

"With Patient Ears Attend": "Romeo and Juliet" on the Elizabethan Stage

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“With patient ears attend”:
Romeo and Juliet on the
Elizabethan Stage

by Leslie Thomson

THE stage for which Shakespeare wrote, with its medieval heritage and physical equivalents of heaven, earth and hell, invited the integration of the visual and verbal for thematic purposes. At the same time, the staging conditions imposed particular demands on the playwright, requirements which are accommodated, even capitalized on in the play's setting and dialogue. A play that seems especially worth exploring with this in mind is *Romeo and Juliet*, since at several points when the staging is particularly complex the language becomes vividly descriptive, helping the audience to imagine what would have been difficult to see. In the absence of pictorial evidence, we cannot know how certain kinds of action were staged or settings represented, and examples of what are perhaps the most problematic kinds of scene—window, bed and tomb—all occur in this early Shakespeare play. The focus here will be the relationship between what the characters say and what they do in these interrelated scenes, since it seems likely that the one is intended to describe the other for the practical reason that the staging would have necessitated it. More particularly, I should like to join those who have speculated about the staging of the tomb scene by considering not only how the scene is prepared for both verbally and visually, but also how and why the language of the scene itself describes the action. At certain points in *Romeo and Juliet*, perhaps what the characters say was determined as much by the circumstances and conventions of staging as by the themes, because the stage was used to emblemize those themes.

The dialogue descriptions of the setting and action in 5.3 are so specific and often seem so literal that, on the one hand, one is tempted

to posit the use of a "discovery space" or enclosure of some sort even if such a staging would have limited the ability of many spectators to see the action of this and several other key scenes. Conversely, one might argue that the detailed verbal pictures were intended to take the place of real sets and large props.¹ Theatre historians, textual critics, and editors have advanced a variety of differing opinions about how such scenes were staged, but in general these can be divided into three camps. The still predominant view is that the stage for which Shakespeare and his contemporaries wrote had a discovery space in the tiring house wall where study, tomb, shop, and perhaps bed scenes were located.² As well, there are those who have persuasively argued for a specially built structure jutting out from the tiring house wall for such scenes, particularly in plays which also have upper level action.³ Finally, there is Alan Dessen's "minimalist" view that more often than not no special staging was required for such "enclosed" scenes, which were performed forward on the main stage itself.⁴

¹ As Alan Dessen has done persuasively both in "Much Virtue in 'As': Elizabethan Stage Locales and Modern Interpretation" (*Shakespeare and the Sense of Performance*, eds. Marvin and Ruth Thompson [Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989], 132-38), and in a paper at the Shakespeare Association of America Conference, Kansas City, 1992.

² Richard Hosley: "In *Romeo and Juliet* the heroine is discovered when Romeo 'opens the tomb' (V.iii). Presumably he opens a pair of double-hung doors like those pictured in the De Wit (sic) drawing of the Swan. ('Thus I enforce thy rotten jaws to open'). Juliet is reclining upon some such property as a sarcophagus or coffin" ("Shakespearean Stage Curtains: Then and Now," *College English* 25 [1964]: 489). G. Blakemore Evans: "Most of the action in the play occurs on the main stage, with probable use in 4.3-5 and the final scene (5.3) of the discovery space at the rear (formerly, and perhaps more accurately, called the inner stage) for Juliet's bed and the Capulet tomb" (*Romeo and Juliet* [Cambridge, etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1984], 29; see also 33). John Jowett: "The most attractive staging is that Romeo first pries open doors, then after killing Paris draws back curtains behind them—the same curtains which earlier enclosed Juliet's bed," (*William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion*, Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor with John Jowett and William Montgomery [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987], note to 5.3.44.2, p. 301).

³ An early and influential argument for such a structure is that of G. F. Reynolds, *The Staging of Elizabethan Plays at the Red Bull Theater, 1605-25* (New York: MLA, 1940), 154-63. For a persuasive recent discussion see Scott McMillin, *Elizabethan Theatre and "The Book of Sir Thomas More"* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1987), chapter 6; see also Albert B. Weiner, "Elizabethan Interior and Aloft Scenes: A Speculative Essay," *ThS* 2 (1961): 15-34; and C. Walter Hodges, *The Globe Restored* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1953), 58-60. One wonders why Hodges did not consider this kind of structure when drawing illustrations for the Cambridge edition of *Romeo and Juliet*. Also, his illustration on the cover of this edition is at odds with those inside (pp. 31-32). Richard Hosley implicitly rejects Reynolds's and Hodges's arguments in "The Discovery Space in Shakespeare's Globe," *ShS* 12 (1959): 42-43ff.

⁴ For another possible stage configuration see John Astington, "The *Messalina* Stage

Regardless of which staging one favors—and it remains largely a matter of conjecture and opinion—none would completely eliminate visibility problems inherent in the requirements of the plot and action of *Romeo and Juliet*. I therefore suggest that Shakespeare, having in mind the stage(s) on which the play would be performed, capitalized on the physical conditions to create thematic visual images; and that a necessary function of the dialogue was to introduce, describe, confirm, or embellish what the audience saw. This idea is implied at the conclusion to the Prologue's summary of the "two houres trafficque of our Stage. / The which if you with patient eares attend, / What heere shall misse, our toyle shall striue to mend."⁵ There are different versions of 5.3 (especially Romeo's speech), in the first (1597) and second (1599) quartos. Most textual critics agree that Q2 is likely closer to what Shakespeare wrote, and with the "false starts" deleted Q2 is the copy-text for modern editions, with apparent clues about the staging added from Q1, which seems to have the authority of performance.⁶ Studies of Arthur Brooke's *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Iuliet* reveal that as always Shakespeare adapted his source to suit his purposes, sometimes virtually repeating Brooke, sometimes departing from the poem substantially. But while he did not slavishly follow Brooke, Shakespeare, like his source, set the death scene of Romeo and Juliet in the Capulet tomb.⁷ This may seem almost inevitable, but it also raises problems since on the page the scene needs only description, but on the stage is rather more complicated, perhaps requiring a semi-enclosed location, certainly seeming to demand verbal embellishment for dramatic effec-

and Salisbury Court Plays," *TJ* 43 (1991): 141-56. Astington's provocative, and admittedly speculative, suggestions about the shape of the Salisbury Court stage would give a playing space well suited to a production of *Romeo and Juliet*.

⁵ *The most excellent and lamentable Tragedie, of Romeo and Iuliet in William Shakespeare: The Complete Works, Original-Spelling Edition*, gen. eds. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), Prologue, ll. 12-14. The text is Q2 (1599) with long "s" modernized and ligatures removed. For convenience of reference, I have used the Oxford's added Act/scene divisions not present in Q2, but as in the Oxford edition the line numbers are continuous. The interpolated stage directions of the Oxford edition are not included.

⁶ See the *Textual Companion to the Oxford Shakespeare*, 288-90; and H. R. Hoppe, *The Bad Quarto of 'Romeo and Juliet': A Bibliographical and Textual Study* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1948).

⁷ The tomb scene is in all narrative versions of the story. See Jill L. Levenson, "Romeo and Juliet before Shakespeare," *SP* 81 (1984): 328-29. For a consideration of how Shakespeare's staging seems to echo Brooke's descriptions of action see E. Pearlman, "Staging *Romeo and Juliet*: Evidence from Brooke's *Romeus*," *ThS* 34 (1993): 22-32.

tiveness.⁸ This being so, it is I suggest hardly coincidental that Romeo's speech in the "tomb": describes what he does as he does it; tells the audience to whom he is speaking; expresses his thoughts; and, in so doing, gathers together at the play's climax its visual and verbal motifs.

As many critics have noted, this play contains a number of poetic conventions: sonnet, epithalamion, aubade, Petrarchan conceits. Focus on the language has perhaps obscured the simultaneous use of staging conventions, but the two—verbal and visual—are complementary, something made especially apparent when the play is considered in the context of its original performance space(s). Along with the poetic conventions, the language of *Romeo and Juliet* is characterized by several related devices, the most pervasive being wordplay in general—puns and double entendres abound. Of particular importance is the use of oxymorons: juxtaposed opposites with thematic implications controlling what the audience both sees and hears. In addition, there is repetition—linguistic, structural and physical—making the specific devices more apparent. Together these emphasize the interrelationship of love and hate, marriage and death, sweet and bitter, light and dark, high and low. Much of this is Petrarchan and from Brooke, but in *Romeo and Juliet* the oxymorons are made visual by Shakespeare's use of the physical properties and conventions of the Elizabethan stage.

The extant evidence indicates that in the London theatres at least there would have been a stage platform and an upper gallery, however minimal, probably with a corresponding space beneath it, behind the tiring house wall. While many plays do not require use of the tiring house space above or below, and most of those which do could be performed on a provincial or great-hall stage with neither, *Romeo and Juliet*

⁸ A sense of Shakespeare's deliberateness is furthered when his decision to include this scene is contrasted with his reworking of Brooke's ending:

The prince did straight ordaine, the corses that wer founde
Should be set forth upon a stage, hye rayseed from the grounde,
Right in the selfe same fourme, (shewde forth to all mens sight)
That in the hollow valt they had been found that other night.

(ll. 2817–20)

As William Carroll says, "Upon a stage"? How could Shakespeare have resisted it, especially when we see the heroes and heroines of later tragedies so frequently associated with a stage?" ("We were born to die": *Romeo and Juliet*," *CompD* 15 [1981]: 66). Indeed, and not only does Shakespeare resist an essentially theatrical scene, he leaves the lovers in the tomb while the action concludes in front of or around them—or even, some have suggested, with the tomb closed.

is not one of these. The source(s) Shakespeare was adapting virtually required the use of both levels, the theatrical result being that in this play the physical relationship between stage and gallery is thematic as well. Furthermore, the use of a bed in Act 4, closely followed by the bier in Act 5 would have invited the spectators to perceive thematic connections in the transition from room to tomb. Thus when first Romeo and then Juliet die in the Capulet tomb the paradox-resolving transcendence suggested by the language and imagery would have been conveyed visually by the staging as well.

Both thematically and theatrically the tomb scene is the last of a related series in which Shakespeare uses the playing space to convey the lovers' progress through the play. Based both on what the dialogue tells us and what we know or guess about the Elizabethan stage, in 2.2 Juliet is above, Romeo below; in 3.5 both are above and Romeo descends. Then in 4.3 and 4.4. Juliet is on her bed, which probably would have been "thrust out" from the tiring house; finally, in 5.3 Romeo breaks into the tomb—perhaps the discovery space (where the medieval hellmouth would have been?), perhaps a thrust forward prop, perhaps a specially built or portable structure. These scenes thus visually chart the inexorable downward movement of the action: the fate of love in a world of hate. And in each scene the dialogue helps the audience to see, both literally and figuratively.

At the start of the first gallery scene (2.1), Romeo focuses the audience's attention on the appearance of Juliet above: "what light through yonder window breaks?"⁹ He then describes her actions: "She speaks, yet she saies nothing"; "See how she leanes her cheeke vpon her hand" (ll. 775, 785, 796). As this scene between the lovers progresses, Shakespeare seems to prepare for the tomb scene while at the same time giving the audience a clear visual impression. Juliet asks how Romeo has come there, since "The Orchard walls are high and hard to climbe, / And the place death, considering who thou art," The romantic Romeo replies, "With loues light wings did I orepearch these walls, / For stonie limits cannot hold loue out" (ll. 836–37, 839–40). These last words can apply as well to his later breaking into the tomb—calling attention to the two visible, analogous violations of sacred, Capulet, space which anticipate then complete the unseen act of consummation.¹⁰ When Juliet

⁹ The emblematic quality of the imagery in this staging and language is conventional. See my "Window Scenes in Renaissance Plays: A Survey and Some Conclusions," in *MRDE* 5 (1991): 225–43.

¹⁰ See David Bevington: "The vertical separation between Juliet's window and the

asks how Romeo found "this place," Shakespeare again has him prepare for his final moments:

By loue that first did prompt me to enquire,
He lent me counsell, and I lent him eyes:
I am no Pylat, yet wert thou as farre
As that vast shore washt with the farthest sea,
I should aduventure for such marchandise.

(ll. 853–57)¹¹

In the second gallery scene (3.5),¹² the opening aubade makes explicit—indeed, directs—the movement of Romeo away from Juliet: "Wilt thou be gone? . . . I must be gone and liue, or stay and die. . . . Therefore stay yet, thou needst not to be gone" (ll. 1935, 1945, 1950). When Romeo then says he will risk death and stay, their roles reverse: "Come, death, and welcome," says Romeo; "hie hence be gone away," pleads Juliet (ll. 1958, 1960). Finally they describe their physical separation. *Juliet*: "Then window let day in, and let life out." *Romeo*: "Farewell, farewell, one kisse and Ile descend." *Juliet*: "Art thou gone so? loue, Lord, my husband, friend" (ll. 1975–77). When Romeo has descended—presumably via the rope ladder suspended from the gallery—Shakespeare gives Juliet a speech which: establishes the staging; probably brings her to lean over the balustrade, making her more visible; and graphically anticipates the final scene:

O God I haue an ill diuining soule,
Me thinkes I see thee, now thou art so lowe,
As one dead in the bottome of a tombe.

(ll. 1988–90)

After Romeo exits, Juliet echoes a theme running through Brooke's poem, controlling its point of view:

O Fortune, Fortune, all men call thee fickle,
If thou art fickle, what dost thou with him
That is renowmd for faith? be fickle Fortune,
For then I hope thou wilt not keepe him long,
But send him backe.

(ll. 1994–98)

orchard or garden below lends itself to recurrent visual images of ascent and descent, aspiration and despondency" (*Action is Eloquence* [Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1984], 111).

¹¹ Romeo's analogy introduces the nautical imagery, picked up visually in the rope ladder, and continued through the play.

¹² Brooke does not have two balcony scenes; this one is Shakespeare's invention.

Q1, which seems to reflect performance, indicates that the action moves to the stage here—“*She goeth downe from the window*”¹³—and so it should as the downward movement of Fortune’s wheel begins. After Juliet descends to join her mother, the ensuing confrontation between parents and daughter is played out on the main stage, which has now become her bed chamber,¹⁴ in thematically and theatrically significant language. As if to signal the downward movement, Lady Capulet angrily exclaims, “I would the foole were married to her graue” (l. 2074), and by the end of the Act, Juliet is alienated and alone, prophetically rhyming “remedie” and “die” (ll. 2175–76)—in this play where paradoxes are resolved and words echo into deeds.

I have noted how Brooke’s poem repeatedly, and conventionally, describes the fickleness of Fortune and the control of events imposed by the inexorable turning of her wheel:

For Fortune chaungeth more, then fickel fantasie;
In nothing Fortune constant is, save in inconstancie.
Her hasty ronning wheele, is of a restles coorse,
That turnes the clymers hedlong downe, from better to the woorse,
And those that are beneth, she heaveth up agayne,
So we shall use to pleasures mount, out of the pit of payne.¹⁵

While Shakespeare begins the play with a Prologue about the “paire of starre-crost louers” and Romeo repeatedly sees fate as malevolent, the idea of the changeability of Fortune, particularly of its rising and falling circularity (the focus of emblems), is voiced explicitly only once, by Juliet in the passage quoted above (3.5.1994–98). One thus might be-

¹³ *The most excellent Tragedie of “Romeo and Iuliet” in Shakespeare’s Plays in Quarto*, eds. Michael J. B. Allen and Kenneth Muir (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1981), sig. G3^v.

¹⁴ This idea is of course not new, but here again the physical conditions for which Shakespeare was writing probably required this relocation of the action, a necessary descent which also has the effect of visually reinforcing thematic concerns.

¹⁵ Arthur Brooke, *The Tragicall Historie of Romeus and Iuliet*, in *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. I, ed. Geoffrey Bullough (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), ll. 1667–72. There are at least 29 direct references to “Fortune” in Brooke’s poem; of these, 9 specific allusions to her wheel and its motion are concentrated at the point when the lovers must part. Fortune is also a central element of analogous stories of Hero and Leander, Pyramus and Thisbe, Tristan and Isolde. In his introduction to the Cambridge edition, Evans notes that Chaucer’s *Troilus and Cressyde*, “leaves its mark strongly” on Brooke’s poem, “and, independently perhaps, on Shakespeare’s play itself” (p. 6). However, Evans does not refer to Fortune in his discussion of the staging.

lieve that Shakespeare makes a merely perfunctory acknowledgment of his source's attitude to Fortune—indeed, its theme.¹⁶

If, however, dialogue is considered in relation to staging, it becomes apparent how the idea of Fortune's process is essential to creating the experience of the play in performance. The movement from the two scenes above at the fictional window of Juliet's bed chamber, to the scenes on the stage level in Juliet's chamber and later in the tomb is a physical movement from high to low: metaphorically a half-turn of Fortune's wheel. But while taken literally the dialogue describes this downward movement, the pervasive wordplay implies elevation, inviting the audience to perceive not funeral but marriage, not death but life. It is sometimes considered romantic wishful thinking to speak of "transcendence" when discussing the after-life of Romeo and Juliet—"out of the pit of payne"—but this is the implication of a verbal-visual combination that reflects, and theatricalizes, the play's source.¹⁷

Significantly, the oxymoronic imagery of the play—bitter and sweet, rising and sinking, darkness and light—is the same as that conventionally associated with Fortune in medieval literature. In his study of the subject, Howard Patch lists the numerous "cults" of Fortune in the

¹⁶ In his introduction to the Arden edition Gibbons says, "Brooke's chief contribution is his emphasis on the power of the 'blynyfold goddess' 'fierce Fortune' throughout the story, providing a perspective which distinctly recalls Chaucer, and without which the verbal borrowings would have little significance" (*Romeo and Juliet* [London and New York: Methuen, 1980], 36). Critics and students of the play have long disagreed over the role of Fortune/fate in determining the lovers' deaths; but in bringing modern sensibilities to bear on not only the idea of Fortune but the stage itself, we are perhaps introducing problems that the audience for which the play was written would not have perceived.

¹⁷ In *Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1983), Frederick Kiefer suggests that in *Romeo and Juliet* Shakespeare "was inspired . . . by the . . . literary and iconographic tradition which had long given representation to Love, Fortune, and Death" (p. 179). And that Shakespeare, "subordinates the unruly phenomena of passion, accident, and sudden death to a formal pattern, familiar and explicable" (p. 180). See also Gibbons's Arden introduction, p. 59. Two contemporary plays dealing with this trio are Kyd's(?) *Soliman and Perseda* (c. 1592-99, Q1599) (Tudor Facsimile Texts, ed. John S. Farmer, 1912), and the anonymous *The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune* (1582?, Q1589), Malone Society Reprint, prepared by W. W. Greg (Oxford University Press, 1930). For a history of the debate between the three forces see *The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune*, ed. John Isaac Owen (New York and London: Garland, 1979), 81-151.

This is the idea behind David Bevington's discussion of the play's action. "Vertical ascent is . . . the means by which Romeo must attain Juliet, and it becomes the dominant image of his aspiring hopes. . . . The visual emphasis on the lovers' last living moments together is . . . on descent The vertical metaphor of fallen fortune and separation is thus related to the metaphoric use of space at the play's end in Juliet's tomb, where Romeo undertakes to 'descend into this bed of death'" (*Action is Eloquence*, 112).

Middle Ages, among them those of love, of the sea, of death, and of time. He quotes several relevant passages; for example, "As we thirst for her gifts, so Fortune gives us sweet and bitter to drink, by turns honey and gall." And he describes the long literary history of Fortune as a guide of ships.¹⁸ More particularly, he discusses the iconography of Fortune's Wheel: its rising and falling imagery and especially the fact that the wheel is sometimes described or pictured as having a pit or grave beneath it. Of significance in the context of *Romeo and Juliet* is Patch's intriguing observation that while the pit is not always an element, "The idea of the pit appears again, however, in Painter's translation of Boaiustau's paraphrase of *Romeo e Guiletta*."¹⁹ In Painter, for a month after their marriage Romeo and Juliet met in her chamber, "vntil Lady fortune enuious of their prosperity, turned hir Wheele to tumble the[m] into such a bottomlesse pit, as they payed hir vsury for their pleasures past, by a certayne most cruel and pitiful death."²⁰ This imagery does not occur in Brooke's version.

Besides repeatedly emphasizing the fickleness of Fortune, Brooke also acknowledges her more positive "up" side:

The world is alway full of chaunces and chaunge,
 Wherefore the chaunge of chaunce must not seeme to a wise man straunge.
 For tickel Fortune doth, in chaunging but her kind,
 But all her chaunges cannot chaunge a steady constant minde.
 Though wavering Fortune toorne from thee her smyling face,
 And sorow seeke to set him selfe, in banished pleasures place,
 Yet may thy marred state, be mended in a while,
 And she eftsones that frowneth now, with pleasant cheere shall smyle.
 For as her happy state, no long whyle standeth sure,
 Even so the heavy plight she brings, not always doth endure.

(ll. 1403–12)

In his dramatization of the story, Shakespeare calls up this imagery, taking the idea of Fortune full circle, as it were. The unlocalized Eliza-

¹⁸ *The Goddess Fortuna in Medieval Literature* (1927, New York: Octagon, 1967), 89ff., 52, and 101–7. This imagery and the oxymorons of the play are also of course Petrarchan. See Jill L. Levenson, "The Definition of Love: Shakespeare's Phrasing in *Romeo and Juliet*," *ShStud* 15 (1982): 21–36.

¹⁹ Patch, 162 n.2.

²⁰ William Painter, *The goodly Hystory of the true and constant Loue betweene Rhomeo and Iulietta*, ed. P. A. Daniel, *New Shakespeare Society Publications*, series 3, no. 1 (London: N. Trubner, 1875), 111. Original spelling with the long "s" modernized and ligatures removed.

bethan stage, with a gallery above the main platform, made possible the conflation—or theatrical oxymoron—of rising and falling.

After Juliet is told she must marry Paris, she goes to her bed chamber and prepares to simulate her death. In its staging and language this scene (4.3) clearly anticipates the later one in the tomb; as well, it makes visual the already voiced conflation of bed and bier.²¹ Unlike Romeo in the tomb, Juliet is alone in this scene; but like Romeo's later speech, her soliloquy is explicitly descriptive of her actions—actions an audience would probably have had difficulty seeing since as she speaks Juliet would likely be first near and finally on her bed, which, although probably "thrust out," would have been equipped with canopy and curtains restricting visibility:²²

My dismall sceane I needs must act alone.
Come Violl.
What if this mixture do not worke at all?
Shall I be married then to morrow morning?
No, no, this shall forbid it, lie thou there.
(ll. 2368–72)

In Q1, the lack of specificity in the last sentence is removed: "Knife, lye thou there" (sig. H4^v). This suggests a desire—Shakespeare's, an actor's—to indicate that Juliet was placing a knife nearby (on the bed?) as an alternative means of self-destruction.²³

Most of the rest of Juliet's soliloquy is concerned with her fearful imaginings of waking in the tomb. Besides introducing heavy proleptic irony, the vivid descriptions serve the practical purpose of creating the tomb in the mind's eye of the spectator even before the scene which takes place there. This is especially effective, even necessary, if in 5.3 there would be little for the audience to actually see because of either or both limited staging possibilities and restricted visibility. The speech ends when Juliet, imagining she sees Tybalt's ghost seeking Romeo, drinks the potion: "stay, Tybalt, stay? / Romeo, Romeo, Romeo, heeres drinke, I drinke to thee," or, in the first quarto: "Romeo I come, this doe I drinke to thee" (ll. 2446–47; sig. I1^r). The action-describing words

²¹ See James Black's perceptive discussion of the play's "repeated pictures," *SEL* 15 [1975]: 245–56), especially 245–49.

²² The idea that the higher the gallery, the higher the price of a seat seems particularly at odds with the usually accepted assumption that the bed would have had a canopy, lessening visibility from a height.

²³ The dagger or knife is a Shakespearean addition; it is not in Brooke.

suggest that the oxymoronic ceremony of marriage-in-death has begun here, to be completed in the tomb by first Romeo, then Juliet. Furthering this idea, Q₁ ends the scene with the stage direction, "*She fals upon her bed within the Curtaines.*"²⁴ Juliet's long speech here, in which she vividly imagines the tomb and Tybalt's ghost, combined with the lamentations of the others immediately following, are preparation for her later death—in fact, Juliet is as good as dead from this point in the action. If Juliet's bed was in the same location as the tomb, the foreshadowing would have been visual as well. Certainly, when it comes Juliet's final short speech in 5.3 completes and affirms what is enacted here.²⁵

When the Nurse enters to awaken Juliet, the focus of the action is once more the curtain-enclosed bed. The Nurse's speech is very like Romeo's later in the tomb: she speaks to another who cannot hear, and describes more than an audience can see (4.4.2435–50). As the Capulets, Paris, and the Friar enter, the dialogue implies that they go to the bed to see the dead Juliet for themselves. At their exit Q₁ again provides some corroboration that visibility would have been restricted by a curtain fixture, necessitating the descriptive dialogue: "*They all but the Nurse goe forth, casting Rosemary on her and shutting the Curtns*" (sig. 12^v). Regardless of whether the bed was located within a recess in the tiring house

²⁴ See Brian Gibbons's note in the Arden edition to this stage direction and to 5.3.48. That Brooke makes no mention of curtains is not surprising since they were a property of the stage for which Shakespeare was writing; the phrasing of the stage direction permits several interpretations: bed curtains, a curtained enclosure for the bed in front of the tiring house, or curtains hiding the bed from view in the discovery space. For a discussion and list of similar scenes, see Richard Hosley, "The Staging of Desdemona's Bed," *SQ* 14 (1963): 57–65.

²⁵ In "The Marriage of Good and Bad Quartos," *SQ* 33 (1982): 421–31, Randall McLeod (i.e., Randall McLeod) addresses the issue of repetitious passages in Q₂ usually considered to be errors on the part of the printer (and/or Shakespeare). One is the Friar's speech to Juliet:

Then as the manner of our countrie is,
In thy best robes vncovered on the Beere,
Be borne to buriall in thy kindreds graue:
Thou shall be borne to that same auncient vault,
Where all the kindred of the *Capulets* lie.
(Q₂, sig. I₃^v; modernized print)

Cloud/McLeod argues: "there is no evidence to show that the printing is accidental (which notion implies that the printer did not obey a delete in the manuscript, or that the version edited out was the first version, or even that it is a 'version'—that is, the author's attempt to express something which he then tried to express alternatively" (425). With my argument in mind, it is interesting that the repetition occurs as the Friar describes—emphasizes?—unstaged events leading up to the tomb scene (which Balthazar later repeats [5.1.2592–95]).

wall below the gallery, or in a specially built semi-enclosed space (with a playing area above it) forward of the tiring house, or was thrust out from the tiring house, the actor on/within it would have been difficult for a spectator to see.

The Q1 direction for the curtains to be shut at the end of the bed chamber scene makes it possible to speculate that the bed was not pushed back into a tiring house recess but remained on stage with its curtains closed until the tomb scene, only 160 lines later, when Romeo finds Juliet dead. Not only the conventions of the unlocalized stage, but staging practicality would seem to dictate a verbal—and visual—metamorphosis of bed into bier.²⁶ Certainly the intervening dialogue helps to create just such a transition, or duality. When Balthasar tells Romeo that Juliet's "body sleepes in *Capels* monument," Romeo vows "Well *Iuliet*, I will lie with thee to night" (5.1.2593, 2609). After buying the poison Romeo apostrophizes, "Come Cordiall and not poyson, go with me / To *Iuliets* graue, for there must I vse thee" (2660–61). And Friar Laurence's last words before 5.3 begin to describe Juliet as, "Poore liuing Coarse, closde in a dead mans Tombe" (5.2.2690).

Comparisons of Brooke's poem with the two quartos suggest that at some points Shakespeare's purpose is thematic scene-painting, thus he echoes Brooke without intending to be taken literally. In 5.3 for example, Romeo tells Balthasar that he, "descend[s] into this bed of death" (l. 2718), but he is explaining what he *will* do, not what he is doing; as well, the visual, literal descent has already occurred, and been proleptically described, in 3.5. In that scene, Romeo's climb down from the gallery would have been very visible, whereas a descent into a trap—which one might postulate here, taking Romeo's words literally—would seem to complicate things unnecessarily, especially since later the bodies must be visible. As soon as Balthasar leaves, Romeo's more literal action-describing begins:

Thou detestable mawe, thou wombe of death,
Gorg'd with the dearest morsell of the earth:
Thus I enforce thy rotten Iawes to open,
And in despight ile cram thee with more foode.
(ll. 2735–38)

Q1 provides the stage direction, "*Romeo opens the tombe*" (sig. K1^r), which, while not necessarily reliable since it could anticipate a later

²⁶ While there seems to me much to recommend this staging, there is also no evidence that it was used here—or in any other play of the period, for that matter.

action, is likely accurate—although what he opens is not at all clear. If the curtained bed has been pushed into the discovery space, perhaps Romeo opens a door or curtains in the tiring house wall; if, as I have speculated, the bed is still on stage in front of the tiring house, he could part the curtains; either way, it is probable that what was bed chamber and bed is transformed into tomb and bier, and his subsequent words and actions emphasize the ironic change. At first Romeo does no more than open the tomb because he is interrupted by Paris. Only after he has killed Paris does Romeo actually respond to his request, “Open the Tombe, lay me with *Iuliet*” (l. 2763). Romeo’s ensuing speech both describes his actions and gives them thematic significance.

Romeo speaks a one-sided dialogue, addressing silent others with whom he shares the stage. And the action-describing specificity of his words prompts my inference that, in part, this visual quality of the speech results from Shakespeare wanting to help the audience picture what would have been difficult for them to see because of the staging.²⁷ First Romeo speaks to the dead Paris, not only inviting us to perceive their similarities and differences, but also describing his actions and the scene:

O giue me thy hand,
 One writ with me in sowre misfortunes booke,
 Ile bury thee in a triumphant graue.
 A Graue, O no. A Lanthorne slaughtred youth:
 For here lies *Iuliet*, and her bewtie makes
 This Vault a feasting presence full of light.
 Death lie thou there by a dead man interd.

(ll. 2771-77)

If “this vault” is intended to give “a local habitation and a name”²⁸ to what has previously been Juliet’s bed and bed chamber, the pervasive verbal oxymorons take physical form most clearly here. The fictional chamber above where Romeo and Juliet have consummated their marriage has, by degrees, become the tomb below where the ceremony will

²⁷ James Black’s otherwise perceptive analysis provides an example of how this problem usually goes unrecognized. At one point he says that in 5.3 the bodies of Tybalt, Paris, Romeo, and Juliet lie “in plain sight” (p. 250); later he observes that the “true focus of this stage picture is unquestionably the dead bodies in the tomb or inner stage” (p. 252). He is not alone in assuming both visibility and a staging that would restrict it, but it is a modern and untheatrical assumption.

²⁸ *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, 5.1.17. This and subsequent quotations from plays other than *Romeo and Juliet*, are taken from *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, gen. eds. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

be completed. The “light” of Juliet—of love—seen by Romeo through her window in 2.1 now illuminates the tomb for him—and, metaphorically, for the audience.

Having fulfilled Paris’s dying request, Romeo shifts his attention to Juliet. His words, besides being ironic reminders to the audience that Juliet is not dead, are also a practical necessity since they describe what no theatre audience can really see, regardless of the staging:

O my Loue, my wife,
Death that hath suckt the honey of thy breath,
Hath had no power yet vpon thy bewtie:
Thou art not conquerd, bewties ensigne yet
Is crymson in thy lips and in thy cheeks,
And deaths pale flag is not aduanced there.

(ll. 2781–86)

Because the verbal emphasis is on Romeo’s perception of Juliet and a spectator’s ability to see her is almost inevitably restricted, the audience’s knowledge that she is alive is set against Romeo’s belief that she is dead but does not “yet” show it. Furthermore, Romeo, “a dead man,” speaks to his “dead” wife before the adjectives are true—“too early” in the context of the action, but right on time dramatically and thematically, as the language gradually prepares the audience for what is to come.

Having again anticipated the lovers’ deaths, Shakespeare has Romeo briefly shift his attention to the dead Tybalt and once more the speech is also a description of action not easily seen.²⁹ Note how it is voiced as questions, which act as reminders that those to whom Romeo speaks cannot answer, and why:

Tybalt lyst thou there in thy bloudie sheet?
O what more fauour can I do to thee,
Then with that hand that cut thy youth in twaine,
To sunder his that was thineemie
Forgiue me Couzen. Ah deare *Iuliet*
Why art thou yet so faire?

(ll. 2787–92)

By placing Romeo’s address to Tybalt between his words to Juliet, Shakespeare makes explicit the relationship between love and hate

²⁹ In “Much Virtue in ‘As,’” Alan Dessen poses the intriguing question, “does Romeo’s reference to Tybalt . . . ‘require’ that a spectator see a ‘real’ body or does Romeo ‘create’ the corpse by conjuring it up in our imaginations . . . ?” (p. 135).

which has governed the play and brought Romeo Montague to the Capulet tomb to die.

In turning verbally—and visually—back to Juliet, Romeo moves further into the world of “death,” which he personifies as a competing suitor—Death as Love:

Shall I beleue
That vnsubstantiall death is amorous,
And that the leane abhorred monster keeps
Thee here in darke to be his parramour?
For feare of that I still will staie with thee,
And neuer from this pallat of dym night
Depart againe, here, here, will I remaine,
With wormes that are thy Chamber-maides: O, here
Will I set vp my euerlasting rest:
And shake the yoke of inauspicious starres,
From this world wearied flesh . . .

(ll. 2792–2802)

Shakespeare emphasizes the location of the speech—the tomb—but in doing so he conflates it with the bedchamber: “pallat,” “chamber-maides,” “euerlasting rest.” Furthermore, he has Romeo reintroduce his rejection of fate, or Fortune, begun with “then I defie you starres” (5.1.2599). Whereas at first Romeo was content to let “he that hath the stirrage of [his] course, / Direct [his] saile” (1.4.571–72), now he acts to take control. But there are indications that it is not this simple: can he “shake the yoke of inauspicious starres” any more than he can “doff” his name, or are the greater forces of Love, Fortune, and Death actually in control—and if so, which will prevail? Again, the use of the stage and language are combined to direct an audience’s response.

If Romeo’s last speech is as much description of staging and action as thematic rumination, nowhere is this more apparent than at its conclusion—when the important business of an actor bending over a reclining body would be difficult to see:

eyes looke your last:
Armes, take your last embrace: And lips, O you
The doores of breath, seale with a righteous kisse
A dateless bargaine to ingrossing death:
Come bitter conduct, come vnsauoury guide,
Thou desperate Pilot, now at once run on
The dashing Rocks thy seasick weary barke:
Heeres to my Loue.

O true Apothecary:
 Thy drugs are quicke. Thus with a kisse I die.
 (ll. 2802–10)

Romeo's last line, often celebrated for its oxymoron-resolving word-play, is also a detailed description of action. At this crucial thematic moment Shakespeare leaves little to chance by inviting an actor to "suit the action to the word, the word to the action."³⁰

At this point Friar Laurence enters and begins his lament; notably, his language does not scene-paint or describe action until he goes to the "sepulchre" — wherever it was that the bodies lay:

Alack alack, what bloud is this which stains
 The stony entrance of this Sepulchre?
 What meane these maisterlesse and goarie swords
 To lie discolour'd by this place of peace?
Romeo, oh pale! who else, what *Paris* too?
 And steept in bloud? ah, what an vnkind hower
 Is guiltie of this lamentable chance?
 The Lady stirres.

(ll. 2830–37)

In explaining events to Juliet, the Friar also describes the scene to the audience—certainly a device of emphasis, but also probably again serving a practical purpose since many in the audience could not (and never can) see clearly for themselves: "Thy husband in thy bosome there lies dead" (l. 2845).³¹ When the Friar urges Juliet to go with him she refuses and—alone as before in her bed chamber—turns her attention to what she sees, her one-sided dialogue with her dead husband making explicit for the audience her last actions:

Whats heere? a cup closd in my true loues hand?
 Poison I see hath bin his timelesse end:
 O churle, drunke all, and left no friendly drop
 To help me after, I will kisse thy lips,

³⁰ *Hamlet*, 3.2.17–18. Romeo's last line is the same in both quartos, despite numerous differences through the speech.

³¹ James Black observes that "Romeo and Juliet come together at the Friar's cell to be married in II.vi; in IV.i Paris and Juliet also meet there. The scenes are similar in arrangement: priest and bridegroom enter and talk about the marriage, and are joined by the lady, whereupon the young couple talk exclusively to one another" (*SEL* 15 [1975]:248). Curiously, he does not note the third, completing repetition in 5.3 when Romeo, Paris, Juliet and the Friar are again together in/at/in front of the tomb—probably the same stage space that earlier represented the Friar's cell, or the door to it.

Happlie some poyson yet doth hang on them,
 To make me dye with a restoratiue.
 Thy lips are warme.

(ll. 2851-57)

Here the watchman's voice interrupts and, fearing intervention, Juliet acts: "O happy dagger / This is thy sheath, there rust, and let me dye" (ll. 2858-59). By introducing the possibility that Juliet will be prevented from acting, Shakespeare not only makes plausible her brevity, but also fosters the audience's acceptance—even encouragement—of the action that ensures her joining Romeo in death. Similarly, in Painter, as she is about to kill herself Iulietta directs the reader's response: "Ah, happy and fortunate graue which shalt serue in world to come for witnessse of the most perfect aliaunce that euer was between two most unfortunate louers" (p. 138). In the play, Juliet's kiss not only answers Romeo's, but also echoes and completes their first meeting, with its more than "holy Palmers kis" (1.5.673). As well, the poison and dagger, twice called attention to here in the tomb, are reminders of Juliet's vial and weapon in the bed chamber scene. Actions, staging and props are repeatedly used to convey opposites which are transformed by events into likenesses.

With Romeo's and Juliet's deaths the movement of the two lovers through the play is complete. Critical discussion of their final speeches often focuses on how the language of love, life, and marriage—the elements of comedy—is used by the protagonists to describe their deaths—events of tragedy. As noted, this essentially theatrical conflict—words contradicting actions—has been prepared for from the play's first moments by the numerous oxymorons. But if the opposites of wedding bed and bier are to be understood by the audience as key signifiers of a finally resolved whole, this scene in the tomb will direct that perception. And the specific quality of the resolution, conveyed by what the lovers say, is a product of the relationship between, on the one hand, the necessities and conventions of Elizabethan staging, and, on the other, Brooke's poem with its description of the tomb scene and emphasis on Fortune.

Although Romeo believes he is acting in defiance of the "stars" and being his own "pilot," his actions at the end are determined from the start—when his love for Juliet in a world of hate places him on Fortune's wheel, making the downward motion inevitable, but iconographically and thematically implying an upward movement to follow. Romeo's "pilgrimage" to the Capulet monument to join his wife in the tomb as he has in the bed chamber is an affirmation of the power of love over

hate. As both the visual bed-bier conflation and the sexual puns of their dying speeches suggest, the two transcend the world that has destroyed them. At his end Romeo might say, "The wheel is come full circle. I am here"³²—not in acquiescence and defeat as Edmund, but in affirmation and triumph. The language of Romeo and Juliet in the tomb tells us that for them the bitter is sweet, the darkness, light. An audience saddened by the lovers' deaths is prompted not only to accept their inevitability but also to see Romeo and Juliet as having risen metaphorically above the world of competing, inanimate statues they leave behind. In the terms of the medieval concepts that linger behind the play's language and staging, Love triumphs over Fortune and Death.³³

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³² *The Tragedy of King Lear*, 5.3.165.

³³ That the play embodies the ideas of medieval *tragedie* is the argument of John Lawlor in "Romeo and Juliet," *Early Shakespeare* (London: Edward Arnold, 1961), 123–43. He says, "[w]hat we see in the close of *Romeo and Juliet* is not simply a renewal of a pattern disturbed, but its re-ordering; life is not continued merely; it is regenerated. Only thus do we experience the quality of a 'Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear.' It is earth, the realm of Fortune, that is the loser. . . . so this love is placed, fittingly, at once beyond reach and beyond change" (p. 127).