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SUBVERSION OF POWER IN *ROMEO AND JULIET* AND *LAYLI AND MAJNOON*

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Abstract

This paper looks at how the leading characters in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and the Persian poet, Nezami's *Layli and Majnoon* challenge the patriarchal system of their societies through subverting power and power relations within their respective societies. It uses Althusser and Foucault's conception of power in order to examine the lovers' subversion of the patriarchal system. The aim is to show the various ways in which these lovers challenge and undermine the patriarchal institutions in their societies, hence threatening the patriarchal system.

Keywords: Romeo and Juliet; Layli and Majnoon; Power Relations; Althusser's ISA's; Patriarchy; Subversive Love.

This paper offers a comparative reading of power relations in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, and the Persian poet, Nezami's *Layli and Majnoon*. It makes an effort to show that the leading characters in both works challenge the patriarchal system of their societies by subverting their societies' system of power relations. This subversive act is a result of the love between Romeo and Juliet, and Layli and Majnoon which leads the four characters to challenge the different institutions that exist in their societies and thus, disrupt power relations.

The societies in which Romeo, Juliet, Layli, and Majnoon live are patriarchal. It is the patriarchal system with its limiting rules and laws that opposes their liberating love, since through their love the lovers come to challenge and ultimately subvert the patriarchal system of their societies. Hence, their love poses a threat to patriarchy and its laws and becomes subversive. Consequently, it is their subversion of patriarchy which ultimately leads to their downfall and death.

Patriarchy is a hierarchical system based on domination and subordination (Johnson, 2005: 14). Accordingly, pure, untainted love based on equality and freedom is inimical to the patriarchal structure and its "love laws," - "laws that constrain whom and how and how much we may love" - and is severely suppressed by the system. Such liberating love based on equality and freedom can, therefore, threaten and pose a challenge to patriarchy and its constraining laws (Gilligan and Richards, 2009: 19-20). Hence, by the mere act of falling in love, Romeo, Juliet, Layli, and Majnoon have proved themselves resistant to patriarchal conditioning, and have moved outside and above its constraining laws, and by doing so they have set themselves against patriarchy, and are ultimately regarded as a threat. Yet, with these lovers, their defiance of patriarchy's limiting ways does not stop there. Their love, in fact, leads them to subvert power relations, and consequently, challenge the many social institutions whose responsibility is to maintain patriarchal control, and thus they, ultimately, subvert the patriarchal order.

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This paper, therefore, makes two claims. First it maintains that the love between Romeo and Juliet, and Layli and Majnoon is unconventional and subversive since it defies their societies' customs and conventions regarding love and relationships, and hence becomes inimical to patriarchal laws of subordination and domination. It also argues that the love between these characters leads them to challenge power relations.

Hence, the paper is divided in to two parts. The first part examines the love and relationship between the four lovers by analysing the characters of Romeo and Majnoon in the context of their societies. The second section deals with power relations and how they are subverted by the four lovers, by looking at the various ways the lovers come to challenge different institutions in their societies.

Romeo and Majnoon as Unconventional Lovers

Both Shakespeare and Nezami have gone out of their way to make sure that Romeo and Majnoon are seen for who they really are: unconventional lovers in patriarchal societies whose subversive love challenges and wins against patriarchal ideology. They have shown their lovers to be unconventional by juxtaposing them with conventional lovers. These conventional lovers do not stand out from the rest of the characters because they love according to their societies' sanctioned codes of behaviour, hence posing no threat to their societies' dominant ideology.

In the case of Romeo, there are two conventional lovers with whom he is being compared. One is Romeo himself before Juliet and in love with Rosaline, and the other is Paris who is approved by society as Juliet's husband – although he never gets to be. Both of these characters stand in sharp contrast with Romeo as Juliet's lover and husband.

From the beginning of the play, Shakespeare already presents Romeo as a romantic lover and hence, it can be claimed that the love Romeo bears Rosaline is the same as his feelings for Juliet. Yet, as it will be shown, Romeo loves Rosaline in a typically conventional manner and there is nothing subversive and rebellious in his love for Rosaline.

Critics have often pointed to the destructive dimensions of the feud and its unavoidable impact on the private lives of Romeo and Juliet (Evans, 2003: 8-9). The feud, however, interferes only with the love between Romeo and Juliet, while other characters are left alone to carry on with their lives as normal. In other words, the only thing that opposes the feud in the play is Romeo and Juliet's love, and the only characters whose lives are impinged on by the feud are Romeo and Juliet as each others' lovers.

The feud's presence in the play is felt during three incidents in particular: the opening scene, the crisis scene (3.1), and at the end of the play (5.3) (Evans, 2003: 8-9). Of the three scenes, the latter two directly affect and include the lovers, yet both Romeo and Juliet are absent from the street brawling of the first act. To open the play with the street fighting, which is Shakespeare's own invention, emphasises the immediacy of the hostility and harshness that exist in Verona (Evans, 2003: 8). Yet the lovers' absence from this scene, especially Romeo's, becomes important when read in light of the nature of their love.

Romeo appears in Act 1, Scene 2, immediately after the brawling, love-struck and grieving his mistress's indifference toward him. The feud has left him virtually unaffected, his private life unaltered, and he is left to lament his unrequited love. Amidst the violent eruption of the feud, Romeo is allowed to brood over his love for Rosaline who is a Capulet and hence a member of the enemy clan. Hence, while in love with Rosaline, Romeo's private life is never altered or even affected and the question of loving the enemy never comes into play. This is primarily because Romeo's love for Rosaline is in accordance with society's conventions regarding love. Romeo fits well into the socially accepted role of a rejected lover worshipping his mistress and lamenting her indifference and there is nothing transgressive about his love for her (Evans, 2003: 11). Hence, no threat or challenge is directed toward the system's underlying power relations. The case however is dramatically different with his love for Juliet.

In loving Rosaline, Romeo is acting the socially assigned role of a tormented lover, lamenting the indifference of his cruel mistress. His love for Rosaline is in fact based on a convention which requires women to remain indifferent and cold, perhaps to appear chaste as Rosaline swears to be (1.1.208-209) ¹, or maybe "to increase male desire." Either way, in such relationships, it is the man who has to actively seek the woman's approval, while the woman

takes a very passive and distant role and never reveals her feelings. Although Rosaline claims that she has no feelings for Romeo, convention holds that the woman has to appear indifferent even if she should harbour any feelings for the man seeking her love (Belsey, 2001: 51). In this sense, the woman becomes an object of male desire whose aloofness and unavailability turns her into a "sadistic goddess" with the man feeding on "masochistic" feelings (Ryan, 2001: 119).

The conventionality and insincerity of Romeo's love for Rosaline is also reflected in his use of conventional Petrarchan expressions with its oxymoron, paradoxes and setstets (Levin, 1970: 85-86; Ryan, 2001: 119; see also Bloom, 2005: 34; Evans, 2003:12):

She is too fair, too wise, wisely too fair,
To merit bliss by making me despair.
She hath forsworn to love, and in that vow
Do I live dead, that live to tell it now. (1.1.212-5)

Thus, his passing love for Rosaline is merely an "attempt at the creation of an identity," Romeo's way of self-fashioning an identity for himself and achieving the self-satisfaction of defining himself as a lover while becoming nothing more than a "stereotype" (Levin, 1970: 85-86; See also Bloom, 2005: 32; Davis, 2001: 37; Raffel, 2004: xvii; Ryan, 2001: 119; Stauffer, 1966: 54-55). Romeo's superficial love for Rosaline serves as a foil for his genuine, sincere and deeply felt love for Juliet (Evans, 2003: 12. See also Stauffer, 1966: 58).

The love Romeo bears Juliet is no conventional or ordinary love. It cuts through the old barriers of convention, and is founded on pure love, freedom, and reciprocity. There is nothing sadistic or dominating in his relationship with Juliet since she openly returns his feelings (See also Ryan, 2001: 123). Their love becomes subversive since it transgresses the underlying power relations of patriarchy, and hence comes to be seen as a threat. Therefore, as soon as Romeo falls in love with Juliet, the feud moves into action to eliminate the threat and this is done through Tybalt. Tybalt, it has to be remembered, recognises Romeo only once he sees and falls in love with Juliet, and not before.

Romeo himself admits to the stifling contrast between his love for Juliet as opposed to Rosaline:

Her I love now
Doth grace for grace and love for love allow;
The other did not so. (2.3.85-7)

The symmetry in his expression further emphasises the mutuality of his love for Juliet and its move from the socially accepted conventions (Ryan, 2001: 123-4): "one hath wounded me/ That's by me wounded." (2.3.50-1)

There is, in the words of A. C. Bradley, "an intentional contrast between Romeo's two loves" (cited in Seward, 2008: 222-223). On this contrast, G. Blakemore Evans writes:

Thus Shakespeare employs Romeo's role as the lover in love with love (hence largely with himself) as a clearly realised foil to set off the new Romeo who begins to emerge after he meets Juliet and who loses his heart in a real love, the kind of love that is beyond the posturing of what may be expressed through the facile medium of mere sonnetese. (Evans, 2003: 12)

Romeo and Juliet move against their society's conventions regarding love, and base their relationship instead on reciprocity, mutual feelings, and freedom, thus freeing themselves from opportunism, domination and subordination dictated by society. Their mutual, unconventional love is pointed to by the Chorus at the beginning of Act 2: "Now Romeo is beloved, and loves again, / Alike bewitched by the charm of looks;" and "she as much in love" (1.5.148-9, 154).

Another lover in this society is Paris. Yet, his love for Juliet – just like Romeo's love for Rosaline – is also conventional, and contrasts sharply with Romeo's pure and unconventional love for Juliet (See also Mack, 2008: 279; Brown, 2008: 305). As the play indicates, Paris and Juliet hardly know each other except through Juliet's parents. Furthermore, he shows little interest in her affections for him and so he is not really after Juliet's love, but only wishes to own and possess her (Bloom, 2005: 58, 59): "Thy face is mine, and thou hast slandered it" (4.1.35). Without even considering her feelings, he already assumes that Juliet must love him: "So will ye, I am sure,

that you love me" (4.1.26). Thus, by grieving her in the tomb, he is in fact trying to define himself as a disappointed lover much like Romeo lamenting Rosaline's indifference earlier (Bloom, 2005: 58, 59).

Hence, Paris, in seeking Juliet, is more concerned with his ownership of her and shows little interest in her feelings. In this sense, he is another conventional lover playing the role of a grieving one. Susana Greer Fein (2005) examines the connotations the name Paris implies, since it is also the name of a herb, asserting that using the name Paris based on the properties associated with this herb was Shakespeare's way of revealing Paris's character. She concludes:

Paris eventually represents a shallow love offered to Juliet in her everyday, familial, public life, a love that ordinarily would seem desirable and happy. But, like the summer flowers that count Paris bears to Juliet's tomb (5. 3. 9, 12), such love dies with time. Romeo, whose name connotes for Juliet the herb rosemary, or remembrance (Williams 402-03), offers her an escape from an ordinary experience. (84)

And such is the nature of the love between Romeo and Juliet: extraordinary, unconventional and immortal. But extraordinary only for a patriarchal society where love plays no role. Romeo and Juliet's society, being patriarchal, is based on conventions and even materiality, and hence allows no room for love based on equality, freedom and true love.

Similarly, in *Layli and Majnoon*, there are also two other lovers against whom Majnoon can be compared: Ibn Salam, Layli's husband, and Salam, the young lover from Baghdad. Yet, both these characters are conventional lovers who, by way of contrast, emphasise Majnoon's pure, unconventional and transgressive love.

One of the lovers in the poem is Ibn Salam who falls for Layli while she is walking in a garden, and later marries her. Yet, as the poem indicates, Ibn Salam's love for Layli is a selfish desire to possess and own the girl. From the moment he sees her he becomes occupied with thoughts of taking Layli for his own, and plans for ways of making her his bride:

One glance at the moon, just fourteen days old, and he decided to conquer this shining light. Unable to forget her, he thought of her ceaselessly on his way home. (Gelpke, 1966: 65)²

Yet, he makes no efforts to speak with Layli, find out her feelings, or seek her consent regarding his marriage proposal. Instead, he seeks permission from Layli's parents and endeavours to convince them, not Layli herself. He sends a mediator who boasts of Ibn Salam's many manly qualities in order to persuade Layli's father of his worth and credibility as a son-in-law (66; 108-9). He offers riches and treasures, but no love. There is never any mention of feelings, neither his nor Layli's. He conceives of love as ownership, and approaches marriage as a trade wherein he offers his wealth, and bargains with Layli's parents in exchange for the girl.

Ibn Salam's attitude to love and marriage contrasts sharply with Majnoon's. To Majnoon love is not a contract to be made with the parents, but a union between two equals with mutual feelings and consent. Accordingly, all his messages are always directed to Layli herself. Instead of offering riches and treasures, he offers his life and soul:

Whoever does not shake for you like the wind, is not worth even dust and whoever does not give up life for you is not worth his life.³

And elsewhere:

I follow obediently my beloved, who owns my soul. (37)

Instead of seeking to possess and own Layli, Majnoon loses his 'self' for her, to the point that he comes to identify himself through the beloved (Sabzeh Ali, 2003: 5; Sattari, 1987: 101):

For you, I have lost myself.

'But that path can only be taken by those who forget themselves. In love, the faithful have to pay with the blood of their hearts; otherwise their love is not worth a grain of rye. So you are leading me, revealing the true faith of love, even if your faith should remain hidden from me forever.

'Let my love for you be the guardian of my secrets. Let the grief which this love causes me, be my soul's caress! What matters it that there is no healing

salve for my wound? As long as *you* are not wounded, all suffering is nothing.
(168, Italics in original)

In his poems, messages, and letter, Majnoon is constantly reassuring Layli of his love for her: "Nothing can ever distinguish the love for you in my heart" (40). At the same time, he is seeking her feelings, asking her if she feels the same toward him: "Oh my beloved come and take my hand. I can endure it no longer, I am yours, more use to you alive than dead. Be generous, send a greeting, send a message to revive me." (38-39)

That Majnoon's love for Layli is strikingly different from, and opposed to, Ibn Salam's, is further evident in the manner in which they meet and fall in love with Layli. Ibn Salam sees, and falls for, Layli while she is roaming in a garden (chapt. 15). Layli's presence in the garden (chap. 14) is one of Nezami's own inventions, a scene which is not taken from his original sources and a product of Nezami's imagination (Sattari, 1987: 36). Being in the garden positions Layli in a conventional setting where she is described in terms of conventional nature imagery: "her body was like a cypress tree on which the pheasant of her face was sitting in majesty" (57). In this sense, Layli becomes an object of male desire who is admired for her beauty. She also becomes passively subjected to men's will, that of her father and Ibn Salam, whose feelings and consent are never considered for the relationship she is to become a part of.

Ibn Salam's relationship with Layli is conventional even after their marriage. Remaining loyal to Majnoon, Layli refuses to consummate her marriage to Ibn Salam, and reacts violently to her husband's advances. Hence, Ibn Salam has no choice but to give in to Layli's wishes and, not wanting to lose her, agrees to stay away:

Ibn Salam was deeply in love with Layla – therefore he gave in to her wish. He said to himself: 'Even if she does not love me, I would rather be allowed to look at her than not to possess her at all. As it is, I can at least glance at her from time to time, otherwise I would lose her for good.'

He went even further and, like a poor sinner, humbled himself, asking forgiveness for having tried to use force.

'My heart is content, even if I am only allowed to look at you. I would be a common thief if I asked for more.' (112-3)

Therefore, in their marriage, Layli adopts the conventional role of a passive and indifferent goddess who can only be seen and worshipped from afar.

Majnoon, on the other hand, meets and falls for Layli while they are both at school. It is interesting that this is another alteration introduced by Nezami where he deviates from his original sources (Sattari, 1987: 43). Nezami's alteration helps to emphasise the unconventional and subversive nature of his young protagonists' love. On their meeting at school, Layli and Majnoon form a relationship which is based on love and mutual consent. At the same time, by falling in love, they come to violate the school's role as a gender police or ISA which has the function of teaching and perpetuating the dominant ideology (Discussed in more detail below). This leads the lovers to transgress patriarchal power relations. Their meeting at school, therefore, highlights their rebellion against, and subsequent subversion of, the patriarchal order (See also Sattari, 1987: 43-44, footnotes).

Between Layli and Majnoon, the question of ownership never comes into play. In their relationship there are no masters and slaves. Their love is not based on subordination and domination, but rather on reciprocity and equality. Their mutual love is reflected in the way the lovers use language. In speaking of their love and themselves during their meeting, Majnoon points to their mutuality in love:

*Though parted our two loving souls combine,
For mine is all your own and yours is mine.
Two riddles to the world we represent,
One answer each the other's deep lament.
But if our parting severs us in two,
One radiant love envelops me and you,
As from another world – though blocked and barred
What there is one, down here is forced apart.* (188, Italics in original)

The lovers' unity and mutuality in love is evident in the symmetrical syntax of Majnoon's speech. Though the meaning is conveyed through the translation used here, the symmetry of the sentence is lost. Majnoon's line can be literally translated as: From now on you and me, me and you from now on; one heart is sufficient between our two bodies (41. 25, AT).

Layli's speeches also reflect her equal role and reciprocity in their relationship. She calls Majnoon you who are like me and worthy of me (19. 124, AT). Later, in her letter, she assures Majnoon of her love for him: "Like your happiness I am separated from you; but even if remote from you, I remain your companion" (159). The poet further emphasizes the lovers' equality and mutuality through their voices: "so similar were the two voices that they sounded like a single chant" (60).

Hence, Layli and Majnoon's love liberates them from the oppressive conventions of their society and, instead of following the patriarchal laws of subordination and domination, they found their love on sincerity, equality and mutuality.

Another lover who is placed against Majnoon is Salam, a young man from Baghdad who stays with Majnoon for a short while. The episode with Salam is, again, another one of Nezami's own inventions not seen in the original Arab poems (Sattari, 1987: 36-37). The encounter with Salam helps to point out the unconventional nature of Majnoon's love. Salam is a renowned lover who has earned himself a name in the world of love: He had also gone through much trouble and had been struck with love. In love, he had endured pain, grief, and suffering. (42. 3-6, AT)

Yet, he is unable to endure the hardships of Majnoon's life. On his arrival Majnoon warns him of the difficulty ahead and points to the differences between them, even if Salam claims to have gone through much hardship and suffering for love (195): "Oh, my noble sir! The path you have taken is full of danger and it would be better for you to retrace your steps. Your place is not with me, for you have tasted not one of my countless sufferings" (193).

Throughout the poem, Majnoon points out, several times, that when it comes to true love, the only way to go is to give up everything for the beloved and give it all for love:

For you, I have lost myself.

'But that path can only be taken by those who forget themselves. In love, the faithful have to pay with the blood of their hearts; otherwise their love is not worth a grain of rye. (168)

The young Salam, however, despite claiming to have gone through much pain and suffering, finds that this road is not for him. While Majnoon is free of his "self" and has stopped caring for anything other than love and the beloved, Salam is too concerned with himself to live in discomfort, and soon realises he has no choice but to return to the city: "But soon the youth could no longer endure life in the wilderness without food or asleep. He felt that he would perish if he stayed longer" (196).

Moreover, Salam's attitude toward love can be taken as a further sign of the superficiality of his emotions as opposed to Majnoon's sincere and true feelings. Like Romeo at the beginning of the play, it seems that Salam is more in love with the idea of love than love itself. Despite claiming to have loved once, he conceives of love as nothing more than a passing feeling sure to die out soon: "Is not the flame of love, which set you alight, the fire of youth? When the youth becomes a man, even this burning furnace cools down" (195).

Yet to Nezami, love is eternal and ever lasting, not a transient feeling which comes and goes with age: "Love, if not true, is but a plaything of the senses, fading like youth" (40). Love is that which does not falter, nor does it alter from its path. That is love, not illusion, which lasts for eternity (15. 86-92, AT).

Shakespeare, too, attests to the unalterable and everlasting nature of love in his Sonnet 116:

Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark

That looks on tempests and is never shaken. (Shakespeare, 1980: 1328)

Yet, love for Salam is a fleeting emotion which can be easily forgotten. Therefore, to describe himself as one who has once loved, he seems to be looking for a way to create meaning and purpose for himself. Consequently, it is not true love which he has been after, but rather love has been his means of establishing a character. By posing as a heartbroken lover who has endured the pains and pangs of love, he wishes to define himself and create an identity which feeds on his role as a heartbroken lover. Salam's love, therefore, serves as a foil for Majnoon's. Through Salam, Nezami portrays a shallow conception of love, and juxtaposes Salam with Majnoon who is the epitome of the true lover: "I am the King of Love in majesty" (195); thus emphasizing his unconventional, extraordinary love, and presenting him as a true and pure lover whose life and love present a contrast with the values of a patriarchal society.

Hence, both the play and the poem present the reader with extraordinary characters whose transgressive love brings them into conflict with patriarchy. Their love brings Romeo, Juliet, Layli, and Majnoon to resist and challenge the many institutions that act as gender police, and by prioritising love over law, custom and convention, they are able to undermine patriarchal power relations and ultimately subvert the system.

Power Relations

All throughout their lives, Romeo, Juliet, Layli and Majnoon remain loyal to their true love and make numerous efforts to subvert patriarchy and its oppressive system in every possible way and at every available opportunity. Based on Foucault's conception, since power exists in the relation of individuals to themselves and institutions, it can also be resisted and subverted at the level of individuals (Mills, 2003: 33-35, 38, 40, 50. See also Falzon, 1998: 37). This is exactly how these four lovers put up a struggle against patriarchy. They spend their entire lives resisting, challenging, and subverting its oppressive ways. Their resistance is evident in the manner in which they subvert the patriarchal social order of their societies including social customs and conventions as well as the many institutions that act as gender police.

Gender police are the different institutions that make up the patriarchal structure and are responsible for perpetuating gender divisions and patriarchal values. These different institutions help to maintain the privileging of men and the oppression of women (Ramet, 2004: 2). They include the state (law and politics), family, as well as cultural institutions such as religion and education (Walby, 1991: 21; See also Johnson, 2005: 41-42). To undermine these institutions is to cause serious threats and challenge the power relations that exist in the society. The concept of gender police is somewhat similar to Althusser's definition of what he terms Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA's). ISA's are the many institutions in a society through which the system propagates the ruling ideology, that is "the ideology of the ruling class" (Althusser, 1971: 149). The Ideological State Apparatuses function through a number of institutions which include:

- the educational ISA (the system of the different public and private 'Schools'),
- the family ISA,
- the legal ISA. (Althusser, 1971: 143)

From the moment they meet right through to their deaths, these lovers are constantly undermining the power of these institutions, hence disrupting the patriarchal order. As a result they become subversive subjects who are punished by the patriarchal system of their societies.

First Meeting

Although Nezami used Arab sources to compose his narrative poem, he has, nevertheless, introduced some changes into his version of *Layli and Majnoon* making it differ slightly from the original sources. One of these changes is how the lovers meet. In Arab sources there are two versions of how the lovers meet and fall in love. One states that Layli and Majnoon knew each other since childhood when they took their animals to pastures, and they fell in love as they grew up together. In another version, Majnoon meets Layli accidentally among some ladies, and falls for her instantly (Sattari, 1987: 7, 14, 41-42). Yet, Nezami altered the beginning to have his lovers meet and fall in love at school. Now the question is what significance would this change have?

In a patriarchal society school, as an ISA, would be responsible for generating the values, meanings, and beliefs of the dominant patriarchal ideology to make sure its attendees

observe the patriarchal laws of subordination and domination. This, however, does not work well with Layli and Majnoon who meet and fall in love at school, hence undermining the school's authority as a gender police or ISA since their love defies all conventions regarding love and relationships in their society. They refuse to observe their culture's sanctioned codes of behaviour and its oppressive laws wherein women are subordinated and become subject to men's rule and domination. Instead, they choose love, a liberating love based on equality, mutuality and freedom.

To highlight the nature of their love and their indifference to the function of school as a gender police, Nezami describes their presence in school and their resistance to conditioning as:

*While all their friends were toiling at their books
These two were trying other ways of learning.
Reading love's grammar in each other's looks,
Glances to them were marks which they were earning.
Their minds were freed from spelling by love's spell,
They practised, writing notes full of caress;
The others learned to count – while they could tell,
That nothing ever counts but tenderness.* (18, Italics in original)

Romeo and Juliet's meeting is also significant. They meet and fall in love at Capulet's ball, surrounded by violence and enmity and under the eyes of Tybalt who swears revenge on Romeo for being on the enemy's quarters (Bloom, 2005: 44-45, 46). The Capulet's "old accustomed feast" (1.2.20) is a social event deeply influenced by patriarchal ideology. It is just before the ball that Juliet is approached by her mother and informed of Paris's proposal and during the ball she is expected to meet him and "read o'er the volume of young Paris's face" (1.3.82). Hence, a conventional proposal and wedding are being planned during the ball, conventional since they are based on the socially established customs regarding marriage (Mack, 2008: 279).

The presence of the feud, which is a very prominent feature of the patriarchal system (Johnson, 2005: 16; Rudman and Glick, 2008: 270-271), and the deep hatred it has resulted in, are also felt during the ball when Tybalt is angered at Romeo's presence and wishes to move to defend his uncle's honour against Romeo's insolence. Tybalt's anger at Romeo momentarily disturbs Capulet's "society function" (Edwards, 1968: 76). It is not Romeo's mere presence, however, that causes slight disruption to the course of an otherwise perfectly peaceful evening. It has to be remembered that Romeo is recognised by Tybalt only *after* Romeo sees Juliet and is bewitched by her beauty, and not before. His purpose of going to the party has been to see Rosaline, who is also a Capulet, and at that point there is never any mention of any danger for being at the enemy's place. Furthermore, none of his other companions gets recognised. Yet, Romeo, upon falling deeply and sincerely in love with Juliet, defies the patriarchal love laws, and is ultimately eliminated through the feud. Accordingly, he comes to be seen as a threat only once he has fallen for Juliet. Therefore, falling in love with Juliet on forbidden grounds makes Romeo undermine the authorities of the feud and of a social gathering which harbours on division and the ideology of the feud.

The Law

Unlike his original source, *The Tragical Historye of Romeus and Juliet*, Shakespeare ends his play with the families announcing their reconciliation and erecting a statue in honour of their children (Brown, 2008: 305). This change in ending has a significance when read in light of the power of love.

The Prince, as critics have pointed out, can be taken as a symbol for the state, or "the voice of authority" (Evans, 2003: 8). He becomes the law in Verona whose orders must be obeyed and observed. He seems, however, to have little power over the feud and the violence that reigns in Verona as a result. While the feud is causing disturbance in Verona and for Veronese citizens, as the play indicates, it is out of the Prince's control.

The play opens with a scene involving harsh violence occasioned by the feud which is the third to have happened recently. Though the Prince's presence brings the fighting to an end, it does not end the feud, and despite the Prince's best efforts, threats, and warnings, Verona witnesses yet another street brawling halfway along the play. The Prince's lack of authority on

this matter is further highlighted when his own kinsman, Mercutio, gets himself, eagerly and willingly, involved in a fight that is not his. Yet, it has to be remembered, he is neither a Montague nor a Capulet, hence his involvement in the feud is based purely on his own interest and wishes and without any consideration for the Prince's earlier warning (See also Granville-Barker, 1970: 16).

Hence, when it comes to the feud the Prince seems to have almost no power, and no way of ending this ancient strife. This is where the love of Romeo and Juliet proves itself more powerful than the law when it brings to an end a very ancient and deadly feud which even the Prince has been unable to control. Therefore, the lovers are triumphant in their love and death for they stand above the law and bring peace to Verona through their deaths.

The feud is in fact part of the patriarchal system through which men and women define themselves as Veronese citizens (Evans, 2003: 50). As such, the feud, with its consequent violence, becomes the law, namely the law of patriarchy (Synder, 2002: 182, 23). Yet, because of their love and devotion to each other, Romeo and Juliet choose to ignore the feud and its governing rules regarding masculinity and femininity. Hence, they stop functioning according to their socially assigned roles and defy the feud as an "all-pervasive" force from which no one can "escape." Instead of adhering to the principles of hate and division as sanctioned by the feud, the lovers decide to love the enemy, thus rising above the feud, the patriarchal law, and subvert its power over themselves (Synder, 2002: 188).

Romeo further breaks the law when he buys poison from an apothecary in Mantua and rushes back to die beside his Juliet (Goddard, 2008: 172). It matters not to Romeo that buying or selling poison is prohibited, since his only concern is to be united with his beloved, albeit in death.

Hence, his reunion with Juliet in death and his break from the constraining laws and rules of a world that has deprived him of pure, untainted love is achieved by means of defying and going against the law.

Layli and Majnoon are also placed outside and against the law since their love leads to disruption in social order. Their outlawed love causes social chaos when it leads to two battles between Nofel's army and Layli's tribe and disturbs the peace in society (chaps. 18 and 20).

The law is also subverted by Majnoon who sees himself as subject to the laws of love, and to Layli, rather than to the state and the Caliph. On several occasions Majnoon declares himself subject to Layli's rule, and as his chosen way of life indicates, he pays no heed to society's rules and laws (Sattari, 1987: 178): Since I am a lover concerned with love, the whole world means nothing to me (30. 104, AT). For him, Layli is the only person who makes the rules: I am your subject and you are the judge; punish me as you see fit (27. 37, AT).

As such he pays no heed to the rules and laws of his society. When Layli's tribesmen are angered at Majnoon for openly admitting his love for Layli and composing poems about it, they take their case to the Caliph's prefect. The prefect then orders Majnoon's arrest which worries his kinsmen who try to find him and warn him of the orders (46-48). Yet, interestingly enough, the orders never reach Majnoon and, as Sattari has pointed out, it would have made no difference to him either way. Accordingly, when his father expresses his fears regarding what the prefect might do, Majnoon simply dismisses them as irrelevant: "What lover goes in fear of the sword? A man in love does not tremble for his life. He who searches for his beloved is not afraid of the world" (55). Hence, Majnoon considers himself subject to the laws of love and under the rule of Layli and so no worldly power could frighten or stop him from loving his beloved (Sattari, 1987: 178).

Family

Family is an ISA crucial for propagating the values of the system and ensuring that everyone functions according to the ruling ideology. In a patriarchal society, the family relies on male control for proper functioning within the system and is run by the father or the husband, who is socially assigned the role of the patriarch (Johnson, 2005: 15, 42).

Authority and male control are key issues in a patriarchal society. Furthermore, patriarchy is a hierarchical system of inequality which privileges men over women (Johnson, 2005: 14). As such women are expected, and have no choice but, to consent to be controlled by men

(Rudman and Glick, 2008: 275). Accordingly, women's submission to male control is essential for the maintenance of patriarchy, thus to challenge male authority is to question patriarchy itself (Johnson, 2005: 15). Yet, this is exactly what happens with Juliet and, in a different manner, with Layli. The love between Romeo and Juliet, and Layli and Majnoon, causes serious threats to the authority of fathers and husbands and leads the girls, who are expected to be very obedient and submissive, to refuse male control.

Juliet's case is the more obvious one since she openly rejects her father in his choice of husband for her, and refuses to marry Paris. Old Capulet's anger and threats are indicative of the severity of Juliet's objections to her father. Yet, Juliet ultimately subverts this ISA through her decision to take the potion and undergo a fake death to escape her father's will, hence prioritising her love for Romeo to male control.

In a similar fashion, Layli, too, subverts male authority. Although she remains quiet at first and offers no objections when she is forced to marry a man she does not love, after marriage she refuses to consummate her marriage, threatening to kill herself should her husband insist, even if it results in death: If you try this once again, you will regret it for both our sakes. I swear to my Creator that I shall not give in to you, even if you should put me to the sword (28. 78-80, AT).

It is worth emphasising that *Layli and Majnoon* predates *Romeo and Juliet* and hence Layli lives centuries before Juliet and as such is much more limited in her actions and decisions than Juliet. Her silence in regard to her forced marriage is probably a result of this difference in time and setting, and not due to her lack of courage. She proves herself very courageous for a woman of her society when she later refuses her husband (See also Sattari, 1987: 233).

As a consequence of her decision, her husband, grieving her indifference toward him, falls ill and dies: "In time Ibn Salam lost all hope. Layla saw him rarely and, estranged from her who, though his wife, was still a bride, fell ill" (198). Therefore, Layli remains loyal to her love and by refusing her husband, undermines male authority and the authority of family as an ISA, thus posing a threat to patriarchal power relations.

Layli's decision brings to focus another issue. Her refusal and her husband's acceptance of her decision point to the concept of consent within marital sex, a very modern notion, yet subtly touched upon by Nezami back in the twelfth century.

Marriage

Another important institution is marriage which is "historically and socially determined" (Kristeva, 2001: 69). Like all other institutions, marriage acts as a gender police and contributes to the propagation of the ruling ideology. Hence to undermine its authority would be to undermine the authority of the system.

Romantic love, in its very nature, threatens the authority of marriage as an established institution within society. While marriage reaffirms the values of society and the system, romantic love is essentially a "rebellion" against those values since its passion is not controlled. Such love cannot exist within society unless it leads either to "the separation of the lovers" or to marriage in order to conform the lovers to society's values. The only other option is death, since such love cannot otherwise be tolerated in society on its own terms (Bloom, 2005: 28; See also Laroque, 2005: 88). Hence, by the very act of falling in love, and remaining true to their love all throughout their lives, both couples undermine the authority of marriage as a socially established and accepted institution.

Furthermore, in both societies, marriage is a social contract, an agreement formed between families and based on worldly affairs where love plays no role (See also Brown, 2008: 305). Hence, even though Romeo and Juliet get married and channel their love into a socially accepted institution, their marriage is based on mutual love, equality and freedom. Therefore, it defies all social conventions regarding marriage and threatens the system, since it does not conform to the socially accepted notion of relationships based on patriarchal domination and female subordination.

Moreover, Romeo and Juliet are the son and daughter of the two warring and opposing families of Montague and Capulet, respectively. By marrying each other they refuse to adhere

to the feud. Consequently, their marriage undermines and defies the authority of the feud which is the major governing force in Verona (Synder, 2002: 23, 188). Hence, instead of relying on violence, the law of patriarchy, they rely on love and freedom, thus placing themselves outside the law and becoming inimical to it (See also Kristeva, 2001: 69; Laroque, 2005: 87).

Layli and Majnoon also subvert the authority of marriage in various ways. First, Layli's refusal to consummate her marriage, not only defies her husband's authority as the patriarch and head of the house, it also subverts the very institution of marriage. This subversion is, of course, the result of her commitment to Majnoon. For her, love and loyalty to Majnoon outweigh anything her husband could offer her: "Even though he has dignity and fame – what does that mean to me? Who is he compared to you, my beloved?" (159).

Layli further undermines the sanctity and seriousness of marriage as a socially established institution when she seeks to keep in touch with Majnoon even after being married. After Layli's marriage, both lovers take every opportunity to write to, and even meet each other. The messengers are in fact sent by Layli herself, and their meeting arranged by her who, despite being guarded at home, tends to run away from home whenever she gets the chance, to meet or send a message to her beloved Majnoon. Therefore, while she is refusing her husband, she has no qualms about staying in touch with Majnoon and remaining loyal to him. These attitudes, as Sattari points out, are proof of Layli and Majnoon's refusal to accept the legitimacy of a marriage which disregards the woman's consent and feelings and is decided on by her father and sanctioned by society, and their adherence, instead, to the true and pure love that exists between themselves (Sattari, 1987: 234). And therefore, the lovers never care for or respect the society's conventions regarding marriage and instead, remain true to their love for each other.

The couples' subversive love, therefore, leads them to challenge the many institutions that act as gender police in their societies, hence also subverting power relations. Based on Foucault's conception, power exists in the relations that people bear with others as well as with institutions. Hence, challenge and subversion of power is also achieved through these relations. The lovers' subversion of patriarchy, therefore, lies in the way they come to disrupt power relations within their respective societies. Romeo and Juliet, through their love and subsequent marriage, undermine the authority of the institutions of family, marriage and the law. Similarly, Layli and Majnoon, by falling in love and remaining true to each other, challenge the authority of the institutions of school, family and marriage. Accordingly, the way Romeo, Juliet, Layli and Majnoon run their lives and act in their respected societies bring them to redefine the existing power relations according to their love, thus undermining and challenging their authority, and ultimately subverting the system.

Notes

¹ All references to *Romeo and Juliet* are from the New Cambridge Edition, edited by G. Blakemore Evans (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003).

² The original text of the poem is in Persian. All references to the poem are taken from R. Gelpke's translation of the poem, followed by the page number, unless otherwise stated.

³ Author's translations (AT) refer to the original Persian poem by Nezami, *Kolliyateh Nezami Ganjavi* (Tehran: Entesharat Negah, 1388). The above quote refers to Book 13, Lines 23-24.

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