Shakespeare and the Mediterranean • 1

Romeo and Juliet

Edited by Silvia Bigliazzi and Emanuel Stelzer

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Contributors

Guido Avezzù, Professor of Greek language and literature at the University of Verona until 2018, is currently co-editor of *Skenè. Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies*. He has worked extensively on Athenian oratory, Greek theatre, and the reception of Greek drama and myths in modern culture. He has contributed to Shakespeare source studies with an essay on classical tragic paradigms in *Romeo and Juliet* (in *Shakespeare,* Romeo and Juliet, *and Civic Life. The Boundaries of Civic Space*, ed. by Silvia Bigliazzi and Lisanna Calvi, 2016) and on his reception in contemporary Italy with an essay on *Julius Caesar* and the Italian 'Caesar plays' up to World War II (in *Shakespeare and Crisis. One Hundred Years of Italian Narratives*, ed. by Silvia Bigliazzi, 2020).

Silvia Bigliazzi is Professor of English Literature at Verona University, where she is the Director of the *Skenè Research Centre* devoted to drama and theatre studies. Her fields of interest include Renaissance poetry, literature and the visual arts, and translation for the theatre (co-ed. *Theatre Translation in Performance*, Routledge 2013). She has translated into Italian John Donne's poetry (Rizzoli 2012^2), *Romeo and Juliet* (Einaudi 2012) and *Double Falshehood* (Rizzoli 2012), and, for the theatre, Q1 *Romeo and Juliet* (2016) and *Macbeth* (2016). On Shakespeare she has published two monographs (*Oltre il genere. Amleto tra scena e racconto*, Edizioni dell'Orso 2001; *Nel prisma del nulla. L'esperienza del non-essere nella drammaturgia shakespeariana*, Liguori 2005) and several miscellanies (*Revisiting the Tempest. The Capacity to Signify*, Palgrave 2014; *Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet, and Civic Life*, Routledge 2016; *Shakespeare and Crisis. One Hundred Years of Italian Narratives*, John Benjamins 2020). In 2019 she published *Julius Caesar 1935: Shakespeare and Censorship in Fascist Italy* (Skenè). Her recent researches include: the reception of classical drama in the English Renaissance, the reception of Graeco-Roman paradoxical and sceptic traditions in the English Renaissance, and the study of the Italian novella tradition behind Shakespeare's plays. She is the co-General editor of *Skenè. Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies*, as well as of the series *Global Shakespeare Inverted* (Bloomsbury) and *Anglica* (ETS). She is the PI of the digital projects SENS (Shakespeare's Narrative Sources, Italian Novellas and their European Dissemination) and CEMP (Classical and Early Modern Paradoxes in England)

Petra Bjelica is an INVITE early-stage researcher and PhD graduate at the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature at the University of Verona. As a Marie Skłodowska-Curie fellow, she defended her thesis about Shakespeare's Hamlet as one of the sources for Dostoevsky's novels, entitled *Let the other be: Hamlet-ideologemes in Dostoevsky's* Demons. Bjelica has a degree in Comparative Literature and Theory of Literature from the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade. The main areas of her research include perfomance, adaptation and theatre studies, comparative literature and theory of literature, as well as Shakespeare and Dostoevsky studies.

Fabio Ciambella is Research Fellow of English Language and Translation at Sapienza University of Rome. Previously, he was a Research Fellow of English Language and Translation at the University of Tuscia, Viterbo, and Junior Research Fellow at the same university. He received his European PhD in English Language and Literature from the University of Rome "Tor Vergata" (2015). His privileged fields of research include the relationship between dance and early modern and Victorian literature and language, historical pragmatics, corpus linguistics, and Second Language Acquisition, topics about which he has published extensively. In 2013 he published a book about dance in nineteenth-century England (from Jane Austen's novels to Oscar Wilde's *Salome*). In 2016 his PhD thesis was awarded by the Italian Association of English Studies (AIA) and his study about dance and the Copernican Revolution in Shakespeare's canon was published the following year. His latest book, *Dance Lexicon in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries: A Corpus-based Approach* (Routledge, 2021), is a corpus-based analysis of dance-related lexis in the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. He is currently writing a volume on how to teach English pragmatics through Shakespeare (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming). He contributes to the digital projects SENS (Shakespeare's Narrative Sources: Italian Novellas and their European Dissemination) and CEMP (Classical and Early Modern Paradoxes in England).

Felice Gambin is Professor of Spanish Literature at Verona University and his research fields include the Golden Ages Spanish Literature, in particular Baltasar Gracián and his reception in Italy; the secretary figure between the fifteenth and sixteenth century; medical and philosophical treatises on melancholy and its literary representations; witches and exorcists during the Spanish Golden Ages; the works of Miguel de Cervantes, Juan Huarte de San Juan, Andrés Velásquez, Lope de Vega, Pedro de Valencia, Helios Gómez, José Ortega y Gasset; Spanish minorities: Jews, Conversos, Moors and Moriscos; the representation of the Spanish Civil War and the recent history of the Iberian peninsula in the graphic novel, on which he has recently published the volume *Segni della memoria. Disegnare la Guerra civile spagnola* (2020); the works by Antonio Enríquez Gómez and the seven dialogues of his *Política angelica*, whose first part has received a critical edition (2019). He is the author of more than 100 works. He has taught in Spain, the United States and Mexico.

Maria Elisa Montironi is Research Fellow in English Literature at the University of Urbino, Carlo Bo. Her research interests lie in the areas of dramatic literature, literary reception, Shakespeare studies and intercultural studies. She is the author of a monograph on the political reception of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* (2013), a study on John Gay's and Bertolt Brecht's dramatic use of songs (2018), a book on female characters by contemporary women playwrights (*Women upon Women in Contemporary British Drama 2000-2017*, 2018) and of essays and articles on Shakespeare, early modern drama and intercultural literary reception. Her current research projects include a collection on Shakespeare and advertising.

Eric Nicholson teaches literature and theatre courses at NYU Florence, and Syracuse University Florence. An active member of the international research collaborative Theater Without Borders, with Robert Henke he has edited *Transnational Exchange in Early Modern Theater* (Ashgate, 2008), and *Transnational Mobilities in Early Modern Theater* (Ashgate, 2014). With Pamela Allen Brown and Julie D. Campbell he has translated and edited Isabella Andreini's *Fragmenti di alcune scritture…* as *Lovers' Debates for the Stage* (forthcoming 2022, ITER Press: The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe series). Since 2018, he has also published several articles in *Skenè. Journal of Theatre* *and Drama Studies*. In Florence and elsewhere, Eric has directed and performed in plays by Aristophanes, Shakespeare, Molière, and others, among them *Clorilli, a Pastoral Drama* by Leonora Bernardi of Lucca," in its premiere modern production (NYU Florence Villa La Pietra, Spring 2018). He is currently preparing a 'floating island' adaptation of Shakespeare's *Tempest.*

Beatrice Righetti is a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Aosta Valley and a former doctoral student in Linguistics, Philology and Literature at the University of Padua. Her doctoral project deals with the reception of paradoxical writing and the *querelle des femmes* as regards the literary figure of the talkative woman in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England and Italy. Her main case study is the literary and theatrical character of the English shrew and the Shakespearean shrew in particular. She has published on Renaissance women writers and Shakespeare's plays, mostly *The Taming of the Shrew*, focusing on both the use of paradoxes and the relationship between metamorphosis, gender-based violence and power relations. She contributes to two digital projects directed by Silvia Bigliazzi ("Shakespeare's Narrative Sources: Italian Novellas and their European Dissemination", SENS; and "Classical and Early Modern Paradoxes in England", CEMP) and to "From Paradise to Padua" directed by Alessandra Petrina.

Silvia Silvestri holds a PhD in "Lettere, Lingue e Arti" from the University of Bari Aldo Moro, where she currently serves as Adjunct Professor of English Culture and Language. Her research interests include Victorian fiction, the relationship between literature and the visual arts, early modern drama, digital technologies and their impact on the study of early modern (inter)textuality. She authored a monographic study entitled *A Provincial Fresco:* Middlemarch *and the Visual Arts* (Aracne, 2018) as well as various essays concerned with different areas of Elizabethan and Victorian literature and culture. She contributes to the digital project SENS (Shakespeare's Narrative Sources: Italian Novellas and their European Dissemination).

Emanuel Stelzer is a researcher at the University of Verona. He is the author of *Portraits in Early Modern English Drama: Visual Culture,* *Play-Texts, and Performances* (Routledge, 2019) and of *Shakespeare Among Italian Criminologists and Psychiatrists, 1870s-1920s* (Skenè Texts and Studies, 2021). His articles have appeared in journals including *Critical Survey*, *Early Theatre*, *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, *English Studies*, *Notes and Queries*, *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, and *Skenè: Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies*. His main interests are early modern English literature and drama, textual studies, and theatre history. He contributes to the digital projects SENS (Shakespeare's Narrative Sources: Italian Novellas and their European Dissemination) and CEMP (Classical and Early Modern Paradoxes in England), of which he coordinates the early modern section. His work on William Sampson has earned him the *Huntington Library Quarterly* Centennial Essay Prize; he has also translated into Italian Philip Massinger's *The Picture* (Aracne, 2017) and John Milton's *Comus* (ETS, 2020). He is managing editor of *Skenè: Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies* and contributes to *The Year's Work in English Studies*.

Introduction

Silvia Bigliazzi

It has often been claimed that the Mediterranean is at the centre of Shakespeare's imaginary. Except for the history plays, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and comedies such as *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *As You like It*, all the other plays have a broadly Mediterranean setting, including the France and Italy of *All's Well that Ends Well* and the Vienna of *Measure for Measure*.[1] His Mediterranean scenarios span from Venice to Aleppo, from Athens to Alexandria, from Parthia to Algiers, encompassing Romans, Goths, Moors, Egyptians and Greeks, and raising questions of race, ethnicity, class, gender, civilisation and barbarism. In the sixteenth century, the Mediterranean was a place of new frontiers between civilisations and religions, but also of new connections across those frontiers and with the wider world, including northern Europe (DeVivo, 2015). It evoked pictures of imperial power and unstable identities: from the Ottoman Empire and the Habsburg-Ottoman antagonism (Brotton 1997, 2002; Jardine and Brotton 2000; Vitkus 2003; Stanivukovic 2007) to the "Turkish-Venetian rivalry in the Mediterranean and the Aegean (Crete, Cyprus, Rhodes, Malta)", at a time when "the discovery of new sea routes caused the Europeans to perceive the world as an exotic island empire, a place of dissension and competition, or a source of extravagant wealth" (Matei-Chesnoiu 2015, 22). The broad space encompassing the coast and mainland areas of Europe, Asia and Africa offered ways to experience the sea at the same time as a place of belongingness and estrangement. The *mare nostrum* was also the "sea of the others",

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[1] Interestingly, Vienna is included in Preeshl 2021, yet not in de Sousa 2018 (138), suggesting varying conceptions of the Mediterranean within Shakespeare's canon.

mare illorum in Pechter's words (2004, 73), a sea which "[b]esides its natural perils of pirates and storms . . . was a supernatural sea, of Cyclopes and sirens, whirlpools and typhoons, ordeals and prodigies, monsters and miracles" (Warner 2004, 308). It was "an arena of interaction, of encounters, and exchanges" (Burke 2002, 136), where the past and the present met and "out of which the richness of Shakespeare's imaginative world grew" (Cantor 2006, 910). That period saw major changes occur in social and political systems, movements of populations, the conflict of the Islamic and Christian worlds, tensions within Christianity, and colonial expansion to the New World. All this offered unprecedented opportunities for cultural exchanges and new encounters. It was the natural setting to explore the centripetal forces of Empire once confronted by the disintegrative clashes of personal desire, sexuality, differences of rank and racial antagonism, cultural integration and disintegration as well as epistemological issues.

But the Mediterranean was also less exotic for an English gaze than this. It was the Italy of Renaissance cities, the cradle of the arts and of the rediscovery of the ancient past as well as the site of political unscrupulousness, Machiavellianism and popery. It was the France of Montaigne and sceptical thinking, the Spain of religious and political antagonisms. It was the Greece of ancient myths and the Rome of the ancient Empire. This variety of perceptions posed possibilities for considering different degrees and types of otherness not identical with alleged barbarism that emphasised ambivalence and cultural differences both geographically and historically. As de Sousa has rightly underlined, the Mediterranean referable to Shakespeare's dramas "ranges from the Trojan War, to different periods of Roman history, up to the Renaissance period" (2018, 139). And as Cantor has pointed out in his attempt to relocate the attention back to the Mediterranean, away from an emerging Atlantic gaze, that area was important in the Renaissance "because it was the nodal point in which all the known continents could interact" (2006, 900). Braudel's famous vision of the Mediterranean as part of World History, inclusive of the great civilizations of Africa, the Middle East as well as Central and Northern Europe, was a space of movement and exchange not confined to the countries overlooking "our sea", but extending inland, which "was from the very dawn of its protohistory a witness to . . . imbalances productive of change" (2001, 46). This implied no unified vision, but "ten, twenty or a hundred Mediterraneans, each-one subdivided in turn" because localities made a difference (14).[2]

It may be easily contended that Shakespeare was a major catalyst of such geopolitical views and cultural phenomena. And it may also be argued that "the Mediterranean is not where Shakespeare happens, but what happens in Shakespeare" (Pechter 2004, 73), in the sense that "the Mediterranean is not a neutral setting but an ideologically saturated *topos*, transforming (or even constituting) Shakespeare's various engagements with (or within) it" (ibid.). But even considering a broad interpretation of the Mediterranean, inclusive of not strictly coastal areas, Shakespeare's engagement with it is to be viewed as belonging to a lateral standpoint, close to the Atlantic and separated from the Mediterranean area by the European continent. His Mediterranean is a place seen from afar by an outsider looking at it through non-Mediterranean cultural frames. But precisely because of this distance, his gaze offers a critical perception both external and not disengaged. It is this distance and, at the same time, its closeness that makes Shakespeare a catalyst of Mediterranean cultures for us, while not strictly belonging to them.

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This volume moves from this premise to consider Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* as an opportunity for looking at Shakespeare and the Mediterranean from the less common point of view of a play not immediately identifiable as a representative of cultural dynamics referable to the West/East or the North/South frontiers, and yet belonging to that plurality of Mediterraneans. It does not focus on the Italian setting as a tacitly Mediterranean place, nor does it explore the many Italian literary and cultural traditions naturally associated with this play – from its pervasive lyrical dimension and the sonnet convention to the topic of duelling and the Catholic inflections of religion, to name but a few popular issues.[3] Inspired by the 2021 Shakespeare and the Mediterranean Summer School held at the University of Verona,[4] this volume does not wish to provide a history of the reception of Italian cultural features as incorporated in this drama.[5] It wishes instead to move along dynamic trajectories traversing Mediterranean cultures and eventually reaching Shakespeare, and then through Shakespeare to cast light on their Mediterranean circulation then and now. It will therefore study examples of how mythemes, themes, narremes, theatergrams and more generally allusions to both contemporary and past Mediterranean aspects of this particular story and mythic archetypes circulated and still circulate in the circum-Mediterranean area. It will explore the transformations they underwent in the translation and re-elaboration of the Romeo and Juliet story in Renaissance Italy, France, and Spain, with a comparative view to what happened in Shakespeare's play. It will ask which Mediterranean qualities these versions retained or revised from their individual cultural standpoints. In this sense, a few myths and texts related to this drama will be examined from the perspective of their transformative potential and what this may tell us about their specific Mediterranean dimension. Therefore, focusing on Shakespeare will entail considering source study as a process, and his play as the starting point for the recirculation of its story through new takes today.

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[2] For a reassessment of Braudel's famous positions, see e.g. Marino 2002. For questions about how to define the Mediterranean, see Abulaifa 2003. See also Fuchs 2001.

Although Shakespeare made personal choices, "virtually all of Shakespeare's revisionary strategies were shaped and influenced by multiple forces beyond authorial control – not only the historical, political, and religious contexts of early modern England, but also the more particular forces that would bear upon a professional playwright" (Lynch 1998, 2). What can be said about Shakespeare can also be applied to the other authors involved in the processes of transmission of that story in a Mediterranean context. In this sense, Belsey's comment that what makes him Shakespeare is differences and not similarities (2015, 63) implies a transformative power of intertextual filiation that, *mutatis mutandis*, suggests that "the sources themselves can be reexamined as products of intertextuality – endlessly complex, multilayered fields of interpretation that Shakespeare refashioned and reconfigured into alternative fields of interpretations" (Lynch 1998, 1). In other words, we should consider them as palimpsestic readings derived from stratified processes of selection, inclusion and exclusion of materials belonging to each immediate source, but also drawn from contemporary cultural models and discourses (Bigliazzi 2018). The articles collected in this book will move from this assumption. They will examine the circulation of the Romeo and Juliet story against this methodological backdrop, which at the same time looks at Shakespeare's play as an endpoint and a comment on the Veronese story, but also as the lens through which we can perceive the successive re-articulations of some of its features in their different Mediterranean appropriations on their way to England.

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[3] On the Italian setting and the local cultural connotations of *Romeo and Juliet*, see Locatelli 1993. For studies of Shakespeare and Italy beyond this particular play, see the AIRS Routledge series (general editor Michele Marrapodi).

[4] This book collects some of the contributions to the first edition of the international Summer School (27 July–3 August 2021) organised by the Skenè Research Centre (https://skene.dlls.univr.it/en/sam-shakespeare-summer-school-in-verona/), and a few additional articles related to its activities.

[5] On which see, for instance, Callaghan 2003 and Stelzer 2022.

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The book opens with Emanuel Stelzer's "Prologue: *Romeo and Juliet* from a Mediterranean Perspective", which sets out to present why Verona was, and still is, perceived as a Mediterranean place, and why this Mediterranean quality adds to the Italianness of this particular city. Stelzer lays the ground to argue that the choice of place was itself ideologically imbued with cultural discourses and stereotypes erasing any sense of neutrality. These discourses made up the horizon of expectations of English audiences for the reception of a story born in Italy from the novella tradition originating in Da Porto, but in fact going back to older, Mediterranean models, besides the more clearly Mediterranean narrative of Masuccio Salernitano's Mariotto and Ganozza, which has both lovers cross the sea in their travels to Alexandria of Egypt. "And yet", Guido Avezzù pinpoints in this volume, "the sense of a wild area as the locus of tragedy in the texts derived from Da Porto lingers in the memory of authors and audiences alike as a potential antimodel in respect to the choice of a town as the setting of the *peripeteia* of the two lovers" (59). In "River, Town, and Wilderness: Notes on Some Hellenistic Narrative Motifs Behind 'Pyramus and Thisbe'", Avezzù discusses the ancient aspects of a narrative whose main topics and sequences of actions, from the contested love of the two youths to the apparent death and the fatal error, are rooted in a Hellenistic tradition behind the Pyramus and Thisbe myth and its Ovidian rendition. Interestingly, in the passage from the Mesopotamian locale of Babylon to Da Porto's novella, the "liquid" quality of the story, typical of the Mediterranean setting, is replaced by a closed civic environment testifying to a new Renaissance imaginary connected with a realistic narrative set in a relatively inland place in the peninsula.

The following three articles select three main topics in Shakespeare's play: the friar, the nurse, and the dance. All of them examine how their Mediterranean circulation connected with the story of Romeo and Juliet at times undergoes significant changes producing different cultural inflections. Silvia Silvestri, in "Reimagining Friar Laurence: from Circum-Mediterranean Novellas to the Shakespearean Stage", explores the stages of transformation of the friar figure in the novellas, weighing the reasons why his ambivalence becomes especially prominent in Brooke and Shakespeare, while it is downplayed in Boaistuau, thus bearing on the overall interpretation of the story in the light of the contemporary political and religious discourses in Italy, France and England. Beatrice Righetti's analysis of the Nurse in "Juliet's Nurse and the Italian *Balia* in the *Novella* and the *Commedia dell'Arte* Traditions" explores so-far understudied theatrical models of nurses as bawds from the Italian *commedia* tradition, positing their contribution to the discursive construction of this figure in a Mediterranean setting as a typically loquacious go-between character, distancing her from the classical *nutrix* as well as the *balia* in the contemporary Italian narrative tradition. Finally, Fabio Ciambella, in "Italian Dance Tradition and Translation in *Romeo and Juliet*: from Narrative Sources to Shakespeare", offers an ingenious reading of the ball scene in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* by connecting it with the tradition of the carnival. He also explores the ways in which this play creatively de-Mediterranises this scene and displaces the symbolism of the torch, elaborately derived from the original *ballo del torchio* here omitted, to other levels of signification concerning the two lovers. This first Part of this volume devoted to "Mediterranean Circulations: from Antiquity to the Early Modern Period" is closed by Felice Gambin's article on three seventeenth-century Spanish theatrical versions of the Romeo and Juliet story ("Romeo and Juliet in Seventeenth-Century Spain: Between Comedy and Tragedy"). Gambin does not advocate knowledge or derivation from Shakespeare but rather explores the relevance of this story in Spain, and how its circulation prompted mainly comedic takes, offering an alternative view to the tragic approach of all the ancient and contemporary Mediterranean novellas as well as Shakespeare's.

In the second part of this volume ("Recirculating *Romeo and Juliet* in the Mediterranean: the New Millennium"), the Renaissance perspective gives way to a discussion of a few contemporary adaptations of Shakespeare's play, which from being the end-point of circulating narratives and mythemes in the Mediterranean, as in the previous articles, becomes the starting point for productions aimed at present-day Mediterranean audiences. This section raises questions on how and in which forms Mediterranean ideas, tensions and impulses of integration/disintegration as well as cultural and gender conflicts readable in Shakespeare's play continue to signify current tensions, offering new performance possibilities, culturally, theatrically and intermedially.

Part 2 opens with Maria Elisa Montironi's feminist discussion of Roberta Torre's *Sud Side Stori*, a 2000 film offering a Sicilian setting and a mafia-like veneer, emphasising the North/South axis with an implied innuendo to the 1961 Hollywood *West Side Story* hit musical film ("A Mediterranean, Women-Centred Rewriting of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*: Roberta Torre's *Sud Side Stori*"). Montironi engages with contemporary racial and migration issues sparked off by the recent massive arrivals in Italy of African migrants, while also discussing typically Sicilian traditions and the role of women in local Sicilian culture. The film relocates the story to a typically Palermitan context and raises compelling ethnocentric and misogynistic questions in the contemporary culture of Southern Italy. The following two articles, Petra Bjelica's "'These violent delights have violent ends': Shakespearising the Balkans or Balkanising Shakespeare?", and Eric Nicholson's "*Romeo and Juliet* as Mediterranean Political Tragedy, On Stage and Beyond", offer two distinctly complementary views of some contemporary politically-inflected productions of this play. Both focus on the 2015 *Romeo and Juliet* Serbian-Kosovar bilingual production to interrogate the uses of Shakespeare to signify and possibly demonstrate political appeasement in conflictual contexts. But while Bjelica convincingly argues that eventually this production failed to erase the dualism implied in a Mediterranean conception of the civilised West and the Balkan 'barbaric other' and that war conflicts require responsibility in exploiting the cultural capital of this play and its author, Nicholson offers a more positive view appraising the collaboration between the two conflicting parties. Nicholson's comments are framed by a broader discussion about the uses of this play in factious Mediterranean contexts. He demonstrates how Shakespeare continues to speak to us as a catalyst of current geopolitical and cultural phenomena that invest the redefinition of intra- and extra-European boundaries to be understood in the light of complex processes rooted in the Renaissance.

Although research in this area has recently shed new light on such phenomena (see esp. Clayton et al. 2004), yet much remains to be done. Work may still be carried out with regard to an integrated approach to Shakespeare source study with a view to illuminating complex processes of transmission, transformation, absorption, inclusion and exclusion in theatrical and cultural performance practices. Further research is also needed to illuminate Shakespeare's Mediterranean imaginary in the face of his 'global' dissemination and appropriations, as well as to his relation to, and impact on, ideas of Mediterranean and 'European' identity. Fresh insights into the phenomena mentioned above may profit from an approach bringing together source and reception studies,[6] as well as adaptation and performance approaches to Shakespeare's Mediterranean imaginative world, the processes of its construction and the possibilities for Shakespeare to speak to, and about, the Mediterranean countries today. This book wishes to offer a contribution to this investigation, helping us reflect on present-day Mediterranean phenomena of cultural hybridisation and on how our Mediterranean belongingness is rooted in an awareness of increasingly mobile boundaries.

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[6] Critical research is vast. For two very recent reappraisals see Drakakis 2021 and Wood 2022.

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Prologue: *Romeo and Juliet* from a Mediterranean Perspective

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Abstract

This Prologue aims at outlining the Mediterranean dimension of the city of Verona and wishes to highlight the ways in which Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* has functioned as a landmark portrayal of a Mediterranean cultural space ever since its composition. The Prologue considers the ideological connotations which Verona had for the Elizabethans and the portrayal of the city in Shakespeare's sources, analogues, and paralogues, but it also discusses the older Mediterranean models and mythemes underlying the Romeo and Juliet story.

KEYWORDS: *Romeo and Juliet*; Italianness; the Mediterranean; cultural space; national stereotypes

In an interview with Gavin Lambert, George Cukor was asked what he would do differently if given the chance of directing another film adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* after his 1936 take (starring Leslie Howard and Norma Shearer). The director answered: "I certainly think – and this was probably my fault – there should have been a more Italian, Mediterranean look to the thing. It's not desperate enough . . . It's one picture that if I had to do over again, I'd know how. I'd get the garlic and the Mediterranean into it" (Lambert 1973, 103-4). In a similar vein, when Judi Dench was asked to describe how working with Franco Zeffirelli on the 1960 production of *Romeo and Juliet* at the Old Vic had helped her, she stated: "He really did enlighten me tremendously about non-classical passion, about real hot-blooded passion – perhaps it's because he's a Mediterranean" (Evans 1974, 138). Every time we read the play or watch a production or an adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, we are confronted with different conceptualisations of Italianness and of the various meanings that can lie behind a Mediterranean dimension. Not that

Romeo and Juliet is probably the first play that comes to our mind if we are asked to think about Shakespeare and the Mediterranean: more obvious instances may be the vastity of locales of *Antony and Cleopatra*, the Venice-Cyprus diptych of *Othello*, or the adventures of the eponymous hero of *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* which cover the whole Eastern Mediterranean (from modern-day Lebanon and Turkey to Greece and Libya). And yet, as we shall see, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* has served as a landmark portrayal of a Mediterranean cultural space for centuries.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it was only in the nineteenth century that the English language admitted "Mediterranean" as an adjective to characterise a certain climate (*s.v.* "Mediterranean", A. *adj.* 2.c) as well as the substantival meaning of "An inhabitant of any of the lands or countries in or surrounding the Mediterranean sea; (*Cultural Anthropology*) a person of the Mediterranean physical type" (B. *n.* 3). Indeed, it was nineteenth-century ethnologists and anthropologists such as Georges Vacher de Lapouge, Ernst Haeckel and Giuseppe Sergi who variously discussed the alleged racial traits of '*Homo mediterraneus*'. Nevertheless, the Elizabethans knew that the Mediterranean basin had a specific climate different from their own and they had inherited and developed Galenian notions of humoral geographic determinism, although they could not imagine future theorisations and the dire consequences of scientific racism and eugenics. They did look ambivalently at the Mediterranean as a site of otherness, though. On the one hand, it was a space of trade and circulation (of wares as well as narratives) still steeped in the traditions of the Graeco-Roman world, especially since the Romans had called the Mediterranean "*mare nostrum*", our sea. On the other hand, it was also a region that had a particular socio-political effect on the English: a place virtually dominated by the Spanish and the Turks. "The presence of the Mediterranean outsider reminded the English that England was a very small political force in the geopolitics of western Europe, and that the English themselves were accruing a sense of the cultural specificities" of those areas (Tavares 2016, 202). This increased understanding was due to the fact that "[b]y the end of the [sixteenth] century, the English were everywhere in the Mediterranean, in Moslem, or Christian countries, and travelling along all the overland routes that led to it or away from it to Europe or the Indian Ocean" (Braudel 1995, 628). And it is clear that Shakespeare's interest in the Mediterranean was paramount, since he set so many of plays there:

> Despite Columbus and the rapidly increasing European presence in the Western hemisphere in the sixteenth century, the Mediterranean was still the center of the world Shakespeare lived in, and his plays reflect that fact . . . the Mediterranean stands at the geographic center of Shakespeare's imagination . . . In general, to shift the geographic orientation in Shakespeare studies from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic is to downplay and perhaps even lose sight of the central importance of the classical tradition in his plays. Critics have become more interested in how Shakespeare looks forward to a world that came to be dominated by Anglo-American traditions and less interested in how he looks back to the Graeco-Roman traditions that shaped his own world. (Cantor 2006, 896-7)

More specifically, coming to terms with Italy implied being aware of the history of the Mediterranean from several points of view. Italy had witnessed invasions and settlements of several peoples since antiquity, ranging from the Greeks to the expansion of the Romans, from the Byzantines to the settlement of Germanic populations such as the Goths and Lombards, and later the occupation of the Angevines and the Aragonese. Italianness, like all national identities, is a Barthesian myth, but was a category even more fraught with sociocultural issues in the early modern period, since the country was divided into many different political entities and the 1559 Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis ratified Habsburg Spain's predominance in the peninsula. Being Italian could mean many different things and the portrayal of Italians in literature and drama reflected this multiplicity. On a religious level, Italy was the propulsive hub of Roman Catholicism; on an economic level, this was for instance where the first banking systems originated (hence the name Lombard Street in London); on an intellectual level, it had witnessed the renewed interest in the sciences and arts of antiquity, and these rediscoveries and new techniques radiated across Europe. All these different aspects led to the rise of Italian(ate) stereotypes, such as the corrupt clergyman, the Machiavel villain, the debauched artist, the sinful seducer, etc. – and such prejudices circulated widely abroad. Italians were thought to be impulsive, passionate and hot-tempered; they were depicted as vendetta-obsessed, duel-enthusiasts, romantic lovers exchanging sonnets, and known for their use of poison and auricular confession; hedonistically sophisticated and, at the same time, ingenuously brutish.[1] Such stereotypes have proved extremely long-lasting. For instance, when the critic Charles Osborne had to describe the influence of Bellini's *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* on Wagner's adaptation of *Measure for Measure* (*Das Liebesverbot*, set in Sicily), he wrote that the German composer "turned the play into a contrast between the puritan Teutonic spirit and the sensual warmth of the South, the composer's sympathies being decidedly with the simple, childlike Mediterraneans" (1982, 14).

Coming closer to *Romeo and Juliet*, Verona is and was a Mediterranean city of prime importance. It may be useful to cite a few examples. The city was remembered as the birthplace of Catullus, the classical love poet par excellence, and its Roman archeological sites (especially the Arena and the Roman theatre) are particularly notable (and mentioned by Thomas Coryat in his 1611 travelogue). Verona's patron saint is Saint Zeno, who is traditionally portrayed as a black man and is said to have come from Mauretania. It had been the most important military centre of Theodoric the Great's Ostrogothic Kingdom (493-553), which comprised the whole Italian peninsula and parts of the Balkans. At its height, the *signoria* of the Della Scala (1262-1387) reached the Tyrrhenian Sea, while, since 1405, the city was a territory of the Republic of Venice, and would remain so until 1797. As is well known, *La Serenissima* controlled large parts of the Balkan coastline, ruled over Crete (until 1669), most of the Aegean islands (until 1714), and Cyprus (1489-1571), and counted among its main routes the emporia of Tunis, Tripoli, Alexandria, Antioch, and Tyre. St Mark's lion can still be seen in several locations in Verona as reminders of Venetian rule; an object hanging from the ceiling of the Cappella Giusti in the

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[1] For further information on such Italian stereotypes, see Marrapodi 1993 and other essays included in that volume such as those by Hoenselaars, Levin, Locatelli, and Rossi. See also Marrapodi 2014.

Church of Saint Anastasia is supposed to be the rudder of a Turkish ship defeated at Lepanto (see below), and the façade of Palazzo Turchi sports the turbaned heads of Ottomans in celebration of the Christian triumph of 1571: Cavalier Pio Turchi had been one of the leaders of the Veronese delegation which went to congratulate the Doge on the victory and decided to add those grotesque decorations to mark the occasion and as a visual pun on his surname.

Shakespeare's Verona is specifically codified as a Mediterranean place: whereas the masked ball in the sources takes place in winter or at Carnival, Shakespeare postponed the action to mid-July to emphasise the heat of the weather. Benvolio's words evoke an agonising summer heat: "For now, these hot days, is the mad blood stirring" (3.1.4)[2] – to which Mercutio replies: "thou art as hot a jack in thy mood as any in Italy" (11-12), thus mobilising the stereotype of the passionate, over-excitable Italian man. The flora of Verona includes pomegranate trees where nightingales take refuge ("Nightly she sings on yon pomegranate-tree", 3.5.4), and rosemary, a herb native to the Mediterranean region, connected with both weddings and mourning remembrance, erotic ardour and death ("Doth not rosemary and Romeo begin both with a letter?" 2.4.198-9; "stick your rosemary / On this fair corse" 4.5.79-80; and Q1's stage direction "*They all but the Nurse goe foorth, casting Rosemary on her*" [i.e. Juliet], Apfelbaum 2019, 2675). Catholic friars actively contribute to the life of the community, and palmers, i.e. pilgrims coming from Jerusalem, and the imagery of relics are Catholic referents deployed in the sonnet shared by the two protagonists on first meeting each other (1.5.92-105) – and the sonnet as a genre had originated in Sicily in the thirteenth century, elaborating the style and poetics of the Occitan troubadours.

Shakespeare did not 'invent' the Verona of *Romeo and Juliet* out of a vacuum. He developed what he found in his sources and more generally in a cultural discourse about that Italian city and Italy in general conveyed by what Robert S. Miola calls paralogues, that is, texts which "illuminate the intellectual, social, theological, or political meanings in other texts", "mov[ing] horizontally and analogically . . . rather than in vertical lineation through the author's mind or intention (2004, 23). It will be seen that Verona was marked by processes of exoticisation and had fairly stable traits in Henrician-to-Elizabethan texts.

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[2] All quotations from *Romeo and Juliet*, unless stated otherwise, refer to Weis 2012.

1. Verona in Shakespeare's Sources and Paralogues

Shakespeare's sources[3] did not dwell too abundantly on the description of Verona. The main one, Arthur Brooke's long poem *Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet* (first published in 1562), was an adaptation of Pierre Boaistuau's *histoire tragique*, itself a loose translation of Matteo Bandello's Italian novella, a re-writing of Luigi Da Porto's *Istoria novellamente ritrovata di due nobili amanti: con la loro pietosa morte intervenuta già nella città di Verona* (c. 1530, revised and interpolated in 1539 as *La Giulietta*). It is possible that Shakespeare also read William Painter's 1567 prose translation of Boaistuau. In Brooke, Verona is the best among "Lombard towns" (12): it is "ancient" (1), "built on a fertile soil" (3), among "fruitful hills" and "pleasant vales" (11), and populated by industrious people ("townish toil", 4); Painter reminds its readers of "an infinite number of other honourable antiquities" (Z2*r*) which can be admired in the city. The only exact toponyms Shakespeare could find in his English sources were Porta Borsari (in Brooke's translation, "Purser's gate", 963; in Painter's, "the Gate of Boursarie", Aa1*r* – one of the city gates built by the Romans, still extant); the Church of St Francis, i.e. the Monastery of San Francesco al Corso (which Shakespeare turned into a church dedicated to Saint Peter, 3.5.114), and Villafranca, a locality outside Verona which was Capulet's castle in Painter ("Villafranco", Bb1*v*) and Brooke ("Freetown" 1974, turned into a "common judgment-place" by Shakespeare, 1.1.100). He could also read of Prince Escalus' rule (i.e. [Bartolomeo] Della Scala), and there are a number of references to the city walls and gates (see Wells 2015, 39-41). Both Brooke and Painter refer to the Adige River which serves as the main channel connecting the city to the sea (Brooke: "The silver stream with channel deep, that through the town doth flow", 6; Painter: "few cities in Italy can surpass the said city of Verona . . . for the navigable river called Adissa, which passeth almost through the midst of the same, and thereby a great traffic into Almaine", Z2*r*).

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[3] All quotations from Boaistuau, Brooke, and Painter refer to the open-access modernised editions available in the SENS (Shakespeare's Narrative Sources: Italian Novellas and Their European Dissemination) digital archive (https://sens.skene.univr.it/shakespeares-works/romeo-and-juliet/); the page numbers indicated for Painter refer to the diplomatic edition.

However, nothing more specific is said about the setting – but the world evoked by Shakespeare's main source, Brooke, corresponds to the representations as well as misrepresentations of Italy which one could find in many English texts of the period. Brooke had warned the Reader that the lovers had confided in "drunken gossips, and superstitious friars (the naturally fit instruments of unchastity", and he felt the need to explain to his English readers some Veronese customs (e.g. "because in Italy it is a wonted guise / That friars in the town should seldom walk alone", 2488-9; "Now throughout Italy this common use they have / That all the best of every stock are earthéd in one grave", 2515-16), thus emphasising the difference between Italian and English mores. Moreover, such foreignness could also be displayed non-verbally: the gesture which opens the play, Sampson's biting his thumb at the arrival of the Montagues, was a clear Mediterranean marker: "the available evidence labels it as a particularly Spanish gesture"; "a gesture both recognizable due to its arrival in England and vaguely incomprehensible due to its specifically European origins" (Thomas 2020, 36).[4]

In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, the eponymous city is basically not described at all, and characters seem to be able to sail directly from Verona to Milan. However, while it is possible that in that earlier comedy Shakespeare had still to decide what to make of Verona (Bergeron 2007, 436), since it "presents multiple problems regarding location" (429), *Romeo and Juliet* is "the most Veronese of Shakespeare's plays" (Wells 2015, 40): the civic dimension so accentuated by Shakespeare causes us to look at the city as under a magnifying glass. "The social dynamics underlying the tensional but also fluid dimension of civic spaces and practices is precisely what is dramatized in *Romeo and Juliet* and what continues to be experimented upon in its afterlife performances" (Bigliazzi and Calvi 2015, 2).

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[4] See also Burke 1997, 74, in a chapter devoted the study of the language of gesture in early modern Italy.

The paralogues about Verona circulating in the Elizabethan period portrayed a city under the sign of violence (see Stelzer 2022). Elizabethans could read that Verona was a city "under Aries, and Mars" (Cunningham 1549, 134) which had been called after Brennus, the Gallic leader who had "sacked *Rome*, and expel[led] the *Tuscanes*" (Stow 1580, 25). Thomas Kelway repeated the idea that Verona was a city under the influence of Aries, which means that its inhabitants are generally "choleric, strong, and right men of war: captains: soldiers: alchemists, and other martialists" (1593, 32). In Chaucer's translation of Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, one could read that Theodoric "at the cite of Verone" was a "kyng, gredy of comune slaughtre" (Chaucer 1542, ccxxxiii). William Thomas' *History of Italy* recorded that the feudal lord Ezzelino da Romano "retournyng to Verona, fel in such a rage, that he caused 12000 Padoanes, part of his armye, to be hewen to peeces. Such a crueltee as hathe not ben hearde of, sens the tyme of Silla" (1549, 98). The Veronese were consistently portrayed as prone to barbaric violence and civic strife: Marino Zeno, who would become the first *podestà* of the Venetians at Costantinople, managed to "pacif[y] certaine greeuous ciuile dissentions that arose among the Cittzens of *Verona*: whereas otherwise if . . . they had not beene preuented, the matter was likely to breake out in hot broiles of warre" (Hakluyt 1582, B4v). Finally, in Thomas Munday's rendition via Estienne's French translation, this is how Ortensio Lando characterised Verona: "for the greefe I haue to beholde in *Venice*, such a crowde of nice darlings: in *Padua*, such indiscreet lookes . . . in *Treuiso*, such disordered libertie: at *Verona*, such frantike fury" (Munday 1593, 38). This is one of the frames through which Shakespeare's audiences could interpret the Romeo and Juliet story: a drama about Southern internecine violence and unbridled passion, making Romeo and Tybalt "the unabsorbed and irreducible 'other' in the Elizabethan context" (Locatelli 1993, 73).

The Veronese setting of Shakespeare's play has been read in several different ways. According to Sasha Roberts, the play "fuses

Italian and English culture by projecting Elizabethan preoccupations onto a Catholic, European 'Other'" (1998, 58), which may explain why Mercutio's monologue about Queen Mab (a figure of possibly Celtic heritage) and Peter's request that the musicians should play a popular English country dance, *Heart's Ease* (4.5.100) do not seem out of place. According to Susan Snyder, instead, Shakespeare's Verona is important as a relatively generic walled community: "The feud exemplifies the workings of any ideology, of Ideology itself, but the specifics of its enactment express their historical moment" (2002, 186), and such specifics are the imperative to maintain one's honour and family loyalty. Snyder argues:

> Nor does a freer space seem to be imaginable for Romeo and Juliet somewhere else. A milieu less insistently enclosing might make visually possible the option of leaving the city together and finding a new life somewhere else. Instead, the play's physical dimensions only confirm that "there is no world outside Verona walls" (3.3.17). Verona, constituted by the feud, asserts itself like any ideology as the only reality there is. (188)

On the contrary, Peter Brook viewed *Romeo and Juliet* as

> a play of youth, of freshness, of open air, in which the sky – the great tent of Mediterranean blue – hangs over every moment of it . . . a play of wide spaces, in which all scenery and decoration can easily become an irrelevance . . . [one should] capture the violent passion of two children lost amongst the Southern fury of the warring houses. (qtd in Dawson 1988, 132)

The difference in the evaluation of the setting could not be greater: in Snyder's view, Verona absorbs and nullifies any aspirations to live outside its boundaries, while, according to Brook, Verona is an arena of stereotypical Southern violence somehow determined by its natural openness.

A solution to this critical disagreement is to remember that the position of one's gaze is important. In the passage quoted above, Roberts had referred to a "European, Catholic 'Other'", but the concept of a European culture was, if not anachronistic, quite contested, and thus it sounds strange to read contemporary historians' claims such as the following: "the various Italian states remained important as meeting-point of the European and Mediterranean worlds" (Hammer 1999, 178), as if there were an inherent divide between what is considered European and what is considered Mediterranean. To the Elizabethans *qua* islanders what happened across the Channel was already something that could alter their own growing national identity, and the influences of the Mediterranean were felt well before reaching the coasts of the sea. Shakespeare's Verona is exoticised so that it could appeal to as well as alert its original spectators who wanted to know more about those Italian lovers: "mythmaking means that *via* his exotic lands 'Shakespeare creates England'" (Locatelli 1993, 72).

2. The Romeo and Juliet Story Outside Verona Walls

It is unlikely that Shakespeare did not know of Verona's connections to Venice (any map would have informed him, besides London had a flourishing Italian community) and, as we have seen, his sources referred to the navigability of the Adige. However, he decided not to thematise these elements, possibly in order to emphasise the enclosing strength of the city walls. However, as we have seen, the fact that the sea is not featured[5] does not mean that Shakespeare's Verona and the non-fictional city are not Mediterranean. One can better understand this issue through Fernand Braudel's influential conceptualisation of 'the Greater Mediterranean'.

> . . . there is a *global* Mediterranean which in the sixteenth century reached as far as the Azores and the New World, the Red Sea and the Persian Persian Gulf, the Baltic and the loop of the Niger . . . To

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[5] More precisely, the sea is not featured in *Romeo and Juliet* except in metaphors (perhaps most memorably, Juliet's "bounty" being as "boundless as the sea, / [Her] love as deep", 2.2.133-4); imagery in Shakespeare's play is occasionally nautical or marine: see Romeos's words, "I am no pilot, yet wert thou as far / As that vast shore washed with the farthest sea / I should adventure for such merchandise", 2.2.82-4), or his description of the means to ascend to Juliet's room as "the high topgallant of my joy" (2.4.182), while his "intents" on his coming to the graveyard are more "fierce and inexorable" than "the roaring sea" (5.3.37-9).

> meet the historian's demands, however, the Mediterranean must be accepted as a wide zone, extending well beyond the shores of the sea in all directions. We might compare it to an electric or magnetic field, or more simply to a radiant centre whose light grows less as one moves away from it, without one's being able to define the exact boundary between light and shade. . . . The rule has been that Mediterranean civilization spreads far beyond its shores in great waves that are balanced by continual returns. (1995, 168-9)

Braudel lists Verona as one of the "'halfway' towns between south and north" (206). One could say that Shakespeare re-invented Verona as a site of passion and death which uncannily stood on the threshold between an exoticised Other and what was understood as (whether desirably or dangerously) assimilable to Englishness. Such hybridity may be interpreted as the in-betweenness which Geraldo de Sousa attributes to Shakespeare's Mediterranean:

> For Shakespeare, the Mediterranean represents a sense of in-betweenness . . . his Mediterranean, where many of his plays are set, lies both within and without the borders of Europe. His Mediterranean remains both distant and near, a region of boundary crossing par excellence. It borders on worlds unknown, and it is fraught with specters from distant borderlands. Freedom of movement and global interconnectedness collide with xenophobic attitudes, religious and racial conflict, and fear of foreign migration and influence. Shakespeare thought of the Mediterranean as part of Europe but also as a world unto itself, familiar and strange. (2018a, 137)

The Mediterranean was indeed "[p]erhaps the most important contact zone in the early modern period" and, as it was "constructed in the English imaginary", "the traffic and intercourse it facilitate[d] between European Christians and non-European Muslims create[d] and sustain[ed] racial formations by establishing the modes and mores of normative whiteness" (Dadabhoy 2022, n.n.). As Lara Bovilsky argues, for the Elizabethans and Jacobeans, "Italianate drama expands on and complicates the relevant senses of otherness. For, as in *The Merchant of Venice* or *Othello*, the representations of Italians in Italianate drama are nearly always bound up with representations of other groups, such as Jews, Moors, and Turks"

(2003, 637). In *Romeo and Juliet*, this does not happen directly. There are scattered images (e.g. Cupid "Bearing a Tartar's painted bow of lath", 1.4.5, or Romeo's blazon of Juliet's beauty via a racialised simile: "It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night / As a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear", 1.5.44-5),[6] and one should bear in mind that Protestants often perceived commonalities between Italians and non-Europeans. This is for example how Fynes Morison (1566-1630), an English traveller who wrote an interesting *Itinerary* (the first three volumes of which were published in 1617), compared the lust of Italians with that of the Turks:

> For fleshly lusts, the very Turks (whose carnal religion alloweth them) are not so much transported therewith, as the Italians are (in their restraint of civil laws and the dreadful law of God) . . . The women of honour in Italy, I mean wives and virgins, are much sooner inflamed with love, be it lawful or unlawful, than the women of other nations. For being locked up at home, and covered with veils when they go abroad, and kept from any conversation with men . . . they [i.e. Italian women] are more stirred up with the sight and much more with the flattering and dissembling speeches of men. (qtd in Kaplan 2002, 168-9)

Italian women were thus depicted as lewd and more naïve than "women of other nations" (Englishwomen may be implied), while Italian men were portrayed as more lecherous than the Turks themselves: national, ethnic, and religious differences were thus deployed to construct the English identity, and such appropriations, misperceptions, and stereotypes abounded. Juliet's rashness could seem a case in point in this othering portrayal of an Italian young woman; however, she is no stock figure, as can be seen in the rhetoric she deploys in 2.2, when she distances herself from both the stereotype of the rash *innamorata* and the idealised image of the chaste and moderate girl praised in contemporary conduct books: "Starting with this soliloquy, in her solitary musing Juliet gradually acknowledges her-self precisely in contrast to current models of social identity and femininity, which from the opening scenes make for docility, weakness, physical submissiveness and usability at large" (Bigliazzi 2015, 251).

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[6] Compare *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* 2.6.25-6: "And Silvia – witness heaven that made her fair! – / Shows Julia but a swarthy Ethiope" (Shakespeare 2017, 85); see de Sousa 2018b, 180-1.

It is well known that the Elizabethans had a deeply ambivalent view of all things Italian, admiring what the Romans had done, praising the arts and the sciences that flourished in the wake of Humanism and the Renaissance, but at the same time deprecating the corruption of its politics and the evils of Popery. If, as we have seen, the concept of Italianness was and still is indissolubly tied to the Mediterranean dimension, one can understand why the Romeo and Juliet story was set in several quadrants of the Mediterranean before and after Shakespeare. Even today, scholars can describe *Romeo and Juliet* as being "[s]et in a Mediterranean honor-based culture" (Tassi 2011, 55) and that the Mediterranean "cult of masculine honor" can be epitomised in "[t]he Montague-Capulet of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in 'fair Verona' (a Mediterranean city)" (Knysh 2017, 334). Many analogues, hypotexts[7], paralogues, and other potential resources of Shakespeare's play included sea voyages, pirates, and trade, elements which almost give credit to the funny exchanges between Will and Marlowe in John Madden's *Shakespeare in Love* (1998):

> MARLOWE I have a new one nearly done and better. *The Massacre at Paris.*
> WILL Good title.
> MARLOWE And yours?
> WILL *Romeo and Ethel the Pirate's Daughter*… Yes, I know.
> MARLOWE What is the story?
> WILL Well, there's a pirate… In truth, I have not written a word.
> (IMSDb, n.d.)

An English antecedent comes to mind: George Gascoigne's 1572 *Masque of Mo(u)ntacutes*. There is a phrase famously used by Shakespeare which he could not find in Brooke, but in William

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[7] Notoriously defined by Genette as any text on which a "hypertext" is engrafted "in a manner that is not that of a commentary" (1997, 5).

Painter's 1567 prose translation of Boaistuau: the "ancient grudge" between the two households (Prologue, 3). Indeed, Painter concludes the story stating that, after the two lovers' tragic end, "for the compassion of so strange an infortune, the Montesches and Capellettes poured forth such abundance of tears, as with the same they did evacuate their ancient grudge and choler, whereby they were then reconciled" (Bb8*r*).[8] However, as Gibbons (1980, 31) and Prior (2000) have noted, Shakespeare may have found this phrase also in Gascoigne's aforementioned masque which deals with the feud between Montagues and Capulets and which drew its materials directly from Brooke.

In 1572, Gascoigne was commissioned to write an aristocratic entertainment which took place at either Montacute House in London or Cowdray Park, Sussex: the double wedding of Thomas Browne with Mary Dormer, and Elizabeth Browne with Robert Dormer, the Brownes being the children of the First Viscount Montacute/Montagu (the siblings of the mother of Shakespeare's patron, the Earl of Southampton). The organisers of the masque had bought Venetian-style costumes and asked Gascoigne to fashion a story which justified such choice in clothing (Trousdale 1981, 96). The poet, inspired by the Montacutes' surname, drew on Brooke's *The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet* and interwove the feud of the Montagues and Capulets with two historical events which had quite recently taken place in the Mediterranean: the siege of Famagusta (Cyprus), August 1570-September 1571, the result of which was the Ottomans' seizing control over that Venetian possession, and the Battle of Lepanto (7 October 1571), which marked a defining (although a definitely more symbolic than lasting) victory of the major Catholic powers of Southern Europe over the Turks. To document himself on the former, Gascoigne read William Malin's *The True Report of all the Successe of Famagosta*, a freshly printed English translation of Count Nestore Martinengo's lurid account which had been published a few months earlier in Verona (*L'Assedio et presa di Famagosta*; see Cawley 1928, 296). The entertainment started with the entrance of a sumptuously dressed boy actor who identified himself as an English-born Montacute on his mother's side. His father, a soldier, fought and died at Famagusta, and he had been captured and enslaved by the Turks. Later, at the Battle of Lepanto, he had been freed by the Italian Montacutes. One of them had thus identified himself:

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[8] Brooke uses the word "grudge" but in a slightly different way: he writes that the feud originated "of grudging envy's root" (34) and speaks of "a kindled spark of grudge" (36).

> Confessing that he was him selfe a Mountacute,
> And bare the selfe same armes that I dyd quarter in my scute:
> And for a further proofe, he shewed in his hat,
> This token which the Mountacutes dyd beare alwaies, for that.
> They couet to be knowne from Capels where they passe,
> For *auncient grutch which lōg ago, twene these two houses was.*
> (Gascoigne 1575, lii; emphasis mine)

A gloss explains that "The Actor had a token in his cap like to the Mountacutes of Italie" (ibid.). Besides blurring the lines between fiction and non-fiction, the gloss seems to imply that the Montagues' wearing of a token in their cap was common knowledge, when in fact none of the sources refers to this device to differentiate Montagues from Capulets (although the latter are associated with headwear, of course, since their surname literally means 'little hats'). Thus, Gascoigne merged Brooke's narrative with the account of battles taking place in the Mediterranean, and framed them from an English perspective by having an English boy as the narrator and an English audience. After the Christian victory at Lepanto (in which "Turkes twentie thousand [were] registered in *Belzebub* his rolles", xlx), the Montacute boy had expressed his desire to be educated in Italy, evidently regarded as the nursery of the arts ("And there by traine of youthfull yéeres in knowledge to excell", lii), but a sudden tempest instead had cast them onto the "Chalkie" shores of "our Lande hight *Albyon*, as *Brutus* once dyd boast" (ibid.). For generations, Lepanto was remembered and the feats of the Christian leaders exalted on the Continent and in the British Isles, as well. Most famously, the young James VI of Scotland wrote c. 1585 *The Lepanto*, a poem which was translated into Latin, French, and Dutch and extolled the heroical triumph of "the baptiz'd race" over the "circumsised Turband Turkes" (1591, 2*r* – see Grogan 2021). The poem was admired but also critiqued, and

James had to explain that only superficial readers could interpret his work as "in praise of a forraine Papist bastard" (G4*r*; i.e. John of Austria, the illegitimate son of Charles V, the admiral of the Holy Alliance fleet). In Gascoigne's text, differences between Protestants and Catholics are not thematised, probably because the Dormers and the Montacutes were "prominent Catholic families" (Austen 2008, 63). Like the previous incarnations of the Romeo and Juliet story, also here the feud between Montagues and Capulets is not marked by religious, racialised or ethnic difference, but is caused by strife between families "both alike in dignity" (*R&J*, Prologue 1), a similarity which necessitates some superficial device to differentiate between the two (in this case, a token in their caps). As is well known, this characteristic is often changed in adaptations such as *West Side Story*: "Globally the play has inspired an abundance of adaptations, which often employ the story of the feud to explore ethnic, religious and caste tensions" (Lupton 2016, n.n.).

The text of this entertainment was included in three editions of Gascoigne's works: the 1573 *A Hundred Sundry Flowers*, the 1575 *Posies* and the 1587 *Pleasantest Works*. We know for sure that Shakespeare read one of these editions because he used *Supposes* as a source for the secondary plot of *The Taming of the Shrew* and perhaps for *The Comedy of Errors*, and *Supposes* was never published alone. That he actually read Gascoigne's masque remains conjectural, as is the New Oxford Shakespeare editors' suggestion that "[t]he followers of the Montagues and Capulets were probably distinguished on stage by badges or tokens, perhaps on their hats" (2017, 1002). More relevantly, Gascoigne's version is a representative text showcasing the deep roots of the Romeo and Juliet story in the cultures of the Mediterranean.

Its archetype, the myth of Pyramus and Thisbe as narrated in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, is set in Babylon, which lay on the main route between the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean, and Thisbe is described as "quas oriens habuit, praelata puellis" (4.56, "loveliest of all eastern girls" in Brookes More's translation – whereas in Golding's Elizabethan translation, it is Pyramus who is the epitome of Eastern beauty: "So faire a man in all the East was none alive as he", 1567, 43*v* – it is unclear why Golding made this change). Besides, as Guido Avezzù shows in the essay included in this volume, the story of Pyramus and Thisbe can be considered "a typically Mediterranean" myth (59) since, "[i]n the Hellenistic age and up to the late imperial period, the Mediterranean coasts seem to be populated with" variants of the same story (53).

Masuccio Salernitano's novella of Mariotto and Ganozza/Giannozza (first published 1470-1471), a hypotext of Da Porto's story, has aptly been described as being cast "in a circum-Mediterranean, romance mode noticeably lacking the public and civic dimensions that . . . Da Porto is the first to interject" (Henke 2015, 67): it is a story mainly set in Siena but which features several sea-voyages. After killing the Tybalt figure, Mariotto flees to Alexandria to join the trade of his uncle, a successful merchant in Egypt,[9] and Ganozza's messenger is captured and killed by pirates while travelling on a wheat-carrying ship. It may not be a coincidence that Masuccio states that Ganozza probably belonged to "casa Saraceni" (Borlenghi 1962, 519): House Saracens – a surname which has an ethnonym as its basis, but not necessarily an othering function, since there are no further clues that the family to which Ganozza belongs is in any way different from the other families of Siena. However, its function may be to foreshadow the characters' sea voyage to the Eastern Mediterranean.

Just as Saraceni is a speaking surname, so is the family name of the narrator of the Romeo and Juliet story in Da Porto and Bandello: a Veronese archer called "Peregrino" and "il Capitano Alessandro Peregrino", respectively – a religious pilgrim, or a roamer (a connotation which resonates with Romeo's name – a "romeo" in early modern Italian, to use John Florio's 1598 definition, was a "a roamer, a wandrer, a palmer", primarily Rome-bound). We are indeed dealing with a travelling, wandering story, which, in each of its versions, has different geopolitical focuses. Take, for instance, Adrian Sévin's novella of Halquadrich and Burglipha (1542), which adapted Da Porto: it is set in the Morea, i.e. the Peloponnesus, then a province of the Byzantine Empire which would soon become a territory shared and contested between the Ottomans and the Venetians. Luigi Groto's tragedy *La Adriana* (a 1578 dramatic adaptation of Da Porto's novella) is instead set in Roman times and in Adria, the ancient city after which the Adriatic Sea is named, and where the aquatic imagery is structural, especially considering that the city at the end is doomed to be engulfed by waves:

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[9] On the historical evidence of European merchants in fifteenth-century Alexandria, see Mahmoud Helmy 2011.

> Sommergeransi i bei palagi nostri,
> E tutti quei, che vi fian colti in mezo.
> Conche d'acque saran quest'ampie loggie,
> Queste piazze, questi archi, e queste mura,
> E col tutto del tutto ogni memoria. (155)
>
> [Our fair palaces will be submerged, / As will be all who will be taken unawares. / These wide halls will turn into watery shells, / As will these squares, these arches, and these walls, / All and all memories thereof will be engulfed. (translation mine)]

All these versions exploit the Mediterranean dimension of the story and may partly explain (besides aesthetic considerations) why Ber[nard] Gar[ter]'s *Tragical and True History, Which Happened Between Two English Lovers* (1565), which attempted to completely domesticate Brooke's version, setting it in England, was not successful: one of the strengths of the Romeo and Juliet story is its being able to depict Mediterranean passion and violence.

Throughout the reception history of Shakespeare's play, many productions and adaptations have striven to recognise and amplify the Mediterranean markers in the play. Influentially, Madame de Staël stated that "Shakespeare wrote the play with the full power of the southern imagination . . . In a violent climate, it is the power of nature, not the whims of feeling, that hastens the development of the passions" (2008, 123). These are indeed some of the elements which have ensured the longevity of the play, besides, needless to say, Shakespeare's dramatic genius. It does not matter that Shakespeare's text does not explicitly mention a balcony: countless productions have made much of "balconies or loggias . . . architectonic features that belong . . . to sensuous Southern climates" (Pfister 2017, 45). Cypresses, cedars, and similar Mediterranean trees regularly feature in the *décor* of productions and film adaptations of the play (see Loehlin 2002, 132); in the 'balcony scene', most theatregoers expect nothing less than a "balustrade" and a moonlit sky "fretted with pinprick stars and sloping, Mediterranean hills in the background" (King 2012, 348), and, possibly, some opera music in the background. However, it is important to contextualise and problematise the stereotypes and cultural representations that have characterised the genesis and popularity of Shakespeare's play, and this volume sets out to do exactly this: to show how fruitful it is to examine the civic space of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* from a Mediterranean lens.

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Part 1

Mediterranean Circulations: from Antiquity to the Early Modern Period

1

River, Town, and Wilderness: Notes on Some Hellenistic Narrative Motifs Behind 'Pyramus and Thisbe'

Guido Avezzù

Abstract

In addition to the model famously provided by Ovid's story of Pyramus and Thisbe, the fate of a hapless pair of lovers has other variants belonging to the Hellenistic age and up to the late imperial period, when the Mediterranean coasts seem to be populated with pairs of unhappy lovers like Pyramus and Thisbe, Alphaeus and Arethusa, or Pamphilus and Eurydike, to recall only those of which we are left with an explicit memory. These tales are characterised by a constellation of variously combined elements: from the families that oppose love, to the suicide of the male lover, whose death, caused by some form of delay and error, in turn causes that of his beloved, from the voluntary annihilation of the lovers, to the participation of nature in the event (the metamorphosis of the mulberry fruit that is the pretext for the Ovidian epyllium). In this article, it will be proposed that not all of these elements are necessarily incorporated in the revivals of the Ovidian model, but that some of them, known precisely thanks to Ovid, seem to re-emerge in other narrative contexts.

Keywords: Pyramus and Thisbe; Hellenistic love stories; narrative motifs; ancient Mediterranean cultures

> What shal I say of yong Piramus?
> Chaucer 2004, *A Complaynte of a Lovers Life*, 365

It is well known that the many models and sources referable to the story of Romeo and Juliet follow closely the narrative pattern of

Pyramus and Thisbe's *non vulgaris fabula*[1] in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 4.55-166 through direct and/or indirect knowledge. I will not linger on the meaning of the word 'source' here, nor on the Italian narratives behind Shakespeare's play. Instead, I will select some motifs common to a few relevant classical narratives comparable to the story of Pyramus and Thisbe and therefore, indirectly, of Romeo and Juliet. I will start from the assumption that in many cases when we deal with ancient stories connected with early modern texts we cannot assume direct knowledge of them, and therefore conscious appropriation, but rather a variety of possibly indirect ways in which they circulated.

Although Romeo and Juliet is the end-point of a genetic line that through Arthur Brooke and William Painter goes back to Pierre Boaistuau, Matteo Bandello and Luigi Da Porto, there are other narratives that appear relevant to it while not belonging to that tradition. In such cases one question is whether we are dealing with the same story. Another way to put it, is whether we should consider differences in the setting, the characters' names and functions, as well as in some other relevant details of the plot as signals that alert us to major changes in the transmission of that particular story. By borrowing a term from textual criticism, we could consider such changes as a kind of *Leitfehler*, or 'index fossils', that is, variations suggesting that some potentially radical swerve from the main narrative line has taken place, marking a new stage in its articulation. In the case of the Romeo and Juliet story, the variety of narratives connected with it raise questions whether and to what extent we can speak of a single narrative and various stages in its history, or whether we should instead identify points of intersection, such as themes, imagery, and plots motifs, of different narratives. We must also consider that at any stage of their dissemination, stories may be subject to contamination with other circulating narratives – not necessarily 'versions' of the same one – which modifies and enriches their basic structure. As for this particular phenomenon, it is significant that, in his *Myths* (*Fabulae*), Gaius Julius Hyginus (64 BC - AD 17), active under Augustus and

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[1] *Met.* 4.53: "this tale . . . was not stale nor common" (trans. Golding 2004 [1567]).

Tiberius, gives an account of the story of Pyramus and Thisbe in which the most characteristic feature, namely the death of Pyramus by an error, is missing, and the brief report speaks generically of suicide "because of love" (*ob amorem*). This suggests that the version known to Hyginus could be substantially different from the one we can find in those same years in the *Metamorphoses*.[2] Having to rearrange a large number of sources, Hyginus sometimes confuses different versions and sometimes arbitrarily simplifies them. For instance, shortly after mentioning Pyramus, he informs us that "Oedipus, the son of Laius, because of his mother Iocasta took out his own eyes and killed himself" (*Oedipus Laii filius propter Iocasten matrem ipse se occidit ablatis oculis*) – a detail otherwise unknown to us. Hyginus, in any case, does not allude to a death due to an error. We could also imagine that, because of the prestige of the repertoire of Babylonian love stories, which were eventually collected in the *Babyloniaca*, a lost work by the novelist Iamblichus (second century AD), the two lovers could be 'recycled' as protagonists of stories with different characteristics from the original one, which could be already lost.

As we shall see, the tale of the unhappy lovers has other variants and many of these belong to the period comprised between the first century BC and the first century AD.[3] In the Hellenistic age and up to the late imperial period, the Mediterranean coasts seem to be populated with pairs of unhappy lovers sharing the fate of Pyramus and Thisbe, Alphaeus and Arethusa, or Pamphilus and

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[2] Hyginus 2002, *Fabula* 242,5: "The Babylonian Pyramus killed himself for love of Thisbe (*Pyramus in Babylonia ob amorem Thisbes se occidit*)" and 243,8: "The Babylonian Thisbe ‹killed herself› because Pyramus had killed himself (*Thisbe Babylonia ‹se interfecit› propter Pyramum quod ipse se interfecerat*)".

[3] Systematic expositions of this tale and its ancient variants are offered by Immisch 1902-1909 and Fiehn 1936. A concise account is given by March 2014, 427. By contrast, the tradition alluded to by Grimal, who narrates that "Pyramus and Thisbe . . . slept together before they were married. Thisbe became pregnant. In despair, she committed suicide" (1990, 381-2) is merely "implicit" according to Rodríguez-Mesa who, however, follows Grimal (2020, 332n1); the outline proposed by Knox 1989 is more reliable. The adventurous implications of this variant also include a children's book by Martino Menghi (2006, see Figure 5).

Eurydike. The variants of the story, from the Pyramus-river's love affair with a Thisbe-spring – on which I will return later – to that of Pamphilus and Eurydike, and on to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, present constellations of narrative elements, neither secondary nor purely decorative, which are co-present in Ovid. Medieval and Renaissance authors as well as Shakespeare himself selected only those which were functional to their narratives or plays. However, it is precisely their simultaneous presence in the *Metamorphoses*, a text that enjoyed a very wide circulation in both Latin and vernacular translations, that suggests a whole range of visual possibilities, making them relevant even when discarded. This is the case, for example, of the motif of the mulberry fruits changing colour, from white to red and black, which, as will be seen, was also present in Greek tragedies: in Ovid this metamorphosis guides the narrative (*Met.* 4.51-3), and yet in Boccaccio and in the Renaissance versions of the story it disappears, although Shakespeare seems to remember it in *Titus Andronicus* 4.3 231 – a detail the audience must not have failed to recognise.

River (and Spring)

Originally the name Pyramus is linked to a river. The Athenian historian Xenophon (430-354 BC) mentions it in his *Anabasis* 1.4.1. It appears to be a watercourse in the nowadays Hatay province of Turkey, which is on the east coast of the Mediterranean and borders Syria to its south and east. From Strabo (64/63 BC - c. 24 AD) we learn that it was a very fast-flowing river, partially karstic.[4] This may have suggested its possibly temporary and only apparent death, which did not prevent it from continuing to flow towards its desired destination underground. A very similar metamorphosis, but this time into a spring, had befallen his Thisbe, who also lived in Cilicia – so narrates the so-called Pseudo-Clement in his Recognitiones (first half of the third century AD): "They [the pagans] say . . . that

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[4] Strabo *Geographia* 12.2.4: "[T]he Pyramus, a navigable river with its sources in the middle of the plain, flows through Cataonia. There is a notable pit in the earth through which one can see the water as it runs into a long hidden passage underground and then rises to the surface.".

Thysbe in Cilicia was dissolved into a fountain; and Pyramus, at the same place, into a river" (10.26; trans. D.M. Riddle).[5] This story is not very different from that of another thwarted love, also recounted in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (5.572-641) and by a great number of poets, from Hesiod to Keats, from Vergil to Montale:[6] the young Alphaeus falls in love with the nymph Arethusa and she, in order to escape his attentions, is turned into a spring on the little island of Ortigia, the heart of the city of Syracuse in Sicily. But Alphaeus in turn becomes a river which flows through the plain of Olympia in the Peloponnese and then crosses the Ionian Sea to rejoin its beloved. Thisbe becomes a river also in the legend reported in Himerius' (c. 315 - c. 386.) Speech 1.11 (fourth century AD), but his story takes place in mainland Greece, perhaps in Boeotia, and the lover is the river Asopos:

> The river [Asopus] was in love with Thisbe, who lived nearby, and the same impulse [i. e. the love of rivers for the sea, which drives them to pour into it] turned the maiden into a river and preserved the couple's love uniting the flowing waters of the beloved and her spouse.[7]

Asopus' love for a girl is mentioned by Ovid also in *Amores* 3.6, an elegy dedicated "to a river searching for the beloved" (33-4; the Latin title is *Ad amnem dum iter faceret ad amicam*). Here, however, her name is not Thisbe, but Thebe.[8] And it should also be noted that the names of the heroines of Hellenistic love novels sometimes present suggestions of springs, for instance Callirhoe (‘Beautiful Flow’), the protagonist of Chariton’s *Chaereas and Callirhoe* (perhaps first/ second century). Then the rhetorician and philosopher Themistius (317-388) mentions the river Thisbe as the protagonist of a love story similare to that of Arethusa with Alphaeus (*Speech* 11). In his *Dionysiaca*, the late imperial epic poet Nonnus of Panopolis (fifth century) parallels the Alphaeus-Arethusa couple with Pyramus and Thisbe. However, he makes no mention of the ‘death by an error’ motif narrated by Ovid and instead confirms the story’s connection to the ancient Cilicia and the nearby island of Cyprus, one of the traditional locations of the goddess Aphrodite:

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[5] https://web.archive.org/web/20040822 053941/http://compassionatespirit.com/Recognitions/Book-10.htm. (Accessed 10 July 2022).

[6] Hesiod, *Theogonia* 337; Vergil, *Bucolics* 10.1, *Georgics* 4.334, *Aeneis* 3.694; J. Keats, *Endymion* 2.936; Eugenio Montale "L'estate" 8, in *Le occasioni*, see Montale 1998.

[7] Trans. Penella 2007, 148; note especially the idea of the two lovers' merging into one: καὶ τηρεῖ . . . εἰς ταὐτὸν ἄγων τῆς τε ἐρωμένης καὶ τοῦ νυμφίου τὰ ῥεύματα.

[8] So in Ovid's manuscripts and also in Christopher Marlowe's translation, published after 1602; but this could be an early confusion, induced by the setting of the story in Boeotia or the mention of one or more daughters of Asopos, called Thebe, with a clear allusion to the main city of the region. For all other sources on Asopos and Thisbe/Thebe cf. Penella 2007, 149-50n19. Like Thebe, Thisbe is also a common toponym in Boeotia.

> The Nile . . . encounters in his wanderings Alphaeus [who], unlucky in love, . . . seeing himself deviated from his usual sea-path, is carried away in anguish; seeing the lovely Pyramus proceeding with them, Alphaeus exclaims: “Nile, what shall I do if Arethusa disappears? Pyramus, why this haste?[9] To whom have you left your Thisbe? . . . I fear that your Thisbe will become the object of [Zeus’] effusions. Pyramus, consolation of Alphaeus, not so much the rain of Zeus upsets us both as the dart of the foam-born goddess [i. e. Aphrodite]! Follow me, the flame of love guides me as I seek Arethusa of Syracuse, you, Pyramus, seek the traces of your Thisbe.” (6.339-55)

Later on, Nonnus also recalls that Thisbe had been “turned into water with Pyramus, both of the same age and in love with each other” (*Dionysiaca* 12.84-5). Whichever the cause of their separation, the divine will or the maiden’s rejection of her lover, the reunion of the two youths becomes ‘invisible’ insofar as the river currents run underground or through the depths of the sea – from Cilicia to Cyprus, from the Peloponnese to Syracuse – or because they both mingle in the sea. These various aquatic Thisbes or Arethusae, although located in different quadrants of the Mediterranean Sea, nevertheless seem to realise the erotic paradigm provided by Himerius: their metamorphosis into rivers allows the lovers to achieve a permanent and perfect union – that of the rivers’ water into the waves of the sea. It is also possible to argue that such a conception of eros, involving the annihilation and undifferentiation of the lovers, is in its own way analogous to death, an ending which, as we shall notice, is more peculiar to the genre of the novella than to the Hellenistic romance. Perhaps the most characteristic feature of this type of narrative is its 'liquid' conclusion, typically marine and Mediterranean. It also does away with the conditionings from which the tale unravels. On the contrary, in the novel we find a progressive and autonomous development of the personalities of the two lovers who will finally be reunited in the same milieu where their separation took place, or in another very similar one.

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[9] The whole passage seems to echo Strabo’s *Geographia* 12.2.4, because of the speed of the Pyramus current and the association with the Nile.

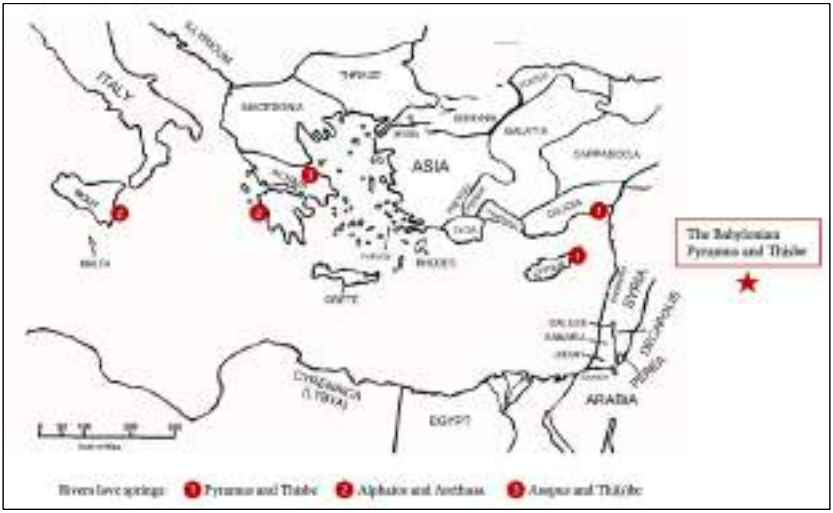
ITALY
THRACE
MACEDONIA
ASIA
GALATIA
CAPPADOCIA
CILICIA
RHODES
CRETE
SYRIA
DECAPOLIS
PEREA
CYRENAICA (LIBYA)
EGYPT
ARABIA
The Babylonian Pyramus and Thisbe
Rivers love springs:
1 Pyramus and Thisbe
2 Alphaios and Arethusa
3

Fig. 1: Pyramus and Thisbe in the Ancient Mediterranean and the Near East.

"Without the towne", into the Wild

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* notoriously offered readers an immense and valuable repertoire of stories, plots, and images during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Translated into English by Arthur Golding in 1567, this collection of epyllia was also a major source of inspiration for Shakespeare, who famously cast the Pyramus and Thisbe story as a hilarious piece of metatheatre, a cameo improvised performance, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – a play contemporary to *Romeo and Juliet*, possibly following hard on its heels. I have already mentioned *Titus Andronicus*, another play whose composition is very close to the "Excellent And Lamentable Tragedie of Romeo and Juliet", which through this Ovidian story re-elaborates a typically Mediterranean aetiological myth concerning the colours of the mulberry fruit. The broad outlines of *Met.* 4.55-166 are well-known: Pyramus and Thisbe love each other but their love is opposed by their two families. They can only communicate through a chink in the wall, and therefore they plan to abscond from their homes, which they perceive as a prison, as well as from the larger prison of the city of Babylon, surrounded by colossal walls:

> Pyramus et Thisbe, iuvenum pulcherrimus alter,
> altera, quas Oriens habuit, praelata puellis,
> contiguas tenuere domos, ubi dicitur altam
> coctilibus muris cinxisse Semiramis urbem.
> notitiam primosque gradus vicinia fecit;
> tempore crevit amor. taedae quoque iure coissent,
> sed vetuere patres: quod non potuere vetare,
> ex aequo captis ardebant mentibus ambo. (Ovidius 2004, 55-62

Here is Golding's 1567 translation:

> Within the towne (of whose huge walks so monstrous high and thicke
> The fame is given Semyramis for making them of bricke)
> Dwelt hard together two yong folke in houses joynde so nere
> That under all one roofe well nie both twaine conveyed were.
> The name of him was Pyramus, and Thisbe calde was she.
> So faire a man in all the East was none alive as he,
> Nor nere a woman maide nor wife in beautie like to hir. (1904, 67-73)

Their houses entrap the young lovers within a confined space that replicates the prison-like city where they live. A wall divides Pyramus and Thisbe and another wall, "monstrous high and thicke", encloses all within Babylon. In order to escape their own prison-like houses, the lovers must also escape from the larger prison that pens in parents and children alike. Broadly speaking, this will also characterise modern retellings of the story up to and including Shakespeare: the city is a closed space which qualifies and gives sense and meaning to those who are part of it. As observed by

Conn Liebler (2003, 306), the concept of the self-sufficient city is an ancient ideal, which the early modern age strongly re-proposes:

> The idea(l) of the walled city, self-contained and carefully managed, and of its microcosmic analogue, the family compound (similarly walled, self-contained, and carefully managed), occurs widely throughout late medieval and early modern writings, and has been well documented.

This is true even when the city becomes the opposite of a well-organised microcosm and its system degenerates into one hosting institutionalised violence (Conn Liebler, 305 and *passim*; Bigliazzi 2016). However, as negative as this social conditioning of the city may be, unlike Pyramus and Thisbe Romeo and Juliet do not attempt to direct their steps "without the towne", but Romeo alone is forced to do so. The two Veronese lovers try to evade the obligations established by the city, from family antagonisms to fathers' potestas over their daughters, yet not the city and its walls – they try to elude the city's rules without escaping them, starting with the regular, albeit secret, marriage officiated by a religious man. And even the fortuitous elements that determine the decisive turning point belong to the city space: the unplanned killing of Tybalt and the fatal error caused by the lack of communication between the two civic spaces of Verona and Mantua. Ovid's myth becomes quite different in Da Porto's novella, where there is no room for the wilderness where Pyramus and Thisbe's deaths occur, and the tragedy takes place entirely within the no less dangerous space of town. On the contrary, in his novella about "Mariotto and Ganozza" Masuccio Salernitano keeps closer to the Ovidian model by introducing a diversion to Alexandria: not a wild space but still a distant and exotic place and a land of infidels. While in Da Porto the obstacle to communication between Verona and Mantua, i.e. the plague, is typical of urban agglomerations, in Masuccio the misunderstanding which will prove fatal for the two lovers is mainly due to the Mediterranean sea, with the mishaps of navigation and the greed of the merchants who sail it. And yet, the sense of a wild area as the locus of tragedy in the texts derived from Da Porto lingers in the memory of authors and audiences alike as a potential antimodel in respect to the town as the setting of the *peripeteia* of the two lovers. From Babylon, the city surrounded by monstrous walls as a visual memento of social constraints, to Brooke's beautiful Verona, "preferde above the rest / Of Lumbard townes, or at the least compared with the best" (11-12), the city becomes a space of symbolic and social tensions. Division and violence feature in the Romeo and Juliet story in Da Porto and down the whole narrative line reaching Shakespeare, where both come to the fore at the play's very outset in 1.1. Not coincidentally, the wall between the two houses in the Pyramus and Thisbe myth has received much attention· Perhaps one of the most interesting visual representations, because it accurately reproduces some of the

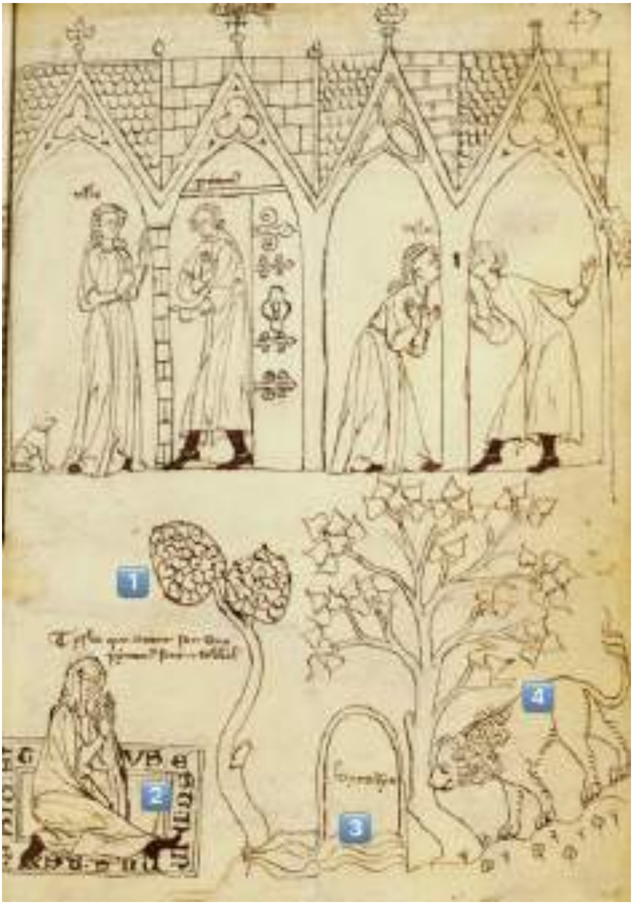

Fig. 2: Paris, B. N. F. Ms. lat. 15158, fol. 47r. (c. 1289).

details in Ovid's narrative, is a medieval manuscript today kept at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (Fig. 2).[10]

In the upper, bipartite band, we can see the two lovers falling in love with each other and their precarious talking through the crack in the wall. In the lower one, some details of Ovid's narrative: (1) the mulberry-tree, (2) Thisbe on Ninus' tomb, (3) the spring, (4) the lion(ess). The latter provides a constellation of iconic elements that are mutually linked and in turn affect several narrative details. In this drawing, for instance, the beast is indisputably a lion, rather than a lioness, as it was in Ovid (97: leaena). A lion will also be present in Caxton's engraving, two centuries later (see Fig. 3): his decision to deviate from the *Metamorphoses* must have been dictated by the desire to ensure maximum iconographic clarity through the beast's mane. Therefore, the variant "This / Leoun in his wildest rage" proposed by John Gower in his Confessio amantis (1398-1400) and then passed on to Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night' Dream* ("lion . . . in wildest rage", 5.1.217), and possibly suggesting the beast's gender also elsewhere (e.g. in the "Lion fierce" of John Thomson's *New Sonet of Pyramus and Thisbe*),[11] should probably be considered as the product of a dialogue between image and text. From a methodological point of view, here, as in other cases, we should not necessarily assume the image's dependence on the word. This constellation of narrative motifs seems to precede the Metamorphoses. To date, the study of models for the Romeo and Juliet story has gone no farther back than the so-called "Story of Pamphilus and Eurydike", preserved in a first-century BC Michigan papyrus edited for the first time in 1981 and then studied by Antonio

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[10] However, there is no lack of interest in modern times as well: between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Symbolist engraver Max Klinger (1857-1920) produced an aquatinct entitled *Pyramus and Thisbe* (1879; source: https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b525025038/f99.item) clearly depicting the initial setting of the story. *Thisbe* (1909; source: https://www.john-william-waterhouse.com/thisbe/), a painting by John William Waterhouse (1849-1917) is instead a belated product of the Pre-Raphaelite Movement.

[11] Published in *A Handful of Plesant Delites* (1584). See Bullough 1957, 409-11. On Gower and Shakespeare's Pyramus and Thisbe in the *Dream*, cf. Taylor 2007.

Stramaglia (2001).[12] In its scanty twenty-seven lines, this papyrus "presents a prose narrative closely related to the famous episode of Pyramus and Thisbe . . . whose version appeared until then fairly isolated within the Greek-Latin literary tradition" (82). This story is supposedly set in Cyprus (col. 1, l. 8), the island mentioned in the tradition that reaches Nonnus. However, if we compare Pamphilus and Eurydike with the Pyramus and Thisbe storyline, we can detect some common elements (literal quotations from the papyrus, essential to the reconstruction of the story, are in italics):

a) there are *openings* (Gr. ὀπαί) – although unspecified at least in the readable portion of the papyrus – which are suggestive of Ovid's "tenui[s] rima" (65, "little chink") in the wall, that allowed the two lovers to communicate secretly;
b) Pamphilus is late at the appointment, after *leaving* his beloved *alone*;
c) not finding her and seeing her *clothing* (which we may presume to be blood-stained) as well as a *circular* set of footprints as if she had been chased, Pamphilus presumes that Eurydike has been *eaten by a wild beast.*

The pathetic energy conveyed by the wall is so intense that it can be used for parody – which is what happens in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where it becomes an unusual stage property in 3.1 207-16:[13]

> QUINCE Ay; or else one must come in with a bush of thorns and a lanthorn, and say he comes to disfigure, or to present, the person of Moonshine. Then, there is another thing: we must have a wall in the great chamber; for Pyramus and Thisby says the story, did talk through the chink of a wall.
> SNOUT You can never bring in a wall. What say you, Bottom?
> BOTTOM Some man or other must present Wall: and let him have some plaster, or some loam, or some rough-cast about him, to signify wall; and let him hold his fingers thus, and through that cranny shall Pyramus and Thisby whisper.

But let us return to Ovid's Pyramus and Thisbe. Their story

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[12] Stramaglia also provides a full list of bibliographic references about this fragment.

[13] All quotations from Shakespeare refer to the 2016 edition.

develops in stages which will interestingly be replicated in Da Porto's novella, despite the change of scenery:
a) 81-92: the lovers promise each other to meet at night under the mulberry tree next to Ninus's grave; here are Ovid:

> neue sit errandum lato spatiantibus aruo,
> conueniant ad busta Nini lateantque sub umbra
> arboris: arbor ibi niueis uberrima pomis,
> ardua morus, erat, gelido contermina fonti. (2004, 87-90)

and Golding's translation:

> They did agree at Ninus Tumb to meete without the towne.
> And tarie underneath a tree that by the same did grow
> Which was a faire high Mulberie with fruite as white as snow
> Hard by a coole and trickling spring. (1904, 108-11)

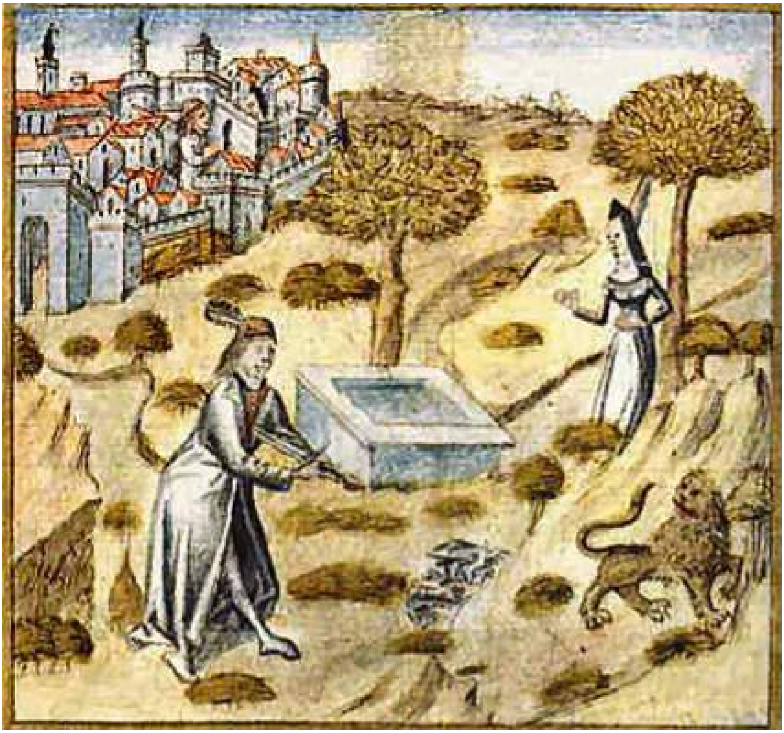

Fig. 3. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* trans. and printed by W. Caxton (ca. 1480).

These visual details will recur again in Renaissance iconographic renditions of this story. For instance, the woodcut illustrating the *Metamorphoses* translated and printed by William Caxton (ca. 1480) shows the city, the fountain, the tree and the lion, however in a daylight setting (see Fig. 3); while an engraving by Urs Graf (ca. 1506-1507, Fig. 4) displays a moonlit scene with an epigraph in Hebrew, presumably on the tomb of Ninus, recalling the eastern source of the story. It restores a mythical dimension that, although following Ovid's narrative, predates it.

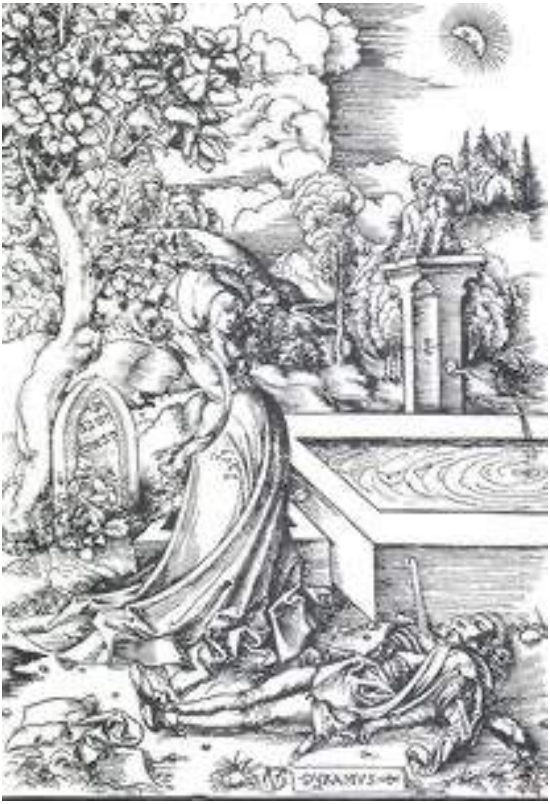

Fig. 4. Urs Graf, *Pyramus and Thisbe* (1506-1507).

These images present the same scenario with only slight differences: the "coole spring" and the mulberries which are at first "as white as snow" and then will take on the same colour as the blood of the two lovers: snowy white flesh, freshly shed red blood, and coagulated black blood. This is a Mediterranean mythical paradigm passed down from Babylon to the Rome 'invented' by Shakespeare in his *Titus Andronicus*, composed just a few years before *Romeo and Juliet*. The symbolism of white ranges from the smoothness and purity of flesh, to feminine delicacy, to erotic attractiveness; red suggests a shift to ideas of gruesome violence, whose first effect is the blood springing from a wound in the flesh; black is the clotted blood, the colour of the violence that has been fully perpetrated, the blood that carries within itself the endless memory of violence. As already mentioned, the motif is ancient; thus, for example, it can be found in Sophocles' *The Prophets or Polyidue*, frg. 395:

> First you will see a crop in flower, all white;
> then a round mulberry that has turned into red;
> lastly old age of Egyptian blackness takes it over.
> (Sophocles 1996)

Ovid ensures the survival of the metamorphic motif until the late Middle Ages; it is also taken up by Dante in the *Purgatorio*:

> Come al nome di Tisbe aperse il ciglio
> Piramo in su la morte, e riguardolla,
> allor che 'l gelso diventò vermiglio. (27.37-9)
>
> [As at the name of Thisbe, though on the point of death, /
> Pyramus raised his lids and gazed at her, / that time the mulberry
> turned red (Dante 2003)][14]

Yet the motif is missing in Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris*, written in 1361-1362, despite the fact that the author amplifies the narrative of this part of the story:

> [Tisbe] nomen invocavit Pyrami oravitque ut Tisbem suam saltem morientem aspiceret, et exeuntem expectaret animam, ut invicem in quascunque sedes incederent. Mirum dictu! Sensit morientis deficiens intellectus amate virginis nomen, nec extremum negare

[14] Dante and then Boccaccio pick up *Met.* 4.143-4 "Pyrame, responde! tua te, carissime, Thisbe / nominat . . . ad nomen Thisbes oculos iam morte grauatos / Pyramus erexit" (Golding: "Make aunswere, O my Pyramus, it is thy Thisb . . . He earing Thisbes name, / Lift up his dying eyes etc."; 1904, 183-6).

> postulatum passus, oculos in morte gravatos aperuit, et invocantem aspexit. (9-10)
>
> [She called out the name of Pyramus and begged him to look upon his Thisbe at least in death and to wait for her soul as it departed her body, so that they could go together to wherever might be their resting-place. Wonderful to relate, the dying Pyramus still heard the name of his beloved. Unable to deny her last wish, he opened his eyes and looked upon the woman who was calling him. (Boccaccio 2001, 58-9)][15]

Thus purged of its mythological component, the story is brought back to a purely human sphere, and the narrative itself is, so to speak, 'secularised'. We could claim that Boccaccio delivers to humanistic literature a historicised figure, as will later be the case with the Montecchi and Capuleti in Da Porto's novella. As noted by Kolsky:

> In spite of the poetical source, Boccaccio attempts to create an illusion of historicity by abandoning all reference to the metamorphic aspects of the Ovidian version . . . Boccaccio creates the illusion of Thisbe as a historical figure by having the narrator state at the beginning of the chapter that he had been unable to find the names of Thisbe's parents[16] (a procedure similar to that employed in the more historical biographies). (2003, 36)

The performance of a *Pyramus and Thisbe* play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, although obviously selective, will privilege precisely this scene, a parody (or incunabulum?) of the analoguous scene in Romeo and Juliet:

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[15] This is the first complete translation printed in England. On the contrary, on the Continent it was repeatedly printed between 1473 and 1539 and had many translations into Dutch, French, German, Italian and Spanish until 1596 (see Boccaccio 2001, 505-7). As remarked by Armstrong, in English early modern culture, "access to Boccaccio's [minor] writings, both 'fictional' and 'non-fictional,' was limited to those people who could read Latin, French, or Italian, which until the mid-sixteenth century at least meant the elite and the professional classes. This is a remarkably restricted picture in comparison to other countries" (2013, 164). The absence of the mulberry tree in Boccaccio makes it unlikely that Dante may be a source of Boccaccio (see Rodríguez-Mesa 2020, 333n6).

[16] "Although we have not learned from our ancient sources who her parents were, etc." (Boccaccio 2001, 54-5).

FLUTE *[as Thisbe]* Asleep, my love?
What, dead, my dove?
O Pyramus, arise,
Speak, speak. Quite dumb?
Dead, dead. A tomb
Must cover thy sweet eyes.
These lily lips,
This cherry nose,
These yellow cowslip cheeks,
Are gone, are gone;
Lovers, make moan;
His eyes were green as leeks.
O Sisters Three,
Come, come to me,
With hands as pale as milk;
Lay them in gore,
Since you have shore
With shears his thread of silk.
Tongue, not a word.
Come, trusty sword;
Come, blade, my breast imbrue.
[She stabs herself]
And farewell, friends;
Thus Thisby ends;
Adieu, adieu, adieu. *[She dies]* (5.1.307-30)

Chaucer's choice in his *Legend of Thisbe*[17] is even more radical: here, despite declaring his Ovidian source ("Naso saith thus", 20 = 720), instead of the mulberry-tree he speaks of a generic "tree" (80 = 780), hence the motif of the metamorphosis is missing, as is the scene of the last exchange of glances between the two lovers (which suggests Chaucer's autonomy from Boccaccio's *De mulieribus*). This very short thread relating to a natural metamorphosis clearly shows how the selection of motifs nevertheless fails to obliterate the discarded ones, which in fact help us decode the reasons behind the new choice.[18]

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[17] *The Legend of Good Women*, probably composed between 1385 and 1386, 706-923 (see Chaucer 1900, and cf. Spisak 1984).

[18] The mulberry tree recurs, obviously without any metamorphic impli-

As opposed to the prison-house and the prison-city, the wilderness in which Pyramus and Thisbe seek to fulfill their desire features a series of details we have already noticed with regard to the Paris Ms. mentioned above (Fig. 2): (1) a mulberry tree and its fruits; (2) Ninus' tomb; (3) a fountain or stream; and, obviously, (4) the lion(ess). To these must be added the moon, necessary for Thisbe to be able to see the beast:

> quam procul ad lunae radios Babylonia Thisbe
> vidit et obscurum timido pede fugit in antrum.
> (Ovidius 2004, 4.99-100)
>
> . . . Whome Thisbe spying furst
> A farre by moonelight, thereupon with fearful! steppes gan flie,
> And in a darke and yrkesome cave did hide hirselfe thereby.
> (Golding 1904, 123-5)

While the moonlight is absent in *Romeo and Juliet*, as their suicide takes place within Capulet's monument, it is famously foregrounded in the Pyramus and Thisbe scene in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where a figure "with a bush of thorns / and a lanthorn" should "com[e] to disfigure, or to present, the person of Moonshine" (3.1.59-60). It is also mentioned in *Titus Andronicus*, where dead Bassianus's paleness is compared to the moon's pallid ray that illuminates Pyramus soaked in Thisbe's blood: "So pale did shine the moon on Pyramus / When he by night lay bathed in maiden blood" (2.3 231-2)[19]

Here is how the story continues:

b) 93-104: Thisbe temporarily remains alone, and this involves Pyramus' responsibility; an unforeseen event seems to produce evidence of her death;
c) 105-27: at his arrival, Pyramus gathers from this evidence that she is dead and kills himself;
d) 128-63: she returns, discovers the body of her beloved, and commits suicide;

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cation, in the King James version of 2 *Samuel* 5.

[19] Cf. the "blood-drinking pit" in the same play (2.3 224) and Ovid's *madefactaque sanguine radix* (4.126: "the root soaked up with blood"), while Ovid's *cruentum solum* (4.133-4: "the ground covered with blood") is echoed by the brutally violent atmosphere of the whole drama.

e) 164-6: the gods and the parents grieve over their deaths are deeply moved by the tragic event; the gods will perpetuate the mulberry metamorphosis: the white fruits are truned blood red (125-7) and finally black (165-6); the parents will immortalise the memory of the two lovers, whose ashes will be indissolubly mingled together *una . . . in urna* (166; "in a single urn"): this will be a *monimentum* (161; "memorial shrine") no less than the mulberries *gemini monimenta cruoris* (161; "memorials of their twinned blood").

The two lovers' decision to escape to the world outside the city proves fatal: venturing into the wilderness exposes them to risks unknown to the civilised space of the city, dangers which are here materialised by the wild beast's attack. Such dangers also encompass the loss of self-control and critical judgment: misled by the sign of Thisbe's death, and perhaps also because he feels guilty for being late, Pyramus makes a hasty and irredeemable choice before having definite proof that the wild animal has killed her.

However, the pattern of this peripeteia does not lack analogues in Hellenistic short narratives, even before the Ovidian epyllium. Thanks to the new, more satisfactory dating of the Michigan papyrus fragment to the late first century BC (Stramaglia 2001, 81-2), the anonymous and fragmentary *Pamphylus and Eurydike* should be ascribed to the second half of the first century at the latest (possibly between 52 and 26 BC, therefore presumably earlier than Ovid's *Metamorphoses*). This is when Parthenius (†14 AD), an author of entertainment literature born at Nicaea – now Iznik, in Turkey, not far from the Sea of Marmara – was active. His very short *Love romances* ('Ερωτικὰ παθήματα, literally 'love sufferings') present various stories that terminate in the suicide either of the male protagonist, who blames himself for having unwillingly caused the death of his beloved (or, in any case, of a girl), or of the female protagonist as a consequence of her lover's death, of which she is in no way responsible. More precisely, I am referring to the following tales of masculine and feminine suicide:

> *Leucone and Cyanippus*: Cyanippus kills his jealous wife by mistaking her for a wild beast (this seems to be a recurring motif) and then kills himself.

> *Anthippe and Cichyrus*: Anthippe hides in a bush with an unnamed young boy with whom she has fallen in love. Cichyrus, the king's son, mistaking her for a wild beast, kills her. As soon as he realises his error, Cychyrus faints, is unhorsed, and dies. Yet nothing is known of Anthippe's anonymous lover's fate.
>
> *Clite and Cyzicus*: Cyzicus dies in fighting the Argonauts and his wife Clite commits suicide.
>
> *Arganthone and Rhesus*: Rhesus dies in the Trojan war and his beloved Arganthone commits suicide.

The two mythemes variously combine under the common sign of love and death, and even if the protagonists are not lovers, as in the case of Anthippe and Cichyrus, their story may end up being listed among the Greek sources of Ovid's treatment of the Pyramus and Thisbe story. In short, it may be argued that this tragic pattern is not appropriate to the genre of the romance, and may provide the narrative backbone of short tales probably belonging to collections exemplifying the sublimation of various kinds of tragic violence: unintentional violence (Cyanippus, Cichyrus) and social or war violence (Pyramus and Thisbe, and Arghantone and Rhesus, respectively). On the contrary, the Hellenistic romances often make use of the apparent death device in order to set off the action (as in Chariton's *Chaereas and Callirhoe*), trigger meaningful turns (as in the romances by Xenophon of Ephesus and Antonius Diogenes), or simply enrich the plot by interpolating unexpected events (as in Iamblichus' *Babylonian Tales*).[20] This pattern intrinsically belongs to the novella rather than to the romance tradition, and it could not be otherwise, given the typically 'comic' structure of romances with their flair for happy endings in which, in Hegelian terms, the fantastic undergoes "the necessary correction" through the reunion of the lovers and their full social recognition on the community's part.[21]

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[20] A discussion of these narratives is offered in Avezzù 2016.

[21] It is the formula used by Hegel in his *Aesthetics* about the genre of romance: "We see how the fantastic must therefore undergo the necessary correction (*die nötige Korrektion*)" (1955, 2.2.3.2.c; my translation).

A Very Short Coda

As regards the survival of mythical motifs, and the ways in which they often unexpectedly crop up in popular culture, we can smile at the title of a story for seven-year-olds (!), *The Escape of Pyramus and Thisbe* (Fig. 5), which is apparently indebted to the version suggested by Grimal;[22] or at the seducing invitation of a 1907 song by Harris and Robinson, "Wait For Me By the Mulberry Tree": the cover of the score shows (Fig. 6) a night landscape with moon, river, mulberry tree, and a Whartonian Thisbe waiting for her modern Pyramus.

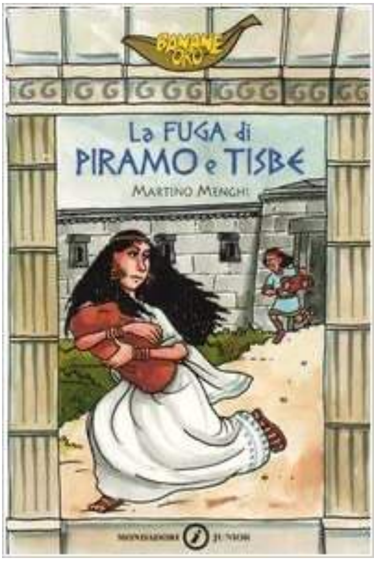
BANANE ORO
La FUGA di
PIRAMO e TISBE
MARTINO MENGHI
MONDADORI JUNIOR

Fig. 5. Martino Menghi, *La fuga di Piramo e Tisbe*, Milano: Mondadori 2006.

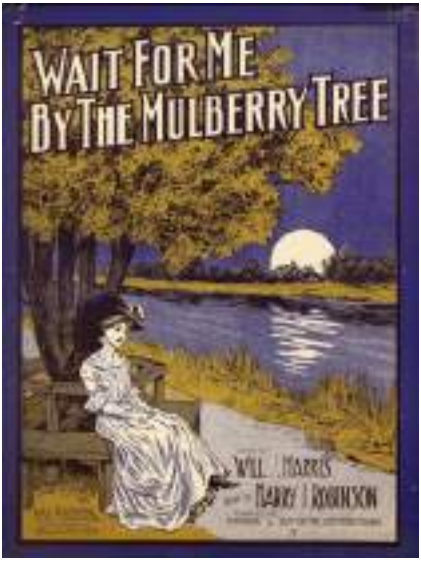
WAIT FOR ME
BY THE MULBERRY TREE
WILL J. HARRIS
HARRY I. ROBINSON

Fig. 6. *Wait For Me By The Mulberry Tree*, words by W.J. Harris and music by H.I.. Robinson, 1907.

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[22] Cf *supra*, n3.

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2

Reimagining Friar Laurence: from Circum-Mediterranean Novellas to the Shakespearean Stage

Silvia Silvestri

Abstract

This essay aims at shedding light on the circum-Mediterranean reshaping of Friar Laurence, a representative of the Franciscan order whose figure famously migrated into Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* via Arthur Brooke's *Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet* (1562), Pierre Boaistuau's *Histoires Tragiques* (1559), Matteo Bandello's *Romeo e Giulietta* (1554), and Luigi Da Porto's *Historia de due nobili amanti* (1530 ca.). Largely bearing upon recent debates on source study, specifically on the reconceptualisation of linear transmission as a dynamic process of intercultural, interdiscursive, and contextual influence, the essay re-examines Shakespeare's portrayal of the friar in view of the stratified narrative renditions present in *Romeo and Juliet*'s source chain, situating its cross-cultural transformation within the historical, discursive, and literary framework of the early-sixteenth-century Mediterranean region. Such palimpsestic readings are analysed in the light of the authors' biographies and cross-referenced with a relevant set of "'imported' foreign practices and 'translated' discourses" (Vitkus 2003, 13) that came to be intertwined with the Romeo and Juliet story during its circum-Mediterranean migration. The aim is to identify the different stages of Friar Laurence's transformation from Da Porto's self-serving hypocrite to Brooke's ambivalent helper, shedding light on how, why, and under what circumstances such variations took place.

Keywords: *Romeo and Juliet*; Friar Laurence; source studies; intertextuality; novellas

Bearing upon recent methodological and theoretical reorientations in source studies, specifically on the reconceptualisation of linear transmission as a dynamic process of intercultural, interdiscursive, and contextual influence (cf. Lynch 1998; Clare 2014; Britton and Walter 2018; Bigliazzi 2018; Drakakis 2021), this essay explores the web of intertextual, intercultural, and interdiscursive influences at the basis of *Romeo and Juliet*, focusing in particular on the ambiguous characterisation of Friar Laurence, a Franciscan religious whose figure famously migrated into Shakespeare's play via Arthur Brooke's *Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet* (1562), Pierre Boaistuau's *Histoires Tragiques* (1559), Matteo Bandello's *Romeo e Giulietta* (1554), and Luigi Da Porto's *Historia de due nobili amanti* (1530 ca.). Critical discourse has often credited Shakespeare with the redefinition of this character, allegedly achieved through the elimination of "the polemical subtext that inflects all of Laurence's previous portraits" (Salter 2008, 67). According to these readings, Shakespeare's religious "inhabits and redirects the stereotypes of the lecherous and politically motivated friar" (Woods 2013, 115) prevalent in early modern culture, providing an "undersong counselling temperance and reason" (Blakemore Evans 2003, 16) to the chaos of passions that dominates the play. He has thus been framed as "benevolent and civic-minded" (Matusiak 2014, 211), his conduct "blameless" (Weis 2012, 46). These benign interpretations, nevertheless, have not gone unchallenged. Already in 1958, Robert Stevenson called attention to Shakespeare's "extremely unsatisfactory" and "unchurchly" depiction of Laurence, deeming him an unfit moral guide (Stevenson 1958, 36, 42). More recent scholarship has further elaborated on this point, bringing to the fore the friar's ill-concealed political ambition (Brenner 1980), his problematic dramatic function (Bryant 1993) and "fallibly human" nature (Blakemore Evans 2003, 25). In an attempt to reconcile such contradictory stances, Kenneth Colston has proposed to link Laurence's "duplicity" to his preoccupation with "the good of souls brought to his care" (Colston 2015, 20): a selfless concern that, he maintains, would compensate for his transgressive behaviour and questionable decisions. New trends in source study bring another possibility to the table: could the reasons for Laurence's ambiguity be sought in the stratified "story-line" Shakespeare inherited rather than in his later "treatment of the character" (Blakemore Evans 2003, 23)? In other words: was the friar's duplicitous role and personality wholly Shakespeare's invention? Or were the seeds of his ambivalence already there, planted during the story's circum-Mediterranean circulation and ready to germinate on the Elizabethan stage, under Shakespeare's care?

To tackle this issue, in what follows I will examine the cross-cultural reshaping of Friar Laurence, comparing selected extracts of the novella tradition in order to highlight the continuities and subtle variations that mark the character's ambiguous treatment along the lines of his intertextual transmission. A fluid "space of cultural hybridity, liminarity and transformation" (Schülting 2019) defined by "the movement of ideas and religions" (Abulaifa 2003, 13) across different territories, the early modern Mediterranean region[1] created the perfect conditions for the realisation of such exchanges, allowing for the circulation of people and texts as well as "'imported' foreign practices and 'translated' discourses" (Vitkus 2003, 13) that came to be intertwined with the Romeo and Juliet story during its transnational migration. The palimpsestic renditions (cf. Bigliazzi 2018) that resulted from such multilayered interactions will be read in the light of the authors' biographies and cross-referenced with the cultural and interdiscursive material available at the time of each novella's composition. The aim is to identify the different stages of Friar Laurence's transformation from Da Porto's self-serving hypocrite to Brooke's ambivalent helper, shedding light on how, why, and under what circumstances such a transformation took place. The resulting inquiry will help to clarify which textual, cultural, and interdiscursive material inflected the religious portrayals featured in Shakespeare's source chain, ultimately testing the potential of a more dynamic and comprehensive research into the dramatist's working practices and inviting further reflection on the complex, multilayered nature of his source material.

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[1] To quote David Abulaifa, the question of what the Mediterranean region is "does not admit straightforward answers" (2003, 11). For the purposes of this study, I will focus on the early modern "civilizations . . . that have emerged along" the coasts of the Great Sea (Abulaifa 2003: 11), paying attention to the circulation of ideas, discourses, and stories allowed by the cultural and religious encounters between different "Mediterranean countries" (de Sousa 2018, 140), particularly Italy and France.

As is well-known, *Romeo and Juliet*'s principal source has long been identified in Arthur Brooke's *The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet*, a verbose poem in poulter's measure first published in 1562 and reprinted in 1587. If "verbal echoes" of this work resound clearly "throughout the play" (Blakemore Evans 2003, 7), making its genetic relation to Shakespeare rather uncontentious, inner textual symmetries suggest that the playwright was also familiar with William Painter's later version of the same story, harboured in the twenty-fifth novella in the second volume of *Palace of Pleasure* (*Rhomeo and Julietta*, 1567). Vice versa, there is no substantial evidence to confirm Shakespeare's first-hand knowledge of the earlier versions of the tale, elaborated across the Continent throughout the sixteenth century: the third story of Pierre Boaistuau's *Histoires Tragiques* (1559), a French translation on which both Brooke and Painter had based their retellings; Boaistuau's direct source, i.e., the ninth tale in the second volume of Matteo Bandello's *Novelle*, entitled *La sfortunata morte di dui infelicissimi amanti* (1554); and Luigi Da Porto's *Istoria novellamente ritrovata de due nobili amanti* (1530 ca.), which served as a model for Bandello. The latter is also the first version to feature "all the focal points which rendered *Romeo and Juliet* so famous" (Perocco 2018, 42), including the presence of a Franciscan friar who functions as "an indispensable cog" (Weis in Shakespeare 2012, 31) in all subsequent iterations: Friar Laurence.

Presented to Da Porto's readers as Romeo and Giulietta's ally, the religious is a crucial enabler of their ill-fated love. He is a respected citizen in Verona and therefore enjoys the confidence of the lovers and is trusted by their feuding families; he blesses the youths' union in the secrecy of his confessional and keeps in contact with Romeo when he is exiled to Mantua; moreover, being "isperimentatore di molte cose così naturali come magiche" ("experimenter in several natural and supernatural matters", B1*v*),[2] he is also the one who provides Giulietta with the infamous sleeping potion, inadvertently precipitating the events towards catastrophe.[3] The intermediary function he thus fulfils would set him up as "a figure who inspires confidence and trust" (Salter 2008, 65) – a disinterested friend who supports the lovers' relationship up to its extreme consequences. Yet, a closer reading into Da Porto evokes a quite different image of Lorenzo, revealing that his actions are never devoid of self-serving purposes. He shares "tanta stretta amistà con Romeo . . . che la più forse in que' tempi tra due in molti loci non si saria trovata" (B1*v*, "such close friendship with Romeo . . . that it would have been difficult at that time to find two closer friends anywhere"), but such an intimate relationship is the result of a clever calculation on Lorenzo's part: "*gli era convenuto* per forza", the narrative voice underlines, "d'alcun gentiluomo della città fidarsi" (B2*r*, "*it had been in his best interests* to take several of the city's noblemen in his confidence"; my emphasis), for this was the only way to "in bona oppenione del suo volgo restare, e di qualche suo diletto godere" (B1*v*-B2*r*, "remain in the good graces of his flock and indulge in some of his pleasures"; my emphasis). His preoccupation with himself is also the main reason for his involvement with the secret wedding, which he agrees to officiate "perché a Romeo niuna cosa arìa *senza suo gran danno* potuta negare" (B2*r*, "because he could deny Romeo nothing *without bringing serious harm upon himself*"; my emphasis). The prospect of gaining "molto onore" (B2*r*, "much honour") for his role in the possible reconciliation of the two households is also a welcomed side-effect of the plan. By the same token, when a deserted Giulietta threatens suicide to escape her upcoming wedding with the count of Lodrone, Lorenzo offers his assistance because he fears Romeo's retribution and the scandal in which he would be implicated if the affair were disclosed.[4] His *protégés*' well-being is but a means to his own selfish ends.

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[2] Quotations from the Italian text from Da Porto 2022 (page numbers refer to the diplomatic edition); the English translation comes from Prustner 2000.

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[3] The same characteristics are present, though *in nuce*, in the thirty-third novella of Masuccio Salernitano's *Novellino* (1476), a short story which Da Porto is believed to have looked up to for the main themes of his novella. Centered on the unhappy vicissitudes of Mariotto and Giannozza, this story differs from Da Porto's in many crucial respects: it is set in Siena, and not Verona; the lovers bear different names; their families are not at war with one another, and they do not die in each other's arms. Yet its unravelling is aided by a crafty unnamed friar who joins the couple in a clandestine marriage, provides Giannozza with a drug to help her feign her death and avoid an unwanted suitor, and ultimately delivers her from the tomb where she lies. Though not a Franciscan, this religious belongs to a mendicant order (Masuccio labels him as a "frate augustinense", "Augustinian friar", Masuccio 1476) and fulfills the same narrative function which would be assigned to his European successors: he is a go-between who validates and facilitates the lovers' relationship. But, unlike Lorenzo, he has no personal ties with Mariotto and Giannozza: he is but casually asked to officiate the wedding, and he does so only for material gain ("per dare al fatto con opera compimento, corrotto per denari un frate augustiniense . . .", Masuccio 1476; "in order to bring this about, they bribed an Augustinian friar . . .").

The mixture of opportunism and sycophancy that defines the friar is further underlined in the follow-up of the story, when Giulietta awakes from her drug-induced sleep in the dark of the Capulet crypt and finds herself wrapped in an unwelcomed embrace. Tellingly, the first thought that crosses her mind is that Lorenzo has taken advantage of her slumber: "'oimè ove sono? Che mi strigne? Misera me, chi me bascia?" e, credendo che questo frate Lorenzo fusse, gridò 'A questo modo Frate serbate la fede a Romeo? A questo modo mi conducete sicura?'" (D1*v*, "'Alas, where am I? Who is holding me? Wretch that I am, who is kissing me?' and believing friar Lorenzo responsible, she cried: 'is this how you show your loyalty to Romeo, friar? Is this how you intend leading me to safety?"). The misgiving is unfunded – it is her dying lover who is lying next to her – but her doubts are enough to cast another dark shadow over the friar, implying that she believes him capable of sexual misconduct.

A few lines later, a similar lack of trust in the friar's integrity is displayed by the town's watchmen. As soon as they see Lorenzo and his "fidato compagno" (D3*r*, "trusted friend") standing next to the open crypt, they wonder whether they are there to perform "qualche malìa" (D5*r*, "some spell"). When the friar refuses to answer their questions, their chief goes on to observe that "se non che io conosco voi Frate Lorenzo uomo di bona condizione, io direi, che spogliare gli morti foste qui venuti" (D5*v*, "if I did not know you for a man of good standing, friar Lorenzo, I would say you had come here to rob the dead"). Here again, Lorenzo is subtly accused of two serious offences – the practice of necromancy and the desecration of the Capulet grave – but his good name prevents him from being openly charged with such crimes. At the end of the novella his position is partially redeemed, as, crying "dal dolore fino nel core passato, sopra e' morti amanti" (D5*r*, "weeping over the dead lovers from heart-felt grieve"), he contributes to dispelling the families' grudge by recounting their unhappy fate. But even this last deed is neither disinterested nor spontaneous: Lorenzo breaks his oath and confesses only when a complaint issued by "molti frati, i quali male gli voleano" (D6*v*, "many friars who wished him harm") puts his reputation on the line, thereby offering yet another clue to his deceiving nature and unpopularity amongst the members of his own Order. The earliest antecedent to Shakespeare's friar is then an equivocal go-between, a figure of questionable moral integrity who acts mainly for his own benefit.

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[4] "Frate Lorenzo udendo l'animo di costei tale essere, e pensando egli quanto nelle mani di Romeo ancor fosse, il qual senza dubbio nemico gli diverria, se a questo caso non provedesse, alla giovane così disse . . ." (C1*v*, "Frate Lorenzo, hearing her determination and thinking to what extent he was still bound to Romeo who would undoubtedly become his enemy if he did not take care of this matter, spoke thus to the maiden . . .").

This is the legacy Bandello received and fully accepted. In his *sfortunata morte*, the soon-to-be Bishop of Agen does not shy away from controversy: not only does he take up the mixture of opportunism and pent-up lechery that had coloured his source, but he also accentuates some of Lorenzo's most questionable traits, including his self-serving agenda and potential lasciviousness. This is particularly evident in the character's presentation, which Bandello alters by expanding the narrator's commentary on the friar's true motives: "voleva il buon frate mantenersi in buona opinione del volgo, ed anche goder di quei diletti che gli capevano nella mente, si sforzava far i fatti suoi più cautamente che poteva, e per ogni caso che potesse occorrere, cercava sempre appoggiarsi ad alcuna persona nobile e di riputazione" (49*r*, "the good friar wished to remain in the good graces of the common people while still indulging in his chosen pursuits, he made every effort to go about his business as discreetly as possible, always seeking the support of some esteemed noble person").[5] Acting perfectly in character, a few lines later Lorenzo agrees to assist Romeo and Giulietta both because he is in no position to deny the boy any favour,[6] and because he hopes to "acquistarsi di più in più la grazia del signor Bartolomeo" (49*r*, "ingratiat[e] himself even more with Lord Bartolomeo") by playing a role in the appeasement of the Montague-Capulet feud. The lovers' happiness and the wider civic good their marriage could do are again merely collateral to his personal gain, which is all that really counts for him.

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[5] Quotations are from Bandello 2022; the English translation is once again from Prustner.

Further developing the line initiated by Da Porto, Bandello aggravates the circumstances of Giulietta's awakening in the crypt. The girl regains conscience "sentendosi baciare" ("feeling herself kissed") and wonders whether "il frate venuto per levarla, o averla a portar in camera, la tenesse in braccio e, incitato dal concupiscibile appetito, la baciasse" (61*r*, "the friar, come to wake her up or take her to the room, was holding her in his arms and kissing her, excited by his concupiscible passions"). The accusation is again debunked in the follow-up of the story, but the link thus established between the friar's assumed misconduct and the desire aroused by the contact with Giulietta's body worsens our impression of Lorenzo, bringing him closer – at least in the reader's imagination – to the lecherous priests that crowd the pages of Renaissance novellas. We shall return to this point, but, for the time being, let us just remark that Bandello follows Da Porto quite closely in the characterisation of the Franciscan, occasionally sharpening the disparaging portrait found in his source to foreground the friar's ambiguity and untrustworthiness. At the same time, Bandello curiously expunges all references to Lorenzo's possible necromantic practices and troubling last confession, two elements that resurface, albeit with different connotations, in Boaistuau's *Histoires Tragiques.*

The frontispiece frames such stories as "extraites des oeuvres italiennes de Bandel" ("taken from the Italian works of Bandello"),[7] who, at that time, enjoyed a significant reputation in France both as a writer and the *ad interim* Bishop of Agen (1550-1555). Boaistuau likely meant to exploit this popularity to recover from the debacle of his edition of the *Heptameron*, published under the title of *Histoires des amans fortunez* in 1558 and immediately suppressed on account of his invasive textual manipulations (see Virtue 1998). Apart from a chance for public redemption, the *Novelle* might have caught Boaistuau's attention for "the strangeness of the intrigue and the horror of the conclusion",[8] two elements that served well the narration of the *miseria homini* that, around those years, was at the core of Boaistuau's production.[9] Inner textual crosschecks, however, cannot rule out the possibility that the French author knew Da Porto's earlier version as well, from which he might have borrowed "many a detail" (Sturiel 1918, 8; cf. Moore 1929) expunged in Bandello. The issue remains contentious due to the vagueness and possible accidentality of the symmetries singled out to support it.[10] That said, some of the passages related to the friar's storyline – namely the sequences concerning the finding of the lovers' corpses and the last public disclosure of their affair – offer an interesting standpoint from which to look at this question.

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[6] "A quello non poteva cosa veruna negare" (49*r*, "he could deny him nothing").

[7] Quotations are from Boaistuau 2022; the English translations is from Prustner 2000.

Swerving from the Italian line, Boaistuau fleshes out a rather sympathetic friar figure in his adaptation, stripping Lorenzo (or better, Laurent) of the moral ambiguity he had been burdened with. The 'Frenched' Franciscan is still a "Docteur en Théologie, merveilleusement bien versé en Philosophie, et grand scrutateur des secrets de nature" (49*v*, "Doctor of Theology, wondrously versed in Philosophy and a great investigator of the secrets of nature"), but it is his mild temperament, "sa prud'homie et bonté" (49*v*, "his integrity and goodness") rather than his political cunning that have so won him the heart of the citizens of Verona:

> Il les oyait presque tous en confession, et n'y avait celui depuis les petits jusques aux grands, qui ne le révérât et aimât, et même le plus souvent par sa grande prudence, était quelquefois appelé aux plus

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[8] Sturiel 1918, 6. See also Menetti 2005, 59 on the noir and grotesque qualities of the *Novelle*.

[9] The reference here is to both his *Théâtre du Monde* (1558) and the collection of the *Histoires Prodigieuses* (1561). See for instance Ménager 2021 and Lestringant 2021.

[10] On the topic, see Carr 1977, 33; Sturiel 1918, 8-9; Marfè 2015, 54.

> étroits affaires des seigneurs de la ville. . . . Le jeune Roméo (comme avons jà dit) dès son jeune âge avait toujours eu je ne sais quelle particulière amitié avecques frère Laurent, et lui communiquait ses secrets. (49*v*-50*r*)
>
> [He heard the confession of almost all of them; and there was no one, young or old, who did not revere and love him; because of his great discretion, he was even summoned as often as not to take part in the most private dealings of the city's lords . . . The young Roméo (as we have already said) had always had from a very tender age I know not what particular friendship with friar Laurens, and told him all his secrets.]

Here Boaistuau reverses the cause-effect relations established by Da Porto and reinforced by Bandello. His Laurent does not act out of a wish for recognition or preferment, nor does he exploit his parishioners' faith for his own ends. On the contrary, he is spontaneously loved, respected, and sought after by the Veronese *élite* for his wisdom and kind disposition. These qualities make it unsurprising for Rhoméo to have chosen him as a spiritual guide and confidant, forging a "particulière amitié" ("particular friendship") that, this time around, is reciprocated without further motives. Their friendship is indeed so close as to resemble a father-son bond, an element Boaistuau introduces by underlining Laurent's paternal affection for Rhoméo[11] and establishing a considerable age difference between them. If the boy is described as young and beautiful in the Italian novellas and a "jeune enfant" (40*v*, "young boy") in Boaistuau, it is only in the latter that the friar is explicitly qualified as "ancien" (49*v*, "aged") or, in a less polite formulation, "sur le bord de la fosse" (68*v*, "close to the grave") – an interpolation that adds to the moral authority and fatherly attitude he displays throughout the narrative.

It is on this positive note that Laurent's characterisation develops. He marries the two lovers because he cares for Rhoméo and hopes to favour civic harmony.[12] When Juliette informs him of the imposed match with Pâris, he quickly resolves to help her "vaincu de pitié, et avisa qu'*il aimait mieux hasarder son honneur*, que de souffrir l'adultère de Pâris avec Juliette" (67*v*, "won over by pity and decided that he would rather risk *his good name* than suffer Pâris's adultery with Juliette"; my emphasis). As the repeated use of the participle "vaincu" ("won") reveals, Laurent has been wrestling with his conscience to send the youths down a righteous path and, even when won by their insistence, he keeps placing their salvation above his reputation. Unlike his predecessors, he is but briefly troubled by fears for himself: "si elle [Juliette] défaillait en quelque chose, tout leur fait serait divulgué, lui diffamé, et Roméo son epoux puni" (67*r*-*v*, "if she failed in something, their whole venture would be disclosed, his reputation compromised and Roméo, her husband, punished"), he thinks to himself, expressing a selfless concern that had never affected Da Porto's or Bandello's friar. Whereas Lorenzo's actions are prompted by his will to avoid retaliation and public shaming, Laurent is prodded only by his own guilty conscience and the love he bears for the young Montague.

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[11] "Je l'ai aussi cher que si je l'avais engendré" (67*v*, "I love him as dearly as if he were my own son").

[12] "Vaincu par sa [de Roméo] pertinacité, et aussi projetant en lui-même que ce mariage serait (peut-être) moyen de réconcilier ces deux lignées"

Such stark differences in characterisation come even more prominently to the fore with regards to Laurent's involvement with magic. At various stages in their narratives, Da Porto, Bandello, and Boaistuau acknowledge the friar's magical expertise, arguably because this aspect is essential to his role in Giulietta/Juliette's pretended death. As noted above, Da Porto goes so far as to indirectly associate the friar with necromancy – a passing accusation Bandello does away with but Boaistuau reinstates, though in a slightly different narrative configuration. While introducing Laurent, the French writer comments on his occultist interests, except that he then points out that he mingles with arcane sciences with moderation, thus preserving his good name (he is "renommé d'avoir intelligence de la Magie et des autres sciences cachées et occultes, ce qui ne diminuait en rien sa réputation, car il n'en abusait point", 49*v*; "famed for having knowledge of Magic and of other hidden and occult sciences. This to no extent detracted from his reputation, for he did not abuse

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(50*r*, "won over by his determination and foreseeing as well that his marriage would perhaps be the means by which these two family lines were reconciled").

his knowledge at all."). Perhaps it is because of this commendable self-restraint that, later on in the *histoire*, the watchmen do not relate their suspicions of necromancy (which they state, nonetheless) to the presence of Laurent and Pierre in the Capulet tomb:

> Les gardes de la ville passaient fortuitement par là auprès, lesquels avisant la clarté en ce tombeau, soupçonnèrent incontinent que c'étaient Nécromanciens, qui avaient ouvert ce sépulcre, pour abuser des corps morts, et s'en aider en leur art. Et curieux de savoir ce qui en était, entrèrent au cercueil, où ils trouvèrent Roméo et Juliette . . . Et lors tous étonnés, cherchèrent tant çà et là, pour surprendre ceux qu'ils pensaient avoir fait le meurtre, qu'ils trouvèrent enfin le beau père frère Laurent, et Pierre, serviteur du défunt Roméo, (qui s'étaient cachés sous un étau). (80*v*)
>
> [The guards of the city happened to be passing nearby and seeing light in the tomb, they immediately suspected that necromancers had opened the tomb to desecrate the corpses and make use of their art. And, curious to learn what was going on, they went down into the vault, where they found Roméo and Juliette . . . And then all astonished, they searched so thoroughly for those they thought had committed the murder that at last they found the good father Friar Laurent and Pierre, servant of the dead Roméo, who had hidden themselves under a stall].

Boaistuau seems to retrieve Da Porto's hint at the hypothetical "malìa" ("spell") performed on the grave, elaborating on the indirect accusation presented in the earlier text: at the sight of the lit crypt the Italian watchmen ask if the friars are there to perform some sort of spell; their French counterpart, instead, explicitly refer to the intrusion of some "Nécromanciens" ("Necromancers") and comment on their possible actions and motives (". . . avaient ouvert ce sépulcre, pour abuser des corps morts, et s'en aider en leur art", 80*v*; ". . . had opened the tomb to desecrate their corpses and make use of their art").[13] But, unlike Da Porto, Boaistuau goes on to free the name of the friar from the allegation: as soon as they spot Rhoméo's and Juliette's corpses and Pierre and Laurent hiding underneath a stall "avec quelques ferrements" (81*r*, "with some iron tools"), the guards apprehend them as suspected murderers. No further allusion to desecrating rites is made in Laurent's presence, as if his character were incompatible with such accusations.

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[13] It is worth remarking that necromancers were extremely popular characters in French and Italian literature and drama throughout the Renaissance, a fact that might account for Boaistuau's passing allusion to them in his *histoire*. For a survey of these characters' presence in sixteenth-century literary production see, for instance, Bettoni 2016.

For seemingly symmetrical reasons, Boaistuau erases all references to Juliet's suspicions about Laurent's conduct, relegating all lustful fancies to the friar's past. "Je dois désormais avoir plus grande appréhension des jugements de Dieu, que lorsque les ardeurs de l'inconsidérée jeunesse bouillonnaient en mon corps" (68*v*, "from now on I must be more fearful of God's judgements than I was when the passions of reckless youth surged within my body"), he confesses right before providing Juliet with the sleeping potion, offering a glimpse of his youthful passions while simultaneously removing them from his present. It is therefore unsurprising that, upon her awakening in the tomb, Juliette simply asks her "beau père" (67*v*, "good father") for reassurance: her trust in him is unflinching, so she never questions his presence in the crypt, nor does she think of a potential misbehaviour on his part.

One last diversion from Bandello – and a decisive one for the Elizabethan line – is Boaistuau's references to Lorenzo's despair, especially with regard to the death of his *protégés*, reminding the reader of Da Porto's presentation of the friar here. Pierre and the friar "menèrent un deuil" ("grieved") at the sight of Rhoméo's corpse and mourned him like "ceux qui ont aimé quelqu'on de parfait amitié" (78*v*, "those who have truly loved a friend") would. The same grief is foregrounded in Laurent's last confession, a sequence again similar to Da Porto's narrative. Bandello had actually cut the friar out of the picture, leaving the disclosure of the affair to the servant Pietro and condensing his confession in just a few lines.[14] Boaistuau, instead, gives the floor back to Laurent, letting him go over the events to clear his name and assuage the Montague-Capulet feud. However, the attitude of the 'Frenched' Franciscan differs starkly from his Italian antecedent. If Lorenzo proves reluctant to speak, and only resolves to do so when cornered by his confreres, Laurent shows up to the trial with "sa barbe blanche toute baignée de grosses larmes" ("his white beard all wet with tears") and, "sans s'émouvoir aucunement pour l'accusation proposée" (81*r*, "unperturbed by the accusation put forward"), he recapitulates the unhappy circumstances to prove his *bona fides*.[15] His testimony occupies "several pages in the story of the French storyteller" (Boudou 2021, 153), who expatiates upon the friar's feelings and motives with the effect of foregrounding his inner struggles and strong moral fibre. Da Porto, on his part, laconically encapsulates the passage in but one short sentence ("et così tutta la passata istoria fu astretto, presenti molti, raccontargli", D7*r*; "thus he was compelled to tell him the whole story before a large gathering"), while Bandello excludes Lorenzo from the sequence all together.

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[14] "Quivi giunti presero i frati e Pietro e, inteso il pietoso caso degli sfortunati amanti, lasciati i frati con buona guardia, condussero Pietro al signor Bartolomeo e gli fecero intendere del modo che trovato l'avevano" (63*v*, "having arrived there, they took the friars and Pietro and, having heard the pitiful case of the unfortunate lovers, they left the friars in good custody and took Pietro before lord Bartolomeo and told him of how they had found him").

Expansions and variations of this length are hardly surprising, given "the very loose conception of translation" (Arnould 2021, 121) that orients the *Histoires Tragiques*. "Boaistuau is a translator of Bandello, but his translation entertains an ambiguous relationship with the *Novelle*" (Grande 2021, 16), so much so that it qualifies as "a fully independent work in which the Italian text serves as nothing but a starting point" (Cavallini 2021, 396), extensively manipulated to fit new narrative and didactic purposes. This adaptive freedom proves crucial in distancing Laurent from the self-centred, scheming religious outlined in the Italian novellas, allowing Boaistuau to turn him into the moral beacon of the story.

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[15] It is worth noting that the *Histoires Tragiques* are conceived at a crucial moment of judicial transition in France, when private written audits were gradually being substituted by orally performed public trials. Anxieties and insecurities related to this change percolated through the time's tragic short stories (Langer 1999) which often incorporate sections of *fictio legis* meant to "unveil all that relates to the 'inner forum' (psychology, motives, passions of the characters) better than secular jurisdictions" (Campangne 2010, 333; see also Pech 2000). This narrative and rhetorical feature can be found in Boaistuau's *Histoire Troisième*, marked by the expansion and spectacularisation of Laurent's trial: after their tragic death, the lovers' corpses are laid down "sur un théatre à la veue de tout le monde" (81*r*, "on a stage for the whole world to see") and it is on that same "théatre" ("stage") that, in the immediate follow up, the friar mounts to be "publiquement interrog[é]" ("publicly questioned") and thus offer a "piteux spectacle" ("sorry spectacle") to the Veronese citizens. This 'staged' confession relies heavily on pathetic tones to serve the moralisation of the character, while also thematising the newly introduced public procedures of French justice systems.

In view of his relation with both Bandello and Boaistuau,[16] it is now interesting to ask how Brooke related to such contradictory religious portrayals. For his part, Painter kept very close to Boaistuau, presenting his readers with a sympathetic and virtuous friar[17] who participates in the lovers' torment and helps them out of paternal love and pity.[18] But what about the first English adaptor, and nearest source to Shakespeare? Did he revive the calculating go-between featured in Da Porto and Bandello or follow the more positive line initiated by Boaistuau? In the light of the unmerciful depiction of friars it encapsulates, the prefatory address of his *Tragical History* would lead us to credit the former option:

[16] In the frontispiece of his *Tragical History*, Brooke credits Bandello as his source, but textual comparisons reveal that the Italian text was actually read through the lens of Boaistuau's version. The reasons for this misdirection are hard to explain. According to Paul Frazer, the inclusion of Bandello in the frontispiece might bespeak Brooke's will to distance his work from the anti-Catholic reputation earned by Boaistuau in England (see Frazer 2020, 13): a possibility that, as we shall see, chimes in well with Arthur's puzzling handling of the character of Friar Laurence.

[17] "This Friar Laurence . . . was an ancient Doctor of Divinity, of the order of the Friars Minors, who besides the happy profession which he had made in study of holy writ, was very skilful in Philosophy, and a great searcher of/nature secrets, and exceeding famous in Magic knowledge, and other hidden and secret sciences, which nothing diminished his reputation, because he did not abuse the same" (Painter 2022, Z7*r*).

[18] "I have known your husband from his cradle, and he hath daily committed unto me the greatest secrets of his conscience, and I have so dearly loved him again, as if he had been mine own son. Wherefore my heart can not abide that any man should do him wrong in that specially wherein my counsel may stand him instead. And for so much as you are his wife, I ought likewise to love you, and seek means to deliver you from the martyrdom and anguish" (Painter 2022, Aa8*r*).

> To this end, good Reader, is this tragical matter written, to describe unto thee a couple of unfortunate lovers, thralling themselves to unhonest desire, neglecting the authority and advice of parents and friends, conferring their principal counsels with drunken gossips, and superstitious friars (the naturally fit instruments of unchastity) attempting all adventures of peril, for the attaining of their wished lust using auricular confession (the key to whoredom, and treason) for furtherance of their purpose . . .[19]

Recovering Bandello's didactic aim and giving it a more heavily moralising spin, Brooke chastises the couple's "unhonest desire" and defiance to parental authority, emphasising the connivance of "superstitious friars" who use confession as a "key to whoredom and treason". Under these premises, the 'Englished' friar seems then to have retained none of the good qualities Boaistuau had attached to him, coming closer to the manipulative and unreliable religious found in the Italian line. Brooke's verses, however, belie such conclusions.

"What we actually find in the poem is a range of complex, sympathetically depicted Catholic characters" (Frazer 2020, 11) whose actions are romanticised and pitied rather than scolded. Friar Laurence is no exception. Far from the corruptor foreshadowed in the pre-text, the "ancient", "barefoot friar" is cast as a wise, compassionate, and authoritative citizen in Verona who sides with the lovers because he truly cares for them. While introducing him to the reader, the narrator labels the Franciscans as "gross unlearned" fools but then goes on to specify that Laurence is not "as the most" (567): he is "doctor of divinity" (568) and practices natural science and magic without making "lewd abuse" (574) of them; he is therefore held in high esteem by his fellow-citizens, who "run" to him to "shrive themselves" (577). As the story unfolds, he guides Romeus and Juliet to the best of his abilities and, after witnessing their tragic death, he mourns them "with piteous plaint". Damping his white beard with "great fast-falling tears" (2828), he recounts their vicissitudes to the Prince of Verona, clearing their name and his own reputation. In short, he seems to display all of Laurent's virtues and none of Lorenzo's vices. Yet it would be hasty to catalogue him as a specular reflection of Boaistuau's friar.

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[19] All quotations are from Brooke 2022.

I agree with Paul Frazer that Brooke gives "more complexity" (2020, 16) to his Franciscan, a many-sidedness that stems from the partial restoration of the ambiguity erased by his French counterpart. Let us consider Laurence's hesitations in marrying Romeus and Juliet. Brooke follows Boaistuau in having Laurence bless their union "[p]art *won* by earnest suit" (607; my emphasis) and part encouraged by the hope that "Of both households' wrath this marriage might appease" (609). But when their circumstances start changing for the worse, he is tossed between desire to help and fear of retribution. In putting such preoccupations in verse, the Elizabethan adaptor swerves from his source, inverting the order of Laurence's worries: "For if she fail in aught, the matter published, / Both she and Romeus were undone, himself eke punished" (2059-60). In the following lines Laurence declares that ". . . he rather would in hazard set his fame" (2063) than risk Juliet's virtue – so Brooke reconnects with Boaistuau here – but the previous reshuffling refocuses the attention on his fears for himself, overshadowing his concern for the lovers.

Another slight but significant discontinuity of this kind occurs a few lines later, when Juliet recovers from the effects of the sleeping potion and, setting eyes on Laurence, asks: "'What, friar Laurence, is it you? Where is my Romeus?'" (2710). In having her marvel at the sight of the religious, Brooke adds questions that are remindful of the ones Bandello's Juliet addresses to her dying Romeo,[20] but he redirects them towards Laurence. He thus finds some sort of middle ground between the girl's disconcerting awakening as described in the Italian novella and the new circumstances presented in the French narrative, namely the elimination of the lovers' last exchange and the anteposition of the friar's entrance in the crypt. As a result, Juliet's reaction comes across as more ambiguous than in Boaistuau, although no reference to Laurence's abuses is reintegrated at this point in the poem. We have to go back a few lines to find an allusion of this sort: possibly elaborating on Boaistuau's hint at Laurent's "ardeurs", Brooke lingers on

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[20] "Oimè, voi siete qui vita mia? Ov'è frate Lorenzo?" ("Alas, are you there my life? Where's friar Laurence?").

> A secret place . . . well sealed round about,
> The mouth of which so close is shut, that none may find it out;
> But room there is to walk, and place to sit and rest,
> Beside a bed to sleep upon, full of soft and trimly drest,
> . . .
> Where he was wont in youth his fair friends to bestow. (1267-70; 1273)

Much like Laurent, the seventy-year-old Laurence has long renounced to such "fair friends", so much so that he uses this room to hide Romeus after Tybalt's killing. Brooke, however, takes evident heed in suggesting that the virtuous friar has not always been deaf to the callings of the flesh – an element barely mentioned in Boaistuau but repeatedly underlined in Bandello.

What do these narrative twists and turns reveal about the circum-Mediterranean evolution of Friar Laurence? For one, that ambivalence became a linchpin of his characterisation well before Shakespeare. As our brief exercise in intertextual reading suggests, the friar is set up as a self-absorbed and duplicitous go-between in Da Porto, and it is in this same guise that he resurfaces in Bandello. The latter's reception in mid-sixteenth-century France marks an interruption in the linear transmission of such characteristics: steering away from his Italian sources, Boaistuau casts his Laurent into the mould of a caring, compassionate, and pious advisor who is only interested in the lovers' happiness and the wider civic reconciliation their union could favour. These traits are then passed down to Painter, while Brooke takes a slightly different route in his earlier adaptation: contradicting what had been implied in his prefatory address, the first English translator (and closest author to Shakespeare) problematises the positive portrayal inherited from Boaistuau by recuperating some of Bandello's remarks and adding new insights into Laurence's youthful indiscretions. The effect is that of darkening the friar's depiction, making him relapse into the ambiguity originally introduced by Da Porto and Bandello.

The possible inputs behind such alterations are manifold and difficult to pin down. "Performed and retold for different audiences, narratives shifted in significance" (Walter 2019, 288), adapting not only to the authors' different ideological programmes but also to the interdiscursive, cultural, and historic material that compounded the story in its transnational migration. As for the earliest Italian depictions of our friar, it is for instance relevant to point out that duplicity and moral abjection are anything but uncommon in the novelistic treatment of this religious man. Scholars have long examined the anticlerical sentiment that informs Medieval and early modern short narratives – a vein of vitriolic criticism that sprang from real-life experiences as much as literary conventions and targeted the very foundations of ordered life: poverty, chastity, and obedience. Capitalising upon the heritage of Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Medieval *facetiae*,[21] European novelists produced "an infinity of texts" hinged on the derision of "'the idleness, lust, gluttony, feathers, slumber, lazy inactivity' and the countless other vices of the clergy" (Niccoli 2005, 19), compiling a rich catalogue of anticlerical invectives that proved especially vicious when aimed at low-ranking churchmen such as priests, monks, and friars. The latter in particular served as the butt of innumerable jokes about avarice, gluttony and lust[22] to which they were believed to be exposed due to their "distinctive socio-professional identity" (Campbell, Gianfrancesco and Tarrant 2018, 205). During the Renaissance, mendicant orders were indeed widely spread and influential, so much so that their support could prove determining for the stability of the local governments. Their members were frequently appointed as confessors of noblemen and thus benefitted from unusual material privileges and political preferment. What is more, friars were not expected to live in the seclusion of their friary. On the contrary, they were encouraged to travel and mingle with the wider Catholic society, preaching and spreading knowledge among their confreres and brethren. These prerogatives allowed them to "inhabit multiple social worlds, moving through them with relative ease" (Campbell, Gianfrancesco and Tarrant 2018, 205) – a form of freedom that, on the other hand, made mendicants an easy prey to wordily corruptions.

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[21] The main reference is of course Poggio Bracciolini's *Liber facetiarum*, a collection of bawdy jokes and anecdotes published around 1476 and subsequently translated into several European languages, French and English included. For more on this, see Hellinga 2014.

[22] For a pan-European survey of such novelistic portrayal see Clements and Gibaldi 1977. On the dissemination of anticlerical *topoi* in the Italian novelistic tradition prior to the Renaissance see Pasquini 2012, 209-27.

With this in mind, we can begin to understand the reasons for the friars' popularity as anticlerical narrative targets. But if during the Middle Ages such attacks remained mostly "a literary device for 'pleasant' and lively representation" (Tateo 1998, 45), a *topos* ingrained in the novelistic genre itself and often devoid of properly polemical subtexts, between the late fifteenth century and the end of the Tridentine Council the anticlerical tradition modified progressively "its specificity and came to be defined in a different way, not only under the pressure of the literary sedimentation of a commonplace but also of a series of concomitant historical events" (Niccoli 2005, 28), first and foremost the spread of the Reformation and the Counter-Reformist reaction to it. The shock waves produced by such pivotal transformations radiated differently through *Romeo and Juliet*'s source chain, varying in intensity according to the timeframe of composition, the wider sociocultural context of the novellas, as well as the authors' individual responses to the turmoil of the age.

Starting from the Italian line of transmission, it is known that Da Porto and Bandello tried their hand at the story in a solidly Catholic society "en route to the restrictions demanded by the Counter-Reformation" (Perocco 2018, 54). Despite a generalised discontent with the Papacy and the ways of the clergy, the Reformation failed to take root on the Peninsula due to the unfavourable conditions determined, *inter alia*, by the influence of the State of the Church and the lack of support of the local *élites*. However, if it is true that most rulers decided to side with the Pope and back up the initiatives of the Tridentine Council and the Inquisition,[23] the fragmented sociopolitical and cultural texture of the early-sixteenth-century Italian states calls for some nuancing. It is for instance interesting to point out that, while generally marginalised and persecuted, Reformist ideas did proliferate among the few philo-Protestant *conventicole*[24] concentrated in Northern commercial cities such as Milan, Venice, Bologna, Lucca, or Vicenza.[25] A province of the Venetian Republic involved in Mediterranean textile trade and therefore open to material and immaterial international exchanges (see Braudel 1953, 392), between the fifteenth and the sixteenth century Vicenza harboured several heterodox circles gathered around noble local families, including the Da Portos. Under the influence of classical readings ranging from Aristotle and Plato to Cicero's *De Officis* and inspired by Lorenzo Valla's philological enterprise, in the years preceding the Reformation "the Da Porto's 'circle' lays more and more often the emphasis on the inner reformation of the faithful, accompanied by the liberty to criticize the corruption of the clergy and the Church, incapable of electing an angelic Pope" (Olivieri 1992, 41). This 'liberty' – understood as the right to intellectual, political, and confessional self-determination – finds expression in original *carmina* centred on Christian virtues and vices and, later on, in prose studies concerned with the individual interpretation of the Bible, the safeguarding of the soul, and the necessity for a wide-ranging spiritual reformation (see Salmistrato 1981-1982). It is in this effervescent milieu – also enriched by the intellectual contribution of the Trissinos – that Luigi Da Porto was born. Little is known about his youth, apart from the fact that, after his parents' untimely death, he was entrusted to the care of his uncle Francesco and grandfather Gabriele, one of the leaders of the family's 'heretic' circle (Olivieri 1992, 42). It does not seem farfetched to assume, then, that the ideas that circulated in this ambience played a role in his intellectual upbringing, possibly motivating the retaliatory (and largely stereotypical) tones that would later inform his portrayal of Lorenzo.

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[23] The matter is of course complex. For a general overview of its historical and cultural implications see for instance Firpo 1993; Benedict, Seidel and Tallon 2013; Firpo 2016.

[24] The term designates small groups of religious dissidents usually gathered around influential courtly personalities – for example, Renate of France in Ferrara or the Gonzagas and the Colonnas in Milan, as well as more selec-

Despite adopting similar strategies in his rewriting of the story,[26] Bandello comes from a very different background. A mendicant friar

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tive intellectual circles born in academic environments. On the subject see Ambrosini 2013.

[25] Olivieri 1992 still represents a point of reference on the Reformist currents in Vicenza. See also the more recent Dalla Pozza 2017.

[26] In this respect, Rozzo (2005), despite acknowledging Bandello's formal rejection of Luther's theses, identifies some thought-provoking points of convergence between Reformist ideals and Bandello's own appraisal of corrupted clergy members.

himself and prospective Bishop of Agen, in the *Novelle* the author navigates "the amphibious dimension of his writing and position" (Menetti 2005, 59), which he achieved thanks to the intercession of his uncle Vincenzo, General Master of the Dominican Order from 1501 to 1506. Over those years, Bandello joined him in a reconnaissance mission among several European friaries with a view to bringing "his unreformed confreres" (Fiorato 1979, 110) under control and restoring a strict observance of the Rule.[27] To call to order the members of St Eustorge, the most ancient Dominican convent in Milan, in 1510 Bandello was even involved in an expedition to the French court of Blois, in which he participated by virtue of his family's reputation as well as his own moral and diplomatic qualities. This longstanding commitment to the Observant cause bespeaks, in Elisabetta Menetti's words, a "spiritual agreement with his stern uncle Vincenzo" (2005, 60), a reformist rigour that resonates with his (failed) attempt to renounce the habit in 1526[28] and the moral decadence of the clergy insistently addressed in the *Novelle*. In many of his stories Bandello adopts indeed emphatically polemical tones to expose the corruption of priests and friars who do not live by the Rule, be they Dominicans or, more often, Franciscans. Several examples of such attacks could be cited,[29] but suffice it here to mention the deceiving preacher don Faustino (2.2), the lecherous friar Filippo (3.6), the ridiculed Franciscans of 4.2, or the dishonest Dominicans in 2.48. Lorenzo's derogatory portrayal is therefore not isolated in the corpus the *Novelle*, where it actually seems to contribute to the thematisation of the broader religious and ethical concerns of a rigorous Observant caught in the midst of the sixteenth-century confessional crisis.

Boaistuau, for his part, engaged with such materials at "a pivotal date in French political and cultural history" (Fiorato 2003, 135). The year 1559 in France marks the end of the Italian Wars, but also the eve of the First French War of Religion (1560). The tensions that fed the conflict, heightened by the spread of the Reformation in the southwest of the kingdom and the related drafting of the French Confession of Faith (1559), advanced in parallel with the work of the Council of Trent (1545-1563), whose direct outcome was the issuing, that same year, of the first Roman Index of Forbidden Books. The loss of all "social, moral, religious beliefs" (Fiorato 2003, 137) implicated in such transformations filtered into the literary and cultural discourse of the time, and Boaistuau's production makes no exception. "It is hard to pin down the religious engagement of this writer" (Grande 2021, 165), for very little remains concerning his life and personal beliefs. His works, on the other hand, are of little help in the task, since they show a tendency to mixing "strict Christian, if not Catholic, orthodoxy with profane-like sensibilities" (Grande 2021, 12). The same indeterminacy reflects into the dedicatory notes that accompany such writings, addressed to prominent Protestant and Catholic figures alike. The case of the *Histoires Tragiques* is rather telling: the first Parisian editions are offered to Matthieu de Mauny, Benedictine Abbot of Noyers, in exchange for an unspecified "courtoisie" ("courtesy"); just a few months later, a second edition of the same work is issued in honour of Elizabeth I, head of the Protestant Church of England.[30] What is more, this ambiguous political and theological standing is not confined to the collection's paratexts. Out of the six tales adapted from Bandello, "the story of Rhoméo and Julliette" is "the most marked by ambiguity": its *sommaire* frames it as an orthodox example of "the greatness of God's works", while the actual narrative pivots on a much more heterodox "relentleness of Fortune against the youth's happiness" (Boudou 2021, 150). The coexistence, on a structural level, of such opposing principles translates into an ethical complexity that "justifies an ambivalence of characters [and] explains the attenuation, in Boaistuau, of some of the traits that characterized certain novellas of Bandello" (Arnould 2003, 99). The friar's portrayal seems to fall into this latter category: the unsympathetic, stock character type sketched in the Italian line "becomes here the irreproachable figure of a venerable religious" (Fiorato 2003, 139), extensively rewritten to fit into the ethical reorientation of the collection and give voice to the moralising intent of the novella (Arnould 2003). As argued by Nancy Virtue, "one of the most obvious changes Boaistuau makes in Bandello's text" is indeed the removal of the strong narratorial presence charged with the didactic commentary on the stories (1998, 42), a variation achieved through the omission of all explicit traces of Bandello's narrator. Far from completely gone, "this voice" still makes itself heard "through the numerous editorial changes Boaistuau made" to the original text (43), among which we may count even the friar's moralising reshaping. In one of Boaistuau's most extensive interpolations – the final trial sequence – the friar is in fact turned into a sort of virtuous, pitiful hero who re-establishes moral and social order by atoning for his sins and bringing all ethical and legal transgressors to justice. Thanks to this alteration, Boaistuau manages then to turn "a tragedy of contrasted and perturbing love" into "a lesson that comforts society and power" (Fiorato 2005, 140) given by a newly moralised *frère* Laurent.

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[27] On the issue of Observance see for example Lodone 2018. On the specific case of Dominicans, see Zarri 2016; on Franciscans, Eibel 2010.

[28] More detailed information about Bandello's biography can be gathered in Fiorato 1979.

[29] Cf. Rozzo 2005 for a more comprehensive survey of Bandello's anticlerical novellas.

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[30] On the characteristics of this edition, which features only minor changes in respect to the Parisian *princeps*, see Bamforth 2018.

As for Brooke, his version comes to light in an equally problematic sociocultural texture. Around 1562, the English state was caught in "political anxieties, primarily concerning its new religion and political regime, and the prospect of returning (once again) to Roman Catholicism" (Frazer 2020, 5). With the 1559 Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity Elizabeth had formally restored England to Protestantism. However, the actual implementation of the new Protestant legislation was hindered by the obstruction of the Catholic bishops in Parliament who, after having gained considerable wealth and power under the Marian rule, refused to acknowledge the supremacy of a Protestant monarch. Between 1559 and 1562 such opponents were gradually substituted with formerly exiled or moderate Protestant bishops (Loades 1992, 159), with a view to providing the English State with a more cooperative episcopate. It is worth noting, nevertheless, that five out of the twenty-five religious included in the 1563 Convocation had actually "continued to serve as priests during the Catholic regime" (Williams 1995, 237), a hint at the "remarkably elastic" (Poole 2019, 89) approach of the Crown to issues of religious (and political) conformity. A much stronger action was taken against the other non-compliant Catholic bodies in the Kingdom, including the Grey

Observant Friars at Greenwich. Dissolved in 1538 under Henry VIII and reinstated seventeen years later by the will of Mary I, the flourishing Franciscan friary in London was again suppressed with the Elizabethan settlement.[31] Several of its members were forced to flee abroad, while others took refuge in Scotland, a neighbouring kingdom that, from 1561, came under the control of Mary Stuart. A Catholic bride of the Dauphin of France, Mary could count on the support of the significant Catholic population concentrated in the Scottish territory, thus posing a threat to the stability of the English Crown that, throughout the 1560s, was further aggravated by the prospect of an imminent match between Elizabeth and the Catholic Archduke of Austria Charles II.[32]

This is the climate in which Brooke worked on his version of the Romeo and Juliet narrative and, consequently, on the characterisation of Friar Laurence. Little evidence remains about Arthur's life up to this point, but the commemorative verses of Thomas Brooke and George Turberville reveal that he died in 1563 – just one year after the publication of the poem – on a mission meant to bring martial aid to the French Huguenots. This information has encouraged generations of critics to engage in a militantly Protestant reading of the *Tragical History*,[33] a practice seemingly validated by the anti-Catholic sentiment discernible in the poem's preface. More recent scholarship has leveraged upon the inconsistency between the disparaging images amassed in the pre-text and the commendable Catholic figures portrayed in the narrative to support a more "theologically nuanced" (Frazer 2020, 20) interpretation of the work, arguing for Brooke's confessional ambivalence rather than downright intolerance. His handling of the main representative of Roman Catholic ethos in the story offers an interesting example of such an attitude: a figure of high moral standing, Friar Laurence sits awkwardly against the superstitious corruptor pre-empted in the preface and the crowd of bawdy mendicants that, at that time, saturated English Protestant discourse. Picking abundantly from the catalogue of friars' failures compiled along the lines of Medieval "academic treatises, literary satires, jestbook fabliaux, and theatrical interludes" (Matusiak 2014, 211), Elizabethan Pro-Reform writers resorted frequently to the conventional image of the lustful, opportunistic mendicant to give voice and body to the corruption of the Church of Rome and bolster the Protestant cause.[34] The literary dissemination of such blameworthy religious characters rested upon the wider opinion English society had of monks and friars, formed during the years that preceded the Henrician dissolution (1540) and still widespread throughout the Elizabethan age. Isolated behind cloistered walls, ordered religious were largely perceived as idle hypocrites who had betrayed their vow to poverty to live off of the benevolence of their patrons and enjoy a wide range of wordily pleasures.

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[31] These events are further analysed in Erler 2013.

[32] For more on these crucial events and transformations see Loades 1992; Williams 1995; Carleton 2001; Chavura 2011.

[33] Examples of this critical stance are offered in Shaheen 1987; Bryant 1993; Pearce 2013; Dahlquist 2016.

Interestingly enough, Brooke would have found a fitting reflection of such a stereotype in Bandello, the only source acknowledged in the *Tragical History*'s frontispiece. Yet, in line with his actual French source, Brooke's Laurence is envisaged as a virtuous and well-intentioned advisor who has fully distanced himself from his dubious past.[35] How to explain this atypical characterisation, especially in the light of the anti-Catholic imagery evoked in the poem's preface? Paul Frazer has recently put forward an interesting proposal: writing at a time of political uncertainty and theological inconsistency, Brooke might have deemed it wise to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds, so to say. Playing up the ambiguity of his text and characters, he incorporated Protestant-friendly anticlerical rhetoric in his *Address* as a sort of red herring, aiming at distracting more fiery Puritan readers from the conciliatory, even pro-Catholic tones adopted in the poem. The choice to follow Boaistuau's more positive depiction of the friar, introducing only minor hiccups in his otherwise virtuous lifepath, might have served this 'deceptive' purpose, allowing Brooke to re-establish ideological neutrality by counterbalancing the anti-Catholic rhetoric exploited in the preface.

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[34] Let us mention, by way of example, the famous case of John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* (1563), a work of Protestant history and martyrology that features numerous mendicants envisaged as hypocritical corruptors: see Fernandes 2020.

[35] Interestingly, the same positive portrayal of the friar resurfaces in a later dramatic rendition of the story, the anonymous Jacobean tragedy R*omeus et Julietta*, composed around 1615 in Latin and modelled upon Brooke. "If he gains his dear bride, pious Juliet, happy in her marriage, that priest will grant them surcease", we read in the chorus. "He is not unschooled (like the common run of priests), but rather a grave and learned minister, a member of the holy Franciscan Order, who knows how to disclose the secrets of abstruse nature. He penetrates the hidden mysteries of the mages, being mighty in that most abstruse art, often revealing amazing things. For there's no disgrace in understanding the profound secrets of the art of magic, if no scurvy swindles are involved. Every kind of learning is lawful and claims its own fine kind of glory. It is lawless abuse that spoils the art, firm ground is put beneath your feet by lawful practise. Romeo is seeking his cell, to him Romeo will expose his wound, revealing the se-

This interpretative knot remains difficult to untie, but the alternative scenario it evokes brings another thought-provoking question to the table: what did Brooke actually mean when, in the closing remarks of that preface, he referred to "the same argument lately set forth on stage *with more commendation* than I can look for (being there much better set for than I have or can do)" (my emphasis)? This play is now lost and no information on its dating, sources, or general development has been found to date. It can only be presumed that it was staged sometime before 1562 (perhaps in 1561, as the LPD[36] proposes) and that it was among the first dramatic variations of the Romeo and Juliet story in England. Hence, an antecedent to Shakespeare's. We have no idea whether it featured a Friar Laurence or, if so, in what fashion it portrayed him. Brooke is the only one who mentions its existence and the confessional and ideological ambiguity displayed in his narrative casts a doubt over his judgement, making any speculation pointless.

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cret to his friend, and store up his advice deep within his mind. Being a man who preens himself himself in that science, he will devise a means of lightening your burden and bring the business to a happy end. Would that the gods would favor this marriage, granting this noble youth his wish, granting this chaste girl her desire! Let the pious priest accomplish chaste things, and may happy fortune return home, let their good faces return to happiness, so that they can celebrate a festive day" (An. 1615).

[36] *Lost Plays Database.*

What can be remarked, however, is that, by the time Shakespeare laid hands on Brooke and Painter, friars had become a popular asset of Elizabethan productions:

> Henslowe's accounts, for instance, show that friars were a regular part of the spectacle at the Rose and Fortune playhouses in the 1590s and early 1600s. In 1598, the Rose's tiring house had in store "iiij freyers gownes and iiij hoodes to them," as well as another "freyers gowne of grey." Strange's Men and later the Admiral's Men wore these costumes in a handful of surviving plays between 1592 and 1602, including "fryer bacon" (possibly Greene's play, but more likely *John of Bordeaux*), three offerings by Marlowe (*The Jew of Malta*, *Doctor Faustus*, *The Massacre at Paris*), the anonymously authored *A Knack to Know a Knave* and *Look About You*, and Munday and Chettle's *The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntington*. But there were others, as Henslowe's notations make clear, possibly even a minor genre now faded from view. (Matusiak 2014, 209)

We are in the dark as to the contents of lost plays, including the one mentioned by Brooke, but most surviving scripts frame friars as agents of all sorts of sins, ranging from greed and hypocrisy (Thomas Heywood's *The Pardoner and the Friar*, John Bale's *Three Laws*) to promiscuity, political intermission (George Peele's *The Troublesome Reign of King John* and *Edward I*, Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* and *The Massacre at Paris*, John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*), and dark magic (Christopher Marlowe's *Faustus*, Robert Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*).[37] It does not seem inappropriate to conclude, then, that the Tudor stage was as unwelcoming a place for Catholic religious as the pages of coeval Puritan writings and European novellas.

It is onto this inhospitable milieu that Shakespeare's Laurence was grafted. Given the popularity of bawdy stage friars in the 1590s, the playwright could well have taken up the stock character outlined in Brooke's preface, a negative avatar his audience was clearly familiar with. "Shakespeare wrote for a commercial theatre that profited from appealing to audience's expectations and desires" (Britton and Walters 2018, 126), so it would have made perfect sense for him to bring another immoral friar on stage. But Shakespeare was not just a follower of trends, of course. He was "a thoughtful and creative actor-playwright" proficient in revising and transforming Elizabethan dramatic models: "Each of Shakespeare's plays is in fact the product of a complex creative negotiation between the materials for its story and the dramatic paradigms governing its stage adaptation, a negotiation in which Shakespeare bends both sources and theatrical forms to his distinctive purpose" (Kay 2018, 159-60). Friar Laurence provides an illuminating example of such contaminations, since his characterisation invokes the paradigm of the early modern theatrical friars while simultaneously trying to upend it[38] – an ambiguity Shakespeare achieved by cleverly reworking on Laurence's narrative precursors.

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[37] For a detailed survey of printed plays, see Berger *et al.* 1998.

Following Brooke (and perhaps also Painter, both based on Boaistuau), Shakespeare portrays the Franciscan as a "reverend holy Friar" (4.2.30)[39] – a chaste, well-intentioned advisor who wants to drag the lovers out of their predicament and restore civic harmony. However, even "virtue itself turns to vice, being misapplied" (2.3.21), as his own actions demonstrate. After a short-lived protest against Romeo's "sudden haste" (2.3.93), Laurence agrees to marry two minors behind their parents' back, using the sacrament of confession as a cover-up. Then, when a deserted Juliet is betrothed to Paris, he elaborates a subterfuge to deceive the Capulets (again) and save her from bigamy, indirectly causing her and Romeo's death. Upon the sight of Paris's and Romeo's corpses in the tomb, he but briefly begs Juliet to flee with him, eventually leaving her to her destiny to try and save himself. He "trembles, sighs, and weeps" (5.3.184) when the guards apprehend him but, given the circumstances, one cannot help but wonder whether he is crying out of pain for the lovers or fear of punishment. Either way, his fame is enough to protect him: despite all his lies and missteps, Prince Escalus pardons him because “we still have known thee for a holy man” (5.3.270).

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[38] To add to Shakespeare's complex engagement with such paradigms, it is interesting to remark that *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* – one of the earliest Shakespearean comedies, set in the same city (and therefore context) as *Romeo and Juliet* and featuring a religious character named Friar Laurence – harbours a neutral representation of mendicants: Silvia meets Eglamour "At Friar Patrick cell, / Where I intend *holy* confession" (Shakespeare 2014: 4.3.44-5, my emphasis); Friar Laurence himself is described by the Duke as a pious man.

[39] All quotations are from Shakespeare 2003.

Interestingly, this is not the only occasion on which doubts about his conduct are dispelled on the strength of his reputation. Right before taking the drug he concocted for her, Juliet’s faith in him wavers and she questions his motives:

> What if it be a poison which the Friar
> Subtly hath ministered to have me dead,
> Lest in this marriage he should be dishonoured,
> Because he married me before to Romeo?
> I fear it is; and yet me thinks it should not,
> For he hath still been tried a holy man. (4.3.24-9)[40]

In Brooke, Painter, and Boaistuau, Juliet does hesitate before drinking the potion, but she never doubts its maker. In having the girl second-guess Laurence’s design, Shakespeare comes paradoxically closer to Da Porto and Bandello, who had Giulietta question the friar’s integrity upon her awakening in the tomb. The imagined reasons for the friar’s misconduct are of course different – lechery in the Italian line, self-serving cunning in Shakespeare – but the three storylines seem to converge towards the idea that the religious cannot be trusted when his interests are on the line.

Together with the poor choices elicited above, this “lurking weakness” (Blakemore Evans 2003, 23) builds a case around Laurence’s ambivalence. “He can be characterized, as is customary, to be the representative of moderation and wisdom. But his stratagems and their aborted results also make it tempting to characterize him as a bungling priest” (Brenner 1980, 48) akin to the ones that, in the 1590s, crowded the Elizabethan stage. Laurence cannot be cast in the mould of the transgressive stage friar nor in that of virtuous moral guide. He interacts with both models but corresponds to neither.

Such a complex depiction testifies to Shakespeare’s creative engagement with the dramatic and discursive conventions of his time, while also foregrounding the "semantic potential" (Bigliazzi 2018, 37) embedded in his sources. The ambiguous characterisation of the friar is a recurrent element in the source chain, taking "different emphasis and connotation depending on the narrative perspective and context" of each retelling (Bigliazzi 2018, 37). Likely prompted by their own beliefs and life experiences, as well as by the broader literary and cultural context of early-sixteenth-century Italy, Da Porto and Bandello fully exploit the satirical possibilities offered by Lorenzo, drawing heavily on novellesque anticlerical rhetoric to sketch him as a selfish hypocrite who embodies the corruption of the Church of Rome. Boaistuau tempers this template under the cloud of an impending civil war, taking a newly pious Laurent to task for bad judgement rather than immorality and ultimately turning him into the voice of justice and rectitude in the story. Painter translates Boaistuau's *histoire* almost word for word, while Brooke revives the friar's equivocal role by introducing derogatory hints at religious misbehaviour in his *Address* and fusing the positive characterisation found in Boaistuau with references to Laurence's lecherous past and political self-interest.

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[40] The accusation is slightly milder in Q1: “What if the Friar should give me this drink / To poison me, for fear I should disclose/Our former marriage? Ah, I wrong him much, / He is a holy and religious man; / I will not entertain so bad a thought” (Shakespeare 2022).

It is by way of such transformations, inflected by the authors' diverging personal, cultural, and contextual situation and interests, that Shakespeare came in contact with the Romeo and Juliet story and, namely, the character of Friar Laurence. The dramatist certainly elaborated on the suggestions offered by his sources, further problematising the friar's personality and function, but the model for Laurence's ambiguous treatment was already there, shaped along the lines of the story's Mediterranean transmission. The acknowledgment of such shared nuclei of significance in the narrative source chain (Bigliazzi 2018) does not belittle Shakespeare's achievements, of course. It rather suggests that his "originality lies in the weave, not in the yarn" (Clare 2014, 265), inviting further reflection on the dynamic processes of cross-cultural, cross-linguistic, and cross-generic transformation that impinged on his source material and, therefore, on the conception of his plays. Far from being "static building blocks" (Lynch 1998, 1), narrative sources are complex, multilayered texts that exist "on a similar plane and in dialogue with other historical and cultural materials" (Loomba 2016, 131) that concur to (re)defining their shape. Their stories were circulated and retold in different forms, languages, and contexts, their characters replicated and remodelled to serve different purposes. Still, they "provide only part of the material with which the playwright works" (Kay 2018, 161). When dramatised and performed before the live audience of a profit-driven Elizabethan playhouse, these narratives came in contact with established patterns of stagecraft and popular dramatic paradigms, to which they responded in terms of both compliance and resistance. The continuous reshaping of the character of Friar Lawrence is a telling example of the possible outcomes of such interrelated processes.

As the ongoing rethinking of source study expands our conceptual and analytical toolbox, it appears all the more interesting to pursue this line of inquiry, with a view to better tracing Shakespeare's indebtedness "to texts and cultural processes" (Britton, Walter 2018, 10) and allowing a new approach to the kaleidoscopic source materials interfused in the crucible of his imagination.

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4

Juliet's Nurse and the Italian *Balia* in the *Novella* and the *Commedia dell'Arte* Traditions

Beatrice Righetti

Abstract

Within the context of Shakespeare source studies, the present essay focuses on Juliet's Nurse and so far under-studied Mediterranean models provided by both the Italian *novella* tradition and the *commedia dell'arte*. Special attention will be paid to the Nurse's language, which has often been defined as exceptional within the Shakespearean canon. Her talkativeness has no equivalent in classical and early modern figures, but the *commedia dell'arte* tradition provides examples of similar female loquacity through the theatergram of the *balia* (wet nurse) as the *innamorata*'s confidant, who prates about earthy topics, such as maidenheads and marriages, joins slanging matches with male characters and is often reprimanded for her loose tongue. In this light, the theatergram of the *balia* is a conduit for a comparison between the Shakespearean Nurse and Italian stock characters.

KEYWORDS: William Shakespeare; *Romeo and Juliet*; source studies; *commedia dell'arte*; wet nurse

Shakespeare source studies have long discussed the main narrative sources of the English playwright, from Brooke's 1562 narrative poem *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet* to Painter's 1567 prose version of the same story likewise based on Boaistuau's French translation of Bandello's *novella* (Muir 1977; Bullough 1966; Belsey 2015; Bigliazzi 2018). As de Sousa has pointed out, "[t]he pervasive presence of the Mediterranean" in Shakespeare consists both of "the array of Mediterranean texts that Shakespeare loved and consulted in writing plays" (2018, 138) and of the social, cultural, religious and economic differences between the countries of the Continent and England which allow the playwright to investigate "unstable borders", unknown spaces and imaginative blanks in his writing. My present aim is to shift the focus onto other so far under-studied Mediterranean models that may be related to the character of Juliet's Nurse with special attention to her language in dramatic situations which see her as a confidant of her mistress and a go-between for the young lovers. To this end, I rely on Clubb's notion of "theatergrams", that is, "interchangeable structural units," such as "characters, situations, actions, speeches, thematic patterns" (2002, 35) typical of *commedia dell'arte* which were constantly modified by theatrical practices until they became "streamlined structures for svelte play-making and elements of high specific density, weighty with significance from previous incarnations" (6). The fluid nature of theatergrams, which are constantly subjected to a process of revision and appropriation, helps us to unveil how a "text carries a web of resonance that can hardly be contained by binary vectors" (Henke and Nicholson 2016, 13) and can highlight why the *commedia dell'arte* tradition with its inter- and transtextual quality proved a pan-European phenomenon.

In the Nurse's case, the "homely little theatergram of the *innamorata*'s abettor" (Clubb 1989, 12) identifies this character as a "balia, old fante, or mezzana" (nurse, old servant, or bawd) who "natter[s] earthily about maidenheads and marriages . . . invites reprimand [and] indulge[s] in slanging matches with insulting boys" who achieved an "unprecedented expressive scope" in the mid-sixteenth century Italian theatre (ibid.). This description underlines two main characteristics which are fundamental in the present study: the "abettor"'s fluidity between the roles of wet nurse and bawd, and her prating talkativeness. Both these characteristics are famously present in the Shakespearean Nurse and thus defined as "a highly original piece of writing" (Everett 1972, 130), "something altogether new both in this play and, in fact, in Shakespeare's output" (Brooke 1968, 92).

Given the Mediterranean focus of the present discussion and the influence of Italian *novellas* on Shakespeare's tragedy, these two characteristics will be tested against the Italian character of the *balia* (nurse) in both the *novella* and the *commedia dell'arte* traditions. As will be seen, a comparison between the language of Shakespeare's Nurse and that of the *balia* of the Italian *novella* tradition elicits echoes of other models rooted in the ancient tradition of the classical *nutrix* in Greek and Latin drama, as well as a particular kind of early modern English wet nurse close to the dramatic figure of the bawd, which were likely known by Shakespeare. However, neither these models nor the *balia* of the Italian *novella* tradition display sufficient linguistic originality to be taken into account as figures in some way comparable to Shakespeare's Nurse, whose verbosity and linguistic "inconsequentiality" (Wells 2015, 308) can instead be spotted in another Italian tradition, that is, the *commedia dell'arte*, and more precisely in the language of the stock figure of the *balia*. As will be shown, the theatergram of the *balia* and its focus on her loquacity shows similarities with Shakespeare's wet nurse, which, if recognised by the Elizabethan audience, may have suggested the Nurse's bawdy talkativeness as a marker of Italianness.

1. Shakespeare, the Italian *Novella* and the "prating noorse"

The Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* is famous for her linguistic exuberance as well as metric complexity to the extent that it is dubious whether she speaks in verse or prose. As Nicholas Brooke noticed long ago, she is "something altogether new both in this play and, in fact, in Shakespeare's output" (1968, 92). Her uncommon prating attitude may derive from her characterisation as a bawd as underlined by Clubb (1989, 12). In Shakespeare's tragedy, Mercutio explicitly refers to Juliet's Nurse as a "bawd" when, in 2.4, she approaches him and Romeo to question the latter about his intention of marrying Juliet. She is greeted first by Romeo as "a sail" (98), usually considered as a reference to her clothing. Then Mercutio picks up the nautical joke started by Romeo and calls the Nurse "a bawd" (124) by playing on the homophonic similitude between 'bawd' and 'board'. The association between the Nurse and the profession of the bawd, traditionally characterised as a conduit of worldly knowledge, has led critics to consider Juliet's Nurse as incomparable to other nurse figures in sixteenth-century drama, which, as I will explain shortly, were generally rather evanescent, vocally restrained *dramatis personae*. On the other hand, Mario DiGangi discusses how the nurse could "function as a bawd" (2001, 165) and indicates as the prime example of this dual role the Nurse of *Romeo and Juliet*, followed by other characters in Italianate plays such as Puttana in Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (1633) (which was deeply influenced by Shakespeare's play). Two female bawds appear in Shakespeare's works: Mistress Overdone in *Measure for Measure* and Mistress

Quickly in both parts of *Henry IV* and *Henry V* (acquiring a more 'respectable' role in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*); however, neither is described as a wet nurse (DiGangi 2011, 165n12).

The conflation of bawd and nurse, however, was already present in George Gascoigne's *Supposes* (performed in 1566 but first printed in 1573),[1] where Balia is called a "baude" by the other characters due to her role as the lovers' go-between ("I called hir baude, and tolde hir that I knew well enoughe howe often she had brought Dulipo to Polynestas bed", 3.5, 217) and is eventually included with the actual bawd of the play in the wider category of those "olde women . . . either péeuishe, or pitifull: either easily enclined to euill, or quickly corrupted with bribes and rewards" (3.3, 214). The merging of these two roles, however, is no English innovation as it depends on the Italian source of Gascoigne's play, that is, Ariosto's *I Suppositi*, where Nutrice, the wet nurse, is called a "puttana vecchia" ("old whore", 3.3, 227) and a "ruffiana" ("bawd", 3.4, 230).[2] More specifically, as will be seen, the conflation of the roles of the wet nurse and the bawd as based on greed and wit recalls a dramatic practice of *commedia dell'arte*, in which the figure of the *balia* was often associated to that of the *ruffiana* (old gossip or bawd) (Preeshl 2017, 11; Dickey 1966, 73; Roberts 1998, 75).

The second main characteristic of Juliet's Nurse, which seems to stem from her bawdy attitude, consists in her unique talkativeness, which has been described as "a highly original piece of writing . . . perhaps Shakespeare's first greatly human verse speech, so supple in its rhythms that its original text – the Good Quarto – prints it as prose" (Everett 1972, 130). The originality of the Nurse's language is reinforced by the lack of similar characters with such an original verbosity in Shakespeare's direct and indirect sources of the Italian *novella* tradition. Unlike Da Porto's, Bandello's *novella* features the character of the nurse and introduces her in the ball scene.[3] Still, her voice is seldom to be heard as it is mainly reported by the narrator.[4] Similarly, her errands as the lovers' witty go-between usually do not require her to speak. In arranging the lovers' meeting, the Nurse is asked by Giulietta not to talk to Romeo, but rather to deliver a letter to him ("la vecchia . . . condescese al voler di Giulietta, la quale tanto seppe dire che indusse quella a portar una lettera a Romeo", 49*r-v*; "the old woman . . . agreed to the will of Juliet, who managed to persuade the nurse to bring a letter to Romeo"). Later in the *novella*, the Nurse does not even receive Romeo's answer, since he immediately turns to his servant Pietro and asks him to find a rope to climb to Giulietta's bedchamber.[5] This pattern of the silent or mediated vocal presence of the Nurse is interrupted only on two occasions which show her trying to wake the drugged Giulietta ("[s]u su, che gli è tempo di levarsi", 57*r*; "come, come, it's time to get up") and announce the young woman's death to her mother ("[m]adonna, vostra figliuola è morta", 57*v*; "my lady, your daughter is dead"). However, in both these situations the Nurse's speech is extremely concise and mentioned only because functional to the unfolding of the plot.

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[1] All quotations are from Gascoigne 1907.

[2] These references to *I Suppositi* are to Ariosto 2008.

[3] "Giulietta, bramosa di saper chi fosse il giovine in preda di cui già sentiva esser tutta, chiamata una sua vecchia che nodrita l'aveva" (Bandello 2022, 47*v*; "Juliet, eager to know who the young man was to whom she had already fallen prey, called an old servant of hers who had been her nurse"). All quotations from *Novella* 1.9 (*La Sfortunata Morte Di Dui Infelicissimi Amanti, Che L'uno Di Veleno E L'altro Di Dolore Morirono, Con Vari Accidenti*) are from the

The representation of Italian wet nurses as vocally restrained confidants seems to be a typical motif of contemporary *novellas* as it can also be found in Bandello's *Novella* 2.5 (*Fabio romano da Emilia per gelosia ammazzato* . . ., 1554), *Novella* 2.41 (*Uno di nascoso, piglia l'innamorata per moglie, e va a Baruti* . . ., 1554), Novella 4.7 (*Accorto avedimento di una fantesca a liberare la padrona e l'innamorato di quella da la morte*, 1554), *Novella* 4.25 (*Ciò che*

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modernised edition of Bandello 2022 (page numbers refer to the diplomatic edition). Translations are mine unless otherwise stated.

[4] For example, see the summary of the moment when Giulietta reveals to the Nurse that she has fallen in love: "Giulietta . . . tutta l'istoria del suo amore alla buona vecchia scoperse. E quantunque la vecchia assai la sgridasse e dissuadesse da cotal impresa . . ." (49*r*; "Juliet . . . revealed to the good old woman the whole story of her love. And though the old woman scolded and dissuaded her much from such an undertaking . . .").

[5] "Aveva Romeo un suo fidatissimo servidore . . . A costui, . . . diede la cura di trovar la scala di corda e, messo ordine al tutto, all'ora determinata se n'andò" (49*v*; "Romeo had a most trusted servant . . . He relied on him to find a rope ladder, and, after having put everything in order, he left at the appointed hour").

facesse una ricca, nobile e forte bella gentildonna rimasta vedova, 1573); in Anton Francesco Doni's *Novella* 82 (*Un accademico fiorentino narra la così detta 'Novella della gentildonna'. . . Marmi*, 2, 1552); in Giovanni Francesco Straparola's *Favola* 2.2 (*Filenio Sisterno , scolare, in Bologna vien da tre belle donne beffato . . ., Le Piacevoli Notti*, 1, 1550) and *Favola* 8.3 (*Anastasio Minuto ama una gentildonna ed ella non ama lui. . . ., Le Piacevoli Notti*, 2, 1554). In all these *novellas*, the *balia* (also called *fante* and *nutrice*) presents herself as a loyal and pragmatic servant: she shows affectionate closeness to her mistress especially when trying to uncover the reason for her sorrows; she proves to be a useful mediator between the lovers; and she witnesses the tragic climax of the story. However, her language is seldom heard since it is usually reported by the narrator. Also, unlike Juliet's Nurse, the *balie* in such *novellas* simply do not ramble since their words must be directly instrumental to the delivery of key news which help to unfold the plot, such as the arrival of her mistress's lover at her door or the nurse's agreement to the lovers' plan.[6] In Bandello's *Novella* 1.5, the nurse is even mute and deaf ("mutola e sorda", 2013, 268).

The conciseness and controlled speech of the *balia* of Italian *novellas* is evident in Bandello's characterisation of Juliet's nurse which was retained in its translations. In Boaistuau, the language of the "nourrice" remains that of the trustworthy confidant as reported by the narrator, as when she deals with the necessary arrangements for the lovers' secret marriage and their first night together. However, the "nourrice" reacquires her 'vocality' sooner than the Italian *balia* in Bandello, since in Boaistuau we hear her speak not only when she comforts her distressed lady after Roméo's banishment[7] – a passage which is shorter than in Shakespeare – but also when she tries to wake Juliette up from her apparent death.[8] And Painter follows Boaistuau very closely.

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[6] "Pertanto io sono di parere che al desiderio vostro si doni onesto compimento": *Novella* 2.41, Bandello 2013, 1255 ("I believe that your wish should be honourably fulfilled").

[7] "Suffise-vous que Rhomeo est vif, et ses affaires sont en tel estât qu'avecques le temps il pourra estre rappellé de son exil, car il est grand seigneur, comme vous sçavez, bien apparenté, et bien voulu de tous" (Boaistuau 2022, 59*r*; "suffice it that Rhomeo is alive, and his affairs are in such a state that in time he may be recalled from his exile, for he is a great lord, as you know, well related, and well liked by all").

The characterisation of wet nurses as vocally moderate and pragmatic confidants seems to have been popular on the early modern England stage too. Although sharing the same description as bawdy nurses, Gascoigne's Balia does not own Shakespeare's Nurse's linguistic unruliness. Her role is limited to the first scenes of *Supposes*, where she mainly speaks with her mistress about the latter's secret relationship. Most importantly, her language shows significant differences from the Shakespearean Nurse's. While in *Romeo and Juliet* the Nurse often takes control of the conversation when speaking to Juliet, in *Supposes*, Balia is heard only in the first scenes of the play, where she mainly speaks with her mistress through rather short and not elaborate questions and answers. Besides lacking the rambling quality which characterises the Nurse's language in *Romeo and Juliet*, Balia never leads the conversation as the Shakespearean Nurse does; instead, she is the one often left to make sense of her mistress Polynesta's riddling sentences.[9]

The popularity of the vocally modest nurse in early modern *novellas* and plays is comparable to the *domina-serva* couple of ancient drama,[10] which in turn may have offered an example for that of the *innamorata-balia* of the *commedia dell'arte* (Clubb 1989,

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[8] "Madamoiselle, c'est trop dormi, le Comte Pâris vous viendra lever" (73*r*; "Madam, it's too much sleep, Count Pâris will come and get you up").

[9] "BALIA Then I understande you not, how sayde you? / POLYNESTA Mary I say that I loue not Dulipo, nor any suche as he, and yet I neither have changed nor wil change my minde. / BALIA I can not tell, you love to lye with Dulipo very well: this geare is Greeke to me" (1.1, p. 190).

[10] In Latin comedy, the wet nurse plays a marginal and often silent role which limits her presence to a couple of lines or mere references to her existence and she seldom plays the faithful confidant to her young mistress. In Plautus' *Poenulus* and Terence's *Eunuch* and *Heautontimorumenos*, for instance, the wet nurse is introduced only as a functional character in the 'recognition plot', while in Plautus' *Aulularia* and *Mercator* she is given no lines as she is only referred to by other characters. Only in Terence's *Adelphoe* does the nurse have a comforting role towards her mistress, i.e. a worried mother, although she shows no loquacity or verbal wit and her role is restricted to only one scene (3.1). For further discussion on the role of wet nurses in Latin comedy, see Dunsch 2013 and Dutsch 2008.

12). In Euripides' and Seneca's plays as well as in Ovid's poetry in particular,[11] the *nutrix* functions as the affectionate and experienced confidant of the young and troubled mistress without showing Juliet's Nurse's communicative unruliness. Here suffice it to recall that in Euripides' *Hippolytus* and *Medea* the Nurse either tries to find a solution to her mistress' troubles,[12] or attempts to make sense of the action by relying on adages.[13] These tragedies were known in early modern England through several Greek and Latin editions published on the Continent (for instance, George Buchanan's Latin translation of Euripides' *Medea*, 1544) and in English translation (John Studley's translations of Seneca's *Phaedra* and *Medea* were published in 1566 and 1567, respectively). However, all such nutrices do not show comparable garrulity.

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[11] Examples of classical nurses as pragmatic speakers can be found for instance in Ovid's works. Although not present in his account of Pyramus and Thisbe's tragedy (*Met.* 6), the archetype of *Romeo and Juliet*, the stock character of the nurse appears in the story of Canace in Book 11 of *Heroides* and in that of Myrrha in Book 10 of *Metamorphoses*. In both episodes, the nurse conventionally refers to her old age and familiar bond with her mistress ("and begged her by her cradle, by the feeds / of her first days", *Metamorphoses*, Ovid 2008, 395-6), which however do not lead her to launch in aimless digressions. On the contrary, the nurse's voice is seldom heard except to further the dramatic action by means of short and poignant lines ("Canace, you're in love", *Heroides*, Ovid 2017, 34; "[t]ell me . . . / and let me help you. My old age is not / inactive", *Metamorphoses*, Ovid 2008, 391-3).

[12] As for example when the Nurse tries to dissuade Phaedra from killing herself: "τί σεμνομυθεῖς; οὐ λόγων εὐσχημόνων / δεῖ σ', ἀλλὰ τἀνδρός. ὡς τάχος διιστέον, / τὸν εὐθὺν ἐξειπόντας ἀμφὶ σοῦ λόγον. / εἰ μὲν γὰρ ἦν σοι μὴ 'πὶ συμφοραῖς βίος / τοιαῖσδε, σώφρων δ' οὖσ' ἐτύγχανες γυνή, / οὐκ ἄν ποτ' εὐνῆς οὕνεχ' ἡδονῆς τε σῆς / προῆγον ἄν σε δεῦρο: νῦν δ' ἀγὼν μέγας / σῶσαι βίον σόν, κοὐκ ἐπίφθονον τόδε" ("[t]his is high moralizing! What you need / is not fine words, but the man! . . . / For if there were not such danger to your life, / . . . I never would have led you on so far, / merely to please your fancy or your lust. / But now a great prize hangs on our endeavors, / and that's the saving of a life – yours, Phaedra! / There's none can blame us for our actions now": 490-9). All quotations are from Euripides 2013.

[13] "δεινὰ τυράννων λήματα καί πως / ὀλίγ' ἀρχόμενοι, πολλὰ κρατοῦντες / χαλεπῶς ὀργὰς μεταβάλλουσιν. / τὸ γὰρ εἰθίσθαι ζῆν ἐπ' ἴσοισιν / κρεῖσσον" ("[r]ulers have dangerous natures: / subjected to little, controlling much, / they are not inclined to relent from their passions. / Better to live in the ways of fair-sharing": *Medea*, 119-22).

Within this long tradition of silent or vocally restrained nurses, Brooke's poem marks a change. The number of the Nurse's direct speeches is surprisingly high: we hear her speak with Romeo about the details of his planned wedding to Juliet,[14] as well as to Juliet about Romeus's intention of marrying her with a long tirade (674-90) that served as the basis of Shakespeare's treatment in 2.5 (22-77). As in Shakespeare, Brooke's Nurse seems to have a taste for useless digressions as she delays the delivery of the actual good news with unnecessary comments on Romeus's fine appearance ("The best y-shaped is he, and hath the fairest face / Of all this town, and there is none hath half so good a grace: / So gentle of his speech, / and of his counsel wise", 679-81) and pointless hesitations ("'N]ay soft', quoth she, 'I fear you're hurt by sudden joy'", 685). While unbothered at first, Juliet shows some irritation at her nurse's incongruous speech, but their exchange is cut short by the Nurse's comforting words about Romeus's positive response.

While in Brooke's poem the exchange between Juliet and the Nurse, including the Nurse's digressions, her opinion on Romeo and advice about the fittest time to enjoy life's pleasures is conveyed in just ten lines (693-702), in Shakespeare's play the exchange occupies the whole 2.5. Here, the Nurse delights the audience with her chaotic energy as she prates about her old age before announcing to Juliet Romeo's long-awaited agreement to their marriage:

JULIET Now, good sweet nurse – O Lord, why look'st thou sad?
Though news be sad, yet tell them merrily;
If good, thou shamest the music of sweet news
By playing it to me with so sour a face.
NURSE I am a-weary, give me leave awhile:
Fie, how my bones ache! what a jaunt have I had!
JULIET I would thou hadst my bones, and I thy news:
Nay, come, I pray thee, speak; good, good nurse, speak.
NURSE Jesu, what haste? can you not stay awhile?
Do you not see that I am out of breath? (21-30)

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[14] "'Now by my truth', quoth she, 'God's blessing have your heart, / For yet in all my life I have not heard of such a part'" (Brooke 2022, 635-6). All quotations from Brooke refer to this edition.

Juliet's irritated reply ("[t]he excuse that thou dost make in this delay / Is longer than the tale thou dost excuse. / Is thy news good, or bad?", 33-5) does not push the Nurse to give any precise account of Romeo's message. The comical exchange is driven by the Nurse's prating speeches which mingle mentions of Romeo ("[y]our love says, like an honest gentleman", 55) with everyday concerns ("have you dined at home?", 45), unexpected questions ("[w]here is your mother?", 57) and complaints about her aching limbs ("[l]ord, how my head aches! . . . My back o' t' other side – O, my back, my back!", 48-50). While Brooke's Nurse soon resolves to grant Juliet's request and faithfully reports Romeus's reply, Shakespeare's almost refuses to deliver the message ("[i]s this the poultice for my aching bones? / Henceforward do your messages yourself", 63-4). "Linguistic inconsequentiality" remains the Nurse's trademark in the second part of the play too, where the young lovers' dream switches to tragedy (Wells 2004, 53).

Unlike in its literary antecedents, in Shakespeare's tragedy the development of the Nurse's complex and central role can also be recognised by her deliverance of the tragic news of Romeo's banishment to the heart-broken Juliet (3.2.35-72). As in the comical 2.5, here the Nurse cannot tell the events straight and ends up giving Juliet clueless pieces of information which prevent her from immediately grasping the truth. In few lines, the Nurse first mourns the death of a well-beloved man whose identity she does not define ("[a]h weraday, he's dead, he's dead, he's dead!", 37). Then, she couples this vague reference with her knowledge of Romeo's active participation in the tragic event ("Romeo can, / Though heaven cannot", 40-1). Juliet's frustration at such a confusion ("[w]hat devil art thou that dost torment me thus? / . . . Hath Romeo slain himself?", 43-5) does not result in a prompt explanation by the Nurse, whose incongruous prating cannot be contained by such reasonable requests for clarity. Thus, the nurse's confused reply ("I saw the wound, I saw it with mine eyes", 52) misleads Juliet into believing Romeo had slayed himself. Only a few lines later would Juliet finally learn that the Nurse was mourning the death of Tybalt, not of Romeo ("[o] Tybalt, Tybalt, the best friend I had!", 61).

Whereas, as I have argued, no Italian *novella* provides any comparable model for such a rambling and talkative confidant, and only Brooke's comes close to it, another Italian tradition abounds with figures sharing a number of traits with Shakespeare's nurse: *commedia dell'arte*. In particular, by loosening the Nurse's exclusive relationship with Juliet,[15] Shakespeare "sharpen[s] the impact of the messenger function by making the Nurse the bearer of all tidings prior to the lovers' tragic separation" (Stevens 1996, 198) in a manner similar to the contemporary comic figure of the Italian *balia*, the *innamorata*'s confidant who is close to both young lovers and often runs errands for them.

2. The Nurse, the *Serva* and the Comical *Lazzi*

In early modern England, curiosity about the Italian peninsula had already emerged during the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI and Queen Mary I, and eventually culminated in the 1560s under Elizabeth I. During these years, early modern English readers and playgoers became acquainted not only with Italian drama by means of translations, editions, and adaptations,[16] but also with the stock characters and theatrical practices of the *commedia dell'arte*. Such peculiar dramatic performances were frequently reported by dignitaries, travellers and players returning from the Continent, such as Will Kemp, Thomas Pope and George Bryan (Grewar 2015, 308). In addition, there were performances of the *commedia* in England as early as the 1570s, when Italian acting companies, such as Drusiano Martinelli's *I Gelosi*, started to tour Europe and eventually cross the English Channel.[17] The presence of Italian *commedianti* is particularly significant for the present discussion as it implies the staging of female leads who played in the comedies brought on the English stage. As Pamela Allen Brown notices,

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[15] While in Brooke the Nurse has a privileged access to her mistress as much as the Friar has to Romeo ("T]he old man's words have filled with joy our Romeus' breast, / And eke the olde wife's talk hath set our Juliet's heart at rest", 1512, in Shakespeare it is the Nurse and not the Friar who entreats Romeo to stand up against the force of adversity (Stevens 1996, 199).

[16] To mention only a few, Gascoigne's translation and adaptation of Ariosto's *I Suppositi* (1566), Wolfe's edition of Aretino's *Quattro comedie* (1588) – the first single-authored collection of vernacular plays to be printed in England – together with his printings of Machiavelli and Castiglione, and Munday's adaptation of Pasqualigo's *Il Fidele* (*Fidele and Fortunio, or, The Two Italian Gentlemen*, 1585) furthered the popularity of Italian dramatic literature.

> [a]lthough the personnel of troupes often fluctuate rapidly, Spanish documents of the following decade are pertinent to the identities of Martinelli's actresses, who are significant for being among the first and perhaps the first, women to feature in full-length plays on the English stage. These records are special licenses of 1587 allowing Drusiano, his wife Angelica Alberghini, his brother Tristano, their companions Angela Salomon and her (unnamed) husband, and "La Franceschina" to perform in Madrid (Falconieri 1957, 74-5). In doing so, they identify the women of "Los Confidentes Italianos" as the first actresses in full-length plays on the Spanish stage - and their troupe as including veterans of the English tour of 1578. (Allen Brown and Parolin 2005, 128)

Within this context of exchanges, let us compare Juliet's Nurse and the *balia* of the Italian *commedia*.

To begin with, in Italian scenarios the *balia* occupies a more central role than wet nurses in the English drama before *Romeo and Juliet*. This importance was probably due to the different duties carried out by Italian nurses in real life. While in England it was common practice to hire wet nurses only for the first three years of life of the foster-child, the Nurse's prolonged permanence at the Capulets' house would not seem unusual in contemporary Italian society, where "wet-nurses, especially among the upper classes, often remained very close to the children they nursed and the families they worked for, thus, becoming members of the larger *famiglia* or household" (Giannetti 2009, 49). As Florio's *World of Words* (1598) explains, in Italian, "allevatrice" comprised three distinct roles, namely those of "midwife", "nurse" and "foster-mother" (Florio 1598, B2*r*). Besides being a caregiver, the Italian nurse could be a teacher to her young mistress, as is the case with *Gl'Ingannati* (whether directly or indirectly, Shakespeare's main source for *Twelfth Night*), where the unexperienced Lelia is described as the "*allieva*", both "nursling", "foster-child" and "student", of her *balia* Clemenzia (Ruggiero and Giannetti 2003, 213). Also, as Clubb's definition suggests, the *balia* could play the bawd by helping her mistress and furthering risky love plots. The close relationship between the Nurse and Juliet seems to reflect the one between the *balia* and the *innamorata* even in their definitive breakup. As Juliet lies to her parents as well as her nurse in order to be reunited with Romeo, so the *innamorata* usually "leaves her household in pursuit of romantic love as a double rupture from a resistant father and an intimate Nurse, a rupture that it is not simply recalled verbally, but represented on stage as well" (Finzi-Contini Calabresi 2015, 130).

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[17] The 1570s are a fundamental moment for the popularity of Italian *commedianti* in England: in 1576, Italian players collaborated with Ferrabosco for a play at court; in 1578, *I Gelosi* reached the English stage; in 1579, *A Masque of Amazons* was translated for Italian players; in 1577-78 and again in 1603, Italian troupes were known to be travelling in England (Marrapodi 2011, 282).

The nurse of the *commedia dell'arte*, however, is more often referred to as Franceschina than "balia". Although "[b]efore 1600, Franceschina, La Ruffiana and La Balia played the female servants" (Preeshl 2017, 42), Franceschina is considered the "oldest and most essential of the female servants" which plays the roles of the "confidant, balia, mezzana, innkeeper" (Clubb 1986, 28)".[18] She appears as the middle-aged *serva* in Flaminio Scala's stock characters of the *commedia*, which "evoke[s] his old friends the Andreini family and their stage names" (Clubb 2004, 37).[19] In *Giornata* 9 of Scala's *Favole Rapresentative* (1611), Franceschina, Isabella's nurse, "feigns death and leaves town, only to return disguised as a gentleman who 'marries' Isabella in order to fend off her marriage to the man her father had intended for her and to enable her to marry her true love, Orazio, upon his return" (Crohn Schmitt 2014, 50).

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[18] In *commedia dell'arte*, there are two basic types of the serving women. Columbina is "young and gullible, flirtatious yet innocent". She serves the *prima innamorata* but is also characterised as the *seconda innamorata* since she usually is "[r]omantically paired with Arlecchino" and proves to be "crafty, coy, and smarter than her lover" (Goell 2015, 93). On the other hand, Franceschina is "the housekeeper with seniority" (ibid.)

[19] Although still debated, the choice of "Angelica" as the Nurse's name (4.4.5) may recall not only stock characters with the same name in the *commedia*, but also specific Italian troupes, such as the best-known company led by Drusiano Martinelli and his wife Angelica Alberghini, who often played the female lead in their performances.

Like the Shakespearean Nurse, the stock character of the Franceschina participates in a comical duo with another low-status character: while in *I Gelosi* – Isabella Andreini's troupe – Franceschina was usually paired with Pedrolino, the *zanni* or clown, in *Romeo and Juliet*, the Nurse is often coupled with her attendant Peter, whose role seems to be conflated with the Clown's in Q1.[20] Also, as in Shakespeare's tragedy, Franceschina is sometimes referred to as a "bawd" (Goell 2015, 93) possibly because of her worldly experience. In an entertaining monologue of unknown origin, *The Melon Peel*, Franceschina is presented as an old woman who reasons with her audience about the ways of love:

> I know all too well where my mistress is headed: the precipice I toppled over when I lost my virginity. It was all on account of a melon peel! Oh when I think of it, I could die of shame. I can't recall it without streaking my cheeks with tears. Let me bring you up to speed ladies and gentlemen: As a young girl, beautiful, round, and soft as a turtle dove, a certain young Spaniard from my town fell in love with me . . . (Goell 2015, 93)

Besides such similarities, the "theatergram of the libertine *balia*" (Marrapodi 1998, 60) suggests that the Shakespearean Nurse may share with the older servant of the *commedia* "moves . . . long familiar in various combinations of the *balia* or *serva* in Italian comedy" (Clubb 1989, 23), such as her

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[20] In Wiles (2005), the comparison of Q1, Q2 and Folio suggests that in Q1 the role of Peter was most probably conflated with that of the Clown as played by Will Kempe (84-9). For further reading on this see Belsey 2014, 107-8.

Franceschina and Pedrolino appear as comical duo in one of the many scenarios reported by Flaminio Scala in his *Il teatro delle favole rappresentative* (1611). Here, *Giornata 18* is devoted to a comical version of Romeo and Juliet's tragedy called *Li Tragici Successi*, which is believed to be "mediated through the Masuccio/Da Porto/Bandello conduit" (Chaffee and Crick 2015, 25). This interplay of common dramatic material seems to suggest how "novellas circulating in both written and oral form would have provided another important source for Commedia dell'Arte" (ibid.). In the comedy, the servant Franceschina loyally helps her mistress to marry the son of a rival family and eventually ends up marrying the *zanni* Pedrolino.

> tantalizing . . . the impatient *innamorata* by dragging out the lover's message, her ancient, earthy reminiscence of the pleasure of losing a maidenhead, encouraging and contrasting with Juliet's high passion, her practical, unprincipled and uncomprehending advice to Juliet to commit adultery (that is, bigamy with Paris), her taking Romeo's money and glossing it with silence. (Ibid.)

More importantly, the Shakespearean Nurse and the *balia* seem to share a taste for skilful verbal improvisation, a well-known performative asset of Italian *commedianti* which generally consisted in *lazzi*, that is, a form of short routines by which "an action . . . begins and ends in itself" (extradiegetic function), or which "help[ed] to advance the action, to complete and take the action itself to an end" (Ludovico Zorzi qtd in Costola and Crick 2022, n.n.). To actresses in particular, improvisations usually consisted in rapid dialogues which relied on their creativity, wit and verbal mastery and were "tightly associated with the actress as the controlling player" (Allen Brown 2022, 60).

This hypothesis seems supported by some typographic peculiarities in the Nurse's first speeches which are printed from the 1597 Q1 to the 1637 Quarto in a peculiar typeface which distinguishes them from all other characters'. The use of italics as the Nurse's typeface may derive from either a mistake or a habit of the printer of the first portion of the play, John Danter (Finzi-Contini Calabresi 2015, 125). The choice of italics for the Nurse's speeches may be justified by the early modern practice of relying on this typeface in "play manuscripts (and printed texts) to indicate 'removable' fragments like songs, letters, prologues, and epilogues; perhaps they also indicated malleable or less solidly rooted parts" and thus worked as "a playhouse system for indicating in a text which arts were changeable and which were fixed" (Stern and Karim-Cooper 2013, 102-3). Also, italics was frequently used in early modern texts to mark foreign, often Latinate, speech, as is the case of Elyot's translation of Castiglione's *The Courtier*, where "the English translation appears in black letter, the Italian original . . . in Italics, and the French translation in 'roman"' (Finzi-Contini Calabresi 2015, 126). Thus, the use of italics in signalling the Nurse's speeches may indicate "a scenario or routine movable or detachable from the rest of the play" (Finzi-Contini Calabresi 2015, 126) comparable to the practices of *commedia dell'arte* and/or be interpreted as a marker of Italianness.

In this light, scholars such as Finzi-Contini Calabresi have compared the speeches of Shakespeare's Nurse with improvised set pieces from the *commedia* which are often indicated in scenario collections reflecting the dramatic practices of the *commedia* in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This suggestion can be substantiated by looking at examples of *lazzi* bearing some analogies with the Nurse's speeches in *Romeo and Juliet*. Chaffee and Crick divide *lazzi* into twelve categories (2015, 169): acrobatic and mimic; comic violence/cruel behaviour; food; illogical; sexual/scatological; class-rebellion; stage/life duality; stage properties; stupidity/inappropriate behaviour; transformation; trickery; wordplay. Although not spoken by a *balia*, the 'illogical' "*lazzo* of 'Have You Eaten?'" shows similarities with the Nurse's rambling exchanges with Juliet in the comical use of apparently incoherent questions. This *lazzo* consists in "two characters com[ing] to a *zanni*, who is a doctor, to bring him to Capitano's daughter. The *zanni* character responds by asking them if they have eaten. They say, 'yes.' The *zanni* character repeats the question several times and they beat him" (Chaffee and Crick 2015, 171). Standard repetitions and the posing of such an unrelated question to the core topic of the exchange also characterise the dialogue between the Nurse and Juliet in 2.5, where the Nurse returns to the young lover to tell her Romeo's intention of marrying her. In spite of Juliet's anxious waiting, the Nurse lingers on useless details, among which stands out a peculiar question, "have you dined at home?":

> JULIET . . . Let me be satisfied, is't good or bad?
> NURSE Well, you have made a simple choice; you know
> not how to choose a man. Romeo? No, not he. Though
> his face be better than any man's, yet his leg excels all
> men's; and for a hand and a foot and a body, though
> they be not to be talked on, yet they are past compare.
> He is not the flower of courtesy, but I'll warrant him
> as gentle as a lamb. Go thy ways, wench, serve God.
> What, *have you dined at home*?

> JULIET No, no. But all this did I know before.
> What says he of our marriage, what of that? (2.5.37-47; emphasis mine)

Unlike the *commedia* scenario, in Shakespeare, the Nurse does not repeat the question regarding Juliet's dinner, but relies on unrelated questions ("[w]here is your mother?", 57) and frequent references to her physical discomforts due to her old age ("[f]ie, how my bones ache. What a jaunt have I had!", 26; "[d]o you not see that I am out of breath?", 30; "Lord, how my head aches! What a head have I! / It beats as it would fall in twenty pieces. / My back a' t' other side, ah, my back, my back!", 48-9).

Overall, the Nurse's delayed report may also be compared to another *lazzo*, "the *lazzo* of delay", which can be found in a dialogue in prose between the Venetian Magnifico and his servant Zani in *Dialogo de un Magnifico e Zani Bergamasco*, which "embodies the central master-servant confrontation, placed firmly in the Republic of Venice, which many scholars see as the core of *commedia dell'arte*" (Andrews 1993, 177). As Pamela Allen Brown notices, Juliet's comic function is like Pantalone's – her gestures and voice must change from hopeful anxiety to ill-disguised fury . . . all the while the Nurse, like Zani, must keep generating a cascade of self-centered digressions . . . to gauge both audience and partner the gain the desired effect of rising tension and laughter" (2022, 125). Once again, although not featuring the stock character of the nurse, this dialogue shows patterns of repetition and linguistic unruliness which can also be found in the Shakespearean exchange as the *zanni* comes back from a courtesan's house and keeps his master guessing what news he has in store by means of useless interpolations, wordplays and digressions:

> MAGNIFICO Splendid! What did she say about me?
> ZANI She's so polite, so accommodating, so friendly.
> MAGNIFICO Yes indeed, she's got all the graces. What did she say about me?
> ZANI She gave me an enormous hunk of her cheese.
> MAGNIFICO Get to the point man, tell me what she thought of the sonnet,
> and what her answer was.

ZANI	She gave me some fresh, white bread.
MAGNIFICO	Do you want me to burst? (qtd in Andrews 1993, 180)

The similarity between these *commedia dell'arte* dramatic situations and the scenes in which Juliet's Nurse appears seems to be supported by other passages in the Shakespearean tragedy which may share some features with the *commedia*. The balcony scene, for instance, can be compared to those moments in many *commedia* scripts where actresses were called to perform at their windows or doorways. From there, like Juliet, they could "admit or repel visitors, trade messages and love tokens, deliver solo laments or soliloquies, sing or listen to serenades, throw down keys, and plan assignations" (Allen Brown 2022, 61). These moments also created some room for humour by having the female lead "pop her head out and back in to react to the absurdities of the Capitano, Pantalone or Harlequin" (61-2). Something similar happens during the balcony scene, where Juliet's love talks with Romeo are comically interrupted by the Nurse, who meddles and 'pops her voice out' with a most inconvenient timing.

In this light, the Nurse's rambling may be considered the linguistic outcome of a process of assimilation and appropriation of foreign dramatic practices which had evidently somewhat influenced the English stage and the Elizabethan imagination.

3. Conclusion

As we have seen, the theatergram of the "*innamorata*'s abettor" (Clubb 1989, 12), that is, the "libertine *balia*" (Marrapodi and Hoenselaars 1998, 60) involves her in actions which qualify her as a prating bawd in ways that make her somewhat comparable to the Shakespearean Nurse. The presence of such actions and exchanges suggests Juliet's Nurse's closer affinity to the *commedia* stock character than to the classical *nutrix* figure, who actively tries to help her mistress but lacks Shakespeare's Nurse's gusto for digression. Similarly, Shakespeare' Nurse's uncommon loquacity cannot be found in those English works which more or less directly influenced his writing. Both Gascoigne's *Supposes* (which inspired Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*) and Painter's *Romeo and Iulietta* (a probable source) show nurses who act as loyal confidants and useful servants to their unexperienced mistresses but lack Juliet's Nurse's linguistic expressivity and "inconsequentiality". In *Supposes*, it is the young Polynesta who delays the unveiling of a secret truth and leads the conversation with her wet nurse who, unlike Juliet's, is often left clueless by her mistress' riddling sentences. In Painter, the nurse is left speechless in a more practical sense as she is turned into an actual silent character who does not talk to Romeo, but rather delivers a letter to him, to which she does not even get a reply. An exception to these vocally restrained models may be found in Brooke's *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet*, which shows a garrulous and comical nurse whose speeches are occasionally characterised by useless digressions and tiresome repetitions.

And yet, Shakespeare's Nurse presents some aspects which invite reflection on the possibility of relations with the *commedia dell'arte* model with which the Elizabethan audience could be familiar, for example through travelling acting companies such as *I Gelosi* and contacts between the Italian stage and English actors. The notion of 'theatergram' thus highlights the transcultural nature of the Shakespearean Nurse as it shows similarities to the stock characters of the *balia* and *serva* and to more general performative practices such as the *lazzi*. Therefore, the Shakespearean Nurse's "inconsequentiality" does not stand for "a mind that is naturally lacking in intellectual control" or affected by "senility" (Wells 2015, 211). Instead, her italicised speeches possibly signal her special performative status, a performative moment in which the actor was given the chance to "create an appropriate physical realisation of all that the speech implies" by means of "gestures, movement, facial play and subtlety of intonation" (Wells 2004, 63), thus showing the importance of taking into account "contaminatio, patterned complication, and the variation of theatergrams" (Clubb 1989, 25) when studying Elizabethan drama.

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4

Italian Dance Tradition and Translation in *Romeo and Juliet*: from Narrative Sources to Shakespeare

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Abstract

This article examines the intertextuality concerning the ball scene in *Romeo and Juliet*'s Italian and French narrative sources, comparing them with the Shakespearean text, with a double aim. On the one hand, I will try to understand how the carnivalesque Italian masked ball, or masquerade, present in the whole intertextual chain (from Da Porto to Shakespeare), acquires a new significance when taken onstage in late-sixteenth-century England. On the other hand, the omission of the so-called *ballo del torchio* or *del cappello* (Torch or Bonnet Dance), understood as a dance-within-the-masque moment in the sources, and its resemanticisation through the persistence of the symbolism of the torch/light in Shakespeare's tragedy, will be analysed. In both cases, I will argue, the cultural and semantic shift of the dances performed or removed is a direct consequence of their de-Mediterraneanisation (Morris 2003) and change of chronotopic coordinates. My contrastive analysis has been facilitated by the SENS archive (Shakespeare's Narrative Sources: Italian Novellas and Their European Dissemination) developed at the University of Verona (https://sens.skene.univr.it/shakespeares-works/romeo-and-juliet/) and carried out by treating the main narrative sources, or sources proximate, and their target text as a trilingual parallel corpus. Specific parts of text, verses and scenes have been compared and contrasted thanks to the text(ual) segmentation of each text available on the website.

Keywords: Shakespearean narrative sources; *Romeo and Juliet*; dance; Torch Dance

1. Introduction

Many scholars have focused on the transcultural confluences that helped shape English dances in 1500s and 1600s drama (see, among others, Brissenden 1981; Howard 1998; Ciambella 2017; 2021), but few have considered the intertextual connections between plays and their sources and how dance scenes are translated, adapted, and/or borrowed from one culture to another, i.e., from Italy to England via France, in the case analysed here. This article examines intertextuality concerning the ball scene in *Romeo and Juliet*'s Italian and French narrative[1] sources, comparing them with the Shakespearean text, with a double aim. On the one hand, I will try to understand how the carnivalesque Italian masked ball or masquerade,[2] present in the whole intertextual chain (from Da Porto to Shakespeare), acquires a new significance when taken onstage in late-sixteenth-century England. On the other hand, the omission of the so-called *ballo del torchio* or *del cappello* (Torch or Bonnet Dance),[3] understood as a dance-within-the-masque moment in the sources, and its resemanticisation through the persistence of the symbolism of the torch/light in Shakespeare's tragedy, will be analysed. In both cases, I will argue, the cultural and semantic shift of the dances performed or removed is a direct consequence of their de-Mediterraneanisation (Morris 2003) and change of chronotopic coordinates.

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[1] It is worth clarifying that the adjective 'narrative' is meant here in its broad, primary sense of "[t]hat narrates or recounts, that tells a story; of or concerned with narration; having the character or form of narration" (*OED*, adj. 1.a). For this reason, Arthur Brooke's *The Tragical History of Romeus and Iuliet* is also considered a narrative source of Shakespeare's tragedy, since it is a narrative poem.

[2] As discussed in section 2 in greater detail, it is hard to expect terminological accuracy in this case because of different factors such as lacunae in sixteenth-century English accounts of masked balls, the late lexicalisation of such nouns as masque, masquerade, etc. In this article, the terms 'masked ball' and 'masquerade' are used interchangeably, but they will be distinguished from 'masque', understood as an out-and-out theatrical genre, which was fully developed with the Stuarts, during the Jacobean and Caroline period. As stated in the *OED*, the noun 'masque' indicated both a masked ball and a theatrical genre in the late sixteenth century; hence, to avoid confusion, I will not use it to indicate the feast at the Capulets' house.

[3] Whereas the Torch Dance was quite widespread in the Renaissance, there is no mention in late-medieval or early modern England of the Bonnet Dance. The phrase is used in this article only as a possible – yet not historically confirmed – translation of the Italian *ballo del cappello*, only to recall another famous British dance performed with hats, i.e., the Scots Bonnet Dance.

My contrastive analysis has been facilitated by the SENS archive (Shakespeare's Narrative Sources: Italian Novellas and Their European Dissemination) developed at the University of Verona (https://sens.skene.univr.it/shakespeares-works/romeo-and-juliet/) and carried out by treating the main narrative sources, or sources proximate,[4] and their target text as a trilingual parallel corpus. Specific parts of text, verses and scenes have been compared and contrasted thanks to the text(ual) segmentation[5] of each text available on the website. Therefore, the following texts have been analysed, in addition to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, here considered as the target text:

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[4] Miola's taxonomy of intertextuality is adopted here. In his well-known book chapter entitled "Seven Types of Intertextuality" (see *infra* for bibliographical detail), Miola identifies three categories and seven types of intertextuality, according to three parameters: "first, the degree to which the trace of an earlier text is tagged by verbal echo; second, the degree to which its effect relies on audience recognition; third, the degree to which the appropriation is eristic" (2004, 13). This article considers *Romeo and Juliet*'s Italian and French "sources proximate", belonging to Miola's fourth type, first category of intertextuality: "the most familiar and frequently studied kind of intertextuality . . . The source functions as the book on-the-desk; the author honors, reshapes, steals, ransacks, and plunders. The dynamics include copying, paraphrase, compression, conflation, expansion, omission, innovation, transference, and contradiction" (19). Hypotexts, hypertexts and analogues, as indicated in *Romeo and Juliet*'s page (https://sens.skene.univr.it/shakespeares-works/romeo-and-juliet/), have not been taken into consideration, since it is highly improbable that Shakespeare would have read those texts. See Bigliazzi 2018 for a thorough analysis of *Romeo and Juliet*'s main sources and their intertextual relations.

[5] Text(ual) segmentation is, very generically speaking, "a method of splitting a document into smaller parts, which are usually called segments . . . Each segment has its relevant meaning" (Pak and Teh 2018, 167). In this study, text segmentation has been used to compare parts of different texts with the same topic or focus, for instance the dance scene at the Capulets' house. For further details about textual segmentation, see the criteria page on the SENS archive website (https://sens.skene.univr.it/about/criteria/).

- Luigi Da Porto's *Istoria novellamente ritrovata di due nobili amanti* (two editions: 1530-31; 1539).
- Matteo Bandello's *Novella IX*, second volume of *Novelle* (1554).
- Pierre Boaistuau's *Histoires tragiques extraictes des oeuvres italiennes de Bandel* (1559; my emphasis).
- Arthur Brooke's poem *The Tragical History of Romeus and Iuliet Written First in Italian by Bandel, and Now in English by Ar. Br.* (two editions: 1562; 1587; my emphasis).
- William Painter's *Novella XXV*, second tome of *The Palace of Pleasure* (1580).

To facilitate the reader's comprehension, only the modernised editions of the above-mentioned texts are taken into account (but line/verse numbers in brackets refer to the diplomatic editions on SENS).[6]

2. *Romeo and Juliet*'s Masked Ball from Italy to England: New Significances in New Paradigms

In Shakespeare's tragedy, Romeo, reluctant to enter the enemy's house, defines the feast he and his fellows were about to sneak into as a masque for the first and only time in the play: "And we mean well in going to this masque" (1.4.48).[7] Later in the scene, the young Montague talks about "this night's revels" (1.4.110) and Capulet defines the masked ball simply as "a feast" (1.5.70). In the late sixteenth century, the noun 'mask(e)' or 'masque' was still not lexicalised, as shown by early modern bilingual (French-English and Italian-English) or monolingual dictionaries.[8] In the anonymous *A Dictionary French English* (1571), the French lemma MASQUE is translated as "a mask, a mummery", thus referring generically to a performance with masks. Claudius Hollyband's *A Dictionary French and English* (1593), on the other hand, translates MASQUE as "a mask, a vizard". Both senses are present in Randle Cotgrave's well-known *A Dictionary of French and English Tongues* (1611); yet the definition "a mask, or a mummery" translates the lemma MASQUERADE this time. Both editions of John Florio's Italian-English dictionary (1598; 1611) distinguish between the noun 'mascara' ("a mask, a vizard, a covert") and 'mascarata' ("a masking, a mask, a mumming or revelling"), both meanings blending when defining the verb 'mascarare' ("to mask, to revel, to mum, to cloak, to hide"). No entry for 'mask(e)', 'masque', or 'masquerade' is present in the first English monolingual dictionaries, grammar books, tables and lists of difficult words, e.g., Richard Mulcaster's *Elementary* (1582), Edmund Coote's *The English Schoolmaster* (1596), Robert Cawdrey's *A Table Alphabetical* (1604), and John Bullokar's *English Expositor* (1616). This can mean that either such words were perceived as borrowings from Italian and French to be listed and translated in bilingual dictionaries, or they were not among those difficult words the first English monolingual dictionaries dealt with.

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[6] Three different versions of the same text/edition have been transcribed in the SENS archive: a diplomatic version which reproduces either the *editio princeps*, or the one the editor(s) have selected for possibly being the edition consulted by Shakespeare; a semidiplomatic version that maintains the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century spelling; and a modernised edition which normalises the spelling and offers a segmented text for intertextual comparison.

[7] Q1, Q2 and the Folio versions do not differ in this case, except for a slightly different spelling of the word in Q2 ("Mask", instead of "maske", as in Q1 and Folio). All quotations from Shakespeare's tragedy are taken from the New Oxford Shakespeare edition by Francis X. Connor.

Cunliffe (1907), who was among the first scholars to investigate the Italian origins of the English masque, also considered sources other than dictionaries, e.g., revel accounts, letters, etc., and ascertained that "the form *masque* is not found in the sixteenth century English" (140; emphasis in the original). Only the form 'mask(e)' is found in the mid- and late-1500s, and it indicated "an evening entertainment in which the chief performers were masked courtiers, accompanied by torchbearers, all in costumes" (146).[9]

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[8] All the entries from early modern dictionaries have been taken from the Lexicon of Early Modern English website (https://leme.library.utoronto.ca/). The spelling of the definitions has been modernised.

[9] On this topic, Chambers affirms that "the introduction of a mask, generally as a revel in a royal feast or wedding banquet, becomes a regular dramatic device at least from the last decade of the sixteenth century onwards" (1923, 231).

This definition perfectly suits *Romeo and Juliet*'s masquerade in 1.4-5, which happens at night, and is performed by masked guests accompanied by torchbearers, among whom also Romeo stands. Nevertheless, to avoid confusion between 'mask(e)' and 'masque', and for the considerations above about early modern bilingual dictionaries – especially Florio's and Cotgrave's – in this article I will call the feast organised at the Capulets' house a masked ball or a masquerade, although, as we have seen, Romeo calls it a mask(e) on a single occasion.

This terminological fluctuation about masques, revels, and feasts seems to be exclusively Shakespearean. When resorting to *Romeo and Juliet*'s sources proximate, no doubt arises. Da Porto and Bandello talk about a "festa" (feast or banquet, according to Florio), exactly like Boaistuau's French version, which reads "festin" (again, feast or banquet, according to early modern French-English dictionaries). Brooke and Painter rightly alternate between "banquet" and "feast". Nevertheless, when dealing with the kinds of dance performed during the feast, Shakespeare's text is the only one that omits any mention of the *ballo del torchio* or *del cappello*, as will be seen in greater detail in the next section. I argue that this discrepancy between the sources and Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is due to the new significance attributed by the English playwright to the Italian masquerade in 1.4-5 and, in addition, to matters of reception, i.e., evident differences between Shakespeare's audience and his sources' readership.

First of all, both Da Porto and Bandello set their stories during Carnival, or, at least, after Christmas. In Da Porto's *Istoria*, the narrator specifies that the party organised by Antonio Capelletti was held during "un Carnevale" ("a Carnival"). Bandello's *Novella* states that the feast occurred after Christmas ("un anno, dopo natale si cominciarono a far de le feste ove i mascherati concorrevano"), and that Juliet's mother decides to organise a masked ball at that precise time of year because at "il carneval passato" ("the last Carnival") all Juliet's friends found a man and got married. Boaistuau, and Brooke and Painter after him, eliminate any temporal reference to the Carnival, setting their stories 'around' Christmas.[10]

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[10] Boaistuau: "environ la fête de Noël" (171); Brooke: "The weary win-

Lastly, Shakespeare sets his tragedy around mid-July: Juliet was born on "Lammas Eve" (1.3.18), i.e., the 31st of July, and there is "a fortnight and odd days" (1.3.16) left. Therefore, only the two Italian texts develop stories at Carnival, a period of the year when, in Renaissance Italy (especially in the north-eastern area between Verona and Venice), masked balls were usually organised; thus, Da Porto and Bandello, writing for an Italian, educated reader, need not specify what kind of "festa" was organised by Antonio Capelletti: they can take it for granted their readers will know. Similarly, one may suppose that Boaistuau's, Brooke's, and Painter's French and English readerships were well aware of the kind of courtly celebrations and balls that were held around Christmas (especially Twelfth Night) in their respective countries. It goes without saying that Shakespeare's audience was different and more varied than his sources'. Italian, French, and English readers were generally well-educated, upper- and middle-class men, rarely women (Wilson 1987, xx), probably the same people who attended the kinds of entertainment described by Da Porto and the others in their books. Early modern theatregoers belonged to any strata of the Elizabethan social hierarchy, as noted by contemporary witnesses[11] and modern scholars (see, i.a., Harbage 1941, 90; Cook 1974; Banks 2014, 18-21; Chiari and Laroque 2017, 52). This meant that connotations of the Veronese/Venetian Carnival, with its masks and masquerades, were probably too culture-specific to be inserted in plays such as *Romeo and Juliet* and its connotations understood by Shakespearean audiences. Although this cultural translation/adaptation may be perceived as a de-Mediterraneanisation of the carnivalesque atmosphere conveyed by the Italian sources, Shakespeare wanted to maintain a certain 'mediterraneity' by moving the chronological setting of his play to a hot and sunny Mediterranean mid-July. In so doing, I argue, he also put forward a double process of cultural domestication: on the one hand, he supported his choice of setting

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ter nights restore the Christmas games, / And now the season doth invite to banquet townish dames" (155-6); Painter: "about the feast of Christmas" (130).

[11] Suffice it to quote from John Davies' epigram no. 17, "In Cosmum", where theatregoers are described as "[a] thousand townsmen, gentlemen, and whores, / Porters, and serving-men, together throng" (9-10).

Romeo and Juliet in the summer by substituting the Italian Carnival with an English corresponding feast: Lammas Day, the day when English people thank God for the harvest on the 1st of August. In fact, both the combination of pagan and Christian origins of the Carnival and the way it is celebrated with masks and dances occur in the celebrations connected with Lammas Day, a Christian feast with Celtic[12] origins, where thanksgiving propitiatory dances were performed wearing zoomorphic or anthropomorphic masks. Knowles explains this Carnival-Lammas combination in terms of "align[ment] of the religious and the natural" (1998, 38), where the religious element is their Christian origin, and the natural element is their pagan (Roman or Celtic) origin. On the other hand, the popular connotation of the Italian Carnival (Laroque 2011, 203) is maintained through the mention of a folk/popular English festival.

Thanks to the domestication of the Italian Carnival and its transposition on, transcodification on the Shakespearean stage, we also witness a cultural shift in the subliminal presentation of the Carnival. If, on the one hand, the Carnival-Lammas binomial may be understood in terms of substitution of a culture-specific Italian element with an English one, on the other hand, acknowledging that the masquerade at the Capulets' house shows influences of the Carnival is also a question of appropriation of an Italian traditional element by the English Renaissance culture. This twofold mechanism of substitution/appropriation was studied, among others, by Cunliffe (1907, 148) and Laroque (2011), who explored how the Italian Carnival influenced the rise of the early modern English masquerades and masques.[13] Laroque, in particular, discusses the carnivalesque element in Shakespeare's plays set in Verona and Venice – where grandiose Carnival celebrations were (and still are) held – written between 1592 and 1606, i.e., *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Othello*. According to Laroque, "Shakespeare, very early on in his work, was interested . . . in the highly theatrical nature of carnival" (209), and problematised the imagery associated with it "in an ambivalent context, half-way between comedy and tragedy" (208), as shown by *Romeo and Juliet*'s masked ball. By reading 1.4-5 via the well-known Bakhtinian carnivalesque principle of "*discordia concors*, where the inclusion of difference and otherness simultaneously connotes harmony and destruction" (212), Laroque perceptively acknowledges Shakespeare's debt towards the Italian Carnival in interpreting the masquerade as a welcoming moment where the otherness represented by a Montague and his fellows is tolerated and accepted. In Laroque's words, the masquerade "is an image of inclusion, later confirmed by Capulet's silencing Tybalt's storming anger and insisting on the sacred duty of hospitality" (210). Therefore, "carnival could simultaneously become a byword for inclusion and hospitality" (219).

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[12] In 1.4, the Celtic 'flavour' of the feast celebrated at the Capulets' house is reinforced by Mercutio's 'Queen Mab' monologue which adds a "Celtic note in an otherwise Italian background" (Laroque 2011, 215).

[13] In addition to the Italian masquerade in *Romeo and Juliet*, see also Gaveston's desire for "Italian masks by night" (1.1.55) in Marlowe's *Edward II* (1592), or Shylock's concern about the Venetian masque (2.5.27-38) in *The Merchant of Venice* (1596).

I would go even further by affirming that the connection between the carnivalesque echoes in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* 1.4-5, and such values as tolerance, inclusion, and hospitality are reinforced by the uniqueness of this moment: the masquerade is the only event in the play where a Montague has free access to the Capulets' house. This is the very essence of Carnival, whose genuine character we find paradoxically more in Shakespeare than in his Italian sources. In fact, unlike his version of the story of Romeo and Juliet, where the two families' "ancient grudge break to new mutiny" (Prologue, 3) and where the only moment when their enmity is suspended is the carnivalesque masked ball, in Da Porto and Bandello, Romeo enters the Capulets' house after the two families have reconciled or, at least, have called a truce. In Da Porto, Antonio Capelletti holds a feast "essendo così costoro pacificati" (44-5: being Montecchi and Capelletti reconciled), and in Bandello the Prince Bartolomeo della Scala manages to stop the continuous brawls they usually start in Verona streets, right before Capelletti organises a feast inviting all the young nobles of the city, Romeo included. The French and English narratives that translate Bandello acknowledge the hatred between the two families and the Prince's attempts to prevent the brawls in the city. Besides, any explicit or metaphorical reference to the Italian Carnival is omitted: in Boaistuau's, Brooke's, and Painter's Christmas feast, Romeo's presence is tolerated not because of "the sacred duty of hospitality" (Laroque 2011, 210). The Capulets endure him only because 1) they do not want to start a brawl in front of their guests, as prohibited by the Prince of Verona, 2) they respect his young age, and 3) they do not want to prove themselves cowards by attacking Romeo alone, or a small group of Montagues.[14] Therefore, just as the terminological accuracy concerning masque, revels, and feast is a Shakespearean stylistic peculiarity, rather than his sources', the carnivalesque concept of *discordia concors*, of "inclusion of difference and otherness" (Laroque 2011, 212) the playwright brings onstage is more significant and salient in his play than in his sources, although he eliminates any explicit reference to the Carnival. As sometimes observed (see James and Rubinstein 2006, 8; Henke 2016, 71; Bigliazzi 2018, 17; 22-3; 25; 28), this may depend on a series of curious coincidences which might suggest that Shakespeare may have read Da Porto's and Bandello's narratives directly in Italian,[15] or on the fact that he developed the carnivalesque idea of tolerance and hospitality independently, considering the Italian setting of his tragedy and thanks to the circulation of English travellers' accounts about the Italian Carnival (for instance, as will be seen, William Thomas and Sir Thomas Hoby) which may have influenced also later Shakespearean plays such as *Twelfth Night*.[16]

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[14] Boaistuau states that "les Cappellets, dissimulant leur haine, ou bien pour la révérence de la compagnie, ou pour le respect de son âge [de Romeo], ne lui méfirent, ni d'effet ni de paroles" (203-7). Brooke suggests similar reasons: "The Capulets disdain / the presence of their foe, / Yet they suppress their stirréd ire, / the cause I do not know: / Perhaps t'offend their guests / the courteous knights are loth, / Perhaps they stay from sharp revenge, / dreading the Prince's wroth. / Perhaps for that they shamed / to exercise their rage / Within their house, 'gainst one alone, / and him of tender age. / They use no taunting talk / ne harm him by their deed" (183-9). Lastly, Painter: "the Capellets dissembling their malice, either for the honour of the company, or else for respect of his age, did not misuse him either in word or deed" (149-52).

[15] Shakespeare's alleged knowledge of Italian is a very much debated issue, which goes beyond the scope of this article. See, among others, Moore 1937; Ball 1945; Shaheen 1994; Camard 2004 for further details.

[16] See, for instance, Logan 1982 for an analysis of the light/darkness in-

Another deletion by Shakespeare concerns the dance performed at the Capulets' masquerade: the Torch Dance. The following section will deal with this topic, analysing a resemanticisation process concerning this peculiar dance of Italian origin and its symbolism.

3. "To Torch Dance or not to Torch Dance": That Is the Question

Since there is no mention of any specific dance at the feast organised by Lord Capulet in Shakespeare's tragedy, dance scholars believe that a number of different choreographies could have been performed on the Elizabethan stage when Romeo and Juliet meet for the first time, for example "a Measure or a Pavan, the Morris Dance, the Canary, or the Coranto, or even the Galliard and La Volta" (Hoskins 2005, 4), although refined courtly dances such as the Measure, the Pavan (Sternfeld 1963, 251), or the Galliard (Berry 1977, 253) are considered the most suitable to the occasion. Nevertheless, all Shakespeare's sources proximate mention the so-called *ballo del torchio* or *del cappello*, the latter reported only in Da Porto and Bandello.

The table below shows the occurrences of the Torch Dance in specific segments of the sources here selected (my emphases):

Da Porto	Et passando la mezzanotte, e il fine del festeggiare venendo, *il ballo del torchio o del cappello*, come dire lo vogliamo, e che ancora nel fine delle feste veggiamo usarsi, s'incominciò. Nel quale in cerchio standosi, l'omo la donna e la donna l'uomo a sua voglia permutandosi, piglia. In questa danza d'alcuna donna fu il giovane levato, e a caso appresso la già innamorata fanciulla posto. (81-91)
Bandello	. . . venne il fine della festa del ballare e si cominciò a far la danza, ossia *il ballo del Torchio*, che altri dicono *il ballo del Cappello*. Facendosi questo giuoco fu Romeo levato da una donna, il quale entrato in ballo fece il dover suo e, dato il torchio ad una donna, andò presso a Giulietta, che così richiedeva l'ordine, e quella prese per mano con piacer inestimabile di tutte due le parti. (158-64)

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terweave in the play, which the scholar associated with the Italian Carnival. After all, the Illyrian territory where the play is set was part of the Republic of Venice at the time Shakespeare was writing *Twelfth Night*.

Boaistuau	Amour ayant fait cette brèche au cœur de ces amants, ainsi qu'ils cherchaient tous deux les moyens de parler ensemble, fortune leur en apprêta une prompte occasion, car quelque seigneur de la troupe prit Juliette par la main pour la faire danser au *bal de la torche*, duquel elle se sut si bien acquitter, et de si bonne grâce, qu'elle gagna pour ce jour le prix d'honneur entre toutes les filles de Vérone. (264-74)
Brooke	When thus in both their hearts had Cupid made his breach And each of them had sought the mean to end the war by speech, Dame Fortune did assent their purpose to advance, *With torch in hand a comely knight* *did fetch her forth to dance*; She quit herself so well, and with so trim a grace, That she the chief praise won that night from all Verona race. . . . Even with his ended tale, *the torches' dance had end*, And Juliet of force must part from her new chosen friend.[17] (243-311)
Painter	Love having made the hearts breach of those two lovers, as they two sought means to speak together, Fortune offered them a very meet and apt occasion. A certain lord of that troupe and company took Iulietta by the hand to dance, wherein she behaved herself so well, and with so excellent grace, as she won that day the price of honour from all the damsels of Verona. . . . Scarce had he made an end of those last words, but *the dance of the Torch was at an end.* (188-237)

Table 1. Segments concerning the Torch Dance in *Romeo and Juliet*'s main narrative sources.

Before comparing the five scenes above with *Romeo and Juliet* 1.5, we should clarify what the Torch Dance is and what it symbolises. The *OED* defines it simply as "a dance in which some of the performers carry lighted torches", and no other dictionary seems to provide a more detailed description of this choreography, except the Merriam-Webster which calls it "serpentine". In addition to a few descriptions of choreographic directions in dance treatises,[18] literary works and paintings help us understand that it was quite widespread during the Renaissance in Europe.[19] For example, as noted by Naselli (1962, 383), the *Golf Book of Hours* (c. 1540), held at the British Library (Ms. 24098), contains a picture of the Torch Dance illustrated in a Flemish calendar, perhaps by Simon Bening of the Ghent-Bruges school, in the page dedicated to February (f. 19*v*). It might be a coincidence that February is also the month of Carnival festivals, but it is definitely a curious one.

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[17] The layout of Brooke's verses reflects the common practice in the Renaissance of breaking the two long lines of the poulter's measure – an alexandrine followed by a fourteener – into two half lines each.

Albeit originally a folk dance, the Torch Dance soon became an upper-class prerogative in Italy and France (Naselli 1962),[20] and was often performed during wedding celebrations at court, the torch being carried by the dancing couple and symbolising their union and the flame of their new-born love. In Renaissance Italy, this dance is known as *ballo del torchio*, where the noun *torchio* is a torch, not to be confused with the word *torchio* in contemporary Italian, i.e., a press, a machine used to produce oil and wine by pressing olives and grapes.[21] In addition to Da Porto and Bandello, Tasso also refers to *ballo del torchio*. His love sonnet no. 51 ("Mentre ne' cari balli in loco adorno" ["While dancing in adorned places"], 1561-62) focuses on the metaphorical meaning of the Torch Dance (Solerti 1900, cxlii; Cabani 2018, 77), accusing his beloved of extinguishing the light of the torch they used to carry together. The same metaphorical connotation is introduced in Tasso's discourse "del maritarsi" ("of getting married"), that is, a letter to his cousin Ercole (1585), where the writer resorts to the *auctoritas* principle by stating that Plato recommended having children:

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[18] See, for instance, Thoinot Arbeau's *Branle du chandelier* in his *Orchésographie* (1588), or Cesare Negri's *danza delle torce* in his *Le gratie d'amore* (1602). See Jones 1986.

[19] Perhaps its most famous version is the German Fackeltanz, which reached its apex in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when such composers as Spontini and Meyerbeer wrote a great deal of music to accompany this dance, which was performed during wedding celebrations.

[20] Naselli analyses a number of mentions of the Torch Dance in European Renaissance literature and paintings, e.g., in Sannazaro's *Farsa*, written in 1492, in Lucrezia Borgia's letters (19 February 1503), in Crispin de Passe's engraved cycle *The Wise and the Foolish Virgins* (1589-1611), etc.

[21] In eighteenth-century Italy, *ballo del torchio* also began to indicate a kind of dance performed around the press, a sort of thanksgiving for a good harvest, given the semantic shift of the noun *torchio*.

> e veramente assai bene disse quel poeta, che l'uno dava all'altro la lampada della vita; non altramente, che a' tempi nostri soglia avvenire nel *ballo del torchio*, quando l'uomo il prende dalla donna, nelle cui mani pare che sia posto il vivere, e il morire. (1823, 142; my emphasis)
>
> [And that poet really said it well, the one gave the other the lamp of life; similarly to what happens in our time in the Torch Dance, when the man takes it from the woman, in whose hands life and death seem to be placed. (My translation)]

Like Da Porto and Bandello's plot, Giraldi Cinthio's novella 5, decade 2 of the *Hecatommithi* (1565) tells the story of two young lovers, Rinieri and Cecilia, who meet for the first time and immediately fall in love during a Torch Dance, as part of the feast organized by Cecilia's father. Tasso's and Cinthio's mentions of the Torch Dance help us understand that in Renaissance Italy it clearly had a metaphorical meaning connected to love and courtship.

Both Da Porto and Bandello also call the Torch Dance *ballo del cappello*, another widespread dance in sixteenth-century Italy. Simeone Zuccolo, in his *Pazzia del ballo* (1549), describes it as a dance of courtship:

> [q]uando l'uomo, con un dolce sorriso o un amoroso sguardo, è invitato da una donna a ballare, si leva la berretta e cortigianescamente baciandola glie la pone sulle bionde trecce. Fanno così insieme il ballo, terminato il quale la donna, medesimamente baciandola, ripone la berretta in capo al suo leggiadro cavaliere.
>
> [When a man is invited by a woman to dance with a sweet smile or a loving glance, he takes off his bonnet and, kissing her courteously, places it on her blond tresses. Hence, they dance together, and in the end, the woman kisses the bonnet and puts it back in the hand of her graceful knight. (My translation)]

The two dances followed the same pattern and were characterised by the same gestures: they consisted in choosing a partner by means of an object (a torch or a bonnet) and dancing with him/her.

Boaistuau's translation is responsible for two main changes affecting later adaptations of Romeo and Juliet's story. First of all, the dance performed at Lord Capulet's house is indicated as a Torch Dance; any reference to the *ballo del cappello* disappears,[22] perhaps because it was a deeply-rooted tradition of Northern Italy, but not, to my knowledge, of France (see also Rodocanachi 1907, 199). Secondly, while in Da Porto and Bandello Romeo dances with some ladies before arriving in front of Juliet, in Boaistuau, Brooke and Painter, as well as in Shakespeare, Romeo does not dance, but waits for the Torch Dance to be over and then approaches Juliet. In Boaistuau it is "quelque seigneur de la troupe" (268-9: "some man within the group") who takes Juliet by the hand, exactly as in Brooke "a comely knight / did fetch her forth to dance" (246), in Painter (who follows Boaistuau, literally this time) "[a] certain lord of that troupe and company took Iulietta by the hand to dance" (190), and in Shakespeare it is "the hand / Of yonder knight" (1.5.38-9).

Shakespeare follows Boaistuau's version of the story, certainly mediated by Brooke and perhaps by Painter. Nevertheless, no mention of the Torch Dance is made by the playwright in the scene. At a mere textual and intertextual level, this is probably because both Brooke and Painter do not mention the Torch Dance as soon as it begins, as happens in Da Porto, Bandello, and Boaistuau, but in a different textual segment which Shakespeare does not seem to consider when adapting his sources for his play, when the dance is over, and the couple is forced to separate for no apparent reason, or probably because the dance itself had finished:

> the torches' dance had end,
> And Juliet of force must part
> from her new chosen friend. (Brooke, 309-10)
> [T]he dance of the Torch was at an end [and] Rhomeo [saw] himself pressed to part with the company. (Painter, 237-46)

In *Romeo and Juliet*, however, the couple part because the nurse calls Juliet; hence the end of the dance does not correspond to the moment when the youths separate: "Nurse: Madam, your mother craves a word with you. [*Juliet departs to her Mother*]" (1.5.107). Therefore, Shakespeare's tragedy is the only text within the intertextual network of Renaissance translations and adaptations of Romeo and Juliet's story that does not mention the Torch Dance.

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[22] When translating Bandello's *Novella*, Boaistuau likely missed the assonance *ballo del cappello*/Capelletti, so decided to focus on the Torch Dance, which was also quite widespread in France.

Scholars have focused on the fact that Romeo does not dance at all in 1.5, while underlining that 1.4 and 1.5 are set at night, hence torches and torchbearers are necessary to light the ballroom – and the Elizabethan stage, of course. Allison Gaw was probably the first to notice the "decorative stress on the torches in the mask", and she is correct in asserting that "Shakespeare advances on his sources [Brooke and Painter] by making Romeo . . . insist on being merely a torch-bearer, not a dancer" (1936, 154). In 1.4, Romeo repeats that he wants only to bear a torch three times, when he states "[g]ive me a torch . . . I will bear the light" (1.4.11-2), when he again demands "a torch for me" (1.4.35) and when he declares that he prefers being "a candle-holder and look on" (1.4.37). For this reason, as Anne Daye perceptively affirmed, we must imagine Romeo entering the ballroom torch in hand (1998, 249) and, I would argue, continuing to carry it all the while, since no stage direction indicates that he discards it before speaking with Juliet. We will return to this latter point later on, but let us now analyse the ball scene from the very beginning and see whether a Torch Dance might have been performed or whether it is actually omitted by Shakespeare. If omitted, I contend, Shakespeare resemanticised this dance through a metonymic mechanism which, insisting on the torches, reflects on such axiological contrast as light/darkness, white/black, which helps us continue to read the masquerade through its carnivalesque "double face, a bright as well as a dark one" (Laroque 2011, 205).

Capulet's welcome speech in 1.5 helps identify him as a master-of-the-revels-like figure: he opens the impromptu masked ball (Gaw 1936; Winerock 2017, 5) and gives essential directions for the performance. At the outset, after welcoming the gentlemen, he asks for more room and invites "the young women to start dancing" (Winerock 2017, 4): "Capulet: A hall, a hall! Give room, and foot it, girls" (1.5.23). As discussed earlier, when dealing with Tasso's and Zuccolo's mention of the Torch Dance, this might hint at the *ballo del torchio* or *del cappello* since women start inviting their partner(s). According to Renaissance dance sources, in no other choreography are women specifically required to choose first and begin dancing, so this might indicate that the guests invited by Juliet's father are asked to open the dancing event with a Torch Dance.

Even Capulet's insistence on illuminating the ballroom at the beginning and at the end of the dance (1.5.24; 83) can be read as an attempt to revive the torches whose light might have faded during the performance, because of the steps and movements of the performers, or, as discussed later, to reinforce the symbology of light in the play and in this particular carnivalesque moment. Since the place is too hot, on such a warm Mediterranean mid-July night, Lord Capulet asks to "quench the fire" (1.5.26); hence the only source of light is the torches, carried by the torchbearers, among whom Romeo stands. According to Weis (2012) and Connor (2016), the torchbearers who enter the ballroom, already introduced at the beginning of 1.4, "may or may not be additional to the masquers; the masquers may simply bear torches" (Connor 2016, 1013), as Q2 seems to suggest (Weis 2012, 156). This might be why Capulet asks his servants for more light rather than directly address the torchbearers, who might be dancing a Torch Dance with the ladies. As suggested convincingly by Daye (1998), however, it is only after 1613, with *The Lords' Masque* by Thomas Campion and *Memorable Masque* by George Chapman, both celebrating the marriage of Princess Elizabeth Stuart, daughter of James I, that torchbearers assumed a definite role as dancers.[23]

Scholars rule out the possibility that a Torch Dance may be performed at the Capulets' house (see Winerock 2017; Daye 2019, 127) and that Romeo and Juliet may dance together,[24] although many stagings and adaptations of the play show the couple dancing,[25] perhaps because some gestures the young lovers perform recall those of a dance. For instance, when Romeo and Juliet speak for the first time, sharing their first sonnet (1.5.89-102), their touching "palm to palm" (1.5.96) may recall the movements of an Elizabethan masque, as noted by Leopold (2019, 158-9): "[w]hile not every Renaissance dance called for close contact, throughout an Elizabethan masque participants would have often touched palms with fellow revelers while dancing the partnered and group routines documented by Arbeau, John Playford, and many others". In the case of 1.5.89-102, Hazrat defines Romeo and Juliet's sonnet as a "dancing lyrical form", meaning that "the rhetorical form of the couple's language plays a crucial role in choreographing their [metaphorical] dance" (2019, 230). Arguably, therefore, it is more the rhetorical structure of their poetic dialogue which recalls some choreographic movements, than the actual gestures implied by their words.

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[23] After 1613, there are mentions of the Torch Dance or of torchbearers dancing in a number of plays, for instance in Thomas Campion's above-mentioned *The Lords' Masque* ("Torch-bearers dance"), in Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Augurs* (1622: "The Torch-bearers danced"), in James Shirley's *The Cardinal* (1652: "Enter Columbo, and five more in rich habits vizarded; between every two a torch bearer: They dance"), and in Leonard Digges' translation of Céspedes y Meneses' *Gerardo* (published 1653: "danced the Torch-dance").

[24] As summarised by Hazrat, "Most critics have taken this as a clear indication that neither does Romeo himself dance, nor do Romeo and Juliet dance together at any point during the festivities. McGuire, Brissenden,

As hinted above, Shakespeare may have decided to eliminate any reference to the Torch Dance because his audience would not have understood its symbolism or even because he himself was not aware of the connotations that such a courtly dance had in Italy or in France. After all, dances with objects in England were usually perceived as folk dances (for instance, Cushion Dance, Morris Dance, Sword Dance, etc.; see Winerock 2005, 37-8) and in most cases were associated with lust and promiscuity. For example, as Winerock explains (37), during the Cushion Dance men went around the circle of dancers with a cushion on their shoulders. When they found their favourite girl, they threw the cushion to the ground, kneeled in front of the woman, and if she accepted the invitation to dance, she would kiss the man on the lips. Such dances were not suited to an upper-class masked ball such as the one held by Capulet in his house, and the late-sixteenth-century audience would have probably associated the Torch Dance with other dances with objects of a folk character, thus misinterpreting the original

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Sorell, and Lindley refuse the possibility of the couple dancing before or during their first conversation" (2019, 231).

[25] Suffice it to think of Zeffirelli's (1968) and Carlei's (2013) film adaptations, among others.

significance of a culturally and socially connoted dance as the Torch Dance. As stated by McGuire, the significance of dancing in *Romeo and Juliet* "comes most clearly into view if the 'old' strategy of examining the cultural context within (and against) which Shakespeare worked is combined with a 'new' approach that calls upon us to think about Shakespeare's play not just as literature, but also, perhaps even primarily, as theatre" (1981, 87). Early modern theatre implies audiences belonging to different social classes who may not have understood, or even cared about, the connotations of a Torch Dance, while the literary genres adopted by Shakespeare's sources proximate imply a well-educated upper- or upper-middle-class readership.

Whatever the reason, Shakespeare's is the only version of the story of the two Veronese lovers where the Torch Dance is not mentioned. Nevertheless, I suggest that the symbolism associated with the torch is metonymically resemanticised in 1.4-5 and in the entire play through an emphasis on the contrast between light and darkness that pervades *Romeo and Juliet*, having interesting similarities with the carnivalesque light/darkness, harmony/destruction connotations hinted at above. Torches have in fact a pivotal function in the masquerade scene analysed thus far: they light the room when Capulet orders to quench the fire. Unlike his narrative sources, which set the story at Carnival or in December and where torches have multiple functions, that is, they light the room, warm it up, and are used by the couples as a symbol of love and courtship during the Torch Dance, Shakespeare reduces their function to the sole illumination of the ball room, since in Italy it is too hot in July to have torches that heat up the environment. Thus, he also restricts the polyphonic symbolism they are associated with, that is, from light, warmth, love, and courtship to simply light. During the ball scene, Juliet's father orders more light twice (in 1.5.24 and 83) and Juliet herself is compared to a torch by Romeo, not because she is warmer than they are, but because she teaches them "to burn bright" (1.5.40): she is brighter than they are. A few lines later, Romeo compares Juliet's dancing among the other girls to the flight of "a snowy dove trooping with crows" (1.5.44), again reinforcing the antithesis between light and darkness.

Yet, exactly as in the Carnival with its double bright/dark face which brings “harmony and destruction” (Laroque 2011, 212), light and darkness are more interwoven than one may think in *Romeo and Juliet*, and the association between light and darkness, rather than their contrast, increases as the play comes to its tragic end. William Thomas, the first who brought the word ‘Carnival’ into English in 1549, describes the Venetian Carnival as a cruel spectacle where poor people forget about their miserable conditions and laugh tragically at it (Salingar 1974, 192). Similarly, Sir Thomas Hoby, while visiting Venice in 1549, reported that the bright costumes and the boisterous, chaotic atmosphere of freedom and subversion of social status of the Carnival were the perfect justification for people who wanted vengeance and justice or who were simply too drunk to stay lucid: he himself witnessed “a brawl over a lady in a masked ball at night, which cost [a] nobleman his life” (191). It is with this double sense of darkness masked by light (Laroque 2011, 205) that the Italian Carnival entered English Renaissance culture and the same oxymoronic proximity between light and dark is one of the main themes of *Romeo and Juliet*, a play set in the birthplace of the carnivalesque festivities in Italy. The light of day is not favourable to the young lovers in 3.5 and Juliet denies that “[y]on light is . . . daylight” (3.5.12); on the contrary, she states that “[i]t is some meteor that the sun exhales / To be to [Romeo] this night a torchbearer / And light [him] on [his] way to Mantua” (3.5.13-15). The image of the torch and the torchbearer comes back, and it is again associated with Romeo and light, not with warmth, since it is not daylight, but the cold light of a meteor. The oxymoronic image of darkness masked by light is reinforced by Romeo’s statement “[m] ore light and light, more dark and dark our woes” (3.5.36), meaning that when the sun rises he must separate from his beloved Juliet. Lastly, a macabre image of light is evoked by Romeo, when he finds what he believes to be Juliet’s dead body: “here lies Juliet, and her beauty makes / This vault a feasting presence full of light” (5.3.85-6). Even in the darkest and most ‘destructive’ hour, Romeo seems to recall the carnivalesque feast, the masked ball where he first met Juliet and the light of the torches that illuminated the room, which, however, once again, cannot compete with Juliet’s radiant presence, whose light floods their grave.

3. Conclusion

In *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare adapts the cultural framework offered by his narrative sources, considering, on the one hand, the different genre he was employing, and on the other the audience he was addressing. In the case of the Italian masked ball organised by Capulet, the playwright domesticates the carnivalesque connotation of the performance and moves the period when "these sad things" (5.3.306) take place from Carnival, as in Da Porto or December, as in Boaistuau, Brooke, and Painter, to mid-July, when similar celebrations occurred in England before Lammas, the festival of thanksgiving celebrated on 1 August, on the eve of which Juliet was born. In so doing, he maintains the association between local Italian and English feasts with masks and masked balls, yet domesticating a culture-specific Italian element, i.e., Carnival.

Nevertheless, I have argued that the carnivalesque Bakhtinian idea of the *discordia concors* permeates the entire play, not only the masquerade in 1.4-5, but also other scenes in the ensuing acts, especially dealing with the contrast between light and darkness which in the tragedy becomes increasingly interwoven in the course of the play, culminating in 5.3, where Romeo finds Juliet bright even in the darkest hour of death. The contrast between light and darkness has also been problematised and contextualised in the resemanticisation of the Torch Dance that Shakespeare, unlike all his Italian, French, and English narrative sources proximate, eliminates from his play, but that acquires new significance thanks to the playwright's insistence on the association between torches/torchbearers and light both in the masquerade and in other scenes as well.

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5

Romeo and Juliet in Seventeenth-Century Spain: Between Comedy and Tragedy

Felice Gambin

Abstract

This article aims to offer a contribution to the study of some rewritings of the story of Romeo and Juliet in seventeenth-century Spanish theatre. On the one hand, I will focus on the story of the two young lovers from a comedic perspective, as in the case of Lope de Vega's *Castelvines y Monteses* and in Francisco de Rojas Zorrilla's *Los bandos de Verona*, whose title reveals a strong link with the city of Verona. In both comedies, the protagonists survive and there is a happy ending. On the other hand, I will also consider a comedy with a tragic ending that testifies to the success in Spain of the story of the two Veronese lovers, showing a new taste and sensitivity on the part of Spanish audiences. A case in point is Cristóbal de Rozas' *Los amantes de Verona*, where the tragic end of the two lovers, Aurisena and Clorisel, no longer reflects family conflicts between the Capulets and the Montagues, but, more generally, political rivalry between the factions of the Guelphs and the Ghibellines. The three plays also reveal profound differences in the representation of the power exercised by the lord of Verona.

> ¿es que Romeo y Julieta tienen que ser
> necesariamente un hombre y una mujer para que
> la escena del sepulcro se produzca de manera viva
> y desgarradora?[1]

The theme of young lovers who have to contend with timeworn and unresolved family feuds is central to much seventeenth-century Spanish theatre. The authors were able to turn to classical mythology passed down to them through medieval tales and legends, and later the sixteenth-century Italian novellas *Giulietta e Romeo* by Luigi da Porto (1530) and Romeo e Giulietta by Matteo Bandello (1554) will be of still greater significance. The volume of Spanish literature and in this case theatre on the subject of love affairs in the context of family rivalry is particularly striking. I am thinking for example of *Los bandos de Salamanca; Monroyes y Manzanos* by Francisco Pérez de Borja (1646); *Los bandos de Vizcaya* by Pedro Rosete Niño (1660); *Los bandos de Rávena y fundación de la Camándula* by Juan de Matos Fragoso (1667); *Pachecos y Palomeques* or *Los bandos de Toledo* by Antonio García de Prado (1674), but the list could continue.

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[1] "Must Romeo and Juliet necessarily be a man and a woman for the tomb scene to be as intense and as devastating as it is?" (García Lorca 1988, 170). If not otherwise stated, all translations are mine.

This theatrical genre begins with *Los bandos de Sena* by Lope de Vega, a play he wrote between 1597 and 1603, based on novella 49 from the first part of Bandello's work (Gentilli 2019). But there are other elements which should be included for a full understanding of the Spanish versions of the characters of Romeo and Juliet. We know that the French translation of Bandello of 1559 by Pierre Boaistuau collected in his *Histoires tragiques* widely circulated in Europe and that in 1589 fourteen of Bandello's novellas were published in Spanish (Bandello 1589). This version uses the French translation as a starting point but modifies the text at many points. It is interesting that in the title Bandello is said to be Veronese, and the same information is repeated in the edition of 1596 and 1603.[2] But besides the question of translations we know that Lope de Vega, as he proudly declares in a letter to the Duke of Sessa in 1613, was a competent reader of Latin, Italian and French (Vega Carpio 2018, 231).[3] The many forays carried out into the works of the Spanish playwright have revealed that he had read one of the numerous copies of Bandello in circulation in Spain straight from the original Italian.[4]

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[2] Bandello's alleged Veronese origin can also be found in recent studies, including that of Muguruza Roca 2016.

[3] The idea of Lope directly accessing Bandello's Italian text is well-established, although it is not shared by everyone. See, for example, Profeti 2016, 103: "direct fruition of the Italian editions is unlikely, if only because the Novelle had been placed on the Index; thus, it was undoubtedly a 'dangerous' or at least a source which could hardly be proclaimed without expecting potential repercussions".

It should be remembered that the case of Lope represents yet another confirmation of the cultural dialogue between the Italian and Iberian peninsulas, a relationship of reciprocal exchanges covering all cultural aspects. This relationship has distant roots and becomes increasingly evident from the sixteenth century onwards, especially under the rule of Charles V and Philip II also for political, imperial and religious reasons. Relations between the two peninsulas of the western Mediterranean were so intense that one can speak of a Spanish empire where the sun never set, stretching from West to East, from the Americas to northern Europe, but which had its political and cultural centre of gravity between Naples and Madrid, between Italy and Spain. In that empire, the Mediterranean Sea played a major role as a place where different cultures and religions met and clashed, a place teeming with a multiplicity of different sounds and voices, an area where humans and books circulated. The intimate political and cultural relations between Italy and Spain on the Mediterranean, which pervaded much of the literature between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – I am thinking of the many Spanish soldiers fighting on those waters with both sword and pen, writing reports, poems and novellas – are also testified by the influence of Bandello's text in many Spanish writers. They usually wrote their tales and comedies bearing in mind and reworking the themes and subjects of Italian authors such as Boccaccio, Giraldi Cinzio, Masuccio, Firenzuola, Straparola and many others, read in Italian or Spanish translations or through the mediation of French ones. And it is the familiarity and use of these Italian materials, the gap between the Italian and Spanish models, the transfer from a novella to a comedy, that become interesting also in the light of the changes imposed by the Counter-Reformation.[5]

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[4] On the importance of Bandello in Spain the bibliography is copious and there are numerous studies on the use of Bandello's *Novelle* by Lope in his drama. Also useful for the many and timely bibliographical references are Carrascón 2017 and 2018; Profeti 2016. The first comprehensive analysis of some relevance, however, dates back many decades ago and is that of Gasparetti 1939. On *Castelvines y Monteses*, see 17-31.

[5] One might think that at times Bandello's text, presented to the Spanish

There are in fact three theatrical works from sixteenth-century Spain that centre on the lovers from Verona. These are in chronological order:

Castelvines y Monteses by Lope de Vega, written between 1606 and 1612;

Los bandos de Verona by Francisco de Rojas Zorrilla, staged for the first time for the inauguration of the Coliseo del Buen retiro on February 4, 1640;

Los amantes de Verona by Cristóbal Rozas (or Rosas), published in 1666 after being staged several years previously.[6]

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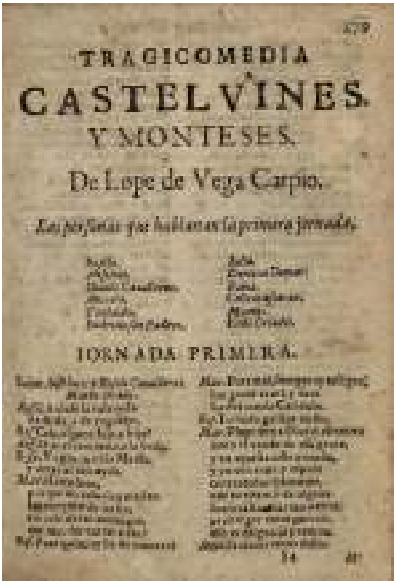

TRAGICOMEDIA

CASTELVINES.

Y MONTESES.

De Lope de Vega Carpio.

Las personas que hablan en la primera jornada.

IORNADA PRIMERA.

Fig. 1 By kind permission of Biblioteca Nacional de España R/23482

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public as *Historias trágicas ejemplares* from the French translation recalled above, so steeped in moralising elements, was often transformed by Spanish writers into an anti-model, as evidenced, for example, by the deviation of the tragedy of the two Veronese lovers towards a happy ending.

[6] As an introduction, see González Cañal 2006 and, even if sometimes limited to quick summaries of works of Spanish writers from the seventeenth to the twentieth century who have referred to the story set in the city of Verona, Torres Nebrera 2010.

Lope de Vega's *Castelvines y Monteses*, composed as we have seen between 1606 and 1612, was printed in 1647 in the twenty-fifth part of the writer's collected plays, when drama had by this point become a discreet source of income if it was published.[7] It is common knowledge that it was Lope who first defined the character of Spanish national theatre, employing formulas which would then be repeated by his contemporaries and then by his successors, but above all it was he who boosted the national dramatic patrimony, some saying by 1,800 works, the dramatist himself claiming 1,400 and ourselves inheriting 470 of what survived. Lope de Vega began to publish his works on his own in 1617, but his editorial activity ended in 1625 when the monarchy suspended the licences for printing works of entertainment in Castile. Too many works were published after his death, too many printed without his permission, too many, perhaps, those attributed to him in order to sell works by other authors, not to mention the countless instances of adaptations on the part of stage managers who very probably changed the original text to correspond to the number of actors in their various companies. The salvaging of Lope's original corpus that has been going on for years has also been able to rescue significant manuscripts and compare them with printed versions. Many of the versions of the same work show important variations such as the omission or the integration of certain lines of verse. The case of Lope, the most outstanding Spanish playwright, reveals itself unique indeed when we consider the fact that there is absolutely no reliable edition of his works. Only in 1989 was El Grupo PROLOPE founded by Alberto Blecua of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, now directed by Ramon Valdés. The main aim of this group is to conclude a critical edition of Lope's complete theatrical works, but they have not prepared a critical edition of *Castelvines y Monteses* yet.

However, since July 2004 a mise-en-scène of the work does exist and has been staged on other occasions too.[8] The adaptation is by Darío Facal, the staging by Aitana Galán, then a young director, and the resulting theatrical operation is particularly interesting. A decision was made to reduce the number of characters, to intervene over the syntax of the Spanish and to change certain obsolete words and idioms. In other words, to modernise the text without missing out on the specific flavour of seventeenth-century Spanish, and in this way to enhance rather than to lose audience reception of Lope's characteristic humour and feeling. Obviously at this point some scenes have been reconstructed and some new ones have appeared, but when this happens the verse metre of the preceding or of the following passage is maintained and the language is midway between Lope's Spanish and that of today. Then again, the length of the play has been significantly reduced from the original 3,055 lines to the 2,212 of the new version, eliminating several of the characters and causing some of them to take on the traits of those who have been cut.

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[7] The date of composition is uncertain, but should be placed between 1606 and 1612 according to the studies on the metrics of Lope de Vega's dramatic texts. On this, see Morley and Bruerton 1969, 299-300. The work was published posthumously on March 29, 1647: Vega Carpio, 279-331.

In the version of 2004 a new character is introduced: a prostitute, whose function is that of emphasising the inconstancy of Roselo, the male protagonist. In point of fact, the entire adaptation, though searching for a balance, swings between lyricism and humour, paying greater attention to Shakespeare's text than the original: certain love scenes of *Romeo and Juliet* are fundamental to the version of 2004, while they are absent in the original *Castelvines y Monteses*. Among other things, the adaptation opens with a Prologue in perfect Shakespearian style which is missing in Lope's, though here it is a character rather than a chorus that recalls the fact that once Verona was a peaceful and beautiful city and only now has it been transformed into a trouble spot by the enmity between the Castelvines and the Monteses (Vega Carpio 2005, 1-32). The whole adaptation and the rewriting, however, follows Lope's happy ending, even though it uses very different lines from those of the writer from Madrid:

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[8] The play was staged by the José Estruch-Resad company for the first time on July 12, 2004 at the *XXXVII Festival de teatro clásico de Almagro*. The adaptation can be read in Vega Carpio 2005. On the stage fortune of Lope's work in the twenty-first century, I refer to Di Pinto 2019, in particular 73-4.

> Así todo se resuelve
> para mostrarle a la historia
> que sin guerras ni muertes
> vuelve la paz a Verona. (Vega Carpio 2005, 2200-3)
>
> [Thus all is resolved / To show to history / That with neither war nor death / Peace returns to Verona.]

But what are the relevant features of Lope's original play? Transferring Bandello's novella onto the stage meant adapting it to the rules of composition demanded by new Spanish comedy.[9] It is of course by following these rules that the Spanish playwright changes the unhappy story of the Veronese lovers into a comedy with a happy ending and thus transforms tragic prose into comic drama.

The *incipit* sees the young Roselo Monteses – this is his name – strolling along a street in Verona, and, after admiring the beauty of his enemy Antonio Castelvin's house, putting on a mask and going in, accompanied by his servant and his friend Anselmo, to meet the lovely girls there. Marin, Roselo's servant and his *gracioso*,[10] is the character who informs the public of the feud between the Castelvines and the Monteses. Their enmity is so great that the *gracioso* presents the two families as dogs and cats going about the city or even other animals such as hens and cockerels:

> MARÍN No solo en cualquier persona
> me cansa, enoja y fastidia
> ver el odio que en vosotros
> es causa de tantos yerros.
> Pero el ver que hasta los perros
> se muerdan unos con otros,

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[9] In addition to the references cited in the preceding and following pages, see: Friedman 1989; Rodríguez-Badendyck 1991; Muir 1992; Rabell 2014 and Ruiz Morgan 2021, particularly the second chapter, in which *Castelvines y Monteses* by Lope de Vega, *Los bandos de Verona* by Francisco de Rojas Zorrilla and *Los amantes de Verona* by Cristóbal Rozas are discussed.

[10] The *gracioso* is an impertinent and apprehensive character from the lower limits of the social scale, who usually has the function of creating a comic contrast with the male protagonist and a balance between the high style and a lower and more amusing one.

> que es ver salir de las puertas
> Monteses y Castelvines,
> bravos gozques y mastines,
> las bocas de furia abiertas;
> que si los dientes sutiles
> espadas pudieran ser,
> bastaban a enriquecer
> por horas los alguaciles.
> No hay hombre que sin carlanca
> traiga su alano valiente;
> que parece linda muerte
> sobre la piel negra o blanca;
> pues los gatos, tan airados
> andan en sus bandos juntos,
> que hacen campaña por puntos
> las cocinas y tejados.
> Si maúllan, es por fin
> de declarar su interés,
> porque unos dicen Montés,
> y otros dicen Castelvín.
> Hasta en los gallos se ve
> de aquestos bandos la furia,
> porque tienen por injuria
> que alguno cantando esté.
> Y con tantos intereses,
> que si un Castelvín primero
> comienza en su gallinero,
> responden treinta Monteses. (1.66-99)[11]

[MARÍN Well, for my part, not only has it pained me / as a man

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[11] For the Spanish text of *Castelvines y Monteses* I refer to the digital edition https://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra-visor/castelvines-y-monteses--0/html/ (Accessed 5 May 2022). The English text is taken from Cynthia Rodríguez-Badendyck's translation published in 1998. In her introduction, Rodríguez-Badendyck interprets the happy ending from the perspective of the Catholic theology of free will: "the comedic ending is earned by passing through tragedy and beyond it" (41). The story of the two lovers could not end in tragedy because human love, when true, participates in divine love. The first English translation is that of Frederick William Cosens: Vega Carpio 1869, even though it must be said that at many points it constitutes a synthesis of numerous passages of the Spanish playwright.

> of sensitive feeling, / to see the hatred among you / breed mischief in human beings, / but you know your very dogs / will go and bite one another. / What a spectacle to see / the hounds of the Castelvins / and the mastiffs of the Monteses / come ravening out the doors, / their jaws gaping open with rage. / If only their sharp little pointed swords, / why, our constables would grow richer / by the hour with the added employment. / Not a man of you walks his dog / without buckling an armored collar – / for the elegant look, I'm sure, / against the black or white fur. / And the cats! Your cats, incensed, / all prowl in packs together, / and swiftly make battlefields/ out of rooftops and kitchenyards. / Their caterwauling battlecries / announce their allegiances: / these here will howl, "Montés!" / and those there will yowl, "Castelvín!" / until the roosters rally/ to the fury of your houses,/ affronted and outraged/ that any cock should crow/ for that other detested faction./ If one backyard fowl begins/ to sing out, "Castelvín!" / thirty others will squawk, "Montés!" (58-9)]

This adventure seems very risky, but in spite of this the two friends enter the Castelvines' dwelling. Roselo is so bold that he takes his mask off and Julia immediately falls in love with him, as does her cousin Dorotea with Anselmo. To cap it all, the maidservant falls in love with Marin. With the decision to meet one another at night in a *locus amoenus*, with Julia's fear when she discovers Roselo's identity, there is also a scene where his father, head of the Monteses, is shown worrying about Roselo's propensity for love affairs and gambling, and hoping he will soon marry.

The meeting takes place in the garden, where Julia greets her cousin Otavio, just before Roselo's arrival, after which he tells her he loves her and wants to marry her in secret:

ROSELO Sabe el cielo que lo hiciera
si pudiera obedecerte,
querida enemiga mía,
luz del alma que aborreces.
Mas, ¿cómo sera posible?,
pues será fácil volverte
el anillo y las palabras,
y el saltar estas paredes,
pero no dejaré de hablarte
y decirte que no pienses

que hay volver, si no hay peligro,
ni amor, que sin él se esfuerce.
Advierte pues, Julia mía,
que también de oírte y verte
te amé sin saber quién eras,
tú sabes si lo mereces;
y que cuando supe el nombre,
y vi el peligro presente,
amenazando mi cuello
si este mi amor se supiese,
procuré dejar de amarte,
mas amor, que siempre ofrece
industrias en imposibles,
y no hay mal que no remedie,
me dijo que no dejase,
Julia mía, de quererte,
pues de secreto, los dos,
si el amor nos favorece,
bien podremos, Julia mía,
bien, Julia mía.
JULIA Detente,
detente pues; y no digas,
Julia mía, tantas veces,
que temo que harás en mí
los efetos que quisieres.
Que el nombre, en ajena boca,
alegra, enternece y mueve.
Mas di, ya que hablaste, cómo
podrás hablarme y quererme.
¿Qué intento llevas?, ¿qué fin?,
¿qué procuras?, ¿qué pretendes?
ROSELO Que nos casemos los dos,
luz mía, secretamente,
en vuestra parroquia un día;
que con quien hacer lo puede,
yo tengo estrecha amistad;
y si el peligro le ofende,
bien podemos engañarle.
JULIA Tiemblo de oírte.
ROSELO ¿Qué temes?
JULIA Mil desdichas.

ROSELO ¡Ay, señora!,
¿qué desdicha te detiene,
si puede ser que estos bandos
con tu casamiento cesen?
Mira que por dicha el cielo
nos provoca ocultamente
a este amor honesto y santo,
con que todos en paz quede. (1.931-86)

> [ROSELO Heaven knows that I would do it; / if I could, I would obey you, / my beloved enemy, / light of the soul you abhor. / But how is it possible? / It would be an easy thing / to return the ring and the words, / and to leap the walls again, / but how can I not speak, / not tell you there's no turning back / without turning back toward danger? / Without it no love is proved. / Then know, my Julia, that I, too, / only seeing and hearing you, / loved you without knowing who you were / (as you know you are worthy to be loved). / Then when I learned your name / and saw the danger present, / menacing my throat / if my love were to be found out, / I tried not to love you any longer. / But love, who is most industrious/ in what is impossible, / and remedies all ills, / love told me not to let go, / my Julia, not to stop loving you. / In secret the two of us, / if love will smile on us, / we two, my Julia, may well, / well, my Julia . . . // JULIA Stop. / Stop now, and please don't say / "my Julia" quite so much. I'm afraid you may have the effect / on me that you wish to have; / my name in the mouth of a stranger/ makes me happy, and tender, and moves me. / But now that you've spoken, tell me, / haw can you see me or speak to me? / What are your intentions? / What do you want from me? // ROSELO That the two of us should be married, / my light, here in your parish, / in secret, on day soon. / I know someone who can do it, / a close and trusted friend; / and if he's dismayed by the danger / we can, if need be, deceive him. // JULIA I'm afraid when I hear you. // ROSELO Of what? // JULIA Of a thousand mischances. // ROSELO Ah, lady! / What mischance can hold you back / when it may well be that these factions / can be brought to an end by your marriage? / Only see, it may be that heaven/ is prompting us secretly / to this honest and only love, / so we all may live in peace. (85-7)]

Act 2 opens in a church where some of the women of one of the feuding families have taken the seats usually occupied by the women of the other one. This affront is the harbinger of violent consequences. Roselo meets his friend Anselmo in church too and reveals the fact that his marriage to Julia has already taken place and he has been meeting Julia for several weeks every night after her conversations with her cousin Otavio. Roselo tells Anselmo that as soon as Otavio leaves the garden of the house at midnight, he comes there with a ladder and climbs up to Julia's room where he stays until the first light of dawn:

ANSELMO ¿Puede dejar entenderse,
Roselo, tu pensamiento,
ya paseando de día
su calle, a su reja atento,
ya, como agora, en la iglesia?
ROSELO En eso, Anselmo, procedo
con la cordura que basta.
ANSELMO ¿Pues hay hombre, amando, cuerdo?
ROSELO No paseo yo su calle,
y de milagro a este templo
vengo a misa.
ANSELMO ¿De qué suerte
os veis?
ROSELO Sin peligro, Anselmo.
ANSELMO ¿Cómo?
ROSELO Poniendo una escala,
las más noches con silencio,
a la pared del jardín
de los naranjos y cedros,
bajo; y Celia, que me espera,
me guía hasta su aposento,
donde primero que el alba,
peine esos rubios cabellos.
Ya doy la vuelta a la escala,
donde Marín llega presto,
subo, y diciendo, y en casa
de día descanso y duermo.
ANSELMO ¿Y eso no tiene peligro?
ROSELO No, Anselmo, que cuando llego
todos duermen en Verona. (2.167-93)

[ANSELMO Roselo, have you wholly abandoned the process of ra-

> tional thought? / You walk down her street in broad daylight, / loiter under her window, / and now, like this, in the church? // ROSELO I proceed in this, Anselmo, / with all necessary prudence. // ANSELMO Is a man in love ever prudent? // ROSELO But I don't walk down her street, / and I come to this church today/ by a miracle. // ANSELMO Then how is it/ that you manage to meet? // ROSELO Quite safely. // ANSELMO But how? // ROSELO By leaning a ladder / to the garden wall, and then softly / many a night I climb down, / through the orange trees and cedars. / And when at first light the dawn / combs out her shining hair, / I turn again to the ladder, / when Marín is prompt to meet me. / I climb up, and I descend, / and by day, at home, I sleep. // ANSELMO And there's no danger in that? // ROSELO No. By the time I arrive, / every soul in Verona is sleeping. (93-4)]

And even if young Roselo intends to go on in this way until the hatred between the two families has ended, as soon as the two friends are outside the church the predicted fight between the Castelvines and the Monteses takes place. Even after swords have been drawn, the young Roselo tries to clarify what happened in the church and to end everything peacefully, but Otavio will not listen to reason, he attacks Roselo and Roselo kills him. On the arrival of the Duke of Verona, with a company of soldiers and their captain, all present affirm that everything had begun because of Otavio's attitude and that Roselo had tried to solve the matter peacefully. Julia, too, who was not even there at the time and has no cause to testify bears witness in Roselo's favour, just so that she can save him:

> VERONA Roselo, ¿mataste a Otavio?
> ROSELO Si es muerto, digo que sí,
> provocado y con agravio,
> y defendiéndome a mí.
> VERONA Mira que está aquí presente
> una prima del difunto,
> que le amaba tiernamente.
> ROSELO Y yo a la misma pregunto
> si le maté, justamente.
> JULIA Aunque en Otavio perdí
> gran señor, primo y marido,
> digo que mil veces sí,

porque obligada he nacido
a esta verdad contra mí.
VERONA ¿Vístelo?
JULIA Desde la puerta
de la iglesia; y en aquesto
toda Verona concierta
que ese hombre estaba dispuesto
a la paz segura y cierta,
cuando Otavio le importuna
a que se maten los dos,
soberbio desde la cuna.
¡Ay Celia, mal me haga Dios
si he visto cosa ninguna! (2.392-415)

> [VERONA Roselo, did you slay Otavio? // ROSELO If he's dead, then yes, I did, / but under provocation /, in the act of defending myself. // VERONA Observe that there is here present / a cousin of the deceased, / and one that loved him dearly. // ROSELO I put it even to her / if I was not justified. // JULIA Although in Otavio I lost, / great lord, both cousin and husband, / I say a thousand times yes. / I was born bound to the truth/ though it be against myself. // VERONA Did you see it? // JULIA I did, from the portal / of the church. Everyone in Verona / concurs with what I've said: / that this man's sole intention/ was a firm and enduring peace, / when Otavio pressed upon him / that they should kill one another. / He was always, from the cradle, proud. / *(Aside to Celia)* (Oh, Celia, may God strike me) if I ever saw a thing! (101-2)]

The result of this is that Roselo is not condemned to death but exiled by the Duke of Verona until the hostility between the two families has cooled down. Before his exile, Roselo and his servant Marin meet up with Julia and Celia. As a contrast to the conventional Petrarchan language of love which requires a vow of mutual fidelity ("Y como en presencia he sido, / el mismo seré en ausencia" (2.564-5) ["and as in presence I have been, / so shall I be in absence" (106)], we have the *gracioso* Marin's dialogue with Celia as a counterpoint in a comic vein which also demonstrates the servant's cowardice. This Act ends with Julia's father's desire to console his daughter by having her marry count Paris; with Roselo who realises that his secret marriage to Julia is compromised when he learns the contents of a letter read to him by Paris (his loyal friend) who is accompanying him to Ferrara and with the same Roselo who suspects he is being tricked by Julia and for this reason decides to avenge himself by marrying the first woman he sees when he arrives at his destination.

The third and final Act opens with the young Julia's promise to her father to accept count Paris's hand. Then, when she is alone with her servant, as she is ready to die rather than to marry another man, she drinks the potion prepared by Aurelio and asks for Roselo to be informed of her death. He has already reached Ferrara, and has just fought a duel with other admirers of the lovely Silvia whom he is courting to forget the suffering caused by the news of the plans for Julia's marriage to count Paris when he learns from his friend Anselmo who has just arrived from Verona, that Julia has taken poison and died and that the funeral has already been held and that her body is lying in the family crypt. As different from the Shakespearian version, however, Roselo is informed by Anselmo that the poison taken by Julia has only caused her to fall into a deep sleep which will last for two days and will permit him to join her and flee with her to France or Spain.

Roselo and Marin go back to Verona and enter the crypt just as Julia, frightened and bewildered, wakes up. The following 150 lines turn into a really comic sequence: everything is happening in darkness as the torch has gone out, the fault of the terrified and clumsy servant. Julia wanders about the vault unsure whether she is alive or dead and all three characters keep coming into contact with skulls and bones, while the exchanges between Roselo and Marin reveal the servant's proverbial pusillanimity in the pervading gloom. Finally, however, the two lovers meet and Roselo tells Julia that Aurelio' potion was not a deadly one. The three characters, on Julia's advice, leave Verona dressed up as peasants and retire to the family's country estate.

In this way Lope de Vega is creating the conditions for a happy ending. In the country house, they are preparing a wedding for the old Antonio Castelvines with his brother's young daughter, his own niece, Dorotea, so that in the light of the recent happenings, the family inheritance is not lost to far-off relations (cf. 3.702-7). Castelvines arrives at his house apparently to be met with his daughter's ghost: Julia pretending to be a heavenly spirit talks to him from an upper room and manages to get him to promise to forgive Roselo for the murder of Otavio and above all to put an end to the enmity between the two families. The conclusion is inevitable and the play ends with the union of three couples: Julia with Roselo, Anselmo with Dorotea and Marin with Julia's maid Clelia.

At this point I should like to emphasise several details. In the first place this is a particular version of Bandello's tale, skillfully adapted according to the canons of the *comedia nueva.* Furthermore, Lope theorises his own theatrical practice in the volume *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias* of 1609. In this work, this too written in verse, he argues above all for the need for a variety of themes and of mixing tragedy with comedy. He underlines the importance of the ordinary public (for it is they who buy tickets for a performance), together with the codification of polymetry, the use of different metres in the same piece, which lends variety to the lines and which is a typical and essential feature of drama at this time.[12]

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[12] As is well-known, the use of a certain metre was the cause of a system of expectation on the part of the audiences of seventeenth-century Spanish theatre. The lines often uttered even before the entrance of the actors were already indicative whether the public should expect an epic moment, a lyrical effusion or a love scene. Another relevant aspect of this theatre is its capacity to unite the different social classes without mixing them. There were places for standing and sitting, covered places and others in the open air, with ushers who managed to fit all the spectators into a noisy space. It must be remembered that performances took place in the afternoon: going to the theatre meant watching a long and multipart performance, with a prologue (*loa*) which presented the company and caught the public's attention, followed by the first act of the play. After that there would be an intermezzo before the second Act, and then a dance. Then came the third Act, followed by a *mojiganga*, which brought the occasion to a lively, festive conclusion. All of this would last at least three hours. We should also recall the figure of the *gracioso*, a real *alter ego* of the *galán*, that is, a servant who in contrast to the 'high' values of the protagonist represents the 'low' ones; fear and avidity, for example; and it is often he, as it is in the case of Marin, who becomes the fulcrum of the action and who also relieves the dramatic tension with his cunning pranks. A final detail: there did not exist any fixed practice of printing and circulation of the dramatic literary text. Lope's plays began to be published, as we have said, in an adventitious way. The work was sold by the writer (who lost any copyright) to the manager, who then was free to adapt, mo-

In the case of *Castelvines y Monteses* we do not need to know if the public was aware of the existence of the work of Bandello, the French translation or Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, all things of difficult access to the public, but it is certain that Lope got hold of a story, modelled it following the taste of his public and reworked it so it ended happily.

A few further points deserve to be made clear. Julia is a character who, as different from her counterpart in Bandello, is often the real *deus ex machina*. It is she who makes the appointment with Roselo, who witnesses in his defence, although she is perjuring herself as she was not present, that it was Otavio who provoked the bloody events: she it is who pretends to feel sorry for her cousin's death and who hides her secret marriage with Roselo from her father. Again it is Julia who makes Roselo, who has been exiled to Ferrara, visit her clandestinely every night that he can, thus disobeying the orders of the Duke of Verona:

JULIA Que vengas
con gran secreto a Verona
todas las noches que puedas,
hasta que llegue ocasión
que nos vamos a Venecia,
dando a estas paredes paso,
los de la escala de cuerdas,
que hasta que viva contigo,
¿cómo puedo estar contenta?
¿Cumplirasme esta palabra? (2.653-62)

> [JULIA Come to Verona / with the greatest secrecy / as many nights as you can, / until the time is ripe / for us to flee to Venice, / scaling these garden walls / with the ladder as you have before. / Till I live my life with you/ how can I be happy? / Will you keep your word to me? (109)]

It is Julia indeed, who in the crypt proposes going to the Castelvines' country estate (and perhaps her name itself renders her more authoritative, compared to the nickname Julieta):

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dify or manipulate it according to the wishes of the public or the number of the actors in the company, situations which could lead to significant cuts.

JULIA Si procuras
que estemos más encubiertos,
hasta que la suerte cumpla
sus términos en nosotros,
y aquellas venganzas duran,
en la hacienda de mi padre
nos librarán de su injuria
dos hábitos de villanos. (3.666-73)

> [JULIA Unless / you've a better way to hide us, / until such time as fortune / has fulfilled its plans for us – / if this vendetta continues / at my father's estate in the country / two simple peasant costumes / will help us elude its mischief. (143)]

And it is the wise and enterprising Julia who, pretending to be a heavenly spirit, saves Roselo's life and creates the conditions that will open a new period of friendship between the two rival families of Monteses and Castelvines. When considering the difference between Lope's Julia and Bandello's, we have only to think that Fra Lorenzo has great doubts about whether the young woman would have courage enough to lie in the same tomb as her cousin Tebaldo, as his body would "sicuramente putire" ("surely stink") and be full of "serpe e mille vermini" ("snakes and many little worms").[13]

In other words, Lope casually dismantles and rewrites the story of the two lovers of Verona. Even the most sinister situations, like the visit to the crypt, in Lope become comic occasions, or at least mingle the tragic with the comic. Deviation and elimination are the basic elements of his comedy. Even in the title it is very probable that the Spanish author distances himself from tradition. Castelvines and Monteses have a vaguely Catalan ring, and seem to recall family feuds of that time and place. And it is noticeable that there are no references to "*Pietosa morte*" (Da Porto) ["pitiful death"] or "*sfortunata morte*" (Bandello) ["unlucky death"]. Certainly, however, the references to Verona and to the Duke are plainly visible. The transformation of the name from Romeo to Roselo is something of a surprise and to be seen nowhere else in the multiplicity of reworkings of this story, and yet another thing to signal is the taste for duplication or even triplication of the couples. There are not only Roselo and Julia, but also Anselmo and Dorotea and then the servants Marin and Celia. They are all happily married and the two servants even receive a thousand ducats:

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[13] I am summarising here some of the indications of the interesting and documented work of Gentilli 2020.

> ANTONIO No es tiempo, dale las manos.
> MARÍN ¿Y a mí no hay quien me consuele?
> ¿No hay quien me paga el sacar
> esta muerte?
> JULIA Razón tiene.
> Celia es suya y mil ducados.
> ROSELO Senado, pues ya se entiende
> lo demás, aquí dan fin
> *Castelvines y Monteses*. (3.1013-20)

> [ANTONIO Not now; give him your hands. // MARÍN And for me, have I no consolations? / Don't I get someone in payment/ for retrieving this corpse? // JULIA He's right. / Take Celia and thousand ducats. // ROSELO Now you know, grave assembly, the rest. / And here is ended the play / *Castelvins and Monteses*. (155)]

In this extreme case of *variation in imitando* it is clear that there is a refusal of the fortuity of events and the arbitrary nature of fortune. Again, many are the instances of motives which are re-proposed or revisited only in part: from the hostility between the two families to the meeting between the young lovers, from the secret marriage to the use of the narcotic, from the apparent death to the macabre re-awakening, even though this is rewritten in a comic vein. Yet another feature already noticed by some observant critics, is the comic degeneration of the prototype, its turn from tragedy to comedy (cf. Gentilli 2020, 146). And not least Lope's ability to smoothen the many traps of the story: no on-stage concessions to the wedding-night. On the contrary: the two months of nocturnal assignations, after their wedding, although it was clandestine, had been celebrated, are never referred to with the slightest trace of false *pruderie*. Those two months have been transformed into a dutiful *ménage* between husband and wife. The union of the bodies of two lovers, that has been repeated night after night, is indeed never staged but is perceptible in Roselo's replies to his friend Anselmo's questions on the second day:

ROSELO Otavio la quiere bien,
pero el peregrino ingenio
de Julia sabe engañarle.
ANSELMO ¿Cómo?
ROSELO Por el mismo huerto,
desde las diez a las doce,
habla con él, y él con esto
vase acostar a su casa.
ANSELMO Ingenioso pensamiento;
con eso andará seguro.
¿Pero tú no tienes celos
de que hable con tu esposa?
ROSELO No, porque los oigo y veo
muchas veces, escondido,
y sé que es lenguaje honesto
el que pasa entre los dos.
ANSELMO ¿Y el tuyo?
ROSELO Licencia tengo
de marido.
ANSELMO ¿Luego ya
en la posesión te ha puesto?
ROSELO Pues si ya estamos casados,
¿quién nos obliga a respeto?
ANSELMO Tiemblo de lo que me dices.
ROSELO Yo con el calor no tiemblo.
ANSELMO ¿No te da miedo la casa?
ROSELO Nada, Anselmo, me da miedo,
porque amor y posesión
son valientes en estremo.
ANSELMO Ya no sé qué aconsejarte.
ROSELO Mi bien no quiere consejo,
porque es llover en la mar
dar consejo a casos hechos. (2.195-224)

[ROSELO It's true he's in love with her, / but Julia's peregrine wit/ knows the way to dupe Otavio. // ANSELMO How? // ROSELO In the very same garden / in the hours between ten and midnight, / she converses with him, and then/ he takes himself to bed. // ANSELMO What an ingenious idea! / Well then, she's secure, / but what about you? Aren't you jealous / of a man that talks with your life? // ROSELO No, since I often hide there / and see and overhear them. / I know it's honest language / that passes be-

> tween the two. // ANSELMO And yours? // ROSELO Well, I have the licence / of a husband. // ANSELMO Then she's already granted you / marital possession. // ROSELO Well, if we are married, / whose will should we wait upon? // ANSELMO It terrifies me to hear this. // ROSELO I tremble, but not with terror. // ANSELMO But aren't you afraid of her household? // ROSELO I am afraid of nothing. / Love and possession, Anselmo, / are valiant in the extreme. // ANSELMO I have no more advice to give. // ROSELO My happiness needs no advice. / For things already accomplished / advice in rain in the ocean. (94-5)]

Roselo's affirmations are confirmed by Julia herself on the third day. This is the moment when the girl declares her wedding, even though it was clandestine and therefore not really in line with post-Tridentine opinion, to be within the Catholic tradition, as it has been blessed by the priest, Aurelio:

JULIA Cualquier hombre te dijera,
por vil y bajo que fuese;
y no puede el que me dio
para marido mi suerte.
Casome Aurelio con él,
que hasta tanto que tuviese
la bendición de la iglesia,
no fue posible moverme.
Dos meses fue mi marido.
ANTONIO ¿Que no se supo en dos meses? (3.881-90)

> [JULIA I'd have told you of any man, / however vile and low, / but I could not name to you / the man Fate gave me for a husband. / Aurelio married us, / for until I had received / the blessing of the Church, / I would not consent to be moved. / Two months he was my husband. // ANTONIO And I didn't know for two months? (150-1)]

I shall not go into the details of the probable, presumed and hypothetical relationship between *Romeo and Juliet* and *Castelvines y Monteses*. Much has been said and written since in 1874 Julius Klein claimed that Lope's play was written before 1603, sustaining his hypothesis first by postulating the existence of a dramatic source, since lost, common to both plays, then perhaps the possibility of copies of Lope's work which had reached England before the composition of *Romeo and Juliet*, and so on and so forth (Klein 1874, 955-84). Critics have taken various sides on this issue. There is an interesting hypothesis in a 2015 article by Agnese Sammanca del Murgo, even though it is not supported by convincing data, where she maintains that the clues disseminated in *Castelvines y Monteses* would suggest that Lope knew about the existence of Shakespeare's masterpiece.

According to her, if the intertextual dialogue between the two works, the duplicates, assonances and echoes on a textual level are taken into account, it would be possible to justify familiarity with *Romeo and Juliet* on Lope's part by basing this familiarity on historical situations. The hypothesis finds its origins in the fact of the presence of "two people close to Shakespeare who were in the streets and the places dear to Lope" (2015, 203; my translation) and concludes that "there is a direct and genetic relationship that makes *Romeo and Juliet* the subtext of *Castelvines y Monteses*" (209). This underlying hypothesis is based on the circumstance that a translator, John Mabbe, who was accompanying the English ambassador to Madrid, John Digby, Earl of Bristol, was a competent Spanish scholar and admirer both of Shakespeare and of Lope, and this would have permitted the Spanish playwright to exploit Shakespeare's text in its entirety (ibid.). This is without doubt a very intriguing conjecture, but in the end it is indeed only a suggestion, one which would, moreover, mean that the date of the composition of Castelvines y Monteses would have to be moved to 1616-17, and that is a long time after the period established by the analysis of its polymetry which allows us to set the time of its writing to 1606 or soon after. What is certain is that the English ambassador John Digby was in fact in Madrid between 1611 and 1616 a few blocks down from the house Lope had bought in 1610.

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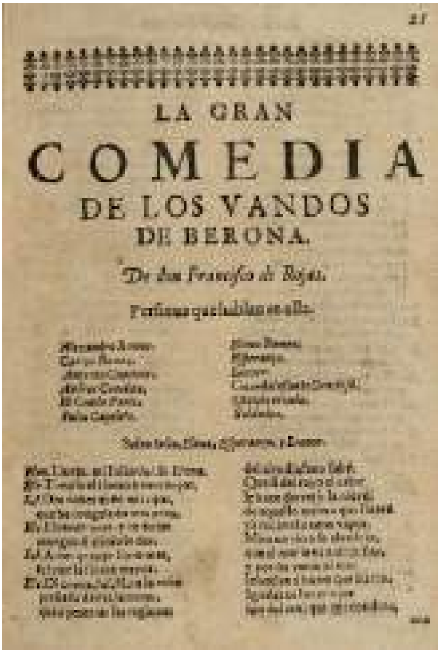

LA GRAN
COMEDIA
DE LOS VANDOS
DE BERONA.
De don Francisco de Rojas.

Fig. 2 By kind permission of Biblioteca Nacional de España TI/64

The second play I shall briefly analyse was written by Francisco de Rojas Zorrilla, an author who enjoyed so much recognition at that time that it was he who inaugurated the theatre space, since destroyed, of the architect Cosimo Lotti's Coliseum of the Buen Retiro, with his play *Los bandos de Verona*.[14] At this point the story of the lovers of Verona moves from the *corral*, usually internal inn-yards, or the courtyards of hospitals or religious associations, to the theatre of the royal court, indoors, with artificial lighting, curtain and perspective backdrops.

The work was published five years later, and from what we have managed to glean from the evidence, the text that has reached us must be the one that was performed in the corrales, not the one, therefore, that was staged in the Coliseum in 1640.[15] Even though it is true that the play does not present many difficulties from the point of view of its staging, there can be no doubt that between the first court performance and the fortunate and continuous performances following this in the corrales we may only hypothesise that there must have been various different scenic solutions.

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[14] For a modern edition see Rojas Zorrilla 2012, 169-321, with a detailed introduction by Pardo Molina and González Cañal 2012, 171-203.

[15] The first edition of this play appeared in 1645 in Segunda parte de las

Los bandos de Verona by Francisco de Rojas Zorrilla proved to be a text with not only a great theatrical fortune, but also an editorial one.[16] In some editions it appears with the subtitle *Montescos y Capeletes*, and in one edition the title is simply *Montescos y Capeletes* tout court. It was twice translated into German (in 1839 and 1953) and partially into English by Frederick William Cosens in 1874 with the aim of comparing it to Romeo and Juliet. It is worth recalling some of the translator's unenthusiastic comments:

> *Los bandos de Verona Montescos y Capeletes* has been bracketed by Shakespearian commentators with another Spanish play, the *Castelvines y Montescos* of Lope de Vega, as illustrative of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*; the author, Francisco de Rojas Zorrilla, has certainly to some extent availed himself of the Italian tradition dramatized by Shakespeare, but has ignored the tragic aspect of the history of the hapless lovers of Verona, whom he marries in the end, and makes happy ever afterwards. . . . I am inclined to think that English students of Shakespeare will scarcely value, as German commentators appear to do, this Spanish play; it is inferior in every way to the '*Castelvines y Monteses*' of Lope de Vega . . . His works vary in style, in language, and in merit; certainly *Los bandos de Verona* is not one of his best productions. . . . I have only translated at length such portions of his play as bear some reference to Shakespeare's tragedy, connecting the scenes so as to render the whole work intelligible to those who feel an interest in every scrap that in the slightest degree can claim to be illustrative of the great dramatist's work. (Consens 1874, vii-viii)

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comedias de don Francisco de Rojas, 21*r*-42*v*.

[16] Cf. García Lorenzo 2007 and González Cañal 2009. The staging of the work, its political symbolism and the political concerns of the Spanish court, at war with France, that can be seen in the clashes between *Monteses y Capuletes* have been discussed by Doménech Rico 2000.

The cuts and paraphrases make the Spanish playwright's work completely incomprehensible – a useless editorial operation, indeed. And yet, from the very beginning, Rojas Zorrilla's *Los bandos de Verona* reveals some interesting peculiarities. The work does not open with parties or masked balls but a scene where we listen to Julia and Elena confide their love difficulties to one another as one is a Capeletes and the other a Montescos. Julia tells of her unlucky love for Alejandro Romeo and the impossibility that she will ever be able to marry him: her father wants to wed her to her cousin Andrés Capelete: Elena, Alejandro Romeo's sister, on the other hand, wants to marry count Paris who is in his turn in love with Julia (Rojas Zorrilla 2012, 1.1-378).

It is thanks to the recounting of their unhappy loves that we understand about the feud between the two families: Julia was present at the tourney when her brother was killed by Elena's father. So the first meeting between Julia and Alejandro Romeo Montesco is not staged – funnily enough here Romeo becomes a surname so that we end up with two Romeos in the play: Alejandro Romeo and Carlos Romeo. Another important difference is that of the wedding ceremony between the lovers – who are quite grown-up – which takes place in public at the happy ending. Yet another difference is to be noticed at the scene in the crypt which takes place in Act 2 and which Rojas Zorrilla transforms into comedy. Antonio Capelete, Julia's father, orders her to marry count Paris or alternatively her cousin Andrés while she insists she wants to marry Alejandro Romeo and from this comes the decision to poison herself. Listening to the discussion between the two is Alejandro Romeo's servant, Guardainfante, who had come to the house to give Julia a letter in which the young man asks her to flee with him. Fortunately, he had been able to hide beneath a table before the arrival of Antonio Capelete. Julia's father, meanwhile, believes his daughter to be dead, and with count Paris's help carries her to the family tomb. But when Guardainfante informs his master Alejandro Romeo of what has happened the young man expresses total disbelief about Julia's demise: and why does he not believe his loved one is dead? Because, as her lover, and turning to Neoplatonic philosophy for proof (2.1732-72), he knows that if he, Alejandro Romeo is still alive, it is because she too is still alive. So Alejandro Romeo, guided by his Neoplatonic vision of love, goes down into the crypt.

His servant's fears accompany Alejandro Romeo's laments as he does so, almost as if he were a new Orpheus who is descending into the underworld to rescue his Eurydice. All this until Guardainfante realises that Julia is not dead and at this point sets off the beginning of a comic sequence: calling her name over and over again while blessing her with an aspergillum, he sprinkles water over her until she awakes (2.2067-123). When the two lovers are ready to escape, Elena and Julia's cousin Andrés arrive. He knows she is not dead because he had procured the poison – which is only a strong narcotic – for her. He now wants to capture her to avenge himself for her refusal of his hand. In the confusion and darkness of the crypt there is an exchange of couples: Alejandro Romeo flees with Elena and Andrés with Julia.

It is above all in the third and final Act that Rojas Zorrilla rewrites the story of the two lovers of Verona in a completely different manner. Everything takes place outside the city walls, on an unnamed mountainside, in a dark wood which fittingly represents the absolute lawlessness and chaos of this world. Julia manages to escape after her cousin attempts to rape her – a situation which is narrated, not staged (3.2303-86).

While she is wandering in the mountains, she meets her father Antonio and count Paris. At first, she manages to convince her father that she is a ghost, but then count Paris disabuses him of this idea and Antonio comes to the drastic decision that he will imprison his daughter for the rest of her life in a tower room in his castle, hidden from the eyes of the world, and given up for dead by all except count Paris.

The action of Act 3 becomes more and more complicated: the Capeletes hide with Elena, Julia and Carlos, Alejandro Romeo's friend, in their castle, while the Montescos begin to besiege and bombard it. It is no good for Antonio Capeletes to ask for mercy and admit that he was the only one responsible for the feud; Alejandro Romeo's anger at the supposed death of Julia, murdered by her father on the mountainside, is so fierce that the capitulation of the Capeletes is not enough: he wants to annihilate the lot of them.

His anger is not to be placated by Elena's words neither by those of his friend Carlos who talk to him from the top of the tower: his only intent is to set fire to the whole castle. But then Julia appears there too and asks Alejandro Romeo for forgiveness and mercy (3.3092-114). Once he has gained permission from her father to marry her and for count Paris to woo Elena the performance ends happily with the unanimous intention of uniting the two families in a close and friendly relationship.

There are many other striking things about this play. It is love that triumphs over social obligations. In fact the power represented by the Duke of Verona is completely absent, only being briefly recalled when Alejandro Romeo and his servant go into the crypt and see his tomb with the inscription which reads "Bartolomé de la Escala / señor de Verona" ("Here lies Bartolomeo della Scala, / Lord of Verona"; 2.1969-70). There is no trace of the apotheosis of the power of a lord and no Leviathan re-establishes order. In fact, there is no authority in the city superior to that of the Capeletes and the Montescos. Count Paris no longer has the role of a neutral agent with no trace of involvement in the feud between the families, as is his position in Bandello, Lope and Shakespeare. In Rojas Zorrilla he takes on a relevant part in the Capeletes faction. Again, there is no reference to any exile.

But it is Julia who is the most fascinating figure. She asks help of no one – in this play there are no characters like Friar Laurence in Shakespeare or Aurelio in Lope. Above all, she takes the poison without knowing it is only a powerful narcotic, so she does not pretend to die as is the case in Lope and in Shakespeare. Julia is the real heroine: not in the slightest degree docile, she is determined, her character is really a strong one and just before she drinks what she is convinced is real poison she defends her identity, her choice in love which goes beyond the codes of honour. Standing before her father she claims her own free will in a line of enormous strength "Yo soy mia" (2.1537) ("I am mine"). Much could also be said about the more than three thousand lines of the play: their metrical diversity, the way they are presented in a variety of styles typical of the period by the playwright who inaugurated with *Los bandos de Verona* Cosimo Lotti's Coliseo del Buen Retiro.

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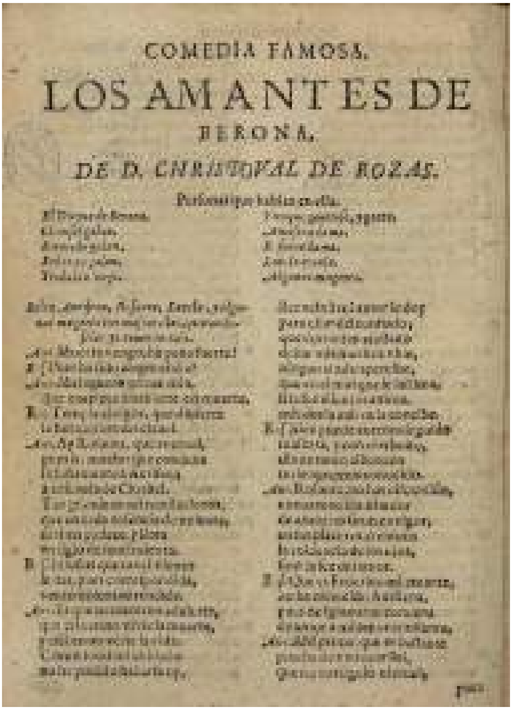

COMEDIA FAMOSA.
LOS AMANTES DE
BERONA.
DE D. CHRISTOVAL DE ROZAS.
Personas que hablan en ella.

Fig. 3 By kind permission of Biblioteca Nacional de España TI/16<24>

Cristóbal de Rozas' play *Los amantes de Verona* is of particular interest. Only one witness remains to us, printed in 1666 in the volume entitled P*arte veinte y cuatro de comedias nuevas escogidas*, ff. 126*v*-44*v* [Part XXIV of Selected New Comedies]. The volume, dedic6vted to a woman (Guiomar María Egas Venegas de Córdoba), also presents the endorsement of Pedro Calderón de la Barca who in a few lines declares the worth of the publication of 12 plays which had been published after he had seen them performed.

This author is the only one of our three seventeenth-century playwrights who returns to the story of the lovers from Verona while proposing a tragic ending. He alters the names of the feuding factions as well as the names of the protagonists. The rivalry is between Guelphs and Ghibellines and the names of the young couple change. No longer Julia or Julieta but Aurisena who belongs to the Guelphs, no longer Romeo or Roselo but Clorisel, the Ghibelline chief. The first scene sees Aurisena, already in love with Clorisel, conversing with her cousin Rosaura on the occasion of a masked ball. In a bold and contemptuous manner, Clorisel, his servant Vitoque and his friend Ricaredo arrive masked at the ball and are discovered. They manage to hide in some of the secret rooms of the palace thanks to the help of Aurisena and Rosaura.

The person who is most annoyed by their presence at the ball is the Duke of Verona, who during the course of the play reveals himself to be decidedly on the side of the Guelphs. In the general confusion the two young people have time to affirm their love for one another. Despite the searches for them, the three Ghibellines manage to escape by climbing down from a balcony by means of a rope (Rozas 1666, 1. 131*r*-2*r*).

The second Act of the play opens with Federico, who is also in love with Aurisena. Having heard the conversation between the lovers, he decides to murder the young Ghibelline and thus avenge himself for his cousin's ingratitude. The action is no longer taking place in the city but in a country-house owned by Teobaldo, Aurisena's father. Once again, the Duke of Verona appears, on a visit to Teobaldo on the way back from a hunting trip, and tells him he has organised Aurisena's marriage to the marquis Teodoro (2. 132*v*-3*r*). The second day is spent among woods and mountains as we follow the fruitless search for Clorisel on the part of Teobaldo and the Duke of Verona, and the duel between Clorisel and Federico, who dies by the Ghibelline's sword (2. 134). The Act ends with Clorisel managing to escape from a cave where he had been hiding, helped by Aurisena.

The most interesting aspect of this second Act besides the actual events and the complicating of the story, is the increase in the references which announce the tragedy. Fatality and references to death are the bases upon which the dramatic tension is constructed.[17] Premonitions increase and the public realises that the solution of a happy ending is impossible. Uneasiness and melancholy become the keynotes of all the lyrical moments of the meetings between Clorisel and Aurisena. The meeting between them outside the cave, with the metaphors of nature and descriptions of the countryside, is filled with a lyricism thick with the premonition of death; a sparrow that dies in Aurisena's hands, a jasmine bush withered and dying (2. 137*v*-8*r*). The same things happen to Clorisel who has seen a goldfinch captured by a kite-hawk and a lamb devoured by a wolf (2. 134*v*). Even the song sung by the maid, on the subject of the unhappy Pyramus and his love for Thisbe, is ominous and Aurisena asks her at once to stop singing (2. 136*r*).

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[17] See in this regard González Cañal 2006, 413-17, one of the very few studies of this play.

In Act 3 the tragedy occurs. The action moves to the city where Aurisena's wedding to the marquis Teodoro will take place. It is Ricaredo, Clorisel's friend, in a conversation with Aurisena, who takes on the role that in Bandello and in Shakespeare belongs to Fra Lorenzo. Ricaredo tells the girl that both he and Clorisel, who had once studied together, understand the secrets of natural philosophy and how to distil poisons and medical potions from herbs and other plants. He proposes to prepare a potent sleeping-draught which will cause a death-like state for two days and assures her that both he and Clorisel will be in the crypt when she wakes up (3. 139*v*-40*r*). But too many things go wrong. Ricaredo proposes warning Clorisel only after Aurisena has taken the poison, as he does not count on her resolution. Aurisena drinks the potion at eleven at night, an hour before midnight thus ignoring Ricaredo's instructions (3. 141*r*). Even Clorisel's servant, who has reached the city, learns of Aurisena's death, but Ricaredo does not trust him and few people know about the trick. He gives a letter to the servant to give to Clorisel but it will never reach him because of the episode of the bandits in the forest. When he is found naked, hiding behind a cork oak tree, the servant tells Clorisel only that Aurisena is dead and that her repentant father had decided he would permit her to marry whom she wished. The desperate young man immediately sets out for the city to say farewell to Aurisena for the last time.

Clorisel's entry into the crypt with his servant Vitoque at half-past ten at night, is full of macabre *elements* and is influenced by the notorious fear on the part of the *gracioso* which tends to mingle tragic with comic. The text has a very precise set of stage directions describing the sleeping girl:

> Córrase una cortina y aparezcan unas paredes como de bóveda, una peaña baja con paño carmesí o blanco donde estará Aurisena, el cabello suelto y atado con una cinta, el vestido blanco o plateado, y sale Clorisel con la luz. (3. 143v)
>
> [A curtain opens to reveal a vaulted crypt, in which there is a low bench with a crimson or white cloth where Aurisena is laid, her hair loose and tied with a ribbon, her dress white or silver, and Clorisel going out holding the light.]

Clorisel gazes at the luminous beauty of his sun which has set and takes out a phial of poison just before Aurisena wakes up. The two lovers have a brief and intense dialogue, which allows them to understand what has happened and the girl asks for his dagger so she can kill herself before he dies from the poison (cf. 3. 144*r*). Ricaredo's arrival with Rosaura, Teobaldo, and the Duke of Verona is too late: the two lovers of Verona die in each other's arms.

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Before commenting on the aspects that unite the three plays I should like to comment on what they have in common on a formal level. In the first place they are all written in verse and the diversity of these verses is a constant. It is also functional to the situations on stage and to the diversity between the various characters. Among the many verse forms adopted is the *redondilla*, that is the strophe of four octosyllabic verses, with consonant rhymes used in the treatment of many themes, even though Lope advised its usage in themes concerning love. Then we have the *romance*, or the lyrical composition of a popular type, made up of an indeterminate series of octosyllabic lines with assonant rhymes in the even lines, while the odd lines remain free; the *lira*, or the strophe of five lines constituted of three septenaries and two hendecasyllables with two consonant rhymes; the *décima* made up of ten octosyllabic lines with consonant rhyme; the *silva*, with its varied combinations of hendecasyllables and septenaries; the *ottava rima* formed of eight hendecasyllabic lines used to express the most tragic parts of the work, the laments, the moments of greatest tension and intense lyric emotivity, and again the hendecasyllables of some sonnets. Specifically, in Lope, Julia recites a sonnet referring to many anguishing love stories, Portia, Lucretia, Dido, Iphis, Sophonisba, Hero, Thisbe:

> JULIA Porcia puede buscar ardiente fuego;
> yerro Lucrecia; Dido, espada en mano,
> reliquias dulces del traidor troyano,
> que al mar de Italia dio su llanto y ruego.
> Ifis cordel, por Anaxarte ciego,
> y por las amenazas del romano.
> Veneno Sofonisba, y agua en vano
> Hero en la torre, y arrojarse luego
> la punta al pecho, y el aliento en calma.
> Tisbe en la sangre mísera resbale,
> del que muriendo fue de amantes palma,
> que a mí, ni fuego ni cordel me vale,
> pues un acto de amor degüella el alma,
> y no hay cuchillo que al dolor se iguale. (3.77-90)

> [JULIA Portia could reach out for burning fire; / for steel, Lucretia; Dido, sword in hand, / who gave the Italian sea her plaint and prayer, / could seize sweet relics of the Trojan traitor; / Iphis, cord before blind Anaxarte; / Sophonisba, poison in the face / of vaunting Roman threats; and Hero vainly / in her tower watched, but then might leap. / The point against her breast, her breast at peace, / unhappy Thisbe, bloody, missed her tryst / with dying Pyramus, the palm of lovers. / Yet for me, there's neither cord nor fire, / for the deed that hacks my soul is an act of love, / and no knife can strike as deep as such a sorrow. (123)]

And this sonnet, a real lyrical soliloquy on the girl's part, takes place just before she drinks the narcotic prepared for her by Aurelio. And again, when she awakens in the crypt and thinks she is dead the monologue is constructed on the *lira*, that is, as we said, on stanzas formed of septenaries and hendecasyllables. The use of these metres lends huge emotive power to Julia's awakening:

JULIA ¿Adónde me ha traído
mi desventura? ¿Cómo, si soy muerta,
hablo y tengo sentido?
¿Adónde estoy?, ¡o, sin ventana, o puerta,
en tinieblas escuras!
Me niega el cielo ver sus lumbres puras.
Que soy muerta es sin duda.
Mas, ¡ay de mí!, ¿cómo no estoy agora
de carne y voz desnuda?
¿Qué casa es esta, y quién en ella mora?
Mas, tan escura y fuerte,
sin duda que es la estancia de la muerte.
Paréceme que toco
cuerpos aquí y allí. ¡Cielos!, ¿qué es esto?
Vuestra piedad invoco.
Si a caso no soy muerta, ¿quién me ha puesto
donde los muertos viven,
y en sus heladas cuevas me reciben?
Y si, como me acuerdo,
Aurelio me mató con aquel pomo,
¿cómo, cielos, no pienso
este cuerpo mortal que tengo; y cómo
hablo y siento, y me asombro,
todas las veces que la muerte nombro?
Allí una lumbre veo:
mira yo si en el infierno vivo,
si he pasado el Leteo,
y aquí la pena de mi amor recibo.
La luz se va acercando,
si no soy muerta, moriré temblando. (3.507-36)

[JULIA Where has misfortune brought me? / And how does it come to be if I'm now dead, / that I speak and I have senses? / What is this place I'm in, without doors or windows, / all dark and murky shadows, / where heaven withholds the sky's pure light from me? / Surely I must be dead. / But oh, ah me! How is that I speak, / not stripped of flesh and voice? / What house is this; whose dwelling could it be / so gloomy and so strong? / No, surely it is, is the house of Death. / Here and there I feel / that I've touched bodies. / Oh, sweet heaven, what's this? / Oh, pity me and defend me! / If by any chance I am not dead, who put me where dead people live, / who put me where they receive me in their icy caverns? / And if,

> as I recall, / Aurelio with that venomous cordial poisoned me,/ how is it I have not lost / this mortal – God help me! – body that I retain? / How do I speak, and tremble/ whenever I speak the terrible name of Death? / Over there I see a light. / Now I shall learn if I live in infernal regions, / if I've crossed the river Lethe, / and if I'm now to be punished for my love. / The light is coming nearer. / If I'm not dead already, I'll die of fright. (139)]

The variety of versification, as we have said, gave rise, both in spectators (and readers), to a system of expectations and when they heard the play being performed or read it the public knew already whether they were to expect a love or an epic moment. To give some idea of this, Castelvines y Monteses presents seven different sorts of metric strophes and thirty changes of versification during the course of three acts and of the resulting 3055 lines (see Julio 2010).

To all this, it should be added that the language reveals an intense experimentalism moving in multiple directions and employing diverse stylistic devices, including the usual figures of paronomasia, alliteration, dilogy and amphibology that result in lexical and morphosyntactic innovations.

One thing is certain: playtexts, including those considered here, thanks to their elaborate versification, showing a whole variety and sundry combinations of verse forms which are not fortuitous, constituted the great source of Spanish poetry and its diffusion among the public, even among people of little formal culture who went to see and hear the plays. Drama speaks its verses to everyone and everyone can gain something from it, even if this in some way affords different possibilities of interpretation to the individual spectator.

I do not think that it is simply by chance that the story of the lovers of Verona was reworked constantly and in different waves in seventeenth-century Spanish culture. This was a century which revised even the classical myths, as in the emblematic case of Luis de Góngora, a century that loved to challenge and overturn codes continually, that reworked themes and experimented new formal conventions. The instance of *admiration* as an aesthetic principle was of absolute priority as was the union of comedy and tragedy in three-Act texts, an evident transgression of Aristotelian norms.

As we have seen, there are many differences between the three works here discussed and the models to which they are referring. The roles of the characters change (only think of count Paris), as do the names of the characters, and the spaces. Sometimes the two lovers already know each other, at others their first meeting is at the ball; the potion makers are different, and this potion is sometimes taken by the female protagonist without her knowing that it is a narcotic and not a poison; sometimes the marriage is a secret one, and sometimes the wedding happens at the end of the play.[18] The differences between the three plays also include the number of characters. In Lope we have 24 individual characters and four groups, whose number is not specified (ladies, knights, soldiers, musicians, servants, people); in Rojas Zorrilla there are 11 individual characters and one group (soldiers); in Cristóbal Rozas we find 9 characters and two groups (people, some women).

But there is one aspect that deserves more attention than others. In Lope, the Lord of Verona is the incarnation of human and divine justice. It is he who makes the decisions not to transform the city into a hell where personal injustice prevails. Roselo's exile to Ferrara is functional to the order that the Lord of Verona wants to restore in the city. That order is re-established thanks to his valuable intervention that leads to the concluding wedding and the relative peace between the two families.

Very different is the role of power in Rojas Zorrilla's work. On the contrary, it could be defined as inexistent. The only reference is to be found, as we saw, when Alejandro Romeo and his servant go into the crypt and find the epitaph on Bartolomeo della Scala's tomb (2.1969-70). Power *qua* civic authority is absent and therefore there is nowhere to be exiled to if not through a flight to the mountains. Peace and order are the logical consequence of the love between tenacious Julia and Alejandro Romeo. Not only does love triumph over social norms, over paternal impositions, but it is the entity that actually recreates social order and gives peace to the warring factions in Verona. In this work, Bartolomeo della Scala, the Lord of Verona, is simply a simulacrum of the past and the events represented happen after his death.

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[18] Some of these changes should be studied keeping in mind the new cultural horizon produced by the Counter-Reformation. For example, it was not very appropriate for a clergyman to prepare the poison, as we read in Bandello, Shakespeare but also in Lope. In Rojas Zorrilla, it is Julia's father who prepares the poison, in Rozas his friend Ricaredo. Likewise, the presence or absence of a secret wedding should be studied taking into account the decrees of the Council of Trent: in Lope there is a secret wedding (and a man of the Church: Aurelio), but we do not find it in Rojas Zorrilla and Rozas.

From this point of view the play *Los amantes de Verona* by Cristóbal Rozas becomes even more interesting. It should be noted that in this play too, as in that of Rojas Zorrilla, there is no exiling of the protagonist because in point of fact there is no power to wield justice, and also in this case the presence of bandits and the forest seems to shroud the story in a world without rules, a world in chaos. Or better still: in Cristóbal Rozas' play power is alive and an integral part of the wanderings of the two lovers. But in any case, the Duke of Verona does not create order, rather contributing decidedly to disorder, injustice and death. As we have seen he participates in the party and his order to Clorisel to remove his mask is what causes the successive search in the palace and the flight from the balcony. The duke of Verona appears again in Act 2, in Aurisena's father's country house and he informs him that he has arranged the marriage of his daughter with the marquis Teodoro. He is also very much a partisan of the Guelphs and exhorts everyone to search for Clorisel in the forest (Rozas 1666, 138*r*). In Act 3 he even enters the crypt and before he leaves he tells Aurisena's father that he will be waiting outside for news of what has happened. The Duke of Verona of Rozas, as different from the one in *Romeo and Juliet*, fails to consider the problem of administering justice, of punishing those responsible for the deaths of the two lovers. And it is not fortuitous that the destiny of the characters, as the *gracioso*, Vitoque, reminds us in the closing words of the play, is all played out on personal choice, that of Aurisena's father to leave for the desert and those of the other characters to shut themselves up in monasteries.

It may seem problematic, but it is not impossible for the different roles of the Duke of Verona in the three plays to be seen as reflecting elements linked to the history of the Spain of this period. Above all, from the early Thirties of the seventeenth century, the country can be seen to fall into a power vacuum and lose the prestige that at both a national and an international level that for many years it had enjoyed in the Europe of the time. These were in fact the years that saw power in the hands of the *privados*, i.e. the all-powerful favourites to whom sovereigns incapable of governing delegated all powers of decision and command: first with Philip III (1598-1621) in those of Francisco Gómez de Sandoval y Rojas, Duke of Lerma, then with Philip IV (1621-1655) in those of the very powerful Gaspar de Guzmán y Pimentel, Count-Duke of Olivares, and Luis Méndez de Haro y Guzmán. These were decades marked by corruption, cronyism, unsuccessful attempts at reform, economic crises, and military defeats with the enemies of all time, France, England, and the United Provinces. And if illicit enrichments are at the root of the discontent that led to the fall of the Duke of Lerma in 1618, even more emblematic is that of the Count-Duke of Olivares in 1643. He was a *favorito* who for more than twenty years governed the monarchy with ambitious measures to bring order to the world. The three comedies, to a different degree, are rich in political symbolism, especially Rojas Zorrilla's play, performed in 1640, the same year in which the Spanish monarchy was confronted with internal wars: the one that would lead to the independence of Portugal, thus putting an end to the union of the crowns of the Iberian peninsula after sixty years, and the one in Catalonia, supported by the French army, which would lead to the subsequent partition of the region with the Peace of the Pyrenees in 1659. But the same can be said of Rosas' comedy, where the dramatist decrees that the figure of the lord of Verona is no longer the embodiment of human and divine justice, as he is in Lope's work, but has become the true author of the disorder that transforms the city into a hell where there is no room for clemency and magnanimity but only for the death of the two lovers of Verona.

Translation by Susan Payne

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Part 2

Recirculating *Romeo and Juliet* in the Mediterranean: the New Millennium

6

A Mediterranean, Women-Centred Rewriting of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*: Roberta Torre’s *Sud Side Stori*

Maria Elisa Montironi

Abstract

Sud Side Stori – La storia vera di Romea e Giulietto (2000) is an unconventional cinematic version of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* by Italian director Roberta Torre. Blending neorealistic techniques with a non-realistic cinematic aesthetic and a Brechtian-inflected form, the film offers an oneiric and political rewriting of Shakespeare’s tragedy set in mafia-ruled contemporary Palermo. In the city, locals are shocked by the massive and unprecedented spike in African immigrants, who are essentially women. The tragic and impossible love at the centre of the film is indeed between an untalented Sicilian singer, Toni Giulietto, and a Nigerian victim of the international sex trade, Romea Wacoubo. This hopeless romance is representative of the wider social tension in the background due to the conflict between the worshippers of Palermo’s two main patron saints: the white Saint Rosalia and the black Saint Benedict the Moor. The article offers a feminist perspective attuned to both Torre’s take and the female-centred filmic interest. The protagonist of *Sud Side Stori* is a black immigrant woman and a prostitute who exemplifies the intersectionality of different sources of oppression, which Torre explores and exposes.

KEYWORDS: *Romeo and Juliet*; *Sud Side Stori*; feminist criticism; adaptation; women; Mediterranean; immigration

1. Women, Immigration and the Sea in *Sud Side Stori*

Sud Side Stori – La storia vera di Romea e Giulietto (2000) is an eccentric cinematic version of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, by the Italian director Roberta Torre, which premièred at the 57th Venice International Film Festival in a section called Dreams and Visions. Blending neorealistic techniques with a non-realistic cinematic aesthetic, and creating a postmodern pastiche of quotations, rhythms, forms of art, images and styles, the film offers an oneiric and political re-envisioning of Shakespeare's tragedy set in mafia-ruled, contemporary Palermo. In the city, locals are shocked and rocked by the massive and unprecedented spike in African immigrants, who are essentially all women. The tragedy's impossible romance is, in fact, between an untalented Sicilian singer, Toni Giulietto, and a Nigerian victim of the sex trade, Romea Wacoubo. The social conflict in the background is between the worshippers of the two main patron saints of the city of Palermo: the white Saint Rosalia and the black Saint Benedict the Moor.

The words "Mediterranean" and "immigration" together already evoked tragic situations of immense concern in the noughties, which is well expressed in the Human Rights Watch definition of the Mediterranean as "the world's deadliest migration route" (*HRW*). Yet, there is virtually no sea in Torre's Palermo. The breathtaking beaches and the turquoise water of the seaside resorts are almost totally absent from the film, and typical seafood is never cited. Although smuggling is mentioned, there are no images of overcrowded boatloads of immigrants in inhuman and degrading conditions, and most of the travelling experiences very briefly touched upon in the story revolve around passports and flights to Italy, while never referring to the perils of illegally crossing the sea, which instead dominate the public discourse on immigration. Furthermore, in the last part of the film Torre's fictional Sicily is apparently connected to Africa by a railway: after receiving the news of Toni's death, the banished Romea travels by train from her continent to Palermo (see Calbi 2013, 95). The deliberate absence of the sea in the film provides, on the one hand, an intriguing proposition open to interpretation, and, on the other, a different perspective on the question of the Mediterranean immigration crisis, defamiliarising it, shifting the attention from immigration per se to immigration as a trade – that is, human trafficking – in this case for the purpose of prostitution. Consequently, the focus is on the immigrants as victims and on different individual responsibilities: of those who make money from it, of the uncaring men who indirectly support it in their everyday life, frequenting prostitutes and treating them as objects, but also of the people who are blind to this contemporary form of slavery, which affects women in particular.

The film serves this purpose through a Brechtian-inflected form: the suspension of disbelief is constantly broken, and the familiar is made strange by means of dislocation and comic juxtapositions.[1] Namely, verbatim and documentary techniques are used, "all the African actresses are prostitutes and many of the Palermitans are ordinary people playing themselves" (Masolini 2002-2003, 232), while the way they often speak directly to the camera "creates the theatrical illusion of an ongoing exchange between the audience and the characters" (229). Moreover, the unveiling of the camera's presence maximises the expressiveness of the images, to the point that, as Pasolini argued in his essay "The 'Cinema of Poetry'", they almost reflect the archetypes of our dreams (see Pasolini 2005).

Despite the direct allusions to *West Side Story* (1961),[2] *Sud Side Stori* is not so much a musical as a film interspersed with thirteen songs, which reflect Brecht's idea of music in epic theatre. Their functions go far beyond the spectacular ones of a sung-through work. Throughout the film, music intentionally breaks the illusion of reality, "communicates", "takes up a position" and "gives the attitude" (Brecht 4[1927], 347). The songs are for the most part original and for the most part sung by actors (see De Crescenzo 2000). The only professional singers that feature in the film are Little Tony (1941-2013, in the role of the King of Rock 'n' roll), and Mario Merola (1934-2006, in the role of Re Vulcano [King Volcano]). The former, an Italian version of Elvis Presley, crams his speeches with English words; the latter, a neomelodic singer, speaks Neapolitan. They are not there for particularly demanding singing performances, but rather to represent two cultural mindsets: the American-oriented and the local one, which in any case share a misogynistic outlook on women, as we shall see.

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[1] Living in Palermo, but coming from Milan – where she graduated in philosophy and studied at the Milan Film School and at the Paolo Grassi Dramatic Arts Academy –, Torre's view of Sicily is similarly estranged. In her own words, her gaze is "the gaze of the anthropologist, the observer" (quoted in Karagoz 2020, 213). As Bernadette Luciano writes: "Torre moved to Palermo in 1990 and finds Palermo and Sicily to be major sources of inspiration for her narratives" (2015).

[2] The allusion works through the title, the characters' names (Toni and Maria), the plot based on interracial love and, to a certain extent, the genre. Torre, in fact, "prefers not to call it a musical, but a film in which music plays a fundamental role" (Calbi 2013, 188).

Though less successful, at least in the Italian context,[3] than her previous musical film on the mafia, *Tano da morire* (1997), Torre's version of *Romeo and Juliet* has attracted the attention of Shakespeare and film studies scholars, most notably because it represents a local – Italian – appropriation of the global icon Shakespeare (Cavecchi 2008; Minutella 2012 and 2013) and because it thematises migration and hospitality (read through Derrida by Lehmann 2015 and, before that, Calbi 2013, who concentrates on the *spectral presence* of Shakespeare-in-translation).[4] Despite the interesting research already devoted to the film, there is ground for further investigation from the viewpoint of feminist studies. The profitability stemming from the adoption of this critical angle of analysis is not only validated by the nature of Torre's work – which gained her the Woman in Set 2020 prize for "the importance the film director had throughout the 2000s in representing women in an industry, that of the cinema, which is still too masculine and sexist" (*sedicicorto*; my translation), but primarily by the characteristics of *Sud Side Stori* itself, which is clearly centred on women. Romea's lone presence in the centre of the film poster suggests she is the undisputed protagonist of the story and the main interpretative key of the reception process the film represents. Being black, immigrant, prostitute and woman, she exemplifies the intersectionality of different sources of oppression, which Roberta Torre explores and reveals.

This essay discusses Torre's peculiar rewriting of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* with an emphasis on the representation of female characters and women's issues from a feminist, intersectional perspective. It also tries to account for the apparent impracticality of an analysis from a "'thalassalogical' perspective (Gr. *thalassa*, the sea)" (Brayton 2012, 4), though the film is set in a Sicilian city by the Mediterranean Sea and is about immigration.

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[3] "*Sud Side Stori* was one of the five films presented at the 2001 Wisconsin Film Festival in the section 'Belonging and Marginality in the New Europe', where it was internationally acclaimed" (Cavecchi 2008, 95).

[4] See also O'Healy 2019 and Masolini 2002-2003.

2. Roberta Torre and Women

Roberta Torre has always shown and asserted a keen interest in the depiction and narration of women's experiences, both out of a sense of gender belonging and of a fascination with inverting and reversing clichés of femininity. Her concern for the description of the female view, historically seen as 'the Other' vis-à-vis the dominant male one, is coherently paired with a thoughtful consideration of different marginalised categories, related to ethnicity, social class, religious creed and mental health. Through her multifaceted work, ranging from cinema to theatre, from fiction to the visual arts, she constantly questions common sense binary oppositions and invites her public to recognise themselves in, or commune with, 'the Other'. In dealing with women issues, her position may be well described as a combination of radical and materialist feminism.[5] From the former she borrows the commitment to and artistic exploitation of women's consciousness-raising, the attention on "either male-gender oppression or female-gender strength" (Case 2014, 64) and the celebration of women's own spirituality, through a systematic appropriation of "the symbols, metaphors, rituals, organisations and experiences of the patriarchal religions that have historically dominated the spiritual realm, with their male priests and their male gods" (69). To such appropriating actions Roberta Torre adds the literary "realm", which she rewrites and provides with a female perspective. From materialist feminism she borrows the awareness of the "role of class and history in creating the oppression of women" (82), tackling the problems of marginalised women in different cultural contexts.

[5] I am here referring to the different types of feminism categorised by Sue-Ellen Case for theatre in her milestone study *Feminism and Theatre*, recently adopted by Elaine Aston in her study of contemporary theatre (2020).

It is in the light of feminism that most of her works can be read. *Trash the Dress*, a study for a postmodern *Medea* (2013), takes the form of a female battlefield, a collective rite where women tied on a chair fight against their bridal wedding dress as the symbol of the social constraints of women and of their relegation into the domestic sphere. This work is, in its tone, reminiscent of Valerie Solanas's SCUM Manifesto (1967), since it blames male supremacy and urges female action. It is also in tune with "rituals such as bra-burnings" (Case 2014, 66), which characterised 1970s social movements and theatre productions. Sisterhood throughout the centuries is told in *Ipazia* (2016), a fascinating story that offers a sort of female alternative to Antoine-de-Saint Exupéry's *Little Prince* in presenting the surreal encounter between Camilla, a 20-year-old astronaut, and Ipazia (Hypatia), the Egyptian philosopher and astronomer killed by the "monks of the desert". The two women, despite belonging to different and distant cultural contexts, are spiritually connected through the code of music.

A reversal of women's representation is offered by Torre's photographic project *Ma-donne* (Palermo, 2009). Through a set of contemporary portraits of women in present-day situations evoking and reverting the well-known and omnipresent Marian iconography, Torre irreverently liberates women from the power of the "Catholic gaze", as it were. Many other of Torre's works, both in theatre and cinema, are devoted to women protagonists and gender issues.[6] Since the beginning of her career, she has explored and rendered justice to the female world. A case in point is the 1991 documentary *Angelesse*, where the damages of patriarchy and cultural poverty are cleverly revealed through interviews with women from Palermo's suburbs, the eponymous female angels of the title, who spontaneously and naively talk about themselves and their lives, which are evidently inhibited by their socio-cultural milieu.

The decolonisation of literature from male supremacy and the centralisation of women's feelings and experiences are objectives pursued by Torre also in her cinematic reception of Shakespeare's plays. After *Romeo and Juliet*, she empowered with agency the female characters of Shakespeare's *Richard III* in a dark musical for the big screen, *Riccardo va all'inferno* (2017), which followed a theatre production of the same play, realised in cooperation with people living with a mental illness (*Insanamente Riccardo III*, Piccolo Teatro di Milano). In the film, as in Torre's entire cinematic oeuvre, contaminations from the world of theatre are evident and all the more so embodied through the presence of theatre actresses that have characterised the Italian contemporary stage with their distinctive traits.[7] Torre's declared intention in adapting *Richard III* was that of updating gender roles (Turrini 2017), thus fixing the unequal gender politics that is handed down through canonical texts, such as Shakespeare's. In what follows, Torre's reclamation of women and world from patriarchal colonisation is revealed through the analysis of *Sud Side Stori.*

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[6] See Lamberti Zanardi 2011 and Karagoz 2020. Torre supports women also through her production company (see Luciano 2015).

3. Women in *Sud Side Stori*

In her version of *Romeo and Juliet*, Torre reverses early modern all-male theatrical practices. The main characters are female, the inhabitants of the neighborhood of Palermo where the film is set are almost exclusively women, and the black community invading it is made of women too. Cristina Cavecchi notices that, in *Sud Side Stori*, "the female body is the most prominent" (2008, 99), both visually and metaphorically, as well as in the choice of narrators, and she contends this can be traced back to the traditional feminine conception of Sicily and of its volcano, Etna.[8] The prevalence of women over men is detected by Courtney Lehmann also in the naming of the characters. "Torre's treatment of the protagonists' names", she observes, "reinforces the matriarchal structure of her film: whereas 'Romea' is an explicit feminisation of Romeo, 'Giulietto' – Toni's last name – is conspicuously derived from Juliet, completely denying the patrimony of 'Montague'" (2015, 100).[9] One may also add that the name Romea, which sounds odd in Italian, allows a Brechtian alienation effect that draws attention to gender issues, so central in the rewriting. Yet, although *Sud Side Stori* may pass the Bechdel test, the society it represents is not exactly as "matriarchal" as has been suggested. Women are commodified, sexualised, and not united in actions of mutual support. They are the victims of misogynistic mottos and beliefs, which Torre reveals as deeply rooted in Mediterranean culture, and they are simultaneously perpetrators of such ideas, as they seem to find the patriarchal ideology the only 'natural' one. The film highlights this attitude and compels the spectators to reflect upon it.

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[7] Two examples are Silvia Calderoni of the Motus Theatre Company, through her bodily explorations of gender and androgyny, and Silvia Gallerano through her vocality (Capocasale 2017).

[8] In a foreword titled "Sicily, Light Queen", Torre defines Sicily as "an impervious and sumptuous queen" (2020, 2).

3.1. The Women Narrators

The narration is entrusted to two white, female voices: Saint Rosalia, patroness of the city, and Giuseppona, called "a sbirra (female police officer)", but actually involved in mafia affairs. Telling the story through voiceovers and also appearing in the film, these two female characters are shown as in-power, but never using that power to support other women. They implicitly reveal the flawed features of the neoliberal idea of feminism that dominated the 1990s: individual empowerment, concentration on economic gains rather than cultural and political ones, and subordination of social demands to the laws of the market (see Aston 2020).

Saint Rosalia
Sud Side Stori opens with a framed prologue and with literal frames, subtly alluding to Luhrmann's double prologue in *Romeo + Juliet* (see Calbi 2013, 83). The introductory narrating voice belongs to the picture of the snow-white Saint Rosalia. She speaks from one of the surrealist paintings with Baroque frames, gradually animating as video installations, crowding a bourgeois, papered, damask wall, which is red like the carpet on the floor. She tells the audience that the story is set in Palermo, where the mayor has sparked a civic quarrel by suggesting the city should celebrate, besides herself, a

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[9] See also Minutella 2012.

second patron saint: Benedict the Moor.[10] The word "Two" that starts off the Shakespearean play, drawing attention not so much to the protagonists of the story but rather to the discord between families that informs the plot and provokes its tragic ending, has always been a major component in the reception history of *Romeo and Juliet*. As noted by Burnett, "across all world cinema adaptations of the play, it is the backdrop of conflict upon which the focus falls", while "the 'starcrossed lovers' are often demoted, seen as less significant than the conditions that draw them apart" (2013, 198). *Sud Side Stori* is no exception. As already mentioned, the conflict situation is here provided by the rivalry between worshippers of two very different saints.

Besides broaching the issue of the cult image of Catholicism, a Shakespearean topic linked to Juliet, the "holy shrine" (1.5.94),[11] and highlighted in Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*, the argument over the proper holy protector locates the film's conflict, first of all, at two different levels: ethnicity and gender. There is a fight between blacks and whites, as well as between the traditional Sicilian culture of Palermo and the Nigerian one of its immigrants, in the name of a religion that is shown throughout the film as hypocritical and feigned as the opening religious gallery. There is, moreover, an antagonism between an overtly feminine Saint Rosalia in the cave, with her recumbent posture, loose hair, and garland-crown of big, pink roses, as she is depicted in the most well-known twentieth-century *santino* (holy card)[12] and a male Saint, who is shown as a black man, wearing white, traditional African clothes. This detail leads to further levels of divergence hinted at in the film: colonial and class conflict.

Saint Rosalia introduces the story speaking from the privileged position of a bourgeois context, whose economic wealth and hedonism is signified by the material pomp of the room and by the presence of a subordinate cleaner in service. This lady is portrayed as unrealistically smaller than the huge wall of paintings she is dusting, which blatantly dominates and overshadows her. The painting of the patroness also suggests the typical attitude of Orientalism in the Saidian sense of the word, because the saint, departing from the traditional iconography, reclines upon a crocodile,[13] which cannot but remind one of the stuffed exotic animals displayed in European households since the early modern period, together with other luxurious and monstrous mirabilia from Africa, connecting "celebrated collectors of the Renaissance with the greed and violence of the transatlantic slave trade" (Greenfield 2017). A detail that is rife with meaning, when one considers that Saint Benedict is the son of African slaves kidnapped by European merchants and sold to Sicilian patrons in the sixteenth century. The slavery of the black saint's parents finds a contemporary correspondence in Romea's prostitution too, revealing postcolonial concerns as pivotal in Torre's work, as will be discussed later in this essay.

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[10] On the corresponding real-life event see Lo Piccolo 2000.

[11] All the references to Shakespeare are from Shakespeare 2011.

[12] The painting is an adaptation of the most popular twentieth-century *santino* devoted to the Saint (see *Cattedrale di Palermo* website). It has the same iconographic features as Gregorio Tedeschi's seventeenth-century marble and golden statue in Santa Rosalia's Cave Sanctuary, at Palermo's Monte Pellegrino.

That Saint Rosalia is speaking from (*"dall'alto"*) ("above"), and that she occupies an advantaged place in the hierarchy of the universe and of society, becomes explicit in her prologue's closing words, when she states: "ora lascio raccontare il resto a qualcuno di giù" ("now I'll let somebody down below tell the rest"). Burnett reads these words as an "abnegation of responsibility for the 'story'" which "points to a reductive construction of a heavenly perspective, to a parodic undercurrent that the saint's childish treble, and the throbbing, neon-lit assembly of portraits within which she appears, only serve to accentuate" (2013, 208). Yet, besides the emptiness of "pop-Catholicism" (ibid.), the Saint's appearance and her shirking of responsibility clearly point also to the patronising outlook on life of higher social classes and of the bosses of organised crime that control (but ultimately don't care about) the life of the city and of its immigrants too. The film makes it clear that Palermitan organised crime is accountable for the illegitimate management of the city's economy, for violent murders and also for human trafficking.

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[13] See Romeo's description of the apothecary's shop: "And in his needy shop a tortoise hung, / An alligator stuffed, and other skins / Of ill-shaped fishes" (5.1.42-4). As René Weis notes, this unique occurrence of the word alligator in Shakespeare's canon "originates in Nashe's *Have With You*: '. . . and after hanged her over his head in his study, instead of an apothecary's crocodile or dried alligator' (Shakespeare 2012, 316).

The patron saint's aristocratic nature is rooted in her hagiography. According to the latest tradition about the saint, which became popular from the late sixteenth century, Rosalia was a twelfth-century Norman princess, rebelling against family duties that would have had her married off for political reasons, therefore sharing Shakespeare's Juliet's will for self-determination as well as that of Toni and Romea. But Torre's patroness shows an indifferent attitude that contradicts the original disruptive power of the *exemplum* of her life. It is as if the original potency of her dissent were no longer part of her canonised identity since corrupted.

Giuseppona

The "down below" narrator is Giuseppona, a mafia dealer who manages the illegal business of the patroness festival and, declaring that "tutto si può fare, è una questione di soldi" ("everything can be done, it's a question of money"), even takes advantage of Toni's aunts, promising them they can get rid of Romea through black magic. Although she may at first seem an independent, self-ruling woman, as she lives alone and administrates money, the film discloses that she is entrapped by men's greed for sex and wealth. The camera zooms in on her generous neckline while she stuffs banknotes inside her bra, and on erotic parts of her body as she is continuously pestered by two grotesque, little old men who frolick around her like two homunculi, looking at her and touching her breasts and bottom with lust. They are always silent but act with outrageous gestures, as in a pantomime representing sexual harassment.

Her way of speaking about women mirrors this "testosteronic" outlook on life. She asserts that women need "forme" ("curves") and "furbizia" ("cunning") to drive men crazy and does so after singing a few lines of the famous Neapolitan song *Malafemmena* (bad woman), written by the celebrated Neapolitan comic actor Totò. The very beginning of the song, which is not sung by Giuseppona but well-known in Italy, mentions and tacitly supports the idea that a betrayed lover can kill his beloved out of anger for an offense. Following such logic, she ends up being killed by mafia criminals, who are men, because they think she is responsible for Toni's death. In other words, she was murdered to save the honour of the Giuliettos and those who protected them.

3.2. Palermitan Women in a Male World

The topic of honour killing is openly brought at stake by Mario Merola in the following scene devoted to Toni's jealousy and cuckoldry. It is set in the tavern of Torre's fictional Palermo, Da Zu Pippo (Uncle Pippo's), which is a sort of hideout for men. As Maurizio Calbi points out: "according to the homosocial logic of the place, being with a woman – and a foreign black woman at that – is tantamount to being a cuckold, which is signified by the fact that he suddenly finds himself with horns protruding from his head" (2013, 89). Investigating the Mediterranean code of honour, Blok explains that the symbolic horns of the man with an unfaithful woman are, in that cultural context, specifically the horns of the billy-goat. Anthropology located the origins of this association in the ancient, Mediterranean pastoral code of honour, where the animal's behaviour was considered lascivious and weak, displaying immoral features in contrast to the moral ones of the ram which, as Blok illustrated, "in Mediterranean thought . . . has been since Homer's time the symbol of strength, honour, manliness and power, forming a complementary opposition with the billy-goat" (Blok 1981, 429). Interestingly enough, pastoral imagery is part of Torre's film, which more generally replicates the complementary oppositions, supported by ethnographic evidence, that Blok considers as "specific to a Mediterranean code of honour: rams – billy-goats; sheep – goats; honour – shame; men – women; virile man – cornute . . .; virility – femininity; strong – weak; good – evil; silence – noise; pure – unclean" and also "right hand and . . . left hand . . ., pastures and home, outside and inside, public and private sphere . . ., cheese and milk" (430-1).

These oppositions are manifest in many details of the film. Men are mostly quiet, while women are noisy: "in a long sequence", as Cavecchi observes, Torre's camera shows "the aggressive rock'n'roll of Palermitan women, dancing clumsily in the street with their brooms and buckets" and "the drum beat and exotic dance" of the Nigerian women (2008, 93). While "uomo bianco puzza di formaggio" ("white man smells like cheese") according to Romea's friend, milk is linked to women. Upon the arrival of the Nigerian women, the camera first zooms in on an iconic image of a Nigerian girl, wearing a surreal, wide, golden collar, holding an old suitcase and keeping a goat on a cord leash. Palermitan women are shown as victims of an inherently misogynistic society, pervaded by that "'domestication' of women, which has often been regarded as one of the most striking features of all Mediterranean regions" (Blok 1981, 431). Toni's mother is described as a prostitute for her promiscuity. It is thanks to her love-affair with a mafia boss that her untalented son is hired to work as singer. She has left Toni to his three aunts, who are depicted in a claustrophobic domesticity where their main objective is cooking. Resorting to Janet Adelman's well-known definitions, Masolini considers them as both "nurturing and suffocating mothers" (2002-2003, 234). They are often in the company of Maria, Toni's betrothed. He dislikes her and calls her "la balena" ("the whale"), because she is overweight and obsessed with food.

From a feminist perspective, Maria's fatness is meaningful and polysemous. Considering the reaction it provokes in Toni, it reveals the important issue of the gendered "problem of the fat body" (Farrell 2021, 47), denigrated and refused. And yet, taking into account the past perception of fatness as "a sign of good health, access to food/wealth, and strong reproductive capacities" (Choudhury 2021, 242), Maria may also embody the image of the chosen wife, a concept pertaining to a likewise old-fashioned outlook on life. Looking at her compulsive way of eating, moreover, Maria's shape may well be read as a manifestation of a dysfunctional society, fixated with consuming and denying women agency outside the domestic sphere.

Tellingly, male chauvinist attitudes are particularly revealed in the scenes set at the tavern, which is "male-dominated" and described by Giuseppona as a place of "orge, perdizione e lussurie" ("orgies, perdition and lust") (Calbi 2013, 88). While in the middle ages alehouses were often defined as "the Devil's alternative to the Church" (Earnshaw 2000, 18), in this place there is a dissonant juxtaposition of Catholic elements, sinful desires and mafia rituals. The church-like tokens include a portrait of Saint Joseph and the Child, a pew, a bookrest and a huge, white mobile-confessional, which reminds one of the Pope-mobile, mainly because inside is seated the venerated host, wearing a white cassock (with a white apron over it) and a showy pectoral cross. Lost among aphrodisiac garlic and dried red peppers hanging from the ceiling, and self-indulgent men who dance as odalisques or pop up bare-chested from little volcanos as in a Dantean *bolgia*, or else emerge from wine casks dressed à la Elvis Presley, Toni is advised on his love affair. It is in this context that Mario Merola as King Volcano bluntly states that "la femmina che ti tradisce non si perdona, si uccide" ("the woman who betrays you cannot be forgiven, she must be killed").

Merola ultimately advocates the justice of the crime of honour, which Ernesto de Cristofaro describes as marked by an "emphasis on private sphere, on family ties and on feelings, which is typical of Mediterranean cultures" and as a motif that has "acquired in Italian history a level of importance which is witnessed by masterpieces of art" (2018, 1). It was considered legal on the Italian peninsula from the Roman law up to the Zanardelli code (1889-1930) and by the following Fascist norm, which even determined that "the discovery of the victims in blazing offence (or *in flagrante delicto* or *in ipsis rebus venereis*) is not required" (3). This is justified by the Minister Alfredo Rocco as follows:

> The cynical and brutal confession of the illegitimate relationship or the discovery of it through love correspondences, where the embraces are often recalled, can determine in the spouse, outraged in his dignity, or in the father or brother, offended in their most vivid feelings of familiar honour, an intense emotion, a state of anguish and pain, an impetus of anger that, if it leads to the consummation of violent acts, cannot but attenuate the seriousness of the fact and reveal in the guilty an unfortunate rather than a dangerous man. (Rocco in De Cristofaro 2018, 4)

The existence of a double-standard is more than clear. Suffice it to mention the words of the lawyer Luigi Filippo Paletti, who asserted, in a harangue of the period, that "the guilt of a man may be the disturbing of peace and the order of the family; and sooner or later the ashes of oblivion come to bury even their memory. But the wife's adultery opens the gates of hell and makes the pain desperate and opens the abyss of all damnation" (in De Cristofaro 2018, 5). It was only with the enfranchisement and emancipation of women led by the newly formed Italian democratic Republic, after World War II, that the law was debated and finally abolished in 1981. Even so, as Torre highlights and anthropological and cultural studies confirm, men's reputation based on honour and the use of murder to protect it are among the elements of an archaic and patriarchal system, still considered valid by mafia culture.

At Zu Pippo's, Toni listens to other two men who, despite their very different standpoints share a certain patriarchal line of thought. Little Tony understands Toni's fascination for Romea and sings of his Elvis cut that attracts "le negrette" ("N-word girls") who dance along. Later on, in the scene where he helps Toni meet Romea, whom he calls "la tua pupa nera" ("your black doll"), he instructs him claiming that "una donna non sa mai quello che vuole fino a che un uomo non glielo dice" ("a woman never knows what she wants, until a man tells her"). These are words that echo Capulet's "Mistress minion" (3.5.151) and his misogynistic attitude towards Juliet in 3.5.

Most significantly, the tavern's host "warns [Toni] against inappropriate liaisons" (Calbi 2013, 88), reminding him, with hammering insistence, that he is not black and that Romea "will be his downfall" (Lehmann 2015, 102). His words are imbued by the same discourse that informs the lawyer's words on men's dishonour and the subsequent "hell" and "abyss of all damnation" (Paletti in De Cristofaro 2018, 5) quoted above. The implied critique towards the hypocrisy of the male-dominated Catholic world, including their consideration of women and immigrants, can hardly be overestimated. Notably, Toni's odd confession with the host is followed by his protest song titled "E se fossi nero anche io" ("And what if I were black too").[14] The lyrics, which describe the past of black people enslaved on cotton plantations, "nati per soffrire"

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[14] Consider also Giuseppona's disillusioned exclamation at the beginning of the film: "se c'è veramente un Dio, beh… lasciamo stare" ("if there really is a God, well… forget it!").

("born to suffer"), beaten on the back by their "padroni" ("masters"), lead spectators to draw a parallel with the modern form of slavery shown in the film. Even more provocatively, the song wonders: "e se fosse nero anche Dio" ("and what if God were black too").

3.3. Romea and the Nigerian Women

The fact that the main protagonist of the story is the immigrant Romea is in line with Torre's intention to "make a film on immigration and on the problems it inevitably brings" (quoted in Cavecchi 2008, 92).[15] When the film maker shot *Sud Side Stori*, Italian society was coping with the tensions resulting from nearly a decade of growing immigration rates from Africa, although the number of black Africans residing in the Peninsula was still relatively small (O'Healy 2019, 78) and the peak of the refugee crisis (2015-2016, see Ambrosetti and Paparusso 2018) had yet to come. In his 1995 study on immigration politics in liberal democratic states, Gary P. Freeman defined Italy as one of the "new countries of immigration" (1995, 893) together with Portugal, Spain, and Greece. Freeman pointed out that these states had "only recently gone from being countries of emigration to experiencing pressures from migrants, legal and illegal, and asylum seekers" (882), and specified that "return migration first exceeded emigration in Italy in 1972" (893). With its rather short immigration history, Italy was unprepared for the social, political and ethical issues posed by the maritime migration across the Strait of Sicily, which was and still is the main gateway to Europe through the Mediterranean Sea, thus a place of dramatic importance for the whole continent. Anti-immigration and xenophobic discourses were gaining ground all over Europe. In Italy, Northern League leader Umberto Bossi championed a referendum to abrogate the Turco-Napolitano immigration Act (1998) and promoted a populistic campaign to establish tougher measures, which were eventually passed under Berlusconi, in 2002, through the widely criticised Bossi-Fini Law, reported as "unjust, disgusting, cruel, enslaving, racist, fascist" (my translation)[16] by its most vehement opponents. More precisely, though, Romea is a victim of trafficking. This is a mostly gendered experience of immigration, involving abuse, exploitation and postcolonial issues.

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[15] Well before other films, *Sud Side Stori* fully captures the interracial frictions, the intercultural shock and the contradictions of this historic juncture. Credited to be "the first comedy about immigration to Italy to tackle . . . taboo subjects such as racism and miscegenation" (Luciano and Scarparo 2013, 137), anticipating Laura Muscardin's *Billo – Il grand Dakhaar* (2007) and Cristina Comencini's *Bianco e nero* (2008), *Sud Side Stori* is aesthetically very different from these new millennium Italian comedies and, despite its "carnivalesque" (ibid.) and parodical traits, the ending is not happy or bitter-sweet but rather tragic.

In his 1999 book *Schiavi* (*Slaves*), Pino Arlacchi, executive director of the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, discusses the existence of contemporary slavery. Its victims, he argues, must endure terrible situations and are as if bound with invisible chains. Indeed, at the beginning of the new millennium, the annual profits of people traffickers amounted to "some $7 billion in prostitution alone".[17] *Sud Side Stori* reports short interviews with Nigerian women explaining how they arrived in Italy paying large amounts of money to have a better future and were then tricked into prostitution. It also offers glimpses into their working routines with unscrupulous, criminal, male *domini* (who nevertheless have female collaborators) and unscrupulous, ordinary, male clients, using aggressive eroticised language. As they speak to the camera, portraits of Saints can be seen in the background achieving an alienating effect. Moreover, Áine O'Healy observes that the crude chronicle of these "conditions, described by various commentators as tantamount to slavery", creates "a sense of a chilling dissonance" (2012, 209), because it interrupts the otherwise ironic tone of the film. Particularly alienating are the very brief conversations in English, while the rest is in Italian, with either Sicilian or Nigerian inflections. The English exchanges reinforce the criticism of human trafficking as postcolonial slavery because of their topics and the non-standard, postcolonial variety used. The Nigerian girls are shown handing down their nightly profits to their madam. She dutifully asks in English "How much is it?", eagerly counts banknotes barking "Go away! Go away!" to the tailing camera[18] and rebukes a girl for having earned too little, saying: "This money is too small". The pimp instead shouts to the camera "first you pay and then you play", as if spectators were punters, and routinely writes the figure of the earnings under the picture of each girl in a big poster where they appear as products for sale. The fact that in a film adaptation of a Shakespearean play, English is never employed to quote its beautiful and musical lines, but exclusively to speak about money and prostitution cannot but recall Caliban's desperate answer against Prospero, which could be misquoted as follows: "You taught me language; and my profit on't / Is, I know how to . . ." (1.2.364-5) enslave people.[19]

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[16] Graziella Mascia, a member of the Italian Refounded Communist Party. Resoconto Stenografico Seduta n. 153 del 4/6/2002 http://documenti.camera.it/_dati/leg14/lavori/stenografici/sed153/s150r.htm (Accessed 20 May 2022).

[17] http://edition.cnn.com/2001/fyi/news/04/05/human.trade/index.html (Accessed 20 May 2022).

Just like the Palermitan population with their money trafficking for the festival of Saint Rosalia, profit is a pervading preoccupation in the Nigerian community. Romea's friend suggests she should not fall in love with Toni because she is there to work, "fare tanti soldi" ("to make lots of money"). In her mind, the only acceptable condition would be finding a rich white man with a beautiful car. The procurer aggressively reminds Romea she is there to make money and that time is money. The film also reports the comments of two Italian men on the prostitutes' conditions, and they all revolve around money. Both speak directly to the camera so that the spectators become complicit in what is said. One of them reveals he is involved in human trafficking and expresses his worries because whereas Nigerian prostitutes "si arricchiscono" ("get rich"), the men of Palermo "si impoveriscono" ("become poor"). Another invites an ideal interlocutor to do the maths and calculate how much money "20 ragazze a 100.000 lire" ("twenty girls at 100,000 lire each") can make, mentioning only in passing that these women are abused and "da macello" ("meat fodder"). These apparently realistic comments and the interviews with the Nigerian immigrants are given alternatingly while the women tricked into prostitution dance and sing together the lyrics of the film soundtrack, titled *Sud Side Stori*, which again involves the spectators since it is addressed to a general, plural "you". As in the best of Brecht's songs, the catchy and lively melody accompanies a biting criticism of society and unveils hypocrisies and responsibilities. They sing that "dalle sei di sera vieni qua e ti scegli la tua nera" ("from six o'clock at night you come here and choose your black woman") in a "vetrina" ("shop window") for "30,000 lire". They also specify that at night "a voi piace l'Africa più nera" ("you like the darkest Africa") in Palermo.

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[18] Zavattini's theory of *pedinamento* (tailing) to investigate reality is one of Torre's main influences. See https://www.adolgiso.it/enterprise/roberta_torre.asp (Accessed 20 May 2022).

[19] There are only a few quotations from *Romeo and Juliet*, and they are in Italian translation. On Shakespeare's text in the film see Calbi 2013.

4. Immigration, Saint Rosalia and the Sea

"With unabashed irreverence", Lehmann writes, "[Torre] align[s] the spiritual trafficking in souls to the sexual trafficking in bodies, tying the local politics of hagiography to the global flesh trade" (2015, 99). Besides being involved in a trade, though, Romea and the Saint share a further common experience. According to an established legend, Rosalia was a "first-century beneficent Middle Eastern hostess, alongside the apostles of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem" (ibid.). A key element in Saint Rosalia's unstable hagiography is the dangerous journey through the Mediterranean, "a structural hagiographical connection" (Waldeier Bizzarro 2020) among different lives of saints, which functions as a guarantee of their sanctity. A nineteenth-century traveller to Sicily, George Glieg was told by a local priest that she was "a lady of rank and fortune" from the Middle East, who "lived in great splendor, and exercised much hospitality towards the believers, till the persecution consequent on the martyrdom of Stephen arose" (Glieg in ibid.). She was one of the early Christian refugees, thus an immigrant ante-litteram, whose oldest extant representation is a thirteenth-century black icon. Rosalia "was a young, noble, and virginal woman, escaping the demands of society [... thus] a transgressive force . . ." (ibid.). These features resonate in today's cult of the saint. Indeed, a strip of sea is depicted in the background of the film's painting of Saint Rosalia, as is often the case in her iconography.

Translocation through the sea is represented in Palermo's patroness feast, whose preparation provides the backdrop for Torre's story. On the cry of

> 'Viva [All hail] Santa Rusalia!' . . . , an enormous boat-shaped float, bedecked with effigies of angels floating amidst clouds of fabric, garlands of roses, serenading musicians, and the cult statue of Santa Rosalia . . . , is drawn through the streets by local teams of oxen . . . , from the city-center to the marina by the sea, from whence Rosalia first reached the island of Sicily. (Ibid.)

This procession and the people's cry to hail the Saint commemorate and advocate the spirit of possibilities and the renewing energy implicit in the saint's life. As Tina Waldeier Bizzarro observes, these ceremonies

> create transformative countersites or heterotopias, in the language of Michel Foucault, which turn our realities upside down. The sites that are created in these ritual dramas are privileged, forbidden, and perfect – all at the same time . . . They mark liminal places where heaven and earth meet, where time collapses, where thresholds tempt us to taste the eternal. We break with traditional time and enter the locus of epiphany and transformation . . . (ibid.).

It is in this carnivalesque setting that Romea and Toni fall in love and their union proves as disruptive and transformative as Saint Rosalia's original holiness, now corrupted by economic interests.

Romea and Toni belong to two separate dimensions, but when they meet up time collapses, they experience epiphany and transformation, and create countersites. The balcony scene, which actually includes also scene 1.5, is emblematic in that it provides a counterdiscourse to both life in Palermo and Shakespeare's play. The noisy and chaotic soundscape of the street is abruptly suspended and gives way to an imaginary silent auditory dimension inhabited by the two lovers only. With Toni on the balcony and Romea underneath, in an interesting reversal of roles, the iconic encounter is rendered as a slow-motion scene in a silent movie, where the characters do not speak but eloquently gesticulate against the tune of a sentimental, violin melody – Antonín Dvořák's *Slovanské tance* (Slavonic Dances) Op. 72 N.2 –, which is interrupted only by a tinkling sound effect associated with an earring worn by Romea. Whereas in Shakespeare the beautiful Juliet is described as bright as a "rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear" (1.5.46) – and as a "snowy dove trooping with crows" (1.5.48) –, Torre borrows the simile but uses the sparkling earring to highlight the black woman's beauty, revealing the ethnocentrism of Shakespeare's words, echoed in Romeo's remark that "These happy masks that kiss fair ladies' brows, / Being black, puts us in mind they hide the fair" (1.1.230-1). The western-centric beauty standards and their influence even on black women are thematised in the film by the presence, in Toni's bedroom, of a life-size cut-out of Marilyn Monroe, "embodying an impossible whiteness" (Lehmann 2015, 102) and by the fact that Romea's friends "demonstrate their admiration for distinctly Berlusconian models of the (white) 'body beautiful,' eagerly purchasing blonde wigs and hair-straightening cream with the exclamation 'Bellissima!'" (104).

A similar locus of transformation is created by the two lovers inside the Tunnel of Love where they meet and kiss, before Romea is obliged to flee back to Africa. Again, silence and the same sentimental violin melody mentioned before indicate the difference of the lover's dimension, which is a countersite to society. It is worth noting that the same tune interrupts, out of the blue, the song *Sud Side Stori* (on the Nigerian prostitutes in Palermo), when Romea refuses Toni's uncle as a client. This act is in fact a *Gestus*: it indicates a breach with the common outlook on life through the triumph of love over money.

The Tunnel of Love, a romantic trope Torre borrows from Hollywood-inspired animations and films, is permeated with racist, postcolonialist and also sexist elements which are part of mass-culture. Above the entrance, there is the huge image of a gorilla, like King Kong, the black monster of the eponymous movie (1933). The ride, moreover, is advertised by an off-screen voice as the "magical world of Tarzan and Jane", referring to Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan of the Apes* (1912), whose film version directed by Scott Sidney in 1918 was most influential. As John Stephens points out, in the novel "Burroughs' depiction of the gorillas (and the indigenous Africans) as lesser species" reveal "imperialist and anthropocentric ideologies" (Stephens 2002, 129). The same political agenda is implicit in *King Kong*, which mirrored the fears and anxieties of an American society "immersed in racial segregation" and facing the outcomes of the economic crisis of '29 (Roche Cárcel 2021, 5).

These popular icons are used by Torre to have the audience reflect upon the Orientalism and the racism pervading Western culture, which Toni and Romea challenge, but which they cannot easily escape. Toni himself, with his Elivis Presley style, shows the introjection of certain Western canons. Haeussler describes Elvis as a cultural artifact, "an American icon in a cold war world" (2020), whose public image was politicised and implied in tackling controversial issues regarding sex, race and class, often with highly controversial results. In Europe, he was inextricably linked with the Janus-faced image of America: on the one side the dream of freedom and revolution, on the other the nightmare of an individualistic and consumeristic society. "In West Germany, for example, the singer's opponents depicted him as a prime example of the US' alleged cultural imperialism and primitivism of its mass culture, whereas his supporters embraced him as the prime symbol of American-style modernity and coolness" (Haeussler 2020).

On the entrance of the funhouse walls there are murals depicting Toni and Romea through a Western-centred iconography. One shows them kissing each other, while being attacked both from the left and from the right, by his white aunts and her black friends respectively. Interestingly, in this drawing Romea is in profile and wears a red veil and a golden hoop earring. This makes her face very similar to the so-called *caput Ethiopicum*, frequent in European heraldry to symbolise Christian and imperial expansion. The second mural portrays Romea dressed as an odalisque and Toni as Disney's Aladdin riding on a camel under the moonlight in the desert, while a monkey hops around him. This discloses the threat posed by the seductive black woman in the white collective unconscious: she can swallow the man in her primitive, animalesque world. Yet, in popular culture "the bestialized Other" (Roche Cárcel 2021, 9), often associated with an uncontrolled eroticism, is commonly a black man who is blamed for falling in love with a white woman, in line with a "Eurocentric system of esthetic valuation that specifically denigrates women of color" (2). In Torre's film, instead, "the bestialized Other" is a woman, metaphorically described as a wild animal throughout the film ("a gazelle, a black panther"), whose libido is manufactured, forced, marketed and exploited, unless stirred by romantic love.

4.1. Looking for the Sea in Torre's Palermo

That interracial romantic love is a patriotic act and a social challenge at the same time is well conveyed by Torre in the meeting scene. As Lehmann points out:

> While Toni and Romea kiss in the funhouse, Torre uses a green filter that highlights the contrast of Romea's red feather collar against Toni's white shirt and skin, creating a fleeting tableau of Italy as a place where responsibility for the other is still possible – where the demarcations of the *tricolore* remain powerfully intact but unopposed, existing peacefully in extreme proximity to each other. (2015, 106)

Yet, the Tunnel of Love turns out to be also a Horror Tunnel. In it, Romea passionately kisses her Toni, but is also constantly reminded she needs money to have her passport back by disturbing visions of a black woman threatening her. It is implicit that the only thing she can do is accept imposed prostitution. It has been suggested that "it is in the times of traumatic situations, generalized crises, and especially economic ones when horror films . . . flourish, which spontaneously reflect symptomatic attitudes of collective unease" (Roche Cárcel 2021, 5). Torre, instead, seems to use the alienating effect arising from the juxtaposition of love with horror to create collective unease and rouse people's consciousness on the conditions of women who are victims of trafficking.

Lehmann's discussion of the film conclusion is acutely insightful:

> Driving the dagger through her abdomen, Romea breathes her last as Toni revives only to be killed by the Mafia moments later. 'Forgetting any other home but this' (2.1.220), Toni and Romea are hereby repatriated in death, their collapsed bodies basking in the obscene glow of *tricolore* lights – this time in a tableau of national implosion. Red, white, and green all over, they embody

> the immigration 'reform' that is written in the blood of insuperable economic interests. (2015, 107)

The glow of lights invades the room and wraps the two corpses like sea water.

By imposing a Mediterranean *genius loci* on the play and re-signifying its characters, *Sud Side Stori* provocatively resonates with the Italian present while exposing motifs of ethnocentrism, greed and misogyny embedded in Shakespeare's play. Questioning Shakespeare, Torre highlights elements of misogyny and ethnocentrism both in the sixteenth century play and in some aspects of contemporary Italian culture. Following Shakespeare, Torre shows that "gold" is a "worse poison to men's souls, / Doing more murder in this loathsome world" (5.1.80-1) than poisonous compounds. She also de-mythologises saints and secularises bliss. The countersites created by the encounters of Romea and Toni demonstrate that it is only in sincere love that the disruptive force of holiness resides. The Mediterranean Sea, as the road of pioneering saints, as "a space of cultural hybridity, liminality, and transformation" (Schülting 2019, 2), is like a u-topia in Torre's film, which finds no place but in the suspended, rebellious and, to some extent, blessed (although tragic) dimension of the two lovers. It is a "boundless" and "infinite" sea (2.2.133, 135); "a sea nourish'd with lovers' tears" (1.1.192).

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7

"These violent delights have violent ends": Shakespearising the Balkans or Balkanising Shakespeare?

Petra Bjelica

Abstract

This essay deals with contemporary Balkan Shakespeare productions and suggests them as a new subcategory in studies of Global Shakespeare concerned with issues related to the Mediterranean. It aims at identifying some main features of Balkan Shakespeares, opening the debate on this definition and questioning whether the Balkan stereotypes of barbarity, violence and conflicts are expressed in the dramaturgic, representational and performative strategies of contemporary staging of Shakespeare in the Balkans. It focuses on two productions especially, *Romeo and Juliet* (2015) and *Hamlet* (2016), as two opposite possibilities for treating the issue at hand. While having in mind the tradition of performing Shakespeare in the Balkans with an emphasis on the ex-Yugoslav countries, this essay attempts to identify whether there is a pattern of self-representation when appropriating and adapting Shakespeare's plays in a local Balkan context. If we assume that Balkan identities are labelled as Europe's, and more generally the Western's and the Mediterranean's barbaric other, the main question is thus how this dynamic appears to be represented in Balkan Shakespeare productions: is it repro-duced or questioned? Are those productions Shakespearising the Balkans or Balkanising Shakespeare?

KEYWORDS: Shakespeare; *Romeo and Juliet*; *Hamlet*; Balkans; Mediterranean; Balkan Shakespeares

From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
(*Romeo and Juliet*, Prologue, 3-4)

I must be cruel only to be kind.
(*Hamlet*, 3.4.178)

Shakespeare in the Balkans seemingly cannot escape the prophetic words of Friar Lawrence when he claims that "these violent delights have violent ends" (*Romeo and Juliet* 2.6.11).[1] Whether the violent history of the area resonates with Shakespeare's plays or the plays offer a poignant space for addressing the actual atrocities of recent history might be an intriguing question. Can we differentiate contemporary Balkan Shakespeare productions as a new research subcategory in studies of Global Shakespeare with special attention to the area of the Mediterranean? What would the main features of Balkan Shakespeares be? Are Balkan stereotypes of barbarity, violence and conflicts expressed in the dramaturgic, representational and performative strategies of staging Shakespeare in the Balkans today? Does the use of concepts such as 'balkanism' and 'balkanisation', *mutatis mutandis*, repeat a certain type of cultural racism?

In this essay, I address two main questions. First of all, I offer a view from within the Balkan perspective about whether Shakespearean productions and adaptations reproduce Balkan stereotypes of barbarity and violence and the mechanisms they use. Secondly, by considering an external perspective, I analyse how a hypothetical concept of Balkan Shakespeares fits into studies of Shakespeare and the Mediterranean. Moreover, could the strategies of representation of Balkan identities in contemporary productions of Shakespeare provide fresh considerations on such issues as the ethics of appropriation, cultural hegemony and racism, the dynamic between the global and the local, West[2] and East, Balkan and Europe, and lastly, the ideological role of neoliberalism, imperialism and globalism in Shakespeare studies?

Just as the terms 'Balkan', 'balkanism' and 'balkanisation' are not unified, cohesive and definite notions (as we shall see in more depth later), similarly there cannot be a singular, harmonious and unambiguous ideological (political, cultural and aesthetical) concept of Balkan Shakespeares. However, the productions done in the Balkans are marked by their historical, cultural and geographical embeddedness, and certain interpretative and performative gestures evoke, or are coloured by, specific meanings. One of the aims of this essay is to open the debate on those meanings. To my knowledge, there has been no academic endeavour or study that deals closely with this issue to date.

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[1] All quotations are from Shakespeare 2012.

[2] In this essay, I am broadly using the term West as defined by Stuart Hall (2018), namely, as a system of representations created in a binary opposition to the other. As he claims, "West Europeans often regarded Eastern Europeans as 'barbaric'" (145). Consequently, I refer to the historical concept of the Mediterranean as one way of representing Western culture.

I concentrate on a close analysis of two productions, *Romeo and Juliet* (2015) and *Hamlet* (2016), while having in mind the Balkan tradition of Shakespeare performances in the ex-Yugoslav countries. These examples have been chosen as two opposite possibilities for addressing my questions. The 2015 production of *Romeo and Juliet* is the main focus of my analysis, and will be set against a 2016 production of *Hamlet* as a contrastive example of ways in which a truly creative approach to Balkan Shakespeare can be envisioned within a Mediterranean context. This essay attempts to identify whether there is a pattern of self-representation when appropriating and adapting Shakespeare’s plays in a local Balkan context. Why is Shakespeare used to treat local problems? What is the local context? To whom do these productions relate and for whom are they made: for the local public, or ‘Western’, non-Balkan audiences? Finally, what is the function of theatrical productions, adaptations and appropriations of Shakespeare in this local context? The essay suggests that an internalised Western gaze is often dominant, and that seemingly apolitical readings reveal symptoms of an internalised cultural racism towards one’s own position in relation to Western culture, problems of justice, conflicts, wars, violence and political struggle.

1. What Does ‘Balkan’ Have to Do with the Mediterranean?

Most scholars agree that, geographically speaking, the Balkan peninsula includes the following areas: Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, part of Slovenia and Serbia, some of which geographically and historically belong to the Mediterranean culture. “Caught between Catholicism and Byzantium, Christendom and Islam, the Western powers and

Russia, the peninsula has been conceived as an unruly borderland where the structured identity of the imperial centre dissolves and alien, antithetic peripheries begin" (Hammond 2006, 7). Following Braudel's famous historical conception of the Mediterranean, according to which "there are ten, twenty or a hundred Mediterraneans, each one subdivided in turn" (2001, 14), the first way of localising the Balkans as part of a larger Mediterranean culture is through its historical region of Illyria. As Braudel claims, the "Mediterranean both gave and received – and the 'gifts' exchanged might be calamities as well as benefits. Everything was in the mixture" (16). If on the seaside and plains "life aimed for progress" (5), the mountains that surround the Mediterranean, including the bigger part of the Balkan peninsula, aimed "for survival" (ibid.). In that sense, Illyria, the older name for some parts of the Balkans, was undoubtedly directly influenced by the Mediterranean culture, while maintaining its cultural differences.

Lea Puljcan Jurić's study of Illyria in Shakespeare's time offers a detailed overview of the relations between the playwright and the Balkan area, convincingly criticising the dominant view of Illyria as a *terra incognita* in Renaissance studies. In the usual representation of Illyria in Shakespeare's time, we can trace the historical continuum of conceptualising the modern Balkan as 'other' from the Mediterranean civilisation. As Jurić demonstrates, Shakespearean scholars often wrongly assume Mediterranean Illyria[3] as a "vaguely definable mythical land" (2019, 3), a mysterious and enigmatic area. She argues that the region was instead known to Shakespeare,[4] and that "entrenched cultural hierarchies tied to ignorance, elitism, and colonial politics have informed our analyses of *Twelfth Night*" (2), as a most obvious example. By claiming that modern regimes of knowledge concerning Balkan territories are highly influential in contemporary Renaissance studies, she identifies three practices in representing Illyria: erasure, marginalisation and negative distortion. More importantly, for the topic of this essay, she elegantly provides a link between Shakespeare's England, Illyria and the contemporary Balkan:

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[3] "At the outset, a brief clarification of nomenclature is in order. We shall see that the name 'Illyria' was generally applied in the Renaissance to the lands once included in the Roman province Illyricum and especially the eastern Adriatic region. My use of 'Illyria' as a common term for the cultural and political formations in the region is primarily a matter of faithfulness to this early modern usage that, along with considerations such as convenience, consistency, and clarity, often leads me to omit more localized or alternate place names, such as Dalmatia, Istria, Croatia, Bosnia, Montenegro, Albania, and others" (Jurić 2019, 5).

[4] For a more detailed argument see Jurić 2019.

> Traditional denigration of the Illyrian peoples around Mount Haemus, which in the nineteenth century comes to be called 'Balkan', finds its tortuous way into modern-day discriminatory discourse that has only recently been called 'balkanism'. This does not mean that ideas about the Balkans evolved smoothly and straightforwardly from antiquity to the present day. Nor am I suggesting that pejoratives were leveled exclusively at the lands and peoples of the Balkan region. Negative conceptions were powered by different sets of political, cultural, religious, and economic interests and suppositions prevalent at various locations and times. (Jurić 2019, 14)

This consideration offers a transition to the problem of Balkanism while solidifying the historical continuum in treating this area from a Western perspective. Accordingly, it opens the space for analysing from both an internal and an external/'Western' standpoint the Balkan discourse in Shakespeare studies and performances. And lastly, by highlighting the stereotyped stigmatisation of the Balkan area in the Mediterranean civilisation, I wish to strengthen the sense of an artificial division between the Western, here broadly Mediterranean, and other related, yet 'marginal' cultures.

2. The Discursive Formations of 'Balkanism' and 'Balkanisation'

Balkan studies are now an established scholarly field that gained more critical attention and controversial interpretations after Maria Todorova's 2009 influential study *Imagining the Balkans* introduced the term 'balkanism',[5] a discourse inspired by Said's notion of

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[5] Matošević-Škokić 2014 offers the latest critical evaluation and presenta-

'orientalism'. However, Todorova argued that "while orientalism is dealing with a difference between (imputed) types, balkanism treats the differences *within one type*" (19; my emphasis). Todorova also analysed the pejorative implications of the term 'balkanisation' claiming that it "had come to denote the parcelization of large and viable political units but also had become a synonym for a reversion to the tribal, the backward, the primitive, the barbarian" (3). Moreover, "the Balkans have served as a repository of negative characteristics against which a positive and self-congratulatory image of the European and the West has been constructed" (189). The common Balkan denominators in the gaze of the West are backwardness, chaos, irrationality, primitivism, barbarity, violence, and a need to be held under control to become civilised, cultured, liberal and democratic. Namely, the image of the 'Oriental' Balkans was constructed upon negative and barbaric stereotypes that served to create the contrastive Other to the civilised West. The Western values were then imposed upon the Balkans, inducing in them a desire to become part of the stereotypical 'West'. Bjelić explains that these 'Oriental stereotypes', hence the aspects of local culture, "are then attributed to the Eastern neighbour, a process which activates Western orientalist stereotyping – and is also self-orientalizing" (2009, 490). In other words, it creates what Milica Bakić-Hayden has called 'nesting Orientalism':

> It may not be a coincidence that similar dissociations take place in the so-called "symbolic wars over heritage", when "the nation-builders of the region devote themselves to breaking away from regional culture" and creating a "myth of absolute autochthony". Myths of national distinction are often symptomatic of the Balkan peoples' desire to march westward and sever their ties with those portions of their past that they share with their 'primitive' eastern neighbors. Milica Bakić-Hayden has shown how Balkan nations, wanting to shed their Balkan identities and become integrated in Western Europe, project 'balkanness' away from themselves and onto their (south)eastern neighbors in the process she calls "nesting Orientalism". (Jurić 2019, 24)

The myth of autochthony develops into mutual accusations. In other

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tion of the state of arts regarding balkanism.

words, all these identities are ideological formations and cultural representations rooted in history, and as such are not factual mirrors of social or political reality. The processes of democratisation and ‘Europeanisation’ are applied to them, even though they are part of Europe and its cultural heritage. “Hayden White considers ‘Europe’ a geo-political concept that exists only ‘in the talk and writing of visionaries and scoundrels seeking an alibi for a civilization whose principal historical attribute has been . . . to destroy what it cannot dominate, assimilate, or consume’” (Hammond 2000, 67). But even more importantly, as Boris Buden claims paraphrasing Todorova, “precisely what we call Balkanization is in fact only a symptom of an Europeanization” (2011, 10). He emphasises her explanation of “the last Yugoslav wars in the 1990s that have been widely ascribed to some Balkan essence – tribalism, primitivism, Balkan violence, nationalism, etc. – as the ultimate Europeanization of the Balkans” (10).

The patronising attitude and culturalist racism (Hammond 2006, 19) of Western democracies go hand in hand with exploitation and influence – they continue functioning under a different ideological cloak but with the same political and economic interests. As Buden explains, post-communistic societies are treated as a regressive infant in need of tutelage and supervision (2010, 18). The project of democratisation involves cloning Western liberal democracy and the erasure of national identities. The struggle for recognition and anger of the so-called ‘children of post-communism’, as Buden shows, can easily be depreciated as uncivilised. Alongside actual war traumas, this complex struggle adds to the reproduction of self-loathing through Althusserian interpellation:

> By feeling addressed by this question and identifying with an attempt to answer it, we automatically become subjects of an ideologically already structured historical process. Concretely, we start to think of ourselves as those who actively make this process – in our case, the process of Westernization of the Balkans – happen. (12)

Balkan identities, in their post-communist phase, are again interpellated as Europe's barbaric other.[6] Following Althusser's theory, a Balkan identity is perceived in that manner from the Western perspective and recognises itself as such by answering the call of the West to evolve and grow up.

The main question of the article is thus how this dynamic appears to be represented in Balkan productions: is it reproduced or questioned? Moreover, why use Shakespeare to address these local problems? In order to give a better answer, a brief overview of the tradition of Shakespeare's studies and performances is offered.

3. Shakespeare in the Balkans

Talking about reprisals of Shakespeare's plays in Eastern Europe, Pavel Drábek offered an informed introduction to that complex cultural and political context[7] "in which Shakespeare's works have long been at home in the region of what is intuitively tagged Eastern Europe" (2016, 747), arguing that the phenomenon is "both foreign and 'our contemporary' (to cite Jan Kott)" (759). Following the tradition established by Jan Kott and researched by Zdeněk Stříbrný, Balkan Shakespeares belong to the same paradigm. Generally speaking, Shakespeare arrived in the Balkans in the nineteenth century and studies of Shakespeare are now an established field in the region, especially in the Romanian and Bulgarian cultures,[8] but also in the countries of Former Yugoslavia. Shakespeare has been one of the most loved, read and influential playwrights, as the scarce but informative studies in English demonstrate.[9] However, the idea of and the theoretical discussions about Balkan Shakespeares are neither considered nor systematically approached. If we follow the main distinction analysed by Ivan Lupić (2010) between textual and performance studies in Shakespearean scholarship, we may notice that in the Balkans, especially in the ex-Yugoslav countries, productions of Shakespeare are much more attractive for analysis than the use or critique of foreign scholarship.

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[6] "After the initial euphoria of 1989, the post-communist peoples were quickly re-imagined as an uncontrollable mass – of criminal gangs, traffickers, prostitutes – that threatened the imminent destruction of Western stability" (Hammond 2006, 13).

[7] "The term, it is important to remember, is almost exclusively used in Western cultural-political discourse, from a perspective that is external to the region itself. In what follows, the use of 'Eastern Europe' is already conditioned by this Western perspective, as well as being (too often) unsettlingly muddied by the influence of political networks and spheres of influence" (Drábek 2016, 747).

[8] See Findlay and Markidou 2017; Golemi 2020; Hattaway, Sokolova and 1994; Matei-Chesnoiu 2006; Shurbanov and Boika 2001.

Nevertheless, not until recently there has been the need to unify few performances into an entity dubbed “Balkan Trilogy” (a Serbian, Albanian and North Macedonian production) for the occasion of the “Globe-to-Globe” festival in 2012. Aleksandar Saša Dunđerović’s review aptly summarises the role of Shakespeare for the rise of Balkan national consciousness as part of Romantic movements across Europe all through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries:

> Nations recently liberated from the Ottoman empire appropriated Shakespeare as a way of connecting themselves with the wider framework of European culture. Moreover, in translation Shakespeare’s iambic pentameter sounds like epic heroic poetry, which dominated the oral tradition in Serbian, Macedonian and Albanian cultures. This greatly helped to localize Shakespeare within people’s experience, making the plays sound like the stories from their national cultures. (Dunđerović 2013, 161)

More importantly, Dunđerović brings to attention the fact that The Globe created the concept of the Balkan trilogy “based on national contexts (some might say prejudices) that suggested which nations could best understand Shakespeare’s *1-3 Henry VI*” (161), demonstrating that such a concept *de facto* is a Western rather than a local invention. The Balkan trilogy included *1 Henry VI* by the National Theatre of Belgrade, Serbia, directed by Nikita Milivojević; *2 Henry VI* by the National Theatre of Tirana, Albania, directed by Adonis Filipi, and *3 Henry VI* by the National Theatre of Bitola, North Macedonia, directed by John Blondell. Additionally, in recent scholarship, Sara Soncini has used the phrase “the Balkan

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[9] See Brautović 2013; Bryner 1941; Klajn 1954; Popović 1928 and 1951.

Shakespeares" for other "Shakespeare inflected responses to the war in the former Yugoslavia", openly taking "an outsider's viewpoint and show[ing] a clear awareness of the problematic implications of this discursive positioning" (2018, 27). Despite this awareness, Soncini inherits a biased perspective on the Balkan wars. Namely, in describing the ethical responsibility of Western authors[10] to "bear witness to the Bosnian crisis", she describes the area as "this European heart of darkness" (28). If the allusion to Conrad's novel was intentional, it ironically implies a possibly unintended cultural racism. Because of the mentioned examples, an assessment of the concept of Balkan Shakespeares should be approached by having in mind a local perspective on recent productions that have dealt with local conflicts.

4. The Historical and Political Context of the Conflict over Kosovo

Both plays that will be discussed here refer to the Balkan wars, more precisely to the ex-Yugoslav and Serbian-Kosovo conflicts. However, *Romeo and Juliet* is directly put in the context of the ongoing Serbian-Kosovo problematic relationship. The dispute between Serbians and Albanians over the territorial rights of the region of Kosovo (in Albanian Kosova or Kosovë, and Serbian Kosovo i Metohija) has a long and contested history that can only the recalled in brief here. The starting point concerns territorial and identity issues. The Albanians claim to be descendants of the ancient inhabitants of Western Balkans, the Illyrians, or more precisely the Dardanians, and thus declare to have an ethnic priority over the land. On the other hand, the South Slavic tribes inhabited the area in the sixth and seventh centuries. The first independent Serbian medieval state and the Serb Orthodox Church were created in the late twelfth century and the most important event was the battle of Kosovo (1389) against the Ottoman Empire, which is regarded as a constitutive episode in the historical construction of the Serbian national identity. These historical facts and religious heritage were nevertheless severely misused on both sides’ twenty-first-century nationalistic propaganda as the ultimate right for claiming the territory.

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[10] Soncini 2018 analyses her 'own Balkan trilogy' including Katie Mitchell's *3 Henry VI* (1994), Sarah Kane's *Blasted* (1995) and Mario Martone's *Teatro di guerra* (1998).

With the establishment of Yugoslavia in 1945, Kosovo became a part of Serbia. In the 1963 Constitution, it was raised to the rank of an autonomous province, and in 1974 a new Constitution approved Kosovo as an autonomous region with “the institutions of legislative, executive and juridical power” (Nikolić 1998, 13). Even though the Albanian population was being discriminated against, these new autonomies seemed threatening to the increasing Serbian minority and opened the space for the rise of Serbian nationalism in the ’80s and ’90s, inspiring both repressions over the Albanian population and strong separatist movements. Daskalovski explains:

> On the one hand, the Serbs interpret: that after the fall of communism Kosovo became Serbia’s internal matter and that based on this fact they can decide whether to ‘give’ Kosovo Albanians rights to self rule or not. Kosova Albanians, on the other hand, construe that due to the disintegration of former Yugoslavia, Kosova’s autonomy was upgraded to an independent status, and that therefore Serbia has nothing to do with the province and should withdraw its ‘occupational forces’. (2004, 20-2)

Slobodan Milošević, the former president of Serbia within Yugoslavia (1989-1997) and of Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1997-2000), abolished the autonomy of Kosovo causing tensions foreshadowing civil war in 1990. Nevertheless, and apart from occasional armed attacks on both sides, the situation escalated only at a later stage, in 1998, when the armed struggle broke out between the so-called Liberation Army of Kosovo, the UCK, and the Yugoslav Army. In 1999, after the unsuccessful Rambouillet talks between Serbian and Kosovo governments and all relevant international institutions led by the EU and the United States, NATO started the aggression on Yugoslavia on the 25th of March that lasted three months. The outcome of the NATO aggression, rather cynically named the Noble Anvil, resulted in the complete withdrawal of Serbian forces from Kosovo and huge damage to the infrastructure and loss of civilian lives on both sides. Kosovo became a region under the protection and government of a peacekeeping force called KFOR led by NATO and the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). However, the international missions in practice did not provide security to both ethnicities and their cultural heritage. Meanwhile, the diplomatic talks resulted in the Declaration of Independence of Kosovo in 2008, still unrecognised by the Serbian government. Thus, the so-called 'Kosovo knot' still remains unresolved and a source of ongoing tensions.

In this light, the question that immediately arises is whether this complex history of political struggle and violence should be treated as just another Balkan 'ancient grudge'. In a recent article, Semenov comments that writing a brief history of the Kosovo conflict is an extremely ungrateful task, thus he rather resorts to "show that the pendulum swings from 'the Serb aggressors – the Albanian victims' to 'the Serb victims – the Albanian separatists' every couple of decades: both sides can be singled out for opprobrium" (2020, 377). Yet, this binary distinction into Serbians and Albanians as only fighting sides for the territory of Kosovo is highly reductive since it excludes the involved international community.

Talking about the Western gaze, Guzina highlights that "caught between two 'truths on Kosovo'– the Serbian one and the Albanian one – analysts often seek refuge, as Julie Mertus observes, in three lines of rhetoric: complexity, denial or Balkan primordialism" (2004, 29). And thus, the nationalisms of both sides are treated as primitive, backward and barbaric, in opposition to the civilised, developed and cultured Western societies. This perspective is myopic and selective in excluding the wider geopolitical context which would reveal that Western powers were directly responsible and engaged in the creation of the political disorder in the territory long before the more recent Balkan wars.[11] Thus, the concept of balkanisation is created for the justification and beautification of the Western hegemony in the region.

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[11] For a more detailed history of the involvement and the influence of the international community in the region see Hammond 2006.

5. *Romeo and Juliet* (2015)

In 2015, William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* was adapted and staged as a collaboration between Kosovo and Serbia aimed at demonstrating the symbolic reconciliation between two conflicting entities. The performance was a joint production between two companies (Belgrade's Radionica Integracije and Priština's Qendra Multimedia) and it has been performed in different Balkan National Theatres, including Belgrade, Priština and Tirana. The main director was the Serbian actor/director Miki Manojlović who asked Jeton Neziraj, the director of both Qendra Multimedia and the National Theatre of Kosovo, to join and co-produce the play.[12] *Romeo and Juliet* premiered on 5 April 2015 at the National Theatre of Belgrade. The actors performed on an X-shaped stage, symbolically representing the Serbia-Kosovo conflict and the crossroad between the two communities. The stage became "a crossroad of love and hate, a life and death union between Romeo and Juliet, and a division of Montagues and Capulets" (Kadija 2014, 85). Manojlović explained that "*Romeo and Juliet* itself is an unsolvable formula of existence, life, love and hate, and of all that man is and that's why I made that X on the stage because X is almost always a part of every formula" (qtd in Kadija 2014, 85). In the same way, the decision of playing a bilingual performance aimed to reflect the diversity of the two groups and to highlight their problems in communication, trying to make the play more in tune with the political and social reality. The cast was composed of outstanding actors from both Belgrade and Priština, alongside some actors from Tirana and New York.

The play was opened by a clear signal of the setting and focal point of the show, having the actress that plays the Prologue exclaim: "Europe, Italy, Verona, Via Calamari 33, Casa di Giulietta". At the very beginning of the production, a Western ideological position was established, although what followed was the reduced and adapted version of the Prologue, given in both Albanian and Serbian. In order to identify the reasons for such choices, we should ask whether the melodramatic and romantic aspects of *Romeo and Juliet* may have been wrongly used to erase the ethical and political aspects of the historical context in which the play was performed. In other words, we should ask whether this production of Shakespeare, and of *Romeo and Juliet* in particular, may be appropriate vehicles for exploring the complexities of the ethnic conflict between Serbians and Kosovo Albanians that escalated into an international war and the NATO aggression in 1999, with visible consequences both in 2015 and today. Have perhaps the play and the cultural capital of Shakespeare been misused as politically duplicitous propaganda tools?

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[12] See Eric Nicholson's essay in this volume also for a different perspective on this production.

The decision to employ both Serbian and Albanian languages was received by the media as meant to reveal the misunderstandings between the two communities, but also, and contrariwise, as a form of collaboration. Doubtless, it was an innovative and daring choice, showing the intricacies of cultural in-betweenness and hybrid identities, but the problem was its realisation. First of all, the creators suggested that, although the audience might not understand one of the languages, the performance was still comprehensible. They did not provide subtitles or translations, which put the aim of the project into question: what kind of social purpose did this choice have in 'breaking down the wall' when the audience did not fully understand what was being said? Second of all, at its outset it seemed that the dialogues were going to be divided equally, or at least one expected the Capulets to speak Serbian and the Montagues Albanian, but Serbian was more often heard on stage.

In many interviews, both Manojlović and Neziraj made clear that *Romeo and Juliet* is not a political performance, even though it has to do with politics. In an interview made by Sarah Edwards, the Executive Producer affirmed that: "we didn't want to deal with this particular social and political context. We were working on Shakespeare's play, and we just used this real political and social context to work with Albanian and Serbian actors in this performance" (Edwards 2016, 22). In response to this statement, Edwards' comment was urgently necessary: "having both Albanian and Serbian actors on stage together speaking their native languages is a political message in itself, thus making the performance political" (23). This production sparked off a debate about the artistic intention to remain apolitical while ‘just using’ the actual political and social context, revealing a possibly unintended hypocrisy behind the empty signifiers of universalism. Interpretations with similar ideological roots were reproduced by the media from all over Europe, highly praising the production. Gillet’s article for *The Guardian* highlighted the curative power of reconciliation in this performance, recollecting a series of statements by actors expressing belief that *Romeo and Juliet* would have been a success in challenging barriers and building bridges (see Gillet 2015).

However, the production was financed by different institutions, the Serbian and the Kosovar governments, the European Union, some private embassies and two private Open Society foundations. As Taneja suggests, “perhaps the choice of Shakespeare even influenced the major financial backers for Neziraj and Manojlović’s project: as both places vie towards accession to the European Union, €130,000 ($142,000) came from the EU offices in both Serbia and Kosovo” (2016, 45). Beka Vučo, the regional manager for the Western Balkans at the Open Society Initiative for Europe argues that:

> The uniqueness of this production is manifold, from the two languages that are spoken in the show to the myriad symbols that the production employs, thus breaking through communication and cultural barriers. Even the sources of funding for the production represent a spirit of breaking down walls . . . This Kosovar Serbian *Romeo and Juliet* is a strong piece of art. And, as with all artistic creation, whether one likes it or not is a matter of personal choice. However, it would be difficult to deny its powerful message. (Vučo 2015)

Having in mind the source of financial support, these types of statements directly point to the geopolitical, neoliberal and cultural colonialism of the ideological project behind the production. More importantly, they imply the cynical hypocrisy towards the actual citizens affected by the war or still living in Kosovo to whom the performance should have been addressed, to put aside the universalist and exaggerated rhetoric of Vučo’s glorification.

The project soon started showing its cracks from within. While Jeton Neziraj said “I think this is going to mark the end of the Serbia-

Kosovo conflict, symbolically" (qtd in Gillet 2015), the Albanian actor playing Romeo, Alban Ukaj, was precautious not to fall into similar overstatements by lamenting that "the play was covered by the media as *the first* performance of this kind" and claiming that "in the past I've worked with plays in which issues were dealt with more harshly, more directly, with more pain – Bosnian-Serbian coproductions, Serbian-Albanian coproductions" (qtd in Halili 2018). In the end, Ukaj withdrew from the project, disagreeing with the type of propaganda around the advertising of the show. He protested against "camouflaging things to the extent that the whole problem is relativized for the sake of getting money" (ibid.). For Armanda Kodra Hysa, the initial idea of artists cooperating and engaging in common projects was exciting, but she also did not support the propaganda surrounding the event, arguing that *Romeo and Juliet* ended being as "arranged couples, catching the right moment, using the right language for sponsorship, and have absolutely zero impact on the wider public" (Kodra Hysa 2015). She then expressed a desire for a better conceptualised and less problematic *Romeo and Juliet* production in the future, "until then, *Romeo and Juliet* will just be make up on the dead body of normal ethnic relations" (ibid.).

To further underline the complexities of this issue, it may be recalled that the general response of the audience was usually very positive. As Nicholson's essay in this volume highlights, Taneja's recollection of the delighted reactions of the audience should induce us to acknowledge the positive potential of reflecting on the conflict and reconciliation through cultural collaboration – and Shakespeare's role in it. In that sense, such a response witnesses a strong need for addressing these problems. However, without denying or diminishing this honest reaction, I wonder whether it might in fact imply falling into the trap of a self-serving satisfaction by feeling personally engaged with painful topics. Releasing emotional tension by watching the tragic love story of Romeo and Juliet as represented in this production is also a way to shift the focus away from its political engagement. Despite the good intentions and the significance of a Serbian and Kosovan collaboration, as well as the quality of the performance, the production had its shortcomings. It was problematic because of oversimplifying and banalising the historical context and treating it without enough ethical responsibility. Did not it paradoxically amount to erasing the authentic local experiences it claimed to be promoting, all in the name of dialogue, diversity and love? Even though the performance had many good qualities (acting, scenography, music), the dramaturgical, theatrical and promotional choices were emancipatory only on the surface. In fact, they perpetuated a politically problematic position of empty signifiers of democracy, reconciliation and dialogue.

6. *Hamlet* (2016)

On the other hand, one of the latest Serbian productions of *Hamlet* in the Yugoslav Dramatic Theatre in Belgrade, which premiered in 2016 as part of the global marking of the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare’s death, offered an alternative solution. *Hamlet* was directed by Aleksandar Popovski[13] and played by Nebojša Glogovac in an adaptation by Goran Stefanovski. By choosing ‘Live, die, repeat’ as the motto of the production, Popovski created Hamlet as a figure that returned from the grave, revealing a continual circle of injustice. And yet, by closing with the paradoxical line “I must be cruel only to be kind” (*Ham.* 3.4.178), Popovski offered a Hamlet that stood for the struggle of the oppressed against this injustice, despite its doom to failure.

The focus of my analysis is the political potential of such a disillusioned struggle. Namely, I am questioning whether the adaptation perpetuates ‘barbaric’ stereotypes of Serbian and Balkan identities in the Western gaze or Popovski’s *Hamlet* offers a counterpoint, a local appropriation that deconstructs this binary division – a sign of a paradoxical identity, of being at the same time in and out of the Mediterranean and Europe, as part of both East and West. By envisioning Hamlet as a leader of the rising dead, Popovski’s Shakespeare aims to make the play achieve a cleansing and cathartic function, both on a national and a universal level.

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[13] It is worthwhile mentioning that Popovski directed *Romeo and Juliet* in 2021 at The Slovene National Theatre. However, I did not have the chance to watch the performance.

Popovski's *Hamlet* takes into consideration a larger piece of history, signalling the period of Yugoslavia by using on stage a book of *Hamlet* that was printed in 1959 by a famous editing house from Belgrade. Thus, the performance refers to the period of Yugoslavia until the contemporary consequences of wars. Also, in opposition to Balkan political appropriations of *Romeo and Juliet* in the region, *Hamlet* has a rich staging history in ex-Yugoslavia and Serbia.[14]

As in many other nations, the play functioned as a way to examine contemporary cultural, social and political circumstances (Portmann 2018b, 173). During the 1970s and 1980s, metatheatrical devices and political readings were dominant as markers of resistance to the socialist regime. In contrast, during the 1990s and ex-Yugoslav wars, productions of *Hamlet* avoided overt political connotations. Throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century, after NATO's bombing against Yugoslavia and a regime change that pushed the country into a post-socialist transition, the atmosphere in high cultural circles changed. *Hamlet* was appropriated as a sign of hope, an opportunity to end the circle of violence, embracing the values of Western democracy and cultural prosperity (cf. Portmann 2018b). However, Popovski's 2016 *Hamlet* demonstrates a disillusionment with such hopes by taking up and enriching a Serbian long-standing tradition of metatheatrical and political interpretations of *Hamlet*, which suggests a need to revise binary ideological constructs of an Eastern barbarism (Serbian, Balkan, post-communist) and a Western, Mediterranean, civilisation.

In 2016, numerous unsuccessful protests occurred both in Belgrade and in North Macedonia, complaining against the parliamentary elections as an alleged fraud, the suspicious death cases of civilians connected to illegal demolition of buildings supported by the Serbian government, corruption and money laundering, the ruling oligarchy, wiretap scandals, state control of media and autocratic premiers, to name just the most important reasons. Moreover, the process of transition to liberal democracy, alongside some positive improvements, mostly brought about disastrous consequences for East European countries in general. In the name of progress towards the EU, national property and goods were sold to foreign investments or the private sector, leaving the vast majority of citizens in poverty, unemployment and in a severe economic and dignity crisis. On the example of the Czech Republic, Kostihová neatly summarises the paradoxical situation of a post-communist state in transition:

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[14] For a more detailed overview of the history of performances of *Hamlet* in the region, see Portmann 2015.

> In the simplest sense, any *rhetoric of human rights*, however well-intentioned, seems suspect in the face of *the material results of EU policies* that effectively and systematically disenfranchise the majority of citizens through enforced layoffs in the name of ‘flexibility’ and ‘efficiency’ of the labour force, inequality in applying EU subsidies for key economic sectors . . . discriminatory application of nominally universal rights to seek employment internationally within the EU, and diminishing social security provisions, while wealth evaporates upwards towards a small wealthy elite and/or international corporations dispatched by Western governments ostensibly to assist with the transitional process. (Kostihová 2010, 5; my emphasis)

Popovski’s *Hamlet* fights against both local and global influences: he mocks the local elites, repesented by Claudius, and fights the hypocritical politics of neoliberalism with cruel justice. In the director’s words:

> Mi smo nepravdu otkrili mnogo puta. Jednom smo imali demonstracije, pa revoluciju, pa drugu revoluciju, pa treću, pa nas je ovaj prevario, pa onaj. . . Kao što je moja generacija prošla – kad sam kao klinac gledao raspad socijalizma u kasnim osamdesetim, pa rat i raspad Jugoslavije, a od tada više ne znam da nabrojim . . . (Kovačević and Stojanović, 2016, 6)
>
> [We have encountered injustice many times. Once we had demonstrations, then the revolution, then the second revolution, then the third, after which we were deceived by this one, that one . . . As my generation witnessed – as a kid I was watching the collapse of socialism in the late 80s, after that, the war and collapse of Yugoslavia, and from that moment on I cannot even count all the injustices . . . (my translation)]

Adding to the deconstruction of these injustices, Popovski identifies the problem of neoliberal capitalism at the core of his *Hamlet*:

> Kao u prošlom veku: Prvi svetski rat nije završen, zato se desio Drugi. Tako mi se čini i ovo. Istumbali smo sve, premestili sisteme, sklonjen je komunizam. Sad je užasna potreba da se on izjednači s fašizmom, da je totalitarizam, što meni ne ide baš, da sad izjednačujemo Mengelea sa Stanetom Dolancom, to mi se ne uklapa. Niko ne govori o ovom materijalno-kapitalističko-liberalnom sistemu – da vidimo šta ćemo s ovim svetom koji stoji na velikoj nepravdi. To Hamlet govori. U tom smislu on je pozitivan lik. (3)
>
> [The First World War did not end, that is why the Second happened. That is how I see this as well. We have mixed everything, alternated systems; communism is removed. Now there is a huge need to equate it with fascism, totalitarianism, which does not quite stand for me, equating Mengele with Stane Dolanc, it does not fit in my opinion. Nobody is talking about this *materialistic, liberal capitalism* – let's see what to do with this world that is *based on such huge injustice.* That is what Hamlet is saying. And in that sense, he is a positive character. (my translation and my emphasis)]

Following the assumption that every aesthetic choice also entails a political one, Popovski's relationship with the Shakespearean text is proof of as a resistance to the cultural capital of Shakespeare, to fidelity to the original and traditional type of performances. What type of a hero[15] is Popovski's Hamlet? The audience witnesses a fifty-year-old, disillusioned Hamlet, a wise, deeply emotional, and rough buffoon, fluctuating from furore to playful irony: a powerful performance of Nebojša Glogovac, who was improvising and twisting lines and whose resistance to an imposed cultural 'sanctity' of or fidelity to Shakespeare's text was a theatrical device itself:

> [The production] goes on to have all manner of fun with the key speeches...when Hamlet embarks on his 'What a piece of work is

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[15] For an analysis of the representation of Balkan masculinity and heroes see Pittman 2015.

> man’ speech, he does so in a parody of Shakespearean acting, all heightened emotion and sonorous line reading: Glogovac’s Hamlet is fully aware of the weight of expectation that accompanies every line, the sense of anticipation. (Tripney 2016)

Shakespeare’s text is mocked, colloquialised, destroyed, localised.

When he appears on stage, Hamlet rises from the grave asking the gravedigger: “How long will a man lie i’th’earth ere he rot?” (5.1.154). He comes back to life with an awareness of the barbarity of materialistic, liberal capitalism and destroys the illusion that it can be dealt with democratically. “I must be cruel only to be kind” can thus be read as a retaliation of justice, outside a lawfully organised community, which is exposed as a scam in this performance:

> Hamlet is something that is born every few years, which is why he always returns and climbs out of his grave . . . Hamlet is here to tell us that injustice has been committed, to shed light, to stir up the ghosts. Hamlet *comes together with the ghosts to shake things up a bit* . . . And, he brings spring. (Kovačević and Stojanović, 2016, 27; my emphasis)

Read in this way, Popovski’s *Hamlet* offers a valuable counterpoint to the naïve universalism of the 2015 *Romeo and Juliet*, and a basis for a nuanced consideration of the role of contemporary Balkan Shakespeare productions in creating a self-image in relation to Western culture.

Conclusion

As we have seen, the first problem to crop up about the 2015 *Romeo and Juliet* production we examined is the reduction of the Serbian-Albanian relations to the ‘ancient grudge’ between two families ‘both alike in dignity’; a production that reduces the ‘grudge’ into a primordial Balkan conflict that needs foreign (especially financial) intervention. As such, it repeats the stereotyped cultural racism towards the Balkans from the perspective of a more developed and civilised West. The second problem arises as a consequence of it, and consists of the lack of ethical, political and historical responsibility of the production in the face of much more complex, silenced, yet ongoing struggles of the oppressed people of both ethnicities, in whose name the performance was actually created. Lastly, the utilitarian use of the cultural and symbolic capital of Shakespeare and appropriation of *Romeo and Juliet* as a universal love story that erases differences and brings reconciliation in fact masks the problems that are supposedly addressed.

As Alexa Alice Joubin notes, “for both conservatives and innovators, the genre of Global Shakespeare is politically expedient in a neoliberal economy” (2020, 26). This production is a very good example of a conservative and politically expedient Balkan appropriation of *Romeo and Juliet*. Taking this perspective into account, the performance might be seen as a commodification of the myths of universal love, peace and reconciliation in *Romeo and Juliet* while participating in a network of economically and politically driven agendas. In other words, the brand of Shakespeare and *Romeo and Juliet* seem to provide the perfect makeup for attracting funds and cultural visibility. This does not entail questioning the actual good intentions of the people involved or the quality of the performance. However, in the face of sensitive topics such as the Serbian-Kosovo relations, issues of ethics and responsibility cannot be evaded as they are crucial when appropriating Shakespeare.

In this respect, Popovski’s *Hamlet* proves to be an interesting foil by offering a better elaborated and conceptualised theatrical experience, with a developed political consciousness that deals sophisticatedly with the given problematic of historical injustice and interpellation of the Western gaze. The ‘I must be cruel only to be kind’ motto criticises this interpellation by channelling the legitimate anger of the Balkan people into a struggle for paradoxical justice. As such, the performance destroys the Western self-serving myth of a clear-cut division between civilisation and barbarity and embeds this performance in the wider context of the treatment of post-communist countries in Eastern Europe. Although Popovski’s Hamlet never actualises justice on the stage, the remaining political potential stirs the dominant geopolitical discourse of neoliberalism and some of its empty signifiers as democracy, human rights and rule of law by emphasising, with bittersweet mockery, the unquestioned disillusionment with them. Lastly, Glogovac’s charisma and public image of a people’s man had a powerful cultural resonance for delivering a sense of moral and emotional integrity, displaying bravery to delve into morally ambiguous realms in the name of justice, never losing a sense of humour.

Manojlović’s *Romeo and Juliet* repeats some of the crucial problems addressed by the term “balkanism”: the erasure of the native culture and history, internalised cultural racism, and “the problem of the sensibility of the observed being aware of being observed” (Todorova 2009, 60), or in other words, the problem of cultural stigmatisation. On the other hand, Popovski’s *Hamlet* elegantly and subtly incorporates local history and culture, fights against internalisation of cultural racism and lastly, deals with the third, one might say, typically Hamletian problem of being both observed and aware of being observed, and does so with parody, humour and emancipated political awareness. Moreover, in quoting T.S. Eliot’s *Hollow Men* at the beginning of the show, Popovski discretely but clearly invoked Conrad’s Kurtz from *Heart of Darkness*, suggesting a link between Shakespeare as a tool of imperialism and colonialism, and the setting of *Hamlet* as a colonised space.

Thus, while *Romeo and Juliet* represents the most problematic aspect of ‘politically expedient’ Shakespeare productions and stages the Balkan space as an unruly and violent Mediterranean area, my reading of the 2016 *Hamlet* invites the audience to re-evaluate a practice in which the cultural capital of Shakespeare is used as a prolongation of neoliberal ideology under the façade of universal values and a selective appliance of studies of otherness, defying the dichotomies between the Balkans and the West. This consideration brings us back to the initial question: whether the two productions here discussed represent a practice of Shakespearising the Balkans or Balkanising Shakespeare. In unintentionally staging *Romeo and Juliet* as a political tragedy, Manojlović unfortunately missed the opportunity to escape the colonial aspect of Shakespearising the Balkans. On the other hand, Popovski’s *Hamlet* offers an example of how Shakespeare may be Balkanised – a committed local response and a fruitful Balkan appropriation of Shakespeare. As such it might be a guiding thread for a more thorough research on creative contemporary Balkan Shakespeare productions within a ‘Mediterranean context’.

If we return to Braudel's description of the seaside and plains of the Mediterranean, where "life aimed for progress" (5), and, more importantly, to the image of the Balkan Mountains that are on the margins of the Mediterranean, where life is aimed "for survival" (ibid.), we identify the same dualism between the civilised West and the Balkan 'barbaric other'. However, Shakespeare's plays often, if not always, defy any clear dualism, and *Romeo and Juliet* in particular demonstrates the inextricable mixture of opposites. Interpreted from this perspective, Friar Lawrence's warning that "these violent delights have violent ends" (*Romeo and Juliet* 2.6.11) should not only be appropriated as suitable to describe a possible outcome of an 'ancient grudge' in a Balkan context. Rather, it can guide us to seek for paradoxes and adopt a critical stance towards any ideas of cultural autonomy and purity.

The essay is devoted to the memory of Nebojša Glogovac and Vlasta Velisavljević (the ghost of Hamlet's father), with kind gratitude to Aleksandar Popovski and Jovana Stojiljković (Ophelia)

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8

Romeo and Juliet as Mediterranean Political Tragedy, On Stage and Beyond

Eric Nicholson

Abstract

Most often given the label of 'love tragedy' and regarded as a theatrical epitome of the classic *Liebestod* (love-in-death) mythos, *Romeo and Juliet* also can be called a dramatic indictment of internecine fighting and futile civil war. While recognizing the play's crucial articulation of the poetic words and passionate deeds of love, my essay focuses on its staging of destructive feuds and factional conflicts, especially as they relate to the Italian and Eastern Mediterranean worlds. In making and comparing connections between late medieval/early modern settings and twenty-first-century ones, I cite and briefly assess influential film versions of the play, and then concentrate on recent adaptations staged and/or set in Bosnia/Herzogovina (site of the real-life 1993 "Romeo and Juliet of Sarajevo" tragedy of the Christian Bosko and Muslim Admira), Kosovo, Serbia, Palestinian/Israeli/Arab Jerusalem, Jordanian refugee camps for Syrian refugees, and the multi-ethnic Asian/European districts of Palermo, Sicily. I pose several key questions, among them: how do such productions empower or at least help to sustain victims of ethno-religious discrimination, racialized violence, and civil warfare, by embodying and performing potential reconciliation? How might less evident factors of social pressures, economic competition and political control operate in *Romeo and Juliet*, entangling its tale of "star-crossed lovers" with early capitalist tensions in northern Italian city-states – and in the international trading networks of the Mediterranean, Black and Red Seas – in ways that still resonate through today's Southern European and Middle Eastern relations? What might be gained, rather than 'lost', in translating the play-script into a different language than English, and by using two or more languages in performance, especially when they affirm the diverse cultures of the clashing socio-ethnic groups?

Keywords: Shakespeare; *Romeo and Juliet*; Mediterranean; adaptation

1. Background

As its relentless uses of antithesis and oxymoron suggest, *The Most Excellent and Lamentable Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet* is a play of uncanny diversity, familiar and different at the same time.[1] Beyond its so-called *Liebestod* paradigm, the script dazzles and provokes audiences through its numerous contrasts, between light and dark imagery, fight scenes *vs* festive scenes, the verbs and actions of standing *vs* those of moving, between enactments of pathos *vs* bathos. Like the society it depicts, the play is itself multifarious, far more imbalanced and chaotic than its formal symmetries seem to suggest (and the notable divergences among its two Quarto texts, and First Folio version, fittingly register and transmit this instability). Its apparent attempts at holding violent opposites together through sonnet and sonnet-like structures also tend to clash with or even collapse on themselves, through the combined weight of ambiguity, hyperbole, and self-parody. As David Schalkwyk has shown (2002, 28-9; 65-6), the sonnet is itself a form of social action, already public before it is made at least doubly so by being deployed in the play's prologue, both a revealing table of contents and a plea for negotiation with its auditors, that foregrounds "Two households" (significantly, *not* yet named) who break to new mutiny in fair Verona "Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean" (Prologue, 4). The *intra moenia* street-scene strife, especially its self-perpetuating, impacted vendetta-for-vendetta, ancient/new cycle takes precedence over the plot of young death-marked love. Or to put it another way, from the outset the public is constantly conditioning, appropriating, and re-configuring the private in this play. As Robert Henke (2016), Shaul Bassi (2016), and others have explained, the cross-overs and ambiguities are too dense and intrinsic for maintaining a possibly stable binary, or for discerning merely occasional intersections between the interior world of the bedchamber and the exterior world of the piazza.

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[1] I would like to thank and acknowledge my debt to Preti Taneja, whose talk at the Theater Without Borders conference in Paris, 2015, inspired me to consider recent non-traditional versions of *Romeo and Juliet*, produced and performed in response to actual civil wars. I also owe much to Jill L. Levenson's studies of the stage and film history of *Romeo and Juliet*, including her Oxford University Press edition (2000), and to Stanley Wells' 1996 *Shakespeare Survey* article on "The Challenges of *Romeo and Juliet*", which provides a critical lens for interpreting the political and experimental aspects of the play: as Wells concludes, "perhaps the play's greatest challenge is to our notions of genre. The script can be interpreted in all its richness and diversity only if we abandon the idea that because it is called a tragedy it must centre on the fate of individuals, and accept its emphasis on the multifarious society in which these individuals have their being" (1996, 14).

Still, despite the tenacious reputation of *Romeo and Juliet* as intimate true love story, I would not presume to claim that my reading of the play as a political tragedy is original or innovative. What I aim for here is a directing of attention towards the Mediterranean as well as trans-historical qualities of *Romeo and Juliet*'s dramatization of civil conflict and factional violence. By yoking together geographically specific and chronologically wide-ranging aspects of the play's production, reception, and transformations, I seek to offer insights derived through consideration of oblique recycling, adaptations, grafting, abridgments, mash-ups, etc. – in short, 'rhizomatic' appropriations and permutations, to use the model of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) – that aptly express the perennially heterogeneous and protean qualities of the Mediterranean cultural zone. In this vein, I will also trace a pattern of creative parody, sometimes moving towards self-parody, as I appraise politically-oriented and/or popular cultural renditions of *Romeo and Juliet,* both mainstream and not-so-mainstream, produced since the early twentieth century. Thus my essay updates and modulates the 'confrontational model' applied by Barbara Hodgdon to the play's performance history (1989). As I aim to show, useful extension can be made of Hodgdon's 'confrontational' coinage, as a term for productions which reflect a Brechtian, deconstructive, and potentially radical approach to the play-text, and thus challenge audiences to recognize not only their own complicity in the political victimization of the two young lovers as shown in the play, but also their potential to re-write the script of ancient prejudicial grudges. In so doing, today's and tomorrow's public could support and even participate in peaceful, reconciling real-life interaction among violent, traditionally enemy social and ethnic factions.

Critical contrast, therefore, will help to bring out my own emphasis on things changed to the contrary in both the play itself, and its cultural legacy. My survey starts by briefly looking at the phenomenon of identifying *Romeo and Juliet* as Romantic Tragedy par excellence, imprinted on the popular consciousness by Hollywood and other influencers. For all its coy, witty, and meta-textual irony, the Oscar-winning *Shakespeare in Love* (1998) – with screenplay co-written by Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard – exploits the familiar premise of the isolated, listless male author needing a Romantic muse to inspire his writing. The feud in Verona is acknowledged and briefly performed, and matters of power, class, and financial ambition are highlighted in the film's main plot, but in the end, it is Love with a capital 'L' that makes all the difference. Thus the film affirms *Romeo and Juliet*'s iconic status as "the preeminent document of love in the west" (Callaghan in Shakespeare 2003, 1), even as it comically critiques and exploits the Elizabethan prohibition against women performing on public stages: Gwyneth Paltrow plays the young stage-struck heiress Viola DeLesseps, who invents the persona of Thomas Kent, passes as male and gets cast as Romeo, but after a series of complications ends up playing Juliet in the imagined premiere of the play at London's Curtain Theatre in 1593. The screenplay thus accomplishes an ingenious demonstration of Marjorie Garber's apt reminder that "modern culture's paradigmatic heterosexual love story, *Romeo and Juliet*, is a play written for an all-male cast" (2004, 208). Like several Royal Shakespeare Company stage productions of the preceding fifty years – such as Peter Hall's of 1961, Trevor Nunn's of 1976, and Ron Daniels's of 1980 – the audience of *Shakespeare in Love* is invited to feel some measure of sentimental reassurance, focusing their attention on the two star-crossed lovers and their tale of woe more than on their disturbingly dysfunctional social setting.

Reviewing major releases from the 1950's and early 1960's, one finds that even adaptations of the politicized, confrontational kind have undergone marketing efforts to sentimentalize them. Leonard Bernstein's, Stephen Sondheim's, and Arthur Laurents's *West Side Story,* first produced on Broadway in 1957, updates and transposes the play to contemporary New York, accentuating economic hardship, ethnic tensions, and youth gang violence in the modern American city. The script ends with the Juliet equivalent Maria's indictment, "We all killed him" ('him' being Tony, the Romeo equivalent) and a stage direction for the "*Adults*" to remain "*bowed, alone, useless*" (Laurents 1965, 224). Yet publicity posters for the film version of 1961 proclaim how it won ten Oscars, and highlight the two lovers in isolation. The recent remake (2021), directed by Steven Spielberg and featuring the Colombian-American actress Rachel Zegler as Maria, and exclusively Puerto Rican and Latinx actors and dancers as The Sharks, makes several revisions that strengthen the screenplay's critique of discrimination and injustice against immigrant minorities. Nonetheless, its main publicity and promotion images focus primarily on the lovers. In the more parodic as well as satirical vein, and exactly contemporary with the late 1950s-early 1960s stage and film versions of the musical, amidst the increasingly tense Cold War, Peter Ustinov's *Romanoff and Juliet* raised the political stakes of adaptation to the global level. Ustinov also opted for the play's inherent potential to resolve itself into a romantic comedy, by changing his own Friar Lawrence character into the prime minister of Concordia, the smallest country in Europe, yet the one with the deciding vote in a key United Nations decision. The British-raised Ustinov ridicules ideological excesses and belligerent posturing on both the U.S. and Soviet sides, subordinating the romance between the American Juliet and Russian Romeo figures to an astutely satirical agenda. Once more, however, a major poster shows how the film was released with an appeal to filmgoers' romantic sensibilities. With or without recourse to a Sputnik or Apollo rocket-ship, how then to escape the gravitational pull of *Romeo and Juliet* as the supreme Tragedy of Doomed Lovers?

Ustinov's topical, serio-comic critique of Cold War escalation stirring and heating blood towards an actual nuclear war – his film was released only a year before the Cuban missile crisis – was by no means the first pastiche of *Romeo and Juliet* to move along these lines. Almost three centuries earlier, in 1679, Thomas Otway adapted the play as *The History and Fall of Caius Marius, a Tragedy,* with the leading actors of the era Elizabeth Barry and Thomas Betterton in the main roles. Written amidst the Exclusion Crisis that sought to prevent the Catholic James II from succeeding his brother Charles II as king, *Caius Marius* spoke to its contemporary audience's fear of a return to civil war, and it did so through appropriation and re-usage of a third of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* text, with occasionally conspicuous modifications. For example, Lavinia (the equivalent character to Juliet) opines to her secret lover, Marius junior, "O Marius, Marius, wherefore art thou Marius?" (Otway 1680, sig. D1*v*). As Ian Munro observes, the play is not a narrow, Tory-favouring diatribe against Whig party exclusionists; instead, "it uses the idea that 'civil blood makes civil hands unclean' to anatomize a corrupt and chaotic society and counsel reformation and reconciliation" (2016, 58). The case of *Caius Marius* shows that even if at one historical moment the civic dimension is foregrounded and the two lovers are shown to lack any true privacy and freedom, subsequent changes of taste are liable to insist on performances that privilege the emotional over the political. Thus the more politically-minded late seventeenth-early eighteenth-century 'Augustan' period gave way to an era of sentiment, and by the 1730s Otway's play ceded the palm back to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet,* re-interpreted. For this ever popular tragedy is both a product and producer of the mass media marketplace, where there would be added pressure to maintain the play's crowd-pleasing status, already recognized by William Hazlitt: "Of all Shakspeare's plays, this is perhaps the one that is acted, if not the oftenest, with most pleasure to the spectator" (qtd by Levenson 2008, 70). David Garrick's revised and streamlined text (of 1748), which idealizes the title characters while becoming a vehicle for two stars of the stage, prevailed for more than a century, and its premium on the title characters' romance for even longer: as Jill L. Levenson notes, "productions of *Romeo and Juliet* continued to centre on the lovers and the performers who played them" (2008, 79). This approach dominated prominent versions through the first half of the 20th century, which even after the superseding of pictorial and melodramatic styles by neo-Elizabethan bare stage and original text revivalism tended to elevate the star-crossed lovers to even higher mythic status: according to John Gielgud, director of the long-running 1935 London production starring Laurence Olivier and Peggy Ashcroft, the play's protagonists are "symbolic, immortal types of lovers of all time" (qtd by Levenson 2008. 85).

The hegemony of such sentimentalizing mystification, however, was not absolute. The rise of popular and mass media forms of mechanical reproduction also encouraged irreverent 'lowbrow' send-ups of 'highbrow' Shakespearean tropes and credos. In the process, some recovery was occasionally made of the original script's parodic, anti-authoritarian, and indeed quasi-absurdist energies (as seen in the brilliantly bathetic, gratuitous scene – 4.4.122-66 – with Peter and the unpaid musicians Simon Catling, Hugh Rebec, and James Soundpost, usually cut in modern productions). This effect appears in *Bromo and Juliet*, the 1926 silent feature produced by Hal Roach and directed by Leo McCarey, with a farcical spoof of the balcony scene, and its satire on clichéd romantic pretensions as well as hypocritical Prohibition era repressions. The play's performance history, then, has witnessed a recurrent divergence between the worlds of idealistic intimate romance, often presented in illusionistic terms, and unstable civil conflict, often rendered with ironic and de-mystifying tones.

There has existed another option, namely to try and have it both ways. As Franco Zeffirelli's version moved from its 1960 Old Vic venue with Judi Dench and John Stride as the lovers to its commercially and critically successful 1967/68 film release starring the teen-aged Olivia Hussey and Leonard Whiting in the same roles, it gave prominence to the theme of youthful rebellion against the oppressive older generation, while prompting associations with anti-Vietnam war protests as well as liberated sexual exploration. The publicity poster for this production is also revealing: no prim and proper image this (the Hays Act had been recently repealed). Instead, viewers of a cinematic *Romeo and Juliet* are now promised a bed scene with nudity, juxtaposed to a small (black-and-white) 'freeze frame' with swordplay. Times change, as do visual technologies and aesthetic sensibilities, but Baz Luhrmann's similarly successful adaptation, released almost thirty years after Zeffirelli's, likewise trades on the clash and even the identification between sex and violence, though in a more deliberately parodic, postmodern way (Holmer 1996; Anderegg 2003). In this regard, both of these well-known films, familiar to secondary school and university students all over the world, are true to the Shakespearean script. So too do their internal contradictions and even confusions – some of them, especially Luhrmann's, deliberately Launcelot Gobbo-esque – convey a faithfulness to the contrariness, to the tragic/comic contiguities of the Romeo and Juliet tale, that could readily flip towards happy endings. This is also an all-too-familiar stereotype of traditional Mediterranean or ‘Latino’ life and identity: the extremely thin line between love and hate, between peace and war, comedy and tragedy. Luhrmann’s allusions to 1980s-90s collusion between U.S.-backed Latin American regimes and international drug cartels can also be seen as a way to politicize the play, even as he pushes the pedal on religious and particularly Catholic iconography, which might also gesture towards ‘heavenly world’ transcendence.

To what extent, however, do such ambiguously ‘confrontational’ productions foster complicity with their spectators, especially when these audiences live many thousands of kilometres away from the violence and disruption of actual civil wars? Or is it possible to think and speak of a truly ‘Global Mediterranean’, and if so, what might this ‘Global Mediterranean’ involve? Is it, and will it be, traversed by the same kind of “appropriations, misperceptions, and stereotypes” that marked Elizabethan representations of both the Catholic and Ottoman-dominated Mediterranean world? In the contemporary world, how can acts of trans-Mediterranean/trans-Balkan Shakespearean appropriation pursue an ethics of citation, as Alexa Alice Joubin and Elizabeth Rivlin put it, that promotes “one’s willingness to listen to and be subjected to the demands of others”, and through seeing “the others within [one’s familiar self]” take “the first step toward seeing oneself in others’ eyes”? (Joubin 2019, 27).

By definition, such questions are not essentialist or transversal, but are conditioned by local, topical, economic, and other material circumstances. They apply, for example, to ‘radical’ or ‘confrontational’ Royal Shakespeare Company versions such as the one directed by Michael Bogdanov in 1986, which ended with Romeo and Juliet transformed into their own statues as their families made cynical capitalist profit from their children’s personal desolation and suicide. This was the same production that earned the nickname of ‘Alfa’, through its spectacular use of an actual bright red convertible Alfa Romeo sports car, an overtly cliché signifier of ‘Italian-ness’ for English, Canadian, and American audiences. What is the difference, however, between the mainly symbolic cultural and “performance work”, as Hodgdon puts it (1989, 359), of these high-budget, English-speaking productions, and the *actual* political work attempted by non-Anglophone, sometimes propagandistic or even self-contradictory, and/or relatively low- or almost no budget ones, in formerly Ottoman Empire possessions like the ex-Yugoslavia, present-day Iraq, Palestine, Syria and Jordan, or in that most centrally and crucially positioned of great Mediterranean port cities/contact zones, the traditionally multi-ethnic and multilingual Palermo?

Before addressing and illustrating these questions more directly, it is worth interrogating the 'Mediterranean qualities' of *Romeo and Juliet*, that help to specify the play's status as a political and societal tragedy. Above all, what exactly do we mean by 'Shakespeare and the Mediterranean'? Fernand Braudel's Mediterranean gains identity through the region's shared climate and ecological conditions, but politically it has rarely been unified, governed by one regime. The ancient Roman imperial "Mare Nostrum" was revived as a propaganda vehicle/naval project by Mussolini, but the Fascist dictator was spouting off ineffectual bluster, and chasing a megalomaniac goal destined to inevitable failure. Braudel himself recognized that "the Mediterranean speaks with many voices", its inter-connected cultures still marked by their almost infinite variety (qtd by Chambers 2008, 1). In consequence, this polyvocal, thoroughly navigated and meticulously charted sea-and-land space remains uncannily elusive, resistant to hegemonic control or stable definition. Its currently twenty sovereign countries and hundreds of ethnicities, cultures, languages, belief systems, cuisines, legal and political systems continue to communicate and compete/interact with each other, in heterogeneous modes whose pedigrees range from Bronze Age/protohistoric to 21st century digital. To cite Iain Chambers' philosophical as well as historical study *Mediterranean Crossings: The Politics of an Interrupted Modernity*, "The Mediterranean, as both a concept and a historical and cultural formation, is a 'reality' that is imaginatively constructed: the political and poetical articulation of a shifting, desired object and a perpetually repressed realization. Here the dominant language of mimesis gives way to a more ragged narrative that arrives through a rent in Occidental sense to insist on another way of telling, another way of being" (2008, 10). This insistent otherness, I would add, makes it possible to perceive the Mediterranean as a volatile, perpetually fluctuating Theatre of migration, contention, and subaltern expression.

If the Middle Ages often saw the Mediterranean as a corrupting entity (Horden and Purcell 2000), the early modern period witnessed the Great Sea's frequent mutability. This was an era when identities in the region were in nearly constant flux, as northern Europeans from Bavaria and the Holy Roman Empire up to Holland and the British Isles became interlopers, as David Abulafia puts it, confronting and sometimes clashing not only with the Ottoman Empire but also with groups like the Portuguese Jewish Marranos, who moved with surprising speed to become influential players, and not just refugees in yet another diaspora. The late 16th century Mediterranean, as perceived by many in Shakespeare's audience, was a place for friends/enemies to operate, with dynamic uncertainties occurring frequently in scenarios of deception, masking, re-naming or heterotopic layering. The scene of *Romeo and Juliet* is laid in Verona, but in Southwark too, as an English language representation of the Italian/Adriatic world, with violent young hordes who could be operating at once in these and other real-imaginary places, as one's allies or one's foes, subject to the kind of disruptive brawling and ambiguous legality/criminality associated with the lands of the Venetian empire. In her monograph *Illyria in Shakespeare's England*, Lea Jurić explains how late 16th-century English and other northern Europeans "inherited the notion of Illyrian criminality centered on the Illyrians' piratical ventures. Illyria's turbulent history, marked among other things by 'barbarian' valor, war-oriented culture, and excessive bodily consumption, and its general lack of civility according to ancient standards, was partially superseded by its heroic contemporary battles and coexistence with the Turks" (2019, 11). Also notorious during Shakespeare's time, and representative of the fascinating as well as volatile Mediterranean world, were the Uskoks, a group who, as Abulafia recounts,

> presented themselves as standard-bearers of the Christian crusade against the Turks, working for the good of Christendom and Habsburg Austria. The Uskoks became the Robin Hood figures of Croatian folk epics and, though few in number and reliant on small

> ships, they succeeded in boxing Venice into a corner of the Adriatic. (2011, 455-6).

As refugees, or at least former refugees, and migrants from diverse backgrounds, the Uskoks resisted social and political classification. Although they presented themselves as loyal allies in the Venetian Christian campaign against the Turks, they could play a double game between the two principal Mediterranean powerhouses, working the large-scale trans-regional feud to their own advantage. With their threat to Ragusa, or Dubrovnik, the Uskoks' activity recalls the decapitated pirate Ragozine in *Measure for Measure,* in some respects also a Mediterranean play – for 'Mediterranean' can mean Protean, and Tragicomic – since its setting of Vienna also resembles London and perhaps also an Italian city-state – Urbino? Mantua? – with its curiously Italianate characters and masks, substitutions, sudden flips and reversals of scenario, leading towards a closure/happy ending that doesn't fully provide closure or happiness. While the practices of erasure, marginalization, and negative distortion that Jurić identifies in Northern European representations of Illyria (and later 'the Balkans') do pertain here, so too does a positive attraction towards and at least partial identification with the cultural Other.

Thus, rather than being simply cast as an ambivalent, binary-defined site of aesthetic splendour/moral corruption, of cultural attraction/political-religious repulsion – as critical literature on the subject has tended to emphasize – the Italianate Mediterranean world of Elizabethan-Jacobean drama appears in both more precise and complex terms as an often liminal zone of hybrid, multiple, and transformational identities and interactions, where shifting loyalties and violent passions can signify more than mere treachery or a hot dry southern European humoral disposition. They just as importantly reflect a theatricalized sense of transcultural exchange and fluidity. The Anglo-Germanic ethnic stereotyping and even racialization of Italy and Italians as duplicitous hot-bloods is more of a post-seventeenth-century development, that has edited out specific nuances and situational intricacies operative in Shakespeare's lifetime. As Shaul Bassi has elucidated,

> the dangerous contiguity between feast and riot, order and chaos,

> also points to the political overtones of *Romeo and Juliet*, where the relationship between the private and the public sphere, whose distinction was not fully articulated in the early modern era, is another prominent theme. The civic issues that underlie the society of Capulets and Montagues correspond to larger political questions fiercely debated in Shakespeare's time and place. (2016, 185).

In short, these insights helpfully contextualize the thorough imbrication of love and politics in *Romeo and Juliet*.[2]

2. Theatrical Efforts Towards Truth and Reconciliation

I now turn to productions of the confrontational, or to use Christie Carson's term, the 'insurgency' kind which can "democratize audiences" (2008). This approach insists that spectators take on some kind and degree of civic responsibility, moving them towards active intervention in the political feuding – as well as towards the agenda of stopping it, of converting enmity to love – staged in the

[2] Bassi goes on to observe: "the role of civil unrest, the relationship between the spiritual and the secular power, the Catholic doctrine and its opponents, the obedience of children toward parental authority, the different, overlapping jurisdictions (secular law, canon law, individual deliberation) that could enter in some sort of friction regarding marriage: in all of these areas, Italy was a mirror and a political laboratory, one where Niccolò Machiavelli was teaching Europe to consider the state not as an idealized realm of benevolent rule, but as a practical battleground where facing the naked truth was a prerequisite for any efficacious action". Bassi also pertinently identifies Friar Lawrence as a good reader of Machiavelli, who nevertheless embodies, through his overwrought and mistimed actions, the kind of contradictory, politically crippling mix of power and weakness in the early modern Italian church diagnosed by Machiavelli himself. In this same context, it is worth noting how Friar Francis, in *Much Ado About Nothing*, manages to correct Friar Lawrence's reckless mistake-making by prudently conspiring with a civil authority – Leonato, the Governor of Messina – to apply the deception trick of a feigned death towards a public wedding and a comedic happy ending. In this case, Machiavellian *virtù* is efficaciously coordinated with Christian virtue, enabling the triumph of love over misfortune and death through the calculated manipulation of appearances, and the unveiling of "another Hero" who is still her original chaste and virginal self, Diana's knight.

play, rather than passively standing by and watching the repetition of factional violence. This interventionist mode could be seen as taking a prompt from the play-script itself, which so easily can be flipped towards comedy (as in Flaminio Scala's ironically named *Li tragici successi,* "The Tragic Events"),[3] and still bears the traces of its multiple intertexts, including Bandello's version of the tale, wherein, as Robert Henke observes, characters are urged to live like citizens, and Juliet herself is represented as a citizen, aware of marriage's potential to resolve potential conflicts (2016). A purpose here might be to succeed where Lawrence the would-be Machiavellian *mezzano* or love and peace-broker fails, in making the personal political, and the political personal, as revealed in the Friar's well-known couplet: "But this alliance may so happy prove / To turn your households' rancor to pure love" (2.2.91-2). Such active goading of audiences' political consciousness, and sense of civic responsibility, even and indeed especially in the context of personal love affairs and marital unions, has given special urgency and challenge to adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* staged since the 1990s in multi-ethnic and multi-religious contact and conflict zones of the Mediterranean world.

First, however, recognition of the difficulty of this approach needs to be made. In 1994, in response to the real-life story of the "Sarajevo Romeo and Juliet", the Romany Company in exile produced a version, as Anthony Dawson explains, "set in Bosnia, Juliet a Muslim and Romeo a Christian; the bombed out ancient bridge at Mostar was used as a twisted balcony for Juliet, who spoke to Romeo over the gorge. There was no reconciliation at the end, no peace, but only bursts of machine gun fire".[4] This directorial choice emulated a well-documented tragedy. In May, 1993, the young lovers Admira Ismić and Boško Brkić, known as the 'Romeo and Juliet of Sarajevo', were shot dead as they tried to flee the city. Their bodies lay on a bridge for four days. They also became the subject of a CBC/PBS documentary film, released in 1994 (directed by John Zaritsky). To mark the twentieth anniversary of the tragic episode, a protest song and video by the rock band Zabranjeno Pusenje was released, and various commemorative events were held, though Admira's parents limited themselves to visiting the lovers' graves and leaving flowers. As reported by RadioFreeEurope RadioLiberty, "Zijo Ismic still wrestles with the forces that swept over his daughter, his city, his country. 'War intervened in love – that's the problem', Ismic says. 'In such situations, the laws of love do not exist. Only the laws of war'" (Sandic-Hadzihasonovic 2013, 1).

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[3] For an excellent English translation and analysis (by Richard Andrews) of this "commedia dell'arte scenario", published in 1611 but almost certainly performed many years before, see Scala 2008, 106-13.

[4] Quoted in the CBC documentary film, directed by John Zaritsky (cited below).

Not long after the Sarajevo commemorations, the National Theatres of Belgrade, Serbia, and Pristina, Kosovo, collaborated on a bilingual, multi-ethnic *Romeo and Juliet,* directed by the Serbian Miki Manojlović, and the Kosovar playwright Jeton Neziraj, and co-produced by Radionica Integracije of Belgrade and Qendra Multimedia of Pristina, and performed at the National Theatres of both countries, in spring 2015. The Montagues were played by Kosovan Albanians, and the Capulets by Serbs, with the actors speaking their lines in their respective languages, without translated super-titles. There was one significant exception: when talking to Juliet, Albanian-speaking Romeo spoke Serbian, and when talking to Romeo, Serbian-speaking Juliet spoke Albanian. More than my own descriptions and comments, excerpts from interviews with the theatre artists themselves communicate crucial aspects of the production and its repercussions. As Manojlović stated, "there are people in Belgrade who don't speak Albanian but they will understand. It is easy to understand why somebody loves somebody, or someone hates someone". He also affirmed that "we are doing a play and this process together, that is our statement. It is much more profound than saying: 'I think this'. Do something together. If we merely talk about reconciliation it is just words" (Gillet 2015, 2). This declaration of commitment can be understood as a response to the closing speeches of the play itself, when Montague and Capulet shake hands and promise a mutual reconciliation, but through the static mode of gilded commemorative statues, rather than through lively collective action. Clearly the production aimed to privilege meaningful movements, gestures, and non-verbal expression of feelings, over the play's often rhetorically stylized language. This sense of physical realization, as a key part of an ensemble process that in itself was an act of bridge-building, was acknowledged by the Kosovan Albanian actor Alban Ukaj (Romeo), who was a student in Pristina during the war and experienced the bombings first-hand: the "gap between the two nations is deep", he admitted, adding that "I started to lose faith that this story was ever going to end, so it was important for me that we start something" (Gillet 2015, 1). Sounding a confident note, Neziraj went so far as to predict that "this is going to mark the end of the Serbia-Kosovo conflict, symbolically" (ibid.).

As if to mark the spot, yet also to cross out the lingering hostilities from the years of war, and at the same time to foster equations and formulas for peaceful co-existence, Manojlović created a raised mini-stage within the space of the main stage, in the form of a giant letter 'X', which also was designed "to symbolize two streets that are crossed into one space" (Halili 2015, 2). Moreover, when not performing on the giant 'X' during their scripted scenes, the actors would remain visible to the audience, in what Manojlović designated as 'position O', a zone that also sought to encourage and strengthen relationships among the attentive characters themselves, while enhancing audience engagement as well. The breaking of illusionistic conventions carried through the entire performance, as a final bow was avoided, and instead the actors shook hands with audience members and introduced themselves. As Manojlović stated, "it's more important that there is an emotional and rational understanding of what is happening on the stage. I don't want the performance to have any 'gift' [from the audience, in their ritual of applause], because that handshaking is the gift and that is the end for me" (Halili 2015, 4). The production was allowed to develop and reach fruition at a time when the governments and high-level institutions of Kosovo and Serbia started to encourage inter-ethnic cultural cooperation, and after the show's premieres in the two nations' respective capitals, the local and national media coverage interpreted it as an attempt at reconciliation between the two countries. The director himself, however, more cautiously averred that the "idea of reconciliation is very nice, but I am not able to reconcile politics and interests that are so different. What I can do, is demonstrate that together, anything is possible" (Halili 2015, 4). In the same interview Manojlović used the metaphor of bridge-building between two feuding families, while another member of the production, Uliks Fehmiu (Friar Lawrence) expressed the will to overcome the stigma of victimization, and to promote healthy organic growth towards understanding and acceptance: "My father [also an actor, who killed himself in 2010 after years of repression] by Slobodan Milošević suffered through this period terribly. Hatred is something that is so dangerous and so contagious. I went through a period of looking at myself and my generation as victims. This seeing yourself as a victim doesn't move you forward", adding that "What is happening here shouldn't be an exception, it should be a normal mainstream thing. This makes sense. You have to believe, at least a bit, that this seed we are planting will continue to grow" (Gillet 2015, 3). Aptly enough, Fehmiu's metaphor resonates with his character's homiletic couplets, as Friar Lawrence makes his entrance into the play gathering plants, herbs and flowers: "For naught so vile that on the earth doth live, / But to the earth some special good doth give" (2.2.17-18). If the play ends with an image of an eclipse – "the sun for sorrow will not show his head", observes the Prince, in a significantly fragmentary sonnet – the 2015 production by the National Theatres of Serbia and Kosovo strove to restore nurturing sunlight to their real-life contexts of conflict and desolation.

My own "sunlight" metaphor, I concede, itself risks being "too sentimental, too twee", to use Preti Taneja's description of Neziraj's own initial doubts about the project, before he eventually agreed to participate, conceding that there "was a temptation to do something big" (Taneja 2016, 44). In fact, for all its high quality acting and production values, and for all its constructively spirited intentions, the Radionica Integracije and Qendra Multimedia *Romeo and Juliet* turned out to be fraught with dissonances and contradictions. For example, even though the production was well-financed, tickets were not made available to the public for performances at the National Theatre of Tirana, and the official publicity for the show started to dodge difficult and painful political questions, falling back on universalist rhetoric about Shakespeare's play. Alban Ukaj, in particular, felt strong misgivings and eventually withdrew from the project, disenchanted with its propagandistic advertising, and protesting its "camouflaging things to the extent that the whole problem is relativized for the sake of getting money" (Halili 2018). I refer the reader to Petra Bjelica's essay in this same volume for an extended and illuminating critique of the production, its apparently disingenuous expression of a redundant kind of self-abjecting, Western-privileging Balkanisation, and its potential misuse of the cultural capital of Shakespeare as a tool of politically duplicitous propaganda. This being noted, in fairness it is worth citing Taneja's eyewitness report: "At the end, I saw audiences in Pristina and Belgrade stand to cheer; the actors stepped off the stage to shake hands with them. Nothing could mar the moment, not even the message, chalked at the foot of those concrete steps outside the theatre: 'No Serbian Hoofs on the Kosovan Stage'", to which she adds, "the play might offer a space for audiences to reflect not only on the 'ancient grudge' that continues to grieve communities and keep them divided, but also on the potential for reconciliation that collaboration through culture – in this case, through Shakespeare – can offer" (Taneja 2016, 26).

During the same season (spring 2015), across the eastern part of the Mediterranean, the Syrian theatre artist Nawar Bulbul was directing an adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, performed by young Syrian refugees of The Souriyat Without Borders hospice near Amman, Jordan. As reported by Taneja, again a first-hand observer of the event:

> Under the eaves of a hospice for Syrian refugees in Amman, Jordan, a wounded young Romeo reaches out to the blurred image of a girl on a screen. From the besieged and bombed-out city of Homs, Syria, Juliet gazes back. Her head is covered because of her religion; her face is masked to protect her identity from the watchful regime of Bashar al-Assad. This is Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, performed by young people separated by war and reunited, in real time, via Skype. In Amman, the attic of the hospice has been transformed into Verona with painted cardboard pergolas, pieces of scrap from the streets and a children's globe to light the stage. The audience includes young men who have lost limbs in the conflict and have been carried up by their carers to see the play (Taneja 2015, 1).

In this case, spectators' sympathy for and identification with a character was not merely imaginary but physical, felt through the blood, nerves, and bones. Ibrahim, the 12-year old refugee actor who played Romeo, was himself a wounded orphan survivor. As Taneja recounts,

> Before he arrived in Jordan, his home had been destroyed by Assad's bombs. His mother and sisters were killed; his leg was crushed. When I met him in early February, he could barely stand without crutches. Now, following weeks of intense rehearsals, he uses them in a sword fight, then casts them aside to perform a forward roll that leaves the audience on both sides of the screen cheering. (Ibid.)

Bulbul, who in 2014 had adapted *King Lear* with a cast of over 100 children at the Za'atari refugee camp near in northern Jordan, worked for three months in person with the young victims of the civil war. Combined with this traditional mode of preparing an ensemble of non-professional actors in a specific shared space, he also worked each day

> via Skype, with the group in Homs and their drama teacher, who carried on rehearsals when the connection could not be made. The two groups "met" just two weeks before the performance, going "palm to palm" as Juliet's line has it, via the screen and getting to know each other as if the technology was not there (2015, 2).

Beset not only by the brutal displacements and deprivations caused by the war, but also by the vagaries of limited and irregular technological access, the politically imposed physical divide between the young lovers was forced to endure recurrent interruptions of their Skype connection. At one performance, the spectators waited an hour before the video feed of Juliet's balcony returned, and Romeo at last declared his love. In Shakespeare's play, Romeo climbs the high orchard walls of the Capulet estate and eventually gains access to Juliet's chamber, but in this production the circumstances more closely resembled those of the original source-text 'Pyramus and Thisbe', with a virtual live stream video feed updating the crack in the wall that simultaneously enables and disables contact between the lovers.

In this case, the representation of such a cruel, arbitrary, so-near-

and-yet-so-far condition became integral to the presentation, with tragicomic effects: a young narrator in Homs, evidently equivalent to the play's Chorus, earned applause as well as laughter when he reappeared after a long interruption, promising "I swear, if we are not caught by bombs or explosives, and if Juliet is not fired at by a sniper, we will still be here in the next scene" (Taneja 2015, 1). Instead of the performance of an on-stage ceremony, the Romeo and Juliet actors poignantly played a virtual version of the secret wedding, as the groom in Amman put a ring on his own finger, while in Homs the bride kneeled in front of the young Muslim actor playing Friar Lawrence. The latter character wore a large cardboard crucifix, and thus gave homage and virtual revival to the Jesuit priest Father Frans van de Lugt, who had been murdered in Homs the year before (in 2014) by the Assad regime, after almost twenty years of assisting disadvantaged Christians and Muslims. As if in defiance of both the inhumane real-life carnage and the *Liebestod* paradigm of doomed lovers, Bulbul's hospice-staged version rejected the familiar tragic conclusion,

> to reflect Father Frans's message and the desire of all present for the conflict to end. Juliet, then Romeo, dash their poison to the ground. Roxanne, playing Juliet's companion, cries: "Enough killing! Enough blood! Why are you killing us? We want to live like the rest of the world!" Many of the audience are in tears. When the play was over, the two groups of actors took their bows turning first to the audience in Syria and then to the audience in Jordan (Taneja 2015, 2).

As reported by the *Hindustan Times*, in an article published on 6 April, 2015, Ibrahim felt a closeness with the actors on the other side of the camera, and hoped to see them face-to-face, if and when the civil war ends. Uncannily, many hundreds of years after the impacted civil mutiny and civil bloodshed portrayed in the play, a syndrome shown by Glenn Clark (2011) to be endemic to the self-contradictory as well as self-mutilating clash of Verona's uncivil internal civilizations, the feud perpetuates itself by destroying the younger generation, denying them the kind of transcendent, liberating love shared by Juliet and Romeo, or even more ordinary but no less meaningful love. As Mohammad Halima, a 24-year-old wheelchair-bound refugee put it, “We young men are the biggest victims of this insane war, and everyone had a love story with someone. But now we don’t know where they are or if they are still alive” (*Hindustan Times* 2015, 2). Staging the play in this context, and changing its dénouement so that the lovers refuse to poison and stab themselves, is not a gesture towards a utopian happy ending alternative, but rather a protest against a regime of institutionalized violence and repression.

This kind of resolution is also a prompt to re-evaluate the traditional western sense of tragic theatrical experience of purging pity and fear, for when the tragedy of real-life civil war intervenes in the Shakespearean representation of deadly internecine conflict, what kind of catharsis can be accomplished? The mix of in-person performance and Skype transmission is not only a vehicle but an embodiment of resistance, a present-absent unreal bridge, a prosthesis seeking to repair broken actual bridges, like the historic one in Mostar, or the one where the Sarajevo Romeo and Juliet lost their lives. Emerging from and embedded within cycles of militarized political conflict, these productions from the war-torn late twentieth-early twenty-first-century Balkan and southeastern Mediterranean regions concur in rejecting the fetishization of *Romeo and Juliet* as an emblem of romantic love. As Sara Soncini notes, in her comparative study of stage and film productions (related to other Shakespeare plays) by Katie Mitchell, Sarah Kane, and Mario Martone in the wake of the 1990s Bosnian war, “the Shakespearean presence becomes progressively unstable and fragmented, directly mired in the violence of war or turned into a site of conflict in its own right” (2018, 28).

This ‘conflict turn’ has been richly documented and analyzed by Ian Munro, whose study of the play’s performance history includes an appraisal of the ground-breaking, controversial 1994 production by the Khan Theatre and El Qasaba Theatre in Jerusalem, an unprecedented collaboration between Israeli and Palestinian theatre companies. Anticipating the bilingual production of the National Theatres of Kosovo and Serbia, the actors spoke in both Arabic and Hebrew: for example, Romeo wooed Juliet in the former language, and she responded in the latter. Despite the fact that the Palestinian actors were sometimes prevented from attending rehearsal by Israeli security forces, and amidst death threats from extremist Jewish organizations, the production went forward, eventually receiving both popular and critical acclaim. While criticized for expressing an Israeli bias, it also went on to have a planetary influence, inspiring an entire series of *Romeo and Juliet* adaptations – from Ramallah to Budapest, Brooklyn to Winnipeg – that referenced the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, including the Palestinian-produced film *In Fair Palestine* (2008), and the American independent *West Bank Story* (2008), the second of which won the 2006 Academy Award for Best Live Action Short Film (Munro 2016, 70-1). For all these efforts and achievements, however, Palestine remains a scene of ancient grudges and civilian bloodshed, where not even a "gloomy peace" has been achieved. In this context, an Abu Dis high school student reading and staging of the balcony scene communicates not so much exuberant romantic passion and "teenage hyperbole" (Sperlinger 2015, 142) as a sense of actual mortal danger, especially when Juliet reminds Romeo "If they do see thee, they will murder thee" (2.1.113). This type of situation not only gives urgency to politically inflected interpretations of the play in performance, but with its matter-of-life-death reality it overrides terms like 'radical', 'confrontational', and 'insurgency', showing them to be inadequate, generalizing labels.

Munro also devotes several pages to the daringly revisionist and deliberately provocative *Romeo and Juliet in Baghdad,* an adaptation by the Iraqi-born actor, playwright, and director Monadhil Daood for the 2012 World Shakespeare Festival sponsored by the Royal Shakespeare Company during London's Olympic Games year. Daood, himself a "legitimate son of tragedy" and exile since the 1980s from Sadam Hussein's regime, and married to World Shakespeare Festival director Deborah Shaw, made several drastic changes to the original script. Not only was the play performed in Arabic with English surtitles, but a new character called 'The Teacher', a blend of The Prince and Friar Lawrence was introduced, who called on the audience to reject hatred-reinforcing traditions. Moreover, the confident attempt of the lovers to end the feud between a pair of Shiite and Sunni brothers did not culminate in their double suicide. Instead, their moment of joy and pleasure within a Christian church where they had taken sanctuary was interrupted by a suicide bomber, none other than the Paris equivalent, a middle-aged foreign-born Al Qaeda operative, who explodes himself along with his victims. No spoken lines followed, only a silent tableau of the two families mourning (Munro 2016, 72-4).

What was for some audience members a clear and harrowing physical allusion to the then recent (October 2010) terrorist massacre of over fifty people during an evening Mass at Baghdad's Our Lady of Salvation, for others was an arbitrary and disturbing subversion of what they expected from the play's ending. As witnessed by theatre scholar Susan Bennett, the sudden simulated explosion and ensuing total blackout caused general bewilderment, with several front-row attendees breaking out into hysterical laughter, and, after subdued applause, most spectators looking anxious to leave the theatre as soon as possible. Bennett acknowledges that on the day after their co-attendance of the performance at Stratford-upon-Avon's Swan Theatre, she and Christie Carson wrote an online review stating "the real tragedy, this adaptation suggests, is the West's passive spectatorship of a story familiar to us from the nightly news", but that later, "with more critical distance from the immediate aspects of the production, I think of *Romeo and Juliet in Baghdad* as a play that literally tore out the possibility of love from the bodies on stage and replaced it with a relentlessly masculinist battle for power" (2016, 704). This interpretation thus coheres with critiques of machismo, masculinist ideology and fratricidal violence, as practiced for millennia from the Tigris to the Adige, that have distinguished recent politically engaged stagings of Shakespeare's play.[5]

Yet the story of *Romeo and Juliet in Baghdad* has one more revealing twist, recorded and assessed by both Bennett and Munro. Two months after its run at the Swan Theatre, the production was revived at the Riverside Studios in Hammersmith, London, where just before the June 28 performance a member of the Reclaim Shakespeare Company (RSC) appeared on the stage, and delivered a two-minute monologue, starting with

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[5] As Bennet also recognizes, feminist criticism has for several decades accentuated the play's own interrogation of masculinities: she cites Robert Applebaum's essay (1997), and its reading of Verona's society as one of "imperfect masculinities" (268), and masculinity itself as a "structure, a regime, a dominant system" (256).

> Two households, BP and the World Shakespeare Festival, both lacking in dignity,
> In befouled Iraq where we lay our scene,
> For oil feud breaks to new hypocrisy,
> Where civil blood makes their money unclean.
> BP, O most wicked fiend, you did conspire to bring Iraq to her knees.
> (Bennett 2016, 705)

Identifying himself as Pete the Temp, the performer went on to denounce the lobbying by British Petroleum (BP) of the British and U.S. governments (then led by Tony Blair and George Bush) to protect and promote its interests before and after the 2003 invasion of Iraq. He ended his 'guerrilla soliloquy' with another satirically creative parody/mash-up of famous lines from *Romeo and Juliet* – "I ne'er saw true hypocrisy till this night. / O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo? / Deny thy sponsor and refuse thy logo / Never was a story of more woe / Than the sponsorship of our Juliet and her Romeo" – and implored the audience, "If you share our concern about BP's sponsorship of the World Shakespeare Festival we invite you to rip BP's logo from your programme. Thank you, and enjoy tonight's show" (Bennett 2016, 706). As Bennett observes, the Reclaim Shakespeare Company flash protests – they staged four others during the Globe to Globe Shakespeare Festival – reminded audiences that contemporary wars in "remote" places are fought for the sake of globally-linked economies, altering her own understanding of *Romeo and Juliet in Baghdad* and its challenge to the original Shakespeare play's "routine labour, to embody an idealized romantic love", and its recasting of it "as an exemplary tragedy of and for our neoliberal capitalist times" (2016, 707).

Similarly, Munro sees the Reclaim Shakespeare Company's intervention as an extension of Daood's revisionist production, reflecting a desire to fuse the worlds of play and reality, and prodding London audiences to reflect on their potentially compromised participation in the World Shakespeare Festival (2016, 75-7). Connecting the altered 2012 version back to Otway's 1679 re-scripting and re-directing of Shakespeare's tragedy as *Caius Marius*, Munro also argues that as

> with *Romeo and Juliet in Baghdad*, this repositioning involves imagining theatre as a radically public and political space, where the boundaries between representation and performance are permeable. If the Prince and the other citizens are proxies for the theatre audience in Shakespeare's play, as I suggested at the start of this chapter, the violent entry of Caius Marius might be understood as the audience violating the space of the play, precipitating the conclusion, demanding attention. And while there is no record of any event comparable to the appropriations of the Reclaim Shakespeare Company, the play certainly acknowledges that the world outside may take notice and intervene. (2016, 77)

Thus there is a long and intricate historical dimension to the quest to transform *Romeo and Juliet* in performance, sometimes through specific parody and often through spatial and temporal re-location, and by doing so to suggest ways for audiences to change their own violently oppressive political realities that sacrifice love to the demands of power and greed. Again the goal could be to take up the challenge identified by Joubin, i.e. to listen to a diverse range of voices, including "foreign" and discordant ones, and to see oneself in others' eyes.

The struggle continues, as attested by a July 2021 production in the Mediterranean crossroads city of Palermo. Sounding hopeful notes of inter-cultural collaboration, in the key of celebrating diversity and inclusion, Daniela Morelli's play entitled *Bengala a Palermo* ("A Bengali Woman in Palermo") was produced by the city's Teatro Biondo Stabile, and directed by Marco Carniti. A dramatic love story of a young Bengali woman and a Palermitan "puparo" (puppeteer), *Bengala a Palermo* was, in the words of Carniti, "a slightly ramshackle *Romeo and Juliet* in the time of Covid" ["Un Romeo e Giulietta al tempo di Covid, un po' sgangherato"] (Brunetto 2021, 2). The title character, as Carniti explains, "è una donna di oggi, che decide autonomamente il proprio destino: è la libertà di scelta individuale che trionfa. E Palermo è la città che le permetterà di realizzare il suo sogno. Palermo città dell'accoglienza" ("is a woman of today, who autonomously decides her own destiny: it is the freedom of individual choice that triumphs. And Palermo is the city that allows her to realize her dream. Palermo, city of hospitality and acceptance"; *Bengala a Palermo* 2021,1; translation mine). Expressing on stage the playwright's aim to avoid Sicilian stereotypes and instead recount the international dynamism of Palermo, Carniti exalted the festive and musical aspects of Shakespeare's play, with a mélange of Bengali and Palermitan instruments, chords, rhythms, and melodies, as part of a ritually suffused mise-en-scène, marked also by Christian iconography. As Carniti also affirms, this approach embodies how "Gli incontri e le convivenze tra culture differenti creano una società più inclusiva per un futuro migliore" ("encounters and partnerships among diverse cultures create a more inclusive society, for a better future"; Teatro Biondo 2021, 2; translation mine). Morelli's script focuses on the close, trusting, and supportive relationship between the expert embroiderer and caretaker Deeta, the twenty-year old daughter of immigrant parents, and the centenarian Bibi, a native Sicilian of aristocratic origin who long before had eloped with her true love, a humble fisherman, and has recently returned from South America to Palermo. In her dreams, Bibi connects with the world of the *Iascari*, the sailors and the multi-ethnic maritime groups of the Bay of Bengal, again accentuating the transcendent potential of the loving relationships in *Romeo and Juliet*, and the play's poetic expression of dream-world alternatives.

With its agenda of affirming and promoting diversity, transcultural creative collaboration, and the reconciliation of elderly and young generations, *Bengala a Palermo* emphatically rejects the model of cynical mistrust, closed-minded tribalism, and racially as well as economically divisive hostility, a model too often used for shorthand, prejudicial stereotyping of southern and eastern Mediterranean culture, and extending inland to countries like Syria, Kosovo, and Serbia. In this case, the Great Sea is neither morally corrupting nor dangerously unstable, but both a real and imaginative zone where boundaries can be crossed, and new, restorative options can be played out, literally and figuratively, in the innovative space-time continuum of theatrical performance. Tragic ends and self-repeating cycles of violence can be superseded, even in the case of *Romeo and Juliet,* and precisely through the positive transformation of audience members into aware interventionists.

I conclude with a pertinent ethical citation of an epilogue by a theatrical visionary-practitioner, adapter of Shakespearean scripts and prompter of audiences named Bertolt Brecht:

> There's only one solution comes to mind:
> That you yourselves should ponder till you find
> The ways and means and measures tending
> To help good people to a happy ending.
> Ladies and gentlemen, in you we trust:
> The ending must be happy, must, must, must! (1976, 104)

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The Mediterranean of Shakespeare's dramas is a vast geopolitical space. Historically, it spans from the Trojan war to Greek mythology and the ancient Roman empire; geographically, from Venice and Sicily to Cyprus and Turkey, from Greece to Egypt, the Middle East and North Africa. But it is also the Mediterranean of Renaissance Italian cities and *Romeo and Juliet* is a beautiful example of how exotic frontiers for an English gaze may be replaced by closer yet different cultural Mediterranean frames. The volume offers studies on the circulation of the story of Romeo and Juliet and its ancient archetypes in early modern Europe, from Greece to Italy, France and Spain, as well as on contemporary receptions and performances of Shakespeare's play in Sicily, the Balkans, and Jordan..

Silvia Bigliazzi and Emanuel Stelzer teach at Verona University. They have extensively published on Shakespeare, Renaissance literature and classical receptions in early modern culture.

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Diogo Homem, *Portolan chart* (sixteenth c.);
Frank Dicksee, *Romeo and Juliet* (1884).

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