

**INVESTIGATING VIOLENT LANGUAGE: MIMETIC DESIRE,  
GENDER NORMS, AND ACTS OF VIOLENCE IN SHAKESPEARE'S  
*ROMEO AND JULIET***

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**Abstract:** This study focuses on the theoretical frameworks of René Girard's mimetic desire theory and John Searle's illocutionary acts to investigate violent language in the play and its relationships with gender norms and mimetic in *Romeo and Juliet*. Through an analysis of the character's discourse, the research unveils how society's expectations of masculinity and individuals mimetic desire create rivalry and violence. In today's world where society experiences violence in all its forms, sensitization about the factors behind violent language is a must to resolve modern conflict.

**Keywords:** gender, language, mimetic desire, violence, norm.

**Résumé :** Cette étude s'appuie sur les cadres théoriques du désir mimétique de René Girard et des actes illocutoires de John Searle pour étudier le langage violent dans la pièce et ses relations avec les normes de genre et le désir mimétique dans *Roméo et Juliette*. À travers une analyse du discours des personnages, la recherche dévoile comment les attentes de la société en matière de masculinité et le désir mimétique des individus engendrent de la rivalité et de la violence. Dans le monde d'aujourd'hui, où la société fait l'expérience de la violence sous toutes ses formes, la sensibilisation aux facteurs qui sous-tendent le langage violent est une nécessité pour résoudre les conflits modernes.

**Mots-clés:** genre, langage, désir mimétique, violence, norme.

## Introduction

Shakespeare's famous work *Romeo and Juliet* has often been analyzed in terms of both love and gender issues. However, this play not only deals with the tragic love of Romeo and Juliet but also implies issues of violent language, rivalry, and mimetic desire under patriarchy. Patriarchy is a system that privileges men over women due to discriminatory gender norms. These norms are a set of rules for behaviors and desires related to gender. In the play, masculinity appears in terms of aggression and power, while femininity involves submissiveness and obedience. The pressure to conform to these norms leads individuals to mimic societal expectations and each other's behaviors causing rivalry and violence. René Girard calls this fact "mimetic desire". The study seeks to investigate violent language in the play and its relationships with gender norms and mimetic. Two questions will be raised: What are the causes of violent language? What are the tragic impacts of violent language? As a theoretical framework, John Searle's illocutionary acts and René Girard's concept of mimetic desire will be used.

Searle's acts will describe the language used by characters in their discourse and its function in creating a volatile environment where violence occurs out of gender norms and mimetic desire. Girard's mimetic desire will be useful in portraying the psychological behavior of the characters related to gender norms and the tragic impact of this behavior.

### 1. The Underpinnings of Violent Language

Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is pervaded with violent language influenced by gender norms and mimetic desire. Aggression, threats, insults, and provocative attitudes can be identified as the cornerstone of violent language. In the play, this type of language takes many forms such as verbal insults, curses, and hated speech. It is mainly highlighted by illocutionary acts. Illocutionary acts refer to the production of acts to ask question, giving an order, promising, or affirming the truth of a proposition. John Searle (1975) identifies five categories: directive, permissive, assertive, expressive, and declarative.

The understanding of the character's use of violent language and violent acts can be also demonstrated by Girard's theory of mimetic desire. For him, people used to desire the same and imitate each other. His theory centers around the concept of a mimetic triangle. This triangle includes three elements such as a subject, an object, and a mediator. R. Girard (1976) argues that when two subjects desire the same object rivalry and violence occur:



Rivalry does not arise because of the fortuitous convergence of two desires on a single object; rather, the subject desires the object because the rival desires it. In desiring an object, the rival alerts the subject to the desirability of the object. The rival, then, serves as a model for the subject, not only in regard to such secondary matters as style and opinions but also, and more essentially, in regard to desires. (R. Girard, 1979, p.147)

This mimetic conflict has to be restored by a mediator. In the play, the two subjects are symbolically represented by the members of the family enemies: The Capulets and The Montagues. They desire the same object which is the power of the city and the maintaining of their honor. As a consequence, rivalry and violence occur and are related to gender norms. In Verona, masculinity was defined in terms of dominance and aggression while submission and chastity were related to femininity. The willingness to mimic these norms affects the language of the subjects of both families. For instance, both Capulets' and Montagues' language are violently oriented. The following dialogue emphasizes their aggressive language:

CAPULET

What noise is this? Give me my long sword, ho!

LADY CAPULET A crutch, a crutch! why call you for a sword?

CAPULET

My sword, I say! Old Montague is come, And flourishes his blade in spite of me.

*Enter MONTAGUE and LADY MONTAGUE*

MONTAGUE

Thou villain Capulet,—Hold me not, let me go.(I.1.p.246)

This exchange highlights not only the hatred between both families but also men's obsession with asserting their masculine power through their readiness to enter into dueling and being verbally aggressive. Capulet's directive utterances "Give me my long sword, ho!" and "My sword, I say! Old Montague is come, And flourishes his blade in spite of me" depict his hatred for Montague as well as his desire to maintain the honor and his predisposition to defend his family in case of insecurity. Montague's verbal insult and assertive speech "Thou villain Capulet" reflects the reciprocal hatred between them.

Both Capulet and Montague represent the patriarchal authorities of their families. All members are under control and should obey them. Therefore, each male members used to imitate their actions especially those concerning gender norms. For R. Girard (1976), people often imitate the behavior of those in power. Unsurprisingly, Capulet and Montague's language of violence and sense of aggressivity are adopted by their relatives. For instance, the entrance of Sampson and Gregory in the first scene demonstrates the imitation of Capulet's behavior: "*Enter SAMPSON and GREGORY, of the house of Capulet, armed with swords and*



*bucklers* (I.1.p.245)”. The swords and bucklers symbolize conflict and the desire whether to protect oneself or the honor of their family. In Verona, a patriarchal society, men used to assert their masculinity through physical confrontation and dueling. Fighting served as a way to demonstrate their masculinity. Both Sampson and Gregory’s following speeches reveal their readiness to maintain the honor of their family and measure their masculinity in case of confrontations with the Montagues:

SAMPSON

I mean, an we be in choler, we'll draw.

GREGORY

Ay, while you live, draw your neck out o' th' collar.

SAMPSON

I strike quickly, being moved.

GREGORY

But thou art not quickly moved to strike.

SAMPSON

A dog of the house of Montague moves me. (I.1.p.245)

Sampson’s directive act “I mean, an we be in choler, we'll draw” reflects his hatred towards the Montagues and informs Gregory that his action of striking will depend on the ability of the opposite clan to upset him. Like Montague he uses the verbal insult to express his disdain: “A dog of the house of Montague moves me”. Through this assertive utterance, Sampson qualifies a member of the Montague family as a dog to dehumanize them. It is also a strategy to boast about himself and express his power and superiority. Furthermore, his readiness to unsheathe following Montague’s provocation reinforces men’s obsession to assert their power and masculinity through confrontations. This obsession not only led them to imitate the patriarch of their family but especially their enemies: “The quarrel is between our masters and us their men” (I.1.p.245). This put forward Girard’s (1976) ideas of the emergence of violence as a result of mimetic desire and rivalry for scarce resources and social status: “the priority of rivalry over desire inevitably increases the amount of suffering caused by vanity” (p.136).

Moreover, Sampson’s speech is filled with aggressivity toward both men and women:

GREGORY

That shows thee a weak slave; for the weakest goes to the wall.

SAMPSON

'Tis true; and therefore women, being the weaker vessels, are ever thrust to the wall:

-therefore I will push Montague's men from the wall, and thrust his maids to the wall.

GREGORY

The quarrel is between our masters and us their men.

SAMPSON



'Tis all one, I will show myself a tyrant: when I have fought with the men, I will be cruel with the maids, and cut off their heads. (I.1.p.245)

In this extract, Sampson and Gregory discuss the conflict between the Capulets and the Montagues. Sampson's speech assertive utterance "true; and therefore women, being the weaker vessels, are ever thrust to the wall" describes women's inferior status in society. He uses their status to oppress them in the same way that he will do for men. The assertive speech "I will push Montague's men from the wall, and thrust his maids to the wall" demonstrates his willingness to attack both members of the Montagues regardless of their sex. This expresses also the hatred and obsession to dominate others and assert his masculinity through aggressivity.

Furthermore, the expressive speech "I will show myself a tyrant: when I have fought with the men, I will be cruel with the maids, and cut off their heads", reinforces Sampson's aggressive behavior towards women. Knowing that women are considered the weaker sex, Sampson wants to take advantage of this fragility by harming them. Indeed, Sampson's assertive utterance "Ay, the heads of the maids, or their maidenheads; take it in what sense thou wilt" (I.1.p.246) reveals his desire to take the honor of Montague's women symbolized by their chastity. In Elizabethan society, Chastity was a symbol of honor for women as well as their families (C.B. Watson, 1960). Sampson's different interactions with Gregory put forward his description as a bloody character deprived of humanity. In his mind, he is making the right decision by wanting to defend the honor of his family through the mimicry of his Master's behavior and sense of aggressivity. Sampson is so obsessed with this desire that he tries to provoke his rivals and create conflict. The next extract confirms this idea:

SAMPSON

Nay, as they dare. I will bite my thumb at them; which is a disgrace to them, if they bear it.

Enter ABRAHAM and BALTHASAR

ABRAHAM

Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?

SAMPSON

I do bite my thumb, sir.

ABRAHAM

Do you bite your thumb at us, sir? (I.1.p.246)

This extract describes the increasing tension between the Capulets and the Montagues following Sampson's provocative behavior. The assertive speech "I will bite my thumb at them; which is a disgrace to them, if they bear it" shows Sampson's willingness to incite conflict by biting his thumb. Abraham's directive act "Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?"



reveals his anger towards Sampson's gesture. During Elizabethan times, the act of biting the thumb was considered as a bad gesture the same way as when someone gives the finger. It is not at random that conflict emerges later between both clans following this exchange as underlined the stage directions: "*they fight*".

The Montagues are not the only ones obsessed by the same object of honor and power. The Capulets are also interested in this quest in the play. Tybalt's actions as a member of the Capulet family are the best illustrations of this fact. The next passage justifies this argument:

TYBALT

What, art thou drawn among these heartless hinds? Turn thee,  
Benvolio, look upon thy death.

BENVOLIO

I do but keep the peace: put up thy sword, Or manage it to part  
these men with me.

TYBALT

What, drawn, and talk of peace! I hate the word, As I hate hell,  
all Montagues, and thee: Have at thee, coward!

*They fight.*

*Enter, several of both houses, who join the fray; then enter  
Citizens, with clubs*

CITIZENS

Clubs, bills, and partisans! strike! beat them down! Down with  
the Capulets! down with the Montagues! (I.1.p.246)

This passage depicts Tybalt as an enemy of peace and a lover of conflict. Indeed, the directive speeches "What, art thou drawn among these heartless hinds?" and "Turn thee, Benvolio, look upon thy death" unveil Tybalt's disdain for Benvolio's actions of maintaining peace by trying to resolve the conflict between the two clans. That is why he engages him in dueling. However, Benvolio's assertive speech "I do but keep the peace: put up thy sword, Or manage it to part these men with me" reveals his desire to remain pacific despite Tybalt's challenge. In a patriarchal society where two clans are enemies, being pacific is not the norm to follow since aggressivity is part of masculine characteristics. Therefore, Tybalt's obsession with asserting his masculinity through aggressivity is outraged by Benvolio's discourse of peace as these assertive and directive speeches underline "What, drawn, and talk of peace! I hate the word, As I hate hell, all Montagues, and thee: Have at thee, coward!". Through this utterance, Tybalt reaffirms his disgust for peace and hatred for the Montagues. The verbal insult of "coward" is an attack on Benvolio's masculinity. He considered him as an effeminate. Unsurprisingly, his insult has a perlocutionary effect on Benvolio since "they fight". The First Citizen's directive speech "bills, and partisans! strike! beat them down! Down with the Capulets! down with the Montagues!" portrays the chaos that occurs following these fighting.

People are encouraged to be involved in the conflict creating chaos. According to Girard (1979), when confronted with chaos, people used to imitate each other

From all the analysis of the characters' violent language using illocutionary acts and Girard's mimetic desire, it is noticeable that gender norms and mimetic desire are the root causes of violence in the play. Members of both families desire the same object which is the power and the city and the maintaining of their honor. The quest for this same object affects the language of the characters and incites violence through physical confrontations. Things become worse when the violent discourse creates a cycle of tragedy in the play.

## 2. The Tragic Impact of Violent Language in *Romeo and Juliet*

In *Romeo and Juliet*, numerous tragic deaths follow violent language. The Montagues and the Capulets' aggressive speeches create a cycle of tragedies whose victims are Mercutio, Tybalt, Paris, and Romeo and Juliet.

Firstly, the death of Mercutio, the Prince's relative and Romeo's friend is the result of both verbal and physical clashes between the members of the family enemies. The violent speech of his murderer Tybalt, a Capulet, highlights the context of his death. As a matter of fact, his death is triggered by Tybalt's obsession with maintaining the honor of his family as well as his hatred towards the Montagues. The following dialogue underlines this argument:

TYBALT

This, by his voice, should be a Montague:- Fetch me my rapier,  
 boy:- What dares the slave Come hither, cover'd with an antic  
 face, To fleer and scorn at our solemnity? Now, by the stock  
 and honour of my kin, To strike him dead, I hold it not a sin.

CAPULET

Why, how now, kinsman! wherefore storm you so?

TYBALT

Uncle, this is a Montague, our foe, A villain that is hither come  
 in spite, To scorn at our solemnity this night.

CAPULET

Young Romeo is it?

TYBALT

'Tis he, that villain Romeo. (I.5.p.252)

This exchange depicts Tybalt's anger following Romeo's intrusion at his family's party. Indeed, Romeo takes part in this party thanks to Mercutio's insistence in order to have fun and encounter a new lover. The direct speech "Fetch me my rapier, boy" and the expressive utterance "What dares the slave Come hither, cover'd with an antic face, To fleer and scorn at our solemnity?" describe Tybalt's feeling of disdain for Romeo. He considers Romeo's



presence as an outrage to the honor of his family. As a consequence, he desires to fight him. The word “rapier” which is a weapon confirms his willingness to challenge Romeo in a battle. Also, the derogatory terms “slave” and “villain” express Tybalt’s hatred as well as his desire to belittle Romeo to provoke conflict. In addition, the assertive speech “Now, by the stock and honor of my kin, To strike him dead, I hold it not a sin” suggests that Tybalt’s motivation and aggressivity are deeply rooted in his attempt to maintain the honor of his family and assert his masculine power in the family’s house. Throughout this attitude, Tybalt strengthens masculine norms related to dominance and aggressivity. For Girard (1979), individuals imitate the desire of others: “imitative desire is always a desire to be another” (p.83). Tybalt’s attitude mirrors that of Capulet since for them, it is part of masculine code to be aggressive and violent within the context of the feud. Unfortunately, Tybalt’s mimicry of masculine norms provoked Mercutio’s death. The next extract describes the context of Mercutio’s death:

TYBALT

Mercutio, thou consort’st with Romeo,-

MERCUTIO

Consort! what, dost thou make us minstrels?

an thou make minstrels of us, look to hear nothing but discords:  
here's my fiddlestick: here's that shall make you dance. Zounds,  
consort!

BENVOLIO

We talk here in the public haunt of men: Either withdraw unto  
some private place, And reason coldly of your grievances, Or  
else depart; here all eyes gaze on us.

MERCUTIO

Men's eyes were made to look, and let them gaze; I will not  
budge for no man's pleasure, I. *Enter ROMEO* (III.1.p.261)

This dialogue puts forward a clash between Tybalt, Mercutio and Benvolio. Through Tybalt’s assertive utterance “Mercutio, thou consort'st with Romeo” it is noticeable that he provokes and accuses Mercutio of being an accomplice of Romeo. Indeed, after the party, Tybalt becomes obsessed with washing away the affront of Romeo’s presence at his house. As a consequence, he attacks and confronts Romeo in another setting. The next lines underline this argument:

TYBALT

Romeo, the hate I bear thee can afford No better term than  
this,—thou art a villain.

ROMEO

Tybalt, the reason that I have to love thee Doth much excuse the  
appertaining rage To such a greeting: villain am I none;

TYBALT

Boy, this shall not excuse the injuries That thou hast done me;  
therefore turn and draw.

ROMEO



I do protest, I never injured thee, But love thee better than thou  
 canst devise, Till thou shalt know the reason of my love: And  
 so, good Capulet,—which name I tender As dearly as my  
 own,—be satisfied.

MERCUTIO

O calm, dishonourable, vile submission! Alla stoccata carries it  
 away. Draws Tybalt, you rat-catcher, will you walk?  
 (III.1.p.261)

Tybalt's assertive speech and verbal insult "thou art a villain" is a strategy to aggress Romeo and provoke him into dueling. Facing this kind of provocation, men used to enter into conflict to defend their honor. However, Romeo following his secret marriage with Juliet, rejects this challenge as this assertive utterance reveals: "Therefore farewell; I see thou know'st me not" (*Ibidem*). For Tybalt, it is unthinkable for men to privilege over violence in the context of a challenge; that is why he argues "O calm, dishonourable, vile submission!". Through this expressive utterance, he links Romeo's behavior as proof of his weakness and femininity since he associates the feminine characteristics of "submission" towards Romeo's behavior. This attack on Romeo's masculinity incites Mercutio to defend the honor of his friend by challenging Tybalt into dueling. Unfortunately, Tybalt agrees and during the fighting the intervention of Romeo and Benvolio causes the death of Mercutio as shows the stage directions: "*TYBALT under ROMEO's arm stabs MERCUTIO, and flies with his followers*"(III.1.261). Mercutio's last words were directed towards members of both the Capulets and the Montagues. In fact, Mercutio's expressive speech "A plague o'both your houses!-Zounds, a dog, a rat, a mouse, a cat, to scratch a man to death! a braggart, a rogue, a villain, that fights by the book of arithmetic!" (III.1.p.262) pinpoints his disappointment and anger. His curse and animalistic imagery towards the families' enemies is the reflection of his masculine ego. He regrets the intervention of Romeo and Benvolio on his mind, he will have undoubtedly defeated Tybalt.

The death of Mercutio was not without consequence implying another death; that of Tybalt. Indeed, the death of Mercutio psychologically affected Romeo and increased his desire for revenge. Consequently, he challenges Tybalt:

ROMEO

Alive, in triumph! and Mercutio slain! Away to heaven,  
 respective lenity,

And fire-eyed fury be my conduct now! *Re-enter TYBALT*  
 Now, Tybalt, take the villain back again, That late thou  
 gavest me; for Mercutio's soul Is but a little way above our  
 heads, Staying for thine to keep him company: Either  
 thou, or I, or both, must go with him.

TYBALT

Thou, wretched boy, that didst consort him here, Shalt  
with him hence.

ROMEO

This shall determine that. *They fight; TYBALT falls*  
(III.1.p.262).

This exchange puts forwards the metamorphosis of Romeo from a pacific to a violent behavior. The assertive utterance “Tybalt, take the villain back again, That late thou gavest me;” describes his readiness to defend himself. The insult “villain” is an answer to Tybalt’s former insult. Romeo asserts now his masculinity by imitating the behavior of both Mercutio and Tybalt to incite conflict and measure their power through fighting. Mercutio’s death has deleted feminine characteristics of submission into him. The assertive utterance “Mercutio's soul Is but a little way above our heads, Staying for thine to keep him company: Either thou, or I, or both, must go with him” highlights Romeo’s willingness to kill Tybalt and defend the death of his best friend Mercutio. The expressive speech and verbal insult “Thou, wretched boy, that didst consort him here, Shalt with him hence” shows Tybalt’s aggressive behavior and readiness to kill Romeo. The stage directions “Tybalt falls “and Benvolio assertive speech “Tybalt slain” confirms the death of Tybalt, the second victim of the feud.

Furthermore, Paris, Romeo, and Juliet’s deaths were related to the violent side of masculinity as well as mimetic desire. Girard (1979) suggests that when two subjects desire the same object, rivalry comes to the front creating violence and conflict. In the play, both Paris and Romeo desire the same that is Juliet’s love. Romeo’s being a Montague rebels himself against his family by falling in love with Juliet at the Capulet’s party. This love becomes reciprocal since they get married secretly thanks to Friar Laurence the monk and Juliet’s nurse. However, at the same time, Paris which is a young lord follows the right path by proposing marriage to Juliet’s father, Capulet. In Verona society, fathers were expected to impose a husband on their daughters as they were seen as a kind of property. Paris was described as the perfect future husband since he held great status in society and was handsome as well. Following her secret marriage and Romeo’s banishment after the murder of Tybalt, Juliet becomes rebellious vis à vis her family which incites violent speech and temporary conflict in the Capulet’s house. The next lines portray Juliet’s reaction concerning her marriage with Paris:

LADY CAPULET

Marry, my child, early next Thursday morn, The gallant, young  
and noble gentleman, The County Paris, at Saint Peter's Church,  
Shall happily make thee there a joyful bride.

JULIET



Now, by Saint Peter's Church and Peter too, He shall not make me there a joyful bride. I wonder at this haste; that I must wed Ere he, that should be husband, comes to woo. I pray you, tell my lord and father, madam, I will not marry yet; and, when I do, I swear, It shall be Romeo, whom you know I hate, Rather than Paris. These are news indeed!

LADY CAPULET

Here comes your father; tell him so yourself, And see how he will take it at your hands. *Enter CAPULET and Nurse.*(III.5.p.268).

This dialogue describes the context in which Lady Capulet announces Juliet her future marriage to Paris. Normally, a daughter should be happy with the idea of marriage which is part of her honor and that of her family. Juliet at the opposite rejects this idea as this assertive speech reveals “I pray you, tell my lord and father, madam, I will not marry yet; and, when I do, I swear, It shall be Romeo, whom you know I hate, Rather than Paris”. She opposes herself to this arranged marriage and subverts the gender norms of obedience and submission related to her sex. In addition, her promise “I swear, It shall be Romeo” pinpoints the conflict between her desire and that society’s expectations. By rejecting her marriage with Paris because of her love for Romeo. Juliet overthrows the parental authority of her parents.

Unsurprisingly, her father who supposed to be the decision-maker in her life becomes upset as demonstrated in the directive speech “But fettle your fine joints 'gainst Thursday next, To go with Paris to Saint Peter's Church, Or I will drag thee on a hurdle thither. Out, you green-sickness carrion! out, you baggage! You tallow-face!”(III.5.p.268). In the name of the honor and out of his patriarchal authority, Capulet wants to oblige Juliet to get married to Paris. He is even ready to harm Juliet in case of refusal: “I will drag thee on a hurdle thither”. In Elizabethan society, the punishment was applied to disobedient girls. Capulet’s assertive speech “Hang thee, young baggage” and “disobedient wretch” underline his willingness to psychologically punish Juliet. His reaction reveals his degree of anger. He uses intimidation and insults in an attempt to change the mind of his daughter. He threatens to disown her: “An you be mine, I'll give you to my friend; And you be not, hang, beg, starve, die in the streets, For, by my soul, I'll ne'er acknowledge thee, Nor what is mine shall never do thee good: Trust to't, bethink you; I'll not be forsworn” (III.5.p.268). This assertive speech reveals that Juliet’s obedience to his decision is a symbol of his honor and patriarchal power; that is why he uses all the strategies even threat to restore this obedience. Capulet’s attitude is justified by his desire to assert his masculinity and mimic traditional norms related to masculinity with characteristics of dominance and aggression.

Facing all this parental pressure and the absence of Romeo, Juliet attempts to commit suicide. However, Friar Lawrence gives her a reason for being alive and to escape the



arranged marriage with Paris. Unfortunately, the plan is tragic for Romeo, Juliet, and Paris. In fact, he planned to fake the death of Juliet by swallowing a poison. Romeo will have learnt the plan and met Juliet at the tomb when she will have been awakening. Subsequently, they will have started a new life while members of the Capulet will have believed in their daughter's death. Tactlessly, Romeo did not receive the letter from Lawrence about the play only after the death of Juliet. Therefore, he decides to return to Verona and die by Juliet's side through suicide. The confrontation between both of them is a tragic consequence for Paris. The next dialogue highlights it:

PARIS

This is that banish'd haughty Montague, That murder'd my love's cousin, with which grief, It is supposed, the fair creature died; And here is come to do some villanous shame To the dead bodies: I will apprehend him. Comes forward Stop thy unhallow'd toil, vile Montague! Can vengeance be pursued further than death? Condemned villain, I do apprehend thee: Obey, and go with me; for thou must die.

ROMEO

I must indeed; and therefore came I hither. Good gentle youth, tempt not a desperate man; Fly hence, and leave me: think upon these gone; Let them affright thee. I beseech thee, youth, Put not another sin upon my head, By urging me to fury: O, be gone! By heaven, I love thee better than myself; For I come hither arm'd against myself: Stay not, be gone; live, and hereafter say, A madman's mercy bade thee run away.

PARIS I do defy thy conjurations, And apprehend thee for a felon here.

ROMEO

Wilt thou provoke me? then have at thee, boy! *They fight*

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O Lord, they fight! I will go call the watch. *Exit*

PARIS

O, I am slain! Falls If thou be merciful, Open the tomb, lay me with Juliet. *Dies* (V.3.p.275-276)

The passage reveals that the cause of the conflict is related to Paris's perception of Romeo's presence as a profanation of Juliet's tomb. The verbal insult "condemned villain" underlines his anger. Also, the directive speech "Obey, and go with me; for thou must die" reveals his desire to challenge Romeo and defeat him for his profanation. However, Romeo's directive speeches "Fly hence, and leave me" and "Stay not, be gone; live" reflects his desire to avoid conflict. He mourns the presume death of Juliet and is not apt to kill another person after Tybalt's death. But Paris persistence to fight out of his desire to defend the honor of Juliet and assert his masculine power creates a conflict. Indeed, the directive speeches "Wilt thou provoke me?" and "then have at thee, boy!" describes Romeo's readiness to fight Paris. This



fighting causes Paris's death. Afterwards, Romeo drinks a poison and dies next to Juliet. This latter, seeing the dead body of Romeo at his awakening take her life by means of Romeo's dagger as underlines this expressive utterance and stage directions "O happy dagger! *Snatching ROMEO's dagger*"(V.3). Juliet's death can be interpreted in terms of Girard's mimetic desire. In fact, she mimics the actions of Romeo by committing suicide. This act reflects her willingness to escape societal norms related to marriage and the conflict between the Capulets and the Montagues that directly affected her relationship with Romeo. Death appears as a kind of freedom for both Romeo and Juliet.

The tragic death of the characters Mercutio, Tybalt, Paris, and Romeo and Juliet illustrates Girard's concept of mimetic triangle and scapegoating. Indeed, the different confrontations for the same object that is honor and power create rivalry and violence between the families enemies. For R. Girard (1976), when conflict occurs out of mimetic desire, an intervention of a mediator is needed to put an end to the conflict. In the play, Friar Lawrence is the representation of the mediator since he tries to resolve the conflict with the secret marriage of Romeo and Juliet. Unfortunately, the plan fails. R. Girard (1979) notes that when conflict is difficult to resolve the scapegoat mechanism emerges and creates peace in the community. In the play, the deaths of Mercutio, Tybalt and Paris do not really stop the conflict. They cannot be considered as real scapegoats. On the opposite, Romeo and Juliet's death brings peace in the community. For T.J. Hoffman (2004, p.1):

René Girard's *Violence and the Sacred* illustrates an anthropological theory of ritual violence, one that works well to describe this prominent system at work in Verona, whether in terms of maintaining peace by threatening violence or enacting vengeance in the name of justice, but especially in terms of sacrificing a scapegoat.

The following extract highlights this argument:

CAPULET

O brother Montague, give me thy hand: This is my daughter's jointure, for no more Can I demand.

MONTAGUE

But I can give thee more: For I will raise her statue in pure gold; That while 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!

PRINCE ESCALUS

A glooming peace this morning with it brings; The sun, for sorrow, will not show his head: Go hence, to have more talk of these sad things; Some shall be pardon'd, and some punished:



For never was a story of more woe Than this of Juliet and her  
Romeo. (V.3.P.277)

This passage reveals the play's shift from violent language to peace discourse. As a matter of fact, Members of the families enemies adopt a language of reconciliation out of their shared grief vis à vis their children's death. Capulet's declarative speech "O brother Montague, give me thy hand: This is my daughter's joint, for I can't ask for more" pinpoints his gesture of reconciliation with Montague and his desire to end the conflict between them. The declarative speeches "There will be no other statue than that of the true and faithful Juliet" and "As rich shall Romeo's by his lady's lie; Poor sacrifices of our enmity!" demonstrates their decisions to build statues of Romeo and Juliet described as "poor sacrifices" or scapegoats in order to transcend the conflict between the families. Romeo and Juliet appear now as a symbol of peace and love; that is why the Prince argues through this assertive utterance "A glooming peace this morning with it brings" a strategy to underline the great importance of the day in terms of grief and reconciliation. By restoring peace in the community, Romeo and Juliet appear as the sacrificial victims, the scapegoats and fourth element of Girard's mimetic triangle that transforms itself now into a square.

### **Conclusion**

This article examined Romeo and Juliet using Girard's mimetic desire theory and John Searle's illocutionary act to reveal the link between violent language and its relationships with gender norms and mimetic desire. At first, it pointed out how mimetic desire and societal expectations related to masculinity in terms of aggressivity and dominance are at the basis of the violent discourse of the members of the families' enemies. The Capulets and the Montagues' desire for the same object of honor and power created a rivalry and multiple confrontations. And then, the analysis of these confrontations revealed how violent language precedes tragedies. These tragedies have been resolved by the emergence of the scapegoats namely Romeo and Juliet who brought back peace in the community and added scapegoating as the fourth element of Girard's mimetic triangle. Through this demonstration, the study encourages the use of peaceful communication and invites people to reverse societal norms that contribute to violence.



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