Heavenly Dances and Mortal Fights: Dance and Swordplay in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*

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Introduction: Dance, Swordplay, and Language in *Romeo and Juliet*

Dance and swordplay played important roles in the early modern playhouse. Considered to be complementary arts, they were a feature of many plays of the time, including William Shakespeare's.[1] Actors would have needed to be skilled in dancing and fencing to fulfil their roles in such plays. To accurately portray a wide range of societies and characters and to appeal to the range of audience members in the playhouse—from the working classes to gentlemen—acting companies would have to know both elite and common dance and fencing practices.[2] Presenting a pavane on stage, for example, would resonate with upper classes in the audience, while a country or morris dance would be recognizable by working-class audience members.[3] In his plays, Shakespeare uses dance and swordplay as part of the play's action, and in his rhetoric to develop characters' personalities, create stylistic figures, portray tropes, and perform other functions.[4]

Romeo and Juliet use both of these modes of embodied communication as part of action and verbal references, most recognizably in its well-known fight sequences and in the Capulet ball scene. While early modern audiences would have been able to understand the various meanings of dance and swordplay, both

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in visual and verbal forms, contemporary audiences frequently miss this layer of meaning due to missing cultural context.[5] The importance of dance and swordplay in Shakespeare and other playwrights' works has been discussed by many scholars, and there are several works on dance, swordplay, and cognition in early modern plays.[6] These scholars argue that there is a need for increased knowledge of dance and swordfighting—as well as early modern society's understanding of them—to uncover "much of the layered meanings in Shakespeare's work."[7] Florence Hazrat argues that dramatic context and language can help us recover possible moments of embodied communication in Shakespeare's plays and that we can and should informedly speculate about the presence and kinds of movement and dance in his plays.[8]

In this essay, I build off previous scholarly work. My analysis of the role of dance and swordplay in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* looks at the interplay of these modes of embodied communication with each other and with rhetorical language, and how they help to communicate the play's dramatic intent. In my analysis, I equate dance with love, and swordplay with violence and hatred. Using these equivalences, I argue that dance and swordplay in *Romeo and Juliet* work with language to express the meshing of love and violence in this Veronese society. I begin with a brief discussion of the destiny set out in the prologue, followed by an exploration of the following scenes: the street fight in the first act, the Capulets' masked ball, the fights between Mercutio and Tybalt and between Romeo and Tybalt, and the final scene at the Capulets' vault. For each of these scenes, I suggest how dance and/or swordplay may have been staged, and then analyze how the presence and use of dance and swordplay can enhance our understanding.

The Prologue: A Doomed Love Written in the Stars

The prologue spoken by the Chorus at the start of *Romeo and Juliet* informs the audience how the play will end and gives the audience contextual information about the society within it. However, I argue that it also acts as a marker of how dance and swordplay are intertwined. The audience hears of the "two households, both alike in dignity" who "from ancient grudge break to new mutiny."[9] Perhaps more importantly, the Chorus

foreshadows the entanglement of love and violence in Romeo and Juliet's relationship, introducing them in relation to their parents' feud:

> From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
> A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life
> Whose misadventured piteous overthrows
> Doth with their death bury their parents' strife. (Prologue 5-8)

The brief mention of the "star-crossed lovers" is bookended with references to the Capulets and Montagues' feud, placing Romeo and Juliet "both structurally and thematically in their familial frameworks" and their associated violence.[10] Even the lovers' birth is mentioned in relation to death, as the Chorus describes them coming from "the fatal loins of these two foes," their parents. Here, "loin" means both the reproductive area of the body and the product of reproduction: children.[11] This double-meaning signals not only that any child born from the Lords and Ladies Capulet and Montague is doomed to die, but also that—as their only two descendants—Romeo and Juliet are themselves "fatal," both to each other and themselves. They are, in fact, born to die.

The phrase "star-crossed lovers" is also of importance to Romeo and Juliet's destiny as doomed lovers. According to the *OED*, this is the first use of the phrase "star-crossed"—now frequently used in relation to lovers—and is defined as "thwarted by bad luck or adverse circumstances (originally considered to be a result of malign planetary influence)," further enshrining Romeo and Juliet's love as doomed.[12] Their ill-fated love, in relation to planetary influence, is reinforced in the masque, as I will discuss later. I argue that the link between love and violence, emphasized in the Prologue, is brought to fruition by the use of dance and swordplay.

Act 1.1: Setting the Stage for Violence

The street fight in Act 1.1 establishes how deeply ingrained the Capulet/Montague feud is in their Veronese society. This scene is the first of several fights in the play and would have been a familiar sight to early modern audiences, who witnessed acts of swordfighting both within and outside the playhouse: in war, streets, sporting tournaments, and fencing events.[13] Audiences

would have been knowledgeable about the types of weapons used and fencing techniques, and would have been able to read what Colleen Kelly calls the "complex language of theatrical swordplay" that uses both "the language of rhetoric and the language of the sword."[14] By analyzing this language, we can gain a deeper understanding of the scene.

The first characters on stage are Samson and Gregory, servants of the house of Capulet. Yet before we even know who they are, they enter "*with swords and bucklers*" (1.1.0 SD), traditional English weapons that were still in use by the working class, but were no longer used by noblemen.[15] The association of swords and bucklers with working-class men not only tells us that these two characters are servants, but also extends the reach of the feud between "two households, both alike in dignity" (Prologue, 1). While the prologue tells us of the noble houses' participation in the feud, the sight of serving men with weapons hints at the metastatic reach of this feud and its violence, so entrenched in Veronese society that the nobles' servants get involved as well. The reach of violence and its roots in the Capulet/Montague strife are reinforced when Samson and Gregory's dialogue quickly shifts to the language of fighting. The two begin conversing about work, as Samson tells Gregory "on my word, we'll not carry coals" to which the latter replies: "No, for then we should be colliers." Samson rapidly picks up on the possible word play, telling him "I mean, an we be in choler, we'll draw" (1.1.1-3). The word "draw" here refers to drawing a sword, and while at first this aggression may be directed toward their employers, it soon shifts to their employer's enemy when Samson says that "a dog of the house of Montague moves me" (1.1.7). This reference to the Montagues occurs before members of this house even appear on stage, foregrounding the feud's effects on this society.

The arrival of Montague servants, the ensuing fight, and the introduction of numerous other characters into this brawl cements the feud's infectious violence that permeates every level of society. While readers know through stage directions that Tybalt, Benvolio, citizens, and Capulet and Montague join the fray, audience members would be able to identify the different ranks of these new actors by their weapons. As we later learn (1.5.54), Tybalt, a young nobleman, uses a rapier; another of that class, Benvolio would also have used the rapier and dagger.[16] Stage directions indicate that

the citizens use clubs or partisans (1.1.70 SD), and Capulet calls for someone to "give me my long sword, ho!" (1.1.73).[17] As Evelyn Tribble explains, "[t]he differences in fencing styles are used as a means of vividly drawing the characters," and in this scene, their choice of weapons identifies their age and social rank.[18] Average citizens use clubs and partisans; servants use sword and bucklers; young noblemen, rapiers and daggers, and Capulet's preference for a long sword shows his old age and class.[19] The medley of weapons present in this brawl indicates that, while the prologue may identify this feud as one between two noble houses, it encompasses all of Verona.

Romeo introduces the association between violence and love when he arrives and notices the brawl's aftermath: "O me, what fray was here? / Yet tell me not, for I have heard it all. / Here's much to do with hate, but more with love" (1.1.171-173). With this last line, Romeo switches topic from the brawl to his love for Rosaline, but implies that what can be said about love also applies to hate, and to this fight. In his love-sick state, he rhetorically asks, "Why then, O brawling love, O loving hate, / O anything of nothing first create" (1.1.174-175), merging love and hate. Romeo explains that both love and hate can arise out of little or nothing, as the recent street fight demonstrates. He further supports the resemblance and interconnectedness of love and hate with the line "Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms" (1.1.177). As previously mentioned, dance and swordplay were viewed as similar arts, and dance was often used to symbolize love, while fencing and swordplay more clearly relates to hate and violence.[20] This line may be a reference to the "forms" of fencing and dance, here technically correct but "misshapen" into the chaos of the fight, rather than the beauty of dance. In this way, *Romeo and Juliet*'s first scene not only establishes the play's context, introduces characters, and entertains the audience with sword fights, but it sets the stage for the pervasiveness of violence in the play; immediately after the fight Romeo establishes the interconnectedness of love and hate and their counterparts dance and swordplay.

Act 1.4: The Capulet Masque and the Lovers' Celestial Dance

The Capulet ball is a pivotal moment in *Romeo and Juliet*, as it introduces Juliet, and with her the beginning of the play's

romance. It is also centered around a dance, and as such is rich with interpretative meaning. The ball in Act 1.4 is a masque, which in the Tudor period was simple and informal.[21] According to Anne Daye, masques featured social dancing, particularly improvised dance forms, such as the galliard.[22] In plays, masques would have been much briefer than they would be in a court ball, but would be similar in style and manner.[23] They could be used to display actors' talents, further the plot, and add an air of festivity.[24] It is the topic of much debate whether Romeo participates in the dancing at the Capulets' ball; however, I argue that Romeo *does* dance, if only for a short period of time. That said, he does initially refuse to dance, telling Mercutio to "Give me a torch. I am not for this ambling, / Being but heavy I will bear the light" (1.4.11-12). Masques would have required much lighting from candles, torches, and lamps. Most of these light sources were displayed in the scenery, but they were also supplemented by torchbearers.[25] Romeo, melancholic because of his unrequited love for Rosaline, proposes to be one of these torchbearers rather than participate in the "ambling" of dancing. However, once struck by Juliet's beauty, Romeo "forg[ets] [Rosaline's] name and that name's woe" (2.3.42), as he falls in love with Juliet. Once Romeo is cured of melancholy— caused by his love for Rosaline—there is no reason for him not to dance, and as Hazrat states, "it makes perfect sense for them [Romeo and Juliet] to participate in the possible slow and stately measure and its cultural associations of wooing and serious love."[26] I agree that Romeo and Juliet dance part of a measure together, but propose that before this, the masque features a pavane and a galliard.

Walter Sorell says that masques would be followed by a galliard, while according to Daye, they would normally begin with a processional pavane, followed by other measures.[27] Robert Mullally suggests that they would begin with Old Measures, and then galliards and other dances.[28] Given the multiple meanings of "measure," defined as both the specific dance "measure" and a general term for any dance—Fabio Ciambella observes that some treat the pavane and measure as the same dance—I suggest that the masque in *Romeo and Juliet* could have begun with a processional pavane, where the members of the Capulet house are introduced, followed by a more energetic galliard, and a courtly measure.[29] The pavane is a stately dance with a slow pace, where dancers parade

around the hall in a procession.[30] It would have been an ideal dance to take place during Capulet's welcome speech, with his promise that "Ladies that have their toes / Unplagued with corns will walk a bout with you" (1.5.16-17). The processional nature of the pavane would work well here to introduce the ladies and gentlemen with whom guests could dance, and the use of the word "walk" can be read as referring to the pavane, a slow dance resembling a walk about (or "a bout") the room.[31] Necla Çikigil suggests that after Capulet's speech, a pavane most certainly followed, but Sorell disagrees, arguing that "[t]he necessity to quench the fire because, due to the dancing, the room had grown too hot" means a slow dance "simply would not fit the text."[32] However, given that dances in plays would have had to be brief and only "*approximate* the style and manner in which they were probably done," it would have been possible for multiple short dances to be staged.[33] Therefore, a short pavane could occur during Capulet's introduction, and after he calls "Come, musicians, play" (1.5.25), the musicians could begin playing more energetic music for a galliard. As a more vigorous dance, the galliard would also have needed more space and energy, hence Capulet's request for "A hall, a hall! Give room and foot it, girls" (1.5.26). The galliard's similarity to the cinquepace—a dance made of five steps, four of which are kicks—its fast rhythm and movements would work as clever wordplay with "foot it," both because of the galliard's speed and its intricate footwork.[34]

If, as I argue, a galliard is performed after the pavane, it would be during this dance that Romeo first notices Juliet, wondering: "What lady's that which doth enrich the hand / Of yonder knight?" (1.5.41-42). While Juliet has not yet been formally introduced, we see her through Romeo's gaze and description. Throughout the play, she is frequently associated with brightness, light, and the sun, a comparison that begins as Romeo muses upon Juliet:

> O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright.
> It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
> As a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear,
> Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear. (1.5.43-46)

At this point in the masque, Romeo is still a torchbearer, and Juliet's brightness invites him, as well as the torches, to burn brighter, letting go of his melancholy. Romeo's comment further likens Juliet to the sun and stars with his use of the contrasting imagery

of Juliet and night, and a jewel and an "Ethiop." In comparison to night and an "Ethiop's ear," Juliet is light, shining brightly in the night sky as stars do. Finally, the last line quoted above can signify that Juliet's beauty is too expensive for the world to afford, but also that it is too precious to belong to earth; she belongs to heaven (or the sky) instead. The rhetorical language used to describe Juliet positions her as a celestial being, an idea reinforced by the dances in the masque. To Sir John Davies, the sun and earth danced a galliard since they imitated the steps of the dance.[35] By introducing Romeo to Juliet as she performs a galliard, the dance adds another layer of symbolism to Juliet's description as the sun, a celestial body. This symbolism is further strengthened by the era's belief in the cosmic dance. Alan Brissenden explains that from the second to eighteenth century, it was thought that the universe's balance depended on "the joyous dance of the heavenly bodies," a belief that associated dance with the movements of the planets and stars, as well as with love, harmony, and order.[36] The play's rhetorical language connecting her with the sun and stars, the association of dance with celestial bodies and love/harmony, and the galliard's association with the dance of the sun and earth work together to create a picture of Juliet as a heavenly being.

The play's text and sparse stage directions do not indicate when Romeo approaches Juliet, only that he begins speaking to her at line 1.4.92. Romeo's speech tells us that he will wait to speak to her: "The measure done, I'll watch her place of stand / And, touching hers, make blessed my rude hand" (1.4.49-50). As mentioned earlier, "measure" can refer to any dance, and would be a natural description of a galliard. Romeo waits for Juliet to finish the galliard before approaching her where she "stand[s]" after the dance. After this line, the dialogue then moves to the argument between Tybalt and Capulet, and so there are no indications as to what Romeo does prior to first speaking to Juliet. I suggest that it is at the end of Romeo's speech that the galliard ends and Juliet moves to the side, before Romeo takes her hand to lead her into the next measure. The play would show Romeo and Juliet dancing briefly, while Tybalt and Capulet argue. Once the argument ends, the lovers remove themselves from the dance floor, and the other masquers continue dancing in the background during Romeo and Juliet's famous sonnet. This short measure would support

Hazrat's argument that Romeo and Juliet likely danced as they spoke, and given the measure's cultural associations with love and its symbolism of matrimony, it would support their presentation as lovers.[37] Romeo's inclusion in the measure ties him into Juliet's cosmic dance, showing their love as divine and emphasizing the prologue's description of it as fated. Furthermore, if Romeo only dances one measure with Juliet, her later comment to the Nurse that identifies him as "he… that would not dance" (1.5.131) holds—he does not dance the galliard—while still supporting Juliet's reference to him as "one I danced withal" (1.5.142). Finally, the simultaneous action of Romeo and Juliet's measure and Tybalt and Capulet's argument would serve to create a contrasting picture on stage of a harmonious dance and the threat of violence when Tybalt calls for his rapier (1.5.54). He will use the same rapier the following day to challenge Romeo and murder Mercutio. In this way, the split-stage reminds us that it is not just Romeo and Juliet's love that is fated, but also their deaths.

Act 3.1: Bringing Love to a Sword Fight

The beginning of Act 3 marks the turning point of *Romeo and Juliet* from romance to tragedy, brought on by Mercutio and Tybalt's deaths, after which no more dancing occurs. Romeo refuses to fight Tybalt, stating that "the reason that I have to love thee / Doth much excuse the appertaining rage / To such a greeting. … farewell; I see thou knowest me not" (3.1.61-64). To Benvolio, Mercutio, and Tybalt, who do not know of Romeo and Juliet's marriage, this response comes as a shock. Joan Ozark Holmer explains that according to Vincentio Saviolo's fencing manual *Vincentio Saviolo his Practice*, "Romeo's refusal to duel with Tybalt would be viewed … not as vile submission but rather as courageous wisdom," following Saviolo's honour code.[38] However, to the characters of the play, whose lives have been so permeated with violence and for whom "these hot days, is the mad blood stirring" (3.1.5), Romeo's move from violence to love is a sign of weakness and his inability to defend his reputation. It is Romeo's "calm, dishonourable, vile submission" (3.1.72) that spurs Mercutio to fight Tybalt, and I argue that it is this same shift to love rather than violence that causes Mercutio's death. However, before discussing

Mercutio and Tybalt's duel, I must first briefly examine Brandon Shaw's analysis of Romeo and Tybalt's duel to establish Romeo, Tybalt, and Mercutio's demeanors at the time of the first duel.

In his analysis of the fight between Tybalt and Romeo (which occurs after Tybalt has slain Mercutio), Shaw compares Tybalt's fighting style to dance, a method that, if used with an opponent using the same practice, shows much skill. However, against an opponent who is "primed to kill," like Romeo after Mercutio's death, Tybalt's dance-like fighting proves a fatal mistake.[39] This deadly Romeo is a different man than the one before Mercutio's demise. The Romeo that first arrives onstage in Act 3.1 is a dancing one; the melancholy that weighed him down before meeting Juliet is gone, and as I have argued above, Romeo is now able to dance, being once again light of foot. Thus, at the start of the scene, he is better suited to a dance than a duel, while Tybalt and Mercutio are primed to fight. Tybalt is still full of choler and gall (1.5.88 and 91), enraged by Romeo's presence at the masque, while for his part, Mercutio has "mad blood stirring" (3.1.5) and seethes with anger at Tybalt for insulting Romeo.

Earlier in the play, Mercutio mocks Tybalt, calling his use of techniques such as the *passado* and the *punto reverso* clownish and posturing (2.4.25-30), giving audience members—and current scholars—a hint of Tybalt's fighting style. The blow that proves fatal to Mercutio is Tybalt's *punto reverso*, the same that Mercutio makes fun of earlier. This technique is "a thrust … delivered from the attacker's left side, usually over but sometimes under the opponent's weapon."[40] When Romeo enters the fight in an attempt to stop it, he and Mercutio figuratively become a single opponent to Tybalt, where Romeo's arm takes the place of Mercutio's weapon, and as in a *punto reverso*, Tybalt "*under Romeo's arm thrusts Mercutio in*" (3.1.89), killing him.[41] In joining Mercutio, Romeo adds his dancing love to Mercutio's hatred, ultimately weakening the pair against Tybalt's untainted and deadly hatred. Romeo himself realizes his role in Mercutio's death, as he laments that:

> My very friend, hath got this mortal hurt
> In my behalf (…)
> O sweet Juliet,
> Thy beauty hath made me effeminate
> And in my temper softened valour's steel! (3.1.112-117).

Not only has Romeo's inaction spurred Mercutio to defend him, but Juliet's beauty, and by extension his love, has "softened valour's steel." Romeo's shift to love and his attempt to stop Mercutio from fighting Tybalt lead to Mercutio's death. His death thus reinforces the interconnectedness of love and violence, and demonstrates that when set against each other, hatred wins out.

As mentioned earlier, the play features no more dances following Mercutio's death; however, it does include more swordfights. After losing his friend, Romeo shifts back to hatred with a promise that "[t]his but begins the woe others must end" (3.1.122). It is both a promise to kill Tybalt and a foreshadowing of the many deaths to come. From this point on, Romeo swears that "fire-eyed fury [will] be my conduct now" (3.1.126), and, strengthened with hatred, he swiftly kills Tybalt. While the stage directions, "[t]*hey fight. Tybalt falls*" (3.1.133), do little to show what happens, Benvolio's description of the fight to the Prince, Capulets, and Montagues, who arrive on stage after the fight has taken place, can provide information of the attack.[42] Benvolio takes twelve lines to describe the fight between Mercutio and Tybalt (3.1.160-171), but only three are needed to describe Tybalt and Romeo's: "to't they go like lightning, for, ere I / Could draw to part them was stout Tybalt slain, / And as he fell did Romeo turn and fly" (3.1.174-176). Benvolio is too slow for Romeo's "newly entertained revenge" (3.1.173). Before Benvolio can stop them, Romeo has already killed Tybalt. While this shift back to violence permits Romeo to defend himself against Tybalt, it also sets up the violence of the rest of the play.

Act 5.3: Violence for Love

As the play started with violence, so it ends, the final scene marking the deaths of three characters: Paris, Romeo, and Juliet. At this point in the play, both Romeo and Juliet have expressed a wish to die if they cannot be with each other. Romeo's turn to violence and death is mirrored in Juliet, who makes several comments linking her wedding night to death. When she first hears of Romeo's banishment, she tells the Nurse that she will retire to her wedding bed: "And death, not Romeo, take my maidenhead" (3.2.135-137). After being informed that she must marry Paris, she asks Lady Capulet to delay the marriage: "Or, if you do not,

make the bridal bed / In that dim monument where Tybalt lies" (3.5.200-202). As Juliet realizes that her love for Romeo may not surpass the odds, she turns to death for comfort, even if she must bring it on herself. As she lays a knife by her side the night before her marriage to Paris, she knows that if all else fails, "This shall forbid it" (4.3.24). Romeo is of the same mind; his turn to violence soon turns inwards. After he hears of Juliet's death, he resolves to end his life, vowing that "Juliet, I will lie with thee tonight" (5.1.34). He views the poison he procures as "cordial and not poison" because it will allow him to be with her forever (5.1.85). While Romeo and Juliet's celestial dance at the Capulets' masque etched their love into the stars among the planets, it could not save them from the Capulet and Montagues' feud and its infectious violence, and so they turn to a different form of violence—suicide—to save their love.

The final scene has less swordplay than in the rest of the play, but what there is works with the earlier dancing, swordfighting, and rhetorical language to support the play's meaning. The fight between Romeo and Paris creates a visual representation not only of the shift to violence but of the shift *in* violence to a melancholic action born out of perceived necessity rather than hatred. Whereas Romeo aimed to kill Tybalt after Mercutio's death, here he is reluctant to kill Paris. He tells him that "I love thee better than myself, / For I come hither armed against myself" (5.3.64-65). However, when Paris stands firm in his defense of Juliet's grave, Romeo attacks him to carry out his intended suicide.

Once again, not much information is given from the stage directions for Romeo and Paris's fight, limited to "[t]*hey fight*" (5.3.70), and none of the play's characters can act as witnesses to describe the events afterwards.[43] Drawing from his knowledge of extant fencing manuscripts, Shakespeare's plays, and current techniques of swordfighting, J. D. Martinez proposes possible choreography for their fight.[44] He explains that after so much senseless death, Romeo is less willing to kill Paris than he would have been in the past, as Romeo does not want to "Put another sin upon [his] head" (5.3.62). Before explaining the choreography of the fight, Martinez sets the stage, stating that they would be fighting in the confined quarters of the Capulet vault. He also specifies each man's weapon: a "single hand English broadsword"

for Romeo and "rapier and lantern" for Paris.[45] I agree with Martinez that at this point in the play, Romeo is more reluctant to kill Paris, but I disagree with other parts of his analysis. Since the sets in Shakespeare's plays tended to be very minimal, it seems unlikely that the set design would suggest or depict a vault, or that the actors would limit themselves to its confines. Moreover, while Martinez depicts Paris holding an electric stage lantern instead of the traditional dagger, I believe that he would be holding an unlit torch during the duel with Romeo.[46] At the start of the scene, Paris says to his page, "Give me thy torch, boy. Hence, and stand aloof. / Yet put it out, for I would not be seen" (5.3.1-2), clearly indicating that his source of light is a torch that he then extinguishes. Finally, I disagree with Martinez's interpretation of Romeo's weapon choice. As I mention earlier, citing Evelyn Tribble, young noblemen tended to carry rapiers and daggers rather than an English sword, and there is no reason that Romeo would differ from his contemporaries Mercutio, Benvolio, Tybalt, and Paris, who all use the rapier and dagger.[47]

While I disagree with parts of Martinez's interpretation, I concur that Romeo and Paris's fight would be subdued. Instead, I propose that while Paris fights with a rapier and torch, Romeo fights only with a rapier, having put down his torch earlier to open the tomb.[48] While Romeo could pick up a dagger to defend himself, it would be incongruous with his fervent desire to die at this tomb. After all, he is not fighting Paris in an effort to kill him and remain alive, but only to gain access to Juliet's tomb to then die. Paris's use of a torch instead of a dagger and Romeo's lack of a defensive dagger would force them both to be more tentative. The muted swordfighting, along with Romeo's sympathy for Paris afterwards, deeming him "One writ with me in sour misfortune's book" and promising that "I'll bury thee in a triumphant grave" (5.3.82-83), creates a visual representation of a change in the play's violence. Instead of the anger and hatred present in the first street brawl and the duels between Mercutio and Tybalt and Romeo and Tybalt, we see here a resigned violence, arising from Romeo's desire for self-inflicted death to be with Juliet.

As the action moves towards Romeo and Juliet's deaths, the imagery of the torches recalls the Capulet masque where Romeo and Juliet first meet. Indeed, the cultural association of masques

and torchbearers and the play's prominent imagery of torchbearers at the masque parallels their first meeting.[49] Once again, Romeo waits to meet Juliet, but this time in death. Romeo strengthens the link between their first and last meetings when he comments on Juliet's tomb, exclaiming that it is not a grave but "a lantern … / For here lies Juliet, and her beauty makes / This vault a feasting presence full of light" (5.3.84-86). Even in what Romeo believes to be in death, Juliet continues to "teach the torches to burn bright" (1.5.43). Despite this reminder of their first meeting and their danced measure, Romeo reunites with Juliet through violence rather than dance. Even so, he infuses his final violent act with love, pronouncing that "[t]hus with a kiss I die" (5.3.120). While Romeo attempts to meet Juliet in death, she is still alive, unbeknownst to him, and so it is she who finally reunites them with her suicide. Juliet's death is not the result of a duel, yet her use of a dagger is akin to other swordplay in the text. With this final act of violence, Juliet not only joins Romeo in death, but enacts the death of the play's violence itself by ending the feud between Capulets and Montagues. As she searches for a way to kill herself, she finds that Romeo has used all the poison, and instead uses Romeo's dagger, the same one he uses in his fight against Paris.[50] Taking the dagger, she says that "This is thy sheath; there rust, and let me die," before stabbing herself (5.3.170). By "sheathing" Romeo's dagger inside of her and styling her body as the place where it will rust, Juliet symbolically and physically puts away one of the many weapons in the play, signalling an end to the feud. As prophesised in the prologue, the Capulets and Montagues accept the lovers' deaths as the final chapter in their enmity, and with Capulet's line "O brother Montague, give me thy hand" (5.2.296), they mark their newfound peace with held hands, an action that is reminiscent of Romeo and Juliet's joining of hands in Act 1.4.

Conclusion: The Languages of Dance, Swordplay, and Rhetoric

In *Romeo and Juliet*, two forms of embodied communication, dance and swordplay, work with rhetorical language to emphasize the portrayal of love and violence in the world of the play. In so doing, they demonstrate the pervasiveness of violence promised by the Chorus in the Prologue. The street brawl's clash of varied weapons and characters presents a strong visual image of the feud's

reach, while the Capulets' masque sets Romeo and Juliet's meeting against a backdrop of dance that calls to mind "the joyous dance of the heavenly bodies," inscribing their love among the stars.[51] The duels, first between Mercutio and Tybalt and then between Romeo and Tybalt, and the resulting deaths of Mercutio and Tybalt, signal the play's tragic shift away from dance and the love it signifies, articulating love's futility against hatred and violence. Finally, Paris and Romeo's fight demonstrates Romeo's resignation to violence as the only solution left, while Juliet's violent death is used to reunite the two lovers and end the play's feud. I have argued that dance, swordplay, and rhetorical language work together in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* to create a layered meaning of the interplay and struggle between love and violence, dance and swordplay, supporting the destiny of fatal love that the Chorus sets out in the prologue. While readers can achieve this interpretation in large part from the text alone, an understanding of early modern dance and swordplay adds nuanced meaning, emphasizing the emotional impact of the story. An analysis of the visual forms of dance and swordplay also serves as an important reminder that Shakespeare's plays were created to be seen.

Notes

1. Brandon Shaw, "Shakespeare's Dancing Bodies: The Case of Romeo," in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Dance*, eds. Lynsey McCulloch and Brandon Shaw (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 183.

2. Walter Sorell, "Shakespeare and the Dance," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 83 (1957): 367-87, 367; Jennifer Nevile, "Introduction to Part I: Shakespeare *and* Dance," in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Dance*, 18.

3. Fabio Ciambella, *Dance Lexicon in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 37.

4. Nona Monahin, "Decoding Dance in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Twelfth Night*," in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Dance*, 50.

5. Monahin, "Decoding Dance," 50-1.

6. See for example Alan Brissenden, *Shakespeare and the Dance* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1981); Fabio Ciambella, *Dance Lexicon in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*; Charles Edelman, *Brawl Ridiculous: Swordfighting in Shakespeare's Plays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992); J. D. Martinez, *The Swords of Shakespeare: An Illustrated Guide to Stage Combat Choreography in the Plays of Shakespeare* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 1996); Erika T. Lin, *Shakespeare and the Materiality of Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Florence Hazrat, "'The Wisdom of Your

Feet': Dance and Rhetoric on the Shakespearean Stage," in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Dance*.

7. Nevile, "Introduction to Part I," 17.

8. Hazrat, "Dance and Rhetoric," 222-23.

9. William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. René Weis (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2022), Prologue 1, 3. Subsequent references to *Romeo and Juliet* are of this edition and will be written as in-text citations, with act, scene, line format.

10. Jonas Kellermann, *Dramaturgies of Love in* Romeo and Juliet (New York: Routledge, 2022), 28.

11. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "loin (*n.*)," September 2023, doi: 10.1093/OED/1090020551.

12. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "star-crossed (*adj.*)," December 2023, doi: 10.1093/OED/3948036788.

13. Colleen Kelly, "Figuring the Fight: Recovering Shakespeare's Theatrical Swordplay," in *Theatre and Violence*, ed. John W. Frick (Tuscaloosa: Southeastern Theatre Conference and University of Alabama Press, 1999), 99.

14. Kelly, "Figuring the Fight," 107.

15. The stage direction quoted in this sentence is included in the 2022 Arden edition of *Romeo and Juliet*, edited by René Weis. As Weis indicates in his editorial notes, this stage direction is also found in the second quarto (Q2), as seen in William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet: Second Quarto, 1599*, facsimile (London: Chiswick Press, 1949), 1.1.0 SD. Subsequent references to stage directions are quoted from Weis 2022 and are followed by endnotes indicating whether this stage direction comes from the first quarto (Q1) or Q2. All quotations from Q2 come from this edition. The reference to use of English weapons by working class men comes from Evelyn Tribble, *Early Modern Actors & Shakespeare's Theatre: Thinking with the Body* (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2017), 72, 84, 86.

16. Tribble, *Early Modern Actors*, 86.

17. Stage direction, Shakespeare, *Second Quarto,* 1.1.79 SD.

18. Tribble, *Early Modern Actors*, 86.

19. Tribble, *Early Modern Actors*, 85.

20. Alan Brissenden, *Shakespeare and the Dance*, (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1981), 65.

21. Emily Winerock, "'We'll measure them a measure, and be gone': Renaissance Dance Practices and Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*," *Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation* 10. 2 (2017): para. 9.

22. Anne Daye, "Dancing at Court: 'the art that all Arts doe approve,'" in *Performances at Court in the Age of Shakespeare*, eds. Sophie Chiari and John Mucciolo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 138.

23. Sorell, "Shakespeare and the Dance," 375.

24. Brissenden, *Shakespeare and the Dance*, 16.

25. Anne Daye, "Torchbearers in the English Masque," *Early Music* 26.2 (1998): 247-62, 247.

26. Hazrat, "Dance and Rhetoric," 232.

27. Sorell, "Shakespeare and the Dance," 375. Brissenden is of the same opinion as Sorell, stating that dances would begin with measures, followed by

more energetic dances. Brissenden, *Shakespeare and the Dance*, 7. Daye, "Dancing at Court," 139. Çikigil is of the same opinion as Daye (Necla Çikigil, "Renaissance Dance Patterns in Shakespeare's Italian Plays: An Analysis of Dialogues," *Studies in Theatre and Performance* 26. 3 (2006): 263-72, 266).

28. Robert Mullally, "More about the Measures," *Early Music* 22.3 (1994): 417-38, 418.

29. Brissenden, *Shakespeare and the Dance*, 10; Ciambella, *Dance Lexicon*, 139.

30. Ciambella, *Dance Lexicon*, 127; Çikigil, "Renaissance dance patterns," 266; Daye, "Dancing at Court," 139.

31. Weis, *Romeo and Juliet*, 167n.

32. Çikigil, "Renaissance dance patterns," 270; Sorell, "Shakespeare and the Dance," 378.

33. Sorell, "Shakespeare and the Dance," 375 (emphasis mine).

34. Ciambella, *Dance Lexicon*, 91, 104.

35. Sorell, "Shakespeare and the Dance," 376.

36. Brissenden, *Shakespeare and the Dance*, 3, 65, 110.

37. Hazrat, "Dance and Rhetoric," 232, 233; Monahin, "Decoding Dance," 57.

38. Joan Ozark Holmer, "'Draw, if you be Men': Saviolo's Significance for *Romeo and Juliet*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 45. 2 (1994): 163-89, 182.

39. Shaw, "Shakespeare's Dancing Bodies," 185-87.

40. Holmer "'Draw, if you be Men,'" 167.

41. William Shakespeare, "Appendix 2: Q1 *Romeo and Juliet*," in *Romeo and Juliet,* ed. René Weis (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2022), lines 1168-69.

42. The stage directions are written as "*Fight, Tibalt falles*" in Q1 (Shakespeare, "Appendix 2," line 1216) and as "*They Fight*. Tibalt *falles*" in Q2 (Shakespeare, *Second Quarto*, 3.1.136 SD).

43. Stage direction: Shakespeare, "Appendix 2," line 2177.

44. Martinez, *The Swords of Shakespeare*, 1.

45. Martinez, *The Swords of Shakespeare*, 134.

46. Martinez, *The Swords of Shakespeare*, 134, 135.

47. Tribble, *Early Modern Actors*, 85.

48. As Paris sees Romeo approach the tomb, he remarks: "What, with a torch?" (5.3.21) before hiding away. Q1 also indicates, *"Enter Romeo and Balthasar, with a torch, a mattock, and a crow of yron,"* (Shakespeare, "Appendix 2," lines 2134-35). However, Romeo would undoubtedly need two hands to open the heavy tomb, and would therefore need to put his torch down to do so.

49. Daye, "Torchbearers in the English Masque," 247.

50. In a footnote to the stage direction "[*Takes Romeo's dagger*.]" (5.3.169 SD), Weis argues convincingly that the dagger Juliet uses is Romeo's.

51. Brissenden, *Shakespeare and the Dance*, 3.