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Shakespeare's comic and tragic gender issues: an attempt at transgression in *The taming of the shrew* (1591) and *Romeo & Juliet* (1597)

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ABSTRACT: This article analyses Shakespeare's literary discourse as an integral factor among the society wherein it was inserted. The overall context of my study is this precise dialogue between the literary structure and the structure of society. The symptoms that I allege literary texts tend to display are crucial for the effective functioning of the narratives herein analysed, and which consist thus in the specific context of my study. Such context consists in Shakespeare's plays *The Taming of the Shrew* (1591) and *Romeo & Juliet* (1597), whose readings focus here specifically on the main characters of both narratives' attempt at transgressing social borders. The comic and the tragic are not opposed, they are not poles apart in terms of meaning, effects, importance, and structure – in fact, in many occasions tragedy depends on comic stances and vice versa. My findings demonstrate how the frontiers dividing tragedy and comedy are not as concrete as it may seem – and trying to insert them within closed epistemological boxes might be detrimental for any fruitful reading of them. Shakespeare's main characters in both plays might be read as a historical token of women's unsuccessful endeavor to defeat repression.
KEYWORDS: Shakespeare. Comedy. Tragedy. Gender.

Resumo: Este artigo analisa o discurso literário de Shakespeare como um fator que integra a sociedade na qual ele se insere. O contexto geral do estudo é precisamente o diálogo entre a estrutura literária e a estrutura da sociedade. Os sintomas que textos literários tendem a apresentar são cruciais para o desenvolvimento das narrativas analisadas aqui, as quais consistem no meu contexto específico. São elas: *A Megera Domada* (Shakespeare, 1591) e *Romeo & Julieta* (1597), cujas leituras enfocam aqui especificamente em como os personagens principais buscam transgredir fronteiras sociais. O cômico e o trágico não se opõem, eles não são polos distintos em termos de significados, efeitos, importância e estrutura – na verdade, em muitas ocasiões, a tragédia depende da comédia e vice-versa. Os resultados demonstram como essas fronteiras entre tragédia e comédia não são tão concretas quanto parecem – a tentativa de inseri-las em caixas epistemológicas fechadas pode ser prejudicial para qualquer leitura proveitosa delas. Os protagonistas de ambas peças podem ser compreendidos como uma manifestação histórica da tentativa frustrada de toda e qualquer mulher que tentasse escapar de sua inevitável repressão.
Palavras-chave: Shakespeare. Comédia. Tragédia. Gênero.

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Resumen: El objetivo de este artículo es analizar el discurso literario de Shakespeare como un factor que integra la sociedad a la que pertenece. El contexto general del estudio es precisamente el diálogo entre la estructura literaria y la estructura de la sociedad. Los síntomas que los textos literarios tienden a exhibir son cruciales para el desarrollo de las narraciones analizadas aquí, que consisten en mi contexto específico. Son ellos: *The taming of the shrew* (Shakespeare, 1591) y *Romeo and Juliet* (1597), cuyas lecturas se centran específicamente en cómo los personajes principales buscan traspasar las fronteras sociales. Cómico y trágico no se oponen, no son polos distintos en términos de significados, efectos, importancia y estructura; de hecho, en muchas ocasiones, la tragedia depende de la comedia y viceversa. Los resultados demuestran cómo estos límites entre tragedia y comedia no son tan concretos como parecen: intentar insertarlos en cajas epistemológicas cerradas puede ser perjudicial para cualquier lectura fructífera de ellos. Los protagonistas de ambas obras pueden entenderse como una manifestación histórica del intento frustrado de cualquier mujer que intentó escapar de su inevitable represión.
Palabras clave: Shakespeare. Comedia. Tragedia. Género.

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> *If in certain scenes the audience doesn't know what to do – whether to laugh or to cry – that will be a success for me*. (GARCÍA LORCA, 1955)

Introduction: the problem of "the primary distinction"

Schopenhauer has written that "[t]he word of man is the most durable of all material" (1970, p. 103); and if there is a man whose word evinces such allegation that would certainly be Shakespeare. The survival of his legacy, which has been travelling around the globe for about half a millennium, manifests an inherent interest and need in the analysis and research of the themes and structures applied therein. Nevertheless, and notwithstanding the fact that most of Shakespeare's productions have already served as the target of many literary analyses and studies – whereby such productions are often scrutinised and ultimately categorised – these productions still have much to inform us. This information depends nonetheless on readers' dodging far too assertive and Cartesian analytical paths, inasmuch as literature has proven to be less objective and well regulated than we have once believed them to be. "Questions of aesthetic value are no longer free floating and apparently universal [...]. The canon itself has been extended and transformed" (WEEDON, 2008, p. 164). Bearing that in mind, the problem to be investigated within this article is that encapsulating literary productions within narrow epistemological categories such as comedy or tragedy end up reducing the strength of artistic discourse if those categories are not considered more flexible than they are traditionally supposed to be. Realising that the canon is extended and transformed throughout time and space, we know now Derrida (1992, p. 45) was right to affirm that "[t]here is […] an experience rather than an essence of literature". The issue of essence has already been surpassed; literature emerges out of experience, and analysing it requires such experience to be taken into account inasmuch as, hitherto, the literary discourse has proven to be much more dialectic and interdisciplinary than it has traditionally been taken.

Itamar Even-Zohar (1990, p. 2) poses that it is high time literature were given an "opportunity to break out of the corner into which it had been pushed by tradition". This is so, he continues, inasmuch as the literary discourse can no longer be conceived "an isolated activity in society, regulated by laws exclusively (and inherently) different from all the rest of the human activities, but as an integral – often central and very powerful – factor among the latter" (p. 3). As an attempt at allowing literature to break out of the corner into which it had been pushed, this article analyses Shakespeare's literary discourse as an integral factor among the society wherein it was inserted. The overall context of my study is this precise dialogue between the literary structure and the structure of

society. In this sense, the intertextuality that might be articulated between the comic, tragic, and "real" worlds, as the two former realms provide the latter with a mirror image of human feelings, ambitions, and boundaries. The idea that comedy and tragedy are very well defined categories overlooks contradictions that are intrinsic to the literary text, and if the world outside the pages of a book is not a clear-cut one, the same is true for the book itself. "Social contradictions are silently inscribed within the text [...]. Even as they convert social contradictions into unified imaginative exercises, literary texts display symptoms of those contradictions in certain formal faults or breaks" (WOLF and NORRIS, 2008, p. 103). The issue of contradiction is pivotal for my analysis inasmuch as they provide the basic premise for a rereading of my objects of research – a rereading that supersedes the patterns inscribed for such objects to fit in. The symptoms that I allege literary texts tend to display are crucial for the effective functioning of the narratives herein analyses, and which consist thus in the specific context of my study. Such context consists in Shakespeare's plays *The Taming of the Shrew* (1591) and *Romeo & Juliet* (1597), whose readings focus here specifically on the main characters of both narratives' attempt at transgressing social borders.

Borders surface and multiply in the most diverse conditions; and in many occasions as one or another category is designed and/or described. Defining issues and trying to separate them based on the attributes shared by some is, no one shall discuss that, of paramount importance depending on each case; to overemphasise this process in artistic analyses nonetheless might jeopardise its very essence – the revolutionary character of the immaterial. Taking that into account one might conclude that understanding what a text means and making out how it fits or not in this or that pattern are not necessarily analogous processes – as a matter of fact they might actually be antithetical. When it goes to the reading of tragic and comic texts, theretofore, it would thus be wise for one to evade thinking far too structurally about such texts. Having an idea about how they are different from one another does not provide us with any clues to the meaning inherent to them: for the literary experience to take place one needs to look at categories as more in need to be questioned than to be respected. The comic and the tragic are not opposed, they are not poles apart in terms of meaning, effects, importance, and structure – in fact, what many texts demonstrate is that in many occasions tragedy depends on comic stances and vice versa. In what concerns the categorical distinctions of tragedy and comedy we have learned to "follow" after reading the *Poetics* (ARISTOTLE, 1968), "[i]t does not matter whether Aristotle meant good and bad, or high and low, or serious and trivial; the contestable words are 'this primary distinction'. They state a palpable untruth that has misled us when making judgments on dramatic characters (STYAN, 1968, 273). Aristotle's work is nonetheless not to blame; what he has done is commendable in terms of providing us with a clear account on issues that evidently pertain to

the comic and tragic effects of literature. Nevertheless, his critique shall serve as a point of departure, and not as an analytical frontier. It is not the category that informs the text; it is the text that informs – and might actually even change – the category.

An endeavour to problematise the frames circumscribing tragedies and comedies, based on Aristotle's (330 BC) categories and guidelines regarding the reading and analysis of both, is, thus, what configures the overall objective of my analysis. This seems to me a pertinent attempt because such frames are in my view still far too operative in the grounds of literary analysis. This would be synonymic to say that one shall evade the traditional analysis of comedies and tragedies that is generally and unfortunately amenable to characterising both solely in terms of Aristotle's definitions. In the words of Matthew (2013, p. 3), Aristotle's work resulted in the contemptible fact that criticism now often looks at the comic "as an escape from reality, light hearted amusement or easy ridicule. By contrast, tragedies are 'serious stuff'. On this view tragedy confronts us with profound truths about morality, whereas comedy provides an enjoyable flight from it". With the purpose of interconnecting such seemingly opposed attributes – that is, looking for moments when the serious and moral might dialogue with the funny and immoral – my analysis is about to address literature as a mirror image of the world: as a reflection and object to be reflected. That is, if in "real life" no one lives a complete tragedy nor a complete comedy, the same could be implied when it goes to the literary text – where boundaries are as liquefied as they tend to be outside the book pages. Every character, fictional or not, tends always to be looking for an opportunity for transgressing the limits previously designed for them to remain within – this is the very characteristic that makes us human, and that makes literature literature. It is given such fact that the specific goal of my study is to compare and contrast the main characters of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* (1591) and *Romeo & Juliet* (1597) as to make out how they embody an unattainable craving for social trespassing through their development, from the beginning until the denouement of the narratives.

Regardless of Frye's (1993, p. 25) assertion that "criticism always has two aspects: one turned toward the structure of literature and one turned toward the other cultural phenomena that form the social environment of literature", my premise is that such division is not compulsory. That is, my view is that one might take into account both the structure of literature and its social environment without necessarily jeopardising none of them. It is very hard, not to say impossible, for the literary structure of a text to operate as opposed to its social structure – the social environment of literature is also what defines its style; tragic and comic effects only function because they make sense to readers. The analysis of literature cannot ignore none of these stances – choosing to study one of them is inevitably choosing

to study the other. However, a basic step for such analysis to operate effectively is to accept that what defines both structures, social and literary, is hybrid and liquefied. I am talking of an invisible and metamorphic structure, one that is never the same and which depends on temporal and spatial conditions and contexts – what is tragic to me might be comic to you. Literature, in this sense, is more a cultural phenomenon than it is a cultural given – and understanding Shakespeare's works as such is the cornerstone of a reconsideration of the comic and the tragic. For such reconsideration to occur, and bearing in mind it configures the greatest ambition of my study, before my analyses I have come up with two hypothesis to guide my potential readers. The first hypothesis is that the frontiers dividing tragedy and comedy are not as narrow, objective, and concrete as it may seem – and trying to insert them within closed epistemological boxes might be detrimental for any fruitful reading of them. More specifically, the following analysis shall test my second hypothesis, which is that Shakespeare's main characters in *The Taming of the Shrew* (1591) and *Romeo & Juliet* (1597) might be read as a historical token of rebellious behaviour – and of its usual inevitable outcome, which is repression.

Cognisant of the fact that for such hypotheses to be efficiently tested my study requires a robust and operational theoretical framework, I shall rely on a vast an interdisciplinary array of analytical tools to scaffold my discussion on Shakespeare's plays. As I imagine my readers have already been able to imply, Aristotle's *Poetics* (330 BC) – its definitions, guidelines, and patterns of tragedy and comedy – is one of the basic texts for my reflection. Nevertheless, and especially for my reading of Juliet and Katherine as they are developed throughout both narratives, Butler's (1990) notion of identity and gender performance is brought in as well. Eagleton's (1976) critical positioning, whereby cultural materialism emerges as an opportunity to think historically about literary productions as to analyse their pertinence, is also summoned when the intertextuality between Shakespeare's plays and its social atmosphere materialises. Apropos, it is precisely given such intertextuality that Jameson's (1981) criticism against the biased idea of the literary text as a schizophrenic text is also taken onto the arena of my analysis. Notwithstanding how dissimilar these analytical tools might seem to be – and indeed they are – they share something which constitutes the heart of my reading of the chosen objects of research, which is the fact that "[t]o understand both the past and the present more deeply […] contributes to our liberation" (Eagleton, 1976, p. xiii). It is in pursuit of such liberation that the protagonists of *The Taming of the Shrew* (Shakespeare, 1591) and *Romeo & Juliet* (SHAKESPEARE, 1597) fight and lose their battle against the prevailing systems wherein they are inserted and whereby they are enslaved. In both works the institution of marriage is addressed, accompanied by characters conflict with the social traditions in vogue; and their denouement is an evidence of everything that has been discussed so far – and that shall be tested hereinafter. If it is true that, in literary analysis,

"[a]ttention to history, context, and genre is necessitated, and not contradicted" (DERRIDA, 1992, p. 67), to look at the social atmosphere of a work is not a possibility: it is an obligation.

Discussion: "deny thy father and refuse thy name"

In a nutshell, one could say Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet* (1597) is a narrative discussing how the tragic death of two young lovers ends up overcoming the hatred between both their families. Right at the onset of the play readers are given a brief account on the events which are about to take place thereinafter: "Two households, both alike in dignity; in fair Verona, where we lay our scene, from ancient grudge break to new mutiny; where civil blood makes civil hands unclean. From forth the fatal loins of these two foes; a pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life" (SHAKESPEARE, 1597, p. 3). This is a scenery of violence, led by the rivalry of these two households alike in dignity. Right at this beginning, then, the narrative implies there is no villain or hero – in what regards the quarrel between the two families, one cannot think in terms of a good versus an evil side. That hypothesis would be proved throughout the development of the narrative, as we learn Montagues (Romeo's family) and Capulets (Juliet's one) hate one another regardless of how similar they are – and notwithstanding the fact that the reason for their animosity is unclear and actually unknown, at least to us. The feud between the families is so longstanding that there is a possibility what triggered such feud in the first place is no longer accessible to any of them – and it would only stop after the suicide of two impossible lovers that endeavoured to trespass the obstacles imposed by the odium surrounding them. There is also a foreshadowing in the first moments of the narrative pointing to that denouement, when we are told that Romeo and Juliet would ultimately "with their death bury their parents' strife. The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love; and the continuance of their parents' rage, which, but their children's end, nought could remove" (SHAKESPEARE, 1597, p. 4).

There is, on the other hand, no tragic death in *The Taming of the Shrew* (SHAKESPEARE, 1597) – and readers are not offered such a straightforward and informative account on the context wherein the narrative is inserted at the onset. We learn, though, as the story develops, that notwithstanding the absence of an evident tragedy in the narrative itself – which fits the requisites of the comic – for some of its features to be delineated something tragic must have happened previous to the first page. This is so for, "[a]lthough *The Taming of the Shrew* (1591) does not provide information about Katherina's family history, through the interaction of the characters, Shakespeare shows a wounded woman, wrapped in a protective shell of shrewish behavior" (THORNE, 2004, p. 57). When, in *Romeo and Juliet* (1597), Juliet refuses to get married to Paris and, for that reason, starts a conflict with her own

father, readers know exactly why she is misbehaving; we know she is already in love with Romeo, and we know she would be unwilling to accept another man but him. In the case of Katherina we are not given an opportunity to access what has wounded her prior to the beginning of the story, but her reluctance to fit in the roles and patterns of female characters invites our sympathy nonetheless. "This invitation to feel sympathy for Katherina […] suggests her family and society have contributed to the circumstances that make her the shrew she is" (THORNE, 2004, p. 59). Unlike Juliet, Katherina does not avoid marriage because she is in love with another man, but simply because she prefers (for unknown reasons) to keep being single. Our sympathy towards her is most likely motivated by our understanding that perhaps she is autonomous to decide what she wants. If "[w]omen are mysterious subjects covered with kitchen tiles" (MUNRO, 2004, p. 47), it would be right to assume Katherina's reasons are, I reiterate, a mystery – but why would there be an inner obligation for her to inform us why she does not want any husband? Why would she need to give anyone an explanation?

These questions might seem rather pertinent today, but the audience contemporary to Shakespeare's production was almost certainly unaware they were interrogations amenable to being materialised. As usual, Shakespeare's production in this case seems to overcome the period wherein it was produced and whereto it was originally designed – many of his plays manifest a potential to be reread and reinterpreted through the lenses of modern times. First of all, it goes without saying that most of the conflict that permeates both narratives discussed and compared herein is generated by the idea of arranged marriage; no matter how questionable such concept might seem to some of us, it is a natural procedure very common in the past and still common in some of our cultures. When both Juliet and Katherine demonstrate they are unwilling to accept dancing according to the music, problems start to arise – as such sort of misconduct is traditionally unacceptable, especially when those presenting it are women. At the onset of *The Taming of the Shrew* (1591, p 12) we are given a glimpse of how Petruchio – Katherine's husband-to-be – understands marriage: "Petruchio: Signior Hortensio, 'twixt such friends as we. Few words suffice; and therefore, if thou know one rich enough to be Petruchio's wife say, as wealth is burden of my wooing dance". The trade is a financial, and not sentimental, one – for women to use their inherited money they needed to get married in the first place; access was only granted if they had a husband. Petruchio does not seem to be bothered by the fact he needs a wife simply because of money – and he is not even worried about pretending to be looking for marriage as if motivated by any other reasons. Petruchio wants a wife rich enough to be his, "[b]e she as foul as was Florentius' love, as old as Sibyl and as curst and shrewd, as Socrates' Xanthippe, or a worse. She moves me not, or not removes, at least, affection's edge in me, were she as rough, as are the swelling Adriatic seas" (SHAKESPEARE, 1591, p. 13). As he effectively makes his point, readers learn that happiness

in marriage is to Petruchio an issue of money, nothing but that; in his own words: "I come to wive it wealthily in Padua; if wealthily, then happily in Padua" (SHAKESPEARE, 1591, 14).

A wealth marriage would in this sense be analogous to a happy one. If this scene is seen through tragic eyes in *Romeo and Juliet* (SHAKESPEARE, 1591), his play *The Taming of the Shrew* (1597) "is but a hilarious mockery of the received truths on the nature of marriage and the proper place of women within it and Elizabethan society" (CORDINGLEY, 2014, p. 11). Petruchio's testimonial, therefore, is effective to, through exaggeration, make readers and audiences ask themselves about how preposterous the notion of arranged marriages might be put into question. Humour, in many occasions, ends up drawing one's attention to serious issues paradoxically with more efficiency than other – less idyllic and peripheral – channels. This is how humour was born, as a satire to question some hegemonic values. As a matter of fact, and as Pasold (1999, p. 47) reminds us, this is one of the most basic tenets of Aristotle's definition of the comic: "The earliest division of poetry occurred when the graver spirits reproduced noble actions and praises of heroes. In contrast, spirits of a more trivial sort, who reproduced the actions of meaner persons, composed satires to criticise them" (PASOLD, 1999, 47). In both cases, the poetry and the satire, art seems to operate as a subjective clothing to a material body – an opportunity for reality to be liquefied and for concreteness to be abstracted. The fact that, for both plays, the connection with the outside world is so evident and crucial, reinforces the importance of context – and the role literature plays in providing such context with epistemes. "Literature is part of a society's ideology – an element in the complex structure of social perception; to understand literature, then, means understanding the total social process of which it is part" (EAGLETON, 2010, p. 5). Eagleton is right; the fictional devices that provide the tragic background for *Romeo and Juliet* (SHAKESPEARE, 1597) and the comic one of the *The Taming of the Shrew* (1591) are directly linked to, for instance, the place marriage occupied in Elizabethan society.

Nevertheless, and as already alleged hitherto, there is a reason why Juliet declines Paris' proposal – there is another man with whom she would like to be united. Notwithstanding her ambition, "[t]he weak and divided Italy of *Romeo and Juliet* cannot sustain their marriage. They must await a different arrangement between church and state" (BOYLES, 2013, p. 109). It is an issue of church, state, and, of course, honour – their families would never let the couple follow their will. As a matter of fact, "when her mother first raises the subject of marriage – even before she meets Romeo – Juliet associates the institution with honor" (Boyles, 2013, p. 110). Honour, apropos, is an issue that generally surfaces when it goes to tragedies – something that heroes die trying to achieve; not in this case, however, inasmuch as her marriage to Paris is, in Juliet's own words, "an honour that I dream

not of" (SHAKESPEARE, 1597, p. 178). Foreshadowing her suicide, Juliet would later tell friar Laurence that she deems herself underserving to have such an honour – and that she would prefer to die than to live what she understood as being a lie. What separates the couple is so small, and at the same time so huge, that in many events they manifest their sorrow and misery for their being so unlucky. In one of this events Juliet complains: "Oh Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo? Deny thy father and refuse thy name; or if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love; and I'll no longer be a Capulet" (SHAKESPEARE, 1597, p. 17). The issue seems to be such an easy one to be resolved; what separates the couple is a name, which for them does not stand for anything at all, regardless of the fact that for the other members of their family such names stand for the total impossibility of their union. To her complaint Romeo answers: "Romeo: By a name I know not how to tell thee who I am: My name, dear saint, is hateful to myself; because it is an enemy to thee; had I it written, I would tear the word" (SHAKESPEARE, 1597, 18). The feelings they feel for one another is nonetheless far from being enough as for the hatred of their names to be surpassed.

Developing upon the impossibility of young love in the face of ancient enmity, what this excerpt seems to demonstrate thus is that oppositions certainly speak to a central theme of *Romeo & Juliet* (SHAKESPEARE, 1597). In the words of Steinbach (2013, p. 2), "this is a play about opposites, where they collide and where they come together, the tensions between them, the melodic dissonance, violence and melody, and joy and possibility while there is a tragic ending". If, in the case of *Romeo & Juliet* (SHAKESPEARE, 1597), the tragedy is evident; when it goes to *The Taming of the Shrew* (SHAKESPEARE, 1591) it is a little more subjective and implied by the actions and discourses of those surrounding Katherine. In the latter narrative, after realising she is far from being a gentle and "docile" woman, Petruchio endeavours to provoke her: "Come, come, you wasp; I' faith, you are too angry"; Katherine responds, and the discussion starts: "Katherine: If I be waspish, best beware my sting. Petruchio: My remedy is then, to pluck it out. Katherine: Ay, if the fool could find it where it lies" (SHAKESPEARE, 1591, p. 18). Here the reader already realises that the "taming" of Katherine shall not be an easy thing; Katherine, different from most of her female acquaintances, is despises marriage and has the uncommon habit of replying to everything she is told – disrespecting the common hierarchy dividing man and women in terms of decision making. The problem, as Petruchio later realises, is her tongue. "Petruchio: Who knows not where a wasp does wear his sting? In his tail! Katherine: No. In his tongue" (SHAKESPEARE, 1591, 19). Katherine is aware she has a wild tongue, and that is exactly the part of her body that Petruchio is most worried about taming. Nevertheless, and as Anzaldúa sagely observes, "wild tongues can't be tamed, they can only be cut out" (1987, p. 57). The theorist's insight is of paramount importance for one to interpret the development of Shakespeare's "comic" narrative –

as, by the end, Katherine is effectively tamed and, consequently, deprived of her identity (as, without her rebellious character, she seems to become devoid of any character at all).

Apropos, it is interesting to devote special attention to some details in this previous excerpt of the narrative. Shakespeare's choice for the words "wasp", "tail", and "sting" opens up a discussion on a matter that shall be often repeated throughout the story of Petruchio and Katherine: the comparison of the latter with an animal or with things related to the animal kingdom. The notion of "taming" already implies such comparison – and when Petruchio addresses her as if she were a poisonous insect only reinforces it. The idea of taming Katherine, this excerpt when she is addressed as an insect, and other moments of the narrative – such as the one of the falconer imagery – are all evidences of the dehumanisation of women in Elizabethan society. Even though Shakespeare's researchers might feel more comfortable believing that he was trying to expose this aspect of his social milieu as to criticise it, we shall never know that for sure – and, as a matter of fact, it would be useless to have such sort of information. What an author thinks is irrelevant, what really matters is what his/her work allows readers to think – and, in the case of the chosen narratives, the institution of marriage and the role given to women are unquestionably two of these issues that one might reflect upon. Confusing as it may sound, Shakespeare's play plays with the roles we play in society; his characters, male and female, perform gender and are developed as to make us reposition ourselves before such performances. Petruchio is the stereotype of the male, and Katherine the antithesis of the female – a character that is in need of adaptation, of fitting in the pattern. In the end, gender and theatre have indeed much in common – perhaps much more than we are prepared to realise. "Gender performance could be seen as a metaphorical type of theatrical performance [...]. Gender always remained within a domain of performative irresolution that defied any notion of authenticity" (BUTLER, 1990, p. 60). This is why the stereotype is so important for the maintenance of our gender patterns. Petruchio is the symbol of what all males are supposed to be: strong, rude, decisive, brutal, robust, vulgar and unemotional. His roughness and toughness are contrary to the supposed sensibility and weakness of women – opposition that Katherine fights against so passionately.

The existence of Katherine, her configuration as failing to fit in this which is purported to be an all-encompassing mould to every women, is an evidence that sexuality is a less crystal clear issue than tradition tends to believe. If there is space in the world for both Romeos and Petruchios, there is also space for Katherines – as there is space for homosexuals, transsexuals, bisexuals, and etc. I say that to make my point clear: if a homosexual is compared to a heterosexual, no one is "less" man or woman than the other. No one is "more" or "less" anything in the realm of sexuality, we are all surrounded by

possibilities and nobody fits perfectly in none of them (no matter how eager some of us might be to fit in the stereotype of man or the stereotype of women). In both narratives discussed herein the institution of marriage and the role of women enter the scene, and they serve to remind us that gender and sexuality are not artefacts that one might simply decide to overlook in literary analysis. On the contrary, the performance of gender "demands attention, not to performative play, but to precisely those kinds of bodily literality and referentiality that queer thinking has sought to expose as essentialist and thus conceptually naïve" (BUTLER, 1990, p. 161). It would thus be essentialist and naïve as well to interpret that Katherine's final conformity – her surrender to tradition – is indeed the token of a happy ending. None of the endings is happy, Juliet dies and Katherine gives up on rejecting Petruchio because both are forced to capitulate their autonomy – an autonomy to come up with decisions that directly affect their own lives. In thesis, only the former perishes while the latter is given a chance to live in coherence with Elizabethan social terms. Effectively, nonetheless, it would be wise to say that divesting someone of her free choice is to divest someone of the right to live. Breathing is never enough, freedom is necessary, awaited, and sought after. That is, if Juliet's existence is hindered by her decision to die with the man she loves, Katherine's existence is, through her submission, turned into a vegetative one.

What all this reflection upon gender performances in the narratives demonstrate is, among other things, that no literary material exist per se – such material needs to see in interaction with the contexts involved. This is why I keep reminding my readers that Shakespeare's plays have much to say to Elizabethan society – it is the society wherefrom the pieces emerged and whereto the authors' thematic and critique are directed. Literary pieces are cultural products and, as cultural products, they do not exist outside the culture that happens to encompass them. In the words of Wolf and Norris (2008, p. 89), "[c]ultural products [...] are, quite simply, unintelligible unless placed within the broader set of historically contingent social relationships from which they emerge". These social relationships are indeed crucial not only for situating Shakespeare's narratives in place and time, but as for us understanding them in the first place. This is so for, regardless of the fact that these works were written about half a millennium ago, they inform us on issues that persist to contemporaneity. Feminism, for instance, is a modern proposal for ideological repositioning – and if it proves to be relevant nowadays it is because there is still much to be done in terms of gender roles and female autonomy. To deprive a cultural product from its contextual referencing is to deprive it of its meaning – in this sense, the social relationships mentioned by Wolf and Morris are not only important for the constitution of a literary piece, but actually a primary basis for its concoction and appreciation. In a following dialogue between the protagonists of *The Taming of the Shrew* (1591, p. 20), Petruchio reminds us about what these some of these social relationships consisted in: "Marry, so I mean, sweet Katharina, in thy bed. Therefore,

setting all this chat aside, thus in plain terms: your father hath consented that you shall be my wife. Your dowry 'greed on; and, will you, nill you, I will marry you."

In what regards the possibility of their marriage, then, this last excerpt summarises things very clearly: Petruchio knows that, effectively, there is no need for Katherine's approval – since her father has already consented. Her will and her fight are, for him, stimuli; they only make the process more fun (fun for him, tragedy for us, and comedy for the audience). It is at this point of the dialogue that her animalisation reappears: "Thou must be married to no man but me; for I am he am born to tame you Kate, and bring you from a wild Kate to a Kate: conformable as other household Kates. Here comes your father: never make denial; I must and will have Katharina to my wife" (SHAKESPEARE, 1591, p. 21). Describing his ambition of taming Katherine as to turn her into someone conformable as other household Kates, Petruchio manifests how her condition is comparable to the condition of many other women. Deprived of autonomy, free-will, and desires of their own, getting married was a matter of finances and male dominance – never of feelings, or of self-interests (in the case of women). To find someone willing to fight for her rights is, to Petruchio, laughable – He knows she cannot be successful and, in the end, he proves he was right from the beginning. Of course things have changed considerably from Shakespearean times to contemporaneity, but the training of women to become good wives and mothers as a social construct still takes place – the alterations have occurred when it goes to levels, and not when it goes to the structure of the system itself. Katherine does not see herself as comparable to other women – which is exactly what Petruchio does; she is, and she knows she is, different, but she learns throughout the development of the narrative that her context is not willing to recognise and accept her difference – it is simply willing to change her, to "fix" her. This is exactly the point: the social molds of gender performance, inexact as they are, require our environment to keep forcing us into patterns where we do not inherently fit – both men and women are taught to operate within the limits designed to them. Nigerian writer Chimamanda Adichie cunningly observes that "[t]he problem with gender is that it prescribes how we should be, rather than recognising who we are" (2013, p. 137).

Nevertheless, and bearing in mind that "the end is the chief thing of all" (ARISTOTLE, 1895, p. 11), the recognition denied by the social chains that deprive subjects from autonomy make the process less innocuous than one might be ready to accept. Prescribing meanings does not work in the long run; and, consequently, people learn they are expected to set forth a form of life that they are actually not willing to. To have an identity is not analogous to fitting in an identity: it is analogous to being accepted, to learning one's desires, wishes, limitations and being capable to share them without the fear of ostracism. It is by the end of both narratives that readers learn how the characters discussed herein –

Katherine, Romeo, and Juliet – decide to deal with their ostracism (ostracism that permeates these characters' stubborn attempts at following their desires). Moving, then, from *The Taming of the Shrew* (SHAKESPEARE, 1591) to *Romeo & Juliet* (SHAKESPEARE, 1597) once again, the final part of the play is when we learn the couple commits suicide. Romeo kills himself first, because he is misinformed about Juliet's decease (whose supposed death was actually a façade for them to run away together, but the plan goes wrong). Before drinking the cup of poison that he brought with him, Romeo says his final words to the (living) corpse of his beloved: "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?" His description of death is as if it were an amorous instance, affectionately willing to transform Juliet in its lover, but he is her lover – therefore, he accepts the challenge. "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; oh, here will I set up my everlasting rest, and shake the yoke of inauspicious stars" (SHAKESPEARE, 1597, p. 42). His intention to commit suicide is now evident, but he deems himself victorious: in the end, until their death no one was ever able to separate Romeo and Juliet – he never left her, and if death is the only way out, that is good enough for him. About to drink the poisonous substance he kisses Juliet's lips; notwithstanding how morbid kissing a dead woman might seem, in Romeo's view it is 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" (SHAKESPEARE, 1597, 43).

Reluctant to accept that, due to their families' enmity, Juliet would be always an impossible and platonic love, there is not a moment when Romeo hesitates when it comes to committing suicide – having her by his side, notwithstanding for just a brief period of time, was already enough to make it worth it. Juliet, who would perhaps rather "remain dead", afterwards wakes up and realises Romeo has just killed himself, unaware of her strategy to use her demise as a possibility for them to be ultimately together. If not in life, however, she should make it work in death. "What's here? A cup, closed in my true love's hand? Poison, I see, hath been his timeless end: O churl! Drunk all, and left no friendly drop to help me after? I will kiss thy lips, haply some poison yet doth hang on them, to make die with a restorative" (Shakespeare, 1597, p. 44). If Romeo saw death as an amorous possibility of an everlasting rest for the couple, Juliet looks for a friendly drop of the poison he brought to commit suicide in the arms of his lover. Kissing his dead lips, as he had done beforehand, proves to be ineffective as a means for her to have some of the poison – so she uses his dragger to kill herself. Society does not defeat them; Romeo and Juliet die, but refuse to surrender to the fate that was drawn by others for them to fit in. Romeo could have accepted being on his own and/or looking for another woman; Juliet could have

accepted Paris as her husband as her father wished. Romeo tries and is unsuccessful, but Juliet, a woman, should never have tried in the first place. Her misconduct, like Katherine's one, is incoherent with her gender; both characters are not in a position to make any sort of demands, especially when it goes to the institution of marriage. It might be true that only in the contemporaneity gender "has finally been posed as a political question" (RUBIN, 1981, p. 114), but such political question has always existed and, as the plays brought herein demonstrate, literature might have been providing us channels to reposition ourselves when grappling with such question for much longer than we were ready to realise. If "[l]iterature is an institution which consists in transgressing and transforming" (DERRIDA, 1992, p. 72), Shakespeare's plays can be read as a possibility for us to look at gender as a political instance, as a form of identity construct, as a means for hierarchies to be reinforced or put into question.

It is true nonetheless that the transgressions and transformations proposed and developed within the plays discussed in this study are not, as demonstrated, restrained to the realm of gender – they also touch the issue of the very structural categories where they are supposed (God knows by whom) to fit in. Let us think for a while, for instance, about the issue of honour followed by death – usually of paramount importance when it goes to tragic narratives. "The ironies which enforce the dialectical conflict of tragedy are simple in formula: each step the hero takes towards a supposed triumph is a step nearer his death, each step one which strengthens the audience's sense of a necessary end" (STYAN, 1968, p. 36). Romeo and Juliet, the "heroes" of the tragedy, do indeed die at the end. Does that happen though because of honour? Power? Revenge? I would rather look at issues a little bit differently; tragic heroes' honour generally concerns their struggling for the values of their families and/or nations – it is an issue of achieving and/or reinforcing their power. In the case of *Romeo & Juliet* (SHAKESPEARE, 1597), the protagonists seem to be opposed to such sort of honour. As a matter of fact they fight against the values of their families and do not care at all if their interests resulted in their banishment (they were actually planning to leave their homes and live together, without anything that other tragic heroes might deem particularly relevant). Those who surround them are indeed guided by honour, family values and principles; worried and motivated by the issue of revenge and power, their families do not accept Romeo and Juliet's union – but the latter characters do not seem to demonstrate any sort of empathy to their apprehensions. Every step of Juliet and every step of Romeo towards their supposed triumph is indeed a step nearer their death – but this is far from being a necessary end. It is their society – and not them per se – that made such end necessary, and their death provides readers with a possibility to feel and understand how marriage as an institution that supersedes free will might be detrimental for some subjects unwilling to accept such condition.

Apropos, regarding the deepness of tragic effects, and contrary to traditional expectations, the counterpart of tragedy is not as different as it was once believed. In fact, "[t]he philosophy of comic irony may come equally from profound laws of feeling and understanding" (STYAN, 1968, 37). Questioning the credited meanings and institutions that prevent one's autonomy from materialising is indeed something that emerges both in *Romeo & Juliet* (SHAKESPEARE, 1597) and in *The Taming of the Shrew* (SHAKESPEARE, 1591). It is true nonetheless that the discourses and paths chosen for such materialisation to take place might diverge when the former is compared to the latter, but both depend on profound laws of feeling and understanding on our part. It is over too simplistic to say that tragedies are sad and comedies are funny. In many occasions, Romeo and Juliet's story is a very happy one, they have moments of extreme gayety and never seem to regret the decisions they make – even though such decisions result in their death. Petruchio and Katherine are never as happy, their story is never as convincing; and, even though the atmosphere circumscribing them is a comic and thus a simpler one, the final part of the narrative is much more complex if one looks carefully into the issues regarding it. The fact that Katherine initially does not "fit in" might be funny sometimes, indeed – but in others, readers are compelled to feel compassion for her situation. This is so for the lack of congruity is turned into a channel for empathy, for our attempt at putting ourselves in her situation – as she is treated as an animal while she is simply trying to choose her fate. Cunningly, Styan alleges the following: "[t]hat a comedy should make you laugh is not admissible as an argument: incongruity is not necessarily laughable. There are too many plays, patently not tragedies, which clearly evoke no laughter; too many fine plays end in questions and by sobering us" (1968, 43). *The Taming of the Shrew* (SHAKESPEARE, 1591) is not a tragedy, but it allows the surfacing of many questions regarding the role of women and the institution of marriage – questions that do not make us laugh any longer. Incongruity, indeed, does not need to be necessarily laughable – it might actually become the very opposite. Katherine's peacefulness does not emerge out of nothing, readers know that she has given up many things before she accepts Petruchio as her husband. Incongruity results in marginalisation, in subjugation and, ultimately, in sadness – and, today, we feel sorry for her.

This is why universalising effects, such as the endeavour to determine that comedies are funny and tragedies are sad, is such a dangerous things – effects depend on contexts and on readers. Through his work, "[t]he author offers the interpreter, the performer, the addressee a work to be completed" (ECO, 1984, p. 61). There is no way, in this sense, to master how readers are to complete such work – this is inaccessible for both authors and critics. But it is fair to say that stories do not travel on their own; they only survive because stories are incorporated by new readers, whose readings reconfigure the effects of the words written in the book pages. Literary works survive through resurrection – they

are only endless because they are inessential (i.e. literature has no end because it has no beginning). What this implies is that what is tragic for you might be comic for me and vice versa – especially when the time and space distances are enhanced, and this is why universalising effects is not only unnecessary, it is actually fruitless. No one can control what a work might tell us in the future, or what it told us in the past – it is in this sense that literature can only operate effectively its categories are transgressed, it depends directly in liquefying its frontiers which have actually never been concrete. If the final words of Romeo and Juliet inform us on how their story surpasses tragic interests, the final words of Katherine in *The Taming of the Shrew* (SHAKESPEARE, 1591, p. 42) do the same with comic ones. After all her rebellion, her fighting, resisting, she ends up the story completely "changed". Katherine surprises every other character when she affirms she learned that a woman moved is "like a fountain troubled, muddy, ill-seeming, thick, bereft of beauty. And while it is so, none so dry or thirsty will deign to sip or touch one drop of it. Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper, thy head, thy sovereign; one that cares for thee". Finally accepting Petruchio as her lord, life, keeper, head and sovereign, Katherine becomes much more tamed than those around her. Afterwards she poses that, while the husband goes out and does all the autonomous things that she once desired for her own, the truthful woman is the one who remains "warm at home, secure and safe. And she craves no other tribute at thy hands but love, fair looks and true obedience: too little payment for so great a debt" (SHAKESPEARE, 1591, p. 43).

Male chauvinist as it may seem, this is Katherine, who would later affirm her initial strengthens was actually weakness, and that one who behaves in such a rebellious fashion as hers is nothing but a "foul contending rebel and graceless traitor to her loving lord. I am ashamed that women are so simple to offer war where they should kneel for peace" (SHAKESPEARE, 1591, p. 43). At the end of the narrative, then, she learns women should "serve, love, and obey", making Petruchio the happiest man in Genoa: "Katherine: Place your hands below your husband's foot: In token of which duty, if he please. My hand is ready; may it do him ease. Petruchio: Why, there's a wench! Come on, and kiss me, Kate" (SHAKESPEARE, 1591, p. 44). That is the end; and they lived happily ever after. Would they? Any reader who accompany the narrative from beginning to end might find it rather weird to see such words as uttered from Katherine's mouth, after so many demonstrations that she would never say such things. What her last words before the end of the book imply is that she is no longer the same person – and, perhaps, that is exactly the point. Nevertheless, one of the things that might make many readers dissatisfied is the fact that she does not seem to be doing them as if coerced by anyone – she changes her behaviour apparently willingly. But, according to Wolf and Norris (2008, p. 101), that is precisely the magic of some ideological frameworks: "to make us do things that may be against our interests and to do them as if they were entirely self-willed". So many expectations surrounding and restraining her

are enough to alter Katherine's behaviour – in the end, one could never make out the number of occasions when these ideological frameworks have determined one's behaviours and attitudes (simply by guiding us to this or that direction). Expectations exert great influence in the subject, let alone when such subject is a peripheral one, with no tools to evade and/or live away from these expectations. Regardless of our apparently autonomous choices and seemingly independent behaviour, everything we do is part of a performance – in the theatre of life people only exist in relation to one another. Paradoxically as it may seem, our selfish interests are motivated and interact with the interests of other, insomuch as "[t]he individual gets his sense of self and can determine what it is only through his relationships within the community" (EAGLETON, 2010, p. 169). If Juliet and Romeo decide to move to the contrary direction, Katherine learns and accepts to fit in this community. Finally, her sense of self begins to make sense to others.

Final remarks: "the same is different each time"

Eagleton (2010, p. 169) suggests that "there is no need to drag politics into literary theory: it has been there from the beginning". What my previous analysis implies is that Shakespeare's plays, in many occasions, trigger the emergence of politics where it was supposed to be completely absent. Theretofore, working upon the transgression of preconceived meanings, Aristotle's categories of comedy and tragedy are not thoroughly respected by the development of my objects of study. To grapple with the political attributes of Elizabethan society, *The Taming of the Shrew* (SHAKESPEARE, 1591) and *Romeo & Juliet* (SHAKESPEARE, 1597) move beyond such categories, making the walls separating comic and tragic effects transparent and impossible to be sustained. As Styan (1968, p. 56) poses it, "Shakespeare's romantic plays have always been inconvenient to critics and theorists"; and now we know perfectly why they have been so. Regarding both plays, aspects inherent to the categories wherein they fit are remodeled, when not disregarded; both the behaviour and attitudes of their protagonists liquefy the essence of such categories – especially when it goes to the emotions that these narratives are supposed to make readers and audiences feel. As addressed in my discussion, "*Romeo & Juliet* is a tragedy, but none of the characters seems to embody the kind of virtue one might properly consider heroic in nature" (BROYLES, 2013, p. 77). What is tragic in the play regards not virtues common to tragic heroes, but the efforts of its protagonists to achieve a distinct end: "to transcend the tension between the merely human and the political; few critics, however, have found this play about love to convey a significant political teaching" (BROYLES, 2013, p. 78). Notwithstanding critics' distain, nonetheless, it seems clear that there is a comprehensive political teaching in both plays analysed hitherto – it all depends on the theoretical lenses applied. If the seemingly innocuous relationship of

Juliet with Romeo raises many questions and issues concerning their political inability to choose for their own destinies, the same is true for the relationship established between Katherine with Petruchio. The final part of my analysis reflects upon the fact that, in the end of the narrative, "Kate's speech is ostensibly delivered with such selflessness and devotion to her husband that all witnesses are left in awe" (CORDINGLEY, 1998, p. 9). Such an awe is justified by the fact that Katherine's transformation is portrayed, through her discourse, in an ostensibly exaggerated manner. This does not occur however by chance, insomuch as "[e]xaggeration has a role in the construction of humorous and tragic situations by generating violations of the moral order" (VEATCH, 1998, p. 203).

No one can ever be sure about Shakespeare's motivations when he gave life to such characters, but the texts analysed here prove they are liable to a very critical reading. Both narratives are potentially capable to make us gaze upon critical issues of Elizabethan society – we just need to nourish a political reading of them, attentive both to their meanings and dramatic structures (for, in the end, there is no clear separation between such issues). As suggested by Eagleton (2010, p. 109), "[l]iterary texts are code-transgressive as well as code-confirming: they may teach us new ways of reading, not just reinforce the ones with which we come equipped". One could of course read Shakespeare's texts as code-confirming – concluding that Romeo and Juliet are indeed wrong to fight against the interests of their families and that Katherine is simply a stubborn woman whose efforts to achieve autonomy are nothing, but funny. I, however, refuse to understand these narratives as that – and my analysis reinforces the idea that, in-between Shakespeare's words, there is much more to the plays than we might imagine. If Lacan (2001, p. 2) was right to assume that "[a]ll sorts of things in the world behave like mirrors", it would not be farfetched to say that literature operates accordingly. Positioned within and depending upon society to be devised and spread, literature, in one way or another, needs to mirror an array of pre-existing material – for art to be intelligible it must reflect objects that had already been there in the first place. This does not mean at all that, as a mirror, literature would just serve to produce an imitative image – one that gives us nothing new in terms of contributions for social repositioning. This is so for "the effect of literature is essentially to deform rather than to imitate. If the image corresponds wholly to the reality it becomes identical to it and ceases to be an image at all" (EAGLETON, 2010, 47). No image is identical to the object it represents, and it is precisely by deforming prior images that a new one is born – i.e., literature provides us with an illusion of reality, which emulates reality by transforming it into something else (that, on its turn, might result in the metamorphosis of the very object it emulates). Make no mistake, what we see when we look at our mirror image is nothing but a representation of ourselves.

Bringing my analysis to the issue of deformation, and raising awareness to the social epistemes whose bases are shaken by the chosen narratives, is a path that has granted me the possibility of looking through the mirror – of moving beyond structures and categories to access what may be hidden beyond them. This is so for, deeming literary structures and categories as ubiquitous and universal realms that emerge supposedly out of nothing and survive regardless of what surrounds them takes our historical, social, and political configurations completely for granted. Unnerving as it may seem, this process is the symptom of "an age that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place" (JAMESON, 1981, p. 7). Still in the words of Jameson (1981, p. 53), this lack of historicism in our analysis of any literary material results in our addressing literature as if it consisted in a panoply of "schizophrenic texts" – something that we should be dodging from. It is true, however, that focusing on gender performance and the institution of marriage as they are articulated within *The Taming of the Shrew* (Shakespeare, 1591) and *Romeo & Juliet* (SHAKESPEARE, 1597) is nonetheless not an easy task – and can only be put in practice if the social and political contexts of both plays are taken into consideration. This is, however, one of the greatest assets of literature, inasmuch as it is configured as an instance that makes history visible "both within the subjectivity it informs, and beyond subjectivity, by, as it were, restoring individuals to history" (WILLIAMS, 2005, p. 32). Such restoration occurs through our understanding that history determines our positionings as much as our positionings determine history. This is, apropos, also true for gender performance: "gender is the discursive/cultural means by which 'sexed nature' or 'a natural sex' is produced and established as 'prediscursive', prior to culture: a politically neutral surface on which culture acts" (BUTLER, 1993, p. 346). Bearing in mind that, when subjects are born, they are already placed within a set of prediscursive epistemes, literature plays a significant role to make us look at ways would never have turned to otherwise. In the end, through literature, "[d]ifferent subject positions are proposed by a variety of discourses, and the individual or social subject may or may not, depending on his or her power to choose, take up the positions offered" (FUNCK, 1998, p. 22).

The proposal of distinct subject positions, therefore, is not enough to guarantee that anyone who wishes shall be able to take up the positions offered – it all depends on subjects' level of autonomy and power to making choices. Texts emerge out of contexts and allows, through their emergence, for new contexts to be devised. "The structure of a text both puts down roots in the unity of a context and immediately opens this non-saturable context onto a recontextualisation. All this is historical through and through" (DERRIDA, 1992, p. 63). Katherine and Juliet are both products and agents; they are simulacrums of Elizabethan women, hindered by all obstacles common to those who were living within Britain in the late XVI century. Perhaps it would thus be pointless to keep putting issues of gender

oppression in the spotlight in the contemporaneity half a millennium after Shakespeare's plays were written if such issues had already been surpassed – unfortunately, this is still far from being the case. In fact, "while the forms of subalternisation have changed during the various stages of globalisation, the hierarchical power structure of the hegemonic world system continues to pit oppressors against oppressed" (EAGLETON, 2010, p. 123). The condition of women, along with the condition of any other marginalised subjects, is finally being taken seriously – regardless of the long way still to go, bringing such issues to the realm of literary analysis is an evidence that, one more time, literature proves to transgress other available discourses (playing with imagination, it simply has nothing to lose). Transgressing time and space frontiers, texts are open to the most varied readers – and the fact that there is so much to Shakespeare's plays, especially (here) in what concerns the treatment of Elizabethan women, evinces that it would be a mistake for one to propose a closed reading of these texts. The structures and themes set forward by the author have no frontiers – travelling through time and space they still talk to us, and still bother our useless efforts to categorise comedies and tragedies within closed boxes. Efforts prove to be useless because "the convention which allows a community to come to an agreement about the literary status of this or that phenomenon remains precarious, unstable and always subject to revision" (DERRIDA, 1992, p. 73). I hope my scrutiny of Shakespeare's narratives effectively stands for Derrida's point – and to his notion that "even among the most canonical texts the possibilities of rupture are always waiting to be effected" (1992, p. 53).

I finish my study, then, by reminding my reader that, if Aristotle is right when he claims that "[a] perfect tragedy should […] imitate actions which excite pity and fear […whereas…] comedy is an imitation of lower characters with no painful or destructive attributes" (ARISTOTLE, 1895, p. 17) my analysis is completely meaningless. Regardless of how pertinent Aristotle's categories have once proved to be, it is high time we moved on. Both in comedies and tragedies, Matthew (2013, p. 20) writes that "[d]evoid of pity and hope we would neither enjoy nor delight in the protagonist's ultimate success since we would be unconcerned about or appalled at the resultant good fortune. Comic catharsis therefore does involve pity and hope". The distinction of lower and higher characters might help us out when dealing with the analysis of plays – but it might also determine our reading, by hampering our ability to apprehend complexities we have already been guided to ignore. Katherine's characterisation is one of these complexities – there is no way for us to understand her development devoid of pity and hope. Implied by Freud's reflections upon humour, comic effects often trigger these feelings that Aristotle seem to relate only to tragic narratives. In the former's view, "[h]umour may produce the various forms of 'broken' humour – the humour that smiles through tears" (1991, p. 153). Again, it is more important to understand effects rather than categories – the dramatic formula

is a liquefied one, it is what it does that ends up determining what it is. *The Taming of the Shrew* (SHAKESPEARE, 1591) and *Romeo & Juliet* (SHAKESPEARE, 1597) are a recommendation: "We may too readily anticipate as the form for a tragedy what should grow out of the content of the play and not be imposed upon it" (STYAN, 1968, p. 30). It is the development of Romeo and Juliet, their attempt at escaping from the tentacles of their parents' intrigues and values and their secret alliance that should tells us what is comic and what is tragic within the narrative. By the same token, Katherine's pursuit for autonomy and her final conformity after mistreated should also be the aspects informing us the meanings and implications of Shakespeare's narrative. Many people might have laughed at her by the time she was created, but today I believe such number have diminished – and perhaps in the future none of us shall find her condition funny at all. In the end, this is precisely perhaps what makes the literary discourse so singular: literature is a confirmation that "[w]hat is the same is that the same is different each time" (DERRIDA, 1992, p. 22).

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