

Love Stories: A Reading of *Romeo and Juliet*

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In *The Portrait of a Lady*, after Isabel Archer rejects his proposal, Lord Warburton begins his intellectual assault on her: he wants reasons. He simply does not understand why she refuses him. Is it his house at Lockleigh that she does not like? (If so, they can buy a different house.) Perhaps she does not care for the climate there? (If that is the case, he suggests, they can move to a different country.) Or is it to him or his looks that she objects? He even goes as far as asking whether she requires some recommendations about him. The comic effect does not arise from Warburton's silly conception of love. In this context, given the way in which love, for a woman, is associated with marriage, and the way in which other characters do not understand Archer's refusal, Warburton's notion of love is not bizarre. The comic effect stems, rather, from the contrast between what he experiences in himself—thinking about her all the time, looking at her every move—and the fact that he expects that her love should proceed according to some argumentative route. It is not her decision not to marry him that he primarily wants to understand, but her not loving him. He sincerely believes, this lord, that he can reason with her concerning whether or not she should love him. He appeals to the normative. He seems to want to argue her into loving him. And all this time it is the marvelous length of her white neck as she bends her head, the density of her braids, her charming back, and a certain flexibility in her movement of which he is so painfully aware.

The contrast is between two conceptions of love: love as the conclusion of some argument as opposed to a momentary bewitchment of one's gaze. But, more deeply, it is between two potential discourses on love: one that thematically justifies, the other that captures and conveys. Philosophy and literature? Not really. Both discourses form James' (literary?) *The Portrait of a Lady*.¹ Both make up this (philosophical?) piece of writing through the simple device of allusion by paraphrase and example.

It has become increasingly difficult to defend the old classifications that have been used to explicate the differences between philosophy and literature in terms of the discursive means that constitute their language. It will no longer do to talk of a figurative, particular,

evocative discourse as opposed to a literal, general and cognitive one. The problem with these oppositions is not only that we have become deeply suspicious regarding the ability clearly to distinguish between emotions and cognition, or between the general and the particular, or concerning the ability to construct a purely literal language. It is, rather, the non-problematic way in which both literature and philosophy can and do simply 'borrow' such elements from each other. Something, no doubt, gets lost through such borrowing, which is why the word should be cautiously used. However, whatever that something is, it is not the poles of the oppositions which have been set up above.

Nevertheless, unless one chooses a non-discriminatory all-embracing textuality, a difference between philosophy and literature has to be acknowledged. If such difference does not, however, lie in the elements that make up these discourses, in what can such a difference reside? Exploring this question is my general topic. For such purposes it seems to me best to turn to a subject-matter regarding which the claim for different capacities between philosophical and literary discourses seems to be most frequently raised: love.

Philosophers often talk of the inappropriateness of philosophy, the sense of its simplicity in capturing love.² Of course, the inadequacies of philosophy need not indicate the cognitive status of its claims (that philosophy's claims are inherently simplistic, or obvious) but, rather, a sense of their deadness. That is, the supposed inappropriateness of philosophical discourse regarding love does not stem from a short degree of insight, but from the way in which it constitutes its reader's low degree of responsiveness. However, while it may be tempting to claim that literary texts create a more receptive reading, we may well feel uneasy about opposing a trusting, yielding literary reading, and a supposedly very rigid, unloving, critical, sense of self that a philosophical work asks its reader to maintain.³ Experienced readers of literature usually remain critical throughout the reading: sorting out elements, evaluating, comparing, 'stepping back' and reflecting, asking for love, or all of these. However, intellectualisation of love can also stem from sources not cognitive. It may well be the case that reflecting on love, unlike other forms of intellectual activity, does not arise only from a desire to know what it is, but rather from a need to perceive it. A theorist of love is perhaps more like the heroine of Delene Matthee's *The Day the Swallows Spoke*: someone who seems to be solely instrumental about diamonds, asking various questions concerning them (how they are classified, what the criterion of verifying them is, how to evaluate them comparatively and so on—but all along

it is the touching and playing with the diamonds that capture her eyes. The intellectual curiosity her questions imply is exposed as being an assumed posture, one that is the outcome of deeper needs that have to do less with intellectual classification and more with recognition, play, and touch.

Of course, talking of the needs that truly operate in certain forms of inquiry is risky. Different readers may want different things at different times. One is also usually motivated by more than one desire. It would be best, therefore, to avoid any generalisations regarding what readers 'really' want and what is only secondary to them. Having said this, I still wish to keep the idea that in some fields of intellectualisation—love being one example—we want the object to be perceived through the theory. Some objects compel us to rephrase them. The popularity of love stories attests to the need both to produce and to consume such reformulations. To lose sight of the hold these objects have, and the way in which this fascination can be—or asks to be—translated into theory would lead to insensitive theory.

I wish to implement these methodological remarks regarding what a philosophy of love may involve in a reading of one aspect of *Romeo and Juliet*, and to begin with the exploration of one sense of love using a form of analysis that is as much a reformulation as it is a theory. On a more general level, I wish to acknowledge and investigate further the claim that literary works create greater responsiveness in their readers than do philosophical texts. This would enable unpacking the claim according to which the limitations of philosophy in treating love stem from the sterile way in which philosophy connects its readers with its insights. Such a sense of deadness, of deafness, would be explained by my earlier claim that triviality is not necessarily banality situated between a claim and fact, but a state in which one is closed off to sense. However, I also wish to elaborate ways through which such greater responsiveness can be explained without invoking the problematic routes surveyed above. Withdrawing from the cognitive and metaphorical clusters that the notions of identification and trust invoke would, in turn, require establishing other paths through which openness to meaning can be explicated.

The problem

Let us begin by sensing something of the evasive complexity of *Romeo and Juliet*. The play does not seem complex. Indeed, it looks rather

simple in the range of meanings to which it is tuned. If the Romantics are to be believed, the tragedy is primarily an exquisite eulogy for youth and first love, a love which is conceived as a totality of emotional investment, commitment and expression achieved through not knowing the future, through being closed—as young lovers are—to the various ways in which passion transforms into the blunt, persistent pain that banality is.

However, reading the play in the way Hazlitt, Coleridge and Schlegel have done is invalidated by elements of plot that seem to be there precisely in order to block such one-sided appropriation. Mercutio makes sharp ironic remarks concerning Romeo's infatuations ('... We'll draw thee from the mire / Of—save your reverence—love, / Wherein thou stickest / Up to the ears' [I.iv.41–43]).⁴ He also describes Romeo as trivially sex-crazed rather than heavenly possessed by love ('For this drivelling love is like a great natural that runs lolling up and down to hide his bauble in a hole' [II.iv.91–93]). Such remarks are one important way through which Shakespeare restricts a reading from being tuned to and over-taken by passion alone. But the biggest obstacle for such a reading is the peculiar fact that Romeo is introduced already in love with another woman.

Presenting a hero with shallow emotions when a tragedy of love is concerned seems blatantly wrong. This conclusion has been avoided because of the tendency of commentary to dismiss Romeo's love to Rosaline as false or solely sexual.⁵ Such an impression in fact endorses the views of Mercutio and Friar Lawrence. Friar Lawrence never did believe that Romeo loved Rosaline (II.iii.77–78) and Mercutio considers the entire affair as a rather comical case of unfulfilled desire. This, though, is hardly the way Romeo sees things. There is, no doubt, emotional and linguistic development in Romeo. His love for Juliet is much deeper than his feelings for Rosaline. However, doubting his love for Rosaline is plainly contradicted by the reports of the depths of his despair: 'Many a morning hath he there been seen, / With tears augmenting the fresh morning's dew, / Adding to clouds more clouds with his deep sighs; / But all so soon as the all-cheering sun / Should in the farthest east begin to draw / The shady curtains from Aurora's bed, / Away from light steals home my heavy son / And private in his chamber pens himself, / Shuts up his windows, locks fair daylight out / And makes himself an artificial night' (I.i.129–38). Claiming that such a depressive state results solely from an unsatisfied sexual appetite is unpersuasive.

So we hear that nothing can replace Rosaline in Romeo's heart

(‘The all-seeing sun / Ne’er saw her match since first the world begun.’ [I.ii.94–95]), but then we are simply to accept the fact that all this is gone as soon as he accidentally sees Juliet. Such an achievement has been difficult even for very sympathetic readers.⁶ Can one really believe that the love of someone who attests to having been ‘stricken blind’ by Rosaline, to whom all other beauties are but ‘a note’ where he reads the one who surpasses them all (I.i.230–34) can disappear, change its object, merely because of a moment of sight? Does not such characterisation posit an obstacle for any attempt to sympathise with what Romeo later says to Juliet regarding the depths of his feelings for her? Does not the whole tragic effect of the work suffer because of this diminishing of Romeo?

The second chorus explains the change from Rosaline to Juliet in the following way: ‘Now old desire doth in his deathbed lie / And young affection gapes to be his heir; / That fair for which love groan’d for and would die, / With tender Juliet match’d, is now not fair. / Now Romeo is belov’d and loves again, Alike bewitched by the charm of looks,’ (II.1–6). The first four lines describe the change; the last two explain it through appealing to the mutuality that was missing from Romeo’s one-sided love for Rosaline.⁷ The justification—altogether missing from the first Quarto—is implausible. To begin with, Romeo confesses to loving Juliet moments after seeing her (I.v.51), before he could have possibly known or guessed about mutuality. However, things are not only chronologically awkward but also substantively implausible. If Romeo was indeed willing to die for Rosaline in that day’s afternoon, it is hardly a persuasive justification to appeal to the fact that his falling in love with another woman in that day’s evening is the result of having some sense of being loved back.

Moreover, two additions of Shakespeare’s to his source (Brooke’s *The Tragicall Historie of Romeus and Juliet*) further intensify the problem. To begin with, Shakespeare compresses the time frame from several months in Brooke to five days, including the turn from Rosaline to Juliet. It is not so much that this makes the change from Rosaline to Juliet implausibly faster in Shakespeare than in Brooke. In both, the switch itself is fast. But the grave costs Romeo immediately has to pay for his love when only days or hours ago he loved another, along with his never questioning commitment, make him a potentially unpersuasive, mechanical hero. Secondly, Friar Lawrence mocks him at length for his changed disposition (II.iii.61–80). Such mockery is nowhere to be found in Brooke’s description of the same scene. The

fact that it is mockery and ridicule and not merely a questioning of his state is also significant. Shakespeare's text thereby appears to invite a reading according to which there is something altogether ludicrous in Romeo's love. Opening up such a possibility seems inexplicable if we assume that a tragic effect is ultimately intended.

Some replies

Some of those who have not simply dismissed Romeo's love for Rosaline have suggested why appropriating the Rosaline affair from Brooke's novella is justified. One may follow Hazlitt and claim that Shakespeare is portraying the way in which some of the more overwhelming loves are not those where one turns from absence of feeling to passion, but from a weaker to a stronger love.⁸ A different explanation is that by stressing a too easy shift between one loved woman and another, Shakespeare highlights the way in which romantic love is always, to some extent, implausible. Falling in love involves a gap between psychological and circumstantial reasons and outcome, a gap which is bridged by some leap. A third possibility, and one that satisfied Coleridge, is that, through stressing Romeo's non-problematic shift from Rosaline to Juliet, the love object is presented as a somewhat contingent 'catch' of a psychic state that already 'hunts'.⁹ We may add to Coleridge's suggestion that Shakespeare would thereby achieve a trivialising of the object of romantic love. One paradox of love that is articulated by the play is, accordingly, the somewhat arbitrary nature of the object as far as underlying needs go, and, on the other hand, a privileging and disproportionate idealisation of it in its specifics by the lover. Such radical mystification of the non-unique is not merely a discrepancy between underlying mechanics and the lover's awareness, but is, in this play, a guiding principle of what a loving gaze is. Exalting the ordinary is manifested in such places as the balcony scene in which Romeo, enchanted, whispers 'She speaks' or 'See how she leans her cheek upon her hand' (II.ii.25, 23). The loving gaze is a new perceptivity of the hitherto unnoticed, not because it has been hidden, but because it was always there. You always saw it until you really did.

However, we may elect to avoid adding missing justifications when Shakespeare employs an implausible one (or, according to Q1, does not supply one at all). The unsaid and inexplicable in a literary work is not necessarily there to be 'solved' through adding speculation—filling out, as it were, the missing parts—but, rather, sometimes needs to be explained as such. An interpretive procedure that wants to respect

the possibility that Shakespeare embeds gaps in plot, motivation and characterisation in his plays should seek to explain how these points of breakdown in flow of information cohere with the more general structures of meaning that these works establish. In what follows I shall claim that respecting this muteness reveals the philosophical considerations that underlie this play.

Suspending doubt

In sharpening Romeo's instability and in making him face the implausible ways in which he so easily replaces the object of his infatuations, Shakespeare presents a context in which scepticism towards one's own certainties should have been invoked. Shakespeare makes it increasingly difficult for Romeo to blind himself to the way in which his emotional instability in the past threatens the veracity of his feelings in the present. The fact that loving Juliet involves costs as grave as dismembering himself from his family, foregoing his name, and even losing his life, should have made him more perceptive to the demand Friar Lawrence makes of him to examine his inner state. The nurse also asks him about the seriousness of his feelings for Juliet (II.iv.158–68). Even Juliet's words should have made him question the depths of his emotions: 'O swear not by the moon, th'inconstant moon, / That monthly changes in her circled orb, / Lest that thy love prove likewise variable.' (II.ii.109–11). In the morning of this same day, he was willing to die for Rosaline. Yet, in the face of all that Friar Lawrence, Mercutio and Juliet tell him, Romeo refuses to engage in self-examination.

A striking example of this refusal is the way Romeo answers the Friar's mockeries: 'I pray thee chide me not, her I love now / Doth grace for grace and love for love allow, / The other did not so.' (II.iii.81–83). This answer in fact repeats the argument of the chorus, appealing to the mutual nature of his and Juliet's love as opposed to his feelings for Rosaline. The reply is particularly interesting in the context of self-examination since it is plainly inadequate. It says nothing about the stability of his own emotions, which is what the Friar was questioning. After all, Romeo could prove fickle-hearted in a mutual love story. This possibility should alarm Romeo in the face of all he has to give up. But he does not hear this. What he attempts, instead, is to have the Friar believe that this love has some better prospect of working out. The Friar is questioning him about himself and his knowledge of himself but all Romeo wants is the Friar's blessings.

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Connected with this refusal to look within is Romeo's unreflective nature throughout the play. Indeed, it would be difficult to miss the mechanical, trigger-response way in which he moves to action. He fights, falls in love, and decides to kill himself, all without hesitation or meditation. In this he manifests not only a deferral of reason (Friar Lawrence calls him both mad and drunk [III.iii.61, 83]), but also what appears to be a shallowness of emotion. However, the way Romeo is characterised, the intensity and originality of his language, his cleverness—manifested most clearly when he outwits sharp Mercutio—as well as the simple fact that both expert and lay readers for centuries now have related deeply to him and his love for Juliet instead of condemning his superficiality and remaining unmoved by this supposed mechanical nature, all make it impossible to dismiss him as shallow. Something is, therefore, fundamentally missing from an account that stresses only his unreflective aspect.

A clue to this question may be found in the fact that Romeo is not only unreflective in his practice, but makes an explicit attack on philosophy and its value:

Friar L. Thou fond mad man, hear me a little speak.

Romeo. O, thou wilt speak again of banishment.

Friar L. I'll give thee armour to keep off that word,

Adversity's sweet milk, philosophy,

To comfort thee though thou art banished.

Romeo. Yet 'banished'? Hang up Philosophy.

Unless Philosophy can make a Juliet,

Displant a town, reverse a Prince's doom,

It helps not, it prevails not. Talk no more.

Friar L. O, then I see that mad men have no ears.

Romeo. How should they when that wise men have no eyes?

Friar L. Let me dispute with thee of thy estate.

Romeo. Thou canst not speak of that thou dost not feel.

Wert thou as young as I, Juliet thy love,

An hour but married, Tybalt murdered,

Doting like me, and like me banished,

Then mightst thou speak, then mightst thou tear thy hair

And fall upon the ground as I do now,

Taking the measure of an unmade grave.

(III.iii.52-70)

Philosophy is useless and blind. To the extent that he can be understood, Romeo requires not some abstract advice, a 'dispute' as to his 'estate', but someone who feels what he does. This dismissal of philosophy coheres with the way in which reflective wisdom (Friar Lawrence) is

portrayed in this play as cold, non-penetrating, and, ultimately, the origin of all disaster. It is also in line with the way the supposed wisdom of the elderly (heralded in Brooke's introductory note to his readers as what the young couple rebelled against, condemning themselves through that very rebellion) leads to catastrophe through its insensitivity. But Romeo is not simply unphilosophical. After his display of wit, Mercutio praises Romeo for his regained 'art' which is also a regaining of his old self ('Now art thou sociable, now art thou Romeo; now art thou what thou art, by art as well as by nature' [II.iv.89–91]). Such a remark conveys to us that Romeo is not in his 'usual' state during the events we witness.

All this boils down to saying that the play does not present a shallow hero, but rather a movement of withdrawing from wisdom. Love involves playing down certain possibilities of thought, a silencing of both internal and external sceptical voices.¹⁰ Such selective awareness is not merely a condition for loving, but an aspect of how romantic love operates, of what it is. Love is not a state in which questions concerning what one truly feels cannot be raised. It is also not a state in which one refuses to ask them. More than these, (and as anyone who has ever tried to talk someone out of loving knows) it is a condition in which one refuses seriously to consider that such questions are there at all. In meeting such refusal in a lover, we do not perceive stubbornness caused by love, but rather see an aspect of love itself. In some domains, allowing certain questions to be raised is a letting go of something one has.¹¹

We should note the subtle contrasts Shakespeare draws here between Romeo and Juliet. Unlike Romeo, Juliet does allow sceptical voices to speak. She not only doubts Romeo's affections, employing a conditional mode of discourse regarding love: 'Dost thou love me? I know thou wilt say 'ay', / And I will take thy word. Yet, if thou swear'st, / Thou mayst prove false' (II.ii.90–92); and: 'If that thy bent of love be honourable' (II.ii.143). However, what is evident in Juliet is that for her, suspending scepticism is not like Romeo's partial awareness, but a choice. In opposition to Romeo, Juliet seems to be always aware of the possibility of doubt, but she opts for a willing blindness. She decides to believe him (II.ii.115).

Romeo's automatic move from stimuli to action is nowhere more blatant than in the moments when he receives news of Juliet's supposed death:

Romeo. Is it e'en so? Then I defy you, stars!
Thou know'st my lodging. Get me ink and paper,

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And hire posthorses. I will hence tonight.

Bal. I do beseech you sir, have patience.

Your looks are pale and wild and do import
Some misadventure.

Romeo. Tush thou art deceiv'd.

Leave me, and do the thing I bid thee do.

Hast thou no letters to me from the Friar?

Bal. No, my good lord.

Romeo. No matter. Get thee gone.

And hire those horses. I'll be with thee straight.

Exit Balthasar

Well, Juliet, I will lie with thee tonight.

Let's see for means ...

(V.I.24–35)

Without lingering for a single moment on his loss, he moves to plan means for his suicide. Compare this to the endless verbalisations in Capulet's house but one scene earlier when Juliet's supposedly dead body is discovered. Lady Capulet immediately says she will kill herself, though this, unlike Romeo's practical seriousness, is empty talk. Capulet himself initially says that death has tied up his tongue and will not let him speak (IV.v.31–32). But then he talks (34–40), and he talks (59–64) and then he talks some more (84–90); and all along it is about himself and what he has lost. The nurse in her exceedingly repetitive lament expresses the deepest feelings: 'O weraday that ever I was born.' (IV.v.15), 'O lamentable day!' (17), 'Look, look! O heavy day!' (19), '... Alack the day!' (23), 'O lamentable day!' (30), which culminates in nothing shorter than a six-line repetition of almost these same lines (49–54).

The less articulate the language used, the deeper the extent of sorrow. This makes Romeo's unexpressed grief almost shout its existence at us through its silence. His mechanical move to behaviour is linked to his pale, mad looks. An unreflecting turning to action manifests here not a hollow heart, but depths of grief and shock. Romeo is a man who seems to be able to talk about his emotions forever. However, here he simply cannot look within. We meet again the dismissal of thought and a preference for action. However, in contrast to earlier moments in which this refusal manifested itself Romeo is now not only sealed off from wisdom but also from expression. Instead, he is suddenly aware of the unbearable passing of time. Balthasar, his man, asks him to 'have patience' (V.i.27), to change, that is, his relation to the movement of time. However, all Romeo thinks about is carrying out his plans as soon as possible.¹²

Suspending reality

The infatuation of romantic love involves avoiding scepticism either through the operations of a censoring mechanism that love activates or through whatever it is that makes one choose certainty. What I wish to turn to now is exploring the ways Shakespeare portrays such withdrawals from reflection. More specifically, the way Romeo's love involves not only circumventing the possibility of doubt, but a suspension of reality.

We may begin here with Romeo's disorientation: the way in which he does not know that it is morning in the very first line he utters (I.i.157) or the way that he only vaguely pays attention to significant things others say: 'What said my man when my betossed soul / Did not attend him as we rode? I think / He told me Paris should have married Juliet' (V.iii.76–78). But Romeo is not merely confused. He is, rather, presented as being in a dream-like state. For Romeo, wakefulness and dream flow one into the other: '... I am afeard, / Being in night, all this is but a dream,' (II.ii.139–40), 'Said he not so? Or did I dream it so?' (V.iii.79). The entire love affair between Romeo and Juliet is structured somewhat like a dream: it takes place only in nights, it does not respect social and familial affiliations, wishing it could be altogether conducted without names. It disregards reality (Juliet's refusal to accept the coming of dawn); it creates its own sense of time. The either-or of oneirics and actuality is replaced with a fuzzy logic in which the distinction is destabilised.

Most of these observations as to the state of the lovers are not new.¹³ What has not been appreciated enough is, I think, the connection between creating the ontological vagueness connected with love—enabling romantic love and being enabled by it—and a certain rhetoric the lovers exploit. Suspending a well-defined reality involves deploying a language of approximations, used extensively in the rhetoric of love. Such approximations range over several domains: an inability to express one's impressions with exactness—'Is love a tender thing? It is too rough, / Too rude, too boisterous' (I.iv.25–26), '... this is but a dream, / too flattering sweet to be substantial.' (II.ii.140–41); or to be exact about the loved one's attributes—'She is too fair, too wise' (I.i.219), 'Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear.' (I.v.46); or in the relative 'correctness' of the love in its relation to social norms—'I have no joy of this contract tonight: / It is too rash, too unadvis'd, too sudden,' (II.ii. 117–18). In all of these, the description is not through employing some positive term, but through using a relational predicate that will not do because of some disproportion: there is a roughness

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that one can bear but not the roughness of love. There is a beauty that can be used, though not Juliet's.

This is not all. A 'reality instinct' involves relating to things as clearly bounded, quantifiable entities. Bracketing off reality in the hazy domain of love, therefore, also takes the rhetorical form of an inability to count which Juliet repeats: 'But my true love is grown to such excess / I cannot sum up sum of half my wealth.' (II.vi.33-34), 'My bounty is as boundless as the sea, / My love as deep: the more I give to thee / The more I have, for both are infinite.' (II.ii.132-35), 'Romeo is banished, / There is no end, no limit, measure, bound, / In that word's death.' (III.ii.124-26). At its extreme, the opposition between love and actuality is manifested in Romeo's love rhetoric as challenging reality: he defies the stars and would swim to the shore of the farthest sea. Hyperbole becomes a most ample trope through which hostility to factuality can be formulated. The use of hyperbole contributes to dissociating the discursive world that the lovers develop from the banal restrictions of actuality. Such disconnection is aided by the extensive use of another figure: oxymoron, a device that many have noted to be the most dominant rhetorical tool employed in this play.¹⁴ Oxymoron, the figure that underlies Romeo's opening lines, creates a sense of dream-logic that eschews 'correct' reasoning patterns. Hyperbole, too, contributes to the dreamy quality of the affair since, in the way in which it corresponds to the exaggeration of wishes, hyperbole is itself a structural feature of dreams.¹⁵ Both hyperbole and oxymoron embody a stepping out of reasonable proportions and reasonable thinking, a forsaking of actuality.¹⁶

However, love in the play is not only a forsaking of the world, some dim, foggy experience, but also a penetration of it through heightened perception. Abandoning the conventional categories which structure perception involves substituting new, hitherto unseen (and possibly unimagined) connections for them. The imaginative discourse of love establishes such links: seeing Romeo at night as a flake of new snow carried on a raven's back, envisaging Juliet as a teacher of a class of torches, explaining to them by her own example how they can shine brighter, wanting to be a woman's glove, wishing to be her sleep.

Sleep

Love and dreaming both involve a sense of disproportion, a dismissing of what is normatively and physically correct, a sense of fuzziness, a change in perception that involves both new seeing and new blindness.

The overlap between these domains in this play begins when we recognise that in the vision of romantic love Romeo exemplifies, being in a dream-like state is not merely similar to love, but a condition for the suspension of scepticism that makes love possible. However, this kind of conceptualisation does not go as far as it should because it still distinguishes between love as some clearly defined passion and its enabling condition. However, the sort of love this work exhibits makes no such distinction: Romeo is afraid that being in night, 'all this' is but a dream. His is not the story of a passion being enabled by something else, but this experience, this inability to leave her, has a dream-like quality. An oneiric quality of experience is simply a part of what romantic love is.

So self-doubt in Romeo never reaches the surface and this is a part of the total change of his experience. But what about the reader? We could not have been affected by this tragedy so much had we kept questioning the constancy of Romeo's feelings. Through Rosaline, the play presents a context in which such doubts should have been unavoidable not only for Romeo, but also for us. Yet, the play's greater achievement is that we seem to be blind or dismissive towards them. Hazlitt, who loved this play so much, told us how to dismiss doubts about the sort of love the play presents, regarding such doubts as stemming from 'grey hair' conceptions of love. Willie van Peer, a recent critic, says much the same thing when he claims that those who dismiss the play act from 'repressed emotionality, or a cynical disbelief in any utopian vision of the relationship between men and women'.¹⁷ However, these are merely examples in a tradition that misses the entire dimension of deferred doubts set in motion by the Rosaline affair. My own impression is that 'lay' as well as 'professional' readers who have not examined the work in detail need to be reminded of the existence of Rosaline in the first place. This disregard, I believe, is as telling as significant forgetting ever gets.

So how do we come to be as forgetful and dismissive of Rosaline as Romeo is? One way to answer this is to claim that, like Romeo, we too dream through the play. One can get support for this route through pointing to impressions of readers like Norman Holland and Brian Gibbons who have indeed spoken of a dream-like quality of the affair.¹⁸ For me, however, Kafka's works are more persuasive contenders for such reading experience. A second option involves exposing the psychological pull of the play. Norman Holland has suggested that the whole play is nothing 'but the most exquisite expression of the child's inverted wish for love: "wait till I'm gone.

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then they'll be sorry.'"¹⁹ Such an explanation fits in nicely with the possibility that some of us go through a dream-like response to this play. If dreams are sometimes, or, *pace* Mercutio's Queen Mab speech, always wish-fulfillments (I.iv.71-88), Holland supplies us with a substantial guess as to the wish projected on to this fictional domain by actual readers. However, the problem with Holland's idea is that assuming a work plays on a certain wish or drive in the reader is never enough. A different work, say, Brooke's *The Tragicall Historie of Romeus and Juliet*, could be an expression of an identical wish or need, yet would fail in capturing its reader. This is, incidentally, why any explanation that seeks to account for 'pull' solely through projected psychological mechanisms would not suffice. Even if we agree that such a projection is one response pattern this work invites, it remains to be asked how Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in particular succeeds in eliciting such projection from us.

If we choose to avoid Holland's suggestion, it seems to me we are left with no real alternative, which some find to be an anachronistic, suspicious and ideologically laden concept but which I find unavoidable in discussing some works of literature: the aesthetic. Not seeing that scepticism should have arisen in Romeo intimates to us a pattern of response that copies his own blindness regarding the stability of his emotions. For him such blindness is achieved through divorce from reality and Juliet's beauty. The blindness of enthusiastic readers seems to be an effect of the strong reformulation of love that the play articulates. In the fictional domain, dream-like experience involves perceiving the beauty of a person. On the level of response, forgetfulness results from moments in which one is overtaken by the beauty of fictions.²⁰

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But what is beauty? Shakespeare was not a philosopher. It is therefore inappropriate to see him as presenting some theory of beauty. However, it is also implausible to relate to his text as if it does not convey to us some understanding of what certain experiences of beauty are. It is when we attempt to extract such understanding that we may perceive the more far-reaching reflective relation that *Romeo and Juliet* creates. We can begin by noting the similarities between what a loving gaze is according to this play and sensing beauty in art. Both may involve dissecting into parts which are then perceived dismembered from the whole, a need to measure what one looks at and then judging it as either

surpassing all others or beyond compare (a judgement that most obviously corresponds with conceptualisations of the sublime), a sense of holiness, of the object as shining through, the wish to keep on looking, a suspending of doubt, of ontology, losing a sense of time.

Of course, if Shakespeare was a philosopher on his way to present a theory in aesthetics, he should have begun by some qualifications as to the possible differences between beauty of persons and beauty in art. He should have then pointed out that the observations above relate more to what experiencing beauty may involve than to really explaining what 'it' is. They form description not analysis.²¹ However, *Romeo and Juliet* is not a philosophical theory.

But, if that is the case, is it not plainly wrong to try to relate to this play as anything but a work of art? Should not a philosopher who desires to understand, say, love do better in getting involved with philosophical theories regarding the concept rather than seeking some understanding from works that were never intended to be knowledge-yielding? Moreover, what, for that matter, is the status of this discourse? If all the play was supposed to yield for the purpose of this philosophical discourse was a description of the experience of beauty, why did we bother reading the play in the first place? We could have much more conveniently lifted such remarks out of the context of the work and assessed them as part of a theory of beauty.

Answering these questions begins with raising an old distinction between a discourse that presents and one that conveys; between a mode of expression that informs and one that re-presents; between a language in which justification takes the form of proposal and argument and one that harks back to the reader's own sense of life through rekindling personal experiences and therein finding the ultimate justification for what it says. Lifting the remarks above regarding the experience of beauty out of the context of Shakespeare's text would have yielded description. So one advantage in invoking literature lies in the way in which it can convey and not describe certain claims about love and personal beauty. However, more needs to be said about what 'conveying' should mean in this context. Works of literature are structures of experience. Interpreting a text is a suggested way through which to accomplish such structuring or restructuring. Appealing to literature, therefore, enables establishing claims, but not through presenting and arguing for them. Instead, we are presented with an experiential possibility, a state through which we are supposed to experience the way certain claims express a human truth.

Shakespeare's work, I argued, does not merely remind or convey to

us our blindness in love, but, on the dimension of aesthetic response, blinds us to an implausible aspect of this love story. The play presents a vision of personal beauty that involves a suspension of doubt. The same relation to beauty structures the reception of the play as well. This time blindness is an aspect of an enthusiastic experience of art. So on a more abstract level we can—keeping possible disanalogies in mind—relate what the play tells us about the experience of personal beauty to what we may wish to know about the experience of beauty in art. What we get to experience here, what is conveyed and not simply claimed or reported is, therefore, the way blindness and aesthetic response can converge.²²

Moving from description to conveying does not circumvent the charge above that such remarks do not constitute analysis. They constitute, rather, a telling reformulation of an effect, of beauty as an effect.²³ However, pressing the analogy between beauty of person and beauty of art as far as this work allows enables transcending description and achieving partial analysis. We have already noted the way the Rosaline affair enables Shakespeare to present the love for Juliet as conditioned upon a pre-existing hunger in Romeo. This model opposes the more simplistic conceptualisation involved in the idea of a Cupid that shoots his arrows arbitrarily. The contrast is simple yet not trivial. It is between a model according to which love is simply a relationship between a lover and a beloved and a model that begins explaining how one falls in love before encounter with the lover takes place. The idea of a framework of conditions that enable love also exists on the level of aesthetic appreciation. Arguing for such conditions in the latter sense involves, I think, distinguishing between two claims, both of which I wish to assert. The first is the rather banal diachronic claim according to which appreciating the aesthetic quality of a work of art involves a readiness. Works of art do not speak to us on all occasions. The second is the more interesting synchronic claim according to which perceiving beauty in art enables and is made possible by a restructuring of experience that changes perception, cognition and emotion. Unlike sticks and stones, both beauty of person and beauty in art cannot simply be fully recognised. Rather, such complete perception involves subtle reworkings, as well as—since non-perceptiveness is at stake—unworkings of the very framework through which one perceives. Like the relations between love and dreaming, those between beauty and suspending doubt are not causal but of containment. Suspending doubt is not an effect of some dazzling beauty of art but rather a part of what some moments of aesthetic pleasure involve. In *Romeo and Juliet*

moreover, such blindness is not only momentary, but a part of an overall reaction to the work.

Finally, we are able to ask what knowledge this discourse presumes to produce, knowledge which could not have been derived from a philosophical discourse that did not appeal to literature. The question arises since the description/conveying distinction boiled down to differences in the ways in which beliefs are established and not to differences in the knowledge-claims themselves. The fact that a certain vision of love is conveyed in a stronger way through literature rather than philosophy says nothing about the truth of the vision itself. False visions can be conveyed through the liveliest of means. It is here that much work into the philosophy/literature relations makes the mistake of not distinguishing clearly between asking for types of knowledge that reading literature can produce and asking for the unique gain in such a procedure—asking, that is, what knowledge, if any, such reading can produce that 'philosophy' taken on its own cannot.

Philosophical readings of literary texts supply us with beliefs. In my own reading, these beliefs regard concepts like love and beauty. If both the literary work and its proposed interpretation are persuasive, such beliefs can turn into experiential knowing. This means that, on one level, what reading or seeing a play achieves for philosophy is not a difference in the belief that is supposed to be known, but in the way through which the belief is justified. We do not get to entertain a belief about love or beauty that could not have been raised by a philosophy that does not invoke literature, but to entertain some beliefs in a different way. We achieve a different kind of knowing. To be sure, knowing through experience is not necessarily better than knowing through argument. It may well be that one should modify, for various reasons and arguments, the way one experiences certain states. However, things can also be the other way round—a belief supported by argument should be modified since it strongly opposes one's sense of life. What can be asserted with confidence regarding the relevance of literature to philosophy is, I think, that to dismiss experiential knowing from the domains of philosophy is to give up a mode of knowing which is at the very least as important as knowledge by argument. It is to opt for a philosophy that is both limiting and limited. When philosophy attempts to address itself to 'life', such limitation could well result in a false philosophy.

Saying that literature can make us entertain certain beliefs in a different way explains why literature is relevant for philosophy. But this is not all. On a second level literature does supply us with new,

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philosophically relevant beliefs. These beliefs relate to the concept of knowledge itself. Reading literature enables us to distinguish between different ways in which we can be made to listen. Philosophers reading literature get to explore contexts of discovery. Mega-epistemic notions such as 'reader-experience' or 'conveying' are unpacked into patterns of relating to sense that emerge in specific contexts. Regarding the concept of knowledge, a persuasive philosophical reading of a literary text yields justified beliefs and not mere beliefs since, when convincing, it proves that the patterns of cognitive experience it talks about do exist simply through giving examples of them. My own reading sought to show that there exists an experience of personal and aesthetic beauty that involves a certain blindness. I tried to support this claim in showing how it has been repeatedly actualised in specific, real, reading experiences of *Romeo and Juliet* that involved an important dismissal.

We began with the question of philosophy's repeated self-acknowledged triteness and simplicity in treating love, with the question of its supposed inadequacies and muteness. Through reading *Romeo and Juliet*, a paradigmatic literary portrayal of romantic love, we have one answer. Non-aesthetic discourse may be able to explain how love operates or what it is. However, it fails to enact the epistemic conditions that enable perceiving love. Such perception is required in a theoretical activity on love since what some of us need from such intellectualisation is not only explanation but, I suggested, also reformulation. This is how we get to feel untouched by non-aesthetic discourse on love. Triviality, I claimed, is not necessarily banality. It could also involve a claim that does not really speak to one. What is unique to literary discourse is not primarily that it is particular, evocative, figurative, or simply denser in such elements than other discourse. Rather, literature reshapes our listening capacities in certain ways. Through the rhetorical strategies that are enacted by this play both in the fictional domain and in the dimension of response, we are made ready to perceive.

Examining *Romeo and Juliet* and the way in which some of us react to it imparts not only a conception of romantic love, but also informs us as to the way through which we may recognise beauty. It tells us something about how we perceive and about how we can be made to listen. It would simply not do to oppose a critical, suspicious philosophical experience of reading to a trusting, yielding literary one. To the extent that we can talk of trust, we may say that, in those rare moments in which we are captured by some line, we also suspend reality, doubt, and reflection. All of these may return almost at once.

reality, doubt, and reflection. All of these may return almost at once. But for a few moments, we get to be blinded to doubt. Which is, at least partly, what aesthetic experience can involve.

Philosophical readings of literary works are parts of 'descriptive epistemology', or 'rhetoric' or whatever title it is that captures an investigation that seeks to achieve a detailed comprehension of human responsiveness—an investigation that may ultimately explain why philosophy cannot make a Juliet.²⁴

Notes

- 1 My (admittedly simplistic) remarks above relate to two scenes in chapters 12 and 14 in Henry James' novel, *The Portrait of a Lady*.
- 2 See Robert C. Solomon, *The Passions*, New York, 1976, p.1; Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, New York, 1990, p.283, and Arthur C. Danto in *The Philosophy of (Erotic) Love*, eds Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins, Kansas, 1991, p.xii.
- 3 Nussbaum draws such a distinction. She admits that these oppositions are simplistic but believes the distinction to be nevertheless informative (p.282).
- 4 Brian Gibbons, *Romeo and Juliet*, Arden edition, London, 1980. Gibbons informs us as to the play here on 'save your reverence' and sirreverence—'a euphemism for human dung' (p.108). All references to *Romeo and Juliet* are to the Arden edition.
- 5 See, for example, Ifor Evans, *The Language of Shakespeare's Plays*, London, 1959, pp. 80–82; and M. M. Mahood, *Shakespeare's Wordplay*, London, 1968, p.61.
- 6 William Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, London, 1817, reprinted 1962. Hazlitt thought that the episode 'is perhaps an artifice (not absolutely necessary) to give us a higher opinion of the lady [Juliet]' (p.114–15). Notice the 'perhaps' and the parenthesised remark, which stand out as the only points of humble critique in Hazlitt's praise for the play.
- 7 Notice the subtle contrast here between Shakespeare and his source, A. Brooke, *The Tragicall Historie of Romeus and Juliet*, 1562. In Brooke the description is almost identical; however, the explanation does not appeal to mutuality but to a mechanical picture in which a new love replaces an old one just as a new nail can drive an old one out of a piece of wood. An edited version of Brooke's translation is supplied in the Arden edition of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (see lines 203–8).
- 8 Hazlitt, p.115.
- 9 Samuel Taylor Coleridge: *Shakespearean Criticism*, 2 Vols, ed. T. M. Raysor, London and New York, 1960, Vol. 1, p.6: '... it marks strongly

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the fineness of his insight into the nature of the passions that Romeo is introduced already love-bewildered. The necessity of loving creating an object for itself, etc. ...'.

- 10 Compare Hazlitt's claim that 'Romeo is Hamlet in love'.
- 11 This last theme is explored not only in *Romeo and Juliet* but is also an underlying theme of *Othello*. In the latter, however, Iago does manage to establish a question, thereby destroying Othello's love.
- 12 James L. Calderwood, *Shakespearean Metadrama*, Minneapolis, 1971, pp.85–119. Calderwood argues that the direction of the play is from articulate language to ineffability and finally silence which is embodied in the two golden statues. Calderwood does not discuss silence through acting, or Romeo's silence in this passage. It is not obvious to me that my remarks here could be conveniently integrated with his overall conception of the movement toward silence because when Romeo does see Juliet's dead body expression returns. (In fact, it returns moments earlier when Romeo is forcing himself into Juliet's tomb in what are, for me, the most moving lines in the play: 'Thou detestable maw, thou womb of death / Gorg'd with the dearest morsel of the earth, / Thus I enforce thy rotten jaws to open, / And in despite I'll cram thee with more food' [V.iii.45–49]).
- 13 See discussions in Hazlitt, p.114 or Norman N. Holland, 'Romeo's Dream and the Paradox of Literary Realism', in M. D. Faber, ed., *The Design Within: Psychoanalytic Approaches to Shakespeare*, New York, 1970, for impressions as to Romeo's dream-like state. On the way the lovers create their own sense of time, see Gibbons' introduction to the Arden edition, pp.55–60. On the contrast between the busy objective time and the quality of 'stillness' that the affair has, see Calderwood's discussion of the work.
- 14 See David Lucking, "And All Things Change them to the Contrary": *Romeo And Juliet* and the Metaphysics of Language', *English Studies* 78.1 (1997): 8–18; and Calderwood. Robert Evans (*The Osier Cage: Rhetorical Devices in Romeo and Juliet*, Lexington, 1966, pp.1, 29) goes as far as claiming not only that oxymoron is used in *Romeo and Juliet* more than in any other Shakespearean work, but 'more than in any other work in literature'.
- 15 See also Bert O. States, *The Rhetoric of Dreams*, Ithaca and London, 1993, p.93.
- 16 For the way Shakespeare endorses the traditional association between dream and madness, see Marjorie B. Garber, *Dream in Shakespeare: From Metaphor to Metamorphosis*, New Haven and London, 1974, p.5.
- 17 Willie Van Peer, 'Canon Formation: Ideology or Aesthetic Quality', *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 36.2 (1996): 97–108, esp. 98–99.
- 18 Speaking of the love affair Gibbons talks of the lovers as being 'spiritually remote from other characters and the concerns of this world' as well as encapsulated in a 'dream consciousness' (p.70). His impression therefore

attests to the dream-like quality of some aspects of the play. Holland is more general and claims that '... the entire relationship of Romeo and Juliet is treated as a dream' (p.52). One may go further with this approach, and turn to writers like Garret Stewart ('Shakespearean Dreamplay', *English Literary Renaissance* 11.1 (1981): 44–69) or Derek Traversi (*Shakespeare: The Last Phase*, Stanford, 1965) for whom all Shakespearean plays have a dream-like quality. The most ambitious formulation of this option would be to follow those who claim that literature and theatre in general are experienced somewhat like dreams. Indeed, Shakespeare himself has Puck ask us in the very end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to treat the play as a dream. The analogy itself is older (see Jackson I. Cope, *The Theater and the Dream: From Metaphor to Form in Renaissance Drama*, Baltimore and London, 1973). For a recent inquiry into its theoretical plausibility see States (1993) but also relevant is his *Dreaming and Storytelling*, Ithaca and London, 1989. Some of the authors in Carol Schreier Rupprecht, ed., *The Dream and the Text: Essays on Literature and Language*, 1993, discuss the idea as well. The fact that we are discussing a play and not simply literature moves the work still closer to dreams since dream phenomenology is closer to the iconic representations of theatre than to the more discursively oriented language of texts (see Eli Rozik, 'The Common Roots of Dreams and the Theatre: A Revision of the Rhetoric Terminology in Freud's The Interpretation of Dreams', *Assaph* 7 (1991): 75–102).

- 19 Holland, p. 53.
- 20 For a different form, such as analogy between fictional occurrences and actual response-patterns can take in Shakespeare, see my reading of *Richard III*: 'A Case of Unfair Proportions: Philosophy in Literature', *New Literary History* 29.3 (1998): 501–20.
- 21 The description/analysis distinction is unavoidable here in at least two ways. The first is that analysing what beauty is can be conceptually independent of what the experience of beauty is like (this distinction is necessary if one believes, for example, that beauty is a property of things. The experience of beauty would be in such a case just an effect). Secondly, analysing the experience of beauty can be different from its phenomenal description (think of the difference between physiological and phenomenal accounts of the experience of pain).
- 22 It is surprising how easy it is to employ models that have been set up to explain love or the aesthetic as non-trivially informing regarding each other. Since we are discussing a romantic love in which one is captivated, applying this model to the aesthetic yields a 'romantic aesthetics'; an aesthetics in which one is momentarily thrown off by the power of some lines. We can, no doubt, think of 'non-romantic' visions of love/aesthetic, as a gradual, dialogical process involving components like intimacy, laughter, play, and many other interactions that are less fragmentary.

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However, such a vision requires discussing a different work.

- 23 This qualification need not mean that a phenomenology of beauty is dispensable for the purposes of philosophy; especially not to an inquiry such as this that is primarily preoccupied with the way in which beauty affects reception of ideas. Nevertheless, it does admit of partiality.
- 24 I would like to thank Marcelo Dascal, Zephyra Porat, Miri Rozmarin, Eddy Zemach, and Shirley Sharon-Zisser for helping me clarify and substantiate these ideas.