet and Judith, were baptized on February 2, 1585.

What Shakespeare did later is not known. The following years to the baptism of his children and the preceding ones to his theatrical career are called the "lost years." One of the legends about him is recorded by John Aubrey<sup>7</sup> around 1681, and it says that "he had been in his younger years a schoolmaster in the country" (Wells, and Taylor XVI).

Even though Shakespeare's professional career had its center in London, his family remained in Stratford, and he maintained his links with his birthplace until he died.

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<sup>7</sup> John Aubrey (1626 – 1697) was an English antiquary, natural philosopher and writer. He is perhaps best known as the author of a collection of short biographical pieces called *Brief Lives*.

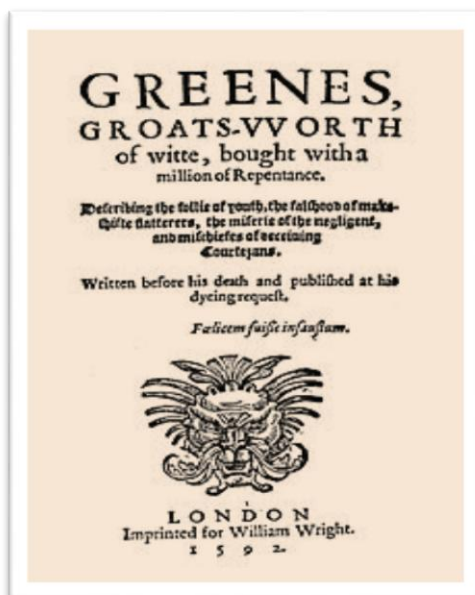




Fig. 6. Shakespeare's birthplace:  
Stratford-upon-Avon  
(<http://www.stratford-upon-avon.co.uk/soatrav.htm>).

## 1.2. Shakespeare's Theatrical Career

It is not known when Shakespeare joined the theater, nor when he began to write. It seems likely, though not certain, that he became an actor before starting to write plays.



The first printed allusion to Shakespeare dates from 1592, by hand of Robert Greene, writer of plays and prose romances. In his work, *Greene's Groatesworth of Wit bought with a Million of Repentance* (1592), Greene addressed his university fellows, Marlowe, Nashe, and Peele, parodying Shakespeare's

Fig. 7. First printed allusion to Shakespeare in Greene's pamphlet published in 1592  
(<http://www.shakespeare-oxford.com/?p=888>).



work and complaining of an actor (Shakespeare) who believes he can write as well as the university-trained playwrights:

There is an Upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tiger's heart wrapt in a player's hide*, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the rest of you; and being an absolute Johannes Fac Totum, is in his own conceit the only Shakescene in a country. (Greer 4)

This pamphlet was published shortly after Greene died, so nobody could find out what he meant. However, Chettle<sup>8</sup> understood that Shakespeare was being accused of plagiarism. Chettle apologized to Shakespeare in the preface of his work *Kind-Heart's Dream* which was published a few months later. His words provide a clear testimony of Shakespeare's successful position in the dramatic world as a writer and adapter, as a Johannes Factotum<sup>9</sup>. Besides, Chettle emphasizes Shakespeare's "... uprightness of dealing, which argues his honesty, and his facetious grace in writing, that approves his art" (Greer 5).

Germaine Greer states that in the sixteenth-century, the theater was as commercial as it is now, so "Shakespeare, as a successful actor, may well have

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<sup>8</sup> Henry Chettle (1564 – 1607) was an English dramatist and miscellaneous writer of the Elizabethan era.

<sup>9</sup> In Latin phrases: Dominus factotum is used for 'one who controls everything', a ruler with uncontrolled power; Johannes factotum, a Jack of all trades, a would-be universal genius, a Mr. Do-Everything.





turned to the university wits for additional material and felt perfectly free to revise what they provided in production. The copying out of plays was a laborious business..." (5).

Wells and Taylor believe that other writers, including Thomas Nashe<sup>10</sup>, contributed to *I Henry IV*, that George Peele<sup>11</sup> is part-author of *Titus Andronicus*, and that Shakespeare wrote part of *Edward III*.

It seems likely that Shakespeare's earliest surviving plays date from around 1590. They include comedies (*The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *The Taming of the Shrew*), history plays based on English chronicles (*The First Part of the Contention; Richard Duke of York*), and a pseudo-classical tragedy (*Titus Andronicus*).

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas Nashe (1567 – 1601) was an English Elizabethan pamphleteer, playwright, poet and satirist.

<sup>11</sup> George Peele (1556 – 1596), was an English dramatist.



Fig. 8. Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton, was an important patron of Shakespeare. This portrait is attributed to John de Critz. He portrays the Earl during his 1603 imprisonment in the Tower of London (Greer 8).

A plague was the devastating outbreak that closed the theaters almost entirely from June 1592 to May 1594. This fact made Shakespeare dedicate to more literary endeavors. In 1593 appeared his narrative poem *Venus and Adonis*, and in 1594 its tragic counterpart, *The Rape of Lucrece*. Both works carry dedications to Henry Wriothesley, third Earl of Southampton. He was only twenty in 1593, and he was already a patron of poets.

Shakespeare's dedications to Henry suggest a strong personal connection with him, "What I have done is yours, what I have to do is yours, being part in all I have, devoted, yours." Many people have speculated about this fact by saying that Henry may be the young man, or one of the young men that are mentioned in Shakespeare's Sonnets.

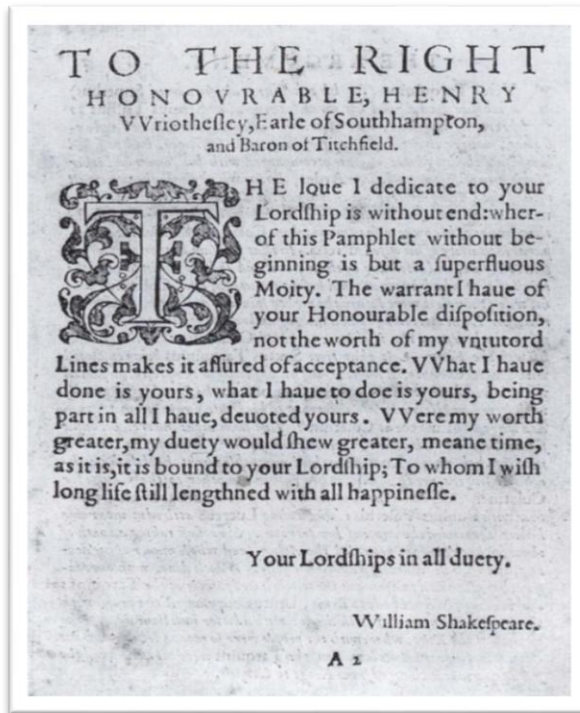


Fig. 9. Dedication page, *The Rape of Lucrece*, with dedication to Southampton by William Shakespeare. It was published in 1594 (Greer 9).

After the plague had diminished, many actors, who had before belonged to different companies, merged to form the Lord Chamberlain's Men (later King's Men). In the Declared Accounts of the Royal Chamber, Shakespeare is named, along with the comic actor Will Kemp and the tragedian Richard Burbage, as payees for performances at court. Shakespeare and Burbage were the leaders of the new company.

It is said that Shakespeare achieved certain eminence as an actor and that he himself acted in different roles. For example, he played Adam in *As You Like it*, and the ghost in *Hamlet*. The Lord Chamberlain's Men rapidly became the leading dramatic company, and Shakespeare stayed with it for the rest of his career as actor, playwright, and administrator.

In 1596, John Shakespeare acquired the official status of gentleman due to a coat of arms that was granted him presumably, thanks to his successful son. In August of that year, Hamnet, William's son, died at the age of eleven and a half, and he was buried in Stratford.



Fig. 10. Detail from the first draft of the grant of arms and crest to John Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon, October 20, 1596 (Wells and Taylor xvii).

In 1597, William Shakespeare bought New Place, a fine old house in Stratford. From that time, Shakespeare often figures in the Stratford records, as a prosperous citizen.

In London, Shakespeare resided near the theaters. The records show him living in Bishopsgate, near the Shoreditch playhouses, in 1596. Later, in 1599, he was living in the Liberty of the Clink, near the Globe.

In 1598 the Lord Chamberlain's Men played *Every Man in His Humor* at the Curtain, and Ben Jonson listed Shakespeare first among the principal comedians. Shakespeare is also listed among the performers of Jonson's tragedy *Senajus* in 1603.

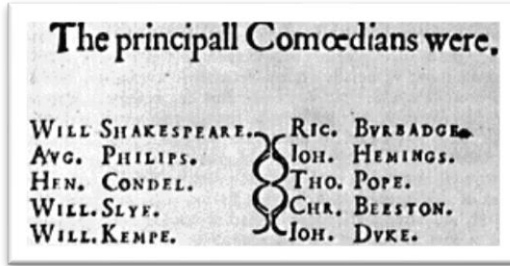


Fig. 11. 1598: List of Actors. In the initial presentation of Ben Jonson's *Every Man In His Humour*, "Will Shakespeare" was a "principall Comoedian" (<http://fly.hiwaay.net/~paul/shakspere/evidence1.html>).

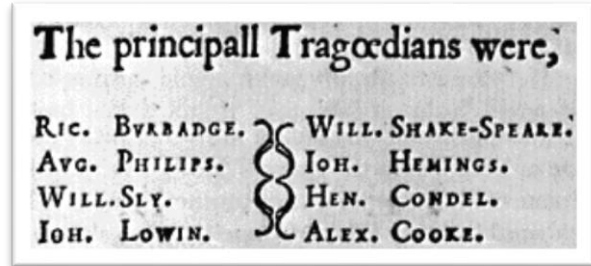


Fig. 12. 1603: List of Actors. In the initial presentation of Ben Jonson's *Sejanus his Fall*, "Will. Shake-speare" was a "principall Tragœdian" (<http://fly.hiwaay.net/~paul/shakspere/evidence1.html>).

In 1598, Shakespeare's reputation as poet, player, and playwright reached its zenith. Richard Barnfield<sup>12</sup> in his work *Poems in Divers Humors* praised Shakespeare's "honey-flowing vein," and Francis Meres<sup>13</sup> wrote a passage in a book called *Palladis Tamia: Wit's Treasury*, in which he makes a comparison among Shakespeare and the Greek, Latin, and Italian Poets:

The sweet witty soul of Ovid lives in mellifluous and honey-tongued Shakespeare, witness his Venus and Adonis, his Lucrece, his sugared sonnets among his private friends, &c. As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for comedy and tragedy among the Latins, so Shakespeare among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage; for comedy witness his Gentlemen of

<sup>12</sup> Richard Barnfield (1574–1620) was an English poet.

<sup>13</sup> Francis Meres (1565 – 1647) was an English churchman and writer.

Verona, his Errors, his Love Labor's Lost, his Love Labor's Won, His Midsummer's Night Dream, and his Merchant of Venice; for tragedy, his Richard the Second, Richard the Third, Henry the Fourth, King John, Titus Andronicus, and his Romeo and Juliet. (Greer 13-14)

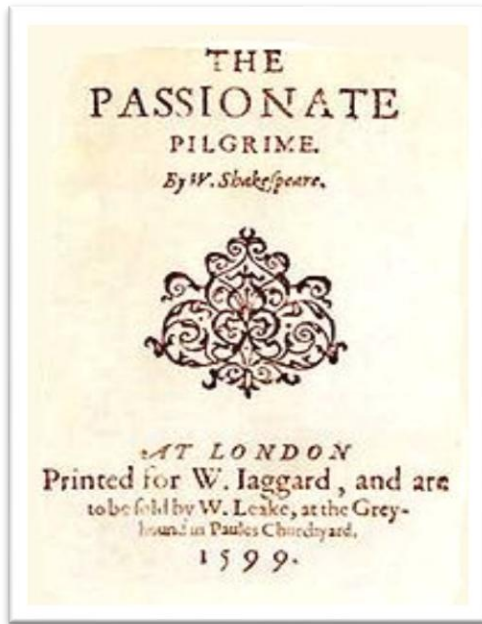


Fig. 13. *The Passionate Pilgrime*, a collection of poems ascribed to Shakespeare's authorship ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Passionate\\_Pilgrim](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Passionate_Pilgrim)).

Shakespeare's personal success during this period may be measured by the ascription of works that not belonged to his authorship. Examples of that are *Lochrine* and *Thomas Lord Cromwell* that were published in 1595 and 1602 respectively as by William Shakespeare. In 1599 William Jaggard<sup>14</sup> published a collection of poems, *The Passionate Pilgrim* by William Shakespeare. Of the twenty poems published in the book only five were by Shakespeare.

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<sup>14</sup> William Jaggard (1568 – 1623) was an Elizabethan and Jacobean printer and publisher, best known for his connection with the texts of William Shakespeare, most notably the First Folio of



Until 1597, when the lease of the company expired, the Lord Chamberlain's Men played in the Theater. This was the first important playhouse in London, and it was situated outside the jurisdiction of the City fathers, who exercised a repressive influence on the drama. From that time, the company seems to have played at the Curtain until 1599. Shakespeare was a member of the syndicate responsible for the building of the first Globe Theater, in Southwark, on the south bank of the Thames.

In 1601 Shakespeare's father died, and he was buried in Stratford. After Queen Elizabeth died, the company was under the patronage of the new king, James I. On May 19, 1603, James I granted Shakespeare and his fellow players a royal Patent under the Great Seal of England. This licensed them to play comedies, tragedies, histories, interludes, morals, pastorals, stage-plays, and others. Thus, The Lord Chamberlain's Men company had become the King's Men company. Unfortunately, London was suffering another severe epidemic which caused the theaters to be closed again; even the King's processional entry in London had to be delayed.

Up to Shakespeare's death, the King's Men played at court more often than all the other theater companies combined. From November 1, 1604, to October 31, 1605, were presented eleven plays at court, and seven of them were by

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Shakespeare's plays.





Shakespeare. Those plays included *The Comedy of Errors*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Othello*, *Measure for Measure*, and *The Merchant of Venice*.

At the same time, Shakespeare's own family affairs engaged his attention. On June 5, 1607, his elder daughter, Susanna, married John Hall, a physician of Puritan tendencies, in Stratford. In the following February, their daughter, and Shakespeare's only grandchild, Elizabeth, was born. Edmund Shakespeare was the only member of the family who took up the theatre as a profession. He was William's youngest brother. He became an actor and died at the age of twenty-eight. He was buried at St. Saviour's Church, on December 31, 1607. It is said that the high cost of Edmund's funeral may have been paid for by his prosperous brother. On September 9, 1608, the poet's mother died and was buried in the parish church.

In 1608, the King's Men recovered the lease of the Blackfriars Theater, and once again, Shakespeare was one of the syndicate of owners. Unfortunately, the residents' protests prevented the company from using it. The Blackfriars served as a winter home, and when the weather was better, performances were presented at the Globe.

The whole of Shakespeare's dramatic work would have probably begun in 1591, and it would have ended in 1611, between his twenty-seventh and forty-seventh year. At that time, Shakespeare was at a late stage in his career.





### 1.3. *Later years and death*

The concluding years of Shakespeare's life were mainly passed at Stratford. However, his plays continued being played at Court. In 1611, *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale* were played before the king who liked them well enough to the extent that he revived them in May 1613, during the Princess Elizabeth's marriage festivities, together with *Othello*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Much Ado*.

*Cardenio*, a lost play, acted by the King's Men in 1613, was ascribed to Shakespeare and Fletcher<sup>15</sup> in a document of 1653; *All is True (Henry VIII)* is also agreed to be a play of the same partnership; and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (1613) seems to be the last play in which Shakespeare collaborated with Fletcher.

One of Shakespeare's last professional tasks was to devise an emblem and motto for the Earl of Rutland to be worn at the mock jousting on the king's accession day in 1613. Such a ceremony is portrayed in *Pericles* (Sc. 6). Shakespeare received 44 shillings for his contribution in the work.

At the beginning of 1616, Shakespeare's health was failing. He called Francis Collins, his solicitor, to draft his will. On February 10, 1616, his second daughter, Judith, married Thomas Quiney.

The cause of Shakespeare's death is undetermined, but probably his illness took a fatal turn in March, when he revised and signed the will that had been

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<sup>15</sup> John Fletcher (1579–1625) was a Jacobean playwright. He was among the most influential dramatists of his day; his fame rivaled Shakespeare's.



drafted in the previous January. By law, his widow was entitled to one third of his estate; however, he left her his "... second-best bed with all the furniture" (Greer 20). Probably, the poet thought his wife was not prepared to manage his property, so as an act of prudence and to safeguard the fortune of his heiresses; he left most of the remainder to his elder daughter, Susanna, and her husband.

On April 23, 1616, he died at the age of fifty-two, and on April 25, the poet was buried in the chancel of Holy Trinity. About 1623, an elaborate monument was erected to Shakespeare's memory in the chancel of the parish church. Gheerart Janseen, a London sculptor, was the creator of this half-length bust that portrays the dramatist on the point of writing.

Shakespeare's widow died on August 6, 1623, at the age of sixty- seven, and she was buried near her husband, inside the chancel, two days later. His elder daughter, Susanna, died on July 11, 1649; his second daughter, Judith, died in Stratford on February 9, 1662, and his last surviving descendant, Elizabeth Hall, who inherited New Place, died in 1670.

The inscription on Shakespeare's funerary monument links him with Socrates and Virgil, and in the First Folio edition of his plays, Jonson links him with his home town as the 'Sweet swan of Avon'.

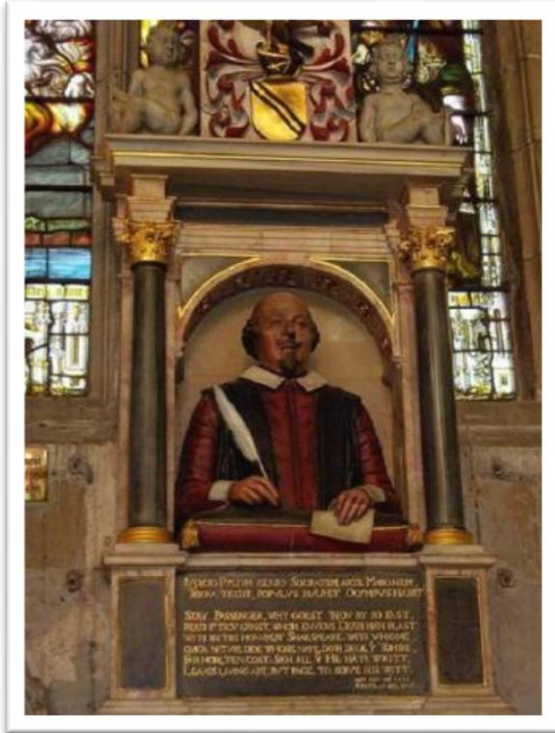


Fig. 14. Shakespeare's monument, designed by Gheerart Janseen, in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon (Wells and Taylor xix).

## 2. Works

### 2.1. Background

#### 2.1.1 The Elizabethan theater

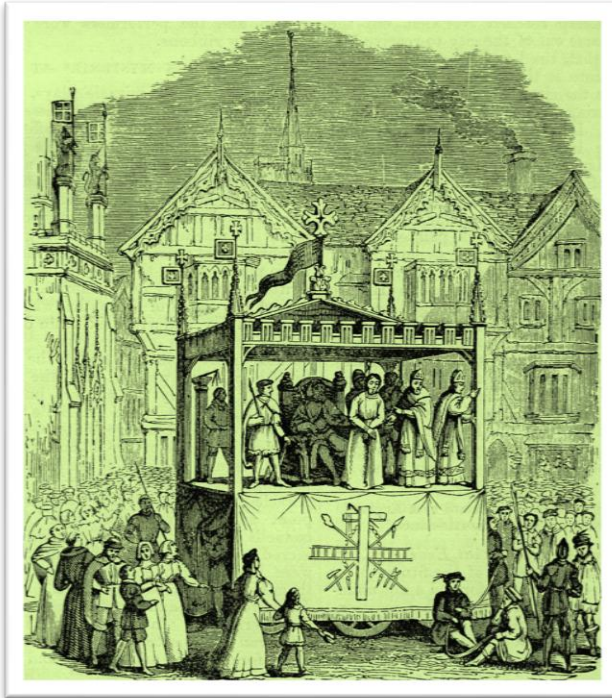


Fig. 15. Middle English pageant wagon: *The Passion and Crucifixion of Christ*  
(<http://mail.luminarium.com/medlit/medievaldrama.htm>)

English Renaissance theater derived from the traditions of the medieval theater. Examples of those traditions were the Mystery plays that were shown on Corpus Christi day by the guilds. The guilds were semi- professional players, and the themes they presented were taken from the Bible.

To present their shows, the guilds devised a moving theater which was a large cart, a wagon, also called a 'pageant', drawn by horses.



Fig.16. A Morality play presents abstract ideas as if they were people: Contemplation, Perseverance, Imagination, and Free Will.  
(<http://aminotes.tumblr.com/page/12>)



The plays performed by the guilds were called pageants, too.

Later, these plays became more secular celebrations, and they were played by traveling groups of players who performed for money on portable stages. These plays were called Morality Plays. The themes were also secular and tried to teach a moral lesson, by means of allegory; that is, through a symbolic representation of ideas. Each player represented a force, not a person.

Ion Youman states that “...with the Morality plays, we have truly professional companies of actors, an important step towards the Elizabethan drama” (127).

When Queen Elizabeth I came to the throne in 1558, there were not buildings specially designed for performances in England, and the system of dramatic presentation called ‘theater in the round’<sup>16</sup> lasted for a long time. Thus, the companies of actors that toured the country had to perform in a variety of spaces. Sometimes the players had to perform in the great halls of the Royal Palaces, in great houses, in Inn Yards, in Town Halls, and in any place where a crowd could be gathered to enjoy a performance.

The main types of venues for Elizabethan plays were the Inn-yards, open air Amphitheatres, and Playhouses. The Elizabethan theater started in the cobbled courtyards of Inns which were also called Inn-yards.

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<sup>16</sup> When a group of players arrived at a new street, they parked their pageant in the middle of the street. Thus, the play could be seen from all sides.



In 1575, some players adapted the inns as temporary outdoor playhouses.

Presumably, they set up a booth stage against a wall on one side of the yard.

The audience was standing, surrounding the stage from the three sides.



Fig. 17. A play in a London Inn Yard, in the time of Queen Elizabeth

([http://www.bookpalace.com/acatalog/Macmillan\\_posters\\_20th\\_Century\\_Illustration\\_Art.html](http://www.bookpalace.com/acatalog/Macmillan_posters_20th_Century_Illustration_Art.html))

These places had a capacity of about 500 spectators. Soon these venues were converted into Playhouses.

The Amphitheaters or open-air theaters were used during the summer season and had a maximum capacity of about 3000 spectators. These venues were also known as public theaters. Examples of those venues were the Theater, the Globe, the Curtain, and the Swan.

The audiences of a public theater were heterogeneous and mainly from the lower classes. The majority of spectators stood in the yard and paid a penny to watch the show; the remainder were sitting on galleries and boxes and paid two pence or more.

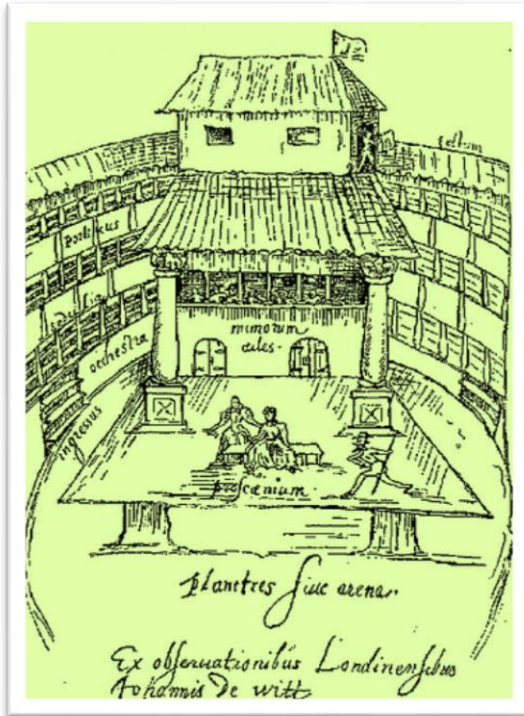


Fig. 18. The Swan Theater: a copy of a drawing made about 1596 by Johannes de Witt, a Dutch visitor to London ([http://www.e-reading-lib.org/bookreader.php/1010845/Shakespeare\\_-William\\_Shakespeare\\_The\\_Complete\\_Works\\_2nd\\_Edition.html](http://www.e-reading-lib.org/bookreader.php/1010845/Shakespeare_-William_Shakespeare_The_Complete_Works_2nd_Edition.html))

During winter, the players moved to indoor playhouses, which were private indoor halls. They were much smaller, and their capacity was about 500 spectators. Examples of those venues were the Blackfriars and the Cockpit. These places were also known as private theaters, and they were opened to more select audiences (gentlemen and nobility).

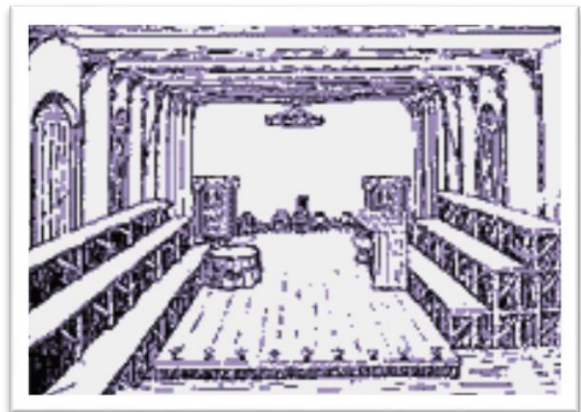


Fig. 19. The First Blackfriars. Reconstruction by Ellie W. Best (<http://www.luminarium.org/encyclopedia/blackfriars.htm>)

In the private playhouses, all the spectators were seated on galleries and boxes, and they paid six pence or more to enjoy a performance. These buildings had a rectangular design, like the theaters we know today.



Fig.20. The actor Richard Burbage (1567-1619) seen in a portrait painted by an unknown artist, possibly Burbage himself. Burbage was well known as the first interpreter of some of Shakespeare's greatest roles, such as *Richard III*, *Hamlet*, *Lear*, and *Othello* (Greer 15).

In 1576, the Players of the Earl of Leicester, led by James Burbage, a joiner, and father of the famous tragedian Richard Burbage of Shakespeare's company, built 'The Theater' in London. It was the first permanent theater, and eventually this building gave its name to all the buildings that were designed for performances.

The Theater seems to have been wooden and polygonal, and it may have had three galleries. The main area of the theater was open, and it had a large yard for spectators.

Later, Burbage's sons were involved in a dispute over the land on which the Theater was built.



Fig. 21. The Globe Theater  
(<http://virtual.clemson.edu/caah/shakespr/vrglobe/index.php>)





They solved that problem by tearing down the Theatre and carrying away the timbers to build a new playhouse on the Bankside. In 1599, they built a new building which they named 'The Globe.'

By this time, the Burbages had become members of the Lord Chamberlain's Company, along with William Shakespeare, and the Globe is famously remembered as the first theater where many of Shakespeare's plays were performed.

In 1613, during a performance of Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*, the first Globe Theater was burned because some sparks were imprudently sent to the roof. Later, a second Globe was built, and it was demolished in 1644 when all plays were banned by the Roundhead Parliament<sup>17</sup> during the Civil War. However, this was not the only reason for the theaters being banned.

Germaine Greer states that "the playhouses were known to be unhealthy places, which is why they were the first institutions to be closed down in times of plague..." (27). Besides, Greer adds that "the playhouses were disorderly places, where prostitutes went in search of clients for the bawdy houses that stood around. There were frequent brawls between the more irrepressible factions of apprentices and students, and other hotheads bearing arms" (28).

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<sup>17</sup> Roundhead was the nickname given to the supporters of the Parliament during the English Civil War. They were also known as Parliamentarians. They fought against King Charles I and his supporters, the Cavaliers (Royalists), who claimed absolute power and the divine right of kings. The goal of the Roundhead party was to give Parliament supreme control over executive administration.

These facts provoked the Puritan attack and persecution. The consequences of the plagues and violent disturbances were paid by the Puritan Corporation of the City of London. Nevertheless, to stop this offense against God, the Puritans tried to persuade people not to go to the playhouses, from the pulpits; however, the Londoners flocked to those places. Moreover, they unsuccessfully deprived the population of access to the playhouses. They accused the performances of being pagan amusements and schools of sin that took people away from God, since those performances exhibited young men dressed in women's clothing.

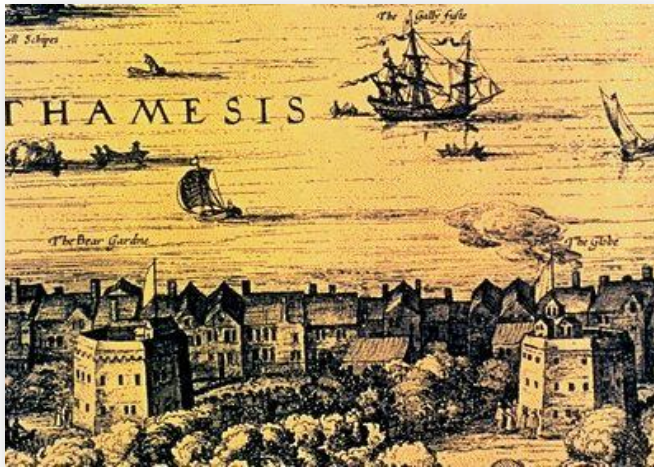


Fig. 22. A view of the south bank of the Thames River, known as the Bankside. It was located outside the jurisdiction of the city of London. The Globe can be seen at the right

(<http://2011apenglish.blogspot.com/2010/09/shakespeare-procreation-sonnets-1-17.html>).

In short, performances were socially dangerous for all the denizens of London, so the solution was to close the theaters, banish the players, or move the playhouses from the City to the suburbs.

Fortunately, the companies of actors belonged to the queen, so the nobles and the whole court acted to save

the players from being persecuted and being considered as rogues and mountebanks by procuring them a license which gave them a rank of respectability. This license allowed the players to rehearse in public their plays

which would be performed before the queen. If a public rehearsal was forbidden, it meant that a royal production was being forbidden. Thus, the placing of players was not only protecting them, but also ensuring the most effective propaganda.

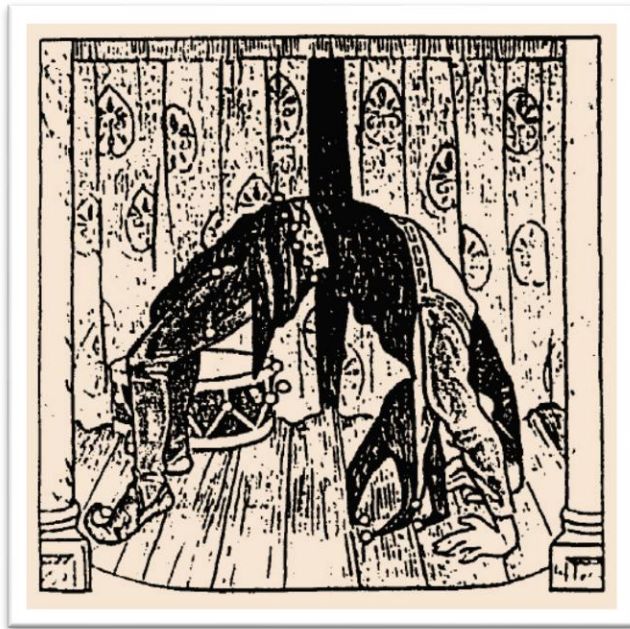


Fig. 23. An acrobat of Elizabethan era  
(<http://www1.brunswick.k12.me.us/bhs/academics/english/shields/hamlet/PDF%20Study%20Guides/Marchette%20Chute.pdf>).

Acting was not an easy profession on the Elizabethan stage. The actors had to be talented, hard-working, and versatile. They had to be able to play numerous roles; that is, if they had to play females characters they had to do it, because acting in England was considered dishonorable for women, so women did not appear on the stage until the seventeenth century.

*Tania Mabel Ayabaca Pineda*

Before an actor became part of a company, he went through a strenuous period, developing his skills as a fencer, a dancer, and an acrobat. This kind of training was extremely useful for the actors because they had to know how to take violent falls without hurting themselves or damaging their expensive costumes.



Fig.24. Edward Kynaston's contemporary portrait (1889). He was one of the last boy players  
([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boy\\_player](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boy_player)).

In playing companies of adult actors, the roles of women were often played by young boys. Perhaps the most important quality of an Elizabethan actor was his voice. Since the actors were men and boys, and the illusion of love-making could not be shown, the words had to be pronounced clearly.



Fig. 25. The Elizabethan technique of fencing ((<http://www1.brunswick.k12.me.us/bhs/academics/english/shields/hamlet/PDF%20Study%20Guides/Marchette%20Chute.pdf>)).

Nearly all plays involved some kind of fighting, and hand-to-hand combats, so the actor's training had to be excellent. The actor had to play real duels without injuring himself or his opponent. These maneuvers required a high degree of training and physical coordination.

Besides, the average man of the audience was an expert on the matter of fencing, so the Londoners would not pay their money to see ineffectual jabs, when the script said that the actors were fighting to the death. Shakespeare, for example, must have gone through long and grueling hours practicing the Elizabethan technique of fencing. He would have learned how to handle a long heavy rapier<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Sword with long slender blade.



in one hand, and a dagger to parry<sup>19</sup> in the other one; how to make savage and calculated thrusts at close quarters from the wrist and the forearm, aiming at his opponent's eyes or below the ribs.



Fig. 26. Dancers of the Elizabethan era (<http://www1.brunswick.k12.me.us/bhs/academics/english/shields/hamlet/PDF%20Study%20Guides/Marchette%20Chute.pdf>).

The physical control had to do with dancing, too. Although there were written dances in the texts of the plays to be performed, it was usual that at the end of a play, some members of the company danced.

For instance, the members of Shakespeare's company were well known abroad because of their excellent abilities as dancers. It is said that they danced marvelously and gracefully.

The fashion of the time was to dance intricate steps, for example, those of the galliard<sup>20</sup>, the exaggerated leap called the capriole, and the volte<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> Parry: in fencing, move to stop the opponent's attack.

<sup>20</sup> The galliard: This was a lively dance whose origin dates from the fifteenth century. It was usually followed and complemented by the Pavane (The Pavane was a court processional dance where Elizabethan couples paraded around the hall, lightly touching the fingers.)

<sup>21</sup> The volte: This Elizabethan court dance was the only dance that allowed the dancers to embrace closely. In this suggestive dance the women were lifted high in the air by their male partners.

The number of actors of a major company were about twelve. Those players who had short speaking parts, or none, were constantly moving about and changing their costumes, to be on the stage, and to play different characters as soon as they heard their cue lines. An example of that is one of Alleyn's<sup>22</sup> productions. In this production a single actor played a Tartar<sup>23</sup> nobleman, a spirit, an attendant, a hostage, a ghost, a child, a captain, and a Persian.



Fig. 27. A poet of the Elizabethan era  
((<http://www1.brunswick.k12.me.us/bhs/academics/english/shields/hamlet/PDF%20Study%20Guides/Marchette%20Chute.pdf>)).

An Elizabethan play was full of action, but the essence that caught the emotions of the audience didn't lie in the physical activity, but in the words. It was through the ear, not through the eye that the audience felt the emotions and the poetry of each one of the characters of a play.

In order for a play to be successful, all the words had to be heard clearly.

This meant that the actor's breath control, emphasis, and enunciation had to be perfect.

<sup>22</sup> Edward Alleyn (1566-1626) an actor, theater owner, and patron of actors. He was the leading tragedian of the Admiral's Men, renowned especially for his performances of Marlowe's heroes.

<sup>23</sup> Tartar: Mongol or Turk.

It was the Renaissance, the time of new ideas and new learning. The playwrights who lived during William Shakespeare's life, including himself, were truly groundbreaking. As a consequence of the time, in the early years of Elizabeth's reign, the players were encouraged to produce anti-Catholic entertainments.

The new drama was literary and rhetorical. Its writers were poets. A playwright was often known as a poet. Shakespeare's most important predecessors and contemporaries, from whom he learned much, were Henry Howard, a pre-Elizabethan poet, who introduced blank verse into English; John Lyly (1554-1606), who developed a courtly comedy and an elegant prose; Robert Greene (1558-1592), who developed a romantic comedy, the tragedian Thomas Kyd (1558-1594), and Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593), whose mighty line<sup>24</sup> put heroism on the stage.

As time passed, Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare began to use blank verse in a more flexible and inventive manner, so that they are credited with establishing the English history play as a dramatic style.



Fig. 28. Christopher Marlowe  
(<http://www.biografiasyvidas.com/biografia/m/marlowe.htm>)

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<sup>24</sup> Marlowe's mighty line is Marlowe's blank verse, with its new vigor and force to suit his heroic themes.



The plays were given in a repertory system<sup>25</sup> on almost every afternoon of the week, except during Lent<sup>26</sup>. The players only had two weeks to rehearse a new play, and during that time the company would be performing other plays.

The success of a play depended almost entirely on the actors. They had to have extraordinary memories. Each player had his own written lines with minimal cue lines (the lines spoken by another actors just before his own) which told him when to speak. There was a bookholder or prompter who had the complete script, and sometimes he helped the actors who had forgotten their lines. Mainly, the prompter had to make sure that the actors entered at the right moment, and properly equipped. The strain on the memory was great and demanded a high degree of professionalism.

The conditions of employment were carefully regulated. A contract of 1614 shows that Robert Dawes, an actor and sharer, was fined one shilling for not attending the beginning of a rehearsal, two shillings for missing a complete rehearsal, three shillings if he was not ready for a performance, ten shillings if four members of the company considered him to be overcome with drink, and one pound if he came to perform without license, or he just used the excuse of sickness.

The standards of competition to be a professional in the London Theater were rigorous, so Chettle was right when he praised Shakespeare for being excellent in the art he professed.

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<sup>25</sup> Theatrical system in which a company of actors alternates performances of several different plays.

<sup>26</sup> Period before Easter in the Christian Calendar.



The word “theater” in Shakespeare’s time meant not principally a place where one might watch dramas, or even a place where actions are played out (as in the modern survivals *operating theater* and *theater of war*), but something further, implying a whole gamut displayed. Theater in this sense did not present actions of particular men in particular places, but a picture of man’s life in *toto*. This was the claim which lay behind the calling of the playhouse built in Shoreditch in 1576 “The Theatre.” (Greer 64- 65)

### 2.1.2. Poetics

The Puritan attack was not an unnoticed fact for the Elizabethan playwrights; on the contrary, they were conscious that the theater had a responsibility to the public. The function of the theater was not only to entertain but to show a moral teaching, not by religious means but in an impressive way.



Fig. 29. Quintus Horatius Flaccus (65 BC – 8 BC) known in the English-speaking world as Horace. He was the leading lyric poet in Latin (<http://pinterest.com/ranatarikhan/ancient-rome/>).



Germaine Greer states that the Elizabethan playwrights fulfilled this function, motivated by the Horatian maxim which said, “Omne tulit punctum, qui miscuit utile dulci: Lectorem delectando pariterque monendo” (29). In other words, the Horatian maxim meant that the playwrights’ function was to delight and instruct the audience and the readers at the same time.

In Shakespeare’s sonnets, for example, there are direct allusions to moral ideas. He combines his fantasy with real elements taken from music, law, medicine, navigation, farming, the court, usury, alchemy, painting, astronomy, etc., to induce profound meditations about the nature of love, sexual passion, death, time, etc.

Before analyzing Shakespeare’s sonnets, it’s important to mention that moral ideas are dependent on history; that is, the ideas of good and evil change from generation to generation, from town to town, from one social class to another. Going further, moral liberty even depends on the level of conscience of human beings to accept or reject imposable rules by society, once they know the interests of the society in which they live. These changes are also reflected in Shakespeare’s messages which are implicit or explicit in his poetry.

For instance, a fragment of sonnet 129 says:

Th’ expense of spirit in a waste of shame

Is lust in action; and till action, lust

Is perjured, murd’rous, bloody, full of blame... (1-3)



In this fragment, Shakespeare explores the reaction of the human psyche to sexuality. He says that the promptings of the sexual urges are lust in action, and lust in action is murderous, perjured, and bloody. The promptings of sexual urges and lust in action make people feel guilty and full of shame.

Perhaps when Shakespeare wrote this sonnet he was influenced by the Christian imperative which dignified the virginal life and scorned the bodily functions, or simply he tried to express a temporary aberration of his mental state as a consequence of the prevailing opinion of the time. In this sonnet, Shakespeare clearly shows that his moral ideas were dependent on the interests of the social class that was ruling at that moment.

However, when he wrote *Antony and Cleopatra*, it seems that he put his conflict aside because Antony celebrated sexuality as a glorification of nature. Antony was completely alienated. He said that kingdoms, which represented power, meant nothing in comparison with the union between two people. For Antony, this union, this power of love meant the nobleness of life...

ANTONY

Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch  
Of the ranged empire fall. Here is my space.  
Kingdoms are clay. Our dungy earth alike  
Feeds beast as man. The nobleness of life  
Is to do thus; when such a mutual pair  
And such a twain can do't, - in which I bind



On pain of punishment the world to weet-

We stand up peerless. (1.1. 35-40)

Shakespeare changed his mind due to the moral liberty that his characters attained; that is, Shakespeare realized that man is open to several possibilities. Man is the protagonist of his own life, and at any time he can put all dogmas aside, and the way he decides to lead his life is what will define the person he will be. Thus, man begins questioning, doubting, and reasoning the established truths to reach his own conclusions. "Know thyself" said Socrates. Through dialogue and his humble tone, Socrates led his audience to passion by inquiring about existence and identity. In Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates embraced this ancient challenge humbly, "I am not yet able, [...], to know myself; so it seems to me ridiculous, when I do not yet know that, to investigate irrelevant things."

I think Shakespeare did that. He tried to attain a self-knowledge of man. His plays talk about man's intimacy with himself. Shakespeare wanted to know man's fears and virtues, but he also wanted to know his dignity and how the forces that move the universe transformed him.

In order to enter man's intimacy, Shakespeare inquired into and expressed many shades of feeling; the several and complex experiences of lovers, and how these experiences affected men and women in youth, in maturity, and in old age.

For instance, in sonnet 116, Shakespeare talks about the changes that militate against love.

...Love is not love



Which alters when it alteration finds... (2-3)

I think this fragment has a universal message, especially for all the couples that are in love and believe that love is a long-lasting feeling. Perhaps Shakespeare realized that love was a feeling that did not last forever, that there was a change, an alteration that militated against it. If love changes, ceases, or becomes unfaithful due to a physical decay or due to any other circumstance, it is not a true love; that is, if love changes or ceases it is because its magical essence, that transforms the consciences of the lovers, is gone.

Although Shakespeare was aware of these imminent changes, he focused on the power of poetry to defeat them. Thus, in his allegorical poem "*The Phoenix and Turtle*", Shakespeare alludes to a different kind of love.

This poem was published in a collection of poems titled *Love's Martyr*, by Edward Blount, in 1601, and it has led to many conflicting interpretations. It has also been considered as the first great published metaphysical poem.

A fragment of the poem says:

So they loved, as love in twain

Had the essence but in one,

Two distincts, division none.

Number there in love was slain. (lines 25-30)



Fig. 30. The Phoenix and the Turtle (<http://www.fanpop.com/clubs/disney-crossover/images/31012631/title/phoenix-turtle-photo>).



Fig. 31. Plotinus  
([http://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soubor:Plotinus\\_LXXIIIv.jpg](http://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soubor:Plotinus_LXXIIIv.jpg)).

In this poem, Shakespeare uses philosophical terms in their technical sense. Perhaps he was influenced by Neoplatonism; that is, by the philosophy that took shape in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century a.d. and whose main doctrines were based on the teachings of Plato. The earliest contributor was Plotinus.



Plotinus was an Egyptian philosopher who took up the study of philosophy and traveled to Alexandria to study it.

Greeks and Christians shared Plotinus' burning eagerness to apprehend the divine being completely and directly, in order to unite with it in a whole unity. However, when the reason displaced the mythical thought which was represented by the several gods, the divine being was more unknown and less understandable.

The divine being was for Plotinus wholly ineffable; that is, it was unable to be expressed in words; it was beyond the limits of experience. It was supreme, and it could not be divided. It was "One." This term "One" is typically a pythagorist notion. The particularity of pythagoreanism was to find in math a clue to solve the enigma of the universe. The Pythagorists were a Greek organization of astronomers, musicians, mathematicians, and philosophers led by Pythagoras who believed that the universe was essentially a manifestation of mathematical relationships; that is, that all things could be represented by numbers, or the essence that was behind them was numbers. These ideas also influenced Plato's philosophy, and consequently, Plotinus'.

Plotinus' One created in itself the world, and it was present in everything; however, it could not be any existing thing, nor was it simply the sum of the whole of things, but it was prior to all existent things.

From the One emanates a triad, which we curiously find in some religions, (for example, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in the Christian religion) that



he calls: the Being or the Spirit, the Nous or the Intellect, and the Soul of the world, or matter.



Fig. 32. A didactic way to understand how the One thinks about itself through the Intellect  
([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narcissus\\_%28mythology%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narcissus_%28mythology%29)).

From the One becomes the Being, and from it, the Intellect or the Nous which looks at the One. The Intellect is the world of ideas and archetypes of Plato. It is the Being with all its shapes; it is an intemporal conscience. It is eternal life but without movement. There life goes by calm and serene, and truth is the food of life. Truth is contemplated by all things that exist there.

If the One is indeterminate, the Nous is its first shape. The Nous is not only thought of the One, but that contemplating the One, the Nous gazes, at the same time, at everything that is born from the One; therefore, it is gazing at itself.

All the objects that become from the Nous exist in a place without time and space, since they don't have a sensible shape, but not for this reason, they lose their own identity.

From the Nous comes the Soul of the world. If the Nous looks at the One, the Soul looks at the Nous. If the Nous is Being and Truth, the Soul turns around the





Being and the Truth, and this movement constitutes the circle of time, as Plato said.

The Soul gives to the bodies the life of the Nous, the essential condition of the Being. Besides, this Soul imposes a certain order and governs the physical reality that creates.

The Soul of the world contains the plurality of individual souls, and here appears man, who comes from the intelligible world, but has fallen into matter. To make the process of creation understandable, Plotinus compares it with a beam of light which is deadened when it moves away from its fountain and ends up transforming itself into darkness. In this case, the divine being or the One ends up transforming itself into matter; that is, matter is for Plotinus absence of good, of truth; matter is the first evil.

Plotinus said that matter receives the souls and wraps them, to make them forget their origin. Thus, the souls in contact with the corporeal world are absorbed by the needs, problems, passions, and sensations of this physical world, so that they are dispersed and moved away from their divine origin. This entry of the soul into matter means its fall into darkness; its remoteness from the divine source.

The world of senses is bad and irrational; but at the same time, this world has been created by the divine light that has penetrated it, so that this world becomes rational and beautiful. This act of emanation of the world by the One was an overflowing act in which this One stayed intact; that is, it did not lose its essence.



Plotinus' ethics says that the aim of man is his participation in the divine life. Man gets this divine participation when he becomes independent from the world. His main moral mission is to set free the soul from the body; that is, to separate the soul from matter. The supreme aim of man's soul is to return to the divine light; that is, to return to the One. How? The human soul can reach the divine source again thanks to love. Love was for Plato like a divine gift, an impulse that made lovers go together toward an encounter with what is good and beautiful.

Plotinus said that human beings perceive what is beautiful almost always with our sight, even though sometimes we do it with our hearing too; that is, we can perceive beautiful things through our senses. But, going further, we can also perceive beauty in habits, actions, characters, sciences, and virtues, so that beauty is not only a characteristic of matter or a characteristic of bodies, but it is beyond them.

According to Plotinus, beautiful habits and virtues cause an interior agitation, a joy, an admiration, an eagerness to stay near the person who possesses these beautiful habits and virtues. The soul feels a loving madness, it falls in love, and love arises. This loving feeling includes all types of love, even love for a body. Love is born in the soul because the soul has eagerness of beauty in order to get back to the superior Beauty. The soul stems from this superior Beauty; therefore, its nature is beautiful. The soul is related to this Beauty, that's why the human soul looks for it.



Thanks to love, the soul acquires the wings which allow it to get back toward Beauty; that is, toward the One. Plotinus said that love is the way toward the junction with what is perfect, divine, and beautiful. Why? Because with love we are able to do and live things that, we thought, were impossible. Because with love we leave tranquility and comfort to help others.

In *The Banquet*, Plato relates a myth about love. This myth was told to Socrates by Diotima. According to this wise woman, when Aphrodite was born, the gods celebrated a banquet. They were drinking nectar, the drink of the gods. Among the guests was Porus, the god of abundance and resources. When he was drunk, he entered Zeus' garden and fell asleep. Then Penia, poverty, came to beg the leftovers of the banquet, and suddenly she saw Porus. She thought she had to take advantage of the opportunity and become pregnant by Porus, to improve her situation. Immediately, she lay down next to the god and conceived Eros. Thus, Eros was conceived on Aphrodite's birth.

As the son of wealth and poverty, Eros inherited the characteristics of both. Due to his mother, Eros is poor; he doesn't have a home; he is an inseparable companion of indigence, but on the other hand, due to his father, he is always in wait of what is beautiful and good; he is brave and persevering, a lover of knowledge, fertile in resources, a formidable wizard.

According to Plato, Eros is neither beautiful, nor ugly; neither good, nor bad. Eros is a mediator between unequal beings and, as a mediator plays the role of cohesion in the cosmos.

But Plotinus asks himself, what does Plato exactly mean with this myth? What does Eros symbolize? Plotinus says that love, or in this case Eros, is like an eye because it provides lovers with the possibility to see each other by its mediation; that is, this eye allows seeing the beauty not only of the bodies, but of the souls too. Love is a mixed thing, since it is devoid of good and beauty, but it is in wait of what is beautiful; it is greedy for wisdom; it



Fig. 33. Eros  
(<http://www.google.com.ec/url?sa=i&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=images&cd=&docid=NcVz1JpSX-KCoM&tbnid=yyy9v8goVanqEM:&ved=0CAUQjRw&url=http%3A%2F%2Fflasideasdelosnaufragos.wordpress.com%2F2010%2F05%2F13>)

participates of the abundance; it is possessed by the capacity of falling in love with beings, with life, and thus it makes man get to know part of the mystery that existence encloses.

Thus, the soul has to impose upon itself a titanic fight, in which it must make its greatest effort in order to not remain without participating of the greatest visions. If the soul achieves this aim, the human soul is happy, thanks to this vision. The only and real unlucky one is he who does not discover what is beautiful. To get back to the One, it is necessary to give up the superficial beauties of the objects of the world, and to look beyond them.



Plato's myth suggests that erotic love takes human beings from the level of affective relationships to the level of affective-intellectual relationships; that is, to the level of knowledge of truth.

Plotinus suggests that to return to the One, we have to change our way of seeing things; that is, we have to arouse the interior eye of our soul. Plato said that the objective of education was to open this eye, and not only to accumulate knowledge. This eye is the only one that is able to perceive what is beautiful, good, and fair. But how do we arouse this eye? Plotinus answers "by not overlooking what drives learning;" that is, by not overlooking what can teach us something. Plotinus invites us to dialogue with ourselves to arouse the eye of our soul that watches, not only superficial beauty, but all the mysteries that life and nature can keep awake, thanks to love. Plotinus proposes to look at ourselves as an act of reflection, as a process of careful thought. This implies to reconsider our previous ideas, actions, and decisions to find the beauty that inhabits in us.

In short, when we love something, we are seeking to possess the good that is in it, not temporarily, but permanently. Thus, Plato gave his definition of love: 'Love is desire for the perpetual possession of the good.' Love was also the opportunity to get out of ourselves, of our corporeidad and material world, to reach the divine light. Love was the conversion of man from the sensible world to the suprasensible one. Platonic love did not consider the person as the last aim, but this person was a means to achieve a superior purpose, which was his or her identification with divinity.



The platonic Eros is a cosmic impulse that is able to take us not only toward the loved being, but also toward wisdom and truth, overcoming simple and corporeal love. Love is the way to communicate the sensible with the intelligible. Eros is the force that produces magnificent deeds, inspiring value and personal sacrifice to such an extent that lovers are able to sacrifice their lives.

With respect to the poem, Shakespeare deals with the death of the ideal love. He describes the Phoenix and the Turtle allegorically. Some critics say that the poem is also an elegy because its content is somber, and it laments the birds' death, and at the same time it memorializes their death.

Those two birds were virtuous, and they loved each other very much. One day, they became one because they died together in a fire. Shakespeare may have been influenced by Plotinus' philosophy, since both have some points in common. For example, Shakespeare uses philosophical terms like essence, to express that the two birds are individually different, but that they have the same essence; that is, they sprouted from the same essence that created the world. In Plotinus' words they sprouted from the Nous or from the mind of the One that has the ideas of creation. In this case, two different ideas, a dove and a phoenix, that's why they were individually different, but they shared the same essence, since they belonged to the species of birds and were created by the One.

So they loved as love in twain

Had the essence but in one... (25-26)



Once Eros touched their souls, they had an eagerness for beauty and truth; that is, thanks to Eros, the two birds fell in love, and they loved each other very much. They not only saw the beauty of their appearances, but the beauty of their souls, too.

Beauty, truth and rarity

Grace in all simplicity... (53-54)

However, this love was neither a temporary love, nor was it a worship of an empty beauty. Once again, Shakespeare agrees with Plotinus, metaphorically of course, by saying that Eros gave the two birds the opportunity to know what they were able to do for love; that is, the emotions' lack of control that love can produce were well oriented and used as means to get to know the truth, the good; in other words, to know that man was able to defeat the senses, the pleasure; to know that love is not only to enjoy a mutual physical pleasure; to know that beauty is not only the appearance of things, but that Eros or love takes out the best qualities of our being to produce magnificent deeds, to inspire value and personal sacrifice. Consequently, love made these two birds virtuous.

Leaving no posterity

'Twas not their infirmity,

It was married chastity... (59-61)

These two birds were seeking to possess the good, not temporarily, but permanently. Their purpose was to reach the divine light from which they sprouted. That's why they feed their love with truth, constancy, and beauty.



Here the anthem doth commence:

Love and constancy is dead,

Phoenix and the turtle fled... (21-23)

However, they didn't seek only the material beauty that could be perceived through the senses, but the beauty that love was able to take out of them and reflect in their deeds, ideas, habits, characters, etc. Going further, they defied the time and changes that militated against love and which make man forget his origin. These two birds aroused the eye of the soul, which sees authentic beauty and makes man feel happy.

The mutual flame could mean their souls; that is, the divine light that had them set free from matter, from their bodies, through death to identify with the One.

Phoenix and the turtle fled

In a mutual flame from hence... (23-24)

Due to their virtuous life, they attained to be one with divinity, and according to Plotinus' description of the triad that emanates from the One, Shakespeare is clearly preaching that the two birds reached the Nous; that is, after they died they were in a place where there was no time or space.

Hearts remote, yet not asunder,

Distance and no space was seen

'Twixt this turtle and his queen.

But in them it were a wonder... (29-32)

Another point of convergence between Shakespeare and Neoplatonism is Pythagoreanism, as we mentioned before. The particularity of this philosophy was





to find in math a clue to solve the enigma of the universe. When the two birds were one, this contact with the divinity or with the One made the distinction, the number, the individuality be erased.

Two distincts, division none;

Number there in love was slain... (27-28)

This union caused conflict to reason, since it was used to interpret reality in mathematical terms, and at that moment it was confounded. It had seen things grow on the Loom of space and time, where the laws of math were applicable.

Reason, in itself confounded,

Saw division grow together

To themselves, yet either neither,

Simple were so well compounded... (41-44)

Shakespeare uses personification to lead us to many interpretations, but I think he believed that everything, not just human beings, strives for the achievement of some good, so that not only birds, or human beings, but the entire universe seems to be continuously in love. Indeed, it is love that makes the world go round; without it nothing can exist.

Some critics say that Shakespeare rejects Plotinus' doctrine because he believes that it is impossible to achieve the One. Besides, they argue that in Shakespeare's sonnets there are no references to angels or to salvation after death, such as in John Donne's Holy Sonnets, but just worms and darkness. For this reason they claim that the poem is for Shakespeare, despite all the wonderful



philosophical notions, a fable like the myth of the Phoenix, in this case with two dead birds. Perhaps they believe that because of the last part of the poem:

### THRENOS.

Beauty, truth, and rarity.  
Grace in all simplicity,  
Here enclosed in cinders lie.

Death is now the phoenix' nest;  
And the turtle's loyal breast  
To eternity doth rest... (53-58)

Truth may seem but cannot be,  
Beauty brag, but 'tis not she.  
Truth and beauty buried be... (62-64)

I don't think Shakespeare rejected Plotinus' doctrine at all, but he made a deep lamentation of his philosophy. In Threnos, Shakespeare laments that there are a few beings who are able to recognize the divine light that co-inhabits with them; in other words, man has a divine essence inside him. Perhaps Shakespeare did not seek to attain the elevated ideals of Plato and Plotinus with his poetry, the identification of man's soul with the One, but he metaphorically wanted to show that man was not able to beget new generations of men able to do good, to feel love and to feed it with truth and constancy, although the feeling is exhausted, and to look for beauty beyond appearances. Using Plotinus' words, it seems that man does not want to shine, nor to recover his divine light, nor to recognize his interior beauty, although love gives him that opportunity. Eros inserts us in a different world, where our individuality raises up truth and beauty; Eros takes out the best of



us and, according to Plotinus, when our souls are good we can appreciate beauty made virtue.

It seems that human beings reject all these opportunities; that's why Shakespeare laments that truth, beauty, and grace be buried; as a consequence, man has to live in darkness, as a slave of the corporeal world, the first evil, as Plotinus said. Human beings don't want to take a risk to live this loving delivery which later becomes an eagerness for our own improvement, to continue with this risk of loving delivery.

I think Shakespeare's lamentation is applicable even nowadays because today love is not considered as a feeling from which to learn, but is considered a spontaneous feeling, a desire, and an attraction that many times doesn't last; or sometimes there is a tendency to consider love between two people like ownership; that is, one person enslaves the other one.

Nowadays there is a worship of beautiful bodies through technology, surgery, and products. Everything is valid. However, there is a tendency to value more a beautiful body than the beauty of ideas, deeds, habits, customs, etc. We seek an empty beauty that follows many stereotypes according to fashion. These stereotypes hide the great power of the market, which has been used to manipulate and to sell something, or perhaps these stereotypes hide needs and weaknesses of a society that suffers lack of love.

I think Shakespeare claims that human beings do have goodness in their souls, but there are few who are able to recognize and maintain that goodness. Most of them like to bury truth, constancy, and good in order to live in darkness.



Indeed, our corporeal world makes us forget our origin; however, Eros gives us the opportunity to know our human condition. Thus, Eros becomes an educational agent.

Shakespeare not only used philosophical terms, but he was able to think and feel in those terms. He evolved from the most elemental similes to the deepest metaphors. His metaphors were not so different from the metaphors of the greatest metaphysicians. Aristotle said that the metaphor is the maximum gift of the poet because he is able to get at the similarities among the things of reality.

Nowadays, new researches in neuroscience, cognitive psychology, and linguistics claim that metaphors are not just words that help to describe a concept that exists in the mind, or simply figures of speech used to make expressions more poetic and appealing, but they represent the means by which the human brain understands something abstract. The deepest metaphors are not optional or decorative. Some research workers say that metaphors are like a sense, like seeing or hearing, and many aspects of our reality can be perceived and experienced only through them. Metaphoric language shows the relationships of things that are not noticed, making them understandable; that is, our brain understands what is not concrete in terms of something else. Thus, we expand the understanding of our reality (Abrams 243).

Shakespeare was the great master of metaphor. His genius made extraordinary associations, and he had the ability to summarize the human emotions and to pose general truths in simple and profound metaphors. For example, the feelings and experiences of a love story are more or less the same in



Ecuador and in Greece; this is a general truth. When we read his works, our five senses, our own sufferings corroborate what Shakespeare wrote.

Shakespeare extracted his metaphors from life itself, and perhaps from his own experience. His metaphors were also oriented toward other aspects of life, too. Thus, the concept that there is a justice for the rich and another one for the poor is shown in *King Lear*:

LEAR

...Plate sin with gold,

And the strong lance of justice hurtles breaks;

Arm it in rags, a pigmy's straw does pierce it. (4.5. 161-163)

Medieval literature made use of personification and allegory to communicate concepts and states of mood. This medieval practice survives to a certain extent in Shakespeare's works, and he also uses personification; however, his method is more subtle. He doesn't use an abstract word with conventional attributes, as the medieval practice used to do. Instead, personification achieved its effect through a phrase, a verb, or an epithet. Thus, in Shakespeare's works desire throws up, dissimulation feeds, corruption bubbles, reason is impoverished, etc.

At the beginning, Shakespeare was mainly a poet who was influenced by Spenser, Marlowe, and Lyly. Then he forsakes verse in favor of prose because some of his characters demanded this new medium, and Marlowe's powerful verse was easy to imitate.



“Nihil est in intellectu quod non prius fuerit in sensu” Aristotle would say, paraphrasing the maxim that all the objects of our thought, including our most abstract intellectual concepts, are derived from the content of our sensorial experience.

Some critics allude to this maxim to illustrate Shakespeare’s style. They claim that the style of his most lofty works owes its vigor to this simultaneous and harmonious activity of knowledge: Nihil est in intellectu quod non prius fuerit in sensu. In other words, Shakespeare thought with his body. In his tragic period, he made use of metaphors combining abstract and concrete things; sensual and intellectual concepts. An example of this is the complex allegory of *The Tempest*. Germaine Greer states that Shakespeare becomes involved in the polarities presented by his characters. Thus, “Ariel is air and Caliban earth; Ariel is soul and Caliban body; Ariel is intellect and Caliban appetite; Ariel intellection and Caliban sensory response” (43).

Jean Kot claims that there are two types of historical tragedy. The first one is based on the conviction that history has a sense and a definite direction. The tragedy of this kind of history lies in the price of progress that humanity has to pay. Marx compared history with a mole that digs without stopping below the land. The mole lacks conscience; however, he excavates in a definite direction. His dreams are not guiding his direction, but the movement of his claws and teeth. The mole could be tragic if the land buries him before reaching the surface. The second one states that history has no sense and stays static or repeats its cycle cruelly, like being born and dying. A mole digs the land, but he will never get to emerge to the



surface. New generations of moles are born, dig the land in every direction, but they are always buried by the land. For a long time, the mole has imagined himself to be the master of creation. He thinks that there is a God of moles who has created the moles, and he has promised them an immortality of moles. However, suddenly the mole realizes that he is only a mole. A mole suffers, thinks, and feels; however, his sufferings, thoughts, and feelings could not alter his fate as a mole. He continues digging the land, and the land will always bury him. It is at this moment that the mole realizes that he is a tragic mole.

According to Kot the second type of historical tragedy is closer to Shakespeare's poetry, not only when he wrote *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, but from his first stories to *The Tempest*.

#### HAMLET

Well said, old mole. Canst work i'th' earth so fast? Can you dig the earth so fast?

A worthy pioneer... (I. 5. 164-165)

Samuel Johnson in his *The Preface to Shakespeare* praises Shakespeare's works for his fidelity to human nature in general:

Shakespeare is above all writers [...] the poet of nature; the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life. His characters are not modified by the customs of particular places, unpractised by the rest of the world; by the peculiarities of studies or professions, which can operate but upon small numbers; or by the





accidents of transient fashions or temporary opinions: they are the genuine progeny of common humanity, such as the world will always supply, and observation will always find. (Johnson)

Johnson also analyzed the criticisms made of Shakespeare's plays. These criticisms said that Shakespeare was guilty of having blurred the genres of tragedy and comedy which were prescribed by the laws and customs of the ancient poets. Johnson argues that the ancient poets treated tragedy and comedy as two different matters that should be treated separately.

Johnson claims that Shakespeare's works were divided into comedies, histories, and tragedies. For instance, a comedy is an action whose end requires a happy ending for the principal characters. A tragedy only required a catastrophic ending. A history was a series of actions; that is, a chronological succession, independent of each other, and without any tendency to introduce a conclusion.

For Johnson, Shakespeare's plays, defined according to all these denominations of drama, are neither tragedies nor comedies in the strict sense of these terms, "but compositions of a distinct kind; [...] mingled with endless variety of proportion and innumerable modes of combination; and expressing the course of the world, in which the loss of one is the gain of another" (Johnson).

According to Johnson, Shakespeare has "united the powers of exciting laughter and sorrow not only in one mind, but in one composition..." Thus "Shakespeare's mode of composition is the same; an interchange of seriousness



and merriment,” developing a “mingled drama” which is a mixture of sorrow and joy that is more realistic and morally instructive:

There is always an appeal open from criticism to nature; [...] the end of poetry is to instruct by pleasing. That the mingled drama may convey all the instruction of tragedy or comedy cannot be denied, because it includes both in its alteration of exhibition and approaches nearer than either to the appearance of life. (Johnson)

José Vega states that “in the Renaissance Europe of the sixteenth-century, Aristotle’s *Poetics* had become a strait jacket that was able to brake and to limit the dramatic inspiration of the poets” (251).

The rules proposed by Aristotle in his *Poetics* decreed how any play must be structured according to the unities of time, place, and action. The unity of time had to do with the duration; that is, the action in a play should take place in a single day; the unity of place was related to one locality; the stage should not represent more than one place; the unity of action had to do with a single set of incidents which were related as cause and effect, having a beginning, a middle, and an end.

As an example of this, Ion Youman compares Shakespeare with Ben Jonson.

Shakespeare followed no rules and had no dramatic theory; Jonson was a classicist. Ben Jonson’s plays generally obey the rules of unity; the action takes place in the course of a single day, and the scene



does not jump about from place to place, as in Shakespeare, but stays in the same place where the play begins. (145)

Perhaps the best example that illustrates this theory is Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. The story takes place in Alexandria, Rome, and Egypt. With this displacement of stages, we have the rupture of the unity of place. The events develop in about a decade, rupture of the unity of time, and the variety of little actions that are related to the historical action represent the rupture of unity of action.

Finally, José Vega argues that "...Shakespeare's greatness lies in having rejected the dramatic laws that were valid for twenty-one centuries" (251).

Some critics ask themselves if Shakespeare is as able to make people laugh as he is able to make people cry, shake, suffer, be horrified, up to the extreme exaltation. Augusto Guillermo Schlegel<sup>27</sup> (1767-1845) emphasizes Shakespeare's comic talent and claims that his comic vein is as great and deep as his tragic vein. However, many critics argue that Shakespeare's comedy is not of "loud laughing" but of "soft smiling".

Finally, Johnson argues "Imitations produce pain or pleasure, not because they are mistaken for realities, but because they bring realities to mind".

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<sup>27</sup> Augusto Guillermo Schlegel was a German poet, translator, and literary critic. He began translating the poetry of Shakespeare in 1799, and he finished the complete edition in 1825.



#### **2.1.4. National background**

It is difficult for modern man to imagine a world where news and opinions could not be quickly spread by newspapers. According to some critics, newspapers have a tendency to make people unsociable. When people can read a newspaper at home, there is no need to go out to find out about the last rumors in an inn or in a bar. In certain terms, it seems that they are right. Nowadays we face the colossal horizon of social networks. Although these social networks, such as Facebook, MySpace, Friendster, etc., have widened our social environment, they have made us more reclusive because we have been cut off from the world, and we spend more time in a virtual world. This is the paradox of the Facebook age. Experts in neuroscience explain that we love chatting because of our social brain, and specifically thanks to a hormone of our brain called 'oxytocin.' This hormone is best known for its roles in sexual reproduction, particularly during and after childbirth. These experts have begun to investigate oxytocin's role in behaviors, including orgasm, social recognition, pair bonding, anxiety, and maternal behaviors. For this reason, it is sometimes known as the 'love hormone.' They claim that while we are chatting, this hormone makes us feel good because we have a social brain; we love links; however, we can end up online for so long that we end up sacrificing face-to-face contact, which, according to them, is very important and necessary to get to know others, to establish links, to be part of a group and guarantee our primitive instinct of survival. When we get to know something of others, they say, we link to them, and it means that we humanize this knowledge; on the contrary, if we don't do this, we are considering others as objects. From this perspective, we



can have 4000 friends on Facebook; we might think we have lots of friends; however, we are sacrificing other languages, like bodily language, which is as necessary to understand and respect others.

Now I understand why we live in an insensitive and dehumanized epoch; that's why we are weak and easily manipulated by others, especially by the social networks and mass media. Although we have progressed as humanity, although we have technology at our reach, we are unhappy, and it is common to see how people post on Facebook phrases like 'forever alone.' (With many friends and they feel forever alone! Many people even commit suicide because of their relationships on Facebook.) This simple phrase has a deep meaning. It is revealing our human condition. The problem is that the social networks are alienating us and encouraging us to be 'phonies,' that is, always annoyingly happy, without a real intimacy, without a real friendship.

This problem has its roots in what Socrates used to say: "know thyself." I think humanity lacked and lacks this knowledge. That's why I also think Shakespeare will never lose his value. His characters lived in a rotten world, and they also felt alone. He attained knowledge of what stays immutable; that is, the essence of human beings has not changed at all. This claim somehow agrees with what Ben Jonson said about Shakespeare: "He was not of an age, but for all time."

On the other hand, Shakespeare lived in a golden age, Elizabeth's age, especially in literature. She herself encouraged art; she herself linked to people, and in terms of neuroscience I could say that she was cultivating empathy and



strengthening her nation's social brain through literature, which represented a closer link to life. That's why I think her reign was outstanding and powerful. In other words, she guaranteed the survival of an epoch.

Shakespeare's contemporaries, who lacked regular newspapers, had perforce to interchange opinions by means of the spoken word. In cities, and mainly in London, people used to live in public. They frequented the Court, the tribunals, the inns, and the theaters, so they lived in an atmosphere of rumor and scandal. Besides, free speech about state affairs was not tolerated; every criticism was considered as sedition or treachery. In 1593, for example, Queen Elizabeth prohibited citizens from posing the matter of her succession, and when a man called Peter Wentworth presented a request about this affair, he was sent to the Tower, where he stayed until his death, which occurred three years later.

In such circumstances, men were naturally more excitable and emotive than at the present time, and more inclined to sudden panic and to certain capricious states of mood; therefore, there were always people disposed to brawl at a minor provocation. We can see these scenes in *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Coriolanus*; these works were closer to the common experience.

For example, in *Romeo and Juliet* (3.1.), Mercutio and Benvolio are hanging out, and suddenly Tybalt arrives, looking for Romeo to challenge him for having crashed the Capulet party. Romeo arrives and Tybalt instigates a fight. Mercutio taunts and provokes Tybalt. However, Tybalt is interested in Romeo, but Romeo is not disposed to fight his wife's cousin. Seeing this, Mercutio says that if Romeo will



not fight, he will do it, so that he begins to quarrel. Attempting to restore peace, Romeo throws himself between the fighters; however, Mercutio ends up being stabbed by Tybalt. Tybalt runs away and Mercutio dies cursing the Montagues and the Capulets: “A plague o’ both your houses” (3.1.90). As we can see, Mercutio and Tybalt were both ready to draw their swords at the slightest provocation.

In *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare uses flattery and persuasion as important tools chosen by the leaders to conspire. In this play, Cassius feared that Caesar would destroy Rome if he became leader. Cassius knew that Brutus would be a powerful force in the conspirator movement to kill Caesar before he became dictator. To carry out these plans, Cassius needed Brutus on his side, so that he used flattery to make Brutus feel comfortable and confident. Then Cassius, making use of sweet talk, said:

“I am glad/That my weak words have struck but thus much show/Of fire from Brutus” (1.2.177-119). By this, Cassius meant that his words had already provoked a small show of protest from Brutus. Once again, Brutus was easily provoked by Cassius to conspire against Caesar.

Shakespeare described many times the effects of rumor. In *King John*, for example, he says that rumors make us feel disturbed because we don’t know if what we hear is true or false; that is, we don’t have facts that confirm what we hear.

...But this from rumour’s tongue

I idly heard; if true or false I know not. (4.2.123-124)



At a time when free speech was restricted, the theaters occupied a peculiar position in London; people found in drama a verbal commentary about life that did not exist anywhere else.

The historical background of Elizabethan drama, from Tamburlaine, written by Marlowe in 1587, to Shakespeare's Hamlet, written in 1603, was a great war. The most impressive of the encounters was the arrival of the great Spanish Armada and its destruction in 1588.



Fig.34. The great Spanish Armada and its destruction in 1588 (<http://ageofsail.devhub.com/blog/912743-the-spanish-armada-decision-by-sail-and-cannon/>).

the Catholic Church. To carry out this invasion, Spain prepared the building of a great fleet. The design of this fleet was quite powerful, and it did have the potential to dominate the seas; however, Queen Elizabeth's privateers and poor weather interrupted the advance of many ships. As a consequence, the largest fleet ever seen was completely destroyed in 1588.

As is known, Spain was a Catholic nation, and King Philip II had once been the co-ruler of England. He considered Queen Elizabeth, who was a Protestant, like an illegitimate ruler, so he thought it was his religious duty to invade and conquer England to convert the nation back to



In 1595, there came insistent information from Spain which said that another and bigger Armada was being built. The great fleet appeared in front of the port of Cadiz, but it was captured and destroyed. It was a gallant and brilliant victory which yielded a substantial booty. Many young men went on the expedition, and these young were from the same social class as the companions of *King John*:

And all th' unsettled humours of the land,  
Rash, inconsiderate, fiery voluntaries,  
With ladies faces and fierce dragon's spleens,  
Have sold their fortunes at their native homes,  
Bearing their birthrights proudly on their backs,  
To make a hazard of new fortunes here. (2.1.66-71)

The Spanish war evoked a complete gamut of national emotions. In 1595 and 1596, there prevailed a patriotic feeling, and it was common to say, "If we were loyal with ourselves, we would not need to worry about our enemies, or fear them." This feeling is reflected in the last verses of *King John*:

This England never did, nor never shall,  
Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror,  
But when it first did help to wound itself.  
Now these her princes are come home again,  
Come the three corners of the world in arms,  
And we shall shock them. Naught shall make us rue,



If England to itself do rest but true. (5.7.113-118)

Sir Francis Vere (1560-1609), an English soldier, received the command of the English and Dutch troops, and during nine months he defended the city against great vicissitudes. The most violent attacks were carried out during Christmas of 1601, when an attack of the Spanish troops was repelled violently in a fight that lasted the whole night. The losses, and the bravery shown on both sides, made *Hamlet* feel piety and admiration for these men:

The imminent death of twenty thousand men,

That, for a fantasy and trick of fame,

Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot

Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,

Which is not tomb enough and continent

To hide the slain. (4.4.51-56) (Additional Passages)

The English became familiar with war, and many of them had been in active service. Among illustrious men who participated in active service we have Spencer, for example. He was intervened in Irish affairs, and his home was set on fire by rebels. Donne was present at Cadiz, and Jonson went as a volunteer to the Netherlands. With respect to Shakespeare, there is no information about his relationship with soldiers and war.

The political parties had not been born yet, since the theory about state was based on the interpretation of the Christian doctrine. From this doctrine emerged three main shapes of religion: Catholicism; the official or Anglican Church, which



was a Protestant religion, but which conserved the beliefs of the Catholic religion, except that the Pope was not the maximum authority; and the radical Protestants, known as Puritans. According to the accepted theory, the Queen was the supreme head of church and state, so she insisted in her discourses on claiming that she had God's blessing, and she was also his representative in the kingdom. In this context, rebelling against the established order meant defying God. This position is emphatically posed by *Sir Thomas More*, who gives a speech to appease the London rebel crowd.

#### MORE

For the King God hath His office lent  
Of dread, of justice, power and command;  
Hath bid him rule, and willed you to obey.  
And, to add ampler majesty to this,  
He hath not only lent the King His figure,  
His throne and sword, but given him His own name,  
Calls him a god on earth. What do you, then,  
Rising 'gainst him that God Himself installs,  
But rise 'gainst God? (Scene 6 111-119)

Catholics were seen by this government as the main danger, because when Pope Pius V excommunicated the Queen in 1570 he excused the Catholics from their duties of obedience toward her, so the Puritans feared a social revolution inside the nation. The extreme Puritans, on the other hand, proclaimed that only



the Bible was the expression of God's will, and from this, they deduced violent and alarming theories about the state.

While the theater was considered a place of reasonable recreation, approved and supported by the Queen, the Puritans considered the theater a meeting place, a constant temptation to leisure, a meeting center for rebellion, and a focus of infection when there was danger of plague.

Another motive of deep and continuous anxiety was the affair of succession. When it was evident that the Queen would not marry and would not have children either, the conflict over succession was keen. The Queen prohibited the citizens from discussing this affair because if a successor was named, it would produce a general unbalance in the society; and, therefore, everyone would abandon her. However, this problem was very much discussed, and many people thought that the solution could necessitate a civil war.

Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, began his career in the Court, and then he took over part of the English military force. He enjoyed the Queen's favor and indulgence; however, his excessive popularity, his arrogance, and his ambition began to conspire against him. The Queen followed his successful military adventures in the Netherlands, Portugal, France, and against the Spanish at Cadiz. He frustrated the launch of the second Armada; this was his main victory.

Essex was heroic, and his skill as a military commander made him very popular among soldiers. Among his admirers were Shakespeare's patron, the Earl of Southampton, and Francis Bacon. When he came back to the Court from his



military adventures, he expected the Queen's praises; however, he felt bitterly irritated because she began to ask him about the economic balance related to the expeditions.

Bacon advised him about the dangers related to military greatness, such as ambition, vanity, and excessive popularity. However, this piece of advice fell upon deaf ears, and soon Essex was in a dangerous position because he was seen as the natural protector of the discontented. His eagerness for military glory degenerated into vanity, so it was easy for his followers to inflame his jealousy with the mere insinuation that his honor had been maligned. Later, he became a threat to the state because he was very popular among the Puritans and the captains, and his adversaries suspected his pretensions to get the crown.

Then Essex signed an unauthorized truce with the Earl of Tyrone, the leading Irish rebel. This act made the Queen order his arrest. Also, she ordered to strip him of his titles. In January, 1601, Essex led a raid together with followers, among whom was the Earl of Southampton, against the Queen. He plotted to start a rebellion to overthrow the Queen. Prior to the uprising they arranged a performance of Shakespeare's *Richard II*. This play was about King Richard, who had abdicated many of his powers in favor of his advisors. Besides, it included the deposition of this monarch, governed by evil advisors. The theme expressed in the play was hoped to generate support for the rebellion. This fact alarmed the Queen and her councilors. She was outraged, and she remarked, "I am Richard II. Know ye not that? "



Despite Essex's attempts to stir up the crowd, the Londoners stayed away from the trouble, and when Essex went to London with his armed followers, he did not receive popular support and was easily arrested. Essex and the Earl of Southampton were judged on February 19, 1601. Essex was executed in 1601 for treason, but Southampton was spared and continued a prisoner in the Tower.

For more than three years, Essex's vicissitudes had been cause of a continuous excitation, which was largely reflected in Shakespeare's plays. After Essex's rising, everybody realized the parallelism of this situation in *Hamlet*. Laertes, in a Danish crowd, is hurled before the King to be humiliated by the royal dignity of Claudius.

#### KING CLAUDIUS

Let him go, Gertrude. Do not fear our person.

There's such divinity doth hedge a king

That treason can but peep to what it would,

Acts little of his will. (4.5.121-124)

Themes concerning royalty and loyalty were constant in Shakespeare's plays. The dreadful responsibility and the isolation of the sovereign was emphasized. In 1601, Queen Elizabeth, in a speech to the members of her last Parliament, said, "Being a queen and wearing a crown is more glorious for those who contemplate it than pleasant for those who wear it."

Hamlet was the maximum expression of melancholy of this epoch. After Essex's death the atmosphere was clear. Neither Catholics nor Puritans had a





strong candidate to assume the throne, and none of the nobles who could plead hereditary rights did anything to discuss King James. The Queen died in 1603, and immediately James was accepted as King, without any dispute, and there was a general feeling of relief at seeing that the problem of succession was solved without any spilling of blood, and without anarchy.

Many changes supervened with the new King. King James was on friendly terms as much with the Pope as with the Spanish monarch, and since wars were still considered as personal quarrels among the princes, the war came to an end, to the general relief of everybody except for the professional captains and the corsairs. The functionaries of the Court accepted subornation to present doubtful candidates to the granted titles. Almost everybody missed the Queen; the same qualities that before were seen as annoying, later were seen as virtues.

The Queen loved public acclamations and proclaimed that nothing was more expensive than her nation's love. King James, on the other hand, was displeased with the crowd. He tolerated it a few weeks, but immediately after he rejected it with annoyance. The Queen had an enormous capacity for work; she was until the end the head of the kingdom. King James spent most of his time hunting, and he gave the order not to be annoyed except for the most important affairs. The consequence was a perceptible relaxation in the general discipline of the state, which was reflected in the theater, too. The ceremonious Court of Queen Elizabeth was little by little disappearing, and soon the elegant manners degenerated rapidly.



In July, 1606, the Danish King made an official visit to the Court, and the people who had any grievance gathered optimistically at the Court; however, soon there was felt a general disappointment. The Puritans verified that the King could not offer them anything, and in a conference that took place in Hampton Court, he scolded them severely. The Catholics, who had been induced to expect a certain religious tolerance, found out that the King had declared, in a public audience, that he would rather sink himself in blood up to his knees than to grant any religious tolerance.

Soon, conflicts emerged. In 1605, the Gunpowder Plot<sup>28</sup> was discovered a night before its execution. It was a stupendous plan by which the whole executive power of the nation would have been destroyed at one slap.

During the new reign Shakespeare wrote fewer plays, and the motives that he chose for his stories offered less parallelism to the situation of the epoch. In *King Lear*, which was presented in 1606, Gloucester's words were an echo of displeasure before the general corruption of society and the particular hate that distinguished the new reign.

As we can see, the troubles of individuals were inseparable from the troubles of the state. The image of Shakespeare isolated from life could be pleasing to the romantic critics, but this does not coincide with facts or with the

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<sup>28</sup> The Gunpowder Plot of 1605 was a failed assassination attempt against King James I of England and VI of Scotland by a group of provincial English Catholics led by Robert Catesby.



comments of Shakespeare himself about his art: "Actors are the abstract and brief chronicles of an epoch, it is better to have a bad epitaph after death than to have an ill report in life" (2.2.525-529).

HAMLET (*to first Player*)

...(To Polonius) Good my lord, will you see  
the players well bestowed? Do ye hear? –let them be  
well used, for they are the abstracts and brief chronicles  
of the time. After your death you were better have a  
bad epitaph than their ill report while you live. (2.2.525-529)

Besides, "the purpose of playing as much at the beginning as now is to offer a mirror to nature; to show to virtue its features; to pride its image, and to age and body of the time their forms and pressures" (3.2.20-24).

HAMLET

...the purpose of playing,  
whose end, both at the first and now, was and is to  
hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature, to show virtue  
her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very  
age and body of the time his form and pressure...(3.2.20-24).



### 2.1.5. Sources of Shakespeare

In *Volpone*'s prologue, Ben Jonson wrote:

Tis knowne, five weeks fully pen'd it:

From his owne hand, without a co-adjutor,

Novice, journeyman, or tutor...

In this prologue Jonson says that in five weeks he wrote everything by his own hand without any helper, or teacher. This boast, to have written his masterpiece speedily and without help, emphasizes the conditions of work that predominated in the Elizabethan theater, and its consequent practice.

The repertoire system and the rivalry among companies demanded a regular provision of new plays. Thus, rapidness of composition was essential, and its logical consequence was collaboration.

The cover of books scarcely mentioned more than two authors; however, Henslowe's information shows very often three, four, and even five poets working together on the same work. Philip Henslowe (1550-1616) was an Elizabethan theatrical entrepreneur, an impresario. He is mainly known because of his diary, a primary source for information about the theatrical world of Renaissance London. The reports of Henslowe recorded payments given to poets for the correction of works of somebody else's which would be presented in the Court.



Due to the urgent necessities of the theater, the actors resorted to whatever argument could have a dramatic affair. The most erudite gave shape to their works thanks to the extensive readings they had done. Others used the *Chronicles of Holinshed* and the *Lives of Plutarch*. These works constituted a material of inspiration, since they offered the playwrights stories already complete with conventional personages and situations. For example, the plebeian hero, the violent captain and the comic policeman were elements that were within the reach of anyone. Due to the urgent necessity of production, originality was uncommon. At the beginning, the moral principle of plagiarism was not condemned so severely. Later, some protests appeared to condemn certain poets as plagiarists.

#### **a) Dramatic material**

##### **1) Henry VI**

Some critics say that Shakespeare fulfilled his apprenticeship in the theater as a reformer of plays; that is, he corrected others' works. Shakespeare wrote two four-play sequences of plays related to the Wars of The Roses. The Wars of The Roses was a civil war that took place in England and lasted from 1455 to 1485. This civil war represented a series of dynastic wars fought between supporters of the two rival houses for the throne of England: the house of Lancaster, whose heraldic symbol was the red rose, and the house of York, whose heraldic symbol was the white rose. It was about 100-130 years before Shakespeare's writing. The first History Cycle includes *Henry VI*, parts *I*, *II*, and *III*, and *Richard III*. The Second History Cycle, which was written a few years later, consists of *Richard II*, *Henry IV*, part *1*, *Henry IV*, part *2*, and *Henry V*.

According to these critics, some of these works were piracy, but later they concluded that they were written by co-authors, and then these works were corrected by Shakespeare. This claim could be confirmed by Greene's famous attack, "O tiger's wrapp'd in a woman's hide." In this line, Greene parodies Shakespeare's talent by saying that Shakespeare got from the university talents the correction of old plays, and then he became famous by giving them a new shape.

## 2) The Ur-Hamlet

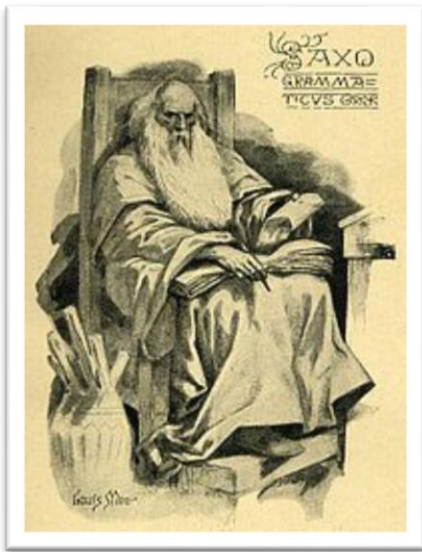


Fig. 35. Saxo Grammaticus  
([http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saxo\\_Grammaticus](http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saxo_Grammaticus))

It is generally accepted that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is based on a Norse play by Thomas Kyd, called the *Ur-Hamlet*. This story comes from a Scandinavian folk-tale, "Amleth," written down by Saxo Grammaticus, the thirteenth century Danish historian. This folk-tale was written about 1185, but it was based on an older oral tradition. It describes the same characters and events that were immortalized by William Shakespeare in *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*.

Some scholars claim that between Kyd's style and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* there are some similarities. Probably, they say, Shakespeare took a history already

dramatized, and a hero with known characteristics, and he treated them in his own way.

The only information about the *Ur-Hamlet* is that it was performed on London stage; it was a tragedy, and there was a character in the play named Hamlet, and a ghost who cried “Hamlet, revenge!”

### 3) Ancient works

Shakespeare took as a source to write his plays the great figures of history, whose lives are often the accounts of biographies. These biographical accounts provide a clear perception of the historical context from which these great figures arise, and they also show how these great figures can shape and interact with this context. For instance, Shakespeare describes episodes of *Henry V's* life in a different format. Shakespeare bases his drama on the historical sources that he had available and provides a biographical account of the greatest kings of English history, and at the same, he reveals contextual information about his own time. Other examples are the rough and tragic reign of *Richard III*, and the true chronicle of *King Leir* and his three daughters.



Fig. 36. King Leir and his three daughters  
([http://shakespeare.berkeley.edu/gallery2/main.php?g2\\_itemId=17265](http://shakespeare.berkeley.edu/gallery2/main.php?g2_itemId=17265)).

Leir was a legendary ancient king of the Britons. His story was recounted by Geoffrey of Monmouth (1100-1155) who was a cleric and one of the major figures in the development of British historiography and the popularity of tales of King



Arthur. Then this story was told in a modified form by Shakespeare in the play *King Lear*, although some names (e.g. Goneril, Regan, Cordelia), and events are very similar.

## b) No Dramatic Material

### 1) Holinshed

Shakespeare's art is also revealed by his method of converting history, which he found in *Holinshed's Chronicles*, into drama. Raphael Holinshed was an English chronicler who published his *Chronicles* in 1577, with a second edition in 1587. Shakespeare used these *Chronicles* as a primary reference for most of his histories and many of his other plays. Shakespeare's history plays rely heavily on Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles* from 1587.



Fig. 37. Holinshed: Queen Cordelia

<http://ucblibraries.colorado.edu/specialcollections/exhibits/past/Gloriana.htm>

For example, Holinshed recounted the history of King Leir. This king divided his kingdom between his two eldest daughters; however, they betrayed him. His youngest daughter, Cordelia, helped him. Holinshed's Cordelia was a woman of courage, and she and her husband gathered an army, defeating the usurpers.

However, when her husband died, Cordelia's nephews rose up and imprisoned her. This fact precipitated her heroic suicide.

Shakespeare took Holinshed's account, and he gave it his own tragic ending.

Shakespeare was selective, and Holinshed's material allowed him to reveal and develop his historical characters, so that he took what was useful for his plays, or he merely mentioned certain facts in a reference, and what was useless he rejected.

### 3) North's *Plutarch*

Through the last historical works, it seems that Shakespeare could have been posing the problem of characterization; that is, the process by which the writer reveals the personality of a character.



Fig. 38. Engraving facing the title page of an 18th-century edition of Plutarch's *Lives*  
(<http://www.crystalinks.com/plutarch.html>)

From *North's Plutarch*, Shakespeare borrowed many historical portraits that had an immediate attraction for Shakespeare's contemporaries. These historical portraits represented women and men who lived and died as the chroniclers tell in their accounts. But what kind of people were they? Biography brings us near these people. Biography is like chronicles, but in this case there is a biography that combines the psychology and narrative of a philosopher-historian





Shakespeare has been praised for having developed his dramatic vein in such a way that he used a dramatic structure that makes his plays switch between comedy and tragedy, to heighten tension. Besides, he developed the minor characters, and he used sub-plots to embellish the stories. This was an early sign of his dramatic skill.

## **2.2 Speculation about Shakespeare**

### **2.2.1. Authorship**

Does it really matter who the author is? I think that posing this question is an ethical obligation for Shakespeare's readers because whoever Shakespeare was, we, the readers, who study and enjoy several works under the name Shakespeare, have the duty not only to honor him, but to restore a sense of authenticity and truth to whom ever gave us the most priceless literary treasures in our culture.

Truth is important, not only within the academic world, but within society, too, so if we get Shakespeare wrong, then we get the whole Elizabethan Age wrong. Doubts about Shakespeare's authorship appeared at the end of the 18th century and at the beginning of the 19th century. At this time the concept of author began to be valued; but not only as a creator but as someone who writes from his or her own experiences. Critics of that time began to relate the works to the author's life, and some of them thought that Shakespeare's life didn't fit his works. In other words, the author of Shakespeare's works was a great reader, an aristocrat, a man who knew about politics and law; he was good at Latin, Greek, Italian, and French; he was familiar with the great classics of literature, and he was also a traveler. In short, this author was highly educated. However, as is known,



many of the details of Shakespeare's life are unknown, and many of them are merely speculation, so nothing of what we know about Shakespeare relates him to any of this in a true way. These premises were the conflicting points that made scholars doubt Shakespeare's language skills, and in general, all his knowledge was much discussed.

Scholars have sought signs of corrections and traces of other pens on the hypothesis that Shakespeare began his career as an adapter of old works and ended up collaborating with other authors, considering that correction and collaboration were established practices in the Elizabethan theater. Thus, research has been done through literary review and by stylistic discrimination, which aspired to reach the same scientific rigor. The result of these researches is known as "disintegration of Shakespeare."

J.M. Roberston used the process of disintegration by stylistic discrimination. This process took into account all the inconsistencies of language and all the inequalities in the dramatic technique, as well as all the parallelisms with the works of other authors. Roberston came to a conclusion; the only work by Shakespeare was *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Meanwhile, bibliographical disintegrators proceeded to study the original texts, by analyzing the spelling differences, the rare punctuations, the passages of verse printed as prose, the incorrect alignment of the verses, the incongruent headings, the presence of dumb characters, or actor names instead of character names. By examining these aspects in the text of fourteen comedies, Professor



Dover Wilson attributed four works to Shakespeare. In the rest, he found fragments of pre-Shakespearean works, or works attributed to collaborators.

It is assumed that Shakespeare and Fletcher worked together on three plays: *Henry VIII*, which is traditionally ascribed to Shakespeare, *Cardenio* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.

*The Two Noble Kinsmen* is a comedy based on *The Canterbury Tales*, by Geoffrey Chaucer. When the play was written is not known; however, it was performed for the public in 1613-14 and for The Court in 1619. The authorship of this play is also unknown, although some scholars have believed that the only author of this play was John Fletcher. They believed this because this play was not included in the editions of the 17<sup>th</sup> folio. Although Fletcher's and Shakespeare's names appeared on the title page, this does not prove that the play was written in collaboration. However, their styles have been analyzed, and the conclusion of the studies shows that both playwrights developed specific styles in language and rhythm. According to these analyses, Shakespeare tends to use old-fashioned language. For instance, he uses *hath* instead of *has* and *doth* instead of *does*, e.g. "Now for the love of him whom Jove hath marked..." (1.1.29). Fletcher, on the contrary, uses *has* and *does*, e.g. "...He has no weapons..." (3.2.13). However, these analyses are not conclusive, since the play may have been exposed to the hands of other writers who may have changed the words.

Frequently authors of literary works were anonymous, since their work was not considered to be an occupation, and consequently they were not regarded as professionals. On the contrary, the authors of literary works often had a civil



occupation, and writing was like a hobby for them, so they rarely got paid for the job they did. The person who paid them was called a patron, who was a rich aristocrat to whom the authors dedicated their pieces of writing. However, at that time, it was difficult to find a patron who could be a patron of the author's works. But payment was not the only reason that obliged the writers to look for a patron; writers needed a patron for protection, too. According to the 1572 Vagrancy Act those acting groups that did not possess sponsorship from a nobleman could be considered as vagabonds and subjected to a range of penalties, which included branding, whipping, enslavement, and even a death sentence, which was repealed in 1593. Since the payment was symbolic, the authors had to search for other sources of income. Once the theaters emerged as new potential markets, the playwrights began to collaborate with theaters.

According to Henslowe's records, playwrights were usually paid during the writing process; that is, a playwright was paid about 10-20s for writing a simple plot about a page long. Then he had to write the play itself, and he got the rest of the payment, £ 5-6, and if the play was accepted they received the profits from one day's performance. But the play was the property of the company to which it was sold, so the writer did not have any possession of it.

There were about 2800 plays written but only 650 of them were printed. This fact can be explained by different factors. Although literacy was widely spread and people read more, plays were not considered suitable to be printed as high-literature pieces of writing. Later, when the theater became very popular, people began to read dramas.





A play was the property of a company; it was a valuable asset, so the company did not want to give it out. If the company did, it was long after the play's premiere. In this context, the texts of the plays were exposed to changes; there were some omissions, additions, and other changes even during rehearsals.

The title page of a printed play shows a lot about the position of a playwright in the Elizabethan era. At the beginning, the name of the author was completely left out. Later on, when plays by an author gained some success, the author's name emerged on the cover page in order to increase sales, but although some names of authors helped to sell the print-outs, the authors were not usually paid for it, or the payment was very low, and, even worse, the plays were often published without giving credit to the author.

An example of this commercial dynamic is Philip Henslowe, a theater manager. He was the owner of the Rose and the Fortune theaters, and he had a group of playwrights, Chettle, Drayton, Munday, Dekker, Shakespeare, Fletcher, Massinger, and Shirley, who wrote plays for his theaters. To fulfill the requirements of a theatrical market, these playwrights had to work together.

Germaine Greer states that "an essential aspect of the mind and art of Shakespeare, then, is his lack of self-consciousness. Nothing but a complete lack of interest in self-promotion, [...] can explain Shakespeare's invisibility (7). Perhaps this claim agrees with the social dynamic of the epoch, since not all playwrights were treated as well as they deserved, or perhaps "Shakespeare was not a propagandist; he did not write plays as vehicles for his own ideas," as some scholars wanted to think. "Rather he developed a theater of dialectical conflict, in



which idea is pitted against idea, and from their friction a deeper understanding of the issues emerges” (Greer 25).

Alas! Poor Shakespeare! Society was debating his authorship. To be objective in their analysis, some scholars took into account Shakespeare’s background, so that to appreciate Shakespeare, it was necessary to read his contemporaries to know if he excelled them or not when he employed the same material used by them. Besides, they considered the influence of Shakespeare’s collaborators on his mind, and the influence of Shakespeare on them.

It’s clear, the critics say, that Shakespeare, in his youthful years, was an apprentice of Marlowe, Kyd, Lyly, and Greene; he took the best of his masters and transformed them at will, rising from the beginning as an autonomous voice, although it is difficult to identify him when he sings in a chorus with other voices. Regardless of the factors that led Shakespeare to write his great tragedies, the fact is that he proposed to write them in his own way, a way that nobody could imitate. This doesn’t mean that Shakespeare did not accept ideas of others, or that others would have learned from his example.

Those who express doubts about Shakespeare’s authorship focus on the propositions that claim that his works are too learned to be the product of a man who did not go to the university. These claims reflect ignorance about the curriculum of the grammar school of Shakespeare’s time. These schools required pupils to write and speak in Latin. Besides, they received training in classical literature, rhetoric, and oratory for the composition of their works. This also ignores the amount of knowledge that could be absorbed from books and conversations,



as a result of the social mobility of the epoch. They are also denying the power of human imagination.

Some research workers say that the function of Elizabethan drama is in some aspects very similar to the function of television nowadays. Why? The English Renaissance playwriting was like the work of the scriptwriters of soap operas and TV series. These series are produced in large amounts; in other words, this process is actually seen as a manufacture. Therefore, it is evident that the playwrights of the Elizabethan drama, no matter how talented they could be, would have never been able to fulfill the demand of their time if they worked alone.

As was mentioned before, one of the functions of drama was to entertain the audience, so the audience decided the success and existence of the theater. If people didn't go to the theater, the play was not going to be performed again. The same happens with TV series, if the rating is not high enough, the new episodes are not going to be screened.

From this perspective, both genres are considered as show business because they have to sell entertainment to the audiences. It is assumed, that if the theater wanted to prosper, it had to draw about two thousand spectators a day, two hundred times a year, and fighting against stiff competition. For this reason, most companies performed at least five different plays a week. The critics claim that the playgoers, like the people who watch TV, did not pay much attention to the authors; that is, they didn't know the name of the authors because they didn't need to know.



According to this background, during the English Renaissance plays were often written in collaboration. The word collaboration has many connotations, such as rewriting other plays, which it is called indirect collaboration, or it can mean revising the work of other authors, or it can mean multiple authorship; that is, straight cooperation between two or more people to create a play.

In conclusion, play-writing in Shakespeare's days was a trade. Elizabethan dramatic collaboration was a matter of necessity, not choice, due to an urgent demand for new plays. There were more than fifteen companies in London, and each of them performed many plays per month, so the playwrights had to cooperate to fulfill the urgent demands.

### **2.2.2. Philosophy**

During the 14<sup>th</sup> century, medieval culture began to be transformed thanks to the first Italian humanists, who made people look backwards, returning their attention to the classical world and to its values. However, we can really speak of the Renaissance in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, although only in Italy, since this new movement did not spread to the other European countries until the early 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The main characteristics of the Renaissance are:

#### **Political aspects**

- The creation of a modern state
- Centralization of power
- Expansionist policy

#### **Social and Economical aspects**



- Privileged classes, like the aristocracy and the clergy, lose their political power.
- Rise of middle-class people, bourgeoisie.
- Expansion of mercantilism and capitalism.

### **Cultural aspects**

- Influence of Italian art (Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio).
- Importance of Greco-Roman myths and bucolic or pastoral poetry.
- New concept of love.

### **Religious aspects**

- Lutheran Reformation and Counter-Reformation (Council of Trent).
- Theocentric and anthropocentric society.

### **Ideological aspects**

- Humanism.
- Resurrection of the Greco-Roman culture.

### **Philosophical aspects**

- Skepticism: a critical vision of reality, especially towards knowledge.
- Epicureanism: moderate enjoyment of life.
- Stoicism: extols the dominion of passions and praises spiritual serenity.
- Platonism: praises the beauty of material beings and of nature in general, which is considered a reflection of absolute and divine beauty.



- Naturalism: extols nature, man, and his liberty. It is based on Aristotle's thinking.
- Bacon, Copernicus, Galileo, and Kepler are central figures in the development of science, which meant the end of the Ptolemaic picture of the world, inspired by a geocentric universe. Nature was mathematized, and the developments of the experimental method were the most significant advantages.

The collapse of Catholicism with the rise of the Protestant Reformation, the introduction of printing, between 1460 and 1480, and the subsequent dissemination of culture were the main factors of change. However, the principal change that determined the social and cultural background was European economic development, with the first signs of mercantile capitalism. Thus, in this cultural climate of renewal, which paradoxically sought models in the Classical world, there emerged in the early fifteenth century an artistic Renaissance in Italy, which immediately spread to other European countries.

In the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the first signs of the Renaissance appeared in England. The glorious reign of Queen Elizabeth was full of intrigues, conspiracies, rebellions, and executions; murders occurred without interruption. These scenes shaped drama. There arose a sudden and extraordinary flowering of dramatists, poets, musicians, and thinkers.

Without doubt, the most dominant feature of England in Shakespeare's time was the coexistence of brutal manners with the refinement of culture. Not only did many well-known gentlemen know how to compose a sonnet or an elegy, but also



a lot of uneducated traders, artisans, and even peasants bought books, to study them. The translation of the Bible into the vernacular gave to the masses a taste for reading; songs and popular ballads put poetry within the reach of the humble; instruction spread.

The Elizabethan theater, in which Shakespeare took part, summarized the survival of popular theater and social experience. Medieval lore merged with the collective experience and historical consciousness. The Elizabethan theater was popular drama, and was enriched by the themes and values added by the Renaissance.

The age of Shakespeare emanated from philosophical reflections about man and from the empirical study of his passions and character. Critics say that Shakespeare and Cervantes were the great visionaries of individualization, of the process by which the particular characteristics of man are disintegrated.

In this background, the new birth of ancient art presupposed a strong historical individual consciousness, which entailed a completely new phenomenon in the spiritual attitude of the artist.

Aside from the cultural richness in which Shakespeare lived, he was a truly talented and inspirational man. However, once again, some critics disagree with this, and now they place in doubt his philosophy.

But before questioning Shakespeare's philosophy, we first have to elucidate what the word philosophy means. The word "philosophy" comes from the Greek roots  $\Phi\iota\lambda\omicron\varsigma$ (love) and  $\sigma\omicron\Phi\omicron\varsigma$ (wisdom), which literally means "love of wisdom."





Pythagoras, the Greek thinker and mathematician, was the first person who invented the term 'philosophy,' and he called himself a 'philosopher.' This attribution is based on a lost work by a disciple of Aristotle. For the ancient Greeks, philosophy meant the same as love of truth, since truth was, for them, the substance and reality of wisdom.

But who is a true philosopher? Plato, in his work called *the Republic*, in Book VII, talks about the types of philosophers that exist, and he distinguishes two types: the true and the false philosophers. According to Plato, "the nature of the true philosopher" is to be a "spectator of all time and all existence" (368). The true philosophers are those whose spirit can attain knowledge of what is immutable, and those who wander in the region of what is variable are not philosophers.

This claim somehow seems to coincide with Shakespeare's profile, if we take into account what Ben Jonson said of Shakespeare, "He was not of an age, but for all time."

I think Jonson's praise has many connotations. If a true philosopher is someone whose spirit can attain immutable knowledge, and Shakespeare attained immutable knowledge (because what is implicit in his poetry is the knowledge about man which has not changed, decoding Jonson's praise), so Shakespeare was a true philosopher.

But this categorical conclusion is not only the product of a mere syllogism, or a logical argument; rather many scholars, after having reading, analyzed, and enjoyed Shakespeare's works, have observed that he wrote with the spirit of a poet and the acuteness of a philosopher. He was not an original thinker; no great artist



has to be this, but he was a great artist with a deep thinking because he was a spectator of all time and all existence, as Plato said.

In summary, Shakespeare reunited these qualities, and in Plotinus's words he aroused the interior eye of his soul. How? Shakespeare did not overlook what could drive him to learning; it has been said that Shakespeare based his drama on historical sources and at the same time revealed contextual information about his own time; that is, he was aware of all the cultural richness of his time, and at the same time he merged these ideas with the joy and pain of the English people, with their questions and preoccupations about human life and nature in general. In Shakespeare's plays, it is possible to recognize the otherness of man; what he hides, his contradictions and his ambiguity. Shakespeare anticipated in his drama what man has experienced, and continues experiencing; that is, man still witnesses the break-up of ideologies, values, and the disturbing progress of science. In sum, man still faces the difficulty of apprehending truth in a context of tolerance.

During his masterly period, Shakespeare was absorbed in his own vision. He was investigating, as strong men can do, the maximum horrors of life, but always with an instinct of supreme health, and perhaps motivated by the Horatian maxim, he wanted to show the disagreeable and pleasant facts of life in order to teach and learn from them at the same time. For having shown these disagreeable facts, Shakespeare has been many times stigmatized as morbid by some people.

Plato said in the *Republic*, in book VII, that we are all like strange prisoners in a cave. These prisoners are chained to the wall of a cave, facing the blank wall. The prisoners only watch shadows projected on the wall. These shadows are



projected because there is a fire behind the prisoners, and things are passing in front of this fire. However, the prisoners have no idea that these images are only shadows, and take them for reality. They spend their lives in a world of illusion, ignoring what is going on in fact. If a prisoner gets free (the philosopher), he begins his long journey towards the light. This trip will not be easy; on the contrary, it will be slow and painful. The prisoner will see the true form of reality, rather than shadows, and finally he will see the sun outside, which represents light and clarity, truth and knowledge. This allegory ends when the prisoner enters the cave again, to free his fellows; however, his fellows make fun of him. When this prisoner attempts to untie and lead their fellows towards the light, Plato says that they will be inclined to kill him, and they will really do it when they have the opportunity.

But now how to apply this allegory to Shakespeare's background? What are the shadows he faced on his cave wall? And how did he go beyond these shadows?

As mentioned before, Shakespeare wrote at a particular time in history, the end of the sixteenth century and at the beginning of the seventeenth. This period was gestating the Scientific Revolution; that is, science was in its infancy in Shakespeare's days; very little was known about astronomy, physics, chemistry, and biology. The achievements of Descartes, Leibniz, Galileo, Newton, Locke, Boyle, and many others of the Renaissance would come in the future. The laws of mechanics were unknown; disease was a mystery; genetics was unheard of; intelligent people believed in witchcraft, ghosts, fairies, and astrology. In fact, eclipses figured in an alarmed superstition. In this context, the conception of the



world as a set of laws; that is, that we are governed by causes and effects, was a distant dream.

Besides, at that time, there was a religious upheaval because the Protestant Reformation had challenged Catholicism, so that the matter of how to interpret Scripture was a vexed question.

In this context of uncertainty, false beliefs become supreme truths for many citizens of Shakespeare's day, and Plato would say that these truths were the shadows. But Shakespeare, by making use of one of the functions of the theater, instruction, tried to set them free, and he began an inner journey of awakening and achieving stages of discovery. It was an age of uncertainty, since it followed a period of dogmatism, the Middle Ages, and it preceded the Age of Enlightenment; that is, Shakespeare lived in a transitional time, in which questioning was the prevailing spirit. So it would not be surprising to find doubt and uncertainty in Shakespeare's plays, and these doubts and uncertainties became deep reflections which would inquire into the nature of man, his place in the cosmos, and the possibility of knowledge.

I think Shakespeare, like Socrates, accepted that the best knowledge that man has is his ignorance. Some scholars even say that Shakespeare's tragedies often revolve around the tragedy of knowledge itself; that is, human beings do desire to know; they are not indifferent to knowledge, but this desire is thwarted, because although we know something, this something is a relative truth that soon can change and become false, and therefore we continue being ignorant, and from



this tragedy other tragedies occur. Thus a basic value in human life is unrealizable, and this is our tragedy.

A striking example of the ignorance of the time and its tragic consequences was the belief that to eliminate the plague that devastated Europe it was necessary to exterminate all cats and dogs, which were in fact the best enemies of the true carriers of the plague -rats.

Actually, ignorance is the greatest antithesis of wisdom. Philosophically speaking, ignorance and knowledge are partners whose co-existence is desirable and inevitable in human life. Ignorance is more than just the absence of knowledge; it becomes the root of suffering.

Ignorance seems to be a universal condition; to a certain extent we are all victims of illusions, and Shakespeare's personages, of course, are the archetypes of humanity showing their ignorance, their inability to distinguish between the real and the fake, to choose what they need to lead their lives, so that they are not able to decide their priorities correctly.

From this perspective, Shakespeare is a clear-eyed observer and is not swayed by dogma or tradition, and as Germaine Greer states:

Shakespeare is not merely the conduit of some kind of divine inspiration. Rather, he was profoundly aware of and interested in intellectual issues, which he did not choose to simplify, codify, reconcile or resolve but rather to dramatize in such a way that his audience also became thrillingly aware of an extra dimension, an imaginative dimension, of daily life. (25)



This means that Shakespeare was a true philosopher because according to Plato's allegory, once the prisoner was free, his mission was to come back to the cave and free his fellows, and Shakespeare did this through his plays; "he developed a theater of dialectical conflict, in which idea is pitted against idea and from their friction a deeper understanding of the issues emerges" (Greer 25).

The goal of dialectical reasoning is to overcome a dualism, in this case, the friction between ignorance and our partial knowledge, that is, to achieve a synthesis in the form of a successful understanding of our reality. But this process does not end here; it is not static; on the contrary, this new synthesis produces new problems, new conflicts and antitheses that expand human Knowledge.

It is said that Francis Bacon was one of the great philosophers behind some of Shakespeare's works; however, once again we are posing the problem of authorship. I could say that Shakespeare, according to the theories expounded, was a great philosopher in a pragmatic way; that is, he was engaged with the ethical function of the Elizabethan theater which was to instruct people, to free them from their ignorance, and by means of catharsis make them see their naked essence; to make them realize the roots of their suffering, but always with an instinct of supreme health, to learn from tragedies and expand human knowledge and the understanding of our reality in general.

Shakespeare showed the imagination of a poet working upon the ideas of others. In other words, as the Elizabethan theater was a trade, Shakespeare had no option other than to work in collaboration, due to the urgent demand for new plays, so his genius was assisted by association with others. So it will not be



surprising to find resemblances and echoes among poets, philosophers, and Shakespeare.

### **2.3. List of works**

It is not so easy to say that Shakespeare's plays have three or four genres, like tragedy, comedy, history, or romance because as Johnson said, Shakespeare has "united the powers of exciting laughter and sorrow not only in one mind, but in one composition," developing a "mingled drama," a drama of sorrow and joy which is more attached to life and morally instructive. In this context, Shakespeare blurred the boundaries of these genres.

This list identifies which plays are associated with each genre; however, the classification is open to interpretation.

#### **2.3.1. Lyrical works**

*Venus and Adonis* (1593)

*The Rape of Lucrece* (1594)

*Sonnets* (1597)

*A Lover's Complaint* (1597)

*The Passionate Pilgrim* (1599)

*To the Queen* (1599)

*The Phoenix and The Turtle* (1601)

*A Funeral Elegy for Master William Peter* (1612)





*Epitaph (1616)*

### **2.3.2. Historical works** (Plays based on the lives of English kings)

*Henry VI (1590-1591)*

*Richard III (1591)*

*Richard II (1595)*

*The Reign of King Edward the Third (1596)*

*Henry IV (1597-1598)*

*Henry V (1599)*

*The life and Death of King John (1596)*

*Henry VIII (1613)*

### **2.3.3. Comedies** (Happy endings)

*The Two Gentlemen of Verona (1592)*

*The Comedy of Errors (1593)*

*The Taming of the Shrew (1594)*

*Love's Labour's Lost (1595)*

*A Midsummer Night's Dream (1595)*

*The Merchant of Venice (1597)*

*Much Ado About Nothing (1599)*

*As You Like It (1599)*



*The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1599)

*Twelfth Night, or What You Will* (1601)

*All's Well That Ends Well* (1602)

*Measure for Measure* (1604)

**2.3.4. Tragedies** (A tragic hero whose tragic flaw leads him to his demise.

They also include love tragedies)

*Sir Thomas More* (1592)

*Titus Andronicus* (1594)

*Romeo and Juliet* (1595)

*Julius Caesar* (1599)

*Hamlet* (1601)

*Troilus and Cressida* (1602)

*Othello* (1604)

*King Lear* (1605)

*Macbeth* (1605)

*Antony and Cleopatra* (1606)

*Timon of Athens* (1607)

*Coriolanus* (1608)

**2.3.5. Tragicomedies or romance** (Genre that blends tragic and comic

forms)

*Pericles* (1608)



*Cymbeline* (1610)

*The Winter's Tale* (1611)

*The Tempest* (1611)

*The History of Cardenio* (1613)

*The Two Noble Kinsmen* (1613)



Fig. 40. *Romeo and Juliet* is a 1968 British-Italian film based on the play of the same name by William Shakespeare. (<http://literaturauniversal2b.blogspot.com/2011/11/influencias-de-romeo-y-julieta-en.html>).



## CHAPTER II

### A VOLUNTARISTIC INTERPRETATION OF ROMEO AND JULIET

#### 2.1. Approach to the philosophical phenomenon, voluntarism.

##### 2.1.1. Definition, history, and main representatives

Voluntarism is a philosophical doctrine that grants a primordial place to will or practical reason over intelligence or theoretical reason. What prevails is will above all; that is, man acts with full will. But what is will? Will is one of the two rational faculties of soul. Only man, as a rational animal, owns will. Animals are moved to action by the sensitive appetites, and, therefore, they obey the law of nature. Human will can be called free because will determines itself by the action it chooses. Intellect doesn't determine will, since will can act against the judgment of intellect.

Will is the force thanks to which we guide our behavior and are able to attain the goals we propose. Although human will is essentially free, it is limited in the exercise of its freedom by imagination, emotions, and habits. Will and intellect are forces that act differently; intelligence moves will through objects, and will moves itself in accordance with the proposed aim.

Plato considered will as an intermediate faculty; that is, will is not by itself an intellectual faculty, but neither is it an irrational faculty. Its acts are executed according to reason. On the other hand, Aristotle emphasized the rationality of will. The variety and degrees of importance that are granted to will are dependent on



the relationship that is established between will and reason. This problem was fundamental in the philosophy of the Middle Ages.

It would be absurd to suppose that Christian thinkers opened an entirely new direction, since the views of Plato and Aristotle weighed a lot in the development of Christian theology.

The idea of a new man, who makes his way in the context of Christian thought, takes many authors to highlight the importance and primacy of will, as much in man as in God. Thus, the philosophical doctrine called voluntarism was promoted.

Usually there are several distinct types of voluntarism: Theological voluntarism, advocated by William of Ockham<sup>29</sup>, says that divine will lacks limits, so that the world, as the work of God's infinitely free will, is essentially contingent.

Ockham believes that will is a nobler faculty than intellect. These ideas mean that good and evil depend on God's will, and not on the essence of things; that is, if God had wanted, things like stealing or murdering would have been good, and love or compassion would have been wrong.

With this idea, Ockham is located outside the Greek tradition, because for the Platonic tradition God was conditioned by the world of ideas, by the world of

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<sup>29</sup> William of Ockham (1288 – 1348) was an English Franciscan friar and scholastic philosopher.



archetypes which existed by themselves or emanated from God without the influence of will.

Political voluntarism, which is often related to the perspective of Marxism<sup>30</sup>, emphasizes the role of the will of the masses to promote revolutionary changes.

Psychological voluntarism holds that will is above other psychical powers, the intellectual, for example, and that this is fundamental to understanding the nature of the human psyche. This is a conception of the mind of Wilhelm Wundt<sup>31</sup>.

From the perspective of epistemological voluntarism, William James<sup>32</sup> says that free choice is essential in the acquisition of true knowledge.

Metaphysical voluntarism puts will in the center of reality itself; it represents the conversion of will into a thing in itself, as in the case of the philosophy of Nietzsche<sup>33</sup> and Schopenhauer<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> Marxism is an economic and sociopolitical worldview and method of socioeconomic inquiry based upon a materialist interpretation of historical development. It is also a dialectical view of social change, and an analysis of class-relations within society. This intellectual development of Marxism was pioneered by two German philosophers, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, and their analysis and critiques were focused on the development of capitalism. Marxism encompasses an economic theory, a sociological theory, a philosophical method, and a revolutionary view of social change.

<sup>31</sup> Wilhelm Wundt (1832 – 1920) was a German physician, psychologist, physiologist, philosopher, and professor, known today as one of the founding figures of modern psychology. He is widely regarded as the "father of experimental psychology."

<sup>32</sup> William James (1842 – 1910) was an American philosopher and psychologist who had trained as a physician. He was the first educator to offer a psychology course in the United States.

<sup>33</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844 – 1900) was a German philosopher, poet, composer, cultural critic, and classical philologist. He wrote critical texts on religion, morality, contemporary culture, philosophy, and science, displaying a fondness for metaphor, irony, and aphorism.



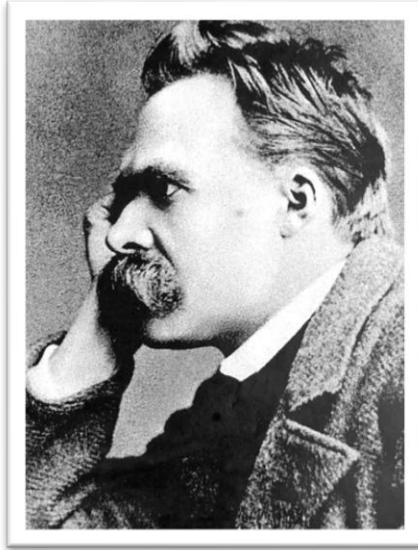


Fig. 41. Friedrich Nietzsche  
(<http://17productora.blogspot.com/2012/07/friedrich-nietzsche-significado-de-la.html>).

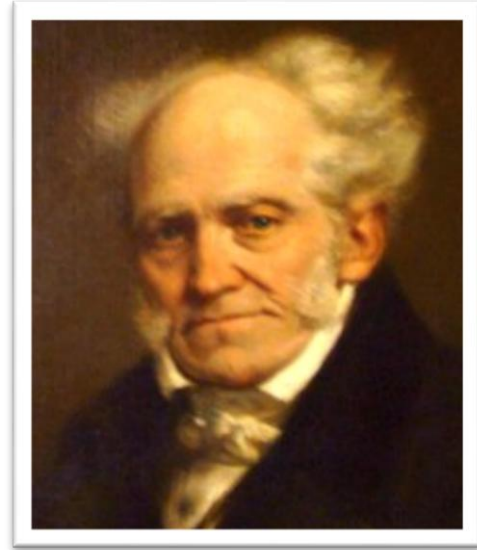


Fig. 42. Arthur Schopenhauer  
([http://www.ecured.cu/index.php/Arthur\\_Schopenhauer](http://www.ecured.cu/index.php/Arthur_Schopenhauer)).

From the ethical perspective, voluntarism means recognizing the absolute nature of will and its predominance in the determination of moral law; that is, the predominance of will over intellect.

It is said that with almost all the philosophers, will almost always has a metaphysical sense.

In Schopenhauer, voluntarism can be summarized as metaphysical because will appears to intellect as a thing in itself that is totally irrational. He considers will as an ontological principle that ultimately explains reality.

Nietzsche, influenced by Schopenhauer, attached great importance to will, but in a unique way. He realized that the ideals of Christianity, socialism, and

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<sup>34</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer (1788 – 1860) was a German philosopher best known for his book, *The World as Will and Representation*, in which he claimed that our world is driven by a continually dissatisfied will, continually seeking satisfaction.



democracy have a moral basis, and that these ideals must be overtaken by a perspective beyond good and evil, and to put an end to intellectualism, he proclaimed the only real principle, the will to power, which makes life intelligible. The will to power describes what Nietzsche may have believed to be the main driving force in humans (ambition, achievement, the striving to reach the highest possible position in life; all these are manifestations of the will to power).

To understand better the voluntaristic interpretation of Romeo and Juliet, I will summarize the metaphysics of love, by Arthur Schopenhauer, which is explained by the will to live. According to Schopenhauer, life, the visible world, that is, the phenomena, are the mirror of will. Will and will to live are, according to him, the same.

Individuals cannot do anything before the will to live; the strength of this will is imposed on individuals, so that living is for them a value. However, philosophical reflection makes individuals realize life's pain, the incomplete and imperfect life. That's why consciousness could impose on the tyranny of will through knowledge, compassion, and renunciation. In other words, knowledge, compassion, and renunciation are the steps by which consciousness is constituted, and this consciousness holds that pure living is not the highest good. Schopenhauer's notion of the will to live is similar in some respects to Nietzsche's idea of the will to power, by which life always wants more life. However, Schopenhauer's notion differs from others because in his philosophy life is not valued for itself.



In one of his essays called *The Metaphysics of Love*, Schopenhauer says that poets are principally occupied describing love. This topic is the leading idea of every dramatic work, be it tragic or comic, romantic or classical. He also maintains that love is the most fertile of topics for both lyric and epic poetry, and that all these works are long descriptions of the passion in question, and the most successful delineation of love, for example, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, have attained immortal fame.

Roche foucauld says that love may be compared to a ghost, since everybody talks about it, but nobody has ever seen it, and Lichtenberg, in his essay *Ueber die Macht der Liebe*, denies its reality and naturalness. For Schopenhauer, both are wrong because if love were foreign and contradicted human nature, or if it were merely an imaginary caricature, it would not have been depicted with such zeal by the poets of all ages, or accepted by mankind with such unaltered interest. The experience of every day verifies that this inclination could grow and surpass, for its violence, all kinds of passions and overcome all kinds of obstacles with incredible strength and persistence. A man, in order to have his love gratified, will unhesitatingly risk his life, and he will even sacrifice it if his love is absolutely rejected.

Schopenhauer states that love increasingly leads many people into the lunatic asylum, and there are lovers committing suicide together because circumstances are unfavorable to their union. However, he cannot understand how these people, who are confident of each other's love, and expect to find their greatest happiness in the enjoyment of their love, do not avoid taking extreme



steps, and violently break the social conventions and suffer all kinds of shame to sacrifice with their lives a great happiness.

With respect to phases and passages of love, Schopenhauer says that all of us have them daily before our eyes. Therefore, we cannot doubt the reality and importance of love.

Schopenhauer was surprised because love, playing such an important role in man's life, had scarcely been considered by philosophers. According to him, Plato devoted himself to the subject of love more than anyone else, especially in the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*; however, what he says about love comes within the sphere of myth, and fable. Kant, in the third part of his treatise *Ueber das Gefühl de Schönen und Erhabenen*, treats love in a very superficial way, that for Schopenhauer is somewhat untrue.

In this context, Schopenhauer manifests that to put in writing his metaphysics of love he was neither influenced by his predecessors or contradicted what had been written by them, but his theory was based on life itself. His view will seem too physical, too material; however, according to him, it is fundamentally metaphysical.

Love plays an important role in all its phases and degrees, not only in dramas and novels, but also in the real world. Love hourly interrupts the most important affairs and disturbs the most earnest occupations; it makes people commit follies; it dissolves the most important relationships and breaks the strongest ties; it makes the honest man a perfidious one, and a man who has been hitherto faithful a betrayer – a demon whose object is to overthrow, confuse, and



upset everything. Then Schopenhauer asks himself, "Why is there all this noise? Why all these outbursts, efforts, and madness? Why should this force have such importance in man's life? Why does it create disturbance and confusion in the well-regulated life of mankind?"

Schopenhauer answers and manifests that to the earnest investigator the spirit of truth gradually unfolds and shows him the answer. Love is not a trifling affair; if man's passion has a tragic or comic nature, the ultimate aim of all love-affairs is more important than all other aims in human life; therefore, it deserves a profound seriousness, Schopenhauer says. Why? Because love determines nothing less than the establishment of the next generation.

What manifests itself to the individual consciousness as the instinct of sex is the will to live. The instinct of sex is very clever and wears the mask of objective admiration, although in itself it is a subjective necessity, and is, therefore, deceptive. Although this admiration may appear objective and sublime, the purpose of every man in love is to beget a being of a definite nature. Mutual love is not enough; love requires physical enjoyment.

The real aim of love's romance, although the persons concerned are unconscious of the fact, is that a particular being may come into the world; and the way and manner in which it is accomplished is a secondary consideration. The future generation in its entire individual determination forces itself into existence, although the medium be bitter, conflicting, and problematic. Indeed, the future generation is already present in the apparent capricious selection for the satisfaction of the instinct of sex which we call love. It is the will to live of the new



being that the two lovers want to beget. In the meeting of their yearning glances, the life of a new being is kindled, and it manifests itself as a well-organized individuality.

The lovers have a longing to be really united and procreate a new being, in order to prolong their existence. This longing is fulfilled in the children born, who inherit the qualities of both parents, and these qualities are not only perpetuated but combined and united in one being.

Conversely, if a man and woman dislike each other, it indicates that they could only bring into the world a badly organized, discordant, and unhappy being. Schopenhauer states that the will to live is present in the whole species and exclusively attracts two individuals of different sex towards each other.

As has been said, in the meeting of their glances there originates the first germ of a new being, which like all germs is fragile, and is willing to disappear. This new individual is to a certain extent a new (Platonic) Idea, and, like all Ideas, strives with the greatest vehemence to enter the phenomenal sphere; that is, to ardently seize upon the matter. This vehement desire is precisely the passion that the future parents suffer for one another.

According to Schopenhauer, all amorous feeling immediately and essentially concentrates itself on health, strength, and beauty, and consequently on youth. Why? Because will above all wishes to exhibit the specific character of the human species as the basis of all individuality. The same applies pretty much to everyday courtship.



Schopenhauer manifests that if 'love' is not in harmony with the purposes of the will to live, and if it leads to marriage, this marriage will be a very unhappy one.

Schopenhauer investigates the matter in a deeper way and says that egoism is a quality deeply rooted in every personality, so when perpetuation and the future of the species require an individual's conscious sacrifice, the importance of this fact will not be sufficiently comprehensible to his intellect, which is mainly constituted to regard individual ends. Consequently, it has difficulty submitting to this need and sacrifice. Therefore, nature attains its ends by implanting in the individual a certain illusion, by which something seems to be advantageous to him when in reality it is advantageous to the species alone. As a result, the individual becomes an unconscious slave of nature at the moment in which he believes he is obeying his own impulses.

In this process he is carried away by a mere chimera, which floats before him and vanishes again immediately. This illusion is instinct. Man imagines that he is pursuing individual ends, when in reality he is pursuing merely general ends, the interests of species before will.

The manifestation of this instinct is best observed in animals; however, it is thought that this instinct has little sway over man, or it is scarcely sufficient when he is born to seek and take his mother's breast. But in spite of this, man has a very decided, clear, and complicated instinct in the way he selects another individual to satisfy his instinct of sex. The beauty or ugliness of individuals has nothing to do with this satisfaction in itself. The passionate pursuit of beauty, and the price granted to it, do not pertain to the interest of the person who chooses, even though





this fact seems to be very important for the individual. He is only obeying the interest of the future being.

The ecstasy with which a man is filled at the sight of a beautiful woman, making him imagine that union with her will be the greatest happiness, is simply the sense of the species. Thus, the role of instinct is to move the individual for the good of the species.

As examples: an insect selects a certain flower or fruit, or a piece of flesh; or the way in which the ichneumon seeks the larva of a strange insect, to lay its eggs in that particular place only to secure its larvae's life. Schopenhauer argues that this process is very analogous to the care with which a man chooses a woman of a definite nature. He strives for her with such ardor that he frequently, in order to attain his object, will sacrifice his happiness in life. He does not back down before a foolish marriage, or ruinous relationships, or dishonor, criminal acts, adultery, or rape. All this is in accordance with the will of nature, which is everywhere sovereign, so that he may serve the species in the most efficient manner, although he does this at the expense of himself.

Nature implants instinct where the acting individual is not capable of understanding the end, or he would be unwilling to pursue it. Consequently, as a rule, instinct is only given prominently to animals, and in particular to those of the lowest order, but for men, instinct, truth, is given in the form of illusion, in order to influence the will of a man, who naturally is able to understand the end, but would not pursue it with the necessary zeal.



With respect to relative considerations, that is, with respect to the individual, Schopenhauer says that each being is an incomplete and imperfect part of everything. That's why each person finds his or her natural complement in a certain person of the other sex who represents the indispensable fraction to neutralize his or her defects and beget a complete being of humankind.

When two lovers are pathetically talking about the harmony of their souls, it must almost always be understood as the harmony of the physical and intellectual qualities of each sex which are necessary to beget a perfect being.

There is something quite singular in the unconsciously serious and critical nature of the penetrating glances that two young people of different sex could exchange at meeting for the first time. This scrutiny and analysis represent the meditation of the genius of the species in the individual, which may be born of the combination of lovers' qualities, and the greatness of their delight for each other is determined by this meditation. It is Cupid's work; he is always busy, always speculating, always meditating. He is related to these ephemeral affairs as an immortal being is to a mortal.

Lovers are always looking for the special and perfect complement of the other which means to restore the species. Thus, this act acquires a nobler and more sublime nature. On the other hand, mere sexual instinct strives to preserve the species, merely considering quantity with little regard for quality. Intense love concentrated in one individual may develop to such a degree that if his or her love cannot be satisfied, all the good things of this world, and even life itself, lose their importance. Consequently, this individual will make any kind of



sacrifice, and if this love cannot be gratified, it may lead him or her towards madness or even suicide. Strictly speaking, the will to live desires to objectify itself in an individual which can only be begotten by this particular father and this particular mother.

This metaphysical yearning of the will in itself fills the hearts of the future parents, who are seized with this desire. In fact, love is an illusion like no other; it will induce a man to sacrifice everything he possesses in the world, in order to obtain a particular woman, who in reality will satisfy him no more than any other.

The yearning of love, which has been expressed in countless ways and forms by the poets of all ages, does not match the longing for an infinite happiness, and an unspeakable pain when this love cannot be satisfied. This longing and pain do not arise from the needs of an ephemeral individual, but, on the contrary, these needs are the sign of the spirit of the species, which, to attain its purposes, sees a unique opportunity to gain or lose. That's why it is capable of endless desire, endless gratification, and endless pain. Only the species has an endless life. These, however, are imprisoned in the heart of a mortal, and this forms the substance of all erotic poetry that is sublime in character; and this poetry soars into transcendent metaphors, surpassing earthly things.

The spirit of the species is the only entity that can see at a glance the value that lovers have, and how they can serve it for its purposes. The loss of the beloved person to a rival, or through death, is the greatest pain of all for those who are passionately in love. Why? Because this love is of a transcendental nature, since it affects lovers not merely as individuals, but in their



eternal essence; that is, in the life of the species. This is why jealousy is so tormenting and bitter, and the giving up of the loved person is the greatest of all sacrifices.

Honor, duty, and fidelity succumb to the interest of the species; that is, they succumb to love after they have withstood every other temptation, even the menace of death. Conscience is sometimes put aside even by people who are honest and straightforward, and infidelity is recklessly committed if they are passionately in love; that is, when the interest of the species has taken possession of them. Schopenhauer says that it would seem that they are consciously obeying a greater authority than the interests of individuals can confer; this is simply because they are concerned in the interest of the species. Chamfort's utterance in this respect is remarkable:

When a man and a woman feel a violent passion for each other, it doesn't matter what obstacles separate them, parents, husband, etc. The two lovers belong to each other reciprocally by divine right, despite laws and human conventions. (44)

The genius of species separates all disputes arising out of social barriers. It dissipates as a slight artist all human institutions, caring only about the future generations.

Schopenhauer remarks that we feel delight in watching, in a play or novel, two young lovers fighting for each other, for the interest of the species, and the defeat of old people who only consider the welfare of the individual. In truth, they



have sacrificed their individual purposes for the welfare of the species, in opposition to the will of the discreet old people.

The mandate of will presents itself in the consciousness of the lover under the mask of the anticipation of an infinite happiness, which is to be found in the union with a particular being. This illusion becomes dazzling if it cannot be attained; life itself not only loses all charm, but appears to be joyless, hollow, and uninteresting to such a degree that the lovers ignore the terrors of death and want to make their life short. But not only does unreciprocated love frequently lead to a tragic end; reciprocated love also leads to unhappiness. Why? Because love is not only in contradiction to social demands but also to the individual's personal welfare, and in consequence it destroys the plans of life built upon them.

When two people are in love, they shut their eyes to all objectionable qualities, overlook everything, ignore all, and unite themselves to the object of their passion. They are completely blinded by this illusion, so that as soon as the will of the species is accomplished the illusion vanishes and leaves in its place a hateful companion for life, Schopenhauer says.

That's why the ancients represented Cupid with a blindfold over his eyes. In fact, although a lover clearly recognizes the horrid defects in his fiancée's disposition and character, defects which promise him a life of misery, he doesn't have the courage to leave her. In truth, he is not acting in his own interest but for a third person who has to come into existence.

The genius of species is at continual warfare with the guardian genius of the individual; it is always ready to destroy personal happiness in order to carry out its



ends. Indeed, the welfare of whole nations has sometimes been sacrificed to its caprice. Shakespeare furnishes us with an example in *Henry VI*, Part III, Act 3, Scenes 2 and 3. This is because the species, in which lies the germ of our being, has a nearer and prior claim upon us than individual interests, so that the affairs of the species are more important than those of the individual.

The ancients personified the genius of species in Cupid. Despite his air of a child, he is a cruel and hostile god, and, therefore, one to be decried as a capricious and despotic demon, and at the same time lord of gods and men. The wings that are attributed to Cupid signify inconstancy, which as a rule comes after the satisfied longing. The illusion necessarily vanishes directly when the end of the species has been attained. Once the spirit of species has got its aim, it frees man again. Deserted by the spirit, man relapses into his original state of narrowness. He is surprised to find that after all his lofty, heroic, and endless attempts to further himself, he is no happier than he was before.

People who marry for love are carrying out the interest of the species, not of the individuals. However, when the illusion vanishes they live in grief. On the other hand, marriages of convenience, which are generally arranged by the parents, will turn out the reverse, that is, a marriage of this kind attends to the welfare of the present generation to the detriment of the future one. It caters to the spirit of individual egoism, Schopenhauer says.

As a result of all this, it seems that marrying means that the interest of the individual or the interest of the species must suffer. According to Schopenhauer, it seems rare that love and convenience go hand in hand. As is well known, happy



marriages are few, since marriage is intended to serve the welfare of the future generation, not the present one. However, Schopenhauer adds some consolation for the more tender-hearted and says that passionate love is sometimes associated with a feeling of real friendship founded on harmony of sentiment, but this, however, does not exist until the instinct of sex has been extinguished. This friendship will generally spring from the fact that the physical, moral, and intellectual qualities correspond to two individuals who are in love.

## **2.2. Romeo and Juliet as a source of analysis**

### **2.2.1. Background, characters, and scenes related to voluntarism.**

With respect to Shakespeare, I could say that he is also a voluntaristic dramatist because he is explicitly incorporating Schopenhauer's metaphysics. Perhaps Shakespeare himself had a great influence on Schopenhauer's point of view. Let's see.

Scene I of Act I opens with a brawl on the streets of Verona between the servants of the Montague and Capulet families. The fight rapidly escalates, and more citizens become involved, and soon the heads of both households appear. Finally the Prince arrives and stops the riot, forbidding any further outbreaks of violence with the death penalty.

After the Prince dismisses both sides, Montague and his wife discuss Romeo's melancholy behavior with Benvolio and ask him to discover its cause. They exit, and Romeo enters in a sad state and says that he feels disdained because his love is unrequited.





ROMEO

Ay me, sad hours seem long.

Was that my father that went hence so fast?

BENVOLIO

It was. What sadness lengthens Romeo's hours?

ROMEO

Not having that which, having, makes them short.

BENVOLIO

In love.

ROMEO

Out.

BENVOLIO

Of love?

ROMEO

Out of her favor where I am in love. (1.1.158-165)

Clearly we can see that Romeo has been caught by the genius of species or the will to live. But this genius is imprisoned in the heart of a mortal, Romeo, or perhaps Shakespeare himself; the immortal essence of the spirit of species is sighing and groaning. This genius saw 'a unique opportunity' to gain or lose, and immediately it imposed its tyranny on Romeo's consciousness, to make him feel an infinite happiness, but suddenly this illusion becomes dazzling because it cannot be attained, and, consequently, Romeo feels unspeakable pain because his love cannot be satisfied; life itself loses all charm and seems joyless.



BENVOLIO

Alas that love, so gentle in his view,

Should be so tyrannous and rough in proof. (1.1.166-167)

Schopenhauer was right – the yearning of love, expressed by the poets of all ages, is considered immortal because its sighs and groans constitute the substance of a poetry that is sublime and soars into transcendental metaphors, surpassing earthly things. The immortal essence of humankind is talking. In this sonnet, Romeo tries to give a definition of this genius, love.

ROMEO

Alas, that love, whose view is muffled still,

Should, without eyes, see pathways to his will.

Where shall we dine? O me! What fray was here?

Yet tell me not, for I have heard it all.

Here's much to do with hate, but more with love.

Why, then, O brawling love, O loving hate,

O anything, of nothing first create;

O heavy lightness, serious vanity,

Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms,

Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health,

Still-waking sleep, that is not what it is!

This love feel I, that feel no love in this.

Dost thou not laugh? (1.1. 168-179)



Romeo is completely alienated by this love or completely caught by the spirit of species.

ROMEO

Tut, I have lost myself; I am not here;

This is not Romeo, he's some other where. (1.1.194-195)

However, Romeo's love is unrequited because his beloved, Rosaline, wants to remain chaste. Romeo says that she has made a mockery of Cupid. This complaint could mean that she, or man, has defied the tyranny of love through knowledge or renunciation, as Schopenhauer said. And this is a cause of endless pain for Romeo, well, for the spirit of species who uses Romeo as a tool to attain its aims.

ROMEO

Well, in that hit you miss: she'll not be hit

With Cupid's arrow; she hath Dian's wit;

And, in strong proof of chastity well arm'd,

From love's weak childish bow she lives unharm'd.

She will not stay the siege of loving terms,

Nor bide the encounter of assailing eyes,

Nor ope her lap to saint-seducing gold:

O, she is rich in beauty, only poor,

That when she dies with beauty dies her store. (1.1.205-213)



This unrequited love makes Romeo feel that death in life awaits him, and although she is fair, Romeo says, it will be unfair for her to be happy because she is the cause of his pain. The spirit of species is talking through Romeo; it is upset because its will is being frustrated.

ROMEO

She is too fair, too wise, wisely too fair,

To merit bliss by making me despair:

She hath forsworn to love, and in that vow

Do I live dead that live to tell it now. (1.1.218-221)

Benvolio advises him to forget Rosaline by looking for another, but Romeo insists that it would be impossible. Romeo was convinced that his beloved was the most beautiful woman in the world, (well, that's what the tyranny of love imposes on our consciousness), that she was unique. He thought that nobody could change his mind. However, he still could not understand the symbolism of Cupid. His wings signify inconstancy, and as soon as possible, this god was ready to free him of his old longing and involve him in a new loving passion. Life wants more life, says Schopenhauer.

BENVOLIO

Be ruled by me, forget to think of her.

ROMEO

O, teach me how I should forget to think.

BENVOLIO

By giving liberty unto thine eyes;



Examine other beauties. (1.1. 223-224)

ROMEO

... Show me a mistress that is passing fair,

What doth her beauty serve, but as a note

Where I may read who pass'd that passing fair?

Farewell: thou canst not teach me to forget. (1.1. 231-234)

Meanwhile, in Scene II, Paris, a relative of the prince, asks Capulet to let him marry Juliet. Initially, Capulet is reluctant to give his consent because Juliet is too young, but finally he agrees to the match, if Paris can gain Juliet's consent.

Capulet invites Paris to a feast. Capulet sends off the guest list with a servant who is illiterate and cannot read the names. This servant meets Romeo and Benvolio, whom he asks for help. They read the guest list, and it includes Rosaline, Romeo's beloved. Despite the danger involved, Romeo decides to go to the feast. Benvolio hopes that Romeo will see another lady there and forget Rosaline; however, Romeo, once again, denies that such a thing could happen.

At Juliet's home, Lady Capulet was persuading Juliet to be a wife and mother. She cautiously advises Juliet to be pleasing to Paris, her future husband. As is known, Shakespeare's characters are developed in the context of a patriarchal system which classifies women as walking wombs who must remain virtuous until marriage. That's why Lady Capulet says to Juliet that she was already a mother at Juliet's age.

LADY CAPULET

Well, think of marriage now; younger than you,



Here in Verona, ladies of esteem,  
Are made already mothers: by my count,  
I was your mother much upon these years  
That you are now a maid. Thus then in brief:  
The valiant Paris seeks you for his love. (1.3. 71-76)

The pressure from these expectations leaves women weak and vulnerable. As long as they appear submissive to men, they are considered good. Although Juliet's parents seem to look out for their child's best interests, Juliet's position is clearly subordinate to her father's political concerns.

Paris 'loves' Juliet mainly because of her social status and then because of her beauty. In Schopenhauer's words, these facts are against the superior purposes of the spirit of species. Juliet's parents are obeying their individual interest, their individual egoism, which is opposite to truth, to nature, and therefore deserves some scorn.

In scene V, the fickle nature of love frees Romeo from his old desire, but once again through a glance, love moves Romeo towards Juliet's beauty, and he is in love again.

The first penetrating glance between lovers is the work of Cupid, who, through them, is always observing, analyzing, and meditating the lovers' qualities to beget the new being.

ROMEO

O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!

It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night



Like a rich jewel in an Ethiope's ear;  
Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear!  
So shows a snowy dove trooping with crows,  
As yonder lady o'er her fellows shows.  
The measure done, I'll watch her place of stand,  
And, touching hers, make blessed my rude hand.  
Did my heart love till now? forswear it, sight!  
For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night. (1.5.43-52)

Romeo woos Juliet with another sonnet which emphasizes the wonder and spiritual purity of his love. They kiss each other, but they are so enrapt completing the sonnet and gazing into each other's sparkling eyes that they forget to ask each other's names. Instead they discover each other's identity from the Nurse, and Juliet realizes the connection between love and hate and marriage and death.

JULIET

My only love sprung from my only hate!  
Too early seen unknown, and known too late!  
Prodigious birth of love it is to me,  
That I must love a loathed enemy. (1.5. 137-140)

Immediately she also declares that if she cannot marry Romeo, she would rather die.

JULIET

If he be married  
My grave is like to be my wedding bed. (1.5.133-134)





When the lovers talk about the harmony of their souls, it must be understood as the harmony of their physical and intellectual qualities to beget a perfect being. However, as Schopenhauer said, love obligations are not compatible with social conventions or with other circumstances of life. Nevertheless, love is not only in contradiction with social demands, but with the intimate nature of the human being, too; that is, the spirit of species has such great power over the individual that the lover shuts his or her eyes and does not want to realize the shortcomings of his or her beloved, and binds the object of his or her passion 'forever.' This is the case of Romeo and Juliet. Their love was in contradiction to the social conventions of the time; they belonged to enemy households. However, as Schopenhauer said, love dissipates the differences arising from social barriers, and Juliet appears on the balcony and, thinking she's alone, reveals in a soliloquy her love for Romeo and a deep reflection about a great social institution, family, and the names that have been created by humans to identify things, but at the same time have served to separate families. According to Juliet, things don't change because of a name, they conserve their essence with whatever name. In her meditation and speaking in the name of love, Juliet encourages Romeo to deny his father and to refuse his own name. Even she does not want to be a Capulet. In other words, love makes Juliet see her beloved as a human being, as an equal, not as an enemy, not as a member of the 'Montague' family.

JULIET

O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?

Deny thy father and refuse thy name;



Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,  
And I'll no longer be a Capulet. (2.1.75-78)

JULIET

'Tis but thy name that is my enemy;  
Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.  
What's Montague? it is nor hand, nor foot,  
Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part  
Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!  
What's in a name? that which we call a rose  
By any other name would smell as sweet;  
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd,  
Retain that dear perfection which he owes  
Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name,  
And for that name which is no part of thee  
Take all myself. (2.1.80-91)

Friar Laurence is a philosophical man who wishes to heal the rift between the families. The dual nature within the Friar's plants and land suggests a coexistence of good and evil. This coexistence between good and evil represents a constant force in this play, a strong undercurrent that influences the characters' lives. Romeo and Juliet's love exists in an atmosphere of darkness because of the hatred between the families.

The theme of nature destroying life in order to create life could be related to Schopenhauer's idea, 'life wants more life,' but to attain a decisive victory love of



life in itself must coexist in imperfect harmony, as Shakespeare says; that is, "Virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied; / And vice sometimes by action dignified." (2.2. 21-22)

Perhaps these phrases are related to Schopenhauer's thinking that argues that honor, duty, and fidelity succumb to the interest of the species; that is, these virtues succumb to irrational love, but when love attains its goals, it frees man, and he recovers his consciousness, in other words his virtue. Life is a dialectal play in which we are involved!

FRIAR LAURENCE

... The earth, that's nature's mother, is her tomb;  
What is her burying grave that is her womb,  
And from her womb children of divers kind  
We sucking on her natural bosom find,  
Many for many virtues excellent...(2.2. 9-13)

...O, mickle is the powerful grace that lies  
In herbs, plants, stones, and their true qualities:  
For nought so vile that on the earth doth live  
But to the earth some special good doth give,  
Nor aught so good but strain'd from that fair use  
Revolts from true birth, stumbling on abuse:  
Virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied;  
And vice sometimes by action dignified.



Within the infant rind of this small flower

Poison hath residence and medicine power... (2.2. 15-24)

Love marriages are concluded for the interest of the species and not for the benefit of the individual; lovers are believed to work for their own happiness, but the real purpose is indifferent to them, which is the procreation of a new being, so to attain this aim they have to obey the same impulse and should try to agree with it.

Although Romeo and Juliet belonged to enemy households, they obeyed their loving impulse and got married in secret at Friar Laurence's cell. Romeo arrives at Friar Laurence's cell while the friar is collecting herbs and flowers. Romeo tells him of his love for Juliet and asks the friar to marry them. The friar is amazed at the news. At the beginning he is reluctant to help them, but finally he agrees to help the couple in the hope that the marriage will put an end to the discord between the two families.

FRIAR LAURENCE

So smile the heavens upon this holy act,

That after-hours with sorrow chide us not! (2.5. 1-2)

Yet, love is not satisfied with a reciprocal feeling; it requires physical pleasure as its ultimate goal, which is oriented toward procreating a new being. After the wedding, the Nurse provides Romeo a rope ladder, so that he can climb into Juliet's window to celebrate their wedding night.

NURSE

Then hie you hence to Friar Laurence' cell;



There stays a husband to make you a wife:  
Now comes the wanton blood up in your cheeks,  
They'll be in scarlet straight at any news.  
Hie you to church; I must another way,  
To fetch a ladder, by the which your love  
Must climb a bird's nest soon when it is dark:  
I am the drudge and toil in your delight,  
But you shall bear the burden soon at night. (2.4. 68-76)

However, such ethereal expressions of true love would not last long within that feuding society. The threat of violence immediately interrupts the loving atmosphere. Tybalt arrives, looking for Romeo; he is angry because Romeo and his friends crashed the Capulet party. Tybalt wants to fight Romeo, but Romeo refuses and tries to make peace with Tybalt. Disgusted, Mercutio begins a sword fight and is fatally stabbed by Tybalt. Enraged, Romeo draws his sword and fights Tybalt. Finally Romeo kills Tybalt. Romeo runs away and hides in Friar Laurence's cell.

These facts would be the beginning of a tragic end. Meanwhile, Juliet's father was arranging her daughter's marriage to Paris. Hearing that Romeo has been banished, Juliet is overwhelmed by grief. Paris, like Capulet, believes that marriage will cure Juliet's grief. However, Juliet has made many decisions, such as defying her family, marrying Romeo, and now, sacrificing her life for her forbidden love. All these decisions are contrary to Paris and Capulet's paternalistic and patriarchal view. Shakespeare shows an image of Juliet as a very young tragic



heroine who is forced to make extreme decisions during the course of the play. Juliet, like Romeo, believes that only death can offer a solution to her dilemma.

JULIET

Be not so long to speak. I long to die

If what thou speak'st speak not of remedy. (4.1. 66-67)

Juliet follows Friar's plan; she takes the potion and exclaims:

JULIET

Or bid me go into a new-made grave

And hide me with a dead man in his tomb. (4.1. 84-85)

Although these images suggest the wild fears of a young teenager, they also highlight her bravery and the depth of her love for her husband.

Schopenhauer says that man is like a fragile glass; he is not able to contain the aspiration of the will to live. Consequently, he has no other way but suicide, sometimes double suicide of the two lovers. Madness covers with its veil the consciousness of a desperate state. The first germ of a new being is born from their first blazing glances. This germ is fragile and quick to disappear, like all other germs, so, to avoid this, it makes a violent effort to manifest itself in the world of phenomena. This effort is the passion that prospective parents experience for each other. In this case, I could say that the will to live, the fragile germ begotten in the first blazing glances of Romeo and Juliet, was losing its opportunity to appear in the world of phenomena. That's why life had no sense for Juliet if she married Paris. Society was boycotting love's plans.



If the loss of the beloved woman causes a great pain to the lover, it is precisely because this pain is of a transcendent nature; it does not just mortify the individual but the life of species, which the individual was commissioned to serve. That's why the greatest sacrifice is to give up the beloved. It is not the individual who complains, but the species.

In Mantua, Romeo mistakenly believes that Juliet has died because Friar Laurence's letter never got to Mantua. Immediately, Romeo offers a poor apothecary a large amount of money to sell him poison illegally. Romeo wanted to be reunited with Juliet in death.

Immediately, Romeo goes to the Capulet mausoleum and after fighting and killing Paris, he kisses Juliet, drinks the poison, and dies at her side. A moment later, the Friar arrives and discovers the dead bodies of Romeo and Paris. Then Juliet awakes and looks for Romeo. Seeing the bodies of Romeo and Paris, Juliet resolves to remain in the tomb. The Friar tries in desperation to convince Juliet to leave the tomb because the night watchman is approaching, but Juliet refuses. Juliet stays alone in the tomb and tries to drink some poison from Romeo's vial. Finding it empty, she tries to kiss some poison from his lips, and hearing that the night watchman is closer, she fatally stabs herself with Romeo's dagger.

After that, the Friar faithfully recounts the events and offers his life in atonement. The Prince acknowledges the Friar's benevolent intent and instead he blames the Montague and Capulet families for the deaths. Finally, the two families are reconciled as the Prince ends the play by saying:



## PRINCE

For never was a story of more woe

Than this of Juliet and her Romeo. (5.3.308-309)

In this great tragedy, love dissolved the social barriers, but its superior purposes, whose tools Romeo and Juliet were, were frustrated by this feuding society, reconciled at last.





Fig. 43. Laurence Olivier as Hamlet in the classic cemetery scene (<http://denverlibrary.org/content/be-or-not-be-many-faces-hamlet>).



## CHAPTER III

### AN EXISTENTIAL INTERPRETATION OF HAMLET

#### 3.1. Approach to the philosophical phenomenon, existentialism.

##### 3.1.1. History, definition, and main representatives

According to the *Akal Philosophical Dictionary*, existentialism is a philosophical and literary movement promulgated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Europe. This existential philosophy does not reduce a human being and his personality, to any entity. Man cannot be reduced to a rational animal, to a social animal, to a psychical or biological entity. Man is not any substance capable of being determined objectively. Man himself constitutes his own being. In this process, man can be in the field of intelligibility, which will allow him to understand himself and his situation with others and the world.

In other words, the central claim of existentialism says that human beings exist without justification (absurdity) in a world in which we are thrown and condemned to assume full responsibility for our free actions and for the values that guide our actions.

According to Jean Paul Sartre<sup>35</sup>, “man freely chooses his own goals” (Olson 53). Man is “condemned to freedom,” and as there is no justification in adopting

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<sup>35</sup> Jean-Paul Charles Aymard Sartre (1905 – 1980) was a French existentialist philosopher, playwright, novelist, screenwriter, political activist, biographer, and literary critic. He was one of the key figures in the philosophy of existentialism. His work has also influenced sociology, critical theory, post-colonial theory, and literary studies. Sartre has also been noted for his relationship with the prominent feminist theorist Simone de Beauvoir.

any value in this world of absolute subjectivity, “the price of human existence is alienation from God, from nature, and from society” (Olson 57).

Existentialism holds that existence precedes essence, that is, man will set the goals and values which will allow him to create his essence, his own being, his own meaning in the world.

Kierkegaard<sup>36</sup> is generally regarded as the first existentialist philosopher. Kierkegaard’s philosophy is notable for its critique of objective speculative systems (especially Hegel’s, which, according to him, is a threat to human individuality), but it is also notable for its emphasis on ‘subjective thinking,’ faith, commitment, and responsibility. His key concepts are dread, anguish, and guilt. He has been criticized for his apparently total subordination of reason to faith.



Fig. 44. Jean Paul Sartre  
(<http://www.scoop.it/t/investigacion-educativa/p/350254443/jean-paul-sartre-el-filosofo-de-la-accion-y-la-libertad-abc-color>).

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<sup>36</sup> Søren Kierkegaard (1813 – 1855) was a Danish philosopher, theologian, poet, social critic, and religious author. He wrote critical texts on organized religion, morality, ethics, psychology and philosophy of religion, displaying a fondness for metaphor, irony, and parables. He is widely considered to be the first existentialist philosopher.

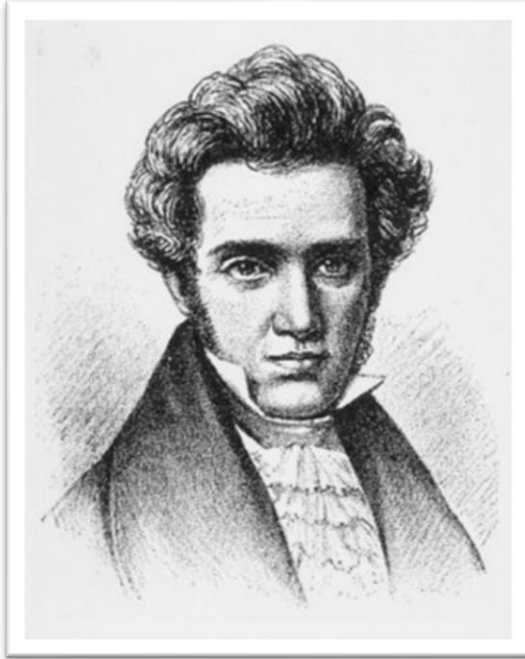


Fig. 45. Soren Kierkegaard  
(<http://centrodeestudiofilosoficolectio.blogspot.com/2011/05/lecturas-filosoficas-soren-kierkegaard.html>).

Kierkegaard describes himself as a dialectical poet. He says that Philosophy should be inseparable from life and from man's existential situation. Although he rejected the content of Hegel's idealism, he appropriated his dialectic, though radically modified. For him, there are no dialectical categories like theses, antitheses, and syntheses; instead, his dialectic goes from universality to particularity, a dialect of commitment, will, and choice. According to this, three stages of dialectic may be discerned:

1. The aesthetic stage: In this stage the aesthetic man is not guided by moral standards or religious dogmas; instead, he is guided by imagination, emotion, impulse, and the senses. He seeks to overcome and transcend all forms of limitation on his individuality to achieve self-dispersal. Thus, he is expressing his freedom. However, the quest for the unlimited or infinite turns out to be illusory and futile, and it leads to despair. Therefore, he must remain in this



condition of desperation, or he must choose to commit himself to make the leap to the next level.

2. The ethical stage: The individual accepts moral standards and duties. This commitment involves renunciation of his impulses, and he may become the tragic hero. But ethical man, although at the beginning these acts seem to affirm his self-sufficiency, may recognize that he is after all inadequate, and he has failed to overcome his inherent sinfulness and guilt.
3. The religious stage: Man, by means of a further leap, commits himself to the personal and transcendental God. According to Kierkegaard, God is not revealed through speculative reason, or by any rationalizing of Christianity, but is implicit in man's awareness of his fallibility and guilt.

The transition from one stage to another is not entirely irrational, but the rational will is subordinated to the acts of choice and commitment. According to Kierkegaard, man is consciously striving to commit himself at every moment of his life. The authentically existential man is always in a process of becoming or making himself in relation to God. Man is an actor, not a spectator, an agent, not a speculative thinker. He remains open to the possibility of freedom, and, therefore, he is attracted towards what has not yet been achieved, his self-realization, but at the same time he is repelled by it because he sees himself leaping into the unknown or renouncing what he wants. This is what Kierkegaard means by dread; he calls it a sympathetic antipathy and an antipathetic sympathy.

Kierkegaard's thought is oriented toward this unique question: What is the self that subsists when a person has lost everything, but has not lost herself? In



other words, this question is inquiring about what man is, but not man himself, but that strange man that subsists when he has lost everything except himself.

Sartre based his existentialism on human free will. Individuals are free, from the moment of conception; they define their essence throughout their existence; that is, a person's nature is what he or she has done in the past and what that person is doing at the moment. No one is complete until death, when self-definition ceases.

Sartre's philosophy is explicitly atheistic and pessimistic; he declared that human beings require a rational basis for their lives. However, we are unable to achieve one; therefore, human life becomes a "futile passion." Yet he insisted that his existentialism was a form of humanism, and he emphasized human freedom, choice, and responsibility. This approach, which relates philosophical theory to life, literature, psychology, and political action, stimulated much popular interest, which became a worldwide movement.

The concept of liberty acquires a new sense when it is seen inside the context of the human situation. I am inside a world in which I have been released forever. I cannot avoid the decision to make my world in this or that way and make myself a person or another. Around me there are stones and houses, and there is a city that I should love, hate, or look at with indifference, in which I live or which I will have to leave or return to. There are my roles; the mailboxes that I have to answer; the theses that I have to do, etc., but this is my job. I must perform within a specified time, or leave it undone, with the feeling that I cannot, with existentialism.



These facts have to become more than mere circumstances to man's consciousness, which must transcend in some direction. These directions could be flight, madness or self-destruction. Thus, the self and the world are born together constantly. Therefore, it is not a contradiction in man to be determined and be free, because freedom would be meaningless if there were not these particular facts to confront or from which to flee, to use, or dispose of; particular events that make myself what I am, but at the same time I make with them the world they are. Thus, man is what he makes himself, that is, there is no essence of humanity; on the contrary, there are only men's actions and responsible acts. This is not an easy road; on the contrary, it is a path of extreme discomfort because it doesn't only involve hope as to what I will do, but also responsibility for what I've done. I, and I alone, have to bear the honor, shame, triumph, or sorrow of those achievements and failures. Arguably, this is a terrible doctrine. And truly, that state of awareness of my responsibility, to make of my world what it can be and what, with it, I can be, brings, without any possible escape, if this state is authentic, a feeling of terror in the presence of such responsibility.

What for Sartre is frightening is free decision itself, since it carries with it the state of awareness in an unjustifiable and absurd way, but it is inevitable that I, and I alone, should create or have created the values that make my world a world.

Man is condemned to be free, to make himself, and a deep anguish accompanies that state of awareness. For Sartre, this feeling of anxiety finds its physical expression in nausea, but this nausea rarely manifests itself, and this rarity attests to its hidden presence because a characteristic of human freedom is



not to be able to support its daily confrontation with the disruptive awareness of its own reality.

Thus, the anguish of freedom is an existence that deceives itself day by day and hides the tragic terror of loneliness of the individual; that is, I am the person who makes sense of the world in which I live. I arise to the surface alone and facing the project of constituting my own being. I am the one who I have to make sense of to the world and to my essence; I am the one who decides, alone, without justifications and excuses.

Existential morality arises from the fact that all choices affect others, physically and emotionally. Social responsibility results from the interdependencies of individuals.

### **3.2. *Hamlet* as a source of analysis**

#### **3.2.1. Background, characters, and scenes related to existentialism**

Hamlet's character is traditionally classified within the genre of revenge tragedy; however, his character is far more than a revenger hero. Baugh says that "...the proverbial *Hamlet* without the character of Hamlet has become the classic way of describing a literary vacuum" (528).

[...] *Hamlet* was really no longer a play of revenge; it was a play of life and death and of man's ambiguous relation to them both. It was the passionate protest of a keen and honest thinker against the inescapable sophistications of thought, which make every thing seem





and yet can give no assurance that anything is absolutely true.  
(Baugh 528)

There are many ways to approach Hamlet. One possibility is to approach it from an existential viewpoint. Hamlet delays the action and does not act at once due to his agony of mind and indecision. Hamlet's delay prevents him from descending to the moral level of his opponents, so Hamlet becomes an executioner, not an assassin.

The tragedy is not of a man who cannot kill; the tragedy is of a sensitive man who has an existential outlook on life. Hamlet towers above other plays of its kind through the nobility of its character, his superior power of insight, and reflection upon his situation, and his capacity to suffer the moral anguish which moral responsibility entails. Hamlet is the modern man who struggles in a rotten world.

The play opens with tension, and the second line of the first scene establishes the mood of the play: "...Stand and unfold yourself," Francisco shouts. This phrase could mean a question "Who are you?" which later will become the core of Hamlet's dilemma, "Who am I?" Hamlet will ask himself, "Who are you?" Later he will ask this question of his mother and of Ophelia. This question, "Who are you?" or "Who am I?" hides the final and unanswerable question, "Who or what is man?," what existentialism's main concern. Man is not what he seems to be, and the world is not what it seems like. Young Hamlet will start to discover the discrepancy between appearance and reality. In Sartre's vision, man is born in a kind of void, a



mud, and Hamlet realized that such is the world in which he has born. He has the liberty to remain in this mud in which he is scarcely aware of himself, in a semiconscious state, and to have a passive existence, or to come out of this passive situation, become increasingly aware of himself, and experience a terrible agony of mind. The last option is exactly what Hamlet chooses to live.

He refuses to be “bounded in a nut-shell and count [himself] a king of infinite space,” for he is a thinking man and his “bad dreams” prevent such a vision. (2.2. 256-258)

Hamlet exemplifies the existential concept: man thinks and imposes meaning onto life, thus life becomes worth something.

HAMLET

There is nothing good or bad but thinking makes it so. To me it [Denmark] is a prison. (2.2.251-253)

Later on, he discusses the emptiness of life when man avoids imposing his own attitude on life:

HAMLET

...What is a man,

If his chief good and market of his time

Be but to sleep and feed? -a beast, no more.

Sure He that made us with such large discourse,



Looking before and after, gave us not

That capability of godlike reason

To rust in us unused (4.4. 24-30) (Additional Passages)

Hamlet does not only speak in terms of poetic images but in terms of keen observations of reality. He is a man gifted with great powers of observation. He is capable of scanning reality with a keen eye and penetrating the core of things. Hamlet's purpose was to penetrate the real nature of man and things, and, to do it, he made use of his relentless determination (although this claim seems contradictory with Hamlet's indecision) in order to break down the barriers raised by hypocrisy.

Talking in Sartre's terms, Hamlet's nausea was linked to his boredom and disgust with the corrupt life. In other words, he had a desire to find out the underlying reality behind the appearances; he wanted to unmask men, to strip them of their fine appearances and to show them in their true nature. However, doing this tremendous labor was not an easy thing; that's why he must speak ambiguously and hide his intentions under puns and parables.

In his first soliloquy, Hamlet emphasizes the disrupting dimensions of life:

HAMLET

...O God, God,

How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable

Seem to me all the uses of this world!



Fie on't, ah, fie, 'tis an unweeded garden  
That grows to seed. The things rank and gross in nature  
Possess it merely. (1.2.132-137)

Hamlet rebels against the chaotic life, but at the same time he has to solve the problematic nature of reality and reevaluate his trust in human nature, since he has seen how “one may smile and smile and be a villain” (1.5.109). In this context, his trust in man and in life was shaken, and on top of all, it was expected for Hamlet to act in this commotion. But where is Hamlet going to find the truth? And on top of all, the ghost is somewhat real, or it may be an apparition. From this point on, doubt pervades Hamlet's actions.

Hamlet's loss of faith in humanity starts with the unexpected behavior of his mother. He considers her marriage as the fall of goodness and purity; humanity has fallen in the form of his mother.

HAMLET

...What a piece of work is a man! How noble  
in reason, how infinite in faculty, in form and moving  
how express and admirable, in action how like an  
angel, in apprehension how like a god-the beauty of  
the world, the paragon of animals! And yet to me what  
is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me-no,  
nor woman neither... (2.2.305-311)



After his disappointment with his mother, Hamlet begins to suspect everyone. He doubts Ophelia; that's why he treats her cruelly; he wants to find out if Ophelia is what she seems to be. Ophelia seems to be the image of innocence; however, like his mother, she is a woman.

HAMLET

I have heard of your paintings too, well enough;  
God hath given you one face, and you make your-  
Selves another: you jig, you amble, and you lisp, and  
Nick-name God's creatures, and make your wanton-  
Ness your ignorance. Go to, I'll no more on't.  
It hath made me mad. (3.1.145-150)

HAMLET

Get thee to a nunnery: why wouldst thou be a breeder  
of sinners?... (3.1.123-124)

This reflects his anguish, uncertainty, and distrust. If Ophelia is what she seems, then that rotten world is not for her. But if she is not what she seems, then a nunnery, (in its other sense of brothel) is appropriate for her.

Hamlet's attitude to Ophelia has many interpretations in Shakespearean criticism. According to some critics, Hamlet's misogynistic tendencies are clearly displayed in this relationship. However, misogyny is not pure hatred of women. Love and misogyny are not mutually exclusive concepts; a man may love and need a woman but hate and detest the fact that he is dependent on her. Hamlet may desire Ophelia, but he hates the fact that he needs her, and that may account for



why he treats her so badly. Hamlet can passionately desire Ophelia, but that 'nausea' has pervaded his world, so he cannot trust her completely.

Hamlet's "To be or not to be" speech is a clear manifestation of the existential man. In Kierkegaard's terms, I could say that Hamlet felt that "thrownness;" he felt that he was thrown into life with no purpose at all, and that there was no distinction between existence and non-existence, "to be" and "not to be" in Hamlet's words, unless the individual himself imposes his own subjective meaning onto life.

The major theme is anguish or dread; the anguish of being (Why do I exist, and how?), the anguish of death (according to Plato, is to learn how to die, and according to Tolstoy, is only to think of death), the anguish of here-and-now (why am I born here and now, within this particular time and place, and why not other possibilities?), and the anguish of freedom (man is free to choose, and this causes hesitation).

Hamlet had to choose and create his identity or essence because man, according to existentialism, has no fixed nature. This freedom of choice entails commitment and responsibility, and, according, to the critics, when these states are authentic, they cause anguish.

Ion Youman holds that:

At the peak of one of these fits of anguish, the thought once again occurs to Hamlet to take the third alternative – to kill himself then and there, and thus throw off the problem once and for all. The idea is tempting: instead of obeying what he thinks is his duty, and possibly



committing a rash and unjustified murder; or failing in his duty, by not doing anything against the king, thus incurring a shame that would make his life impossible and his death a favor to the world; why not do neither, but kill himself forthwith, and thus “wash his hands “of the whole matter? (204)

HAMLET

...thus conscience does make cowards of us all,

And thus the native hue of resolution

Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,

And enterprizes of great pitch and moment

With this regard their currents turn awry

And lose the name of action. (3.1.85-90)

Hamlet feels that he cannot stand existentialism; that is, his responsibility is so huge that his human forces are not able to bear such a burden; that's why he thinks of fleeing and says that conscience makes us cowards. He has to define himself at that moment as an avenger, a murderer, or an honest man, or a suicide, but always thinking of the consequences of his decisions, which also delay his actions due to his hesitation

As was mentioned before, according to Kierkegaard, there are three stages of existence in life: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. Hamlet lives in the aesthetic stage because his acceptance of Ophelia's love could be interpreted as some kind of personal enjoyment and pleasure, with its implications of physical and spiritual pleasure. However, Hamlet, moved by disappointment and loss of trust in



humanity, in despair, shows preference for the practice of the ethical life style and devotes his life to set things right.

Hamlet's spirit was alienated by the burden of not being able to overcome the weight of existentialism; that is, Hamlet's disappointment and anguish were delayed by the pretended madness which was the result of an incomprehensible world. Hamlet's madness is not a mask, but his lack of masks. The disillusioned Hamlet suffers from lack of masks.

That apparently real world was ruled by Claudius, which was considered rational, common sensical, and clear. This world had its contrast with the blurred and intangible world of the ghost, made up only of apparitions. Hamlet as an existential man felt the tragic tension between freedom to choose and the limiting factors of the human condition. He knew that if he chose to believe the ghost, he would have been disqualified in the seemingly real world represented by Claudius. However, the ghost is the agent that moves Hamlet to search for truth, and unmask Claudius, who is the embodiment of falsehood, hypocrisy, and double-dealings.

Hamlet devises the play-within-the-play to test the ghost and to verify his hypothesis about Claudius, and, therefore, to unmask him, and in general to validate the world of falsehood in which he was living. The play-within-the-play assures Hamlet that Claudius is guilty of murder. Hamlet is free to avenge his father; however, once again he delays killing the king. He waits for an appropriate moment, when the king will have no time to ask forgiveness for his sins.

Facing this dilemma, Hamlet does not know who he really is. It is only in the last act that we find a changed Hamlet. He is certainly quieter, perhaps because he





is at last himself, no longer afflicted by mourning and melancholy, by murderous jealousy, and rage. He is no longer haunted by his father's ghost. He is now a wise passivity; a mysteriousness and disinterestedness dominate his character:

HAMLET

...If it be now, 'tis

not to come. If it be not to come, it will be now. If it

be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all. (5.2.166-168)

According to Kierkegaard's existential dialectic, Hamlet would now be in the third stage, the religious one. Man, at this stage, must suspend abstract and impersonal ethical rules for his personal and religious growth, which requires a choice without outside criteria; that is, a leap of faith.

The existential hero cannot find meaning in the universe except when he makes a leap of faith. Evidently, Hamlet has gained a crucial knowledge, but knowledge of what? And faith in whom? Perhaps Hamlet expresses some kind of resignation, but the question is, what kind of resignation? Is it of a religious kind or not? Is it an absolute faith in Providence? Or is it mere fatalism? What is it?

His calm and serenity may signify Kierkegaard's leap of faith toward some outside entity which governs the world, but Kierkegaard does not attribute any godliness to this outside entity; instead he leaves it ambiguous and does not define it by any religious or mystical concept.



In this context, it seems that Hamlet is resigned because he is dying. Feeling so close to death, he does not fear it any more; instead, he awaits it as a welcomed guest:

HAMLET

We defy augury. There is a special  
providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis  
not to come. (5. 2.165-167).

For some critics, the play is the negation of optimistic humanism. A man of Hamlet's intelligence and sensitivity cannot assert himself in this world and gain a workable degree of self-sufficiency, but he is overwhelmed by emotional turmoil and the follies and crimes of people around him.

OPHELIA

Now see that noble and most sovereign reason  
like sweet bells jangled out of time and harsh;... (3.1.160-161)

Ophelia is talking about the collapse of a whole world view. Hamlet suffers from perplexity in his self or selves. If nobody knows what Hamlet is, it is because he himself doesn't either. He is an existentialist hero, in search of his true and authentic self; however, this process causes anguish, due to freedom and to the state of awareness.



Yet, Hamlet fails as an existential hero. The tragic tension between freedom and the limiting factors of the human condition is finally lost in Hamlet. He finally accepts the very limiting factors of human condition. Hamlet could not manage to impose meaning onto life, so the only way to escape from this convulsion, for him, is death.

Hamlet recognizes his weakness or nothingness in the face of the greater powers. Hamlet acknowledges divine determination of events, but without enthusiasm, because he, as an existentialist hero, has failed.

HAMLET

There is a divinity that shapes our ends,

Rough-hew them how we will. (5.2.10-11)

When Hamlet was in agony, he says to all:

HAMLET

You that look pale and tremble at this chance,

That are but mutes or audience to this act,... (5.2. 286-287)

According to some critics, these lines may indicate that the real seal is void and silent. Man is the totality of his deeds and his actions, and the playing with words, language in general, is just a mask which is worn to play the short comedy of life.



Fig. 46. Photograph of Paul Robeson as Othello and Peggy Ashcroft as Desdemona from the 1930 London production of Shakespeare's Othello. Rutgers Special Collections and University Archives ([http://njdh.scc-net.rutgers.edu/enj/lessons/paul\\_robeson/?part=othello](http://njdh.scc-net.rutgers.edu/enj/lessons/paul_robeson/?part=othello)).



## CHAPTER IV

### A PSYCHOANALYTIC INTERPRETATION OF OTHELLO

#### 4.1. Approach to the philosophical phenomenon, psychoanalysis.

##### 4.1.1. History, definition, and main representatives

According to Ferrater Mora, psychoanalysis is a process of diagnosing and treating certain neuroses (1950). Psychoanalysis is a method, but it is also a doctrine related to human nature. In terms of both method and doctrine, certain fundamental concepts are employed.

As a therapy, psychoanalysis is based on the concept that individuals are unaware of many factors that cause their behavior and emotions. These unconscious factors have the potential to produce unhappiness, which is expressed through distinguishable symptoms like disturbing personality traits, difficulty in relating to others, or disturbances in self-esteem.

As a method, psychoanalysis is a process of understanding mental functioning and the stages of growth and development. Psychoanalysis seeks to explain the complex relationship between body and mind, and furthers the understanding of the role of emotions in medical illness and health.

As a clinical method, Freud developed a treatment psychopathology through dialog between a patient, or analysand, and a psychoanalyst.



Sigmund Freud<sup>37</sup> was the first psychoanalyst and the true pioneer in the recognition of the importance of unconscious mental activity. In 1896, he coined the term “psychoanalysis,” and developed its main principles, objectives, techniques, and methodology. His writings detail many of his thoughts about mental life, such as the structural theory of mind, dream interpretation, the technique of psychoanalysis, and other topics.

In 1939, Freud succumbed to cancer, and although his life had ended, he left a legacy that continues very much to this day. Nowadays new ideas and techniques have enriched the field of psychoanalysis. Many psychoanalysts today believe that psychoanalysis is the most effective method to obtain knowledge of mind because, through it, patients free themselves from terrible mental anguish and achieve greater understanding of themselves and others.

On the basis of his clinical practice Freud developed theories about the unconscious mind versus the conscious one and the mechanism of repression.

While Freud was developing hypnosis and urging his patients to remember the past in a conscious state, he realized the very difficulty and laboriousness of the process. These observations led him to a crucial insight.

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<sup>37</sup> **Sigmund Freud** (1856–1939) was an Austrian neurologist who became known as the founding father of psychoanalysis.

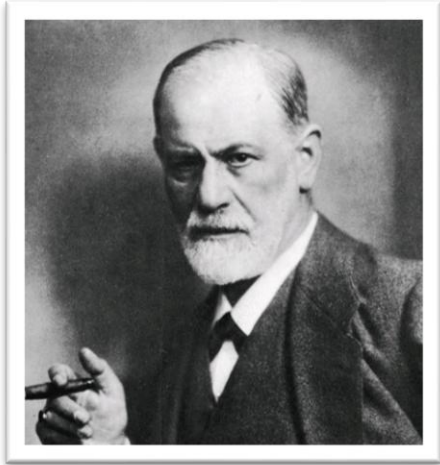


Fig. 47. Sigmund Freud  
(<http://imagenpolitica.com.wordpress.com/2011/09/23/1939-muere-sigmund-freud-medico-austriaco-iniciador-del-psicoanalisis/>).

He concluded that there was a force that prevented the memories from becoming conscious, and they were compelled to remain unconscious. This force received the name of repression. Therefore, psychological repression is the attempt by an individual to repel his own desires and impulses towards pleasurable instincts by excluding the desires from his consciousness and subduing them in the unconscious.

The conscious mind is what we are aware of at any particular moment; that is, our present perceptions, memories, thoughts, fantasies, feelings, and emotions. Very close to the conscious mind is what Freud called the preconscious mind; the memories we are not at this moment thinking of, but we can readily bring to mind. Freud suggested that these two layers of mind are the smallest parts. The largest part is the unconscious, and it includes all the things that are not easily available to awareness, including things that have their origins in this part, such as our instincts, and things that are put there because we cannot bear to look at them; these things are related to memories and emotions associated with trauma.



Freud proposed the evocative metaphor “the psyche is like an iceberg.” It is used to illustrate Freud’s structure of the human mind. The mind is likened to an iceberg; only the tip of the iceberg is visible. This is our consciousness, or awareness. Under the water line is our preconscious; the vast bulk of the iceberg or mind is our unconscious, which is hidden from view, and we are unaware of it. Often parts of an iceberg break off and float to the surface. Freud also thought that pieces of our unconscious could break off and float to the surface of our conscious in terms of neuroses<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> According to Freud, neurosis comes about from the frustration of basic instincts, external obstacles, or internal mental imbalance. Another mental misadaptation which Freud describes is repression because of repressions that occurred in earlier childhood, usually of a sexual nature:

"In a situation of extreme mental conflict, where a person experiences an instinctual impulse which is sharply incompatible with the standards he feels he must adhere to, it is possible for him to put it out of consciousness, to flee from it, to pretend that it does not exist. So repression is one of the so-called "defence mechanisms," by which a person attempts to avoid inner conflicts. But it is essentially an escape, a pretence, a withdrawal from reality, and as such is doomed to failure. For what is repressed does not really disappear, but continues to exist in the unconscious portion of the mind. It retains all its instinctual energy, and exerts its influence by sending into consciousness a disguised substitute for itself - a neurotic symptom. Thus, the person can find himself behaving in ways which he will admit are irrational, yet which he feels compelled to continue without knowing why. For by repressing something out of his consciousness he has given up effective control over it; he can neither get rid of the symptoms it is causing, nor voluntarily lift the repression and recall it to consciousness" (Leslie Stevenson).





Fig. 48. The Iceberg Metaphor  
(<http://www.breathingforgiveness.net/2013/01/anti-slavery-campaign-interview-series.html>).

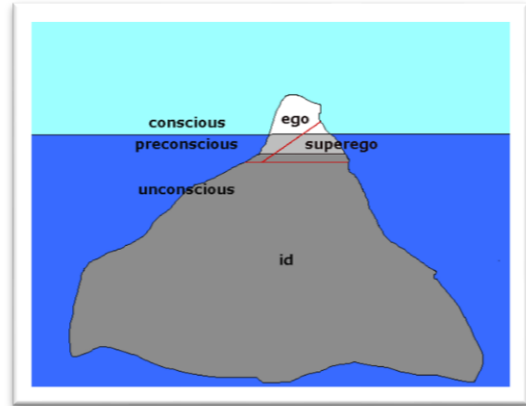


Fig. 49. Freud Conception of the Human Psyche  
(<http://childpsych.umwblogs.org/psychoanalysis-2/sigment-freud/>).

Freud classified mental activity as existing at three levels: the Id, the Ego, and the Superego. He states that psychological reality starts with the world and its objects. Among these objects is the organism, whose functions are special because it acts to survive and reproduce. But how does the organism attain these functions? The organism is guided toward these ends by its needs: thirst, hunger, sex, etc., through an important part of the organism, the nervous system. The nervous system translates the organism's needs into motivational forces called instincts or drives. The nervous system is also known as 'it' or 'id.' It is the only component of personality that is present from birth. It is the unorganized part of the personality structure that contains instinctual drives. The id contains the libido, which is the primary source of instinctual force. The id acts according to the 'pleasure principle,' and it seeks to avoid pain aroused by increases in instinctual tension.

According to Freud, the id is unconscious by definition:



It is the dark, inaccessible part of our personality; what little we know of it we have learned from our study of the Dreamwork and of the construction of neurotic symptoms, and most of that is of a negative character and can be described only as a contrast to the ego. We approach the id with analogies: we call it a chaos, a cauldron full of seething excitations.... It is filled with energy reaching it from the instincts, but it has no organization, produces no collective will, but only a striving to bring about the satisfaction of the instinctual needs subject to the observance of the pleasure principle. (*New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* 105-106)

The pleasure principle can be understood as a demand to take care of needs immediately. For example, a hungry infant could be screaming; he knows what he wants, and he wants it now. The infant, in the Freudian view, is pure or nearly pure id.

The id is the psychical representative of biology. In the id, "contrary impulses exist side by side, without cancelling each other out [...] There is nothing in the id that could be compared with negation [...] nothing in the id which corresponds to the idea of time" (*Freud New Introductory Lectures* 106).

The id "knows no judgments of value: no good and evil, no morality.... Instinctual cathexes seeking discharge — that, in our view, is all there is in the id" (*Freud, New Introductory Lectures* 107). It is regarded as "the great reservoir of libido", (*Freud, The Ego and the Id, On Metapsychology* 369) the instinctive drive to create — the life instincts that are crucial to pleasurable survival.



When we haven't satisfied some need, it begins to demand more and more of our attention, until we cannot think of anything else. The drive or wish is then breaking into consciousness. The consciousness is hooked up to the world through the senses. During the first year of a child's life, some of the 'it' becomes 'I,' some of the 'id' becomes 'ego.' The ego relates the organism to reality by means of its consciousness, and its searches for objects to satisfy the wishes that the id creates.

The ego is the organized part of the personality structure, and according to Freud it means a set of psychical functions such as judgment, tolerance, reality testing, control, planning, defense, synthesis of information, intellectual functioning, and memory. The ego helps us to organize our thoughts and make sense of them and of the world around us.

The ego is that part of the id which has been modified by the direct influence of the external world [...] The ego represents what may be called reason and common sense, in contrast to the id, which contains the passions [...] in its relation to the id it is like a man on horseback, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse; with this difference, that the rider tries to do so with his own strength, while the ego uses borrowed forces. (Freud, *The Ego and the Id, On Metapsychology* 363-364)

Still worse, "it serves three severe masters [...] the external world, the super-ego and the id" (Freud, *New Introductory Lectures* 110).



Thus the ego, driven by the id, confined by the super-ego, repulsed by reality, struggles ... [in] bringing about harmony among the forces and influences working in and upon it, and readily breaks out in anxiety — realistic anxiety regarding the external world, moral anxiety regarding the super-ego, and neurotic anxiety regarding the strength of the passions in the id. (Freud, *New Introductory Lectures* 110-111)

The ego's task is to find a balance between primitive drives and reality; it has to do its best to satisfy all three severe masters, and it is constantly feeling hemmed in, of causing discontent in the three masters. However, it is said that the ego seems to be more loyal to the id, but the super-ego is constantly watching every one of the ego's moves and punishes it with feelings of guilt, anxiety<sup>39</sup>, and inferiority.

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<sup>39</sup> Freud once said "life is not easy!"

The ego, the "I" sits at the center of some pretty powerful forces: reality; society, as represented by the superego; biology, as represented by the id. When these make conflicting demands upon the poor ego, it is understandable if we feel threatened, feel overwhelmed, feel as if we were about to collapse under the weight of all this. This feeling is called **anxiety**, and it serves as a signal to the ego that its survival, and with it the survival of the whole organism, is in jeopardy.

Freud mentions three different kind of anxieties: The first is **realistic anxiety**, which is translated as fear. For example, if I were thrown into a pit of poisonous snakes, I might experience realistic anxiety. The second is **moral anxiety**. It comes not from the outer, physical world, but from the internalized social world of the superego. It is, in fact, just another world for feelings like shame and guilt and the fear of punishment. The last is **neurotic anxiety**. This is the fear of being overwhelmed by impulses from the id. For example, if we have ever felt like we were about to lose control, our temper, our rationality, or even our mind, we have felt neurotic anxiety. Neurotic is



The ego struggles to keep the id, and ultimately the organism, happy. To attain this, the ego meets with obstacles in the world, and it occasionally meets with objects that actually assist it in attaining its goals. Besides, it keeps a record of these obstacles and aides. In particular, it keeps the rewards and punishments meted out by two most influential objects in the world of the child, mom and dad.

The superego represents society, and society often doesn't want us to satisfy our needs at all! For Freud

the installation of the super-ego can be described as a successful instance of identification with the parental agency; the super-ego also takes on the influence of those who have stepped into the place of parents — educators, teachers, people chosen as ideal models.  
(Freud, *New Introductory Lectures* 95-96)

In this context, the Super-ego can be thought of as a type of conscience that punishes misbehavior with feelings of guilt, for example, for having extra-marital affairs.

The super-ego could also be seen as an inner critic, and it works in contradiction to the id. The super-ego controls our sense of right and wrong, and it strives to act in a socially appropriate manner, whereas the id just wants instant self-gratification.

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actually the Latin word for nervous, so this is nervous anxiety. This kind of anxiety intrigued Freud most.

According to Freud's theory, the super-ego is a symbolic internalization of the father figure and cultural regulations. The super-ego and the ego are the product of two key factors: the state of helplessness of the child and the Oedipus complex.



Fig. 50. Oedipus Rex (Latin title of the Greek tragedy)  
(<http://www.litdrift.com/2009/05/06/oedipus-rex-the-video-game/>).

Freud analyzed myths from a psychological standpoint. *Oedipus the King* is a Greek tragedy based on a myth; it was written by Sophocles in 430 BC. Freud coined the term 'Oedipus complex' in his *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1899 from the legend of Oedipus.

According to the myth, Oedipus killed his father and married his own mother and fathered children. In psychoanalytic theory, it means a

desire to sexually possess his mother, and kill his father.

This complex denotes the emotions and ideas that mind keeps in the unconscious, via dynamic repression, The Oedipus complex occurs in the third phallic stage<sup>40</sup> (ages 3-6).

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<sup>40</sup> Freud said that the sex drive is the most important motivating force. Freud realized that this motivating force exerted its influence not only on adults but on children, too. Thus, he began to introduce his ideas about sexuality from childhood. But according to Freud, sexuality meant not only intercourse, but all pleasurable sensation from the skin. Therefore, it is clear that babies, children, and, of course, adults, enjoy tactile experiences such as caresses, kisses, and so on.



Much of Freud's sources for analysis are in literature. In his book *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Sigmund Freud begins with a lengthy study of literature from Aristotle to contemporary figures.

### **The causes of dreams**

From a conception of dreams as an inspiration from the divine, man has arrived at the view that they are simply the result of sensory excitation. According to this explanation, dreams such as finding myself naked are the result of my bedclothes falling off; flying dreams are caused by the rising and falling of the lungs, and so on. However, Freud felt that sensory stimuli did not explain all dreams. According to him, physical stimuli could certainly shape what we dreamed about, but they could be equally ignored and not incorporated into our dreams. The

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Freud noted this at different times in our lives; that is, different parts of our skin give us greatest pleasure. In these observations, Freud made a psychosexual stage theory.

The oral stage lasts from birth to about 18 months. The focus of pleasure is the mouth. Sucking and biting are the favorite activities.

The anal stage lasts from about 18 months to three or four years old. The child focuses on the anal pleasures of holding fecal matter in and letting it go.

The phallic stage lasts from three or four to five, six, or seven years old. The focuses of pleasure are the genitalia. Masturbation is common.

The latent stage lasts from five, six, or seven to puberty. During this stage, Freud believed that the sexual impulse was suppressed in the service of learning.

The genital stage begins at puberty, and represents the resurgence of the sex drive in adolescence. The focus of pleasure is sexual intercourse.



ethical dimension was also present in many dreams which did not suggest merely physical causes.

Freud worked with people with psychoses<sup>41</sup> and realized that their dreams were a good indicator of their mental state. As a result of his work, he concluded that dreams have a preference to use impressions from the present, but they also have access to early childhood memories. The unconscious mind generally does not focus on major events, but it remembers the trivial or unnoticed ones; this is projected in dreams. Although dreams are considered to be absurd, they have a unifying motive that easily connects people, events, and sensations into one story.

Dreams are always about the self. Nearly all dreams are wish-fulfillments; that is, they reveal a deep motivation or desire which wants to be fulfilled. Freud came to the view that both physical sensations while we are asleep and memories of what happened during the day were like a cheap material always available and put to use whenever needed. They were not the cause of dreams but simply elements used by the psyche in its creation of meaning.

Despite all these considerations, Freud wondered, why is the wish so poorly articulated, so wrapped up in strange symbols and images? Why should it need to avoid the obvious? Many of our wishes have to be repressed because of the requirements of the superego which are internalized in the consciousness, so our

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<sup>41</sup> It refers to an abnormal condition of the mind, and is a generic psychiatric term for a mental state often described as a "loss of contact with reality."



dreams may only have a chance to reach our consciousness if they are somewhat disguised.

Freud famously wrote that there had been three great humiliations in human history:

- 1) Galileo's discovery: the earth was not the center of the universe; that is, man is not already the center of the universe.
- 2) Darwin's discovery: man was not the center of creation.
- 3) Freud's own discovery: man was not in charge of his own mind, as was believed.

### The Psychoanalytic View of Narcissism

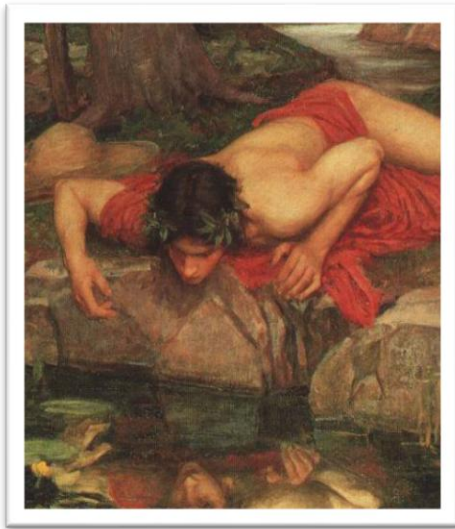


Fig. 51. Narcissus

(<http://fishduck.com/2012/05/flyover-country-47-letters/narcissus/>)

The origin of this personality disorder has its earliest roots in ancient Greek mythology. According to the myth, *Narcissus* was a handsome and proud young man. When he saw his reflection on the water for the first time, he fell in love with it that he could not stop gazing at his own image. He remained at the water's edge until he died.

In Freud's paper, *On Narcissism: An*



*Introduction*, he suggested that narcissism is actually a normal part of the human psyche, as the energy that lies behind each person's survival instincts.

In Freud's theory of personality, people are born without a basic sense of self. Infancy's experiences and early childhood determined what is known as ego, or a sense of self. In other words, when children interact with the outside world, they begin to learn social norms and cultural expectations. All these factors help to develop an ego idea, or a perfect image of oneself that the ego strives to attain.

Healthy narcissism: The individual must learn to love others and love himself to acquire mental stability.

Pathological narcissism: The person becomes ill, as a result of a frustration, when he is unable to love any object beside himself. Freud calls this megalomania. The ego turns back on itself, and such a person is incapable of loving others and uses them for self-gain.

In this context, the Narcissus myth is not that he fell in love with himself, but that he failed to recognize himself in his own reflection. In other words, true narcissists are not self-aware. A real narcissist is dissociated from his or her true self; he feels haunted by chronic feelings of loneliness, emptiness, and self-loathing, and seeks to replace that disconnection with a sense of worth and importance fueled by others. Narcissism is also marked by a profound lack of empathy, a fundamental inability to understand and connect with the feelings of others.



## Jealousy

According to Freud, the different feelings of jealousy are rooted in the loss and search for love. However, Ernest Jones in 1929, in his paper *Jealousy*, argues that neurotic jealousy is in fact a sign of hate and self-loathing. He emphasizes that narcissistic love is a refusal to acknowledge the otherness of the person, and it has its roots in defensive hateful aggression, and the kind of jealousy that will emerge will be particularly aggressive, too. In this context jealousy is not related to the wish to defend a love based on attachment, but rather it manifests itself as part of psychic defenses to bolster up the fragile ego of the subject.

Freud distinguished three layers or grades of jealousy: normal, projected, and delusional.

Normal jealousy is made up of grief, the pain at the thought of losing the loved object, and of the narcissistic wound, one's 'amour propre' is hurt at the idea of losing the loved object. There is also a feeling of hostility against the successful rival and a certain amount of self-criticism for losing the object. Although it is called normal jealousy, it is not always entirely rational; that is, it is not based altogether on actual situations, nor is it proportionate to the real facts or under full control of the ego.

Freud wrote that fidelity is only maintained in the face of continual temptations. Even a person who denies these temptations in himself experiences them. How can such a person relieve his guilt over the impulse or the actual



infidelity? One way is to “project his own impulses to faithlessness on to the partner to whom he owes faith. He can then justify himself with the thought that the other is not much better than himself ” (Freud, *Some Neurotic Mechanisms in Jealousy, Paranoia and Homosexuality*).

A man who has been unfaithful, or desired another woman but didn't act on it, may “project” that infidelity onto his innocent wife-blaming her for the things he did or wanted to do, and then responding to the projected threat with jealousy.

The third form, delusional jealousy is more severe. It originates on the basis of repressed impulse toward infidelity, but according to Freud, the objects of its fantasies belong to the same sex. (Modern psychoanalysts tend to disagree with Freud on this point.) In a man it may be expressed in the formula, “Indeed, I do not love him, she loves him.”

## **4.2. Othello as a source of analysis**

### **4.2.1. Background, characters, and scenes related to psychoanalysis**

Freud always recognized the genius of artists in perceiving deep psychic truths. This explains his interest in art, specifically with the birth of psychoanalysis which moves along three main aspects: the analysis of works of art, of creative activity, and of the aesthetic experience.

Artists have always shown great interest in the human mind and its passions. Their genius has offered visions of invisible inner realities. Consequently, psychoanalysis focused its earliest attentions on art. Freud showed great



admiration for the deep psychological intuition of artists and implicitly recognized a debt to the poetic intuition of the great Greek tragedies which were related to the unconscious mind. Then, the psychoanalysts have added more awareness to the explorations made by the artists, trying to recognize clearly those psychic processes that artistic insight had perceived only obscurely.

If Shakespeare dramatized his searching into the human mind, Freud mapped it out. Shakespeare dramatized man's wishes and dreams, and Freud made it possible to discuss these wishes and dreams scientifically.

Although Freud discusses *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth* in detail, he rarely mentions *Othello*, the fourth of the four major tragedies. However, the psychiatric condition of sexual jealousy was named as the Othello syndrome in 1955 by the English psychiatrist John Todd in a paper he published with K. Dewhurst entitled *The Othello Syndrome: A Study in the Psychopathology of Sexual Jealousy*. In medical terms, this syndrome is defined as the delusion of infidelity of a spouse. It often affects males. It is characterized by recurrent accusations of infidelity, searches for evidence, repeated interrogation of the partner, tests of the partner's fidelity, and sometimes stalking. This syndrome can be highly dangerous, with consequent disruption of a marriage, homicide, and suicide.

In *Othello*, the play by Shakespeare, Othello displays the full range of this psychiatric condition. Traditional readings tend to present Othello in his best possible condition: a noble victim destroyed by his simplicity of nature, by his



innocence in regard to Venetian society, and, mainly, by the diabolical character of Iago. However, most psychoanalytical studies see Othello's character as responsible, in some way, for his downfall.

Karen Horney observes that Othello displays many characteristics of a narcissistic person. The narcissist "is his idealized image [...] which gives him a seeming abundance of self-confidence" (194). Marvin Rosenberg, too, sees the negative aspects of Othello: "rootless, histrionic, self-deceiving, irritable, hasty, dependent, insecure, a pathetic image who lives in a fantasy of himself and others, who shrinks from reality into a world of 'pipe dreams'" (186-187). Bernard J. Paris also confirms this negative view of Othello. He argues that Othello's marriage to Desdemona symbolizes his entry into the highest level of Venetian society, and it means a gratifying triumph. "He loves Desdemona because she feeds his pride and confirms his idealized image" (81-83). David Enoch, a psychiatrist, also thinks that Iago merely fanned the flame of jealousy, "which was already embedded in Othello's personality" (38).

Narcissists are readily offended, and they are eager to defend their rights. Othello was always trying to defend himself. His speech against Brabantio's accusation of his having seduced Desdemona displays his desperate attempts to maintain his idealized image.

## OTHELLO

I do beseech you,

Send for the lady to the Sagitary,



And let her speak of me before her father.

If you do find me foul in her report,

The trust, the office I do hold of you

Not only take away, but let your sentence

Even fall upon my life.(1.3.114-120)

Then, he justifies his homicidal act, and he talks as if he was blameless except for having loved Desdemona too much.

OTHELLO

...I pray you in your letters,

When you shall these unlucky deeds relate

Speak of me as I am. Nothing extenuate,

Nor set down aught in malice. Then must you speak

Of one that loved not wisely, but too well,

Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought,

Perplexed in the extreme; ... (5.2.349-355)

Freud distinguished three layers or grades of jealousy: normal, projected, and delusional, and according to Reid, Othello's jealousy would likely be of the delusional variety.

Desdemona says that her husband is not jealous:



DESDEMONA

Believe me, I had rather have lost my purse  
Full of crusades, and but my noble Moor  
Is true of mind, and made of no such baseness  
As jealous creatures are, it were enough  
To put him to ill thinking.

EMILIA

Is he not jealous?

DESDEMONA

Who, he? I think the sun where he was born  
Drew all such humors from him. (3.4.25- 31)

In Freud's view, Othello would have repressed severely his jealousy; that's why he appeared to be without it, which made him more susceptible to jealousy's dangers, and, consequently, this fact played the greater part in his unconscious mental life.

Othello's suspicion turned into morbid jealousy, and this fact contributed to increase his doubts about Desdemona's innocence. His early signs of jealousy began long before they become obvious. When Othello is interrogated by Iago about trivialities, he explodes in a fit of fury. Iago was surprised by his reaction:

IAGO

O, beware, my lord, of jealousy;  
It is the green-eyed monster, which doth mock





That meat it feeds on. That cuckold lives in bliss,

Who, certain of his fate, loves not his wronger.

But O, what damned minutes tells he o'er

Who dotes, yet doubts, suspects, yet strongly loves! (3.3.169-174)

Othello, as in Narcissus's myth, sees his own reflection in Desdemona's love. If something is threatening his belief in her love, it is also threatening his own idealized image, which he constantly needs to check from Desdemona's gaze.

According to David Enoch, "the core of the problem is one of inadequacy arising from a discrepancy between what the patient wants to be and what he considers he actually is" (42). In this context, Othello's feelings of inadequacy may be linked with (1) his race, which involves his status as a black man in relation to a white aristocratic woman, (2) the age gap between Desdemona and him, and (3) his insecurity. Therefore, Othello's character collapses because he realizes the discrepancy between his idealized image and his true self. In the next speech, Othello displays all the three characteristics:

OTHELLO

...Haply for I am black,

And have not those soft parts of conversation

That chamberers have; or for I am declined

Into the vale of years-yet that's not much-

She's gone. I am abused, and my relief

Must be to loathe her. O curse of marriage



That we can call these delicate creatures ours  
And not their appetites! I had rather be a toad  
And live upon the vapor of a dungeon  
Than keep a corner in the thing I love...(3.3. 267-276)

Iago's power over Othello is best understood because of Othello's love for Desdemona. The text reveals how Othello internalizes the cultural associations of blackness with dirt and pollution. This means a defense against the idealization of Desdemona since her fidelity is significant to Othello only as a mirror for his own idealized self image. The possibility of Desdemona's infidelity causes him to see himself as black, and this blackness is a measure of sexual corruption and social disgrace.

#### OTHELLO

By the world,  
I think my wife be honest, and think she is not.  
I think that thou art just, and think thou art not.  
I'll have some proof. My name, that was as fresh  
As Dian's visage, is now begrimed and black  
As mine own face...(3.3.388-393)

Novy's interpretation is interesting because it discusses how the racial stereotype of the Moor overlaps with the gender stereotype of the woman. Joyce Green MacDonald argued that Cassio's prostitute, Bianca, is "racialized as black, assigned a set of negative sexual characteristics associated with Africa and



Africans” (196). Cassio calls her a “monkey” and a “fitchew.” These words, according to MacDonald, are animals associated with strong sex drives. Bianca “is racialized as black because of her sexual activity outside of patriarchal control over the disposition of her body” (197).

CASSIO

This is the monkey’s own giving out. (4.1.126)

CASSIO

‘This such another fitchew! Marry, a perfumed one. (4.1.143)

In Freud’s words, the superego is acting as a universal alienating force in the human psyche of Othello’s characters.

The unconscious itself functions as an “internal other” that radically disturbs the homely sense that each of us apparently masters. This internal other opens its own way to a collapse of confidence in the self, so it doesn’t matter how robust our self might seem; it has already been infiltrated by something inexplicable, something that the ‘self’ is not.

Freud postulated that an individual’s actions and behavior are based on motivations which lie in emotional forces of the unconscious mind. He was concerned with an important question, how to overcome the pleasure principle? Freud’s inquiry is displayed in Iago’s speech:

IAGO

...In following him I follow but myself.



Heaven is my judge, not I for love and duty,  
But seeming so for my peculiar end. (1.1.58-60)

Iago is pretending to be an honest man to Othello, but he actually is pursuing his own ends. However, Shakespeare through Iago himself answered Freud's inquiry:

IAGO

...If the beam of our lives had not  
One scale of reason to poise another of sensuality, the  
Blood and baseness of our natures would conduct us  
To most preposterous conclusions. But we have reason  
to cool our raging motions, our carnal stings, our  
Unbitted lusts;... (1.3.326-331)

In other words, reason tempers our angry passions.

In Shakespeare's patriarchal world, a man betrayed by a woman represented the greatest humiliation. This humiliation placed him in a position of weakness, a feminine posture, so "to recover his honor he must destroy the man or woman who is responsible for his humiliation, for placing him in a position of vulnerability," Sprengenther says (154).

Adelman contends that Othello's relationship with Desdemona is steeped in his anxieties around maternal dependency. She emphasizes Desdemona's maternal pity towards him (64).



## OTHELLO

...She loved me for the dangers I had passed,  
And I loved her that she did pity them...(1.3.166-167)

However, not only the id or the impulsive instincts disturb the human psyche, but, as we saw before, the punitive superego also plays a great role.

The Oedipal complex is displayed in Othello's struggle to reconcile the role of his mother with the role of his wife. The object of this struggle was Desdemona's handkerchief. This handkerchief meant a lot to Othello because his mother gave it to him on her deathbed with the instruction that one day it should be given to his bride. Othello describes the handkerchief as a gift from an Egyptian charmer, a gift that meant faithfulness between his father and his mother. Othello suffers from a misplaced Oedipal complex repressed through his love affair with Desdemona. He was trapped by a subconscious desire to marry woman who reminds him of his mother. The linking cue to the whole mystery comes with the mythical handkerchief that originally belonged to Othello's mother.

## OTHELLO

...That handkerchief  
Did an Egyptian to my mother give.  
She was a charmer, and could almost read  
The thoughts of people. She told her, while she kept it  
'Twould make her amiable, and subdue my father  
Entirely to her love; but if she lost it,



Or made a gift of it, my father's eye

Should hold her loather, and his spirits should hunt

After new fancies. She, dying, gave it me,...(3.4. 55-63)

The power of the handkerchief moves Othello far beyond a mere sentimental gift; the handkerchief becomes a fetish because it symbolizes Othello's conflicting feelings about women. Iago takes advantage of this conflict, and he exploits it, and he even suggests how to kill Desdemona.

IAGO

Do it not with poison. Strangle her in her bed, even  
the bed she hath contaminated.

OTHELLO

Good, good. The justice of it pleases, very good. (4.1.202-204)

Some critics point out that the bed is both the place where infants are fed by their mothers and where men are pleased by their wives. Therefore, the decision to strangle Desdemona was seen as evidence of Othello's pre-genital concern with organs of feeding and breathing. That's why Othello says, "The justice of it pleases."

Orgel states that stealing Desdemona away from her father is, for Othello, the equivalent of living out the Oedipal fantasy of stealing his mother away from his father. However, the fantasy cannot be fulfilled without punishment, so Iago is the perfect man to assume the role of the superego which "observes, judges, criticizes" (Orgel 259), and it must pay Othello for his sin.



IAGO

...I am nothing if not critical. (2.2.122)

In his theory about dreams, Freud concluded that dreams have a preference to use impressions from days, and they also incorporate the ethical dimension. Freud also stated that nearly all dreams are wish-fulfillments; they reveal a deep motivation or desire which wants to be fulfilled.

When Othello asks for “living reason,” a proof, that Desdemona has been “disloyal,” Iago tells him about a sexy dream that Cassio supposedly had one night while he was lying in bed next to Iago. According to Iago, while Cassio was sleeping, he began to talk about a steamy encounter with Desdemona, but not only that but Cassio also grabbed Iago, wrapped his leg over his thigh, and made out with him. He did all these things while he was dreaming about Desdemona, of course.

OTHELLO

Give me a living reason she's disloyal.

IAGO

I do not like the office,

But sith I am entered in this cause so far,

Pricked to't by foolish honesty and love,

I will go on. I lay with Cassio lately,

And being troubled with a raging tooth,

I could not sleep. There are a kind of men



So loose of soul that in their sleeps  
Will mutter their affairs. One of this kind is Cassio.  
In sleep I heard him say 'Sweet Desdemona,  
Let us be wary, let us hide our loves,'  
And then, sir, would he grip and wring my hand,  
Cry 'O, sweet creature! then kiss me hard,  
As if he plucked up kisses by the roots,  
That grew upon my lips, lay his leg o'er my thigh,  
And sigh, and kiss, and then cry 'Cursed fate  
That gave thee to the Moor!'

OTHELLO

O, monstrous, monstrous!

IAGO

Nay, this was but his dream.

OTHELLO

But this denoted a foregone conclusion. (3.3.414-433)

According to Freud's theory, Cassio's ego freed itself from all ethical bonds in his dream and fulfilled the demands of his sexual desire. But for Othello, this dream was the proof that Cassio's evil wishful impulses were carried out in reality, since a dream, for Freud, incorporates the impressions from reality and the ethical dimensions to reveal a deep motivation. In this case, this dream was revealing that Desdemona was truly unfaithful to her husband.





This delicious and delightfully visual image of Cassio groping and passionately kissing in the night not simply completes Othello's humiliation, but it steels his resolve. The image is so powerful because it is both a homosexual and heterosexual image, and it may cause a sexual confusion in Othello.

It is known that resolve is serious when it uses the language of religion. Othello carries out his plans by saying the words that raise his plans from the profane to the sacred.

OTHELLO

He kneels

Now, by yon marble heaven,

In the due reverence of a sacred vow

I here engage my words. (3.3.462-464)

The language of sacredness increases with the handkerchief. It becomes the sacred woven article with magic in it.

OTHELLO

...There's magic in the web of it. (3.4.71)

When a person makes an appeal to the sacred, he or she is not simply conferring power on the act with the garment of divine authority, but he or she is ceding that act to the divinity. Othello will commit a crime, but this act is approved by divine authority.



Nowadays, many fanatic religious people defend all manner of bizarre killing with the argument that they are the instruments of the divine. In this context, once resolve is sealed and steeled with religious fervor, everything can be justified. And in Freud's words, the superego, disguised as religion, too, is too powerful to alienate people and cause serious neurosis.

By the end of Iago's narration, Othello is ready for action. Although his life may be over, he still has one more great act to perform before it is really over. Othello kills Desdemona under the guise of righteous indignation; he will not admit his true motive; he will not admit Desdemona's distortional image that he has created in his mind. However, when Othello finds out Desdemona's pure and innocent emblem, he is obligated to commit suicide. The Moor must once again render justice, this time upon himself.

Othello had an obligation to allow Desdemona to contend the charge of adultery. However, he chose to treat her disrespectfully, to satisfy his own fixations.

DESDEMONA

Kill me tomorrow; let me live tonight.

OTHELLO

Nay, an you strive-

DESDEMONA

But half an hour.

OTHELLO

Being done, there is no pause.



DESDEMONA

But while I say one prayer.

OTHELLO

It is too late. (5.2.87-92)

*He smothers her*

It would be easier to defend Othello and blame Iago, but Iago is an aberration, and Othello is 'Everyman' fighting an internal battle. Othello made great decisions in a weak state of mind; he was driven by his pain and confusion, but these circumstances don't exonerate him.



Fig. 52. Cordelia shows toward her father, King Lear. She refuses his demand for a declaration of love. Photograph of John Gielgud as Lear and Peggy Ashcroft as Cordelia (Greer 130).



## CHAPTER V

### A VITALISTIC INTERPRETATION OF KING LEAR

#### 5.1. Approach to the philosophical phenomenon, vitalism.

##### 5.1.1. History, definition, and main representatives

In philosophy, vitalism is a school of scientific thought whose germ dates from Aristotle. In opposition to mechanism<sup>42</sup> and organicism<sup>43</sup>, vitalism attempts to explain the nature of life as the result of a vital force which is peculiar to living organisms and different from all other forces found outside living things.

In his 1924 article, "Neither vitalism nor rationalism," José Ortega y Gasset<sup>44</sup> warns of the temptation to include his thoughts in the vitalistic current.

José Ortega y Gasset points out that vitalism loses much of its radicalism when it accepts the method of rational knowledge and believes that the main philosophical issue has to be life. Therefore, vitalism is the doctrine that foregrounds issues concerning the relationship between life and reason.

Ortega y Gasset is not against reason but against rationalism and its exaggeration in the use of reason, and the neglect of life. He believes that any

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<sup>42</sup> In philosophy, mechanism holds that natural phenomena can and should be explained by reference to matter and motion and their laws.

<sup>43</sup> Organicism is the philosophical perspective which views the universe and its parts as organic wholes.

<sup>44</sup> José Ortega y Gasset (1883 – 1955) was a Spanish liberal philosopher and essayist working during the first half of the 20th century while Spain oscillated between monarchy, republicanism and dictatorship.

theory has to be rational and conceptual, but at the same time, it doesn't have to forget life. Ortega y Gasset's vital reason shows that a fundamental dimension of life is "to know what to expect, to be aware." That's why it is impossible to live without reason. Reason is an instrument of life to overcome the original chaos of existence. In order to avoid irrationalistic interpretations, Ortega y Gasset proposes other titles for his philosophy such as "vital doctrine of reason," "doctrine of historical reason," "living doctrine of reason," "ratio-vitalism." In short, Ortega y Gasset states in his "The Theme of Our Time" that "thought is a vital function, such as digestion or blood circulation..." (IV).

Ortega y Gasset considers that only in this sense can his philosophy be called vitalistic.



Fig. 53. José Ortega y Gasset  
([http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jos%C3%A9\\_Ortega\\_y\\_Gasset](http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jos%C3%A9_Ortega_y_Gasset))

His philosophy became popular around the phrase "I am myself and my circumstance, and if I do not save it, I don't save me."

Ortega y Gasset's metaphysics means a radical way of thinking about things.

Ortega y Gasset in his *Metaphysical Lessons* holds that the essential condition of human beings is our radical disorientation. It doesn't mean that in moments of desperation, we are occasionally clueless, but human beings



constantly feel lost.

Life is a radical disorientation; but we do not live clueless, we could retort to him. On the contrary, we know that our house is located in a certain direction; that we must wake up at certain hour to go to work; that we belong to a certain country; that we occupied a place in the universe... And “Is all that a proof of our unbreaking orientation?” Ortega y Gasset will ask. “Well, I don’t think so” he will answer. If we think about all these little securities upon which we have built our lives, we realize that all of them are inherited; they are securities that others have left us, and we have accepted them without questioning. The direction of our house, the territory we call country, our planet and the universe are things in which we believe because others have taught us to believe that, but not because we have attained that knowledge by ourselves; we are unaware of that. If we want something to be evident for us, we actually need to have questioned about it before. This something must become a problem for us, and to assume a problem means feeling disorientation. Disorientation is the real situation of the human being. We authentically live when we recognize that radical disorientation, when the world always appears to us as a problem.

When we live according to the orientations that others offer us, our life becomes fictitious because we walk on false assurances; assurances that we have not conquered by ourselves. What occurs in this fictional way of living is the supplantation of our effective personality by a pseudo-self who comes from the social environment. It is the blind delivery to that repertoire of alien convictions



which obey the desire to escape from anguish produced by the radical disorientation in which we are inserted.

Metaphysics is the attempt to respond to that estrangement of which life consists; it is the attempt to obtain guidance in the worldly chaos which radically disorients us. That's why every human being, consciously or unconsciously, makes metaphysics. Metaphysics is something that man makes; it is just one more thing among the many things he does, but this doing has a special singularity; it is the doing that looks for orientation for all the doings.

For Ortega y Gasset, life consists of a self and a circumstance, always in mutual implication. I have to make my life permanently; I have to deal with my circumstance. What I do is what I will be. Being me there, in that circumstance, that's life, and this is a problem that I need to solve. To do that, I need to organize my doing, and to organize it, I need to orientate myself in the "there" of my circumstance. Man's circumstance is pure trouble, and pure trouble is absolute insecurity, which forces us to build security.

This search for radical orientation has requirements. While the scientist can make his/her science in community (he/she can appropriate others' opinions if they are handy), the metaphysician is forced to be alone. Metaphysics is loneliness. Nobody, however excellent his will may be, can give us made our convictions ready-made.

But what is the situation of man? He is inserted not in one but in many different situations. For example, I am now writing my thesis, and in the morning, I was in the library, and so on. According to Ortega y Gasset, all these situations are





different portions of my life, as matter is composed of atoms. Every doing is a living. Therefore, the situation of man's life is to live. But what is life? Life is what we are, what we do, and what happens to us.

For Ortega y Gasset, the purpose of his *Metaphysical Lessons* is to encourage us to take care of our life because we have only one, and this one is composed of very limited moments of nows, and if we misuse them it is like destroying our life, like killing a bit of our life.

Nothing of what we do would be our life if we didn't have consciousness of that. Living is a revelation, not to be content with being but to understand, to find myself. It is the incessant discovery that we do of ourselves and of the world around us.

Ortega y Gasset holds that this presence or consciousness of my life before me gives me possession of it; this presence makes my life mine. This is what the insane needs. The life of a crazy person is not his or hers; it is not strictly life. That's why seeing a madman is the most harrowing fact thing that exists because life appears like a mask behind which there lacks an authentic life. The crazy man, by not knowing himself, doesn't belong to himself; he has been expropriated; that is, his ownership is foreign; he is alienated; he is "gone;" he is possessed by another.

We are not free to be or not in this world that is now. One can only give up on life, and even to do this, I have to motivate my decision; that is, my life must be oriented. In other words, such a decision convinced me that it is better to die than to live. I am oriented with respect to something when I own a plan in my treatment



of it, and that plan presupposes that I have a scheme about what that thing represents in my life.

But if we live, we cannot choose the world in which we live. This gives to our existence a terribly dramatic gesture. Living is not to enter for fun a site previously chosen, as we choose the theater after dinner, but it is to find ourselves suddenly and without knowing how dropped, submerged in an unchangeable world which is now.

In its radical lines, life is always unexpected. We have not been briefed about our life before entering it, in its scenario, which is always concrete and determined. We are not prepared to face it.

No matter how confident we are of what will happen to us tomorrow, we will always see it as a possibility. This is another essential and dramatic attribute of our lives. For the same reason, our existence is at all times a problem, big or small, that we have to solve. It is not possible to transfer the problem to another being. This also means that a problem is never solved, but at all times we feel forced to choose among several options. Isn't this amazing? We have been thrown into our life, and at the same time, we have to face it by ourselves; that is, we have to make our life. Or, to put it in another way: our life is our being, but that being is not predetermined, decided in advance, but we need to decide, we have to decide what we will be. Taking into account that life always weighs because it consists of a taking, supporting, and conducting by itself, the word "joy" is perhaps to lighten, to lose weight.



Living forces us to decide what we are going to be; that is, living is constantly to decide. Living is to find out who I am and what the things around me are. But all this means that I know, that I am aware that I am immersed, shipwrecked in a strange element for me, where I have no choice but to do always something to hold me in it, to stay afloat. I have not given myself my own life, but on the contrary, I find myself in it unintentionally; I have been thrown into life without being asked. My life is not given to me made. What is given to me is the inexorable need to do something. Life is endeavor, and the fundamental task of this endeavor is to decide in each moment what we will do in the future. Decisions mean that my being is never decided in advance, like the stars' whose beings are already decided, whose orbits are already decided.

But the essential substance of life is perplexity; that is, man finds before him several possibilities of doing, of being, but he doesn't know which to choose; he doesn't know for which to decide. Hence the symbol of perplexity is the crossroads. Many roads are open to us. Which one will we take? One leads us to be one thing; the other one leads us to be another. We will choose nothing less than our very being, and this happens at every moment of our lives. We are free to choose one or another, but this weaving is by itself fatal. We are free because we have no choice but to choose our destiny in the play offered by our fatal circumstance. The world in which we live doesn't force us to do and to be one thing. I wish it did! Then human life would be like a stone's life, very comfortable, because for the stone existing means to be guided by the cosmic forces; its being is already decided. For



example, if we throw a stone into the air, it doesn't feel any perplexity; what the stone will do is already decided; it will fall toward the center of the earth.

Knowing is possession of the being of a thing, not possession of the thing, but of its being. The beginning of my thinking about things will be not to know what they are. The thinking that ends in knowledge begins by being ignorance. Thinking is before knowledge pure ignorance. Ignorance is positively thinking about something; it is to think that we don't possess the beings of a thing; it is to think that we do not know what the thing is. In short, it is to know that I don't know.

If everything around me, starting with my body, were comfortable, I would not notice anything. I would not feel the circumstance as something strange for me, but I would believe that the world was myself.

Everything in our life is originally a system or equation of comforts and discomforts. When a thing is uncomfortable for me, it makes me question because I need it, and I do not have it because I lack it. Things, when missing, begin to have a being. Apparently, being is what is missing in our lives, the huge gap or void in our lives that thought, in its ceaseless effort, strives to fill.

What is the earth? What is the sun? These questions for the being are born from having lost confidence in our circumstance. We question when we don't know what to do, how to behave, and what course to pursue. When our circumstance fails, we notice that failing as a resistance to us, as a denial of us, and this characteristic, of being against me, makes me see my circumstance as independent from me. The same happens to my body. When I am sick, my body opposes me and doesn't serve me; it is alien to me, heterogeneous to me.



The world in which man is thrown out of paradise is the real world because it is composed of resistances to man, of some things around him, with which he doesn't know what to do because he doesn't know what to expect with regard to them. When the usual confidence is broken, mistrust, disorientation, and constant alertness ensue.

The question about the earth means that I need to get away from the earth that is there and get towards its being, that is not there. Here the more insistent metaphor is born to designate thinking as a walking, and a man who thinks as a walker.

When I find the earth as unmanageable to my service, the first thing that I find is that the earth doesn't have a being; that is, it is nothing for me. I don't have the earth, but instead I have a void of its being.

Our second act after questioning is to find out what is said about the earth. The subject of this saying is people, the social environment, the collective character without individuality who is nobody, and therefore, irresponsible. I admit as an answer an idea that is not mine; I have not made this idea, but I take it made from my social environment. My individual self is supplanted by the social self. I stop living my authentic life and make it adjust to a common and anonymous mold.

The "people," the social "I" is not born and dies, doesn't suffer, doesn't have to decide its being, doesn't think by itself, but it is only repeating thoughts; that is, it says and talks in the unique sense in which the saying is not the same thing with the thinking and with the being aware of what is being said. Thinking and saying are the same thing, and it is not by chance that in Greece thinking and saying



meant both. For all these reasons, Ortega y Gasset qualifies the social self as unauthentic; the common self is nobody. And when I repeat these thoughts said by the social self, I become part of the people who are nobody. I, therefore, become nobody.

The primary sense of the saying is not to converse, but in order for me to be able to say something to somebody, it is needed that before I have said it to myself; that is, that before I have thought about it; I have revealed it to myself. However, to do this, I must have made questions about it before, and then, I had to define it, to say it. Language is in itself a science, the primitive science that I find made; it is the elemental knowledge that I get from the community in which I live and which imposes on me through language an interpretation of things. But, at the same time, language is the place where I lodge all my own, original, and authentic thinking,

## **5.2. *King Lear* as a source of analysis**

### **5.2.1. Background, characters, and scenes related to vitalism**

The opening scene of *King Lear* is a fascinating exploration of flattery, self-love, and the relationship between father and daughters. It seems absurd that a king would divide his kingdom according to his daughters' professions of love, but it is worth considering how a king who was accustomed to exercise power makes deep reflections about himself and his circumstance when he loses his power. In Ortega y Gasset's words, King Lear realized that his life was nothing, a complete void, when he didn't count on his daughters' love and his power. His circumstance



failed, and it denied him. If king Lear before had confidence in his two daughters, and his power, once he lost his comfortable circumstance, he was disoriented; he didn't know what to do and what to expect with regard to his youngest daughter and the people around him. This already meant a fatal circle. Feeling nothing, King Lear felt that need of filling his own being and finding out the true being of the people around him. Thus, King Lear's ignorance leads him to begin a ceaseless effort to discover the world around him, and, through it, to discover himself.

To divide his kingdom, King Lear proposed a test based on his daughters' love, but Lear's willingness to believe the empty flattery of his older daughters led to the death of many people.

#### LEAR

Which of you shall we say doth love us most,

That we our largest bounty may extend

Where nature doth with merit challenge? Goneril,

Our eldest born, speak first. (1.1.51-54)

This decision, according to many critics, demonstrates that Lear lacks common sense or the ability to detect his older daughters' falseness. I think King Lear perhaps thought like the ancient Greeks. They said that thinking and saying were the same thing; that is, they coincide each other. Perhaps this is the reason why he believed his daughters' professions of love. Yet he didn't realize that Regan was repeating Goneril's thoughts; that is, they were saying something embedded in everybody's mind. In the social environment, people thought that by saying



beautiful words, they were expressing true loving feelings, when the single purpose of their flattery was to please and gratify people in order to get favors.

Historically, flattery was used as a standard form of discourse, meaning conversation. It was one of the oldest and most used skills to please and gratify people. It was used when people addressed a king or queen. During the Renaissance period, it was a common practice among writers to flatter the reigning monarch. According to Ortega y Gasset, the primary sense of saying is not to converse but to question about something, to define it and then say it. There was a strong connection between thinking and saying. However, in this case, it seems that Goneril and Regan never question about what love for a senile father means. They were only repeating what the social self said, “use flattery to get favors.” They were not aware of what they were saying. Thus, they became nobody for their father, and consequently, their father felt that his own being was missing because they were part of his circumstance, and his circumstance became uncomfortable and unknown (I am myself and my circumstance).

Ortega y Gasset states that we have to decide all the time to build our own being, to stay afloat in the world we have been thrown into. Perhaps King Lear based his decision on professions of love because he didn't have a healthy self-esteem or self-validation, so he tried to fill his void with his daughters' loving words. In his attempt to stay afloat, King Lear became very susceptible to flattery and being buttered up.





Throughout the play, we see how Lear deals with problems. He is shocked when people do not obey him as he expects and as they used to do in the past.

LEAR

Darkness and devils!

Saddle my horses, call my train together

Degenerate bastard, I'll not trouble thee.

Yet have I left a daughter. (1.4.230-233)

Lear looks for the Fool to distract him with entertainment, to help him forget his problems. Ortega y Gasset states that life always weighs because it is always supporting and conducting by itself, so joy is perhaps an element to lighten, to lose weight. Once King Lear realized that his daughter neglected him, he immediately looked for his Fool to lighten the weight and the void of his existence.

LEAR

Thou but rememberest me of mine own conception.

I have perceived a most faint neglect of late, which I

Have rather blamed as mine own jealous curiosity than

As a very pretence and purpose of unkindness. I will

Look further into't. But where's my fool? I have not

Seen him these two days. (1.4. 65-71)

FOOL

...Nay, an thou canst not smile as the wind sits,



Thou'lt catch cold shortly

KENT

But who is with him?

FIRST GENTLEMAN

None but the Fool, who labors to outjest

His heart-struck injuries. (2.2.7-9)

Shakespeare explores the theme of madness, providing circumstances that cause King Lear to fall into the abyss of mind. As I said before, I think King Lear did not have a healthy self-esteem before the division of his kingdom, as he himself recognizes:

LEAR

...O Lear, Lear, Lear!

Beat at this gate that let thy folly in

And thy dear judgement out... (1.4.249-251)

These lines mean that King Lear didn't have the control of his emotions, of his life. According to Ortega y Gasset, when a person has consciousness of his/her life, life belongs to this person; that is, this person has control over his/her life. On the contrary, if a person doesn't have consciousness about himself/herself, an insane person, his/her life becomes unauthentic; he/she is possessed by another. In this context, Lear recognizes that before the division of his kingdom, he was insane because his life appeared like a mask; he didn't have a healthy image about



himself; he didn't know himself and his circumstance. That's why it was easy to lose control and to be possessed by his older daughters' flattery.

Many critics say that King Lear became insane when he was neglected by his older daughters. However, I think that this fact was the trigger that made him realize his own being and the world around him. His circumstance was uncomfortable for him; he didn't count on his daughters and his power, so this trigger made him aware that he was nothing, so he felt a huge necessity of building and filling his own being because his circumstance made him realize that he was a complete void.

LEAR

How now, daughter? What makes that frontlet on?

You are too much of late i't' frown.

FOOL

Thou wast a pretty fellow when thou hadst no need

To care for her frowning. Now thou art an 0 without

A figure. I am better than thou art, now I am a fool;

Thou art nothing... (1.4.171-176)

When Lear's life became a problem, he began to question about himself. He is trying to solve his problem, which is to know himself.

LEAR (to Goneril)

Are you our daughter?



GONERIL

I would you would make use of your good wisdom,  
Whereof I know you are fraught, and put away  
These dispositions which of late transport you  
From what you rightly are.

FOOL

May not an ass know when the cart draws the  
Horse? [*Sings*] Whoop, jug, I love thee!

LEAR

Does any here know me? This is not Lear.  
Does Lear walk thus, speak thus? Where are his eyes?  
Wither his notion weakens, his discerning  
Are lethargied-ha, waking? 'Tis not so.  
Who is it that can tell me who I am? (1.4.201-212)

Goneril wants her father to come back to his insane state, that's why the Fool says that even an ass knows when the cart is drawing the horse. This is a deep metaphor which means that when we are in an insane state our reason is controlled by our emotions and by what happens to us. For this reason we lose the orientation of our lives. Ortega y Gasset stated that a fundamental dimension of life was to be aware of our relationship between life and reason. He said that is impossible to live without reason because reason is a vital instrument of life which helps us to overcome the original chaos of existence. I think the Fool, as an



ingredient of joy whose function is to lighten the weight of our existence, is also an important part of our reason. Why? Because the Fool made Lear realize that his reason was not orienting his life. Lear was not overcoming the chaos of his circumstance, perhaps an unhealthy self-esteem, because others were controlling his life.

Eventually, the King reveals that he is frightened and apprehensive for his future, but he refuses to submit to another's decisions. He wants to remain in charge of his destiny, although the choices he makes are dangerous. Then Lear chooses to go out into the storm because he wants to retain some element of control. Many critics say that Lear is stubborn, like a willful child. What's why he flees into the storm, as a child flees a reality too harsh to accept.

I think Lear's decision to go out into the storm, or the escape as some people say, means the tragic element of our life – of not knowing what to do when our life becomes a problem that needs an urgent solution. But the tragic element by itself is that we have several possibilities before us; that is, such a decision may make me a certain person, but another decision may make me another one, and so on. We don't know which decision to make at that moment because we don't know which is better for us.

KENT

...Where's the king?

FIRST GENTLEMAN

Contending with the fretful elements;



Bids the wind blow the earth into the sea  
Or swell the curled waters 'bove the main,  
That things might change or cease. (3.1.2-6)

Shakespeare, like Ortega y Gasset, criticizes the exaggeration of reason; that is, the development of human thinking, based on progress, has brought a lot of comfort, and it has aborted what really matters – life and reason working together as a vital function for human beings – to make way for the distinction between rich and poor with all its cultural connotations.

FOOL

[Sings]

Fathers that wear rags  
Do make their children blind,  
But fathers that bear bags  
Shall see their children kind.  
Fortune, that arrant whore,  
Ne'er turns the key to th' poor. (2.2.223-228)

LEAR

O, reason not the need! Our basest beggars  
Are in the poorest thing superfluous.  
Allow not nature more than nature needs,  
Man's life is cheap as beast's... (2.2.438-441)



Shakespeare, like Ortega y Gasset, was also aware that we have to build our own life, and not to subordinate it to the social self, but we have to have our own convictions, and not to believe what the social self, who is nobody, says. I think they are right because the social self usually imposes crazy and dangerous things. Edmond is a clear example of this rebellion against social self.

#### EDMOND

Thou, nature, art my goddess. To thy law  
My services are bound. Wherefore should I  
Stand in the plague of custom and permit  
The curiosity of nations to deprive me  
For that I am some twelve or fourteen moonshines  
Lag of a brother? Why 'bastard'? Wherefore 'base,'  
When my dimensions are as well compact,  
My mind as generous, and my shape as true  
As honest madam's issue?...  
Our father's love is to the bastard Edmond  
As to th' legitimate. Fine word, 'legitimate'... (1.2.1-18)

He says that the social self has made distinctions between children born inside wedlock, and those born out of it. This distinction is so hurtful because children who are born out of wedlock are treated in a derogatory way. This situation is uncomfortable for Edmond, and he begins to question this distinction,



and he concludes that there is no distinction between him and his brother. He built his own convictions and was ready to enforce his rights.

Edmond is very critical with the social self:

EDMOND

This is the excellent fopperty of the world: that

When we are sick in fortune –often the surfeits of our

Own behaviour –we make guilty of our disasters the

Sun, the moon, and stars, as if we were villains on

Necessity, fools by heavenly compulsion, knaves, thieves,

And treachers by spherical predominance, drunkards,

Liars, and adulterers by an enforced obedience of

Planetary influence, and all that we are evil in by a

Divine thrusting on. An admirable evasion of whore-

Master man, to lay his goatish disposition on the charge

of a star!... (1.2.116-126)

Edmond means that there is a comfortable situation among men to blame the stars and the divinity for their misfortunes. They don't question anything. This is man's escape. He is not aware of his life, and much worse, he is not responsible for his decisions. In this situation, man lives alienated and easily ruled by others. His life and his being are not authentic. Human beings don't realize that when they begin to question their comfortable situation, it appears the thinking's work that





makes them aware that they have in their own being the instrument to control their lives, reason. Therefore, there is no need to look for the protagonist of our lives far away from ourselves. In short, Shakespeare was criticizing the role of the science of his time, astrology, and its influence on people's minds.

After questioning life, Lear displays regret, remorse, empathy, and compassion for the poor, a population that he has not noticed before. His own situation was building a new being. His understanding of his complicity in the events that followed was a great step because he accepted responsibility and recognized that he and his situation were not infallible. He learned from his own suffering.

In conclusion, I could say that when life is opposed to us or when we feel that we don't count on it, when life becomes necessity, we wake up; we become aware of our being and the world around. The void that life can make us feel is an encouragement to build ourselves every single day. Besides, it is good to know that we are the protagonists of our lives, and we can build an amazing being if we use our own reason in the context of our lives. Thus reason becomes critical; that is, we will not be repeating things imposed by others and to accept them as absolute truths. We have to question our own circumstance in which we live and use the reason as a tool to solve the problem that living represents.

LEAR

The art of our necessities is strange,

And can make vile things precious... (3.2.70-71)



Fig. 54. Illusions that destroy hope (<http://spiritualquestions.org.uk/2011/02/illusions-that-destroy-hope/>).



## CHAPTER VI

### A NIHILISTIC INTERPRETATION OF MACBETH

#### 6.1. Approach to the philosophical phenomenon, nihilism.

##### 6.1.1. History, definition, and main representatives

One of the first philosophers to use the term 'nihilism' was William Hamilton<sup>45</sup>. In the first volume of his *Lectures on Metaphysics*, Hamilton considered that nihilism (from Latin nihil = 'nothing') is the negation of substantial reality (Ferrater 2562).

Hamilton's nihilism has been called "epistemological nihilism," unlike other types of nihilism, like moral nihilism, which denies that there are valid moral principles.

According to Leibniz<sup>46</sup>, there are two kinds of men: the ones that are happy with the present state; others who are hostile to it. In every republic there are oppressed groups which the existing laws condemn to poverty. It is natural that these people try to change such laws to better ones because the legislation of States is not perfect, but perfectible. But the people who are dissatisfied with the

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<sup>45</sup> Hamilton (1805 - 1865) was an Irish mathematician, physicist, astronomer and philosopher. He conceived algebra as a science of pure time and focused his research towards a systematic mathematization of the physical world.

<sup>46</sup> Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1646 –1716) was a German mathematician and philosopher. He occupies a prominent place in the history of mathematics and the history of philosophy.



laws of the State of the Universe, whose king is God, don't have this justification; this world, and the legislation by which this world is supported, are the best. Therefore, in this world any indignation is never just. Thus, cosmic discontent is the worst sin, the most indefensible.

Fernando Savater<sup>47</sup> in his work, *La filosofía tachada precedida de Nihilismo y acción*, holds that Leibniz, with all his fabulous argumentative capabilities, undertook the colossal task of justifying God and advocated the creation to absolve the Creator. The world was purified, transfigured into harmonic perfection; lights and shadows collaborated in the beauty of a Whole made of freedom and order.

However, one hundred years later, of Leibniz's theodicy, the Marquis of Sade<sup>48</sup> wrote,

There is a God who has created what I see, but for evil, this hand is pleased. Evil is his essence; everything he makes us do is essential for his plans. Evil is needed for the vicious organization of this

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<sup>47</sup> Fernando Savater was born in Spain, in 1947. He is the author of multiple philosophical, literary, and political essays, novels, and screenplays, which have been translated into various languages.

<sup>48</sup> Donatien Alphonse François, Marquis de Sade (1740 – 1814) was a French aristocrat, revolutionary politician, philosopher and writer, famous for his libertine sexuality and lifestyle. His works include novels, short stories, plays, dialogues and political tracts. He is best known for his erotic works, which combined philosophical discourse with pornography, depicting sexual fantasies with an emphasis on violence, criminality and blasphemy against the Catholic Church. He was a proponent of extreme freedom, unrestrained by morality, religion or law. The words "sadism" and "sadist" are derived from his name.



universe. God is vengeful, evil, and unjust. The consequences of evil are eternal; the world has grown in evil and by which it holds it; evil also perpetuates the world, and the creature must exist impregnated of evil and returns to the bosom of evil after existence. (Savater 30)

For Sade, something that deserves to be called God is evil, and sometimes he himself called him this:

I see eternal and universal evil in the world. The evil is a moral being uncreated, eternal, and imperishable; it existed before the world, it constituted the monstrous being that could create a whimsical world. The author of the universe is the most evil, the most ferocious, and the most horrendous of all beings. (Savater 31-32)

Leibniz composed a system which embraces everything, and it was God; on the contrary, Sade thought that everything was evil, and like chaos is one kind of boundary system that he called evil with the name of God. According to Sade, in the Day of Judgment God will address the sweet virtuous flock in these terms:

When you saw that everything was vicious and criminal on earth, the Supreme Being will say: Why have you been lost by the paths of virtue? And what was the act of my conduct in which you have seen in me a benefactor? I have sent pestilence, civil wars, diseases, earthquakes, and hurricanes. I shook your heads with the snake of discord. Did I persuade you that good was my essence? Imbecile! Why did you not imitate me? (Savater 33)



Sade holds that if God is an omnipotent and capricious tyrant who commands us to do unreasonable and atrocious things, it is legitimate to assume that the triumphant evil in the world is not an illusion, but the most obvious proof of the lasting hatred of this infinitely powerful creator against the abject creatures he has made is to entertain with his torture the vacuum of his eternal leisure.

The world is not a product of God's love, as Leibniz believed, but it is the product of God's anger, as Jacob Boehme<sup>49</sup> suspected. If man wants to adjust his behavior to the divine model he should do evil with constancy, in obedience to his creator. So what is the only possible rebellion against this sovereign of nightmare? Doing good, knowing that it is the more unlikely and difficult exercise. Cioran<sup>50</sup>, who accepts the universe described by Sade, expresses this option like this:

With the exception of a few aberrant cases, man is not inclined toward goodness: What god would propel man to do so? Man has to defeat himself; he has to make himself violent in order to make the slightest act of evil untainted. And as many as times he succeeds, he provokes and humiliates his creator. (Savater 34)

The true nihilist rebellion will consist of trying to fulfill the project of good that the whole universe denies and condemns.

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<sup>49</sup> **Jakob Böhme** (1575 –1624) was a German Christian mystic and theologian. He is considered an original thinker within the Lutheran tradition, and his first book, commonly known as *Aurora*, caused a great scandal.

<sup>50</sup> Emil Mihai Cioran (Émile Michel Cioran in French; 1911 - 1995) was a Romanian philosopher and writer. Most of his works were published in French.



The refinements of wisdom and culture are curtains that are trying to hide the rot that is our finitude, whose open presence is unbearable for us. Knowing that we are mortal is not only to be aware of our gradual end, but also to be aware of how stupid the daily tasks are, the tasks of life that unsatisfactorily furnish the misery that death will dissolve. Sade holds that to proclaim these truths is intolerable but necessary. This is the frightening function of saying everything that Sade demanded of philosophy, despite the trembling that this radicalism could stir up.

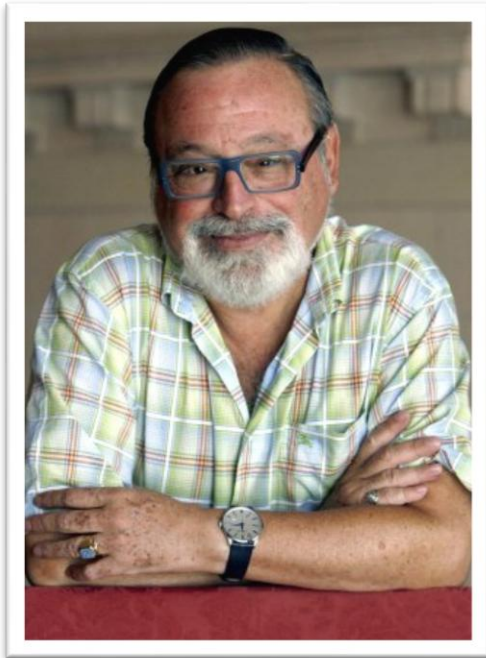


Fig. 55. Fernando Savater  
(<http://www.unmundoperfecto.blogspot.com/2012/06/la-crisis-europea-entrevista-fernando.html>)



Fig. 56. Marquis of Sade  
([http://cooperativaduliska.blogspot.com/2012\\_05\\_27\\_archive.html](http://cooperativaduliska.blogspot.com/2012_05_27_archive.html)).

All rationalist systems that agree in identifying the Whole and Good are theodicies. The denial of this identity Whole=Good characterizes all nihilisms.



Theodicy becomes rationalization of a guilt complex before the domain of the will. When reason loses its prestige, it inevitably becomes suspicious. When a being is declared irrational or perverse, it means that it has not sufficient courage to guide its life.

Hegel tried to lift the last and greatest attempt of theodicy of history of philosophy. He proclaimed that freedom already had a name: state. The untamed ferocity of reason has never attained such levels as when Hegel affirmed the terrible pain of submission to work and its absolute necessity.

Schopenhauer was the first to torpedo this great system by claiming that there were irrational reasons that moved reason to reason. Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud studied the grounds on which these systems are built, and the material they are made of.

Against Leibniz, who thought that whoever dies discontented, condemns, nihilists risk to die condemned rather than to meekly accept the condemnation of dying. They don't deny the existence of God, but God's right to exist; that is, his work. The protest against death and evil doesn't involve God's inexistence, but it demands His existence as the only proper basis of this protest. For the nihilist, nothing should have such firm and unquestionable existence as God; God is the only thing that exists.

As the nihilists don't accept God's world, then this non-acceptance is crystalized into a practical transformation of the refused world, until it stops being rejected. In this context, the nihilist poses the question about action: Is it possible





to act? In the name of what? What should be done? The nihilist poses these questions more diligently than others because his/her nihilism consists of having denied the traditional responses to these questions.

In this universe, ruled by evil, actions cannot produce other things than new forms of evil. Performing a first act, with the hope of getting something good, we discover with alarm that what we gain is bad, at least to the extent that it is not complete, and it needs the correcting action of other actions, each of which will be incomplete, too. These actions should be completed by other actions, and these ones by new ones, and so on.

Every movement we start, every caress, or every word, promises to bring definitive appeasement and liberation, but they really bring the beginning of a new nightmare whose name will indefinitely continue being: disquiet and dissatisfaction. Acting is agreeing with the enemy.

Acting is always collaboration with evil. Actions always hurt; their essence is the distress of those who do them and those who suffer them. That's why Sade foresaw, as demonstrated above, doing evil in a conscious and deliberate way as entering into dreadful harmony with chaos disguised as the cosmos in which we move. Every act promises and gives pleasure, somewhat, but it inexorably stains with suffering and ultimately death.

The action, if Freud doesn't lie, has a negative objective; that is, to remove a tension, relief that constitutes pleasure. In psychoanalytic theory, pain has a real entity, although it is negatively experienced as lack and deprivation, while pleasure



is revealed as pure relief and a return to the previous stage of serenity. This idea had already been exposed earlier by Schopenhauer. He characterized natural instincts as irritations caused by the will to perpetuate itself, to whose realization this will added a drop of honey as bait. Pleasure stains actions that hold nature, as flowers produce colors so as, with their viscosity, to attract insects that help them reproduce.

After the pleasant illusion, man realizes he is driven by something that is superior to himself. This something deceives him, and it will certainly destroy him. Each orgasm is presented as an end, without any other future than the denial of future we call satisfaction. Then man realizes that the show has not been mounted on his behalf, and that he will immediately return to dissatisfaction because it is more useful that he be unsatisfied. These things hurt!

Nietzsche proclaimed, "God is dead." This means that man is not able to fulfill his values. The anger itself that is produced by discovering that values cannot be fulfilled means that something fundamental has been distorted. And not only that, the highest values mock man's effort and pain to attain them, when he discovers that these values are helpful masks that serve the most odious opposite values. Thus, justice collaborates with the most despicable inequality, and liberty with oppression, while life is empty of content and fills itself with objects as commercial profit dictates.

## **6.2. Macbeth as a source of analysis**

### **6.2.1. Background, characters, and scenes related to nihilism**



Shakespeare's *Macbeth* describes how Macbeth becomes involved and absorbed by progressive and growing guilt, when he tries to gain power. The followers of nihilism say that evil is everywhere and in every action, so Macbeth's guilt is the result of the first encounter with evil beings, in this case the witches, whose promises and omens can be both good and bad. This inversion of values is one of the most recurring themes and is posed from the first scene:

ALL (witches)

Fair is foul, and foul is fair... (1.1.10)

This phrase could illustrate Schopenhauer's idea about the will to perpetuate itself. Fair could mean beauty, justice, power, etc., all the things we want, so the bait that encourages us to attain them is pleasure (satisfaction). However, once we get them, the only thing we have is foulness or dissatisfaction, and once again we want more of fair, and so on. We are the instruments of the will to perpetuate nature. Savater says that it is more useful to have us unsatisfied. This dissatisfaction is a sign of confusion because after the pleasant illusion, as Schopenhauer stated, man realizes he is driven by something that is superior to him. This something deceives him, and it will certainly destroy him.

MACBETH

*Exit Servant*

Seyton!-I am sick at heart

When I behold-Seyton, I say!-This push

Will cheer me ever or disseat me now. (5.3.21-23)



Macbeth realizes that the show has not been mounted on his behalf, and that he will immediately return to dissatisfaction, to chaos. This is one of the keys of Macbeth's tragedy.

*Thunder and lightning. Enter three Witches*

FIRST WITCH

When shall we three meet again?

In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

SECOND WITCH

When the hurly-burly's done,

When the battle's lost and won. (1.1.1-4)

These lines offer some keys of drama too, order and chaos, extraordinary powers. Sade said that this universe is ruled by a God who commands us to do reasonable and atrocious things. These lines could also refer to the order and chaos of human nature too, when every action throws us into the infinite vertigo of effects, which blur and confuse our minds in the mist of a terrifying plot. Another of the recurrent theme is the distinction between being and appearance.

Appearance becomes an obsession through which what is abominable can consolidate itself as virtue, and evil can consolidate itself as good. Shakespeare is always trying to confuse and mix the opposers. I think he uses this means not only as a dramatic method, but he is a true nihilist because he, like Nietzsche, believes that the highest values that man tries to attain are only helpful masks that serve the most odious opposite values.



MACDUFF

...You may

Convey your pleasures in a spacious plenty

And yet seem cold. The time you may so hoodwink. (4.3.71-73)

Shakespeare is a true nihilist because he also claims that evil is a product of nature, and if nature is God's work, then God is evil.

CAPTAIN

...The merciless Macdonwald-

Worthy to be a rebel, for to that

The multiplying villainies of nature

So swarm upon him- ... (1.2.9-12)

According to Savater, theodicy becomes rationalization or guilt complex before the domain of the will. When reason loses its prestige, it inevitably becomes suspicious. When a being is declared irrational or perverse, it means that it has not sufficient courage to guide its life. This is exactly what happened to Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.

LADY MACBETH

Here's the smell of the blood still. All the

Perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. O,

O, O! (5.1. 48-50)



Lady Macbeth could appear as irreligious, cold, and ambitious, but she is not. To prepare for “what she feels must be done,” she calls on evil spirits in order to be relentless. Otherwise her conscience would not allow her to act. This is a moral issue because later her actions would lead her to meaningful moral nihilism; that is, on behalf of things she considered good for both of them, she committed atrocities.

Macbeth asks the doctor to cure her or give her a drug that will erase the troubles of her heart. However, the doctor responds that he cures physical, not moral, problems.

MACBETH

Cure her of that.

Canst thou not minister to a mind diseas'd,

Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,

Raze out the written troubles of the brain,

And with some sweet oblivious antidote

Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff

Which weighs upon the heart?

DOCTOR

Therein the patient

Must minister to himself. (5.3.42- 48)

Macbeth also experiences the same guilt, but with irony. When we discovers Duncan's murder, he pretends to feel pain, and claims that his fame, honor, and



happiness have been destroyed, and he claims this in desperation, so in this way he had said the truth.

MACBETH

Had I but died an hour before this chance  
I had lived a blessed time, for from this instant  
There's nothing serious in mortality.  
All is but toys. Renown and grace is dead.  
The wine of life is drawn, and the mere lees  
Is left this vault to brag of. (2.3. 90-95)

After his accession to the throne, Macbeth is not happy and honored, as he craved to be. His monologues express his fears, and he is not able to enjoy the benefits of the acts performed. It seems that his greed (will) doesn't have limits.

MACBETH

Upon my head they plac'd a fruitless crown,  
And put a barren scepter in my gripe,  
Thence to be wrench'd with an unlineal hand,  
No son of mine succeeding. If't be so,  
For Banquo's issue have I fil'd my mind;  
For them the gracious Duncan have I murder'd;  
Put rancours in the vessel of my peace,  
Only for them; and mine eternal jewel  
Given to the common Enemy of man,



To make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings!  
Rather than so, come, fate, into the list,  
And champion me to th'utterance!... (3.1. 62-73)

Sade said that acting is always collaboration with evil; it is a conscious way to enter into dreadful harmony with chaos disguised as cosmos. Macbeth, like Sade, foresaw that every act promised and gave pleasure, somewhat; however, at the same time, these acts were inexorably stained with suffering and, ultimately, death.

Lady Macbeth is dead, she has possibly killed herself, and Macbeth awaits his own end, despite the prophecies.

#### MACBETH

I have almost forgot the taste of fears.  
The time has been my senses would have cooled  
To hear a night-shriek, and my fell of hair  
Would at a dismal tratise rouse and stir  
As life were in't. I have supped full with horrors.  
Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts.  
Cannot once start me. (5.5. 9-14)

Macbeth has suffered so much that it is not newness to suffer once again. This is a proof of God's existence, speaking in nihilist terms; this is a proof that God is evil.





[Enter Seyton]

Wherefore was that cry?

SEYTON

The Queen, my lord, is dead.

MACBETH

She should have died hereafter.

There would have been a time for such a word.

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow

Creeps in this petty pace from day to day

To the last syllable of recorded time,

And all our yesterdays have lighted fools

The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle.

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player

That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,

And then is heard no more. It is a tale

Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,

Signifying nothing. (5.5. 15-27)

Macbeth is a true nihilist because he doesn't deny the existence of God, but he denies his work. That's why Macbeth says that life is a walking shadow, a tale told by an idiot that signifies nothing. As was mentioned before, God's existence is the only proper basis of a nihilist's protest. He will die dissatisfied with the laws of this God; however, his protest and indignation are never just. That's why he says



that his life is like a poor player “that struts and frets his hour upon the stage/ and then is heard no more.”

Macbeth was also aware of how stupid his tasks were; the tasks of his life that unsatisfactorily furnished his misery that death would dissolve. Perhaps he was proclaiming Sade’s demands about the intolerable and necessary truths that philosophy must say. Ambition of power did not give Macbeth the life he expected.

It is useful to reflect upon Macbeth’s tragedy and conclude that this play is not only the tragedy of an ambitious person, but of a whole civilization submerged in evil and its consequences.

An example of this is George Bush. He has claimed he was on a mission from God when he launched the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. According to Nabil Shaath, a Palestinian foreign minister in 2003, President Bush revealed his religious fervor during the Israeli-Palestinian summit. Nabail said: "President Bush said to all of us: 'I am driven with a mission from God'. God would tell me, 'George go and fight these terrorists in Afghanistan'. And I did. And then God would tell me 'George, go and end the tyranny in Iraq'. And I did."

It is clear that transcendental values are not attained by humankind. On behalf of the noblest values, such as peace, love, life, liberty, the greatest atrocities are committed. “God is dead” said Nietzsche. If God is good and truth, we are not able to attain these values, rather, they are helpful masks that serve the most odious opposite values. This is the circular trap in which the world is perpetuated.



Both Macbeth and our current civilization live a moral nihilism; we live the nightmare of actions; that is, we live in the paradox that crimes are committed to put an end to other crimes. This is the mechanism that holds the world, and it would seem that there is a concept of justice that is superior.

ROSS

Your castle is surprised, your wife and babes

Savegely slaughtered. To relate the manner

Were on the quarry of these murdered deer

To add the death of you. (4.3.205-208)

MALCOLM

Be comforted.

Let's make us medicines of our great revenge

To cure this deadly grief. (4.3.214-216)



## CONCLUSIONS

To read, or not to read Shakespeare? This was the fundamental and initial query of my investigation that evoked many answers which generated other questions about the nature of Shakespeare's poetry and its relationship to life. The reading of Shakespeare's tragedies entails the consideration of deep problems related to the human condition and man's role in the universe. The anguishes of human existence, the pruritus of the finitude, the precariousness of life, the vanity of ambition, the adversity of fate, etc., can be treated from the tragic or comic perspective, from the philosophical essay or from the scientific viewpoint.

Thus, reading involves searching, but what kind of searching? The general objective of this investigation was to explore the philosophical elements that are included in the tragedies of William Shakespeare (Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth).

To find these elements, I analyzed the literary elements of Shakespeare's tragedies through historical criticism. I analyzed the plots of the tragedies, the characters and their motivations, the climax of the plays, the endings, the consequences, the points of view of the author, the verbal interactions among the characters (dialog, monolog, soliloquy, and figures of speech), the national background in which the personages act, and how they are affected by it. The interaction between the literary figures and the historical moment in which these tragedies were created made it possible for my research to find worldviews and universal constructions such as voluntarism, existentialism, psychoanalysis,



vitalism, and nihilism. But why universal constructs? Because Shakespeare's personages are metaphysicians, and they know that their existence is pure problem; their world is an unsafe place, and this uncertainty forces them to question their reality and their beliefs, and, consequently, what they do is to try to build a safe world, to relieve the circumstances that cause their trouble. This is human life itself.

The main contribution of these worldviews and universal constructs is a more complete understanding of man. Furthermore, this interaction between the literary figures and the historical background gives us a worldview of the author, and his stance toward fundamental issues such as man, life, death, religion, love, etc.

Shakespeare can be considered as one of the greatest philosophers. He can also be considered as a Socratic or ethical philosopher whose object of study is man and the physical world.

Moral ideas are dependent on history, so the ideas of good and evil change from generation to generation, from town to town, from one social class to another. Shakespeare's poetry reflects these changes. The main causes of these changes were the reigns of Queen Elizabeth and King James. Shakespeare, through his characters, presented an echo of the particular way of governing of each monarch, and at the same time he was already constructing the archetype of man.



I have said that Shakespeare's tragedies entails the consideration of deep problems related to the human condition and man's role in the universe. But what is the human condition and man's role in the universe? Well, it seems that all the philosophical doctrines found in Shakespeare's poetry converge on that man's condition is to have been thrown into life without being asked. His life is not given to him made. What is given to him is the inexorable need to do something. His fundamental task is to decide in each moment what he will do and be in the future. Man creates his essence, his own being, his own meaning in the world.

Man has not been briefed about his life before entering its scenario, which is always concrete and determined, so he is not prepared to face it. Thus, man and his world are born together. Therefore, it is not contradiction in man to be determined and be free, because freedom of decision would be meaningless if there were not particular facts to confront or from which to free, to use, or to dispose of; particular events that make man what he is, but at the same time he makes with them the world they are.

The anguish of freedom hides the tragic terror of loneliness of man. He, and he alone, has to bear the honor, shame, triumph, or sorrow of his achievements and failures. He arises to the surface alone and facing the project of constituting his own being. He is the one who has to make sense of to his essence; he is the person who makes sense of the world in which he lives, so this would be man's role in the universe. Living is a revelation, not to be content with being but to understand, to find himself. It is the incessant discovery that he does of himself and of the world around him.



Everything in man's life is originally a system or equation of comforts and discomforts. When a thing is uncomfortable for him, it makes him question because he needs it, and he does not have it because he lacks it. Things, when missing, begin to have a being. Apparently, being is what is missing in man's life, the huge gap or void in his life that thought, in its ceaseless effort, strives to fill.

The literary and philosophical interrelation also displays that there are irrational and invisible inner realities such as love, anger, hatred, ambition, envy, etc. that becloud reason and lead it toward unhappiness and dissatisfaction which also seems to be an important element of human condition in order to continue perpetuating life.

When man interacts with his world or his situation, he begins to build his being. In other words, man begins to live. In this interaction, life presents to him both tragedy and comedy. When tragedy strikes, security evaporates, is undermined. Uncertainty abounds, fear invades. Human frailty is exposed. Our vulnerability becomes an impenetrable fog that envelops the human heart. Tragedy becomes deeper when it destroys our sense of security and shakes us with feelings of loss and weakness. When we face such devastation, a barrage of questions assaults our minds: What remains when we have lost so much? How do we handle a tragedy like that? How can we survive? How are we supposed to feel? Will we feel secure at any time?



The world is not a safe place. We know this; however, few live as if this were true. Instead, we tend to cultivate a level of self-deception; that is, we guide our lives according to false beliefs.

Tragedy exposes the undeniable reality of how vulnerable we really are. The winds of tragedy shatter the thin veil of safety we have raised to deal with the anxieties of daily life. Tragedy shows us how unsafe we are and reminds us that we have no control. Suffering forces us to question our most fundamental beliefs.

Shakespeare undresses man and leads him naked through tragedy. Tragedy is uncomfortable for man, so man begins to ask questions about his circumstances and himself because he doesn't count on them. He lacks them. This inquiry leads man to realize that it is being that is lacking in his life; he feels nothing.

In this context, Shakespeare's tragedy has an ethical function; to display what we are made of, and to free us from our relative ignorance; to make us realize the roots of our suffering, but always with an instinctual feeling of supreme health.

We are nothing, our life is nothing. In this state, man feels the urgent need to fill this huge gap or void, in which tragedy has left him, with thought and knowledge, by using his vital reason as an instrument. Man makes a constant effort to fill that void; man himself creates his own being and life with each decision and action that he makes, in order to save his situation, and consequently to save himself, too.





Shakespeare was a clear-eyed observer and was not swayed by dogma or tradition. He dramatized issues of daily life to make his audience thrillingly aware of the extra dimensions of it. Living is a revelation, not to be content with being but to understand, to find myself. It is the incessant discovery that we do of ourselves and of the world around us.

William Shakespeare developed a theater of dialectical conflict, in which idea is pitted against idea, and from this conflict a deeper understanding of life's issues emerges. The goal of dialectical reasoning is to expand human knowledge. The friction between our ignorance and our partial knowledge achieves a synthesis, in the form of a successful understanding of our reality. However, this process never ends; it is not static; this new synthesis produces new problems, new conflicts and a new friction that continues expanding our knowledge. Chaos and order, rationality and irrationality, good and evil, knowledge and ignorance, love and hatred are the key elements of this theater of dialectical conflict. Philosophically speaking, these partners co-exist in the universe and in human condition.

Another very important objective of this investigation was to observe the importance and the multifaceted relationship between Literature and Philosophy, since an interdisciplinary study enriches and increases human knowledge.

The development of this investigation led me to this conclusion: the boundaries between Literature and Philosophy are not sharp but diffuse. Both



disciplines interact with each other because they share the same material: the human experience and the words that express it.

Between philosophy and literature there has always been an open but enigmatic relationship. When literature aims to deepen the issues it treats, it faces a number of problems which require philosophical treatment. In this sense, literary theory is constrained to collaborate with philosophical aesthetics.

Each and every literary event has been preceded, accompanied, or followed by a philosophical theory. And every philosophical idea has been fed by poetic intuitions or has resulted in literary revolutions; but this intimate relationship has not always been noticed.

Philosophy initially appears as a form of literature, as a symbolic and meaningful dialog with reality, as an interpretation, as an organic view, as another stage of the first stories, myths, and legends. Therefore, philosophy, in its inception, coexists with literary forms in their subjects and functions.

Poetry feels drawn to express the ineffable in two ways: as something close and intimate, and yet as something inaccessible, as the meaning beyond all sense – the ultimate reason beyond all reason.

Thus, the poet, like the philosopher, operates in the dark. Both await clarification of what must somehow be reality. Thus, there is a common space in which both discourses complement each other in an inevitable way, achieving, in the effort to attain truth, that common place of creation itself.



What the philosopher and the poet attain, after painstaking effort, is a limited landscape of truths or “irrefutable lies,” but in different ways. In this regard, the method is what radically differentiates the philosophical discourse from the literary one. In the first case, the deployment of analytical reason is put to use. Literature, on the other hand, uses allegorical and metaphorical resources.

The ideal of every writer, philosopher, or poet is to discover the true mystery of things, to achieve the radical truth of reality, but by different procedures.

Each true philosopher is, above all, a composer, and, consequently, he must also fulfill the tasks of an interpreter and hermeneutist. He is the Interpreter of the traditions and signs of his own time. He can compose a proposal, expressed in written form, to serve as a vital clue to open the great labyrinth in debate, in teaching, and in reflection, in order to discover the enigma that encloses reality. At the same time, he should be the interpreter of his own proposal, too, so that it achieves the maximum of lucidity and self-enlightened criticism.

Due to the fact that each philosopher approaches the clarifying effort of reality, he needs to draw on the allegorical and metaphorical resources that literature provides. Metaphors are concepts, the literary tropes, the functioning of the language itself with which human beings think.

The age of Shakespeare emanated from philosophical reflections about man and the world. He, as poet and philosopher, disintegrated the particular characteristics of man which later became the subject of scientific study in



psychology, neuroscience, biology and many others. In sum, he made huge contributions to Philosophy and to the branches derived from it, in order to unravel the cloak that covers reality and man.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

Since this project undertook an interdisciplinary study, I recommend that new investigations be made about man and his role in the Universe from another interdisciplinary point of view. It could be Literature and Science. Why? Because Shakespeare himself, with his critical thought, gave many advances to science in general. Man in his situation, and especially in his tragic situation, realizes his nothingness.

Nowadays, there are many studies in chemistry and quantum physics that reveal that the tiniest structure of the universe, the atom, is inside a void. Then the question arises, how can an empty atom form the solid world around us?

There are many answers to this question, but the purpose of a new investigation is not to find the obvious, or what the modern man wants to believe, but to recover man's ability to feel himself as an earthly and cosmic being, since these features are lost nowadays by the quick progress and selfish eagerness of civilization, that dehumanize man every day. And, consequently, this brings on the destruction of our own world, too.

These interdisciplinary studies are very useful because through them we are able to see and understand the several relationships among many disciplines. I think that the interdisciplinary exercise should be practiced in any activity because only in this way can we gradually remove the stigmas (sharp boundaries among disciplines) that exist among different disciplines.



These stigmas are not only creating boundaries among disciplines, but they are also fragmenting the people who study them. For this reason, there is a tendency to think that people who are good at math are better than those who study humanities. This 'little distinction' also creates boundaries among women and men, so technical careers in which reason is used are for men, and the 'easy' ones are for women. Reason is associated with concepts of power, and men foment this association. Weakness and emotions are frequently applied to women. Thus, men and women have to behave according to imposed stereotypes that prevent them from developing in an integral way. As we can see, there are many problems that make us realize why our relationships among ourselves and with nature are gradually becoming worse.

In teaching, if we are literature teachers, we should not only display and transmit the content of literary works. This would be the tragedy of pedagogy. Instead, we should denude the literary works; that is, we should analyze and find what is hidden behind them. When we do this, we realize we need other disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, geography, history, and even the hostile math, so we create a need of knowledge. In this sense, learning becomes a vital need, and consequently our students, and we as teachers, will have an integral view of reality because in reality everything is connected. It is a more demanding task for teachers and for students, but I think that in this way, studying makes more sense.



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