"The Lightning Which Doth Cease To Be:" The Human Experience of Time in *Romeo And Juliet*

Simon J. Ryle
University of Split, Croatia

This essay will interrogate the formulation of time in *Romeo and Juliet* and will root this investigation in Augustinian temporal concepts. It will suggest that a conscious artifice pervades the time schemas of the play and will seek to establish how this artifice relates to the play's application of Augustine's figuration of time.

There is an enthralling capacity to the love narrative at the heart of *Romeo and Juliet*, which leads Julia Kristeva to term it, partly in ironic response to the common perception of the play, "the most beautiful love dream in the Western world."[1] Kristeva goes on to investigate the subconscious violence that disrupts this "love dream." In this way she calls on post-structuralist techniques that seek out "the totality [that] has its centre elsewhere."[2] Kristeva locates the displaced centre of "the totality" (love in *Romeo and Juliet*) in "hatred at the very origin of the amorous surge[, a] hatred that antedates the veil of amorous idealization."[3] Thus, she finds no element of parody in the play, but rather roots the destabilization of the love narrative in realistic psychological impulses in the protagonists. I propose a similar project: to look at the way the overt love narrative is subverted in the play. However, in a manner perhaps closer to Bakhtin's utilization of the concept heteroglossia (if it is not overly anachronistic to apply a theory developed to analyze the novel to early modern drama), I would suggest there is a parodic element in *Romeo and Juliet,* especially prevalent in the temporal structures of the play, that deliberately undermines the realism of the love narrative.

The experience of time presented in Sonnet 129 is a useful introduction to the temporal themes of *Romeo and Juliet*.[4] The sonnet approaches the problem of man in time by recounting a moment of lust, which the poem's speaker uses as a moment of heightened perception to investigate the temporal meaning of experience. The

sonnet demonstrates that due to the temporal mutability of memory our deepest instincts can appear in retrospect as baseless illusions. Within the sonnet, the meaning of the impulse to action is reinterpreted as the speaker works back into past time, tracing first the departure from and then the approach to the vital moment. The loosening of the speaker's orientation in time reaches its apotheosis in the third quatrain of the sonnet, where the event (the moment of lust) is repeatedly redefined from shifting temporal perspectives:

> Mad in pursuit and in possession so,
> Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme;
> A bliss in proof, and proved, a very woe,
> Before a joy proposed, behind a dream.[5]

Working forward through memory, the "mad" of pursuit in the present, which we might understand as the past of the event itself imagined as the present, reaches over into the present "possession" of the moment. However, when the speaker tries to work backwards through time—"Had, having, and in quest to have"—the meaning of experience is confronted with an odd reversal: The most recent event in time, the future of the event itself, must be rendered in the past—"had"; the event itself is located in the progressive—"having"—to convey its "now-ness"; and the most distant past of sensation that the event entails, the anticipation of the moment, is rendered as a present that defines itself by reference to the future—"in quest to have." Thus, the subject's experience of time is oriented around the moment of heightened perception, negating the moment of telling that the sonnet's existence proposes. Yet the onward flux of time that works to distance the speaker from the moment renders this meaning illusive. This distancing, as a feature of poetic investigation, is marked in the reduced clarity of the adjective usage, where "mad," denoting a specific mental state at certain specific points of the experience, becomes "extreme," denoting a general impression of the whole of the experience.

As the speaker perseveres and attempts to define this extremity, understanding is fractured. The meaning of the moment is destabilized in the perception of the speaker, so that the lust as a past event becomes "woe"; yet this meaning is refuted by the lingering impression of the "bliss in proof" of the moment itself that the speaker seems to recall. This uncertainty proves fatal to the ability of the speaker to investigate the moment in poetry. In a final attempt to reach back, the speaker cannot locate the experience

as it was felt when present, but only the meaning before it was enacted in time—"a joy proposed"—and the elusive form it seems to retain in memory after it has become past—"a dream." On one level, then, Sonnet 129 makes a protest against the constant tendency of human experience in time to become severed from the events which engender its meaning.

In making an acute examination of the effects of poetic investigation on the human experience of events in time, the sonnet concisely broaches temporal themes investigated in *Romeo and Juliet.* This essay will expand an exploration of similar thematic acuity in Shakespeare's early tragedy, first, in applying Augustine's temporal conceptualizations as investigative paradigm; second, in interrogating the implications of the play's deliberately problematized plot chronology; third, in relating the self-conscious artifice of Shakespeare's verse to Augustine's conception of poetry in time; and finally, in tracing the pessimistic metaphorical figuration of time encoded in the utterances of the play's characters.

An anxiety with the human experience of time, similar to that in Sonnet 129, informs a central discussion of St. Augustine's *Confessions.* In Book Eleven, Augustine establishes a paradox of time based on the insubstantiality of the concepts *past, present* and *future.* Both *past* and *future* are by definition nonexistent: the *past* meaning is no longer, the *future* meaning not yet. Located as an infinitely narrow division between the *past* and *future*, the *present* meaning proves equally elusive, for the defining characteristic of the *present* is its tendency constantly to pass. It exists only by immediately ceasing to exist. The implication seems to be that time has being only because it tends to non-being.[6] Where, though, does one locate human consciousness in this shimmering, fluid present that has a tendency to constantly negate the meaning of itself and that slips from one's grasp as soon as one attempts to conceive of the qualities of its existence?

A vital first step in Augustine's constitution of time from apparent nonexistence is the identification of, besides the presence-of-the-present, a presence-of-the-past and a presence-of-the-future. In this conceptual schema, the past is existent in the present as memory, and this takes the form of conceptualized lines of action that, projected forward into time, anticipate future events in the present.[7] Of course, in making this formulation Augustine commits himself to an investigation solely of the time of human consciousness. The succession of events in the world that we perceive is an internally performed organization, a triumph of human imagination. Yet one might also note the anticipation of

phenomenology in Augustine's system, whereby all we know of time in the world is a projection of perceptual data onto the mechanism of consciousness.

While these philosophical preliminaries may seem initially to have little to do with early modern drama, the influence of the fifth-century theologian on Renaissance, and more specifically Shakespearian, thought is well established. William J. Bouwsma looks at the utilization of Augustinian conceptions in the Renaissance, finding key strands of Augustinian thinking in Petrarch and Boccaccio (who nearly gave up public life to join an Augustinian monastery) and in justifications for Protestant Reformation, especially Calvin.[8] Bouwsma also suggests Augustine's unknowable God leads to the secularization of the late sixteenth century of the kind Machiavelli propounds, because it implies the affairs of the world should be based on solid realities.[9] Meredith Gill finds Augustine one of the key thinkers for early modern scholars: "Renaissance readers encountered him long before they knew Plato."[10] Whether or not Shakespeare drew directly on Augustine or on Renaissance temporal structures influenced by Augustinian theology, it seems clear that Augustinian concepts, such were their importance to the period, can aid us in an understanding of time in *Romeo and Juliet*. Ann Livermore indicates that this prevalence of Augustine in Renaissance thought arrives mostly via Erasmus and Vives (Thomas Thorpe, publisher of *Shakespeare's Sonnets,* also published Vives' *Commentaries on The City of God*).[11] Livermore also finds numerous thematic links, even signs of parallel imagery, in Shakespeare's plays and Augustine's theology. Though she does not specifically mention *Romeo and Juliet*, she notes Augustine's influence is "to be seen chiefly in plays where Shakespeare was re-working and strengthening older plots,"[12] a category that certainly includes his treatment of the tragic Veronese lovers.

On occasion critics seem to tend unwittingly towards an Augustinian reading. For example, Vimala Herman discusses the confusion Juliet suffers when she must take Friar Lawrence's distilling liquor:

> O, look! Methinks I see my cousin's ghost
> Seeking out Romeo, that did split his body
> Upon a rapier's point. Stay, Tybalt, stay!
> Romeo, I come…[13]

In Juliet's confused blurring of chronology, Herman finds past, present and future "intermingled in the domain of the 'present'."[14] Without acknowledging it, Herman has hit upon exactly the formulation Augustine uses to escape his paradox of time.

A close analysis of the Prologue of the play serves as introduction to the application of Augustinian temporal concepts in *Romeo and Juliet.* While seeming to attribute a tragic destiny to the lines of action of the kind Augustine proposes, the Prologue also examines the role that human imagination plays in the understanding of time. The play is established as an artifact, a product of "toil" (line 14) given at least a figuratively physical existence: "we lay our scene" (line 2). This laying down of the play-space proposes a present moment in the meta-dramatic existence of the play as staged artifact. As the Prologue progresses, it appears that this play-artifact is constituted as a meeting point of the lines of action in time. The "ancient grudge" and the products of the Capulet and Montague "loins" (lines 3, 5) meet in a coalescing of past potential in the present of the play's enactment. As art-artifact, though, the anticipation of future that these lines of action propose is not configured as potential, as Augustine suggests, but as certainty: "Doth with their death bury their parents' strife" (line 8). This cursory sketch of the play's ending at the very start establishes for the audience that "How will it happen?"—not "What will happen?"—is the significant question to be answered by the play, and therefore, that the principle concentration of the play will be the manner in which these lines of action merge. This application of Augustinian concepts within a structure that demonstrates awareness of its own artifice is characteristic of Shakespeare's treatment of time in *Romeo and Juliet.*

In apparently making a claim for tragic destiny as responsible for the play's events, the Chorus encapsulates, in a present moment of telling, the entire lives of the protagonists: "From forth the fatal loins of these two foes / A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life" (lines 5-6). The bleak vision of human existence proposed in these two lines is perhaps clearer if we note the similarity of a later image proposed by Samuel Beckett: "They give birth astride a grave."[15] In fact, in starting at the very point of conception, Shakespeare's couplet, even more thoroughly than Beckett, traces the inevitability of his protagonists' path to death. Not only does Shakespeare present here an introduction to the dramatic compression his play will utilize, but he seems also to introduce the relationship of poetic compression of the human span to an understanding of the present existence of past and future.

In returning, near the end of the Prologue, to a meta-dramatic discussion of the length of the play's fictional events as "now the two hour's traffic of our stage" (line 12), Shakespeare signals not

only the indifference of his dramatic compression to the Aristotelian Unity of Time, but also projects forward to an actual future, external to the events of the play, when the drama will finish. Thus, the play establishes itself as an artifact able to leave the constraints of chronological time, a projection into chronological time of the human consciousness of time. "Now" is also significant here: The Prologue seems to claim that these "two hours" will function as a kind of extended present.

Problematic plot chronology is an important motif in the destabilization of time in *Romeo and Juliet*, though it must be conceded that this is not a paradigm accepted by all critics. Following a measured degree of disagreement in the nineteenth century, understanding of the play's time span has achieved a level of consensus, at least in recent popular criticism. In the introduction to the New Penguin edition of the play, T.J.B. Spencer explains the play in terms of "five dawns," finding "Shakespeare gives very precise indications"[16] of this time structure. J.L. Halio also proposes the "five dawns" temporal hypothesis in his book-length guide to the play, as does Brian Gibbons in the introduction to the Arden edition.[17] If one follows the Spencer formulation, though, there appears to be a piece of carelessness in Q2, the "good" quarto, for in introducing the vial of distilling liquor, which he gives to Juliet to induce a death-like state, Friar Laurence notes, "And in this borrowed likeness of shrunk death / Thou shalt continue two-and-forty hours" (4.1.105-106). His forecast proves mistaken if we impose the "five dawns" hypothesis onto the play, for in this time schema Juliet awakens on the night of her proposed wedding day, about twenty-four hours after taking the potion.

Spencer notices this, finding it, in his introduction, to be the "only serious discrepancy"[18] in Shakespeare's version of the tragic lovers. However, when the watchman stumbles into the newly opened Capulet tomb at the end of the play, after Romeo and Juliet have committed suicide, he is astounded at "Juliet bleeding, warm and newly dead, / Who hath lain thus two days newly buried" (5.3.174-75). In his commentary on the text, Spencer notes this pronouncement of the watchman to be consistent with Friar Laurence's directions regarding the length of the potion's effect. He fails to note, however, that it is entirely inconsistent with the time schema commonly used to understand the play, which he employs in his introduction, to propound the theme of four "momentous and breathtaking"[19] days.

The internal consistency of these features, Friar Laurence's "two-and-forty hours," verified by the watchman's "two days newly

buried," suggests not a discrepancy, at least not of the kind that Spencer proposes, but an extra day: a day unaccounted for by the "five dawns" hypothesis. But what other evidence do we have concerning the chronology of the play's final days? When Balthasar first reaches Romeo in Mantuan exile he says, "I saw her laid low in her kindred's vault / And presently took post to tell it you" (5.1.20-27). An audience might be inclined here to understand that his viewing of the funeral procession leads him to immediately set off for Mantua, thus supporting the "five dawns" hypothesis. However, ambiguity is added if we note that in early modern usage, *lay/laid* can be used intransitively, for example, in Francis Bacon: "Nature will lay buried a great time."[20] Balthasar could mean either that he saw Juliet being laid as part of the funeral, or that he saw her lying in the tomb (if perhaps it was open in some viewing capacity).

If we find sufficient ambiguity in the meaning of Balthasar's words to propose one day of non-action, followed by a glooming dawning on Friday morning, instead of the commonly accepted Thursday, we must alter our conception of the incessant rush of time that criticism commonly affirms the protagonists are caught in. If, however, we find insufficient ambiguity in Balthasar's words to doubt the "five dawns" hypothesis laid out by Spencer, we are faced with an even more radical instability in the time schema of the play, one that figures as a chronologic antinomy, a dual time system informed in each case with localized textual support, yet which is globally inconsistent.

We might argue, as scholars have, that this time inconsistency suggests merely that the play was rapidly written, or that a young Shakespeare unconcerned with publication overlooked these details. Of course, we might also ascribe the difficulty to unreliable printing practices or the sources of the printed material (possibly made from Shakespeare's foul papers, or the unreliable memories of actors). There will probably always be issues of textual doubt concerning Shakespeare's plays. We cannot be certain we have his finished intention before us in T.J.B. Spencer's New Penguin edition, or even that Shakespeare ever conceived of drama as being something that should be definitively, authoritatively finished the way Jonson did in publishing his *Works* in 1616.

Often critics have sought to brush away the difficulties that a close reading of the play broaches, with arguments grounded in the problem of textual doubt. Granville-Barker, for example, claims this level of engagement with the detail of the play to be "futile," as Shakespeare was only intending a general "effect,"[21] and Grant

White finds there is "no vainer"[22] activity than this type of critical practice. Such claims, however, sit uneasily with the very obvious focus on specific details of time in the play (Driver counts 103 specific references to the actual time of the action taking place).[23] Certainly, we must be careful if we use the potential for textual doubt as a method of suppression each time we uncover details that do not fit our preconceived vision of the plays: in this way one might merely balk at the very complexities which reveal the limitations of one's conceptions. If one maintains a commitment to detailed reading and is not ideologically opposed to a considered form of "Bardolatry," one might find the chronologic destabilization consistent with the design of Shakespeare.

Arguments against the intentionality of this problematized chronology are also weakened if one considers the unusual focus Shakespeare directs to these two days, the Wednesday and Thursday that fall at the end of his play. Capulet's opinion veers between the suitability of these two days for the proposed date of his daughter's marriage. At first he decides, on Monday evening, just hours after his daughter's marriage to Romeo,

> Well, Wednesday is too soon.
> A' Thursday let it be. A' Thursday, tell her,
> She shall be married to this noble earl.
> Will you be ready? Do you like this haste? (3.4.19-20)

In his last comment Capulet seems almost to address the audience, with a reference to the way he, as agent, has sped along the plot of the play. He boasts at his haste, yet is unaware that the play, in staging Romeo and Juliet's marriage a day after their first meeting, has already set the pace of a more rapid romance. When Juliet consents, on Tuesday evening, Capulet suddenly decides to move the wedding forward to Wednesday: "I'll have this knot knit up tomorrow morning" (3.4.118). There seems little narrative effect generated by this shifting wedding date except the direction of audience attention to the very days the play's uncertain chronology problematizes.

This direction of audience attention is sustained for several scenes. Repeatedly, characters stress the plan for the Thursday wedding. In fact, through scene 3.4, when Capulet and Paris make specific plans for the wedding, to 4.2, when the wedding is moved forward to Wednesday, "Thursday" is mentioned fourteen times in connection with the wedding. For one reason or another, Shakespeare worked hard to draw audience attention to this Thursday. It so happens this is the very day the play works to both

introduce and deny the ambiguous extra day. Whether or not a critical explanation can be devised to account for the apparent inconsistencies, it seems clear, in the repetition of "Thursday," that a primary concern of Shakespeare's text is to foreground the site of these temporal difficulties.

The incessant rush of time that seems to drive forward the plot of *Romeo and Juliet* is a commonplace of criticism, but critics unwilling to find in the play a parody of its own artifice have tended to downplay traces of the time schema of Arthur Brooke's *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet* that Shakespeare trails throughout his *Romeo and Juliet*. Critics have employed the term "double time"[24] (coined by Raymond Chapman) to review these repeated instances of chronologic inconsistency, similar in form to the often noted double chronology of *Othello*. The destabilizing this inflicts upon the play narrative, though, is not always fully investigated.

Shakespeare seems especially to have lent to the Capulets an incongruence of reaction that follows from incorporating directly aspects of Brooke's plot into his much compressed time scheme. For example, as in Brooke, repeatedly they decry Juliet's excessive tears following Romeo's banishment, which they believe stem from grief for lost Tybalt: "Evermore weeping for your cousin's death? / What, wilt thou wash him from his grave with tears?" (3.5-69-70). This protest from Lady Capulet seems less reasonable if one considers it comes little more than twelve hours after Tybalt's death, perhaps even before his funeral.

Equally, Capulet's position regarding his daughter's marriageability, which veers wildly enough in Brooke's poem (but over the course of around five months), is arguably even less internally consistent in Shakespeare, where the changes are affected over the course of about thirty hours. Early in the play he expresses concern to a suitor, Paris, for his daughter's youth:

> She hath not seen the change of fourteen years.
> Let two more summers wither in their pride
> Ere we may think her ripe to be a bride. (1.2.9-11)

He seems a gentle, understanding father (quite unlike Egeus in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example), a father concerned for his daughter's desires: "But woo her, gentle Paris, get her heart. / My will to her consent is but a part" (1.2.16-17).

This is quite at odds with Capulet's anxiety to wed his daughter on the Monday evening of the play, just one day later:

> Things have fallen out, sir, so unluckily

> That we have had no time to move our daughter
> Look you, she loved her kinsman Tybalt dearly,
> And so did I. Well, we were born to die. (3.4.104)

Here the caring father of act one has significantly changed to one who seems, in the use of the verb "move," to objectify his daughter. This Capulet implies that the unhappy deaths of Mercutio and Tybalt have stalled the marriage process, yet a day earlier he indicated no sense of urgency. The metrical division created by the internal rhyme, "And so did I. Well, we were born to die," also emphasizes the trite nature of Capulet's moralizing and its insufficient gravity as a platitude spoken the very day of Tybalt's death. While making tragic moves, Shakespeare is encoding farce in the insufficient grasp of events that he gives his characters. This inappropriate lightness is replicated a few lines on by Paris, "These times of woe afford no time to woo" (3.4.8), where the absurd, alliterative slant rhyme points to Shakespeare's parodic tone. We might note that these absurdities are grouped around time motifs: the absurd speed of events and attitudes in the play suggest some alternative time schema lingering behind events, and the brevity of these aphorisms somehow mirrors this narrative rapidity on a stylistic level.

The play also seems to indicate a lackadaisical attitude to time in institutional Verona. After his failure to deliver the vital message to Romeo in exile, Friar John explains he did not manage to leave Verona because, having believed him to have visited a plague house, the "searchers of the town" confined him, "sealed up the doors, and would not let us forth, / So that my speed to Mantua was there stayed" (5.2.8, 11-12). If one postulates that Friar Laurence dispatches Friar John immediately after giving Juliet the distilling liquor, which is at the very earliest around noon on Tuesday, and Friar John returns shortly before Romeo enters Juliet's tomb, in the "five dawns" hypothesis on Wednesday at around midnight, the plague quarantine has detained him a maximum of thirty-six hours. However, as the standard quarantine period in sixteenth-/seventeenth-century Italy was forty days (the word derives from the Italian *quaranta,* for forty), this detail points to an artificial compression in Shakespeare's version of the story. Taken together, these traces of an original time schema destabilize the heuristic framework supplied by the paradigms of the overt love narrative.

A curious parallel exists between Augustine's escape from his paradox of time and the poetic treatment of time in *Romeo and Juliet.* Augustine works towards his final formulation of "time as a distention of the soul"[25] with an extended analysis of the meaning of poetry in time. The pronouncement of a long syllable, Augustine

suggests, presents a problem to a conception of time not rooted in the soul, for at the point of sounding the long syllable, the outer boundaries of the tone are not yet established. It has a starting point, now past; but without having reached an ending point, we cannot establish the syllable as having passed. Therefore, there is an extended present in the consciousness of the speaker at the point of sounding a long tone. Augustine builds from this awareness to think about the relationship of the successive units in poetry. The speaker of poetry is confronted with the internal division of the poem into syllable, word, line and stanza units, yet the music that the speaker is conscious of depends on an apprehension at one moment of all the units of the poem that have already passed. There can be no poem unless we keep a "psychic impress"[26] of all the units together in the distended present of the soul. Augustine also suggests that the speaker of the poem runs over in anticipation all the units of sound to come at the moment before pronouncing the poem, and holds in imagination all that has passed and all that is to come as the poem progresses. We grasp the poem in its wholeness, and this interconnection of meaning and music illustrates the way events in time for us are a function of consciousness.

These ideas can be useful in approaching the sonnet that Romeo and Juliet make together upon first meeting at the Capulet party. If one understands the four lines of verse that Juliet makes merely as a conventional response to Romeo's four-line verse introduction, common especially in Shakespeare's comedies, then in reality the dialogue is fashioned into a sonnet purely by the insistence of Romeo's rhyming replies. From the third quatrain of the sonnet, the following interchange does not imply the creation of verse any more stylized than much of Shakespeare's iambic pentameter:

> *Romeo:* Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?
> *Juliet:* Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer. (1.5.101-102)

It is Romeo's insistence that develops the conceit and rhyme scheme into sonnet form: "O, then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do! / They pray: grant thou, lest faith turn to despair" (1.5.103-104). This pattern is continued into the couplet, where Juliet's apparent passivity is mimicked in taking the first line—it is not a couplet unless a satisfactory second line is provided, which Romeo's fulfills. The creation of a sonnet that they have enacted, then, has been due to the determination of Romeo to shape their first meeting to poetic form. As the sonnet closes, just before they

take their first kiss, Juliet must be caught in an odd feeling with regard to the unfolding experience. She sees how Romeo has fashioned their opening exchange, itself an enchanting display of courtly wit, but perhaps only intuitively she also perceives his wit has offered her a novel experience of time. The sonnet, by taking its meaning in all the interaction they have thus far made, gives to Juliet an extended present moment in a way she has perhaps never known before. In Augustine's understanding of poetry as it is apprehended by the soul, since she began speaking to Romeo time has literally ceased to move forward. After such an experience, it is no wonder she submits so readily to be kissed.

Juliet, though, quickly develops misgivings to this technique. After he kisses her a second time she replies, "You kiss by th' book" (1.5.110). Perhaps Juliet realizes the way Romeo engineers the wondrous experience of time that she has recently undergone. He has stopped time for her, but he has done so by making their experience art, an artifice. His wit, delightful at the moment of experience, upon reflection is exposed as a typical courtly practice, merely a sophisticated variation of the love verses a young noble woman such as Juliet would have received in excess. Surely, we must share Juliet's ambivalence at Romeo's success in our evaluation of the love narrative unfolding, whether or not we long for a purely sentimental drama.

The manner in which the encoding of artifice in the play's problematic textual details works to interrogate the sentimentality of the love narrative is concisely illustrated by observing the variance between Shakespeare's text and the long stage tradition of the play. This dissimilarity perhaps peaked with Garrick's modifications made for his 1748 production, which were played far into the nineteenth century, where as well as an altered tomb scene and much reduced punning, Rosaline was cut "to render Romeo's love more uniform."[27] Surely, there is a parallel to be drawn between Garrick's unwillingness to stage Shakespeare's problematic details and the critics' unwillingness to consider the full implications of the play's textual manipulations of time. One might argue that to determinedly ignore the parodic elements that Shakespeare's play seems to encode is to miss the extent to which the play examines the role of artifice in artistic representation.

Certainly, Rosaline presents a complication to the love narrative. The rapidity of Romeo's love for Juliet is highlighted with consideration of the apparently sustained nature of his feelings for Rosaline, which we can deduce from Montague's observation of his son's love melancholy: "Many a morning hath he been

there seen / With tears augmenting the fresh morning's dew" (1.1.131-32). Many critics note the way Romeo, in the early scenes of the play, seems a parody of the stereotypical unrequited lover. A comic Romeo, foolishly caught up in feelings irrelevant to his destiny, though, was not to neoclassical tastes. Criticism commonly explains that Romeo's patently artificial feelings for Rosaline are introduced to suggest a contrast with the genuine in his love for Juliet. Does this neat idea, though, stand up to a close examination of the play?

It is true that the popular travesties of the nineteenth century imply the play as a whole has an excess of sentiment. But it is eminently arguable that the play itself encodes an attack on sentimental love in its parody of the sonnet sequence, which achieved rejuvenated popularity in early modern England following the 1591 publication of Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella.* Romeo's lovelorn behavior, itself based around a disrupted appreciation of time, is parodied by Mercutio, who remarks, "Now is he for the numbers that Petrarch flowed in" (2.4.38-39). This meta-dramatic remark seems placed in case the audience does not realize the origin of the satire at hand. As a contribution to the disruption of the "reality" of the play this causes, Wells suggests we imagine *Titus Andronicus* performed with a copy of Ovid on the stage.[28]

In *The Sonnets* Shakespeare also seems keen to parody this type of Petrarchan element. The speaker of Sonnet 130 repeatedly denies the similes applied by other sonneteers: "My mistress eyes are nothing like the sun/ Coral is far more red than her lips red."[29] In fact, it seems Romeo's love for Juliet in the balcony scene does not move very far from the artifice that Shakespeare so evidently felt was ripe for parody. In the famous first line (quoted above), the speaker of Sonnet 130 does not accept the solar qualities Romeo, like other Petrarchan sonneteers, finds in his paramour: "Juliet is the sun" (2.2.3). To Romeo's claim that Juliet's voice is "softest music" (2.2.166), Sonnet 130 suggests, "Music hath a far more pleasing sound" (line 10) than the voice of a lover. The speaker of Sonnet 130 would be equally cynical to Romeo's claim that Juliet is "a winged messenger of heaven" (2.2.28): the commitment to realism in the line, "My mistress when she walks treads on the ground" (line 12), seems both to acknowledge the merely figurative nature of love sonnets (obviously Romeo does not really believe Juliet can fly), yet maintains that this type of figurative approach, in choosing patently impossible tropes, is an inferior apprehension of the love object. By the standards of Sonnet 130, Romeo's commitment to the figures of the sonnet

tradition, steeped in artifice, undermines his claims to sincerity of feeling. In light of this, can we really establish a significant difference between Romeo's approach to Juliet and to Rosaline?

The question of time is vital to the jaded inauthenticity that permeates Romeo's love talk in the balcony scene. The artifice of Romeo's conceits is matched in the non-naturalistic rapidity of the deepening of their love, which takes them from strangers to a proposition of marriage in about five minutes of stage time. Just as she experiences ambivalent emotions upon kissing Romeo, so too Juliet is doubtful in the face of all Romeo's artful protestations of love in the balcony scene. Her anxiety at the gap opening between her experience and the narrative pace of events culminates in one of the play's central images of time:

> I have no joy of this contract tonight.
> It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden;
> Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be
> Ere one can say "It lightens." (2.2.117-20)

The flash of light in darkness is a figurative repetition in Shakespeare's text that appears to have no precedent in Brooke's poem. It occurs five times in *Romeo and Juliet*. In complaining of the speed with which Romeo drives forth their love, Juliet conjures a vision of human consciousness caught in time. Like the speaker of Sonnet 129, it is the intensity of feeling inspired by love/lust that opens Juliet's perception to this mechanism. In this state, Juliet perceives the present moment as a lightning flash in the dark. Because of the process of thought-in-time, the moment is gone before one can understand what has happened. The implication of this is that, because of the incessant onward flux of time, man's consciousness of his experience is of something constantly running away from him, contingent on the vagaries of imperfect memory, never correlating with actual experience. Rather than Kristeva's idea that love in the play leads Shakespeare "to accentuate the *present moment*,"[30] we might suggest instead it is the very impossibility of the present moment that is accentuated. As a side note, one might find that the quibble, whose frequency in the play so troubles neoclassical critics, is a stylistic representation of this gap between experience and consciousness. In a punning dialogue, understanding lingers behind as speech runs on, providing a succinct demonstration of thought-in-time.

Whether or not Shakespeare intends to directly address Augustine's theory of time, the image of lightning at night presents a literalization of the very paradox of time with which Augustine begins his meditations on temporality. Just as Augustine escapes

from the pessimistic implications of his paradox by examining man's experience of poetry, so too Romeo uses poetry to manipulate Juliet's perception of time. Considered this way, we might find Juliet's ambivalence to Romeo's poetry and her use of the lightning metaphor indicate, in the philosophical system of the play, a refusal of Augustine's escape from his paradox of time. By representing it as a lightning flash, Juliet signals her perception of their love as an extended present moment, yet rejects the extended present as a mechanism for escaping the distancing of man from his experience by time. Of course, this perception comes to Juliet because of the patently artificial pacing of the events of the play she experiences. At the heart of this issue, then, is a paradoxical evasion: Juliet refutes Augustine's conception of the human experience of time, but only because her experience of events is temporally artificial.

As a dramatic demonstration of the elusive moment of experience that the lightning image suggests, we might consider a gap at the very centre of *Romeo and Juliet.* If we take Sonnet 129 as our guide, the consummation of the marriage vows should be considered the moment of the most heightened experience of the protagonists, yet this moment is absent. Just as the moment of lust in Sonnet 129 proves ultimately unrecoverable by the action of memory, so in *Romeo and Juliet*, this love scene must remain unstaged. Juliet's anxious wait for the moment—"Gallop apace you fiery footed steeds.../ Spread thy close curtain, love performing night" (3.2.1-5)—is followed, in the play's references to the moment, by the erotic symbolism of the second dawn parting: "Night's candles are burnt out" (3.5.9). The key interaction between Romeo and Juliet, then, the consummation of their marriage, is dramatically configured as before/after. As Belsey puts it, calling on Lacan's conception of desire as unable to name itself, "Desire is what is *not* said."[31]

One might argue that this is more due to the practicalities of Elizabethan censorship than the modesty of the Chamberlain's Men (at least, if we go by the profusion of bawdy puns in the play), yet one of the reasons Shakespeare studies attract so much attention is Shakespeare's ability to turn the limitations of the stage to his advantage. He cannot stage the love scene, but its central importance, staged as elusive before/after, emphasizes the human experience of existence in time. "The centre," as Derrida states, "is elsewhere."[32] Like Juliet's lightning flash that is unrecoverable from time, this non-scene is characterized by its absence. Rather

than the moment, the audience sees distance build between the protagonists and their experience of the moment.

Augustine's lines of action are radically disturbed by this conception of the present moment. We might see that it is the very un-recoverability of where the lines of action issue which forces onto the characters of the play such an obsession with whence they lead. When Romeo finds Juliet in the tomb, for example, he speaks of "a lightning before death" (5.3.90). We might see this as an extension of the implications of her lightning image. Where before "lightning" was a symbol for thought that is constantly running behind actual experience, here the very impossibility of grasping the moment itself has illuminated that which is inevitable in the future. Death is the only corollary that will answer the problematized time the play locates as human experience.

Certainly, it would not be an exaggeration to claim that the idea of death permeates *Romeo and Juliet.* Perhaps this should not surprise us, for in the short span of the feud-contextualized narrative there are three violent outbursts and five deaths. Death lingers, too, in memory, as Susan, the child of the Nurse. With the apparently concurrent births of Juliet and Susan, "Susan and she.../ Were of an age" (1.3.19-20), Shakespeare makes retrospective play with the concept of future potential. At the point when the Nurse speaks, Susan is long dead, and Juliet alive. Juliet, as long as she lives, will remind the Nurse of the unfulfilled lines of action of her daughter's potential, for Susan, the future-in-the-present, which Augustine uses to escape his paradox of time, has proved an insubstantial nothing.

Indeed, in a play so concerned with temporal lines of action, one would be surprised to find no consideration of the inevitable vanishing point, which all our lines of action anticipate. However, the repeated application of death as figurative paramour of Juliet signals some oddity in the collective imagination of the characters. This figuration is made on at least five separate occasions in the second half of the play, when the diffuse metaphoric occurrences of death seem to focus on this image. One might argue the temporal vision of time that the play impresses upon the characters forces them to this, though Shakespeare rather problematizes this tidy formulation by also giving the idea to Juliet in act one of the play: "My grave is like to be my wedding bed" (1.5.135). As the play progresses, though, the idea assaults the consciousness of the audience in the frequency of its application: "I'll to my wedding bed / And death, not Romeo, take my maidenhead!" (3.2.36-37); "I would the fool were married to her grave!" (3.5.140); "Make the

bridal bed / In that dim monument where Tybalt lies" (3.5.201-202); "Death is my son-in-law. Death is my heir" (4.3.38); "Shall I believe / That unsubstantial death is amorous" (5.3.112-13).

Working from a psychoanalytic position, Julia Kristeva explains that this pervasive death demonstrates "love is supported by hatred."[33] For this reason she finds the suggestion in the play of "death's immanent presence within love."[34] Kristeva's idea, though, fails to take account of the consciously artificial nature of the play's temporal compression and the poetic manipulations of time that the characters impose upon one another. Indeed, there appears to be no hatred in any of the quotations, except Lady Capulet's frustration with her daughter. Instead, one might suggest the peculiar way they personify death as lover is due to the elusive non-scene of love at the centre of the play. The unstaged love consummation is literally reconfigured in the imaginations of the characters, with the inevitability of time, death, in one of the lead roles. This, then, is a conscious artifice: the naturalism of the characters' speech is abandoned for figures that emphasize the play's temporal vision.

In the very final scene, the play seems to emphasize its status as art-artifice. As the "two hours' traffic" of the play draws to a close, Montague and Capulet vow to raise statues of their unfortunate offspring "in pure gold" (5.3.299). If we consider the play as a Queen Mab-like dream, "inconstant as the wind" (1.4.100), what are we to make of this invocation of solidity within the dream, as the dream-space evaporates into nothingness?

Stanley Wells claims that "academic" critics interpret this as Montague and Capulet "revealing false, materialistic values."[35] In fact, there does not appear to be such a marked consensus. Brian Gibbons, for example, finds this a positive proposal that "symbolizes the alchemical transmutation of worldly wealth, property, earth, into the spiritual riches of the heart and imagination."[36] It is true that David Lucking finds some ambivalence in this final gesture: "It is profoundly ironic that a play that depicts the movement from art to life should end with the triumph of art."[37] It seems, though, that Lucking makes an error here. Surely these statues do not represent the transformation of life into art, but rather an artistic construct (statue) within an artistic construct (play) that has already worked to highlight its own artifice. These statues are not a transformation, but a deepening of irony, an emphasis on the awareness of artifice. Lucking is right to recognize irony, but in locating it in an apparent reversal in the presentation of the symbolic entities "art" and "life," he seems not to account for the meta-dramatic irony of these semi-

permanent artifacts projected forward into the future of an imaginary time, as that imaginary time comes to a close.

Again, the play emphasizes its own status as artifact-in-time. Indeed, the concurrence of time motifs with meta-dramatic features in the play indicates an inter-twining of Shakespeare's account of the human experience of time and the medium in which he works. But how is one to marry the self-conscious artifice with the handling of Augustinian time in the play? On one level *Romeo and Juliet* seems to deny, or at least problematize, Augustine's account of the human experience of time, but repeatedly this denial is contingent on a non-naturalistic dramatic staging which seems to refute its applicability to human experience. Shakespeare's characters agonize over the lightning-flash, the unrecoverable moment of experience, but within a chronologic structure that emphasizes its own artifice. They propose art-artifacts whose invocation of future-in-the-present is negated by the ending of the chronologic projection in which they exist.

It is possible there is no escape from this paradoxical evasion, though in closing one might tentatively hypothesize that the dramatic projection of imaginative time into chronological time tends towards a particular framing of the investigation of the human experience of time. If this is so, at least as far as *Romeo and Juliet* is concerned, perhaps Shakespeare emphasizes the artifice of his medium to demonstrate the vision of time that it has provided him.

Notes

1. Julia Kristeva, "*Romeo and Juliet*: Love Hatred in the Couple," in *Shakespearean Tragedy*, ed. John Drakakis (Harlow: Longman, 1992), 302.

2. Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. David Lodge and Nigel Wood (Harlow: Longman, 2002), 90.

3. Kristeva, "Love Hatred," 305.

4. It is likely, using the "early words" "late words" dating technique, that Sonnets 129 and 130 (also used in this discussion) were written between 1591 and 1595, roughly contemporary with *Romeo and Juliet* (1595-96).

5. William Shakespeare, "Sonnet 129," in *The Complete Works,* ed. Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, John Jowett and William Montgomery (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 766.

6. St. Augustine, *Confessions,* trans. William Watts (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1912), 11.14.

7. Ibid., 11.18.

8. William J. Bouwsma, "The Two Faces of Humanism: Stoicism and Augustinianism in Renaissance Thought," in *Itinerarium Italicum: The Profile of the Italian Renaissance in the Mirror of Its European Transformation,* ed. Hieko A.

Oberman and Thomas J. Brady (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975), 35-45.

9. Ibid., 46-47.

10. Meredith J., Gill, *Augustine in the Italian Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 7.

11. Anne Livermore, "Shakespeare and St. Augustine," *Quarterly Review* 303 (1965), 181.

12. Ibid., 192.

13. William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet,* ed. T.J.B. Spencer (London: Penguin, 1996), 4.3.55-8. Line references in the text refer to this edition.

14. Vimla Herman, "Discourse and Time in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*," *Language and Literature* 8:2 (1999), 158.

15. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot: A Tragicomedy in Two Acts* (New York: Grove, 1953), 103.

16. T.J.B. Spencer, introduction to *Romeo and Juliet,* by William Shakespeare (London: Penguin, 1996), 32.

17. J. L. Halio, *Romeo and Juliet: A Guide to the Play* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998); Brian Gibbons, introduction to *Romeo and Juliet*, by William Shakespeare, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1980).

18. Spencer, introduction to *Romeo and Juliet*, 33.

19. Ibid.

20. Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed. s.v. "lay."

21. Harley Granville-Barker, *Preface to Romeo and Juliet* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1993), quoted in G. Thomas Tanselle, "Time in *Romeo and Juliet*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 15 (1964), 358.

22. Richard Grant White, *Studies in Shakespeare* (New York: AMS Press, 1973), quoted in Tanselle, "Time in *Romeo and Juliet*," 358.

23. Tom F. Driver, "That Shakespearian Clock: Time and the Vision of Reality in *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Tempest*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 15 (1964), 364.

24. Tanselle, "Time in *Romeo and Juliet*," 354.

25. St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 11.26.

26. John M. Quinn, "The Concept of Time in St. Augustine," *Augustinianum* 5 (1965), 20.

27. David Garrick, *Plays of David Garrick: Garrick's Adaptations of Shakespeare* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981), quoted on The Royal Shakespeare Company, "Romeo and Juliet Stage History Webpage," RSC, http://www.rsc.org.uk/romeo/about/stage (accessed September 18th, 2005).

28. Stanley Wells, "The Challenges of *Romeo and Juliet*," *Shakespeare Survey: An Annual Survey of Shakespeare Studies and Production* 49 (1996), 6.

29. Shakespeare, "Sonnet 130," *The Complete Works,* 767.

30. Kristeva, "Love Hatred," 300.

31. Catherine Belsey, *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 18.

32. Derrida, "Sign, Structure and Play," 90.

33. Kristeva, "Love Hatred," 305.

34. Ibid., 300.

35. Wells, "Challenges," 3.

36. Gibbons, introduction to *Romeo and Juliet.*

37. David Lucking, "Uncomfortable Time in *Romeo and Juliet*," *English Studies* 82 (2001), 126.