

Concept and necessity. The ideas in the plays take shape due to the characters brought by the playwright in front of the audience. By their intelligence and emotional life they lead the action to a denouement or another. The same idea, embodied in characters with different inner structures, can have different denouements. Therefore, accepting the importance of the analysis of the characters' inner structure, we enter a territory of a science of the human being, defined by the combination of intelligence with emotional life and expressed by individual character.

In analysing the characters one must look for what is necessary and truthful, so that one may discover why it is necessary for a character to speak or act in a certain way and why an event is necessarily followed by another. A general look at the Shakespearean plays makes us draw the conclusion that the characters are very distinguished, they are built according to their historic model or individual nature and, especially, they are constant – in the sense of a constant behaviour throughout the tragedy. In our attempt to synthesize what, in our opinion, are the dominants of the characters, we have circumscribed the action of the tragic heroes in the following fields of meaning: *The Universe of Love, The Rulers of the World, The Architects of Crime, The Victims of Fate.*

THE UNIVERSE OF LOVE

Multiplicity of meanings. Many of the main characters of the tragedies can be defined on the ground of love, always approached from a different perspective and showing an impressive multiplicity of meanings of behaviour. Those who become the "victims" of this feeling belong to various typologies – some love desperately (Romeo, Juliet, Troilus), others come to be mastered by a possessive feeling leading to self-destruction (Othello, Antony), some see in love only flesh (Tamora, Chiron, Demetrius, Cloten, Regan, Goneril), others place love among the instruments of gaining power (Gertrude, Octavia) and a lot fewer place love as the basis of morals and a life's meaning (Bassianus, Lavinia, Portia, Thaisa).

THE CHARACTERS IN THE SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDIES (I)

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Utopian love. *Romeo and Juliet* are a case one cannot consider to be love as such, but the desire for love of a 19 year old adolescent taken over by a girl of 14 who experiences this state as a reflex. The heroes do not have well-formed characters, they are in the process of forming their own identity. Their "love" is a day dream, a way of young ambition to a fulfillment they consider able of covering all the meanings of existence and giving rise to personality. Romeo invests all his hopes in love, as it appears to him as a real universe of accomplishments. Without having known love, the young lovers believe in it as if in a salvation. Everything in the play is reduced to the fulfillment or unfulfillment of this feeling and their suicide is the proof of a limited understanding of life. Two children suffer and die because of one fatal event born out of their confusion or error. The conflict between generations, source of their tragic guilt, is not a theme that fits the heroes' tender age, too young to face life with so much stubbornness. This tragedy of adolescence is obviously exaggerated by Shakespeare.

Romeo has only one dimension, he is dominated by an offensive emotion. Knowing almost nothing of life's secrets, he seems to

dominate it by his confidence and perseverance. His love becomes symbolic, as it accumulates all the characteristic elements (the duel, night's mystery, the messenger, the song, the sky, contemplation, supreme sacrifice). But the hero's character is a synthesis of his intelligence and an emotional life. Romeo, by his nature, does not have the necessary firmness to lead to a climatic denouement. His tragic side feeds rather upon the dreamy state he is entangled in, than upon the reality he experiences.

Juliet is the feminine projection of the same state. The heroine, hardly a teenager, has the vision of discovering life's meaning in love. For this meaning, not known yet and presupposed to be unique, she is ready to die. What is the value of supreme sacrifice for such a cause? The play gives no hint about it. Juliet dies motivated rather by a strong emotion she experiences at the sight of Romeo's lifeless body. Her gesture is the bursting out of a disillusionment, the result of a strong teenage mimetic attitude, expressed by tragic heroism.

Surrounded by conventional characters, Romeo and Juliet try to overcome, by lyrical ecstasy, life's deposits of baseness that make the union of their destinies impossible. Their feelings are rather instinctive than born out of the substance of some well-formed characters. The tragedy's action seems to be a music in search for its notes, a sonnet of the teen years.



War's *Troilus and Cressida* are a pair of lovers victims. in which the hero seems to be a conscious and disappointed Romeo and the heroine – a Juliet of the moment who loves the idea of love, as her man is a choice determined by the context. Troilus meets Cressida during the war between the Greeks and the Trojans, war that broke out because Menelaus' wife Helen had run away with prince Paris to Troy.

Troilus, just like Romeo, is the one who acts in order to draw closer to love. The way he does it (with the help of a pander) is a shadow over his love. This "short" way to his beloved woman's heart can be blamed on the war, which changes the temporal dimensions of people's desires, always subject to life's uncertainty.

A settled date and a night of love under Pandarus' protection lead to hot oaths and a token of love that has just been born: a sleeve Troilus gives to Cressida. When the two lovers are brutally parted by fate, they do not promise things worthy of the sacrifice of waiting, a marriage or something else meant to last. Troilus leaves behind him only the scent of a love night. This is his only basis for the hope in a faithfulness he is sure the woman he chose will show him. The hero's character is not contoured enough. His presence in the war is not significant and it is unknown in the city's life. What does he rely on when he claims for Cressida's love? A difficult answer. Although more mature than Romeo, Troilus' behaviour is naive and his disillusionment, brought about by betrayed trust, does not have a ground able to give rise to real suffering. His soul does not experience feelings that influence his major decisions in life.

Cressida is at the same time a symbol of the feminine whims and of the war. The dominants of her character are inconstancy, pragmatism, lack of scruples, survival and the experience of the moment. They prove shallowness and deficiencies in her moral structure. If we remember that her father is in the Greek's camp after having betrayed the Trojans and that her leaving Troy is the price for the services Calchas did to Menelaus, then Cressida's labile character is not a mystery any more.



Love and mistrust. *Othello and Desdemona*, a famous couple for suffering in love, is under the overwhelming burden of the question: jealousy or betrayed trust?

Othello has a potential virtue in the beginning of the play. In spite of his age and experience, he has not come across the evil in the world. When he encounters it, he will be knocked down into an abyss of suffering. The madness seizing him in the end makes him cover his murder in the grotesque solemnity of a ritual sacrifice required by justice (he tells Desdemona the reasons that made him blame her and gives her time to pray). When he has committed the murder, reality's world bursts on to the stage

through Emilia's voice. Othello understands that he has acted under the impulse of a false belief and that the punishment for his sin is damnation. He gives up the rights of his glory and asks that his deeds be judged according to the justice he has encroached upon. His last words speak about his desire to unite, in death with the good he tried to destroy.

A strong and impulsive character, who uses force to the same extent in changing a war's course, in loving or in killing what he actually loves; he leaves life without having touched happiness. He proves to be a character in which greatness and pettiness are equal in size. His life collapses like a huge mountain over the lives it was protecting. It is the tragedy of the man who has an open sky above him, of the character who goes on the way to virtue and baseness at the same time. The great destinies do not always prove to be exceptional syntheses, but only unilateral accumulations, unable to strike a balance when important events shake their lives. Othello decays from the heights of glory to the common grounds of existence because of his deeds.

Desdemona is angelic, but naive. She runs away from her father, accompanies Othello in his military mission, intercedes for Cassio to get back his lieutenant position, loving more the heroic stories of the moor general than the man Othello. Desdemona, unlike Juliet, confronts her father openly, declaring her love to the Venetian state leader. Yet, her love seems to take the course of a legend, the woman seems to want to enter the mystery of a fairy tale world. The events we witness are, in fact, the stages of this adventure of knowledge, mistaken for love. Othello's passionate love is responded by Desdemona with faithfulness (we find no moment of dreaming, of inner struggle or desire for love). And this faith which is the dominant of her character will be denied and will bring her death.



The ideal of Desdemona is the prototype of femininity. Very humane, charming, she embodies the woman ready to face the great unknowns of marriage, attracted by the mystery of her man warrior. Endowed with beauty and

grace, Desdemona is a real woman, kind, loving, brave, giving herself with all the trust to the moor general in search for a new way to live by marriage. The shining goddess, whose character is drawn in colours of discretion and warmth, will die defeated. She becomes the victim of an impulsive nature, unadjusted to domestic life in which suspicion and passion are solved by other means than force, which only is suitable to the war. Her death does not destroy the ideal of marriage, nor that of love, it destroys only that ideal of founding a couple according to the criteria of haphazard and first impression.



The child Ophelia is a naive being that seems woman. lost in the world surrounding her; submissive and kind, childish and loving, woman for her attire and virgin for her desire. She is involved in a universe of some problematic human actions always in the verge of important decisions. As if brought from another story, a calmer one she does not seem to adjust to the troubled reality that will kill her. Ophelia is unable to understand both her father and her lover. She believes and gets lost in her beliefs, suffering and dying because of the harshness of a life that breaks her tender soul. This character, having more feminine scent than blood in her veins, is part of a picture whose raw colours intermingle because of the movements of an earth shaken by dramatic events.



Love's Anthony and Cleopatra are the lovers slavery. for whom dreaming meets love as pleasure. The two crave and wait for each other continuously. It is an intoxication with the pleasure to be together, a love unaffected by the military or political priorities of the time.

Antony, who will pay for this love, is the undecided hero vacillating between love and duty. His love for the queen of Egypt is a wonderful subject for dramatic poetry, is a total love a brave military man discovers late, after a harsh life of plots and contempt. But this love brings about a total disinterest towards his military and public duties. Love and disillusionment that master him will contribute to his

ruin. He chooses the chains of the Egyptian queen's love, Caesar being the winner of the ship battle at Actium; Antony is a general defeated by passion. In Antony's mind and soul there is no more room for other feelings. When he dies, it is not one of the triumvirs of the Roman power who disappears, but a humble slave of love.

Cleopatra, the charming feminine embodiment of love, is a disillusioned soul in search for its own fulfillment. Her charm lies in her cunning and in the death game. Sighs, exaltation and wantonness are instruments of her passing from joy to sadness, from slyness to sincerity – overwhelming Antony's thirsty soul. Her feminine pride devours the power of the Roman general's deeds, as he is full of passion. The proofs of love Cleopatra expects are an indication of the gradual lowering of the man who loves. Without emotions, without remorse, Cleopatra kills herself in the end. Her end is not impressive if we are to consider the destruction it has brought about.

Dominated by selfishness, Antony and Cleopatra are characters bringing passion to the ground of the unreal, to a state of sickness with possession.



Actors of adultery. *Aaron and Tamora*, the characters embodying the evil in *Titus Andronicus*, make out of love a secret of sinful desires covered by the mystery of adventure. Tamora's hand is asked by the new emperor of Rome due to her beauty, and she obtains honours she has not dreamt of before. Her new life with Saturninus should have been at least an honest one, if not warmed by feelings.

Her answer places her much lower than her royal dignity, as she has a double life with her subject, moor Aaron. This affair will have as a result a child. Her double life reveals a character unable to rise, by means of a right behaviour, to the level of her social status. Moral disorder seems to have dominated her all the time, for Aaron is one of Titus Andronicus' prisoners, accompanying the queen all the time. It is too much to speak about love in Tamora's case; it is rather a sinful desire defying the social norms and barriers of her time.



The degenerate of fate. *Chiron and Demetrius*, Tamora's sons, can be regarded as masculine symbols of carnal obsession, as their behaviour brings to the stage human relics of sexual primitivism. Having a criminal psychology, unable to think about consequences in the moment of their wild outburst, they kill Bassianus, rape Lavinia, who has been torn away from her husband, and maim her so as to make it impossible for her to testify against them. Their deeds are beyond any limit of human behaviour, revealing characters which despise life and its moral values. Their impulses, dominated by instincts and lacking any reason, regret or inner struggle, are indications of animal life under the cover of persons in high social positions.



Sinful affinities. *Goneril, Regan and Edmund* are representative for a type of baseness that affects feelings. According to the pattern in which a murderer chooses his victim, King Lear's two elder sisters choose the same male – Edmund – at one same moment to fulfill their sinful desires.

Physical attraction and partnership in murder, a relationship already established between the three characters, are a sign of similarity in character. Their desire has nothing to do with feelings; it is just a selfish instinct that needs satisfaction. They do not shrink from revealing their thoughts to Edmund and even their intention to kill their husbands. Their wish is added to the need of associating an instrument of support to evil doing. Therefore, it has no connection with any feelings; the three are just executioners who, admiring one another's deeds, also want one another's bodies.



Temptation and faithfulness. *Cloten and Imogen* remind us, to a certain extent, of what Lavinia goes through. King Cymbeline's stepson intends to punish Imogen's resistance to his proposal to divorce her husband Posthumus and marry him. He plans to rape her

and then to humiliate her in front of her parents. This character, somewhat akin to Chiron and Demetrius, cannot achieve his goal because of the unexpected help Imogen gets from king Cymbeline's two wandering sons. In this case too, primitive instinctual impulses master Cloten's behaviour, lowering him from his high social position (son of a queen) down to degrading baseness. The primitivism of his pride reveals the features that define the geography of his character – impulsive, selfish and vindictive.



Power's accomplices. *Claudius and Gertrude* unite their lives by complicity in murder. Their marriage distorts the noble idea of a union of human destinies due to feelings of love. Its place is taken by foul murderous intentions, covered by a false contract of human affection. The thesis that baseness exists at all social levels is confirmed by this case. Soul's and body's warmth can be offered in exchange for some advantages. Life offers these opportunities, and Hamlet's tragedy identifies them. Falsehood gains ground in human feelings too, and baseness grasps the power of making two sinful mime even happiness.

Morals are gone, sincerity does no longer exist, and souls can become means of fight and truce.



Love and politics. *Antony and Octavia* are an instance of a marriage done out of political reasons. Opposite natures, having nothing in common, each with its direction and united only because of the power crisis between Antony and Octavius, the two engage themselves in marriage with the obvious feeling of doing a duty. Wishes and souls can, therefore, be distorted if political needs ask for it. But their compromise aims at building a future and does not cover (as in the case of Claudius – Gertrude relationship) a sinful past. By this marriage, Antony pays for not having exerted his triumvir functions, and offers the guarantee of a change in his behaviour, while Octavia chooses this as a way to support her brother in his way to power. We experience a disillusionment in accepting

the play's message: dignity, the last redoubt of human personality, can become subject to deal. Bodies and feelings too work in the sense of fulfilling political and social aspirations.



Devotion and love. *Pericles and Thaisa* are a couple uniting two noble beings, the Prince of Tyre and king Simonides' daughter. Their marriage, as if taken out of a fairy tale (the hero takes part in a contest of the knights and wins his future wife's heart), is done with the consent of Simonides and their life knows the happiness of childbirth. This couple chooses its own fate relying on strong feelings, like devotion and love, which accompany their marriage. We witness the dramatic outlining of two heroes that seem unreal in the real world. Their natures contribute to defining a human ideal. Their perfection, hard to find in real life, is defined in a fairy tale atmosphere. This reinforces the belief that such perfection can exist at least in this way.



Noble natures. *Lysimachus and Marina*, a deserving governor and an honest girl, marry after a whole set of sufferings Pericles' daughter goes through. An ideal meeting of two moral characters unites two destinies in a dream marriage, over a kingdom in which neither selfishness nor meanness seem to exist. At the age of artistic maturity, Shakespeare chose to day dream, searching in a utopia for what he could not find in life. Yet, a possible question shadows the beams of this bright projection – would Lysimachus have asked for Marina's hand if he had not found out that she was a king's daughter? If we try to find an answer, the fairy tale veil might rise.



The real couple. *Bassianus and Lavinia* are – in *Titus Andronicus* – the most real and well-balanced couple in all Shakespearean tragedies. In a territory where immorality and cruelty are seen in every deed, their presence is like a spot of light. Their marriage is the result of both their feelings of love and of their courage to face

Saturninus, who wanted Lavinia for himself. Their meeting is a model of human living together on the basis of morals. But, having no force, cunning and wickedness, the two will perish, leaving behind ideas of love and devotion which must be the foundation of a couple. Two strong characters, yet vulnerable because of their impossibility to defend themselves; they make up an as real as possible image of life.



Imogen and Posthumus, Cymbeline's daughter and his unwanted son-in-law, are victims of fate. Forced to live away from each other, Imogen takes faithfulness and devotion as guidelines of her behaviour, rejecting the proposals to marry again the queen's son, repelling Iachimo's advances, believing her husband's false letter which makes her fall in a trap meant to kill her. She is by far much above Posthumus, her husband, who, seized with jealousy, asks his servant to kill his wife. Fidelity and moral strength define the stainless portrait of a human icon living, like Imogen, in pure faith.



The nobleness of *Brutus and Portia*, a troubled soul and a noble and tender soul, leave in theatre the image of a really happy family up to a point. Up to the point when Brutus assumed the role of saviour of the city and the republican ideas, their lives were quiet and happy. When her husband is away, on the battlefield, Portia realizes the dimensions of the murder of Julius Caesar. Faithful to the man whom she entrusted herself to through marriage, she puts an end to her life as she understands that Brutus does no longer deserve her love and devotion, because of what he did. This character's morality lies in the fact that, when she realizes a huge breach in their compatibility, she chooses death. Her life has belonged to only one man, in whom she believed. When his merits fall suddenly, their relationship is devoid of meaning. By her verticality, Portia confers the idea of faithfulness in love a wonderful aura.