Romeo, Juliet and the Art of Naming Love

BARBARA L. ESTRIN

IN Act II of *Romeo and Juliet,* Mercutio defines the successful man, incorrectly assuming that Romeo's recovered wit signals the decline of his infatuation for Rosaline:

> Why is this better now than groaning for love? now art thou sociable, now art thou Romeo; now art thou what thou art, by art as well as by nature: For this drivelling love is like a great natural that runs lolling up and down to hide his bauble in a hole.[1]

To be Romeo at his best is to have acquired distance from the amorous situation and to have "separate[d]" himself, as Pyrocles admonishes Musidorus in the *Arcadia,* "a little from himself," so that his "own mind may look upon [his] own proceedings."[2] The capacity for reason distinguishes man from the beasts, raising him above all other creatures. Groaning, drivelling and lolling are mannerisms of a "natural," one who feels victimized by, rather than master of, his situation. Sociability, as a manifestation of reason, signals for Mercutio the measure of manhood. Conversely, love marks a retreat from the art of forming, and so becoming, fully what man was destined to be. To "hide" is to fail to evince the jewel of the complete, and hence fully alive, self.

When, in Act III, he affirms the gravity of his wound as he slips into the death hole from which he tried to extract Romeo, Mercutio makes the figure of his speech literal by facing the very fate he feared:

> Ask for me tomorrow, and you shall find me a grave man. I am peppered, I warrant, for this world. A plague a both your houses! Zounds, a dog, a rat, a mouse, a cat, to scratch a man to death!
> (III.i.98-105)

"Peppered," "sped" (III.i.92) "scratched" by death, as he claimed Romeo had been "stabbed . . . run through" (II.iv.15) and cleft (II.iv.16) by love, Mercutio is badgered into the grave, rendered solemn instead of witty, made the steward ("grave," *N.E.D.* IV, p. 374), instead of the owner of his being. His presence in the play demands that the flatness of nature be enriched by the fulness of art. His injury reduces him to the animal — dog, rat, mouse, cat — he hoped to overcome.

For Mercutio, art is the opposite of death because it stabilizes the self, confirming man's formulative presence in the universe. Art makes the whole self visible by completing nature. At the opposite extreme is the dream which begins by depleting nature to foster the invisible. In the "Queen Mab" speech, Mercutio describes the expansion of airy nothing into a something of fancy. Queen Mab is "no bigger than an agate stone / On the forefinger of an alderman / Drawn with a team of little atomies" (I.iv.55-57). The list of diminutives grows as Mercutio expounds on the inflationary process of fancy.

The fallacy of the dreamer is that he makes the small disproportionately large; the strength of the artist is that he preserves things as they are, neither denying the self, like the lover Mercutio disdains, nor exaggerating the self, like the dreamer Mercutio deflates. If wit raises man by pushing nature into its destined fulness, the dream distorts him, distending the little that is. In Mercutio's sphere, the hero maintains the balance between the merely bestial and the wholly vacuous by developing what he might, most abundantly, be. The *raisonneur* of the play, Mercutio defends the jewel of the self which the lover, as he defines him in II.iv, seems anxious to hide.[3] If the dreamer expands the microscopic, distorting it to defy the test of the real, the artist encompasses the actual, using it to soften the impact of the fates. The dreamer dissolves into an empty vista; the artist evolves out of the natural world.

Romeo and Juliet begin as dreamers, testifying to the immensity of their love. But they succeed for a while as artists containing, as Mercutio would wish them to do, the natural impulses initially igniting them. The life they form bridges, however briefly, the moonshine beams drawing them together and the

graveside truth pulling them apart. They create, in the moments they share, an art of love, described even by the chorus of Act II as a configuration of a full body out of the raw material of life:

> Passion lends them power, time means, to meet
> Temp'ring extremities with extreme sweet.
> (Prologue, II, 13-14)

The subject of temper is at once the power in the lovers (passion) and the circumstances without them (time). Thus they cast the shape of their love (extreme sweet) from the situations (extremities) in which they are caught, freeing themselves both from descents of nature and flights of emptiness.

In his praise of Romeo, Mercutio begins with nature and ends with art. In their paeans to each other, Romeo and Juliet start with art (extreme sweet) so that they might enjoy their nature (extremities). For Mercutio, wit is the culmination of human experience; for Romeo and Juliet it is the means whereby they can touch and so return to the element they mutually desire. Romeo is clever when he meets Mercutio in II.iv because he has learned by then the satisfying consummation of language and because he knows, by then, the overwhelming need of love. The words he shared with Juliet to discover his nature are now the tools he uses against the world to protect his secret.

During the opening sequences, the lovers approach Mercutio's ideal. The introductory sonnet (I.v.95-109) and the balcony scene (II.ii) manifest their wish to share an art which at first recognizes, and then builds upon, the solidly present cycle of nature. They use the reason Mercutio so avidly espouses to ensure the union they so physically desire, their wit determining the course of their bodies. The happiness in the early scenes stems from a belief found first in the lovers' creative capacity, evidenced in the echoes of Genesis in II.ii.37-47, and the second in the earth's created endowment, manifested in the references to nature of II.ii.133-35. Romeo and Juliet exult in the strength they impress upon each other and in the support they derive from the world, fixing the metaphors for their love on the certainty of the constellations (II.ii.184-85) and the reality of the senses (II.ii. 165-66). They move from moments of self doubt to periods of

self-confidence (II.ii.28-34; II.ii.139-41) when they confirm their feelings in a natural setting. In the first half of the play the lovers cement their union with what they think is a firm physical bond. Their effort through the second half is to salvage what they made despite the inexorable retreat of the structure underlying their hope. In the *aubade* (III.v.1-35), they begin to see nature's unavoidable indifference to their plight. Just before she takes the Friar's potion (IV.iii.15-59), Juliet envisions her physical end as a mental collapse, the animal in her destroying the reason earlier directing it. The edifice of love topples when she imagines her uncontrolled body "dashing" (IV.iv.54) — as Mercutio had seen the brutes "scratching" (III.i.102) — her defenceless brains. Nature obliterates in that scene the art which it had once sustained. The tragedy in the final acts is defined while the lovers witness the erosion of the foundation binding their union. Nature withdraws, leaving an empty art — hollow statues instead of supple bodies. Yet, if Mercutio saw, in his gravity, the levelling power of the bestial, Romeo and Juliet remember in the vault the soaring strength of the creative. What remains in the enveloping gloom at the end is the recollected light of the beginning, the lovers determined to secure the golden vision originally inspiring them. Thus Romeo seeks to preserve with a kiss (V.iii.120), and Juliet to restore with an embrace (V.iii.166), the image of the life they named together.

That sense of co-operation is apparent from their first encounter where the ingredients of fairy tale romance become the properties of actual experience. Their love begins with the Pygmalion formula, the melting of art into life — a formula which allows them, in turn, to live that life as art:

Romeo. If I profane with my unworthiest hand
This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this,
My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.
Juliet. Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,
Which mannerly devotion shows in this;
For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,
And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.

Romeo. Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?
Juliet. Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.
Romeo. O, then, dear saint, let lips do what hands so;
They pray, grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.
Juliet. Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake.
Romeo. Then move not, while my prayer's effect I take.
(I.v.95-109)

When Romeo calls Juliet a shrine, he makes her both the container of the saint and the thing contained, exalting and embodying her. Unlike the conventional sonneteer, he can touch the Petrarchan idealized woman and yet not die of her. When Juliet takes his hand, she raises him to the level he has praised her, allowing him to join her on the same plane. The gratification is immediate. Through the submerged metaphor of a ladder, Juliet's indulgence emboldens Romeo to climb even one rung higher:

Have not saints lips and holy palmers too?

Is it Juliet who maintains his equilibrium, keeping Romeo from toppling over with audacity or tripping out of dizziness. Like Rosalind with Orlando, she puts him "to entreaty," refusing him momentarily so that they can have more "matter" to discuss, letting him take the reins by giving him something to do. The lovers alternatingly provide tasks for each other, extending the arena of the possible to the height of the exhilarating. Demanding prayer, Juliet keeps Romeo looking up. Begging Juliet to join him in the name of balance, Romeo reminds her of the possibility, always near, of despair. If she falters now, things may reverse themselves. Romeo might slip into the void. Similarly, Juliet suggests the need for equanimity when she argues for continual vigilence. If Romeo stops praying to her, he becomes inconstant, himself subject to change. Thus, in concert, they find a solution:

Juliet. Saints do not move, though grant for prayer's sake.
Romeo. Then move not while my prayer's effect I take.

Permitting the kiss, Juliet bestows herself on Romeo, acknowledging her feelings by consenting, but encouraging his suit by

permitting it "for prayer's sake." Such a constant coming-to-be and fulfillment is the promise of the sonnet, a mutual exchange to keep from changing. The gentleness (granting) of nature preserves the stillness (or permanence) of art.

The banter about movement anticipates Florizel's speech to Perdita in *The Winter's Tale:*

> When you do dance, I wish you
> A wave o' th' sea, that you might ever do
> Nothing but that, move still, still so,
> And own no other function. (IV.iv.140-43)

Florizel's play on moving and stillness in the seemingly contradictory line "move still, still so" suggests at once the peace (stillness) he has found in her motions and the inexhaustibility ("still," in the Renaissance, meaning always) of her sexuality. Not only does Perdita dance but she "moves" (inspires) Florizel to contemplate eternity (stillness). Granting without moving, Juliet maintains the opposite eternity of Perdita. In the late play, Shakespeare's sympathies are clearly with the reproductive powers Florizel compares to the sea. Thus, Perdita progresses towards a maternal fulfillment to be achieved in future "stillness." In *Romeo and Juliet*, the young lovers attempt a permanence through the art of their current lives. By allowing Romeo to imbibe the kiss, Juliet breathes life into him, becoming the muse of the prayers he formulates to get more. The give and take of the kiss in this initial scene permits both lovers to realize a fulness not (as in *The Winter's Tale*) in anticipation of some promised and remote generation but as an actualization of a present and willing nature. The lovers in this play find a state which is at once solidly unchangeable ("saints do not move") and softly yielding ("grant for prayer's sake"). They provide thereby the conditions — Juliet by imploring Romeo to pray afresh, Romeo by urging Juliet to kiss again — which foster both immediate gratification and persistent desire. They stimulate each other by coming to life, simultaneously as they guarantee each other by surfacing as art, in an abiding vehicle for love.

The continuity of speaking becomes the incentive for expansiveness as the lovers meet again in the Capulet garden. When

Juliet sighs, Romeo exults. Yet, as he praises her, he places himself in the exigency of the moment prior to the initial sonnet. In the garden, separate from Juliet, he seems to have fallen off the imaginary ladder. It is only through the process of the balcony scene that Romeo finds the courage to climb to, and enjoy, the heights of their first encounter. Overhearing Juliet, he is overcome by the wonder he perceives:

> O, speak again, bright angel! for thou art
> As glorious to this night, being o'er my head,
> As is a winged messenger of heaven
> Unto the white-upturned wond'ring eyes
> Of mortals that fall back to gaze on him
> When he bestrides the lazy pacing clouds
> And sails upon the bosom of the air. (II.ii.28-34)

Like the saint of the initiating sonnet, Juliet is a bright angel. But unlike the woman contained in the earlier metaphor, this Juliet is unreachable — a "winged messenger of heaven." She moves majestically in the spheres above, while Romeo, in typical Petrarchan fashion, falls back into the ground below. Passive and bereft of energy, Romeo is overtaken, his eyes fixed on the soaring and powerful eagle of his image.

It is Juliet who returns him to himself by recreating him, not out of the vacuous clouds in the sky, but out of the solid substance of the earth. In her garden, Juliet becomes a kind of Adam in reverse, unnaming the universe, decomposing — in order to recompose — the world. By moving backwards in time and recreating the experience of Genesis, she moves upwards in space, revitalizing the sense of Adam's dream:

> And the Lord God said, *It is* not good that man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him.
>
> And out of the ground, the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought *them* unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.
>
> And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found a help meet for him.
>
> And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept; and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof.

> And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.
>
> And Adam said, This *is* now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man.
>
> Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.
>
> (*Genesis* 2.18-24)

The process of Eve's emergence is curious. First God forms every beast of the ground for Adam to name, so that he becomes the arbitrary and wholly conscious word maker. But the woman — the companion — was taken, not out of the earth, but from Adam's rib; he was made less in order to be made more. Further, the moment of Adam's greatest creativity occurs during a trance, the height of his powers realized during the depths of his sleep.

In the joy of Adam's awakening the two negative components — the usurping of the body, the surrender of the mind — do not detract from the pleasure of discovering the wholly made being. Adam still names the woman, as he had all the other creatures, but he names her after himself, as she had been taken out of him. He feels a double triumph, returning to himself the namer, discovering himself — the maker. The joy is immediate (now) but it bears with it a sense of the past (now, in view of these accumulated facts) and the future (now, in light of these forthcoming events). The exultation is temporary, preceded as it was by Adam's absence in the conditions necessary for creation, and foreshadowing, as it does, a future leavetaking in the circumstances governing marriage. History surrounds the now with anterior and ensuing diminution but it can never retract the joy of believed-in power.

In the balcony scene, Juliet allows Romeo to experience Adam's moment of happiness by giving to him, however fleetingly, a belief in his own capacity for making and a consequential faith in his own resources for giving. The scene in the Capulet gardens parallels the scene in Eden. At first Romeo is, through his own hyperbole, rendered as passive as Adam, while Juliet finds the means to bring him to himself. She begins by defining her terms:

> Tis but thy name that is my enemy;
> Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.
> What's Montague? it is nor hand, nor foot,
> Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part
> Belonging to a man. O, be some other name! —
> What's in a name? that which we call a rose
> By any other name would smell as sweet;
> So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd,
> Retain that dear perfection which he owes
> Without that title. — Romeo, doff thy name,
> And for thy name, which is no part of thee,
> Take all myself. (II.ii.37-47)

Juliet is in sequence God, then Adam, then Eve until Romeo awakens, newly baptized, ready to act and name and be Adam to the Eve she has become. The exchange of roles continues throughout the scene as one enters the other and as each revels in the self the other made and found. At first Juliet reforms Romeo by unnaming him, starting with hand and foot, returning him, part by part, to the nature of his origin and directing him, name by name, towards the art of his aspiration.[4] In the recreative moment she seems like the God of Genesis. But, in the next line, she descends to the place of Adam:

> What's in a name? that which we call a rose
> By any other name would smell as sweet;
> (II.ii.43-44)

By equating Romeo to the rose, Juliet renders him part of the found universe which she, like Adam, merely names. The more she speaks the further she retreats, enlarging Romeo's promise as she diminishes her role. He is next the "dear perfection" (II. ii.45), at once the precious ("dear") beginning and the ultimate ("perfection") consummation of her life. When she asks him to substitute herself for his name, Juliet crawls into Romeo, emerging the nascent Eve of Genesis. She becomes, in that act, flesh of the flesh, bone of the bone which is their mutual compound. With the command, "take all myself," she makes Romeo simultaneously the God who "took" Eve from man's rib and the Adam who named her because she was so taken. Through the giving of herself Juliet converts Romeo into the begetter of her

life — "all." The mutuality of the exchange continues as the lovers toss each other compliments testifying to their power to rework the world.

Romeo in turn makes Juliet his Adam and his God:

> I take thee at thy word:
> Call me but love, and I'll be new baptized;
> Henceforth I never will be Romeo. (II.ii.49-51)

By "taking" Juliet at her word, Romeo credits her as mortal and believes in her as "saint" (II.ii.55), perceiving that she is, as he was to her, his origin and his destiny. If she renames him, he will be reborn, no longer the old Romeo but the "new baptized" self. Such a rebirth is premised on a creative mutuality which neither is ashamed to call love. The Romeo who earlier lay gazing in passivity is now active in appreciation, ready to "tear" the word (II.ii.57) Juliet cannot bear and prepared to dare the world (II.ii.68) which tries to stop him.

Recovered, Romeo reveals how he entered Juliet's enclave. He compares himself retrospectively to the bird he called Juliet, flying in backward glances to the now attained heights:

> With love's light wings did I o'er-perch these walls,
> For stony limits cannot hold love out,
> And what love can do that dares love attempt;
> Therefore thy kinsmen are no let to me. (II.ii.66-69)

And Juliet, too, speaks in excess:

> 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.133-35)

Both lovers emerge limitless, their happiness based on the illusion of strength (paralleling the moment after Adam's trance) inspired by the renaming process. Juliet's goodness (bounty) equals her generosity and that equals her boundlessness. Like the sea returning to the shore, she crests with still more to give, expressing, in the reference to the ocean, the circular completion of Romeo's earlier metaphor of the bestriding bird in the heaven's range. The extension builds on nature, stretching its limits to a vision of grandeur and moving outwards from a fixed centre

towards a limitless circularity. Juliet's concluding expansion downwards in the sea corresponds to Romeo's initial praise upwards in the skies, rounding the universe *now*.

Having defined her fulness not by her ability to take but by her capacity to give, Juliet casts herself as the maker Mercutio praised. When she calls Romeo the "god" of her "idolatry" (II. ii.113), she summarizes the progress of the scene where Romeo moves from passive worshipper, to active Adam to idealized god. As god, Romeo is the object of her adoration; as idol he is the image she carved. The illusion of creativity satisfies their craving, forming a temporary frame of love around the core of nature. In the course of time, reality will break through with the dark truth of its unyielding presence but for the moment, at least, the lovers seem to be able to bend the lines of the world to the encircling purposes of their art.

They are able to so shape their vision because they find in nature a pattern of certainty where they can hinge their imagined flights. The process by which they fix their beliefs is like the process by which they proclaim their love — a movement towards resolution from a position of uncertainty. Immediately following the mutual discovery of power Romeo, left alone, fears for its loss:

> O blessed blessed night! I am afeard,
> Being in night, all this is but a dream,
> Too flattering — sweet to be substantial.
> (II.ii.139-41)

Repeating Mercutio's admonition about dreams, Romeo tests his own expanded expectation against the inflationary process of wish-fulfillment. All this is "too flattering-sweet," he whines, worried that, inspired on insufficient grounds, he has been flattered into believing himself the hero of his own life. During that moment alone, Romeo loses faith in art because he has lost touch with nature. The sweetness of the night is unsubstantial. It cannot be seen or smelled or heard.

It is only in the reawakening of his senses that Romeo is able to rekindle his faith. When Juliet calls him back, he combines sight and sound by comparing her voice to music:

> How silver-sweet sound lovers' tongues by night,
> Like softest music to attending ears! (II.ii.165-66)

Juliet's voice provides a light that awakens touch ("soft") sound ("music") sight ("silver") and taste ("sweet") to the nature of the world. With the word "attending," Romeo pushes his present listening into a projected act. The sweetness promises more than a "now." It anticipates a "then," leading him to expect fulfillment because of an instantly realized substance.

Similarly, Juliet prolongs the word of departure so that it becomes the signal for return:

> Good night, good night! parting is such sweet sorrow
> That I shall say good night till it be morrow.
> (II.ii.184-85)

Sound restores Juliet's faith here just as it earlier bolstered Romeo's. If she continues calling it will, as surely as day follows night, be morrow. By centring her prolongation of the "now" on a permanently recurring cycle, Juliet attempts to guarantee her word. Her art is linked to nature, the sorrow of the parting "sweet" because the repetition of the sound will make Romeo return to her when the sun completes its journey in the sky. While the lovers rejoice in their own creative capacity, they hinge that potential on what they assume to be the firm foundation of nature's reserve. If they began the balcony scene with an imagined dream of love, they close it with a felt experience of life, reiterating with the sweetness, a solid sight and sound and smell. That sweetness recalls Juliet's rose which appeared as a promise of what nature, signalling its immutable "bounty," might give.

In the opening acts, the lovers feel confident that the shrine they build has the strength of a sympathetic cosmos at its centre. But their early belief is fleeting. What they discover subsequently is that the centre does not hold. The foundation keeps slipping out from under them. The last acts "scratch" away the illusion of art, leaving only — what Mercutio found — the indifference of nature.[5] In the first half of the play Romeo and Juliet turn figurative flights of fancy into uplifting possibilities of hope. The

birds of their immediate imagination signified the high level of their ultimate aspiration. They gave to each other, when they exchanged vows, the capacity to realize a creative life. The more they touched, the more they sparked the universe with their desire, converting external objects into manifestations of their inner state. They named the world out of the selves they promoted in each other. But in the final acts, the bird-songs of their early expansive similes are replaced by the death-knells of reductive actuality.

The *aubade* begins with Juliet's attempt to transform the lark into the nightingale she covets just as, in the balcony scene, she had reconstructed Romeo into the lover she desired:[6]

> Wilt thou be gone? it is not yet near day:
> It was the nightingale, and not the lark
> That pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear;
> Nightly she sings on yond pomegranate tree.
> Believe me, love, it was the nightingale.
> (III.v.1-5)
>
> . . . .
>
> Yond light is not daylight. I know it, I:
> It is some meteor that the sun exhales,
> To be to thee this night a torch-bearer,
> And light thee on thy way to Mantua:
> Therefore stay yet; thou need'st not be gone.
> (III.v.12-16)

Romeo's perception, she claims, is shaped by the pressure of a reality he fears, the hollow in his ear pierced by his failure to believe in love. Sensing the vacancy, Juliet tries, as she so successfully earlier had tried, to fill it with the bird of her imagination. In her efforts to prolong Romeo's stay, she asserts the logic of her calculations, rendering the light Romeo paints an exhalation of the sun, a torch left as a remainder from the day before instead of a signal sent as a herald of the morn ensuing. Such a wish to reverse time is based, not as her sweet sorrow speech was, on the certainly seen and solidly stable cycle of the fixed star, but on the dubious gift and sudden miracle of the variable meteor. With the redundant, "I know it I," she desperately recalls the strength of her earlier intuitions about nature and her previous

assertions of being, both of which empowered Romeo to find his way with her. Juliet clings to the assumptions of self and the vision of nature inaugurating her reformation of the world.

It is Romeo this time who reminds Juliet that reality nullifies her expectations:

> Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day
> Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops:
> I must be gone and live, or stay and die.
> (III.v.9-11)

On the one hand, day flattens Juliet's heightened expectations, reducing her hopes to the mist of dreams. On the other, day stands ready, poised like a dancer, to begin the journey across the sky launching (from tiptoe) the inevitable succession of the spheres and manifesting (with the jocund) the utter indifference of the planet. Romeo's counter to Juliet here forces her to face not the sound of her fancy but the role of reality. The *aubade* contrasts with the balcony scene, the lovers issuing to each other the responsibility for dealing with nature, the necessity of parting from their dreams.

Romeo commands Juliet to say what he has already seen; she orders him, in turn, to do what he himself has proposed:

> It is, it is: hie hence, be gone, away!
> It is the lark that sings so out of tune,
> Straining harsh discords and unpleasing sharps.
> Some say the lark makes sweet division;
> This doth not so, for she divideth us:
> Some say the lark and loathed toad change eyes;
> O, now I would they had changed voices too!
> Since arm from arm that voice doth us affray
> Hunting thee hence with hunts-up to the day.
> (III.v.26-35)

In Act II, the sound of voices had signalled an awakening of the lovers' faith; now the rousing echo of nature initiates the destruction of hope. With the line "arm from arm that voice doth us affray," Juliet acknowledges the defeat of the body through the devastation of the mind. Romeo and Juliet are torn apart (physically frayed) by the voice that makes them psychologically fearful. Left armless (defenceless) they are bereft of the

power to enclose nature within the sphere of their desire. As light now approaches, they remain in the darkness of distress (woe as grief). Further, the sight of day increases the sound of their lamentation (woe as exclamation), leaving them, as Mercutio had found Romeo in the beginning, subjugated by sound, overwhelmed by sight, the very forces they had, in Act II, so well mastered. Their eyes are now turned downwards towards the grave as they feel themselves betrayed by, rather than formulating, reality:

> *Juliet.* O God! I have an ill-divining soul:
> Methinks I see thee, now thou are below,
> As one dead in the bottom of a tomb:
> Either my eyesight fails, or thou look'st pale.
> *Romeo.* And trust me, love, in my eye so do you:
> Dry sorrow drinks our blood. (III.v.54-59)

Parting this time, Juliet envisions Romeo not as the enshrined saint she might bring to life but as the contained body nature has already cast in marble. In the balcony scene, the lovers instilled liquid life into each other; here dry sorrow drinks their blood, sucking the life they had formed, sapping the expectations they had raised. Early, Romeo and Juliet, the creative artists, felt themselves infinitely ready to give; now nature, the controlling force, manifests itself as inexorably destined to take.[7]

While "dry sorrow" attacks from without in Act III, "cold fear" circulates from within in Act IV. When she imagines her death there, Juliet extends the fear of the *aubade* until it reaches every part of her body, moving from the torn arms to the frozen marrow of her being:

> I have a faint cold fear thrills through my veins,
> That almost freezes up the heat of life:
> (IV.iii.15-16)

The fear is active, penetrating Juliet's body, controlling her totally. In the potion-taking moment, Juliet reverses the process of the balcony scene where she used her mind to construct the Romeo she desired:

> Alack, alack, is it not like that I,
> So early waking, what with loathsome smells

> And shrieks like mandrakes torn out of the earth,
> That living mortals, hearing them, run mad:
> O, if I wake, shall I not be distraught,
> Environed with all these hideous fears?
> And madly play with my forefathers' joints?
> And pluck the mangled Tybalt from his shroud?
> And, in this rage, with some great kinsman's bone,
> As with a club, dash out my desperate brains?
> O, look, methinks I see my cousin's ghost
> Seeking out Romeo, that did spit his body
> Upon a rapier's point: — stay, Tybalt, stay! —
> Romeo, I come! This do I drink to thee.
> (IV.iii.45-58)

Here, death becomes all physical. It "smells" and "shrieks" and "environs" her until she sees herself madly playing with her forefathers' joints and in a rage "dashing" out her "desperate" brains. While she speaks, Juliet turns the faith for which Romeo prayed in the initial sonnet into the despair he feared. The corpses closing in on her smash and depress her spirit. Having begun with a brain hopeful enough to create a body, she ends here with bodies powerful enough to unmake her mind. Death for Juliet, as it was for Mercutio, is "madness" — the dashing — the confounding of reason. Already in the throes of her anticipated derangement, Juliet imagines Tybalt's ghost avenging Romeo. As she drinks the potion, she bids Tybalt "stay," seeking to keep from her lover — in order to prevent him from feeling — the despair that has overtaken her. Similarly, Romeo will "stay" with Juliet to stop "death's pale flag" (V.iii.16) from advancing on her cheek. Faced with the onslaught of unavoidable fate, both lovers attempt somehow to pre-empt it, to overtake it before it unmakes them. Thus, they die in an effort to revive the image of the heroic selves they once made possible.

If, in Act IV, Juliet contemplates the body quelling the mind, Romeo remembers, in Act V, the mind infusing the body. His famous dream speaks of the power they had together found:

> I dreamt my lady came and found me dead —
> Strange dream, that gives a dead man leave to think! —
> And breathed such life with kisses in my lips
> That I revived, and was an emperor. (V.i.6-10)

Once more, Romeo turns Juliet into the goddess inspiring him to strength. She breathes "such life" into him that he feels, as Adam did for the moment of naming, the maker of the world. He gives her the ability to give him a life of creative power. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Cleopatra dreams there was an emperor Antony who, after his death, becomes the energetic source of her final act. But in this play, the dreamer is the emperor, having already been granted the energy to control his life. This mutual bringing to strength by memory (he dreaming her reviving him, she imagining him restoring her) counterbalances the encroaching levelling to weakness by destiny.

If Juliet sought to protect Romeo from Tybalt, so Romeo takes on death, finding in the tomb the same monster that Juliet saw. But if Juliet with the potion envisions a future based on dissolution, Romeo in the vault seeks to preserve a past premised on consolidation. Act IV ends with Juliet feeling only the darkness. Act V ends with each lover recovering light. In the vault Romeo vows to act:

> Ah, dear Juliet,
> Why art thou yet so fair? shall I believe
> That unsubstantial Death is amorous,
> And that the lean abhorred monster keeps
> Thee here in dark to be his paramour?
> For fear of that I still will stay with thee,
> And never from this palace of dim night
> Depart again: here, here will I remain
> With worms that are thy chambermaids; O, here
> Will I set up my everlasting rest,
> And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars
> From this world-wearied flesh. — Eyes, look your last!
> Arms, take your last embrace! and lips, O you,
> The doors of breath, seal with a righteous kiss
> A dateless bargain to engrossing death!
> Come, bitter conduct, come, unsavoury guide!
> Thou desperate pilot, now at once run on
> The dashing rocks thy sea-sick weary bark!
> Here's to my love! O true apothecary!
> Thy drugs are quick. — Thus with a kiss I die.
>
> (V.iii.103-20)

Romeo does not passively await or groan or sigh, he actively "stays," "remains," "shakes" and "run[s] on." Finally, with "a kiss," he "dies" reversing the process by which he came to life in the early sonnet. There, the lovers kissed, advancing from stillness to movement. Here, Romeo retains — with a kiss — the beauty originally prompting him to move. Similarly, Juliet dies with a "restorative" seeing the kiss as a means for revitalizing the shrine of the self Romeo worshipped:

> I will kiss thy lips;
> Haply some poison yet doth hang on them,
> To make me die a restorative.
> Thy lips are warm! (V.iv.164-66)

In actively stalking Death, the lovers consciously revive the golden images inspiring their union.[8] The statues the Montagues erect are merely symbols of the conscious artifice their children — following Mercutio's philosophy — struggled to make of their lives. Doing their own undoing, Romeo and Juliet retain the vision that enabled them, however briefly, to achieve a fulness of being, an awakening of self, in the naming of love.

NOTES

[1] *Romeo and Juliet,* ed. Brian Gibbons (London: Methuen, 1980), II.iv. 90-95. All references are from this edition and will be cited in my text.

[2] *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia,* ed. Jean Robertson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 19.

[3] Critics who see Mercutio as merely vulgar assign him the role of foil to Romeo. But such dismissals misconstrue the importance of his defence of reason and underestimate his role as spokesman for art. Among those who cite his carnality are Harold C. Goddard, *The Meaning of Shakespeare, Vol. I* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), pp. 120-23; Harley Granville-Barker, *Prefaces to Shakespeare, Vol. II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), pp. 335-38; and J. Dover Wilson, "The Elizabethan Shakespeare," *Proceedings of the English Academy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), 123.

[4] Harry Levin makes a similar distinction between art and nature when he argues that "Juliet calls into question not merely Romeo's name but, by implication, — all names, forms, conventions, sophistications, and arbitrary dictates of society as opposed to the appeal of instinct directly conveyed in the odor of a rose." See "Form and Formality in *Romeo and Juliet,*" *Shakespeare Quarterly,* XI (1960), p. 4.

[5] On nature's callousness, Frederick Turner writes: "The lovers call their love infinite, but in the world of time there can be nothing infinite. Time itself turns against the lovers, and blindly ejects them from its system as

incompatible with its texture and tissue. The lovers treat time subjectively . . . and time revenges itself blindly for such temerity." See *Shakespeare and the Nature of Time* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 126.

[6] Comparing the balcony scene to the aubade, Mark Rose writes: ". . . the segments of the early scene are arranged to give the effect of the dream dominating "reality," the lovers overwhelming the "outsiders" as the short initial segment yields to the long lyric episode. The [*aubade*] suggests "the dream" dissolving into "day," the magical world of the lovers literally overwhelmed before our eyes." See *Shakespearean Design* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 72. Similarly, James Black counterpoints the two scenes: "The fact that in each of these scenes the setting is the same and the stage picture reduplicated lends emphasis to the pathetic alteration in the speakers' tones and circumstances. The parallels emphasize the differences: things look the same but are painfully altered. Thus the audience is looking at what it saw before, but is being forced to see more intensely." See "The Visual Artistry of Romeo and Juliet," *Studies in English Literature* 15 (1975), 247.

[7] Commenting on the way nature retracts its support, Donald Stauffer maintains: "In no other play does Shakespeare envisage a general moral order operating with such inhuman, mechanical severity." See *Shakespeare's World of Images* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), p. 55.

[8] M. H. Mahood writes that "Romeo and Juliet 'cease to die, by dying'." See *Shakespeare's Word Play* (London: Methuen, 1957), p. 72.