

# Adrian Noble and Language in *Romeo and Juliet*

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It is often said that Shakespeare is “myriad-minded”. This is probably why directors and actors in every age have been attracted to his plays. The kaleidoscopic, flexible nature of his plays allows them to meet the demands of each age. One good example is *Romeo and Juliet*, which, roughly speaking, has been as popular as *Hamlet* in the theatre.<sup>1</sup> Like other Shakespearean plays, however, it had been revived exclusively through adapted forms until the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> In these adaptations, the words in the original text(s) and even the plot would be changed to suit the tastes of new audiences. In this way, *Romeo and Juliet* was made their “contemporary”. It is only since the middle of the nineteenth century that directors have attempted to be as loyal as possible to the original text. But as is often the case with classical drama, how to deal with the linguistic difference created by the lapse of time remains a crucial matter. In addition, *Romeo and Juliet*’s highly rhetorical, poetic use of language is an unfamiliar mode of drama for modern audiences. The production of the Royal Shakespeare Company directed by Adrian

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<sup>1</sup> Jill L. Levenson, introduction, *Romeo and Juliet*, by William Shakespeare, ed. Levenson (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000) 69–70.

<sup>2</sup> Charlotte Cushman used Shakespeare’s text in 1845 for the first time since the Restoration.

Noble in 1995<sup>3</sup> seems to be good material to discuss how the handling of these linguistic aspects affects the whole representation of the play.

The central element of *Romeo and Juliet* is arguably the portrayal of youthful passion. This is exactly what Adrian Noble aimed to impress on the audience in the production. As George L. Geckle stated, this interpretive approach was clarified in the programme for the production with “four full pages of quotations from writers and critics on the subjects of love, passion, death, and suicide”.<sup>4</sup> This emphasis was, of course, evident in its staging. When Zubin Varla’s Romeo and Lucy Whybrow’s Juliet first exchanged words at the Capulets’ ball, Romeo embraced Juliet from behind at the foreground of the stage, both of them facing to the audience (fig. 1). This shows Noble’s attempt to express their passion more directly to the audience than is conventionally seen. Likewise, in the balcony scene, Romeo revealed his deep adoration for her in his asides, often looking back at the audience. Moreover, the two actors employed somewhat exaggerated gestures when their parts demanded expression of their intense feelings. Several reviewers, in fact, referred to Varla’s stamping his feet in particular.<sup>5</sup> The production, however, seems to

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<sup>3</sup> Adrian Noble, dir., *Romeo and Juliet*, by William Shakespeare, perf. Zubin Verla, Lucy Whybrow, and Julian Glover, The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, 30 Mar. 1995 – 25 Jan. 1996.

<sup>4</sup> George L. Gickle, rev. of *Romeo and Juliet*, dir. Adrian Noble, *Shakespeare Bulletin* 14. 1 (1996): 11.

<sup>5</sup> For example, we can see such descriptions as “his [Varla’s] insistent stamping of a foot” (Nicholas de Jongh, rev. of *Romeo and Juliet*, dir. Adrian Noble, *Evening Standard* 6 Apr. 1995); “Romeo stamps his right foot in temper, hoists his left knee when in need of comfort” (Alastair Macaulay, rev. of *Romeo and Juliet*, dir. Adrian Noble, *Financial Times* 7 Apr. 1995); ↗

have accomplished its aim for a limited number of reviewers and critics. Alastair Macaulay, for instance, stated that “this is the first Romeo in years where my eyes started with tears at several points, and where the play – one of Shakespeare’s dramatically simplest – held me riveted from first to last”.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, most reviewers shared the following view of Michael Coveney :

Overall, instead of passion and tears, we have babyish petulance and screeching. Romeo stamps his feet too much and Juliet should join a pony club<sup>7</sup>

Curiously enough, reviewers such as James Christopher and Paul Lapworth also remarked that one of the features of the production was “petulance” rather than passion.<sup>8</sup> Why did the production result

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↘ and “Romeo’s foot-stamping frustration” (Paul Lapworth, rev. of *Romeo and Juliet*, dir. Adrian Noble, *Herald* 13 Apr. 1995).

<sup>6</sup> Alastair Macaulay, rev. of *Romeo and Juliet*, dir. Adrian Noble, *Financial Times* 7 Apr. 1995. Charles Spencer agrees with her view, stating that “during Adrian Noble’s entrancing production, I was sometimes watching the stage through a mist of tears. It is a staging that effectively demolishes weary cynicism” (“Rediscovering the Bloom of Young Love”, rev. of *Romeo and Juliet*, dir. Adrian Noble, *Daily Telegraph* 7 Apr. 1995).

<sup>7</sup> Michael Coveney, “Greed, Lust and Cowardly Culprits”, rev. of *Romeo and Juliet*, dir. Adrian Noble, *Observer* 9 Apr. 1995. Those critics who did not find the production successful include Nicholas de Jongh, George L. Gickle, Paul Lapworth, Michael Billington (“A Noble Failure”, rev. of *Romeo and Juliet*, dir. Adrian Noble, *Guardian* 7 Apr. 1995), Benedict Nightingale (“Sonnetering without the sex”, rev. of *Romeo and Juliet*, dir. Adrian Noble, *Times* 7 Apr. 1995), Peter Holland (“Shakespeare Performances in England 1995–1996”, *Shakespeare Survey* 49 (1996): 242–245), and Russell Jackson (“Shakespeare at Stratford-upon-Avon, 1995–1996”, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 47. 1–4 (1996): 321–322).

<sup>8</sup> James Christopher stated that “Varla’s Romeo seems spurred by petulance rather than passion” (rev. of *Romeo and Juliet*, dir. Adrian Noble, *Time* ↗)

in this apparent failure, in spite of Noble's seemingly sensible and orthodox approach? Why was petulance born instead of passion? Some reviewers attribute this to the immature acting skill of the two leading actors.<sup>9</sup> But there seems to be another reason to explain the major problems of the production, which stems from Noble's directorial line.

The elaborate sets of the production were designed by Kendra Ulliyart. The action was set in the late nineteenth- or early twentieth-century Mediterranean, and this atmosphere was sustained by the settings of outdoor cafes as public place in Verona. Noble used at least three cafes, and his rather naturalistic approach can especially be seen in the events happening in these cafes. In the cafe used most frequently, Mark Lockyer's Mercutio suffered a hangover; Lawrence, delivering the speech beginning with "The grey-eyed morn smiles on the frowning night" (2.3.1),<sup>10</sup> had his morning coffee before gathering "baleful weeds and precious-juiced flowers" (8), and looked at some flowers in a vase when he said "Within the infant rind of this weak flower / Poison hath residence, and medicine power" (22-23); and

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↘ *Out* 4 Apr. 1995). Lapworth commented that "Romeo's foot-stamping frustration became obtrusively petulant".

<sup>9</sup> For example, Nicholas de Jongh stated that "the two little players are not quite up to the difficult task" that the director assigns to them. Paul Taylor pointed out the general tendency of Varla's acting: "in the tomb, you feel that his [Varla's] performance is too busy watching itself in some mental mirror. Unlike many recent Romeos, Varla is infatuated; with whom he is infatuated is sometimes little unclear" (rev. of *Romeo and Juliet*, dir. Adrian Noble, *Independent* 7 Apr. 1995).

<sup>10</sup> All the citations from *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare are from the New Cambridge Shakespeare, on which the production was based: G. Blakemore Evans, ed., *Romeo and Juliet*, by William Shakespeare (1984; Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996).

the waiters asked the characters to pay for a cup of coffee and spoke short casual lines to them, such as “good morning”, which are not in the original text. The Capulets’ ball was also represented on the stage in a realistic, or naturalistic, way (fig. 2); the stage teemed with people, and a man manipulating a puppet amused some children excluded from the dancing of the adults.<sup>11</sup>

The use of realistic sets inevitably entails the necessity of changing them according to the locations of scenes. One of the few strengths of the production is that the sets were changed with speed and smoothness, so as not to disturb the intrinsically swift pace of the play. A cafe in 1.4 turned into Juliet’s chamber in just a few moments. Besides the mobility of the sets, the characters’ ways of entering and leaving the stage and the effective use of lighting served to further maintain the fast pace. For instance, when the production proceeded from 3.2 to 3.3, before Juliet and the Nurse exited completely from the stage, Romeo and Lawrence appeared before the audience. The restrained use of lighting facilitated this simultaneous movement of the two sets of characters.

The use of lighting also worked symbolically. In the last half of the play, the dimness of the light and the dark clothes of such characters as Lawrence and the Capulets made an interesting contrast with the white clothes of Romeo and Juliet. This not only stressed Juliet’s solitude and perplexity in her adversity, but also enacted the contrast between images of light and darkness

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<sup>11</sup> The full instructions in the promptbook kept in the Shakespeare Centre Library in Stratford-upon-Avon show the elaborate choreography and design of the scene.

which Caroline Spurgeon points out.<sup>12</sup> The realistic details of the sets may also imply some symbolic meanings. The closed parasol in the cafe can function as a phallic symbol. The iron gates with spear-like bars in the scenes at Capulet's house might signify the bitterness of the feud and inevitable obstacle to the love between Romeo and Juliet. They appeared not only to protect Juliet but also to deprive her of her liberty at the same time. Indeed, the production employed at least three gates of different size and shape in different scenes, which served to reiterate this paradox.

Realistic sets themselves are not necessarily a problem, unless they disturb the swift pace of the play. *Romeo and Juliet*, of course, has a quality that allows a variety of historical or cultural contexts and settings. By placing it in a specific context, a director can magnify certain aspects and provide the audience with a fresh way of looking at the play. But some of the realistic details in this production did not stem from an acute, consistent interpretation by the director. One example is the use of the cafe, especially in the payment of the money. Trevor Nunn also used a cafe in his recent production of *The Merchant of Venice*.<sup>13</sup> Here, the waiters were obsessed with asking the customers to pay the bill, and some characters ran away from the cafe without paying it. These are episodes inserted into the text by Nunn himself. But one must admit that they are ingenious directions that endow the realistic sets with a thematic function, since

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<sup>12</sup> Caroline Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us* (1937; Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999) 310.

<sup>13</sup> Trevor Nunn, dir., *The Merchant of Venice*, by William Shakespeare, perf. David Bamber and Henry Goodman, The Olivier Theatre, London, from 1999 to 2000.

*The Merchant of Venice* is inextricably linked to economy, especially capitalism. In the production of *Romeo and Juliet* under discussion, the characters also paid the bill in the cafe. But compared with *The Merchant of Venice*, *Romeo and Juliet* seems less concerned with economy.

It is true that there are some episodes involving monetary matters in the play. Romeo tries to give money to the Nurse for her errand, and also pays the Apothecary for poison, saying “There is thy gold, worse poison to men’s souls, /.../ I sell thee poison, thou hast sold me none” (5.1.80). Perhaps the characters at the cafe sell “poison” to the waiters, paying their bill? More significantly, the fathers of the protagonists promised each other to build the golden statues of their deceased children. While one may argue that the “pure” love of the protagonists is replaced by the monetary and political negotiation between the two powerful families, these statues can also signify long-continued celebration of their love.<sup>14</sup> In fact, Michael Bogdanov had also used a cafe in a similar way in the production of *Romeo and Juliet* before Noble did.<sup>15</sup> But, in Jill L. Levenson’s words, Bogdanov made “the feud a capitalist disaster in late twentieth-century terms”, and “the lovers’ tragedy became, in the closing scene, a stunning media event”.<sup>16</sup> The cafe in Bogdanov’s production contributed to the representation of the modern, capitalist society on the stage. On the

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<sup>14</sup> James L. Calderwood argues that part of the function of the golden statues is to indicate the “expressive stillness”: James L. Calderwood, *Shakespearean Metadrama* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 1971) 109.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Bogdanov, dir., *Romeo and Juliet*, by William Shakespeare, perf. Sean Bean and Niamh Cusack, The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, 1986.

<sup>16</sup> Levenson 89.

other hand, in Noble's production, the cafe is not really relevant to the type of the society he represented.

Another confusing point for the audience is that Noble used a stylized yet realistic set at the same time in 3.5. At first, the lovers were in a bedroom that had huge long draperies as a backdrop. Then, Romeo and Juliet went behind the draperies. In the next moment, the draperies opened, and then appeared the balcony that had the two lovers on it. The bed sank into a trap while the stage except for the balcony was unlit. At first glance, this reminds us of the use of the limited space in the Elizabethan theatre, but it is rather a serial presentation of two realistic scenes. The speed of change of these two sets was a *tour de force* on the part of Ulliyart. However, ironically, it created a comical effect: the change was so swift that Romeo descending from the balcony appeared to go back to the bedroom again, saying "Adieu, Adieu".

Also confusing is the swing in 3.2, where the Nurse brings the news of Tybalt's death and Romeo's banishment (fig. 3). In this scene, Noble used the same set as in 2.4, where the Nurse also brings some news from Romeo to Juliet. The notable differences in 3.2 were some laundry on a washing line above on the stage, and a swing hung by long strings from the ceiling of the stage. From this swing, Juliet delivered the speech beginning with "Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds" (3.2.1). Noble's intention to use this swing is evidently to emphasize Juliet's impetuosity. The movement of the swing may also reflect the sexual connotation in the speech. But where is this swing located in the world of the play? Where does the Nurse bring the news to Juliet? Irving Wardle took it for "a city



square”,<sup>17</sup> but for Geckle it was Juliet’s courtyard.<sup>18</sup> In either case, this somewhat symbolical use of the swing placed within the context of realistic scenes may have perplexed the audience rather than realized Noble’s aim.

But even if the audience was not bothered by the location of the swing, it contains more serious problems, indicating Noble’s attitude towards the language in *Romeo and Juliet*. A problem on a practical level is that the swinging backwards and forwards made the words in the speech hard to catch. Peter Holland stated that “no Juliet can be expected to make the language of ‘Gallop apace’ do its work when she is stuck on a swing”.<sup>19</sup> Noble does not seem to have paid enough attention to the clear delivery of the words to the audience. More significantly, this swing indicates his thought that the speech “Gallop apace” cannot fully represent Juliet’s impatience and passion by itself, and his concern that modern audiences may not understand the words to the full extent. He pursued visual images rather than relying on or trusting the effect of the words.

Noble treated or interpreted some words in a naturalistic way that also seems to come from his disregard for the words. According to the text, in 1.1, Romeo makes poetic speeches and seems to fall in love with his own rhetoric, but Varla’s Romeo did not. Noble’s concern seems to have been how to make these unnaturally rhetorical words sound natural. In this production, Romeo spoke casually to Benvolio as if his words were from a natural conversation. What

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<sup>17</sup> Irving Wardle, “Private Vices on Parade”, rev. of *Romeo and Juliet*, dir. Adrian Noble, *Independent* 9 Apr. 1995.

<sup>18</sup> Geckle 12.

<sup>19</sup> Holland 245.

facilitated the realistic way of delivering those rhetorical words was the use of menus passed to them at the cafe, and the cutting of the twenty lines that include :

For beauty starved with her severity  
Cuts beauty off from all posterity.  
She is too fair, too wise, wisely too fair,  
To merit bliss by making me despair (1.1.210 – 213).

From a realistic, or naturalistic, perspective, a person delivering such a rhymed speech is too self-conscious and too unnatural.

Similar direction is found in the treatment of Mercutio's speeches. As Russell Jackson describes, "Mark Lockyer's Mercutio was clearly disturbed. The Queen Mab speech started as exhibitionism and became a dark, unnerving descent into sexual disgust, a dangerous mood from which his friends had to help him recover".<sup>20</sup> But what is the relationship between the play and Mercutio's distraction? It seems that Noble could not tolerate Mercutio's unnaturally long, poetic speech. The same kind of treatment could be seen in 2.1, which precedes the balcony scene. Here, Mercutio delivered his speech with a glove puppet in his right hand, sometimes ventriloquizing. The audience of the performance of 5th April 1995, recorded on video tape at the Shakespeare Centre Library, often laughed at the movement of his puppet rather than his words.<sup>21</sup>

What is interesting as regards comic effects is that Noble did not

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<sup>20</sup> Jackson 322.

<sup>21</sup> *Romeo and Juliet*, dir. Adrian Noble, The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, The Shakespeare Centre Library, rec. 5 Apr. 1995.

cut a single line from the Nurse's speech in 1.3, though he cut many from the speeches of Romeo, Benvolio, and Mercutio in the early scenes. Even from the beginning of the play up to 3.1, only 8 lines were cut from the Nurse's speeches whereas 34 of Mercutio's lines were cut. Part of the reason for this is that, whereas the comical effect of Mercutio is mainly in his words, that of the Nurse lies in her way of speaking as well as in her words; that is, the comedy comes from the way she ignores the other characters' responses and makes interminably long speeches. By contrast, Mercutio's speech is rhetorically more complicated than that of the Nurse. Such direction of Noble not only indicates some disregard for language but also a tendency of the production to gain an easy laugh.<sup>22</sup>

The words, especially the poetic ones, in the play do not seem to have interested Noble so much. His extensive use of visual effects and gestures may be based on his assumption that modern audiences cannot fully enjoy Shakespeare's language. It is certain that a good many words in Shakespeare's plays are already obsolete. This kind of problem is seen, for example, in the following dialogue between Romeo and Benvolio:

Ben.     Take thou some new infection to thy eye,  
          And the rank poison of the old will die.

Rom.    Your plantain leaf is excellent for that.

Ben.     For what, I pray thee?

Rom.                                    For your broken shin.

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<sup>22</sup> Holland pointed out that the waiter in the cafe dropped a tray "only so that Mercutio could wince and Lockyer gain an easy laugh. The action was solely conditioned by its immediate effect" (Holland 243).

Ben. Why, Romeo, are thou mad?

Rom. Not mad, but bound more than a madman is (1.2.48 – 53).

The editor of the New Cambridge Shakespeare explains that “Plantain leaves were used as poultices for something minor like a ‘broken’ (= skinned) shin. Romeo is sarcastically referring to the stream of proverbial wisdom Benvolio has just let loose as no better than employing a mere poultice when a desperate remedy is needed”.<sup>23</sup> The problem in Noble’s interpretation of this dialogue consists in where Romeo’s “madness” is. Varla’s Romeo literally kicked Benvolio’s shin, and poor Michael Gould’s Benvolio yelled with pain. This is how this Romeo looked “mad”. He did not look madly passionate but just madly violent. And Romeo’s kick and Benvolio’s (or rather Gould’s) scream diverted the attention of the audience from the witty exchange of words. As the detailed commentary of the New Cambridge Shakespeare shows, the modern audience may not understand the whole meaning of the dialogue. Even so, Noble had the option of cutting these lines. This treatment of the dialogue epitomizes the tendency of the production to try to treat words on a physical, not a metaphysical, level and to deprive words of their multi-layered meanings: each line is forced to correspond to each movement of the characters’ psychology as in our everyday reality.

Such an attitude does not place trust in the evocative power of the poetic words. This significantly influenced the representation of the love between Romeo and Juliet because the actors were required

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<sup>23</sup> Evans 67.

to act as if the rhetorical words were the exact reflection of their psychology. The more rhetorical the words became, the more passionately they had to act. This brought about the collapse of the production because *Romeo and Juliet* consists of highly rhetorical speeches. This is bound to be the effect especially when the lovers bemoan their fate. For there are many ways for actors to express negative feelings like grief, by screaming, shedding tears, stamping feet and so forth. This is how petulance instead of passion was evoked in the production, contrary to Noble's intention. One example of this is Whybrow's way of making an imaginative speech in 4.3, in which Juliet drinks Lawrence's potion (fig. 4). Here she imagines what could happen to her in a tomb. In the production, from line 4.5 onward,<sup>24</sup> where Juliet's imagination accelerates, Whybrow's Juliet had to hysterically scream the lines to match her psychology to the highly imaginative words.

Cutting lines from a realistic perspective is also responsible for creating petulance or hysterics rather than passion. The lines Noble

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<sup>24</sup> "Alack, alack, is it not like that I,  
 So early waking – what with loathsome smells,  
 And shrieks like mandrakes' torn out of the earth,  
 That living mortals hearing them run mad—  
 O, if I wake, shall I not be distraught,  
 \* (Environed with all these hideous fears,)  
 And madly play with my forefathers' joints,  
 And pluck the mangled Tybalt from his shroud,  
 And in this rage, with some great kinsman's bone,  
 As with a club, dash out my desp' rate brains?  
 O look! Methinks I see my cousin's ghost  
 Seeking out Romeo that did spit his body  
 Upon a rapier's point. Stay, Tybalt, stay!  
 Romeo, Romeo, Romeo! Here's drink – I drink to thee" (4.3.45–58).  
 \*This line was cut in the production.

cut in 3.2, where Juliet hears the news of Romeo's banishment, include the following :

- 1) Hath Romeo slain himself? Say thou but 'ay',  
And that bare vowel 'I' shall poison more  
Than the death-darting eye of cockatrice.  
I am not I, if there be such an 'ay',  
Or those eyes shut, that makes thee answer 'ay' (3.2.45 – 49);
- 2) To prison, eyes, ne'er look on liberty!  
Vile earth, to earth resign, end motion here,  
And thou and Romeo press one heavy bier! (58 – 60);
- 3) Then, dreadful trumpet, sound the general doom,  
For who is living, if those two are gone? (67 – 68);
- 4) Back, foolish tears, back to your native spring,  
Your tributary drops belong to woe,  
Which you mistaking offer up to joy (102 – 104).

Noble's intention seems clear: placed in this kind of situation, people in reality neither play on the sound "ay", nor speak to their own "eyes", "tears", and bodies. They do not use such an abstract expression as "dreadful trumpet" either. Concerning Whybrow's Juliet in the scene, Jackson commented that "her response to the news of Tybalt's death and Romeo's banishment was more hysterics than desperation".<sup>25</sup> This effect seems to be related to the cuts shown above. For one thing, the rhetorical nature of these lines, to some extent, has the effect of restraining the passion an actor tries to represent. More importantly, the lack of the quotations

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<sup>25</sup> Jackson 322.

1, 2 and 3 precipitated Juliet into her despair over Romeo's banishment, immediately after her cheerful mood in waiting for Romeo's visit.

These lines may have been too unnatural for Noble. However, when Juliet speaks these lines, it does not necessarily follow that she is too self-conscious, or that her affection toward Romeo is superficial, in the world of the play. For Shakespeare did not write a play based on realism, or naturalism. If the above lines were unnatural, is it natural that two people's conversation turns into a sonnet at their first meeting; that the place Romeo happens to reach is directly under the window of Juliet's chamber, though he is a total stranger to the place; and that she just appears there? From the first, the play represents itself as fiction. The appearance of the Chorus, and its use of such lines as, "where we lay our scene" (Prologue 2), and "... / Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage" (Prologue 12), stress the fictional nature of the play. And interestingly the play ends with "never was a *story* of more woe / Than this of Juliet and her Romeo" (5.3.309–310). Rhetorical lines that the characters speak create a world which we can call a dramatic reality. How meaningful, therefore, is it to treat the language in *Romeo and Juliet* realistically, when it has such an unnaturalistic nature? The formal nature of the play requires a realistic as well as stylized kind of acting on stage. The success and popularity of David Garrick's production may have derived from the fact that the actors fulfilled these seemingly contradictory requirements. Levenson states that the actors projected character through "formal elocution and stylized gestures", and that "reviews make it clear that the leading actors interpreted their roles moment by moment, through the conventional modulations of voice,

facial expression, and posture”.<sup>26</sup>

A slight esteem for words is fatal for a performance of *Romeo and Juliet*. We can readily find the importance of words when we look at the balcony scene. The simplest but the most powerful line is Juliet’s repetition of “Romeo”: “O, Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?” (2.2.33). Logically speaking, Juliet is wrong when she wishes him to refuse the name of “Romeo”, because what he has to refuse is not Romeo but Montague. She even shows her awareness that his “self” has nothing to do with his name, taking the example of a rose. But at the same time, she cannot but repeatedly utter his name, contrary to the point she is making :

So Romeo would, were he not Romeo called,  
Retain that dear perfection which he owes \_\_\_\_\_  
Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name (2.2.45 – 47).

Her affection is expressed by her repeated use of “Romeo”. Calderwood states that “their love becomes a great name-singing celebration”.<sup>27</sup> The words that they utter are quite important for each other, as we can see in these exchanges :

- 1) Jul. My ears have yet not drunk a hundred words  
Of thy tongue’s uttering, yet I know the sound  
(2.2.58 – 59);
- 2) Rom. Th’exchange of thy love’s faithful vow for mine (127);
- 3) Jul. And make her airy tongue more hoarse than mine

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<sup>26</sup> Levenson 78.

<sup>27</sup> Calderwood 93.



With repetition of my Romeo's name.

Rom. It is my soul that calls upon my name.

How silver-sweet sound lovers' tongues by night,

Like softest music to attending ears! (162 – 166)

Quotations 1 and 3 were cut in Noble's production. In other scenes, the characters also show their keen sense of words; and words have significance for their present and even future situation. For Juliet, in 3.2, "Brief sounds determine my weal or woe" (51). In the following speech of Juliet, it is as if the words had as much importance as the actual events in the world of the play, and Romeo's name was equated to his self.

Ah, poor my lord, what tongue shall smooth thy name,

When I, thy three-hours wife, have mangled it? (3.2.98 – 99);

Some word there was, worsen than Tybalt's death,

That murdered me (108 – 109);

That 'banished', that one word 'banished',

Hath slain ten thousand Tybalts (113 – 114);

But with a rear-ward following Tybalt's death,

'Romeo is banished': to speak that word,

Is father, mother, Tybalt, Romeo, Juliet,

All slain, all dead. 'Romeo is banished!'

There is no end, no limit, measure, bound,

In that word's death, no words can that woe sound (121 – 126).

In the play, words thus exert strong power over the characters, inextricably linked to the expression of their passion. In Noble's production, from the 121st line (beginning with "But with"),

Whybrow's Juliet turned round because of her despair and confusion, and finally fell to the ground. This turning may symbolize her confusion. However, like the speech from the swing, her turning around and screaming made the words unclear. Noble's concern did not lie in stressing the power of words, but in impressing the audience with the beautiful image that the crinoline of Juliet's costume made as she turned round. Even the words that suggest the power of words were delivered unclearly to the audience. The major flaw of the production lies in this kind of realistic treatment of the rhetorical words. This led to the undermining of the evocative power and significance of the words in *Romeo and Juliet*. Petulance was thus represented on stage instead of passion, and the play became a melodrama.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Concerning the melodramatic nature of the production, it is interesting that Macaulay and Spencer, who praised the production, both mentioned their tears in their reviews: "This is the first Romeo in years where my eyes started with tears..." (Macaulay); "I was sometimes watching the stage through a mist of tears" (Spencer).



fig. 1 © The Shakespeare Center, Stratford-upon-Avon



fig. 2 © The Shakespeare Center, Stratford-upon-Avon

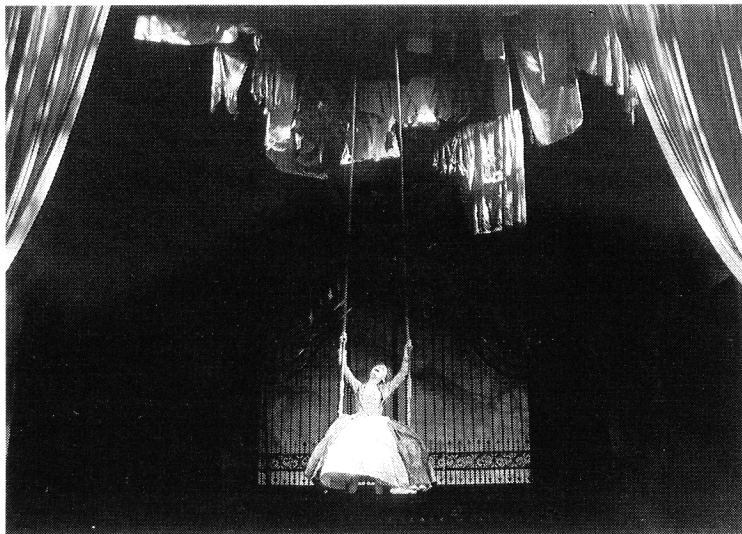


fig. 3 © The Shakespeare Center, Stratford-upon-Avon



fig. 4 © The Shakespeare Center, Stratford-upon-Avon