

Between reason and passion: the Ovidian myth of Pyramus and
Thisbe revisited in Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet /
*Entre a razão e a paixão: o mito ovidiano de Píramo e Tisbe
revisitado em Romeu e Julieta, de Shakespeare*

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ABSTRACT

This work aims to analyze two literary works: Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare and the myth of Pyramus and Thisbe, present in Book IV of The Metamorphoses, by the Latin poet Ovid. Comparing both, we investigate their tragic aspects in the light of Stoicism, according to the Latin philosopher and tragedian Seneca. The theoretical background includes Seneca, Cicero, and Brun (1986) for discussions regarding Stoicism; Aristotle, Brait (1980), and

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Ubersfeld (2010) for remarks concerning the character and the tragic; Bate and Rasmussen (2007) and Heliodora (2016) for discussions on Shakespeare; Closel (2011), Lucas (1922), and Lohner and Freitas (2014) to guide considerations about the Latin influence in the Elizabethan theatre. We believe that the characters responsible for moving the plots in the two works allow themselves to be influenced by affect us and, driven by passion, contrary to reason, they make imprudent decisions that result in catastrophes. Similar catastrophes in Shakespeare and Ovid portray the consequences of the soul which allows passion to settle, setting aside its rationality. As a result of non-restraint, tragic death functions as a pedagogical resource in the action for the readers of the tragic texts in question.

KEYWORDS: Pyramus and Thisbe; Romeo and Juliet; The Stoicism of Seneca; Affectus; Tragedy.

RESUMO

O presente artigo tem como objetivo realizar uma análise de duas obras literárias: *Romeu e Julieta*, de William Shakespeare e o mito *Píramo e Tísbe*, presente no livro IV das *Metamorfoses*, do poeta latino Ovídio. Ao comparar os dois textos, investigamos seus aspectos trágicos à luz do Estoicismo, como proposto pelo filósofo e tragediógrafo latino Sêneca. Os principais aportes teóricos são os textos de Sêneca, Cícero e Brun (1986) para as discussões acerca do Estoicismo; Aristóteles, Ubersfeld (2010) e Brait (1980) para as considerações acerca da personagem e do trágico; Bate e Rasmussen (2007) e Heliodora (2016) para discussões sobre Shakespeare; Closel (2011), Lucas (1922), e Lohner e Freitas (2014) para orientar as considerações acerca da influência latina no teatro Elisabetano. Consideramos que as personagens responsáveis por moverem os enredos nas duas obras deixam-se influenciar pelo *affectus* e, tomados pela paixão, contrária à razão, tomam decisões imprudentes que resultam em catástrofes. As catástrofes semelhantes em Shakespeare e em Ovídio retratam as consequências da alma que permite que a paixão se instale, colocando de lado a sua racionalidade. A morte trágica, como resultado do não comedimento, funciona, no trágico, como um recurso pedagógico aos leitores dos textos trágicos em questão.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Píramo e Tísbe*; *Romeu e Julieta*; Estoicismo senequiano; *Affectus*; *Tragédia*.

1 Introduction

We cannot very likely state that *The Metamorphoses* by the Latin poet Ovid is a popular work that those who are not researchers and scholars of Classical Languages would immediately associate with its content. We believe that by rescuing elements of its composition and proposing investigations of its text, we are cooperating with the diffusion and update of its wide narrative framework and themes. William Shakespeare, on the contrary, seems to be more widely known once the mediatic adaptation of his works favours the permanence of the universal themes discussed in the Bard's literary productions. *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, one of his main tragedies, remains alive in the people's imagination through several ways: either from the reading of the source text or the combination of cheese and guava paste as a dessert¹, for instance.

Although some may not know who Shakespeare was, but still know any information about *Romeo and Juliet*, it proves the immortality of the English actor and playwright, who was part of the consolidation of what we understand today as Elizabethan Theatre, in the final years of the Sixteenth century and the initial years of the Seventeenth. Even though William Shakespeare

¹In Brazil, this dessert is called "Romeo and Juliet".

was not the only representative playwright of Elizabethan Theatre, his was the most remarkable name; either because of the way he constructed the dramatic action, or because he integrated theatrical companies directly related to the Court: *The Chamberlain's Man* and, later when King James I ascended the Throne in 1603, *The King's Man*.

Shakespeare had contact with Latin literature since not being from so poor a family he attended grammar school, where he studied Latin and, studying the Latins — Ovid, Horace, Virgil — he consequently had access to the Greeks through them. Concerning some formal aspects, his tragedies are inspired by some Latin texts and, concerning plots, Shakespeare created them from stories that were part of medieval popular culture, having been recognized by the way he took such stories and retold them. Therefore, it is how he organized and constructed plots applying new points of view and themes that give him notoriety (HELIODORA, 2016).

It is worth highlighting the particular influence of the philosopher and tragedian Seneca on Shakespearean tragedies, for their tragedies have similarities concerning the dramatic construction. During the Sixteenth century, in England, Latin texts were used in Latin classes, and later, they were translated into English, hence the perceptible influence of Latin tradition on the tragedies of that time, even before Shakespeare. Regarding the elements of the Latin legacy on the dramatic composition of the English poet, we point according to Luna (2008), the presence of the linguistic convention of adopting an elevated language standard, which is an aspect that resembles the Tradition, the high style and even the high status of tragic heroes, in addition to the employment of the Senecan terrible ultra-pathetic through the emphasis on closed tragic conflicts:

The attention of the poet in “metamorphosing” the negativity of his deep tragic conflicts with the final appearances of new characters suggestive of hope (Malcolm in *Macbeth*, Fortinbras in *Hamlet* and Richmond in *Richard III*), is neither a rule in his tragedies nor is it explained by the influence of this medieval tradition, being perhaps (...) a resource inspired by Ovid (LUNA, 2008, p. 127, translated by the authors).

The first compilation of Senecan tragedies was published in 1581 under the title *Seneca His Tenne Tragedies: Translated Into Englysh*. In his study on the history of the Senecan influence in the Elizabethan Theatre, Closel (2011), based on Spearing (1921) and Winston (2006), discusses that a motivation for the translation of Seneca's tragedies must have been the popularization of these texts as well as the achievement of political privileges.

In his book *Seneca and the Elizabethan Tragedy*, Frank Lawrence Lucas claims that one of the reasons the texts of Seneca staged then were welcome is related to a cultural similarity between Elizabethan England and the Roman Empire of Seneca. Regarding the preference for Latins over Greeks, Lucas points out that

This preference was no mere chance, and not merely because Latin was more familiar than Greek. The rising infancy of English drama could find nothing in Classics so near its own level as the declining senility of Rome. Nero's Rome had the crudity of surfeit, Elizabethan England the crudity of hunger, his Rome the cruelty of over sophistication and decadence, her England the cruelty of raw and primitive youth" (LUCAS, 1922, p. 108).

Lucas' research, as well as others who studied the theme, do not shed light on the philosophical issues in Shakespeare's plays when compared to those by Seneca. Lucas (1922) makes comparisons to find similarities in the verses or any other elements that also constituted Seneca's theatre, such as the presence of ghosts, moralizing ends, the five-act structure, amongst others:

In addition to the stoic substratum, rhetorical devices used by Seneca are found by researchers mainly in the early phases of Shakespeare, in historical dramas such as *Richard III*. There, constructions of confrontational dialogues analogous to those in Seneca's plays are evident. However, there are also traces of the Latin author in *Hamlet*, such as self-dramatization in soliloquies. In the final phase of his career, there is still evidence of the Senecan elocution in the summoning of divinities by Prospero in *The Tempest* (LOHNER; FREITAS, 2014, p.102, translated by the authors).

Romeo and Juliet unfolds the use he adopted of his only virtual source, the poem *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet* [by Arthur Brooke] (HELIODORA, 2016, p. 8, translated by the authors). Although Shakespeare used Brooke's poem for the composition of his tragedy, we believe that he might have also taken the myth of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, as a reference. We can still conjecture that the Ovidian myth may have served as an inspiration for Arthur Brooke. Concerning the Latin influence on Shakespeare, Bate and Rasmussen point out:

One suspects that his conscious mind would have been more engaged by the stories he encountered: in Ovid he read of erotic obsessions and magical transformations from man to beast, in Caesar he found the technical vocabulary of warfare, and in Sallust the machinations of conspiracy and power politics (BATE; RASMUSSEN, 2007, p. 20).

This article aims to make a comparative analysis of the Ovidian mythological narrative, *Pyramus and Thisbe*, and the Shakespearian tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* observe their tragic intersections in the light of the Stoicism of Seneca, thus pointing to the influence of the Latin tragedian on the aforementioned tragic texts. We consider both texts as tragic actions, because in the course of the events, there happens a “change from bad fortune to good or from good fortune to bad, in a sequence of events which follow one another either inevitably or according to probability” (Arist., *Po.* 1451a 15)².

We summarize both plots as thus: Pyramus and Thisbe are two youngsters from different families who are forbidden to meet each other by their parents, so they talk to each other through a hole in the wall that divides their houses. They fall in love and decide to run away. They make plans to meet at Nino’s tomb, but Thisbe arrives there before Pyramus, and she is surprised by a lion. When trying to escape the animal, she lets her cloak fall, so the lion takes it and stains it with its mouth full of blood. When Pyramus arrives at the place and does not see his beloved, but only the bloody cloak, he is driven mad and stabs himself with a sword. Thisbe, on the other hand, leaves her hiding place and finds Pyramus almost dead. So she takes him in her arms and, by seeing him die, stabs herself too.

Romeo and Juliet are members of the families Montague and Capulet, respectively. Both families are known in Verona for their rivalry. In a ball at the Capulet’s house, Romeo meets Juliet for the first time, and they fall in love. After some secret meetings, Friar Lawrence pressures them to marry, so they get married but cannot stay together because Romeo had interfered in a duel between Mercutio and Tybalt, killing the latter. Romeo was then exiled. Enticed to marry Count Paris, Juliet, helped by Friar Lawrence, decides to drink an antidote which should make her look dead whilst she sleeps. The Friar sends a message to Romeo in the neighbouring city explaining what was accorded with Juliet. However, the message does not arrive at Romeo because the messenger is “trapped” in a town under quarantine. A friend of Romeo arrives first and tells him Juliet is dead. He heads back to Verona and finds her in the Capulet’s grave. As he thinks she has died, he buys poison from a physician and drinks it. Juliet wakes up soon afterwards and, seeing Romeo dead, takes his dagger and stabs herself in the chest.

²The references of ancient authors (Greek and Latin), in the body of the text, do not follow the ABNT norms; they are made by informing the author, the work and the internal divisions, which are used universally in good editions. This format is necessary so that the text can be found in any edition.

A common aspect that permeates the two narratives, our object of study, is the *pathos*, that is, the suffering that affects the soul of the hero causing him to take an irrational attitude. Among the aspects of Stoicism on which we will focus our analysis, we highlight the *affectus*, an irrational movement of the soul that, contrary to reason, subordinates the subject to a state over which he has no control. For Seneca, the soul taken by *affectus* lacks reason, hence temperance; therefore it is subordinate to vices and farther from virtue. By analysing Shakespeare's and Ovid's texts, we noticed how the influence of *affectus* or *passio* occurs, as well as its eventual consequences for the characters. Seneca brings in his work (philosophical and tragic) the Stoic concepts so that readers can learn through them. In other words, the philosopher and tragedian aims to help the individual to follow the path of virtue. Thus, the tragic texts analyzed herein can be considered pedagogical, since they teach readers that *affectus* can cause their downfall.

The theoretical framework of this paper consists of Bate and Rasmussen (2007), who study Shakespeare's complete works; Aristotle's *Poetics* and Luna (2005, 2008) discuss the underlying structure and concepts of the tragic action. The works by Seneca will guide the discussions on the *affectus*, mainly his texts *Of Anger* and *Moral Epistles*. Based on Luna, we reaffirm that “[the *Poetics* is] the main source from which concepts and ideas flow for the study of tragic art [literary art] and drama in general” (2005, p. 197, translated by the authors). For any theoretical considerations about the characters and their importance, we will use the texts by Ubersfeld (2010) and Brait (2017) as a basis.

2 Ovid and William Shakespeare: tragic intersections according to Aristotle and Seneca

When we first read the Ovidian myth and its tragic history lived by Pyramus and Thisbe, it immediately reminded us of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. This was most likely due to the similarities shared by the texts since there is a correspondence of actions that lead to a tragic outcome. We will therefore outline how the texts are constructed as well as their intersecting points.

In a literary work, according to Ubersfeld (2010, p. 72), the character is “the decisive device of the verticality of the text”, which means, we “enter” the literary work through the characters. Once they hold a “poetic place”, they also function as mediators. The conception of character for Aristotle is in accordance with Ubersfeld regarding their importance for the text. For

the Greek philosopher, however, they differ in the sense that the plot (*mythos*) and the action are more prominent than the characters, since “They do not, therefore, act to represent a character, but character-study is included for the sake of the action” (Arist., *Po.* 1450a 20). The actions enacted by the characters either in Shakespeare’s tragedy or in Ovid’s myth conduct the plot until its tragic ending, which is a consequence of their thoughtless choices due to acting moved by *affectus* as we will soon present.

In her study on *The Character*, Brait (2017) talks about several aspects and different historical conceptions of how the character was conceived and understood, even in contemporaneity. When presenting considerations on the *Ars Poetica* by the Latin poet Horace, she emphasizes the points in common with Aristotle’s *Poetics*, especially concerning the pedagogical function of poetry — poetry should be understood here as literary art as a whole — and the comprehension that characters have a moral faculty that is revealed through their actions.

Regarding the moral aspects of the characters, we can establish a connection with the Senecan-Stoic philosophy because once they are free from divine will, characters can make their own decisions, thus making moral choices whose consequences they must assume. The possibility of acting according to one’s will (*uoluntas*) provides the character with the alternative of developing oneself towards virtue as a necessary condition for the individual to reach complete happiness and have a happy life.

Beyond being responsible for the catharsis, that is the purification of the feelings of fear and piety, thus provoked by the catastrophe that befalls the character who is unfortunate without deserving it, tragic action has a pedagogical aspect shared by Seneca and Horace. On the pedagogical function of literature, we believe, according to the examples that might be presented to the reader, it can be didactic when teaching to reach virtue and happiness by living a virtuous life.

Related to this view present in Senecan-Stoic literature, Horace, in his *Ars Poetica*, understands that the notions of morality and virtue, as they are part of the statute of men, suppose imitation, so the character is conceived as a model to be imitated. Therefore, Horace corroborates with a tradition that evaluates characters based on human models (BRAIT, 2017).

Tragic heroes are thus conceived as models for actions that should not be practised, above all because they happen under *affectus* and irrationally moved by *pathos*, hence by

suffering. From this point, we will focus our analysis by establishing a comparison between the two plots of the works aiming to identify similarities regarding their tragic construction, basing our interpretation on Senecan Stoicism, highlighting stoic concepts, particularly *affectus*, which moves the plots by Ovid and Shakespeare.

Something prevents the couples from staying together in both plots, and that happens for different reasons. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the Montagues and Capulets are entwined in a fight that lasts years and causes the deaths of the two youngsters, but also the deaths of other young from the two families, “victims of a hatred whose origin is never identified” (HELIODORA, 2016, p. 18, translated by the authors). Shakespeare puts into action two powerful feelings that are constantly present in the play in a complementary or opposite way: love and hate. Both are characterized as feelings that awaken in the character obsessions that can lead him to irrationality, to the point where Mercutio, Romeo's friend, suggests that love is just a dream or illusion, to which Romeo blesses the night, but acknowledges his fear that “Being in night, all this is but a dream,/ Too flattering sweet to be substantial” (SHAKESPEARE, 2000, 140-141).

Basing the analysis of the two works on Senecan-Stoic philosophy, we can state that love and hate are vices attached to passion, or *affectus*, according to Seneca. And the passions, in turn, are responsible for removing the individual from the path of goodness, of virtue. Passion is a feeling external to the soul that needs its contentment to be installed within and once within the soul, passion displaces reason, leading the individual to act impulsively and be taken by irrationality. It means that they cannot cohabit in the individual's soul. If the individual allows the domination of passion, it means they will be way farther from reaching virtue. The Stoics classified passion as an irrational movement of the soul that sets itself against reason and nature, thus subdividing it into types related to affection, which explains the passionate phenomena (*passio*; passion): pain, fear, concupiscence and pleasure. Diôgenes Laêrtios (D.L. VII) characterizes pain as an irrational contraction of the soul, besides listing its species: compassion, envy, jealousy, rivalry, grief, melancholy, restlessness, anguish and madness. He defines fear as an “evil expectation” and manifests itself through terror, excitement, shame, dismay, panic, and restlessness.

The Ovidian myth is not clear regarding why the parents of Pyramus and Thisbe do not allow their proximity, even though it does not prevent us from conjecturing. Would these two families have problems between them? Did the parents think their children were too young and

thus immature to meet each other? There is no answer to this. The two youngsters had a physical and palpable barrier symbolizing separation, the desire to achieve something seemingly impossible. They are symbolically apart by a wall that, in addition to being a paradigm of the unachievable, seems also ambiguous, since “There was a slender chink in the party-wall of the two houses, which it had at some former time received when it was building” (OV., *Met.* IV, 65-66). At the same time that the wall separates them, acting as the palpable object that represents the impossibility of being together, is also responsible for allowing them to communicate through the chink, thus also bringing the two lovers together.

The ambiguous symbolism of the wall and its chink is clearly presented in the speech of the protagonists who curse and thank the wall:

‘O envious wall’, they would say, ‘why do you stand between lovers? How small a thing ‘twould be for you to permit us to embrace each other, or, if this be too much, to open for our kisses! But we are not ungrateful. We owe it to you, we admit, that a passage is allowed by which our words may go through loving ears” (OV., *Met.* IV, 73-77).

In the speech of the youngsters, the human feeling of jealousy is attributed to the wall, since it interposes between their love. The wall may also symbolize their parents who, for reasons unknown, are against the love of the young. The wall is for the Ovidian myth what the surnames are for the Shakespearean tragedy: two relatively banal elements. The wall could open and make their meeting possible whilst their surnames (*Montague* and *Capulet*) could be “changed” as pointed by Juliet:

‘Tis but thy name that is my enemy.
Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.
[...] What’s in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other word would smell as sweet.
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo called,
Retain that dear perfection which he owes
(SHAKESPEARE, 2000, 39-40. 43-46).

We can also read the wall and the surnames through the lens of Senecan-Stoicism in regards to anger. We understand that this is the main reason for the tragic actions, so the elements we commented on here can also be understood as symbols of the anger shared between the two families. Still, concerning anger as a manifestation of lack of restraint, responsible for replenishing the individual from the full faculties of *lógos*, we highlight the constant

reckless duels fought in the streets of Verona between the two families, as presented in Shakespeare's tragedy. From the unreasonable attitudes of the families, we notice that there is a relation between prudence and lack of restraint. Prudence is directly related to restraint, which is a necessary principle for human life since the lack of it destroys the individual. Romeo's friend Mercutio is constantly taken by impetuous attitudes when provoking and being provoked by the Capulets, almost always resulting in a duel because of trivial matters. We present the episode in which Tybalt, from the house Capulet, fights Mercutio, thus killing him:

TYBALT: Gentlemen, good e'en. A word with one of you.

MERCUTIO: And but one word with one of us? Couple it with something. Make it a word and a blow.

[...] O calm, dishonorable, vile submission!

Alla stoccata carries it away. (He draws.)

Tybalt, you ratcatcher, will you walk?

TYBALT: What wouldst thou have with me?

MERCUTIO: Good king of cats, nothing but one of your nine lives.

(SHAKESPEARE, 2000, 37-39. 71-75)

That duel ends in two great catastrophes: the death of Mercutio by Tybalt and, afterwards, the death of Tybalt by Romeo. The latter avenges his friend, and by killing Tybalt, he is exiled from Verona. We can observe how the absence of prudence easily leads the characters to fighting, that represents the effects of furor, thus moving them towards revenge. The desire for revenge added to the preexisting rivalry between the two houses is the cause of Romeo and Juliet's conviction since the individual ridden by anger aims to cause pain and suffering through revenge. Feelings such as anger and revenge, in turn, are not present in Ovid's narrative, but passion, responsible for lack of restraint, is. From now on, we shall see how passion is discussed in the plot of *Pyramus and Thisbe*.

Pyramus and Thisbe live a passion that gradually grows as it is spatially repressed. They are in conflict with the desire for one another. Two lines of the text exemplify it: "the more they covered up the fire, the more it burned" (*Ov. Met.*, IV, 62); "How small a thing 'twould be for you to permit us to embrace each other" (*Ov. Met.*, IV, 74). The author clearly states the erotic desire that one feels towards the other, especially by mentioning a fire that burns. The fire in this sense might represent the energy of the love they feel and the will to consolidate it through their bodies, as they desperately want to unite them. So strong is this desire that both decide to run away together, thus committing a transgression which refers to the predominance of irrationality over

reason — a consequence of *affectus*: they take this attitude moved by desire and, therefore, cannot measure the possible consequences of their acts.

There is a similar action depicted in the tragedy by Shakespeare: when they meet and perceive that passion was born, Romeo and Juliet not only manifest the energy of erotic desire in their speech but decide to marry in secret so as not to break the code of honour (a factor which cannot be applied to Roman context since it would be anachronic). It is noteworthy that their relationship is not that of a love that does not pass through the scrutiny of sex. On the contrary, the play is full of sexual and erotic references, even so, we cannot forget that Romeo and Juliet are young and expect something more from one another as explicit in these lines that show their first meeting: “ROMEO: O, wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?/ JULIET: What satisfaction canst thou have tonight?” (SHAKESPEARE, 2000, 125-126). Considering the dialogue that comes before this one, we can understand that by “unsatisfied”, Romeo also refers to the consummation of the love they share.

Whilst Pyramus and Thisbe plan to run away to stay together, Romeo and Juliet plan to marry since Juliet, particularly, has to deal with a specific concern: “For a girl in Shakespeare’s time, chastity was a priceless commodity. To lose her virtue without the prospect of marriage would be to lose herself” (BATE; RASMUSSEN, 2007, p. 1676). The reference to the care and maintenance of chastity is also present in the advice given by Friar Lawrence, an emblematic character who always using reason, tries to maintain order throughout the play.

These violent delights have violent ends
And in their triumph die, like fire and powder,
Which, as they kiss, consume.
[...] Come, come with me, and we will make short work,
For, by your leaves, you shall not stay alone
Till Holy Church incorporate two in one.
(SHAKESPEARE, 2000, 9-11; 35-37)

In the friar's speech, we emphasize the relationship between 'pleasure' and 'violent end', in which we can identify *affectus* (pleasure) that takes the soul of individuals, leading them to practice excessive actions causing their misfortune.

There are flash-forwards and foreshadowing in both plots that help the reader understand the course of the action. In the case of the Ovidian myth, we see the following (not so clear) foreshadowing: “[...] they were to meet at Ninus’ tomb and hide in the shade of a tree” (Ov. *Met.* IV, 88). The image of the tomb, as well as the shade, evokes the idea of death regarding the

place they are to meet. In the Shakespearian text, there are not necessarily flash-forwards because the play prologue announces the death of the protagonists. However, if it were not for the prologue, we can consider the following speech by Romeo just before he meets Juliet as a foreshadowing at least: “I fear too early, for my mind misgives/ Some consequence yet hanging in the stars/ Shall bitterly begin his fearful date/ With this night’s revels” (SHAKESPEARE, 2000, 101-104). Flash-forwards can help the attentive reader in the construction of the meanings in the text once we can read it from the expectancy of the observed flash-forward.

Even though the Ovidian myth is not a tragedy, it is configured from tragic elements, and thus we understand based on Aristotle’s words regarding the tragedy. Note what the Stagirite understands by Tragedy:

Tragedy is, then, a representation of an action that is heroic and complete and of a certain magnitude—by means of language enriched with all kinds of ornament, each used separately in the different parts of the play: it represents men in action and does not use narrative, and through pity and fear it effects relief to these and similar emotions (Arist., *Po.* 1449b 25).

The composing elements of a tragedy, according to the Greek philosopher, can be found in *Romeo and Juliet* since Shakespeare had access to Latin tragedians who, in turn, had the Greeks as reference. However, there is certain flexibility in the words of Aristotle that allow us to extend the concepts to literary art, not only dramatic, since, in his *Ars Poetica*, Aristotle also used examples taken from epic poems.

A characterizing element of the tragedy is the catastrophe, and it is present in both plots. Both in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Pyramus and Thisbe*, there is an imbalance caused by an error whose responsibility lies with the characters. These errors are not of divine responsibility, that is, they are not predestined by the gods, but rather caused by the *hybris* of the characters. Our assertion about the non-divine responsibility of the hero, but his *uoluntas* (will), is based on Senecan-Stoic philosophy. The Stoics believed the *lógos* as not susceptible to errors, which means the individual must follow providence (destiny) for them not to happen. Although Seneca assured that the man has the power to choose to remain in the vulgar or to pursue happiness, we understand that this decision is not entirely free because, for him to be happy and achieve virtue, he must necessarily accept what *lógos* wants. The individual may not want to follow the *lógos* but choosing this path, the consequences are disastrous, since he will live in error and vices, far from truth and virtue, living as a pawn of fortune.

Reason provides the individual with the necessary knowledge to decide which path to choose; it also quiets impulsivity, desire and eliminates fear. The man is a divine being doted with reason; he, therefore, is naturally born good but becomes vulnerable to vices since he lives in a society where individuals are soul-sick. Thus those not endowed with wisdom can be influenced by the environment in which they live and let themselves be affected by what is outside, especially if they are always in contact with people who live far from virtue, that is, dominated by vices. Seneca teaches us that vices are unnatural but generated from the coexistence of the individual in society (Sen., Ep. 94, 54-56) since he lets himself be affected by external pleasures. In nature, there is what is beneficial (wisdom and virtue) and what is harmful (ignorance and vice). Intrinsically related to this are actions that can be right when they follow the logos and those not right, which are the actions driven by vices and passion. For the Stoics, living means feeling; and Brun (1986, p. 36, translated by the authors) helps us to understand what this means: “to feel is to have the senses and soul affected by what is exterior, this change might be in harmony, in which we are in the truth, or it can be in disagreement, in which we are in error and passion”.

Under the influence of Senecan-Stoic drama, Shakespeare makes the will of the hero prevail. We can notice in his texts that man is responsible for his actions. We recognize this aspect in the Ovidian myth of Pyramus and Thisbe, which emerges in a context when, although there is still a strong influence of the gods in several aspects and situations, the character is responsible for the catastrophe. The tragedy is, therefore, driven by passion, the fear of having lost the beloved makes heroes take their own lives.

According to Cicero, through the definition used by Zenon, passion is what distresses the soul, and it is contrary to reason and nature (Cic., *Tusc.* IV, 11). As we have stated before, passion (*affectus*) is a feeling external to the soul, and the individual must not allow it to arise because, once it is present, it cannot be controlled as it does not obey reason. The disobedience to reason happens because the cause of *affectus* is external to the soul; so, when criticizing the peripatetics, Seneca states that

it makes no difference how great the passion is; no matter what its size may be, it knows no obedience, and does not welcome advice. Just as no animal, whether wild or tamed and gentle, obeys reason [...] so the passions do not follow or listen, however slight they are. [...] Again, if reason prevails, the passions will not even get a start; but if they get under way against the will of reason, they will maintain themselves against the will of reason. For it is

easier to stop them in the beginning than to control them when they gather force (Sen., *Ep.* 85, 8-9).

Cicero (*Tusc.* IV, 16) lists some subdivisions concerning disturbances: in the domain of fear are laziness, shame, terror, fear, dread, awe, disturbance and apprehension; whilst joyful malevolence with the evil of others, delight, and vanity are related to pleasure; and in the domain of sensuality are anger, fury, hatred, enmity, discord, destitution, and desire.

“The tracks of the beast” (*Ov.*, *Met.* IV, 105) are the first images that awaken fear in Pyramus and immediately turn him completely pale. At this moment, it happens what Seneca calls the prelude of passion: the soul of Pyramus is deceived by the tracks of the beast, thus opening itself so that fear enters it. The second image is the cloak smeared in the blood (*Ov.*, *Met.* IV, 107), which makes the soul of Pyramus, already dominated by passion, take a disastrous and tragic attitude. The disturbances listed by Cicero are manifest in his soul: fear, awe and fury. Overwhelmed by these feelings that bring with them overwhelming suffering, the hero announces: “One night shall bring two lovers to death” (*Ov.*, *Met.* IV, 108).

Romeo is also seized by fear, but even before finding Juliet “dead like” in the tomb. While still in exile, the messenger Balthasar manages to arrive before Friar Lawrence messenger, informing Romeo of the “death” of Juliet. From this instant, Romeo embodies an attitude that, although already seized by irrationality, is rather premeditated regarding the tragic plans he intends to fulfil. From the messenger's speeches, we can identify that the news brought by Balthasar awakens the fear in Romeo: “I do beseech you, sir, have patience:/ Your looks are pale and wild, and do import/ Some misadventure” (SHAKESPEARE, 2000, 26-28). Romeo, unbalanced due to fear, chooses death when he buys poison from an apothecary, thus understanding death as something to be welcomed, since he would not have Juliet's correspondence to his passion by his side anymore: “Come, cordial and not poison, go with me/ To Juliet's grave, for there must I use thee” (SHAKESPEARE, 2000, 85-86).

According to Seneca, the cause of anger is found in injury and it arises from an erroneous judgment of the image perceived by the soul. As a precise consequence, anger must be overflowed by its only aim, which is revenge. We can better understand its definition from what Seneca expounds in the dialogue *On Anger*:

this consists wholly in action and the impulse of grief, raging with an utterly inhuman lust for arms, blood and tortures, careless of itself provided it hurts another, rushing upon the very point of the sword, and greedy for revenge

even when it drags the avenger to ruin with itself. [...] it is equally devoid of self control, regardless of decorum, forgetful of kinship, obstinately engrossed in whatever it begins to do, deaf to reason and advice, excited by trifling causes, awkward at perceiving what is true and just, and very like a falling rock which breaks itself to pieces upon the very thing which it crushes (Sen., *Ir.* I 1, 1-2).

The philosopher uses two meaningful adjectives to describe anger: *concitatus* (excitement, rapture) and *impetus* (impulse), both derived from verbs that indicate violent movement towards something or someone, a "launching towards"³. *Affectus* occurs through stimuli external to the soul, triggering fear, affecting the one who lets himself be overcome by anger by making him throw himself violently, moved by destructive revenge, towards something or someone, with the sole objective of causing pain and suffering.

Guilt is one of the feelings which affects Pyramus, being one of the reasons that cause him pain, and arise the nefarious fury:

"On my head lies all the guilt. I have been the cause of your death, poor girl, in that I bade you come forth by night into this dangerous place, and did not myself come hither first. Come, rend my body and devour my guilty flesh with your fierce fangs, O all ye lions who have your lairs beneath this cliff!" (Ov., *Met.* IV, 110-114).

Seized by passion, by the pain of loss, that is, totally lacking in reason, his soul allows the devastating movement or impulse to emerge. Seneca teaches us that "whilst anger is the foe of reason, it nevertheless does not arise in any place where reason cannot dwell" (Sen., *Ir.* I 3, 4). Therefore, anger is an impulse that must be overflowed, ravishing reason along with it. And as an impulse, it necessarily needs the soul's consent. In the process of the outbreak of anger, there is an initial feeling regardless of the will of the soul, for it is still not the passion but a prelude. Then, the movement depends on the attitude of the soul, as it affects it in some way once it feels offended - in this moment of weakness of the soul, passion settles, takes over the whole being, and begins its quest in search of revenge. Finally, the individual, all taken by *affectus*, angry, cannot discharge himself from anger. There happens a mental disorder in the individual taken by anger, preventing him from controlling his actions, manifesting an irascible outburst of intense but

³ Respectively, *concito*, -as, -are, -avi, -atum - frequentative of *concio*, *concio* (GAFFIOT, 2000, pp. 376-377); or as a compound of *cieo*, -es, -itum (ERNOUT; MEILLET, 2001, pp. 119-120); and *impeto*, -is, -ère, -, -itum(in, peto) (GAFFIOT, 2000, p. 788); or as a compound of *peto*, -is, -ère, -iui(ii), -itum (ERNOUT; MEILLET, 2001, p. 503, translated by the authors).

fleeting fury. At this moment, the man resembles an irrational animal⁴, once he finds himself destitute of his rational ability, he is completely given over to *affectus*. Moreover, his soul became passionate and lost its primitive health.

When he sees Thisbe's cloak smeared in blood, Pyramus despairs. Now, he could have thought of an alternative, or waited a little longer, or even cried for her, but the profoundly human characteristic of despair at a possible loss, and already completely taken over by *affectus*, proves to be essential in the construction of the action developed by Ovid. The same could be argued about Romeo, who, if waited some more seconds, would have avoided the catastrophe.

The hero of the Ovidian myth, taken by the pain of imagining having lost his beloved

[...] picks up Thisbe's cloak and carries it to the shade of the trysting-tree. And while he kisses the familiar garment and bedews it with his tears, he cries: 'Drink now my blood too.' So saying, he drew the sword which he wore girt about it, plunged the blade into his side, and straight away, with his dying effort, drew the sword from his warm wound (Ov., *Met.* IV, 115-119).

Thisbe, recognizing the wounded and dying loved one on the ground, also allows passion to affect her soul. As Pyramus had done before, she lets herself be carried away by the pain and suffering that unleashes the fury that makes her wound her arms (Ov., *Met.* IV, 139) and, then, pull her hair off (Ov., *Met.* IV, 140). Acting on impulse and motivated by passion, she screams, suffers and decides: "I, too, have a hand brave for this one deed; I, too, have love! This shall give me strength for the fatal blow" (Ov., *Met.*, IV, 150-151). After a painful soliloquy, Thisbe "[...] fitting the point beneath her breast, she fell forward on the sword which was still warm with her lover's blood" (Ov., *Met.*, IV, 162-163).

Pyramus and Romeo, as well as Thisbe and Juliet, are similar in the sense that they all let themselves be dominated by passion, and their actions demonstrate the irrationality caused by the absence of reason in their souls.

Once we discussed catastrophes, Aristotle understands it as "a destructive or painful occurrence, such as a death on the stage, acute suffering and wounding and so on" (Arist., *Po.* 1452b 10). We believe it difficult to refute that the deaths of Romeo and Juliet, as well as those of Pyramus and Thisbe, are great catastrophes. Save their distinctions, they explore the *páthos* of

⁴ Seneca lists numerous physical signs in his text *On Anger* (Sen., *Ir.* I 1, 4); and, to exemplify the prominence of anger, the philosopher uses the aggressiveness of irrational animals, assuring that "no animal is so horrendous and so dangerous by nature that it is not apparent in it, as soon as the anger has invaded it, the addition of renewed ferocity." (Sen., *Ir.* I 1, 6-7). It is necessary to emphasize that animals are not aware of anger, they only manifest a similar feeling; they were deprived not only of virtues, but also of vices.

the spectator and the reader for it is the death of the characters for futile and banal reasons for disagreements, in addition to the characters having goodness in themselves, that is, being more prone to good than to evil (Arist., *Po.* 1454a 20).

The difference in the catastrophes of the two works, for example, relies on the exploitation of violence. Romeo drinks the poison, and before dying, he says: “O true apothecary:/ Thy drugs are quick. Thus with a kiss I die” (SHAKESPEARE, 2000, 119-120); whilst Juliet says: “O happy dagger,/ This is thy sheath; there rest, and let me die” (SHAKESPEARE, 2000, 169-170). Although Juliet stabs herself on the scene, these catastrophic actions are not similar to those described in Ovid’s text.

Ovid makes the violent aspect of the deaths of the two lovers much clearer. Pyramus drives a sword into his bowels and “[drows] the sword out of his warm wound. As he lay stretched upon the earth the spouting blood leapt high” (Ov., *Met.*, IV, 120-121). When describing the death of Thisbe, the realism that the figure can build in the mind of the reader does not make it any less crude: “But when after a little while she recognizes her lover, she smites her innocent arms with loud blows of grief, and tears her hair; and embracing the well-beloved form, she fills his wounds with tears, mingling these with his blood” (Ov., *Met.*, IV, 137-141).

We understand that, differently from Shakespeare’s dramatic text, Ovid’s epic was not written aiming at the stage. Even if Shakespeare had invested in violent scenes like duels and murderings in his tragedies, the resources available at the playhouses, despite being ahead of time for that context, would not be enough for a performance richer in details beyond those fitting for the conventions as well as the conditions. Therefore, we believe that this is one of the main reasons that allow Ovid to describe a more violent and grotesque death than its presentation on stage would be possible.

Both deaths arouse fear and pity. In Shakespeare, it happens because Romeo and Juliet are just married and very young, besides dying for a family brawl which they might not even understand the essence. Not only the catastrophes themselves but also the speech of the characters appears as fundamental for the arousal of fear and pity: “pity for the undeserved misfortune, fear for the man like ourselves” (Arist., *Po.* 1453a 5). Both Juliet and Romeo, when contemplating each other’s swooning bodies, are capable of arousing deep pity from the audience or the reader, as well as Thisbe when she finds her beloved suffering. In addition to their deaths, we can highlight Thisbe’s speech when she witnesses the suffering of Pyramus: “O,

my Pyramus, what mischance has reft you from me? Pyramus! answer me. “Tis your dearest Thisbe calling you. Oh, listen, and lift your drooping head!” (Ov., *Met.* IV, 142-144). Thisbe’s speeches before the body of Pyramus potentialize *páthos*. It is also relevant to mention another aspect that is not present in *Romeo and Juliet*, that is the fact that Pyramus is yet to die when Thisbe finds him, so she witnesses and lives the impossible and the unachievable until the last moment. Because of the wounds he inflicted on himself, nothing else would save him.

We can mention the sacrifice as necessary for establishing a new situation, as a characteristic that, if it does not unite, it brings the two stories together considerably. In Shakespeare’s tragedy, not only the death of the protagonists, but also that of the other youngsters of the rival families, is mourned by the Prince of Verona, and these deaths are the pure sacrifice that ends the rivalry between Montagues and Capulets:

MONTAGUE: For I will ray her statue in pure gold,
That whiles Verona by that name is known,
There shall no figure at such rate be set
As that of true and faithful Juliet.
CAPULET: As rich shall Romeo’s by his lady’s lie,
Poor sacrifices of our enmity.
(SHAKESPEARE, 2000, 299-305).

The same happens to Pyramus and Thisbe, so we can imply that their sacrifice established a new state of their love given that they could not stay together in life, this was at least granted them in death. As to their families, we do not know if they were rivals, but they agree not to separate Pyramus and Thisbe: “Her prayers touched the gods and touched the parents; for the colour of the mulberry fruit is dark red when it is ripe and all that remained from both funeral pyres rests in a common urn” (Ov., *Met.* IV, 164-166).

Conclusion

The themes we can reflect upon in the Ovidian myth also appear in Shakespeare as the intense passions converge into dramatic transformations and the energy of love that emanates from young hearts brutally drains away. In the words of Bate and Rasmussen (2017, p. 165), “Pyramus and Thisbe meet by an ancient tomb outside the city. They fall to earth in death, but their love is symbolically remembered in the ripening of the blood-dark mulberry”. The connection with the earth might also be found in *Romeo and Juliet* when Friar Lawrence states: “The Earth

that's nature's mother is her tomb; What is her burying grave, that is her womb" (SHAKESPEARE, 2000, 9-10).

The idea of renewal and hope permeates the two tragic endings, in the perennial memory of young people through ripe mulberries and, in another, the renewal that symbolizes the establishment of a new reality, since the Montagues and the Capulets only reconcile because of the sacrifice wrought by Romeo and Juliet.

It is worth highlighting here, from the Senecan-Stoic philosophy, how passion - *affectus* - is responsible for moving the two plots. Both anger and love conflict at all times with *lógos*, that is, the impulses of the soul seized by *affectus* are translated in the plots by actions that engender tragic consequences, namely, the inexplicable anger established between the two rival families of Verona, and the unrestrained love between Romeo and Juliet, and between Pyramus and Thisbe.

From the point of view of Stoicism, the texts by Ovid and Shakespeare can be regarded as instruments that might provide the reader/spectator with a didactic experience given the *pathos* evoked by the actions of the characters. The catastrophic outcomes, hence tragic, serve as learning to their different receptions. Although it is not possible to measure how transforming a literary work can be for each reader, we believe in its didactic potential regarding the reflection on the importance of the faculty of reason and the education of the feelings raised by the tragic action.

The reading of both works can provide reflections on restraint and prudence, reflections that, according to Senecan-Stoicism, should be applied to practice and not just remain in the field of theory. We realized how the anger of the two families incited gratuitous duels that resulted in the death of young people. We also identified the following aspect of Shakespeare's play: the number of young people who die because of the anger of others, which easily takes their souls, making them co-responsible for the rivalry. In *Pyramus and Thisbe*, passion, which had deprived them of all restraint and prudence, is responsible for their deaths. Therefore, the lack of balance of the characters is didactic, through which moderation and balance can be learned.

The death of the characters is necessary for the occurrence of a transformation and it can be validated by the fact that the two families learned from the catastrophes that resulted from their anger. In particular, we would like to draw attention to the new reality created by the death of *Pyramus and Thisbe*. Their death, which takes place under a mulberry tree, presents contradictory symbolic characteristics since the tree represents life or vitality. However, even after

their death, we cannot see the absence of life since the blood of *Pyramus and Thisbe* water the tree and paint the mulberries purple, imprinting on nature the vitality of a love that was once intense.

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