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Shakespeare and the Mediterranean • 1

Romeo and Juliet

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S K E N È   Theatre and Drama Studies

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Part 2 – Recirculating *Romeo and Juliet* in the Mediterranean: the New Millennium

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

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

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.

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

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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.

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*).

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

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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.

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).

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 break 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

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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.

social identity and femininity, which from the opening scenes make for docility, weakness, physical submissiveness and usability at large" (Bigliazzi 2015, 251).

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

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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 kin-
dled spark of grudge" (36).

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:

> 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

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

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:

> 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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