INTRODUCTION

In a copy of the 1623 folio of Shakespeare's *Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies*, an early reader paid particular attention to *Romeo and Juliet*. He drew a line down the margin of passages he thought especially commendable, or perhaps just liked: in general, he preferred lyrical verse, the lovers' dialogue, and passages of description. He corrected obvious typographical errors and compared his copy with another edition, making emendations as an editor would. Most notably, he copied the play's prologue, not printed in the folio text, into the space at the end of the previous play, *Titus Andronicus*, neatly titling it 'The prologue to Juliet and Romeo'.

The reader was identified in 2019 as John Milton, author of *Paradise Lost*. He was 14 in 1623, and seems to have acquired the book by the late 1620s. There is no evidence that he ever saw the play performed, but the seriousness and the pleasure of his reading are visible not only in the emendations but in how his curving vertical lines are so often extended, to take in more of Shakespeare's text.[1]

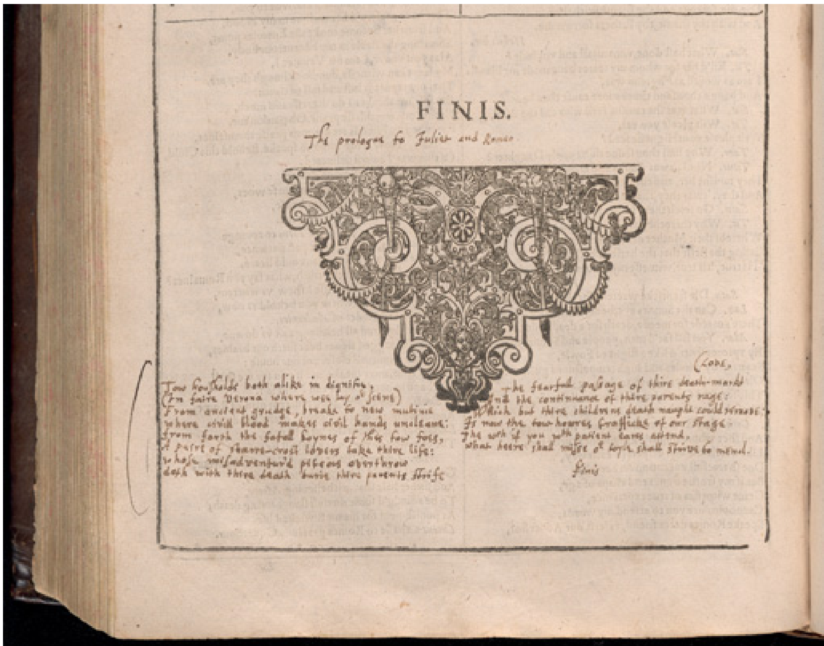
Taylor Swift re-released her 2008 hit 'Love Story' as 'Love Story (Taylor's Version)' in 2021. The 2008 video depicted a tongue-in-cheek romantic fantasy, framed as a daydream within a schoolyard encounter: Taylor on a balcony in an off-the-shoulder corseted dress, an almost parodically sultry young man in a floppy white shirt, intercut with scenes of a ball, a garden at night, a meadow, a horse. And there's a fantasy happy ending, when 'Romeo' proposes and this day-dreamy love story ends with parental approval, a white wedding and a heartfelt 'yes'. A reviewer described it as being about 'the kind of extravagant feelings you have when every interaction with your crush is life-or-death in a way that can only be expressed by referencing the Shakespeare play you were just discussing in your high school English class'.[2] *Romeo and Juliet* is one of the most performed, read, studied, adapted and referenced of Shakespeare's plays, one of the best known and most popular by any definition, and it seems that it always has been. The play's resonance with teenagers in particular has a long history: in the 1623 folio acquired by the Bodleian Library in Oxford in 1624, the play which shows most wear is *Romeo and Juliet*, its most worn scene the lovers' first meeting.[3]

*c.*1595: A Poet-Playwright at Work

In the plays he wrote in 1595 – most likely *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Richard II* and *Romeo and Juliet* – Shakespeare 'reached a new level of artistic

[1] See Claire Bourne and Jason Scott-Warren, '"thy unvalued Booke": John Milton's copy of the Shakespeare First Folio', *Milton Quarterly* 56 (2022), 1–85.
[2] Simon Vozick-Levinson, *Rolling Stone*, 12 February 2021.
[3] Emma Smith, *Shakespeare's First Folio: Four Centuries of an Iconic Book*, 2016, p. 75.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press


FINIS.

1 The prologue to *Romeo and Juliet*, written on the page (sig. ee2v) facing the play's opening in a copy of the 1623 Folio by a seventeenth-century reader identified as John Milton. (Courtesy of the Free Library of Philadelphia, Rare Book Department)

development'.[1] Trying to pin down the exact sequence of those plays is less interesting than thinking about them as having been worked on in parallel, as a series of interrelated poetic and dramaturgical experiments. While the near-total closure of the London playhouses from summer 1592 to summer 1594, mostly by plague, is usually referenced in relation to Shakespeare's writing of *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, it's also important context for the plays generally agreed to have been performed for the first time in 1594–5. The figures for new plays over this period are stark: the *British Drama Catalogue* has thirty-four entries in 1592, and only eleven in 1593; there are twenty-six in 1594; and in 1595, forty-five.[2] This basic outline shows both the precarity of the playing companies and, much more positively, the preconditions for the abundance of new writing for the stage in 1594–5. The closure of the theatres in 1592–4 doesn't have to be thought of solely in terms of Shakespeare's writing of his long poems: a cluster of Shakespeare's works can be approached as being part of the same extended, mutually informative creative process, as Shakespeare read and wrote both poetry and drama.[3] The next part of this section looks at some examples of

[1] Hugh Grady, *Shakespeare and Impure Aesthetics*, 2009, p. 52.
[2] See *BDC* III.
[3] *BDC* suggests *TGV* 1594; *Rom.*, *R2*, *MND* 1595; *MV*, *LLL* 1596.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

how Shakespeare worked with his chief source, Arthur Brooke's *Tragicall Historye*, at the level of plot, transforming a long narrative poem into drama, and then goes on to explore some of the other things that were 'in the mix' around 1595, in what Shakespeare was writing himself, and in works by other writers. Setting *Romeo and Juliet* in the context of its poetic and dramatic moment more generally suggests that Shakespeare saw no hard-and-fast distinction between poetry and drama, at the same time as he was exploring and experimenting with the particular qualities and potential of both theatre and verse.

The identification of a play's sources and its date are often mutually dependent. *Romeo and Juliet* certainly has specific sources, above all Brooke's *Tragicall Historye*; Brooke's poem is frequently cited in the commentary notes, and substantial excerpts are included as an appendix to the online edition. The main way in which sources and dating are intertwined is in the establishment of the earliest possible date for a work's composition (because it demonstrably makes use of a source not available until that time) and the latest possible date (because the work itself becomes a source, established by clear allusions in other texts) or (even more definitively) by its appearance in print. A key text here for some editors is Thomas Nashe's *Have With You To Saffron-Walden*, printed in 1596, but which it's been argued Shakespeare knew in manuscript; there are certainly some possible verbal echoes in *Romeo and Juliet*, noted in the Commentary. Editors of *Romeo and Juliet* have sometimes tried to identify the earth-quake described by the Nurse in 1.3, too, as a way of dating the play.[1] But the discussion here is less concerned with tying *Romeo and Juliet* to a particular date (which it broadly assumes is 1595) than with establishing what sort of conversation Shakespeare's play might be having with other texts around that moment.

The story of Romeo and Juliet long predates even Brooke's poem. The feuding Montecchi and Cappelletti were first mentioned in Dante's *Purgatorio* (1320): the Montecchi were Ghibellines, from Verona, supporting the Holy Roman Emperor, and the Cappelletti were Guelphs, from Cremona, supporting the Pope. These factions divided Italy from the twelfth to the fifteenth century. Next came the publication of Masuccio Salernitano's *Novellino* (1476), including a story broadly similar to the play; Luigi da Porto's 'Hystoria novellamente ritrovata di due nobili amanti' (1524), set in Verona and naming Romeo and Giulietta; and Matteo Bandello's 'La sfortunata morte di due infelicissimi amanti' (1554), expanding da Porto; both da Porto and Bandello set the story in the late thirteenth century, when Bartolomeo della Scala governed Verona. Finally, Pierre Boaistuau translated Bandello as 'Histoire troisième de deux Amants' in his *Histoires tragiques* (1559).[2] Most significant for Shakespeare's play, however, was Brooke's narrative poem *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet* (1562), based on Boaistuau, and the publication of the second volume of William Painter's *Palace of Pleasure* (1567), which included a prose version also based on Boaistuau. Very little is known about Brooke, who did not live to see his poem's influence: he drowned in 1563.

[1] See Weis, pp. 36–41, and Levenson, pp. 99–102, on the earthquake and Nashe.
[2] See the timeline by Christopher Dearner in Julia Reinhard Lupton (ed.), *Romeo and Juliet: A Critical Reader*, 2016, pp. xiv–xxiii.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

His poem was reprinted in 1567 and 1587. The first volume of Painter's work was printed in 1566 and reprinted in 1569, the second volume was reprinted in 1580, and *both* volumes were printed together in 1575; Shakespeare might have had that 1575 edition (and by early 1594) because he echoes Painter's version of the story of Lucretia (which is in volume 1) in his own *Lucrece*, which was entered for publication in the Stationers' Register on 9 May. But the story of Romeo and Juliet was well known.[1]

As Catherine Belsey suggests, 'analysis of the way the play treats its sources is as close as we can get to seeing Shakespeare at work':[2] what follows are some particular examples of Shakespeare's transformations of his sources. As Brooke's *Tragicall Historye* begins, young Romeus is going to lots of parties in Verona in an attempt to get over his infatuation with an unidentified woman. He goes with his friends to a Christmas party and they dance with the ladies, but when the time comes to unmask he is 'bashfull' and with 'shamefast face forsook / The open prease, and him withdrew into the chambers nooke' (171–2). Then he sees Juliet, and the sight of her puts all thought of his former love out of his mind, 'as out of a planke a nayle a nayle doth drive' (207).[3] Shakespeare draws on another source for further details of his lovers' meeting, however: Christopher Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*. Although it wasn't printed until 1598, it must have been written before Marlowe's death (30 May 1593), and editors now assume that Shakespeare knew it in manuscript.[4]

In Brooke, Juliet has sat down with Romeus 'at thone side of her chayre' and on the other 'one cald Mercutio'. This is not the unforgettable friend Shakespeare gives his hero: Brooke's Mercutio has just one memorable quality, his icy hands. 'As soon as had the knight / the vyrgins right hand raught: / Within her trembling hand her left / hath louing Romeus caught.' (Mercutio's hands are just as cold in Painter's version.) Brooke is a very long way from the extraordinary intimacy of the sonnet which Shakespeare's lovers share, and its erotic charge is partly supplied by the meeting of Marlowe's lovers. *Hero and Leander* is not drama, but emphatically the work of a dramatist. Leander has seen Hero at a festival of Venus and they have instantly fallen in love: 'Where both deliberat, the love is slight / Who ever lov'd, that lov'd not at first sight?', the narrator observes. (Romeo on seeing Juliet: 'Did my heart love till now? forswear it, sight! / For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night', 1.5.51–2.)[5] Leander kneels in prayer, at which 'Chast *Hero* to her selfe thus softly said: / Were I the saint hee worships, I would heare him.' And, when Leander and Hero meet, 'These lovers parled by the touch of hands'.[6] Juliet's plight in Brooke is comic, one

[1] See Jill Levenson, 'Romeo and Juliet before Shakespeare', *SP* 81 (1984), 325–47.

[2] Catherine Belsey, *Romeo and Juliet: Language and Writing*, 2014, pp. 68–9.

[3] Seeing Silvia, Proteus quotes the same proverb (*TGV* 2.4.185–8); Brooke was probably a source for *TGV*. See M. S. Allen, 'Brooke's "Romeo and Juliet" as a source for the Valentine–Silvia plot', *University of Texas Publication: Studies in English* 18 (1938), 25–46.

[4] *Shakespeare's Poems*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones and H. R. Woudhuysen, 2007, pp. 20–1.

[5] See also *AYLI* 3.6.80–1.

[6] *Hero and Leander* 175–9, 185, in Marlowe II. Roma Gill in *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe*, vol. I, ed. Gill, 1986, notes that 'the encounter seems to anticipate the first contact – "palm to palm" – of Romeo and Juliet': 183–5n. There are other echoes: notably *Rom.* 3.2.26–31 closely follows *Hero and Leander* 237–42.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

hand in Mercutio's clammy grip, the other warmly clasped by Romeo, but it's a scenario which would not easily translate into drama. Marlowe's poem, however, *does* suggest a kind of symbiosis of the poetic and the dramatic, the voice and the body. Like Marlowe's lovers, Romeo and Juliet 'parl', speak (at least at first) by the touch of hands (pp. 34–5).

At the end of the party, Brooke's timeframe dilates: Romeus hangs around under Juliet's window, night after night, and she spends hours vainly looking out for him, until one night they coincide, see each other and declare their love. Romeus persuades the Friar to marry them, the Nurse acts as go-between and they are married under cover of Juliet going to confession. There is a rope ladder and the wedding night duly follows. Shakespeare compresses this into mere hours. In Brooke, there's not only a gap of weeks between the lovers' meeting and their encounter at Juliet's window, but after their marriage the lovers' relationship continues for a further three months, Romeus visiting his wife every other night before the crisis caused by Tibalt's killing. In a narrative poem, time can be as easily compressed as it can be dilated, with months reduced to a few lines. The headlong, passionate intensity in Shakespeare's play is fostered by its careful time-scheme – five days – but it's also a recognition that such repetitive action, night after night, would be both difficult to convey and, even more, inherently non-dramatic. (An early modern audience, perhaps cued by actors' bodies and physical action to think in more realistic ways, might expect a crisis to be occasioned by pregnancy, as is the case for Juliet's namesake in *Measure for Measure* 1.2.126–36.)

Shakespeare engineers the crisis via the challenge that Tybalt sends to Romeo the morning after the party, the day of the lovers' wedding, but in Brooke the outbreak of violence is months later and not directed at Romeo at all: Tibalt leads a Capilet gang who ambush the Montagewes. Romeus tries to stop the fight but, in the space of ten lines or so, he kills Tibalt, and in another dozen lines, he's banished. Shakespeare personalises the crisis (the challenge, Mercutio's goading of Tybalt, their duel, Mercutio's death and Romeo's grief-stricken revenge) and it takes place immediately after the wedding. But he also adds suspense by leaving Romeo's fate undecided for considerable stage time: the Prince's verdict is only given after Benvolio's narration of events and the parents' interventions, all of which take up around fifty lines before Romeo is banished. In Brooke, Juliet hears of her cousin's death and her husband's exile almost immediately, but in the play the scene changes to Juliet's soliloquy as she awaits the wedding night (pp. 36–7), and the Nurse takes another thirty or so lines to state plainly that 'Tybalt is gone and Romeo banishèd' (3.2.69).

It's only at this point in Brooke that Juliet's marriage is mooted by her parents: Paris hasn't even been mentioned. The action continues much as in the play, with Juliet's initial defiance, her desperate visit to the Friar, his provision of the potion, her overcoming her fear of taking it, the discovery of her apparent corpse, and her funeral. Romeus's servant Peter sees the funeral procession and goes to Mantua to tell Romeus, who finds an apothecary and buys poison. He rides at speed back to Verona; he and Peter break into the tomb (no Paris), he laments, embraces Juliet and takes the poison, dying with a prayer for God's forgiveness. The Friar arrives and Juliet

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

awakes; she laments and 'A thousand times she kist [Romeus's] mouth as cold as stone' (2731). (By a simple inversion, Shakespeare focuses the pathos far more terribly in Juliet's heartrending 'Thy lips are warm', 5.3.167, p. 40.) The Friar flees and Juliet kills herself. The Friar is taken to the Prince and tells his story, and the Prince delivers his judgement: the Nurse is banished, Peter is forgiven, the apothecary is hanged, and the Friar is exonerated. The families are reconciled and Brooke concludes that, in Verona, 'There is no monument more worthy of the sight: / Then is the tombe of Iuliet, and Romeus her knight' (3019–20). Shakespeare's final couplet ostentatiously remakes Brooke's. The point of setting out these comparisons is not simply to demonstrate that 'Shakespeare does it better.' What's striking is how Shakespeare's version of the story of Romeo and Juliet is so distinctive as *drama*, but, as Gordon McMullan argues, 'in *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare seems wilfully to refuse to differentiate between his two vocations: poet and playwright'.[1]

Many possible sources or echoes for particular phrases, lines or passages in *Romeo and Juliet* are cited in the commentary notes, but it's also illuminating to trace larger connections between the play and 1590s lyric poetry, especially sonnets, with which Shakespeare often seems to be in conversation, and with other things that Shakespeare himself is writing, especially his own plays. The next part of this section makes some of those comparisons and connections – the kinds of things that might have been noticed by an audience member who saw *Romeo and Juliet*, *Richard II* and *Midsummer Night's Dream* at around the same time (and which could almost have been in-jokes for actors; this seems particularly the case with *Romeo and Juliet* and 'Pyramus and Thisbe') and who was *also* reading (or writing) the poetry which was fashionable in that same mid-1590s moment. The point is not trying to pin down what came first, who was borrowing or quoting whom, but mapping some of the possible connections – between Shakespeare and sonnets by Sidney and Spenser, for instance, or *Romeo and Juliet* and *epithalamia*, wedding poems, written in 1594–5 by poets including Spenser and John Donne.

The publication of Philip Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* in 1591 fuelled a sonnet-writing craze,[2] including sonnet sequences by some of the better-known poets of the day: Samuel Daniel's *Delia* (1592), Michael Drayton's *Idea the shepheards garland* (1593) and *Ideas mirrour* (1594), and Edmund Spenser's *Amoretti* (1595); there were many other sonnets published by less well-known poets, as well as all those that never made it into print. That Romeo has been reading Petrarch or his imitators is not in doubt: Montague describes him as 'private in his chamber pen[ning] himself' (1.1.129), shutting himself away, but a quibble on 'pen' suggests writing too. In Baz Luhrmann's 1996 film, Romeo is first seen writing (p. 65), his lines in voiceover (1.1.167–70), his oxymorons an example of 'the numbers that Petrarch flowed in' that Mercutio accuses Romeo of churning out (2.4.34–5). Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* is demonstrably an influence on Shakespeare's play;[3] its sonnets and songs are also frequently dramatic in their effect. Four sonnets (79–82) remember, imagine or

[1] McMullan, p. xii. [2] *Astrophil and Stella* was written *c*.1581.
[3] See 5.3.118 supplementary note.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

anticipate kissing Stella, but a kiss itself cannot be contained in the sonnet; it's always just outside its envelope. Astrophil nearly kisses Stella in the Second Song; and in the Eleventh, they duet: 'Who is it that this darke night, / Underneath my window playneth?', asks Stella (1–2). Sidney's sequence plays with what sonnets are capable of and also what they apparently *can't* do.[1] Thomas Nashe's preface to the unauthorised 1591 edition calls it 'this Theater of pleasure . . . a paper stage streud with pearle . . . whiles the tragicommody of loue is performed by starlight', but 'the chiefe Actor here is *Melpomene*'.[2] Whether or not the idea of a 'tragicommody of loue . . . performed by starlight', its action shaped by Melpomene the tragic muse, was noted by Shakespeare, Nashe thinks about the inherent theatricality of sonnets. Shakespeare takes up the challenge and makes it flesh; he explores the potential of what staging sonnets might do (pp. 34–40).

Almost all the *Amoretti*'s sonnets are in Spenser's own elaborately interlocking form (rhymed *ababbcbccdcdee*), and the sequence opens by imagining the book being read by Elizabeth, whom he married in 1594: 'Happy ye leaues when as those lilly hands, / which hold my life in their dead doing might / Shall handle you and hold in loues soft bands, / like captiues trembling at the victors sight' (1.1–4). Spenser's conceit is tactile, as the poem slips between the poem itself, the book's pages and his wife's hands: this sonnet is a nest of words and hands intertwined, and Romeo and Juliet's first meeting perhaps glances at it. The *Amoretti* are followed by a long poem, the *Epithalamion*. An *epithalamium* is a classical form;[3] literally a song sung outside the bridal chamber, it can refer to wedding poems more generally. Spenser's is not quite the earliest English epithalamium (Sidney included one in the *Arcadia*, published 1593), but it is unusual in being in his own voice as poet-bridegroom (they are more usually sung by wedding guests). John Donne's 'Epithalamium made at Lincoln's Inn' was likely written as a response to Spenser's, possibly for the Christmas revels in 1594–5;[4] its dramatic occasion is suggestive. A further epithalamium *was* written for a real wedding, that of Lady Elizabeth Vere and William Stanley, Earl of Derby, at Greenwich Palace on 26 January 1595, by John Davies (pp. 8, 24–5).[5] There is a long tradition of speculating that *Midsummer Night's Dream* might have been performed at the Vere–Stanley wedding, although no definitive evidence has ever been found.[6]

These offer a suggestive cluster of analogues for Shakespeare's epithalamium, Juliet's 'Gallop apace'.[7] Like Spenser, Juliet speaks her own epithalamium. The versions by Donne and Davies seem to have been written for performance. In Spenser's poem, the poet-bridegroom waits impatiently for nightfall on the longest day, urging on the sun: 'Hast thee O fayrest Planet to thy home / Within

1 See David Schalkwyk, *Speech and Performance in Shakespeare's Sonnets and Plays*, 2002, p. 68.
2 *Syr P.S. His Astrophel and Stella* (1591), sig. A3.
3 Catullus 61, 62 and 64 were the most important models.
4 See Donne, pp. 617–18.
5 Davies, pp. 202–7, 407.
6 The case has been made for two, the Vere–Stanley wedding and the Carey–Berkeley wedding (19 February 1596).
7 See 3.2.1–4 supplementary note, and Gary M. McCown, '"Runnawayes Eyes" and Juliet's epithalamium', *SQ* 27 (1976), 150–70.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the Westerne fome: / Thy tyred steedes longe since haue need of rest' (282–4).[1] Juliet calls on night to 'Spread thy close curtain' and imagines being concealed by night's 'black mantle' (3.2.5,15); Spenser's speaker implores night to 'spread thy broad wing ouer my loue and me, / That no man may vs see, / And in thy sable mantle vs enwrap' (319–21).[2] The point is almost less the echo than the voice, the direct invocation which Spenser models, and the sense of dramatic occasion, of really speaking aloud, which is affirmed by Donne and Davies. In the final sonnet of Davies' 'Epithalamion', the muse promises the couple that their names will be written in the heavens 'in starry letters': 'Longe shall you shine on earth, like Lampes of heaven, / Which when you Leave, I will you stellifie' – that is, transform into stars. When Juliet instructs that, if night gives her Romeo, 'when I shall die, / Take him and cut him out in little stars' (3.2.21–2), the parallel with Davies is striking (p. 37).

Shakespeare also quotes himself, and not just in words but in situations and staging. Quite possibly written for the same actors, the farewell between Richard and the Queen in *Richard II* poignantly echoes the *meeting* of Romeo and Juliet:

RICHARD One kiss shall stop our mouths, and dumbly part.
Thus give I mine, and thus take I thy heart.
QUEEN Give me mine own again. 'Twere no good part
To take on me to keep and kill thy heart.
So, now I have mine own again be gone,
That I may strive to kill it with a groan.
RICHARD We make woe wanton with this fond delay.
Once more adieu, the rest let sorrow say. (5.1.95–102)

Romeo and Juliet and *Richard II* also share their careful use of the upper stage. In the balcony scene, Juliet's location literalises Romeo's idiom as he addresses her as sun and angel, with the audience too gazing up: at the Theatre, they might have had to shade their eyes against the afternoon sun (p. 15). Romeo's adoration of Juliet was quite literally turning west to east. (With his obscenely tragic Wall in 'Pyramus and Thisbe', Shakespeare demonstrated that he also knew exactly how *not* to stage a pair of separated lovers: vertical yearning is poignant, horizontal somehow ridiculous.) 'Characters appearing above are always a focus of attention, and typically the raised location is thematically significant':[3] in *Richard II*, the King enters '*on the walls*' when he surrenders to Bullingbrook at Flint Castle, appearing 'As doth the blushing discontented sun / From out the fiery portal of the east / When he perceives the envious clouds are bent / To dim his glory and to stain the track / Of his bright passage to the occident' (3.3.62–7). These are Bullingbrook's words, but Richard identifies himself with the sun too: when he finally comes down, he descends 'like glistering Phaëton' (3.3.178). The invocation of Apollo's ill-fated son is as ominous for

[1] See Catherine Belsey, 'The elephants' graveyard revisited: Shakespeare at work in *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *All's Well That Ends Well*', *S.Sur. 68* (2015), 62–72: 67–8.
[2] Belsey, 'Elephants' graveyard', 68.
[3] Leslie Thomson, 'Staging on the road, 1586–1594: a new look at some old assumptions', *SQ* 61 (2010), 526–50: 535, and pp. 15–16.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

him as it is for Juliet and Romeo. *Romeo and Juliet*'s audience are cued by torches and even more by words to imagine night; in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, however, Peter Quince and his company are sceptical that their courtly audience will be able to imagine anything, let alone moonlight, without crashingly literal cues, at the same time as they worry that the audience will enter into the illusion (the lion, the killing) too far (3.1.8–55). *Romeo and Juliet*'s audience are four times (2.3, 3.5, 4.4, 5.3) invited to picture day-break: in the dawn scene, Juliet says that 'It is not yet near day', Romeo counters that 'envious streaks' of light are appearing, Juliet denies that it's the sun (3.5.1–15). If the Chamberlain's Men revived *The Taming of the Shrew* in the late 1590s,[1] then Katherina and Petruchio's argument and Katherina's capitulation ('And be it moon or sun or what you please; / And if you please to call it a rush-candle, / Henceforth I vow it shall be so for me', 4.5.13–15) would have sounded even more hollow by comparison with the poignantly shifting vision of Romeo and Juliet's aubade (pp. 37–9).

Midsummer Night's Dream and *Romeo and Juliet* are most obviously connected by the story of 'Pyramus and Thisbe', staged at the wedding celebrations for Theseus and Hippolyta, Demetrius and Helena, and Hermia and Lysander. The coincidence of the bathetic 'Pyramus and Thisbe' with the tragic *Romeo and Juliet* suggests considerable confidence on Shakespeare's part in both his actors and his own writing. Beyond their correspondences in terms of plot, the most striking link between *Romeo and Juliet* and *Midsummer Night's Dream* is Mercutio's 'Queen Mab' (1.4.54–95), which reads like an off-cut of the fairy play. The fairies in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth and Mustardseed, are apparently tiny, but Mercutio's minuscule imaginings are more threatening: Mab herself is 'no bigger than an agate-stone / On the forefinger of an alderman', in her nut-shell chariot, pulled by 'little atomi / Over men's noses as they lie asleep', the coachman 'Not half so big as a round little worm / Pricked from the lazy finger of a maid' (1.4.55–69). She gallops through dreams, and as Mercutio's speech gets faster and more vivid, the audience's heads must whirl too, with the effort of keeping up, the effort of imagination. It's a heady space to be in (modern productions sometimes supply hallucinogens) and, in some ways, Mercutio's speech creates the pre-condition for the lovers' *coup de foudre*, their explosive love-at-first-sight, for the audience as well as the characters. A spell is cast, no fairy magic needed.

The earliest allusions to *Romeo and Juliet* are found in both poetry and drama. John Marston's *Scourge of Villanie* (1598) mocks '*Luscus*', who speaks 'naught but pure *Iuliat* and *Romio*', although Luscus's theatre obsession ('h'ath made a common-place booke out of plaies') is at least 'warranted by Curtaine *plaudeties*' – that is, by applause at the Curtain; Marston might also have meant *Romeo and Juliet* in his allusion to 'some new pathetique Tragedie', although it was not especially 'new' by 1598.[2] Other plays around this date referenced Shakespeare's play: Henry Porter's *The Two Angry*

[1] *BDC* 916.
[2] John Marston, *The scourge of villanie* (1598), sig. H4^{r}. *Rom.* would have been relatively new *in print* in 1598.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Women of Abingdon (1598) has verbal echoes, feuding families and a balcony scene, and there are balcony/window scenes in Marston's *Blurt, Master Constable* (1600), although 'the popularity of *Romeo and Juliet* has caused most amorous balcony exchanges to be labelled imitative'.[1] In the first part of *The Return from Parnassus*, a Cambridge student play (1598–1601), Ingenioso says of his foolish patron Gullio, 'We shall haue nothinge but pure Shakspeare, and shreds of poetrie that he hath gathered at the theators', to which Gullio responds with a near-quotation from *Romeo and Juliet* (2.4.35–7, ironically Mercutio mocking Romeo for his tired poetic commonplaces). 'Marke Romeo and Iuliet', Ingenioso continues, 'o monstrous theft, I thinke he will runn throughe a whole booke of Samuell Daniells.'[2] This is neat evidence not just of *Romeo and Juliet*'s popularity but of theatre and poetry's inseparability for young men of this kind: Luscus copies bits from plays into his commonplace book, Gullio too gathers 'shreds' at the theatre, and such extracts are thought of in the same way as 'a whole book of Samuell Daniells', one of the most prolific and popular sonnet-writing poets of the day (p. 6). There are numerous passages from *Romeo and Juliet* in the popular anthology *England's Parnassus* (1600), arranged under headings such as 'Love'. More mysterious is *The Passionate Pilgrim* (1599): it includes two of Shakespeare's sonnets (138 and 144), three poems from *Love's Labour's Lost*, and an anonymous poem which 'may have been suggested by Romeo and Juliet's night-time parting at the end of 2.2';[3] there are verbal echoes, although not close: 'Good night, good rest, ah, neither be my share' (compare 2.2.184–7); 'While Philomela sits and sings, I sit and mark, / And wish her lays were tuned like the lark' (compare 3.5.1–7). But all of these examples suggest the easy slippage between the 'dramatic' and the 'poetic', in the witty and rivalrous homosocial world in which such texts circulated and were consumed.

Writing for the Chamberlain's Men

A longstanding narrative held that, in 1594, English professional theatre became a 'duopoly', carved up between the Lord Admiral's Men at the Rose and the Lord Chamberlain's Men at the Theatre, a deal cut by their respective patrons Charles Howard and Henry Carey;[4] recent research has modified this story considerably, however.[5] Certainly the years around 1593 saw many changes in London's theatrical landscape, with companies disappearing and reforming, often under different names;[6]

[1] Mary Bly, 'Bawdy puns and lustful virgins: the legacy of Juliet's desire in comedies of the early 1590s', *S. Sur. 49* (1996), 97–109: 97. See also Tom Rutter, *Shakespeare and the Admiral's Men: Reading across Repertories on the London Stage, 1594–1600*, 2017, pp. 156–62, 198.

[2] *The First Part of the Return from Parnassus*, in J. B. Leishman (ed.), *The Three Parnassus Plays*, 1949, 3.1.986–94 (pp. 183–4).

[3] *Shakespeare's Poems*, ed. Duncan-Jones and Woudhuysen, p. 402.

[4] See Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespeare Company, 1594–1642*, 2004.

[5] See Roslyn L. Knutson, 'What's so special about 1594?', *SQ* 61 (2010), 449–67; Holger Schott Syme, 'The meaning of success: stories of 1594 and its aftermath', *SQ* 61 (2010), 490–525; and Bart Van Es, *Shakespeare in Company*, 2013.

[6] Roslyn L. Knutson, 'Playing companies and repertory', in *A New Companion to Renaissance Drama*, ed. Arthur Kinney and Thomas Warren Hopper, 2017, pp. 239–49: 242.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

it's clear that the Chamberlain's Men existed in some sense by summer 1594 and were playing at the Theatre (pp. 13–15) probably by September 1595. Shakespeare was first named as a member (with Will Kempe and Richard Burbage) in connection with payment in March 1595 for a performance at court the previous December.

This company was 'the matrix through which [Shakespeare] could structure his thinking'.[1] What did the Chamberlain's Men look like around 1595? There were eight 'sharers', including Kempe, Burbage and Shakespeare, who had equal shares in the company's assets, income and expenses, running the company as a collective. When they moved to the Globe in 1599 (p. 14), the sharers contributed substantial sums to the construction costs. Shakespeare's status as house playwright and sharer was unique: unlike other playwrights of the period, he was not paid per play (the going rate was £5) but a share of the profits for every performance of *every* play, whether he wrote it or not. The sharers formed the nucleus of the company, which also included boys playing women's parts (four or five at any one time) and relied on 'hired men' (not 'casuals': some were part of the company for years). Offstage were the 'book-holder' (stage manager/prompter) and tireman, looking after the costumes. There were other workers with less formal associations with the company: wardrobe and laundry staff, 'gatherers' taking the money, carpenters and painters. Some were women.[2]

The boys playing women's parts were adolescents, 'no younger than twelve and no older than twenty-one or twenty-two, with a median of around sixteen or seventeen', whereas the children in the boys' companies (the Children of Paul's, the Children of the Chapel) were aged 10 to 14.[3] The boys were 'bound' as apprentices to adult company members.[4] Most seem to have come from London parishes in which there were players living, suggesting that they were talent-spotted (or stage-struck); later on, some were players' sons. Some, but by no means all, of the boys went on to perform with the companies as adults and, with their apprenticeship generally beginning at the age of 14 and ending around the age of 21 or 22, it is likely that some would have been playing young men by the end of their time. There is evidence that puberty started later and, perhaps, was a slower process in the early modern period: 14 was often the age given as the start of puberty in boys.[5] Some, perhaps slightly younger than 14, might be bound as 'covenant servants' for a shorter period. It is also possible that boys joined the company before being formally bound.[6] There is no real evidence that older women's roles, such as the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, were played by adult men.

It's *almost* impossible to identify the characters in *Romeo and Juliet* with specific actors in the Chamberlain's Men, but – even if definitive identifications largely remain

[1] Van Es, p. 111.
[2] See Natasha Korda, *Labors Lost: Women's Work and the Early Modern English Stage*, 2011.
[3] David Kathman, 'How old were Shakespeare's boy actors?', *S.Sur. 58* (2005), 220–46: 220, 222. See also Roberta Barker, '"Not one thing exactly": gender, performance and critical debates over the early modern boy-actress', *Literature Compass* 6/2 (2009), 460–81.
[4] See David Kathman, 'Players, livery companies, and apprentices', in *Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theatre*, ed. Richard Dutton, 2011, pp. 413–28.
[5] Kathman, 'How old?', 221–2.
[6] Kathman is sceptical: see '*The Seven Deadly Sins* and theatrical apprenticeship', *Early Theatre* 14 (2011), 121–39: 133.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

out of reach – it's still illuminating to set out the kinds of evidence on which 'best guesses' can be based, as the next part of this section explores. The discussion here draws on some of the recent research into the acting companies and their repertories, giving examples of the patchwork of documentary evidence that survives and how it might be interpreted; it suggests some of the practical, theatrical considerations that shaped Shakespeare's writing of *Romeo and Juliet*.

The earliest surviving snapshot of the Chamberlain's Men in action is the 'plot' of *The Second Part of the Seven Deadly Sins*, the poster-sized running order pinned up backstage during performances, dating from 1597–8.[1] It included the names of the actors involved in each episode, music cues, props and special effects. This plot identifies five boys, each playing one or two women's parts. 'T Belt' is Thomas Belte, 'Nick' is Nicholas Tooley, and 'Saunder' is Alexander Cooke. 'Ro Go' is almost certainly Robert Gough, and 'Ned' might *just* have been Edmund Shakespeare, who was a player when he died in 1607; he would have been 17 in 1597.[2] Cooke, Gough and Tooley were 'the big three … around the turn of the century';[3] all three became (adult) members of the King's Men in 1603–4. Assuming they were apprenticed around 14 and were 21 in 1603–4, they would have been 12 or 13 when Shakespeare was writing *Romeo and Juliet*. Gough and Cooke had major roles in *Seven Deadly Sins*, suggesting that they were experienced by 1597–8; David Kathman speculates that they played 'Portia and Jessica in *Merchant*, and Beatrice and Hero in *Much Ado*'.[4] *Romeo and Juliet* predates those by around a year, but it is a reasonable inference that Juliet was played by either Alexander Cooke or Robert Gough in the original production or an early revival.

But there is no firm evidence as to the casting of *Romeo and Juliet*, save that Will Kempe, the company clown, seems to have played Peter, the Capulet servant. When Capulet instructs a servingman 'Sirrah, fetch drier logs. / Call Peter; he will show thee where they are' (4.4.16–17), Q1 reads 'Go, go, choose drier. Will will tell thee where thou shalt fetch them' (17.41–2). In the following scene, Peter speaks with the musicians (4.5.100): in Q1, the speaker is identified as 'servingman' but Q2's direction reads 'Enter Will Kemp'. The episodes with servingmen and musicians (1.5, 4.2, 4.4, 4.5) are now often cut, but if Peter appears in all four, 1.2 (as the illiterate servant) and 2.4 (accompanying the Nurse), then the part looks quite substantial, with scope for improvisation and comedy. Less securely, the Apothecary could have been played by John Sincklo, a hired man with a long association with the company, and also identified with particular roles through speech prefixes in the Induction of *The Taming of the Shrew* and *3 Henry VI* (3.1) and the 1600 quarto of *2 Henry IV*, in which, playing the Beadle, he is mocked for his thinness (5.4);[5] he could also have played Starveling the tailor in *Midsummer Night's Dream*. The Apothecary is impoverished in Brooke,

[1] David Kathman, 'Reconsidering *The Seven Deadly Sins*', *Early Theatre* 7 (2004), 13–44; and Andrew Gurr, 'The work of Elizabethan plotters, and *2 The Seven Deadly Sins*', *Early Theatre* 10 (2007), 67–87.
[2] Kathman, 'How old?', 230–1.
[3] David Kathman, 'John Rice and the boys of the Jacobean King's Men', *S.Sur. 68* (2015), 247–66: 252.
[4] Kathman, 'Reconsidering', 34.
[5] *BDC* dates *2H4* to 1596, and suggests a revival of *3H6* in 1594–5.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

but Shakespeare explicitly makes him *thin*: 'meagre were his looks, / Sharp misery had worn him to the bones' (5.1.40–1).[1]

It's usually assumed that Richard Burbage played all the leading roles in all Chamberlain's Men plays, and so Romeo, but recent scholarship has questioned this;[2] he may well have, although Mercutio would be another possibility. In 1595, Burbage was 27; Romeo's age is never given in the play but it's a reasonable assumption that he is in his late teens or early twenties (p. 33). The secure identification of Burbage with roles in Shakespeare's plays is extremely limited (Hamlet, Lear, Othello): there are only eleven plays in which he is definitely known to have acted, and he was the lead in six of those.[3] (That it's possible even to identify Kempe and perhaps Sincklo with specific roles in the *Romeo and Juliet* is extremely unusual.) In addition, that Burbage played leading roles does not mean that other players did not: 'Alternating plays with different actors in the leads would . . . have made for a more equitable distribution of labour among players', who might have around thirty plays simultaneously in their repertory in a typical year.[4] Labour means line learning and recall, and the physical and cognitive demands of performance, especially fighting. It is illuminating to think of Shakespeare taking into account the demands of the repertory system, whereby a particular player might *tend* to play roles of a particular type, some larger than others, but also play smaller roles or even have a play 'off'.

In terms of the balance between its roles, *Romeo and Juliet* looks more like a comedy than a tragedy. Comedies

> tend to engage the entire ensemble: they may still have identifiable leads, but those leads are not usually textually dominant; the texts of comedies (and hence, stage time and presence) are typically divided quite equitably among at least ten players. Tragedies put a much heavier emphasis on the two leading roles, who on average speak almost 40 per cent of the text.[5]

By a crude word count, Romeo and Juliet dominate (around 4,800 and 4,400 words respectively), with a clear gap between them and the next four. But with word counts in the mid-2000s, the Friar, the Nurse, Capulet and Mercutio all have 'large' roles, with another gap between them and the remaining characters. No other 1590s tragedy has fully six roles which so dominate the play: Mercutio's is the sixth-largest, even though he appears in only four scenes; he has the largest share of the text of *any* sixth-largest role in a surviving 1590s play.[6] Despite its title, *Romeo and Juliet* is in many respects an ensemble play, probably written for actors Shakespeare knew well.

Shakespeare in Shoreditch: the Theatre and the Curtain

It would take a modern pedestrian around half an hour to walk to the site of the Theatre in Shoreditch from St Paul's. Shoreditch is now firmly in London's

[1] See Allison Gaw, 'John Sincklo as one of Shakespeare's actors', *Anglia* 49 (1926): 289–303.
[2] See Holger Schott Syme, 'A sharers' repertory', in *Rethinking Theatrical Documents in Shakespeare's England*, ed. Tiffany Stern, 2020, pp. 33–51.
[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 36–7. [4] *Ibid.*, p. 42. [5] *Ibid.*, p. 43.
[6] Syme, personal communication.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

regenerated inner city, but in the mid sixteenth century it was suburban, around 500 yards (less than 0.5 km) beyond the north-eastern boundary of the City. The site had been occupied by Holywell Priory, dissolved in 1539; it was not an empty field surrounded by empty fields but a built-up site in a generally built-up area. In 1576, the freehold was leased by Giles Allen to James Burbage, leader of Lord Leicester's Men, who built the Theatre. Some of the buildings were rented out to residential tenants; some would have accommodated tap houses, selling refreshments. It was not quite London's first purpose-built playhouse – that was the Red Lion in 1567. 'But if cost, permanence and influence are important, one can probably still think of Burbage's building as the first playhouse.'[1]

The Theatre was plagued by legal disputes, which reached crisis point at around the time of the first performances of *Romeo and Juliet*. Burbage had gone into partnership, and then violently quarrelled, with his brother-in-law John Brayne, leading to lawsuits, enduring bad blood and sometimes physical violence between the families. Under the terms of the original lease, the Burbages had always owned the building: in winter 1598, when the lease proved impossible to renew, they hired a carpenter, Peter Street, who dismantled the building with a gang of workmen. Its timbers were temporarily stored and then recycled in the building of the Globe on the Bankside.[2] Such protracted legal wranglings mean that there is an unparalleled documentary record: the Theatre was 'a large timber building with tile roofs.... It had a yard, tiring house, galleries in which spectators sat and stood, and a door leading up to the galleries at which a gatherer stood to take money from people going to the galleries.'[3] There are also descriptions from tourists: the German traveller Samuel Kiechel recorded in 1585 that there were a number of playhouses which had 'about three galleries one over another', and Johannes de Witt, a Dutch tourist who attended plays at several London playhouses in 1596, wrote a letter in which he described all the playhouses as 'amphitheatres', suggesting that he perceived a similarity to Roman theatres.[4]

In 1585, Burbage and Brayne had entered into a curious arrangement with Henry Lanman, the owner of the nearby Curtain playhouse, whereby they would pool and share their profits for the next seven years. Despite the unorthodox nature of the contract and the volatility of the personalities involved, the arrangement seems to have functioned smoothly; there is no useful trove of legal documents relating to the Curtain. It was also on the main road, slightly closer to the City; it probably opened in 1577. Its name had nothing to do with any association between theatres and curtains: it had been built in a field known as 'the Curtain', probably so-called because it was enclosed by a wall.[5] By the autumn of 1598, the Chamberlain's Men had abandoned the Theatre completely and moved down the road to the Curtain, where they played until they opened the Globe in May 1599. *Romeo and Juliet* was almost certainly performed at both, and probably at all three.

[1] Herbert Berry, 'The Theatre', in *English Professional Theatre, 1530–1660*, ed. Glynne Wickham, Herbert Berry and William Ingram, 2000, pp. 330–87: 330.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 332. [3] *Ibid.* [4] *Ibid.*

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 404–18. Berry's suggestions about the appearance of the playhouse have been modified by archaeological evidence.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The documentary record has been supplemented with archaeological investigations at both Shoreditch sites, resulting in the rethinking of these sites, and the London playhouses more generally. Excavations have shown that the Theatre was most likely a fourteen-sided regular polygon, with a diameter of 22 metres and a footprint of around 370 m². (A modern tennis court is just under 24 m in length; the reconstructed Shakespeare's Globe is a twenty-sided polygon.) There were probably three entrances at the stage's rear. Although it was long thought that the Theatre and the Curtain were similar in size and shape, the Curtain excavations revealed that they were quite different. The Curtain seems to have been rectangular, 22 m in width but at least 25 m in length, giving it a footprint of around 550 m², considerably larger than the Theatre. Their stages seem to have been roughly the same size (around 60 m²), but the Curtain likely held a much larger audience. There was probably a balcony at first-floor level, extending out over the stage, from which a curtain could be hung to form a discovery space or inner stage (there is no evidence of a tiring house, as at the Theatre).[1]

Excavations have prompted a rethink of other aspects of both buildings too. Both were on main roads: 'The most important aspect in the location of a playhouse, like any other commercial enterprise, was, of course, that the available building plot was directly accessible by the paying public', and it made sense that the main entrance was at the back of the auditorium, to allow for the easy admission of latecomers.[2] John Orrell, the main architectural consultant for the reconstruction of Shakespeare's Globe, assumed that playhouses were oriented to enable their stages to be lit by the afternoon sun, but in fact the access issue was more important, and while the Theatre's stage was at the west end of the building, the Curtain's was at the east.[3] That the Chamberlain's Men were able to transfer their repertory wholesale from the Theatre to the Curtain is a solid reminder of the flexibility of early modern playing companies.[4] That flexibility had been honed by regular performances at court (in various locations), and especially by touring, which continued throughout this period, even after the company had a permanent London base.

'Aloft': Staging *Romeo and Juliet*

Romeo and Juliet's staging requirements are particular, not elaborate. Its most famous episode, now known as the 'balcony scene' (2.2), requires a playing area above the stage, originally either a gallery or a window in the front wall of the tiring house. ('Balcony' doesn't appear in the play, and is unknown in English for at least another two decades; Juliet's location in 2.2 isn't specified in any early play-text.) Modern productions often make it possible for Romeo to climb at least part way up to the 'balcony', but it's unlikely that this would have been possible at the Theatre or the

[1] For preliminary information from the excavations, I am indebted to Heather Knight, of Museum of London Archaeology.

[2] Julian M. C. Bowsher, 'Twenty years on: the archaeology of Shakespeare's London playhouses', *Shakespeare* 7 (2011), 452–66: 460.

[3] *Ibid.*, 459.

[4] See Thomson, 'Staging'.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Curtain, or on tour.[1] The space had to be large enough for two actors to appear later in the dawn scene (3.5), where the stage directions '*Enter Romeo and Juliet aloft*' (Q2–4, F) or '*at the window*' (Q 1) appear, and solid enough for Romeo to descend from via a rope ladder. In modern productions, the rope ladder almost always disappears: either the set supplies enough footholds for him to climb or (now almost universal) the dawn scene is set *inside* Juliet's bedroom and Romeo exits out the (sometimes imaginary) window (pp. 37–8). What follows discusses some practicalities of staging in the original performance spaces and the assumptions on which they were based, and some staging questions which might be overthought by modern critics, editors and directors.

Audiences in the 1590s were used to imagining a play's action shifting instantaneously between different locations without visual cues, and also imagining several locations occupying the stage simultaneously, the norm in medieval drama. An example of this is in *Richard III* (5.3) when ghosts appear to both Richard and Richmond, in separate army camps, the night before Bosworth. Modern critics sometimes see, and so attempt to solve, difficulties which were unlikely to have been troubling – or even apparent – to early modern playwrights or their audiences. In the first performances of *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, it's unlikely that an audience would speculate about the precise layout of the Capulet house in 3.5 if Juliet is '*aloft*' at the beginning and then comes down (3.5.67) to meet her mother in the same space which has just been imagined as the garden into which Romeo has exited (3.5.42), because they were not envisaging a coherent space; modern audiences are more likely to expect spatial coherence. Similarly, an early modern audience wouldn't expect Juliet to appear in night attire or undressed in 3.5: costume changes were rare on the early modern stage, but Juliets in modern productions often have a hectic quick change between 3.5 and 4.1, because audiences expect verisimilitude.

What is the Capulet 'monument', in perhaps the play's most complex scene? It's initially imagined as an English-sounding churchyard: Paris asks his Page to conceal himself 'Under yond yew trees' (5.3.3), suggesting that it should be easy to hear someone coming because the ground is 'loose, unfirm with digging up of graves' (5.3.6). He has brought a torch but instructs the Page to 'put it out, for I would not be seen' (5.3.2). In Q1, '*Paris strewes the Tomb with flowers*', probably just the ground, rather than any structure; Romeo comes equipped '*with a torch, a mattocke, and a crow of yron*', and speaks of the tomb as if it is subterranean (he will 'descend into this bed of death', 5.3.28). There almost certainly *has* to be an assumed spatial discontinuity in the scene, allowing Romeo and Paris to fight in the churchyard, but Romeo then to enter the (apparently below ground) tomb, taking Paris's body with him.[2] Both the question of what happens to Juliet's bed in 4.4 and the tomb scene become more straightforward if there is no assumption of spatial coherence: Juliet could even remain onstage continuously from 4.3, with the curtains of her bed being quickly removed for it to become her tomb, and the Mantua scene simply taking place in another part of the stage.[3]

[1] Thomson, 'Staging', 533, 542.
[2] For one approach to staging this scene 'authentically', see p. 55; see also p. 49.
[3] Leslie Thomson, '"With patient ears attend": *Romeo and Juliet* on the Elizabethan stage', *SP* 92 (1995), 230–47: 234.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Romeo too has a torch or lantern ('Give me the light', he says to Balthasar, 5.3.25), which he has to put somewhere while he starts to open the tomb and then fights Paris; he might place a torch in a holder on a pillar or the back wall of the stage. This means that he fights Paris in the (imagined) semi-dark, perhaps retrieving the light in order to 'peruse this face' (5.3.74) and enter the tomb. Although Jill Levenson suggests that Romeo and Paris could fight with rapiers and torches, this seems hideously dangerous for tired actors.[1] The Friar finds only swords on the ground (5.3.142) and Romeo still has his dagger, because Juliet uses it to kill herself (5.3.169). It's not a formal duel: Romeo's only aim is to get to Juliet. If he and Paris have fought with rapier and dagger (p. 27), Romeo could sheathe his dagger after the fight, but a fight just with rapiers wouldn't be unusual. Does Tybalt's corpse appear within the tomb? It seems unlikely (even though Romeo refers to him, 5.3.97–100), both unduly realist and also theatrically impractical: in early productions, the actor playing Tybalt was probably needed in the final scene, for example as the Captain of the Watch. Eleven men are required, assuming that Paris's page is played by the boy who has played Lady Montague, and that Balthasar is played by the actor who has played Benvolio. With all these questions of stage realism (or its absence), it's instructive to look at 'Pyramus and Thisbe' (pp. 8–9): it might be assumed that what Quince and his amateurs regard as essential (a real wall; some representation of the moon) is the opposite to the conventions of the professional stage. Shakespeare was writing with theatrical expedience in mind, with a close eye on the capacities of his company.

Verona-on-Thames

That the author of Shakespeare's plays must have been to Italy (and was therefore *not* Shakespeare) is a commonplace of authorship conspiracists, who argue that the plays demonstrate a knowledge of Italian settings which would have been impossible without lived experience. This is emphatically not true of *Romeo and Juliet*:[2] the Verona locations named in *Romeo and Juliet* are 'Freetown', the Abbey and St Peter's Church, hardly specific. There are Italian proper names, but less obviously in performance than on the page: Benvolio, Romeo and Mercutio are all addressed or referred to by name, Romeo most of all (Shakespeare's alteration of Brooke's 'Romeus' to 'Romeo' has an Italianising effect), but Paris, Tybalt, Friar Lawrence and Juliet don't sound Italian. Although the Prince is sometimes referred to as 'Prince Eskales' in the Q2 stage directions and hence named as 'Escalus' or 'Escales' in lists of roles, he is only ever called 'Prince' in the text – not even a ghost of the historical 'della Scala' (p. 3). The passages which *might* make the play sound marginally more Italian both concern the Capulet party: first, the guest list which names Signior Martino, County Anselme, the lady widow of Vitruvio, Signior Placentio, Signior Valentio, Lucio and Helena, as well as 'Mercutio and his brother Valentine' – the latter perhaps one of the *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1.2.63–71). In fact, although modern editions give 'Signior' or 'Signor', all of the early quartos and the folio use the French 'Seigneur'. And, second, when Juliet

[1] Levenson 5.3.70.1n. [2] Or any of the others.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

is trying to discover Romeo's name, she asks about other guests first, allowing the Nurse to identify 'The son and heir of old Tiberio' and 'young Petruchio' (1.5.128, 130), possibly glancing at *The Taming of the Shrew*, especially as 'Petruchio' reappears in a stage direction when he (silently) accompanies Tybalt (3.1.29 SD).

Many Italians lived in London. Three generations of the Bassano family had been court musicians: in the early 1590s, Emilia Bassano was the mistress of Henry Carey, Lord Hunsdon, briefly the patron of Shakespeare's company (named as 'the Lord of *Hunsdon* his Seruants' in Q1 *Romeo and Juliet* in 1597); she is now better known as the poet Aemilia Lanyer. Vincentio Saviolo (p. 26) took over his fencing school in the Blackfriars from a previous Italian master, Rocco Bonetti; James Burbage acquired the lease in 1596. But, in addition to these two Italian Londoners who happened to have theatrical connections, Italians could be found at all levels of London society.[1] Shakespeare's Verona is entirely homogeneous, however: even riven by its feud, there are no strangers in Verona. Shakespeare would have known that any play which might be construed as depicting London's community tensions would likely have met with heavy censorship. What became known as the 'Dutch Church Libel', a poem threatening violence against immigrants, had been stuck to the door of the 'strangers' church' at Austin Friars on 5 May 1593: it was signed 'Tamburlaine', vividly illustrating the precariousness of good relations between London's various communities and disturbingly invoking the spectacular violence of the stage; anti-immigrant rhetoric was a feature of the London riots in the summer of 1595 (p. 19). It's important to *Romeo and Juliet* that the Capulet and Montague households are *alike in dignity*, rank and social status, but also that they are each as Veronese as the other in belonging to a more or less imaginary Verona.

John Florio, the figure most identified with the Italian language in late sixteenth-century England, published *Florio his Firste Fruites*, a manual for teaching Italian, in 1578, and the first edition of his Italian–English dictionary, *A Worlde of Wordes*, in 1598. He almost certainly knew Shakespeare (they had the same patrons) and he moved in literary circles. His direct influence on Shakespeare's works is demonstrable: the *Firste Fruites* are quoted in *Love's Labour's Lost* (4.2.85–6), for example. Florio's success as a teacher of Italian and the ready market for his books attested to a lively popular interest in Italian; John Gallagher describes early modern English literary culture as 'profoundly multilingual and international'.[2] Those with the time, education and aptitude might learn Italian in order to read Italian texts, or to write in Italian themselves; others accessed Italian texts via English translations. Shakespeare seems to have done both. Some learnt Italian because it was seen as prestigious and they wanted to be able to converse in a 'good' accent; they might learn specifically in anticipation of foreign travel. English people did travel to Italy, but travel in general and to Italy in particular was not straightforward in the late sixteenth century. Passports and licences to travel were granted on a case-by-case basis: 'with the exception of established merchants, individuals were required by law to request

[1] See Duncan Salkeld, *Shakespeare and London*, 2018, pp. 131–7.
[2] John Gallagher, *Learning Languages in Early Modern England*, 2019, pp. 4–5.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

permission to leave the country, under the condition that they "do not haunte or resorte unto the territories or dominions of any foreign prince or potentate not being with us in league or amitie"'.[1] Travel specifically to Italy opened a man to suspicion of Catholic sympathies; Englishmen who spent time in Italy might become 'Italianated' and it was proverbial that 'an Englishman Italianated is the Devil incarnate'.[2]

Like Verona (3.3.17), London still had walls, although they were no longer an official city boundary; its suburbs, and so the environs of the theatres, could be leafy, like 'the grove of sycamore / That westward rooteth from this city side' where Benvolio has seen Romeo (1.1.112–13). Lady Capulet informs Juliet that she will marry Paris at 'Saint Peter's Church' (3.5.114), a name allowing Juliet to retort, without any metrical disruption, that 'by Saint Peter's Church and Peter too' she will not (3.5.116); there are churches dedicated to St Peter Martyr in Verona, but they are not among its best known. In London, St Peter le Poer, known as St Peter le Poor, was close to Austin Friars, the former Augustinian friary, whose extensive gardens survived its dissolution and redevelopment. An audience in the 1590s might still connect a church of St Peter and a monastery garden, such as Friar Lawrence perhaps tends. But there were two other City churches with a similar dedication, one at Paul's Wharf and another, St Peter's Westcheap, on the corner of 'Goldsmiths' Row'. If a 1590s audience thought even indirectly of St Peter's Westcheap, it would have reinforced an impression of the Capulets' wealth and status.

By 1600, the population of London was around 200,000, and it had more than doubled since 1550; it was three or four times the size of its nearest rivals among English cities, Norwich and Bristol, and it was growing rapidly. But in *Romeo and Juliet*, there is almost no sense of the civic, social or economic life of a city. There are citizens, but they are not particularised; their only lines in the opening scene are 'Clubs, bills, and partisans! Strike! Beat them down! / Down with the Capulets! Down with the Montagues!' (1.1.64–5). There are servants and musicians, but no carpenters, shoemakers or apprentices. Neither are there equivalents to the artisans and low-ranking officials who make up the amateur actors of *Midsummer Night's Dream*, the watch in *Much Ado*, or the crowd in *Julius Caesar*. There is a Prince, but no magistrates or other civic officials; there is a watch, but its officers are not 'constables' or 'beadles'. In June 1595, there were twelve popular disturbances in London protesting about food shortages and prices, culminating in a riot on Tower Hill on 29 June involving around 1,000 apprentices; 5 of the leaders were executed as traitors on 24 July.[3] If the play's first performances overlapped with the riots, which explicitly challenged the authority of the Lord Mayor, it would have been extremely unwise to include any characters who might be identified with the civic authorities in London: the apparently benign dictatorship of the Prince in Verona circumvents any such possibility. Verona is (mostly) not London in the same way that Rome is in *Julius Caesar* or *Coriolanus*, or

[1] Clare Howard, *English Travellers of the Renaissance*, 1913, p. 86, cited in Nandini Das, João Vicente Melo, Haig Smith and Lauren Working (eds.), *Keywords of Race, Identity, and Human Mobility in Early Modern England*, 2021, p. 273.
[2] Gallagher, *Learning Languages*, pp. 199–200.
[3] See Chris Fitter, *Radical Shakespeare: Politics and Stagecraft in the Early Career*, 2012, pp. 144–73.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Vienna in *Measure for Measure*. If it has any character of its own, Verona seems a world more akin to the small-town communities of Messina or Windsor than a city like London; it has only a small presence, through the intermittent sense of its disruption by the feud – and at the very end, when Lady Capulet describes the confusion in the streets: 'O, the people in the street cry "Romeo", / Some "Juliet", and some "Paris", and all run / With open outcry toward our monument' (5.3.191–3).

How Italian, therefore, is *Romeo and Juliet*? Thanks to Zeffirelli's sun-baked piazzas and any number of other productions which take their inspiration from Italian Renaissance art or twentieth-century Italian design, it is probably more recognisably Italian *now*, at least in visual terms, than in the 1590s. Italy *was* known for its fashion even then: in *Richard II*, York laments, anachronistically, that Richard listens only to 'Report of fashions in proud Italy, / Whose manners still our tardy-apish nation / Limps after in base imitation' (2.1.21–3). Given their close proximity in date, it's a possibility that there might have been overlap between the costumes worn by Benvolio, Mercutio, Paris and perhaps Tybalt, and Bushy, Bagot, Green and Aumerle in *Richard II*; Romeo seems to be more French in his tastes, though (2.4.38–9). With its friars Lawrence and John (despite their English names), Verona is Catholic. *Romeo and Juliet* doesn't, however, have a Machiavel character, something else stereotypically Italian, like Iachimo in *Cymbeline*; Tybalt barely qualifies as a villain by comparison. Highly technical and sophisticated sword-play was certainly Italian in its origins and terminology, but was also very much part of London life (pp. 26–7). It might suit an English audience to think of Italy as *the* place of feuding clans, duelling, revenge, passion and poison, and they would have found plenty of 'evidence' for those stereotypes in Italian novellas, but those were associations that they (and subsequent audiences and readers) largely brought to the play, rather than being intrinsic to it. As the play unfolds, there is less a sense that 'There is no world without Verona walls' (3.3.17) than that there is no world beyond that of the lovers. Italy, signalled only superficially, and Verona, barely a name, fall away.

Early Modern Marriage: Becoming One Flesh

In the 1980s and 1990s, the historian Lawrence Stone cast a long shadow for editors of plays like *Romeo and Juliet*. In *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500–1800* (1977), Stone posited that the period *c*.1550–*c*.1700 was one of transition from a model of family as dynasty, which he termed the 'open lineage family', to the private, affective unit which he called the 'closed domesticated nuclear family'. His work has been hugely influential (although also criticised) and his hypothesis remains 'good to think with'.[1] Applying Stone's framework, *Romeo and Juliet* has been read as setting the lovers' idealised love match against the patriarchal despotism of their parents. But there is a paradox in reading *Romeo and Juliet* in terms of early modern marriage at all, because Romeo and Juliet do not have a marriage; rather, in a matter of days, they have

[1] 'Introduction', in Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster (eds.), *The Family in Early Modern England*, 2007, 1–17: 8.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

a courtship and a wedding. The play shows almost nothing of their relationship as husband and wife, Juliet's management of their servants, or Romeo's disciplining of their children, central to conduct manuals aimed at godly Protestant spouses; they have no time to quarrel and so no need to reconcile. Their tragedy, in part, is the impossibility of living out the promise of their relationship's beginning. Yet the play still maps out key elements of the territory; it matters that Romeo and Juliet get married.

For, unlike Petrarch and Laura, Dido and Aeneas, Antony and Cleopatra, Pyramus and Thisbe or Paris and Helen (all invoked by Mercutio, 2.4.34–7), Romeo and Juliet *do* marry. What experiences of marriage might audiences have brought to its first performances? In England *c*.1600, late marriage was the norm (mid-to-late twenties for both men and women) and a significant proportion of people never married.[1] But London was different: 'London women married for the first time around the age of 23, with hardly any remaining single into their 40s.'[2] Men significantly outnumbered women (p. 28) and the marriage market was competitive. It tended to work in women's favour: Romeo's despair over Rosaline, sworn to chastity (1.1.208–9), and Sampson and Gregory's sexualised competitiveness (1.1) might resonate with a London audience. 'Marriage defined the achievement of social adulthood':[3] the unmarried man, in some respects, still shared his social status with boys. When the Nurse and the Friar tell the banished Romeo to pull himself together ('stand, and you be a man'; 'Art thou a man? thy form cries out thou art' – 3.3.88, 109), they are not simply telling him to act rationally or 'man up', but reminding him of his changed status and the need to act accordingly.

Juliet's age would have been almost as anomalous to an audience in the 1590s as it is now (pp. 33–4): the age of majority for women was 14 and for men 21. Couples were expected to be financially independent and the household responsibilities of marriage called for maturity. Modern perceptions of very early marriage as common are shaped by a tiny number of elite marriages, which could be contracted but never solemnised: sometimes engagements were terminated by the death of one of the parties, but they more often ended because dynastic calculations shifted. For example, a marriage was proposed but never formally contracted between Philip Sidney and Penelope Devereux (generally identified as his 'Stella') when both were young teenagers; Sidney and Anne Cecil were contracted in 1569, when he was 15 and she was 12 – when that broke down, Anne married the Earl of Oxford in 1571, and Sidney finally married Frances Walsingham in 1583, when he was 29 and she was 15. In a strange case in 1594, a marriage was solemnised between Maria Touchet and Thomas Thynne, both 16, at the Bell Inn at Beaconsfield. Their families had been feuding

[1] 'Between 1575 and 1700, an estimated 13 to 27 per cent of the population never married': Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster, 'Childless men in early modern England', in *The Family*, ed. Berry and Foyster, pp. 158–83: 163.
[2] Eleanor Hubbard, *City Women: Money, Sex, and the Social Order in Early Modern London*, 2012, pp. 53–4.
[3] John Walter, 'Faces in the crowd: gender and age in the early modern crowd', in *The Family*, ed. Berry and Foyster, pp. 96–125: 108.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

for two decades; it was the first time they had met, but they apparently married willingly. Maria's mother was present, and the marriage may have been intended to spite Thomas's family. When they found out, they attempted to have it annulled; after a four-year court case, it was declared valid in 1601. Some of Maria's passionate letters survive: 'My best beloved Thomken, and my best little Sirrah, know that I have not, nor will not forget how you made my modest blood flush up into my bashful cheek at your first letter, thou threatened sound payment, and I sound repayment, so as when we meet, there will be pay, and repay. . .'.[1]

Maria Thynne died giving birth to her third child in 1611. When Capulet tells Paris that Juliet is too young to marry, he cites the proverbial 'too soon marred are those so early made' (1.2.13): as well as expressing concern for his daughter's well-being, a carefully negotiated marriage would be all for nothing if an heiress died in childbirth. There was a distressing case in 1614:

> When James Billingsley and his two brothers abducted the heiress Susan Wittey and forced her to marry him, a number of witnesses in the ensuing case mentioned Susan's age as well as her tears in the church, vehement objections, attempts to escape, and refusal to eat or undress. One man deposed that she was no older than 13 or 14, and 'also for that she is of a very small stature of body she is very unfit to be married and to live with a man as his wife'.[2]

Marriage at a *relatively* young age was not unknown, however. Shakespeare's marriage at 18 was probably precipitated by Anne Hathaway's pregnancy, and Alexander Cooke and Robert Gough, likely candidates for the first Juliet (p. 12), married young even by London standards: Cooke at 19, and Gough at around 21.[3] Shakespeare's friend and colleague John Heminges had married Rebecca Knell in 1588, when he was 21 and she was 16 – and it was her second marriage; her first husband, William Knell, was also an actor, killed in a fight the previous year.

An early modern audience would, however, have probably disapproved of the secrecy of Romeo and Juliet's marriage. Marriage involved families and communities as well as individuals: the Friar partly agrees to marry the lovers because he has a sense of this larger context (2.3.91–2).[4] But there was, in the late sixteenth century, an increase in 'clandestine' marriages, conducted without banns or licence, or outside the couple's own parishes. 'They were the recourse of eloping couples, acting in defiance of their families; of poor people whose neighbours were reluctant to see them wed, or who simply needed to marry cheaply; of couples when the bride was visibly pregnant and wished to avoid embarrassment.'[5] Such marriages were illicit, but not illegal, and neither were marriages made without parental consent. During the marriage service, the congregation were invited to declare 'any just cause, why thei may not lawfully be joined together' before the marriage could proceed.[6] Such impediments would include

[1] Alison D. Wall (ed.), *Two Elizabethan Women: Correspondence of Joan and Maria Thynne, 1575–1611*, 1983, p. 37 (the letter is undated). Wall argues that the Thynne case might have prompted *Rom.*
[2] Hubbard, *City Women*, pp. 52–3.
[3] Kathman, 'How old?', 237.
[4] See Claire McEachern, 'Love', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Religion*, ed. Hannibal Hamlin, 2019, pp. 101–17.
[5] Martin Ingram, *Carnal Knowledge: Regulating Sex in England, 1470–1600*, 2017, pp. 419–20.
[6] *BCP*, p. 157.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the marriage's violation of the proscribed degrees of kindred and affinity, which prevented the marriage of those too closely related, or one of the couple having a spouse living or an existing pre-contract to marry someone else. Bigamy, in particular, which the Nurse encourages Juliet to commit (3.5.217, 222–5), occasioned a 'moral panic' in the late 1590s: a fast-growing population and increasing mobility made bigamous marriages more common; divorce was near impossible, even if a spouse disappeared without trace.[1]

A marriage was contracted through 'the dramatic performance of consent', a handfasting and the expression of the intention to marry by the couple themselves. If that intention were expressed in the present tense (*per verba de praesenti*; 'I *take* you as my wife'), it was binding; if it were expressed in the future tense (*per verba de futuro*; 'I *will take you* as my husband'), it became binding if the marriage was consummated.[2] The church ceremony was desirable, but not essential; huge numbers of court cases demonstrate the tangles in which people found themselves. It matters that Romeo and Juliet's marriage is consummated, but not for legal reasons. The Friar instructs Romeo: 'Go get thee to thy love as was decreed, / Ascend her chamber, hence and comfort her' (3.3.146–7). This is one of many echoes of the marriage service: the liturgy reminds couple and congregation that marriage 'was ordained . . . for the mutual societie, helpe, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other', and the husband promises to 'comforte' as well as 'love . . . honour, and kepe' his wife.[3] In the Protestant theology of marriage, as the liturgy affirms, sex was both important and positive.

Romeo and Juliet thus presents more or less a checklist of issues regarding marriage, both negative and positive.[4] Juliet is definitely under-age, and Romeo probably is too. They marry without the consent of their parents, and without the knowledge of their wider community, even Romeo's closest friends. Juliet recognises the importance of parental consent: instructed to look at Paris as a potential husband, she assures Lady Capulet that 'no more deep will I endart mine eye / Than your consent gives strength to make it fly' (1.3.99–100). In disobeying their parents by marrying without their consent, they are violating the fifth commandment.[5] But an audience would also recognise that their marriage was legal and binding and, moreover, that it reflected other values promoted in the contemporary discourse on marriage. Romeo and Juliet are social equals and apparently around the same age. This would not be an unequal marriage. It is freely entered into; neither has a pre-contract or any other impediment. Even more, its formation and expression perform the mutuality and equality that writers on marriage endorsed. The marriage service gives considerable emphasis to husband and wife becoming one flesh and the ultimate primacy of the marriage over other bonds, building on Ephesians 5: 'For this cause shall a man leave father and

[1] Ingram, *Carnal Knowledge*, pp. 421–2.
[2] Daniel Swift, 'The drama of the liturgy', in *Shakespeare and Religion*, ed. Hamlin, pp. 52–66: 60.
[3] *BCP*, pp. 157, 158.
[4] See Marjorie Garber, *Coming of Age in Shakespeare*, [1981] 1997, pp. 119–20; her discussion exemplifies Stone's influence.
[5] 'Honour thy father and thy mother', *BCP*, p. 153.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

mother, and shalbe joined unto his wife, and thei two shalbe one flesh';[1] once married, Juliet recognises that her first loyalty must be to Romeo, not Tybalt (3.2.97). When Friar Lawrence says that 'you shall not stay alone / Till Holy Church incorporate two in one' (2.6.36–7), he recalls this language too, and there is a properly physical quality to 'incorporate'; he (and the lovers) are anticipating two becoming one flesh – and that done, they will not 'stay', remain, be, alone ever again, a poignant irony.[2] As one of the speakers in George Whetstone's *Heptameron* comments, 'where Beautie, Loue, and Free choise, maketh the Mariage, they may be crossed by Fortune, & yet continue faithfull', and he names '*Romeus and Iuliet*' among model lovers in this respect.[3]

Dancing and Duelling

The Capulet party has become known as the 'ball scene', and in performance it's usually one of the play's set-pieces: in Zeffirelli's 1968 film, the scene as a whole takes up 15 minutes out of a total running time of just under 2 hours and 20 minutes. It isn't, however, written as a masked ball, or fancy dress: Romeo, Benvolio and Mercutio are *maskers*,[4] not gate-crashers. As the young men gather, they discuss what they're going to do: do they have a speech prepared (1.4.1–8)? No, they're just going to dance, suggests Benvolio: 'We'll measure them a measure and be gone' (1.4.10). What they perform is a version of an Italian and French custom also practised in England: a group of young men turned up at a party uninvited, masked or more thoroughly disguised, danced with the guests and then left.[5] That it was an accepted social convention, a not unwelcome addition to an evening's festivities, partly explains why Capulet overlooks Romeo's presence at the party: he welcomes such 'unlooked-for sport' (1.5.28). When he says 'Welcome, gentlemen! Ladies that have their toes / Unplagued with corns will walk a bout with you' (1.5.15–16), he's addressing Romeo and his friends, rather than the guests in general, and when he says to his cousin 'How long is't now since last yourself and I / Were in a mask?' (1.5.31–2), he's saying not just 'How long is it since you and I wore masks?' but 'How long is it since we did this sort of thing?'

There's no way of knowing what sort of dances might have originally been performed.[6] Dancing was fundamentally social; the highly patterned steps and gestures of courtly Renaissance dance expressed order and harmony, especially in stately dances like the pavane. Sir John Davies's poem *Orchestra* (1596) uses dance as a conceit

[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 162–3.
[2] See Harry Levins, 'Form and formality in *Romeo and Juliet*', in *Romeo and Juliet: Critical Essays*, ed. John F. Andrews, 1993, pp. 41–53: 50; and p. 39.
[3] George Whetstone, *Aurelia, the paragon of pleasure and princely delights*, 1593, sig. H4v.
[4] See Janette Dillon, 'From revels to revelation: Shakespeare and the mask', *S.Sur. 60* (2007), 58–71.
[5] See Anne Daye, '"The revellers are entering: Shakespeare and masquing practice in Tudor and Stuart England', in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Dance*, ed. Lynsey McCulloch and Brandon Shaw, 2019, pp. 107–32.
[6] See Brandon Shaw, 'Shakespeare's dancing bodies: the case of Romeo', in *Shakespeare and Dance*, ed. McCulloch and Shaw, pp. 173–96, and Emily Winerock, '"We'll measure them a measure, and be gone": Renaissance dance practices and Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*', *Borrowers and Lenders* 10 (2017) [online].

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

for marriage, 'a form of embodied accord' between husband and wife, and he writes of the harmonious ordering of the cosmos as a dance too: 'Yet doe they neyther mingle nor confound, / But every one doth keepe the bounded space / Wherein the daunce doth bid it turne or trace: / This wondrous myracle did Love devise, / For Dauncing is Loves proper exercise.'[1] Philip Maguire suggests that dancing in *Romeo and Juliet* also 'embodies a norm of appropriately paced, timely action', so that when Romeo does not dance and Juliet stops dancing to talk with him, the play's untimely, disordered action (a clandestine love affair; the death of young lovers) is precipitated.[2] The idea of 'keeping the bounded space' in a dance is strikingly apposite for *Romeo and Juliet*, too. Dancing itself also enables the transgression of spatial boundaries, especially in dances where couples form and reform, or take hands: Romeo and Juliet do not explicitly dance together, but they do join hands, a decorous action in a dance but shockingly bold in any other context; that they move outside the space of the dance and create their own space apart makes it all the more transgressive and intense. Space apart is also time apart: Evelyn Tribble notes that 'skilled dancing can introduce an alternative temporality into the playworld. Control over temporality – over the delicate balance between stillness and movement – was essential to skilled dancing.'[3] Omitting or downplaying dance can leave what she terms 'an affect gap':[4] both dancing and duelling in *Romeo and Juliet* are not simply spectacular, but inculcate a particular kind of attentiveness from the audience; they enable and shape the audience's (and the actors') apprehension of meaning and emotion, how language and affect are embodied, how bodies can think and speak and be understood.

As well as meaning the sequence of dance steps, a measure is a unit of music, which might now be called a bar, and also a term used for the distance between combatants in fencing.[5] Mercutio describes Tybalt as keeping 'time, distance, and proportion' when he fights, and fighting 'as you sing prick-song', as if from a song sheet; 'he rests his minim rests, one, two, and the third in your bosom', and has mastered moves such as 'the immortal "passado", the "punto reverso", and the "hay"' (2.4.19–24). These sound as much like dance steps as fencing terms, and the 'passado' involves the movement of the feet as well as the blade. A playful dance of words is second nature to Mercutio but Tybalt cannot compete with Mercutio's dazzling mock outrage in response to his own leaden 'Mercutio, thou consortest with Romeo': Mercutio puns on consorts, minstrels, discords, and his 'fiddlestick, here's that shall make you dance' (3.1.39–42). At the beginning of the scene which will end with Mercutio and Tybalt dead and Romeo banished, Benvolio warns Mercutio that 'The day is hot, the Capels

[1] See Emily Winerock, '"The Heaven's true figure" or an "Introit to all kind of lewdness?": competing conceptions of dancing in Shakespeare's England', in *Shakespeare and Dance*, ed. McCulloch and Shaw, pp. 21–48: 26; *Orchestra*, in Davies, stanza 18 – it was written in 1594.

[2] Philip C. Maguire, 'On the dancing in *Romeo and Juliet*' in *Critical Essays*, ed. Andrews, pp. 215–28: 220.

[3] Evelyn Tribble, *Early Modern Actors and Shakespeare's Theatre: Thinking with the Body*, 2017, p. 118.

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 156–7. See also Florence Hazrat, '"The wisdom of your feet": dance and rhetoric on the Shakespearean stage', in *Shakespeare and Dance*, ed. McCulloch and Shaw, pp. 217–36: 218.

[5] See Joan Ozark Holmer, '"Draw, if you be men": Saviolo's significance for *Romeo and Juliet*', *SQ* 45 (1994), 163–89: 172–4.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

are abroad, / And if we meet we shall not scape a brawl' (3.1.2–3); a 1590s audience might also hear *braule*, a popular French dance.

It is likely that *Romeo and Juliet* was influenced by the duelling manual published by Vincentio Saviolo in 1595.[1] Joan Ozark Holmer points out that Shakespeare does not use any technical fencing terms until *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Romeo and Juliet*, and that '*Romeo and Juliet* includes more Italian fencing terms than any other play in Shakespeare's canon.'[2] The new style of fencing taught by masters like Saviolo was 'dance-like';[3] Saviolo instructed his pupil that 'he had need to vnderstand well his times & proportions, and to know howe with skill to shifte and moue his bodie, & to be readie and nimble as well with his foot as hand'.[4] He also describes 'some fantasticall madde conceited fellowe, taking this kinde of discurtesie in euill parte, [who] will fall a reasoning with him that offereth it, and so by multiplying of speeche, they may fall from words to blowes' (compare Mercutio's baiting of Tybalt, 3.1.34–5), and there are other echoes that have nothing to do with duelling: Mercutio's bitter cry that he is 'worms' meat' (3.1.98), although proverbial, recalls a woodcut in Saviolo with the motto 'O froath: o vanitie why are thou so insolent o wormes meat', and the Friar's speech about plants (2.3.9–30) closely echoes another passage.[5] Like dancing, swordplay was a 'mindful bodily skill'; to master such skills involved 'an entire way of being in the world, including wit, timing, grace and skilful coordination with others'.[6] But Tribble points out that, in spite of its attention to duelling's technicalities, the fights in *Romeo and Juliet* are 'chaotic, confusing, quick and deadly, with the outcome less a result of real skill (on the part of the characters, not the actors) than of the luck of the draw'.[7] In theory, the code of the duello, like the play's meticulous time-scheme, its dancing, the stark binary of its feud and its very title, promises structure and order, but in practice 'the shift from comedy to tragedy hinges literally upon a razor point'.[8]

Although the opening of the play might have recalled the apprentice riots of 1595 (pp. 18–19), street fighting was far from being confined to the lower orders. There had been regular proclamations against fighting in public since the reign of Henry VII, and although 'by the 1590s Queen Elizabeth's policies were taking hold, defusing violence through litigation or limiting it to private confrontation in duels', the number of (recorded) duels and challenges had increased from five throughout the 1580s to nearly twenty in the 1590s. For all Tybalt's much-vaunted precision, he and Mercutio (and then Romeo) fight without any of the formalities which Tybalt has previously sought to initiate, and Mercutio in particular chooses to ignore the rules.[9] Some in the audience would be sensitive to this: 'swordfights on Shakespeare's stage took place between highly trained men who used and carried weapons in daily life and before audiences

[1] *Vincentio Sauiolo his practise* (1595). See also Jillian Luke, '"Draw thy rapier, for we'll have a bout": duelling on the early modern stage', *The Seventeenth Century* 34 (2019), 283–303.
[2] Holmer, 'Draw', 164. [3] *Ibid.*, 172. [4] Saviolo, sig. G3v.
[5] *Ibid.*, sigs. Hh2–Hh2v, P2. See Holmer, 'Draw', 174–5, 179–80, 182.
[6] Tribble, *Early Modern Actors*, p. 11. [7] *Ibid.*, pp. 86–7. [8] *Ibid.*, p. 88.
[9] Jill L. Levenson, '"*Alla stoccado* carries it away": codes of violence in *Romeo and Juliet*', in *Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet: Texts, Contexts, and Interpretation*, ed. Jay L. Halio, 1995, pp. 83–96 (85–6).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

who were themselves highly skilled viewers'.[1] Levenson posits that Tybalt's fencing in the Spanish style, 'geometrical' and 'handsomely choreographed', would reinforce 'with xenophobic features Shakespeare's broad characterization of Tybalt as a villain', in contrast with Benvolio and Mercutio's more Italian style, favoured in England.[2] There were also longstanding connections between the display of fencing skills and London's performance spaces. The 'Masters of Defence' who were licensed to teach fencing displayed their skills through prize fights, some of which took place in playhouses.[3] In the opening scene, Sampson and Gregory might be carrying old-fashioned swords and bucklers because they are off to 'Verona's version of Smithfield', to participate in the public fencing competitions held there.[4] Such contests took place on Sundays, and so this would be the very first marker of Shakespeare's meticulously plotted time-scheme.[5] There would have been considerable overlap between the theatre audience and the audience for prize fights; the latter were as much a part of the entertainment landscape of early modern London as the theatres.

The right to carry specific weapons was defined by rank. Duelling necessitated not only the money to purchase weapons and instruction, but participation in an agreed set of behaviour codes: Jennifer Low describes duelling as 'an overdetermined sign of masculine identity that helped to stabilize significantly volatile notions of both rank and gender'.[6] When Tybalt challenges Romeo by calling him a 'villain', he insults him by calling him common, not a gentleman. As well as staging duels, *Romeo and Juliet* demonstrates what duelling culture does to elite bodies. The Capulet servant Sampson blusters that he will 'take the wall', the more privileged part of the street, if he encounters a Montague servant: to walk beside the wall lessened the chance of being splashed by mud from the road or waste flung from above. Sampson is acutely aware, as the audience would be, of the class-based organisation of urban space, and how those of higher rank were able to take up more space. Duelling culture added another dimension to this: a rapier massively extended a man's reach, with blades typically over a metre long. Rapiers were deadlier than other weapons in single combat because their long, thin blades 'could so easily pierce the rib cage and puncture the lung or another organ'.[7] The elite men in *Romeo and Juliet* will probably fight with rapier and dagger, the latter used for parrying and for stabbing when in close. But even when their weapons were not drawn, the bearing of men accustomed to wearing rapiers reflected their enlarged sense of personal space. The fencer's 'ward', the defensive area around his body, extended not simply his personal space but his body.

Such 'proxemic assumptions . . . created expectations about personal space that strengthened the sense of competitive masculinity', and 'this bodily expression of spatial

[1] Tribble, *Early Modern Actors*, p. 11.
[2] Levenson, '"*Alla stoccado*"', pp. 88–91. See also Ian Borden, 'The Blackfriars gladiators: masters of fence, playing a prize, and the Elizabethan and Stuart theater', in *Inside Shakespeare: Essays on the Blackfriars Stage*, ed. Paul Manzer, 2006, pp. 132–46: 138–9.
[3] Tribble, *Early Modern Actors*, pp. 72–3.
[4] Charles Edelman, *Brawl Ridiculous: Swordfighting in Shakespeare's Plays*, 1992, pp. 34–5.
[5] The play's action begins on Sunday morning (3.4.18).
[6] Jennifer Low, *Manhood and the Duel: Masculinity in Early Modern Drama and Culture*, 2003, p. 3.
[7] Tribble, *Early Modern Actors*, p. 87.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

assumptions could be reproduced by actors':[1] Romeo's deportment could well mark him as a trained fencer, even though he is probably not wearing his rapier at the party (Tybalt has to call for his, 1.5.54). Capulet comments that Romeo 'bears him like a portly gentleman' (1.5.65), dignified and perhaps imposing; Romeo is used to taking up space – and so, as a young noblewoman, is Juliet. She could be wearing a farthingale, physically extending the boundaries of her body and shaping her posture and movement. In 1.5, dancing performs a particular understanding of space as the dancers move through figures, and the maskers perform a socially sanctioned space invasion. Romeo and Juliet's first encounter combines a combat of wits with both quite literally letting their guard down and, quite precipitately, defining and sharing the same space. That space is a poetic one (p. 34), but it is also physical, and it is powerfully intelligible within the highly spatialised dynamics of Shakespeare's Verona.

Men and Women: Friendship, Love and Sexuality

Romeo and Juliet is deeply interested in relationships between men. Those relationships form the background to that between the lovers, but they're also important in their own right. The portrayal of men's relationships in *Romeo and Juliet* reflects the period's profound investment in friendship, and the partnership between Romeo and Juliet is shaped not only by the family feud, but by homosocial structures of exchange in the nascently capitalist setting of Verona. The sex ratio in early modern London was sharply skewed: by some estimates, there might have been as many as 139 men for every 100 women, their numbers swelled by apprentices, the Inns of Court and the court itself; women came to London too, usually as maidservants, but there were fewer of them.[2] Young men made up a significant component of the audience at the playhouses, and they would have dominated the yard. Although some theatre workers were women (p. 11), it's not unreasonable to think of the playhouses as primarily male spaces.

Romeo and Juliet begins with 'aggressive virility and unabashed phallicism'.[3] Sampson and Gregory, the Capulet servants, are as anxious as the other young men to display their skills in both wordplay and swordplay. Their laboured punning quickly turns to threats of sexual violence ('I will push Montague's men from the wall, and thrust his maids to the wall', Sampson promises, 1.1.15–16; 'Me they shall feel while I am able to stand, and 'tis known I am a pretty piece of flesh', 1.1.25–6), and in no time Sampson's 'naked weapon is out', as the Montagues arrive, thumbs are bitten and a brawl commences. This violent opening establishes the centrality of the feud, pursued even by servants, but it also frames the play with male sexual competitiveness, and the ease with which words can turn to blows. *Romeo and Juliet* is close in date to *Titus Andronicus*, revived in the mid-1590s; if and when *Titus* became part of the repertory of the Chamberlain's Men,[4] the actors playing Sampson and Gregory

[1] Low, *Manhood*, pp. 27, 48, 71–2. [2] Hubbard, *City Women*, p. 52.
[3] François Laroque, 'Tradition and subversion in *Romeo and Juliet*', in *Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet*, ed. Halio, pp. 18–36: 19.
[4] See Holger Schott Syme, 'Three's company: alternative histories of London's theatres in the 1590s', *S. Sur.* 65 (2012), 269–89 (275–84).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

could also have appeared as Chiron and Demetrius, who rape and mutilate Titus's daughter Lavinia. Sampson and Gregory may be servants in Verona, but they share with *Titus*'s Goths an edgy need to assert their masculinity.

Men's relationships in *Romeo and Juliet* are finely calibrated in terms of class. Tybalt, Romeo, Benvolio and Mercutio are noble, but they are not courtiers (any notion of 'the court' is absent) and they have no titles, although Mercutio is the Prince's kinsman (3.1.136). Also related to the Prince, Paris is of a higher rank: he is 'County' Paris, 'Count', and the Capulets regard him as a catch. Paris has the title while Capulet has money: 'he that can lay hold of her / Shall have the chinks' (1.5.115–16), the jingling coins, the Nurse says of Juliet.[1] Marriage transfers capital and consolidates male relationships: Romeo is not immune from employing a financial idiom when he first lays eyes on Juliet and asks 'What lady's that which doth *enrich* the hand / Of yonder knight?' (1.5.40–1). It would be a familiar scenario to Londoners and was a staple of city comedy, new money and old nobility seeking a sometimes uneasy alliance. Baz Luhrmann finds a brilliant equivalent: 'Fulgencio' Capulet (Paul Sorvino) is nouveau riche Italian-American, 'Ted' and 'Caroline' Montague are WASPier and 'Dave' Paris (Paul Rudd) is 'the Governor's son'. Luhrmann frames Paris and Capulet's conversation (1.2) as male bonding in lift and sauna, with an establishing shot of an enormous skyscraper: it's not just capital at stake, but phallic capital too. In the terrible scene between Juliet and her parents, when she has refused to marry Paris, her father sets it out bluntly: 'And you be mine, I'll give you to my friend . . . I'll not be forsworn' (3.5.191, 195); he will not lose face by breaking a promise he's made to Paris, man to man.

Romeo can appear unsympathetic in his first appearances, self-absorbed and mopey. So Shakespeare gives him friends – above, all devoted Benvolio, a name not given to any of Romeus's friends in Brooke, quickly establishing his character: he is a man of good will. On his first appearance, Benvolio tries to break up the fight between the servingmen (1.1.55), more concerned with keeping the peace than demeaning himself with his social inferiors, which is what Tybalt sneers at him ('art thou drawn among these heartless hinds?', 1.1.57). His closeness to Romeo is established in his conversation with the Montague parents, as is his sensitivity: Benvolio too has been up early with 'A troubled mind' (1.1.111), but he's more concerned about Romeo's unhappiness than his own. He is (reasonably) patient with Romeo's infatuation with the unseen Rosaline; he's not above gentle mockery, but still recognises that his friend is unhappy, and wants to help him.

Friendship was the subject of scrutiny in the Renaissance, and Cicero's treatise on friendship, *De amicitia*, was a standard school text. Tom MacFaul suggests that Shakespeare's plays were written at 'a particularly important time in the history of friendship, as older feudal modes of allegiance gave way to modern friendship of affection'.[2] Shakespeare almost entirely avoids what MacFaul terms 'the jealousy plot – in which two friends love the same woman';[3] it's common in other plays, but

[1] See 1.2.15 supplementary note.
[2] Tom MacFaul, *Male Friendship in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*, 2007, p. 5.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 65.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Shakespeare uses it only in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and (with Fletcher) *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. Lisa Jardine wrote influentially about how male friendship could be seen as being in conflict with marriage,[1] and this is certainly one way of reading Romeo's relationship with his friends, especially Mercutio. But perhaps his intimate friendship with his male companions prepares him for his relationship with Juliet. MacFaul discusses the importance of moments of recognition in Shakespeare's representation of friendship, as friends recognise in each other 'an element of oneself, or a complement to oneself'.[2] Romeo and his friends have this kind of closeness; it's expressed in their shared jokes, the sense that they have got each other's backs: Benvolio's concern, Romeo calming Mercutio as Queen Mab spirals out of control, and, catastrophically, his avenging of Mercutio's death, 'My very friend', my true friend, as he calls him (3.1.101). 'Now art thou sociable, now art thou Romeo; now art thou what thou art, by art as well as by nature' (2.4.72–4), Mercutio crows, when Romeo comes back to his boys, fizzing with banter, having just persuaded the Friar to conduct the wedding. Romeo's himself again, because of Juliet.

As Will Tosh writes, 'in the sixteenth century, intimate friendship between men was routinely praised as the purest and most noble form of human relation'.[3] Romeo is accustomed to self-revelation, but his relationships with his friends are also characterised by verbal playfulness. Some of this is just verbal point-scoring, but it's significant that Romeo relates to Juliet in a way far closer to his conversations with his friends than to his second-hand Petrarchan witterings about Rosaline, for Juliet can be every bit as witty as *As You Like It*'s Rosalind – or Mercutio. Notably, Tybalt has no friends: he is cut off 'from a whole rhetorical range available to the other young men of the play: lyric love, witty fooling, friendly conversation'.[4] It's tempting to infer an opposition between Romeo's oxymoronic infatuation with Rosaline and the quick-fire banter of Mercutio, as if sonneteers never wrote satire, or the writers of tender lyrics never wrote bawdy elegies. But an early modern audience would not necessarily have seen it like that. Sonnets might have had nominally female addressees, but their intended readers were primarily male, and this is sometimes explicit: Henry Constable's *Diana* (1594) includes a prefatory address 'to the gentlemen readers'. Much poetry was essentially homosocial, circulating among coteries in the Inns of Court and elsewhere; Shakespeare's own sonnets were read 'among his private friends' at least a decade before most of them appeared in print.[5] Nancy Vickers long ago pointed out that the Petrarchan poetic tradition was 'the product of men talking to men about women';[6] Romeo's idealisation of Rosaline makes her 'other' as much as Mercutio's obscenities do.

In performance, it's sometimes suggested that Mercutio is gay and in love with Romeo, fearing rejection and so determined to sabotage Romeo's relationships with

[1] Lisa Jardine, *Reading Shakespeare Historically*, 1996.
[2] MacFaul, *Male Friendship*, pp. 27, 28.
[3] Will Tosh, *Male Friendship and Testimonies of Love in Shakespeare's England*, 2016, p. 180.
[4] Susan Snyder, '*Romeo and Juliet*: comedy into tragedy', in *Critical Essays*, ed. Andrews, pp. 73–83: 76.
[5] Francis Meres, *Palladis Tamia* (1598), sig. OO1^{v}–OO2.
[6] Nancy Vickers, 'This heraldry in Lucrece' face', *Poetics Today* 6 (1985), 171–84: 171.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

women (p. 54). Productions that pursue this can risk perpetuating lazy stereotypes of queer angst, or simply the 'gay best friend'; Baz Luhrmann's film has been criticised in this respect (p. 66). Some recent productions have suggested that Benvolio is in love with Romeo (the 2018 RSC production, p. 56) or have Mercutio and Benvolio become a couple (the 2021 National Theatre film, p. 78). MacFaul nevertheless suggests that 'Romeo's love means that his camaraderie with Benvolio and Mercutio must end',[1] and (as has been noted already) this has become a commonplace in criticism of the play. But one of the play's small tragedies is that there's no time for Romeo to tell his friends about Juliet: Mercutio dies and Benvolio disappears from the play's action. In Q1, it is announced in the final scene that he, like Romeo's mother, is dead, but it can be devastating if Benvolio is silently present as one of those who rushes to the tomb. There is an added poignancy if one imagines that Juliet would be welcomed as an equal by Mercutio and Benvolio, as witty as they are, and as lovingly careful of Romeo.

Witty Juliet has much in common with the women in comedies, but, unlike Hermia and Helena in *Midsummer Night's Dream* or the women in *Love's Labour's Lost*, or even the Queen with her ladies in *Richard II*, she has no friend her own age. (This becomes a problem for ensemble balance in musical or ballet versions, p. 61.) Juliet's lack of a companion isolates her, especially after her estrangement from the Nurse, and the isolated woman is a device that Shakespeare repeats in some later tragedies. Juliet could become a figure of Ophelia-like pathos, but instead she shows her strength and self-sufficiency, above all when she takes the potion (4.3). It also means that Romeo readily becomes her friend. When she says to him at their parting, 'Art thou gone so, love, lord, ay husband, friend?' (3.5.43), 'friend' suggests lover,[2] but it also just means friend.

What of the play's other women? Shakespeare resists making the two pairs of parents mirror each other. Romeo's parents, like his friends, care about him deeply (although, in comparison with Juliet, he is 'adrift in the unsupervised realm of male adolescence'),[3] but the family share no dialogue. Lady Montague's role is tiny (three lines in 1.1) and some productions reallocate lines, reverse the Montagues' roles or combine them; her absence from the final scene, having died of grief at Romeo's banishment, is probably explained by the original actor being needed for another role (p. 17). Lady Capulet is much more complex and significant as a character, crucial to the relationships which shape Juliet and her fate. The impulse in some productions to give her some of Capulet's lines or to reverse the roles entirely is understandable, and to see Juliet's estrangement from her parents primarily as alienation from a cold, damaged mother is perhaps more psychologically resonant for a modern audience. But such reversals can obscure the patriarchal dynamics of the play, and it's worth exploring how Lady Capulet fits into those structures.

[1] MacFaul, *Male Friendship*, p. 150. [2] *OED* 'friend' 5.

[3] Edward Snow, 'Language and sexual difference in *Romeo and Juliet*', in *Shakespeare's 'Rough Magic': Renaissance Essays in Honor of C. L. Barber*, ed. Peter Erickson and Coppélia Kahn, 1985, pp. 168–92: 186.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Lady Capulet is isolated like her daughter. She mocks her husband for wanting to fight ('A crutch, a crutch! why call you for a sword?', 1.1.67), and the usual inference is that she is the discontented younger wife of an elderly man. At the beginning of 1.3, when Lady Capulet sends the Nurse away so that she can speak with Juliet in private and then immediately recalls her, it's implied that she isn't used to having this kind of conversation with her own daughter (1.3.1–10). It's established that Juliet is the Capulets' only surviving child (1.2.14), and that, in early childhood at least, Juliet has largely been brought up by her Nurse (1.3.24–33). The little vignette that the Nurse sketches so vividly would, setting aside the earthquake, have been a familiar one to an early modern audience: a lower-class woman paid to breastfeed the child of another woman. Lady Capulet is doing her duty as a well-to-do mother in suggesting that Juliet marry Paris, but she does fulsomely praise his charms: he is 'The valiant Paris' and 'Verona's summer hath not such a flower' (1.3.75, 78); 'this unbound lover, / To beautify him, only lacks a cover' (1.3.88–9). Her use of such conceits is as artificial as Romeo's second-hand Petrarchan playbook, and it assumes the same patriarchal hegemony: 'So shall you share all that he doth possess, / By having him, making yourself no less' (1.3.94–5), she concludes, acknowledging that all this is about capital at least as much as love. The Nurse's mildly ribald rejoinder ('No less! nay, bigger women grow by men', 1.3.96) is a reminder that it is (successful) pregnancy that allows such investments to prosper. For the Nurse and Lady Capulet, love, sex and marriage are entirely subordinated to motherhood. The Nurse's attitude to sex is more cheerful than Lady Capulet's, though; she is also the play's most lovingly maternal figure, who has suffered the death of at least one child already, little Susan, who was 'of an age' with Juliet (1.3.20). The Q1 text of 4.3 begins with a brief exchange between Juliet and the Nurse which is touching in its evocation of practical care: the Nurse says nothing here in Q2, but in Q1 she reassures Juliet that 'there's a clean smock under your pillow, and so good night' (17.4). By the end of the play, the Nurse faces the death (twice over) of her surrogate daughter; if she arrives at the tomb with the rest of the crowd, the effect is heart-breaking.

Lady Capulet is young: if Juliet is a young teenager, then Lady Capulet might only be approaching 30, given that she says to Juliet 'I was your mother much upon these years / That you are now a maid' (1.3.73–4). She is closer to her daughter in age than to her husband (1.5.35–8), suggesting she is also close in age to her nephew Tybalt (3.1.137); it's sometimes implied they are having an affair, notably in Zeffirelli's film. The Nurse is usually played as older than Lady Capulet, especially with her cheerful admission of toothlessness (1.3.13–14), although this suggests age to a modern audience more readily than it would have in the 1590s. Kenneth Branagh's 2016 production cast Meera Syal, and Erica Whyman's 2018 RSC production had Ishia Bennison, both actors in middle age who – in Syal's case, in particular – gave the Nurse glamour as well as strength; both made her a more interesting and tragic figure than is sometimes the case. The 2021 Shakespeare's Globe production cast Sirine Saba, even younger, suggesting the backstory of a maid working abroad to support her family (pp. 56, 76).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The relative ages of the three Capulet women inevitably foregrounds Juliet's age, and there is a larger question here about treating dramatic characters as 'real people'. In the Capulets' case, this approach is fostered by glimpses of backstory (the deaths of other children, Juliet's childhood) and the play's careful time-keeping being disproportionately loaded into the Capulet scenes. An actor playing Lady Capulet might want to develop her history (Was Capulet married before? Did Lady Capulet give birth to the children who died?), and such approaches retain popular appeal in books like Cedric Watts and John Sutherland's *Henry V: War Criminal?*,[1] in which the focus of Sutherland's discussion is Juliet's age and sexuality. That this can be problematic for modern audiences and readers is not in doubt, and sometimes in performance Juliet's age is explicitly raised: Luhrmann's 1996 film cuts any reference to it, although there is a brief shot of school uniform (implicitly that worn by the schoolgirls in the opening scene) on her bedroom floor in the sequence corresponding to 1.3. Catherine Belsey notes, helpfully, that 'the question is not whether Juliet is a couple of weeks short of fourteen – she is. The more pressing issue is what that age is taken to mean in the play'; she suggests that it gives emphasis to Juliet's vulnerability and artlessness; her passionate outpourings are more 'true' because they are unrehearsed and new.[2]

Another way of thinking about Juliet's age is that it pertains less to Juliet's sexuality than her death. Fourteen was the age of majority for girls (p. 21); it was probably the age of some of the boy actors. Ben Jonson's epitaph for the actor Salomon Pavy, who died in 1602, laments that in 'years he number'd scarce thirteen / When fates turned cruel', although Pavy was actually 14 when he died.[3] There might be the implication that, rather than Jonson getting it wrong (not unlikely), dying aged *only* 13 or *not quite* 14 is a pathetic trope. In Donne's 'Funeral Elegy' on Elizabeth Drury, he comments not only on the fact that Elizabeth was unmarried ('Clothed in her virgin white integrity', 75) but also that she died 'at not fifteen', having 'much promised, much performed' (86).[4] That Juliet dies young is tragic; that she is on the cusp of maturity adds pathos, especially in a play whose final tragedy is occasioned not simply by chance but by the narrowest of misses, painfully dramatising the almost but not quite.

Sutherland's essay discusses Juliet with a mixture of censoriousness and prurience. He suggests, for instance, that 'if, as appears from his skills with the sword, Romeo is in his late teens (and old enough to be banished) he is less lover than child molester';[5] more temperately, Belsey notes that in Jaques's 'seven ages' speech in *As You Like It* (2.7.139–66), 'the lover' seems to be between 14 and 21, because he follows 'the schoolboy' and the speech is organised in roughly seven-year intervals;[6] by analogy, Romeo is only a few years older than Juliet. (In some US states, clauses preventing the prosecution of the older partner in a consensual sexual relationship when one partner is below the age of consent *and* the age difference does not exceed a defined number of years are known as 'Romeo and Juliet laws'.) Sutherland also observes that 'it complicates one's reactions that Juliet is one of the few heroines ("maids") that

[1] John Sutherland and Cedric Watts, *Henry V: War Criminal? and Other Shakespeare Puzzles*, 2000, p. 53.
[2] Belsey, *Language*, pp. 143, 150–1. [3] Kathman, 'How old?', 223.
[4] Elizabeth Drury died December 1610. See Donne, p. 860, and also 4.5.28–9n.
[5] Sutherland and Watts, *Henry V*, p. 55. [6] Belsey, *Language*, p. 145.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Shakespeare shows us in a patently post-coital state. And very happy she is doing the dawn scene after her marriage night . . . It is not just ears that have been pierced, we may deduce. Juliet, we may calculate, has lost her maidenhead at Lolita's age', adding that 'should she have gone through with the charade and bigamously married her official fiancé, he would doubtless have killed the little baggage himself when he discovered her hymen broken'.[1] It's hard to know what to say in response to both tone and opinions here, without sounding prurient and censorious in turn. But it's worth thinking properly about what *Romeo and Juliet* might say about love, sex and being a teenager, and how it does so in poetry and drama.

Body Language

Shakespeare takes the urgency of teenage passion seriously and puts it into words.[2] The sonnet that Romeo and Juliet share at their meeting is shockingly intimate, not just in its eventual enabling of a kiss, but in its sharing: two become one in formal terms, two voices speak a single poem. In John Donne's 'The Canonization', he and his lover will 'build in sonnets pretty rooms', punning on the Italian *stanza*, 'room':[3] for Romeo and Juliet, the poem they make together creates a space apart. The sonnet has the spontaneity of improvisation but it has a textual quality too, as if the lovers write and read the same page;[4] in their shared conceits, Romeo and Juliet are already inside each other's heads, under each other's skin. Lips do what hands do as bodies do what words do, and what lyric forms do, through rhyme, repetition, refrain. Shakespeare explores not simply the performance but the embodiment of lyric.

Recognition of self and of self-in-other is one of the conditions of intimate friendship and of love, and the sonnet Romeo and Juliet share formally enacts such a moment of recognition, at the same time building on and disrupting the essential homosociality of the sonnet form (p. 30). Shakespeare's Sonnets to the young man depict a relationship which struggles for equality, a variation on the fundamental asymmetries of the Petrarchan tradition more generally – the performative powerlessness of the poet, the silent (or silenced) 'power' of the beloved. When Romeo and Juliet recognise each other in a sonnet, those tensions are disrupted and resolved; they are alike, and equal. When Juliet matches Romeo's quatrain with her own, it is a moment of recognition expressed in language and form: here are two people recognising their other selves. Juliet answers a question that Romeo doesn't even realise that he's asked, claiming the position of co-creator, not object, demonstrating not only that she understands this language, but that she speaks it fluently.

The language of *Romeo and Juliet* might properly be called body language. It is important, here, to think of *bodies*, not the more abstract construct of 'the body',

[1] Sutherland and Watts, *Henry V*, pp. 55, 56.

[2] For a longer version of this section, see Hester Lees-Jeffries, 'Body language: making love in lyric in *Romeo and Juliet*', *Review of English Studies* 74 (2023), pp. 237–53, https://doi.org/10.1093/res/hgac097.

[3] 'The Canonization', line 32, in Donne, pp. 147–55: 154.

[4] See Diana E. Henderson, *Passion Made Public: Elizabethan Lyric, Gender, and Performance*, 1995, p. 217.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

because *Romeo and Juliet* is interested not only in embodiment, touch, the reach of an arm in duelling, the lightness of feet in a dance, but also in what it is to experience a particular body, especially in proximity to another particular body. Drama particularises body language in a way that poetry cannot; there is an actual body in question: 'See how she leans her cheek upon her hand! / O, that I were a glove upon that hand, / That I might touch that cheek!' Romeo rhapsodises (2.2.23–5). It is striking that Romeo's three lines here are almost entirely monosyllabic, with no modifying adjectives; all that matters is that it is *her* cheek, *her* hand, *that* hand, *that* cheek. (By contrast, in his infatuation with Rosaline, 'Romeo's praise [has been] as bodiless as his love itself'.)[1] The death wounds in *Romeo and Juliet* are as fake as *Titus*'s dismemberments, but the touches and kisses are real, and the bodies of characters and actors are frequently perfectly aligned in what they do. Body language marks the lovers' relationship, contrasted not only with the crude bluster of Sampson and Gregory but with Mercutio's more sophisticated fantasies in his mocking, bawdy blazon of the never-seen Rosaline (2.1.17–20).

Juliet blazons her own frustration that the name of Montague 'is nor hand nor foot, / Nor arm nor face, nor any other part / Belonging to a man' (2.2.40–2). Language works with bodies in the definition of new relationships and identities, but there's always a gap between word and thing, name and person, language and body; in this 'balcony' scene, there is a crucial distance between bodies too. Juliet not only speaks but articulates her own desires, and even in (imagined) soliloquy here, Juliet and Romeo address each other with the familiar 'thou'.[2] Later, there's a delicately adolescent balance of frustration and restraint in their perhaps only being able to touch each other's hands, and a sense of another gap in language and experience, when touch expresses what words cannot. Juliet sometimes gets a laugh on 'any other part belonging to a man', but one of the most appealing things about her is her frankness. She matches Romeo's conceit of virginity as a 'vestal livery' that should be 'cast off' with a name as something that can be 'doffed': if Romeo takes off his name, as he would a hat or a shirt, she will in exchange give him 'all herself' (2.2.8–9, 47–9). They are both thinking as much about undressing as about bodies. The fantasy here is not simply of wholeness but of reintegration: just as hand has met hand, and lip, lip, in the embodied speaking of a sonnet, so here the parts of bodies, fragmented by names, feud, blazon and banter, can be re-embodied, given and taken, experienced as whole. When Juliet demands of Romeo 'What satisfaction canst thou have tonight?' (2.2.126), 'her reply does not so much reject the implied gratification as defer it':[3] her desire for Romeo is as great as his for her; the symmetry of their exchanges and their shared idioms are about parity of passion as much as reciprocity.[4]

Lyric 'attempts to slow down the experience of time':[5] the lovers' sonnet, with its complex patterns of reiteration and generation, its stichomythic structure, frames time as *kairos*, a propitious moment – less a moment of stasis than of ecstasy, a standing

[1] Gayle Whittier, 'The sonnet's body and the body sonnetized in *Romeo and Juliet*', *SQ* 40 (1989), 27–41: 30.
[2] Belsey, *Language*, p. 10. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 29. [4] Grady, *Impure Aesthetics*, p. 210.
[5] Henderson, *Passion*, p. 22.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

outside of time, and watershed. *Romeo and Juliet* is frequently explicit about its embeddedness in *chronos*, worldly time, invoking clocks and calendar, years, seasons, months, weeks, days, hours and minutes. But lyric dilates, temporarily suspending the relentless forward momentum of blank verse; at the same time, it gains its force from the recognition that such a suspension can only ever be temporary.

Juliet's 'Gallop apace' soliloquy (3.2.1–31) wishes the time away. Recognisable as an epithalamium (pp. 7–8), it extends the dynamics which originate in the shared sonnet and are then developed in the balcony scene, above all in its imagining of darkness, bodies and touch.[1] Its bright horses appear only fleetingly as the speech quickly becomes much smaller in scale, more private and tactile, less visual. It's domestic: night falls like the curtains being drawn around a bed and the world of the lovers will shrink to a little room of darkness and discovery, where Romeo will 'Leap to these arms, untalked of and unseen' (7), the deictic '*these* arms' recalling Romeo's earlier specification of '*that* hand' and '*that* cheek'. Juliet initially imagines an encounter in total darkness, for 'Lovers can see to do their amorous rites / By their own beauties' (8–9), and although the conceit of love being light enough is a lovely one, the imagining of touch is also implicit here. In darkness, the lovers will recognise each other by touch alone, as they recognised each other by sight at their first meeting and by their voices in the balcony scene: the lovers' 'ardent tactility' has been 'predicted' – literally, already spoken into being – by the palmers' kiss.[2] Juliet imagines intimacy in terms the lovers' shared sonnet established, too: paradox ('learn me how to lose a winning match') and, above all, balance, mutuality. She assumes the 'match' will be 'played for a *pair* of stainless maidenhoods': nothing suggests that Romeo is any more experienced than Juliet.

Juliet conflates night with Romeo himself in her epithalamium's central invocation 'Come, Night, come, Romeo, come, thou day in night' (17),[3] and turns to the imagining of light in darkness, applying to Romeo a way in which she has been described. The 'rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear' (1.5.45) to which Romeo compares Juliet evokes proximity and the possibility of touch (the implicit cheek) as much as it does chromatic contrast (the jewel is surely a pearl). Juliet's later speech 'jumbles blackness, night, sex, and death together in an orgiastic tangle':[4] Romeo's conceit has activated 'the racialized sexual consciousness built into the historical moment of *Romeo and Juliet*', and 'the play's invocations of mysterious, potent, revelatory darkness finally not only embody the prohibitions hedging love in Verona, but racialize them, as a fragment of an otherwise sanctioned black body becomes the expressive vehicle for the impact of Romeo's sudden flash of emotional and erotic insight'.[5] Romeo will 'leap' to Juliet's arms and, while the Nurse and Mercutio refer to women bearing the weight of men in sexual intimacy, sometimes violently (1.3.43, 57; 1.4.27–8, 92–3; 2.5.75), Juliet imagines her union with Romeo in terms of gentleness, lightness, flight.

[1] See Denise Walen, 'Unmanning Juliet', *S.Sur. 69* (2016), 253–76.
[2] Julia Reinhard Lupton, *Shakespeare Dwelling: Designs for the Theater of Life*, 2018, p. 56.
[3] Walen, 'Unmanning', 257; the sexual sense is only just emerging (*OED* 'come' v. 22).
[4] Joyce Green MacDonald, *Shakespearean Adaptation, Race and Memory in the New World*, 2020, p. 52.
[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 47, 49.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

To imagine Romeo transformed into a constellation, cut out in little stars, is dazzlingly outrageous, but the suddenly extended timeframe here is also poignant, imagining posthumous transformation when hitherto the future has meant only the next few hours.[1] The enduring resonance of stellification, transformation into stars as both honour and loving tribute, was poignantly exemplified when Juliet's lines (3.2.21–5) were quoted in a eulogy proposed for Martin Luther King by his speechwriter and friend Clarence B. Jones.[2] There, Juliet's words performed complex work in relation to Blackness, beauty, mourning, memory and hope. 'Adolescence *is* metamorphosis':[3] as Juliet longs for her own transformation from virgin to wife, Romeo's eventual death (or her own) seems as remote as the stars themselves. The deaths being imagined here are sexual, too, but the little stars might also be textual, *asterisks*, * * *, a typographical variation on the theme of chromatic contrast and complementarity which so marks the play.[4] The little rooms of lyric, like the bridal chamber and the bed, contain apparently infinite possibilities. As Valerie Traub points out, for early moderns 'sex is likened to a form of knowledge':[5] in her soliloquy, Juliet acknowledges both that she does not know and that she badly wants to know and to *be* known; 'knowing that one *does not know* . . . can engender tremendous erotic frisson in the form of wonder'.[6] The words and forms in which Romeo and Juliet are coming to know each other have an intimacy more profound than the sexy back-and-forth of Shakespeare's comedies, because their intimacy is grounded in a shared language of bodies and touch, light in darkness, mutual world-making.

When Romeo and Juliet turn to lyric again in the aubade that initiates their parting, they are attempting to slow time, for 'going out into the day means stepping into time and narrative'.[7] Their dialogue's echoic structures, its refrain-like qualities, align it once again with the longed-for lyric space which their shared sonnet created, but for the lovers 'a new tragic knowledge' has intervened 'between the vows (word) and the consummation (body) of their love . . . the knowledge of death and death's companion, time'.[8] Even as it attempts to suspend time, an aubade is always *after*.[9] However bittersweet the moment, though, the lovers now inhabit their lyric space together: they are 'aloft' (pp. 15–16) and the sonnet space is concealed behind them, the little room of their marriage bed, where two have become one. Modern directors almost always set the dawn scene in Juliet's bedchamber, however: Belsey suggests that, when Zeffirelli and Luhrmann do this, 'the effect is to replace the play's passionate imagining with

[1] Lupton, *Shakespeare Dwelling*, p. 55.
[2] From the 'Letter of response' from Clarence B. Jones to J. Saba Alexander, in the Morehouse College Martin Luther King Jr Collection, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center, GA.
[3] Julia Reinhard Lupton, '"Cut him out in little stars": Juliet's cute classicism', *S.Sur. 70* (2017), 240–8: 243.
[4] On asterisks, see Laurie Maguire, *The Rhetoric of the Page*, 2020.
[5] Valerie Traub, *Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns*, 2015, p. 9.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 307.
[7] Fiona Green, 'Aubade: Jorie Graham and the "pitch of the dawn"', in *Forms of Late Modernist Lyric*, ed. Edward Allen, 2021, pp. 13–36: 32.
[8] Whittier, 'The sonnet's body', 37.
[9] Green, 'Aubade', p. 35.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

innocence and vulnerability';[1] Daileader argues, however, that '[Zeffirelli's] film shows us . . . what it is that the lovers are threatened with losing'.[2] Keeping not only the lovers' sole sexual encounter but even the space of their love-making unseen is perhaps more in keeping with the intense intimacy of lyric forms, as well as theatrically expedient.

The aubade is an ancient form, a dawn song for parting lovers: sometimes they are joined by a third voice, that of a watchman, but what Romeo and Juliet hear is birdsong which 'pierce[s]' (3.5.3) like a rapier's point. When Juliet asks Romeo 'Wilt thou be gone? It is not yet near day', it has the monosyllabic directness which has characterised some of their most intimate exchanges, and their intricately constructed duet is inherently bittersweet because (as Fiona Green points out) talk 'is the first symptom of twoness'. The 'unrecoverable past of the dawn song is blissful unity', Green suggests, for not-yet-parting lovers 'lie in the aftermath of a wordless oneness to which we were not privy'.[3] Even the most telepathically attuned dialogue is still by definition divided: language itself arises 'in the realization of embodiedness – which is to say, of bodily separation – but also in the concurrent attempt to heal this separation, to heal through touch',[4] and the lovers very often speak their dialogue *in touch* with each other, cuddled together. The unarguable monosyllables continue: 'I must be gone and live, or stay and die', says Romeo to his wife (3.5.11), and even Juliet's fantasy that the dawn is a meteor 'To be to thee this night a torch-bearer' (3.5.14) is a reminder that Romeo goes to Mantua without his light-in-darkness, depriving Juliet of her light-in-darkness too. This dialogue has all the intimacy of the shared sonnet in 1.5, but does without its tight formal structures. There are not alternating quatrains but longer units (Juliet speaks five lines, followed by six from Romeo, five from Juliet, nine from Romeo, ten from Juliet) manifesting the lovers' desire to delay and overgo. Romeo's imagining of their future conversations is bitterly ironic (3.5.52–3); lovers who delight in having the time to talk are a staple of comedy.

The moment of parting is marked by another couplet and another kiss, a parody of the shared sonnet in 1.5. Whereas the scene began with the lovers attempting to slow time in their lyrical denial of the dawn, Juliet imagines the future as one in which time will drag (3.5.44–7). Even though the Nurse has prompted Romeo's descent, she's not there to pull Juliet away, and there's no servant or friend waiting for Romeo, urging him to hurry: the final division is something that the lovers have to do themselves, together. After the soaring lyricism of the scene's opening, their parting is hurried; Romeo's last 'Adieu, adieu' (3.5.59) offers one final pair, but there is no more time. There's a poignant symmetry in their two partings: at the end of the balcony scene, Juliet exits first, her couplet ('Good night, good night! Parting is such sweet sorrow, / That I shall say good night till it be morrow', 2.2.184–5) the lovers' lyric idiom in miniature, in its oxymoron and temporal play. But in the dawn scene, it's Juliet left

[1] Belsey, *Language*, pp. 131–2.
[2] Celia R. Daileader, *Eroticism on the Renaissance Stage: Transcendence, Desire, and the Limits of the Visible*, 1998, p. 45. See also Christine Varnado, '"Invisible sex!": what looks like the act in early modern drama?', in *Sex before Sex: Figuring the Act in Early Modern England*, ed. James M. Bromley and Will Stockton, 2013, pp. 25–52.
[3] Green, 'Aubade', 14, 32, 33.
[4] Daileader, *Eroticism*, p. 142.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

alone, and she must descend from the elevated, intimate space of lyric as the play jolts back into the time of narrative. Her subsequent encounter with Paris is a joyless contrast to the lovers' lyrical exchanges; Paris is creepy and dull and Juliet's responses are brittle, but when she so urgently begs the potion from the Friar, her 'Give me, give me!' (4.1.121) echoes her own epithalamium, in which desire and death so potently overlapped.

In the tomb, Romeo finally gets his aria, a passionate threnody as erotic as it is desolate, speaking in body language for the last time; light in darkness, tender sensuality, a fatal kiss. The tomb turns out to be both the last little room of the sonnet and the unseen space of Romeo and Juliet's marriage, for it is there that Romeo and Juliet at last are *seen* to lie down together. Romeo's description of Juliet's beauty makes the tomb not 'a grave' but 'a lantern',[1] 'a feasting presence full of light' (5.3.84–6): Romeo's back in the moment of their first encounter. It's light that Romeo puns on, the lightening before death (5.3.90), the lifting of his spirits at the sight of Juliet, and yet it's not simply a circling back to the terms of the lovers' meeting because he addresses her as 'my wife' (5.3.91). It's the only time he calls her 'wife': Mark Van Doren suggests that 'five short words at Juliet's bier—"O my love! my wife!"—make up for all of Romeo's young errors'.[2] Unlike Juliet, Romeo has most often appeared in dialogue with others (Mercutio, Benvolio, the Friar, Juliet herself) and here he is very alone. He speaks, mostly, to Juliet: 'Thou art not conquered' (5.3.94), he says, as he delivers, with lingering sensuality, a brief blazon of her beauty, the 'crimson' of her lips and cheeks (5.3.95). He is so caught up in his agony that he doesn't consider that his question, 'Why art thou yet so fair?' (5.3.102), might have more than one answer. Instead, there is a strange, compelling fantasy of Juliet being kept, Proserpina-like, as death's own lover,[3] and 'For fear of that', says Romeo, 'I still will stay with thee' (5.3.102–6). 'Here, here will I remain', he vows, and the deictic, embodied specificity of drama allows *here* to be both the tomb and Juliet's arms.

Singing his swansong, Romeo is a desperate Orpheus, in the underworld not to rescue his Eurydice, but to stay with her forever. He looks deliberately and lingeringly on Juliet's face, and his narration of his final actions ('Eyes, look your last! / Arms, take your last embrace! and, lips, O you / The doors of breath, seal with a righteous kiss / A dateless bargain to engrossing Death!', 5.3.112–15) imagines her looking at him, embracing him, and kissing him too even as he embraces and kisses what he assumes is her lifeless body; it is a blazon of Juliet's body as well as his. They are indeed one flesh. The embrace and the kiss must be awkward in ways that cannot register on the page, though, because Juliet cannot reciprocate; she is a dead weight in Romeo's arms, when previously her physicality has been so eager. Romeo's actions must take up time,

[1] A glazed structure at the top of a building (*OED* 'lantern' 4).

[2] Mark Van Doren, '*Romeo and Juliet*', in *Critical Essays*, ed. Andrews, pp. 3–11: 11.

[3] Janice Valls-Russell, 'Erotic perspectives: when Pyramus and Thisbe meet Hero and Leander in *Romeo and Juliet*', in *Shakespeare's Erotic Mythology and Ovidian Renaissance Culture*, ed. Agnès Lafont, 2016, pp. 78–89: 81. The nightingale's pomegranate tree (3.5.1–7 supplementary note) also suggests Proserpina, doomed to spend half each year in the underworld because she ate pomegranate seeds while captive there.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

disrupting the verse, making it awkward until he dies, with a kiss. In Juliet's last moments, too, what looks regular on the page must be interrupted by time-taking action, a final fall from lyric into plot: prising a vial from Romeo's fingers, attempting to drink from it, another kiss. This last kiss is followed by the terrible half-line, 'thy lips are warm' (5.3.167): it's a palpable, metrical absence, indicating that Romeo has only just died, that Juliet is only just too late.

This last encounter between the lovers is both a culmination and a breakdown of the play's body language, its embodiment of lyric forms. In 'Gallop apace', Juliet longed for night and Romeo, imagining both sex and death as transcendent, metamorphic ecstasy; her last words, like that earlier speech, are aptly animated by the sexual sense of 'die'. It's an urgently erotic speech, and Juliet's death becomes the unseen and untalked-of consummation of the lovers' marriage, Romeo's dagger sheathed in Juliet's body. The dagger is 'happy' because luckily it's there, to hand, and it's also the means whereby (as Juliet thinks) the lovers will achieve their ecstatic union in death.[1] The dagger will penetrate Juliet's body as easily as it has slipped into the scabbard that was made for it, a perfect fit, an 'eternal sexual embrace'.[2] That's how Romeo and Juliet die, in each other's arms, together and *here*, echoing each other's words even in death: 'Thus with a kiss I die', 'there rust, and let me die' – two half-lines that, together, make up more (in metrical terms) than the sum of their parts.

Romeo and Juliet's emotional impact derives in part from how the intense yet unfocused desire of adolescence, its hazy, urgent longings, undirected yearnings and simultaneous sense of lack, excess and an overwhelming longing to *give*, are shown as being reciprocated and overcome, with vivid particularity, in its poetry, and above all in its dramatic embodiment of lyric. It may be 'an adult fantasy about adolescent desire',[3] but the play takes seriously and portrays with tremendous tenderness the all-or-nothing intensity of young love. Desire is lack, but in *Romeo and Juliet* dramatic poetry and embodied lyric create the conditions of its redress and fulfil them, in their conceits and forms, the sonnet's room, the couplet's kiss.

Restoration to Romantic: Romans and Rivalries, Passion and Propriety

When Samuel Pepys saw *Romeo and Juliet* on 1 March 1662 it was 'the first time it was ever acted' following the reopening of the theatres, but he was unimpressed: 'it is a play of itself the worst that ever I heard in my life'. Starring Henry Harris as Romeo, Thomas Betterton as Mercutio, and Betterton's future wife Mary Saunderson, it was probably an adaptation by William Davenant, now lost. Davenant's *Romeo and Juliet* might have been 'a largely comic play that ends tragically',[4] and there was also

[1] See Ramie Targoff, 'Mortal love: Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and the practice of joint burial', *Representations* 120 (2012), 17–38.
[2] Lloyd Davis, '"Death-marked love": desire and presence in *Romeo and Juliet*', *S.Sur. 49* (1996), 57–67: 65. See 5.3.170 supplementary note.
[3] Jonathan Dollimore, *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture*, 1998, 2001, p. 109.
[4] Christopher Spencer, '"Count Paris's wife": *Romeo and Juliet* on the early Restoration stage', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 7 (1966), 309–16: 315–16.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

a tragi-comic version of the play by James Howard in which the lovers survived: 'when the Tragedy was Reviv'd again 'twas Play'd Alternately, Tragical one Day, and Tragicomical another'; this play, too, is lost.[1] Pepys's bad impression wasn't helped by the fact that the actors 'were all of them out, more or less' – that is, they didn't know their lines.[2]

Pepys's diary unfortunately ends a decade before the first performances of Thomas Otway's *The History and Fall of Caius Marius, a Tragedy* (1679, first printed in 1680), which transports *Romeo and Juliet* to ancient Rome. Caius Marius's son Marius is already in love with Lavinia, the daughter of Metellus, and she with him, but Metellus wants her to marry Sylla (Paris/Tybalt). Caius Marius was played by Betterton, Marius by William Smith, Lavinia by Elizabeth Barry, and the Nurse was played by the comic James Nokes. Large chunks of Shakespeare's text, rewritten and reordered, appear: in the first scene between the lovers, for instance, with Lavinia '*in the balcony*', Marius rhapsodises:

> What Light is that which breaks through yonder Shade?
> Oh! 'tis my Love!
> She seems to hang upon the cheek of Night,
> Fairer then Snow upon the Raven's back,
> Or a rich Jewel in an *Æthiop*'s ear.[3]

In the tomb, Lavinia awakes as Marius kisses her farewell, groggily (and suggestively) observing ''Tis very cold; and yet here's something warm.'[4] They exchange some thirty lines before Marius expires; Lavinia kills herself with Caius Marius's sword (that is, her erstwhile father-in-law's, not her lover's). Bafflingly, Otway's play was preferred to Shakespeare's for decades. In 1745, the critic and playwright Eliza Haywood wrote that she 'was a little surprized when I heard that Mr. *Cibber* junior had reviv'd the Tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* as it was first acted; *Caius Marius* being the same Play, only moderniz'd and clear'd of some Part of its Rubbish by *Otway*'.[5] She confidently asserted that *Romeo and Juliet* – that is, *Caius Marius* – was 'the very best and most agreeable of all the Tragedies of that excellent Author', that is, Shakespeare.[6]

At the beginning of Theophilus Cibber's *Romeo and Juliet* (first performed 1744), Romeo is already in love with Juliet and she with him, although neither knows of the other's love. The balcony scene is again the lovers' first encounter. There's no reason for Tybalt to challenge Romeo, but the action of the play proceeds in a version fairly close to Shakespeare's, with marriage, fatal duels and banishment, wedding night, parting and desperate plan. In the original production, Cibber himself (aged 41) played Romeo, with Juliet his 14-year-old daughter Jenny. As in Otway, Juliet

[1] *Roscius Anglicanus*, in Vickers, II, 188–9.
[2] *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed. Robert Latham and William Matthews, 1970, III, 79.
[3] Thomas Otway, *The History and Fall of Caius Marius, a Tragedy*, 1680, sig. D1v.
[4] *Ibid.*, sig. I3v, I4.
[5] Eliza Haywood, *The Female Spectator* Book VIII (1745), ii, 90–3, in Vickers, III, 162–5: 163.
[6] Vickers, III, 164.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

2 David Garrick and George Anne Bellamy as Romeo and Juliet. From an engraving by R. S. Ravenet (1753) after a painting by Benjamin Wilson. (Harvard Theatre Collection)

wakes at Romeo's farewell kiss ('Where am I? Bless me, Heaven! / 'Tis very cold: and yet here's something warm—'), but after a short exchange, Romeo dies and Juliet stabs herself, Cibber giving her two lines more than Shakespeare, her dying words ''Tis o'er; —my eyes grow dim. Where is my Love? / Have I caught you! Now, now we'll part no more.'[1]

David Garrick's version of *Romeo and Juliet* was first performed on 29 November 1748, and dominated the stage for over a century. The 'Advertisement' to the second edition (1750) promised that: 'The Alterations in the following Play are few, except in the last act; the Design was to clear the Original as much as possible from the Jingle and Quibble which were always thought a great Objection to performing it.' This is disingenuous as well as dismissive: Lady Montague disappears, so does all mention of Rosaline, and Garrick added Juliet's funeral, as well as Juliet's awaking after Romeo's taking the poison, enabling the pathos of their final leave-taking; there is much rewriting. Garrick hadn't omitted Rosaline in his 1748 version, but did so in response to criticism, because 'the sudden Change of *Romeo*'s Love from *Rosaline* to Juliet was a *Blemish* in his character'.[2] Theophilus Cibber noted, with not unbiased disapproval, the ridiculousness of Garrick's Romeo finding time en route to the tomb 'to shift his Cloaths that he may

[1] Theophilus Cibber, *Romeo and Juliet, a Tragedy, Revis'd, and Alter'd From Shakespear*, 1748.
[2] For extracts from Garrick, see Vickers, III, 333–42.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

die . . . in a Suit of Black'; he also mocked the business whereby Romeo fought Paris with his crow-bar.[1] Juliet wakes at Romeo's kiss; he carries her from the tomb and they have a rapturous reunion, only for him to confess what he has done, growing weaker and more delirious from the poison:

> *Jul.* Oh my breaking heart—
> *Rom.* She is my wife—our hearts are twin'd together—
> *Capulet*, forbear—*Paris*, loose your hold—
> Pull not our heart-strings thus—they crack—they break—
> *Oh Juliet! Juliet!* [Dies.
> *Jul.* Stay, stay for me, *Romeo*—
> A moment stay; fate marries us in death,
> And we are *one*—no pow'r shall part us. [*Faints on* Romeo's *body*.

Attesting to the enduring influence of Garrick's version, there is a 'lurid transformation' of the tomb scene in Matthew Lewis's Gothic novel *The Monk* (1796), in which Antonia awakes in a tomb to see her would-be lover Ambrosio – the eponymous monk, who is also, it transpires, her brother – who rapes and stabs her; her 'true love' Lorenzo arrives only in time to watch her die.[2]

For twelve nights in 1750, there were rival versions of the play – Garrick's at Drury Lane, and Cibber's at Covent Garden (Spranger Barry played Romeo, and Susannah Arne Cibber, Theophilus's estranged wife, played Juliet) (p. 56). An anonymous female spectator remarked that: 'Had I been Juliet to Garrick's Romeo,—so ardent and impassioned was he, I should have expected he would have come up to me in the balcony; but had I been Juliet to Barry's Romeo,—so tender, so eloquent, and so seductive was he, I should certainly have gone down to him!'[3] *Romeo and Juliet* is recorded as the first play by Shakespeare performed in America; the amateur production was directed by Joachimus Bertrand, a doctor (he played the Apothecary) at the Revenge Meeting House, New York, probably a tavern; the production is known only from an advertisement in the New York *Gazette* on 23 March 1730.[4] In the period 1747–76, it was the most popular of Shakespeare's plays on the London stage, playing more than 100 times at Drury Lane, and nearly 200 at Covent Garden (*Hamlet* was the only other Shakespeare play performed more than 100 times at either). Performed by Lewis Hallam's English touring company, Garrick's *Romeo and Juliet* was also the most popular play (with Cibber's *Richard III*) in pre-Revolutionary America.[5]

Eighteenth-century editors tended to regard *Romeo and Juliet* as unworthy of much serious or sustained attention. In the introduction to his 1747 edition, admittedly much derided by other critics, William Warburton divided the plays into four

[1] Theophilus Cibber, *Two Dissertations on Theatrical Subjects* (1756; 2nd edn, 1759), in Vickers, IV, 255.
[2] Michael Caines, *Shakespeare and the Eighteenth Century*, 2013, pp. 126–7.
[3] Philip H. Highfill, Kalman A. Burnim and Edward A. Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers & Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660–1800*, vol. VI, 1978, p. 22.
[4] See Loehlin, p. 44, and Ewa Elandt, '"The judicious author": a note on possibly the first American production of *Romeo and Juliet*', *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* 25–27 (1991–3), 267–70.
[5] Loehlin, p. 44.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

'classes': *Romeo and Juliet* he regarded as a third-class tragedy (alongside *Richard II*, *Coriolanus* and *Troilus and Cressida*), only just above *Titus Andronicus* and *Henry VI*, which he thought too poor to have been written by Shakespeare at all.[1] Samuel Johnson, though, thought that it was

> one of the most pleasing of our Author's performances. The scenes are busy and various, the incidents numerous and important, the catastrophe irresistibly affecting, and the process of the action carried on with such probability, at least with such congruity to popular opinions, as tragedy requires.

He thought, too, that 'here is one of the few attempts of *Shakespeare* to exhibit the conversation of gentlemen, to represent the airy sprightliness of juvenile elegance'.[2] Elizabeth Griffith made her debut as Juliet at the Smock Alley Theatre, Dublin, in 1749, aged 22; she moved to London and became a playwright, novelist and critic. In her *Morality of Shakespeare's Drama Illustrated* (1775), she observed of *Romeo and Juliet* that, although 'the language abounds with tenderness and delicacy', it was not a play on which she could draw for moral examples, because the play's plot 'is founded on a vicious prejudice unknown to the liberal minds of Britons, that of entailing family feuds and resentments down from generation to generation'. She thought, too, that 'the catastrophe of the unhappy lovers seems intended as a kind of moral, as well as poetical justice, for their having ventured upon an unweighed engagement together without the concurrence and consent of their parents'.[3] Her concluding stricture here is ironic, if not hypocritical: Griffith and her husband had eloped in 1751.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge devoted two of his Shakespeare lectures in 1811–12 to *Romeo and Juliet*, suggesting that in it 'are to be found all his excellences such as they afterwards appeared in his more perfect dramas'.[4] As well as the lovers, he admired Capulet ('a worthy, noble-minded old man of high rank, with all the impatience of character that is likely to accompany it'),[5] Tybalt, the Nurse and Mercutio, whom he described as 'possessing all the elements of a poet: high fancy; rapid thoughts; the whole world as it were subject to his law of association . . . a perfect gentleman, himself unconscious of his powers';[6] Coleridge was very much praising Mercutio in his own idealised self-image. He took the lovers seriously, and, for him, the play exemplified love as 'that sense of imperfection, that yearning to combine itself with something lovely'.[7] Going against the theatrical consensus of the day, he was at pains to explain and defend Romeo's abrupt shift in affections from Rosaline to Juliet, using it to amplify his discussion of true love,[8] and he suggests that 'it was Shakespeare's intention in this play to represent love as existing rather in the *imagination* than the feelings', in poetry before passion.[9]

[1] William Warburton, *The Works of Shakespeare in Eight Volumes* (1747), in Vickers, III, 226.
[2] *The Plays of William Shakespeare, Volume the eighth*, 1765, pp. 124–5.
[3] Elizabeth Griffith, *The Morality of Shakespeare's Drama Illustrated*, 1775, p. 497.
[4] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lectures on Shakespeare*, ed. Adam Roberts, 2016, p. 72.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 74. [6] *Ibid.*, p. 76. [7] *Ibid.*, p. 85. [8] *Ibid.*, p. 95.
[9] *Ibid.*, p. 97.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

William Hazlitt thought that *Romeo and Juliet* was Shakespeare's first play: 'there is the buoyant spirit of youth in every line, in the rapturous intoxication of hope, and in the bitterness of despair'.[1] It was written by a young man about young love: '[Shakespeare] has founded the passion of the two lovers not on the pleasures they had experienced, but on all the pleasures they had *not* experienced.'[2] While Hazlitt is most effusive in his admiration for Juliet, he was also impressed by the character of Romeo: 'Romeo is Hamlet in love', he says, 'there is the same rich exuberance of passion and sentiment in the one, that there is of thought and sentiment in the other'.[3] Hazlitt quotes 'Gallop apace' in its entirety not only as evidence of Juliet's character ('It has nothing forward, nothing coy, nothing affected or coquettish about it'), but because he presumed that it had been 'expunged from the Family Shakespear', the edition published under the name of Thomas Bowdler (actually by his sister, Henrietta Bowdler), 'In which Nothing is Added to the Original Text; but those Words and Expressions are Omitted which Cannot with Propriety be Read Aloud in a Family'.[4] Hazlitt was being unfair: the speech was retained by Bowdler, albeit cut to fifteen lines, and *Romeo and Juliet* gets off fairly lightly in its 'bowdlerisation', with the predictable exception of Mercutio. The *Romeo and Juliet* in Charles and Mary Lamb's hugely popular *Tales from Shakespear* (1806), similarly aimed at a 'domestic' readership, is more circumspect: 'The ceremony being over, Juliet hastened home, where she stayed impatient for the coming of night, at which time Romeo promised to come and meet her in the orchard.'[5] As Molly Yarn points out, later expurgators dealt with the play more severely, in the case of Rosa Baughan's *Shakespeare's Plays Abridged and Revised for the Use of Girls* (1863, 1871) reducing it to just nine pages.[6]

Victorian *Romeo and Juliet*: Travesties, Actresses and Art

Escaping employment as a teacher in the sadistic squalor of Dotheboys Hall, the hero of Charles Dickens's *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838–9) encounters the actor-manager Mr Vincent Crummles, whose attention is drawn by the 'capital countenance' of Smike, the abused and disabled boy whom Nicholas has rescued: 'He'd make such an actor for the starved business', for example as 'the Apothecary in Romeo and Juliet'.[7] Nicholas and Smike accordingly join the company: Smike plays the Apothecary, and Nicholas, Romeo.[8] Few details of the Crummles *Romeo and Juliet* appear in Dickens's novel, but when the RSC adapted *Nicholas Nickleby* in 1979–80, David Edgar wrote a version of the final scene.[9] Romeo revives as Juliet is about to stab herself, Paris is 'Not dead so much as stunned', Mercutio isn't dead after all – and Benvolio '*takes off his cap, and lets fall her long hair*' as 'Benvolio becomes Benvolia!' Only Tybalt stays dead. The Prince

[1] William Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, ed. J. H. Lobban, [1908], 2009, p. 106. Hazlitt's essays were first published in 1817.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 107. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 114.
[4] *The Bowdler Shakespeare*, vol. VI, 2009, p. 233. First published 1807.
[5] Charles and Mary Lamb, *Tales from Shakespeare*, [1906] 1990, p. 248.
[6] Molly Yarn, *Shakespeare's Lady Editors: A New History of the Shakespearean Text*, 2021, p. 24.
[7] Charles Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby*, 2008, p. 281. [8] *Ibid.*, p. 330.
[9] David Edgar, *Plays: 2*, 1990, pp. 200–9.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

3 Charlotte Cushman as Romeo, *c.*1870. (Sepia Times/Universal Images Group via Getty Images)

concludes that 'never was a story better set / Than this of Romeo and his Juliet', and Mrs Crummles, transformed from Lady Capulet into Britannia, leads the company in a patriotic song.

Edgar's pastiche of Victorian Shakespeare was more accurate and less extreme than modern audiences might imagine. Until the 1843 Theatres Act, the theatres in which 'spoken drama' could be performed were restricted by law. Other venues got around this by adding songs and dances to melodramas, for instance; this was the context in which hugely popular 'travesties' or 'burlesques' arose. Both *Romeo and Juliet: Travesty in Three Acts* by Richard Gurney (1812) and Maurice Dowling's

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Romeo and Juliet: 'As the Law Directs', an Operaticall Burlesque burletta (1837) included bare-knuckle boxing.[1] Andrew Halliday's *Romeo and Juliet Travestie, or, The Cup of Cold Pison* (1859) incorporated twenty-three musical numbers, and the Apothecary does a comic turn in almost every scene. Romeo, Mercutio, Paris and Tybalt were all played by women, and the Nurse by a man who, rather than narrating the fight between Mercutio, Tybalt and Romeo, re-enacts it, to music. Juliet appears at the ball '*dressed in short petticoats and pinafore*'; she responds to Romeo's rapturous greeting with 'Do you, la—do you like toffee? Just stop— / Hold my hoop, (*gives hoop*) I know a stunning shop— / (*brings out various sweetmeats from pocket*)'.[2] She duets with a dog from the balcony; Romeo is banished to Islington. Queen Mab appears to revive the dead, who are rebuked by Shakespeare's Ghost for what they have done to his play.

Perhaps the most celebrated Romeo of the nineteenth century was Charlotte Cushman (1816–76), who first played the role in New York in 1837, and subsequently at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, in London in 1845, initially opposite her sister Susan. Such casting was not unusual: Fanny Kemble had appeared with Ellen Tree as one of her Romeos in 1829. What *was* radical was Cushman's insistence on Shakespeare's text, a great inconvenience to the company, who knew only the Garrick. Cushman complained that the manager 'had asserted disparagingly that her performative choice had been made "because one Miss Cushman could not bring another Miss Cushman out of the tomb"' – that is, because she wouldn't have been able to carry her sister for the lovers' final farewell (p. 43); Lisa Merrill notes that 'the Haymarket stock company was said to have referred to the Cushman sisters as "American Indians" because of their adherence to Shakespeare's older, original text, which they considered "primitive"', a derision both nationalistic and racialized.[3] Susan Cushman was 23 and divorced, with a child; she had been married at 14 to an associate of her father's, who abandoned her soon after she gave birth. Charlotte Cushman answered objections by arguing that she was protecting her sister from being taken advantage of by male actors, denying that she had any 'gross motives' but, as Merrill points out, 'the spectre of something more explicitly suggestive of the erotic possibilities of gender transgression and same-sex desire' was certainly present in the protests by some critics.[4] Cushman did not adopt the flirtatious, 'feminine' postures often associated with breeches roles; at 5 foot 6 (1.67 m) she was comparatively tall, and she fenced and moved with a masculine gait. Speculating as to what audiences 'saw' in Cushman's performance, Merrill suggests that 'some spectators clearly perceived Cushman's/Romeo's embodied depiction of "amorous endearments" in keeping with the text's suggestion of a male character, while others could not get out of

[1] Richard Schoch, *Not Shakespeare: Bardolatry and Burlesque in the Nineteenth Century*, 2002, p. 124.
[2] Andrew Halliday, *Romeo and Juliet Travestie, or, The Cup of Cold Pison*, 1859. See Schoch, *Not Shakespeare*, pp. 119–25.
[3] Lisa Merrill, 'Charlotte Cushman', in *GS*, VII, 133–79: 141 (quoting a letter from Cushman to Benjamin Webster, the Haymarket's manager).
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 151.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

their minds the female, but "mannish" Cushman performing her passion for other women onstage in this guise'.[1]

Romeo and Juliet was performed as part of the Shakespeare tercentenary celebrations in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1864, although it was, ironically, the Garrick version.[2] In the same year, Juliet was notably absent from the Shakespearean heroines approvingly listed by the critic John Ruskin, when he observed that 'there is hardly a play that has not a perfect woman in it, steadfast in grave hope, and errorless purpose: Cordelia, Desdemona, Isabella, Hermione, Imogen, Queen Catherine, Perdita, Sylvia, Viola, Rosalind, Helena, and last, and perhaps loveliest, Virgilia, are all faultless'.[3] Ruskin was thinking about Shakespeare read, not performed, but, surprisingly, Fanny Kemble had also argued for *Romeo and Juliet*'s superiority in the reader's imagination. She made her debut as Juliet in 1829, but in 1832 wrote:

> Oh, Juliet! vision of the south! rose of the garden of the earth! was this the mingled strain of Love's sweet going forth, and Death's dark victory, over which my heart and soul have been poured out in wonder and ecstasy?—How I do loathe the stage! . . . To *act* this! to *act* Romeo and Juliet! Horror! Horror! how I do loathe my most impotent and unpoetical craft![4]

Kemble's reservations reflected a widespread attitude to Shakespeare, and to *Romeo and Juliet* in particular, typified by the German critic A. W. Schlegel:

> All that is most intoxicating in the odour of a southern spring, – all that is languishing in the song of the nightingale, or voluptuous in the first opening of the rose, all alike breathe forth from this poem . . . the echo which the whole leaves behind in the mind resembles a single but endless sigh.[5]

Helen Faucit (1814–98) made her début as Juliet in 1833, aged 18, so involved in the performance that when her clutching of the potion phial shattered it and she bled all over her white satin dress, she didn't notice.[6] Faucit was also meant to play Juliet for her Covent Garden debut in 1836, but

> the Romeo of the theatre—the only one available at the time—was of too mature an age to act with so young a Juliet when she came before an audience on her *début*. A little later on, I did act the character with him. He was an excellent actor in his way, but very vehement,—so much so that, when he played Romeo, my sister would never trust me in the tomb alone. He shook it so violently with the crowbar . . .[7]

Faucit's description confirms that George Bennett's Romeo (who was 36) was still faithfully reproducing Garrick's business (p. 43). But she notes, too, how important it was to be 'allowed to see the real Shakespeare instead of the imperfect copy

[1] *Ibid*., p. 151. [2] Stuart Sillars, *Shakespeare and the Victorians*, 2013, pp. 2–3.
[3] He did say that 'the wise and brave stratagem of the wife is brought to ruinous issue by the reckless impatience of her husband': John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, ed. Deborah Epstein Nord, 2002, pp. 70–1.
[4] *Journal of Frances Ann Butler* (1835), vol. II, pp. 26–7, quoted by Jacky Bratton, 'Frances Anne Kemble', in *GS*, VII, 92–132: 100.
[5] A. W. Schlegel, *A Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, trans. John Black, 1846, pp. 400–1, cited by Adrian Poole, *Shakespeare and the Victorians*, 2004, p. 208. Schlegel's lectures were delivered in Vienna in 1808.
[6] Helena Faucit Martin, *On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters*, 1885, p. 115.
[7] *Ibid*., p. 122.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

4 Artist's impression of the last scene of Henry Irving's production at the Lyceum in 1882, with Irving as Romeo and Ellen Terry as Juliet

[Garrick's version], adapted for the stage, in which I originally knew the play'.[1] Faucit continued to play Juliet until her retirement in 1871, aged 57. In her final performance, she fainted at the end of the potion scene, overcome; of Juliet's death, with a strikingly modern sensibility, she suggests that 'here is relief: to die by the instrument which had touched his hand, had been part of his daily wearing and belongings—nothing could be more welcome'.[2]

For many critics, however, Shakespeare was still appreciated most when read, not performed: 'in 1882 Henry James complained of [Henry] Irving's *Romeo and Juliet* that he had converted the play "from a splendid and delicate poem into a gorgeous and over-weighted spectacle"'.[3] Irving's production was a disaster: 'no one remembered the acting, but everyone remembered the scenery'.[4] The scenery *was* spectacular – eighteen sets in total, including two for the tomb scene: first the exterior, then the interior, of the

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 134. [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 148–9, 181.
[3] Poole, *Victorians*, p. 26, quoting Henry James, *The Scenic Art: Notes on Acting and the Drama 1872–1901*, 1949, p. 163.
[4] Richard Schoch, 'Henry Irving', in *GS*, VI, 127–72: 141.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

5 Mrs Patrick Campbell as Juliet at the Lyceum in 1895. (Photo by W. & D. Downey/Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

burial vault.[1] Ellen Terry, Irving's Juliet, recorded in her memoirs Irving's declaration that 'Romeo and Juliet proceeds from picture to picture. Every line suggests a picture',[2] and the 1882 Lyceum production exemplified this vision. Unsurprisingly, *Romeo and Juliet* was also a popular source for Victorian artists: four of Julia Margaret Cameron's sixteen surviving Shakespeare photographs were of *Romeo and Juliet* (1867),[3] and Adrian Poole notes in particular Ford Madox Brown's painting *Romeo and Juliet* (1869–70), in which Romeo, one foot already over the balustrade, embraces a bare-shouldered Juliet, although 'put a pretty girl on a balcony and you could call her "Juliet" as surely as a woman in white with flowers near a stream was "Ophelia"'.[4]

Although by the end of the nineteenth century there was no presumption that Juliet would be played by a very young woman, Juliet was frequently an actress's debut role. Mrs Patrick Campbell (Beatrice Stella Tanner) was 30, however, when she played Juliet at the Lyceum in 1895. She was the mother of two children, but reviews still

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 157. [2] Ellen Terry, *Ellen Terry's Memoirs*, 1933.
[3] See Sally Barnden, *Still Shakespeare and the Photography of Performance*, 2019, pp. 121–4.
[4] Poole, *Victorians*, p. 67.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

emphasised her Juliet's extreme youth: she was 'asleep in an instant like a tired child' after taking the potion; her 'mere slip of a body' was 'slim and girlish'.[1] To one reviewer, Campbell appeared 'not a month over the fourteen years', and as Sophie Duncan observes, 'the specificity was important. 1875 legislation had raised the female age of consent from twelve to thirteen; the Criminal Law Amendment Act (1885) had raised it to sixteen. Girls aged thirteen to sixteen, who before 1885 could have legally consented to sex, became sexually unavailable.'[2]

Throughout the nineteenth century and beyond, '*Romeo and Juliet* was a constant, sure-fire success.'[3] An anonymous playgoer wrote to the management of the Princes Theatre (now the Shaftesbury) to express their opinion of a 1913 production of *Romeo and Juliet*; it was the third production they had seen, so they felt well qualified to judge: 'there was nothing outstanding at all, either in the staging or the players, but it was all solidly done, and if the scenery was obviously cheap and flimsy, the actors put plenty of fire into this drama of youthful passion'.

> Mr Harcourt Williams' 'Romeo' was satisfying, but in my opinion it was somewhat too melancholy and almost weak . . . There was a very great contrast between his rendering of the part and the manly and vigorous rendering of Mr Matheson Lang, whom I saw in the Lyceum production. The 'Juliet' of Miss Lilian Hallowes was also very good. It seems impossible to get an actress young and girlish enough to convince you in the earlier acts that Juliet is only 14, or anything near it, and yet with sufficient dramatic power to carry through satisfactorily the dramatic intensity of the later scenes. Miss Hallowes certainly had the dramatic power, and consequently failed to absolutely satisfactorily portray the supposed tender youth of the heroine.. . . In conclusion let me say that both Ethel and I thoroughly enjoyed the play.[4]

This was neither a 'name' production nor a professional critic, but their account of the play gives a useful snapshot of audience tastes and of a mainstream production of the play on the eve of the First World War.

The Twentieth Century and Beyond: Continuity and Change

The sheer number of productions of *Romeo and Juliet* means that they are in conversation with each other, and with a larger and longer tradition, to a far greater extent than many other Shakespeare plays.[5] It is striking, however, to note that significant or influential productions of *Romeo and Juliet* have appeared around once a generation – perhaps once a decade at most. Twentieth-century theatrical productions in particular were often influenced by, and in turn influenced, films, ballets and musicals, paralleling the interplay between theatre, visual art and music in the

[1] Reviews by A. W. Walkley in the *Star* and the *Album*, October 1895, quoted by Sophie Duncan, *Shakespeare's Women and the Fin de Siècle*, 2016, p. 107.

[2] Duncan, *Shakespeare's Women*, p. 107.

[3] Sillars, *Shakespeare and the Victorians*, p. 13.

[4] Letter to the management of the Princes Theatre, 22 March 1913, Production Archives of the Shaftesbury Theatre, London, held in the Theatre and Performance Archive at the Victoria and Albert Museum, ref. THM/LON/SHA.

[5] The focus here is on UK productions. For more detailed and broader discussion of productions up to 2000, see Loehlin, and Jill L. Levenson, *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare in Performance), 1987. Loehlin's notes can be switched on as part of the commentary in the Cambridge Shakespeare online edition.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

nineteenth century. The final part of this introduction (pp. 75–9) gives a more detailed account of five 2021 UK productions in the context of the coronavirus pandemic.

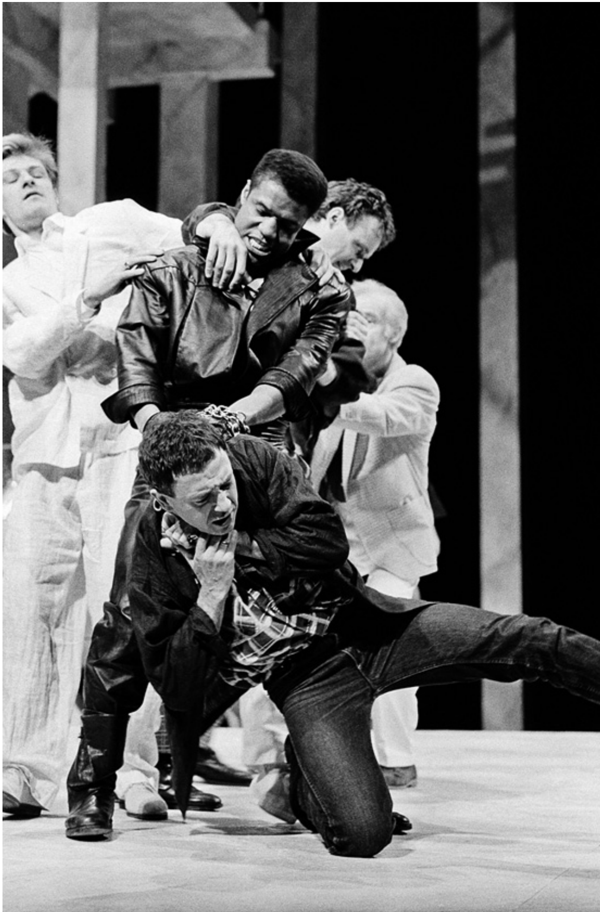
John Gielgud's *Romeo and Juliet* at the New Theatre in London in 1935–6 was probably the most influential staging of *Romeo and Juliet* until Zeffirelli's, a generation later.[1] Peggy Ashcroft played Juliet, and Gielgud shared the roles of Romeo and Mercutio with Laurence Olivier. The design was by Motley (Margaret and Sophia Harris and Elizabeth Montgomery), perhaps the first example of a 'colour-coded' production (pp. 60, 69), with the 'aristocratic' Montagues in reds and greens and the Capulets 'bourgeois', in darker shades.[2] The very different characterisations of Romeo shaped conceptions of the role for decades to come, Olivier's physical passion triumphing over Gielgud's vocal lyricism.[3] *Romeo and Juliet* has been performed regularly by the Royal Shakespeare Company: since Peter Hall's production in 1961, the year of the RSC's foundation, there have been at least thirteen productions, and there were at least six in the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in the previous twenty-five years. Of those earlier productions, Peter Brook's in 1947 was probably the most notable: he cast young actors (Daphne Slater was 19, Laurence Payne was 27) and Brook was only 21. Brook wanted to 'break away from the popular conception of *Romeo and Juliet* as a pretty-pretty, sentimental love story, and to get back to the violence, the passion, and the excitement of the stinking crowds, the feuds, the intrigues'.[4] As Peter Holland comments, 'the effect was to strip the play of its usual lyricism … and replace it with an overwhelming atmosphere of Italian heat'.[5] Reviews were mostly poor, although it was popular with audiences; its influence over the next generation of productions is clear.

It was perhaps most apparent in Franco Zeffirelli's 1960 *Romeo and Juliet* at the Old Vic – but that production's emphasis on youthful passion and generational conflict was also influenced by *West Side Story*, which had opened on Broadway in 1957 (pp. 58–60). In its spectacle, the Old Vic production partly looked back to, but also renewed, the nineteenth-century tradition. Zeffirelli's realism extended to his characters: the feud had a developed backstory, as 'the conflict between an intellectual, well-bred house on the decline (Montagues) and a family of rich merchants (Capulets)'.[6] Zeffirelli made much of the young men of the company growing their hair – radical in the early 1960s, for all that it had become era-defining by the decade's end.[7] Judi Dench, playing Juliet, was 25, and John Stride, Romeo, was 24. The Old Vic production anticipated the 1968 film (pp. 63–4) in its heavily cut text, cutting around 1,000 lines, but it was massively successful and influential, not only on later productions of *Romeo and Juliet*, but on Kenneth Macmillan's 1965 *Romeo and Juliet* ballet (p. 61).

A generation after Zeffirelli's, Michael Bogdanov's 1986 production was a game-changer. It was the first RSC production of the play to be set *specifically* somewhere and sometime other than Renaissance Italy, aggressively modern, emphatically set

[1] Loehlin, p. 52. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 53. [3] *Ibid.*, pp. 53, 55–6.
[4] Peter Brook, *The Shifting Point: Forty Years of Theatrical Exploration, 1946–1987*, 1988, p. 71. See Loehlin, pp. 56–9.
[5] Peter Holland, 'Peter Brook', in *GS* XVIII, 7–46: 28.
[6] Levenson, *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare in Performance), p. 93.
[7] Ramona Wray, 'Franco Zeffirelli', in *GS* XVII, 141–84: 158.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press



6 Sean Bean as Romeo, Hugh Quarshie as Tybalt, and Michael Kitchen as Mercutio, directed by Michael Bogdanov at the Royal Shakespeare Company, 1986. (Getty Images)

(albeit still in Italy) in the 1980s, with much posturing and black leather. Tybalt (Hugh Quarshie) drove a red sports car, vandalised by Michael Kitchen's Mercutio: the critic Michael Billington christened the production 'Alfa-Romeo and Juliet'.[1] It was regarded as noteworthy that Niamh Cusack and Sean Bean spoke in their own (Irish/Yorkshire) accents. A trained flautist, Cusack played to herself before taking the potion, reinforcing the sense of Juliet as 'the sort of girl often alone, who might well play a good deal of music, read a lot, and dream'.[2] Romeo injected the poison, although

[1] *Guardian*, 10 April 1986. See Loehlin, pp. 70–2.
[2] Niamh Cusack, 'Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*', in *Players of Shakespeare 2*, ed. Russell Jackson and Robert Smallwood, 1988, pp. 121–35: 133.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Bean reverted to drinking it during the run. Bogdanov reshaped the ending: following Juliet's death, the action switched to a press conference, with the Prince reading part of the prologue and the families 'reconciled' in front of their children's golden statues. Despite being radical for the RSC, 'nothing in Bogdanov's approach to the play was especially original – there had been many angry modern productions in the nearly three decades since *West Side Story* – but he carried it off with such flair, energy, and fun that this *Romeo and Juliet* became probably the most influential since Zeffirelli's'.[1] It is easy to see how it anticipated Baz Luhrmann's 1996 film.

Michael Attenborough's 1997 production, with Ray Fearon and Zoë Waites, was the first time the RSC had cast the lovers as Black and white, although 'there was no attempt to represent the Montague/Capulet conflict as racially motivated'.[2] The National Theatre staged its first production of the play in 2000, directed by Tim Supple, with Chiwetel Ejiofor and Charlotte Randle: its casting was 'race-specific', the Capulets white and the Montagues Black, the design suggesting a 'postcolonial African state'.[3] Both major subsidised UK companies thus cast the lovers interracially at around the same time, but far later than a number of regional productions. The 1988 Temba Theatre production (dir. Alby James), with David Harewood and Georgia Slowe, and Joe Dixon 'a dreadlocked, acrobatic Mercutio', was set 'in 1870s Cuba . . . The Capulets were intermarried Spaniards and Cubans, the Montagues the descendants of African slaves'; it is striking that many of the productions Loehlin notes distanced their interracial love stories both geographically and historically: 1870s Cuba for Temba, 1930s Trinidad for a production at the Albany (1988), and a colonised 'African island' in Baron's Court (1992).[4]

The 2000 RSC production, directed by Michael Boyd, with Alexandra Gilbreath and David Tennant, was dark and violent, set in a world shaped by plague. Romeo spoke the prologue as a spectral figure part-way through the opening brawl, and Mercutio (Adrian Schiller) became a revenger, returning first as the Apothecary and then as Friar John. Tennant writes thoughtfully about his conception of Romeo, especially his relationships with Benvolio and Mercutio, the latter fraught with sexual tension. He memorably suggests, of Romeo's opening quatrain to Juliet in 1.5, 'I'm quite sure that he's used this line before'; her response, however, 'is where it all starts changing for Romeo . . . now he has met his match intellectually'. Tennant's Romeo wore black, was a poor duellist and a 'misunderstood poet' who grew up and became, all too briefly, a responsible husband and, at the end, spoke not with 'self-indulgence or grief' but rather 'a strong sense of someone who has come home'.[5]

To date, there have been four major productions of *Romeo and Juliet* at Shakespeare's Globe. The first was directed by Tim Carroll in 2004, with Tom Burke and Kanunu Kirimi; as well as its immaculately reconstructed Elizabethan costumes, it staged three performances in Elizabethan pronunciation. The 2009 production (dir. Dominic Dromgoole) was also in Elizabethan costume (des. Simon Daw),

[1] Loehlin, p. 72. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 74. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 80. [4] *Ibid.*, p. 80.
[5] David Tennant, 'Romeo in *Romeo and Juliet*', in *Players of Shakespeare 5*, ed. Robert Smallwood, 2003, pp. 113–30: 123, 124, 125, 129.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

7 Ukweli Roach as Tybalt, and Philip Cumbus as Mercutio, directed by Dominic Dromgoole at Shakespeare's Globe, 2009. (Robbie Jack/Corbis/Getty Images)

with mostly period music and dancing, although it was not an 'original practices' production.[1] It cast young actors in the leads (Ellie Kendrick was 18, and Adetomiwa Edun was 25), and was swift and clear. Penny Layden's Nurse was young and warm, and Philip Cumbus's Mercutio comparatively staid, although not in his obscene 'conjuring' of Romeo in 2.1. The wedding scene (2.6) mostly played the Q1 text, and other passages were augmented or replaced with Q1 text too, including the beginning of 4.3 (the only time I have ever heard the Nurse's Q1 lines in performance; p. 32). The set extended the gallery over the stage, with a spiral stair to stage level; this upper stage was used throughout, not just as the balcony. In 5.3, Paris and the page entered on the upper stage, followed by Romeo and Balthasar; the final fight was brief: Romeo began the fight with his crowbar but then stabbed Paris with the latter's own sword, and they staggered down the stairs together to Juliet's tomb.

Productions in the twenty-first century have frequently embraced contemporary settings, albeit where teenagers lack mobile phones. In 2010 (RSC, dir. Rupert Goold, des. Tom Scutt), Minnie Gale and Sam Troughton began the play in hoodies and trainers, surrounded by 'Elizabethans'; by the end, the costuming had reversed, so that Gale died in farthingale and ruff and Verona reconvened in suits. Rob Icke directed *Romeo and Juliet* for the touring company Headlong in 2012. The younger characters were played very young, sometimes gauche (Catrin Stewart and Daniel Boyd as the lovers), with Mercutio (Tom Mothersdale) and Benvolio (Danny Kirrane) laddish and

[1] Available on DVD and some online platforms.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

often very funny. The production's central feature was a digital clock which counted down from beginning to end, sometimes stopping and rewinding so that scenes replayed with different outcomes: no brawl, or the lovers never meeting at all. Far less adolescent in its sensibility, a production directed by Kenneth Branagh and Rob Ashford played at the Garrick Theatre in London in 2016. Its cast included Richard Madden (*Game of Thrones*, 2011–13) and Lily James (*Downton Abbey*, 2012–15); they had previously starred in the 2015 Disney *Cinderella*, also directed by Branagh. Christopher Oram's design combined monumental architecture with café seating and Fellini-esque costumes; the live broadcast film was black-and-white. Meera Syal was a glamorous Nurse (p. 32), Marisa Berenson an even more glamorous Lady Capulet, and Samuel Valentine a youthful, bicycle-riding Friar. The headline casting was Derek Jacobi (aged 77) as Mercutio. He was a mentor for the young men, dapper and camp as he held forth at his café table. Mercutio's lines were played largely uncut, including a song for the 'old hare hoar' in 2.4; he fought Tybalt (very briefly) with a sword stick, pulled with a flourish from his cane. The casting was more interesting than revelatory, unbalancing the friends' relationship and diminishing Mercutio's dangerous energy.

Erica Whyman's 2018 RSC production[1] was contemporary in its design (Tom Piper). The set's central feature was a large rotating cube, open on two sides; a hatch gave access to its 'roof', for the balcony, the bed and the tomb. A programme essay noted the production's engagement with the issue of youth knife crime, and the fight between Tybalt (Raphael Sowole) and Charlie Josephine's live-wire Mercutio believably performed an escalation from verbal sparring to fists to blades. Karen Fishwick and Bally Gill were convincingly young, Gill's Romeo angular and strutting, Fishwick's Juliet a cascade of golden hair, wearing skinny jeans. These were not the coolest kids in town but, rather, with Mercutio and Benvolio (Josh Finan, ruefully in love with Romeo), they were the indie kids, bright, witty, and fluid in their gender and sexuality in a very 21st-century way.

Romeo and Juliet as Opera, Symphony and Musical

Romeo and Juliet in opera is inextricable from the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theatrical tradition.[2] William Boyce's dirge for Juliet's funeral in Garrick's 1750 production was added (like the scene itself) three days after the production opened because Cibber's rival version featured an elaborate funeral with a dirge by Thomas Arne (pp. 41–3). Many operas featured such additions, providing spectacle and opportunities for a chorus; most followed Garrick's version in having Juliet awaken after Romeo's swallowing of the poison, allowing for a heart-rending final duet. Other alterations were also common, and by no means all of the Romeo and Juliet operas were based on Shakespeare's play. George Benda's *Romeo und Julie* (1776) was, partly, but with the lovers surviving, and Daniel Steibelt's *Roméo et Juliette* (1793) likewise.

[1] Available on DVD and some online platforms.
[2] Julie Sanders, *Shakespeare and Music: Afterlives and Borrowings*, 2007, pp. 4, 32–3, 96–111.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Niccolò Antonio Zingarelli's *Giulietta e Romeo* (1796) was based on da Porto's novella (p. 3). Felice Romani's libretto for Nicola Vaccai's *Giulietta e Romeo* (1825) drew on Italian sources, and he revised it for the far more successful and enduring *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* (1830) by Vincenzo Bellini. In Bellini's opera, Giulietta is meant to marry Tebaldo, there is no banishment, and no real reason for Giulietta to fake her death; she drops dead in the tomb after Romeo poisons himself. Romeo is a 'trouser' role for mezzo soprano. The most successful of all the Romeo and Juliet operas was Charles-François Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette* (1867). After Roméo's banishment, the marriage to Paris advances as far as the actual wedding; the Friar's potion is slow-acting and Juliette collapses mid-ceremony. There are four love duets, including one in the tomb: Juliette stabs herself just before Roméo finally expires, enabling the lovers to die at the same moment.

Far more musically significant is Hector Berlioz's dramatic symphony *Roméo et Juliette* (1839). Although it involves soloists, chorus and orchestra, it is not an opera. The lovers are not represented by soloists; instead, the orchestra does 'their entwining delight and horror for them'.[1] Berlioz was a passionate lover of Shakespeare,[2] but the libretto by Emile Deschamps was not closely based on Shakespeare's play: Berlioz was influenced above all else by seeing a performance (of Garrick's *Romeo and Juliet*) by Charles Kemble's company in Paris in 1827. He saw *Hamlet* in the same season, and described the experience as 'the explosion', because he became violently infatuated with the Irish actress Harriet Smithson, playing Juliet and Ophelia. (Berlioz and Smithson married in 1833; they separated in 1844 and she died in 1854.) He wrote that 'the very sublimity of this love rendered its depiction so dangerous for the composer that he had to give to his imagination a latitude that the positive sense of sung words would not have allowed him, and to resort to the language of instruments'.[3] The tomb scene is the most 'programmatic' – that is, its music closely corresponds to moments in the plot:

> Juliette awakens (clarinet); a passage of delirious joy follows for this final lovers' reunion, the love-theme disfigured in high registers, before Roméo collapses (to descending fourths in the bass, below screaming violins) and Juliette stabs herself (two strident chords).[4]

Garrick's version ended with Juliet's death, but Berlioz added a finale, which included Friar Lawrence's (sung) narration of events. Wagner was present at the first performance in Paris in November 1839, and acknowledged its influence on his own *Tristan und Isolde* (1865).[5] In turn, Tchaikovsky was influenced by Wagner's opera of doomed passion in his *Romeo and Juliet* 'Fantasy Overture'. Its soaring love theme anticipates Prokofiev's (p. 60), finally resolving into 'the wished-for tonic-major utopia', with 'more than a suggestion here of a post-*Tristan und Isolde* redemption-through-death'.[6]

[1] Daniel Albright, 'Introduction', in *GS* XI, 1–6: 4.
[2] See Peter Bloom, 'Berlioz', in *GS* XI, 7–76.
[3] Quoted *ibid.*, p. 59.
[4] Jean-Pierre Bartoli, '*Roméo et Juliette*', in *Cambridge Berlioz Encyclopedia*, ed. Julian Rushton, 2018, pp. 286–91: 290.
[5] J. P. E. Harper-Scott, 'Symphonic music', in *The Cambridge Guide to the Worlds of Shakespeare*, ed. Bruce R. Smith, 2016, 2019, 1832–8: 1834.
[6] *Ibid.*

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The *Liebestod* from Wagner's opera, the ecstatic 'love-death' theme, is the soundtrack for the final moments of Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo+Juliet* (1996) (pp. 64–7). As Julie Sanders observes, 'by framing his tomb scene so self-consciously with classical allusion, Luhrmann allows his postmodern film to acknowledge its own participation in a tragic and artistic continuum'.[1]

The creators of *West Side Story* – composer Leonard Bernstein, writer Arthur Laurents and choreographer Jerome Robbins – had been talking about it in some form since 1949. It had briefly been *Operation Capulet*, *Gangway!* and, more enduringly, *East Side Story*, but they mostly referred to it as *Romeo*. In their earliest conception, they thought to set the Romeo and Juliet story in Manhattan, the protagonists an Irish Catholic boy and a Jewish girl, but abandoned the idea when they realised its similarity to an earlier play, Anne Nichols's *Abie's Irish Rose* (1922). The scheme was revived in summer 1955, amid growing attention to the problem of youth gangs, and by autumn *Romeo* was 'proceeding apace, with a new young lyricist called Steve Sondheim, who is going to work out wonderfully'.[2] *West Side Story* opened on Broadway on 26 September 1957. It has long been regarded as a watershed in musical theatre, in its complete integration of dance, script ('book', in musical theatre terminology), music and lyrics, no one element more important than the other. Bernstein wrote that 'this show is my baby, my tragic musical comedy, whatever that is; and if it goes in New York as it has been on the road we will have . . . maybe changed the face of the American musical theatre'.[3] The 1961 film version, which won ten Oscars, cemented its status: Ernesto Acevedo-Muñoz describes it as 'the musical film equivalent of the great American novel'.[4] A new film version, directed by Steven Spielberg, with a new book by Tony Kushner and without the Robbins choreography, opened in 2021.

West Side Story translates the Romeo and Juliet story to 1950s New York. The Montagues become the Jets, a 'white' street gang, led by Riff (Mercutio); Tony (Romeo) works for Doc (the Friar Lawrence character) in his drugstore. The Capulets become the Sharks, Puerto Rican migrants; their leader is Bernardo (Tybalt) whose sister Maria (Juliet) has recently arrived from Puerto Rico. The musical's portrayal of its Puerto Rican characters has historically been controversial, and Sondheim expressed some reservations about taking on the project on these grounds, saying 'I've never been that poor and I've never even known a Puerto Rican', although it was central to the conception of the show that its tragedy was precipitated by racism (see pp. 69–70 and Figure 12).[5] In the original cast, only Chita Rivera, playing Maria's friend Anita, was Latinx; for a 2009 Broadway revival, Lin-Manuel Miranda translated some of the dialogue and lyrics into Spanish. The outline of the plot is close to Shakespeare's play, but there are significant differences:

[1] Sanders, *Shakespeare and Music*, pp. 164–8, 171.
[2] *The Leonard Bernstein Letters*, ed. Nigel Simeone, 2013, letter 363, 29 October 1955, p. 350.
[3] Letter 396, to David Diamond, 12 September 1957, in *ibid.*, pp. 374, 380.
[4] Ernesto R. Acevedo-Muñoz, *West Side Story as Cinema: The Making and Impact of an American Masterpiece*, 2013, pp. 148–9.
[5] Elizabeth A. Wells, *West Side Story: Cultural Perspectives on an American Musical*, 2011, pp. 32, 107.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

8 A dance scene from *West Side Story* being filmed on location in New York, with George Chakiris as Bernardo (centre). (Bettmann/Getty Images)

crucially, Maria doesn't kill herself after Tony is shot dead. In the 2021 Spielberg film, Doc became Valentina, Doc's widow, played by Rita Moreno (Anita in the 1961 film).

Bernstein's score makes considerable use of Latin rhythms and percussion ('America', the 'Jet Song') but also more conventional 'Broadway' idioms in the lyrical numbers associated with the lovers ('Maria', 'Tonight', 'One Hand, One Heart'). The unsettling tritone (an interval of six semitones or three whole tones; an augmented fourth) is the score's characteristic interval, heard most clearly in 'Maria'. Bernstein uses it to create dissonance which sometimes resolves into harmony; the score ends with two unresolved tritones. The minor seventh is central to 'Somewhere', reinforcing its yearning quality.[1] Bernstein was influenced by Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* and, ultimately, by Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*; Berlioz's *Romeo and Juliet* had been important to his career as a conductor. His conception was operatic. Jerome Robbins 'envisioned a modern ballet with words',[2] and it is 'an unabashed celebration of the male dancer and male singing actor. The large set

[1] Bruce D. McClung and Paul R. Laird, 'Musical sophistication on Broadway: Kurt Weill and Leonard Bernstein', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Musical* (3rd edn), ed. William A. Everett and Paul R. Laird, 2017, pp. 230–43: 240–1.
[2] Wells, *West Side Story*, p. 14.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

pieces . . . are ritualistic tableaux in which male energy, male behaviors, and male street values are reified.'[1] The show was driven by dance, especially in its depiction of the gangs, and more dramatic action is located in the dance sequences than in the songs: Robbins kept the groups apart backstage and during rehearsal, and the characters' rivalries were mirrored by tensions within the company.[2] While Irene Sharaff's costumes, in both film and original production, look like contemporary streetwear (the men's jeans, in an age before ubiquitous stretch denim, had to be specially woven), the designs incorporated Renaissance elements such as contrasting linings and a male silhouette which balanced a doublet-like blouson top half with (relatively) tight jeans below. Jets wore white, gold, orange, blue; Sharks wore red, pink, purple. Sharaff's costumes enhanced the dancing as much as they facilitated it; her creation of the gangs' identities went far beyond any kind of straightforward colour-coding.

Dancing *Romeo and Juliet*

Romeo and Juliet has been choreographed in many different versions and idioms – usually, but not always, to the score by Sergei Prokofiev: Mats Ek's 2003 ballet used music by Tchaikovsky (but not Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet*), and Edward Clug's 2005 *Radio and Juliet* was danced to Radiohead. While Kenneth Macmillan's 1965 version for the Royal Ballet is the best known, it is only one among many; *Romeo and Juliet* is as prominent in the classical repertoire as *Swan Lake* or *Giselle*. As Joseph Campana observes, 'it is hard to overestimate the centrality of *Romeo and Juliet* in the world of dance'.[3]

Prokofiev's score had been commissioned by the Bolshoi but was rejected as too complicated; he made alterations for the 1940 Kirov production, choreographed by Leonid Lavrovsky. The orchestration includes extensive percussion, a tenor saxophone and mandolins, and the heavy use of leitmotifs is frequently translated to the choreography: 'Friar Laurence is represented by the subtle use of cornets, Juliet is . . . represented by woodwind instruments, in particular solo flute. Cellos frequently carry tragic portent into the schema.'[4] The 'Dance of the Knights', most prominent at the beginning of the ball scene, returns in fight scenes and when Capulet tells Juliet that she must marry Paris, becoming the score's musical signature of violent masculinity (p. 29).[5] In the tomb scene, however, the love themes predominate, and in the original version, the lovers were happily reunited. This perhaps reflected Soviet ideology, and a reluctance to present 'a narrative that smacked too much of fatalism', although Prokofiev also wrote that 'the reason for taking such a barbarous liberty with Shakespeare's play was purely choreographic; live people can dance, but the dying can

[1] *Ibid*, p. 114. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 160.

[3] Joseph Campana, 'Of dance and disarticulation: Juliet dead and alive', *S.Sur. 71* (2018), 164–74: 170. For an overview of *Rom.* in dance, see Campana, 'Dancing Will: the case of *Romeo and Juliet*', in *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. Lupton, pp. 153–76; and Elizabeth Klett, *Choreographing Shakespeare: Dance Adaptations of the Plays and Poems*, 2020.

[4] Sanders, *Shakespeare and Music*, p. 68. [5] *Ibid.*

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

hardly be expected to dance in bed'.[1] In 2008, the original score was reconstructed and performed by the Mark Morris Dance Group.

The Lavrovsky choreography was followed by new versions by Frederick Ashton (1955), John Cranko (1958, 1962), Macmillan (1965), John Neumeier (1971) and Rudolf Nureyev (1977, 1984); other classical versions continue to be choreographed – for example, Francesco Ventriglia's lavish Italian Renaissance production for the Royal New Zealand Ballet in 2017. Cranko's version, in particular, demonstrably shaped Macmillan's;[2] Macmillan and the designer Nicholas Georgiadis were influenced by the Italian Renaissance setting of Franco Zeffirelli's 1960 production (p. 52). Classical ballets need crowd scenes for the *corps de ballet* and plentiful roles for women: Cranko introduced the roles of the 'harlots' or 'gypsies' in the street scenes, later borrowed by Macmillan. Both Cranko and Macmillan included Rosaline; Macmillan added a group of Juliet's friends.[3]

Romeo and Juliet readily lends itself to a narrative ballet structured around *pas de deux* between the lovers. Macmillan's choreography for the balcony scene was his ballet's point of origin, full of leaps and extraordinary lifts: 'The *pas de deux* ends with a long and swooning kiss before Juliet runs back up the stairs, reaching one arm down over the balcony as he reaches up toward her.'[4] Although the dancers must be on the same level in order to dance their *pas de deux*, setting aside the vertical separation so central to Shakespeare's scene, Macmillan's choreography captures its yearning and intimacy. One of the most moving, but also potentially most disquieting, passages in any narrative ballet of *Romeo and Juliet* is the tomb scene, where the impulse to give the lovers a final *pas de deux* can result in something approaching necrophilia. In Macmillan's version, 'with the apparent corpse of Juliet, Romeo reprises gestures from the balcony *pas de deux* that seals their love', and 'even death', Campana observes, 'does not inhibit the elegant articulation of the balletic body'.[5] In Mark Morris's 2008 'happy ending', however, Romeo returns when Juliet is still 'dead' in bed, the Friar prevents his suicide, Juliet awakes and the lovers escape together, spinning endlessly, palm to palm, as the curtain falls.[6]

Michael Nunn and William Trevitt filmed *Romeo and Juliet: Beyond Words* (2020) with dancers of the Royal Ballet at the Kordás Emberek Studios in Hungary, on sets originally constructed for the *Borgias* TV series.[7] Danced to the Prokofiev score with the original Georgiadis costume designs, it is largely the Macmillan choreography. Zeffirelli's influence is very apparent in the cinematography; the most filmic scene is Romeo's fight with Tybalt, with a choppier edit and rain turning dust to mud; the grief of Lady Capulet (Kristen McNally) over Tybalt's body (Matthew Ball) is powerful. The acting is more naturalistic than it would be on stage and, very unusually for ballet,

[1] Karen Bennett, 'Star-crossed lovers: Shakespeare and Prokofiev's *pas de deux* in *Romeo and Juliet*', *Cambridge Quarterly* 32 (2003), 311–47: 313.
[2] See Amy Rodgers, 'Creation myths: inspiration, collaboration, and the genesis of *Romeo and Juliet*', *Borrowers and Lenders* 10 (2017) [online].
[3] See Lynsey McCulloch, '"Hildings and harlots": Kenneth MacMillan's *Romeo and Juliet*', in *Shakespeare and Dance*, ed. McCulloch and Shaw, pp. 343–56.
[4] Klett, *Choreographing Shakespeare*, pp. 61–2.
[5] Campana, 'Dance and disarticulation', 170.
[6] *Ibid*., 174.
[7] Available on DVD.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

9 Paris Fitzpatrick as Romeo, and Cordelia Braithwaite as Juliet, in *Romeo+Juliet*, choreographed by Matthew Bourne, Sadler's Wells, 2019. (Robbie Jack/Corbis/Getty Images)

there's some blood, for example in the death of Mercutio (Marcelino Sambé); the sword fights are still accompanied with the balletic clatter of foils, not clashing steel, however. The leads, Francesca Hayward and William Bracewell, are outstandingly beautiful dancers, touching in their youth and delicate characterisation.

Matthew Bourne's 2019 *Romeo+Juliet* could not be more different from Macmillan's. Well known for his re-imaginings of the classical ballet repertory, Bourne sets the action in the Verona Institute, a forbidding institution of incarcerated teens, part penitentiary, part psychiatric unit (des. Lez Brotherston). The Prokofiev score is rearranged; Friar Lawrence becomes Reverend Bernadette Lawrence, the well-meaning chaplain; and Tybalt is a bullying guard. Juliet is already an inmate and a long-term victim of Tybalt's abuse; Romeo, preppy, twitchy and vulnerable, is committed by his politically ambitious parents, Senator and Mrs Montague. Romeo and Juliet find each other at a dance organised by the chaplain, referencing high-school movies and, ultimately, *West Side Story*. Later, they dance a version of the balcony scene; it's an extraordinary sequence, 'a couple so besotted that they dance connected at the mouth'.[1] In Act 2, there is a torchlit 'wedding' scene, as if the other inmates are giving their blessing, but a drunken Tybalt appears, produces a gun, takes hostages; he kills Mercutio, who dies in his boyfriend Balthasar's arms. In the ensuing fight, Romeo and Juliet kill Tybalt together, but Romeo takes the blame. Juliet has a breakdown and the lovers, in their cells, dance an agonised, separated *pas de deux*. The chaplain eventually enables them to meet and they go to bed together, but Juliet has a psychotic episode in which Tybalt's ghost appears. She stabs Romeo, believing

[1] Lyndsey Winship, *Guardian*, 11 August 2019.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

10 Olivia Hussey as Juliet, and Leonard Whiting as Romeo, directed by Franco Zeffirelli, 1968. (Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

him to be Tybalt and, following an increasingly bloody *pas de deux*, Romeo dies and Juliet stabs herself. The ballet ends where it began, with the lovers' bodies on slabs in the white-tiled morgue.[1]

Beyond Zeffirelli: *Romeo and Juliet* on Film

With Laurence Olivier's *Henry V* (1944), Franco Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* (1968) is still 'most' people's idea of a classic Shakespeare film; 'most' people, however, might well be past retirement now, thinking fondly of the *Romeo and Juliet* of their high-school days. There is no denying that Zeffirelli's film has been hugely influential on subsequent versions of the play and Shakespeare films generally, but Anthony Davies expresses his reservations well: 'it is the poetry that makes this relationship something more than just any adolescent love relationship, and while many of the best known poetic lines remain in the film's dialogue, they come across with a puzzling superficiality'.[2] Zeffirelli cut around 70 per cent of Shakespeare's text, including Juliet's 'Gallop apace' (3.2). To describe Zeffirelli's film as classic in terms of its

[1] The 2019 New Adventures *Romeo+Juliet* is available on DVD and to download.
[2] Anthony Davies, 'The film versions of *Romeo and Juliet*', *S.Sur. 49* (1996), 153–62: 158.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

influence is still at least partially true, but it is also a product of its own historical moment.

Zeffirelli's film is beautiful to look at, largely filmed on location, full of heat haze and sun-baked stone. Its visual texture is rich and alluring: ceramics in Juliet's bed-chamber, the heavy weave of bed-sheets and costumes displaying their detailing before a lingeringly attentive camera.[1] This attentiveness extends to the actors. One of Zeffirelli's most influential choices was his casting of young, unknown actors as the lovers: Leonard Whiting was 17 and Olivia Hussey was 15. Earlier stage productions had occasionally cast young actors, but it was Zeffirelli's film which established it as the near-default. There was a stark contrast with George Cukor's 1936 Hollywood film: Norma Shearer was 34, Leslie Howard was 43, and Mercutio the rapidly declining John Barrymore, 54. While this seems ridiculous to a modern audience, it mostly reflected the norm on both stage and screen in the first half of the twentieth century, when there was often little relation between the ages of character and of actor. The 'realism' of Zeffirelli's Renaissance setting is therefore matched by its central casting. In addition, Whiting and Hussey's extreme youth enabled the film to resonate with 1960s youth culture. They are misunderstood teenagers, 'flower children': Romeo first appears with a flower, all references to Rosaline are cut, and he's 'simply' a moody teen. They are beautiful and often touching, but (largely excluding other complexities) they are defined above all by their youth.

When Romeo is introduced, the camera is teased in a long shot as his beauty is slowly revealed; Juliet is first glimpsed through a series of windows, across an interior palazzo courtyard, the camera panning up rapidly to her, contrasting her vitality with her enclosure within the household. In the balcony scene, however, the commitment to realism means that the sequence works less well. The possibility of close-ups, and the desire to look at Romeo through Juliet's eyes and Juliet through Romeo's, efface the sense of the distance between the lovers, and the realism of the setting prompts one to see all the ways in which Romeo would be able to climb over the balcony. The intimacy is often touching, but at the expense of tension. The most effective image is near its end, a slow pull-back from the lovers' hands.[2] Critics have commented, sometimes pruriently, on the careful framing of the nudity in the dawn scene; the merest flash of a topless Juliet meant that the film was re-rated PG in the US, while 'Romeo is on screen naked for more than seventeen seconds in three shots, during which he is the sole object of attention: Juliet's nude "scene" lasts less than a second.'[3] Hussey's Juliet doesn't threaten to kill herself when she goes to Friar Lawrence, she doesn't place a dagger next to her when she takes the potion, and there is no indication that Whiting's Romeo is going to poison himself until he actually does. These are, above all else, a couple of nice kids.

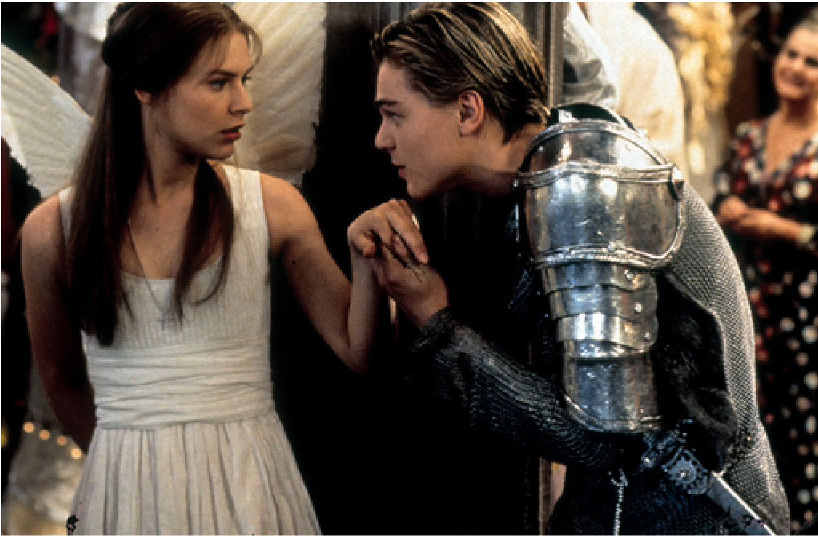
The *Romeo and Juliet* film of this editor's youth was *William Shakespeare's Romeo+Juliet* (1996), directed by Baz Luhrmann. It's often discussed in terms of music videos, and those

[1] See Wray, 'Franco Zeffirelli', 157–69.

[2] See Peter Donaldson, *Shakespearean Films / Shakespearean Directors*, 1990, pp. 174–80.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 169. On the film's homoeroticism, see Anthony Guy Patricia, *Queering the Shakespeare Film: Gender Trouble, Gay Spectatorship and Male Homoeroticism*, 2017.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press



11 Claire Danes as Juliet, and Leonardo DiCaprio as Romeo in *William Shakespeare's Romeo+Juliet*, directed by Baz Luhrmann, 1996. (20th Century Fox/Getty Images)

influences are clear in the montages, crash zooms, slow-motion and high-speed sequences, as well as the soundtrack. Whereas Zeffirelli's film made a bid for classic status in its finely detailed Renaissance realism, one of the taglines for the Luhrmann film was 'the classic love story set in our time', 'we' being a generation born from the late seventies onwards, brought up on American television. There is a nod, too, at the high-school musicals of the 1970s and 1980s, like *Footloose* and *Grease*, in the vivid evocation of intense friendships and rivalries, the centrality of cars, the certainty of teen rebellion. (Many such films looked back to *Romeo and Juliet*, via *West Side Story*.) But Luhrmann is also in dialogue with Zeffirelli: his introduction of Romeo, teasingly back-lit in gold as he smokes and scribbles at the Sycamore Grove, a dilapidated theatre, quotes Zeffirelli, and Leonardo DiCaprio typifies the physical ideal which Leonard Whiting more or less inaugurated: young, androgynous, unthreatening (see Brad Pitt, Zac Efron, and especially River Phoenix, who died, aged 23, in 1993). As Barbara Hodgdon puts it, 'Appealing to the precarious liminality of early to late adolescents, DiCaprio functions as a tabula rasa [blank slate] on which fans project the romance of identity';[1] Luhrmann said that the character was based on James Dean and Kurt Cobain.[2] The film targeted teenagers, and its popular success was reinforced when DiCaprio starred in *Titanic* the following year. (Hodgdon describes *Titanic* as '*Romeo and*

[1] Hodgdon originally proposed writing just about DiCaprio, 'titling my essay, "Was This The Face that Launched a Thousand Clips"': '*William Shakespeare's Romeo+Juliet*: Everything's nice in America?' *S. Sur. 52* (1999), 88–98: 88, 92.

[2] Tom Ryan (ed.), *Baz Luhrmann: Interviews*, 2014, p. 20.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Juliet with three hours of water'.)[1] Also following Zeffirelli's precedent, DiCaprio was 21 and Claire Danes as Juliet was 17; unlike Whiting and Hussey, though, they both had established careers.

There has been some criticism of Luhrmann's employment of Latinx stereotypes, the trope of the (gay) Black friend, Blackness and queerness more generally in the character of Mercutio (Harold Perrineau),[2] and the way in which his Verona Beach, 'with its visual tangle of Mexican, Latin American, and Caribbean production details [serves] as an exotifying but nonfunctional backdrop for its two white stars'.[3] Toby Malone writes about the film's collision of verisimilitude and escapism, 'a distinctive, created world, uniquely crafted and microscopically detailed': the guns became the most notorious example, with branding identifying them as a 'Sword', 'Rapier' or 'Dagger'. The cityscape of 'Verona Beach', filmed on location in Mexico City and Veracruz, was both digitally enhanced in its vast establishing shots and given a witty Shakespearean surface (the opening confrontation at 'Phoenix Gas: add more fuel to your fire!', the 'Argosy' taxi-cabs), even if the details flash past too quickly to be appreciated. Few cinema-goers would appreciate that the opening pastiche of 'O Fortuna' from Orff's *Carmina Burana* sets a Latin translation of the prologue: 'O Verona'.[4]

Within this complex and total world, Romeo and Juliet have their own look. When they first see each other, it's through a fish-tank in the Capulet mansion's opulent bathroom: the brightly coloured fish extend the hallucinogenic aesthetic of the party (Romeo is high, thanks to Mercutio), but, like the fish, the lovers move slowly, dreamily, as does Des'ree on the soundtrack. Water is introduced as the lovers' element. When Romeo and Juliet share their sonnet, their textual intimacy is compellingly translated into the idiom of film: sonnet spoken, they hurtle into a lift, carrying them up and away. Luhrmann introduces into that confined space a glorious shot which tracks around them in an exuberant whirl; the tiny lift seems enormous, and rapid cutting makes it both disorienting and immersive. As Juliet's angel wings suggest, the lovers (briefly) succeed in transcending the decadent chaos of Verona Beach. The sense of apartness achieved in the sonnet's aftermath is revisited in the balcony (or rather pool) scene, where it's not simply the water but the slow patterns of reflections and bubbles that make it so dreamy. Bringing the lovers together in the pool removes the tension of the distance between them, although the overt dynamic of surveillance (CCTV, armed guards) offsets this. At least in retrospect, the splash as they fall into the pool sounds like a gunshot. The final image of the film's closing montage is an underwater shot, but the whole aesthetic of the tomb scene, candles and

[1] Hodgdon, '*William Shakespeare's Romeo+Juliet*', 90, 93.

[2] Nicholas F. Radel, 'The Ethiop's ear: race, sexuality, and Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo+Juliet*', *Upstart Crow* 28 (2009), 17–34; Patricia, *Queering*, pp. 110–18.

[3] MacDonald, *Shakespearean Adaptation*, p. 55; and Alfredo Michel Modenessi, '(Un)doing the book "Without Verona walls": a view from the receiving end of Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo+Juliet*', in *Spectacular Shakespeare: Critical Theory and Popular Cinema*, ed. Courtney Lehmann and Lisa S. Starks, 2002, pp. 62–85.

[4] Toby Malone, 'Behind the red curtain of Verona Beach: Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo+Juliet*', *S.Sur.* *65* (2012), 398–412: 398, 406.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

blue neon crosses, recalls the vivid colours of the aquarium. The water makes visual and sensually palpable the craving of these lovers for a space and time of their own; showing water in motion is also a classic assertion of being a film, not a still photograph, and not theatre either. Apart from the ostentatiously ruined Sycamore Grove, scene of Romeo's sunrise mooching, there's no residual sense of the stage in Luhrmann's film.

In 2013, a new film version of *Romeo & Juliet* (dir. Carlo Carlei) was mostly met with bafflement. The screenplay by Julian Fellowes (*Downton Abbey*) is based on Shakespeare but adds and alters many lines, leading to moments of uneasy anachronism ('Hey there', says the apothecary), leaden paraphrase ('Our worries make us pale', says Romeo as the lovers part, rather than 'Dry sorrow drinks our blood') and blank verse that slides uncomfortably into prose (Juliet and Paul Giamatti's Friar Lawrence in the tomb: 'You go, I must bid farewell to Romeo'; 'Linger not, I'll hold back the watchmen'). There are random alterations to the plot: Benvolio is much younger, Friar John stops en route to Mantua to treat a sick child, Mercutio is unambiguously a Montague. Shot on location in brightly frescoed palazzi, its visual debts to Zeffirelli are clear (even a *moresca* dance at the ball), especially in the leads, Hailee Steinfeld and Douglas Booth, whose Romeo is, inexplicably, an amateur sculptor. It feels unfair to quote from reviews ('the worst of both worlds, neither authentic Shakespeare nor a wholesale updating of the language, but rather mangled Shakespeare mixed with stilted, clumsy fake Shakespeare – a lifeless fake')[1] but this is a truly dreadful film.

But films 'of' *Romeo and Juliet* are almost as old as film itself: early in the 'silent' era, Judith Buchanan notes *Le diable et la statue* (Georges Méliès, 1901), 'featuring Veronese lovers Roméo and Juliette', and Vitagraph's *An Indian Romeo and Juliet* (1912), in which they are 'culturally translated into a Mohican princess and a Huron brave' [*sic*].[2] There were also short comic films referencing the play, often simply via a scene depicting a young woman at a window with a man below, with titles such as *Martha's Romeo* (1915), *A Tugboat Romeo* (1916), *A Prairie Romeo* (1917), *A Reckless Romeo* (1917) and even *Roping her Romeo* (1917).[3] There were two Hollywood films in 1916, one starring Theda Bara (better known as Cleopatra) whose Juliet appears 'snuggling little birds, murmuring in her sleep, kissing the bottle of poison sensuously and later extracting it from her cleavage';[4] both are known only from photographs.

Romeo and Juliet has long been hugely popular in global non-Anglophone cinema: Mark Thornton Burnett notes 28 adaptations from the late 1980s onwards, including versions from India, South Africa, Brazil, Colombia, Denmark, Italy, Germany, Japan, China, Burkina Faso, Singapore and Finland. As he observes, '*Romeo and*

[1] *San Francisco Chronicle*, 27 December 2013.
[2] Judith Buchanan, 'Shakespeare and the film industry of the pre-sound era', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Screen*, ed. Russell Jackson, 2020, 9–25: 11–12, 24n.2.
[3] Robert Hamilton Ball, *Shakespeare on Silent Film: A Strange Eventful History*, 2013, first publ. 1968, pp. 217–19, 356–7.
[4] Buchanan, 'Shakespeare and the film industry', pp. 16–18.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Juliet repeatedly forms a partnership with societies caught on the cusp of transition, arguably because the play itself is concerned with a coming of age.'[1] In the popular Hindi film *1942: A Love Story* (1994, dir. Vidhu Vinod Chopra), for instance, the lovers Naren (Anil Kapoor) and Rajjo (Manisha Koirala) come from families on different sides of an increasingly violent political divide in the years before Independence; Brian Glover plays the villainous General Douglas, whose assassination is plotted during a performance of *Romeo and Juliet*. Shakespeare films have been made in India since 1923, with *Romeo and Juliet* the most popular: Poonam Trivedi and Paromita Chakravarti count 17 different adaptations, from *Ambikapathy* (1937) to *Ashinagar* (2015) and *Sairat* (2016).[2] (From 1923 to 2016, they count a total of 115 Shakespeare feature films.) R. S. White notes that Shakespeare's play is close to similar stories in the epic *Mahabharata* and the folk tradition, as well as reflecting a long history of Hindi films 'turn[ing] on young sweethearts divided by some variation on family opposition', suggesting that this might explain why the play 'has lent itself to such deep and apparently natural absorption into mainstream Hindi cinema'.[3] The popular *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* (1988, dir. Mansoor Khan), for example, draws on folktale material, and includes a long sequence giving the origins of the family feud (sexual scandal, suicide and murder) twenty years before its lovers Raj and Rashmi meet. They elope but are hunted down; Rashmi's father sends an assassin to kill Raj but Rashmi is killed by mistake, and Raj kills himself.[4] Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Ram-Leela* (2013) fuses *Romeo and Juliet* with the *Ramayana*, the second-century-BCE love story of Ram and Sita, via *West Side Story*, in a present-day setting.[5] Leela (Deepika Padukone) and Ram (Ranveer Singh) are the children of rival clans, who fall in love during the Holi festival, elope, are parted by their families (leading to violent retributions and retaliations) and then, in a final misunderstanding, kill each other in a double murder–suicide pact.

As Thornton Burnett notes, 'the number of films that trade upon a forbidden love narrative is legion', but there are still staggering numbers of films, all over the world, which draw specifically on Shakespeare's play.[6] In global cinema, it has come to function as 'a mobile representational resource', especially in cultures and communities experiencing alienation or transition.[7] But there are also low-stakes comedies: in *Chicken Rice War* (*Jiyuan qiaohe*) (dir. Chee Kong Cheah, Singapore, 2000), Fenson Wong (Pierre Png) and Audrey Chan (May Lee Lum) are the teenage children of families running rival food stalls, who fall in love while rehearsing a production of *Romeo and Juliet*. At the end of the mockumentary-style film, the lovers share their

[1] Mark Thornton Burnett, *Shakespeare and World Cinema*, 2012, p. 196. See also pp. 70–2.

[2] Poonam Trivedi and Paromita Chakravarti, 'Introduction: Shakespeare and Indian cinemas: "local habitations"', in Trivedi and Chakravarti, *Shakespeare and Indian Cinemas: 'Local Habitations'*, 2019, 1–19: 2.

[3] R. S. White, *Shakespeare's Cinema of Love: A Study in Genre and Influence*, 2016, p. 201.

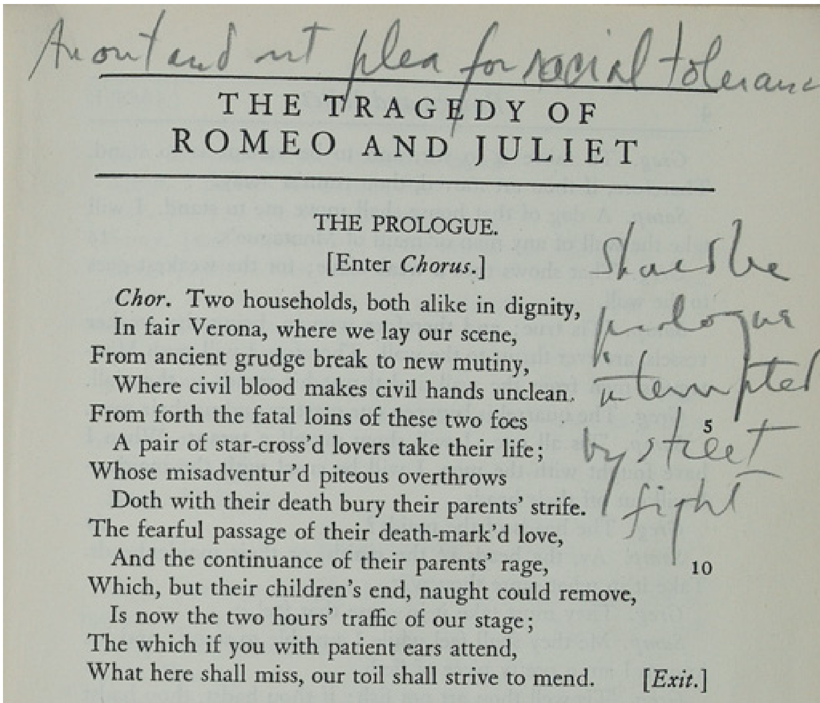
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 202–3. The Urdu title has been translated as 'catastrophe upon catastrophe', 'from apocalypse to apocalypse' and 'doom and destiny' (p. 202).

[5] See Varsha Panjwani, 'Juliet in *Ram-Leela*: a passionate Sita', *S.St.* 46 (2018), 110–19, and White, *Shakespeare's Cinema*, pp. 205–6.

[6] Thornton Burnett, *World Cinema*, p. 196.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 226.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press


An out and out plea for racial tolerance

THE TRAGEDY OF
ROMEO AND JULIET

THE PROLOGUE.

[Enter *Chorus.*]

Chor. Two households, both alike in dignity,
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes 5
A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;
Whose misadventur'd piteous overthrows
Doth with their death bury their parents' strife.
The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love,
And the continuance of their parents' rage, 10
Which, but their children's end, naught could remove,
Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage;
The which if you with patient ears attend,
What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend. [*Exit.*]

12 The first page of Leonard Bernstein's copy of *Romeo and Juliet*, with his note, 'An out and out plea for racial tolerance'. (Image courtesy of the Library of Congress, and used by permission of The Leonard Bernstein Office, Inc.)

families' 'secret' recipes, ending the feud.[1] And at the end of *Gnomeo and Juliet* (dir. Kelly Asbury, 2011; soundtrack Elton John), the garden-gnome lovers of Stratford-upon-Avon (voiced by James McAvoy and Emily Blunt) survive a lawnmower attack on Juliet's tower, reconcile their families and live happily ever after.

Adaptation, Appropriation, Afterlives and Other Lives

In *Sweet Sorrow* (2019), David Nicholls's novel about first love and summer Shakespeare, the hapless Charlie (an initially unwilling Benvolio who falls in love with the more sophisticated Fran (Juliet)) observes that:

> 'In the play, it's not 'cause one side's posh or black or white or whatever, it's just what they're used to. Fighting, lashing out, smashing things up. The boys mainly. They're just confused, angry boys'. . . . in the end it was decided that the Montagues could maybe wear red T-shirts and the Capulets perhaps blue, and that this would probably be enough to make the point.[2]

[1] See White, *Shakespeare's Cinema*, pp. 217–19.
[2] David Nicholls, *Sweet Sorrow*, 2020, p. 142.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Suggesting that Romeo and Juliet are divided by differences of class, religion or race seems largely to be a late twentieth-century phenomenon, perhaps reflecting a desire to make Shakespeare 'relevant' in a world scarred by such divisions. At least since *West Side Story*, and perhaps because of it, this has become a central 'meaning' of *Romeo and Juliet*: Leonard Bernstein wrote on his own copy 'An out and out plea for racial tolerance'.

Productions and adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* have often treated the lovers' story as a hook on which to hang Bernstein's 'plea'. In 1989–90, the Canadian Robert Le Page directed *Romeo & Juliette*, with francophone Capulets and anglophone Montagues; the Capulet dialogue was translated into French: 'the Capulets automatically spoke English to anglophones; the anglophones, by contrast, were consistently monolingual, apart from Mercutio, who offered Tybalt a few incendiary French taunts, and Romeo, who falteringly tried to communicate with Juliette, and, after his marriage, with his new kinsman Tybalt, in French'.[1] In the balcony scene, Juliette embarked on an 'experimental role-play as an English speaker', but when Romeo offered to 'take [her] at [her] word', 'his interruption unleashe[d] a rapid-fire – and for him as an English speaker, impenetrable – French speech to which he [could] only awkwardly reply, in French, "Pardon?"'.[2]

Monadhil Daoud Albayati's *Romeo and Juliet in Baghdad* was performed by the Iraqi Theatre Company in Stratford and London in 2012. The fathers are brothers who have fallen out; Capulet is Sunni and Montague, Shia. Tybalt is Juliet's brother. Paris quotes hadiths at the Capulets: 'in a trench coat and round sunglasses, [he] was immediately recognizable to Arab audiences as a foreign-born Qaeda operative'.[3] The action is close to Shakespeare's text, albeit in colloquial prose. At the denouement, Romeo takes refuge in a church after killing Tybalt. Juliet goes to him, but is injured in an explosion; she revives in Romeo's arms and they have a rapturous exchange: 'I love you as much as the sky'; 'I love you as much as the sun'; 'I love you as much as Baghdad'; 'I love you as much as Basra.' But then

Paris *approaches them and blows himself up. The two families enter. They find* **Juliet***'s scarf with that of* **Romeo**. *The* **History professor**[4] *hands them to the families. The two brothers shake hands and exit. The end.*[5]

Critics recognised the production's achievement while being lukewarm about the play: Katherine Steele Brokaw described it as 'vacillat[ing] between histrionics and honesty', allowing that it showed 'how the muddle of youth, passion, and greed lead to such tragedies as we read about in four-hundred-year-old plays and breaking-news headlines'.[6]

1 Laurie Maguire, *Shakespeare's Names*, 2007, p. 63.
2 Margaret Jane Kidnie and Jane Freeman, 'Robert Lepage', in *GS* XVIII, 113–47: 135.
3 Review by Katherine Steele Brokaw, *Shakespeare Bulletin* 31 (2013), 267–72: 269.
4 The play's Chorus/Friar Lawrence.
5 Monadhil Daoud Albayati, *Romeo and Juliet in Baghdad*, in *Contemporary Plays from Iraq*, ed. and trans. A. Al-Azraki and James Al-Shamma, 2017, 71–106: 105.
6 Steele Brokaw, 268.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In *Romeo and Juliet in Palestine* (2015), Tom Sperlinger asks his students at Al-Quds University how they would set Shakespeare's play. The lovers could be divided by different ID cards, West Bank/Gaza, or Gaza/Jerusalem; more predictably, 'Juliet should be a Christian Palestinian and Romeo a Muslim, or Romeo could be Israeli and Juliet could be a Palestinian. ("That happens a lot", one young woman said)', and 'another student said that if it were an Israeli/Palestinian conflict, the ending would have to change, because the Montagues and Capulets would never join hands'.[1] Sperlinger quotes Romeo's protestation that 'With love's light wings did I o'erperch these walls . . . Therefore thy kinsmen are no stop to me', and Juliet's response, 'If they do see thee, they will murder thee' (2.2.66, 69–70); he concludes by suggesting that 'you could read Juliet's words, like Romeo's, as teenage hyperbole. But I now think she is in earnest.'[2] More cheerfully, the New Zealand/Aotearoa comedy *Romeo and Tusi* (*c.*2000) frames Westside College's production of *Romeo and Juliet* with the feuding families of Samoan Tusi (Juliet) and Māori Anaru (Romeo), especially the rivalry between their mothers, Mrs Aiu and Mrs Heke. 'Tusi, you are a coconut. He's a kumara',[3] Mrs Aiu admonishes her daughter; she's also worried there might be 'kisikisi' in the play.[4]

Pamela Laskin's YA verse novel *Ronit and Jamil* (2017) depicts Israeli Ronit and Palestinian Jamil, who meet secretly in city streets and in the desert, where it's suggested that they make love. Laskin gives them a happy ending: as Jack and Rachel, they run away together. Late twentieth-century teenagers might have read Joan Lingard's five *Across the Barricades* novels (1970–6), about Protestant Sadie and Catholic Kevin in Troubles Belfast. *Noughts and Crosses* (2001), the first volume in Malorie Blackman's YA series, portrays the relationship between Callum, a Nought, and Sephy, a Cross, in a world where the Black Crosses have subjugated the white Noughts. Chloe Gong's YA novel *These Violent Delights* (2020) makes Juliette Cai and Roma Montagov the emerging leaders of the Chinese Scarlet Gang and the Russian White Flowers, in a gothic fantasy of 1920s Shanghai. Among films, *Torn Apart* (1989) portrays the doomed relationship between Palestinian Laila and Israeli Ben, doing his compulsory military service; in *This Is the Sea* (1997), Hazel and Malachy are divided by Northern Irish sectarianism, and *Solomon and Gaenor* (1999) locates its tragic couple, Jewish and Welsh, in a mining village in 1911.[5] When Admira Ismić, a 25-year-old Bosnian Muslim, and her 24-year-old Christian Serb partner, Boško Brkić, together since they were teenagers, were killed crossing the Vrbanja Bridge on 19 May 1993, the world's media dubbed them the 'Sarajevo Romeo and Juliet', 'shorthand for "love across the divide"'.[6] Before the war, however, 40 per cent of Sarajevo marriages were 'mixed' and there was no family opposition to the

1 Tom Sperlinger, *Romeo and Juliet in Palestine: Teaching under Occupation*, 2015, pp. 2–3.
2 *Ibid.*, p. 142.
3 A kūmara is a Māori sweet potato; there's no suggestion that the 'coconut' is 'brown outside, white inside'.
4 Oscar Kightley and Erolia Ifopo, *Romeo and Tusi*, 2000, pp. 44, 46.
5 See Courtney Lehmann, *Romeo and Juliet: The Relationship between Text and Film*, 2010, pp. 99–101. On *Solomon and Gaenor*, see White, *Shakespeare's Cinema*, pp. 209–16.
6 Gillian Woods, *Shakespeare: Romeo and Juliet*, 2013, p. 1.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

relationship. The individual tragedy stands for and makes personal the larger tragedy. But it also, perhaps, aestheticises and distracts from more intractable and multifarious conflicts with origins and actors going far beyond the local.

Joe Calarco's brief for *Shakespeare's R&J* (1997) was *Romeo and Juliet* for four male actors. In his introduction to the play-text, Calarco observes that 'If you have a cast made up of men, they better inhabit a world made up of men';[1] his solution was setting the play within an oppressive boarding school, where *Romeo and Juliet* is the students' secret fantasy, performed at night. The students playing the lovers seem to fall in love 'for real': as their shared sonnet ends, '*it is a moment filled with terror and excitement. Eventually their lips meet. Nothing will ever be the same*.' Calarco recalled:

> the first time we staged the ball scene.... Well it wasn't working *at all*. It was sweet and annoying and cloying and... well, just *Romeo and Juliet* with two guys.... then I suddenly had a flashback to being a teenager and being in the backseat of a moving car . . . it suddenly *was* the Ball scene to me in terms of its terror and danger and raging hormones . . . I told them that the minute they touched each other to dance it needs to feel like their skin is going to sear off.[2]

Calarco had originally been at pains to suggest that 'This play is not *nor should any production of it be* strictly about homoeroticism. Nor should it be strictly about homophobia . . . I thought the strongest choice was to make the students heterosexual.'[3] But, directing a 2013 revival, he wrote:

> For 15 years I've been refusing to say the word 'gay' in regards to my play *R&J*. I was passionate in my statements saying that the piece had nothing to do with being gay. I proudly said it was about the human experience. It was about unearthing and highlighting the passion and violence in Shakespeare's text. It was about the transformative power of art. It was about what it means to be a man. It was about what it means to be in love. It was about what it means to be in lust. It was about what it means to be young. Well, guess what? It is also about what it means to be gay.[4]

In 2013, Calarco rewrote the ending, deciding that 'it felt irresponsible' for the play to end with an 'all-too-familiar tableau of queer adolescent angst',[5] instead allowing the characters a little more hope.

In *Shakespeare in Love* (1998, dir. John Madden, screenplay Tom Stoppard, Marc Norman), Will Shakespeare (Joseph Fiennes) has writer's block, and Viola de Lesseps (Gwyneth Paltrow) is stage-struck. Viola auditions in disguise for Shakespeare's (unwritten) *Romeo and Ethel, the Pirate's Daughter* and is cast as Romeo; she and Will (who quickly discovers her identity) fall in love and 'improvise' many of the play's lines. Viola's intended husband is the Earl of Wessex (Colin Firth), who needs her money to invest in Virginia; he becomes a Tybalt when he apparently arranges Marlowe's murder. When Viola is unmasked, Will takes over as Romeo, but at the first performance Sam, playing Juliet, finally has to admit that his voice has changed.

1 Joe Calarco, *Shakespeare's R&J*, 2003, p. 2. See Cary M. Mazer, *Double Shakespeares: Emotional-Realist Acting and Contemporary Performance*, 2015, pp. 139–45.
2 http://joecalarco.blogspot.com/2013/02/r-blog-dont-say-gay.html?q=r&J.
3 Calarco, *Shakespeare's R&J*, pp. 2, 3.
4 Blog, as in n. 2 above.
5 Quoting from a review of the original production.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Viola slips away from Wessex and arrives on stage as Juliet. They perform the play, but at the end the Master of the Revels arrives to shut down the theatre; Queen Elizabeth I (Judi Dench) has been there incognito and saves the day. There is no happy ending: Viola must still leave for America. The film ends with Will beginning a new play, with Viola its heroine: *Twelfth Night*. It's a witty, sometimes poignant mixture of surprisingly accurate reconstruction, forgivable conflation and flagrant invention (Elizabeth I never went to a public playhouse). In 2014, the film was adapted for the stage by Lee Hall, with music by Paddy Cunneen.

Sharman Macdonald's *After Juliet*[1] was written for young people. Its characters include Juliet's many cousins, Rosaline among them: '*This could be Verona. Or it could be Edinburgh, Dublin, New York or Liverpool*' (9). Rosaline did love Romeo after all, it seems, even though (as her half-sister Livia reminds her)

> He didn't know you loved him.
> You wouldn't speak to him.
> You sent his letters back;
> Left his flowers without water to die
> And his poems in the rain.

'I wanted him to see / I wasn't so easily won', protests Rosaline, but as Livia has already taunted her, 'Romeo's dead, Rosaline / And didn't even think of you. / Forgot you as soon as he saw Juliet' (5–6). Rosaline now has another suitor, Benvolio, even though she thinks she's still in love with his dead friend. She still resents Juliet ('Juliet, daddy's princess, rich, / Mummy's darling, quite a bitch') and blames her for Romeo's death: 'I know you, Juliet. / You hesitated, frightened. / Didn't take the stuff until the dawn. / Wakened too late in the tomb' (30, 31). The play's focus is as much on the relationships between the girls as on Rosaline and Benvolio. At the denouement, Rosaline goes to the tomb; she challenges Tybalt's brother Petruchio in an election to be the next 'Prince of Cats'.

A very different kind of afterlife, Ben Power's *A Tender Thing* was first produced by the RSC in 2009.[2] A two-hander lasting around 70 minutes, it is made almost entirely from texts by Shakespeare, sometimes lightly rewritten as beautifully collaged speeches. The play opens with Romeo addressing his 'tomb' speech to a sleeping Juliet. She is ill, awaiting a diagnosis which is apparently terminal. Romeo's response is resolute:

> I'll take thy hand and stand as one with thee.
> Love is not love
> Which alters when it alteration finds.
> O, no it is an ever-fixed mark
> That looks on tempests and is never shaken.
> I am thy husband.

[1] Sharman Macdonald, *After Juliet*, 2001.
[2] Ben Power, *A Tender Thing*, 2009. See Pamela Bickley and Jenny Stevens, *Studying Shakespeare Adaptation: From Restoration Theatre to YouTube*, 2021, pp. 73–9.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In the final scene, Juliet says 'I do remember well where we should be, / And here we are.' They play the dawn scene, but with the speakers reversed, for it is Juliet who must go. She takes a lethal drug and dies, and Romeo follows suit: 'Here's to my love.' But there's an epilogue: '*Sunlight. A ripple of chatter and laughter. Both* ROMEO *and* JULIET *are suddenly younger than we have known them. They are strangers. They notice and circle each other, both watching from a distance*.' They play the lovers' first meeting, its last line Juliet's: 'Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight. / For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night. Give me thy hand', and they dance.

Juliet and her Romeo played at the Bristol Old Vic in 2010, adapted by Tom Morris and Sean O'Connor. It set *Romeo and Juliet* in the Verona Care Home; the two houses were the two wings of the home (one private, one NHS). Capulet became Ms Capulet, trying to marry her mother off for financial gain. Critics praised Siân Phillips, playing Juliet in her late seventies: 'When her Juliet tells Romeo that he kisses "by the book", she does so with the authority of someone who's chalked up enough kisses to write the manual.'[1] More bleakly, in Lost Dog's *Juliet & Romeo* (2018–22), a dance/theatre/comedy piece written and directed by Ben Duke, and originally performed by Duke and Solène Weinachter, it transpires that the lovers

> didn't die in a tragic misunderstanding, they grew up and lived happily ever after. Well, they lived at least. Now they're 40ish, at least one of them is in the grips of a mid-life crisis, they feel constantly mocked by their teenage selves and haunted by the pressures of being the poster couple for romantic love. They have decided to confront their current struggles by putting on a performance – about themselves. Their therapist told them it was a terrible idea.[2]

This Romeo and Juliet are ground down by parenthood, familiarity, their incompatible memories of their relationship and the burden of their own myth.

Afterlives continue to be imagined. *& Juliet* opened in London in November 2019, and on Broadway in 2022. With a book by David West Read (one of the writers of *Schitt's Creek*), it's a 'juke-box' musical featuring songs by Max Martin, the songwriter/producer behind hits such as 'Baby one more time' (Britney Spears), 'Since U been gone' (Kelly Clarkson) and 'I kissed a girl' (Katy Perry), all of which feature in the show. *& Juliet* imagines that Juliet doesn't kill herself, instead going to Paris with Anne Hathaway, the Nurse, and her best friend May. West Read suggested that 'it didn't feel like that much of a stretch for an emboldened Juliet to express herself through the powerful pop anthems made famous by Britney, Kelly, and Katy'. Paloma Young's costumes fused 'renaissance costume, high-fashion whimsy and contemporary street culture', with Juliet in 'a bright berry mini poof dress . . . cool white trainers and striped athletic socks' and Romeo (revived) as the 'classic frontman rock rebel heartthrob'. [3] 'Romeo who?', the show's merchandise declares.

[1] Susannah Clapp, *Observer*, 21 March 2010.
[2] www.lostdogdance.co.uk/currentproductions/juliet-and-romeo.
[3] Young and West Read quoted from programme notes.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

13 Alfred Enoch as Romeo, directed by Ola Ince, Shakespeare's Globe, 2021. (Marc Brenner)

Love in the Time of Coronavirus: *Romeo and Juliet* in 2021

In March 2020, Emma Smith observed that 'Twitter has been taunting us: When *he* was in quarantine from the plague, William Shakespeare wrote *King Lear*.' As she went on to point out, however, 'no one in Shakespeare's plays dies of the plague. Romeo and Juliet, who die because the friar's letter is held up by quarantine measures in northern Italy, are the nearest his work comes to plague fatalities.'[1] In 2021, a rush of *Romeo and Juliet*s appeared in the United Kingdom, responding in various ways to the circumstances of their production in a pandemic. Some theatrical productions had been delayed but eventually went ahead, with modifications; some were born digital; some were wholly reconceived. The Open Air Theatre in London's Regent's Park, for instance, postponed its 2020 production until summer 2021 (dir. Kimberley Sykes, des. Naomi Dawson). Joel MacCormack and Isabel Adomakoh Young played the lovers. The design suggested a devastated city, which Sykes linked to the earthquake described by the Nurse, positing that 'Verona' had been destroyed and not rebuilt: 'Let us imagine, if an earthquake happened today, if a catastrophe happened today, in this country and our lives as we knew them were changed. Imagine. How would we recover. In our production I feel we can explore that without even saying the word "covid".'[2]

Shakespeare's Globe also mounted its postponed 2020 production in summer 2021 (dir. Ola Ince). It opened with a reduced capacity and, unheard of at the Globe, fixed

[1] 'What Shakespeare teaches us about living with pandemics', *New York Times*, 28 March 2020.
[2] See https://openairtheatreheritage.com/productions/romeo-and-juliet/YUCb-REAACMARysQ.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

seating in the yard; it played without an interval, and some performances were livestreamed. Lady Montague and all the servants were cut: Clara Indrani played both Montague (identified as Romeo's mother, moving as the parent of a deeply depressed teenager) and Friar John, and Dwane Walcott doubled Paris and the Prince; Zoe West (Benvolio) took Balthasar's role in Mantua. Jacob Hughes's design used a largely red and black palette, with a sharp eye for street wear and class: Juliet's pool sliders, Romeo's North Face cross-body bag, the contrast between Paris's conservative suit and Capulet's all-black, slightly cropped trousers and Gucci-style loafers. Max Perryment's lively score included karaoke at the party (Paris's sincerely unhip rendition of Lionel Richie's 'Hello' was a highlight). Sirine Saba's Nurse folded laundry, carried heavy shopping; like many of the characters, she was vulnerable. As the lovers, Alfred Enoch and Rebekah Murrell were individually sparky, although some reviewers commented on the lack of 'chemistry' in their relationship. This perhaps wasn't surprising, as the production was meticulously blocked to be 'covid-secure', with almost no touching; the loss of physical intimacy was particularly apparent in the heavily cut tomb scene. 'Verona is sick', the programme observed. A screen above the stage flashed up headlines and statistics with a focus on adolescent mental health and structural inequalities, also spoken by the actors. This classic epic theatre device was not without wit and irony: the wedding was accompanied by bubbles, red heart-shaped confetti and the headline that 'The rational part of a young person's brain is not really developed until they are 25.' An actor signposted mental health resources at the end of each performance; these features attracted criticism from some quarters as overly 'woke'.

On a far smaller scale, two other 2021 productions of the play experimented with digital environments. Metcalfe Gordon Productions created what was described by Peter Kirwan as 'an impressive step forward in creating long-form virtual theatre':[1] it filmed its actors separately (with the exception of the lovers, Sam Tutty and Emily Redpath, whose scenes were filmed on a single day) and then layered performances together 'in' a (digital) deserted theatre. The film was available to stream for two weeks; it played a cut text, but with a final running time of nearly 2½ hours. Critics were more enthusiastic about the achievement of the digital aspects than the production itself, which was largely 'traditional' in its interpretation, noting that pace suffered from the recording of individual, isolated performances. Creation Theatre, another UK-based company with a considerable track record in making digital theatre, blended live action and pre-recorded elements with an interactive interface in their livestreamed *Romeo and Juliet* (May 2021, dir. Natasha Rickman). Having chosen to be Capulets or Montagues, the audience were welcomed to a 'party' and explored different pathways through the play. Its platform was the familiar Zoom, but it incorporated techniques from gaming in choose-your-own-adventure elements: in one scenario, the Nurse (Katy Stephens) became part of Juliet's plan; it was possible to 'save' the lovers (Annabelle Terry and Kofi Dennis). There were 'Easter eggs', discoverable 'secret' elements, such as private conversations with Capulet or

[1] https://drpeterkirwan.com/2021/02/14/romeo-juliet-metcalfe-gordon-productions-film.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Mercutio's ghost. Some audience members returned multiple times to explore different pathways. The experience was less 'live' than it initially appeared, because the multiple possible plots necessitated pre-recorded material, but it was a beautifully designed production, its stylised idiom largely overcoming the way in which actors were mostly not filmed in the same space.[1]

The most ambitious and high-profile of these Covid-era UK productions of *Romeo and Juliet* was released on television in spring 2021. Simon Godwin's National Theatre production had been scheduled for summer 2020; when theatres closed, the decision was made to film a reimagined version of the play. The result, a profoundly moving film/theatre hybrid, met with critical and popular acclaim: with a stark caption at the beginning of the credits stating that '*Romeo and Juliet* was filmed in an empty theatre, over seventeen days, during a global pandemic', it was as much a love letter to longed-for live performance as it was a production of the play. Emily Burns's script cut it to 100 minutes: no Lady Montague, Balthasar, Friar John or Apothecary; the servants' roles were reduced to cameos for Sampson (Ellis Howard) and Peta (Ella Dacres), and Montague's role (Colin Tierney) was minute. Most of Capulet's lines were reassigned to a steely, complex Tamsin Greig; Lloyd Hutchinson was her more kindly husband. Jessie Buckley and Josh O'Connor played the lovers. Design was by Soutra Gilmour, and Tim Sidell was the Director of Photography: Godwin had never directed a film before.

The film begins with the actors arriving at rehearsal. The safety curtain closes from top and bottom, like the narrowing aperture of a camera, and Lucian Msamati (Friar Lawrence) speaks the prologue; Buckley and O'Connor share a smiling eye-meet. There's a lightning 'flash-forward' montage of key moments, and then Sampson and Tybalt (David Judge) begin to rehearse a fight, their weapons wooden staves. Benvolio's intervention goes badly and it's briefly unclear whether this is the play or an out-of-control rehearsal exercise: the staves have become knives, with Benvolio (Shubham Saraf) cut across the hand. Burns's script describes the four 'levels of realisation' of the production: 0 being the 'real' rehearsal environment; 1 still a rehearsal, but with more atmosphere (light, sound, elements of set); 2 a more fully realised illusion (blades, blood, bed); and 3 the most fantastical, 'dislocated from the bounds of reality, rooted in the imagination of theatre'.[2] As the film progresses, the levels tend higher: Juliet's bedroom is initially a bed in the middle of the rehearsal room, but is later surrounded by walls and gains a door. The balcony hovers between different levels: Romeo grabs a set-builder's ladder to climb closer, while a vast photorealistic moon floats in the background. The shoot never moves outside the theatre building, however, utilising not only the stage but the wings and scene docks. Juliet wanders through its deserted spaces as she prepares to take the potion; Mantua is a dusty scenery store.

[1] See Gemma Allred, Benjamin Broadribb and Erin Sullivan (eds.), *Lockdown Shakespeare: New Evolutions in Performance and Adaptation*, 2022.

[2] *Romeo and Juliet*, adapted by Emily Burns, p. 3. All quotations are from the script supplied to schools by the National's Education Department.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

14 Jessie Buckley as Juliet, and Josh O'Connor as Romeo, directed by Simon Godwin, National Theatre, 2021. (Rob Youngson)

The film offers a bittersweet realisation of love in the time of coronavirus, not least a deep love of theatre. Benvolio and Mercutio (Fisayo Akinade) realise their love for each other as their friend falls for Juliet: there are glances, fleeting touches and, after the party, Mercutio's 'This field-bed is too cold for me to sleep. / Come, shall we go?' is followed by the direction 'This is an invitation. Benvolio accepts. They leave'. The scene of the fatal fight with Tybalt begins with the two of them discovered snuggled backstage kissing, giving a pointedly insulting force to Tybalt's 'Mercutio, thou consort'st with Romeo'. As David Rooney noted, 'this is by no means the first time Mercutio has been depicted as gay, but usually he's quietly pining for Romeo. Giving him a full-fledged love of his own makes his death by Tybalt's sword cut deeper.'[1] It's Benvolio, tending the little shrine he's made for Mercutio, who overhears the Nurse (Deborah Findlay) tell the Friar that 'Juliet is dead', and so he goes to Mantua. It is a tender film, all the more charged because of the circumstances of its production, at a time when human contact had become so precious and precarious. (The cast were tested rigorously for Covid, with a three-hour 'intimacy window' after test results for filming close-ups.) Romeo and the Friar are close, loving and tactile, as are Juliet and the Nurse and Romeo and his friends, a contrast to Juliet's relationship with her mother in particular.

Seeing Juliet at the party, Romeo pushes through the crowd, and they almost whisper their quatrains over their shoulders, hands just clasping together as Juliet says 'palm to palm'. Then a cut to the two actors chasing each other around the rehearsal room, sometimes cutting back to the party, as the sonnet continues, in both times and spaces. A moment later, Juliet's balcony floats above the darkened stage. Played in intimate semi-darkness, and mostly shot in close-up, the balcony scene is swift yet measured, and full of joy. A mere 15 minutes of screen time after they meet,

[1] *Hollywood Reporter*, 15 April 2021.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Romeo and Juliet marry: the Friar's cell is dark at first, but as the lovers kneel, the space around them fills with candles and they touch, laugh and kiss – with a brief shot of Mercutio and Benvolio doing the same. As Mercutio speaks his curse, it cuts to Juliet, grimly speaking the first lines of 'Gallop apace', then back to Mercutio, dead in Benvolio's arms, Romeo distraught, back to Juliet, to Romeo, stabbing Tybalt, to Juliet as she says 'Come, gentle night', continuing in voiceover as Romeo looks at his bloody hands. The intercutting brings out the overlapping invocations of love and death to shocking effect. 'Terror and delight', the shooting script reads, as Romeo arrives in Juliet's room; there is a short, glowing scene of their love-making. It cuts abruptly to Tybalt's wake, where Paris (Alex Mugnaioni) has outstayed his welcome. After an intimate beginning, the dawn scene is rushed and chilly, and the tomb scene terrible. Paris is swiftly dispatched. When Juliet wakes, she notices the empty vial (previously palmed by Romeo from the Friar's table); cradling Romeo, she whimpers 'oh, no no no no no'. As the Friar approaches, she howls 'No!', clasping Romeo's hand as she stabs herself. A fade to black is followed by a montage, back to the first shared moment in the rehearsal room. The Prince (Adrian Lester) speaks the last lines as the black-clad cast crowd around the tomb, and then, back in the rehearsal room, huddle around a riser.

Both actors were older than has become usual for the lovers (Buckley 31, O'Connor 30) with well-established careers in theatre, film and television; O'Connor had most recently played Prince Charles, Susannah Clapp noting that his Romeo 'has the same lopsided smile he wore in *The Crown*, but here it looks like a heart melting'.[1] There is absolutely no sense that there is a 'frame' narrative of a group of actors, two of whom fall in love. Rather, the trust, vulnerability and risk-taking of theatre-making and its ultimate expression in the intentional interactions of bodies in space are not merely paralleled, but intertwined, with those of loving. In the circumstances of the film's production, all these are precious, celebrated and yearned for, like the moments of gentle, daring, hopeful touch which are at the heart of both film and play.

[1] *Observer*, 11 April 2021.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108590303.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press