

**CLASSICAL MYTHOLOGY IN ENGLISH RENAISSANCE DRAMA:
AN ANALYSIS OF *ROMEO AND JULIET***

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0. ABSTRACT

This dissertation's objective is to find and explore the connections that exist between English Renaissance and classical mythology in both the literature and artistic fields. This is done by explaining and investigating the philosophical current of humanism, which was quite popular through the Renaissance. Another important part of this explication is to define how mythology was employed. After validating these links, the next step of this dissertation is then to analyse William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* to find the mythological references that appear in the play, alongside other kinds of references or ideas that Shakespeare employed for inspiration, like local folklore, Christian imagery, other pagan mythologies or medieval literature. The bulk of the work is occupied in identifying and analysing the Greco-Roman classical references, both in their mythological origins and meaning, and how these references are employed, both inside the play by the different characters and outside the play, investigating why Shakespeare employed that particular myth in the play. Finally, the last part of the dissertation shows the conclusions reached after this analysis, in particular the mastery that the author possessed to both employ mythological reference to embellish the play and to add an additional meaning to it, only understandable for those with knowledge of classical mythology.

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this dissertation is to establish the use of classical mythological elements in *Romeo and Juliet*, one of William Shakespeare's most famous dramas. The idea behind this project was born in my mutual interest towards English Renaissance theatre and classical mythology, and how both are connected.

On one side, the English Renaissance theatre, which encompasses Elizabethan, Jacobean and Caroline theatre, marks one of the most important points in the genre's history, since it signalled the change from travelling troupes towards the creation of permanent theatres. At the same time, the Renaissance movement expanded through Europe creating new philosophical and intellectual ideas, including Humanism, which defended the idea of androcentrism, in which man was the centre of the universe, and advocated the rediscovery

and study of the classic works of Greek and Roman literature to improve the philosophical, educational and religious sides of society.

On the other side, I have always been interested in classical mythology and how deeply its impact is felt in our culture and art through the centuries, and how at the same time it can tell us a great quantity of information about the history and society of these cultures. Since the beginnings of civilization, humanity has tried to understand the world in which we live: how the world works, how it was created, how life began, why we are alive, what happens after someone dies... To find answers to these questions, humanity creates myths, stories which help us define the world in a way that we can understand. With a clear vision of the world, people now know what to do, how to behave. As such, myths create both religion and society. Since the Greek and Roman cultures are the pillars of modern society, their mythology is deeply entrenched in it, and has a prominent role in both art and literature, as this dissertation will show.

My analysis of *Romeo and Juliet* is focused in how these myths are employed through the play. We can see that Shakespeare uses them in different forms: in some cases, they are used as little more than scenery, to help set the mood in that scene, but in others they have an important meaning and even shape the play. The method of analysis employed is the one followed in this kind of work, going from the general towards the specific. As such, the second chapter of this dissertation, “Classical Mythology in the English Renaissance: a general view”, I will explore the influence that mythology and classical philosophy and literature have during the English Renaissance, explaining the concept of Humanism and its influence in art and literature. The third chapter, “Mythology and *Romeo and Juliet*”, I deal with the influence of classical mythology in Shakespeare’s works and how he employed it, alongside the explanation and exploration of the myths employed in the eponymous play.

Then, in chapter four, “Analysis of Classical Myths in *Romeo and Juliet*”, which forms the central part of this dissertation, the different myths that appear through the play are explained and evaluated, in order to understand what effect Shakespeare wanted them to have. These myths reflect the social status of the characters in the play, since only those with money or occupation that allowed them to achieve such knowledge (nobility and the friar) employ them, and at the same time express the personality and the point of view of life of those who use them. At the end a chapter of conclusion and the bibliography are provided.

2. CLASSICAL MYTHOLOGY IN THE ENGLISH RENAISSANCE: A GENERAL VIEW

The main point of my approach in this dissertation of *Romeo and Juliet* is the idea that Greco-Roman mythology was one of the main focuses in the literary and artistic fields of the Renaissance. This representation could be either faithful, in order to bring them to a new audience in accordance with the spirit of humanism, or modified to suit the taste and ideas of the author's society. This is a consequence of the importance that Classic authors and their work acquired during this period, becoming part of the educational model of the time and used as a source of inspiration by numerous artists and writers.

The idea behind this importance is the philosophy of Humanism. This philosophical current has changed through the centuries, due to the fact that multiple intellectual movements have affiliated themselves with the term, but has always been defined by its objective of the betterment of humanity by improving its cultural and intellectual side. During the Renaissance, this movement led towards a revived interest to interpret the classic authors and their philosophies, leading towards the adaptation and imitation of their works since they were seen as the cultural peak of humanity. This renewed interest in classic literature, accompanied by the invention of the printing press, resulted in the spread of classic ideas through Europe, something that led towards the use of such ideas alongside Greco-Roman aesthetics by most writers and artists of the time. For the Renaissance humanist, classical knowledge was a mean to an end, a way to improve humanity's condition.

The interest towards classical mythology follows the same pattern. While most of the information that the public possessed came from the classical authors' works, like for example, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, this period saw the creation of different guides and manuals called mythographies which contained information of such myths, like Boccaccio's *Genealogia deorum gentilium* or Giglio Gregorio Giraldi's *De deis gentium varia et multiplex historia*, which were extensively used by numerous artists and writers. These guides were usually written in Latin, which helped to transmit their contents internationally, but at the same time it made the information accessible only to educated people. Alongside these guides, which were widely consulted, the authors employed popular dictionaries which were used in school, such for example Thomas Cooper's *Thesaurus Linguae Romanae et Britannicae*. (Rivers 1989: 24)

The methods employed by Renaissance authors to utilize the resource that was the Greco-Roman mythology can be separated in two different categories. The first one consisted in using either a myth or a classical work as the core of their creation. This method was used when the author wanted to explore the themes contained in the myth and recreate them into a new story. This can be seen, for example, in many works by William Shakespeare, including *Romeo and Juliet*, the play being analysed in this dissertation. This method was created following the ideals of humanism by reviving classic ideals and exploring their contents, leading them towards new directions or emphasise how their themes are still relevant.

The second method employed by Renaissance authors was the use of myths as supplements of a given work. Their function then was to add depth to the chosen composition, working in two ways: while most people could make the connection between the myth and what they represent, for example that Cupid was the god of love; those educated in classical culture could identify the themes touched by these myths and as such employ them to understand the whole context of the work and analyse why the author employed such example. These two methods were complementary, allowing both writers and artists to fuse and connect different myths to create something new.

The interest that Renaissance authors had in the Greco-Roman mythology can be explained by the nature of the myths themselves. Classical myths represent the anthropomorphism of both nature and the human condition, created to understand the world where we live and at the same time justify their way of live, something that can be seen in the modification that suffered the Greek myths when the Roman Empire adopted them. Then, the use of myths by Renaissance author can be seen as continuing the evolution of these myths, by adapting the archetypes contained in them towards the reality of their time.

3. MYTHOLOGY AND *ROMEO AND JULIET*

Shakespeare is nowadays considered as the best writer in English literature tradition and as one of the greatest dramatist of all times, but he was actually a writer of his time, who followed the fashions that were popular through his life to attract and entertain his audience. Theatre is a business, and as such it is forced to change with time if they want to make a profit. Shakespeare was not different in this regard, as seen in his change from an Elizabethan style of theatre towards a Jacobean one. Like the rest of writers of the Renaissance, Shakespeare subscribed to the humanist ideal of using classic literature and philosophical works as inspiration and as a model to improve human culture.

Romeo and Juliet is based in a popular story in Italian and French literature that has changed through the centuries. While the story of two young lovers being separated and of them faking their death has been around since classical times, the first story that possess the recognizable elements from Shakespeare's future play is Luigi Da Porto's *Giulietta e Romeo* (1530), also known as *Historia novellamente ritrovata di due nobili amanti*, which is set in Verona, uses the names "Romeo" and "Juliet" and made the young lovers part of feuding families, and at the same time introduces an early version of characters which will become important in the play, like Mercutio or Tybalt. Other versions of this story include Mateo Bandello's *Romeo e Giulietta (Novelle)* (1554), Pierre Boastiau's translation of Bandello's version included in *Histoires Tragiques* (1559) and Arthur Brook's *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet* (1562) a poem that was Shakespeare's source when writing his play. Each retelling of the story modified it, including new characters and situations, which are all reflected in the play, but Shakespeare also included changes to the story, the most notable one being the action being compressed to only a few days, instead of the months that appear at the sources, which not only make the story fit better as a play, but also intensifies the sense of tragedy.

There are multiple mythological references through *Romeo and Juliet*, ranging from simply being metaphors and metonymies used to mark a character's social status, since only the characters that have received formal education (nobility and Friar Laurence) use this kind of metaphor; to being directly connected with the plot of the story. The core myth, the one in which the play and the source texts are built around is *Pyramus and Thisbe*, from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. *Metamorphoses*, written by Publius Ovidius Naso, better known as Ovid, is a

poem compiled in fifteen books which contains two hundred and fifty mythological stories in chronological order, with the central theme of metamorphosis as a link between them. *Pyramus and Thisbe* tells the story of two young lovers who could only talk through the crack of a wall, since their parents forbid their relationship due to their rivalry. One day they decided to meet under the mulberry tree in Ninus' tomb, where they could at last profess their love to each other. Thisbe arrived earlier, and in the tomb she met a lioness, with its mouth full of blood from an ox it killed previously. Thisbe ran away, and in her escape she lost her veil, which the lioness picked up and played with it before departing to the forest. When Pyramus arrived to the tomb, he found Thisbe's veil drenched in blood, and thinking that a wild animal has killed his love, commits suicide under the mulberry tree, splashing it with his blood. When Thisbe returned to the tomb, she found Pyramus dying alongside her lost veil. Seeing the misunderstanding that led to her lover to commit suicide, Thisbe decided to follow him in death, but not before asking the tree to remember their impossible love. The gods, touched by what happened, turned the mulberry fruits black, as a sign of mourning. As it can be seen, the myth possessed all the characteristics found in the play. While *Pyramus and Thisbe* is the main focus, other myths compiled in *Metamorphoses* are referenced in the story.

While classical myths constitute an important influence in Shakespeare's play, Christianity is also an important part of the story, with Friar Laurence as a main character and as an advisor of both Romeo and Juliet, who decide to marry them as a way to stop the feud between their families. He tries to be the voice of reason for the young lovers, by being Romeo's confidant and also by trying to stop Juliet to do something rash after Romeo's death. Christian imagery also appears through the play, with Juliet's birthday as an important reference: Juliet was born at Lammas Eve (July 31). Lammas Day is a religious festival (that was originally pagan, but was adapted into Christianity) in England where the wheat harvest is celebrated. With Juliet being born the day before this celebration, it can be seen as an omen that she would die before she fully matures. Christian imagery is also present in Romeo and Juliet's courtship, which differentiates them from the rest of references to love in the play, in which mythological elements are employed instead, something that suggests a true relationship, rather than mere love.

There are also other literary references in the play from different sources than Christianity or Greco-Roman mythology. Mercutio references the ballad *The King and the Beggar-maid* in act II. The ballad tells the story of how King Cophetua, an African king who

has never felt attracted to women, until he met a beggar from whom he fell in love at first sight. The king finds her by scattering coins for the poor and asks her to marry him, and after that they lived a happy life. This legend is used as an example of perfect romance, but Mercutio uses it sarcastically, by mockingly mentioning it, alongside Venus and Cupid (which in the ballad are the ones who makes the king fell in love) in a way to call Romeo, who like the king has fallen madly in love for Rosaline (what Mercutio does not know is that Romeo has already met Juliet at this part of the drama). Another pagan reference can be seen in Queen Mab. While Queen Mab is a creation of Shakespeare, her origins could be traced to Medb, queen of Connacht, from Irish mythology, which name is usually anglicized as Maeve.

Not all classical references in *Romeo and Juliet* are mythological in nature. After seeing Romeo returns happily from his meeting with Juliet the day after the party, he is content with his friend's mood, and compares positively his lady, whom he believes is Rosaline, with Dido (from Virgil's *Aeneid*), Helen (Homer's *Iliad*), Hero (from the myth *Hero and Leander*) and Thisbe (From Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, as explained before), alongside Laura (from Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, whose author is mentioned, and belongs to the early Renaissance) and Cleopatra.

MERCUTIO

Without his roe, like a dried herring. O flesh, flesh, how art thou fishified!
Now is he for the numbers that Petrarch flowed in. Laura, to his lady, was a
kitchen wench – marry, she had a better love to berhyme her- Dido, a dowdy,
Cleopatra, a gypsy, Helen and Hero hildings and harlots, Thisbe a grey eye or
so, but not to the purpose. Signor Romeo, *bon jour*. There's a French
salutation to your French slop. You gave us the counterfeit fairly last night.

While he makes this comparison due to the beauty these women possessed, the author is using these references to clue the spectator of the nature of the ending of this play, since all of them experienced tragic romances. There is also a reference towards medieval literature in the character of Tybalt, Juliet's cousin. Tybalt shares his name with a character in the literary cycle of Reynard the Fox. This is mentioned in the play by Mercutio, who calls Tybalt the "Prince of Cats" in reference of this character as an insult. Another humorous reference

towards medieval literature is the reveal of Juliet's nurse name, which is Angelica, the same name as the princess in Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, known for her beauty.

4. ANALYSIS OF THE MYTHOLOGICAL REFERENCES IN *ROMEO AND JULIET*

As it has been already explained, *Romeo and Juliet* contains numerous mythological references. The objective of this chapter is to analyse these references and how they are employed thorough the play and what intentions the author had when implementing them. These references will be analysed in order of appearance, emphasizing those which bear importance in the story.

4.1. Aurora

Aurora was the Roman goddess of dawn, sister of Sol, god of the sun, and Luna, goddess of the moon. Her Greek equivalent is Eos, goddess of dawn and mother of the Anemoi, the wind gods. She was known for having multiple romances with mortal men, which ended tragically. She appears in Act I, scene 1, when Montague is talking with Benvolio, his nephew, about being worried of how his son, Romeo, is acting.

MONTAGUE

Many a morning bath he there be seen
With tears augmenting the fresh morning's dew,
Adding to clouds more clouds with his deep sighs.
But all so soon as the all-cheering song
Should in the farthest East begin to draw
The shady curtains from Aurora's bed,
Away from light steals home my heavy son
And private in his chamber pens himself,
Shut up his windows, locks fair daylight out
And makes himself an artificial night.
Black and portentous must this humour prove
Unless good counsel may the cause remove.

Montague only uses Aurora as a metonymy for dawn, but knowing how the goddess was known for his multiple, tragic romances, the author is employing her to signal the viewer of the nature of the relationship between Romeo and Juliet.

4.2. Cupid

Cupid was the god of Love in Roman mythology. He was the son of Venus, goddess of beauty and fertility and either Vulcan, god of fire and forging, or Mars, god of war. Cupid was represented as a handsome winged young man or as a comely winged male child, carrying a bow and arrow. By shooting his arrows to the hearts of both mortals and gods, Cupid would cause them to fall in love or make them hate someone, depending of which arrow he shoots. Cupid sometimes was represented as being blind or carrying a blindfold, to indicate how love can be irrational and arbitrary. His Greek counterpart is the god Eros, and although both of them were revered as gods of love, they possessed differences. Originally, Eros was a primordial god, born from Chaos, and represented fertility and sexual love, and was depicted as a winged young man, but later he was represented as a mischievous young child, son of Aphrodite and Ares, which is the depiction that was adapted into Roman mythology. Cupid also represented live after death, which is why his image appears in numerous Roman tombs. This could give a second meaning to the multiple appearances of Cupid through the drama, foreshadowing its tragic end.

Cupid appears in the myth of Daphne, one of the myths compiled in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In the story, Apollo, god of arts, constantly ridiculed Cupid by mentioning how small the god and his arrows were. One day, in revenge, Cupid shot a golden arrow (which represented love) to Apollo's heart and a lead one (which represented hate) to the nymph Daphne. After seeing her, Apollo fell in love, but she ran away, so he chased after her. Daphne, losing her strength asked his father, the rivergod Peneus, to help her escape Apollo, and her father turned Daphne into a laurel tree, which a heartbroken Apollo, still in love with her, decided to make the laurel his sacred tree, wearing a crown made from its branches since then. Cupid is referenced multiple times in the play, first appearing in Act I, scene 1, during a conversation between Romeo and his cousin Benvolio.

Well, in that hit you miss. She'll not be hit
With Cupid's arrow. She hath Dian's wit,
And, in strong proof of chastity well armed,
From love's weak childish bow she lives uncharmed.
She will not stay the siege of loving terms,
Not bide th'encounter of assailing eyes,
Nor ope her lap to saint-seducing gold.
O, she is rich in beauty; only poor
That, when she dies, with beauty dies her store.

In this conversation, Benvolio is worried about Romeo, whose parents have asked him to find what's happening to him. Romeo is depressed since the girl he loves, Rosaline, has rejected him. Cupid here reflects Romeo's desire for her, rather than love. While it is clear that Romeo is attracted by her, he only mentions her physical beauty and even shows resentment against her because she rebuffed his advances. As we learn through the play, Romeo is quite a romantic person, and is clearly trying to find a perfect relationship, so each time he becomes attracted to someone, he mistakes these feelings for love and become depressed after he is rebuffed.

Shakespeare also introduced a reference toward the myth of Daphne in this dialogue. Romeo considers Cupid's bow to be weak and childish, similarly to what Apollo said in the myth to insult Cupid. In the myth, Cupid takes his revenge by making Apollo fall in love with Daphne and making Daphne hate him, something that ends with Daphne turning into a tree to escape the god and Apollo is left heartbroken. By possessing previous knowledge of the myth, this dialogue, which can easily be considered as Romeo simply being depressed for being rejected, turns into a veiled reveal of the nature of the ending. By insulting Cupid, Romeo is condemned to suffer a tragic romance, which ends with him losing his life.

The next mentions of Cupid happen in Act I, scene 4, when Romeo, Benvolio and Mercutio are preparing to enter Capulet's masquerade, in order to let Romeo meet Rosaline again so he can win her heart.

BENVOLIO

The date is out of such proximity
We'll have no Cupid hoodwinked with a scarf,
Bearing a Tartar's painted bow of lath,
Scaring the ladies like a crowkeeper,
Nor no without-book prologue, faintly spoke
After the Prompter, for our entrance.
But, let them measure us what they will,
We'll measure them a measure and be gone.

Here, Benvolio is trying to convince Romeo not to announce their arrival to the party. Here, Cupid is referenced due to his ability to cause someone to hate another person by piercing their heart with a lead arrow, which appears in the myth of Daphne. Benvolio is telling Romeo that they should not present themselves, since it's a Capulet party, and while Mercutio can enter without problems, both Benvolio and Romeo are members of the Montague family, and will be treated coldly or even ejected from the party or something even worse due to their identities. Shortly after, Cupid is mentioned again in the same conversation.

MERCUTIO

You are a lover. Borrow Cupid's wings
And soar with them above a common bound.

With this sentence, Mercutio is trying to encourage Romeo to go to the party, since Romeo is so depressed for being rejected by Rosaline that he does not want to enter, despite the fact that Rosaline is there, and as such he could try to woo her again. This time, Cupid represents the courage created by love, using its wings as a symbol. Cupid is mentioned again by Mercutio in Act II, scene 1.

MERCUTIO

Nay, I'll conjure too.
Romeo! Humorous! Madman! Passion! Lover!
Appear thou in the likeness of a sight.

Speak but one rhyme, and I am satisfied.
Cry by "Ay me!" Pronounce but "love" and "dove".
Speak to my gossip Venus one fair word,
One nickname for her purblind son and heir,
Young Abraham Cupid, he that shot so trim
When King Cophetua loved the beggar maid.
He heareth not, he stirreth not, he moveth not.
The ape is dead, and I must conjure him.
I conjure thee by Rosaline's bright eyes,
By her high forehead and her scarlet lip,
By her fine foot, straight leg, and quivering thign,
And the demesnes that there adjacent lie,
That in thy likeness thou appear to us!

In this scene, Mercutio and Benvolio are searching for Romeo because he disappeared from the Capulet's party. Since Romeo doesn't appear, Mercutio call him in an affectionate but mocking form, to see if he responds this way. In this example, Cupid is used as a representation of Romeo's obsession with love. In this dialogue, we can see a reference towards the ballad of King Cophetua which, alongside the mythological references, is Mercutio's way of mocking Romeo's way of acting as if he is the protagonist of one of such ballads. Mercutio calls Cupid "Young Abraham Cupid", which, in a way references how Cupid is at the same time represented as one of the primordial gods (Abraham) and one of the youngest gods, the son of Venus and Mars (Young). In this fragment, there is again a reference of how Romeo's "love" towards Rosaline is simply physical attraction, with Mercutio mocking the way Romeo describes her. Cupid is mentioned one last time in Act II scene 5, during a soliloquy of Juliet at the start of the scene.

JULIET

The clock struck nine when I did send the Nurse.
In half an hour she promised to return.
Perchance she cannot meet him. That's not so.
O, she is lame! Love's heralds should be thoughts,

Which ten times faster glides than the sun's beams
Driving back shadows over louring hills.
Therefore do nimble-pinioned doves draw love,
And therefore hath the wind-swift Cupid wings.
Now is the sun upon the highmost hill
Of this day's journey, and from nine till twelve
Is three long hours, yet she is not come.
Had she affections and warm youthful blood,
She would be as swift in motion as a ball.
My words would bandy her to my sweet love,
And his to me.
But old folks, many feign as they were dead,
Unwieldy, slow, heavy and pale as lead.

In this scene, Juliet is waiting for her nurse, who has gone to talk with Romeo to arrange their secret wedding, and is growing impatient since she still has not arrived. In this soliloquy, Cupid is used as a messenger of romantic love, rather than sexual one, which is how it has appeared in the other examples, since they make reference to Romeo's attraction towards Rosaline. Juliet is comparing her nurse with the god, since Cupid would have managed to easily contact with Romeo, while the nurse, who is an old woman, still has not returned after three hours.

4.3. Diana/Cynthia

Diana was originally an Italian goddess of the forest which later was identified with the Greek goddess Artemis, the goddess of hunting, who at the same time has become identified with Selene, Greek goddess of the moon. As such, Diana became the Roman goddess of hunting and the moon. Diana gets mentioned in Act I Scene 1, in the same conversation between Romeo and Benvolio analysed before.

ROMEO

Well, in that hit you miss. She'll not be hit

With Cupid's arrow. She hath Dian's wit,
And, in strong proof of chastity well armed,
From love's weak childish bow she lives uncharmed.
She will not stay the siege of loving terms.
Not bide th'encounter of assailing eyes,
Nor ope her lap to saint-seducing gold.
O, she is rich in beauty; only poor
That, when she dies, with beauty dies her store.

Here, Romeo is comparing Rosaline's rejection of his feelings to the goddess herself, which was a virgin. This aspect of the myth is taken directly from Artemis' one, since when she was young, she wished to her father, Zeus, to be a virgin forever, something that she was very protective about, which is why Romeo mentions "Dian's wit". This reference to Diana, alongside Cupid's reference and how small his bow is, clearly shows that Shakespeare was inspired by the myth of Daphne that appears in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. One of the main reason of why the nymph Daphne runs away from Apollo, alongside the fact that she hates him thanks to Cupid's lead arrow, is that she followed Diana's example, and as such she wishes to remain a virgin.

Diana is referenced again in the drama, under the name of Cynthia, an epithet used originally for the Greek goddess Artemis, since she was born on Mount Cynthus in Delos, and which was later used with Diana. This reference appears in Act III, scene 5.

ROMEO

Let me be ta'en, let me be put to death.
I am content, so thou wilt have it so.
I'll say yon grey is not the morning's eye;
'Tis but the pale reflex of Cynthia's brow.
Nor that is not the lark whose notes do beat
The vaulty heaven so high above our heads.
I have more care to stay than will to go.
Come, death, and welcome! Juliet wills it so.

How is't, my soul? Let's talk. It is not day.

In this scene, Romeo and Juliet are talking in the balcony, moments before the dawn, the night before he is exiled to Mantua. Here, Diana is used as metonymy for the moon, which as Artemis ended being identified as Selene, Greek goddess of the moon, Diana also ended being identified with the Roman goddess of the moon, Luna. Juliet is trying to convince Romeo to stay a bit longer before being exiled, trying to convince him that there is still hours until dawn. Romeo tries to convince her, in a jokingly way, that staying would mean his death, since he has to go to exile.

4.4. Venus

Originally an obscure Italian goddess, Venus became the Roman goddess of love and beauty after being identified with the Greek goddess Aphrodite. She was the consort of Mars, god of war, and the mother of Cupid, god of love. Her role in myths mirrors those of Aphrodite, with the only exception being her role in the Roman national epic, Virgil's *Aeneid*. In this poem, Venus guides Aeneas, her mortal son, and a group of Trojan refugees towards Italy after the destruction of Troy by the Greeks, including the use of Cupid, disguised as Aeneas' son, to make Queen Dido of Carthage fall in love with Aeneas, giving the refugees a place to rest. After their arrival in Italy, Aeneas and the Trojans became the ancestors of the Romans. Due to this, Venus was considered the mother goddess of the Roman Empire. Venus appears in Act II scene 1, in Mercutio's mocking imitation of Romeo.

MERCUTIO

Nay, I'll conjure too.

Romeo! Humorous! Madman! Passion! Lover!

Appear thou in the likeness of a sight.

Speak but one rhyme, and I am satisfied.

Cry by "Ay me!" Pronounce but "love" and "dove".

Speak to my gossip Venus one fair word,

One nickname for her purblind son and heir,

Young Abraham Cupid, he that shot so trim

When King Cophetua loved the beggar maid.

He heareth not, he stirreth not, he moveth not.
The ape is dead, and I must conjure him.
I conjure thee by Rosaline's bright eyes,
By her high forehead and her scarlet lip,
By her fine foot, straight leg, and quivering thign,
And the demesnes that there adjacent lie,
That in thy likeness thou appear to us!

Venus is referenced in this dialogue due to her role as goddess of love, alongside Cupid. Both she and her son Cupid are considered gods of love, but their roles were different. Cupid represented romantic love, alongside hate and life after death, while Venus represented physical, sexual love, as befitting of the goddess of beauty. Mercutio's mention of the two gods, alongside the rest of the dialogue, is his way of mocking Romeo. Venus is mentioned again in Act IV scene 1.

PARIS

Immoderately she weeps for Tybalt's death,
And therefore have I little talked of love,
For Venus smiles not in a house of tears.
Now, sir, her father counts it dangerous
That she do give her sorrow so much sway,
And in his wisdom hastes our marriage
To stop the inundation of her teases,
Which too much minded by herself alone,
Maybe put from her by society.
Now do you know the reason of this haste.

In this scene, Count Paris is talking with Friar Laurence, trying to arrange his wedding with Juliet so it happens the next Thursday. Here Venus is portrayed as a metonymy of love, which both Paris and lord Capulet are trying to force in Juliet with this sudden marriage as a way to cheer her up, since she spent all day shut away in her room crying, for what they

believe is Tybalt's death, while originally lord Capulet wanted to wait one of two years more before the wedding. The truth is that Juliet is crying for Romeo's exile, since he is her husband after their secret marriage. Friar Laurence knows this, which is why he is trying to stall the ceremony. This shows the dual nature of love: Count Paris and Lord Capulet are trying to invoke love as a way to make Juliet happy, but the truth is that love is the reason why Juliet is depressed.

4.5. Vesta

In *Romeo and Juliet*, there is a mention to the Vestal Virgins, servants of the goddess Vesta. Vesta was the Roman goddess of hearth, who was widely worshipped in both the state and the political domain. In her temple in Rome, a sacred fire was tended, representing the life force of the city itself. Her Greek counterpart was Hestia. Vesta is referenced in Act II scene 2 by a mention towards her priests.

ROMEO

But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?

It is the East, and Juliet is the sun!

Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,

Who is already sick and pale with grief

That thou her maid art far more fair than she.

Be not her maid, since she is envious.

Her vestal livery is but sick and green,

And none but fools do wear it. Cast it off.

It is my lady. O, it is my love!

O that she knew she were!

She speaks. Yet she says nothing. What of that?

Her eye discourses. I will answer it.

I am too bold. 'Tis not to me she speaks.

Two of the fairest stars in all the heavens,

Having some business, do entreat her eyes

To twinkle in their spheres till they return.

What if her eyes were there, they in her head?

The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars
As daylight doth a lamp. Her eyes in heaven
Would through the airy region stem so bright
That birds would sing and think it were not night.
See how she leans her cheek upon her hand!
O that I were a glove upon that hand,
That I might touch that cheek!

In this scene, Romeo is watching Juliet in her balcony, admiring her beauty. In this description, he mentions the Vestal Virgins, the priestesses of Vesta, whose job was to tend the sacred fire and prepare food for festivals. As their name indicates, they took a vow of chastity in honour of Vesta, who remained a virgin, which is why Romeo uses them as an adjective in his speech, since Diana, goddess of the moon, was also a virgin. In this soliloquy we can see how different that he feels towards Juliet are compared with those he felt toward Rosaline: with Rosaline, he described how attractive were the different parts of her body, showing more of a sexual attraction, but with Juliet, he describes how beautiful he finds her eyes and cheeks, which signifies a more romantic attraction.

4.6. Jupiter/Jove

Jupiter was originally the Italian god of the sky, the one who caused the rain and watched over agriculture. Later, the Romans identified him with the Greek god Zeus, turning Jupiter into the leader of the Roman pantheon. He was worshipped with numerous epithets, like *Optimus Maximus* (“best and greatest”), *Fugurator* (“Sender of Lightning”) or *Prodigialis* (“Sender of Omens”), each one with specific characteristics and their own temple. His role in myths was similar that Venus’s, since he took part in all events that Zeus participated, with the exception of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, in which he created the plan to move Aeneas and the Trojan refugees to Italy, where they would create the “master race” that will be the Romans. Jupiter, under his alternate name Jove, is mentioned by Juliet in Act II scene 2.

JULIET

Thou knowest the mask of night is on my face,

Else would a maiden blush bepaint my cheek
For that which thou hast heard me speak tonight.
Fain would I dwell on form; fain, fain deny
What I have spoke. But farewell compliment!
Dost thou love me? I know thou wilt say “Ay”.
And I will take thy word. Yet, if thou swearest,
Thou mayst prove false. At lovers perjuries,
They say, Jove laughs. O gentle Romeo,
If thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully.
Or if thou thinkest I am too quickly won,
I’ll frown, and be perverse, and say thee nay,
So thou wilt woo. But else, not for the world.
In truth, fair Montague, I am too fond,
And therefore thou mayst think my ‘haviour light.
But trust me, gentleman, I’ll prove more true
Than those that have more cunning to be strange.
I should have been more strange, I must confess,
But that thou overheardest, ere I was ware,
My true-love passion. Therefore pardon me,
And not impute this yielding to light love,
Which the dark night hath so discovered.

Jupiter is referenced in this dialogue by a variation of a quote from Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria*, “Jupiter from on high smiles at the perjuries of lovers”, which became a common Elizabethan saying. With this Juliet means that God does not punish the lies told by lovers, but at the same time she wants Romeo to be sincere with her about how he feels.

4.7. Echo

Echo was a nymph in Greco-Roman mythology, which is the origin of the phenomenon of echo. There exist two different versions of the myth. In the first one, which appears in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Echo was a nymph that loved to talk and worked for Jupiter. Each

time Jupiter wanted to have an affair, he sent Echo to talk with Juno as a distraction. One day, Juno discovered this arrangement, and punished Echo with being unable to talk unless when spoken to, and even then she could only repeat the last word spoken by the other person. Sometime later, she met the beautiful Narcissus and fell in love with him and she started to follow him when he hunted, but she could not talk to him to express her feelings and could only repeat what he said to her. After seeing Echo, Narcissus rejected her. Depressed for being rejected, Echo hid in a cave in the mountains and slowly wasted away, until only her voice remained.

In the other version of the myth, the faun Pan, god of shepherds, fell in love with the nymph Echo, but she rebuffed him, since she wanted to keep her virginity. Pan, furious by this and envious of her musical talent, drove the shepherd of Mt. Helicon mad, who tore Echo apart, leaving only her voice. Echo is mentioned by Juliet in Act II scene 2, in her conversation with Romeo in the famous balcony scene.

JULIET

Hist, Romeo, hist! O for a falconer's voice,
To lure this tassel-gentle back again!
Bondage is hoarse and may not speak aloud,
Else would I tear the cave where Echo lies
And make her airy tongue more hoarse than mine
With repetitions of "My Romeo"!

Juliet makes a reference to the first myth of Echo, which her living in a cave. Once again, Shakespeare's choice of mythological figures reveals the future of the relationship between Romeo and Juliet and the nature of the play's ending. In both myths, Echo finds herself entangled in romances with a tragic end, falling in love with Narcissus in one myth and being the object of Pan's desires in the other, and in both myths she ends with only her voice remaining, capable only of repeating the sounds other makes, as a direct result of such romance.

4.8. Helios

Helios was a Greek Titan and god of the sun. Helios was often represented as riding a flaming carriage pulled by fiery horses, travelling through the sky from East to West, giving light to the world. With the pass of time Apollo, which one of his titles was the god of light, began to be identified with Helios, mixing both deities.

While Helios possessed a Roman counterpart in Sol, the god of the sun, and Shakespeare employs prominently Roman mythology in *Romeo and Juliet*, the text makes a direct reference toward Helios rather than Sol by mentioning the god as a Titan. This change in mythology reflects the background of the one who made the reference, Friar Laurence. As a man of faith, Friar Laurence not only has received classical education, like the nobility members of the cast, but has also access to the classical works of Greek and Roman literature due to the role of the Catholic church of preserving classical knowledge. As such, Friar Laurence can correctly identify Helios, rather than Apollo or Sol. Helios is referenced during Friar Laurence's soliloquy in Act II scene 3.

FRIAR LAURENCE

The grey-eyed mom smiled on the frowning night
Chequering the eastern clouds with streaks of light,
And darkness flecked like a drunkard reels
From forth day's pathway made by Titan's wheels.
Now ere the sun advance his burning eye
The day to cheer and night's dank dew to dry,
I must up-fill this osier cage of ours
With baleful weeds and precious-juicèd flowers.
The earth that's nature's mother is her tomb.
What is her burying grave, that is her womb;
And for her womb kids of divers kind
We sucking on her natural bosom find,
Many for many virtues excellent,
None but for some, and yet all different.
O mickle is the powerful grace that lies
In plants, herbs, stones, and their true qualities.
For naught so vile that on the earth doth live

But to the earth some special good doth give;
Nor aught so good but, strained from that fair use,
Revolts from true birth, stumbling on abuse.
Virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied,
And vice sometime's by action dignified.
Within the infant rind of this weak flower
Poison hath residence, and medicine power.
For this, being smelt, with that part cheers each part;
Being tasted, stays all senses with the heart.
Two such opposèd kings encamps them still
In man as well as herb, grace and rude will.
And where the worser is predominant,
Full soon the canker death eats up that plant.

In this soliloquy, Friar Laurence mentions Helios' "burning eye", which is a reference to how it was believed, due to the fact that he spent all day in the sky driving his chariot, Helios could see anything that happens in Earth, and as such it was invoked in many myths as a witness. This soliloquy is an extended metaphor of one of the main themes of the drama: love. It shows how something as good as the love that Romeo and Juliet feels towards each other can lead to tragedy, with the death of both protagonist, alongside those of Mercutio, Tybalt and Paris. There is another reference to Helios/Sol at the start of scene 2 in Act III.

JULIET

Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds,
Towards Phoebus' lodging! Such a waggoner
As Phaëton would whip you to the West
And bring in cloudy night immediately.
Spread thy close curtain, love-performing night,
That runaway's eyes may wink, and Romeo
Leap to these arms untalked of and unseen.
Lovers can see to do their amorous rites
By their own beauty; or, if love be blind,

It best agrees with night. Come, civil night,
Thou sober-suited matron, all in black,
And learn me how to lose a winning match,
Played with a pair of stainless maidenhoods.
Hood my unmanned blood, bating in my cheeks,
With thy black mantle till strange love grow bold,
Think true love acted simple modesty.
Come, night. Come Romeo. Come, thou day in night;
For thou wilt lie upon the wings of night
Whiter than new snow upon a raven's back.
Come, gentle night. Come, loving, black-browed night.
Give me my Romeo. And when I shall die,
Take him and cut him out in little stars,
And he will make the face of heaven so fine
That all the world will be in love with night
And pay no worship to the garnish sun.
O I have bought the mansion of love,
But not possessed it; and though I am sold,
Not yet enjoyed. So tedious is this day
As is the night before some festival
To an impatient child that hath new robes
And may not wear them.

While this soliloquy Juliet references some of Helios characteristics, the name Phoebus is actually an alternative name to refer to the god Apollo, showing how the latter god was identified with Helios in both Greek and Roman mythology. This also shows the difference in knowledge in the characters making these references: Juliet, as a noblewoman, has acquired basic classical education, which was the norm in that period and as such mentions Apollo, which is the better known god of the two. Meanwhile, Friar Laurence has access to a great number of classical works thanks to his position so he can make an exact reference.

4.9. Phaethon

According to Greco-Roman mythology, Phaethon was the son of Helios/Sol and commonly Clymene, an ocean nymph (Oceanid), although there are different versions of the myth in which the identity of his mother changes. The better known version of the myth is included in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and tells how Phaethon, after being teased by his playmates, asked his mother to tell him if his father really is the god of the sun. His mother told him to go to Sol's palace in the East and to ask the god himself. In the palace, Sol was overjoyed by finally meeting his son, and promised him anything he wished as proof of being his father. Phaethon wished to ride his father's fiery chariot for a day. While Sol was sceptic at first, the insistence of his son won him over, and he fulfilled his wish. Soon it was clear that Phaethon was not prepared to do his father's job and he lost control of the chariot, burning trees, drying rivers and turning black the skin colour of those who lived near the equator. At the end, Jupiter intervened by hurling a thunderbolt to the chariot to shoot it down, killing Phaethon in the act. Phaethon is mentioned during Juliet's soliloquy in Act III scene 2.

JULIET

Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds,
Towards Phoebus' lodging! Such a waggoner
As Phaëton would whip you to the West
And bring in cloudy night immediately.
Spread thy close curtain, love-performing night,
That runaway's eyes may wink, and Romeo
Leap to these arms untalked of and unseen.
Lovers can see to do their amorous rites
By their own beauty; or, if love be blind,
It best agrees with night. Come, civil night,
Thou sober-suited matron, all in black,
And learn me how to lose a winning match,
Played with a pair of stainless maidenhoods.
Hood my unmanned blood, bating in my cheeks,
With thy black mantle till strange love grow bold,

Think true love acted simple modesty.
Come, night. Come Romeo. Come, thou day in night;
For thou wilt lie upon the wings of night
Whiter than new snow upon a raven's back.
Come, gentle night. Come, loving, black-browed night.
Give me my Romeo. And when I shall die,
Take him and cut him out in little stars,
And he will make the face of heaven so fine
That all the world will be in love with night
And pay no worship to the garnish sun.
O I have bought the mansion of love,
But not possessed it; and though I am sold,
Not yet enjoyed. So tedious is this day
As is the night before some festival
To an impatient child that hath new robes
And may not wear them.

In this fragment, Juliet is waiting impatiently for the night to arrive, since she wants to see Romeo again, and is unaware of the events that that happened that day, in which Tybalt killed Mercutio and, in return, Romeo killed Tybalt, leading to Romeo's exile to Mantua. In this soliloquy the end of the play is once again foreshadowed, since Juliet asks the heavens to turn Romeo into a constellation when she dies, similar to numerous myths, which was translated in Romeo killing himself after what he thought was Juliet's death to be with her.

While Phaethon only appears as a metonymy to the sun in this soliloquy, his myth is actually an important theme in *Romeo and Juliet*, by showing how young impulsiveness can lead to tragic consequences. Similar to how in the myth Phaethon asked his father to drive his chariot without thinking in the consequences of this act, which ended up killing him; in the play most problems are caused by the act of the younger cast. Both Tybalt and Mercutio's desire to fight and kill someone (Romeo for Tybalt and Tybalt for Mercutio) for their "offences", despite the fact that other characters told them that this would only make things worse, leading to their death, and to Romeo's exile after taking revenge for Mercutio's death.

Also, the impulsiveness of Romeo and Juliet's feelings for each other lead to them to commit rash actions, like speeding their relationship to marriage, which led to Romeo not fighting against Tybalt at first, since now they were family, which caused Mercutio's death, and in the end their actions lead them to their deaths, alongside count Paris', who decided to make a vigil in Juliet's tomb and attacked Romeo after seeing him, which ended with Romeo killing him in self-defence.

4.10. Fortuna

Fortuna was originally an Italian fertility goddess who later became identified with Tyche, the Greek goddess of fate and luck. Fortuna was a popular goddess in the Roman Empire, worshipped in numerous temples and possessing different epithets like Fortuna Augusta ("Luck of the Emperor"), Fortuna Muliebris ("Women's Luck") or Fortuna Romana ("the Luck of Rome").

Fortuna was later integrated into Christianity as Fortune, keeper of the Wheel of Fortune, a concept which originated in classical times but that gained popularity during the Middle Age as an allegory of the temporality of the mortal plane. While the Wheel of Fortune's result could be either positive or negative, authors of the time preferred to depict the tragic side of the results. Fortuna is referenced in the play in Act III scene 5, after Romeo abandons the scene.

JULIET

O Fortune, Fortune! All men call thee fickle.
If thou art fickle, what dost thou with him
That is renowned for faith? Be fickle, Fortune,
For then I hope thou wilt not keep him long
But send him back.

Here, Juliet laments Romeo's fate and hope to see him again. This reflects how Fortune was referenced in the author's time, only mentioned when something tragic occurs, but at the same time Juliet invokes the goddess to spin the wheel one more time, hoping that luck will make Romeo return to Verona. But as she said, Fortune is fickle and could bring even more tragedy, which is what happens at the end.

The use of Fortuna in *Romeo and Juliet* can lead towards the question of what lead to the events of this play, fate or luck? In one hand, the events of the drama are sometimes too improbable to have happened unless fate is behind them, and Romeo did insult Cupid in Act I in the same way that Apollo insulted him in the myth of Daphne, so there could be said that a divine hand was guiding the events. At the other hand, the critical events of the play are more or less casualty, like the meeting with Tybalt in Act II that ends with the death of Mercutio and Tybalt, Romeo not receiving Friar Laurence's letter since it was believed that it comes from a house infested by the plague, Paris deciding to make a vigil in Juliet's tomb, etcetera. The fact that neither fate nor fortune can be confirmed to have been the main influence in *Romeo and Juliet* is why the figure of Fortuna is an important factor. Fortuna is the goddess of both fate and luck, and both elements are mixed through the play.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the importance of classical mythology in the creation of *Romeo and Juliet* has been made clear through this dissertation, and how classical mythology and literature affected the social and educational fields of the Renaissance, and the influence they had in the artists of that time.

Something that becomes clear after a careful analysis of the play is the intimate knowledge that Shakespeare possessed about Greco-Roman mythology, not only knowing the gods and characters of those myths, but the different myths that are associated with them. It is important to note how the only characters that make mythological references in *Romeo and Juliet* are those who realistically could possess such knowledge at that time it is set and written, which are those members of the cast who are either nobility or belong to a religious order. The use of mythological and classical references by these sectors of society responds to the ideals of the philosophy of humanism, which defended that classical knowledge could be used for the betterment of humanity.

The mastery that Shakespeare shows in employing classical mythology is not only visible in how he used it to distinguish between social classes, but also in the choices of the myths that appear in the drama. While most mythological references add little more than a more colourful dialogue, since they are employed as metonymies or metaphors, a better analysis of those myths reveal that they were chosen specifically since they all involved themes present in the play, despite the fact that these references not appearing in these allusions. The clearest example of this situation is Phaethon, who only appears alongside his father to represent the movement of the sun, but the truth is that this myth reflects one of the most important themes in *Romeo and Juliet*, that of young impulsiveness. Many other mythological references have their origins in myths that end with tragic romances, like Aurora or Echo, which foreshadows how the ending is going to be. Even Cupid, the god of love in Roman mythology, which appears in multiple myths, is not exempt of this analysis, since the particular myth which Shakespeare employs as a base for Cupid's references is Daphne's, in which Cupid is the one who creates the tragedy, which parallels how love is the spark that provokes of the events of the drama.

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