

# Authority, Resistance, and Woe

*Romeo and Juliet* and Its Afterlife

*Edited by*  
Lisanna Calvi

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Palazzo Roncioni - Lungarno Mediceo, 16, I-56127 Pisa

info@edizioniets.com

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## Introduction

Lisanna Calvi

HOMBRE 1 Venimos a felicitarle por su última obra.

DIRECTOR Gracias.

HOMBRE 3 Originalísima.

HOMBRE 1 ¡Y qué bonito título! *Romeo y Julieta*.

(Federico García Lorca, *El Público*, 1930)<sup>1</sup>

Not long ago I happened to teach a class on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* to a group of ten-year-old school pupils. After I had summarized the plot, pointing out the various unfortunate turns of the action that lead to its deadly ending – which unsurprisingly astounded my young auditors, probably more familiar with the sugar-coated tourist-wise tale than with the original one – a couple of them raised their hands and very worryingly asked: “Why did they have to die? Who’s to blame for all this?”. As naive as this question may sound (and is), we could say that, after all, it is exactly about this that Shakespeare’s drama makes us wonder. In the final scene of *Romeo and Juliet*, before Friar Laurence’s final recapitulation, delivered in front of the dead bodies of the two “star-crossed lovers” (Prologue, l. 6)<sup>2</sup>, the Captain of the Watch muses over the murderous events he has just discovered at the Capulets’ vault. The “true ground”, he says, quibbling on the double meaning of cause and earth, “of all these piteous woes | We cannot without circumstance descry” (5.3.180-1). Moments later, the Prince will close the “lamentable tragedy” of Romeo and Juliet on the same note of pity and woe anticipated in the Captain’s cue, while the two mourning fathers, Capulet and Montague, seal a mutual pact of remembrance of their children’s tragic deaths. But before coming to this, Shakespeare’s drama questions the notions of authority, liberty, but also the nature and cause, the “true ground” of the play’s sorrowful ending: is it the feud, is it parental coercion and duress, is it the rashness of adolescent love or just an unfortunate series of ‘mishaps’ that cause Romeo’s and Juliet’s eventual deaths? The many adaptations and appropriations of the play have often “simplifi[ed], sentimentaliz[ed], and commodifi[ed]” the story of the two Veronese lovers, especially through the “downplaying of death and the foregrounding of conflict” (Byron 2008: 171). This perspective – at its various levels, familial, social, clannish – has surely been fundamental in this regard, but of course this (simplifying) attitude does apply to all adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet*, which have also concentrated and thrived upon the exploration of the nature of love, rather than on the origin and substance of struggle and violence only. Indeed, as Stanley Wells aptly put it, this story is “one of the great myths of the Western world” (1996: 1). In fact Shakespeare himself, or better, his works can be compared to myth. He is “the playwright whose *oeuvre* functions in a remarkably similar way to the communal, shared, transcultural, and transhistorical art forms of myth and fairy tale” (Sanders 2006: 45) and “[a]s long as there

<sup>1</sup> “MAN 1 We’ve come to congratulate you on your last play. | DIRECTOR Thank you. | MAN 3 So very original. | MAN 1 And such a pretty title! *Romeo and Juliet*” (trans. by Carlos Bauer, in Fischlin and Fortier 2000: 107).

<sup>2</sup> All quotations are taken from Shakespeare 2000.

# “Refuse thy name”: Some Further Notes on Language, Authority, and Roses

Iolanda Plescia

The celebrated lines spoken by Juliet in 2.2 of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* have become one of the most proverbial expressions from his entire corpus. The message they convey would rarely be challenged in the linguistic culture of our post-Saussurean world<sup>1</sup>:

What’s in a name? That which we call a rose  
By any other word would smell as sweet;  
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo called,  
Retain that dear perfection which he owes  
Without that title.  
(2.2.43-7)<sup>2</sup>

Modern linguistics mostly operates on the premise of what Saussure famously defined as the arbitrary nature of the sign (Saussure 2000 [1916]: 27), that is, the absence of an intrinsic link between things and words. In a semiotic framework, the arbitrary nature of language works together with other principles – most notably the ‘productive’ principle – which make linguistic systems inherently flexible and versatile to a near-infinite degree: neologisms can be coined as need be, as history progresses, as new things appear in the world, and the same things can be called in a variety of ways (Lyons 1981: 1-30). Precisely this variety is epitomized here in Juliet’s indifference to the signifier ‘rose’, which according to her has nothing to do with the intrinsic qualities of the flower it signifies, and which might easily assume any other linguistic shape: in Catherine Belsey’s words, Juliet is “a Saussurian *avant la lettre*” (1993: 133).

However, it is important to note that this view of language was already an accepted one in the English Renaissance, and it was one that stemmed, well before Saussure, directly from the Aristotelian tradition (Hope 2010: 1-3). Much has been said about the relation between ‘names’ and ‘authority’ in this passage and in the play in general<sup>3</sup>: it is true that when Juliet suggests that Romeo should refuse his name, she is not only challenging the authority of the family and patrilineal descent, but she is also resolutely moving away from a land of absolutes to embrace a world of (linguistic) indeterminacy. It is a passage that to contemporary palates has always had a distinctly postmodern taste. If read against the

<sup>1</sup> I use the term here merely in a chronological sense, as having come after Saussure, rather than in the more specific sense of a modification or development of Saussurean linguistics.

<sup>2</sup> All textual references are to the 2012 Arden edition edited by René Weis.

<sup>3</sup> See in particular Belsey 1993, and among the most recent contributions, Weis 2012: 19-24, Bassi 2016: 197-8. Although it is not possible here to review the entire bulk of literature written on the problem of the name, I refer the reader in particular to Weidhorn 1969; Brisman 1975; Rutelli 1985; Shore 1987; Lucking 1995; Hunter 2005; and Schalkwyk 2000 on Derrida’s treatment of the name in *Romeo and Juliet* in “Aphorism Countertime” (1992).

# Resisting, Appropriating, and Becoming the Signs in *Romeo and Juliet*

Lucia Nigri

In this idolatrous love of the creature,  
love hath wings, and flies not;  
it flies not upward, it never ascends to  
the contemplation of the Creator in the creature.

John Donne, *Sermons* I, 200

Mentioned for the first time in the prologue (“a pair of star-crossed lovers”; l. 6)<sup>1</sup>, love is the driving force of *Romeo and Juliet*’s “story of woe”. Typical of Shakespeare, the play’s treatment of this central theme is, nevertheless, not straightforward as Romeo is first introduced on stage as frantically in love with Rosaline, and not, as one would expect from the play’s title, with Juliet. The dramatist’s portrayal of Romeo’s sudden change of his object of desire in a play where the two protagonists are commonly viewed as the model of authentic, strong, and passionate young love is, of course, not coincidental, neither is Romeo’s equally verbose professions of love to, both, Rosaline (offstage) and Juliet (onstage). An understanding of Romeo’s position within a codified, though unsuccessful, tradition of *amor cortese*, of Rosaline’s frustrating coyness, perfectly in line with that same literary pattern, and, most importantly, Juliet’s resistance to and subversion of the authoritative Petrarchan model adopted by the lover is pivotal to entangle some of the many conceptual knots (religious, civic, and semiotic) that have made this tragedy speak to different times and cultures. It is indeed through the characters’ varied appreciations and appropriations of Petrarch’s idealism that Shakespeare re-discusses the worldly awareness of the mobile, ephemeral, and continuously deceiving phenomenology of relations.

## 1. Romeo, Juliet, and the ‘Authority’ of the Petrarchan Subtext

Romeo’s pose as a Petrarchan lover, hyperbolically presenting himself as a martyr to love, is established at the very beginning of his first speech (1.1.158-236). In his conversation with Benvolio, he “trots out”, according to Rebecca Munro, “a litany of conventional and hackneyed Petrarchan conceits as he affects the love-sick courtly lover” (2011: 232): sighs and desperation are the hallmarks of his one-way relationship with Rosaline, whose unrequited love is an obvious, recognisable echo of Petrarch’s adoration for Laura (see Headlam Wells 1998). Described by critics as a “burattino delle circostanze” [puppet of the circumstances] (Rutelli 1985: 155; my translation), Romeo seems unable to emancipate his language from those literary codes that, by assigning him a pose, are perceived by the female characters in the play as artificial. Rosaline, as we are informed by the Friar’s

<sup>1</sup> All quotations from *Romeo and Juliet* are taken from Shakespeare 2012a.

“We can clear these ambiguities”.  
Escalus’s Econoliterary Authority in *Romeo and Juliet*

Enrico Reggiani

The dazzling *incipits* of Shakespeare’s plays “possibly always” perform the function of a “rapid and incisive dramaturgical *mise en abîme*” because of their “intense codifying action” (Pugliatti 1999: 258). Moreover, they form “the traditional loci in which to stress their commodity function as well as the contractual relationship between author, players, and audience” (Bruster 1992: 8). Thus, the initial syntagms of his dramatic texts lay many of the premises of future textual and cultural developments within the plays. It should be more accurately noticed that a remarkable part of such premises is represented by Shakespeare’s econo(-)literary<sup>1</sup> dramaturgical foundations which deal with the relationships between Shakespeare’s “theatrical competence” (De Marinis 1993: 176) and the economic experience and culture of his times, and which are investigated by the so-called econoliterary critics.

The *incipits* of *Othello* and of *King Lear* could be mentioned as paradigmatic cases in point, because they structure econoliterary components which have often been critically neglected or ignored, even though they determine a substantial amount of the following events in their plots. Such components also characterize the Prologue – its “textual fluidity and change” (Stern 2004: 119) notwithstanding – in *Romeo and Juliet*’s Quartos and, above all, in Q2. Though quantitatively limited, their econoliterary complexity is qualitatively increased by textualization dynamics and procedures which, according to Douglas Bruster and Robert Weimann, weave together, on the one hand, the Prologue’s mixed “in

<sup>1</sup> In order to define the manifold manifestations of the relationships between literature in English and the dyad economy/economics, my preference goes to the compound adjective econo(-)literary (with or without hyphen depending on their degree of interdisciplinary integration), apparently coined by the ‘literary economist’ Deidre N. McCloskey (1990: 150; see also Reggiani 2012: 10-11). This adjective should be understood and employed as follows: 1) its head (literary) makes an etymologically substantial reference to literature – where the adjective substantial implies not only that literature is and remains the substantia at stake, but also emphasizes the need to deal with the literary text as a whole not ideologically reducible to a hypothetical *stricto sensu* literary entity; 2) its modifier (econo-) specializes the aforementioned substantial reference to literature and summarizes all those elements – very frequent, but not always immediately identifiable – of literary thinking, experience and textualization whose existence is inextricably intertwined with the economic experience of their writer, origins, times, etc., and whose interpretation requires a hermeneutic effort, not negligible or replaceable, and oriented towards interdisciplinarity. Econo(-)literary culture and textualization may be conceived of as a “bidirectional” (Scola 2007: 59) manifestation of cultural *mestizaje* (or *métissage*), where, so to speak, Mother Literature is made pregnant by Father Economy and generates a metis baby who, though mingling together the anthropological identities and epistemological DNAs of its parents, it is just like her Mother (thus obeying the well-known proverb “mater semper certa, pater nunquam”!): an econo(-)literary text. Such a text is a scientific borderland which should be examined bearing in mind one of Jean Starobinski’s methodological intuitions: “tra i due estremi – ridurre il testo a semplici parole o ridurre il testo esclusivamente al suo rapporto con il mondo – ho sempre preferito tenere assieme testo e mondo senza mai perdere di vista le specificità dell’uno e dell’altro” (Ordine 2011: 37) [between the two extremes – reducing the text to simple words or reducing the text exclusively to its relationship with the world – I have always preferred to keep text and world together never losing sight their specificities; my translation].

# “Wherefore art THOU Romeo?”

## Henry Irving and the Dark Side of *Romeo and Juliet*

Maria Serena Marchesi

On March 8, 1882 Henry Irving's *Romeo and Juliet* premièred at the Lyceum Theatre. It was in many ways an extremely atypical production.

Irving's work was endowed with a matchless artistry which went happily hand in hand with another facet of the actor's personality, that of the consummate show-businessman. He knew, having learnt it from Dion Boucicault, the Victorian master in show-business, “the importance of making a theatre pay” (Craig 1930: 131), even though we must admit that both men went bankrupt – Boucicault more than once – and that both died in extremely straitened circumstances. Irving's stagecraft had an experimental quality that was recognized but also admired by his contemporaries: he was not an avant-gardist, rather an artist who respected his audience's tastes and sensibilities and experimented in order to instruct, not to shock. The reasons why the audience sensed that *Romeo and Juliet* was a production where something was really different from all their previous experiences, something that definitely did not match their expectations, are complex and worth considering in detail.

The contemporary press – and also later memorialists and critics that have tackled this unusual Lyceum production – focused mainly on one issue: miscasting<sup>1</sup>. If this time, with *Romeo and Juliet*, something seemed to be amiss in the usually perfect Lyceum productions, the fault must have lain above all with the actor-manager, who should have known better than to cast a forty-four-year-old man – nearly forty-five, actually – in the role of an amorous youth. To the contemporaries, in fact, the main point seemed to be that, strangely enough for Irving, who was, if anything, a master in the art of selecting a cast, the leading role seemed to be disastrously unfit for the leading man. A contemporary American actress, Mrs Eldridge<sup>2</sup>, was scathing in her criticism of Irving's Romeo: “Romeo is Mr Irving's worst piece. [...] It is unloverlike”. In the same article, Albert Marshman Palmer, the manager of the Union Square Theatre, New York, was equally hard on the actor, maintaining that he lacked “the physical grace necessary for the part”, even though he found only praise for the production as a whole, calling him “the greatest manager in the world”<sup>3</sup>. *Punch* summarized the problem and perhaps also the audience's impression by a rhetorical question that mocked the most famous line in the play: “Wherefore art THOU Romeo?”<sup>4</sup>. Even more than a decade later the miscasting was still an object of derision<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> For a review of contemporary adverse criticism see Richards 2005: 132-3.

<sup>2</sup> Probably Lillie Eldridge (born 1852) see *Guide to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Actors Carte de Visite Collection*.

<sup>3</sup> “Two Criticisms of Mr Irving's Romeo”, *The Western Daily Press*, Bristol, 21 September 1882. All nineteenth-century articles, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the British Newspaper Archive (<<http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>>, last accessed 30 October 2016).

<sup>4</sup> *Punch*, qtd in Pettitt 1939: 224.

<sup>5</sup> See *Bucks Herald*, 16 September 1893.

# William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and Its *Manga* Version

Cristina Vallaro

Recent studies of Shakespearean adaptations show how important this subject is in the academic community and how difficult it is to give an appropriate definition of 'adaptation' itself (Kidnie 2009: 3). Some critics believe that rewritings and modern productions – theatrical, editorial, critical – can be defined as adaptations since they deal with the process of making a particular author fit for our times, but, as Kidnie wisely comments, “by finding adaptation potentially everywhere, they are in danger of emptying the term of meaning, making it simply synonymous with production” (5). To avoid this risk, scholars need to define not only adaptation but also its place and role in literary criticism. In Linda Hutcheon's opinion, for example, adaptations “have an overt and defining relationship to prior texts” and openly announce it (2006: 3). Indeed, as often happens, “recognition and remembrance are part of the pleasure (and risk) of experiencing an adaptation” (4) which, being a transposition of a particular work, has to be studied comparatively. In short, adaptation can be defined as “an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable work or works, a creative and an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging, an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work” (8).

*Romeo and Juliet* is the Shakespearean play which, more than any other, apart from *Hamlet*, has been transposed into comics, or at least, quoted and referred to in comic strips. First mentioned in *Krazy Cat* on 28 May 1916, it has since attracted the attention of many artists who have adapted the text to their own styles and stories. Of the many examples which could be cited, Gianni De Luca's *Romeo e Giulietta*, first published in 1976, is one of the most outstanding because its use of movie techniques to draw characters' actions introduces a new way of devising comics. Completely different from De Luca's work is Walt Disney's 1979 version of the story with Donald Duck as Romeo and Daisy Duck as Juliet. Short as it may be, this list of examples cannot ignore Goscinny's and Uderzo's version, *Astérix et le grand fossé*, which was published in 1980 and set the lovers' tragic love in Asterix's Gallic village<sup>1</sup>. In more recent times, however, adaptations and transpositions of Shakespeare's tragedy into comics have assumed the features of a narrative text, to the point of turning it into a graphic novel mirroring the artist's cultural background.

The *manga* text analysed in these pages is a clear case in point because it is a transcoding that involves the shift from drama to graphic novel. Though the story of the Italian lovers is faithful to the original text, it takes place in contemporary Japan and has been adapted to suit twenty-first-century adolescents, fashion, and settings. The feud between Montagues and Capulets has been kept, the young characters' violent, passionate attitudes

<sup>1</sup> For further information on the comic versions of *Romeo and Juliet*, see Vallaro 2016: 19-63.



Fig. 2. Sonia Leong, *Romeo and Juliet*, SelfMadeHero, 2012.

Mercutio Can't Die.  
*Romeo and Juliet* Re-created by Carmelo Bene and Armando Punzo

Nicola Pasqualicchio

When in experimental theatre a performance is mounted starting from a dramatic text (which is not a necessary choice, of course, but certainly a possible and still widely practised one) the end result is not aimed – to borrow Jerzy Grotowski's distinction<sup>1</sup> – at *executing* that text, but at *reacting* to it. The performance, then, will not be a mere scenic realization of what is literally *pre-determined* by the text, but rather it will be a translation into scenic language of the reactions that the text arouses in the intellectual and emotional sphere of the person who is creating the performance itself (the director, or a collective, or even a single performer who takes responsibility for the whole scenic event). Experimental theatre, especially in Italy, has often 'reacted' to Shakespeare, and more so than it has ever done to any other past or present playwright. There is a twofold explanation for this. First of all, the works of the greatest English playwright, especially the most celebrated ones, are familiar to a large audience, at least in their general plotlines. In line with the methods of experimental theatre, the dramatized events can be modified, taken apart and put back together again, relying on basic knowledge of the different plots and characters, which clarifies the import of the 'reactive' intervention of the performance itself. Secondly, even the directors or groups who are most hostile to the textual dimension of the theatre are fully aware of the wealth, power and variety of Shakespeare's work, which makes it an inexhaustible source of theatricality in the most profound and essential sense – well beyond the literary value of his texts. I would go so far as to say that Shakespeare, in this sense, appears to the experimental theatre that 'reacts' to him not as merely *a* playwright like others, however immense he may be, but as *the theatre* in its essence, the ultimate reservoir of the entire potential of Western theatricality. Such potential is so boundless that the institutional, representational, 'literal' theatre would end up blocking and limiting it rather than being able to exploit it.

In this sense, 'deconstructing' Shakespeare may appear not as a betrayal but as a consistent though extreme development of his innate tendency to overflow his own boundaries, to combine the most diverse dramatic materials with incomparable skill and freedom. The unparalleled 'openness' of his language is transfigured into a kind of lesson to contemporary theatre, a lesson on extreme intertextuality (quotations, interpolations, allusions) which often characterizes experimental 'reactions' to Shakespeare, almost as if his plays were peculiarly inclined to attract and appropriate the words of other plays, other myths, other poems.

From this perspective, there are two Shakespearean texts that have most captured the

<sup>1</sup> See Temkine 1969: 56.

# Leo Muscato's *Romeo & Giulietta*: 'a Shakespearean massacre'

## Rewriting as an Act of Challenge and Defiance

Maria Elisa Montironi

### 1. Introduction. *Romeo & Giulietta*: Multiplying Conflict and Resistance

From ancient Greek theatre, to Hegel's as well as more contemporary dramatic theories, it has always been stated that tragedy arises from conflict, i.e. an outward or inward struggle between contrasting forces which gives rise to the dramatic action, develops up to a climax point and then precipitates towards a catastrophic resolution. Conflict is in many ways a key concept in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, with its focus on the opposing themes of life and death as well as appearance and reality, the semantic fields of day and night, generational clashes, the painful collision between children's aspirations and their parents' expectations, the bloody quarrels of opposing factions, the ethical problems arising from the development of medical knowledge, the divergence between money-driven and emotion-driven people, the interplay between comedy and tragedy<sup>1</sup>. As Colin Butler points out, this binary semantic system is also emphasized by the prologue:

The Chorus's first word after his stylized entrance is 'Two.' It draws attention to the fact that division is fundamental to the play. 'Verona' transforms the stage nominally into an Italian city and conceptually into an area in which 'fair' and 'civil' will be pitted against 'blood' and 'unclean'. A modern audience might well instinctively concentrate on the eponymous lovers, but the Chorus places a different emphasis. His approach is situational before it is individual, so he refers to the lovers not by name but functionally, [...] the broad terms of reference of the tragedy to come [...] include Romeo and Juliet, but they are not restricted to them. (2005: 170)

Such a wide-ranging definition of conflict also informs Italian director Leo Muscato's reading of Shakespeare's play in his *Romeo & Giulietta - Nati sotto contraria stella*, an Italian rewriting of Shakespeare's tragedy which premièred in 2005 at the Ventidio Basso theatre in Ascoli Piceno and ran from January of that year to February 2012<sup>2</sup>. Muscato's may be considered as a refined dramatic and dramaturgical operation written to challenge, and thus collide with, conventional productions of the text.

*Romeo & Giulietta* was a success from the beginning, both with audience and critics, despite its unusual and, at times, eccentric characteristics. The actual protagonists of this rewriting are not those mentioned in the title, but seven aged and somewhat wretched strolling players, who have an ardent desire to tell the audience the story of Romeo and

<sup>1</sup> See, among others, Knight 1967: 313.

<sup>2</sup> The analysis which follows in this chapter is based mainly on the production I saw in 2005. My memory has been refreshed by on-line videos and materials available at the director's website (<<https://www.leomuscato.com/>>, last accessed 12 January 2017), and by Muscato himself, who provided me with stage sketches, manuscripts, and personal information, for which I am really grateful.

## Young Violence *versus* Institutional Duress. Questions of Authority and Challenge in *Romeo and Juliet* on Screen

Anne-Marie Costantini-Cornède

As early as in the narrative and poetic texts illustrating the old feud between the Capuletti and the Montecchi – Luigi Da Porto’s *Istoria novellamente ritrovata di due nobili amanti* (1530), Bandello’s *Giulietta e Romeo* (1554), and later on Arthur Brooke’s long poem *The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet* (1562) – the archetypal “star-crossed lovers”, Romeo and Juliet, have been presented as entangled in circles of misfortune, caught in the harsh intricacies of the feud or in oppressive patterns of excessive authority, be they domestic (patriarchal coercion) or institutional (stifling aristocratic conventions). Cinema has jubilantly appropriated Shakespeare’s play, making it one of the most adapted dramas in the world and re-interpreting its story in all possible “glocal” ways. Shakespeare’s is truly “an iconic text in popular culture” as Michael Anderegg asserts (2003: 56). Each film in its own way enhances the themes of power and authority and represents patriarchal rule in such a way as to highlight its most unsympathetic exercises. Renato Castellani (1954) paved the way by making social issues central to his cinematic adaptation of the tragedy and openly tackling the themes of generational conflict and institutional duress. Robert Wise’s and Jerome Robbins’s 1961 *West Side Story* definitely followed that way, while popular ‘teen films’, like Franco Zeffirelli’s (1968), noticeably enhanced this trend by providing striking images of repressive authority and spontaneous acts of defiance against adults as well as the whole social system. Baz Luhrmann, who incidentally saw Shakespeare as a “rambunctious, sexy, violent, entertaining storyteller” (Luhrmann and Pearce 1996: 1), proposed a postmodern *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) full of sound and fury, enriching it by highly colourful and spectacular visualizations of violence. Fiery youths were not so much shown as victims as they were transformed into the very spirit of liberty and resistance. More recently, John Madden’s and Tom Stoppard’s *Shakespeare in Love* (1998) has depicted sixteenth-century coercive, aristocratic society as disparaging individual passions (namely love and art) in order to preserve old traditions. In these versions, youths are shown as both repressed and rebellious, desperately struggling against any attempt at predetermining their fate against their will and more generally trying to impose their own ways. While foregrounding these social issues, cinema provides complex interpretations of Shakespeare, both topical and global, trans-historicized and (re-)universalized, but always powerfully sustained by authorial aesthetic strategies. One may wonder about the enhancing effect of visualization or, in other terms, whether cinema makes this dimension even more striking as it is vividly visualized. Violence, as the expression of an active, dynamic phenomenon and one easily sustainable on screen, is cinematic *per se*. Violent or disruptive moments, such as the ones that are merely alluded to in the play, often become either the pretext for visually triumphant and idiosyncratic extrapolations or pure objects of personal creation. As Robert Hapgood remarks, the “kinetic

# A Story of Greater Woe.

## Sean O'Connor's and Tom Morris's *Juliet and Her Romeo* (2010)

Lisanna Calvi

There's an established tradition in British theatre  
of messing around with Shakespeare.  
(O'Connor and Morris 2010: 8)

### 1. Adapting and (Re)Motivating

In *As You Like It*, Jaques mocks the third age of man, the one that follows infancy and boyhood, by depicting it as that of “the lover, | Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad | Made to his mistress' eyebrow” (2.7.47-9). This age is adolescence; and Shakespeare's most famous adolescents are, of course, Romeo and Juliet who, in the course of the eponymous play, turn from disobedient children falling in love without their parents' consent into more mature characters who enter adulthood by making their own (tragic) decisions. As Catherine Belsey remarked paraphrasing Juliet's own words, in “establishing that their bent of love is honourable, their purpose marriage”, the two young Veronese lovers “raise their love to a new level” (2014: 146), that is, they grow out of sighs and “woeful” ballads and come of age by casting their “violent delights” (2.5.9) into the institutional permanency of marriage. But what if Romeo and Juliet were older, much older than their professed and (at least in Juliet's case) extremely young age?

The answer to this question can perhaps be found in Sean O'Connor's and Tom Morris's *Juliet and Her Romeo. A geriatric Romeo & Juliet*, first staged at Bristol's Old Vic on 16 March 2010, and starring Siân Phillips (Juliet) and Michael Byrne (Romeo). O'Connor is a British producer and writer, known for his work as executive producer of *EastEnders* (2016-17) and for his stage adaptations of Pierre Boileau's and Thomas Narcejac's 1954 novel *D'entre les morts* – on which Hitchcock's *Vertigo* was based – in 1997, and Winston Graham's 1960 novel *Marnie* in 2001. Tom Morris, artistic director of Bristol's Old Vic and associate director of the National Theatre, co-directed, with Marianne Elliot, the successful West End and Broadway productions of Nick Stafford's play *War Horse* (2011) for which he won a Tony Award for Best Direction of a Play. At Bristol, he has recently directed Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (2015) and Shakespeare's *King Lear* (2016).

As Susannah Clapp wrote in her review of O'Connor's and Morris's 2010 play, “*Juliet and Her Romeo* is Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* turned upside down – or sideways” (2010). Overturning the Shakespearean drama's age perspective, but, as Morris had it, maintaining “Shakespeare's text with some cuts” (Higgins 2009: n.p.), the two adapters set their version of *Romeo and Juliet* in a retirement community, aptly named Verona Nursing Home. The Shakespearean protagonists' extreme youth is wholly reversed: an octogenarian Romeo meets, falls in love with, and secretly marries eighty-year-old widow Juliet who lives with her brother Tybalt in the care home.

As in *Romeo and Juliet*, O'Connor's and Morris's play opens with a Prologue – here

Edizioni ETS

Palazzo Rucconj - Lungarno Mediceo, 16, I-56127 Pisa

[info@edizioniets.com](mailto:info@edizioniets.com) - [www.edizioniets.com](http://www.edizioniets.com)

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