

## INTRODUCTION

*Romeo and Juliet* is not only one of the most popular of Shakespeare's plays, it is one of the most popular stories in the world. It is probably the most widely disseminated myth of romantic love; the very names of its heroes have become synonyms for young lovers. The image of a young woman on a balcony, conversing with her lover by moonlight, is a universally recognised icon. Romeo and Juliet are endlessly invoked in pop culture, in advertisements, TV shows, cartoons, and popular songs. The play has been filmed dozens of times and is probably second only to *Hamlet* as the most frequently performed of Shakespeare's works.

Yet while *Romeo and Juliet* has rarely been off the stage since Shakespeare's time, it has rarely – if ever – been there as Shakespeare wrote it. Wide discrepancies between the two quarto texts suggest a degree of instability in the play even in Shakespeare's day, and since the theatres reopened after the Restoration the play has undergone radical transformations. It has always been popular, but it has also always been edited, adapted, and rewritten. In spite, or perhaps because, of its enduring appeal as the definitive love story, *Romeo and Juliet* has been a dynamic and unstable performance text, endlessly reinvented to suit differing cultural needs.

Restoration adapters radically altered the text, adding a happy ending in James Howard's version, and a Roman political context in Thomas Otway's *Caius Marius*. A century later David Garrick, following Otway and others, added a passionate scene between Romeo and Juliet in the tomb. Garrick tailored the play to showcase his own histrionic powers, making it primarily a vehicle for Romeo: he and Spranger Barry had a celebrated rivalry in the role. By the nineteenth century, however, Romeo had become a role that actors avoided, and the play primarily a vehicle for actresses. Juliet became the signature part of Eliza O'Neill, Fanny Kemble, and Helena Faucit, and developed into an idealisation of Victorian womanhood. Even Romeo became a star part for actresses, especially Charlotte Cushman, who finally rejected the Garrick text in favour of Shakespeare's. This restoration coincided with the Victorian penchant for authenticity, which, together with technological and theatrical developments, shifted the play's focus from the lovers to their environment. Henry Irving's production used scrupulously detailed Veronese settings, expertly choreographed crowd scenes, and spectacular scenic

effects to create an imaginative representation of Renaissance Italy in which he and Ellen Terry were awkwardly out of place.

The twentieth century has seen further shifts in the play's meaning. The influence of William Poel and Harley Granville-Barker led to fuller texts and leaner stagings, notably John Gielgud's celebrated production of 1935, in which he and Olivier alternated Romeo and Mercutio. The contrast between them marked a crucial change in modern acting styles, with Gielgud's poetic elegance giving way to Olivier's intense realism. This transition, continued by Peter Brook at Stratford, was fully realised with Zeffirelli's boisterous, earthily Italian production at the Old Vic in 1960, a seminal moment in the play's history. Zeffirelli made the play a celebration of youthful rebellion, in keeping with the cultural trends of the sixties and the rise of the teenager. The focus on recognisably modern youth in Zeffirelli's play and film, as well as in the stage and film versions of Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story*, redefined *Romeo and Juliet* as a study of generational and cultural conflict. In the twentieth century *Romeo and Juliet* turned from a play about love into a play about hate. Modern-dress versions became increasingly common, as did settings in various contemporary blood-feuds such as Northern Ireland or Bosnia. Baz Luhrmann's 1996 film version sums up the contemporary approach with its urban nightmare world of gang violence, conspicuous consumption, and frenzied, lurid imagery.

While different aspects of *Romeo and Juliet* – its lyricism and bawdry, its comedy and tragedy, its politics and sentiment – have emerged at different times, it has remained a vivid index of cultural attitudes about romantic love and social crisis. This edition aims to trace the broad trends whereby performance has reinvented the play, as well as to detail the remarkable variety of individual choices actors and directors have made to bring life and death to Shakespeare's star-crossed lovers.

### ROMEO AND JULIET ON SHAKESPEARE'S STAGE

About the first performances of *Romeo and Juliet* we know little that is concrete. We do not know when, where, or how often the play was performed, or who played the leading roles, although there has been much speculation on these subjects. The title page of the 1597 first quarto (Q1) records that 'it hath been often (with great applause) played publicly, by the right honorable the Lord of Hunsdon his servants'. This company was Shakespeare's, better known as the Lord Chamberlain's Men. The play must have been performed before 1597, but there is no conclusive evidence that it was written later than 1592; probably it dates from between 1594 and

1596.<sup>1</sup> At any rate, the Q1 title page suggests that it was a success, and it is among the plays Francis Meres cited in 1598 as examples of Shakespeare's mastery of tragedy.

Shakespeare almost certainly wrote *Romeo and Juliet* for the Theatre, the first home of the Chamberlain's Men and the first purpose-built theatre in London since Roman times. The Chamberlain's Men probably performed the play at the Curtain, their temporary home during the closure of the Theatre, in 1598, and at the Globe after their move there in 1599.<sup>2</sup> It is also likely that *Romeo and Juliet* was performed on tour; the company performed in Ipswich, Cambridge, Dover, Rye, Bath, and Bristol, among other towns, between 1594 and 1597.<sup>3</sup> The first quarto version of the play can be performed with doubling by a company of twelve, plus supers, such as might have been available for a provincial tour.<sup>4</sup>

The two quarto texts of *Romeo and Juliet* have occasioned much discussion as to their relation and provenance. The second quarto (Q2), published in 1599 and long regarded as the superior version, is the basis for all standard texts of the play. However, Q1, once dismissed as a 'bad quarto', has gained much esteem in recent years. Scholars have moved away from the idea of an authorially sanctioned 'authentic' Shakespearean text toward a notion of the text as merely one unstable element in the complex creation of Elizabethan theatre. Even if Q1 is a pirated version, reconstructed from memory (the traditional interpretation), it reflects something of Elizabethan playhouse practice. David Farley-Hills has argued that it is a shortened version adapted for provincial performance; Jay Halio concurs, and suggests the adapter was Shakespeare himself. Donald Foster has also argued, using a computer analysis of the text, that Q1 is Shakespeare's work, though Foster asserts that it precedes Q2.<sup>5</sup> Whatever its history, Q1 provides suggestive material for performance historians, including unusually precise stage directions. Before their wedding at the Friar's cell, 'Enter Juliet, somewhat fast, and she embraces Romeo' (Q1, 2.5.8 SD).<sup>6</sup> While Romeo is lamenting his banishment,

1 See Gurr, 'Date', p. 19.

2 Evans, Introduction, New Cambridge Shakespeare edition, p. 28.

3 Gurr, 'Date', p. 20, n. 14. 4 King,  *Casting*, p. 82.

5 Farley-Hills, "'Bad' Quarto", p. 27; Halio, 'Handy-Dandy', p. 137; Foster, 'Webbing', p. 134. Critics supporting the memorial reconstruction theory include Hoppe, *The Bad Quarto*, and Irace, *Reforming the 'Bad' Quartos*. Jill Levenson, who includes both Q1 and Q2 in her 2000 Oxford edition, concludes her comprehensive discussion of the issue by saying that 'both early quartos of *Romeo and Juliet* can be viewed as important records of a tragedy that underwent many changes when first written and performed, beginning a process still vital after four centuries' (p. 125).

6 All citations of Q1 are from Jill Levenson's Oxford edition.

'Romeo offers to stab himself, and the Nurse snatches the dagger away' (3.3.98 SD). After Juliet drinks the potion, 'She falls upon her bed within the curtains' (4.5.98 SD). When Juliet is discovered, apparently dead, 'They all but the Nurse go forth, casting rosemary on Juliet and shutting the curtains' (4.5.80 SD).

As Andrew Gurr has pointed out, *Romeo and Juliet* makes considerable demands on the resources of the Elizabethan theatre.<sup>7</sup> It has a very large cast (especially in Q2), numerous properties, and very specific scenic requirements, notably an upper playing area, a curtained bed, and some representation of a tomb. A performance at the Theatre or Curtain would have made full use of Elizabethan staging conventions. Played in broad daylight, night scenes would have been identified by the torches carried by the actors, as before the Capulet ball (1.4). The unlocalised stage, a bare platform in front of the tiring-house façade, would have allowed fluid changes of scene, as when Romeo and his friends move from the street to the party without leaving the stage: 'they march about the stage, and servingmen come forth with napkins' (Q2, 1.4.114 SD). Sometimes the location could change even within a scene. In 3.5 Romeo and Juliet enter 'aloft' (Q2) or 'at the window'(Q1) of Juliet's bedroom, clearly at an upper level above the stage; then 'he goes down' to the main-stage platform (presumably using the rope ladder), where he converses with Juliet as from the Capulet orchard. After his exit Lady Capulet enters the platform, and Juliet 'goes down from the window' (Q1); when she reenters the platform, it is now presumed to be her bedroom. Such free changes of scene have frustrated many modern directors, but were easily managed on the Elizabethan stage.

The complex demands of the last few scenes must have required similar staging. Juliet's bed, which appears in 4.3 and 4.5, was either brought out from the tiring house, in which case it must have had its own curtains, or it was located in the discovery space in the tiring-house façade, and so curtained off; the former seems more likely, given sight-line constraints. If the bed was brought onto the stage, it clearly remained during the intervening scene in the Capulet household (4.4), and it may well have become the bier for 5.3.<sup>8</sup> The staging of the tomb scene raises multiple possibilities. Either the tomb was the discovery space; or the body of Juliet was brought up out of the trap; or she had remained onstage in her bed, which became a bier; or some form of tomb-structure was brought on.<sup>9</sup> Each of these solutions has its

7 Gurr, 'Date', p. 15.

8 Graham Holderness argues that the bed remained and became the bier, given the non-illusionistic nature of the Elizabethan stage, and the many metaphoric connections between Juliet's bed, the marriage bed, and the tomb. Holderness, *Romeo*, pp. 64–5.

9 Dessen, *Recovering*, p. 193.

adherents, and indeed each has been made to work, one way or another, in subsequent performances.

About the casting we know almost nothing. A bit of an elegy associating Richard Burbage with the role of Romeo is now generally discounted as inauthentic, though as the leading actor of Shakespeare's company he is the likeliest candidate.<sup>10</sup> In *The Organization and Personnel of the Shakespearean Company*, T. W. Baldwin argued that Richard Burbage played Romeo, Thomas Pope Mercutio, Robert Goffe Juliet, George Bryane Friar Lawrence, John Heminges Capulet, Augustine Phillips Benvolio, William Sly Tybalt, Will Kemp Peter, and Shakespeare the Prince.<sup>11</sup> Donald Foster, using computer analysis, has argued that Shakespeare played Friar Lawrence.<sup>12</sup> Only the assignment of Peter to Kemp has any direct evidence to support it. The Q2 text has the stage direction 'Enter Will Kemp' for Peter's scene with the musicians at 4.5.99. Beyond that, all we really know is that *Romeo and Juliet* was performed by a professional theatre company, of which Shakespeare was a member; that the women's roles were played by male actors; and that the play availed itself of such scenic resources as the Elizabethan playhouse afforded.

As to what Elizabethan audiences made of the play, there again we can only speculate. Stories of young lovers confronting parental opposition were familiar enough, though mainly limited to comedy; Shakespeare had used similar situations, and the same setting, for *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, written either just before or just after *Romeo and Juliet*, he burlesqued the star-crossed lovers' story, both through the adventures of Lysander and Hermia and with the Mechanicals' version of *Pyramus and Thisbe*. In any event, *Romeo and Juliet* used a familiar narrative and dealt with issues of interest to the Elizabethans, notably marriage, family conflict, and civil disturbance. It did not, however, present a strict mirror of Elizabethan family life. Juliet's marriage at age thirteen, for instance, was not at all typical. Elizabethan women of the propertied classes usually married at twenty, the middle and lower classes even later.<sup>13</sup> Upper-class families certainly made arranged marriages, though the children's wishes were usually consulted. The notion of a love-match based purely on personal affection was something of a novel one, and Shakespeare's play may well have encouraged it. As Lawrence Stone observes, there was 'a clear conflict of values between the idealisation of love by some poets, playwrights and the authors of romances on the one hand, and its rejection as a form of imprudent folly

10 Evans, Introduction, New Cambridge Shakespeare edition, p. 28, n. 3.

11 Baldwin, *Organization*, pp. 268–9. 12 Foster, 'Webbing', p. 134.

13 L. Stone, *Family*, p. 46.

and even madness by all theologians, moralists, authors of manuals of conduct, and parents and adults in general'.<sup>14</sup> Shakespeare's sympathy for the lovers was not the only possible response; the preface to his source, Arthur Brooke's *Romeus and Juliet*, describes 'a couple of unfortunate lovers, thralling themselves to dishonest desire, neglecting the authority and advice of parents and friends . . . abusing the honorable name of lawful marriage to cloak the shame of stolen contracts, finally, by all means of dishonest life, hastening to most unhappy death'.<sup>15</sup> While Brooke's narrative itself isn't so harsh, such antipathy toward the lovers' 'dishonest' behaviour was certainly an available attitude.

At any rate, the conflict between love-matches and marriages arranged for family interest would have been a recognisable one to Elizabethans, particularly as many of the audience were likely to have been in their late teens and early twenties.<sup>16</sup> Another highly topical issue was duelling. Despite Tudor edicts against them, street fighting and violent feuds were a constant danger, and duelling was on the rise in the 1590s.<sup>17</sup> The late sixteenth century saw an invasion of Italian and Spanish fencing masters, with their stylish terminology and elaborate rules of etiquette.<sup>18</sup> Shakespeare's Mercutio, though ostensibly Italian himself, repeatedly mocks 'such antic, lispings, affecting phantasies' (2.4.25) in his characterisation of Tybalt as 'the courageous captain of compliments . . . the very butcher of a silk button, a duellist, a duellist' (18–19, 21–2). Indeed, the play's presentation of duelling is a part of its curious admixture of things English and things Italian. Elizabethans certainly associated the Italians with violence and passion: Roger Ascham wrote in 1570 of 'private contention in many families, [and] open factions in every city'.<sup>19</sup> Yet English playwrights regularly used Italy as a mirror, and audiences would not have needed to look too hard to see themselves in Shakespeare's play. The domestic details of the Capulet household, with its servants Potpan, Sue Grindstone, and Nell, and its joint-stools, trenchers, log fires, and baked meats, suggest middle-class Elizabethan life rather than the aristocracy of the Italian Renaissance.

Elizabethan audiences certainly seem to have liked and remembered the play. It was reprinted three times before the 1623 Folio, and *The Shakspeare Allusion-Book* cites thirty-six references to it before 1649, more than to any play except *Hamlet*. Several plays of the period echo or parody elements of *Romeo and Juliet*. Porter's *The Two Angry Women of Abingdon* and Dekker's

14 Ibid., p. 181.

15 In Evans's New Cambridge Shakespeare edition, pp. 215–16.

16 Novy, 'Violence', p. 368. 17 Levenson, 'Alla stoccado', pp. 85–6.

18 Martinez, *Swords*, p. 109. 19 Quoted in Levith, *Italian Settings*, p. 55.

*Blurt, Master Constable* both include burlesqued balcony scenes, as well as deliberate verbal echoes.<sup>20</sup> John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (1631) invokes Shakespeare's tragedy in depicting a star-crossed love affair between a brother and sister, admonished by a Friar and aided by a Nurse. Robert Burton, discussing the dangerous effects of love in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, cites Shakespeare's lovers, as though they had already, in 1624, become universally recognised emblems of tragic passion:

Who ever heard a story of more woe,  
Than that of Juliet and her Romeo?<sup>21</sup>

### ROMEO AND JULIET IN THE RESTORATION THEATRE

*Romeo and Juliet* returned to the stage, in some form, soon after the Restoration. Samuel Pepys records in his diary that he saw the premiere on 1 March 1662, given by William Davenant's company, the Duke's Men. Pepys was not impressed: 'It is the play of itself the worst that ever I heard in my life, and the worst acted that ever I saw these people do', largely because the actors didn't know their lines.<sup>22</sup> Mary Saunderson played Juliet, probably the first woman to take the role. Her future husband Thomas Betterton, the leading actor of the period, did not partner her, but played Mercutio, while Henry Harris was Romeo, according to the prompter John Downes.<sup>23</sup> Downes relates that the play was next revived in altered form: 'This tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*, was made sometime thereafter into a tragicomedy by Mr James Howard, he preserving Romeo and Juliet alive; so that when the tragedy was revived again, 'twas played alternately, tragical one day, and tragicomical another, for several days together.'<sup>24</sup> No other account of this version exists, but the story isn't

20 Bly, 'Bawdy Puns', p. 97.

21 Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 2nd edition, 1624, cited in Munro, *Shakespeare Allusion-Book*, 1, p. 324.

22 Pepys, *Diary*, 1 March 1662 (III, p. 39).

23 Downes, *Roscius Anglicanus*, p. 22. Downes goes on to relate the following anecdote: 'There being a fight and scuffle in this play, between the House of Capulet, and the House of Paris; Mrs Holden acting his wife, entered in a hurry, crying, "O my dear Count!" She inadvertently left out, "O," in the pronunciation of the word "Count!", giving it a vehement accent, put the house into such a laughter, that London Bridge at low-water was silence to it.' This story led Christopher Spencer to devise an elaborate theory about the lost play, related in "'Count Paris's Wife": *Romeo and Juliet* on the Early Restoration Stage', *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* 7, 1966, 309–16.

24 Downes, *Roscius Anglicanus*, p. 22.

implausible: Howard was a writer of comedies, and Nahum Tate was soon to add a happy ending to *King Lear*. While *Romeo and Juliet* has seldom been played with the lovers surviving, several adaptations and non-English versions have had happy endings. In David Edgar's stage version of Dickens's *Nicholas Nickleby*, Vincent Crummies's troupe perform a hilarious *Romeo and Juliet* wherein the lovers come back to life singing a patriotic British anthem.<sup>25</sup> Sadly, I can find no evidence that any Victorian companies actually ended the play this way, though something similar does happen in Andrew Halliday's popular 1859 burlesque, *Romeo and Juliet Travestie: or, The Cup of Cold Poison*, wherein Queen Mab appears to reanimate the corpses.<sup>26</sup>

After Howard's version, the next important incarnation of *Romeo and Juliet* was in Thomas Otway's *Caius Marius*, 1679. Otway grafted much of Shakespeare's language and characterisation onto a story from Plutarch's Rome, renaming Romeo Young Marius, and turning Juliet into Lavinia, the daughter of a rival senator. Otway acknowledges, in a disarming prologue, that he has stolen from Shakespeare out of his own necessity, rather than trying to improve the material as other Restoration adapters had done:

Like greedy beggars that steal sheaves away,  
You'll find h'has rifled him of half a play.  
Amidst this baser dross you'll see it shine  
Most beautiful, amazing and divine.<sup>27</sup>

In Otway's play the elder Marius is a demagogue who falls foul of the ruling party in Rome. Though he has himself proposed that his son marry Lavinia, daughter of his rival Metellus, he forbids the match when he learns that Young Marius loves her. Metellus meanwhile wishes Lavinia to marry Sylla, Marius' chief opponent. Otway gives Young Marius and Lavinia a fairly full version of Shakespeare's balcony scene – 'O Marius, Marius, wherefore art thou Marius?' – as well as much of the dawn parting. As in the French and Italian versions of the story, the lovers share a brief scene in the tomb, when Lavinia awakes from her trance before Young Marius dies:

LAVINIA . . . Hadst thou not come, sure I had slept forever.  
But there's a sovereign charm in thy embraces,  
That might do wonders, and revive the dead.  
MARIUS Ill fate no more, Lavinia, now shall part us,  
Nor cruel parents, nor oppressing laws.

(5.5.379–83)

25 Edgar, *Nicholas Nickleby*, pp. 131–6. 26 Wells, *Shakespeare Burlesques*, III.

27 Otway, Prologue, 30–3. All references are to *Works*, ed. J. C. Ghosh.

After Young Marius dies, Lavinia has to watch Old Marius kill her own father before she stabs herself. Her suicide is an act of fury rather than pathos, as she rages at her former father-in-law:

. . . You have my father butchered,  
 The only comfort I had left on earth.  
 The gods have taken too my husband from me.  
 See where he lies, your and my only joy.  
 This sword yet reeking with my father's gore,  
 Plunge in my breast: plunge, plunge it thus.  
 And now let rage, distraction and despair  
 Seize all mankind, till they grow mad as I am.

(450–7)

The political conflict remains unresolved; civil war once again threatens to engulf Rome. The play ends with the death of Sulpitius, Old Marius' henchman, who is based loosely on Mercutio but turned into a character of almost unmitigated brutality and cynicism:

SULPITIUS A curse on all repentance! How I hate it!

I'd rather hear a dog howl than a man whine.

GRANIUS You're wounded, sir: I hope it is not much.

SULPITIUS No, 'tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church-door.

But 'tis enough; 'twill serve; I am peppered I warrant, I warrant for this world. A pox on all madmen hereafter, if I get a monument, let this be my epitaph:

Sulpitius lies here, that troublesome slave,  
 That sent many honest men to the grave,  
 And died like a fool when he'd lived like a knave.

(484–93)

Later critics have been very hard on Otway's adaptation, with some justification. Frederick Kilbourne, in 1906, refused 'to waste any time or words upon such a contemptible piece of thieving', while in 1927 Hazelton Spencer found it an 'abominable mixture of Roman and Renaissance', of which 'the execution . . . is as grotesque as its conception'.<sup>28</sup> Yet Otway's work deserves reappraisal, especially in the light of twentieth-century attempts to reinterpret *Romeo and Juliet*. For while Otway's setting the play in Rome may seem incongruous, he is in fact doing what many modern productions have done, in trying to give the play a contemporary political relevance. As Kerstin P. Warner has pointed out, Otway's play is not really concerned with ancient

28 Kilbourne, *Alterations*, p. 131; Spencer, *Shakespeare Improved*, p. 206.

Rome but with the politics of Restoration England.<sup>29</sup> Old Marius is a version of Lord Shaftesbury, a powerful Whig politician Otway saw as a dangerous demagogue. The scenes of civil conflict throughout are directly related to the Exclusion crisis; Otway feared that Whig attempts to keep the Catholic Duke of York from succession would lead to civil war. By using the story of Romeo and Juliet to protest, not the feuding of rival families, but a contemporary political crisis, Otway was anticipating many directors and adapters of much more recent times.

Two other features of Otway's version are notable, from the point of view of staging. Otway acknowledged in the Epilogue that some of his audience came 'Only for love of Underhill and Nurse Nokes' (18). These were two of the star performances, in the roles of Sulpitius (Mercutio) and the Nurse – then as now characters in danger of stealing the play from the leads. The Nurse was played by a man, James Nokes, in the Elizabethan tradition. This practice continued until at least 1727. Mrs Talbot was apparently the first female Nurse, at Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1735.<sup>30</sup> Otway and the actor Cave Underhill made Sulpitius a caustic and brutal swordsman. In the 1774 Bell edition, Francis Gentleman, comparing Otway's 'snarling cynic' with the 'vacant, swaggering blade' typical of eighteenth-century Mercutios, declared that 'Otway's conception of him is more consistent with nature and with Shakespeare.'<sup>31</sup> Otway's cynical Sulpitius was perhaps not so far from the violent gang-leader Mercutio often became in the twentieth century. Betterton played Old Marius; the lovers were William Smith and Elizabeth Barry, the leading tragic actress of the Restoration.

The play fared well with Restoration audiences, and proved Otway's third most popular: it was performed most seasons for the next fifty years.<sup>32</sup> Its success presumably inspired the staging of more Shakespearean versions in the 1740s, by Theophilus Cibber at the Haymarket, Thomas Sheridan in Smock Alley, Dublin, and finally David Garrick. Perhaps Otway's most important influence was the inclusion of a scene between the lovers in the tomb, which became standard practice for nearly 165 years.<sup>33</sup>

Theophilus Cibber's version, performed in 1744, restores a good deal of Shakespeare's text, though it also incorporates large sections of Otway and bits of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. There is no ball scene, as Romeo is in

29 Warner, *Thomas Otway*, p. 33. 30 *The London Stage*, III, 1, p. 504.

31 Gentleman, *Bell's Edition*, p. 89. 32 Warner, *Thomas Otway*, p. 8.

33 A handwritten acting version prepared for a performance at the English College in Douai in 1694 includes Shakespeare's original ending (see G. Blakemore Evans, *Philological Quarterly* (41), pp. 158–72).

love with Juliet from the beginning. As in Otway, Romeo's father has previously considered a match between the two,

Which so increas'd the anger of our wives  
(Whose quarrels we are ever apt to join in)  
That rage of civil war, broke out more fiercely.<sup>34</sup>

Almost all of Shakespeare's scenes appear in some form, generally abbreviated; the Mantua scene, 5.1, is reset 'near the walls of Verona' in accordance with the neoclassical unity of place. The tomb scene between the lovers is taken from Otway almost without alteration, though Juliet is given a more pathetic death speech:

Come well-secreted dagger.  
This is thy sheath, there rust and let me die.  
'Tis o'er; – my eyes grow dim. Where is my love?  
Have I caught you! now, now, we'll part no more.  
(p. 64)

Cibber, the dissolute and much-hated son of Colley Cibber, played Romeo himself, opposite his daughter Jane (Jenny), who was Juliet's age of fourteen at the time. Much of the Prologue to the play is devoted to begging indulgence for young Jenny, 'Who, full of modest terror, dreads t'appear, / But, trembling, begs a father's fate to share' (p. 74). By Cibber's own account, the play ran successfully for twelve nights at the Haymarket: 'Jenny nightly improved in the part of Juliet. Our audiences were frequently numerous, and of the politest sort' (p. 74). Other contemporary accounts are harsher. John Hill pitied Jenny Cibber for having to play opposite 'a person whom we could not but remember, at every sentence she delivered concerning him, to be too old for her choice, too little handsome to be in love with, and, into the bargain, her father'.<sup>35</sup> Such quasi-incestuous pairings were not uncommon among the theatrical dynasties of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but the Cibbers came under particular attack. David Garrick was revolted: 'I never heard so vile and scandalous a performance in my life . . . the girl, I believe, may have genius; but unless she changes her preceptor, she must be entirely ruined.'<sup>36</sup> *Romeo and Juliet* did seem to catch the public's fancy, and would have played

34 Cibber, *Romeo*, p. 2. In Shakespeare, the wives specifically oppose their husbands' entry into the quarrel.

35 Hill, *The Actor* (1750), pp. 134–5.

36 Garrick, letter to Somerset Draper, 16 September 1744, quoted in Pedicord and Bergmann, *Garrick's Adaptations*, p. 407.

longer had not the owners of the two patent theatres invoked the Licensing Act to shut down the Haymarket performances.

The next revival of the play was by Garrick's sometime associate Thomas Sheridan in Dublin, opening 15 December 1746. Sheridan's performances, at the Smock Alley Theatre, were notable for their reattribution of the Queen Mab speech. According to Gentleman, Sheridan, who played Romeo, 'by an amazing stroke of injudicious monopoly annexed this whimsical picture to his own sighing, lovesick part'.<sup>37</sup> Sheridan gave the speech 'with all the melancholy solemnity of a sermon', according to Thomas Wilkes.<sup>38</sup> Juliet was George Anne Bellamy, a young Irish actress who would later partner Garrick. The play, 'written by Shakespeare with alterations', was grandly mounted; Sheridan added an elaborate funeral scene and raised his prices to cover 'a great deal of expense in decorations'.<sup>39</sup> The production managed a successful run of nine nights.

#### DAVID GARRICK AND THE 'BATTLE OF THE ROMEOS'

The most significant of the eighteenth-century adaptations was certainly that of David Garrick. First published and performed in 1748, Garrick's version was close to Shakespeare by eighteenth-century standards. As he explained in his preface, 'the alterations to the following play are few and trifling, except in the last act; the design was to clear the original, as much as possible, from the jingle and quibble which were always thought the great objections to reviving it'.<sup>40</sup> By jingle, Garrick meant rhymed verse, which he avoided by judicious substitutions. Speaking of Juliet's eyes, Garrick's Romeo observes, 'They'd through the airy region stream so bright / That birds would sing and think it were the morn' (rather than 'not night', as in 2.2.21–2). The sonnet shared by the lovers at the Capulet ball (1.5.92–105) is reduced to a seven-line exchange containing only one rhyme. By quibble, Garrick meant the punning and bawdry that offended eighteenth-century sensibilities. Garrick's Mercutio loses the quip about dying 'a grave man', for instance, and the sexual innuendo is increasingly curtailed in successive editions of the play. Garrick makes other concessions to decorum: Juliet's age is increased to eighteen, and in the 'Gallop apace' speech she loses her most explicit reflections on 'amorous rites' and 'stainless maidenhoods' (3.2.8–16). Nevertheless, in his first version of the play in 1748, Garrick

37 Gentleman, *Dramatic Censor*, p. 175. 38 Sheldon, *Thomas Sheridan*, p. 79.

39 Highfill, *Biographical Dictionary*, XIII, p. 341.

40 'To the Reader', 1748 edition, in Pedicord and Bergmann, *Garrick's Adaptations*, p. 77.



1 George Anne Bellamy and David Garrick in Garrick's added tomb scene, wherein Juliet wakes after Romeo has taken the poison but before he dies, c. 1750.

included Romeo's love for Rosaline, in the face of public opinion: 'Many people have imagined that the sudden change of Romeo's love from Rosaline to Juliet was a blemish in his character, but an alteration of that kind was thought too bold to be attempted; Shakespeare has dwelt particularly upon it, and so great a judge of human nature knew that to be young and inconstant was extremely natural.'<sup>41</sup> By 1750, however, Garrick accepted his friend Dr Johnson's dictum that 'the drama's laws the drama's patrons give', and wrote Rosaline out of the play, protesting only that he did so 'with as little injury to the original as possible'.<sup>42</sup> Gentleman approved, commenting: 'Making no mention of Rosaline, but rendering Romeo's love more uniform, is certainly improving on the original, notwithstanding the caprices of love.'<sup>43</sup>

In the last act, Garrick added a new scene between the lovers in the tomb, even longer and more complex than the Otway–Cibber version (see Appendix, pp. 252–4). In a preface to his published text, Garrick cited literary precedent to justify his alteration: 'Bandello, the Italian novelist, from whom

41 Ibid.

42 'Advertisement', 1750, in Pedicord and Bergmann, *Garrick's Adaptations*, p. 78.

43 Gentleman, *Bell's Edition*, p. 93.

Shakespeare has borrow'd the subject of this play, has made Juliet to wake in the tomb before Romeo dies: this circumstance Shakespeare has omitted not perhaps from judgement, but from reading the story in the French or English translation, both which have injudiciously left out this addition to the catastrophe.<sup>44</sup> While it is unlikely that Shakespeare couldn't have thought of a tomb duet by himself, Garrick is perfectly correct in his account of the various versions. Garrick's own judicious 'addition to the catastrophe' afforded scope for the virtuoso display of alternating passions that was the hallmark of eighteenth-century acting. In 1746 Aaron Hill had codified the ten dramatic passions in an actor's arsenal as 'joy, grief, fear, anger, pity, scorn, hatred, jealousy, wonder, and love'.<sup>45</sup> Garrick's tomb scene allows for all of these, most in the seventy-line exchange with Juliet, as his happiness at her awakening gives way to the poison's effect, and he dies cursing his fate:

'Twixt death and love I'm torn, I am distracted!  
But death's strongest – and must I leave thee, Juliet?  
O, cruel, cursed fate! in sight of heaven –  
(5.4.125–7)

Garrick's ending, however, adds another dimension to the scene beyond the actor's self-display. Garrick's text brings the social causes of the tragedy into the tomb. 'Fathers have flinty hearts, no tears can melt 'em', Romeo cries. 'Nature pleads in vain – children must be wretched.' Shakespeare's lovers give little thought to the feud in their final moments, whereas Garrick's are bitterly aware of the reason for their fate, and die exclaiming against it. Accordingly, when the families enter the tomb at the end, the Prince's condemnation of them is even harsher and more explicit than in Shakespeare:

Well may you mourn, my lords (now wise too late)  
These tragic issues of your mortal hate:  
From private feuds, what dire misfortunes flow,  
Whate'er the cause, the sure effect is WOE.

Garrick's ending certainly proved popular with contemporary critics. Francis Gentleman, in 1770, wrote, 'As to the catastrophe, it is so much improved, that to it we impute a great part of the success which has attended this tragedy of late years.'<sup>46</sup> In 1808 Thomas Davis asserted that the scene 'was written with a spirit not unworthy of Shakespeare himself'.<sup>47</sup> Charles

44 'To the Reader', 1748 edition, in Pedicord and Bergmann, *Garrick's Adaptations*, p. 77.

45 Quoted in Wright, *Romeo*, p. 65. 46 Gentleman, *Bell's Edition*, p. 83.

47 G. W. Stone, *Romeo*, p. 103.

Wyndham used Garrick's text as late as 1875, and Fanny Kemble allegedly preferred Garrick: Clifford Harrison quotes her as saying, in 1879, 'I have played both; my father has played both; and I *know* which is best for the stage.'<sup>48</sup> Few would now make this claim; but in the twentieth century it again became common to have Juliet wake before Romeo's death. Julie Harris, in Michael Langham's 1960 Stratford, Ontario production, awoke in time to watch Romeo die, a moment described by one reviewer as 'electric in its impact'.<sup>49</sup> Trevor Nunn and Barry Kyle, at Stratford in 1976, made Juliet's awakening a central emblem of the production, and in Baz Luhrmann's 1996 film the lovers share a few moments of desperate anguish and even exchange some lines. The early awakening of Juliet can add not only pathos, but a defamiliarising shock that reminds the audience of the larger social circumstances responsible for the lovers' deaths.

*Romeo and Juliet* opened, under Garrick's direction, at Drury Lane on 29 November 1748. Well performed by Spranger Barry and Susanna Cibber (Theophilus' estranged second wife), the play ran successfully for eighteen performances. Two years later, however, Barry and Cibber decamped to the rival Covent Garden management of John Rich, who announced they would play *Romeo and Juliet* there. Garrick, anticipating the challenge, secretly prepared for the part of Romeo opposite George Anne Bellamy, who had acted Juliet at Covent Garden earlier in the year. The two productions opened simultaneously on 28 September 1750, beginning what was known as 'the Battle of the Romeos'. For twelve nights the productions ran head to head, until Cibber withdrew from fatigue or illness. Garrick played for one more night to mark his triumph, but audiences had grown tired of having a single play monopolise both patent theatres, as a verse in the *Daily Advertiser* attested:

Well, what tonight, says angry Ned,  
As up from bed he rouses,  
Romeo again! and shakes his head,  
Ah! Pox on both your houses!  
I. H – tt<sup>50</sup>

There are a number of contemporary accounts of the relative merits of the two productions, all centring on the character of Romeo. According to William Cooke, 'Parties were much divided about which of the Romeos had the superiority; but the critics seemed to be unanimous in favour of Barry.

48 Harrison, *Stray Records*, p. 132.

49 Arnold Edinborough, 'Artistic Success in Canada', *SQ* 11:4 (1960), 455–9; p. 457.

50 12 October 1750, quoted in *The London Stage*, IV, I, p. 211.



2 Spranger Barry and Isabella Nossiter in the balcony scene, c. 1753. Hannah Pritchard commented, '... had I been Juliet to Barry's Romeo, – so tender and seductive was he, I should certainly have jumped down to him!'

His fine person, and silver tones, spoke the very voice of love.’<sup>51</sup> Some felt Barry was better in the love scenes of the first three acts, Garrick better in the tragic ending, and Cooke reports that ‘some of them supported this opinion by frequently leaving Covent Garden in the middle of the play, to see it finish at Drury Lane’. While Garrick exhibited more tragic passion, he could not compete with the tall, good-looking Barry as a stage lover. Francis Gentleman gave a divided verdict based on careful study of both performances:

As to figure, though there is no necessity for a lover being tall, yet we apprehend Mr Barry had a peculiar advantage in this point; his amorous harmony of features, melting eyes, and unequalled plaintiveness of voice, seemed to promise every thing we could wish, and yet the superior grace of Mr Garrick’s attitudes, the vivacity of his countenance, and the fire of his expression, showed there were many essential beauties in which his great competitor might be excelled.<sup>52</sup>

Gentleman felt Barry was more successful in the balcony and parting scenes, Garrick with the Friar and Apothecary; he divided the play’s end, awarding ‘Mr Barry first part of the tomb scene, and Mr Garrick from where the poison operates to the end’. In conclusion he felt that ‘Mr Garrick commanded most applause, Mr Barry most tears.’

John Hill likewise felt that their different gifts illuminated different aspects of Romeo, but that finally Barry was more suited to it:

in parts where violence and fury are the great characteristics, Mr Garrick succeeds best, and Mr Barry in those distinguished by tenderness; and in the character of Romeo, where there is a great deal of both, they are both . . . amazingly eminent: if upon the whole, we see Mr Barry with the greatest pleasure, it is not because Mr Garrick is the inferior actor, but because Romeo is more distinguished by love than rage.<sup>53</sup>

One of the most succinct and oft-quoted comparisons is attributed to the actress Hannah Pritchard: ‘Had I been Juliet to Garrick’s Romeo, – so impassioned was he, I should have expected that he would have come up to me in the balcony; but had I been Juliet to Barry’s Romeo, – so tender and seductive was he, I should certainly have jumped down to him!’<sup>54</sup> Katherine Wright observes that by his triumph as Romeo, Barry redefined the

51 Cooke, *Memoirs of Charles Macklin*, p. 160.

52 Gentleman, *Dramatic Censor*, p. 189.

53 Hill, *The Actor* (1755), p. 66.

54 Simpson and Braun, *Famous Actresses*, pp. 11–12.

character as a romantic lover rather than a tragic hero, leaving a mark on the play that would not be challenged until the twentieth century.<sup>55</sup>

As to their respective Juliets, Susanna Cibber, who had originally been directed by Garrick, was generally felt to be the more successful, particularly in the tragic passages. Thirty-six at the time of the rivalry, she possessed great beauty, skill, and stage presence, and excelled in tenderness and pathos. As John Hill wrote, 'What is the reason that nobody ever played Juliet so well as Mrs Cibber, but that Mrs Cibber has a heart better formed for tenderness than any other woman who ever attempted it . . . ?'<sup>56</sup> Bellamy, at nineteen, was a younger, more passionate Juliet, lacking Cibber's stature and depth of feeling. The actresses' offstage identities may have coloured the reception of their performances, as has often happened with this play. Susanna Cibber was the long-suffering wife of the hated Theophilus, and constantly plagued by ill-health, while Bellamy was a bold, vivacious beauty with many lovers and a reckless taste for gambling. The critic of the *Gentleman's Magazine* seems to reflect this perception in his assessment: 'Miss Bellamy, if she possesses not Mrs Cibber's softness, she makes a larger compensation by her variety . . . For my own part, I shed more tears in seeing Mrs Cibber, but I am more delighted in seeing Miss Bellamy.'<sup>57</sup> The partnerships were later reversed; Cibber returned to Drury Lane in 1753 and played Juliet opposite Garrick, though her health frequently kept her off the stage. Barry's new Juliet, the eighteen-year-old Maria Isabella Nossiter, made a sensational début in the role, but was replaced in 1757 by Bellamy. Nossiter remains the best documented of eighteenth-century Juliets, as an admirer (probably the critic MacNamara Morgan) wrote a detailed pamphlet praising her; he called Nossiter's potion scene 'the greatest acting that has been exhibited on the stage, by man or woman, since Betterton went off'.<sup>58</sup>

The rival Mercutios were also noteworthy. By far the more successful was Henry Woodward, who played with Garrick at Drury Lane. A master of high comedy, Woodward made Mercutio a graceful, whimsical fop. The high point of his performance was the Mab speech, treated as an extravagant flight of fancy; John Hill felt ' . . . it is not more certain that none but Shakespeare could have wrote this speech, than that no man but Woodward can speak it'.<sup>59</sup> By contrast, Covent Garden's Mercutio was Charles Macklin, famous for turning Shylock from a low comic part to one of bitter tragedy. Macklin made Mercutio a coarse and cynical malcontent, along the lines of Otway's Sulpitius. Gentleman felt Macklin's 'saturnine cast of countenance,

55 Wright, *Romeo*, pp. 89–90. 56 Hill, *The Actor* (1750), p. 116.

57 October 1750, quoted in Highfill, *Biographical Dictionary*, II, p. 12.

58 *A Letter to Miss Nossiter*, p. 31. 59 Hill, *The Actor* (1750), p. 242.

sententious utterance, hollow toned voice, and heaviness of deportment, ill suited the whimsical Mercutio'.<sup>60</sup> Yet he conceded that Macklin showed 'ten times more art' than Woodward. The predominance of Woodward's approach is evident in a comment by Macklin's friend and biographer William Cooke: 'How Macklin could have been *endured* in a character so totally unfitted to his powers of mind and body, is a question not easily resolved at this day; particularly as Woodward played this character at the other house, and played it in a style of excellence never perhaps before, or since, equalled.'<sup>61</sup> Macklin's darker interpretation of the character would have to wait for the twentieth century to become predominant.

As far as the staging goes, the Covent Garden and Drury Lane performances followed the conventions of the mid-eighteenth century. The theatres were proscenium houses seating well over a thousand, though the actors shared the same light with the audience and could address them directly from the forestage. While actors used conventional gestures to indicate the different passions, Garrick had led a revolution of 'real feeling' on the stage, and both Cibber and Bellamy were known for crying real tears.<sup>62</sup> The scenery was primarily two-dimensional, with wings and shutters pulled from the theatre's stock of streets, palaces, churches, and groves. Costumes were modern dress: long coats, knee-breeches, elegant gowns, and powdered wigs, even a tricorne hat for Barry's gallant Romeo.<sup>63</sup> Both the Drury Lane and Covent Garden productions added elaborate music and spectacle. In addition to a grandly staged masquerade dance at the Capulet ball, both productions included Juliet's funeral procession, accompanied by a solemn dirge. The dirges were significant musical events, written by two of the leading composers of the day; Drury Lane's was by William Boyce, Covent Garden's by Thomas Arne, the brother of Susanna Cibber. Of this innovation Gentleman comments sardonically: 'Though not absolutely essential, nothing could be better devised than a funeral procession, to render this play thoroughly popular; as it is certain that three-fourths of every audience are more capable of enjoying sound and show, than solid sense and poetical imagination.'<sup>64</sup> The funeral dirge remained an important part of productions through the nineteenth century, and was often more prominent on playbills than the names of the actors.

*Romeo and Juliet* was performed 399 times between 1750 and 1800, more than any other Shakespeare play.<sup>65</sup> Garrick went on playing Romeo until

60 Gentleman, *Dramatic Censor*, p. 190.

61 Cooke, *Memoirs of Charles Macklin*, p. 196.

62 Wright, *Romeo*, p. 97. 63 Halio, *Romeo*, p. 102.

64 Gentleman, *Dramatic Censor*, p. 185.

65 Hogan, *Shakespeare in the Theatre*, II, p. 716.

1761, when he switched to Mercutio; Barry played it continually until 1768, when he was nearly fifty. The play appeared in virtually every season, often at both theatres, through to 1800.

#### NINETEENTH-CENTURY FAILURES

By the end of the century the London theatre was dominated by the Kemble family, particularly John Philip Kemble and his sister, Sarah Siddons. Both excelled in lofty tragic roles, and were rather too statuesque for *Romeo and Juliet*. John Philip Kemble's marmoreal patrician demeanour was more suited to Coriolanus than to Romeo, whom he played for only three performances, without success. Even his loyal biographer James Boaden conceded that 'youthful love . . . was never well expressed by Kemble: the thoughtful strength of his features was at variance with juvenile passion'.<sup>66</sup> Kemble did carefully reedit the play, retaining most of Garrick's alterations, in what became the standard theatrical version for much of the century. Sarah Siddons played Juliet in the provinces in her youth, but only took the role once in London, opposite her brother on 11 May 1789. She was then thirty-four years old, and 'time and study had stamped her countenance . . . too strongly for Juliet'; besides, her cold and formal style was ill suited to the role.<sup>67</sup> Boaden felt her Juliet 'was exactly what might have been anticipated – too dignified and thoughtful to assume the childish ardours of a first affection; but, as the serious interest grew upon the character, impassioned, terrific, and sublime'. Nevertheless, 'she left fewer of her marks upon it, than she did upon any other character of equal force', and she never attempted it again.<sup>68</sup>

It was Charles Kemble, another brother, who had the best luck with the play. He had considerable success as Romeo opposite Eliza O'Neill, but truly distinguished himself when he switched to the role of Mercutio in 1829, in which part 'he walked, spoke, looked, fought, and died like a gentleman', according to one viewer.<sup>69</sup> He avoided the bullying cynicism of Macklin as well as the foppishness of Woodward, making Mercutio instead an elegant and courtly figure of high comedy. His Mab speech was famous for its freshness and spontaneity, the way each 'sudden burst of fancy' led to the next, 'till the speaker abandoned himself to the brilliant and thronging illustra-

66 Boaden, *Memoirs of J. P. Kemble*, I, p. 419.

67 Campbell, *Life of Mrs Siddons*, II, pp. 158–9.

68 Boaden, *Memoirs of J. P. Kemble*, I, p. 437.

69 Fitzgerald, *Lives of the Kembles*, II, p. 387.

tions which, amidst all their rapidity and fire, never lost the simple and spontaneous grace of nature in which they took rise'.<sup>70</sup> He was gallant and courtly in his banter with the Nurse, and made a point of grasping Romeo's hand in forgiveness even at the moment of his death. His 'heroic and courtly humorist' was the definitive Mercutio of the nineteenth century.<sup>71</sup>

Among other actors of the period, William Charles Macready had some success when he débuted as Romeo in 1810, but later audiences resisted his Romeo because of his appearance. His 'want of personal attractions' was noted in one review, which, according to Macready, observed that 'Nature had interposed an everlasting bar to my success' by being 'unaccommodating . . . in the formation of my face'.<sup>72</sup> He later found himself reduced to playing Friar Lawrence, a part in which he found 'no direct character to sustain, no effort to make'.<sup>73</sup>

The greatest actor of the age, Edmund Kean, failed disastrously as Romeo; as William Hazlitt crushingly declared, 'His Romeo had nothing of the lover in it. We never saw anything less ardent or less voluptuous . . . He stood like a statue of lead.'<sup>74</sup> The Drury Lane committee, noting the success Eliza O'Neill was having as Juliet at Covent Garden, decided to push their star actor into the play; Kean reluctantly accepted, opposite Mrs Bartley.<sup>75</sup> Hazlitt observed that Kean's remarkable powers, which he admired, were particularly unsuited to Romeo: 'Mr Kean's imagination appears not to have the principles of joy or hope or love in it. He seems chiefly sensible to pain, or to the passions that spring from it.' Accordingly, while he was effective in the Friar's cell and the tomb, he was unconvincing before Juliet's balcony: 'His acting sometimes reminded us of the scene with Lady Anne [in *Richard III*]', Hazlitt observed dryly, 'and we cannot say a worse thing of it, considering the difference of the two characters.' After the first three performances a different Juliet was tried, Miss L. Kelly, but to no avail. The play was taken off after nine performances, and Kean never attempted Romeo again.

The major English Shakespeareans of the Victorian period – Macready, Samuel Phelps, Charles Kean, and Henry Irving – were all better suited to tragic kingship than to the youthful ardour of Romeo. Phelps limited himself to Mercutio, and Charles Kean attempted Romeo only a few times, to bruising reviews. The response to his début in the role, opposite Miss C. Phillips, is not atypical of nineteenth-century biases: 'Miss Phillips was a great

70 Marston, *Our Recent Actors*, 1, p. 122. 71 Williamson, *Charles Kemble*, p. 118.

72 Macready, *Reminiscences*, 1, p. 92. 73 Trewin, *Mr Macready*, p. 146.

74 Hazlitt, *Hazlitt on Theatre*, p. 32; subsequent quotations are from pp. 33, 32.

75 Hillebrand, *Edmund Kean*, pp. 141–2.

success, and Kean a great failure. He was consequently very much humiliated and distressed.<sup>76</sup> Though the play remained popular, Romeo became a role actors sought to avoid.

### VICTORIAN ACTRESSES

For women it was a different story. Where virtually every important nineteenth-century actor failed as Romeo, virtually every important nineteenth-century actress succeeded as Juliet. In part this has to do with the importance of Juliet in the canon of nineteenth-century women's parts; it was typically a *début* role, and if one failed in it, one was unlikely to have much of a subsequent career.

The position of actresses in the nineteenth-century theatre was an ambiguous one. Tracy Davis, in *Actresses as Working Women*, has pointed out the disproportionate hardships women faced in an ill-paid and highly competitive industry where they were often regarded as little better than prostitutes. Gail Marshall has argued that Victorian actresses were constrained by a dominant cultural 'Galatea myth' that positioned them as sculptures, silent and immobilised commodities for male visual and sexual appreciation. Kerry Powell has asserted that the Victorian theatre 'conspired in producing repressive codes of gender even as it provided women with a rare opportunity to experience independence and power'.<sup>77</sup> Yet women achieved increasing numbers and economic success on the stage in the nineteenth century, and *Romeo and Juliet* was one of the chief vehicles by which they did so. Indeed, the history of nineteenth-century theatre is a long catalogue of triumphant *débuts* as Juliet.

The first was Eliza O'Neill, who *débuted* at Covent Garden in 1814. She was twenty-four but looked fifteen, and her performance called up hyperbole in all who saw it. 'Through my whole experience hers was the only representation of Juliet I have seen,' gushed Macready, who later played opposite her. 'I left my seat in the orchestra with the words of Iachimo in my mind. "All of her, that is out of door, most rich! . . . She is alone the Arabian bird."' <sup>78</sup> His apparently unselfconscious quotation of Iachimo, the villain who lustfully describes the beauties of the innocently sleeping Imogen in *Cymbeline*, says a good deal about how nineteenth-century spectators viewed their Juliets. Much of Macready's account has this same voyeuristic quality:

It was not altogether the matchless beauty of form and face, but the spirit of perfect innocence and purity that seemed to glisten in her speaking eyes and

76 Armstrong, *Great Actors*, p. 290. 77 Powell, *Women*, p. xi.

78 Macready, *Reminiscences*, I, p. 98. The following quotation is from p. 97.

breathe from her chiseled lips . . . There was in her look, voice, and manner, an artlessness, an apparent unconsciousness (so foreign to the generality of stage performers) that riveted the spectator's gaze . . .

It is Juliet's eyes that speak, while her lips are those of a statue; she is unconscious and innocent, but rivets the (male) spectator's gaze. Macready's effusions are firmly in line with the 'Galatea aesthetic' Gail Marshall has identified. The most famous critic of the age, William Hazlitt, resisted O'Neill's performance, being partial to her great predecessor Sarah Siddons; but he did acknowledge her skill in 'the silent expression of feeling'.<sup>79</sup>

John Cole made an extended comparison between the two actresses that suggests much about the changing fashion between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries:

Inferior to Siddons in grandeur, and in depicting the more terrible and stormy passions of human nature, [Miss O'Neill] excelled that great mistress of her art in tenderness and natural pathos . . . Mrs Siddons presented a being exalted above humanity, to admire and gaze upon with wonder; but whom you hesitated to approach in familiar intercourse. Miss O'Neill invited sympathy, and while she suffered with intensesness, appeared incapable of retaliation.<sup>80</sup>

Eliza O'Neill, with her beauty, artlessness, susceptibility to 'familiar intercourse', and defenceless suffering, became the model for nineteenth-century Juliets. With her graceful figure, fair curls, and huge, easily weeping eyes, she was 'a perfect image of loveliness in distress', according to William Winter, and 'evoked prodigious sympathy, – as loveliness in distress always will'.<sup>81</sup> Fanny Kemble, who succeeded her in the role, archly commented that O'Neill 'was expressly designed for a representative victim'.<sup>82</sup> Nonetheless, accounts of Kemble's own *début* stress similarly vulnerable qualities. Kemble first played Juliet at the age of twenty, at Covent Garden, with her father Charles playing Mercutio and her mother as Lady Capulet. Her first appearance was a metatheatrical emblem of innocence suffering under an oppressive gaze:

On her first entrance she seemed to feel very sensibly the embarrassment of the new and overwhelming task she had undertaken. She ran to her mother's arms with a sort of instinctive impulse, but almost immediately recovered

79 Hazlitt, *Hazlitt on Theatre*, p. 18. 80 Cole, *Life of Charles Kean*, I, p. 73.

81 Winter, *Shakespeare on the Stage*, p. 147.

82 Kemble, *Records of a Girlhood*, p. 195.

her composure . . . In the garden scene she gave the exquisite poetry of the part with a most innocent gracefulness . . . The scene with the Nurse was full of delightful simplicity.<sup>83</sup>

In spite of the critical emphasis on her timidity, Fanny Kemble was given credit for saving her family's management of Covent Garden. *Romeo and Juliet* was a tremendous success, and her career was launched. The vehement effusions of contemporary writers make it difficult to judge how Kemble actually played the role: Anna Jameson, for instance, says she did it 'as though every line and sentiment in Shakespeare had been transplanted into her heart, – had long been brooded over in silence, – watered with her tears, – to burst forth at last, like the spontaneous and native growth of her own soul'.<sup>84</sup> Interestingly, Kemble's writings reveal a degree of frustration with the character of Juliet, whom she calls a 'foolish child', and an intelligent and slightly cynical attitude toward the play: 'I have little or no sympathy with, though much compassion for, that Veronese young person.'<sup>85</sup> She also had little tolerance for traditional and sentimental stage business; when Ellen Tree, as Romeo, wanted to carry her to the footlights in the tomb scene, Kemble declared, 'If you attempt to lift or carry me down the stage, I will kick and scream till you set me down.'<sup>86</sup> Though she never again matched her initial success and was often a reluctant actress, Kemble was a perceptive critic and writer, full of insights into the role and the play. She observed to Clifford Harrison that 'Romeo represents the sentiment, Juliet the passion, of love. The pathos is his, the power hers.'<sup>87</sup> She made her mark on the role of Juliet and continued to give readings of it, in public and private, until she was at least seventy.

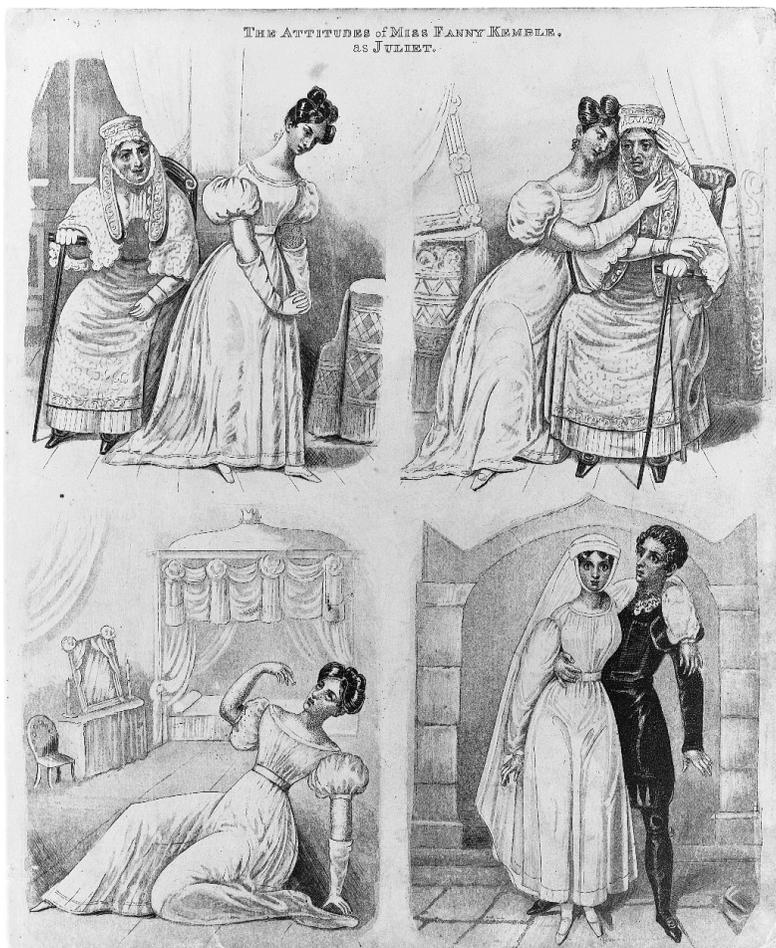
Helena Faucit also made her *début* as Juliet, and identified herself with the part for much of her early life. In her book, *On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters*, she discusses her childish admiration for Juliet's courage, and her terror in reading the tomb scene. She recalls playfully acting the balcony scene opposite her sister in the empty Richmond Theatre, being overheard, and thus being invited to play Juliet there at the age of thirteen. She felt her youth worked against her; she was 'too near the age of Shakespeare's Juliet, considering the tardier development of an English girl, to understand so strong and deep a nature'.<sup>88</sup> In the potion scene, Faucit recalls, she was so overwrought that she crushed the vial in her hand, and then genuinely fainted at the sight of her own blood staining her dress.

83 *Times*, 6 October 1829. 84 Jameson, *Sketches*, p. 482.

85 Kemble, *Records of a Girlhood*, pp. 438–9. 86 *Ibid.*, p. 201.

87 Harrison, *Stray Records*, p. 134.

88 Faucit, *Shakespeare's Female Characters*, p. 107.



3 Fanny Kemble, from her 1829 Covent Garden performances: with the Nurse, taking the potion, and in Garrick's version of the tomb scene.

Whether accurate or not, Faucit's reminiscences embody the same combination of innocent fragility and unbidden, passive sexuality that made O'Neill and Kemble so successful in the role. As Gail Marshall argues, the story of *Romeo and Juliet*

enabled the display of, and contained its own solutions to the problems raised by, theatrical representations of female sexuality. Juliet's youthfully unconscious desirability is invoked by others only to be obliterated by death . . . Juliet's sexual awakening is amply contained by the dimensions of the

tragedy, thus making the part the perfect vehicle for conveying the attractively malleable sexuality of the actress.<sup>89</sup>

Faucit gave a highly successful performance at Covent Garden in 1836, and continued to play Juliet regularly for the next thirty-five years. Her ability to embody the ideal of Victorian womanhood was an important aspect of her performance. According to her husband and biographer Theodore Martin, 'People saw in her not only a great actress, they felt themselves in the presence of one who was in herself the ideal woman of whom poets had written.'<sup>90</sup> Faucit to some extent played into this role, idealising Shakespeare's heroines as 'these sweet and noble representatives of our sex', and declaring that 'women are deeply in debt to Shakespeare for all the lovely noble things he has put into his women's hearts and mouths'.<sup>91</sup> But her detailed discussion of the play, in *On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters*, reveals insights that go far beyond an idealised stereotype. For one thing, Faucit was rare in the nineteenth century in viewing the play in social terms rather than focusing solely on the protagonists; she felt Shakespeare's 'far wider and deeper' purpose was obscured if the play ended, as it often did, with the deaths of the lovers.

Faucit's account of the potion scene shows the pragmatic choices of an intelligent performer fully aware of the emotional demands of the role: 'What a scene is this – so simple, so grand, so terrible! What it is to act I need not tell you. What power it demands, and yet what restraint!' Her moment-by-moment account of the scene is full of vivid psychological details:

I always felt a kind of icy coldness and stillness come over me after leaving the Friar's cell which lasted until this moment. The 'Farewell!' to Lady Capulet, – 'God knows when we shall meet again' – relaxed this state of tension.

I could never utter these words [about Tybalt's corpse] without an exclamation of shuddering disgust accompanying them.

At the mention of Romeo's name I used to feel all my resolution return.

By charting her own psychological journey through the scene, Faucit asserted a degree of creative autonomy, and to some extent transcended the objectification to which her performance on stage was subject. The writings of actresses like Faucit, together with other women like Mary Cowden Clarke (*The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines*) and Anna Jameson

89 Marshall, *Actresses*, pp. 107–8. 90 Martin, *Helena Faucit*, pp. 125–6.

91 Faucit, *Shakespeare's Female Characters*, pp. viii, 118. Subsequent quotations are from pp. 153, 145, 143, 144, 145.

(*Shakespeare's Heroines*), fleshed out the conception of Juliet that had been offered to the gaze of Victorian spectators. These character-studies, though in many ways false to the play, enabled women to lay claim to Juliet's inner life, and insist on her depth and complexity.

### CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN'S ROMEO, 1845

If Victorian women were able, through their performances and writings, to give cultural prominence and variety to Shakespeare's Juliet, they were also able to best their male counterparts in the role of Romeo. A variety of actresses played Romeo on the Victorian stage, including Caroline Rankley, Felicita Vestvalli, Fanny Vining, Margaret Leighton, Esmé Beringer, and Ellen Tree.<sup>92</sup> Tree played Romeo at Covent Garden in 1829, opposite Fanny Kemble, who described it as the 'only occasion on which I ever acted Juliet to a Romeo who looked the part'.<sup>93</sup> According to John Cole, Tree's 'hazardous attempt' achieved 'singular success, all the newspapers being unanimous in her praise'.<sup>94</sup> Other female Romeos were less enthusiastically received: William Archer felt Esmé Beringer was 'a clever young lady, and made a graceful, inoffensive and even intelligent Romeo . . . but for my part, I hold such travesties, in their very nature, unprofitable and unattractive'.<sup>95</sup> Nonetheless, the most acclaimed Romeo of the century – male or female – was the American actress Charlotte Cushman. Cross-dressing actresses had been common on the English stage since the Restoration, but in the nineteenth century women were able to transcend the crude bodily display that initially made 'breeches parts' popular. Actresses like Cushman who could convincingly embody male characters 'dissociated breeches roles from their tradition of sexual titillation', according to Sandra Richards.<sup>96</sup> Cushman defied and transcended gender roles even in female characters like Lady Macbeth, according to a contemporary critic, William Winter: 'She was not a theatrical beauty. She neither employed, nor made pretence of employing, the soft allurements of her sex. She was incarnate power: she dominated by intrinsic authority: she was a woman born to command.'<sup>97</sup>

92 William Winter records fourteen female Romeos in the US between 1827 and 1869, but notes that 'In description of their performances the chronicles of our Theatre are comparatively barren' (*Shakespeare on the Stage*, p. 201).

93 Kemble, *Records of a Girlhood*, p. 200. 94 Cole, *Life of Charles Kean*, 1, p. 322.

95 Archer, *Theatrical 'World' of 1896*, p. 155. Clement Scott, by contrast, felt that 'a more ideal Romeo has seldom been seen' (Winter, *Shakespeare on the Stage*, p. 200).

96 Richards, *Rise of the English Actress*, p. 93.

97 Winter, *Other Days*, pp. 152–3.

Cushman ostensibly took the role of Romeo in order to showcase her sister Susan, who played Juliet; she wrote that she wanted to give Susan ‘the support I knew she required and would never get from any gentleman that could be got to act with her’.<sup>98</sup> The arrangement caused some concern among the citizens of Edinburgh, where they played before coming to London; her friend and fellow-actor John Coleman reports that ‘her amorous endearments were of so erotic a character that no man would have dared to indulge in them’.<sup>99</sup> Such comments were actually quite rare, though Lisa Merrill has convincingly argued that Cushman’s performance enacted a passionate lesbian sexuality – which the public mostly took great pains to ignore.<sup>100</sup> Cushman defended herself by citing the precedent of Ellen Tree, and claiming that her performance opposite her sister was less indelicate than Fanny Kemble’s, who played Juliet to her father’s Romeo on a US tour. In any event, when *Romeo and Juliet* opened in London in December 1845, it was clear not only that Cushman’s Romeo was acceptable to the public, but that she was the star of the production; Susan’s Juliet passed almost unnoticed.

Cushman’s Romeo was noteworthy in part because she used Shakespeare’s original text instead of Garrick’s. She was not the first to do so; Madame Vestris had apparently attempted it, without success, in 1840.<sup>101</sup> Cushman herself had played the Garrick text in the US, but for the Haymarket she insisted on reverting to Shakespeare. Cushman’s version was not by any means complete, and indeed she made many of the same cuts as Garrick and Kemble. According to the Lacy edition of 1855, she cut the Prologue, the servants’ bawdry and the entry of the Capulet and Montague wives in 1.1, much of the discussion of Rosaline’s chastity, most of the Nurse’s story of Juliet’s childhood, most of the bawdy jesting of Mercutio, Benvolio’s report of the duel in 3.1, some of the lamentations in the ‘banished’ scenes, and much of the Friar’s counsel, much of the mourning for Juliet in 4.5, the Musicians, and a certain amount of the final recapitulation and sorting of evidence. Perhaps not surprisingly, her version favoured the part of Romeo at the expense of nearly everyone else. Her return to Shakespeare had the crucial effect of expanding Romeo’s character by including his early passion

<sup>98</sup> Leach, *Bright Particular Star*, p. 170.    <sup>99</sup> Coleman, *Fifty Years*, II, p. 363.

<sup>100</sup> Merrill, *When Romeo Was a Woman*, pp. 126–30. One critic, George Fletcher, did object strongly to ‘the disgustingly monstrous grossness of such a perversion’; though his invective was directed not only at ‘the hysterical sobbing and blubbing’ and ‘coarse, unmodulated vehemence’ of Cushman’s performance, but also at ‘the nasal utterance and awkward vowel pronunciation of her country’ (*Studies of Shakespeare*, pp. 379–81).

<sup>101</sup> Odell, *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving*, II, p. 191.

for Rosaline. Passion was the keynote of her performance; as one review remarked, ‘Miss Cushman has suddenly placed a living, breathing, burning Italian upon boards where we have hitherto had an unfortunate and somewhat energetic Englishman.’<sup>102</sup> *The Times* concurred: ‘For a long time Romeo has been a convention. Miss Cushman’s Romeo is a creative, a living, breathing, animated, ardent human being’ (30 December 1848). James Sheridan Knowles compared her Romeo to Kean’s Othello, citing ‘the genuine heart-storm’ of the banishment scene: ‘not simulated passion, – no such thing; real, palpably real’.<sup>103</sup> Several critics commented that Cushman was restoring a previously lost role:

The character, instead of being shown to us in a heap of *disjecta membra*, is exhibited by her in a powerful light which at once displays the proportions and the beauty of the poet’s conception. It is as if a noble symphony, distorted and rendered unmeaning by inefficient conductors, had suddenly been performed under the hand of one who knew in what *time* the composer intended it should be taken.

While her unified and passionate grasp of the role was widely praised, her gender certainly didn’t pass without comment. Queen Victoria herself went to see her, and was surprised by her authentically masculine performance:

Miss Cushman took the part of Romeo, and no one would ever have imagined she was a woman, her figure and her voice being so masculine, but her face was very plain. Her acting is not pleasing, though clever, and she entered well into the character, bringing out forcibly its impetuosity.<sup>104</sup>

In the one surviving photo of Cushman as Romeo, taken in the 1850s, she looks obviously female and middle-aged, but in 1845 audiences had no difficulty responding to her as a passionate young man.<sup>105</sup> Joseph Leach summarises the contemporary response: ‘Few Romeos in London’s memory had looked young enough and passionately agile enough to be convincing, but watching this fiery young gallant, one witness was soon exclaiming that this Miss Cushman seemed “just *man* enough to be a *boy!*”’<sup>106</sup>

At some level, Cushman was able to succeed as Romeo, where men failed, because of her gender. One reviewer, commenting on recent male performances, observed that ‘there is no part more difficult to sustain efficiently than Romeo. At one time we have seen it a lifeless, sickly, and repulsive

102 Unidentified review quoted in Levenson, *Romeo* (1987), p. 38.

103 Quoted in Clement, *Charlotte Cushman*, p. 45; the following quotation is from p. 46.

104 Rowell, *Queen Victoria*, p. 74. 105 Merrill, *When Romeo Was a Woman*, p. 116.

106 Leach, *Bright Particular Star*, p. 175.



4 Charlotte Cushman, the most successful woman to take the role, in her costume as Romeo, c. 1855.

conception; at another a rough, indelicate, animal picture.<sup>107</sup> The character of Romeo, as understood in the nineteenth century, was incompatible with Victorian notions of masculinity. As an article in *Britannia* observed, in reference to Cushman's performance, 'It is open to question whether Romeo may not best be impersonated by a woman, for it is thus only that in actual representation can we view the passionate love of this play made real and palpable.'<sup>108</sup> Indeed, Victorian productions of *Romeo and Juliet* seem to suggest a rare case where gender bias, in a small way, liberated women and hindered men. Where Victorian women used a range of performances, and their considerable writings on the play, to assert a degree of female subjectivity and independence, their male counterparts repeatedly failed as Romeo; and failed, at least in part, because they just weren't sexy enough. Emma Stebbins, companion and biographer of Charlotte Cushman, thought that Victorian actors were simply too old and ugly for Romeo: 'Who could endure to see a man with the muscles of Forrest, or even the keen intellectual face of Macready, in the part of a gallant and loving boy?' Turning the tables on an oft-repeated aphorism about Juliet, Stebbins put male actors firmly in their place: 'When a man has achieved the experience requisite to *act* Romeo, he has ceased to be young enough to *look* it.'<sup>109</sup> For most of the nineteenth century, the English theatre-going public seems to have agreed.

#### HENRY IRVING AND ELLEN TERRY AT THE LYCEUM, 1882

Cushman's success broke the hold of the Garrick–Kemble version of *Romeo and Juliet*, but it by no means meant a return to full Shakespearean texts. Not only were the many sexual references consistently censored, but theatrical conventions prompted heavy cutting for various reasons. London's two patent theatres had greatly increased in size and scenic capabilities. After fires in 1808 and 1809, Covent Garden and Drury Lane were rebuilt with seating capacities of 3,044 and 3,611 respectively, roughly twice the size they had been in Garrick's day. In such a cavernous theatre, the nimble banter of Mercutio could have much less impact than a rhetorical set piece like Juliet's potion speech, and the play was cut accordingly. The need for slower, more demonstrative playing increased as a series of renovations reduced and eventually eliminated the stage apron, leaving a picture-frame opening measuring 12.8 metres (42 feet) across at

107 Quoted in Levenson, *Romeo* (1987), p. 31.

108 3 January 1846, quoted in Merrill, *When Romeo Was a Woman*, p. 110.

109 Stebbins, *Charlotte Cushman*, p. 59.

Covent Garden, with wings of 6 metres (20 feet).<sup>110</sup> Through this proscenium audiences viewed more and more elaborate scenery, complemented, after 1817, by gas lighting. New scenes, rather than stock flats, came to be employed (and advertised) for major new productions; the painter's art was increasingly supplemented by that of the carpenter, as more and more elaborate three-dimensional structures were employed. The difficulty in changing these caused managers to cut and rearrange scenes in order to simplify the staging; for instance, 4.2 and 4.4 were regularly cut, so that the only sets needed for the fourth act were the Friar's cell and Juliet's bedroom. A representative production was that of Charles Kean, the antiquarian son of Edmund, who played Romeo opposite his wife Ellen Tree at the Haymarket in 1841. Charles Marshall designed thirteen separate scenes that carefully reproduced the art and architecture of the Italian Renaissance; the brief Mantua scene, 5.1, even had a recognisably different architectural style from the Verona scenes.

One exception to the prevailing trend was Samuel Phelps. After the Theatre Regulation Act of 1843 abolished the monopoly of the patent houses, Phelps took over the management of the unfashionable Sadler's Wells Theatre, where he staged all but four of Shakespeare's plays, emphasising acting and poetry over scenic spectacle. He played Mercutio with William Creswick and Laura Addison in 1846, using a remarkably full text unrivalled until the twentieth century. The Nurse's story was complete (except for her reference to 'a young cock'rel's stone', 1.3.54), Phelps allowed himself most of Mercutio's banter, and every scene of Shakespeare's play was included in some form. Both Benvolio and the Friar retained their accounts of past events, and the mourning for Juliet in 4.5 was included, with only the Musicians gone. In a smaller theatre, with less scenery to change, Phelps was able to give a virtually complete performance of the play, anticipating the 'Shakespeare revolution' led by William Poel and Harley Granville-Barker at the beginning of the next century.

Phelps had few imitators, however, and the other London theatres continued to opt for spectacle. The culmination of the Victorian pictorial tradition came with Henry Irving's production of *Romeo and Juliet* at the Lyceum, opening 8 March 1882. Irving's conception of the play, from the beginning, was visual. According to Ellen Terry, he observed that '*Hamlet* could be played anywhere on its acting merits. It marches from situation to situation. But *Romeo and Juliet* proceeds from picture to picture. Every line suggests a picture. It is a dramatic poem rather than a drama, and I mean to treat it from that point of view.'<sup>111</sup>

110 Styan, *Shakespeare Revolution*, p. 15.

111 Terry, *Story of My Life*, p. 227.

Accordingly, Irving created a theatrical experience of unprecedented splendour and expense. The play was given in twenty-two scenes, most of which had different sets, solidly constructed in three dimensions. He made innovative use of lighting to enhance his changes of scenery, producing 'a sort of richness of effect and surprise as the gloom passes away and a gorgeous scene steeped in effulgence and colour is revealed'.<sup>112</sup> The production clearly used every resource the Victorian theatre could afford. Clement Scott responded to the combination of scenery, lighting, and music by which Irving created an Italian world:

Such scenes as these – the outside of Capulet's house lighted for the ball, the sunny pictures of Verona in summer, the marriage chant to Juliet changed into a death dirge, the old, lonely street in Mantua where the Apothecary dwells, the wondrous solid tomb of the Capulets – are as worthy of close and renewed study as are the pictures in a gallery of paintings.<sup>113</sup>

In the costumes, which Irving designed along with Alfred Thompson, he sought to convey 'the rich harmonies and bold compositions of the Italian masters'.<sup>114</sup> Sir Julius Benedict provided accompanying music in the Italian manner.

Much of Irving's direction seems to have been theatrically effective. Irving had seen the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen and his company play in London the previous year, and imitated his method of directing crowd movement. The opening fight was particularly gripping, according to Bram Stoker, as the Montagues pushed the Capulets downstage over a bridge: 'they used to pour in on the scene down the slope of the bridge like a released torrent, and for a few minutes such a scene of fighting was enacted as I have never seen elsewhere on the stage'.<sup>115</sup> Ellen Terry, though dissatisfied with her own performance as Juliet, agreed that the production was visually breathtaking:

In it Henry first displayed his mastery of crowds. The brawling of the rival houses in the streets, the procession of girls to wake Juliet on her wedding morning, the musicians, the magnificent reconciliation of the two houses which closed the play, every one on the stage holding a torch, were all treated with a marvellous sense of pictorial effect.<sup>116</sup>

In this last scene, Irving achieved a *coup de théâtre* that demonstrated his confident marshalling of Victorian stage techniques. Not content with a

<sup>112</sup> Fitzgerald, *Henry Irving*, p. 141.    <sup>113</sup> *The Theatre*, 1 April 1882.

<sup>114</sup> Irving, *Henry Irving*, p. 388.    <sup>115</sup> Stoker, *Personal Reminiscences*, I, p. 99.

<sup>116</sup> Terry, *Story of My Life*, p. 227.

single image for churchyard and tomb, he divided 5.3 into two distinct scenes. Romeo killed Paris in a moonlit gothic churchyard, from which Irving moved the scene into the tomb with an almost cinematic dissolve, as one critic later recalled:

Seizing his torch and dragging after him the lifeless form of his antagonist, Romeo disappeared, descending into the vault below. While the flare of his torch still reddened the damp walls of the entrance, the picture faded from view. Silently it came; as silently it vanished . . . Again the darkness became luminous, and the outlines of a deep cavern, hewn in solid rock, grew before the eye. It was the crypt in which rested the Capulet dead. High up in the background was seen an entrance from which a staircase, rudely fashioned in the rock, wound downward on the left to the cavern floor, and through which the moonlight streamed and fell upon the form of Juliet lying upon a silken covered bier in the foreground. Immediately the scene was developed Romeo appeared at the entrance leading from the churchyard above, bearing his flaming torch, and with the corpse of Paris in his arms, descended the rocky stairway to the bottom of the tomb.<sup>117</sup>

Irving spent hours practising how best to carry the body; in the end he substituted a dummy for the actor of Paris, but insisted that it be the appropriate weight and dimensions.<sup>118</sup> His care paid off, as this became the most memorable effect of the production. Even Shaw, no fan of Irving's, was haunted by the image years later: 'One remembers Irving, a dim figure dragging a horrible burden down through the gloom "into the rotten jaws of death".'<sup>119</sup>

Irving prepared his own version of the text, cutting the bawdry as usual, judiciously eliminating all references to Juliet's age (Ellen Terry was thirty-six, Irving forty-four), and dropping 4.2 and 4.4 to accommodate the scenery. Following Cushman, he retained and even emphasised Romeo's love for Rosaline: 'Its value can hardly be over-appreciated, since Shakespeare has carefully worked out this first baseless love of Romeo as a palpable evidence of the subjective nature of the man and his passion.'<sup>120</sup> He even carefully chose a tall dark actress to play Rosaline at the ball. 'Can I ever forget his face,' Terry asked rhetorically, 'when in pursuit of *her* he saw *me*.'<sup>121</sup>

By a good margin, the performances were less successful than the stage effects. The one triumph was Mrs Stirling's Nurse, a definitive performance for the era. The young and handsome William Terriss played a vigorous

117 *The Era*, 7 December 1907, quoted in Vardac, *Stage to Screen*, p. 99.

118 Stoker, *Personal Reminiscences*, I, p. 99.

119 Shaw, *Our Theatres in the Nineties*, III, p. 212.

120 Irving, *Acting Edition*, Preface, v. 121 Terry, *Story of My Life*, p. 233.

Mercutio, and many felt he should have been Romeo, as indeed he was in Mary Anderson's Lyceum production two years later. Irving achieved a few powerful effects in scenes of melancholy and despair; his reception of the news of Juliet's death, and his subsequent visit to the Apothecary, were his best moments. But Irving's age, his intellectuality, his bony figure and hoarse voice, all precluded a successful characterisation of the young lover. As Henry James observed, 'How little Mr Irving is Romeo it is not worth while even to attempt to declare; he must know it of course, better than anyone else, and there is something really touching in so extreme a sacrifice of one's ideal.'<sup>122</sup> A less charitable critic compared Irving to 'a pig who has been taught to play the fiddle. He does it very cleverly, but he would be better employed in squealing.'<sup>123</sup> Irving's inadequacy did not, however, prevent the production from running for over a hundred performances.

Terry's Juliet was not a success, though it was not quite so great a failure as Irving's Romeo. One of the chief complaints against Terry was that she was simply 'too English', in Henry James's phrase. Her Victorian heroine lacked 'the joy of this passionate young Italian', as Terry characterised her.<sup>124</sup> One critic wrote, 'Miss Ellen Terry is very charming, but she is not Juliet; and when really tragic passion is wanted for the part, it is not forthcoming.'<sup>125</sup> Ironically, Terry's relative lack of success as Juliet seems to have been due in part to the ideal of Victorian womanhood she embodied. She was unable to compete with a new conception of Juliet that went beyond the fragile, unconscious sexuality of O'Neill and her followers. In several reviews, Terry was compared unfavourably with the darkly passionate, doom-laden Juliet of Adelaide Neilson.<sup>126</sup>

#### FOREIGN JULIETS OF LATE-VICTORIAN TIMES

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, several actresses succeeded as Juliet by playing against the English conception of the role. Capitalising on the Imperial fascination with the exotic and foreign, and the licence associated with other cultures, Adelaide Neilson, Stella Colas, and Helena Modjeska achieved considerable success and extended the possibilities for performing Juliet.

Neilson, who played Juliet from 1865 to 1879, was actually from working-class Leeds, but she wrapped herself in an aura of illicit Mediterranean sexuality. Allegedly the natural daughter of a Spanish artist and an English

<sup>122</sup> Quoted in Salgado, *Eyewitnesses*, p. 201.

<sup>123</sup> Quoted in Terry, *Story of My Life*, p. 231.   <sup>124</sup> Terry, *Four Lectures*, p. 138.

<sup>125</sup> Hiatt, *Ellen Terry*, p. 166.   <sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

gentlewoman, raised at Saragossa and educated in Italy, she owed to this upbringing ‘the richness of her voice, the depth of expression in her dark eyes, the sensuous grace of her movements, the burning energy of passion which she displays as the tragedy progresses’.<sup>127</sup> Her phoney origins, her dark beauty, and her death at the age of thirty-two all contributed to her legend, but she clearly was a remarkable performer. What critics chiefly comment on is her very un-Victorian passion. William Winter writes that ‘her performances were duly planned, and her rehearsals of them conscientious; but at moments in the actual exposition of them her voice, countenance and demeanor would undergo such changes, because of a surge of feeling, that her person became transfigured, and she was more like a spirit than a woman’.<sup>128</sup> None of her competitors could match her in ‘manifesting the bewildering, exultant happiness of Juliet, or her passion, or her awestricken foreboding of impending fate’. These notes of open sexuality and tragic doom made her Juliet distinctively different from the innocent heroines who had preceded her. Her supposed otherness enabled her to stretch the role of Juliet beyond the conventional Victorian expectations for the part.

Several other actresses succeeded as Juliet in Victorian London by exploiting their foreign origins. Stella Colas, a French actress, had a period of success in the role, both in London (first in 1863) and at the Tercentenary celebrations in Stratford in 1864. Colas had a thick French accent, was considered a great beauty, and performed with ‘a strong voice and much force, volitive and physical’.<sup>129</sup> Her merits as an actress were much debated. Clement Scott commended her youth, beauty, and passion in the early scenes, and the tragic force of her potion speech. In the balcony scene, he felt, ‘her foreign origin enabled her to delight us with those tricks, fantastic changes, coquettings, poutings, and petulance which come with such difficulty from the Anglo-Saxon temperament’.<sup>130</sup> In the potion scene, by contrast, she ‘turned positively green with fear, and became prematurely old, ugly, and haggard’, uttering a terrifying shriek as she lapsed into momentary madness. Henry Morley thought her coquetry in the balcony scene ‘abominable’, and her shrieking at Tybalt’s ghost a ‘claptrap stage effect’ done with ‘a great deal of misdirected force’.<sup>131</sup> George Henry Lewes found her lacking in spontaneity and tiresomely over-emphatic: ‘With all her vehemence, she is destitute of passion; she “splits the ears of the groundlings”, but moves no

127 Wright, *Romeo*, p. 172.

128 Winter, *Other Days*, p. 284. The following quotation is from p. 286.

129 Winter, *Shakespeare on the Stage*, p. 151.

130 Scott, *Yesterday and Today*, II, p. 301. 131 Morley, *Journal*, p. 278.

human soul'.<sup>132</sup> Her accent hindered her somewhat, but her beauty, energy, and non-English passion seem to have compensated for it, at least for the popular audience.

Helena Modjeska, a Polish actress who later emigrated to America, first acted in *Romeo and Juliet* in 1866 at the Imperial Theatre, Warsaw. After giving some performances in English in the United States, she played Juliet at the Court Theatre in 1881, in a well-cast revival featuring Wilson Barrett's highly praised Mercutio and the Romeo of the young Johnston Forbes-Robertson. Responses to her performance were mixed. Having studied the role outside the English tradition, Modjeska brought many original touches; rather than playing the 2.5 exchange with the Nurse as comic wheedling, she alternately wept with anxiety and laughed with joy.<sup>133</sup> Odell found the love scenes 'sweetly and sympathetically played', and Winter praised her 'ingeniously devised and expertly used' stage business, such as her frenzied recoil from Tybalt's ghost.<sup>134</sup> One of the striking features of her performance was her emphasis on the increasing disorder of Juliet's mental state. 'If in her hands Juliet's mind is not completely shattered like Ophelia's', one critic wrote, 'it is at least unhinged and strained to a point bordering closely on the very confines of madness.'<sup>135</sup> Her undeniable technical skill impressed many critics, but seemed inappropriate for Juliet: 'she could scarcely have lighted on a character less suited to her physique, temperament, and histrionic method'.<sup>136</sup> In her forties, she expressed Juliet's youth 'by crossing the stage now and again with a certain skipping, ambling, skittish gait', and her 'airs of ingenuousness became almost grimaces'. Reception of her Juliet was in part coloured by her most famous role, in Dumas's *Camille*; though her European origins gave her a licence beyond that of English actresses, she was perhaps too much of a sophisticated and experienced woman of the world.

Another important late-Victorian Juliet was also a foreigner, the American actress and producer Mary Anderson. She engaged the Lyceum for her London début only two years after the Irving-Terry production, and borrowed two prominent members of its cast: William Terriss, who graduated from Mercutio to Romeo, and Mrs Stirling, who repeated her definitive Nurse. Further, Anderson sought to rival Irving's production in pictorial effect. She consulted with the painter Lawrence Alma-Tadema on the visual

132 Quoted in Mullin, *Victorian Actors*, p. 129.

133 Shattuck, *American Stage*, II, p. 127.

134 Odell, *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving*, II, p. 377; Winter, *Shakespeare on the Stage*, p. 172.

135 Altemus, *Helena Modjeska*, pp. 130–1.

136 Dutton Cook, *Nights at the Play*, II, p. 311. The following quotations are from p. 312.

design, and even travelled to Verona to study the architecture; every scene was set in a recognisable Veronese location. Her efforts as producer may have hindered her performance, which she herself felt was crude and disappointing.<sup>137</sup> Several critics denounced the production as vulgar, attacking Anderson's American speech and her overplaying of the potion scene. Clement Scott found her 'artificial to the last degree . . . modern, unideal, and exaggerative in every tender scene', and thought the production was 'a melodrama . . . not a poem'.<sup>138</sup> Yet Anderson had her defenders also; Winter, who saw her play Juliet thirty-five times, thought her performance exceeded Terry, Neilson, and Modjeska in being 'saturated with the force and color of tragedy'.<sup>139</sup> Odell found her 'self-conscious and at times declamatory, but her faults were faults of exuberance. One never had to complain of her performances that they were too quiet or too "naturalistic." And how melodiously she read the verse!<sup>140</sup> The production was a success with the public, in part because of the beauty of the designs. Their splendour led to a debate in the press about the value of pictorial Shakespeare. Scott opined, 'We are gradually overdoing spectacle so much that poetry must suffer in the long run . . . Acting is more and more made subordinate to mere scenic success.'<sup>141</sup> Such reservations would lead, within a few years, to the bare-stage experiments of William Poel.

Undeterred by the mixed reviews in London, Anderson took the production to the US the following year, adding a new Romeo, Johnston Forbes-Robertson. After his debut opposite Modjeska in 1881, he had quickly risen to be recognised as the definitive Romeo of the period; he was the first successful male actor in the role since Charles Kemble. Tall and handsome, with a beautiful voice and elegant classical profile, he played Romeo 'with a chivalrous grace and a subdued ardor equally rare and delightful', according to Westland Marston.<sup>142</sup> He also apparently achieved a marked freshness and naturalism in his speaking of Shakespearean verse, though recordings made in his later life suggest otherwise. The critic of the *Athenaeum* of 28 September 1895 proclaimed, 'It is doubtful whether since the days of Spranger Barry a Romeo more satisfactory than Mr Forbes-Robertson has been seen. The delivery of the lines is perfect; not a single mannerism mars speech or disfigures gesture. The attitudes and bearing are natural, and yet heroic.' In

137 Anderson, *A Few Memories*, p. 184.

138 Quoted in Shattuck, *American Stage*, II, p. 106.

139 Winter, *Shakespeare on the Stage*, p. 177.

140 Odell, *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving*, II, p. 434.

141 Clement Scott, *Dramatic Notes*, November 1884, quoted in Odell, *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving*, II, p. 434.

142 *The Critic*, 4 June 1881.

1895 Forbes-Robertson was at the Lyceum, in his own production, opposite the undistinguished Juliet of Mrs Patrick Campbell. His Romeo combined the handsome gentleman lover of the Barry tradition with the doomed melancholy of Irving. William Archer found him rather too restrained: 'It is neither thought nor understanding that is lacking in his performance, but that lyric rapture, that throb and flush of youth, which no intensity of thought can compass.'<sup>143</sup> Forbes-Robertson emphasised Romeo's premonitions of his fate 'yet hanging in the stars', and allowed these to temper his love scenes; he used a restrained delicacy before Juliet's balcony. He played the duel with Tybalt with resignation rather than rage, and the despair in the Friar's cell 'without extravagance'.<sup>144</sup> The tomb scene was the most famous part of his performance. He played it with great dignity and pathos, with none of the gothic extravagance of Irving's version. With Juliet's bier downstage centre, Forbes-Robertson could make his farewell an intimate and tender one, and 'bring out to the full the romance, the poetry, and the sadness of the scene'.<sup>145</sup>

#### ROMEO AND JULIET IN EUROPE

*Romeo and Juliet* has always been popular outside the English-speaking world. The play's overwrought rhetorical conceits are easily dispensed with in translation, and the story has immediacy and power across a wide range of cultures. *Romeo and Juliet* was one of the first Shakespeare plays staged outside England, part of the repertory of the 'Englische Komödianten', who toured the Continent beginning in the late sixteenth century, giving performances of Elizabethan plays in English and eventually German. Some version of the play was performed as early as 1604 in Nördlingen; *Eine Tragædia von Romeo und Julietta* was played at court in Dresden on 1 June and 29 September 1626. A Dutch version was apparently given in Amsterdam in 1634. The earliest German text in existence is an undated manuscript from the Imperial Library in Vienna; it may or may not reflect the performances of the Komödianten but is typical of the period. It follows the story almost scene by scene, and incorporates direct translations of some poetic passages. It is considerably shortened and simplified: Romeo's love for Rosaline remains, for instance, but there is no trace of the Queen Mab speech; Juliet's taking of the potion and her supposed death occur offstage. But the German version is most notable for the intrusions of

143 Archer, *Theatrical 'World' of 1895*, pp. 287–8.

144 Winter, *Shakespeare on the Stage*, p. 137.

145 *The Theatre*, 1 January 1876, quoted in Wright, *Romeo*, p. 169.

the low-comic clown *Pickl Häring*, a standard character in plays of the period. He takes on some of Mercutio's role in mocking Romeo's love for Rosaline, though his main concern, inevitably, is to procure food for himself. He adds some low comedy to the duel scene, ordering the dead Tybalt to go with him to the Duke: 'But look what a parcel of snot is this? Zounds, it is Tybalt, bleeding like a pig.'<sup>146</sup> He brings the news of Tybalt's death to Juliet in garbled fashion, thus accounting for her confusion as to who exactly has been killed; likewise, he takes the Nurse's place during Romeo's scene in the Friar's cell. It is certainly a crude piece of work, reproducing merely the outlines of Shakespeare's plot; its Victorian editor, Albert Cohn, complains with some justice that the adaptation is spoiled 'by the omission of all the finer motives of this magnificent tragedy, as also by the insertion of comic scenes which are utterly devoid of taste, and by their disgusting coarseness obliterate even the very small amount of tragic feeling of which this author is capable'.<sup>147</sup> A more decorous, but even less Shakespearean version appeared in 1767: Christian Felix Weisse's *Romeo und Julie*, subtitled 'a bourgeois tragedy'. A friend of Lessing, Weisse turned the play into a tightly focused domestic drama set almost wholly within the household of Herr and Frau von Capellet. The play hinges on the relationship between Julie and her parents; the feud, and even the love story, are secondary to this family tragedy, which proved compelling and successful in the theatre.<sup>148</sup> Goethe produced his own adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* in his theatre at Weimar in 1812. He concentrated wholly on the love story, making Romeo a mature figure of idealised dignity. Goethe virtually eliminated the feud, as well as the 'many disharmonious trivialities' which he felt disrupted the tragic mood of Shakespeare's play.<sup>149</sup> A more faithful translation by A. W. Schlegel was published in 1797, enjoying regular revivals into the twentieth century.

A French version by J.-F. Ducis played at the Comédie-Française in 1772, and soon became the most popular Shakespeare play in France, enjoying seven revivals in the period leading up to the revolution. To call it a Shakespeare play is misleading, since Ducis knew no English, and significantly altered the story to conform to the decorum of the French neoclassical theatre. All the comedy of Mercutio and the Nurse is cut; there is neither ball nor balcony scene; Friar Lawrence is omitted altogether. Ducis borrows from Corneille's *Le Cid* the conflict between love and family duty: Romeo is torn between his love for Juliet and his desire to avenge his own father, who has

146 Cohn, *Shakespeare in Germany*, pp. 367–8. 147 *Ibid.*, p. cxxiv.

148 Williams, *German Stage*, p. 61. 149 Quoted in Williams, *German Stage*, p. 101.

suffered terribly at the hands of the Capulets. The overall emphasis of the play is on the horror of the feud, and Romeo and Juliet deliberately sacrifice themselves in order to end it; there is no sleeping potion, only a solemn double suicide among the tombs. This final scene, with its gothic setting, brought out the best in the scenic artist Brunetti, who provided the Comédie-Française with fourteen separate tombs of marble, porphyry, and bronze, some of enormous size, centred on a mausoleum twenty-four feet high and topped with a pyramid.<sup>150</sup> Mercier wrote a prose adaptation in 1782, *The Tombs of Verona*, in which Juliet awoke at the last minute and averted the tragedy.<sup>151</sup> Two musical versions of *Romeo and Juliet* premiered in 1792 and 1793. The first was written by J.-M. B. de Monvel, the actor who had played both Romeo and the Duke in Ducis's play; the second by J.-A. de Ségur. Both were romantic fantasies, with the nightingale and lark duet set to music, elaborately floral funeral scenes, and happy endings in which both lovers survive. Both were very successful, and Ségur's played well into the nineteenth century.

In Italy, *Romeo and Juliet* was first played in the late eighteenth century, in a version based on Mercier's French adaptation. Madame de Staël, who promoted the translation of Shakespeare, wrote that in Italian *Romeo and Juliet* seemed returned 'to its maternal language'.<sup>152</sup> The Veronese quickly recognised the value of the play to the tourist industry; Juliet's supposed balcony became a popular nineteenth-century pilgrimage site.<sup>153</sup> *Romeo and Juliet* has been mounted regularly in Verona's Roman amphitheatre; Eleanora Duse played Juliet there as a teenager.<sup>154</sup> The play was also immensely popular in Italy's puppet theatres, with the *commedia dell'arte* characters Brighella and Arlecchino joining the cast.<sup>155</sup> The famous tragedian Ernesto Rossi played Romeo, both in Italy and on tours throughout Europe and the United States, for nearly thirty years, though many critics felt his 'massive head and portly figure ill accord[ed] with anybody's notion of a love-sick boy'.<sup>156</sup> Nonetheless, Italians responded eagerly to Rossi and to the play, which, along with *Othello*, became Shakespeare's most popular in Italy.<sup>157</sup>

150 Monaco, *French Stage*, p. 96. 151 Jusserand, *Shakespeare in France*, p. 444.

152 Collison-Morley, *Shakespeare in Italy*, p. 80.

153 Bradbrook, 'Romeo', pp. 70–1; Weaver, *Duse*, p. 21.

154 Grebanier, *Then Came Each Actor*, p. 328.

155 Young, *Shakespeare Manipulated*, pp. 31, 107.

156 Frederick Wedmore in the *Academy*, 3 June 1876, quoted in Carlson, *The Italian Shakespearians*, p. 162.

157 Collison-Morley, *Shakespeare in Italy*, p. 164.

MUSICAL ADAPTATIONS OF *ROMEO AND JULIET*

*Romeo and Juliet* has been from the beginning a favourite work for adaptation into musical form. The love story, the feud, the fanciful Mab speech of Mercutio, the pacific impulse of Friar Lawrence, the power of the Prince – all lend themselves readily to musical interpretation. Not surprisingly, perhaps, most of these versions have come from continental Europe, where music can provide a way to translate Shakespeare when his original language is unavailable.

The first important operatic version of *Romeo and Juliet*, in 1830, was related to its Italian heritage; indeed, it was something of an attempt to reclaim the lovers for Italy. Vincenzo Bellini and his librettist, Felice Romani, bypassed Shakespeare altogether and went back to the original Italian sources of the tale. The title, *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, reflects Romani's interest in the feuding families, who are linked both to the Guelphs and the Ghibellines of Dante's time and to the political factionalism that still divided Italy in the early nineteenth century. Romeo is the captain of the Ghibelline faction, and has killed the son of Capellio before the action begins; Juliet is engaged to be married to the Guelph Tebaldo. For all the politics of the story, Bellini's music is pure *bel canto*, filled with tender, lingering melodies of great beauty. Bellini wrote the part of Romeo for a mezzo-soprano, Giuditta Grisi, though in 1966 Claudio Abbado adapted it for a male tenor at La Scala.<sup>158</sup> Bellini gives his female lovers a gorgeous duet in the tomb, ending in a simultaneous *Liebestod*, when they sink down together, in Peter Conrad's phrase, 'languid casualties of Romantic sensibility'.<sup>159</sup>

Hector Berlioz, in his dramatic symphony *Roméo et Juliette*, returns to Shakespeare, though in Garrick's version. Berlioz had seen Harriet Smithson, his future wife, play Juliet in Paris in 1827, and was instantly smitten with her and with the play. His musical adaptation, first performed in 1839, follows the general outlines of Garrick's version. It begins with an orchestral rendering of the opening brawl, followed by a choral version of the Prologue. Many of the main events of the play are represented, in music or song: the Capulet ball, the balcony scene, even Garrick's funeral procession and tomb scene. The admonitions of Friar Lawrence are sung, as is Mercutio's Mab speech. But Berlioz leaves out the voices of Romeo and Juliet themselves, representing them only through the orchestra; instrumental language, he argued in his preface, 'is richer, more varied, less punctuated, and thanks to its very indefiniteness, incomparably more powerful'.<sup>160</sup>

158 Sadie, *New Grove*, p. 106. 159 Conrad, *To Be Continued*, p. 65.

160 Quoted in Bate, *Genius of Shakespeare*, p. 233.

Charles Gounod brought the lovers into the realm of grand opera in 1867. His *Roméo et Juliette*, which follows Shakespeare more closely than either the Bellini or Berlioz versions, enjoyed a series of Paris revivals and was spectacularly staged at the Opéra in 1888. It begins in grand style at the Capulet party, a lavish affair reflecting the materialistic *nouveaux riches* of Second Empire Paris. The meeting of Romeo and Juliet is a minuet-like duet, reflecting the formality of their sonnet exchange in the play.<sup>161</sup> The action progresses through the balcony scene, the wedding at Frère Laurent's cell, the fight in which Mercutio and Tybalt are killed, and the dawn parting of the lovers, all accompanied by sumptuous music. Gounod's Juliette doesn't faint from the potion in the privacy of her bedroom, but in the midst of a grandiose wedding to Paris. Even the lovers' deaths, again staged as a duet, are a 'delicious reverie . . . lush, upholstered, comfortable'.<sup>162</sup> *Roméo et Juliette* was an immediate success and remains the most popular operatic version of the play. Frederick Delius' opera, *A Village Romeo and Juliet* (1907), is based not on Shakespeare but on Gottfried Keller's story of a love-suicide in a Swiss village.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's version of *Romeo and Juliet* is a purely orchestral 'Fantasy Overture' (1869), in which he dramatises the tension between love and power. Written under the spell of his infatuation with a fifteen-year-old boy, Eduard Zak, Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* reflects a dominant theme in his work, 'the psychological drama of unfulfilled and frustrated love and of impossible youthful passion consumed by omnipresent death'.<sup>163</sup> Perhaps reflecting his own anxiety and guilt over his homosexuality, Tchaikovsky's work gives the lovers 'only a brief, fugitive interval of lyricism' between the solemnity of Friar Lawrence and the destructive energy of the feud.<sup>164</sup> The lovers' melody is quickly overwhelmed by the tumult of conflict and death. The love theme is last heard, in Tchaikovsky's revisions of 1880, 'twisted, broken, and accompanied by a lacerating dissonance'; with his grim, concluding B minor chords, Tchaikovsky 'drove home the fatalism' of this despairing masterpiece.<sup>165</sup>

Serge Prokofiev's ballet similarly oppresses the lovers between the thrusting rhythms of the feud and the frightening crash of state power, with the threatening Prince, perhaps, standing in for Stalin.<sup>166</sup> Prokofiev and his Soviet scenarists had contemplated a happy ending in which the lovers were spared and the Capulet and Montague factions chastened and subdued.<sup>167</sup>

161 Sadie, *New Grove*, p. 549. 162 Conrad, *To Be Continued*, p. 81.

163 Poznansky, *Tchaikovsky*, p. 119. 164 Conrad, *To Be Continued*, p. 81.

165 Brown, *Tchaikovsky*, p. 195. 166 Conrad, *To Be Continued*, p. 82.

167 Clarke and Crisp, *Ballet Goer's Guide*, p. 237.

The final result was something much darker; according to John Gruen, 'for the first time in ballet under Soviet rule, a work went beyond the precepts of Socialist realism to the heart of human tragedy'.<sup>168</sup> The production by Leonid Lavrosky, with Galina Ulanova as Juliet, was staged first at the Kirov in 1940, then at the Bolshoi in 1946, finally appearing in the West at Covent Garden in 1956 and in New York in 1959. It featured staggering spectacle, with a massive force of dancers and thrilling swordplay. The Royal Ballet staged its own version in 1965, with Margot Fonteyn and Rudolf Nureyev, in Kenneth Macmillan's choreography. Prokofiev's music ranks among the greatest orchestral works derived from Shakespeare, along with the *Romeo and Juliet* compositions of Berlioz and Tchaikovsky.<sup>169</sup>

### ROMEO AND JULIET IN AMERICA

The first recorded Shakespeare performance on the American continent was *Romeo and Juliet*. It was produced in 1730 by an amateur troupe under the direction of a New York doctor, one Joachimus Bertrand, while Otway's version still held sway in London. Bertrand himself played the Apothecary, joking in his advertisement that he hoped his performance of this role would 'be kindly taken and looked upon as a great condescension in a physician'.<sup>170</sup> In 1752, when Lewis Hallam brought an itinerant company of actors from England, Garrick's version of *Romeo and Juliet* was part of the repertoire. For several years the Hallams performed at various makeshift theatres around the colonies, with Mrs Hallam, the company's leading lady, playing Juliet opposite William Rigby, and eventually opposite her own son, Lewis Jr. *Romeo and Juliet* proved, along with Cibber's *Richard III*, to be the most popular play in the colonies during the period preceding the Revolutionary War.<sup>171</sup> The play held the stage during the growth of the new nation, though even then most American Shakespeareans were born and trained in England. After the War of 1812, English stars began to make frequent American tours. Charles Kean played Romeo in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, as did Charles Kemble, opposite his daughter Fanny. The first great American Shakespearean, the muscular and commanding Edwin Forrest, was wholly unsuited to Romeo and never attempted it. The first native Romeo of distinction was Charlotte Cushman, who played the role first in Albany in 1837, reprising it regularly around the country until at least 1860.

<sup>168</sup> Gruen, *World's Great Ballets*, p. 171.

<sup>169</sup> Fiske, 'Shakespeare in the Concert Hall', p. 241.

<sup>170</sup> Rankin, *Theatre in Colonial America*, p. 23.

<sup>171</sup> Grebanier, *Then Came Each Actor*, p. 50.

Perhaps the most significant American production of the play in the nineteenth century was that with which Edwin Booth opened his grand theatre in New York in 1869. Determined to make the American stage the equal of the British, Booth had spared no expense in constructing one of the most lavishly equipped playhouses in the world. Seating 1,750, with standing room for many more, Booth's Theatre had the most elaborate stage machinery that had ever been seen in the United States.<sup>172</sup> Booth chose *Romeo and Juliet* for his opening production, perhaps under the influence of his infatuation with Mary McVicker, a young Chicago actress to whom he was engaged. From an acting perspective, it was a disastrous choice. McVicker was unequal to a leading tragic role, having 'a face that is too small to be expressive, and too attenuated to be pleasing, and a voice deficient in quality and power'.<sup>173</sup> Booth was equally unsuited to Romeo; his accustomed princely dignity was lost in his effusions of youthful passion, which the critic of the *Herald* described as 'ludicrous by-play under the arch of the balcony, which suggested the active, bustling, glittering harlequin of the pantomime'.<sup>174</sup> His adoption of a blond wig probably didn't help. Like Irving, he was more effective in tragic scenes – the killing of Tybalt, the Friar's cell, the tomb – but Booth still considered it one of his worst performances.<sup>175</sup> The production was sumptuous and elaborate, though there were long waits between scenes on the opening night. The scenery was the most ambitious ever seen in the US, with a sweeping, solidly constructed loggia for Juliet's balcony, and a Romanesque church 12 metres (40 feet) high for the backdrop to Mercutio's death. Booth's direction was highly praised, his crowd scenes particularly: he used over a hundred well-trained fighters for the opening mêlée, and a full *corps de ballet* for the Capulet ball. In spite of the mediocre performances, the production ran successfully for ten weeks. Unfortunately, theatre on this scale was a great financial risk, and Booth declared bankruptcy only five years later.

The New York stage produced several undistinguished revivals. A production at the Union Square Theatre in 1885 achieved popular success but was attacked by critics as showy and artificial; Margaret Mather, as Juliet, was best remembered for rolling down a flight of steps after taking the poison.<sup>176</sup> William Winter called her 'a commonplace person fortuitously placed in a prominent public position'.<sup>177</sup> Another lightweight actress, Cora Brown Potter, was similarly o'er-parted in the 1888 production at the Grand

172 Odell, *Annals*, VIII, p. 423.

173 *New York World*, 4 February 1869, quoted in Shattuck, *American Stage*, I, p. 139.

174 1 March 1869, quoted in Shattuck, *American Stage*, I, p. 140.

175 Winter, *Shakespeare on the Stage*, p. 165. 176 Odell, *Annals*, XIII, p. 25.

177 Winter, *Shakespeare on the Stage*, p. 182.

Opera House, though Kyrle Bellew won some praise as a ‘handsome, ir-resolute, romantic Romeo’.<sup>178</sup> Charles Frohman’s production of 1899 was a notable disaster: Maude Adams, though successful in light popular drama, ‘showed herself unsuited to tragedy and woefully out of place as Juliet, giving a performance which ceased to be frivolous only when it became mildly hysterical’.<sup>179</sup>

Edwin Booth’s mantle as the leading American exponent of Shakespeare fell to Julia Marlowe. She first played Juliet, to considerable acclaim, in 1887, but it was her production with her eventual husband, E. H. Sothorn, that became an American institution. They first acted *Romeo and Juliet* together in Chicago in 1904, and continued to perform it for twenty years, until Marlowe was fifty-seven and Sothorn sixty-five. She was generally recognised as the bigger talent, and the production was designed to showcase her. As a producer, Marlowe was unimaginative, opting for rich spectacle and star glamour. She crowded the stage with business – for instance, creating elaborate comic by-play for the masquers attending the Capulet ball – and resisted none of the sentimental details that through nineteenth-century tradition had gradually come to clutter the role of Juliet. At the ball, she dropped a flower for Romeo to pick up; she kissed rose petals and dropped them to him from the balcony; she gave her mother a furtive farewell kiss before her potion speech. This scene was crowded with ‘points’ in the nineteenth-century manner, notably surrounding her vision of Tybalt’s ghost, as her promptbook records:

Juliet starts up looks toward C then as if satisfied that it was only her imagination looks away – then as if conscious of some thing beside her, she turns and her eye seems to rest on some moving form . . . Juliet springs up as if to intercept and then as if she had failed she utters a piercing scream and sinks back against the post of the bed for support –<sup>180</sup>

When the production played in New York, the *New York Times* doubted ‘whether the English-speaking stage has any two actors who could surpass the present performance’.<sup>181</sup> Marlowe and Sothorn were respectfully received in London in 1907, though Gordon Crosse noted a good deal of ad-libbing and paraphrasing among the company. He thought Marlowe ‘undistinguished at first’, but felt she ‘rose with the character and gave a strong wild rendering of it which was very effective’.<sup>182</sup> The

178 Brereton, *Romeo*, p. 31. 179 Winter, *Shakespeare on the Stage*, p. 189.

180 Promptbook, 570. 181 18 October 1904, Shattuck, *American Stage*, II, p. 266.

182 Crosse, *Diaries*, IV (1907), pp. 65–6.

Sothorn–Marlowe production of *Romeo and Juliet* was seen by thousands of people across the US over two decades, and remained the dominant popular image of the play for over a generation.

The first half of the twentieth century saw three big New York successes all centring on star Juliets: Jane Cowl, Eva Le Gallienne, and Katherine Cornell. Cowl's production ran for a record-breaking 174 consecutive performances in 1923. An immensely popular actress in light contemporary drama, Cowl impressed critics with the depth and lyricism of her Juliet. With thick dark hair and huge dark eyes, 'she was convincing to the eye as few Juliets have the good fortune to be', though she was thirty-nine years old.<sup>183</sup> Bernard Grebanier called the look with which she fell in love with Romeo at the ball 'a miracle of acting'.<sup>184</sup> Cowl played Juliet with tenderness and simplicity rather than showy passion; according to the *New York Times*, in the tomb scene she 'rose to that rare height where gesture is impotent and speech most effective when most subdued' (25 January 1923). Rollo Peters, as Romeo, and Dennis King, as Mercutio, gave effective support, but the focus was clearly on Cowl; beyond her performance, Stark Young complained, the production lacked 'a single stamp of invention or idea'.<sup>185</sup>

Eva Le Gallienne, an important director as well as actress, staged *Romeo and Juliet* as part of her Civic Repertory Theatre season in 1930. At the first rehearsal, she told her cast that the play 'had been written by a young man just a few days before. It's a young, vital, gay, passionate and romantic play, and it isn't the Bible'.<sup>186</sup> The production began vigorously with a drum roll and the Capulet/Montague fight spilling out onto the apron; the Prologue was cut. Le Gallienne herself designed the effective unit set of stairways and platforms, along with her collaborator Aline Berstein. The production built up tragic momentum as the play progressed. According to Brooks Atkinson, both Donald Cameron's Romeo and Edward Bromberg's Mercutio were best in their death scenes, and Le Gallienne herself '[grew] steadily in dignity and command as the tragedy unfold[ed]' (*New York Times*, 22 April 1930). He considered Juliet the 'finest and most elastic performance of her career' to date.

The Cornell production, while centred on its star actress, also capitalised on a rich array of native and imported talent in the other roles. In its first New York run in 1934, it featured Edith Evans as the Nurse, Brian Aherne as Mercutio, and the nineteen-year-old Orson Welles as Tybalt. Welles had actually played Mercutio in the out-of-town tryouts, but accepted the demotion in

183 *New Republic*, 14 February 1923. 184 Grebanier, *Then Came Each Actor*, p. 452.

185 *Ibid.* 186 Schanke, *Shattered Applause*, p. 83.

order to make his Broadway debut; he also spoke the Prologue, in a gold mask.<sup>187</sup> Romeo was played initially by Basil Rathbone, then by Maurice Evans in the production's second season. Ralph Richardson took over as Mercutio, Tyrone Power played Benvolio, and Florence Reed played the Nurse. The sets, by Jo Mielziner, were among the more inventive of that period. Though they featured fairly standard arrangements of low steps and arched openings for the various interior scenes, they employed painted drops by Mielziner that ranged from the fanciful to the expressionist. The brief Mantua scene, for instance, showed a huge, menacing aqueduct towering in distorted perspective over the characters of Romeo and the Apothecary.

The director, Cornell's husband Guthrie McClintic, emphasised the lightness, speed, and youth of the play. When touring the play in the previous year, he had used the heavily cut Sothorn–Marlowe promptbook; for New York he restored all the scenes, cutting only the Musicians and some of the servants' bawdry. Mielziner's sets and McClintic's pacing allowed for fast changes of scene, with no lapses for audience applause. The thirty-six-year-old Cornell emphasised Juliet's youth through an exuberant, athletic physicality. She ran offstage at the end of all her scenes; Richard Lockridge described her as 'an eager child, rushing toward love with arms stretched out'.<sup>188</sup> John Mason Brown called her 'free-limbed and lovely, with enchanting and seemingly unconscious grace'; she seemed to move 'with the rapidity of thought': 'Her Juliet is innocent and unawakened yet hotly eager for love. Later she is vibrant with the all-consuming passion which seizes upon her. Girlish as she is, her heart and mind are mature enough to do justice to the poetic beauty and human anguish Shakespeare wrote into the character of his fourteen-year-old maiden.' Cornell's *Romeo and Juliet* ran for ninety-seven performances in 1934, made a national tour in 1935, and returned to Broadway for a special two-week Christmas engagement that year. It was the most critically acclaimed American production of the century. In its full text, lightness of touch, and fast, fluid staging, it was in many ways comparable to its English contemporary and parallel, John Gielgud's 1935 production at the New Theatre.

#### WILLIAM POEL AND THE ELIZABETHAN REVIVAL

The twentieth century saw a shift toward fuller texts, leaner stagings, and an attempt to return to the conventions of Shakespeare's theatre. This 'Shakespeare revolution', as J. L. Styan termed it, was led above all by the

187 Brady, *Citizen Welles*, p. 65.

188 Quoted in Brown, *Dramatis Personae*, p. 218. The following quotation is from p. 219.

scholar, actor, and director, William Poel, who devoted his life to rescuing Shakespeare from the proscenium-arch pictorialism of Irving and Beerbohm Tree. Poel's productions for the Elizabethan Stage Society, performed on reconstructed stages in various London halls, were remarkable and sometimes eccentric events. He experimented with boy actresses and 'bad quarto' texts; he put spectators on the stage in Elizabethan dress; he insisted on a rapid and musical delivery of the verse according to something he called 'tuned tones'.<sup>189</sup> But his insistence on letting Shakespeare's scenes flow rapidly and naturally on an open, uncluttered stage had a great impact on twentieth-century production.

Poel's last production for the Elizabethan Stage Society was *Romeo and Juliet*, given at the Royalty Theatre on 5, 6, 9, and 11 May 1905. Poel cast two very young actors, Esmé Percy and Dorothy Minto, as the lovers (Percy would later be Poel's Hamlet). Recalling the performance, Shaw quipped that Poel had

the ridiculous habit of going to see what Shakespeare said. When he found that a child of fourteen was wanted, his critics exclaimed, 'Ah – but she was an Italian child, and an Italian child of fourteen looks exactly the same as an Englishwoman of forty-five.' Mr Poel did not believe it. He said, 'I will get a child of fourteen', and accordingly he performed *Romeo and Juliet* in that way and for the first time it became endurable.<sup>190</sup>

The young lovers had pathos and passion, and the play moved quickly, with few cuts, on a bare Elizabethan stage constructed within the Royalty's proscenium. In *The Stage-Version of 'Romeo and Juliet'*, Poel argued emphatically for the inclusion of scenes regularly cut from Victorian productions. He insisted on the dramatic effectiveness of the normally cut scenes in the Capulet household that frame the famous potion speech, calling the alteration of these scenes 'perhaps the most dramatic episode in the whole play':

We are shown Capulet's household busy with preparations for the marriage-feast, and the father, now bent on having a 'great ado' . . . While the poor child lies prostrate upon her bed in the likeness of death, we are shown the dawn of the morning, the rousing and bustle of the household; we hear the bridal march in the distance . . .<sup>191</sup>

Poel also emphasised the great public scenes of the feud, which give context and meaning to the lovers' tragedy. Complaining that Irving had cut all but

<sup>189</sup> Styan, *Shakespeare Revolution*, p. 49.

<sup>190</sup> Speaight, *William Poel*, p. 192.

<sup>191</sup> Poel, *Stage-Version*, pp. 19–20. The following quotation is from p. 26.

a few lines following the lovers' deaths, Poel wrote that 'no stage-version of *Romeo and Juliet* is consistent with Shakespeare's intentions that does not give prominence to the hatred of the two houses and retain intact the three "crowd scenes" – the one at the opening of the play, the second in the middle, and the third at the end'.

An interesting reemergence of the Poel tradition occurred in 1976, when George Murcell directed a nearly uncut *Romeo and Juliet* at St George's Theatre, London, an Elizabethan-style playhouse recreated by C. Walter Hodges (*SQ* 28: 2, Spring 1977). With Elizabethan costumes and staging techniques, the production provided an effective realisation of Poel's methods. Night scenes were conveyed without light changes, by actors carrying torches; the tomb problems were easily solved by using the perimeter of the large stage to suggest the churchyard. Murcell did use actresses in the women's roles; Sarah Badel played Juliet to Peter McEnery's Romeo. The real centre of the production, however, was Joseph O'Connor's magisterial Friar Lawrence, one of the most distinguished recent performances of the role.

Poel's most influential follower, Harley Granville-Barker, never directed *Romeo and Juliet*, though his *Preface* to the play shows Poel's influence, and in turn affected many subsequent productions. Granville-Barker is particularly stern on the subject of cutting the text:

To omit the final scurry of Montagues and Capulets and citizens of Verona to the tomb and the Friar's redundant story for the sake of finishing upon the more poignant note of Juliet's death is, as we have seen, to falsify Shakespeare's whole intention; and to omit the sequel to the drinking of the potion is as bad and worse!<sup>192</sup>

As to the scenery, Granville-Barker remarks that the producer 'must devise such scenery as will not deform, obscure, or prejudice its craftsmanship or its art'.

Poel's impact on the play was gradual. In 1913 Beerbohm Tree staged it in a traditional Victorian manner, with elaborate scenery and a cut and rearranged text. In his diary, Gordon Crosse, a convert to Poel's approach, complained that 'there is no excuse for playing I iv as a continuation of I ii, and then I iii and v as a single scene – it is merely rearranging Shakespeare for stage convenience'.<sup>193</sup> The nineteenth-century tradition of cumbersome realistic scenery passed more quickly on the Continent, because of the

192 Granville-Barker, *Prefaces*, iv, p. 67. The following quotation is from p. 65.

193 Crosse, *Diaries*, v (1913), p. 157.

general aesthetic tendencies of modernism and the influence of designer–theorists Adolphe Appia and Edward Gordon Craig. Alexander Tairov, at Moscow’s Kamerny Theatre, used a constructivist unit set for his 1921 *Romeo and Juliet*, so that the action swirled around a dynamic arrangement of steps and platforms that filled the stage.<sup>194</sup> Jean Cocteau staged an experimental, poetic version of the play in Paris in 1924, with a mobile set derived from Italian futurism that could ‘decompose and rebuild like a house of cards’.<sup>195</sup> In Warsaw, Arnold Szyfman used an expressionist combination of soaring, nonrealistic spaces and starkly angled lighting for the Polish Theatre production of 1931.<sup>196</sup> The eccentric and visionary director Terence Gray brought modernist inventiveness to Britain in 1929 with a production of *Romeo and Juliet* at his Cambridge Festival Theatre. Using a permanent set of five medieval-style mansions, continuous action, and colourful flamenco costumes inspired by the films of Rudolph Valentino, Gray and his designer Doria Paston created a playful visual spectacle that broke radically with the Victorian tradition.<sup>197</sup>

Even mainstream British *Romeo and Juliet* productions in the twenties and early thirties came to embrace the revolution in staging methods. Gordon Crosse praised Barry Jackson’s 1924 production, with the young John Gielgud and Gwen Ffrangcon–Davies, for the full text and rapid pace allowed by a single unit set: ‘the columns of the public place of I i remained in place as the pillars of Capulet’s hall . . . the musicians’ gallery in that hall reappeared as Juliet’s balcony’.<sup>198</sup> Crosse noted ‘how happily the dialogue of Peter and the musicians (which I don’t think I have ever heard on the stage before) relieved the tension just at the right places. Sh. always justifies himself when the manager (and actors) will let him.’<sup>199</sup>

Gielgud himself felt the scenery ‘was hard and rather crude, though it solved the problem of speed very satisfactorily, and the production was commendably free from cuts or extraneous business’.<sup>200</sup> Ffrangcon–Davies was the recognised star of the production, highly praised for her childlike simplicity and beautiful speech. Gielgud was unhappy with his own performance: ‘I had neither the looks, the dash, nor the virility to make a real success of it, however well I spoke the verse and felt the emotion’; in addition, Gielgud felt that he ‘looked a sight . . . a mixture of Rameses of Egypt and a

194 Kennedy, *Looking at Shakespeare*, pp. 94–6.

195 Oxenhandler, ‘Theatre of Jean Cocteau’, p. 130.

196 Kennedy, *Looking at Shakespeare*, pp. 103–4.

197 *Ibid.*, pp. 117–18. 198 Crosse, *Diaries*, VIII (1924), p. 151.

199 *Ibid.*, p. 153.

200 Gielgud, *Early Stages*, p. 51. The following quotation is from p. 50.

Victorian matron'. Nonetheless, he was converted to the Poel method of Elizabethan-style playing, and adopted it when he directed the play at Oxford in 1932.

Gielgud directed a cast of male undergraduates, with two professionals brought in for the female leads: Peggy Ashcroft and Edith Evans. Molly MacArthur's set used a backdrop of three curtained arches, which could be preset for various locations, allowing the production to proceed quickly from scene to scene; the open space in front was used for large crowd scenes. The costumes were by the design team Motley (Margaret and Sophia Harris and Elizabeth Montgomery). Among the undergraduate cast members were Christopher Hassall as Romeo, George Devine (later director of the Royal Court) as Mercutio, Hugh Hunt as the Friar, and Terence Rattigan as one of the Musicians. Gielgud rehearsed the cast rigorously to develop a quick and poetic delivery of the verse, and capitalised on their youth for a swift and energetic production. After a successful run in Oxford, the company gave a single Sunday performance at the New Theatre in London, where Gielgud's historic revival would take place three years later.

### GIELGUD AND OLIVIER, 1935–1936

Gielgud's *Romeo and Juliet* at the New Theatre in 1935–6 has become a landmark in the history of the play. It was at the time the single most successful run of any Shakespeare play, with 183 performances. Many aspects of the Oxford production remained. The swiftly alternating scenes, on a single variable set, were repeated, though this time Motley designed both set and costumes. Ashcroft and Evans repeated their roles, further developing their highly successful characterisations. Gielgud played Mercutio to the Romeo of Laurence Olivier, exchanging parts, by design, after the first six weeks of the run.

The production was put together in only three weeks. The Motley design provided a variety of acting spaces that could be curtained off when not in use. There were two arched alcoves on either side of a central tower, which had both upper and lower acting areas. Each scene was given in a clearly defined location, occupying one or two of the acting spaces; the full stage was used for large scenes such as the Capulet party or the opening brawl. Gordon Crosse described it as a 'remarkably effective piece of modern staging . . . a reproduction under modern conditions of the upper and lower stages . . . The arrangement of IV iii, iv, v, without any change or even the drawing of a curtain, was one of the most Elizabethan things I have seen.'<sup>201</sup> Juliet's

201 Crosse, *Diaries*, xv (1935), pp. 93–5.

bedroom was on a raised dais in one of the side alcoves, allowing it to remain visible while Romeo descended from the balcony in 3.5, and after Juliet took the potion in 4.3.

The only drawbacks of the setting were that it made the small stage of the New Theatre rather cramped, and the black velvet curtains muted any sense of Italian heat; Gielgud later added a strip of blue sky to the brawl scenes. Both scenery and costumes were elegantly decorated with colourful patterns in the style and palette of the Italian Renaissance. The Montagues, conceived by Gielgud as more aristocratic, wore rich reds and greens, while the bourgeois Capulets wore darker colours, with the exception of Juliet. Peggy Ashcroft's costumes alluded to the *Primavera* of Botticelli, making her a figure of freshness and youth in floral-printed green.<sup>202</sup> Romeo went from moody blue and grey to tragic crimson velvet for the end.

The fluid staging allowed Gielgud to play a nearly full text, almost unprecedented in productions of the play. Aside from the second chorus and the Musicians' banter, little was cut; with one interval after Mercutio's death, the production ran over three hours, but the pace was fast and grew faster over the course of the run.

The remarkable cast included Glen Byam Shaw as Benvolio, Harry Andrews as Tybalt, George Devine as Peter, and the young Alec Guinness as the Apothecary. Edith Evans's Nurse was considered by many to be the finest modern performance of the role: 'I have never seen a better Nurse than Edith Evans. And I don't believe anyone ever has . . . Coarse, garrulous, wordy, dominant, massive with the accretions of an experience that has left her fundamentally shallow-pated, it is a mighty achievement in characterization.'<sup>203</sup> Evans used a coarse country accent and a wheezing, shambling walk; W. A. Darlington called her 'the most real old woman you ever saw, earthy as a potato, slow as a carthorse, cunning as a badger' (*Daily Telegraph*, 18 October 1935). G. W. Stonier thought her the core of the production: 'Whenever she was on the stage, reprimanding, soothing, or merely getting her breath, the lovers both seemed children, and it needed her magnificently vital presence to give their story depth' (*New Statesman*, 26 October 1935). Evans played the Nurse again twenty-six years later at Stratford, and made an audio recording of the part the same year.<sup>204</sup>

Ashcroft was also very well received, playing Juliet as 'a child who in love, and in nothing but love, is a woman', according to *The Times* (18 October 1935). 'She has not had time to think, only to feel . . . The petals have hardly

202 Levenson, *Romeo* (1987), p. 61.    203 Farjeon, *Shakespearean Scene*, p. 122.

204 Shakespeare Recording Society SRS-M 228, 1961 (with Albert Finney and Claire Bloom).



5 Laurence Olivier and Peggy Ashcroft in John Gielgud's production at the New Theatre, 1935, featuring Motley's flexible set with a central tower flanked by archways. According to Gielgud, Olivier's 'beautiful pose as he stood beneath the balcony expressed the essence of the character to perfection'.

opened when the flower is crushed.' Although twenty-eight at the time of the performance, Ashcroft looked very young, and she emphasised the childlike aspect of the character. Accordingly, most critics found her better in the first half of the play; James Agate felt 'the eager and touching childishness could not be bettered . . . I found the performance heartrending until it came to the part where the heart should be rent' (*Sunday Times*, 20 October 1935). However, Stephen Williams, in the *Evening Standard* (18 October) wrote, 'I cannot imagine a sweeter, sincerer or more melting Juliet.' The *New York Times* critic felt that 'the lovely eagerness of the child moves perpetually hand in hand with the passionate eagerness of the woman, and this entirely unrealistic treatment of the character gives it a reality that is purely poetic' (17 November 1935).

As to the leading men, Gielgud had greater success with the critics in both roles, but Olivier's influence came to dominate the role of Romeo in the twentieth century. The two have come to be seen as representing two distinct acting traditions, Gielgud harking back to the poetic beauties of the nine-

teenth century (Ellen Terry was his great-aunt), Olivier forward to the naked emotional realism of the post-war era. In an interview with Kenneth Tynan, Olivier compared himself with Gielgud:

I've always thought that we were the reverses of the same coin, perhaps . . . the top half John, all spiritual, all spirituality, all beauty, all abstract things; and myself as all earth, blood, humanity . . . when I was playing Romeo I was carrying a torch, I was trying to sell realism in Shakespeare. I believed in it with my whole soul and I believed that Johnny was not doing that enough. I thought that he was paying attention – to the exclusion of the earth – to all music, all lyricism, and I was for the other side of the coin. I dived for that.<sup>205</sup>

Olivier opened as Romeo, playing him as an exuberant, passionate Italian adolescent, suntanned and athletic. Alec Guinness thought him 'undoubtedly glamorous' and 'remarkably beautiful', but felt his performance was 'a bit cheap – striving after theatrical effects and so on – and making nonsense of the verse'.<sup>206</sup> Most critics concurred: 'His voice has neither the tone nor the compass and his blank verse is the blankest I ever heard' (*Evening Standard*, 18 October 1935). Yet he had his defenders: 'Mr Olivier, it is true, never made his lines ring, so far as speech went all his effects were obtained by prose; and yet he seemed to me an excellent Romeo – abrupt, passionate, ill-fated – how well he looked!' (*New Statesman*, 26 October 1935). St John Ervine in the *Observer* thought him the best Romeo he had seen: ' . . . here at last is a young and gallant Romeo, a manly Romeo, a lad to take a girl by storm, and be taken so himself . . . I have seen few sights so moving as the spectacle of Mr Olivier's Romeo, stunned with Juliet's beauty, fumbling for words with which to say his love' (3 November 1935).

Gielgud was felt to be 'the Mercutio of tradition. He lived like a rake and died like a gentleman' (*Evening Standard*, 18 October 1935). He drew praise for his elegantly poetic Mab speech, 'the words fluttering from Mercutio's brain as lightly as the elfin vision that they draw'.<sup>207</sup> But most of the London critics were happier when the actors traded roles after six weeks:

Now that John Gielgud and Laurence Olivier have changed parts, the production, which could hardly have gained in emotional effect, gains greatly in artistic balance. Mr Gielgud's Romeo is more romantic than was Mr Olivier's, has a much greater sense of the beauty of the language, and substitutes a thoughtfulness that suits the part for an impetuosity that did not. And if there were doubts as to whether Mr Olivier was well cast as

205 Quoted in Hayman, *Gielgud*, p. 97. 206 Quoted in Gourlay, *Olivier*, p. 56.

207 Dent, *Nocturnes*, p. 13.

Romeo, there can be none about his Mercutio. This is a brilliant piece of work – full of zest, humour, and virility.

*Daily Telegraph*, 29 November 1935

Some of the discussion of Gielgud's Romeo, however, had an edge of faint praise about it, as though critics were beginning to acknowledge Olivier's achievement: 'As Romeo Mr Olivier was about twenty times as much in love with Juliet as Mr Gielgud is. But Mr Gielgud speaks most of the poetry far better than Mr Olivier.'<sup>208</sup> 'Mr Olivier's Romeo showed himself very much in love but rather butchered the poetry, whereas Mr Gielgud carves the verse so exquisitely . . . but I have the feeling that this Romeo never warms up to Juliet till she is cold' (*Sunday Times*, 1 December 1935).

Over the years, Olivier's performance has had the greater impact. Gielgud himself said, 'I knew I was more lyrically successful as Mercutio in the Queen Mab scene, but his virility and panache in the other scenes, his furious and skilful fencing and the final exit to his death, were certainly more striking in the part than anything I was able to achieve, while his performance as Romeo was infinitely romantic. His beautiful pose as he stood beneath the balcony expressed the essence of the character to perfection.'<sup>209</sup> The production, with its contrasting leads, marked a division between the late nineteenth-century conception of a melancholy and poetic Romeo and the modern emphasis on youth, sexuality, and violence.

#### PETER BROOK AT STRATFORD, 1947

*Romeo and Juliet* played frequently at Stratford-upon-Avon from the opening of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in 1879, but there were few performances of distinction. The first Stratford production to make a real mark in the history of the play was one that initially displeased nearly all the critics. It was directed in 1947 by the twenty-one-year-old *enfant terrible*, Peter Brook. Having established himself the previous year with an enchanting *Love's Labour's Lost*, Brook now took on *Romeo and Juliet*. He made his intentions clear in a press conference, reported in the *Birmingham Post* of 10 March 1947:

It is our job . . . to forget the conventions of painted curtains and traditional business, and to do everything to make you feel that the play is something new . . . we must make you feel this is not the *Romeo and Juliet* you have all loved and read but that you have come into an unknown theatre in an unknown town prepared for a new experience . . . To present Shakespeare

208 Farjeon, *Shakespearean Scene*, p. 123. 209 Gielgud, *Acting Shakespeare*, p. 48.

alive without being vulgar, and exciting without being crude is the function of the Shakespearean producer.

Brook's was the most highly anticipated production of the season. His interpretation was much discussed in the press even before the production opened: 'Intense hate, violent passion, and no sentimentality are Peter Brook's theme which he constantly instils into the actors, and which he has distilled from what he maintains is the play's most telling line – "For now, these hot days, is the mad blood stirring"' (*Leamington Spa Courier*, 21 March 1947). After a highly publicised search, Brook cast an eighteen-year-old, Daphne Slater, as Juliet; his Romeo, Laurence Payne, was twenty-six. He conceived Romeo and Juliet as 'as two children lost among the warring fury of the Southern houses'.<sup>210</sup> Many of the critics thought they *were* lost. *The Times* found Slater 'childlike and nothing more', and called Payne 'a Romeo with scarcely a note of music in him' (7 October 1947). Harold Hobson found Payne an utter failure and thought Slater's Juliet too immature to communicate Juliet's passion: 'As the hot words burn her mouth she seems like a precocious child babbling of things she doesn't understand.'<sup>211</sup> The performance that gained most notice was the young Paul Scofield as an unusually grave Mercutio, 'who really has seen the fairies and wishes, perhaps, that he had not' (*Sunday Times*, 6 April 1947). One of the most memorable moments of the production was the Mab speech, which Scofield gave 'lying on the stage in the torchlight, arms raised and eyes rapt as he let the words flower into the silence of the grotesquely-visaged masquers'.<sup>212</sup>

Brook's setting, designed by Rolf Gérard, used a broad empty space surrounded by miniature crenellated walls, suggesting an Italian town baking under a 'great tent of Mediterranean blue'.<sup>213</sup> Unit set pieces were introduced for the central scenes, so that Juliet's bedroom and balcony could remain visible from 3.5 to 4.5. Brook expended great effort on the atmosphere and the crowd scenes: 'Hot arid, bare, brown and enclosed, [Brook's Verona] resembles . . . old Baghdad, thronged with negroes, Jews and water-sellers' (*Theatre World*, 13, June 1947, p. 29). *The Times* acknowledged that Brook 'invariably achieves decorative significance with crowded rooms or street scenes, and surely never have the factions brawled with more vigour or verisimilitude' (7 April 1947). Hobson also felt that 'all the life of this production is packed into the burning pavements under the glaring sun'.<sup>214</sup>

Brook's text was also unconventional and corresponded to his interests in the play. There were some deep cuts: after Juliet's death the play ended, with

210 Trewin, *Shakespeare on the English Stage*, p. 205.

211 Hobson, *Theatre*, p. 145.

212 Trewin, *Shakespeare on the English Stage*, p. 206.

213 *Ibid.*

214 Hobson, *Theatre*, p. 144.



6 Daphne Slater and Laurence Payne, under the 'great tent of Mediterranean blue' in Peter Brook's hot-blooded, controversial Stratford production. Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, 1947.

the Chorus speaking the Prince's final words. The scene wherein the Friar gives Juliet the potion (4.1) was at first cut entirely, and later reinstated in an abridged version (*Times*, 7 October 1947). The wedding scene, 2.6, was replaced with the version in the first quarto. On the other hand, Brook included many scenes that had usually been cut, including the bawdy jesting

of the servants in 1.1 and Mercutio and friends in 2.4, Benvolio's recapitulation of the fight in 3.1, and most of Romeo's ravings in the Friar's cell (3.3). Brook originally included even the Musicians from 4.5, but cut them just before opening.

Summing up the critical response to the production, *The Times* of 7 October 1947 reported, 'It was considered that the poetry and passion of the tragedy were by no means well lost for the sake of much clever stagecraft. Yet the stagecraft, with its realistic crowd scenes and elaborate duelling, pleased festival audiences, and the spectacle arranged by Mr Peter Brook became the most popular thing of the year.' Brook felt vindicated:

If my production of *Romeo and Juliet* has done nothing else, it has at least aroused controversy, which in itself is a good thing . . . What I have attempted is to break away from the popular conception of *Romeo and Juliet* as a pretty-pretty, sentimental love story, and to get back to the violence, the passion, and the excitement of the stinking crowds, the feuds, the intrigues. To recapture the poetry and the beauty that arise from the Veronese sewer, and to which the story of the two lovers is merely incidental.<sup>215</sup>

The idea that the lovers could be 'merely incidental' to the play was indeed a radical one, but one that was borne out by many productions in the remaining half of the century.

A series of significant British productions in the 1950s extended Brook's influence. Sets became more streamlined and settings more Italian; the lovers grew younger and the fights grew fiercer. In 1952, Hugh Hunt's Old Vic production to some extent vindicated Brook's innovations, gaining almost universal praise for its sun-drenched porticos, youthful cast, and dangerous, exciting fights. Critics who had damned him as Brook's Romeo heaped praise on Laurence Payne, who not only choreographed the duels but played a Tybalt 'of smouldering rage and fierce passions' (*Times*, 16 September 1952), 'the night's one completely flawless performance' (*Daily Sketch*, 24 September 1952). The twenty-one-year-old Claire Bloom was 'childlike and touching' in the love scenes (*Times*) but criticised for poor verse-speaking; 'As a romantic child the Juliet is more affecting than as a tragic woman' (*Punch*, 1 October 1952). Kenneth Tynan, however, called her the best Juliet he had ever seen, insisting 'that what Shakespeare demands is not verse-speaking but verse-acting', and praising her for being 'impatient and mettlesome, proud and vehement, not a blindfold child of milk'.<sup>216</sup> Alan Badel's Romeo lacked traditional romantic good looks but was convincing as 'an adolescent Romeo wildly extravagant in his love' (*Times*). One critic, who

<sup>215</sup> Brook, *Shifting Point*, p. 71.    <sup>216</sup> Tynan, *Curtains*, pp. 32–3.

thought him the best Romeo since Olivier, praised his 'resolve to act the part with a Southern intensity, to shun a false restraint, and for once to give the passionate speeches their full weight and drive' (*Daily Sketch*). Above all, critics applauded the 'atmosphere of lusty and hot-blooded youth which pervades the production'; the very thing Brook had been attacked for five years before (*Daily Telegraph*, 16 September 1952).

A pair of Stratford productions by Glen Byam Shaw, in 1954 and 1958, carried on the new tradition, though with less complete success. In the first, film star Laurence Harvey was a dashing young Romeo to the dimpled Juliet of twenty-year-old Zena Walker in a smooth, swift, nearly uncut production. What was missing was the Italian heat of Hunt's production. The set, by Motley, was an updated, streamlined version of their setting for Gielgud: an elegant, symmetrical construction of unpainted wood that could accommodate fluid scene changes. To critics, however, it suggested 'a Swedish furnishing store rather than hot, sandy Verona' (*Manchester Guardian*, 29 April 1954). Derek Granger complained, 'Here we have a Verona that seems almost cool in Midsummer and though the pace has the appropriately ardent rapidity the effect of the stage picture throughout is one of pale neatness' (*Financial Times*, 28 April 1954). The 1958 version likewise had youth and pace, but lacked fire. Richard Johnson was a handsome and vigorous Romeo; Dorothy Tutin made a noteworthy Stratford début as a 'touchingly childlike' Juliet (*Times*, 9 April 1958). The Motley designs were more decorative than in 1958, and while they allowed a well-paced and stylish production, they still reflected the general aesthetic of the Gielgud version nearly twenty-five years before. The definitive new version, the next major milestone after Gielgud and Brook, was to come two years later at the Old Vic, in the legendary production of the young Italian director Franco Zeffirelli.

### ZEFFIRELLI, 1960

Franco Zeffirelli's production achieved what Brook had attempted: to free *Romeo and Juliet* from lyricism, prettiness, and the weight of the past, and present it as a vivid and immediate play about youth. It is no coincidence that it opened in 1960, ushering in a decade wherein young people gained a political, cultural, and economic status they had never had before. Zeffirelli commented on the historical ironies of the production in his autobiography. When he first met his young cast in London, he had to browbeat the men into growing their hair long:

at first the boys were embarrassed, they wore their hair under berets on the underground and were galled by the jokes their friends made. But when they

started to act they saw the point – instead of the posing a wig brings with it they acted freely, moving their heads like lions tossing their manes . . . by a strange coincidence, at the end of the run the fashion for long hair was in full swing, so our curious cast came to seem more and more in tune with the youngsters who packed the gallery and the gods. Romeo and Juliet slotted neatly into the world of the Beatles, of flower-power and peace-and-love.<sup>217</sup>

Of course, the way for Zeffirelli's production was paved, not only by Brook, Hunt, and Byam Shaw, but by John Osborne and Leonard Bernstein. *Look Back in Anger* had alerted the British theatre to the power of angry youth, and indeed Zeffirelli's Mercutio, Alec McCowen, was often compared to Osborne's misanthropic Jimmy Porter. *West Side Story*, which opened on Broadway in 1957, achieved startling contemporary relevance by resetting *Romeo and Juliet* amid the youth gangs of New York City. The importance of *West Side Story*, in redefining Shakespeare's play as a story of youth violence and generational conflict, cannot be overstressed. Meanwhile, in London, a revolution in acting styles was under way, as vigorous young talent poured out of drama schools with regional dialects intact, privileging feeling and authenticity over classical technique. Zeffirelli, an Italian opera director then in his thirties, seized the moment for a production that remained the dominant influence on the play for the rest of the twentieth century.

Zeffirelli designed his own settings, of peeling whitewashed walls that could double for indoor and outdoor scenes. Compared to the spare, elegant unit sets then in fashion, Zeffirelli's looked heavy, solid and earthy. The Montagues and Capulets were not sumptuously dressed aristocrats but middle-class Italians; in place of the traditional open white shirt, dark wig, and velvet cloak, John Stride's Romeo wore 'comfortable, hard-wearing, familiar clothes' in which he 'could sit, squat, run, or stroll; he could run his hand through his hair or look insignificant among a crowd'.<sup>218</sup> Judi Dench, who played an eager young Juliet, recalled that 'the audience gasped when the curtain went up because it was all misty in this very real-looking Italian street and people were throwing out sheets to air: nothing as realistic had been seen for a very long time in Shakespeare'.<sup>219</sup> Zeffirelli's neorealist environment complemented his approach to the characters, who were, in Kenneth Tynan's phrase, 'neither larger nor smaller than life; they were precisely life-size, and we watched them living, spontaneously and unpredictably' (*Observer*, 9 October 1960).

217 Zeffirelli, *Zeffirelli: The Autobiography*, pp. 162–3.

218 Brown, *SS* 15 (1962), p. 147.

219 Dench, in Bate and Jackson, *Shakespeare*, p. 201.



7 Joanna Dunham and John Stride as passionate young lovers in the international tour of Franco Zeffirelli's celebrated Old Vic production (1960-2).

The street life of Verona was at the centre of the production, with wholly convincing scenes of young people idling, playing, fighting, and making love: 'they ate apples and threw them, splashed each other with water, mocked, laughed, shouted'.<sup>220</sup> The fights were not swashbuckling swordplay but adolescent scrapping; Mercutio was killed accidentally after his fight with Tybalt was more or less over. The lovers were equally prosaic; Judi Dench 'was made

220 Brown, *SS* 15 (1962), p. 148.

to flop over the rail of the balcony, like a sulky child who doesn't agree that it's bedtime', while John Stride scrambled awkwardly up a tree in order to kiss her.<sup>221</sup> Some critics felt such choices undermined the dignity of the play, but Zeffirelli defended them in relation to his overall goal: 'to make the audience understand that the classics are living flesh'.<sup>222</sup> Many critics approved: Henry Hewes, reviewing the New York tour, noted that 'instead of the usual poetic and static reciting of sentiments, we have two hot-blooded kids trying to get at each other, with all the awkwardness and embarrassment of inexperienced lovers. The result is highly entertaining and predominantly humorous' (*Saturday Review*, 3 March 1962). John Stride and Joanna Dunham, who took over the role of Juliet for the tour, succeeded in conveying 'consuming young love with its desire, sweetness and uncontrollable rashness', according to Howard Taubman (*New York Times*, 14 February 1962).

Even the production's defenders conceded that it was weaker in the later scenes. The prosaic style was at odds with the long speeches of formalised despair and lamentation; Zeffirelli clearly had less interest in the figures of adult authority than in the youth of the streets, and, as Tynan put it, 'in the tangible, credible reality that he has created, magic potions have no place' (*Observer*, 9 October 1960). Further, some of his cuts were very severe; the production moved directly from Juliet's supposed death to Romeo's line, 'Is it e'en so? then I defy you, stars!' (5.1.24). Even Judi Dench felt that Zeffirelli 'had no respect for the verse at all, and cut it appallingly, hacking at it, for which he was rightly criticized. He left the text to the actors, and it didn't survive at all well.'<sup>223</sup> Long speeches, such as Queen Mab and Juliet's potion speech, were broken up with stage business, muting their rhetorical force. Yet the lovers 'made their own clarity and their own modern cut-down poetry', according to one critic.<sup>224</sup> The production overcame its shortcomings, and initially bad reviews, to achieve a huge international success, extended by Zeffirelli's 1968 film. Kenneth Tynan called it 'a revelation, even perhaps a revolution', and it proved to be both in the history of the play.

### MODERN PRODUCTIONS WORLDWIDE

*Romeo and Juliet* was performed around the world in the twentieth century, and the most interesting productions were often in countries where English was not the native language. The New York stage has not had a notable

221 Speaight, *SQ* 12 (1961), p. 426.

222 Quoted in Loney, *Staging Shakespeare*, p. 252.

223 Dench, in Bate and Jackson, *Shakespeare*, p. 201.

224 *Plays and Players*, November 1960, quoted in Levenson, *Romeo* (1987), p. 97.

success since Cornell's in the thirties. Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh mounted a disastrous revival in 1940. Encumbered by a slow-moving set and heavy costumes, the production dragged along, and Olivier was unable to recreate the fiery Romeo of his London performance. Equally unsuccessful was a 1951 production featuring Olivia de Havilland. The traditional American model of a production designed to showcase a major star clearly no longer worked. A more youth-orientated production, showing the Zeffirelli influence, failed at Circle in the Square in the early seventies, and *Romeo and Juliet* was a particularly limp entry in Joseph Papp's Shakespeare Marathon at the Public Theatre in the eighties. Peter MacNicol was miscast as Romeo opposite Cynthia Nixon's fresh but unmoving Juliet. Courtney B. Vance contributed a brave performance, playing Mercutio as flamboyantly gay, but could infuse little life into Les Waters's lacklustre production, which Frank Rich condemned as 'so devoid of pulse that it seems a form of indentured servitude' (*New York Times*, 25 May 1988). Some of the more successful American versions of *Romeo and Juliet* have come from the regional repertory theatre scene. In the 1980s a number of distinguished actresses led successful regional productions: Tovah Feldshuh in San Diego, Mary Beth Hurt at the Long Wharf Theatre, Amy Irving at Seattle Repertory, Amanda Plummer at La Jolla Playhouse.<sup>225</sup>

In Canada, *Romeo and Juliet* has been performed regularly at the Stratford Festival in Ontario. Michael Langham's 1960 production was in the traditional vein, with bright Renaissance costumes and a touch of idealisation, led by Christopher Plummer as a dashing and romantic Mercutio. Julie Harris's voice was not ideally suited to the demands of Juliet, but her grave and introspective stage presence gave her performance great impact. With her realistic modern acting, she was the emotional centre for the production's pageantry. Bruno Gerussi made a strong Stratford début as a virile and tender Romeo. The unlocalised Elizabethan stage of the Stratford Festival Theatre allowed effective solutions to the traditional staging problems of bedroom, balcony, and tomb. The tomb scene featured two arresting pieces of business. Juliet awoke in time to watch Romeo die, in the Garrick tradition, though without additional dialogue. At the end, the two families rushed jealously forward to reclaim their dead children, only to find that the bodies still clung together in death; only then did the impulse toward reconciliation emerge.<sup>226</sup>

A subsequent Stratford production (1968) explored the ethnic and cultural divisions in Canada by using a French Canadian actress, Louise Marleau, opposite Christopher Walken's Romeo. A Napoleonic setting

225 Londré, 'Romeo', p. 628. 226 Ibid., p. 639.

brought the action out of Renaissance prettiness but ill suited the play. Douglas Campbell's staging used a raised platform in the centre of the Stratford stage, which served both for Juliet's bed and her bier, as well as a seating area for the street scenes; it was rather awkwardly in the way during the ball. The lovers actually made little impression; the most memorable performance came from Leo Ciceri's Mercutio. Much older than Romeo, a battle-hardened soldier with physical and emotional scars, he gave a tragic power to the play's ordinarily comic first half. Ciceri, noting connections between Mercutio and Jaques in *As You Like It*, played the Queen Mab speech as a sardonic catalogue of human folly, which 'suddenly brings him face to face with his own realities and his own memories of his life as a soldier when the glamour and the glory is drowned in fear, filth, rapine and horror'.<sup>227</sup> Mercutio's impulse to fight Tybalt was suicidal, a product of his disillusionment at finding the world of peace no different from that of war. He died cursing both houses as an embittered veteran – a powerful statement in 1968, at the height of the Vietnam conflict.

Productions outside the English-speaking world were even more aggressive in their use of the play to make political statements. As Dennis Kennedy has argued, directors who present Shakespeare in translation are often much freer to take strong interpretive lines.<sup>228</sup> Felicia Harrison Londré has observed that *Romeo and Juliet* was particularly popular in Central and Eastern Europe during the cold war era.<sup>229</sup> At the Vakhtangov Theatre in Moscow, Iosif Rapoport staged the play as a political drama, with the hapless lovers destroyed by social forces. The depiction of the Prince as violently abusive to his subjects represented an overt critique of medieval tyranny, and perhaps a more subtle one of Stalinism. Otomar Krejca's Czech production also had submerged political implications, though the general tone was lyrical and elegiac. Mercutio's cry, 'A plague a'both your houses!' (3.1.97), resonated powerfully in 1963 Prague, which was struggling to find an alternative to both Western capitalism and Soviet totalitarianism. The production was distinguished by a remarkable design by Josef Svoboda, which allowed fluid and graceful interplay between highly expressive lighting and moving scenic units. A 1970 Moscow production by Anatoly Efros condemned commercial greed, represented by a fat bourgeois Capulet, but also upheld the youthful idealism of the lovers against a cynical and life-denying world. Tamás Major's overtly political Hungarian production of 1971 made

227 In Raby, *The Stratford Scene*, p. 162.

228 Kennedy, *Foreign Shakespeare*, p. 16.

229 Londré, 'Romeo', p. 625. The following discussion is much indebted to her catalogue of productions.

the love of the protagonists merely a symbol of resistance; the feud was an outright civil war, and the Prince represented a crushing military authority.

### THE ROYAL SHAKESPEARE COMPANY, 1960–2000

While British productions have not been as explicitly political as those on the Continent, they have followed the same general interpretive trend. In the latter half of the twentieth century, *Romeo and Juliet* was transformed, in production and perception, from a play about love into a play about hate. Modern productions have tended to emphasise the feud over the love story, and have used it to comment on a variety of social ills: from the competitiveness and greed of the parents, to the sexual aggression of the young men, to ethnic or cultural difference as a source of conflict. The productions of the Royal Shakespeare Company, from its inception in 1960 to the end of the century, illustrate this trend clearly.

Peter Hall directed the play, in what some critics termed an ‘anti-Zeffirelli production’, in 1961.<sup>230</sup> Staged with Hall’s trademark coolness and clarity, on a cumbrous, gothic revolving set, the production couldn’t match the Southern fire of its London rival. Part of the problem was that it was actually *Benvolio and Juliet*: Hall’s Romeo, the young Pakistani actor Zia Mohyeddin, had left the production six days before opening, leaving Brian Murray to take over. Whatever the intended force of Mohyeddin’s casting, his departure made the central pairing blandly English. Murray spoke the verse well, but there was little chemistry between him and Dorothy Tutin, who gave her second Stratford Juliet in three years. Robert Speaight called her the best English Juliet since Peggy Ashcroft, and the comparison was frequently made, partly because she played opposite Ashcroft’s Nurse, the legendary Dame Edith Evans. Like Ashcroft, Tutin ‘was a child who grew into a woman’, according to Speaight; her birdlike delicacy, youthful innocence, and exquisite poetry all resembled Ashcroft’s Juliet, as did her essentially English characterisation. Ian Bannen’s sophisticated, poetic Mercutio also drew critical praise, though the highest accolades were reserved for Evans’s definitive Nurse. In general, the production connected solidly back to the old Gielgud tradition.

In 1973, Terry Hands directed a very different *Romeo* at Stratford, one that fully established the preoccupations of modern versions. The set, designed by Farrah, was an austere metallic structure on which the actors played out a grim spectacle of fate and violent death. Hands’s motto for the

230 Speaight, *SQ* 12 (1961), p. 436.

production was ‘these violent delights have violent ends’; he emphasised the speed and impulsiveness with which the lovers fling themselves into tragedy, as well as the cruel tricks of fate that hasten their doom.<sup>231</sup> The Apothecary, a sinister embodiment of Destiny, brooded over crucial points of the action from a metal catwalk high over the stage. Verona was a cold and violent world. In place of the traditional costumes of the Italian Renaissance, the young men of the play wore leather jerkins and trousers, vaguely seventeenth-century but bristling with the straps and studs of contemporary biker culture. The leader of this gang of thugs was Bernard Lloyd’s Mercutio. Aggressively misogynist and presumably homosexual, he carried around a life-size female dummy, which he dismembered obscenely during the conjuration by Rosaline. The fights, led by David Suchet’s sadistic, macho Tybalt, were given with shocking violence.

Estelle Kohler’s Juliet was an earthy, physical, wholly unidealised girl, far removed from the fragile child–woman of Tutin and Ashcroft. With her open face, strong voice, and evident physical vitality, she made a vivid impression from the beginning of the play, laughing delightedly at the Nurse’s bawdy story. She was very much involved in the domestic tasks of the Capulets’ middle-class household, taking washing in, beating carpets, and the like, and her ‘impetuous stretching, twisting, reaching, lunging gestures’ revealed her eager and impulsive character.<sup>232</sup> Some critics found her frankness unappealing: ‘In the early scenes she indicates a man-hunting voraciousness beyond her years and in her latter scenes we have visions of a tiresome shrew she might have become in middle age had not death saved her’ (*Evening Standard*, 29 March 1973). However, she drew praise for her shift to sudden maturity at the Nurse’s betrayal, and her defiance in the Friar’s cell. Her performance was strong and original and she made much more of an impression than did Timothy Dalton, who was ‘remarkably unobtrusive as Romeo, a gentle victim of the production’s violence’.<sup>233</sup> While plausible as the romantic lover with his good looks and physical grace, he was unable to meet the emotional and vocal demands of the latter half of the play. Hands managed numerous striking stage effects, particularly in the later scenes. The mourning speeches over Juliet’s supposed death were overlapped, creating a formal ritual of lamentation; the bizarre, parodic effect was heightened by the presence of the grotesquely masked Musicians. At the end of the scene Juliet’s bed stayed onstage to become her bier; the Mantua scenes were played up on the metal catwalks, while Juliet remained visible

231 David, *Shakespeare in the Theatre*, p. 107.

232 *Ibid.*, p. 109.    233 Thompson, *SS* 27 (1974), p. 151.

below. The final moments of the play were shocking, with Juliet's lifeless body sprawled in gore, an image that disturbed the 'glooming peace' of the Prince's lines.

Trevor Nunn and Barry Kyle directed the play in 1976, again focusing attention on violence, in this case within rather than between the families. John Woodvine's Capulet was a brutal patriarch, 'the source and fountain of the hate and violence that runs through the play', according to Michael Billington (*Guardian*, 2 April 1976). He beat Juliet, kicked Romeo's corpse in the tomb, and turned a dagger on the bumbling Friar.<sup>234</sup> By contrast, the young men were fairly amiable, with Michael Pennington's Mercutio 'no gang-leader but the adored funny-man in a group of more casual companions'.<sup>235</sup> Even Paul Shelley's Tybalt was a courteous and affectionate young man, who strove to maintain a patient dignity against Mercutio's provocations. Their duel was 'pure game', according to Irving Wardle, 'very fast and sexy, with Pennington playing clown to Shelley's straight man, and receiving the death blow as he leaps into Tybalt's arms to kiss him' (*Times*, 5 April 1976). Even Mercutio did not realise the seriousness of the wound at first; his joking was genuine. Tragedy came not from the violence of youth, but from the fatal gulf between youth and age.

In a production emphasising the generation gap, Ian McKellen and Francesca Annis seemed a little too old for the lovers. McKellen tried to compensate through an excess of adolescent energy, bounding about the stage and bursting into tears at the slightest provocation. His despair over Rosaline was exaggerated to comic absurdity; his infatuation with Juliet was equally extreme, and played out through physical exuberance: 'He jumped on and off stools, popped up unexpectedly in various balconies, and finally made a jet-landing from the staircase stage left to snatch Juliet for their first meeting.'<sup>236</sup> Annis also stressed Juliet's youth, giggling at the Nurse and chattering nervously in the balcony scene, which had comic energy but little passion. The later scenes of separation and despair successfully contrasted the frenzied abandon of the lovers with the blunt incomprehension of the older generation. Woodvine's Capulet even yanked Juliet's unconscious body to the floor on the morning of her marriage to Paris, thinking initially that she was staying in bed out of spite.

One of the most distinctive moments in the production came in the tomb scene, where Nunn and Kyle, like Hands, stressed the cruel mischance that continually plagues the lovers. The tomb was merely a trap door in the stage, which had been redesigned for the season as a modified Elizabethan theatre.

234 Dawson, *Watching Shakespeare*, p. 131.

235 David, *Shakespeare in the Theatre*, p. 115.    236 *Ibid.*, p. 116.



8 The moment of Juliet's awakening, just before Romeo drinks the poison, in Trevor Nunn and Barry Kyle's Royal Shakespeare Company production with Francesca Annis and Ian McKellen. Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 1976.

McKellen's Romeo brought Juliet up out of the trap and carried her around with him in his farewell speech, which he delivered with a quiet gravity in sharp contrast to his earlier animation. As he sat to drink the poison, with Juliet still in his arms, her fingers began to flutter into life behind his head, though he was too deep in his grief to notice.<sup>237</sup> This striking image, reproduced on the production's poster, recalled the heightened pathos of Garrick's adaptation, where Juliet wakes before Romeo dies.

Ron Daniels's 1980 production returned to the masculine violence of Hands's version, though placed in a more recognisably modern context. Ralph Koltai's set of two bare, peeling walls suggested 'a faceless precinct for urban violence, where rival gangs lounged, hands in pockets'.<sup>238</sup> The young men's costumes, though not specifically contemporary, were made from black leather and worn with surly modern swagger. Tybalt and Mercutio fought with heavy sticks, from which they produced sword-blades as the duel escalated out of control. Daniels stressed not only the violence but the camaraderie of the young men, their wit-contests punctuated with hand-claps and playful wrestling matches. Jonathan Hyde's Mercutio turned the Capulet party into a raunchy disco as he led an impromptu masque featuring

237 Holding, *Romeo*, p. 62.    238 Warren, *SS* 34 (1981), pp. 149–50.

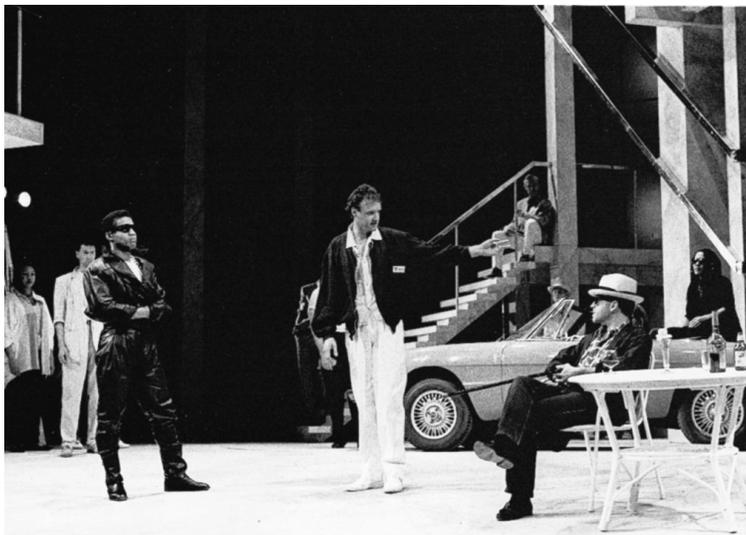
a grotesquely endowed pink Cupid doll. As a pale and neurotic Romeo, Anton Lesser gave an incisive performance very much against the romantic tradition, 'wild, frenetic, careless of dignity'.<sup>239</sup> With his wiry build, intense dark eyes, and high raspy voice, Lesser was equally convincing as a member of the down-market male gang and as 'an intemperate, ferocious adolescent poleaxed by love'.<sup>240</sup> Judy Buxton made less of an impression on the critics, perhaps because her tremulous childish Juliet didn't fit clearly into Daniels's contemporary world of aggressive masculinity. Brenda Bruce drew praise, however, as an unusually young and lively Nurse, with long silk dress and red curls, actively enjoying the sexual teasing of the young men. Daniels seems to have focused, in rehearsal, on creating the distinctive male and female worlds of the play, so that the love of Romeo and Juliet was less convincing than the antics of Romeo and his friends or the evolving relationship of Juliet and the Nurse.<sup>241</sup> When the production transferred to London, Daniels went so far as to get rid of the balcony, a choice that displeased critics: 'having the lovers clutch each other at ground level in what looks like a shabby alley, deprives the situation of all its symbolism', according to Milton Shulman (*Evening Standard*, 10 October 1981). In any event, Daniels's production provided another tough modern take on the play.

The impulse toward a contemporary urban *Romeo and Juliet*, where the lovers contend against the crassness of a bankrupt culture, had not yet run its course, and Michael Bogdanov injected it with vigorous life in a sensationally successful production in 1986. Set in contemporary Italy, the production made the lovers victims of their parents' materialism. After Juliet's supposed death, Robert Demeger, as a tough young urban Friar, attacked the Capulets' values with the line, 'The most you sought was her *promotion*' (4.5.71). The conspicuous consumption of the idle rich was everywhere evident. The cast wore chic Italian fashions, mostly in black and white. Chris Dyer's revolving set was a hideous faux-marble and chrome construction of stairs and platforms. The Prince was a sinister Mafia don, the Apothecary a drug pusher. Hugh Quarshie's Tybalt even drove a red convertible onto the stage, causing Michael Billington to nickname the production 'Alfa-Romeo and Juliet' (*Guardian*, 10 April 1986).

Bogdanov handled the big public scenes with enormous verve. The fights mixed convincing violence with uproarious comedy; at one point, Michael Kitchen's Mercutio evaded the chain-wielding Tybalt by sprawling across the bonnet of his car, causing Tybalt to desist for fear of scratching the paint job. At the Capulets' party, Mercutio and his dance partner jumped into a

239 Michael Billington, quoted in Cowl, *Shakespeare Observed*, p. 119.

240 Ibid. 241 Cowl, *Shakespeare Observed*, p. 104.



9 Michael Bogdanov's stylish modern-dress production, nicknamed 'Alfa-Romeo and Juliet'. Hugh Quarshie as Tybalt, Martin Jacobs as Benvolio, Michael Kitchen as Mercutio. Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 1986.

swimming pool to the accompaniment of a jazz-rock band. Kitchen played the part as a drunken roué, too old to be cavorting with Romeo and his friends, and without a very convincing emotional connection to them. He delivered the Queen Mab speech as a sort of parodic bedtime story, taking Romeo onto his lap; this choice got a couple of big laughs but otherwise sacrificed the whole effect of the speech. The Capulets were more plausibly updated as a *nouveau riche* couple, with Dilys Laye as a surprisingly unsympathetic Nurse, a sycophantic social climber in pink suits and high heels.

The lovers, Sean Bean and Niamh Cusack, were less obviously modernised, though both retained non-standard regional dialects. In the balcony scene, though they emphasised feeling at the expense of poetry, they conveyed a timeless sexual ardour removed from the gimmickry of the production. Bean found a balance between machismo and sensitivity, and Cusack conveyed both Juliet's wide-eyed youth and her growing maturity. Both were attractive and sympathetic according to the standards of the mid-eighties, and young audiences flocked to the production.

Bogdanov's most striking and controversial choice involved the ending. When the production opened, Romeo committed suicide by injecting himself with a hypodermic syringe, though Bogdanov later switched to conventionally administered poison. At any rate, after the deaths of the two

lovers, Bogdanov made a sudden cut to the final tableau. This was a sort of press conference at the dedication of the statues of Romeo and Juliet, which were represented by the actors themselves, wearing golden metallic gowns and masks. As cameras rolled and flashbulbs popped, the bored Mafioso Prince read a brief speech from cue cards. His words were the first eight lines of the Prologue (which had earlier been cut), converted to the past tense: 'Two households, both alike in dignity, / In fair Verona, where we laid our scene', and so forth. Capulet and Montague shook hands for the photographers; their reconciliation was a business merger or media event rather than a true recognition of their responsibility for their children's deaths. This choice annoyed many critics: 'an ending doubtless to the taste of modern sceptics, but a grotesque distortion of Shakespeare, who wanted to suggest that out of love, pain, death, good might come' (Benedict Nightingale, *New Statesman*, 18 April 1986). Actually, Bogdanov's ending allowed the play to conclude on a note of hip postmodern irony rather than timeless sorrow; and indeed, the whole production was informed less by Bogdanov's critique of capitalism than by his youth-friendly theatrical verve. Nothing in Bogdanov's approach to the play was especially original – there had been many angry modern productions in the nearly three decades since *West Side Story* – but he carried it off with such flair, energy, and fun that this *Romeo and Juliet* became probably the most influential since Zeffirelli's.

None of the RSC's remaining twentieth-century productions matched its success. In 1989 Terry Hands staged the play again in the new Swan Theatre, using virtually no scenery beyond the bare stage and wooden galleries of the Swan. Hands employed many of the same staging techniques he had used in 1973, such as the choral mourning, and the presence of the 'dead' Juliet throughout Act 5, while scenes were played on the levels above. Georgia Slowe was a very youthful Juliet, skipping about the stage in the early scenes and responding to Romeo with eager delight. Her parents continued to treat her as a child throughout; in a disturbing and effective moment, Bernard Horsfall's towering Capulet picked her up and spanked her when she refused to marry Paris. Mark Rylance's striking Romeo was closely connected to his neurotic Hamlet of the same season. Stooped and soft-spoken, Rylance was a tortured adolescent, haunted by death from the beginning of the play: he delivered his despairing Petrarchan oxymorons with chilling conviction. For once it seemed that he, rather than the feuding families, might be the source of the tragedy. It was an odd and powerful performance that grounded an otherwise somewhat unfocused production.

David Leveaux's main-stage production in 1991 was initially a disaster. The critics assailed it for a dark and cumbersome set and a lack of chemistry between Michael Maloney and Clare Holman. It was also very long, with a

nearly uncut text playing close to four hours. The production was certainly distinctive, eschewing the now-traditional Italian heat in favour of a Caravaggiesque world of brooding shadowy interiors. The darkness extended to the characterisations, with Maloney's pensive Romeo matched by Tim McInnerny's psychotic Mercutio. When the production transferred to London, it was shorter, faster, and lighter in tone and atmosphere, and better pleased critics and audiences.

Adrian Noble's production in 1995 took its lessons to heart, and kept the tone light for much of the play. Noble used a nineteenth-century Italian setting, with clothes-lines strung in the narrow streets, espresso served at pavement cafés, and frock-coats, parasols, and crinolines for the citizens of Verona. His lovers were not only young, they were children: immature, self-dramatising, tantrum-throwing. By not treating the play as an idealised love story, Noble breathed a good deal of freshness into it, but at the expense of tragic impact. Zubin Varla's petulant, foot-stamping Romeo and Lucy Whybrow's Alice-in-Wonderland Juliet, who gave her 'Gallop apace' speech from a garden swing, were interesting but too rarely moving. Many of the other characterisations were also original. Christopher Benjamin was an unusually sympathetic Capulet, kindly and befuddled. Mark Lockyer was a sweet-tempered, youthful, and giddy Mercutio who wore drag to the Capulet party (an elaborately staged Italian festa featuring Verdi's *brindisi* from *La Traviata*). The dominant performance came from Julian Glover's Scots Friar Lawrence, who went from confident authority to eager meddling to shocking cowardice in his flight from Juliet's tomb.

The most successful RSC version of the 1990s was directed by Michael Attenborough at the Pit, the company's small studio theatre in the Barbican Centre, before going on tour in 1997–8. Attenborough capitalised on the intimate space and a simple, effective design to create a hot-blooded and original take on the play. The production was set, not in Renaissance Verona or a modern city, but in a small Sicilian village in the early twentieth century. The set was a sun-baked, tiled piazza backed by a single crumbling wall; Juliet's little balcony featured green shutters and a potted geranium. A water-pump added to the homely detail of the town square; a rectangular stone plinth served for Juliet's bed and tomb, as well as seating for the townsfolk. The Capulets and Montagues were not aristocrats, but working country people; Mercutio came from the fields, scythe in hand, and Juliet chopped parsley in the kitchen while talking to the Nurse and her mother. The Capulet party featured accordion music, a string of electric light bulbs, and red wine from unmarked bottles.

In this setting both the passion and the violence of the play flourished. The fights were scrappy and unchivalric; Chook Sibtain's insolent, mean-



10 Ray Fearon and Zoe Waites in Michael Attenborough's production, typical of many late twentieth-century productions in its emphasis on violence and sexuality and its racially mixed cast. Royal Shakespeare Company, the Pit and the Swan theatres, 1997.

spirited Mercutio taunted Tybalt with a broomstick. The bawdry of the young men was continually reinforced with crotch-grabbing and pelvic thrusting. The love of Romeo and Juliet lacked lyricism but was convincingly carnal. Zoe Waites played a young woman ripe with sexual hunger: she danced a sensuous tango with Paris and writhed on her bed in anticipation of her wedding night. Ray Fearon's Romeo was ardent and muscular, and the lovers' scenes had a sweaty intensity that matched the earthy design of the production. It is also worth noting that this was the RSC's first production to cast the lovers across racial lines (Fearon is black, Waites white, and they played Othello and Desdemona the next season). There was no attempt to represent the Montague/Capulet conflict as racially motivated – this was merely 'colour-blind' casting such as the RSC often used – but it added to the production's impact, and linked it to the many contemporary productions that use the play to comment on ethnic or cultural conflict.

The RSC again staged *Romeo and Juliet* in the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in 2000, in a dark and pessimistic production by Michael Boyd. A stark grey set of high, curved walls, colourless costumes, expressionist lighting, and brutal, relentless violence created a world in which the lovers were doomed from the start. The Prologue was delivered, in the midst of the opening brawl, by a pale, spectral figure who turned out to be Romeo himself, perhaps

already dead. David Tennant's nervous, Hamlet-like Romeo and Alexandra Gilbreath's huskily sensual Juliet were unable to generate much warmth in the grim surroundings of the production, but many of Boyd's images were vivid and compelling. He depicted the violence depopulating Verona as a literal plague, so that by the end of the play all the characters were wearing surgical masks to try to avoid infection. The presiding spirit of this Verona was not the Prince, an enervated old man hobbling on two canes, but rather Paris, a strapping, black-clad sadist, always accompanied by a band of armed retainers, who nearly raped Juliet in the Friar's cell. The final attempt to establish a 'glooming peace' was a hollow one. While the families wallowed in self-pity and made futile gestures of reconciliation, Romeo and Juliet emerged eerily from the tomb and walked out through the audience, noticed only by Friar Lawrence. The diseased world of Verona was far from ready to receive or even understand them, and the play ended on a note of fatalism and despair.

#### FILM

*Romeo and Juliet* has been one of the most popular plays for adaptation to film and video, rivalled only by *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth*. In the silent era it was the most frequently filmed of all Shakespeare's plays, inspiring such adaptations as *Romeo in Pajamas*, *Romeo in the Stone Age*, Mack Sennett's Western *Roping Her Romeo*, Fatty Arbuckle's *A Restless Romeo*, and *Doubling for Romeo*, in which Will Rogers plays a clumsily amorous cowboy who dreams himself into the play.<sup>242</sup> There were numerous feature films of the play itself, including a 1916 Fox version in which Theda Bara played Juliet in her characteristic vamp style: the *New York Tribune* critic described her as 'a Juliet with a sensuous mouth and provocative arms . . . beautiful but oh! so knowing' (23 October 1916). This picture was defeated at the box office by a rival Metro production starring Francis X. Bushman and Beverly Bayne; both films are now unfortunately lost. Of the silent versions remaining, the earliest is William Ranous's 1908 Vitagraph production, a fifteen-minute one-reeler, which experiments with a variety of outdoor locations around New York City; Romeo and Tybalt fight their duel in Central Park.<sup>243</sup> The Thanhouser production of 1911, of which only the second reel survives, incorporates more of Shakespeare's plot, but George A. Lessey's bulky middle-aged Romeo is hard to take seriously: 'A bears him like a portly gentleman' (1.5.65). Lo Savio's Italian version of the same year (Film d'Arte Italiana, 1911), uses extensive and elegant location

242 Ball, *Shakespeare on Silent Film*, pp. 218, 268.    243 Rothwell, *History*, p. 8.

shooting; the funeral of Juliet is staged as an elaborate procession across a square and up the great steps of a church. The film also features a really memorable performance of Juliet from Francesca Bertini, well partnered by Gustavo Serena. Their scenes together are charming and sexy, and Juliet's final scene – she wakes while Romeo is dying – is truly haunting.

The first major sound version, George Cukor's 1936 MGM film, has been often cited as an example of how not to film Shakespeare.<sup>244</sup> With its \$2 million dollar budget, elaborate sets and costumes, reverential tone, and dowdy middle-aged leads, it was such a colossal failure that Hollywood produced no more Shakespeare for nearly twenty years.<sup>245</sup> Romeo was the 44-year-old Leslie Howard; Juliet the 36-year-old Norma Shearer, wife of producer Irving Thalberg. Neither really gives a bad performance, but their scenes have little passion or romance. John Barrymore's hammy Mercutio is easily outclassed by Basil Rathbone's sinister Tybalt. The film has its moments: an elaborate if slightly kitschy ballroom scene choreographed by Agnes de Mille, and a very beautiful slow tracking shot as Romeo approaches Juliet's balcony through a moonlit garden along the edge of a reflecting pool.

Renato Castellani's film of 1954 used authentic Italian settings of remarkable beauty, in which his English actors seem slightly stiff and out of place. Indeed, the whole film has a rather chilly feeling; the architecture is made to look rigid and imposing, in spite of its beauty, and Robert Krasker's photography is clinically cool, with long takes and little camera movement. The lovers are kept remote from the audience. The face of Susan Shentall's Juliet looks like a mask of porcelain, and Laurence Harvey, as Romeo, has the brainwashed quality he later used effectively in *The Manchurian Candidate*. The film has considerable power and restraint, however, with an insistent sense of doom from the beginning. Though the lovers generate little emotional warmth, Castellani achieves some striking images, as when they perform their wedding ceremony from the opposite sides of a metal grating, while an ominous plainchant is sung in the background. During her potion speech, Juliet is menaced by her enormous wedding dress, on a dummy standing in the corner of her darkened bedroom. The grim atmosphere is unrelieved by action or humour. The fights are short and clumsy. Mercutio, deprived of Queen Mab, does little to lighten the tone, and Flora Robson's Nurse is sturdy and pragmatic rather than warm and bawdy. Only Friar

244 Laurence Olivier credits the film with inspiring his directorial approach to *Henry V*, which combined theatrical acting and cinematic techniques. Watching Norma Shearer's potion scene, which moves into close-up as it nears its climax, Olivier came to believe that 'cinematic' acting is at odds with the full play of Shakespeare's language. Manvell, *Shakespeare and the Film*, pp. 37–8.

245 Rothwell, *History*, p. 44.



11 The accidental killing of Mercutio (John McEnery) in Franco Zeffirelli's 1968 Paramount film, with Michael York as Tybalt and Leonard Whiting as Romeo.

Lawrence is played, oddly, for comedy. Friar John's quarantine with the plague victim is developed into an elaborate set piece. John Gielgud opens the film as a Chorus rather absurdly made up to look like Shakespeare.

The 1968 film by Franco Zeffirelli extended and developed the tendencies of his stage version. It seems earthly realistic next to Castellani's, with dusty streets packed with extras, and long-haired teenagers bounding with hormonal energy. Flooded with sunshine, with indoor scenes warmed by torchlight, it is a vivid and colourful film, washed with Nino Rota's cloying but effective romantic score. The characters are colour-coded: the Montagues wear blues, the Capulets reds and oranges; when the dead bodies of Romeo

and Juliet are carried across the square at the end of the film, they wear muted lavenders and pinks combining the colours of their houses. As in the stage production, the leads are very young; unlike that production, they are untrained and can give no vocal life to the lines. Zeffirelli cut the potion speech – once the most famous in the play – because Olivia Hussey was unable to make it work.<sup>246</sup> The film's most striking performance is John McEnery's neurotic Mercutio, whose descent into madness during the Mab speech created an abiding cliché for late twentieth-century performers of the role. As in Zeffirelli's stage version, Mercutio is killed accidentally in an essentially playful fight; his companions fail to realise he is wounded until he collapses at the end of a furious denunciation of both houses. The film collapses with him; the tragic scenes are heavily cut, perfunctory, and drowned in Rota's music. But the film overall conveys the exuberant youth and rich visual detail that made Zeffirelli's stage production such a landmark.

*Romeo and Juliet* has been broadcast on television a number of times. A 1955 BBC-TV version with Tony Britton and Virginia McKenna is well acted but awkwardly crowded into tight studio settings. Laurence Payne – who on stage was Peter Brook's Romeo and Hugh Hunt's Tybalt – is here an effective, sardonic Mercutio. The 1978 television version for the BBC/Time-Life *Shakespeare Plays* was one of the first and least successful of that series. Fourteen-year-old Rebecca Saire is convincingly young and innocent as Juliet, but lacks chemistry with Patrick Ryecart's lacklustre Romeo. Anthony Andrews gives a mannered, campy performance as Mercutio, and Alan Rickman is a surprisingly bland Tybalt. The older characters are given much better, more interesting realisations. Joseph O'Connor repeats his near-definitive Friar Lawrence from the St George's production, though with slightly less effect in the smaller-scaled medium. Michael Hordern gives a richly engaging and likeable portrait of Capulet, affable and bewildered, wholly lacking in patriarchal authority. Jacqueline Hill is an affectionate Lady Capulet, who plainly wants what is best for her daughter. Celia Johnson is a dignified and sympathetic Nurse. According to the director, Alvin Rakoff, 'It's very important to realise that the Capulet family is a happy family . . . If the family unit is tight it heightens the tragedy.'<sup>247</sup> The television close-ups are effective in conveying this sense of a close-knit family unit; the more public scenes are less successful. The plywood soundstage Verona looks cheap and uninhabited, without the degree of imaginative stylisation that works for some of the BBC projects.

Along with straightforward film and television productions, *Romeo and Juliet* has inspired countless spin-offs, with the star-crossed lovers adapted

246 Loney, *Staging Shakespeare*, p. 260.    247 Fenwick, 'Production', p. 23.

to other settings. *West Side Story*, the most influential of these (filmed in 1961), has led to numerous films about young lovers trying to cross social divides in American cities, such as Duncan Gibbons's *Fire with Fire* (1986), Abel Ferrara's *China Girl* (1987), and the Jet Li martial arts picture *Romeo Must Die* (2000). The play has also lent itself to comic parody, as in the polymorphously perverse Troma Films production *Tromeo and Juliet* (1996). Directed by Lloyd Kaufman, *Tromeo* is a tongue-in-cheek retelling loaded with soft-core sex, cartoonish violence, crude humour, and occasional wit. The young lovers eventually discover that they are brother and sister, as in Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*; they decide to live happily ever after anyway, and in the last scene are shown at a cheerful backyard barbecue surrounded by their malformed, inbred children.

Some international variations on the theme have been more sophisticated. *Les Amants de Vérone* (1948), scripted by Jacques Prévert as a début vehicle for the 16-year-old Anouk Aimée, portrays two young understudies for a film of *Romeo and Juliet* who end up living out the play's conflicts. *Romeo, Juliet, and Darkness* (Czechoslovakia, 1959), set during the Nazi occupation, tells of young Czech boy trying to protect a Jewish schoolgirl. *Shakespeare-Wallah* (India, 1965), an early Merchant-Ivory picture, depicts the doomed interracial romance of an Indian prince and a young English actress who is part of a travelling Shakespearean troupe. *Romeu y Julieta* (Brazil, 1982) is a free adaptation set in the mining town of Ouro Preto; *Torn Apart* (Israel, 1990) tells of an Israeli Romeo and Arab Juliet, while in *Henna* (India, 1992) the lovers are a Pakistani Muslim and an Indian Hindu.<sup>248</sup> No doubt the twenty-first century will see more such films, as old hatreds continue to plague young loves across the world.

#### ROMEO AND JULIET AFTER THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The theme of ethnic or social hatred has become the dominant one in *Romeo and Juliet*. The play has come to symbolise bitter blood-feuds everywhere. In Sarajevo in 1993, a Muslim woman and Serb man died in each other's arms, gunned down by snipers while trying to flee the city. Bosko Brkic and Admira Ismic became known around the world as 'the Bosnian Romeo and Juliet' (*New York Times*, 8 May 1994). Their fate, and that of others like them, has moved countless theatre companies to try to address contemporary conflicts through productions of *Romeo and Juliet*. In June 1994, Palestinian and Israeli theatre companies in Jerusalem

<sup>248</sup> Rothwell, *History*, p. 170.

worked together on a joint production. The Montagues were Arab, the Capulets Jewish. Rehearsals began only three days after a Jewish settler had massacred twenty-nine Arab worshippers in Hebron, and continued through two suicide bombings that killed thirteen Israelis (*Jerusalem Post*, 24 June 1994). The production made some direct allusions to the conflict; stones were thrown onstage during the opening brawl, and Tybalt and Mercutio fought with the kind of knives used during the Intifada (*The Jerusalem Report*, 14 July 1994). But the text was largely unaltered except through translation. In the balcony scene Romeo (Halifa Natur) spoke Arabic and Juliet (Orna Katz) replied in Hebrew. Despite death-threats to the actors and repeated disruptions, the production played successfully in Jerusalem and toured internationally.

In late twentieth-century Britain there were several productions that used racial division as the basis for the Capulet/Montague feud. Some were very much in the *West Side Story* mode, using contemporary urban settings. A 1990 production by the Hull Truck theatre company featured Roland Gift, lead singer of the Fine Young Cannibals, as a black Romeo opposite Daphne Nayar's Asian Juliet. Interestingly, both were represented as the products of racially mixed unhappy marriages. The production, aimed at young audiences, made Romeo's friends into loutish hooligans who illustrated their bawdy banter explicitly, with the help of an inflatable banana (*Independent*, 11 June 1990). A more sophisticated approach was taken by Temba Theatre Company, which set the play in 1870s Cuba under Spanish colonial rule. The Capulets were intermarried Spaniards and Cubans, the Montagues descendants of African slaves. Romeo was David Harewood, Juliet Georgia Slowe, who would go on to play the role at Stratford the following year. The actors gaining most praise were Joe Dixon as a dreadlocked, acrobatic Mercutio and Elin Morgan as a flamenco-dancing Rosaline. Live Spanish guitar music accompanied the action throughout. A production at the Albany Empire the same year was set in 1930s Trinidad, with the Capulets as well-to-do Indians and the Montagues as Afro-Caribbeans. Another, in Barons Court in 1992, had white colonial Montagues confronting black native Capulets on an African island. The Royal National Theatre used race-specific casting for its 2000 production of *Romeo and Juliet*, directed by Tim Supple. The production suggested a postcolonial African state, with white Capulets, black Montagues, and machetes carried in military holsters. Though plagued by production problems that caused it to open late, the National's *Romeo* established the postcolonial approach to the play as mainstream fare, and it featured appealing performances by Chiwetel Ejiofor and Charlotte Randle in the lead roles (*Independent*, 8 October 2000).

Tensions associated with colonialism were also central to two Australian

productions from 1999. In Sydney, the Bell Shakespeare Company set indigenous Montagues against European Capulets in a modern-dress production directed by Wesley Enoch. At almost the same time, a Brisbane production, sponsored jointly by La Boite Theatre and Kooemba Jdarra Indigenous Performing Arts, used racially opposite casting. Director Sue Rider began the play with a tense, silent meeting around a conference table where the two families had gathered for an attempted reconciliation. This table later served as the balcony on which Maria Tusa's Juliet, dressed in pyjamas, apostrophised Romeo in her diary. The indigenous Capulets were led by a domineering matriarch, Roxanne McDonald, and their deaths were underscored by didgeridoo music (*The Australian*, 27 April 1999).

In the United States, a community-based production by Cornerstone Theater Company brought Verona's warring houses to the town of Port Gibson, Mississippi in 1988. The Harvard-based troupe took up residence for several months and incorporated dozens of locals into the production. Edret Brinston, an 18-year-old black high school student, played Romeo opposite Cornerstone's Amy Brenneman, later the creator and star of the television series *Judging Amy*. By using a racially divided company drawn from the community, Cornerstone addressed – and confronted – the severe racial tensions plaguing the town. The text was adapted to local realities, sometimes rather crudely, as when Tybalt challenged Romeo with, 'the love I bear thee can afford/ No better term than this: thou art a nigger'.<sup>249</sup> Mercutio's dying curse was 'A plague on both your races.' The play has been similarly invoked in response to racial problems in America's inner cities. In the 1997 Oscar-nominated documentary *Colors Straight Up*, a group of black and Latino teenagers in Los Angeles adapt the play as a response to, and a defence against, their culture of broken families and drive-by shootings. *Rome and Jewels*, a hip-hop adaptation by Rennie Harris's Puremovement company, reset the story in Philadelphia and used differing urban dance styles to depict the confrontation between two gangs, the Caps and the Monster Qs (*Los Angeles Times*, 30 October 2000). In Washington DC, a joint production combined students from historically black Howard University, as the Capulets, and predominantly white Catholic University, as the Montagues (*Washington Post*, 1 November 2000).

Questions of gender and sexuality, rather than race, were at the centre of another successful American adaptation, Joe Calarco's *Shakespeare's R&J*. First performed off-Broadway in 1997, *R&J* depicts *Romeo and Juliet* performed by four male parochial school students as an act of creative rebellion. After a prologue evoking the repressive routine of the school, the play uses

249 Coe, 'Verona, Mississippi', p. 52.

only Shakespeare's text, as the boys confront questions of homoerotic desire and gendered role-playing. When one of the boys first assumes the role of Juliet, his friends are nervous and uncomfortable with his earnest portrayal. At the Capulet ball, the verbal fencing and erotic tension of the shared sonnet take on a new subtext: the boy playing Juliet, at first, is reluctant to take his performance into the realm of sexuality. Romeo and Juliet begin fully to inhabit their roles in a passionate balcony scene, so that the other two boys are alarmed by their performance. The hostility of Tybalt and Mercutio to Romeo's love becomes layered with the two schoolboys' homophobia, which temporarily threatens to break off the impromptu performance of the play.

When the boys finally accept the homoeroticism of the cross-gender casting, the frame story fades from view. The second half of the play is a straightforward but inventive small-cast version of *Romeo and Juliet*, with a strong emphasis on the young lovers at the expense of the other characters. In the New York production all the adults were played with varying degrees of parody and stylisation; Capulet and the Prince, in particular, were sinister, inhuman forces of adult authority, their lines barked by all the boys together. The younger characters, by contrast, were played with Method intimacy, especially Daniel J. Shore's sensitive Juliet and Sean Dugin's Mercutio. The production not only applied *Romeo and Juliet* to questions of homoeroticism and homophobia, it made a convincing argument for the effectiveness of cross-gender casting. Even when issues of sexuality were not foregrounded, Shore's Juliet carried absolute conviction. Calarco's *R&J* thus provided an original and contemporary approach to the conflicts in the play as well as an exploration of the Elizabethan convention of the boy actress. It established once again how *Romeo and Juliet* can be adapted to a variety of social circumstances, and to many kinds of love and hate.

The cultural position of *Romeo and Juliet* at the beginning of the twenty-first century may be summed up by two films from the late 1990s, *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* and *Shakespeare in Love*. The former brings Shakespeare's play into a grim postmodern world of greed and violence; the latter wishfully projects contemporary values back into an idealised Elizabethan England. *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* is very much in the tradition of late twentieth-century stage productions, with its emphasis on the masculine aggression of the feud and its condemnation of the materialism and insensitivity of the older generation. The film is set in 'Verona Beach', a near-future urban dystopia combining elements of Los Angeles, Miami, and Mexico City. Social organisation is a mixture of capitalism, Catholicism, and feudalism: the smoggy skyline is dominated by a monumental statue of Christ flanked by the skyscrapers of the Capulet and Montague empires. The rival youths carry high-tech sidearms marked with the



12 Mercutio (Harold Perrineau) urges Romeo (Leonardo DiCaprio) to fight Tybalt in Baz Luhrmann's 1996 Twentieth-Century Fox film, *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*.

family crests, while Captain Prince, the chief of police, tries to maintain order with helicopters and riot squads. Within this apocalyptic setting, Romeo and Juliet are played in conventional post-Zeffirelli style as eager, earnest adolescents misunderstood by their crass and selfish parents.

Director Baz Luhrmann succeeds admirably in creating his frenzied contemporary setting, using MTV editing rhythms, lurid colours, and endless pop-culture references. Some of the characterisations are vivid and immediate. John Leguizamo is a Latino gang-leader Tybalt; Diane Venora a pill-popping, chain-smoking Lady Capulet; Paul Rudd a blandly smiling Paris, who attends the Capulet party in an astronaut costume. Harold Perrineau's Mercutio comes to the party in drag and does a flashy *Paris is Burning*-style dance number. Luhrmann whips up an atmosphere of frantic excess, with pounding music, drug trips, car chases, and gunfights. The whole film is clearly marked as postmodern spectacle, beginning and ending as a television news broadcast.

The lovers, however, are to some extent kept apart from the chaos of Verona Beach. Leonardo DiCaprio and Claire Danes, though they give little depth to the poetry, are easy and natural on screen, and play their love scenes with gravity and innocence. Luhrmann repeatedly associates them with quiet, stillness, and water; they play their balcony scene in a swimming pool. Though they are recognisably modern kids, Luhrmann links them with a

mythic past of courtly love: they attend the party dressed as a young King Arthur and a Botticelli angel. They play their tomb scene in a shimmering candlelit church that seems miles from the raucous present of the rest of the film, and their suicide is accompanied by the *Liebestod* from *Tristan und Isolde*. Only the final frames of the film thrust us back into the present, with a grainy television news image of two shrouded corpses being loaded into an ambulance.

There is a clear ambivalence in Luhrmann's film, a tension between a wish to throw modern gang violence and ethnic hatreds into the face of the audience, and a desire to retain the sense of Romeo and Juliet's love as a timeless ideal. Directors may want the play to comment on our world, but audiences still want the lovers to remain above it. *Shakespeare in Love* is, in a sense, the other side of the coin from Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*. The 1998 Academy Award Winner for Best Picture, scripted by Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard and directed by John Madden, *Shakespeare in Love* reinvests the play with the cultural authority of Shakespeare in a unique way. The film's conceit is that Shakespeare not only wrote the play, he lived it. *Shakespeare in Love* posits a star-crossed romance between young Will Shakespeare and a court lady, Viola de Lesseps. The course of the affair parallels and inspires Shakespeare's writing of *Romeo and Juliet*. The film makes numerous witty connections between the events and incidents of the play and the world of Elizabethan theatre that produced it. 'A plague a'both your houses' is prompted by the street-corner imprecations of a Puritan against the Rose and the Curtain, the rival theatres of the Admiral's and Chamberlain's Men. The death of Mercutio is paralleled by the death of Marlowe, for which Shakespeare mistakenly feels responsible. In the end, the opening production of *Romeo and Juliet* is rather implausibly performed by Shakespeare and Viola; earlier, a cross-dressing Viola had played the balcony scene, effectively, with a male Juliet. The film's reauthenticating of *Romeo and Juliet* as the true experience of Shakespeare, and its subsequent popularity, suggest how much audiences have invested in this originary myth of romantic love. *Shakespeare in Love* gives *Romeo and Juliet* the sanction, not only of Shakespearean authorship, but of Shakespeare's own experience; it reconfirms the play's status as the ultimate love story.

The huge success of both of these films provides a test case of how *Romeo and Juliet* has evolved with the times while always retaining its unique importance as the central love myth of Western culture. Much as the play has changed over the years, it has continued to hold its central place, at least since the eighteenth century. Whether the focus has been on Romeo or Juliet; on the comedy of the Nurse or the anger of Capulet; on the poetry of the balcony scene, the bawdy wit of Mercutio, or the violence of the feud, the

play has remained on the world stage. *Romeo and Juliet* has rarely been regarded as one of Shakespeare's greatest works, but it continues to function admirably as 'equipment for living', in Kenneth Burke's phrase.<sup>250</sup> The latest appropriations of *Romeo and Juliet* are part of a long history of reinvention, whereby successive cultures have used the play to figure their own civil brawls and death-marked loves.

<sup>250</sup> Burke, *Philosophy*, p. 253; see Montrose, *Purpose of Playing*, p. 40.