

# Romeo Montague Behind Bars



A Shakespeare Prison Theatre Workshop  
Led by Mariacristina Cavecchi, Lisa Mazoni,  
Margaret Rose, Giuseppe Scutellà



Milano University Press





# Romeo Montague Behind Bars

A Shakespeare Retelling  
at the “Cesare Beccaria” Youth Detention Centre

A project by Mariacristina Cavecchi, Lisa Mazoni,  
Margaret Rose and Giuseppe Scutellà

Edited and introduced by  
Mariacristina Cavecchi & Margaret Rose

Preface by Lisa Mazoni and Giuseppe Scutellà

Translation by Claudio Favazza



Milano University Press

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To our children, both those outside and those inside  
youth detention centres





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# New Prefaces to the English Edition

*Mariacristina Cavecchi & Margaret Rose*

(Milan University)

In November 2018, a group of boys and young men from Milan's "Cesare Beccaria" Youth Detention Centre, students from the University of Milan and young actors from the Puntozero theatre company took part in a Shakespeare prison workshop. We decided to put Romeo Montague on trial for the murder of Tybalt Capulet, following the procedures of the current Juvenile Justice Code. Given the uniqueness of the workshop, we brought out *SceKspir al BeKKa* (2020, Clichy), a book which presents this fictional trial and investigates what is a compelling experience of prison theatre. We are proud to bring out this English-language translation which will hopefully reach an international readership.

First and foremost, we believe that this innovative model of a theatre workshop will be of interest outside Italy. In addition, since the workshop, we have had an opportunity to get to know several prison theatre programmes, thanks to research projects funded by the Italian Ministry of Education (MIUR) and the European Union. These experiences have confirmed the uniqueness of our collaborative project.

The recent conference, "Shakespeare negli istituti penali per minorenni: sogni e libertà" ("Shakespeare in Juvenile Correctional Facilities: Dreams and Freedom"),<sup>1</sup> which we organised as part of a National Research Project entitled *Applied Shakespeare: Developing New Educational Models for Transversal Competences and Life-skills* (2023-25), revealed that there are theatre activities in all seventeen juvenile detention centres in Italy. However, unlike the theatre workshop experience presented in the present volume, none of these involves university students on a regular basis, nor are they included in university curricula. Instead, our annual workshop (started in 2016) actively engages students. Year after year, thanks to this opportunity, dozens of

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1 The programme of the conference is available at the link: <https://www.appliedshakespeare.org/en/events-activities/universita-degli-studi-di-milano/convegno-shakespeare-negli-istituti-penali-per-minorenni-sogni-e-liberta> (accessed 15.1.2025).

them visit a prison environment for the first time and meet young people of their own age who are incarcerated. During the workshops, students start to grapple with topics such as punishment, prison, sentencing, and to see the boys of the Beccaria in a new light. They are particularly struck by the boys' ability to engage with them and to read and interpret Shakespeare – an experience that is entirely new to most students.

To our surprise, our workshop emerged as a model of best practice, even when compared to the Norwegian prison system, which is widely praised for its focus on education and fostering social relationships to facilitate an individual's reintegration into society. This comparison was made possible by our involvement in the Creative Europe programme, TYPUS - *Transforming Young People Using Shakespeare* (2022-24).<sup>2</sup> The programme took us to Bergen, where our partners at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology run theatre workshops at Bjørgvin prison. We can say, with some pride, that it was our model which ensured that the results of the Norwegian workshop were presented to a mixed audience of academics and students at the University of Bergen's auditorium and not exclusively to other people inside the prison, as in the past.

Last but not least, the present book seeks to reaffirm the value of education, theatre and the arts as powerful antidotes to all forms of unlawful behaviour – a message made all the more urgent by the steady erosion of the values at the heart of the Italian juvenile judicial system. While in the 18th century, Cesare Beccaria, aided by Alessandro Verri, wrote the pioneering book *Dei delitti e delle pene* (1764, *On Crimes and Punishments*), which was soon translated into French and was used as a model in many European countries, today, Italy's youth detention centres suffer from overcrowding, a lack of a well-trained staff and an education syllabus that needs renewing to meet the needs and aspirations of young people in prison. A recent incident in the spring of 2024, when some prison officers at the Beccaria Youth Detention Centre were accused of abusing the minors in their care, was another strong indication of the need for reform. This general state of affairs has made us realise that our Prison Shakespeare workshop and those other cutting-edge theatre workshops in prisons all over Italy have a crucial role to play. They are a benchmark, upholding the idea that art,

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2 A video on the project is available at the link: <https://vimeo.com/952587823> (accessed 8.5.2025).

culture and theatre can act as an antidote and a healer. They have become even more necessary in the present political climate when Italy's right-wing government headed by Premier Giorgia Meloni has chosen to prioritise punitive measures – such as those outlined in the Decree Law 123/23 (known as the Caivano Decree and containing “Urgent measures to combat youth hardship, educational poverty and juvenile crime, as well as to ensure the safety of minors in the digital environment”), which was later converted into Law 159/23 – over a more humanitarian approach to tackling youth poverty, educational inequality and juvenile crime. Sadly today, our juvenile justice system is under attack. A minor like Romeo Montague, who in our 2018 courtroom play was eligible for a suspended sentence and supervision, treatment and support, would no longer have this opportunity following the Caivano Decree and would end up in prison.

In conclusion, the present book seeks to chart the positive, transformative experience of a prison Shakespeare theatre workshop for all those involved – detained minors, university students, young actors and workshop leaders. As well as hopefully providing food for thought and stimulating debate, it also sounds an alarm bell.

*Lisa Mazoni & Giuseppe Scutellà*  
(Puntozero)

We are truly excited to see the English translation of *SeeKspir al BeKka* finally come to life. This step represents much more than a mere linguistic adaptation: it is a bridge that allows us to connect with similar experiences around the world. Expanding the audience that can learn about our work is essential for us. It lets us share our story and discover how others share the same goal: redefining the relationship between art, society, and rehabilitation.

When we set up the first prison theatre at the Cesare Beccaria Juvenile Detention Centre, we aimed not just to create performances. We wanted to test our belief that theatre could break down barriers, turning the prison from a place of exclusion to a space of connection and growth. In Italy, the Puntozero Beccaria Theatre is a unique experience, blending art, education, and social inclusion in an environment that, by its very nature, is closed and isolated.

A tangible symbol of this transformation is the door that directly connects the theatre to the outside world – a physical and symbolic passage between “inside” and “outside.” This door has enabled the Puntozero Theatre to become a fully operational public performance space, changing our daily routine. We now operate seven days a week, from 9 a.m. to 11 p.m., transforming the theatre into a real theatre community – a vibrant and pulsating hub of activities, relationships, and dreams.

The idea that prisons should concern everyone and be a collective responsibility inspired the creation of the Shakespeare workshop in partnership with the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at Milan University. For ten years, Professor Mariacristina Cavecchi and Professor Margaret Rose have shared this journey with us, promoting among their students the notion that prisons reflect the health of society as a whole. “Show me not your palaces, but your prisons, for it is through these that the degree of civilisation of a nation is measured.” This quotation, of uncertain attribution, perfectly sums up the collaboration between Milan University and Puntozero. A more humane prison, one that respects human dignity and aligns with constitutional principles, guarantees that the system cares

for citizens who succeed and those who falter, focusing on their genuine reintegration into society.

Italy has too many prisons and too many prisoners. There are 190 prisons for adults and 17 for minors. Today, the prison population exceeds 60,000, with an average overcrowding rate estimated at 130%. Since their establishment in 1934, overcrowding has become an issue for the first time in juvenile detention facilities. We need fewer prisons, but the majority of citizens must share this idea. Society needs to overcome the fear of the “prisoner” as a threatening hazy figure and instead recognize, understand, and humanize those in detention. In doing so, it becomes clear that there are no monsters in our prisons; instead, there are individuals who need the help of those with greater resources and tools.

We must also reflect deeply on the meaning of the law and consider how, at times, it can turn an individual into a “criminal.” It’s time to set aside emotional reactions and approach the purpose of punishment without prejudice, questioning not necessarily the abolition of prisons but at least their function and role within the framework of legislative principles. This is why the workshop with the University of Milan is a space where citizenship is active but also thoughtful and critical. In this environment, opinions and conventions are not stigmatized but shared to foster new ways of thinking and acting.

Theatre, particularly our Puntozero company, creates real opportunities for training and employment, which often culminate in the hiring of former detainees. Here, they have the chance to express their personality, creativity, and potential to the fullest. Our theatre is not merely a space for performance but a springboard toward a possible future where talent and commitment translate into concrete opportunities for redemption. This is our contribution to transforming the prison experience into a moment of personal and social rebirth.

At the Beccaria detention centre, theatre is not just about performance and scripts. It is a microcosm of life and learning. We organize programmes on theatre professions, experiment with new technologies, such as virtual and augmented reality, use video mapping for digital scenography, explore innovative lighting solutions, and work with 3D printing. For the young people involved, their cell becomes merely a backdrop – they return to it late in the evening after a full day’s work, creative activities, and engagement

with others. Theatre becomes a workshop for self-discovery and connecting with others, but it is also a space to imagine a professional future far removed from the stereotypes that often oblige young detainees to follow preordained paths. Instead, new paths open up, made of choices, skills, and opportunities.

The translation of *SeeKspir al BeKKa* marks a new phase in our journey. It gives us the opportunity to reflect on how our model might be shared and implemented in other parts of the world. Do similar experiences already exist? What are the differences and similarities? And above all, how can we learn from other contexts? We are eager to find out and hopeful that we can share our approach with those who, like us, believe that theatre is a powerhouse capable of changing people and communities.

We hope that the English version of our book will tell our story and serve as a tool to spark dialogue and new joint ventures that can help our model grow. Theatre is not just about performance – it is also a key to opening doors, creating connections, and imagining a more inclusive future.

# Prefaces

*Elio Franzini*

(Former Chancellor of Milan University)

The kind of experience described in the following pages is an example of the work the University of Milan carries out at the “Cesare Beccaria” Juvenile Detention Centre<sup>1</sup> and other correctional facilities across our city. This work deserves a great deal of attention and depends on the close collaboration between our staff and the prison staff, all of whom are guided by the principle that “punishment” should never violate a person’s dignity and rights. I must, therefore, thank the key players and protagonists in our prison programme.

What happens at the Beccaria also has a cultural value, a sign that culture can make an individual think and grow. And, finally, it uses theatre, a theatre that embodies the highest form of artistic expression, that of William Shakespeare. This is not without its consequences and holds symbolic value. Shakespeare perfectly understood the ambivalence of the human mind and recognised that we live our lives at a crossroads, where mysterious forces are at work.

Reading his plays, one always has the impression that there is a hidden truth that can never be fully confirmed. This creates a sense of uncertainty in the reader or spectator, as the textual fractures present us with open symbols, thus preventing a definitive moral judgement. As early as 1858, Elizabeth Montague observed that symbols are not only philosophical but also produce a pervasive anxiety that alters the viewer’s perception, as it naturally does whenever the reversible nature of signifiers and values is revealed. Through such symbols, we are constantly driven towards a dimension in which the boundary between a category and its opposite grows thinner, thus promoting superhuman associations of qualities that hide immeasurable substitutes that transcend humanity. This inner split reality is not abstract but signals a deep cultural and philosophical rupture.

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1 We use indifferently both terms Juvenile Detention Centre and Youth Detention Centre.

We are, therefore, on the edge of two worldviews, each with a specific symbolic methodology. I believe that the Beccaria boys understand this in a “visceral” way because they consciously enter a vast hall of mirrors. Through Shakespeare we enter a new dimension that automatically restores and transforms. When it transforms itself into a representation, precisely because it is “idea” and *Sinn-Bild*, both meaning and image at the same time, the symbol is not limited to its historical significance. Still, it embodies an instance of knowledge that is historically and spiritually grounded. The images that populate a work are experiences and representations which enter into a process of meaning that they traverse, suggesting further symbolic possibilities and creating new images. The theatre thus appears as an authentic synthesis of experiences: a historical sign of a magical reality, which, taken to its extreme consequences, goes beyond its necessary symbolic conclusion – the reunification of forces – to inaugurate a new dimension.

It is impossible not to “feel” Shakespeare’s words and the demons that inhabit them, even before considering the necessary historical awareness. Undoubtedly, the influence of Renaissance culture prevents Shakespeare, unlike Spinoza, from demystifying the demonic in favour of enlightened reason; on the contrary, the devil that emerges from medieval and Renaissance mythologies is “interiorised” and begins, as it were, his descent into the soul: here lies the Cartesian possibility of representing the most negative passions, describing them as “real” objects and dividing the world into contrasting representations. The darkness lurking in the heart of man is, thus, given a new possibility, that of “experiencing” evil without embodying it in devils, witches, or ghosts. The fact that the diabolical is transformed into a “symbol” is indicative of a theoretical substrate that Spinoza, in the same period, found in his struggle against those devils in which people believed: human beings are not damned creatures, guilty of original sin and incapable of turning to good. Instead, they are mathematical and physical entities, with passions, like hot and cold air. This metaphysical basis is the reason why many “Enlightenment” intellectuals believed that the fears instilled in individuals by images of hell were a tool of civil and religious power that we must fight in the name of human freedom. Shakespeare, like Spinoza, is a forerunner in this struggle, aware that the spirits of negativity can take on different and often faceless forms. They represent the “passions of the soul,” which *internalise and spiritualise the places of Hell* but which remain an

enemy to be defeated and demystified, albeit with different tools. In this way, two traditions emerge that are typical of modernity. The first is libertarian and culminates in the Enlightenment. It leads to a rationalist and naturalist denial of Hell and, therefore, of its images. The second sees Hell as a “literary” image of the soul’s passions, which reason can illuminate but by which one can still be trapped because duality is at the heart of subjectivity itself. In this way, a “modernity” of Hell becomes possible, and new ways of looking at it emerge, ways that can undoubtedly be exemplified by Michelangelo’s *Last Judgement* but that have their original “manifesto” in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and in *Macbeth*, in its “interiorisation” of the witches.

In other words, Shakespeare enters the soul of the boys at Beccaria because he speaks of the ambivalence of the soul’s places. He does this not abstractly but through representations, actions, and words, thus creating a new way of “doing metaphysics.” In other words, he seeks the foundations of human action. The metaphysics to be rejected is therefore, as in Spinoza, that which “splits in two” the cognitive relationship with the outside world, while the metaphysical instance to be recovered is one in which the devil makes sense because he participates in a symbolic, and not diabolical, genesis and metamorphosis that unifies and produces a new symbolic necessity. There is neither a dialectical synthesis nor an unequivocal position: the symbol and the devil are contained in what Goethe called “polarity,” where the symbol, namely an organic and metamorphic thought, needs the devil because in it “what is separated seeks itself again and can be found and reunited once more,” leading inevitably to “a third, new, superior, unexpected thing!”<sup>2</sup> In this incessant metamorphic force, it is, therefore the symbolic tension, the will to always find a meaning for things, that defeats this opposing force and, with it, the nihilistic form it has taken in our time, where it has also become an abyss for the artist, ready to swallow their whole. The experience at the Beccaria therefore has a profound cultural and formative value: it is the beginning of a metamorphosis that starts from what Schlegel called the “corporeality” of Shakespeare’s work, affirming that, like nature, it “produces beauty and ugliness without separating them and with the same exuberant richness.” In his works, beauty and ugliness are always juxtaposed. They are never beautiful things free from “impure residue,” useful “for some other purpose,” driven as they are by “some characteristic or

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2 J. W. Goethe, *Metamorfosi delle piante*, Milano, Guanda, 1983.

philosophical interest.” The symbolic is not – and I would like to stress this in conclusion – the regained harmony, the closing of a dialectical circle, but rather, as Leibniz states in the same years, a baroque symbolic fold (according to Deleuze’s interpretation), a confusion of the rational and the sensible that contains within it a strong cosmological tension. Therefore, when we speak of harmony, we should acknowledge that differences and contrasts permeate it. Hence, the meaning of a work is all the richer, the more the things that live in it. As Leibniz writes, harmony “is made pleasant by the dissonances which are inserted and are compensated for with admirable rationality.”<sup>3</sup> Drama is not an illusory harmony but rather the result of the creation of meaning, which produces organisms in which different possibilities harmonise, thus imitating the possibilities of nature itself, its infinite gradations. Shakespeare is understood and appreciated because he shows us an aporetic universe pierced by an irreconcilable sense of unease, by the ever-emerging unconscious that threatens harmony and truth. Here is a world without monolithic and immutable values but rather a reality that presents itself as a system of references capable of establishing a dialogue between differences, especially between the different faculties that live in the spirit itself, that is, between sensitivity and intellect, between reason and rhetoric.

Theatre can make those people who have already experienced the contradictions of life understand that the world of things does not present itself in a static and formal space, on an immobile screen along which illusory images move, but rather in a living space that cannot be reduced to its mere historicity. At its core is *a subject who lives in and inhabits the world*. Looking at things is not a metaphysical procedure but rather a search for mediation – of different kinds and nature, and according to different modes – through which they are represented, thus placing oneself between the idea and the image, between the thinking of things and the intuition of things. Mediations that seem to deprive knowledge of its “immediacy,” of that naive worship of “presence” linked to an intuitive contingency. The cognitive meaning of appearance must participate in a generative, mediated, and stratified process.

At the Beccaria detention centre, in conclusion, the individual learns through theatre to describe the genesis of knowledge, thus exploring conceptual territories as a way of questioning things, without the presumption

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3 G. W. Leibniz, *Confessio Philosophi*, Napoli, Cronopio, 1992.

of “defining” or “explaining” them. Therefore, the image, the scene, is not a “derealisation,” access to a more or less mediated virtuality, but a starting point to show the symbolic, expressive, spiritual meaning of our life. As Goethe said, it is a “descent to the Mothers” that teaches us and the boys at Beccaria that the world is a complex reality that needs to be organised: it is not a window onto an ideal or utopian city but a way of interpreting the space in which we live, with all its ambiguous, uncertain horizons. Suppose the “normal” world is “deformed” by theatre. In that case, it does so, not to create an illusion but rather to show that this world is only one possibility, and that creative power cannot be reduced to a single datum or to a univocal relationship with things. Those who experience theatre from the inside develop a penetrating eye. This eye delves into the possible and sees that creation is never finished and that new horizons, forms and “formations” are always possible.

*Francesca Perrini*

(Former Director of Youth Justice in Lombardy)

The theatre experience described in the following pages gave the boys at the “Cesare Beccaria” Juvenile Detention Centre a chance to be something else and talk about themselves. It also invited them to “enjoy the opportunity of being somewhere else,” wearing someone else’s shoes on a stage. The boys could “have fun” and “disagree,” the latter, a very strong impulse when you’re a teenager, until you discover that, to your great surprise, even though your life stories are different, your emotions are just the same. They were given a chance to think about their lives through their emotions.

They were allowed to have a name that represents their inner state and does not just evoke their unlawful actions. This dichotomy between social and personal identities, name and essence, is often experienced by both boys and girls in custody. It is *Romeo and Juliet*’s dilemma.

The social rehabilitation of young boys and girls who are detained in the penal system is an institutional duty, as well as a social one. In the same way, it is our shared responsibility to encourage these minors to take part in experiences that can help them grow and learn.

There’s no doubt that theatre holds a strong pedagogical and rehabilitative power. This is clear to Giuseppe Scutellà and Lisa Mazoni, who have worked for many years at the Beccaria and have seen how theatre workshops can be an important trigger of personal growth for many imprisoned young people. As a matter of fact, the masks the boys wear onstage not only teach them to find their true selves and to think about their past lives in a future perspective, but they also invite the community to look at these young people in a different light, and to see them as opportunities and resources, rather than “criminals”; not just individuals to be punished, but young people with talent and dreams, who are capable of embracing opportunities which help them leave their unlawful past behind.

The project “SceKspir at the BeKKa” derives from a successful collaboration between the Puntozero company, the University of Milan, and the Beccaria juvenile detention centre. It is part of a cluster of educational programmes that allows the boys at the Beccaria to experience a different reality from the one they are used to. When university students and imprisoned young men work side by side, they all have an opportunity to grow. For the

young men in prison, it is important to cooperate with the students. They get an idea of how different their life could be, they start questioning themselves, and hopefully, they end up wishing to be something else. For the university students, instead, the workshop is generally their first experience inside a prison and allows them to question themselves and to challenge any prejudices they might have regarding prison life and the young people in prison whom they work with.

Contemporary society, which makes it so difficult to create meaningful connections and often fails to offer concrete alternatives and answers to young people's needs, would benefit from similar initiatives that break down barriers and can create a stimulating, productive and fun dialogue between inside and outside, as the "SceKspir at the BeKKa" programme is doing. Everyone, inside and out, would benefit from these experiences.



# Introduction. Milan University at BeKKa

*Mariacristina Cavecchi & Margaret Rose*

(Milan University)

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“Scekspir” is how F. spells “Shakespeare” in a note. F. is nineteen, his arms are heavily tattooed, his head is shaven and his tone ranges from arrogant and angry to disillusioned. He still has a few months before being released from the “Cesare Beccaria” Youth Detention Centre. F. works with us in the “blue room,” and although he is initially reluctant, he finally agrees to play Balthasar, Romeo’s servant, in our show, *Romeo Montecchi: innocente o colpevole?* (*Romeo Montague: Innocent or Guilty?*), scheduled for the end of the workshop.

This is the fourth<sup>1</sup> edition of the “Shakespeare & Law” workshop, a joint venture between the present writers and teachers of British Theatre Studies at the “Statale” (Milan’s State University) and Giuseppe Scutellà and Lisa Mazoni, directors of the Puntozero theatre company. These two directors have been working for thirty years with the young men at the Beccaria Youth Detention Centre (nicknamed “BeKKa”).<sup>2</sup> Every year since 2016, in November, we run a theatre workshop based on one of Shakespeare’s plays, with a mixed group of university students, young actors from the Puntozero theatre company, minors in prison or on licence. This year it is *Romeo and Juliet*.

Shakespeare’s works are undoubtedly difficult for these teenagers to read and understand, so they are usually reluctant to read them at first. F. spontaneously asks the question that many of our students are perhaps afraid to ask: “Who the fuck writes this shit?” With these workshops, we aim

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1 In November 2024 we held our tenth annual Shakespeare Prison workshop. An eight-minute documentary, subtitled in English, directed by Francesco Castagnino and featuring interviews with young people involved in the project, is available on vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/801210079>.

2 This means that Scutellà and Mazoni have just celebrated their thirtieth year at the “Cesare Beccaria” Juvenile Detention Centre with all the boys.

to “narrow” the gap between university and prison by using Shakespeare’s plays – a playwright who spoke with great sensitivity about freedom, imprisonment and change – as catalysts leading the workshop participants into different worlds, experiences and languages, but also introducing them to shared fears, struggles and prejudices. Giuseppe Scutellà, the company’s director and actor, facilitates this process of “narrowing the gap.” Giuseppe studied at Milan’s “Paolo Grassi” drama academy and believes that theatre has a social dimension. He is also an educator, able to charm the young men of the BeKKa, as well as the rest of us, by his relaxed manner, self-irony, witty banter, but also by his determination and reassuring attitude. He knows how to discover the “creative subjectivity that lies beneath the cover of the individualism that prison imposes on people,” as Claudio Meldolesi describes it in an essay on theatre in prison.<sup>3</sup> For us, too, this is a unique teaching programme whose potential and results are constantly confirmed by the enthusiasm and energy of our students. Their commitment, which goes far beyond what is required of them in other university workshops, shows – if it were still necessary – that the cognitive process cannot be separated from the emotional sphere and how creativity and freedom of expression allow students to process what they have learnt. Moreover, their engagement in a mixed group of students, teachers, actors, and experts in different fields is crucial for developing critical thinking and connecting with the literary texts, the world of theatre and the world in general. This workshop therefore offers an incredible opportunity for students to grow culturally and emotionally. When you read the entries in their logbooks, it is evident that the prison theatre experience has empowered them, making them more mature and sometimes in awe of their new experiences.

The workshop also includes a writing competition, “Scrivere per il teatro,” now in its sixth edition: another project that allows Milan University students to use their creativity by challenging them to write a short play. The two playlets we added as prologue and epilogue to the script, *Romeo Montague: Innocent or Guilty?* are the winners of two different editions of this competition: the first is Davide Novello’s *Rage*, inspired by *Romeo and Juliet*; the second is Dimitri Patrizi’s monologue, *At the Bottom*. The latter, spoken by Nick Bottom, one of the mechanicals in *A Midsummer Night’s*

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3 C. Meldolesi, “Immaginazione contro emarginazione. L’esperienza italiana del teatro in carcere”, *Teatro e storia*, 1994, vol. 16, pp. 41-68, p. 45.

*Dream*, explores the inadequacy and mistrust many young people feel in and outside prison.

“Narrowing the gap.” When we work on Shakespeare’s script, we try to make sure that the language the characters use does not sound obscure or far-fetched. The way they speak must come alive and sound authentic to the young participants. This means a lot of work, modernising Shakespeare’s language and sometimes making radical cuts and additions to the scenes. This is why our retellings are always carried out from the perspective and life experiences of the people in custody and students. For us, *Romeo and Juliet* is first and foremost a tragedy about the turmoil and violence of youth, and hence, our idea of ending our retelling with the clash between Romeo and Tybalt, after which Romeo, who is still a minor, is put on trial, according to the procedures of an Italian juvenile court. In this way, the tragedy becomes a new, powerful and visceral vehicle, capable of arousing the interest of people who have actually been on trial and have personally experienced what is presented on stage. But even those who have only seen a trial on television or in cinema, or read about it in newspapers and books, will hopefully immerse themselves in this retelling out of curiosity to better understand the justice system and what minors go through when committing a crime.

## A Multi-Disciplinary Approach

We start by re-reading *Romeo and Juliet* from the perspective of the young people in prison. They tell us about their personal experiences with the impertinence of someone who has lived through these situations and knows how they usually end. We are also supported by several specialists whom we have invited to work with us. This multidisciplinary approach is typical of our programme, bringing together different and even conflicting points of view. It stimulates a creative process that breaks down the barriers between different research fields.

Daniela Carpi, Professor of English Literature, Founder and Chairperson of AIDEL (Associazione Italiana di Diritto e Letteratura), helped us understand *Romeo and Juliet* better by giving us the tools to examine the legal issues raised by Shakespeare’s tragedy, with all its tensions and paradoxes. The characters’ repeated “mutiny” against the order of things reflects Elizabethan

society, where private vengeance and public justice often clash. The issue of people's names likewise stood central to our workshop. After all, a name plays a key role in defining a social and personal identity today, just as it did in Elizabethan times. In the tragedy, private and public identities are at odds, and this is evident not only in the relationship between the young men and women who attend the workshop, but also in the way our trial/show is conceived. On the one hand, Romeo Montague's name is associated with different identities. On the other, it ends up being a deadly trap because it represents a faction, a family, a household, and a specific upbringing. The influence of the family and society on a person's life inevitably coincides with one of the most important principles of the juvenile justice system, as Simone Pastorino, an educator and criminologist with many years' experience as a lay judge ("giudice onorario"), points out. Unlike the adult courts, the juvenile courts, which were set up in Italy in 1934, focus both on the crime committed as well as the minor's personality. It is no coincidence that in a juvenile courtroom, the professional judge is assisted by lay judges: psychologists, criminologists, psychiatrists, educators, and social workers who investigate the crime committed, as well as trying to define the reasons why a young person has ended up in a criminal environment and embarked on criminal actions. So Pastorino examined Romeo Montague's profile, considering the possibility that Romeo's lawyer would ask for an investigation into the young man's altered state of mind, due to the violent environment in which he grew up. Pastorino also aired the likelihood that Romeo's crime might be written off as unintentional and asked whether there were reasons to suggest that he be ordered to do community work.

Instead, Lucio Camaldo, a university teacher, lawyer and scientific coordinator of the postgraduate programme in Juvenile Criminal Justice at Milan University, informs us how, on the basis of Decree No. 448 of 22 September 1988, the justice system invests in promoting educational experiences that can bring about a positive change in the offender, such as postponing the trial and ordering work in the community. This last decree, which allows a temporary postponement of the trial in exchange for a period of observation, treatment and support, after hearing the interested parties, inspired our imaginary trial of Romeo Montague, which saw him released on probation. All of us believe, whenever possible, in alternative sentences and thought that Romeo would be the perfect candidate for a

radical retelling of his story, where he sets out on a constructive, participatory journey towards self-improvement and social rehabilitation which Camaldo illustrates in his chapter. We felt that the experience of a theatre workshop and performance, and especially Shakespearean theatre, a well-known tool for change,<sup>4</sup> could transform the young Romeo by exposing him to “alternative narratives.” In fact, according to Pierangelo Barone, Full Professor in General and Social Pedagogy at the “Riccardo Massa” Department of Human Sciences and Education at Bicocca University, these alternatives should allow Romeo to encounter very favourable circumstances leading to transformation and change.

## A Collaborative Retelling

Having carefully read the play and understood how the Italian justice system works, in the second phase of the workshop we rewrote *Romeo and Juliet* drawing on the recently resurrected area of criticism that sees Shakespeare’s characters as real people who “perform feasible actions in a feasible world.”<sup>5</sup> So we put our Romeo on trial (as opposed to Shakespeare’s play, where the Prince of Verona exiled the hapless protagonist to Mantua), an event which takes place in Milan in 2018.

We worked together using a collaborative model, not unlike that which is said to underlie Shakespeare’s creative process. It is well known that Elizabethan scripts were unstable. The scripts that have come down to us are often altered versions of earlier drafts, changed to make them stageable, to suit the actors’ needs or the changing tastes of audiences, and usually written by more than one person.<sup>6</sup> Inspired by Shakespeare’s creative process, we encouraged the workshop participants to create a script

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4 Anglophone literature is littered with works on “Prison Shakespeare”. We mention here only the most well-known studies, like Scott-Douglas’s *Shakespeareinside. The Bard behind Bars* (New York, Continuum, 2007) and N. Herold’s *Prison Shakespeare and the Purpose of Performance. Repentance, Rituals and the Early Modern* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

5 M. Bristol, “Introduction: Is Shakespeare a Moral Philosopher?”, in M. Bristol (ed.), *Shakespeare and Moral Agency*, London, Oxford, New York, New Delhi, Sydney, Bloomsbury, 2010, p. 3. See also P. Yachnin, J. Slights (eds.), *Shakespeare and Character. Theory, History, Performance, and Theatrical Persons*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

6 D. E. Henderson, *Collaborations with the Past: Reshaping Shakespeare Across Time and Media*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2006, p. 2.

that, by questioning and rewriting *Romeo and Juliet*, would be the result of a collective effort, while at the same time showcasing the specific skills of each participant.

Under our guidance, the young people wrote and performed a script which director Giuseppe Scutellà turned into a witty, well-structured final show, which also featured some logbook entries. The logbooks, which are included in this volume, and which sometimes surprised us by their clarity of thought, were written by university students and young actors from the Puntozero company. The writers seek to evaluate the final show/trial and to talk about their personal experiences at a detention centre. As a result, they raise moral and ethical questions that should concern everyone in and out of prison.

Having taken into account what happens during a real trial, we started to populate our courtroom with different characters: a prosecutor who reads the indictment and, after hearing the parties, draws his conclusions and pronounces a verdict; four judges (two professional and two lay); a defence lawyer who cites Article 444 of the Penal Code as well as the general mitigating circumstances provided for in Article 588; a Party-Appointed Expert and an Expert Witness who carry out the psychiatric reports requested by the defence lawyer and the professional judge; several witnesses: Benvolio, Balthasar, and K., a non-Shakespearean character whom we created. We imagined the latter to be an Albanian, who does not speak a word of Italian and whose statement requires the support of a cultural mediator. He happens to be at the crime scene, during a stopover on his clandestine journey from Albania to Milan. We also included Mercutio's and Tybalt's versions of the story, even if they are dead. Juliet, however, is not present. After much discussion, we felt that Romeo would not wish to hurt Juliet's feelings, by dragging her onto the witness stand: in the patriarchal society of the Elizabethan era, she would have been disowned by her father, and even today, she would be vilified by the media.

It was rewarding to note how much enthusiasm, fun, and critical awareness the group showed in writing the witness statements. They drew on the lines spoken by the original Shakespearean characters, but also on their personal experiences, from which they reproduced the "basic and rough lexicon," as Giorgia Galiazzi wrote in her logbook.

Far from being a mimetic representation of reality, our courtroom is a space where past and present can coexist. The feud between the Montagues and the Capulets flares up right at the beginning of Shakespeare's play. This was carefully assembled by Giuseppe Scutellà, following many hours of rehearsals aimed at improving the actors' movement on stage. This quarrel goes on to echo in the following scenes: at the beginning, when the two houses, one dressed in red and the other, in blue, face each other to the sound of a beating drum played by one of our students, Mirko Preatoni; and later, in the visually striking choreography devised and performed by Michela Segato and Debora Fraschini, two students who are specialised in modern dance. They vie with each other during an intense conflict, a fusion of classical ballet and modern dance, to the sound of Woodkid's *Run Boy Run*. They also chose and choreographed this powerful song, highly appropriate in the context.

The courtroom contains a multitude of voices: not only the protagonists in the trial, but also Mercutio and Tybalt, logbook entries, the lines displayed on a huge screen filling the stage with words. There are also voices from the outside world, thanks to the breaking news summaries, presented by a reporter figure, played by student Beatrice Cioni. She presents Romeo's dilemma and his trial, using the sensational and superficial language of the tabloid press. And finally, the voices of the world inside, the real world, those of Benvolio, Tybalt, Balthasar, Mercutio, and K., interpreted by imprisoned actors who must remain nameless and are not allowed to leave the prison and join us in the theatre.

The courtroom is also a space of the mind, where the prison as an institution of detention becomes a metaphor for the prison of life. As he reflects on the murder he has committed and its inevitable consequences, Romeo finds himself in an actual cell awaiting punishment, but also in a mental cage that robs him of his freedom. We wanted Romeo's condition to reflect our own. While we are not in prison, we are too often deprived of our freedom (or we deprive ourselves of it). We illustrated this condition by scattering a series of signs around the stage, which we designed during a masterclass led by Irish artist Peter McCaughey, teacher at Glasgow School of Art, and founder of *WAVEparticle*.<sup>7</sup> Peter's work questions the artist's role

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<sup>7</sup> Peter McCaughey (1964 Omagh, Northern Ireland) is the artistic director of *WAVEparticle*, an award-winning study which seeks to investigate the presence of art

in the construction and reconstruction of space. He started experimenting with “Freespace,” a free and social corner, when he curated the Scottish pavilion, *The Happenstance*, at the 2018 International Architecture Exhibition at the Venice Biennale. We were very fortunate in that he agreed to help us rethink our notions of confinement and freedom. The signs used by the actors to mark out Romeo’s cell is the result of a massive individual and collective introspective process. Peter asked us to write (and denounce), in less than five words, things that limit our freedom or, on the contrary, things that could make us free. Among the slogans: “Share emotions!” “Raise your voice,” “There are more important things.” We wanted this scene to simply and straightforwardly show, that prison is also a metaphor. It represents all those emotional, psychological, social and cultural constraints that prevent us from being fully ourselves, without fear or inhibition.

But how do we create a free space? Peter challenged us to move out of our comfort zones and consider that our words and bodies, often limited by our inhibitions and introversion, are essential tools for self-expression. In this way, we can break down the walls and barriers we put up when we restrict and blame ourselves or when somebody blames us. This is in line with the experience of Giuseppe Scutellà, who says that one of the most challenging things to do as a director and educator in prison is to teach young boys how to control their emotions, especially since they are not allowed any physical contact with their parents, relatives, friends, boyfriends or girlfriends.

To help us retrieve our bodies’ physical, political and spiritual nature, Peter asked us to create some living statues based on Erwin Wurm’s *One Minute Sculptures*. Like the Austrian artist’s bodies, we tried to develop new, non-aesthetic relationships with the surrounding environment, whose tensions and contradictions were reflected in our poses. We accepted the challenge and attempted to experience everyday situations while using common, familiar objects in unusual ways, giving them unexpected meanings and senses. This allowed us to explore and give free rein to our creativity. Thanks to this experiment, we saw for the first time how the coexistence

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and of the artist in the world, beyond galleries and museums. WAVEparticle is a way of producing new processes, events and objects that can lead us to rethink both the places we inhabit and the systems that regulate our lives afresh. This is possible thanks to models that are more creative and make connections. See the website: <https://www.waveparticle.co.uk> (accessed 15.1.2025).

and balance between order and freedom is crucial in prison, in life and in theatre.

## The Hard Slog of Theatre

Working in a theatre is always an enormous strain.

For minors in youth detention centres, be they Moroccan, Albanian, Syrian, South American or Italian, working on a theatre project is terribly difficult, especially as they are often uneducated. For them, it also means struggling with a language they do not know and learning difficult scripts. In addition, the experience of engaging in performance might have an extraordinary emotional impact. For many of them, being onstage at the Puntozero Theatre means interacting with people who are different from the unlawful people and unreliable adults they may have grown up with. They are also different from the lawyers, judges, psychologists, and educators whom they come across in prison. It allows them to meet young women after a long time in an all-male environment. But it also means working with their peers who are not in prison and who usually come from very different backgrounds, young people with whom they can interact, befriend, and even argue. Furthermore, through our workshops, our students learn what it is like to be in prison, with all its contradictions. They learn, perhaps for the first time, that the young men behind bars are not so different from themselves and that “*errare humanum est*,” as the revealing title of Puntozero’s successful show says.<sup>8</sup>

For all of them, whether in prison or not, the experience of a theatre workshop in prison means that they feel forgotten or never experienced emotions that can be expressed through Shakespeare’s words. Shakespeare helps them to write their own “emotional grammar,” as Scutellà points out in the chapter included in this volume.

Work in a theatre helps you to grow up. After all, “education through theatre,” as the title of a recent book on the subject puts it,<sup>9</sup> is now an established practice. By interacting with others, you build self-confidence and regain that dimension of fantasy and wonder typical of childhood and early

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8 *Errare humanum est... il carcere minorile spiegato ai ragazzi*, [http://www.puntozeroteatro.org/errare\\_progetto/](http://www.puntozeroteatro.org/errare_progetto/) (accessed 15.1.2025).

9 F. Cappa, *Formazione come teatro*, Milano, Raffaello Cortina, 2016.

adolescence. This is an experience of which minors in prison have often been deprived, but which is extremely important in a process of recovery and growth, as Elvira Narducci, Director of Education at the Beccaria, explained to us. Thanks to imagination, these young people can achieve self-confidence, an inner transformation necessary to be truly free.

Theatre gives them the chance to appear in a different guise, to be appreciated and applauded as never before. Cristina Valenti, scientific adviser on the Coordinamento Teatro Carcere Emilia Romagna (Coordination Programme of Theatre and Prison in Emilia Romagna), notes that since the end of the 1980s,

when theatre was accepted as a ‘rehabilitative’ strategy [...] people inside and outside prison began to meet, creating new perspectives on the interaction between actors and audience members. Audiences learned that it was possible to appreciate actors even if incarcerated. Actors understood that a different representation of themselves could emerge through interaction with the audience. And while the debate about the rehabilitative function of theatre versus entertainment continued, a prison proved to be a privileged place to experiment with the dialectical principles of an actor: between reality and fiction, being and seeming, person and representation.<sup>10</sup>

During the workshop, all of us, teachers and students alike, learned to understand and appreciate the boys at the BeKKa as actors, singers, rappers, lighting technicians, and stagehands and, inevitably, to forget their criminal past. By getting close to them, not just in an abstract way, but by working with them, our beliefs and prejudices were challenged. We began to question the meaning of exclusion and punishment.

The show. We are ready. Everybody on stage.

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10 C. Valenti, “La sfida del teatro in carcere”, *Rivista anarchica*, 39, 342, Marzo 2009.





## Logbooks

What can I say? It's amazing how each day I spend with them in the theatre surprises me more. I'm experiencing feelings and emotions I've never felt before: the tenderness I feel for them, the pain I feel listening to their crimes, the trust they give you after a 5-minute conversation. F. and H. explain how a trial works. THEY explain to US all the formalities: where the public prosecutor sits, what the judge says. They tell us very clearly that the trial is not public. Then, they get confused, they don't know when the photo would be taken. Later, H. corrects F. and tells us a story about the time he spent in Palermo... Palermo? Why was he there? What did he do there? F. continues with his story. He quotes the penal code as if he were telling us what he had eaten for breakfast. He feels like an expert, almost boasting that he has had so many trials ... How old are they? One is 17, the other 19... But it looks as if they've already lived nine lives. Poor boys, I think. But then I smile. They joke, they joke, they want to take a break... Then, they read Shakespeare. THEY are reading Shakespeare. THEY, who seem untroubled. They, who don't know the meaning of the words, who get tired of reading the long passages, and who shy away... "I'm not good at this shit," says F. "What the fuck are they talking about?"

Alessandra Romeo, 21 November 2018

“So, during the trial my dad told the judge to fuck off. He said he would kill her. So funny.” WE aren’t laughing, though. In our minds we immediately compare: “My dad would never do that if I were on trial.” We have grown up looking to our parents for moral guidance, but morality is not universal, and not all parents teach their children the same things. We all know that we are not all brought up according to the same rules, but when we experience this first hand, in a small room in prison, we are still shocked. It is obvious at first glance that F. did not grow up watching cartoons and eating sweets. He seems ready to kick your ass, but then, if you pass his test, he softens. In his own way, of course. He forces his love ticket on you and doesn’t ask your permission to take it.

Camilla Ponti, 20 November

Of course, the vocabulary is not the same, but the meanings are similar [...] Perhaps because, in the end, the motive that drives our actions is the same, even after so many centuries? Or perhaps because what attracts us and what we ultimately fear to encounter can be the most ruthless part of ourselves?

Giorgia Galizzi, 22 November



It's incredible how the young men at the BeKKA change each time we see them. It's incredible how we have changed, too. You don't know what can happen in a week. You don't know how they are, they don't know how you are. It's like sniffing around to maybe get to know each other in the end... They read. Shyly, at first. Then, their voices grow stronger. They fill the room. "Well, I was with Romeo, then Mercury came... no, wait a minute, Mercutio. Oh, I can't believe this. Well, I was with Romeo, then Mercutio came along."

One of the boys raps, telling his story. The air gets heavy. It crushes you. It squeezes your shoulders and your chest. It squeezes you so hard that tears fall from your eyes. You try to hold them back. You meet Kristian's eyes. He smiles and covers his eyes with his hands.

"Peace, peace, Mercutio, peace! Thou talk'st of nothing." G. performs Queen Mab's monologue. From time to time, he looks at the script, but he is already off-book. "True, I talk of dreams, which are the children of an idle brain, begot of nothing but vain fantasy, which is as thin of substance as the air, and more inconstant than the wind."

When they finished, we burst into thunderous applause. And we continue to applaud loudly. We applaud and want to shout, "I'm free" and dance and jump and cry and hug and run and kiss and put on very loud music and sing. And live.

We say goodbye, smiling. We say goodbye, knowing that the next time we meet we'll do it all over again. There'll be silence again. There'll be the sniffing. There'll be the prison all over their bodies and the city all over ours. Then maybe we'll smile and say hello again.

Emilia Piz, 27 November



Meeting Peter McCaughey is disarming. His teaching is interactive and unconventional. He talks about shame and its power to freeze us in fear of what others will think. He has us singing, dancing, posing like human statues, and finally, he helps us make the signs that will serve as the set for the show. On some white sheets, there are five words about what is important to us now. I help Kristian, translate for him and draw with H. I'm beginning to relax and connect with them. I go home even more convinced of what I wrote on the sign: "Don't be shy, shine." It's so true that shyness and prejudice can make you miss out on so many fantastic opportunities, like making new and unexpected friends in a juvenile detention centre.

Sylvie Viglino, 17 November







Today was a wonderful day. We all shared a small part of our lives.

...But the most magical moment was created by Kristian when he took the microphone and told his story through rap. He found the perfect rhythm with every word and effortlessly conveyed his emotions and vulnerability. I had goosebumps. The lyrics are so powerful. So much truth and pain in just a few verses. Such a strong desire for redemption, a hunger to succeed, to start over, to be REBORN. I am more and more grateful to have been part of this workshop. Now I'm home, feeling full and enriched.

Denise Manna, 17 November







To be honest, I never thought that this seemingly harmless workshop would completely and irreversibly change my perspective. I used to think that all prisoners deserved to stay in their cells and do nothing. Now I'm embarrassed to think this was how I judged people who remind me so much of my friends.

For the bonds and friendships that were forged, tonight onstage was magical.

Beatrice Cionti, 1 December

The theatre is packed. After the usual "Break a leg" ritual, we rush to get ready. Backstage, we're all buzzing with excitement. Kristian hugs me: "I'm starting to get nervous." We tease each other to relieve the tension. On one side of the stage are the Montagues, dressed in red, and on the other, the Capulets, dressed in blue.

The performance starts, and in the blink of an eye, it's over.

How is this possible? During rehearsals today, it felt like it would never end!

We're moved, hug, thank, and take a few photos. Sylvie and I stay on the steps with H., chatting, almost as if we didn't want to leave this theatre that had given us so many emotions and new relationships. I am very grateful for this experience. I'd do it again a thousand times.

Michela Segato, 1 December





# THE RESEARCH



# Shakespeare in Italian Youth Detention Centres

*Mariacristina Cavecchi*

(Milan University)

DOI: 10.54103/st.227.c424

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5575-0584>

## **Abstract**

The chapter explores the presence of Shakespeare workshops in Italian juvenile detention centres, highlighting the lack of comprehensive documentation of the activities carried out in the seventeen IPMs (Istituti Penali Minorili) across Italy. The dissemination of many of these initiatives is often prevented by the right to privacy of the minors involved, and in some cases, it is limited to the local area or to specialist conferences. Thanks to various associations and cooperatives, from Puntozero at the “Beccaria” in Milan to Teatro Kismet OperA at the “Fornelli” in Bari, from the Teatro del “Pratello” in Bologna to the Officina di Teatro Sociale Adynaton at the “Casal del Marmo” in Rome, to name but a few, one can find a lot going on, culturally speaking, inside these institutions. Many prison theatre workshops take their inspiration directly from Shakespeare’s works.

**Keywords:** Shakespeare; Prison Shakespeare; *Romeo and Juliet*; theatre; Italian youth detention centres; theatre workshop; Teatro del Pratello; Officina di Teatro Sociale Adynaton; Teatro Puntozero; emotions; Teatro Metropolitano; inclusion; empowerment; crime.

## Prison Shakespeare in Italian Youth Detention Centres

It is widely acknowledged that the tradition of theatre in Italian prisons is comparatively recent, in contrast to the long-standing practice in the Anglophone world. Nevertheless, Shakespeare's plays have become a cornerstone of the Italian prison theatre scene, with numerous theatre groups in prisons across the country regularly staging his works.

Australian scholar and director Rob Pensalfini writes that the specific phenomenon of Shakespeare's plays being performed by people in prison was first recorded in the mid-1980s, and this is roughly contemporary to the birth of theatre practice in Italian prisons.<sup>1</sup> Italian prison theatre was pioneered by Armando Punzo, who founded the Fortress Theatre Company in 1987 and was awarded the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement at the 2023 Venice Theatre Biennale. Throughout his long career, Punzo has succeeded in transforming the Fortress Company into a repertory theatre and in transforming Volterra prison into a vibrant cultural hub.<sup>2</sup> However, it was only decades later that the existence of Shakespeare's theatre in Italian prisons came to the attention of a wider audience, due to the internationally acclaimed film *Caesar Must Die* (*Cesare deve morire*) by Paolo and Vittorio Taviani. Winner of the Golden Lion Award at the 2012 Berlin Film Festival, the film vividly brings to life Fabio Cavalli's theatre workshops at Rebibbia, Rome's high-security prison.

While the programmes at Rebibbia and Volterra prisons are the best known, numerous other important projects have still to be critically assessed. Moreover, although significant studies on prison theatre have been published – notably Massimo Marino's *Teatro e Carcere in Italia* (2005)<sup>3</sup> – the specific nature and scope of Shakespeare in Italian prisons remain largely unexplored.

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1 R. Pensalfini, *Prison Shakespeare. For These Deep Shames and Great Indignities*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2016, p. 9. In the Anglophone world, the term "Prison Shakespeare" is employed to denote a field of research that encompasses both academic and practitioner involvement in the use and study of Shakespeare's plays within prison contexts.

2 A. Punzo, *È ai vinti che va il suo amore. I primi venticinque anni di autoreclusione con la Compagnia della Fortezza di Volterra*, Firenze, Clichy, 2013, pp. 295-8.

3 M. Marino's *Teatro e Carcere in Italia*, [http://www.ristretti.it/areestudio/territorio/antigone/teatro\\_europa.pdf](http://www.ristretti.it/areestudio/territorio/antigone/teatro_europa.pdf) (accessed 15.1.2025).

Unfortunately, there is still no full account of the drama activities in the seventeen juvenile detention centres (IPM, Istituto Penale per Minorenni) across our country.<sup>4</sup> However, it is important to note that several associations and cooperatives are actively working in these institutions, including Puntozero at the “Cesare Beccaria” in Milan, the Kismet Opera Theatre at the “Fornelli” in Bari, the Teatro del Pratello in Bologna, the Officina di Teatro Sociale Adynaton at “Casal del Marmo” in Rome. A significant number of their workshops concentrate on Shakespeare’s plays, although these initiatives remain largely ignored, typically being presented only locally or at academic seminars.

Shakespeare is such an important reference point that many of these associations have produced his plays on significant occasions. In 2019, the recently opened entrance to the Puntozero Beccaria Theatre was inaugurated with a performance of *Romeo and Juliet Disaster*, directed by Giuseppe Scutellà. This event marked a significant milestone as it was the first time in Europe that a theatre housed within the confines of a prison had two doors: one connecting the theatre to the prison and the other, to the outside, allowing audiences access, without any prior security checks. Two years earlier, the Kismet Opera Theatre in Bari had celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the Sala Prove Theatre in the “Nicola Fornelli” juvenile detention centre in Bari, with the event “VENT’ANNI - atto primo dedicato a Shakespeare” (“TWENTY YEARS - First Act dedicated to Shakespeare”), conceived and directed by Lello Tedeschi. This included a play drawing on *Othello*, performed by a mixed group of professional actors and minors from the “Fornelli,” and a thirty-minute documentary, *A che punto è la notte - Le confessioni di tre giovani attori* (*How goes the night. The confessions of three young actors*) directed by Vincenzo Ardito. The documentary combines Macbeth’s nightmares with the lives of three minors in prison and their learning process. Even Claudio Suzzi’s first production at a juvenile detention centre, the “Menucci” in Florence, was *MaCbEtH CoScIENtIa* (2003). This was a multimedia project loosely based on Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, combining

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4 But one of the goals of the conference “Shakespeare negli Istituti Penali per Minorenni: Sogni e libertà” (Milan University, 29-30 November 2024), organised as part of the national research project PRIN *Applied Shakespeare*, is to map prison Shakespeare workshops in youth detention centres.

video, juggling and Japanese Noh theatre. On this occasion, the young men at “Menucci” made paper mache masks and built the stage props.

It is noteworthy that an early attempt to establish a network of theatre companies working with minors in juvenile detention centres across Italy centred on Shakespeare’s *King Lear*. Between 2005 and 2007, young men and women from three such centres in Milan, Bologna, and Palermo were asked to create three acts of “a play, each act produced by a different director, but influenced by a unique style and experience,” as Massimo Marino writes in his photo book *Il mare dietro un muro. Nostro padre Re Lear*.<sup>5</sup> The obstacles posed by the organisation of the juvenile justice system and the precarious nature of funding (the problem of having to find new ways to finance an ongoing programme when the money runs out), led the three directors to create three different shows that were no longer part of a single entity. The initial aspiration “to bring them together in a festival that would be hosted in each of the cities involved, or at least in one of them”<sup>6</sup> was soon thwarted. It soon became apparent that it was impossible to move the minors from one city to another, or even to obtain permission for them to perform in a theatre. Only in Milan was the show performed outside the prison. It was thanks to Sandro Marilotti, the prison director, that a group of young men at the “Beccaria,” including some who had committed serious offences, were given the opportunity to leave the prison and perform in a warehouse in the Milanese suburb of Bovisa. Marilotti aimed to enable these young men and women to work not only inside but also outside the prison.

*King Lear* was chosen as the reference text for the workshops because, according to the project’s creators, it is so multi-layered that it can be interpreted in many ways. At the same time, the play contains several references that make it perfect for a prison performance, not only for the ominous words of mourning that Lear utters at the end of the play, while Cordelia is being taken prisoner (5.3.8-18), but also because the events are driven by a series of betrayals that lead to “awareness and new possibilities.” Furthermore, *King Lear* tells a story of loss, which “can represent a path to

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5 M. Marino, “Teatri adolescenti reclusi”, in M. Marino e R. Mutti, *Il mare dietro un muro. Nostro padre Re Lear*, Milan, Electa, 2008, p. 11.

6 Marino, *Teatri adolescenti reclusi* cit., p. 11.

self-discovery.”<sup>7</sup> It is also “able to create an emotional connection with the actors because it’s a tragedy that deals with family dynamics, the breakdown and disintegration of a family unit, all aspects that the boys know well because they’ve experienced them first hand.”<sup>8</sup> These elements found their way into three different plays: *King Lear*, *Quel che resta del mio regno* (*What Remains of my Reign*) and *Fool Bitter Fool*.

*King Lear*, directed by Giuseppe Scutellà (Puntozero), is an uncut version of the original play translated by Emilio Tadini. It was performed in a warehouse that Marino describes as a “handmade theatre.” The spacious area on the ground floor “is almost entirely occupied by a sloping platform built by the inmates who took part in a woodwork workshop. [...] The whole space [...] is littered by the fabrics used for the costumes, pieces of real or synthetic fur, provided by the Piccolo Teatro or found in street markets.”<sup>9</sup>

In *Quel che resta del mio regno*, directed by Claudio Collovà (Cooperative Dionisio) at Palermo’s “Malaspina” Juvenile Detention Centre, Shakespeare’s tragedy inspired a show that “uses the language of cabaret, farce and the grotesque” and in which “the mistakes made by the actors become meaningful and essential material.”<sup>10</sup> In this play, Lear is portrayed as a mafia boss, who “tears [...] the city apart,”<sup>11</sup> although the word “mafia” is never mentioned. However, as Marino says, “the anti-mafia sentiment is encoded in Collovà’s DNA”<sup>12</sup> and “the mafia lurks in the shadows,” ready to strike at the young men in this Sicilian prison.

*Fool Bitter Fool*, staged at the “Pietro Siciliani” Juvenile Detention Centre in Bologna, nicknamed “Il Pratello,” and directed by Paolo Billi<sup>13</sup> and Valentina Fulginiti (Bloom Culture Teatri association), is a show that “combines a reduced version of Lear’s story with that of the Fool, the embod-

7 Marino, *Teatri adolescenti reclusi* cit., p. 12.

8 R. Mutti, “La prigionie dimenticata”, in Marino and Mutti, *Il mare dietro un muro* cit., p. 37.

9 Marino, *Teatri adolescenti reclusi* cit., p. 19.

10 Collovà in Marino, *Teatri adolescenti reclusi* cit., p. 24. *Il Piccolo Amleto*, directed by Collovà, was staged on 16, 17 May 2019 at Teatro Biondo in Palermo. The boys and girls who acted in the play were supervised by the USSM (Ufficio di Servizio Sociale per Minorenni) and by the Centro di Giustizia Minorile of the city.

11 Marino, *Teatri adolescenti reclusi* cit., p. 24.

12 Marino, *Teatri adolescenti reclusi* cit., p. 24.

13 P. Billi’s work at the “Pratello” in Bologna is well illustrated by Alessandro Zanini in *Alla luce delle prove. Il teatro nel carcere minorile di Bologna*, Bologna, Bononia University Press, 2009.

iment of madness, who judges the rules of our upside-down world.” In words written by one of the young men in prison and uttered by a mad Edgar: “The law is a book written upside down... I don’t like the law.”<sup>14</sup>

Writing about the project’s aim, Marino argues that “there is no particular end to this experience. The groups will split up at the end of the workshop, the professional actors will go their own way, looking for someone else to work with, and so will the young people in prison. Some of them will be released, others will be transferred. Some will end up behind bars again, others will find work. Maybe some of them will play again or simply carry this experience in their hearts.”<sup>15</sup> Giuseppe Scutellà, on the other hand, insists on the importance of continuity. He never tires of organising workshops and shows in the theatre inside the prison which he literally built together with his wife, Lisa Mazoni, and a group of imprisoned young people. They built this theatre little by little, with the help and generosity of many private individuals and public institutions. Among Scutellà’s dream supporters was the Teatro alla Scala, which donated their old but still very beautiful red velvet armchairs. “Beppe,” as the young men call him, has worked for many years to create a theatre, with a proper season and a mixed company of young people in prison and on probation, and university students joining the Puntozero company out of passion. He has also put together a repertoire inspired by the classics, especially Shakespeare. *King Lear* was one of a series of shows drawing on Shakespeare’s works: *Juliet and Romeo* (1996), which combined scenes performed on stage by the actors, videos taken during rehearsals, scenes inspired by city life, instrumental pieces and Arabic requiems; *The Tempest* (1997), a short storyboard that left a lot of room for improvisation and was performed for only the prison staff; the Beckettian *Tanti Romei nessuna Giulietta* (*Many Romeos and No Juliet*, 2020); *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (2015), which premiered at the Piccolo Teatro in 2017; and *Romeo & Juliet Disaster* (2019), a light-hearted rewriting of Shakespeare’s tragedy, which sold out very quickly and gave around three thousand people access to the prison theatre during its fifteen-day run. Lisa Mazoni, actress and co-founder of the company, emphasises the importance of this continuous work, not only for the young men at the BeKKA, but also for those who are released and find in Puntozero Beccaria Theatre a safe place to

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14 Marino, *Teatri adolescenti reclusi* cit., p. 18.

15 Marino, *Teatri adolescenti reclusi* cit., p. 32.

which they can always return. She also points out that at Puntozero, those in detention learn the basics of lighting, stagecraft, video production and acting (along with the cooking and baking skills they learn inside). These are all valuable when they start their lives again on the outside. These newly acquired skills have led to them finding employment as stagehands in important theatres, such as La Scala Opera House and the Piccolo Teatro. On the other hand, as a character in the award-winning short film *Se tu non cerchi lavoro il lavoro cerca te* (2003) puts it, “a life without work has no meaning, but a job without a meaning cannot make a good life.”<sup>16</sup>

## Love Behind Bars

Only a few traces remain of prison workshops and productions, but *Romeo and Juliet* is undoubtedly one of the most frequently performed plays in juvenile detention centres. After all, this tragedy portrays young characters struggling with the consequences of young love, forced to live up to their parent’s expectations and involved in terrible gang fights, all of which are very appealing to young people, whether they are in prison or not.

It’s no coincidence that over the years Giuseppe Scutellà has continually returned to two scenes from *Romeo and Juliet*: the opening scene, with the two rival gang fights (1.1), and the scene where Mercutio and Tybalt die and Romeo is sent into exile (3.1). According to the director, these two scenes are easy to understand for his boys, who have probably lived similar experiences: “Verona, the square, the fight between rival gangs: that’s the language they speak, that’s what they know [...] Actors on the outside look for experiences to help them get into character, but these boys do the opposite: they’ve already lived through terrible moments, often very close to those described in Shakespeare’s tragedies, and are therefore able to share these experiences through their acting.”<sup>17</sup> Moreover, as the director writes in

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16 The short film *Se tu non cerchi lavoro il lavoro cerca te* (*If you don’t look for work, work looks for you*), with the young men of the Beccaria, the students from the “Elio Vittorini” high school and the participants of the Puntozero workshop, directed by Giuseppe Scutellà and with a special guest appearance by Franca Rame can be viewed at the link <https://www.arcoiris.tv/scheda/it/1951/> (accessed 15.1.2025).

17 G. Scutellà was interviewed by Alice Strazzi, “Shakespeare e la legge. Interview with Giuseppe Scutellà”, *Stratagemmi. Prospettive teatrali*, 7 January 2020, <https://www.stratagemmi.it/shakespeare-e-la-legge-intervista-a-giuseppe-scutella/> (accessed 15.1.2025).

the present volume, the fact that the characters' lives are somewhat similar to their own "can help the boys not only to better understand how to move on stage, but also to develop new ways of reacting to situations they have already experienced." The first scene of *Romeo and Juliet*, which dramatically echoes in the gang war between Latinos on the outskirts of Milan, is therefore used in Puntozero's play *Errare humanum est* to reflect on deviance and juvenile justice. The show, which premiered at Milan's Piccolo Teatro on 26 November 2014, has been successfully performed since then in primary and secondary schools, no doubt because it focuses on an individual's mistakes as a basis for triggering their rebirth.

Emanuela Giovannini, who together with Giorgio Spaziani founded the Officina di Teatro Sociale Adynaton in 2001, agrees: Shakespeare's plays, especially *Romeo and Juliet*, are particularly effective in her work with boys and girls from the Casal del Marmo reformatory in Rome, as well as with minors on probation who took part in the "In libertà" workshop. It is no coincidence that *Una impresa impossibile (An Impossible Undertaking)*, an entertaining 2013 short film directed by Giovannini with Roberto Saura, is a collage representing (and parodying) different forms of love selected from the eleven film scenes which the group worked on during the workshop (from the 1947 classic *Angelina* to Baz Luhrmann's 1996 *Romeo + Juliet*) and framed by Shakespeare's prologue introducing the "star-crossed lovers" and the scene of their death.

Love also stands at the centre of several editions of the production of *Il classico dei classici (The Classic of the Classics)*, a play staged many times since 2010. In this case, according to Giovannini, the focus is on the difficulties that three pairs of lovers (Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet and Ophelia, Othello and Desdemona) have to overcome "while they are busy dealing with the villains of their stories, who try to hinder their relationships for various reasons." These couples have to face "duels, conspiracies, intrigues and dreamy, secret rendezvous in a play that brings together the classics and more recent work in the entertainment industry, from Pulp Fiction to rap music." Significantly, *Il classico dei classici*, which premiered on 17 November 2010 at Rome's Teatro delle Muse during a show conference on Education and Legality, Prevention of Aggressive Behaviour and Drug Addiction for high school students, was presented as "a journey through William Shakespeare's

work, drawing on the most representative, iconic scenes” and projecting them “into the present time and space.”<sup>18</sup>

Love is also the theme of *Tanti Romei e nessuna Giulietta* (*Many Romeos and No Juliet*), the first show performed by the Puntozero company at Barrio’s, a youth club founded by Father Gino Rigoldi in 1997. The show was repeated on other occasions in venues outside the prison, with young, imprisoned men who were allowed out of prison to perform. The play, which deals with love in a very Beckettian way, begins with five boys sitting on a green bench. As they wait for their Juliets, they declare their love by quoting Shakespeare or singing neo-melodic songs while emotional saxophone solos create an atmosphere for the performances on the bench.

Likewise close to absurdity is the mixture of tragic and comic elements from Shakespeare drawn from Karl Valentin’s *Tingeltange*<sup>19</sup> in the hilarious *Romeo & Juliet disaster*. Here, a company of unlikely actors are attempting to put on a play based on *Romeo and Juliet*. Still, they face many difficulties, from the gaffer who can’t turn on a light, to the secretary who loses her glasses. This last role is played by the amazing Emilia Piz, a university student who joined the company after attending a Shakespeare prison workshop. The love story between Romeo and Juliet is also enriched by a few moments of comic relief drawn from two iconic parodies of love: Valentin’s *Lettera d’amore* (*Love Letter*), an absurd love letter written by an abandoned girl to her former lover who hasn’t answered her letters;<sup>20</sup> and *Io ti amo* (*I love you*), one of Stefano Benni’s most famous poems, a hyperbolic declaration of love that ends with an unexpected “fuck you.”<sup>21</sup> Juliet delivers this in a very funny modern version of Shakespeare’s balcony scene in the play.

What is most striking about the productions of Scutella and Giovannini, as well as the other projects that use this tragedy as a springboard for their activities in prison, is their choice to focus on love and to change the original ending into a happy one. This means a kind of utopian escape in dreams

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18 The programme is available at the link: <http://www.actroma.it/programmmailclassico-deiclassici.pdf> (accessed 14.2.2020).

19 K. Valentin, *Tingeltange*, edited by Mara Fazio, Milano, Einaudi, 1980.

20 The Italian text of the letter is available at the link: [http://copioni.corrierespettacolo.it/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/VALENTIN%20Karl\\_\\_Lettera%20d’amore\\_\\_null\\_\\_\(1\)\\_\\_Monologo\\_\\_1q.pdf](http://copioni.corrierespettacolo.it/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/VALENTIN%20Karl__Lettera%20d’amore__null__(1)__Monologo__1q.pdf) (accessed 15.1.2025).

21 Stefano Benni, *Io ti amo*, 1970, in <https://www.stefanobenni.it/io-ti-amo/> (accessed 15.1.2025).

that, in fact, could really benefit these boys and girls who need to be invited to dream again and be made aware that there's more to them than their crimes and mistakes.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, *Romeo. La Recita* (*Romeo. The Performance*), staged at the Pratello in the autumn of 2004, is not only “a show about teenage romance, performed by young people who have often been robbed of love at the age of sixteen,” but also an opportunity for them to understand, through “the serious and real game of theatre,” that “they were not born just to cry.”<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, love is understandably central in an environment that lacks a comprehensive sex education programme, which explores the “emotional grammar” Giuseppe Scutellà talks about in his chapter. It is a place where sex is not only forbidden, but also treated as a taboo, even if many people in juvenile detention centres already have children of their own, as Susanna Marietti, national coordinator of Antigone, an association that has been monitoring living standards in prisons for years, points out.<sup>24</sup>

Significantly, Shakespeare is considered a “teacher” by Livia Gionfrida, a Sicilian actress and director who founded the Teatro Metropolitano collective in 2006. She has been artist in residence at the Casa Circondariale La Dogaia in Prato since 2008, where she has set up a permanent theatre workshop.<sup>25</sup> She has also created a multimedia project, *Una acerba felicità* (*An Immature Happiness*), with the young women of Pontremoli Juvenile Detention Centre, the only all-female youth detention centre in Italy.<sup>26</sup>

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22 With different aesthetic and political implications, escape is also at the heart of Armando Punzo's *Mercuzio non vuole morire*, a famous 2012 adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, in which Mercutio, after being fatally wounded, refuses to die and rewrites his story. Cfr. M. Cavocchi, “Brave New Worlds. Shakespearean Tempests in Italian Prisons”, *Other Modernities*, November 2017, pp. 1-21,

23 The notes and work memos, and the script of *ROMEO. La recita* can be read on DOCPLAYER, <https://docplayer.it/15098860-Romeo-la-recita-drammaturgia-di-paolo-billi-brunella-torresin-e-valentina-fulginitti-lavoro-diretto-da-paolo-billi.html> (accessed 14.2.2020).

24 S. Marietti, “In giro per le carceri minorili d'Italia”, *Ragazzidentro.it*, 2019 - Associazione Antigone, <http://www.ragazzidentro.it/in-giro-per-le-carceri-minorili-ditalia/> (accessed 15.1.2025).

25 Gionfrida has produced a Shakespeare trilogy in Prato prison: *Hamlet's Dream* (2011), *Macbetto* (2012-2013), and *H<sub>2</sub>Otello* (2014). Cfr. B. Montorfano, “Shakespeare, a Basketball Court and *Felicità*. Collettivo Metropolitano in *La Dogaia* Prison, Prato”, *Textus*, XXXI, n. 3, September-December 2018, pp. 139-52.

26 Marietti, *In giro per le carceri* cit., p. 7.

The project,<sup>27</sup> which consists of an art installation and a theatre performance that premiered on 2 May 2014, represents an investigation into love, and specifically the patriarchal responsibility of a father who decides who his daughter can marry, and the right of these girls to choose for themselves. The inquiry is led by actresses from difficult backgrounds: some of them, mostly from the Roma community, are detained in this prison, far from any major city, and not easily accessible to their children and families. Yet, this isn't always a bad thing, as they might come from toxic family environments which they need to be sheltered from to find a voice of their own. Gionfrida began by working on physical exercises with the actresses, who gradually responded and began to share their feelings and thoughts with her. Eventually, they took an active part in the writing of the play and the screenplay, as well as in the staging of the play and its videotaping/recording. It was a long and challenging process, requiring a focus on movement and diction, which led one of the Roma girls ("zingare") working on the project to complain: "It's easier to steal than be an actress!"

The video challenges both the girls in prison and the older citizens of Pontremoli to question the story of Romeo and Juliet and to reflect on the meaning of the expression "Be a good girl!" – a question that is relevant in prison. It begins with a series of mouths in close-up (an artistic choice that allows these underage girls to hide their identity since they never show their faces on camera). One of these mouths tells the story of "a boy and girl who love each other but can't be together because their families don't get along;" another mouth describes Juliet as "a young girl who still has a lot to learn." A quick video cut switches from the mouths and voices of the actresses to interviews and scenes from Shakespeare's tragedy, showing the conflict between parents who want their daughters to marry for money and girls who dream of love. Several mothers speak to their daughters using different accents and tones. J. speaks with a pronounced Italian accent as she orders Juliet to marry Paris. Another mother pleads with her daughter in very elementary, broken Italian: "Please. This for your good. You marry Paris. He good for you. He rich. He has big house. He has money."

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27 A video recording of this project, *Una acerba felicità*, which was made in February 2013 with the support of "Regione Toscana - Progetto teatro in carcere", is available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R6UL4hlBKj4> (accessed 15.1.2025).

The young protagonists ask questions such as, “What’s a good girl?,” “What’s a bad girl?,” “Is a girl bad, if she runs away from her father because he cares only about money and not about his daughter?” “What does happiness feel like?” “Felicità è tenersi per mano, andare lontano, felicità” (“Happiness is holding hands, going far, happiness”), the young Juliets in Pontremoli sing to the tune of a very well-known song by the Italian-American pop singers Al Bano and Romina Power. Meanwhile, they dream of utopian happiness with Romeo. These imprisoned Juliets dream of love and freedom and in their shaky Italian imagine they will be finally happy in a distant land:

La storia di Romeo e Giulietta va a finire che un giorno Giulietta va sulla spiaggia. Vuole entrare e divertirsi nel mare e giocare. E inciampa e cade in mare e questo mare era stregato. A un certo punto le è uscita la coda, come una sirena. Era da una parte felice perché poteva vivere da sola, senza che qualcuno le dicesse “tu fai questo, tu fai quell’altro! Tu sposa l’altro, tu sposa questo”. Era felice anche se era diventata un pesce. Subito dopo Giulietta cominciò a vivere come un pesce. [...] E Romeo le ha chiesto: “Perché ti sei trasformata in un pesce?” [...] e Romeo decise di trasformarsi anche lui in un pesce. E quindi nuotando, nuotando, nuotando in questo oceano, hanno fatto un giro e hanno trovato nel mare un bellissimo posto. Si sono fermati là, e lì ci abitarono felici e contenti.<sup>28</sup>

The utopian nature of the project *Una acerba verità* is somehow reflected in the way the Pontremoli juvenile detention centre is managed. The staff seem keen on education and open to the outside world. In fact, the centre seems to be a place that is not intended to punish or imprison, but rather as a space where the girls can imagine a new life for themselves.

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28 *Una acerba felicità* cit. Trans.: “The story of Romeo and Juliet ends with Juliet going to the beach one day. She wanted to go into the sea and play. And she stumbled and fell into the sea, and the sea was bewitched. At one point her tail appeared, like a mermaid. She was happy, on the one hand, because she could live on her own, without anyone telling her, ‘You do this, you do that! You marry that one, you marry this one.’ She was happy even though she had become a fish. Soon after that, Juliet began to live like a fish. [And Romeo asked her: ‘Why did you turn into a fish?’ [...] and Romeo decided to turn into a fish, too. And so, they swam, swam, swam in this ocean, and they went around and found a beautiful place in the sea. They stayed there and lived happily ever after.”

While working on *Romeo and Juliet* with the young women of Pontremoli, Gionfrida, who also had the opportunity to lead a workshop at the “Meucci” Youth Detention Centre in Florence before it closed for renovation in 2012, decided to work on the same tragedy involving the boys at Meucci in a re-writing of the play from Romeo’s perspective. The boys were asked to think about love and imagine an ideal Juliet and an ideal Romeo. Drawing on their experience of sports, such as football and boxing (traditionally considered more masculine), and analysing sometimes very different role models, such as Rocky Balboa and Charlie Chaplin, Gionfrida helped the boys consider the consequences of lying and being the victim of bullying. Looking back, the director admits that it was challenging to work in this environment because some of the boys were difficult to handle. Some were not Italian and had no papers, which meant they were probably older than they claimed to be. And yet she managed to involve them all in the creative process, giving them different roles according to their abilities. Some of them filmed the workshop, others did manual work such as building the sets and handling the animated scenes, out of which the director recalls one, where a giant animated Juliet looms large in a room. Unfortunately, there is no recording of the project, and the final show put on at the end of the workshop (of which we have no trace, except for a few unobtainable video and audio recordings) was performed for a small audience.

Romeo and Juliet’s love story is also reimagined in *Fiore (Flower)*, a film directed by Claudio Giovannesi that premiered at the 2016 Cannes Film Festival. The film retells the story from the perspective of two young people in prison, Daphne and Josh. Their young love contains the seed of “an infinity yet to come,”<sup>29</sup> innocent and forbidden<sup>30</sup>. The director, who spent four months writing the script at the Casal del Marmo juvenile detention centre, wanted to show “the innocence of boys and girls who, from a legal perspective, are not innocent at all.”<sup>31</sup> In this case, the ending is far from

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29 H. Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, New York, Riverhead Books, 1998, p. 91.

30 The role of Josh is played by newcomer Joscua Algeri, who trained with Puntozero at Beccaria. Scutellà recalls how he and Lisa organised the audition and accompanied Giovannesi to Bergamo to meet Josh, who had his audition in the street on the day his daughter Victoria was born.

31 C. Ugolini, “Cannes, Romeo dietro le sbarre. Il regista: “La vita è confluita nel film”, *La Repubblica.it* (accessed 15.1.2025).

happy. It shows how complex rehabilitation can be, and how difficult it is to get back into society when you can't rely on the support of a stable family. As Shakespeare writes, "A gloomy peace is what is left of this day" (5.3).

## Many Romeos and Juliets from Abroad

Not surprisingly, many of the Shakespeare projects in prisons involve rewriting the story of the two young lovers in a multitude of languages and dialects. This plurilinguism reflects the multi-ethnic nature of the prison environment, where 42.9% of the population comprises foreigners, according to recent data from the Antigone Association as of 15 January 2020.<sup>32</sup> The people who take part in the drama workshops as actors speak different languages and come from distant places: Albania, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Romania, Morocco, Egypt, Gambia, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador and Venezuela.<sup>33</sup>

Without dwelling on the nature of multiculturalism behind bars or the link between incarceration and social marginalisation, a prison, by virtue of its multicultural character, naturally functions as a potential laboratory for coexistence. Undoubtedly, theatre can make a real contribution to promoting a culture of diversity and inclusion. It can raise questions of identity based on the experiences of displacement and disorientation of the imprisoned people. Theatre can therefore serve as an ideal medium for exploring what Peter Brook has described as "the culture of links"<sup>34</sup> – a network of links and relationships between people of different ethnicities, religions and cultures that is created when "the act of theatre" becomes "inseparable

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32 The data updates of 15 January 2020 were included in the report by A. Scandurra "Gli istituti penali per i minorenni. Uno sguardo ai numeri", *Ragazzidentro.it*, 2019 - Associazione Antigone, <http://www.ragazzidentro.it/istituti-penali-per-i-minorenni-uno-sguardo-ai-numeri/> (accessed 15.1.2025). The number of foreign minors in juvenile detention centres has continued to increase as a result of the Caivano Decree, as shown in the latest report published by the Associazione Antigone, "Ventesimo rapporto sulla condizione di detenzione", <https://www.rapportoantigone.it/ventesimo-rapporto-sulle-condizioni-di-detenzione/minori/> (accessed 15.1-2025).

33 *I servizi della Giustizia Minorile in Italia*, Dipartimento Giustizia Minorile e di Comunità, 15.12.2018 published on [https://www.giustizia.it/resources/cms/documents/quindicinale\\_15.12.2018.pdf](https://www.giustizia.it/resources/cms/documents/quindicinale_15.12.2018.pdf) (accessed 15.1.2025), pp. 21, 25.

34 P. Brook, "The Culture of Links" in P. Pavis (ed.), *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, Routledge, New York, 1996, pp. 63-6.

from the need to establish new relationships with different people.” These links may have been lost over time, but they remain essential for forging new relationships between cultures, emphasising what unites us rather than what divides us.

In the short version of *Romeo and Juliet* that Giovannini produced at the “Casal del Marmo” Youth Detention Centre in Rome in 2002, the family drama is therefore used as a means of cultural mediation, as many of the actors are from the Roma community and have grown up in an abusive environment where family feuds reign supreme. Gang fights are quite common in many prisons.

Rehearsals for the show *Romeo. La Recita* at the “Pratello” (September to December 2004) also provided the opportunity for a second, parallel intercultural project. This project brought together four immigrant girls (Jinchuan He and Jin Jing Huang from China, Loubna Handou from Morocco and Ilva Gacaj from Albania) who came from outside to watch the rehearsals, while inside a young Ecuadorian, nicknamed Netto, played the role of Romeo. The girls were then invited to keep a diary of their experiences, creating an ideal meeting between Romeo and Juliet: a boy and a girl from different worlds, but finding common ground in the shared, ‘free’ space of the theatre. These diaries were collected in the volume *Il diario di Romeo e Giulietta. Fare teatro in un carcere minorile (Romeo and Juliet’s diary. Acting in a Young Offenders Institution)*, 2005, edited by Maria Chiara Patuelli and Silvia Storelli.<sup>35</sup> The reading of the diaries written by these young people, who have Bolognese accents but foreign roots, is also part of a video that accompanies the book. This video is interspersed with footage of the rehearsals and the final performance. Significantly, the book’s editors, who also created the second part of the project, write that these four girls represent “one of the many faces of immigration in Italy,” where “the best students are the children of immigrants and the majority of people in juvenile prisons are young foreigners.”<sup>36</sup>

Finally, although there is little documentation of *Romeo and Juliet* produced by the boys at IPM Catania-Bicocca in 2007, directed by Mario Bonica of the Kerè Centre and Cinzia Insinga, we do know that it was a dialect version

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35 M.C. Patuelli and S. Storelli (eds.), *Il diario di Romeo e Giulietta. Fare teatro in un carcere minorile*, Bologna, Pendragon, 2005.

36 Patuelli, Storelli (eds.), *Il diario di Romeo e Giulietta*, cit., p. 11.

of the tragedy. This production, involving thirty young men in a workshop, was performed by nine actors who debuted at the “Nautilus” theatre inside the prison.<sup>37</sup> In this case, too, the decision to rehearse and perform in dialect is in keeping with the logic of mediation. For many of the people involved, who speak little and often poor Italian – a language considered distant from their cultural background – the use of dialect is not only a prerequisite for genuine participation in the project, but it also allows freedom of expression.

## Romeo on Trial

Although *Romeo and Juliet* is a tragedy that brings issues of justice, legality and punishment to the fore, there is no other workshop or production which I know of that derives from an analysis of the crimes committed by Shakespeare’s characters and their corresponding punishment, except our play, *Romeo Montague: Innocent or Guilty?* This includes the production of *Romeo and Juliet*, directed by Gianlorenzo Brambilla, which premiered at the Licinium open-air theatre in Erba during the 2006 summer season. Despite the choice of casting the renowned judge Giuliano Turone in the role of the Prince, the production did not highlight the legal dimension of the tragedy in any way. In a café in Milan, shortly before the city was closed down due to the Covid-19 emergency, Turone explained that he had approached his role without considering himself an actor who is also a legal professional. On the contrary, he confessed that, as a Prosecutor at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague, he often felt like an actor playing a role, thus confirming the “obvious parallelism between theatre and a trial”<sup>38</sup> that has been emphasised by several legal professionals.

As mentioned in the introduction, the participants in the workshop – students, imprisoned or formerly imprisoned young people and young people on probation – agreed to rewrite *Romeo and Juliet* with a focus on legal

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37 G. Sardella, “Liberi di fare teatro. Il teatro per detenuti di Claudio Collovà approda a Catania dove inaugura uno spazio scenico nel carcere di Bicocca”, *officine ouragan*, [http://www.officineouragan.com/\\_rassegnastampa/quelcheresta/Anteprima\\_dicembre\\_2007.htm](http://www.officineouragan.com/_rassegnastampa/quelcheresta/Anteprima_dicembre_2007.htm) (accessed 20.8.2019).

38 M. Cartabia, L. Violante, *Giustizia e mito*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2018, p. 145.

issues and to re-enact Romeo's trial for Tybalt's murder. This choice is also the result of a double impulse: on the one hand, it is inspired by the trials and various instances of truth-seeking and accountability for alleged crimes found in Shakespeare's works, from *The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, *Hamlet* to *Measure for Measure*, to name but a few. On the other hand, it follows in the footsteps of other well-known precedents, such as the many stagings of actual trials concerning Shakespearean characters. It is worth remembering the trial staged by Dutch artist and director Yan Duyvendak and Catalan director Roger Bernat, which has been performed in various European courts since 2011, when their *Please, Continue (Hamlet)* debuted in Geneva.<sup>39</sup> In a hybrid play shifting between reality and fiction, Hamlet is put on trial for the murder of Polonius, using the languages and legal procedures of different countries' penal codes. This transnational project, which aims to involve several European legal systems by having them rule on a specific legal case, features professional judges, lawyers and experts alongside actresses playing Ophelia and Gertrude, who are called to the stand as witnesses. The legal professionals present their cases to the audience, who are then asked to reach a verdict. Giancarlo Cataldo, magistrate of the Court of Assizes and author of the very popular *Romanzo criminale*, was recruited for the production in Rome. When the show played at Milan's Unicredit Pavilion in November 2015, the role of Prince Escalus was performed by Gherardo Colombo, who served for over thirty years as a judge at the Law Courts, the Public Prosecutor's Office in Milan and the Court of Cassation.

On a much smaller scale, at the University of Milan, together with Puntozero, we also staged the trial of Romeo Montague, recruiting lawyers, educators and criminologists as script advisors rather than actors. Like Duyvendak and Bernat, we felt it was crucial to involve the audience and encourage their judgement by inviting them, at the end of the trial, but before our verdict, to vote on Romeo Montague's innocence or guilt by a show of hands.

Like Duyvendak and Bernat, we want to take our trial/performance on tour, presenting and re-staging it in juvenile detention centres in Italy, and

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39 For further details about the project see, S. Soncini, "Please, Continue (Hamlet): Shakespeare on the Move", in *Worlds of Words: Complexity, Creativity and Conventionality in English Language, Literature and Culture*, eds., R. Ferrari and S. Soncini, Pisa, Pisa University Press, 2019, pp. 389- 409.

other penal institutions across Europe. We want *Romeo Montague: Innocent or Guilty?* to be a starting point for a dialogue between the institutional and voluntary sectors, which are still struggling to communicate, and an opportunity to exchange best practices, promoting a project that is both utopian and achievable.<sup>40</sup>

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40 It is worth remembering that *Romeo Montague: Innocent or Guilty* was presented on 21 February 2025 at the Spazio CAM Gabelle, Milan, by English Theatre Milan, directed by Claudio Favazza.













# Theatre as “Pleasure of Being Somewhere Else”: A Pedagogical Fiction

*Pierangelo Barone*

(Bicocca Milan University)

DOI: 10.54103/st.227.c425

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7831-9386>

## **Abstract**

Theatre as an educational tool for “troubled children” requires further reflection and critical input. We see theatre as a powerful educational tool that can stimulate relevant processes of intrapsychic reworking and change our relationship with our bodies. This is why drama workshops are so widely used in educational contexts, especially with young people. However, it is precisely theatre’s ability to influence our relationship with ourselves and our bodies that makes it a tool to be used wisely and carefully when working with minors in juvenile detention centres.

**Keywords:** Juvenile detention; applied theatre; pedagogical programme; pedagogical fiction; game; education.

Developing pedagogical programmes inside a juvenile detention centre is a challenge. There are many reasons for this complexity, starting from the analysis of the contingent and structural factors and conditions that determine the rugged life paths of imprisoned young people. Behind these crimes lies a multitude of meanings, some of which define the individuality of those who committed them and their interaction with the world. Yet, a criminal act also comprises an element of *prominence*, which identifies the search of these teenagers for a place in the world. A search which is generally common at their age but that in the case of these “troubled kids” often reflects a need to be acknowledged and identified, which becomes so intense and urgent that it prompts them to act, more often than not, without

thinking. A boy or girl who commits a crime is to be judged according to the complex system of circumstances they find themselves in (be they social, economic, cultural, material or relative to their home circumstances), the criminal act being its most dramatic outcome. Being aware of this means recognising the rehabilitative work, and the possibility of leading an inclusive journey, first as a deconstruction and later as a reconstruction of those elements which contribute to outlining the personal history of the boy or girl in prison. I deem it unnecessary to discuss here the psychological implications and interpretations which can be used to explain the dynamics lying behind a teenager's criminal act; from a pedagogical standpoint, I'd rather consider the potential generative aspects that can trigger an authentic process of transformation, and which can help the teenager to piece back together their subjectivity. If we agree that crime, when committed by a minor, is the result of the deviant manner in which the subject perceives the outside world, then a pedagogical approach should help minors who have committed crimes to experience themselves beyond their deviant identity. Leaving aside the "rugged" narratives of these subjects, it is fundamental to give more space to *different narratives* in order to bring about a behavioural change. We need to help each boy and girl recognise different forms of "biographical structure" through a double move: hook and engage. This will allow them to create a different narrative that can make an intentional world possible.<sup>1</sup>

An authentic transformation cannot occur without a conflict between the subject's idea that they possess a strong identity due to their criminal lives, and their discovery of resources hitherto experienced which can enable them to discover parts of their personality which go beyond their criminal guise.<sup>2</sup> Theories on adolescents' psychological development suggest that it is at this stage in their lives that young boys and girls experience a cognitive shift as they leave their childhood behind. Indeed, during puberty they develop the ability to speak about themselves.<sup>3</sup> Here lies the importance of a pedagogical approach that gives the young people involved with the justice system the possibility to "speak up" as they start to use the power

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1 P. Bertolini, *L'esistere pedagogico*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1988.

2 F. Scaparro, G. Roi, *La maschera del cattivo*, Milano, Unicopli, 1984.

3 A. Fabbrini, A. Melucci, *L'età dell'oro. Adolescenti tra sogno e esperienza*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1992.

of “words” to acknowledge and discover themselves so as to modify their self-awareness. Paulo Freire powerfully demonstrated the pedagogical power of words, showcasing their immense value for marginalised communities in Brazil during the military dictatorship. The power of words is, first of all, that of an “embodied word,” a word that is felt, a word rooted in experience that, consequently, can be sensed on one’s skin.<sup>4</sup> For the Brazilian pedagogue, the power of words lies in their ability to make people “conscious”; namely, to make them aware of their transformative consciousness, which comes from their ability to question their own lives.

## The Power of Words and Theatre

For a young boy or girl whose life has been marked by complicated relationships and educational experiences, giving power to words is the key to cognitive change that can lead to a transformation. From an educational standpoint, it is particularly interesting to investigate the role of theatre as a practical exercise to acknowledge words’ expressive power when they are translated into body gestures.<sup>5</sup> The relationship between theatre and education has long been the subject of thorough and widespread pedagogical studies<sup>6</sup> and animated theatre projects with an educational purpose. In that respect, a more in-depth analysis of the impact of theatre on teenagers must consider the variety of situations which in the last thirty or forty years, have allowed the development of new solutions and actions with a definite pedagogical awareness. This has been possible thanks to the transformation of theatre into a cultural and social entertainment as well as an educational asset. However, I do not aim to write a report about what has been happening in Italy in the last few decades but rather to interpret the theoretical implications of this relationship. By doing that, I seek to explore

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4 P. Freire, *La pedagogia degli oppressi*, Milano, Mondadori, 1972.

5 J. Grotowski, *Per un teatro povero*, Milano, Bulzoni, 1968; F. Antonacci, F. Cappa, a cura di, *Riccardo Massa. Lezioni su: la peste, il teatro, l’educazione*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2001.

6 F. Antonacci, M. Guerra, E. Mancino, *Dietro le quinte. Pratiche e teorie tra educazione e teatro*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2013; M. Buccolo, S. Mongili, E. Tonon, *Teatro e formazione. Teorie e pratiche di pedagogia teatrale nei contesti formativi*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 2012; F. Cappa, *Formazione come teatro*, Milano, Cortina, 2016; M. D’Ambrosio, *Teatro come pratica pedagogica. Ricerca-azione per la formazione al teatro-scuola*, Lecce, Pensa Multimedia, 2015; G. Oliva, *La pedagogia teatrale. La voce della tradizione e il teatro contemporaneo*, Milano, Unicopli, 2005.

the associations of meaning that emerge from those dimensions that come together in the theatre experience, when it is understood as an educational experience.

## Elsewhere

To describe the relationship between theatre and education from our perspective, we need to refer to the concept of metaphorical transitivity.<sup>7</sup> I stand by the idea that a theatre experience always entails an interesting semantic shift, which concerns the “fictional” relationship between the person undergoing this experience and the surrounding reality. A fictional relationship that causes a splitting in time and space, and that in light of the possibility of turning that specific time and space into a temporal and spatial “elsewhere” expresses its weight as a pedagogical experience.<sup>8</sup> This “fictional nature” is also emblematic of games; it is, then, this metaphorical transitivity between games and theatre that I want to investigate rather than its intrinsic pedagogical reach. Speaking of which, about sixty years ago, Eugene Fink wrote: “These spaces and times [the spaces and times of games and theatre, but also the spaces and times of the actor onstage] are linked together, they happen simultaneously, and yet not simultaneously, like different actions can sometimes occur in the same space. Somehow, on stage, a clearing [Lichtung] in space and time appears, and it surfaces from the fictional realm of games, whose fiction is produced by the use of existing tools.”<sup>9</sup> From a pedagogical standpoint, it is precisely this clearing in space and time, which the author mentions, that stands pivotal to our thinking about theatre as a tool for education. Theatre and games share an essential feature that is typical of fiction: they both allow a splitting in time and space which redefines reality as a heterotopy and heterochrony without removing its materiality.<sup>10</sup> In other words, theatre, like games, delivers a narrative that can take us elsewhere, while it does not detach our connection with the physical world, with our being in a material “here and now.” It is by establishing a “double” that it is possible to give a different account of

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7 R. Massa, *Cambiare la scuola. Educare o istruire?*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1997.

8 J. Orsenigo, *Lo spazio paradossale*, Milano, Unicopli, 2008.

9 E. Fink, *Oasi del gioco*, Milano, Cortina, (1957) 2008, p. 62.

10 M. Foucault, *Utopie eterotopie*, Napoli, Cronopio, 2006.

time, space, and the bodies that partake in such experience, thus revealing the peculiar nature of both games and theatre.

## Life, Games, Theatre, Education

Fink's quote highlights the existence of a metaphorical transitivity that starts from the interaction of life, games, and education as if these activities were also to be considered as "theatre." This is the starting point: games are intrinsic to human nature. They are ruled by complex dynamics and carry profound psycho-social implications, which make them a model to interpret life. Games represent, therefore, the primary instrument to reproduce reality through their fictional and simulative nature. They allow people to connect with the outside world, and become, thereby, a metaphor for life. Games actually trigger a shift from the inner world of desires, urges, emotions, affections, feelings and experiences to the outside reality governed by relations, limitations, rules, prescriptions and competitions.<sup>11</sup> Playing together, then, has a unique purpose, as it allows an individual to alter reality in the context of a very particular environment. Here, we can face the otherness of the real world, which we see as a challenge to the sovereignty of desire. Through games, humans can symbolically enact reality without suffering its material effects. They learn how to react to life's restrictions in a fictional context that allows them to represent the conflict between pleasure and reality.

At the same time, games stand as an interesting metaphor for education. While acknowledging the role of education in improving and assisting individuals to grow, develop their identities and ultimately achieve independence, education also means creating a relational space where the conflict between desire and reality can develop. This is a liminal space between impulse and frustration, almightiness and restraint, individuality and society. Likewise, when theatre drama is used as a pedagogical exercise, it provides a context of mediation and manipulation, where our real-world experience can be remoulded, recomposed, and restructured. As John Dewey suggests, what makes an educational experience is the possibility of retrieving it creatively by integrating and transforming it in such a way that it can teach us

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11 D. Winnicott, *Gioco e realtà*, Roma, Armando, 1971.

something more.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the fictional component of education (doing something authentic in a simulated situation) holds the primary pedagogical function. It is like saying that outside that space and time, which were intentionally devised to experience a specific situation, there is no education but a simple reproduction. Education, like games, determines an emotional and cognitive reworking of concrete experiences to turn them into knowledge; theatre makes this mechanism more efficient since it allows us to consciously reproduce onstage those vital instances in which learning and playing occur.

Life, games and theatre are all transitive concepts, since they reveal the centrality of experience in the educational process. And if we accidentally learn from life, and in games, chance and intentionality mingle, theatre requires an intentional reworking of experience for it to further develop.

## **Educating through Fiction: The Pleasure of Being Somewhere Else**

Using theatre as a pedagogical asset for “troubled kids” requires further thoughts and critical input. We imagine theatre as a powerful educational tool (which it actually is) that can boost relevant processes of intrapsychic reworking and can alter our relationship with our body. This is the reason why it is so widely used in educational contexts, especially with teenagers (from local schools to communities and youth detention centres). However, it is precisely its ability to influence our relationship with ourselves and our bodies that makes theatre an instrument to be used wisely and carefully while working with young boys and girls from difficult backgrounds. Working on your body and with your body can be intolerable at an age when your relationship with your physicality is so difficult and taxing. This is an age when appearance seems fundamental, and you try to decipher the complex messages your body sends you, a body that demands to be heard and that does so through pain, discomfort, trouble and clumsiness.

The relationship between theatre and games can, therefore, be a perfect methodological approach to finding suitable pedagogical procedures and solutions that exploit the potential of fiction. It is all about exploiting the recreational component embedded in the fictional experience as an asset

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12 J. Dewey, *Esperienza e educazione*, Milano, Cortina, (1949) 2014.

and a strategy to engage the young participants in theatre, given its representative and expressive nature. By doing so, we can offer them a “clearing in space and time,” where they can experience the pleasure of being *somewhere else*. The same pleasure which is typical of every narrative *performance*, and that through words and gestures leads us to a liminal area where we can experience the potential of *duality* in the *authentic* game of the “staging.”

Educating through fiction means learning how to arrange a series of thoughts and gestures that can create the best circumstance to live a meaningful experience and trigger a transformation. Theatre becomes, in this way, a pedagogical space where people can experiment with new diverse identities.











# Legal Issues in *Romeo and Juliet*

*Daniela Carpi*

(Verona University)

DOI: 10.54103/st.227.c426

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2990-441X>

## Abstract

This chapter explores the transformation of the concept of justice in Elizabethan society, focusing on its representation in Shakespeare's works, and particularly in *Romeo and Juliet*. It examines how the legal system shifted from private vengeance to public justice, highlighting the role of theatre as a critique of the corruption and violence within legal institutions. The essay also analyses the themes of legitimacy, identity, and the *patria potestas*, linking them to modern legal concepts such as equity and human rights.

**Keywords:** Shakespeare; *Romeo and Juliet*; theatre; insubordination; justice; revenge; legitimacy, identity; *patria potestas*; Law and Literature.

Elizabethan society was marked by profound economic, social, legal and philosophical transformations. Theatre was affected by these changes as well because of the constant negotiation between theatre and society, as explained by Stephen Greenblatt.<sup>1</sup> The English Renaissance, though influenced by the Mediaeval period, shows signs of a transformation which affected not only the literary production, but also the religious beliefs of the previous era. In a period of social upheaval like this, when the Mediaeval hierarchical uniformity started to be challenged, and signs of the religious

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1 S. Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*, Chicago, Chicago UP, 1980; S. Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1989.

and cultural crisis of the 20<sup>th</sup> century could already be spotted,<sup>2</sup> the legal system underwent a profound transformation.

Theatre records the passage from private vengeance (such as the family feuding in *Romeo and Juliet*) to a modern form of justice where an authority is appointed to take care of legal issues (a judge, the tribunal, higher authorities). Theatre became an instrument to criticise a form of justice which was often violent and corrupt. Lawyers are often represented as crooks: in *Doctor Faustus*, they are described as “mercenary drudge[s],” in *The White Devil*, they appear as corrupt and dishonest, and in John Webster’s *The Devil’s Law Case*, lawyers are given the title of “villain[s].”<sup>3</sup> The justice system was evaluated and criticised for its flaws: people started questioning its honesty, equity and ability to punish lawbreakers.

During the Renaissance, talk of “justice miscarried” started to spread. This paved the way to the creation of “Critical Legal Studies” and hence the “Law and Literature” movement in the Twentieth Century, which also re-examined the Elizabethan theatre from a legal perspective by initially denouncing the unreliability of the law. The first comparative studies on law literature were carried out by James Boyd White and published in two volumes: *The Legal Imagination* (1973) and *Justice as Translation. An Essay in Cultural and Legal Criticism* (1990). In these works, White describes the law as a form of rhetoric, the art of persuasion, but also a deliberative constitutive art which allows one to build entire worlds of meaning and actions solely by using linguistic structures. The law uses an interdisciplinary approach which draws on the humanities, social studies, and even natural science and is influenced by critical theory studies developed in the English-speaking world and by several critical approaches to the literary text.

Many literary and theatrical works mark the ambiguous, momentous shift from the Middle Ages to the Modern era. This is the case of *Hamlet*, where the lead character is well aware that he needs to rely on the competent

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2 D. Carpi, “Renaissance into Postmodernism: Anticipations of Legal Unrest” in D. Carpi, J. Gaakeer eds., *Liminal Discourses. Subliminal Tensions in Law and Literature*, Berlin/Boston, DeGruyter, 2013, pp.179-91.

3 D. Carpi, “*The Devil’s Law Case* by John Webster: Legal Fraudulence or New Professionalism?”, in *Anamorphosis, Revista Internacional de Direito e Literatura*, 4, 2, julho-dezembro 2018, pp. 345-356; D. Carpi, “The Trial in John Webster’s *The White Devil*: Italy in the Reenactment of a Renaissance English Drama”, *Forum Italicum*, Sage journals online, 16 February 2019, pp. 1-12.

authority to punish his father's murderer, but he also knows that this higher authority is represented by the murderer himself: King Claudius. Hence, his decision to take things into his own hands and resort to the necessary, though archaic, private justice. Here lies one of the reasons that prevents him from acting on his vengeful thoughts: the ethical issues of private justice.

A similar debate on public and private justice takes place in *Romeo and Juliet*, where Prince Escalus who, unlike Hamlet, is a public, judicial authority, criticises the feud going on between the two families because of the deaths it causes and because it prevents him from exercising his legal authority. Maybe his failure to enforce the law allowed the feuding between the two families to keep growing, as they harboured feelings of hate. Here, private and public justice stand in sharp contrast. Only impartial public authority can restore the harmony society has lost.

## The Question of Insubordination

In *Romeo and Juliet*, the transformation of the justice system is what makes people insubordinate. From the play's beginning, the Chorus repeats the word "mutiny." This term is strictly connected to an idea of justice that gradually acquires symbolic meaning. The concept of "mutiny" implies the existence of a rule and the will to infringe it; it shows people are aware of the existence of a shared code but still decide to disobey it. It implies the existence of social unrest which is cause for transgression, or it may be a consequence of an ongoing, unsettled social transformation, which inevitably causes upheaval.<sup>4</sup> Many are the mutinies which appear in the play: citizens disobey the Prince's orders, Juliet goes against her father's wishes, the cosmic order of day and night is upset by Romeo's agonising over love as the character's psychology splits, and he doffs his name, even the harmonic balance of the body (with the senses balancing each other out) is upset by the pathos of the situation. The entire social and physical organism is, thus, distraught by a disruptive force.

First of all, citizens deliberately disobey the Prince when he orders them to stop fighting, to the point that he accuses them of being "rebellious

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4 D. Carpi, "Law and its Subversion in *Romeo and Juliet*" in *Shakespeare and the Law*, G. Watt, P. Raffield eds., Oxford, Hart Publishing, 2008.

subjects, enemies to peace, /Profaners of the neighbour-stained steel” (I.I.72).<sup>5</sup> Yet, the Prince is well aware his subjects do not respect his laws, since soon after he asks: “Will they not hear?” (I.I.74). The Prince says his citizens do not listen to him, meaning that his supreme authority seems ineffective. He later adds: “And hear the sentence of your moved prince” (I.I.79), as if he wants to reassert the authority he has been stripped of.

In the original play, the character of the Prince is bestowed with sacred virtues: he is pious and forgiving; he loves his subjects and pardons them for their disorderly behaviour. He, thereby, acquires a metaphysical aura: he shows signs of superior wisdom and appears as an ideal governor. And while he knows the danger his citizens face due to their disobedience, “the fire of your pernicious rage” (I.I.75), on the one hand, he threatens to punish them, “If ever you disturb our streets again, /Your lives shall pay the forfeit of the peace” (I.I.87-8), on the other, he shows indulgence: “For this time, all the rest depart away” (I.I.89). Something similar happens when the Prince commutes Romeo’s death sentence into exile.

Here lies a much-debated issue in the Elizabethan period: the contraposition between equity and the strict enforcement of the Common Law. This debate is particularly relevant in *The Merchant of Venice*, where terms like piety, equity, and law are used to decide the best form of justice. This issue has been discussed for a long time since it was first laid out in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. From that moment, equity and justice have been inextricably linked. Equity epitomises an ideal form of justice because when a law is strictly enforced to the point that it no longer corresponds to an ideal form of justice, the idea of justice itself is compromised. Equity denotes creative flexibility, piety, individuality, and the “perception” of justice, as it requires the law to be enforced according to different circumstances. It can be a useful tool for the law, which can be thus directed to its actual goals, namely, justice and fair play. Basically, equity seeks to correct the flaws of the law. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle invites us to question the person who makes the law more than the law itself. He invites us to think about the legislator’s intentions more than the rule.<sup>6</sup>

5 *Romeo and Juliet*, edited by John Dover Wilson and George Ian Duthie, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1971.

6 Cfr. Daniela Carpi ed., *The Concept of Equity: an Interdisciplinary Assessment*, Heidelberg, Winter, 2007; D. Carpi ed., *Practising Equity, Addressing Law. Equity in Law and Literature*, Heidelberg, Winter, 2008; D. Carpi, “Equity: Assessing the Results of a Project”, in *Law*

It can be generally affirmed that among the different meanings which equity has been given by private law, there are two main ones which foster the idea that justice should be enforced in a different way, according to the circumstances. On the one hand, equity is seen as the very essence of the law. In order for positive law to be “just,” it needs to apply similar punishments in similar circumstances. On the other hand, equity can also be seen as antithetical to positive law, since the idea of justice itself implies that positive law be interpreted and enforced considering the specifics of each case and considering the subjective and objective circumstances that led to the crime.<sup>7</sup>

The Prince, then, embodies the “government as a form of art”:<sup>8</sup> history is like the stage where the moral drama of good governance is performed; and being a good governor means interfering with the private lives of citizens and imposing one’s will on others to keep order. Good governance is like a theatre performance since it implies some form of negotiation between the judge/governor (metaphorically represented by the actor) and his citizens (the public). Coexistence and balance between authority and freedom result from a series of agreements that must be constantly renegotiated and adapted to social needs. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the Prince is torn between his duty to enforce the Common Law and the need to adapt and mitigate it, according to each case. Hence, his decision to commute Romeo’s punishment into exile (which is technically like killing his rights as a citizen).

Stability and innovation, conservatism and renovation go hand in hand, as they are not only historical processes but also spiritual diagrams. The play brings together these conflicting legal issues, as the Prince embodies the image of the good governor who manages to maintain a precarious balance while trying to establish the right form of government.

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*and Humanities*, 5, 1, Summer 2011, pp. 221-9; D. Carpi, “Equity in Classical Times”, *Pólemos*, 1/2008, pp. 35-46.

7 A. Mordecai Rabello (ed.), *Aequitas and Equity: Equity in Civil Law and Mixed Jurisdictions*, Jerusalem, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1997.

8 I. Ward, “A Kingdom for a Stage, Princes to Act: Shakespeare and the Art of Government”, *Law and Critique*, VIII, 2, 1997, pp. 189-213.

## The Theme of Legitimacy

The theme of legitimacy is linked to the idea of the “legal person.” The link between legitimacy and identity is explained in a passage of the play, where Lord Capulet threatens to disown Juliet were she to refuse to marry Paris:

And you be mine, I'll give you to my friend;  
And you be not, hang, beg, starve, die in the streets.  
For, by my soul, I'll never acknowledge thee,  
Nor what is mine shall never do thee good.  
Trust to't, bethink you, I'll not be forsworn.  
(3.5.191-5)

Thomas Kuehn states that “Legitimacy was both a moral and a legal category. It set the role of the family in transmitting status and property in social reproduction [...]. Illegitimacy, on the other hand, marked those who stood outside the usual, legitimate social relations.”<sup>9</sup> Lord Capulet threatens to deprive his daughter of the family name, thus making her a bastard.<sup>10</sup> In that period, bastard children had no rights regarding their fathers’ properties: “Nor what is mine shall never do thee good” (3.5.194). Moreover, illegitimacy had some relevant social implications: once their families had cut them off, illegitimate children were no longer entitled to legal protection; they became outcasts with no identity: “hang, beg, starve, die in the streets” (3.5.192). Therefore, by disowning Juliet, her father takes away her citizenship and condemns her to die of starvation. This brings us to Romeo’s condition as an exile: he, too, is stripped of his citizenship. The punishment for a rebel child meant ostracising them from society. “Juristic treatment of legitimation, the acquisition of family membership, had much in common with the treatment of acquired citizenship. For both families an ideology of descent figured as the basis for identifying members.”<sup>11</sup>

The theme of legitimacy is also connected with the issue of a name. “I’ll never acknowledge thee” (3.5.193) says Lord Capulet to his daughter

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9 T. Kuehn, *Law, Family and Women. Toward a Legal Anthropology of Renaissance Italy*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1991, p. 176.

10 D. Carpi, “*Romeo and Juliet*: The Importance of a Name”, *Pólemos*, 9.1.20, 15, pp. 37-50.

11 Kuehn, *Law, Family and Women*, cit., p. 192.

because names likewise define our identity. When children are born, they are given a name to identify them, acknowledge their existence as a son or a daughter, register them, and recognise them as part of a community. A name plays a symbolic role similar to that of baptism: by baptising a child, we make them part of an ecclesiastic community; we give them a religious identity. When Lord Capulet threatens Juliet, saying that he will strip her of her name, he also threatens to take away her legal privileges. Identity, then, is a linguistic construct: in *Genesis*, God names (the divine *logos*) things, and they come into being. Words assume thereby an informative value. Naming something or someone has religious and political, spiritual and creative implications: it's by naming them that the spiritual essence of an individual is transferred from God to man, and when humans name things, they reproduce that divine act of creation.

In *Romeo and Juliet*, the act of naming someone and changing one's name are central. Yet, there's a conflict between social identity (represented by one's name and legal status) and personal identity, our sense of self. When Juliet asks Romeo to doff his name because his name is her enemy and not his personal identity, she highlights the difference between name and essence. There is, then, a close link between language and identity.

Starting from the assumption that "nomen est omen" Catherine Belsey stresses the difference between signifier (the name) and signified (the person to whom the name refers).<sup>12</sup> Individuals are both linguistic entities and physical ones. The splitting of personal identity is portrayed in *Romeo and Juliet* when Tybalt kills Mercutio. At first, Romeo tries to be impartial and mediate between the parties, regardless of their family names:

Romeo: Tybalt, the reason that I have to love thee  
 Doth much excuse the appertaining rage  
 To such a greeting. Villain I am none –  
 Therefore farewell; I see thou knowest me not.  
 (3.1.55-8)

He rebuffs the title of "villain," which Tybalt gives him. According to Romeo, Tybalt doesn't know him well and his accusations are idle. The epithet does not represent his real essence. The duality of the name becomes

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12 C. Belsey, "The Name of the Rose in *Romeo and Juliet*", *Yearbook of English Studies*, 23, 1993, p. 133.

evident in this passage: Romeo is a Montague, but his spiritual essence is much more than a family name. Moreover, Romeo's sense of self differs from how Tybalt sees him: private and public identities clash. Personal identity is stuck in a symbolic linguistic labyrinth. This ambiguity is even more apparent when Mercutio gets fatally wounded by Tybalt and yells: "A plague a'both your houses!" (3.1.97). Once more, the family name is called into question: even though Romeo is trying to show he is more than his name, that name becomes a trap, forcing him to do something he would not otherwise have done. Therefore, the sense of responsibility that comes with his name is greater than his will. Mercutio embodies the traditional link between name and legal person, while Romeo represents the ethical shift in the concept of identity.

## The *Patria Potestas*

The concept of *patria potestas*, developed in Ancient Rome, denotes the absolute dominance of the father over his family. In *the Institutiones* (I BC), the Roman jurist Gaius makes a distinction between *sui juris* individuals and *alieni juris* ones: the first group includes those people who are not under anyone's authority but their own and are thus free; by contrast, the second includes those people who are subject to the authority of someone else and are not free. This distinction separates free men from enslaved people. Yet, inside the family, *patria potestas* gave fathers absolute dominance, *ius vitae et necis*, over all family members, including the servants. This pyramidal structure is portrayed in *Romeo and Juliet*: the father is the highest authority, while his daughter is just a *commoditas*, a commodity which needs to be invested in an arranged marriage; servants (as enslaved people) are, instead, the family's property. The street fight scene suggests that servants are a commodity, where they, too, take part in that "ancient quarrel" between families: their livery represents their belonging.

Lord Capulet's dominance over his daughter encapsulates the violence of the patriarchal system. Jacques Derrida states that justice itself is rooted in violence.<sup>13</sup> Strength is, in fact, a form of violence and legitimates power:

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13 J. Derrida, "Force of Law: The "Mystical Foundation of Authority" in D. Cornell, M. Rosenfeld and D. Gray Carlson eds., *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, New York, Routledge, 1992, pp. 3-67.

Lord Capulet's will acts as a performative power embedded in the principle of authority. He subdues Juliet and ignores her will. Once again, Juliet's personal identity, according to her own perception, does not match her social one which is imposed on her. For her father, Juliet is nothing as an individual entity but exists only as part of an authoritarian and hierarchical structure.

The violence of the *patria potestas* violates Juliet's fundamental rights. Even if it was passed in the twentieth century, after the horrors of the Holocaust, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) helps us understand from a contemporary perspective the form of violation Juliet is subjected to in Shakespeare's play. In art. 3 the Declaration states, "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person." Seeing his threats, Lord Capulet does not respect his daughter's right to liberty and security because he threatens to disown her, thus leaving her without legal protection.

Art. 6 states "Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law." As previously mentioned, if Lord Capulet had acted on his threats, Juliet would have been stripped of her identity as a legal person. Last but not least, art. 12 states, "No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks." The law can't protect Juliet regarding her father's violent behaviour because families were still under the tutelage of the *patria potestas*. Hence, she cannot be protected from what is a violation of her freedom.

In many of his works, Shakespeare questions legal issues which have been central to political debates since the twentieth century. In this case, the codification of unalienable rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights helps us to get a better grasp of the kind of coercion Juliet was subjected to. Overall, by presenting complex legal cases, *Romeo and Juliet* gives us a chance to better understand the transformation of the social background in the period the play was written and reveals Shakespeare's interest in the many controversial aspects of justice.



# Staging Masculinities.

## *Romeo Montague: Innocent or Guilty?* at the “Cesare Beccaria” Youth Detention Centre

*Margaret Rose*

(Milan University)

DOI: 10.54103/st.227.c427

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5519-3266>

### **Abstract**

This paper explores the complex representations of masculinity in *Romeo and Juliet*, examining how Shakespeare portrays young men caught between love, aggression and societal expectations. Through a close analysis of key characters such as Romeo, Mercutio, Benvolio and Tybalt, the study shows how their actions reflect different aspects of masculine identity, from romantic idealism to violent assertiveness. The play's depiction of the volatile nature of masculinity, influenced by family feuds and personal honour, provides a lens through which to understand the destructive consequences of rigid gender norms. By examining the tragic outcomes of these characters' lives, the paper links Shakespeare's portrayal of masculinity to contemporary issues such as gang violence and the pressure to conform to traditional male roles, offering insight into ways in which masculinity is constructed and challenged at the “Cesare Beccaria” youth detention centre.

**Keywords:** Shakespeare; *Romeo and Juliet*; masculinity; youth violence; masculine identity; gender; juvenile detention

## ***Romeo Montague: Innocent or Guilty? A Collective Retelling of Romeo and Juliet***

During the workshop we asked the twenty-five participants, made up of university students, young men in prison from the “Cesare Beccaria” Youth Detention Centre and members of the Puntozero company, to collaboratively write a new play, drawing on Shakespeare’s tragedy. On this occasion, we decided not to create an abridged version of the Shakespeare play, as we had done for *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (2016) and *Sir Thomas More* (2019), but a retelling of the tragedy in modern Italian that would focus particularly on the figure of Romeo and the other young men in the play. We also decided on a significant spatial and temporal shift: the action would take place in a changing room, a prison and a law court in contemporary Milan.

*Romeo Montague: Innocent or Guilty?* is therefore a radical departure from the Shakespeare play, featuring scenes that don’t appear in Shakespeare. Instead of being sent into exile, as happens in *Romeo and Juliet*, Romeo is arrested and finds himself in a cell, awaiting trial for Tybalt’s murder. In other scenes, the trial unfolds.

## **Curricula at the Beccaria Youth Detention Centre and at Milan State University**

It’s worth underlining that the workshop, like the three preceding Shakespeare theatre workshops, is not an integral part of the prison curriculum, but are attended on a voluntary basis. Some of the young men are Italian, from different parts of Italy, others from countries around the world. They are frequently from deprived backgrounds and have had little formal education. For the university students, the Shakespeare workshop is likewise not a compulsory part of their academic curriculum (most of them study Languages and Literatures, some, the Law), but if they sign up, they receive credits for their attendance. Unlike the people inside the prison, these students hold a secondary school diploma, which has given them access to university. By joining the workshop, participants show their willingness to be part of a challenging process; they work as active members of a mixed group, made up of people, often, very different from themselves, with respect to social class, education and ethnicity. As team leaders, we

encourage the attendees to work creatively, either individually or in small groups, so helping them learn creative writing and performance skills, often for the first time.

## Aims of the Workshop

As leaders, we believe that our drama workshops can bring about a positive change in participants. There are of course ample studies on the positive impact of drama workshops on individuals of all ages and the behavioural changes they can bring about in very different settings (see Pietro Barone's chapter). However, I feel, as in many things, that Shakespeare and other thinkers of his day got there first. We know that Shakespeare read Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and was fascinated by ideas of change and mutability that surface in many of his plays. In *Romeo and Juliet* Friar Lawrence puts forward a view of human nature and the world that is not an essentialist one. He reminds us that every animate and inanimate thing in the world is both good and bad, and subject to change. It is actually the way we perceive the natural world and the people living there, the manner we treat and use them, that makes the difference. According to this view of the natural world and human beings, each of us has the power to embrace good or evil and change our behaviour. Such a mindset becomes vital, when one is working with minors involved with the justice system, or any young attendees come to that.

O mickle is the powerful grace that lies  
 In plants, herbs, stones, and their true qualities;  
 for naught so vile, that on the earth doth live,  
 But to the earth some special good doth give;  
 Nor ought so good but, strained from that fair use,  
 Revolts from true birth, stumbling on abuse.  
 Virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied,  
 And vice sometimes by action dignified.

*Enter Romeo*

Within the infant rind of this weak flower  
 poison hath residence and medicine power;  
 for this, being smelt, with that part cheers each part,  
 being tasted, stays all senses with the heart.  
 Two such opposed kings encamp them still

in man as well as herbs, grace and rude will.  
 And where the worser is predominant,  
 Full soon the canker death eats up that plant.  
 (2.2.15-30)

## Shakespeare's Young Men in *Romeo and Juliet*

In around 1595 when Shakespeare penned *Romeo and Juliet*, he was writing for an exclusively male company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men. As indeed was true of his entire career, given the strict laws, prohibiting women from working in theatre, he never had the opportunity to write for women. Notwithstanding, he created several strong female roles, such as Desdemona, Portia, Katherine, Rosalind, Cleopatra, etc. *Romeo and Juliet* is no exception: Juliet and the Nurse are two rounded female characters, while the respective mothers of Romeo and Juliet are sketchily drawn. Still, by and large, in *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare's focus is on the male characters and especially the young men.<sup>1</sup> The group of young men, in love and out of love, by turn, angry, lustful, remorseful and depressed, desperately wanting to live their lives, but sometimes meeting an early death, includes very different masculinities. Thanks to an exploration of the young men's roles in the tragedy, the young men at the Beccaria had a chance to familiarise themselves with very different male roles from their real-life selves and experiences. Shakespeare pens, moreover, young male servants as well as upper class youths. The ongoing feud between the Capulets and Montagues impacts on the behaviour of all the characters in the play, but especially the acts of violence and aggression and contrasting peace-making affect the young men's lives. As Coppelia Kahn says, "I shall argue that the feud in a realistic social sense is the primary tragic force in the play – not the feud as agent of fate, but the feud as an extreme and peculiar expression of patriarchal society, which Shakespeare shows to be tragically self-destructive.

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1 Since the 1990 many critics have explored masculinities in Shakespeare. Important works include: R. Headlman Welles, *Shakespeare on Masculinity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000; B. Smith, *Shakespeare and Masculinity*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000; J. Feather and C. E. Thomas, *Violent Masculinities, Male Aggression in Early Modern Texts and Culture*, New York, Palgrave-Macmillan, 2013.

The feud is the deadly *rite de passage* that promotes masculinity at the price of life.”<sup>2</sup>

The tragedy begins with what Robert Appelbaum defines as “(...) its opening and recurring spectacle of masculine aggression.”<sup>3</sup> The Capulet servants, Sampson and Gregory, set the tone of violence and aggression that intermittently surfaces in the tragedy. The language of this streetwise pair is brimming with bawdy innuendoes, such as Sampson’s “I strike quickly being moved,” reflecting his youthful longing for violence and his lusting for sex. Especially Sampson, whose speaking name, alludes to the biblical Sampson and Goliath, is itching for a fight with members of the enemy clan. In a drama class, which Giuseppe Scutellà led in the “blue room” at the Beccaria, the young men in prison showed that they could convincingly play these exuberant, lower-class characters, whose aggression seethes beneath the witty banter. Here are characters, close to the experience of young men in prison, so they immediately understood and were able to express the servants’ lewd gestures, through their body language. Sampson cries: “I will bite my thumb at them, which is disgrace to them if they bear it,” signalling to the Montague servants his eagerness to rile them.

Instead, some of the young men’s roles presented the actors with a far greater challenge. Romeo, Benvolio, Mercutio and Tybalt belong to well-to-do, upper-class families in late 16th century Verona, a very different background from their own. We did not include Paris in the rewrite since he emerges as a rather flat, stereotypical character.

Romeo, at the centre of our rewrite, is a complex figure, whose stylised, poetic language, verging on the flowery and artificial in the early scenes of Shakespeare’s play, tests an actor’s ability to deliver blank verse. When Romeo declares his love for Rosaline, he seems to be in love not so much with the girl, but with his ability to pen and recite this artificial Petrarchan poetry to impress Benvolio: “Love is a smoke made with the fumes of sighs\being purged a fire sparkling in lovers’ eyes.” As Appelbaum reminds us, “Petrarchanism provides Romeo with a strategy for performing a gender role that both insists on gender difference and allows him to remain aloof from the psychic requirement of thrusting and standing against another.”<sup>4</sup>

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2 C. Kahn, *Man’s Estate*, California, University of California Press, California, 1981, p. 84.

3 R. Appelbaum, “Standing to the Wall,” *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 48, 1997, pp. 251-72.

4 Appelbaum, *Standing to the Wall* cit., p. 265.

Interestingly, Romeo's language and his capacity to love and to empathise evolve during the play, presenting an excellent example of positive change for the workshop attendees. The moment Romeo sets eyes on Juliet, he undergoes a sea-change. Having challenged Romeo's lack of spontaneity when he kisses her for the first time ("You kiss by the book"), Juliet wastes no time in asking him to forget his bachelor life and marry her. Instead of dreaming of Rosaline, who never appears onstage, in the presence of the real-life Juliet, Romeo's language and the metaphors he deploys grow more down to earth:

See how she leans her cheek upon her hand!  
Oh that I were a glove 'pon that hand  
That I might touch that cheek!"  
(2.1.66)

Romeo's passion for Juliet, moreover, persuades him to declare his willingness to give up his very identity by taking another name:

Call me but love and I'll be new baptised.  
Henceforth I never will be Romeo.  
(2.1.93-4)

Just before he kills Tybalt, Romeo seems to plumb and understand the very depth of civil strife:

This day's black fate on more strife doth depend;  
this but begins the woe others must end.  
(3.1.119-20)

After murdering Tybalt, Romeo breaks down during his meeting with Friar Lawrence who berates him for his tears and his thoughts of suicide:

Art thou a man? Thy form cries out thou art.  
Thy tears are womanish; thy wild acts denote  
The unreasonable fury of a beast.  
Unseemly woman in a seeming man,  
and ill-beseeming beast in seeming both,  
thy hast amazed me.  
(3.3.108-14)

The Friar gives voice to the commonplace idea that tears and shows of weakness are totally unacceptable in a man, who was expected to be both morally and physically strong. Instead, Romeo looks as if he is made of wax:

Thy noble shape is but a form of wax  
digressing from the valour of a man;  
(3.3.125-26)

As was mentioned earlier, the workshop participants gave voice to the feelings of our modern-day Romeo in newly written scenes. In our retelling, Romeo is locked in a cell and later tried for Tybalt's murder. For anybody who has committed a murder, or who has physically harmed another person, Romeo's new trajectory is not unfamiliar. In a sequence of ever-shifting moods, the young man expresses remorse, suffering, anger, as he reflects on his crime and the consequences.

*Scene 5 of the retelling.*

ROMEO:

Romeo... couldn't I have had another name? What's in a name? What's a Montague? It's not hand, foot, arm, face. Perhaps this is all a dream and not really happening. What did I do? Fuck, what have I done? I couldn't ditch Mercutio. No! He would have done the same for me. But now I'm like them. I'm a murderer.

(my translation)

To make Romeo's trial as accurate and authentic as possible, we researched Youth Justice in Italy and explored questions of gang violence, murder, knife crime, in Shakespeare's day and in the present. To support us, we called in a criminologist and a lawyer, both specialised in Youth Justice. It was soon apparent that law and criminality were topics that the workshop participants, and particularly the young people in prison, were keen to learn about. For the trial scene, which turned out to be very dramatic and full of suspense, the writers, some of whom were studying law, skilfully exploited the information they had gleaned from the specialists. In the following example, the Defence Lawyer cites the Italian law that gives a young person,

guilty of murder, a chance to pay for what they have done, without a custodial sentence:

*Scene 2.*

ROMEO'S DEFENCE LAWYER:

Your Honour, we are not here to claim the innocence of our client, nor to say he was unaware of the facts. The Prosecutor has fully demonstrated Romeo's involvement in the crime. I repeat, we have not come here to say there is no evidence, nor to plead for my client's release. Instead, we ask that the trial should be suspended, with a probation order, according to article 287 D.P.R. 448/1988.

Benvolio can be considered a positive role model for the workshop attendees. In Italian, his name means "a well-wisher" or somebody who is affectionate, and, like the Prince of Verona, he is bent on keeping the peace between the opposing factions. He expresses this intention the minute the Montagues put in an appearance, through two imperatives: "Part fools. Put up your swords" (1.1). He is down-to-earth and offers Romeo some sound advice: he should look for another girlfriend if Rosaline wants nothing more to do with him: "Tut, man, one fire burns out another's burning\ one pain is lessened by another's anguish." (1.1.60) Benvolio, like Mercutio and Tybalt, is a witness at Romeo's trial. As in Shakespeare's tragedy, he is articulate and, in our retelling, he recounts the events which led up to the murders of Mercutio and Tybalt. Moreover, he details these events, from the point of view of a Montague, cleverly tailoring his statement in favour of Romeo and Mercutio.

*Scene 8*

BENVOLIO:

We were all drunk and high.

We left Juliet's house, looking for a *paninaro*.

Tybalt began rubbing Romeo up the wrong way.

How? He eyeballed him.

Mercutio was high.

When he's high, it's like nothing can stop him.

He was out of control.

But leave off. Leave off, I shouted.

I didn't do anything ...shit.

Mercutio was off his head.

Romeo stepped between the two.  
 He tried to stop them.  
 It was an accident ... shit.  
 Can I go now?  
*(Calmer and almost to himself)*  
 Tybalt killed Mercutio. He threw himself on Romeo.  
 Romeo acted in self-defence. Tybalt died.  
 He'd been looking for it. ...shit.  
 Can I have a smoke?  
 (my translation)

Like Benvolio, Mercutio has a speaking name; he is “mercurial,” witty, intelligent, effervescent, constantly changing. His name alludes to Mercury, the messenger of the gods, a trickster, known for his eloquence and magical use words. Mercutio actually purports to be a magician, with a remarkable imagination. He loves punning about sex and girls as sexual objects, a mindset which stands in sharp contrast to Romeo’s overtly romantic vision of love:

If love be blind, love cannot hit the mark.  
 Now will he sit under a medlar tree  
 And wish his mistress were that kind of fruit  
 As maids call medlars when they laugh alone.  
 O Romeo, that she were, O that she were  
 An open-arse, or thou a popp’rin’ pear.  
 (2.1.34-9)

This poet, wordsmith and songwriter immediately sparked the group’s creativity. Many of the inmates write songs and raps, often expressing their difficult experiences in prison, so for them Mercutio was a particularly attractive figure. Mercutio is well capable of analysing the dynamics that can make petty quarrels escalate into terrible crimes. Such dynamics are very familiar to young men, who may have spent their youth engaged in gang warfare. In the following scene Mercutio seeks to rile Benvolio by accusing him of not being the peacekeeper he claims to be:

Thou? Why, thou wilt quarrel with a man that hath a hair more or a hair less in his beard than thou hast. Thou wilt quarrel with a man for cracking nuts, having no other reason but because thou hast hazel eyes.  
 (3.1.17-9)

The reasons, which Mercutio claims make Benvolio quarrel, become gradually more absurd – from somebody waking up his dog, lying in the sun, to a tailor who dares to wear a new doublet before Easter. In our retelling, Mercutio plays a very different role. In the Prologue, set in a changing room, he reveals how at Juliet’s party he spent most of the time upstairs, making love to one of the girls. He is boisterous and loud, accusing Benvolio of being effeminate and not enjoying sex. When Tybalt enters, like Benvolio, he comes in for some taunting, but this time the argument escalates into a fight.

Tybalt, Prince of Cats, is the most aggressive and violent of the young men, embodying a recurring trait of the masculine gender in Renaissance England. Jennifer Feather puts it well, “Men’s capacity to imagine, control and enact violence has come to define normative masculinity in both Western and global contexts.”<sup>5</sup> Among the group of young men in Verona, Tybalt is the one most inclined to stir up the feud between Capulets and Montagues. He mocks and rejects Benvolio’s pleas for peace, in the following words, “What, are thou drawn among these heartless hinds? \ Turn thee Benvolio, look upon thy death” (1.1.62-3). A little later he mounts an even more threatening attack on this self-appointed peacekeeper, extending his threats to the entire Montague clan, “What, drawn and talk of peace? I hate the word \ as I hate hell, all Montagues, and thee” (1.1.65-6). Tybalt’s hate of the Montagues surfaces again at the Capulets’ party, where he attempts to convince Juliet’s father to throw Romeo out. When he doesn’t succeed, on meeting Romeo again, he insults him, “Romeo, the love I bear thee, can afford \ No better term than this: thou art a villain” (3.1.61-2). Notwithstanding Romeo’s attempts to appease Tybalt, the latter refuses to listen to reason and attacks Mercutio, who draws his sword. Like Mercutio, Tybalt’s role is drastically reduced in our retelling, and he, like Mercutio, returns as a ghost to give evidence at Romeo’s trial, admitting that he murdered Mercutio.

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5 J. Feather, C.C. Thomas, *Violent Masculinities, cit.*, p. 3.

## Outcome of the Workshop

Through the study of the young male characters in *Romeo and Juliet*, the attendees gained an insight into a wide spectrum of masculinities, which doubtless helped them to contribute to our new playscript. As was seen, some of the characters in Shakespeare's tragedy were rewritten and became part of the new script. It should also be mentioned that during the workshop the young men learnt to work in small groups and engage in a lively exchange with their peers. They began to show more respect for difference and enjoyed developing friendships with both genders. The university students developed similar skills and many of them reconsidered the stereotypes they may have had about prison and prisoners prior to the workshop. We encouraged students to keep a logbook and some of their reflections can be found there.



# Group Together, Act Together: A Multidisciplinary Approach to Criminal Justice

*Simone Pastorino*

(Comunità Nuova)

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## **Abstract**

This chapter examines the evolution of the Italian juvenile justice system, tracing its roots in the establishment of juvenile courts in 1934 under Fascist rule. Despite its origins in authoritarian politics, the system adopted a multidisciplinary approach, incorporating expertise in psychology, education and social work. Over time, the focus has shifted to rehabilitative and restorative models, including minimal legal intervention and the reintegration of young offenders. The chapter highlights the importance of an holistic approach, such as drama programmes, to help develop responsibility, self-expression and emotional growth in juvenile rehabilitation.

**Keywords:** Juvenile justice; theatre; restorative justice; multidisciplinary approach.

In Italy, the Fascist Era was characterised by repression and violence. It was a time when freedom of speech was infringed, but it was still pivotal for the insurgence of Juvenile Justice, thanks to the creation of a Juvenile Court in 1934 as a result of Royal Legislative Decree No. 1404. The need to rehabilitate and (re-)educate juvenile offenders, was not, however, the main concern of the Fascist legislators who, on the contrary, aimed to control and restrain these subjects who, in their view, needed to be brought back under their paternal authority. However, by creating a “special judicial authority,” the Fascists inadvertently encouraged the rise of a pedagogical culture that, from the postwar period to the present day, has led to the recognition of

the legal rights of minors. The mixed composition of the juvenile court that for the first time opened its doors to forms of knowledge unrelated to the juridical culture sprang from the need to appoint lay judges (“*giudici onorari*”) working alongside professional judges. These figures were to be experts in fields that focused on the subjectivity of the individuals they encountered, so they called on social workers, biologists, psychiatrists, criminal anthropologists, pedagogues, and psychologists.

The mixed composition of the juvenile court (which is also characteristic of the Appeal Court, Family and Minors Division, and Surveillance Court) ensures a multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary outlook and response. Considering the difficult age of the individuals the court deals with, it is imperative for it to welcome different interpretations of human behaviour, which is, by nature, unpredictable and cannot, therefore, be rigidly contained by a cold, juridical algorithm. This is especially true when retribution is expected. Courts cannot only consider the crime committed without analysing a minor’s personality and trying to meet their personal and educational needs.

In that respect, it is possible to pinpoint three main movements which influenced the educational approach of the Italian juvenile justice system. The first is based on a *retribution* model, as it promotes those approaches which seek to control and contain the offender, thanks to various institutions (reformatories, probation, boarding houses, school prisons, and surveillance institutes). These were later dismantled and replaced by communities and foster homes. The second follows the *rehabilitation/welfare* model, spanning from the 1950s to the 1960s. It is characterised by the so-called “therapeutic myth,” which examines juvenile crime using a clinical approach, namely by using scientific rigour, providing sociocultural hypotheses, and studying personality. The possibility of developing a treatment, which proved highly influential for many Italian criminology scholars and later became fundamental for our correctional system, is rooted in this movement. Instead, we have adopted a *restorative* model, *Restorative Justice*. It is considered the most effective penal response for educational purposes. The Presidential Decree 448/88, a cornerstone of our Juvenile Criminal Law, sees detention as a last resort for young offenders because, as Erving Goffman said, this labels them, thus fostering the development

of a negative identity.<sup>1</sup> The crisis of welfare policies and institutionalisation in general (due to overcrowded facilities and cost-cutting measures) forced Italy to adopt the solutions of other Northern European countries. There, socio-criminological theories prevail, as sentences follow the territorial principle, thus merging the socio-rehabilitative model with the retribution one. The new Juvenile Criminal Law, established by the legislation n. 121 of 2018 is based on this model. Even if it promotes “minimal” legal action, it also encourages a rehabilitative process to make offenders aware of their accountability, hence changing their system of values in their interaction with society (rules, effort, joint decision-making) and, especially, with their victims. Minimal legal action, in particular, is informed by the pedagogical philosophy of the 1988 criminal law, which led to the introduction of probation. This regulation was later applied to adult criminal law but only for minor offences. Mediation in criminal cases studies the communicative and relational aspects of the interaction between offender and victim by establishing a common ground where the two parties – together with the entire community – can meet and discuss any felonious behaviour.

The fact that the Juvenile Court focuses on the minors themselves, rather than their criminal actions, is also demonstrated by its diverse functions. First, it protects minors who come from dysfunctional families, who have not received adequate schooling or are abused and harmed. These minors can be put in the care of foster parents or Child Services because, as of the legislation n. 184 of 1983, all minors are entitled to have a family. The Juvenile Court also has an executive function, as it serves as a criminal prevention institution. It deals with those issues which affect the way teenagers behave and which, even if not criminal, can be dangerous and irregular, like drug use, running away from home, skipping school, or selling their bodies. While the judicial authority does not protect adults who engage in such activities, it does protect minors, as it seeks to rehabilitate them.

The three functions of the Juvenile Court show how complex and multifaceted adolescents can be. As such, they deserve better than stereotypical and conventional answers. Each intervention should be based on the minor’s personality and needs. Mario Portigliatti Barbos, Emeritus Professor of Forensic Pathology at Turin University and Honorary President of

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1 E. Goffman, *Asylums. Le istituzioni totali: i meccanismi dell’esclusione e della violenza*, Torino, Einaudi, 2010.

the Italian Society of Criminology, and Duccio Scatolero, Professor of Criminology at Turin University for over thirty years and honorary judge at the Juvenile Court of Piedmont, write that adolescence is an “ambiguous period”: “it is unstable, contradictory, hard to get through. It is the time of heated and fruitless arguments, uncompromising stubbornness, fraught friendships, limitless devotion, and generous effort. It is the time when you feel you are somebody, even though you still don’t know who. You know more than your parents do and defy them, but you are still not independent. Your personality vanishes as you become part of a group, but you feel you have found independence. You persistently follow everyone’s opinion and role model while believing you are original. You don’t talk but yell. You don’t argue but expect. You don’t participate but dramatise. It is the heyday of slogans, choruses, and intolerance. On the inside, adolescents are in conflict with themselves. On the outside, they are tossed about in their environment, inconsistent, careless. Without defences, they must face a period of vulnerability, which is biological, psychological, and social. They question all their relationships: with themselves and the world.”<sup>2</sup> A few centuries before, Aristotle, in *The Art of Rhetoric* (II, 12), described adolescents as passionate, quick-tempered, and prone to get carried away by their urges. When they make a mistake, they do so out of excess, in love, in hate and in everything else. They think they are omniscient and are always certain of what they say; this is why they always exceed.

This is the reason why in a Young Offenders Institution, like a Juvenile Court, experts in a range of therapies should be consulted. These can offer the judge a representation of what a minor’s experience in the prison system would be like, as well as advancing a hypothesis about the reasons that led the person to commit a crime. This multidisciplinary approach provides a lot of information and responses to a minor’s deviant behaviour, ranging from a strictly behavioural and educational one to a more psychosocial, psychopathological, psychiatric, bioanthropological and genetic one.

Prison, which is hard for everyone but especially for minors, must expand the inmates’ knowledge of criminal genesis and criminal dynamics (to prompt them to process their crimes). Still, it should also provide different therapy supplied by the different educational agencies available in prison

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2 G. Ponti, I. Merzagora Betsos, *Compendio di criminologia*, Milano, Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2008, p. 231.

(both the institutional and private ones), which invite minors to talk about themselves or to try out activities they've never considered before (or that they have actively spurned). This can also allow them to realise that they have a talent which might be useful for their community or to feel confident in their relationships with their peers and with adults who have a different background from themselves, but which can still gratify them and make them feel part of a group, where they can freely express themselves.

This is the virtuous role that both youth detention centres and adult prisons have, one of demolishing those processes of "imprisonment" which characterise the prison subculture. Those processes inevitably affect the men and women detained in prison who suffer the "prison machine" but also the staff who work there.<sup>3</sup> The constant exchange between experts from different fields and the therapy offered to the detainees – which also allows them to reconnect with their communities and the territory – can also help them re-evaluate their cultural background and, maybe, even challenge some of their prejudices and prevent self-sabotage.

The educational drama activities at the Beccaria are praiseworthy since the young men in prison perform as actors or jugglers who, winking at Dario Fo's clownish figures and Fellini's oneiric visions, can question the stereotypes about people in prison. By constantly playing with the absurd and the ridiculous, the "empty space" they experience can be filled with meaningful relationships and new interests. It is helpful for them to experience something new and to "erode" the monolithic apathy that has taken over their lives, using irony and self-irony, essential elements for developing an *emotional intelligence*.

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3 F. Vianello, *Il carcere, sociologia del penitenziario*, Milano, Carocci, 2012, p. 71.



# Romeo Montague's Trial and Probation for the Young Defendant

*Lucio Camaldo*

(Milan University)

DOI: 10.54103/st.227.c429

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0240-7483>

## **Abstract**

The chapter illustrates the modern-day relevance of juvenile justice principles and the potential of probation to achieve both accountability and reintegration by analysing the case of Romeo from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* within this framework.

**Keywords:** Juvenile Criminal Proceedings; probation; *Romeo and Juliet*; trial.

## **The Juvenile Criminal Proceedings**

The juvenile criminal proceedings, regulated by the Presidential Decree n. 448 of September 22, 1988, protects minors who commit a crime, by fostering a process of individualisation and prompting them to take responsibility. Education, more than re-education, is what inspired the reform and the main purpose of every criminal proceeding, regarding a minor. This legislation attempted to combine the punitive function of a trial with a series of interventions and measures which seek to bring about social rehabilitation. With this aim, the juvenile criminal system is centred on the person, and not only the crime committed.<sup>1</sup>

The importance of investigating the young offender's personality was also stressed by the European Directive n. 800 of 2016 on procedural

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1 Article 3 of the legislation n. 81 of 1987 contains guidelines regarding a trial of a young offender. It establishes that the minor's psychological state, their maturity and educational needs must be considered during the trial.

safeguards for children who are suspects or accused persons in criminal proceedings.<sup>2</sup> In particular, Article 7 regulates the minor's right to an «individual assessment,» in order to identify the specific needs relating to their protection, education, training and social rehabilitation, as was previously affirmed at an international level.<sup>3</sup>

The need for a judicial response tailored to the individual characteristics and educational needs of a person is catered for by the presence of a specialised judge together with lay judges,<sup>4</sup> and it originates from the need to carry out a psycho-social inquiry into the personality of the underage suspect or person on remand.

The evaluation of their personality,<sup>5</sup> considering the complexity and sensitivity of the task in question, requires a multi-disciplinary and composite approach. The aim is to gather information on the personal, family, social and environmental history of the minor, which will aid the prosecuting authority to consider the right measures for the case. Every decision made during the trial happens after the acquisition of background information on the minor offender. This, along with the evaluation of the crime committed, is fundamental to be able to decide on the most appropriate legal solution.

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2 See the Directive n. 800 of May 11, 2016, of the European Parliament and of the Council on procedural safeguards for children who are suspects or accused persons in criminal proceedings, in *The Official Journal of the European Union*, May 21, 2016, L 132. See also L. Camaldo, “Garanzie europee per i minori autori di reato nel procedimento penale: la direttiva 2016/800/UE in relazione alla normativa nazionale”, in *Cassazione penale*, 2016, n. 12, p. 4572 ss.

3 At an international level, see the «Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice», approved by the 6th Congress of the United Nations in 1985.

4 According to Article 2 of the Royal Legislation n. 1404 of July 20, 1934 («Institution and functioning of Juvenile Courts»), as amended by Article 4 of the legislation n. 1441 of December 27, 1956, the Juvenile Court «consists of a professional judge of the Court of Appeal, who presides over it, a judge from the tribunal and two social experts, a man and a woman, chosen amongst biologists, psychiatrists, criminal anthropologists, pedagogists, psychologists, who have reached the age of thirty».

5 The evaluation of the offender's personality is regulated by Article 9 of the Presidential Decree n. 448 of 1988. See L. Camaldo, “Gli accertamenti sull'età e sulla personalità: aspetti processuali, in D. Vigoni (ed.), *Il difetto d'imputabilità del minorenne*, Torino, Giappichelli, 2016; C. De Luca, “Gli accertamenti sulla personalità dell'autore di reato minorenne e il divieto di perizia psicologica nel rito ordinario: riflessioni e nuove prospettive”, in *Cassazione penale*, 2018, n. 6, p. 2140 ss.

This idea of focusing on the minor's needs and rights, however, does not prevent the State from using criminal penalties. It rather allows a diversification of punishment, thus granting offenders a rapid and non-traumatic experience, while avoiding any impact on their education. Therefore, the traditional legal proceedings used for adults are not unreservedly applied to minors. Such proceedings need to be carefully considered, as they might not be adequate.<sup>6</sup>

The establishment of a legal system geared to minors' special needs and characteristics, as of the 1988 legislation, led, on the one hand, to the creation of procedures which allow minors to quickly exit the penal system,<sup>7</sup> when their offence is of little consequence and, on the other, to educational practices which foster a positive change in the minor, like the suspension of criminal proceedings in favour of probation.

## **Probation of Juvenile Offenders: The Centrality of the Educational Programme**

Among the alternatives to punishment, probation is particularly relevant.<sup>8</sup> This procedure, which originated in the UK, allows the judicial authorities to interrupt a trial. After hearing the parties, the judge temporarily suspends the criminal proceeding if the minor willingly accepts to undergo a period of observation, rehabilitation, and support.

This procedure can only be granted if the judge expresses a positive assessment of the minor's ability to critically evaluate their unlawful action, and to embark on a constructive path of growth and social rehabilitation.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the offence must be judged as being the manifestation of a temporary difficulty, which the minor can overcome through a socially integrated

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6 See art. 1, c. 1 of the Presidential Decree n. 448 of 1988.

7 Such as "perdono giudiziale" ("judicial pardon") (art. 169 of the Penal Code and art. 19 of the Royal Legislation n. 1404 of 1934); dismissal due to the lack of imputability (art. 26 of the Presidential Decree n. 448 of 1988); dismissal due to the irrelevance of the fact (art. 27 of the Presidential Decree n. 448 of 1988).

8 See artt. 28 e 29 of the Presidential Decree n. 448 of 1988 e art. 27 of the Legislation n. 272 of 1989 (which will be hereafter referred to as disp. att. min.).

9 See Criminal Supreme Court., Sec. V, October 12, 2016, n. 48288.

programme, rather than the result of a deviant choice rooted in the person's mind.<sup>10</sup>

The minor is asked to willingly consent to the rehabilitative programme, which is crucial for the entire duration of the probationary period. At the outset, this programme is devised by Juvenile Social Services<sup>11</sup> but it must be approved by the judge that can suggest changing, reducing or adding other activities. Still, it is important to stress that only the judicial authority can order the suspension and evaluate the outcome of the probationary period, while Juvenile Social Services play an advisory role. In particular, the intervention consists of a series of separate prescriptions, whose content may differ. These address the minor, their family, and the environment they grew up in.

The said programme must adhere to some essential minimum requirements,<sup>12</sup> and it must be specific, suitable, viable and flexible. It must not set unrealistic goals, as this could be detrimental to the minor. Moreover, the possibility of changing the programme as it goes along ensures it is constantly adjusted to their personality, which is still not fully developed due to their young age. The project consists of detailed, composite prescriptions that often address the minor's school life, working environment, and leisure time. Volunteering is also appropriate and, whenever possible, a programme of restorative justice can be established between the offender and the victim. Restorative justice might persuade the minor to acknowledge the social harm his or her action has caused.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, it is important that the prescriptions respect the young offender's interests and proclivities, so as to create a suitable, customised programme.<sup>14</sup>

The characteristics, which we have mentioned, show how the aim of this procedure is not just one of easing the judiciary load, or of avoiding

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10 See Criminal Supreme Court, Sec. V, December 7, 2012, n. 14035.

11 See Criminal Supreme Court, Sec. III, September 8, 2016, n. 6019.

12 See art. 27, c. 2, disp. att. min., "The probation programme must include: a) procedures to engage the minor, his or her family and environment; b) the minor's specific obligations; c) the procedures regulating the way legal practitioners and local authorities can be involved in the project; d) the procedures to compensate for the crime committed and to promote the reconciliation between the minor and the victim."

13 See G. Albanese, "La mediazione nel procedimento penale minorile tra normativa e prassi", in *Cassazione penale*, 2019, n. 1, p. 370 ss.

14 Regarding this, see Milan's Juvenile Court, June 6, 2006, in *Foro ambrosiano*, 2006, n. 3, p. 337.

punishing the offender for his or her actions. On the contrary, the success of probation depends on the close supervision of a subject's real and authentic efforts.<sup>15</sup>

## Salient Features and Conditions of Probation

Until a recent legislation came into being, probation could always be granted no matter what the crime was: it wasn't restricted, in fact, by the severity of the offence, so it has been granted even in the event of a very serious crime, like murder.<sup>16</sup> After the legislation n. 159 of 2023, which converted the previous Decree Law n. 123 of 2023 (known as "Decreto Caivano"), it is no longer possible to apply probation if the young defendant has committed the following crimes: aggravated homicide, aggravated sexual violence, aggravated robbery.

The severity of the minor's misconduct has an impact on the duration of the probationary period. It can last up to three years, for those minors who have committed crimes punishable by life imprisonment,<sup>17</sup> or by a sentence of at least twelve years. In all other cases, probation cannot exceed one year.<sup>18</sup>

As said, the judge must defer their decision until after the end of probation, so as to be able to properly evaluate the minor's personality.<sup>19</sup> This norm shows, once again, how significant the individuality of the offender really is, and how important it is to make an individual assessment of the minor. This will be the guiding principle behind the judge's verdict. In other words, data collected at the end of the psycho-social inquiry allows the judge to recognise the positive outcome of the probationary period.

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15 See art. 27, c. 2 lett. b), disp. att. min., where it is stressed that probation must also stipulate the "commitments that the minor abides by".

16 See L. Camaldo, "Sospensione del processo e messa alla prova del minore imputato di omicidio: una recente decisione del Tribunale per i minorenni di Milano", in *Cassazione penale*, 2006, n. 4, p. 1589 ss.

17 Minors cannot be sentenced to life imprisonment, as established by the Constitutional Court, with the sentence n. 167 of April 28, 1994.

18 See art. 28, c. 2 of the Presidential Decree n. 448 of 1988. The lack of any legal instruction on the minimum duration of probation means that the choice is entirely in the the judge's hands.

19 See art. 28, c. 1 of the Presidential Decree n. 448 of 1988.

A further imperative condition is that the young offenders must willingly and spontaneously submit to probation. Not only do they have to agree with the judge's decision in general, but they must also consent to the specific contents of the programme prepared for them. This is necessary to ensure that the offender's decision is not the result of a coercion or of a defensive strategy. Because of this, it is important to carefully monitor the environment where the decision is made, to be sure that the minors are not under somebody else's influence and that they are fully aware of the consequences. In order for probation to be granted it must be freely and willingly accepted by the offender. This kind of consent requires the subject to be capable of understanding and exercising free will, i.e. they have imputability. Imputability is, in fact, crucial and indefectible to criminal prosecution regarding a minor.

Another premise before granting probation is that the judge, albeit implicitly, assesses the defendant's criminal liability. It would, in fact, be unwarranted, and unfair, to make an innocent young person undergo a social-rehabilitation programme. However, it must be said that this evaluation is only temporary, as it originates from a preliminary evaluation.

To that end, a confession, while revealing the guilt of the offender, cannot be a necessary requirement to grant this benefit.<sup>20</sup> A different solution would be at odds with the presumption of innocence, as regulated by the Constitution. According to this principle, in fact, the defendant must be considered innocent until the irrevocable sentence is pronounced.<sup>21</sup>

## The Procedural Steps of Probation

Article 28 of the Presidential Decree n. 448 of 1988, which regulates probation, addresses only defendants and not suspects. It, then, becomes clear how this legislation can be implemented only at the end of the preliminary investigation. Probation therefore can be granted in the following stages of the proceedings: during the preliminary hearing or the trial, throughout the special procedures allowed by Article 25 of the Presidential

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20 See the Criminal Supreme Court, Sec. I, May 9, 2017 (dep. September 6, 2017), n. 40512.

21 The presumption of innocence principle is mentioned in Article 27 of the Italian Constitution.

Decree n. 448 of 1988, and during the appeal judgement.<sup>22</sup> As far as the latter is concerned, considering how much time has elapsed since the crime was committed, it is still debatable how useful it would be to grant probation at this stage. To be honest, nothing in the wording of this provision suggests it cannot be done. Yet, the final goal of this procedure, which allows minors to quickly exit the penal system, would not be achieved were probation to be granted at this stage.

Notwithstanding the lack of restrictions on this subject, it is during the preliminary hearing that probation is most likely to be granted, as this is the focus of the juvenile trial.<sup>23</sup> This stage comes after the prosecutor has issued an indictment, provided that the evidence gathered during the preliminary investigation is enough to move forward. The trial plays, therefore, a residual role, as it is only implemented for more severe, complex cases. The conclusion of the criminal proceedings during the preliminary hearing, however, is only possible if the defendant gives their consent, in accordance with art. 32, c. 1 of the Presidential Decree n. 448 of 1988.

Article 28 of the Presidential Decree n. 448 of 1988 states that, after deciding to grant probation, the judge suspends the criminal proceedings with an ordinance that can be appealed to the Italian Criminal Supreme Court.<sup>24</sup>

The judge's decision contains the regulations, constituting the project, previously arranged by Juvenile Social Services, who take care of the minor from the very beginning of the criminal proceeding.<sup>25</sup>

Social Services play a leading role in the development of the programme, as well supporting the minor for the duration of the probationary period.

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22 See Milan's Appeal Court, May 20, 1999.

23 Artt. 31 and 32 of the Presidential Decree n. 448 of 1988 regulated the juvenile preliminary hearing. To learn more about this topic, see L. Camaldo, *L'udienza preliminare nel processo penale minorile*, Torino, Giappichelli, 2023.

24 Art. 28, c. 3 of the Presidential Decree n. 448 of 1988 states that only the ordinance which grants such benefit can be appealed to the Supreme Court (See Criminal Supreme Court, Sec. I, July 8, 1999, n. 10962). The ordinance of the Juvenile Court, which rejects probation, cannot be challenged on its own, but only together with the sentence which closes the proceeding (See Criminal Supreme Court, Sec. IV, June 18, 2003, n. 34169).

25 Juvenile Social Services are governed by artt. 6, 12 and 28 of the Presidential Decree n. 448 of 1988. They are an equipt of trained operators, usually made up of social experts, educators, psychologists and consultants of the office for the administration of justice. They work very closely with social experts appointed by local authorities. See Camaldo, *Gli accertamenti sull'età e sulla personalità*, cit., p. 93.

They keep in constant touch with the judicial authority, through periodical social reports. Moreover, they are obliged to provide psychological support, and to supervise the progress of the probationary period. In light of this, they may also recommend some amendments to the judge, if the educational programme proves inadequate. This may lead to a shortening of probation, or, in the event of repeated and serious transgressions, to the withdrawal of the benefit. The decision to revoke probation is left to the judge's discretion (art. 28, c. 5, of the Presidential Decree n. 448 of 1988). It is worth noting that occasional, minor misdemeanours are not enough to revoke probation; in fact, there have to be relevant, systematic violations, which prove the minor's rejection of the probationary period, making it futile to continue.

## The Outcomes of Probation

At the end of the probationary period, there may be different outcomes, based on the evaluation of the overall performance after its conclusion.

For the final evaluation, the judge considers the report drawn up by Juvenile Social Services concerning the minor's behaviour and the development of their personality and, if everything is in order, a direct hearing of the defendant takes place.<sup>26</sup>

As said, whatever the outcome of probation, this procedure is valuable to assess the minor's growth and development. Even if all the prescriptions have been respected, the probation is unsuccessful if the minor is not deemed reformed and changed. Likewise, provided the general evaluation of the minor's personality is positive, their infringement of some specific prescriptions may not lead to a failure of probation.<sup>27</sup> As far as the procedural consequences are concerned, the positive outcome of a probationary period will lead to extinction of the crime. On the contrary, if probation is not successful, proceedings resume from the point they left off (Article 29 of the Presidential Decree n. 448 of 1988).

In the case of a negative outcome, the probationary period does not count as time served to reduce the sentence. This disposition was recently

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26 See art. 27 c. 5, disp. att. min.

27 See Milan's Juvenile Court, June 6, 2006, cit., p. 337.

evaluated by the Constitutional Court<sup>28</sup> which has, nonetheless, reasserted the constitutionality of such a norm.

## Probation in *Romeo and Juliet*: What are the Alternatives for Romeo?

As is well-known, “there is a parallelism between theatre and a criminal trial.” As a matter of fact, “everything concurs to make a trial a performance: the judge’s bench, the shape of the courtroom, the dock, the robes worn by judges, prosecutors and lawyers, the tone of the debate which often seeks to stir emotions, more than inciting a critical analysis, the suspense leading up to the final sentence.”<sup>29</sup>

Trials, after all, figure in many literary works and stage plays. In many of his tragedies, William Shakespeare includes criminal proceedings. And even when this does not happen, he often makes his characters accountable for the illegal actions they committed. This is true of *Hamlet*, *the Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*.<sup>30</sup>

In the tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*,<sup>31</sup> the third act is particularly relevant, as here Romeo is depicted not just as Juliet’s lover, but rather as Tybalt’s wrathful murderer.

Because of this murder, the Prince of Verona hears several young witnesses and decides to send Romeo into exile, instead of having him executed (3.1.186-97). If we read this passage from a contemporary perspective, it is possible to speculate on the legal consequences of the murder Romeo commits.

First of all, we should highlight that when the crime happened, young Montague was a minor. Article 98 of the penal code states that it is up to the judge to verify whether an offender aged fourteen to eighteen may be

28 See the sentence of the Constitutional Court of February 20, 2019 (dep. 29 March 2019), n. 68, available online at [www.giurcost.it](http://www.giurcost.it).

29 M. Cartabia, L. Violante, *Giustizia e mito*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2018, p. 145.

30 See G. Forti, C. Mazzucato, A. Visconti, *Giustizia e letteratura*, vol. I, Vita e pensiero, Milano, 2012, p. 4 ss. (in particular, I - “Legge, giudizi e pregiudizi in William Shakespeare”, pp. 4-41); the article “Perché gli avvocati amano Shakespeare”, in *The Economist*, January, 25 2016, in the translation published in the magazine *Internazionale*.

31 W. Shakespeare, *Romeo e Giulietta*, edited by A. L. Zazo, trans. by S. Quasimodo, introd. by P. Bertinetti, Milan, Oscar Mondadori, 2001. Quotations are taken from this edition.

exempted from the proceedings. The principle of criminal liability may be divided into two fundamental components, both of which are necessary. On the one hand, the ability to recognise the moral and social harm their criminal behaviour has caused, as well as the ensuing consequences. On the other, the ability to control and resist their impulses.

In order to verify Romeo's criminal liability, it is important to consider the life he was leading. He was enmeshed in adult feuding, and he was familiar with two factions, the Montagues and the Capulets, who had divided the city. Moreover, Romeo is not just a Montague, but he is also fuelled by the rivalry between the two families when he falls in love with Juliet Capulet and is well aware of the dire issues their relationship might cause. Given all this, it is clear that Romeo was conscious of the consequences his actions might have and still decided to act.

As far as the offender's personality is considered, Romeo does not seem prone to violence. On the contrary, he is described as an intelligent and sensitive young man, who is keen on reading and writing poetry as well as searching for an ideal love match. Romeo's innocence, mistaken for cowardice by his friend Mercutio, is exhibited in the scene of the above-mentioned duel (3.1.61-71). As for the circumstances surrounding the murder, it is significant that the event leading up to it, was Tybalt murdering Mercutio. These circumstances prove that Romeo did not carefully premeditate Tybalt's killing, as Benvolio tells the Prince:

BENVOLIO: Tybalt, here slain, whom Romeo's hand did slay;  
 Romeo, that spoke him fair, bid him bethink  
 How nice the quarrel was, and urged withal  
 Your high displeasure: all this uttered  
 With gentle breath, calm look, knees humbly bowed,  
 Could not take truce with the unruly spleen  
 Of Tybalt deaf to peace, but that he tilts  
 With piercing steel at bold Mercutio's breast,  
 Who, all as hot, turns deadly point to point,  
 And, with a martial scorn, with one hand beats  
 Cold death aside and with the other sends  
 It back to Tybalt, whose dexterity,  
 Retorts it. Romeo he cries aloud,  
 'Hold, friends! friends, part!' and swifter than  
 his tongue  
 His agile arm beats down their fatal points,

And 'twixt them rushes; underneath whose arm  
 An envious thrust from Tybalt hit the life  
 Of stout Mercutio, and then Tybalt fled;  
 But by and by comes back to Romeo,  
 Who had but newly entertained revenge,  
 And 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.  
 This is the truth, or let Benvolio die.  
 (3.1.152-81)

It would rather appear that Romeo behaved impulsively, like a young man who tries to refrain from violence, but ultimately gives in when faced by the injustice of his friend's murder. And so, he succumbs to the instinct of revenge to give his friend justice.

Considering this, Romeo may be granted probation, instead of exile, which he suffers in Shakespeare's play. Ostracising him from where he lives would actually be counterproductive, as he would not learn to take responsibility for his actions and could not be socially rehabilitated. Therefore, exile would be totally inadequate and useless since it would make the offender angrier and more frustrated. Considering Romeo's educational needs, it would, instead, be more productive to put him on a probationary period, based on his personal characteristics.

As for the premises and limits of these proceedings, as previously mentioned, probation can be granted even in the event of a murder, for it is not tied to the severity or type of crime committed.<sup>32</sup> If Romeo's personal and socio-familiar profiles are considered, it is possible to predict a successful outcome of the probationary period. Moreover, the boy's personality suggests he would willingly and spontaneously agree to probation. This will also take account of his emotional confusion and of the intensity of the gruesome action he engaged in.

If a probationary period were granted in Romeo's case, this could not exceed three years, as required by the norm.

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32 After the "Caivano Decree" of 2023, as already considered above, probation is not possible in the case where the minor has committed an aggravated homicide (for example, when the homicide is premeditated or is committed against the ascendant or descendant or is committed for abject and futile reasons).

As to the content of the programme, it is necessary to identify a series of prescriptions that would fit the proclivities and interests of the minor. Still, it is likewise important to bear in mind that the aim of the procedure is to help the offender process the criminal episode. A distinction can be made between those prescriptions which require the minor's active commitment, as well as their personal involvement, and those which simply dictate their behavioural obligations, also called negative prescriptions.

Considering Romeo's interests, taking a poetry or literary class may be perfect for him, as long as a certificate is issued at the end. Furthermore, to improve his interpersonal relationships with his peers, he could attend a theatre workshop.

Some acting training can help us to get to know ourselves better, and it also allows us to explore and challenge our impulses, faults, weaknesses, and shyness.

Finally, to undermine the hegemonic compulsions originating in his powerful upper-class background, it could be beneficial for him to volunteer to help the needy.

As for the negative prescriptions, he may be compelled to hand in his weapons, and to stop bragging in public places.

In addition, it would be desirable to implement a programme of restorative justice, such as a mediation process with Tybalt's family, and with the Capulets in general, so as to facilitate Romeo's social rehabilitation.

Mediation can be defined as a "mostly formal process which allows a neutral third party to intercede in the rivalry between two factions, with the purpose of helping them share their opposite perspectives and sort out their conflict, through a series of controlled interactions."<sup>33</sup> This entails a number of meetings between the offender and the victim, assisted by an expert. The main goal of this rehabilitative and conciliatory activity, however, is not that of persuading the victim to forgive their offender. It rather aims to help both parties process the criminal experience they had and improve their relationship, as much as possible. If the outcome is positive, the mediation process ends in an agreement between the parties, who perform symbolic but concrete gestures, such as forgiving each other and reconciling publicly.

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33 See B. Schmitt, *La médiation une justice douce*, Paris, Syros Alternatives, 1992.

If it is correctly implemented and willingly accepted, a similar process may be beneficial in two ways: for the victim, it offers them an opportunity to be heard, and to express their feelings, while also trying to understand the offender's reasons. For the offender, instead, mediation is useful to critically process their behaviour, and to become aware of the harm they've caused.<sup>34</sup>

The potential of these procedures may be undermined by the victim's unwillingness to meet their offender, especially when the crime committed is particularly serious, like a murder. In the specific case of *Romeo and Juliet*, it is unlikely that Tybalt's parents, and the other Capulets, would agree to meet Romeo, seeing the conflictual relationship between the two families and their deep sorrow for the loss of their son.

At the end of the probationary period, it would be necessary to check whether the prescriptions given to Romeo were, in fact, followed. But it would also be crucial to attest the boy's efforts, and how he has changed throughout the entire process. Were the probationary period to be positive, the crime of murder would be considered extinct.

Otherwise, if probation failed, the trial would resume, and Romeo could be condemned for voluntary homicide. However, the sentence could be mitigated. When he committed the crime, Romeo was in fact a minor. Moreover, he acted out of rage for the injustice his friend Mercutio suffered when Tybalt murdered him.

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34 See Albanese, *La mediazione nel procedimento penale minorile*, cit., p. 370 ss.



## Logbooks

We all want to put ourselves out there and experience new things. We enjoy experimenting and using different methods to reach unique conclusions. We like bodies, and the way they move, touch, and brush each other, the way they look at each other, that shiver that runs down our spine and from our head reaches our feet, shaking us to the core. We like chatting, but we are too afraid of being exposed, and when we find someone who's willing to glue back together our broken pieces, we feel free of all constraints. We are flooding rivers, we are gurgling water. And we make so much noise that even when we flow into the sea we will not be at peace. We will turn into a tidal wave, an ebb, and few will be the banks able to hold us in. And even those that manage, are going to end up battered and weakened.

Giorgia Galizzi, 17 November

To get to the blue room, where we work with the boys of the Bekka, we had to walk through a courtyard with many green spots. I thought: "This is so nice. It looks like the courtyard of Milan university." Then, I looked around, and I saw the bars up at the windows. I must say, I was probably looking for them. I mean, it was the first time I had been in a prison, and I wanted to see all those things we expect in a place like that.

Lorena Siqueira Leuzzi, 28 November



Inside the blue room.

“Am I supposed to play Romeo?”

“I’ll sit next to her. Was I with you last time?” I reply with a simple “I believe so.”

Then, he starts to read. He fumbles and apologises, fumbles again and apologises. He says he is sorry, as if we were all there to judge him. As if he always expected to be judged. After all, this is what has happened to him in the last five years... Wait, has it been five years? Was he really twelve when it all started? How can a twelve-year-old boy do something so bad to end up in prison? We are used to seeing twelve-year-old kids playing with their friends after school, messing around, laughing and lying to their parents that they’ve done their homework, playing football, swimming and teaming up because teamwork is important, etc. etc. But he didn’t do all this. He didn’t have all this. No games for him. No laughing. When he smiles, you can see some teeth are missing... who knows how many times he’s been beaten, I think...

After a while, he exchanges a knowing look with H. They laugh, as if they were really up to something...

Then, he grabs my red notebook and reads it.

“You’re nuts! How can you write so much?... nice writing.”

“Thank you.”

Then, he asks for a break. He calls H. and tells me to tag along, before going out. I don’t follow him, as I need to stay inside to speak to my teacher. Then he comes back. He has the smirk of a child who wants to tell you something but doesn’t know how to. As if he had to confess some shenanigans to his mother.

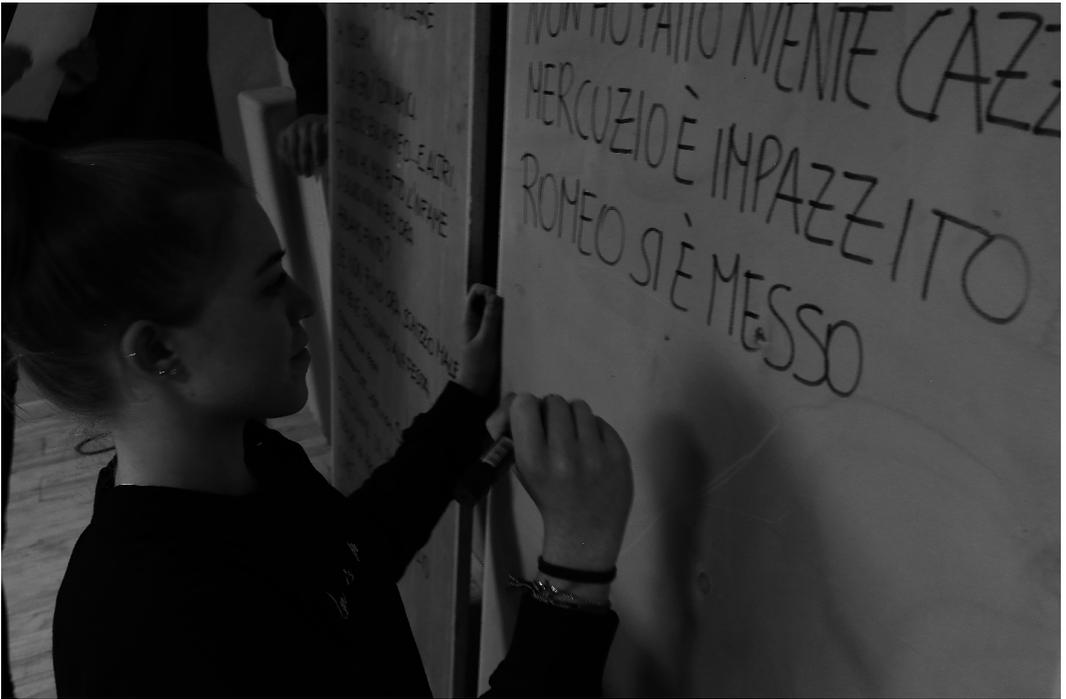
We sit together, since we have to write our depositions. He listens to me, but as soon as I get distracted, he slips a letter into my notebook.

“What did you put in my notebook?”

“You can look at it later...” he says with a satisfied smile. He winks at H., who also wrote a letter, to Emilia. They got that off their chest. They delivered the letters. They wrote them last Tuesday. They’ve been waiting for a week. And they’ll have to wait an entire week to receive an answer. A letter. Who writes letters these days?

“I’m a shy guy, but I couldn’t take my eyes off you from the very first moment I saw you. I’d like to get to know you better.” He says this three times. He asks me out for a coffee. No, for a drink.

Alessandra Romeo, November 21





## Logbook

These days have been amazing. Not only were we together, but we also got to do an incredible job with the photos we took. We are given instructions not to expose the boys' faces. So, I tried to use secondary forms of expression to showcase their emotions, without actually revealing their looks (secondary to the representation of faces, which are normally prevalent in our aesthetic imagery). Gestures, details and movements became the focus of this workshop. I've been observing and listening, in order to understand how to unearth what usually disappears into the background.

Francesca Carezzi, 1 December







# Thirty Years of Prison Shakespeare Tragicomedy. A Prologue, Three Acts and an Epilogue

*Giuseppe Scutellà, Lisa Mazoni*

(Puntozero)

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## Abstract

Two practitioners explore the transformative impact of theatre, particularly the works of Shakespeare, on minors at the “Cesare Beccaria” Youth Detention Centre.

**Keywords:** Theatre; juvenile detention; Shakespeare workshop; *Romeo and Juliet*; transformation; youth empowerment; emotions; inclusion; law; Puntozero Beccaria Theatre.

## Characters

LUCIO CAMALDO Associate Professor at the Department of Legal Studies “Cesare Beccaria” – Milan University

DANIELA CARPI Professor at the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures – University of Verona

MARIACRISTINA CAVECCHI Associate Professor at the Department of Languages, Literatures, Cultures and Mediations – Milan University

LISA MAZONI actress and president of Puntozero

PETER McCAUGHEY Artist – founder of WAVEparticle, Glasgow

ELVIRA NARDUCCI Educator and supervisor of the pedagogical activities – “Cesare Beccaria” Youth Detention Centre, Milan

SIMONE PASTORINO Educator – “Cesare Beccaria” Youth Detention Centre, Milan

MARGARET (MAGGIE) ROSE Associate professor at the Department of Languages, Literatures, Cultures and Mediations – Milan University

GIUSEPPE (BEPPE) SCUTELLÀ Director, actor, co-founder of Puntozero

MILAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS G. Caccialanza, F. Carezzi, L. Ceriani, B. Cionti, M. De Tomasi, M. Fisichella, D. Fraschini, G. Galizzi, I. Greppi, K. Karabin, G. Leone, L. Siqueira Leuzzi, D. Manna, E. Piz, M. Preatoni, A. Romeo, M. Segato, S. Viglino

PUNTOZERO ACTORS AND YOUNG PEOPLE AT THE BECCARIA YOUTH DETENTION CENTRE

## Prologue

Since we started working with the young people at the Beccaria Youth Detention Centre thirty years ago, we have constantly used two scenes from *Romeo and Juliet*. The first scene opens the tragedy (1.1), where the two factions fight for the first time in the play; the second is the scene where Mercutio and Tybalt die and Romeo is sent into exile, a turning point in the drama (3.1). From 1995, at least once a week, the words of the young Capulets and Montagues come to life through the voices of the minors, reverberating inside the prison walls. For thirty years, these boys have lived the lives of Shakespeare's characters and have found through them a way to talk about themselves and uncover new facets of their identities. "You could say that each of us writes and lives a 'narrative', and that this narrative represents us, it embodies us, our identities," as Oliver Sacks writes in *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*. I sincerely believe that the power of theatre lies in its ability to interfere with this narrative, as it allows us to imagine other stories and endings. I believe in the power of the classics, especially Shakespeare. I'm in love with Shakespeare because I've seen his words enthrall and change the young men I have worked with for thirty years by offering them the words they lack to express their feelings and emotions.

The philosopher Carlo Sini writes that "theatre is the oldest form of knowledge associated with humanity" and that "there is no knowledge which is not theatrical." Through theatre, we can project ourselves into the outside world and give voice to the inner one. This process promotes personal growth and a consciousness of the self and reality, which is the only way we can improve. Theatre questions our actions by allowing us to play different roles on the stage of life. For minors in prison, acting in a play

means learning those skills that will hopefully allow them to change before release. When we began our work inside the Beccaria, this hypothesis was widely accepted by the prison administration and by legal practitioners (social workers, educators, law enforcement and psychologists), who allowed us to develop our theatre activities.

Being behind bars does not change people. It does not correct their past or amend their actions; at most, it can keep them locked away. Therefore, it is important to give them the keys to their freedom. This is possible only by guiding them on a path of self-discovery and teaching them to keep their actions and choices in check – empowering them to take control of their lives. Theatre can expedite this process, as it allows them to try out new identities through different stories and characters, which can challenge their own. Theatre makes them question themselves, showing them new ways of dealing with their thoughts, emotions and actions. Hence, the fictional nature of acting does not pressurise them to try and flee from themselves or their reality, but it prompts them to see everything through fresh eyes, to see new possibilities. When they walk onstage, these young people shapeshift. They wear a new life and imagine new scenarios, with outcomes and developments different from the ones they are used to. They find an opportunity to redeem themselves, a new way of appreciating their freedom and living without constraints.

I can't think of anything other than theatre that can make these young people imagine and experience a different life, let alone make them believe they can change their own; there's nothing like theatre that can help them get rid of their physical and psychological automatisms. Moreover, when we imagine, we can anticipate the outcome of our actions and, therefore, reassess our course of action.

I work with the steadfast belief that theatre can change my actors. It can teach them to act “righteously” (both in the sense of “rightly” and “lawfully”), and to avoid being acted on by the circumstances they find themselves in or influenced by external conditioning. To make this possible, it is important for them to understand their emotional state. If they want to understand and dominate their feelings, they first need to name them. Theatre can give them the tools they need to decode the complex universe of things that hides inside each of us by helping them act on the world's stage.

Actions and feelings, that are not rightly named or addressed can be detrimental, especially for those subjects who, due to their young age, have not yet acquired the ability to recognise them. Criminals are made, not born. Therefore, it is essential to monitor the environment in which young people grow up, especially their family context, that reflects our society. How do we make our children self-aware? If it is true that social and cultural studies are important, it is likewise fundamental to implement psychology, which is often neglected.

When I think of the boys I've met at the Beccaria over the years, I can't help but acknowledge that they all lacked an "emotional syntax." They were affected by the "emotional illiteracy" Umberto Galimberti talks about in his book *L'ospite inquietante: il nichilismo e i giovani* (*The Disturbing Guest. Nihilism and young people*). This condition seems to be affecting the age we live in, a period where love gets mixed up with pornography, material possessions are used to assess our value, and the virtual world overlaps with the real one. Juvenile detention centres are full of young people who are not able to "spell their emotions," and this "emotional aphasia" is often mistaken for cognitive and/or behavioural deficiencies. Every young man is defined by a long list of shortcomings, such as "devoid of something," or "lacking in something else." If we do not allow these young people to make up for their deficiencies, if we do not provide them with the tools, they need to find a way of dealing with their emotions, thoughts and actions, when they come out of prison, they will be no different than when they were sentenced. Words are not enough. Words, as Galimberti highlights, are empty. It is time to act together.

This also means that we need to find meaning to inform our actions and take responsibility for our failures. We need to turn our words into something concrete, and Shakespeare is perfect for this. He can tell us how to understand and use what we have inside because, as the American critic Harold Bloom writes, "Shakespeare will continue to explain who we are, in part because he invented us." He invented our emotions, or at least he named them.

So, Shakespeare's plays become a magic mirror: his characters reflect our own state, our fears, our mistakes and our desires. By acting in Shakespeare's plays (an experience that calls for our voices, bodies, thoughts and feelings), we can figure out who we are and make sense of our actions and emotions.

For the young people we work with, minors in prison and others, theatre, and especially Shakespeare's theatre, is a way to recognise and give voice to their emotions and process their conflicts and problems. It can help them become active protagonists in their lives and responsible for their actions.

I decided that Shakespeare would be the starting point for my theatre-making in prison because he would help me to promote a "comprehensive sex education." Thanks to him, I knew that I could write an "emotional grammar."

Over the years, I have had a chance to understand that theatre is a school for our young people. It teaches them how to deal with their emotions, which is essential if they are to change.

The story of G. is quite informative. He arrived in Italy three years ago from the Ivory Coast. He was convicted for segregating and beating up a young boy in a garage, with the complicity of three other minors. His educators compelled him to work with us in the belief that theatre could help him develop the empathy he lacked, which, according to them, was the reason behind his crime. So, we gave him the part of Romeo in the tragedy *Romeo & Juliet disaster* which we were rehearsing at the time. When he first set foot in the theatre, G. seemed not to care about his crime.

Juliet was played by Sara, an incredibly gentle eighteen-year-old student who worked with the Puntozero company for many years. A few days after G. was given the part, we were rehearsing the balcony scene (2.2), and I was flabbergasted by how quickly he had learned his lines. It was incredible how resolute this young man, who didn't make it past the eighth grade, could be. But the words he was saying didn't seem to resonate with him. They did not move him because he could not feel them. Memory is not enough without feelings, so he started faltering, fighting with the script because he couldn't find the right emotions. His sentences were incoherent and unconnected. They looked like small dots in a bigger picture that struggled to appear. And his gestures did not match his words. I soon realised what the real issue was. He lacked an emotional drive. He was not feeling those emotions since they had never found a place or a voice in his life. So, I gave him some 'crazy' physical exercises, as he defined them, in the hope those words would begin to mean something to him. These exercises were, of course, relevant but for him they were just "bullshit." Suddenly, he burst out using the distinctive intonation of Inspector Clouseau: "Cmon, dog! I'd never say this to a

chick!." I asked him, "What would you do? What would you say?" and he replied with an annoyed look "Oi, luv! Lie down." I then asked again, "And once she's down, what would you do? What would you tell her?" He simply said, "Don't know... I'd talk to her." I insisted, "What words would you use?" G. mumbled something; he was struggling. So, he just snapped, "I'd deffo never use the words of this bloke, this Romeo!"

At that moment, I realised he was right. The real issue, though, is not the timeless words Shakespeare gives to these teenagers but rather the emotions behind them. Those same emotions G. was struggling with. Reading Shakespeare is tricky because if you have never experienced the feelings embroidered in his texts, it is easy to miss the point, as the dialogues may seem too long and unrealistic. I'm convinced, though, that the quality and quantity of those words are suitable to talk about love and to make it real. Action is delayed not because the characters are shy but rather because they relish the longing that grows with waiting. Romeo and Juliet do not talk to fill awkward silence but to express their feelings. And this feeling becomes more impetuous as the two characters push it back. After all, what else can make love blossom but distance, space, and absence? Our impatience has closed this gap. It has corrupted love, making it a synonym for sex or another commodity. How can G. and all of those who experience this "emotional illiteracy" grasp the truth behind those words?

He needs to attend an emotional rehabilitation programme. He needs to develop empathy. And I know you cannot fake empathy on stage: you need to feel it, or it would be impossible to work together.

G. tries to convince me that the real issue is Shakespeare and his obscure words and that we should rewrite and update the text. I tease him and say it is not Shakespeare's fault if he cannot connect with his emotions. He gets upset and replies: "I have plenty of chicks!" "That's not the point. You don't need many, but just one you truly love," I scold him, hoping to breach his stone-cold heart.

G.'s story is heartbreaking. G. experienced a war, and when he was a child, his parents abandoned him on the Ivory Coast with his uncle, who used to beat him – a language he quickly learned to use to survive life on the streets. His mother returned for him when he was a teenager, while his father had already made a new life with a different family. Notwithstanding his mother's efforts, G. kept playing the only part he knew, that of the crook who

uses drugs, alcohol, and violence to get by. How can you talk about love with someone who's never been loved? I witnessed a meeting between G. and his mother: they had not seen each other for a long time, yet they stood there, still and distant. No hugs or kisses, not even a gesture. They spoke, but their words were empty. Nothing moved inside them.

We take a break to calm our nerves and think, and then we reach a compromise: we will divide the scene into small fragments, trying to bring out the emotions behind them. We stop there, with no clear direction. We make up the most bizarre games. Is love blind? We put on blindfolds. Is love overwhelming? Then, we let ourselves get carried away by others. Step by step, we try to understand what Romeo feels and realise how difficult it is to overcome resistance and stereotypes. In the end, that psychological and physical strain pays off. Our analytical study of love allows G. to discern the many facets of this feeling and to connect the emotional core to a general picture. G. enjoys saying those words. Now he has reconnected with his emotions, which helps him work with a different attitude. This first level of empathy impacts how he interacts with others when working in a group. G. now follows the lead of others, and he willingly accepts those suggestions that he once saw as intolerable criticism. He is gradually starting to take responsibility for his actions. He apologises when he talks back and asks to do a scene again if he forgets a line.

Would we have had the same outcome if we had used a different play? No, definitely not. Here lies the power of the classics. They prompt us to look deep inside ourselves. They reveal our dark side and allow us to give it a name. They never stop teaching us. What, you may ask? The right thing to do. Shakespeare is first and foremost theatre. His words are physical and emotional actions.

"Next time I see a hot chick, I can make a good impression and tell her what I've told ya!" G. says at the end of our rehearsals. It is incredible that he wants to use Shakespeare in his life and has found a way to turn love into action. He has now learned those gestures and words that will make him see love as something other than a sexual exercise. But I keep these thoughts to myself. I don't want to ruin this experience with my theoretical speculations.

"It's 'I tell her'. 'Her' is feminine, 'him' is masculine," I say, trying to contain my excitement. "Whatever!" he snaps. "No. It's not whatever! Words matter! You'll see how many lasses will fall in love with you during the

show!.” “Cut the crap, Beppe!” he grunts, “Lasses? Who are you, my grandpa? Call ‘em chicks!” “Chicks sounds like they’re animals!” I reply, “Lasses is nicer. Anyway, wanna bet?” G. laughs, revealing his dazzling white teeth. He’s not buying it, but you can tell he secretly hopes it’s true. And I’m sure they will fall for him because as the Greeks say, *kalòs kai agathòs*, “who is beautiful is also virtuous.” Meeting the audience is crucial for G. Even though he feels like everyone is staring at him, he tries to stay calm. Even when he stumbles over the words, he takes a deep breath and keeps going. When he is done, he is overwhelmed by emotion. He is shaking and breathes heavily. He puts his hands on his head and hugs everyone he sees. He sits on the floor, exhausted, with such a big smile that he looks like he has fallen in love with someone. This is what theatre can do. It can help us to take hold of our inner world and to discover empathy, which is fundamental to establishing a relationship; it gives us the tools to read our emotions and everything that surrounds us; as Galimberti says, it teaches us to: “connect the heart and the mind, the mind and the actions, the actions and the emotional echo that the events we go through produces in our heart.”<sup>1</sup>

This episode is just one of the many where I experienced first-hand the impact theatre can have on these boys. Every time, I rediscover the strength and the disruptive power of Shakespeare’s plays in the process of individualisation. Shakespeare can change people’s lives.

At first sight, using Shakespeare in a prison may seem crazy. I can already see purists frowning at these poorly educated boys from traumatic backgrounds trying to chew over such complex emotions and words. I’ve often been told I shouldn’t start with Shakespeare. It’s too difficult. And that I can only get to Shakespeare after I’ve worked on something less demanding. Yet, I’ve learned that Shakespeare can unlock a new way of feeling and being. Shakespeare can change us.

The reaction minors have when faced with Shakespeare’s works has been the same for thirty years. They all struggle with words they don’t know, which can broaden their minds and open new perspectives. You can see their effort from their faces and bodies. The complexity of the task forces them to come to terms with their past, their struggles and failures. It prompts them to read and turn those words into action. Even if, at first, it may scare them, it reassures them discovering that their struggle is normal and that

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1 U. Galimberti, *L’ospite inquietante: il nichilismo e i giovani*, Milano, Mondadori, 2007, p. 53.

everyone who reads Shakespeare for the first time reacts in the same way. After they overcome this initial obstacle, they are carried away by the intrinsic power of the script.

The paper script our boys hold clumsily in their hands will soon be useless. The lines they took so long to learn by heart will start to move their mouths and resonate within their bodies. Even though they are unaware of this, these boys can speak the same language as Shakespeare because he is inscribed in each of us.

I start off by using scenes from *Romeo and Juliet* describing street fights between the two factions – an experience most of my boys know well. Because of their backgrounds, they can easily relate to these episodes, allowing them to find the appropriate body language. Yet, they go through these experiences from a new perspective, as the outcomes, consequences and setting may differ greatly from the ones they have experienced. This helps them imagine what they couldn't even conceive before and to think and act differently.

The way boys approach a text is physical more than intellectual. Once they've learned their parts, words flow and move action in a way which is not informed by mental constructs. This spontaneity is their strength and weakness. We need to find a way to channel it to prevent it from becoming destructive. Only by doing so, these young actors can leave behind their stereotypical violent behaviour.

Before approaching the classics, we need to work on their bodies and minds. That's why I have developed a psycho-physical training called *Khorós*. To an outside observer, this activity may recall a dance ritual, but it contains all the steps an actor must go through before performing a show. It allows them to get rid of all the things that hinder them and prevent them from being aware of themselves and others. There is nothing mystical or transcendental about it. It is only hard work. *Khorós* does not require you to be able to do anything. It works on what you don't know or don't want to share: no expectations. *Khorós* has an inner beauty, and it marks the start of every activity and performance. The audience takes part in this game, too. *Khorós* moves the audience empathically.

## Act 1

The theatre section of Milan University, where Cristina and Maggie have their offices, reveals their passion for Shakespeare. The hall leading to it is a gallery devoted to the Elizabethan playwright. As I climb the three flights of stairs that make me dizzy, I feel like a character in *Richard III*. There is a lift, but I prefer to take the stairs as I feel the urge to immerse myself in this Shakespearean atmosphere. I pretend to be the ruthless King of England, moving around the tower/prison, and Lisa is Clarence, my hapless brother. Al Pacino would be captivated by this place. He would use it as a setting for *Looking for Richard*. One last flash of colour before getting to the professors' offices is apparent in the posters, newspaper articles and photos that cover the walls of the entrance.

It's July and extremely hot. It is that kind of hot, humid weather you can find only in Milan. We have met in this place for many years to renew the partnership between Milan University and the Puntozero Theatre. It is always a pleasure to sit at that big conference table. The windows are wide open as if the slight breeze coming from outside could refresh us from the summer heat. Here, we plan the workshop that will bring together a mixed group of university students, boys in prison or on probation and young actors of Puntozero from October to December. By now, we've reached such a perfect understanding with Cristina and Maggie that Lisa and I are happy to see them and tell them the news about our work at the Beccaria, knowing they will lend an attentive ear.

We talk about "Scrivere per il teatro," a creative-writing competition which invites university students to compose a short play based on themes like justice, guilt, and forgiveness, using *Romeo and Juliet*. This year the three winning plays were selected by me, Cristina, Maggie and actress, director and teacher, Tiziana Bergamaschi. We are all amazed at the skills and talent shown by these young playwrights. After a long and heated discussion, we reach a verdict and choose the winner: Davide Novello's *Collera (Rage)*. This piece will open our show, *Romeo Montecchi: innocente o colpevole?*

During the meeting, we also plan the workshop. We had already agreed to develop a project that would investigate the nuts and bolts of Juvenile Justice, called "Shakespeare e la legge. Romeo Montecchi: innocente o colpevole?" We now need to determine how to conceive the workshop so that it unveils the procedures of the Juvenile Justice system, and we decide

to put Romeo on trial. A distinctive feature of the juvenile prison system, which is missing in its adult counterpart, is its focus on the person who committed the crime, their socio-cultural background, the environment they grew up in, and their personality, rather than the crime itself.

We determine what the strengths and weaknesses of the project are by developing a SWOT analysis: Strengths. Weaknesses. Opportunities. Threats. Unfortunately, this workshop edition will have many weaknesses, some of which will be quite significant. The main issue is that many boys in prison will not have access to the theatre. So, we will have to work inside the prison, in the infamous (at least, for us) “blue room.” Moreover, even if they have attended the workshop, it won’t be possible for them to participate in the final show. So, we divide our activities as follows: on the one hand, we will work in the theatre with university students and young people released from the Beccaria, boys on probation, living in communities or foster care; on the other, we will run a workshop inside the prison, where we can work with those boys who are not allowed in the theatre. Not the best start, but... *Spes contra spem*. In addition, due to their schedule, not all university students join us inside the prison. The final group is quite numerous, including thirty-two incarcerated minors and university students.

## Act 2

We met for the first time outside the Beccaria. Despite our instructions, some girls are not suitably dressed for the situation, but our stage costumes save the day.

I explained to the visibly tense students a series of rules, all starting with a “no”:

NO sexy outfits.

NO cell phones.

NO bags.

NO screaming or talking loudly.

NO, NO, NO. I feel like an idiot as I keep repeating the same rules. Still, I insist on making sure everything runs smoothly. Respect for the places we visit and for the rules we find are signs of intelligence.

A month earlier, Lisa, who works behind the scenes to ensure these projects are successful, had sent a list with participants’ details to the prison

authorities, asking for clearance from the judge to access the detention area. The clearance, laid down by art. 17 of the Italian prison system (1. July 26, 1975, n. 354), regulates the participation of citizens regarding the rehabilitative activities inside the prison:

The social rehabilitation of people awaiting sentence or in prison shall also be pursued by encouraging the participation of private citizens and institutions, public or private associations in rehabilitation activities. All of those who show a genuine interest in the re-socialisation of inmates and demonstrate they can promote productive interaction between the prison community and society may be granted access to the prison, with the due authorisation, under the Surveillance Magistrate's directives, and with the prison officers' permission. The people referred to in the previous subsection are under the officers' supervision.

The ritual of entering the prison seems designed to frighten visitors. It's overwhelming the first time you experience it; you can't understand why the procedure is so complicated. To prevent the students from worrying about it, I invite them to hold back their questions. We need time to explain what eludes logic.

The places we move in modify and condition our perception; this is especially true inside a prison. The architecture of a detention institution causes some unease, even when you look at it from the outside. An anachronistic black plaque emphasises this is a place of atonement. On the white inscription, "Ministero di Grazia e Giustizia. Istituto Penale per i Minorenni Cesare Beccaria - Milano," there is one word that stands out: "Grazia" (Pardon), even though this was removed from the 1999 regulation, in compliance with the Bossetti reform of the Legislative Decree n. 300 of 1999.

Words are musical notes which play in your heart. To understand them, you need to experience them. Thus, the word "prison" cannot be fully grasped until you've gone through the gates. There are nine separate entrances from the "blue room" where the workshop is held. As the gates close behind us, we gradually descend into the prison environment. Here, any myths and abstract beliefs are debunked as we face a reality that is more complex than we imagined.

The first gate is the main entrance. It is the size of a standard door and framed in a windowpane, giving us a glimpse of the hall. Having gone through this, we show our IDs to the security guard. After he has checked

our names from the list he has received from administration, he gives us the locker keys, where we leave the personal items that we cannot take inside the prison. Many items are prohibited; some of them unexpectedly, like phones, wallets, lighters, and food. We can now go in. Some participants look warily at me, others hide their emotions, but I feel they are all tense. The first time you enter a prison is always weird.

As they busily empty their pockets and bags of their personal belongings, not many students notice Cesare Beccaria's statue in the middle of the room. On the other hand, I cannot help looking at it whenever I enter the prison. Since more than one person has told me I look like him, I have ended up identifying with this Milanese lawyer. Not only that, I have also started associating the steadiness and stability of that heavy block of iron with the idea of the semi-eternal duration of my work inside the prison. One day, I came in, only to find the statue wasn't in its original position. I was dismayed and shocked. I tapped it with my knuckles, and I noticed it was hollow. So, I moved it a little. I felt like I could be moved too, and that upset me. Only then did I realise how intimately connected my life is to that location.

Once we have left behind our personal belongings, whose absence makes us aware of our unconscious, profound dependence on them, we go through the second door. Here, something unexpected usually happens. It might be because of the plants the boys take care of, or the heart-shaped flowerbed one of the boys created for his supervisor, that you get the impression prison is a little heaven, so much so that a few students are visibly surprised. However, all it takes is one look at the barred windows on the left to remember where we are. The bars are so heavy it would be easier to blow the wall down to escape. These morphological details about the structure make an impression on the students, who are in disarray. Lisa and I try to pacify them by explaining why the building was designed that way, and how the boys live in that space.

We cross the yard and cover the distance to the third gate under a canopy. The doors are blue and covered in a spiral with the names of the activities carried out inside: school, music, photography, gym, kitchen, theatre, and so on. The faded drawing of a sad clown welcomes us into the room. I press the intercom, and after a few moments, the gates automatically open. In less than five metres, we are faced with four more gates. I push the button to

call the assistant (as the boys call the prison officer), who escorts us through the barriers. We wait for what seems like an eternity. The low ceilings make things worse, making us long for fresh air. It's a bit claustrophobic, and students feel it, too. Our thoughts and sensations are interrupted by the assistant who, after we go down the fourth and the fifth gates, lightens the mood with a few jokes. His presence is reassuring. As he is accustomed to this place, he knows how to make us feel at ease since we are troubled by such a confined space.

We are officially "inside." We go down a long, narrow corridor through the seventh and eighth gates. The walls are painted in bright colours that seem inappropriate. We see the ninth door. Our footsteps click on the walls, along with the sound of the big brass keys jangling in their locks and the loud voices of the incarcerated boys. We climb a flight of stairs and face a pink wall; then, we turn left and continue up the stairs until we enter a large room with low ceilings, where our final door is. I put the key in the typical big metal door with a grille, typical of a prison, and we find ourselves in the "blue room." From inside, it looks like a Kafkian room, no larger than thirty square metres. This is "home," and nothing but the bars on the windows reveal the true nature of the place. For thirty years, we have worked in this room with boys who, under Article 21, are not allowed to go outside. It is here that we recruit the actors for our company.

The students look around, as do Cristina and Maggie. I realise that this is the first time they have been inside the prison. We have always worked in the theatre, but this is different. Usually, the boys come to us, and not the other way around. There is a tiny but crucial difference there.

Now we are waiting for some boys to be escorted out of their cells. Our first instinct is to sit on the benches (some made of iron, others of wood) in the room. Yet, my experience has taught me I cannot start a theatre lesson sitting down. In order to present the playscript of the meeting, we need to take care of our workspace by cleaning it and setting up the props. Our script will change according to the presence or absence of those benches and how we use and position them. Like people, objects can create different dynamics based on the way they are arranged in space and time.

Chaplin's decalcomania hangs on the wall.

I begin by explaining the plan for our final show. The students can hear me, but I am not sure they are listening. There are too many stimuli and

distractions, and a long, sustained sound from the corridor is preventing them from concentrating. The boys' voices are being amplified by the low ceiling. They sound almost like raucous hooligans. Suddenly, the door bursts open as they finally enter. The world stops, and I take advantage of this to go back for a moment.

## Break

I had told the boys we would be working with students from Milan University a while ago. I also let slip that we would work on *Romeo and Juliet*. "Are the girls pretty?" asked F. on that occasion, with a crooked smile. "Why are you asking? If they are all ugly, or worse if they are all men, then what? Should we forget it?" I respond playfully. He closes our discussion with a shy, "That's not what I meant... I was asking... just wondering."

I know he was not "just asking." He is genuinely interested, but my reaction keeps him in place. I can sense he is a little bit ashamed of his question. I smile to myself and soften a bit. At least, he said what all the other boys were thinking. I know they chose theatre because they know there are girls here and they will have a good time. I know it is not their passion for theatre that motivates them to work with me. Still, I've realised that the seduction element can work as an effective bait. Yes. They come for the girls, but after, they take an interest in our theatre activities.

Besides, when the doors of the prison open, things get interesting. And while I think a sewing or crocheting class would work the same, my pride and belief in the rehabilitative power of theatre are seriously challenged. The young female students from Milan University wield more influence than any academic, pedagogue or dramatist! I wait. I have to patiently wait for the moment theatre has the same appeal.

## Act 3

The first meeting between the boys and the university students turns into a bizarre mix of high-class fashion and sloppy clothes. On the one hand, there are the boys from the BeKKA, dressed up and with their hair slicked back, ready to perform what seems to be a mating ritual. On the other hand,

the embarrassed students from Milan University, after we reprimanded and re-styled them, showed up in jumpsuits, dishevelled and without makeup.

It is not easy to involve the boys at the BeKKA in our activities, as they do not want to spoil their dazzling looks. Still, they risk jeopardising the look they spent four hours on, with their archaic, macho primitive chitchat: “Fuck off,” “I’m just chill today.” As I hear this, I take a deep breath and call upon the fathers of semiology to try and find a new meaning to the weird phonetic signs. “Fuck off,” for instance, can be read as “Can’t you see I’m trying to hit on her, and I can’t deal with you right now?.” The trick is to get a girl in the group to do something that calls for a knightly chivalry. And suddenly our hero starts to react. He ruffles his hair and ruins the stylish look he spent so much time on. He turns into something else, something more beautiful even: because he is now of real service, looks young, and unearths his lust for life.

These guys are barely able to read. They have often failed at school, as they have spent so much time on the streets rather than focusing on their education. It is crucial to find a way to guide them without humiliating them. They need to be captivated and entertained, because only through games can they be brought back to life. We need to pull out their inner child (that child they were never allowed to be). Only by doing this, we can open up a breach. That is the moment when they take notice of you and, in return, you need to play with them like a child. That’s right. If you don’t play, you don’t have fun, and if you don’t loosen up you can’t learn. As the workshop progresses, theatre is given more space. The chemistry between inmates and university students grows stronger, and as the date of the final show draws near, I notice the boys are magically changing. The prison officers can see it too: “What are you doing with these guys? They come back to the cells, with a smile on their face!”

What I remember of this first meeting in the “blue room” is the reluctance of the boys, who tried to escape our activities. I remember the shocked, anxious faces of the students, of Cristina and Maggie. But I also remember that when we started playing, all barriers crumbled, as we came together to have fun. I seized that opportunity to introduce *Romeo and Juliet*: act 1, scene 1, a square in Verona.

At first, the boys are reluctant. They don’t know their lines and mix up the words. They look like second grade students. But with the help of their

new fellow actors, who patiently assist them without prejudice, they eventually loosen up.

“Pe’ [short for Beppe], I didn’t even finish middle school. I can’t read”

“No biggie. She’ll help you!”

He looks at me, as if I’ve said something preposterous. Then, he turns his gaze to the girl who’s going to help him and starts working on his task. He puts his experience on the streets into his acting, and everything sounds so true and intense. In this first meeting we finish reading the first scene, and we assign a role to everyone. We split them into small groups, so it will be easier for them to get to know each other. And just like that, inmates and university students start familiarising themselves with Mercutio, Romeo, Tybalt. Our time is up, and the officers come in to tell the boys they have to go back to the cells. I throw up my hands. I had forgotten to check the time, to give them at least ten minutes to say goodbye. Who knows how long it will take them to do that, with all their hugs, kisses, and half sentences. I look at the assistant, who immediately understands and, with a half-smile, patiently waits for them to finish. I say goodbye to the last boy at the door, and as I turn round, I find everyone sitting on the benches, exhausted. Cristina looks my way, and I immediately know what she is about to ask: when we are at the theatre the boys listen to you, follow your directions, and are quite kind. Here, instead, they act like little devils running around a kindergarten. They need to be looked after and persuaded. Yet, behind their distractions and requests (to smoke, go to the bathroom, stop work) is a call for help. They still need to grow up, in order to walk down the path that, through those gates, leads to the theatre. I explain that my goal is to help them grow up, to become self-conscious and learn to interact with others through my theatre activities.

Now that we have broken the ice, we can go on a little faster. The following meetings are less chaotic. The boys of the BeKKa are starting to bond with the university students. The idea of being on a stage for the final performance makes everyone excited but we are still not sure whether they will be allowed to take part in the show in the theatre. There’s still no clearance. So, I come up with plan B. The boys will act on camera.

We start from the tragedy that sees the two rival factions, Capulets and Montagues, fighting each other. Each group works on the point of view of a different character, and on the dispute between Romeo and Tybalt

who testify in court. They are able to come up with three or four different perspectives, just like a real trial, when each defendant tells their side of the story to the judge.

Each actor learns the monologue written by the group (almost) by heart. We have very little time, so we build some prompt boxes from the slats of the boys' old beds. They are interesting, since they are covered in dates, names, words and drawings. We use the clean ones to write our lines on.

We keep collecting material, and we organise it according to the activities we have planned in the theatre on Saturday. Here, Elvira Narducci, Simone Pastorino, Lucio Camaldo, Peter McCaughey and Daniela Carpi feed us their knowledge. We'll use their suggestions to continue building our trial scene.

And then, we also have the students' logbooks. They are surprising for the rationality and poetical value they display. Some of them still speak to me, after such a long time. They are so powerful that we have decided to include them in the final show, so as to produce an alienating effect and avoid any sentimentality.

As always, there are times during the workshop when the participants are struck by doubts. And even if they do not say so, I can see it in their eyes that they do not trust my method. They want to know where they are going and want to make sure you, as a director, know where and how you are leading them. This uncertainty, the choice not to choose is suspicious. It is as if actors refuse to consider that the director, too, needs to listen and to wait for things to happen.

My shows are the result of an open inquiry. They can change until the very last minute. I turn the unexpected into useful material and take inspiration from what happens in the real world and from the interaction with my actors and the rest of my team. It is only in the end that all this material is given a definite shape, a design, like dots connected with a pencil.

I think that a director's work, much like that of the actors and of the team, can be summed up by the term "stage writing." This definition was introduced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to suggest the interrelation between the script and the other components that make up a performance, like makeup, costumes, lighting, set design. This method can be confusing for someone who thinks of a show only as the result of the director's craft. After all, it was Shakespeare who first suggested the idea of "stage writing." His scripts

were put together on stage, and are thus informed by it, so much that stage directions are a later addition. Everything that comes out during rehearsals flows into the script, and these elements together make up the play, under the director's supervision. When we talk about directing in these terms, we inevitably end up questioning ourselves. Not only that, but we are faced with the challenge of co-operating with others and questioning our stereotypes and mindset.

I decide nothing beforehand. I listen, and like a collector, I store everything that happens around me and inside of me. Of course, I make sure things happen, but with no clue as to where we are going.

I collect, and then I try to put together the pieces of the puzzle. And so, a joke, a move, an action, or even a gesture can evoke a scene. They make me jump from one fragment to another, as if I was editing a movie. These transitions happen spontaneously. Sometimes, it's the actors themselves who suggest them, often unconsciously.

Breaks, too, can be productive for my work: as someone sings a song, or tells a story, I collect material as if I were a greedy pillager. "Are you serious? Do you want me to sing this or do this?." The actors often ask when I tell them we will be using some of these spontaneous suggestions for the final show. Yes, because it is often when we are relaxed that our greatest ideas are born. When we don't feel like we are being judged, and we feel free to speak our mind.

What happens, then, is that life and theatre intertwine and influence each other: we end up using the gestures and lines of the play in our daily lives and, during rehearsals, we turn what happens in our lives into a performance.

If thoroughly internalised, our work does not end with the rehearsals. It goes on backstage, and in private. As we walk down the street, we may hear some laughter or see a gesture that reminds us of our character, or we can detect in a particular situation the perfect inspiration for a scene.

I can only give my actors guidelines, some input they can use. I don't like rigid or mandatory instructions. I'd rather embark on a journey of discovery with them, so that we can all learn something. And I never shame them, because I know from personal experience how shame only makes us put up walls, and this helps no one grow. I am really serious and anxious when it comes to my work, but I try not to take it out on the actors.

I like to think each actor has something special inside, so each journey has to be different. If we do not reach the goals we set, then, I need to be careful in the way I communicate or give directions to my actors. Hence, I adjust my language according to the person I have in front of me. What is clear and useful for someone, may not work for someone else.

Once they have started work, I give my actors time to settle and experiment on their own. I just act as an external observer and write some notes from the back of the stalls. I use my laptop, so I don't need to take my eyes off the stage as I write. This allows me to put in words my stream of consciousness, something I could not do when I used to take notes in a notebook. I use these notes to make some corrections at the end of rehearsals. This way, I don't have to interrupt the actors while they practise a scene. Such interruptions, in fact, would not benefit the actors. On the contrary, they would only disturb them and often confuse them. It is only at the end, then, that we talk things over, and put together the actors' experience with my external observations.

The relationship between actors and director is central for me. Yet, the director's technical and creative skills are pivotal for a show to succeed. Lighting, music, set design, and costumes all come together for the staging of a show. Knowledge of these aspects is fundamental. But this is not the right place to talk about this.

## **Epilogue: Fifteen Years to Pull Down a Wall**

*Lisa Mazoni*  
(Puntozero)

2020 was an important year for us. We finally succeeded in opening the door of Puntozero Beccaria Theatre by establishing a separate entrance for the audience, who can now buy tickets to attend productions without prior authorization. This situation is unique in Italy (and perhaps in Europe), because Puntozero Beccaria is the theatre of a prison, and not a theatre inside a prison. There's a significant difference.

Beppe and I have always felt the need to have our work reviewed by outside observers.

Inside the Beccaria there was an unusable and unsafe theatre that needed a lot of work before it could be reopened. A “theatre to be” inside the prison. A theatre that, even when renovated, could only be accessed from the outside with the authorisation of the competent authorities and after passing the security checks. A theatre that not even the boys in prison could access for security reasons.

Rather than putting me off, these hindrances excited me. I started asking around, but Beppe was reluctant; something he would soon reconsider. And so, on a warm spring day, I found myself standing outside the Ansaldo, where the Teatro alla Scala has its warehouses. Here, I met Ciccio, the caretaker, whose real name is Lino Begnis, a former stagehand. The situation was bizarre: Ciccio, a sturdy guy, blind in one eye, but very observant with the left one, listens to my requests and takes immediate action to get the prison theatre back on its feet. The administration of the Teatro alla Scala helped us with the refurbishment, together with Sergio Escobar, the director of Milan’s Piccolo Teatro. At that time, the Piccolo hosted our productions for three seasons: *Errare Humanum Est* (26-30 November 2014), *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1-5 February 2017), and *Antigone* (22-27 January 2019).

It took us fifteen years to get the authorisation we needed to build a separate entrance, so that the public could have access to the auditorium. We had to install two different emergency exits, one that could be accessed from the prison, and one that could be used by the audience. These two doors cannot be used together but must always be kept separate.

The renovation works began in 2005. The amazing Ciccio coordinated a crew of fifteen young inmates, under the supervision of prison officer Salvatore Anzalone. We were also assisted by some technicians from the Teatro alla Scala, the Piccolo Teatro and the Puntozero company, including my father and Beppe’s. This first phase in the renovations went on for just two months, as we were unable to work without heating.

For a few years we only worked in autumn and spring, when the temperature was still bearable, and the cold was not so bitter that we could see our breath.

This approach perfectly encapsulates the nature of Puntozero, with its pragmatism and setting of short-term goals. The epic history of this theatre progressed in several phases. The renovation work was completed in

different stages, based on our finances and on the permissions we needed. With each goal we reached, we celebrated with a party and an open performance. We have inaugurated the theatre four times! For the entire period, the boys at the Bekka played an active role in the renovation works. They pulled up the old floor and removed the sound-absorbing panels from the walls; they installed the armchairs and the lighting truss; they widened the stage, cleared the storerooms, and replaced the old bathroom. Our objective was to teach these young men how to work in a theatre, by developing their skills in electrotechnics and carpentry, all the while renovating the theatre. We have a saying at Puntozero that we are very proud of: “We built this theatre piece by piece.” There were more than a hundred boys who worked with us to renovate the place, some of them staying for years, others just for a few days. I can’t think of anyone who didn’t keep their shoulder to the wheel. They were all passionate about what they were doing, even when faced with impossible challenges. They put up with dirt and exhaustion while acting in our productions.

I can still hear prison officer Anzalone’s words when, at the end of our weekly activities, before taking the boys back to their cells, he confessed: “I can’t get the boys to stop work.”

In 2013 the Marazzina Foundation donated money to fund an air conditioning system. Everything changed. We could finally use the theatre all year round, but only for activities for the boys in prison. In agreement with the administration, we were able to plan some open events. Still, the audience had to pay for a ticket and go through a security check. The entrance to the theatre was the same as the one used to access the “Cesare Beccaria” Youth Detention Centre. So prison officers had to supervise and inspect everybody as they entered and exited. We were not allowed to organise more than ten events per year.

In May of that same year, after we had inaugurated the theatre for the first time and finished installing the air conditioning, the Mayor of Milan, Giuliano Pisapia, and Head of the Department of Juvenile Justice Caterina Chinnici announced in a press conference that the theatre would open to the public. Plot twist! We started again and submitted a complex project covering the fire regulations and the prison’s security measures. In October 2016, we were given the green light from the Department of Juvenile Justice and from the local authorities. We could finally build a separate entrance.

In September 2019, the theatre opened to the general public, thanks to the incredible support of many people that made this dream come true. We would not have made it, if it had not been for the assistance of private citizens, institutions and foundations that backed our project, both financially and ideologically. This cooperation is what made everything possible. In “our first official season,” we put on three shows: *Errare Humanum Est*, *Antigone* and *Romeo & Juliet disaster*. All three of them were sold out for two whole months. Each of the forty performances had a full house, with eight-thousand people coming to see the shows. Eight-thousand people who willingly chose to enter a prison and witness this revolution. Eight-thousand people whom we reached by handing out flyers, posting on social media and spreading the word through our loyal supporters, but also by means of our billboard.

To put on these three shows, we worked every day from 9.00 to 22.00. We spent all our time in the theatre with the young inmates, students and volunteers. We created a community inside the prison, made up of people who work for the cultural, social, and professional rehabilitation of these boys. At long last, we are a permanent company. We have a theatre, and we have the means to train those who work with us and even offer them work. Our company is a safe space even for those boys who choose to stay and work with us after their release. They choose to return inside the prison so they can keep on working in a theatre.

Our boys have been offered internships at prestigious institutions such as the Teatro alla Scala and the Piccolo Teatro. They are given the chance to take part in activities that give them access to the outside world.

Our theatre is a bridge between inside and outside.



## Logbook

It's showtime day and I'm late. "Damn it!" I think. "I've always been on time, and today of all days I miss the train." Finally, I make it. Everyone is eager to rehearse. There's a mixture of uncertainty, excitement and determination. We dive right in.

It feels as if Giuseppe has deliberately left everything until the last moment, and yet within a few hours the performance comes together. The expressions on our faces change – anxiety gives way to playfulness, screams, laughter and raw emotion.

It's showtime day and there's little time before the audience arrives. My heart is heavy. In less than an hour it will all be over. No more Saturday meetings. We won't see Giuseppe, Lisa, Kristian or H. again. Our professors, Cristina and Maggie, will only be familiar faces within the walls of the university. And the group we've built together? That too will be gone.

There's a bitter taste in my mouth, but I must push through. It's showtime and it has to be unforgettable.

Debora Fraschini, 1 December



























# A COLLABORATIVE REWRITING



# Romeo Montague: Innocent or Guilty?

DOI: 10.54103/st.227.c434

## Abstract

The script of the play *Romeo Montague: Innocent or Guilty?* was written collaboratively by the workshop participants. It consists of different scenes, each developed at different stages of the workshop, both in the theatre or in the “blue room” inside the prison.

Prologue – 2018. After the party. *Rage* by Davide Novello.

Scene 1 – The Courtroom. 1 December 2018.

Scene 2 – The Hearings

Scene 3 – Psychological Assessment

Scene 4 – Logbook. *Silence* by Emilia Piz

Scene 5 – A Cell

Scene 6 – Do You Bite Your Thumb at Us, Sir?

Scene 7 – Acting, Running, Stepping Outside the Box

Scene 8 – Witnesses

Scene 9 – Breaking News

Scene 10 – *Angel and Devil*, a Rap Song by Kristian Sefgjini

Scene 11 – Logbook. *For Them, For Us* by Alessandra Romeo

Scene 12 – The Sentence

Epilogue – *At the very bottom* by Dimitri Patrizi

## Prologue. 2018. After the Party – *Rage* by Davide Novello

(Winner of the 2018 edition of the writing competition “Scrivere per il teatro”)

*Two rival fan groups scream and threaten each other. One group is dressed in red (the Montagues), the other, in blue (the Capulets). They sit on two sides of a platform in the middle of the stage. The screams are in sync with Mirko Preatoni’s claps. When the noise subsides, the play starts. The setting: a boys’ changing room in a high school. At the centre there’s a bench with two gym bags, some clothes and a printed hoodie. Stage left, the sound of running water in the showers.*

*Characters:*

*Benvolio, 17*

*Mercutio, 17*

*Tybalt, 15*

*Benvolio enters.*

*Benvolio:* It’s just us.

*The water stops. Mercutio enters.*

*Mercutio:* What was that?

*Benvolio (turns):* The others left.

*As they speak, they dry themselves, dress and put their dirty clothes in their bags.*

*Mercutio:* It’s the least they could do. Today, they sucked.

*Benvolio:* ‘Cmon man, they didn’t suck... we just weren’t at our best.

*Mercutio:* Bullshit. I was at my best. And you were good, too. I say they were shit.

*Benvolio:* Thanks, man.

*Mercutio:* And I even think I know why.

*Benvolio (puzzled):* Why they were shit?

*Mercutio:* Yeah, they train a lot, but never actually play.

*Benvolio looks at him deadpan.*

*Mercutio:* Think about it. Were any of our team mates at Rose’s party on Saturday?

*Benvolio:* No, but what does that have to do with what you’re saying?

*Mercutio (raising his fist to the air):* They stayed at home to train, I'm telling ya.

*Benvolio laughs.*

*Benvolio:* ... and you never lose, do you?

*Mercutio:* That's right, my dear Ben, that's just right. I never train, and yet I always win. (*He takes the printed hoodie*) Is this yours?

*Benvolio shakes his head. Mercutio drops the hoodie to the floor.*

*Benvolio:* I lost you at Rose's. You disappeared soon after we got there.

*Mercutio:* No, I didn't. I was around.

*Benvolio:* What do you mean?

*Mercutio:* I never left; I was around.

*Benvolio looks at him, puzzled.*

*Mercutio (sighs):* Must I always spell everything out for you? Where were we on Saturday, again?

*Benvolio:* At Rose's.

*Mercutio:* And do you remember when you last saw her sister?

*Benvolio:* No idea. She insisted on eating the cake and opening her presents, and then she disappeared.

*Mercutio:* And do you remember how much time went by before we had the cake?

*Benvolio:* Couldn't tell you for sure, maybe an hour? Wait, are you saying...

*Mercutio:* That while Rose was busy unwrapping her presents and filling her mouth up with cake, I was upstairs unwrapping and filling her sister up.

*Benvolio (laughs):* You're joking, right? There were at least forty people in that house!

*Mercutio:* They were all focused on Rose, the ugly pig. It must have been hard for her. So, she got something harder instead.

*Benvolio:* What was it like? What did you do to her?

*Mercutio:* It was her. She dragged me into her room, without a word, and pushed me onto her bed. You can imagine what happened next.

*Benvolio:* Yes, but what was it like?

*Mercutio:* It was okay, nothing special. No better than the other girls I've been with. But she was hungry, I'm telling you.

*Benvolio:* Was it the first time?

*Mercutio:* With her? Of course.

*Benvolio:* I mean, was it her first time?

*Mercutio:* How would I know? Knowing her, I doubt it. If it really was her first time, I'm sorry for those she'll go with next.

*Benvolio:* Right.

*Mercutio:* How about you?

*Benvolio:* What about me?

*Mercutio:* Nada?

*Benvolio (avoiding Mercutio's gaze):* Nope, nada.

*Mercutio:* Wasn't the second-year gal there, the one who always hovers around you at the party? The one who always stares at you at break time.

*Benvolio:* Yes, she was. She was there too, on Saturday.

*Mercutio:* What's wrong with you, mate?

*Benvolio:* It's just that... I told you, I want my first time to be special.

*Mercutio:* I can't stand you when you talk like a fag. You're at a party, there's booze, and a gal who wants to fuck you. And what do you do? Nothing.

*Benvolio:* 'Cmon man. You know I don't like her like that.

*Mercutio:* What do you mean, "like that"? And what does this have to do with you liking her? You have to fuck her, not marry her.

*Benvolio:* You don't understand. (he hesitates) I'm not... I'm not sure I could do something with a girl... if I don't have feelings for her.

*Mercutio steps closer to Benvolio, smiling.*

*Mercutio (mocking him):* My little, coward Benvolio. Trust me, when you have a naked girl in front of you, you feel things all over your body. Especially in one part.

*Mercutio pats him on the shoulder. Benvolio smiles.*

*Mercutio:* You are not proving my point, though. How were you able to play so well today?

*Benvolio (hesitates):* Well, I wasn't laid, that's true, but did you hear me say nothing happened?

*Mercutio:* Ah! You're just afraid of dipping it in, then. Who were you with? That second-year gal?

*Benvolio:* Name the sin, not the sinner.

*Mercutio:* Oh, she was a sinner, alright. (He reaches for Benvolio's thighs) I know who else sinned here.

*Benvolio pulls back his legs, embarrassed. Then, he laughs*

*Mercutio:* ‘Cmon, man! You always want me to tell you everything, but if I ask you to spill some tea, you hold back like a damn virgin. Was it an oral test? Did you do it to her, or did she do it to you?’

*Benvolio remains silent. Mercutio looks at him.*

*Mercutio:* I don’t think you actually...

*Benvolio:* Let’s just say it was wet and went on for a while.

*Mercutio makes an obscene gesture. Benvolio nods.*

*Mercutio:* That’s my man! Well done, Ben! What was it like? Did you manage to hold back, or did you come super-fast like when you’re alone?

*Benvolio (laughs):* You’re such a dick.

*Mercutio (laughs):* Yes, and...? Who did you have this wet interaction with?

*Benvolio keeps quiet. Mercutio sits on the bench, avoiding eye contact.*

*Mercutio (continues):* I know you, man: I bet you couldn’t keep your hands to yourself. Who was it?

*Tybalt comes in. Mercutio gets in his way to stop him. Benvolio and Tybalt look at each other.*

*Mercutio:* The fuck are you doing here? This is the men’s locker, the girls’ one is down the other corridor.

*Tybalt looks down and tries to go past him. Benvolio stares at him.*

*Tybalt:* Please, let me through.

*Mercutio:* Wait, you can’t go into that one, either. I’d notice, if you were a girl. Where do you get changed when you come to the gym, ah?

*Tybalt tries to push past him, but Mercutio stands in his way.*

*Tybalt:* Leave me alone.

*Mercutio:* Do you happen to know if the school has a fags’ locker? I think this one got lost. You got lost, princess? Isn’t this what your classmates call you, Cat Princess? Or maybe you came to have a look at us boys getting changed? *(he moves closer to Tybalt)* Did you come looking for some cocks to shove up your ass, Princess? *(he puts a hand between his legs)* You like this, don’t you? This is what you wanted.

*Tybalt:* I just need to get my hoodie. *(he pushes Mercutio aside)* Let me through.

*Mercutio:* What the fuck do you think you’re doing?

*Mercutio knocks Tybalt to the ground and threatens him from above. Benvolio stands up and walks over to them.*

*Benvolio:* ‘Cmon, man, that’s enough. Somebody might see us.

*Mercutio:* Let them watch. They have eyes.

*Benvolio:* Mercutio, please.

*Mercutio (keeps looking at Tybalt):* What? Are you jealous?

*Benvolio freezes. Tybalt stands up.*

*Mercutio:* Ben, take the hoodie. The Cat needs to wipe his dirty face.

*Mercutio spits in Tybalt's face. Tybalt holds his head high and refuses to wipe his face.*

*Benvolio takes the hoodie and wraps it around his arm. Then, he moves closer to Tybalt, keeping his eye on him.*

*Mercutio:* What are you waiting for? Are you scared you are gonna become a fag too, if you touch him?

*Benvolio punches Tybalt in the stomach with his wrapped hand.*

*Mercutio:* 'Cmon, Benvolio, that's no way to treat a Princess. You should show respect (*he kicks Tybalt*), deference (*another kick*) and devotion (*a third one*).

*Tybalt lies on the ground, not saying a word.*

*Mercutio:* Now, subject, treat your majesty as is befitting. Make her meow.

*Benvolio gets closer to Tybalt. Tybalt keeps looking Benvolio in the eye. Benvolio maintains eye contact and starts kicking him. Then, he drops to the floor and punches him all over his body and head. Mercutio gets changed and throws his clothes in his bag.*

*Mercutio:* That's enough, Ben.

*Benvolio keeps hitting Tybalt*

*Mercutio:* You'll kill him.

*Benvolio doesn't stop. Mercutio grabs him from behind and tries to pull him away.*

*Mercutio:* I said, that's enough! Fuck.

*Benvolio sits on a bench. Mercutio turns to look at Tybalt and picks up the hoodie from the floor.*

*Mercutio (tosses the hoodie at Tybalt):* I told you, you need to wipe your face. (*to Benvolio*) Have you cooled off?

*Mercutio squats down and looks at Tybalt for a few seconds*

*Mercutio:* You are not gonna say a single word about this. Is that clear?

*Mercutio stares at him. Then, he acts like he is about to punch him in the face, but he stops just before hitting him. Tybalt doesn't flinch.*

*Mercutio:* Fuck, I hate you fags.

*Mercutio gets back on his feet, and beckons Benvolio to get out. They both exit. Tybalt gets up and wipes off his clothes. Benvolio comes in.*

*Benvolio:* Tyb... Tyb, I... I don't know what...

*Tybalt:* You're gonna know soon enough, when he starts treating you like that.

*Benvolio takes a step back.*

*Benvolio:* But... you said that-

*Tybalt:* I won't do it. I won't even say what happened here today. I'm not a coward like you.

*Tybalt picks up his hoodie.*

*Tybalt:* But hitting me like that doesn't make him more of a man. And it doesn't change the fact that you sucked me off on Saturday.

*Benvolio freezes. Tybalt exits.*

## Scene 1. The Courtroom. 1 December 2018.

*Milan's Juvenile Court. The Judge comes in with three honorary judges. One of them also serves as a secretary.*

*Judge:* Good evening. The Juvenile Court is now in session. To assist me in court today are associate judge Denise Manna, and honorary judges Letizia Ceriani and Lorena Siqueira Leuzzi. We are gathered here for the trial of Romeo Montague. Is the defendant in the courtroom? The Judge opens proceedings.

*Prosecutor:* Romeo Montague, born in Verona on 1 April 2002, is charged with the murder of Tybalt Capulet, and is punishable by articles 61 n. I and 575 of the penal code. The defendant, aged 16, is a Montague, the family, feuding with the Capulets. He committed the crime that happened in Piazza delle Erbe, Verona, when two rival gangs clashed: in one gang, Romeo Montague, Mercutio and Benvolio; in the other, the plaintiff and other members of the Capulet family. According to reports, Mercutio assaulted Tybalt Capulet in a fit of anger after being verbally abused by him. He was killed in the fight. The defendant, who arrived at the scene soon after the incident, at first tried to reason with Tybalt Capulet, but being taunted by him, intentionally, and I repeat, intentionally, pulled a knife out

and stabbed the victim. Aggravated by the futile reasons that moved his actions. He was arrested in Verona, on 1 November 2018.

## Scene 2. The Hearings

*In the courtroom. The Judge gives the defendant an opportunity to speak.*

*Judge (to Romeo):* Hello, Romeo. Is it okay if I use your first name? I don't want to be rude. I'm simply trying to make this easier for you. I want you to be comfortable. Before we start, I want to remind you that you have the right not to answer. Our system does not force anybody to plead guilty. If you decide to remain silent, we'll simply go on with the proceedings. Remember that if at any time during your statement you mention someone who is not here today, you will turn into a witness. What does that mean? It means that, as long as you are the defendant, you can say whatever you want in self-defence, even lie to us, although I would not recommend it. However, if you hold someone else accountable for what happened, then you'll become a witness, and you'll have to tell the truth, because you are talking about someone else, and they must be given the chance to defend themselves. So, are you going to answer our questions? Did you hear what the Prosecutor said, and do you know what the charges against you are? Now you can tell us your version of the story.

*Romeo:* Mercutio and Tybalt were fighting. A punch in the face, one in the back, and one in his side. I tried to stop Tybalt. I got in the way and stood between the pair of them. I thought I was doing the right thing. I'm sure I did whatever I could to stop them. Tybalt looked at me. I can still see the sweat on his forehead. His mouth, wide open. He looks like an animal. I can tell he's seething with rage. He pulls out a knife. I dodge the first thrust. Fuck. The knife goes right by me and hits Mercutio who drops to the floor. Mercutio is laughing. He says: "Ay, ay, a scratch, a scratch." Then, he's crying. He's bleeding. He's losing so much blood. He screams: "A plague o' both your houses!" Mercutio was a friend. A pal. A brother. Then came the rage. Tybalt legs it. He gets away without a scratch. Rage. That's all I remember. No, Mercutio! Don't touch my brother. You can

stomp me, kill me if you want. But don't lay a finger on Mercutio! My heart's racing in my chest. I hear someone screaming: "Stop it! Stop it! Let him go, you're gonna kill him!." Then, all went quiet. Everything's all right. I'm alive. Nothing to worry about. Tybalt is there, on the floor. He's not moving.

I stand still. I don't scream, or cry. It doesn't feel real.

I didn't mean to do it.

*Judge:* The Judge now gives the floor to the defence attorney, who verifies the facts and collects the evidence to make his case.

*Defence Attorney:* Your honour, we are not here to prove our client's innocence, nor are we here to deny his involvement. The Prosecutor has already confirmed Romeo Montague's guilt and provided evidence of his role in the events mentioned. I repeat: we are not claiming he did not commit the crime, nor do we want him to be acquitted. We are asking for him to be put on probation, and to defer the decision in accordance with art. 28 of the Judicial Decree n. 448 of 1988. It's undeniable, Romeo Montague murdered Tybalt Capulet, and we recognise his crime. Yet, a more objective look will reveal the complexity of this situation. First of all, when it comes to the criminal offence Romeo Montague is guilty of, we must separate our client's responsibility from the objective circumstances that prevented him from handling the situation properly. Among the circumstances that lead to a "necessary action," we have to take into consideration the family and social background of the accused. These inevitably influenced the young Romeo. It is not our place to relate yet again the feud between Romeo's family, the Montagues, and the Capulets that for years has stained our city walls with blood. It is not our place to remind you of all the many raids, pillaging, damages and injuries suffered by both families during this civil war that clearly shows no sign of stopping. Can we really dismiss these circumstances? Are we really going to blame it all on Romeo, a teenage boy? Or are we going to consider the other factors, which contributed to the murder?

### Scene 3. The Psychological Report

*The Judge calls two experts to the stand to present their psychological reports, one is appointed by the defendant, the other by the court.*

*Expert Witness:* Romeo Montague is sixteen years old. He is an only child and belongs to a prominent, wealthy family, the Montagues. After a long assessment, we have gauged the moral and normative influence this ongoing feud with the Capulets has had on him, from a very young age. From the day he was born, he was assigned some difficult tasks, since he had no brothers or sisters, he could share the responsibility with. As a result, this dispute was passed on to him almost genetically, even if he wants nothing to do with it. A personality test revealed the boy's behaviour is quiet and meditative. He is sometimes impulsive, probably because he is young. He was kind and sincere when answering our questions, and he collaborated from the outset. When we started asking him more sensitive questions (especially when we brought up his love life), he became upset and showed a more irrational, passionate side to his personality. However, this is perfectly normal for a boy his age. Romeo's personality is still developing, and growing up in such a fraught environment caused his personality to split. He is experiencing cognitive dissonance, caused by the clash between his ideal self, made up of all the rules and norms he is supposed to follow, and his real self, which is totally detached from his family's values and beliefs. This makes him struggle a lot, as he wants to change not only himself, but also the entire city of Verona. This inner struggle became more evident when he killed Tybalt. The boy didn't strike first, but attacked Tybalt only after Tybalt had murdered Mercutio. This wasn't a gang fight, but an impulsive act of self-defence triggered by his rage. Moreover, the boy shows signs of guilt for what he did and wishes to make amends in every possible way. His violent reaction was triggered by circumstantial factors that have nothing to do with his personality. He is known in Verona as a decent person, and has even made a name of his own, unblemished by his family ties. He was ready to give up his name and his whole being for the girl he loved, thus showing exceptional maturity. He is unstable, but as said, this comes as no surprise, considering his young age. We are sure Tybalt's murder wasn't premeditated. Premeditation, in fact, requires cold, manipulative behaviour, which our tests and observations have not detected.

*Defence Attorney:* If our client is convicted, the motive is clear: the murder of Mercutio Montague. This drove him to act in a fit of rage that temporarily and irreparably compromised his cognitive abilities. Therefore, as our client acted in a state of anger provoked by the unlawful conduct of others, namely the offended party, the Capulets, we request the consideration of mitigating circumstances pursuant to Article 62(2) of the Penal Code. Romeo was a young man who did possess the capacity to understand, albeit impaired by the criminal environment extensively discussed here. However, he lacked the capacity to check his impulses. Romeo did not intend to kill Tybalt, nor did he wish to cause his death. He was so blinded by rage, so deeply wounded and shaken by the death of his friend Mercutio, that he acted impulsively—a victim of a society far too accustomed to taking justice into its own hands. Romeo did not just act as himself, but as a reflection of the environment in which he was born and raised, as a victim of the very society that drove him to commit this act.

*Prosecutor:* Objection, your Honour. Both social services and the defence attorney affirm Romeo grew up in an environment which is unfit for a sixteen-year-old boy, and that the pattern of violence in his family influenced his course of action. It was said that the social environment he grew up in cannot be disregarded, as it left the boy psychologically and physically scarred. Now, allow me to share some thoughts. How is it possible that a young boy who grew up in such a dysfunctional environment and, as a result, developed impulsive, violent behaviour could be so kind to a person that was trying to kill his best friend? As mentioned, the boy's personality is still developing, and the environment he is part of hasn't allowed him to become a balanced, stable person. How is it possible, then, that such a fragile, violent and impulsive sixteen-year-old could hesitate to INTENTIONALLY kill his rival in a moment like that? How could he stop to think and control his emotions when faced by his enemy? Wasn't it normal for him to attack Tybalt Capulet, as his family had taught him? The psychological report confirms my theory.

*Party-Appointed Expert:* Romeo Montague, sixteen-years-old, is the boss of the Montague clan. At first glance, he looks like a polite, good-looking boy. It's hard to believe how such a young person could be given so much

power. And yet, this does not worry him. On the contrary, it makes him feel proud and satisfied. We have conducted a psychological assessment to match the results the defence provided. However, we've noticed that he took a long time to answer our questions, probably to deceive us. Moreover, his answers were really polarised. He labelled things as right or wrong, nothing in between. This reveals a lack of critical judgement. He was very cooperative, but also smug and complacent when answering our questions, and he didn't show any sign of fear for what his punishment might be. It's well known in Verona that Romeo's friends are deviant and violent. They have been hassling the citizens there for a very long time. Mercutio, his best friend, was violent and aggressive, and displayed disturbing homosexual tendencies. His other friend, Benvolio, is defiant and dissolute. The group are well known for their parties and drug use, including alcohol and hashish. Let's not forget, the night Tybalt was murdered, they were all under the influence of drugs. After hearing his family and friends, we learnt that Romeo had slept with many girls, showing his lack of commitment to the opposite sex. Rosalind, the boy's ex-girlfriend, said one moment he seemed deeply in love, and the next he broke up with her, after seducing her both romantically and physically. From the evidence we've collected, we discovered that during the fight between Mercutio and Tybalt, Romeo got in the way as an act of bravado. He actually deflected Tybalt's blow, thus causing Mercutio's death. After that, he used his friend's death as a pretext to kill Tybalt and then ran off. Our psychological report, then, reveals Romeo's lack of empathy, his cold, cynical personality. He is smart and knows how to adjust his behaviour according to the person he is interacting with. This allows him to manipulate a situation as he pleases. He often picks unnecessary fights. So, it comes as no surprise that he ended up killing someone. His family heritage has played a pivotal role in his life. Hence, we think he will not hesitate to defend his honour again, even if this means killing another human being. He is a dangerous person who shouldn't be allowed to roam free.

#### **Scene 4. Logbook. *Silence* by Emilia Piz**

*Emilia:* When we were let in, the first thing I noticed was the silence.

The air was quite dense.

As we went further into the prison, the space seemed to be shrinking, and the silence started to throb.

Long, colourful corridors with tiny windows.

One thing I remember perfectly: the moment we heard the boys' voices as they came up. It was comforting to hear them laughing and swearing.

I can't recall what happened in chronological order. I just remember some fragments, images, sensations that pop into my head.

The tattoos on their arms.

The hidden glances.

The way they backed each other up.

The way they flex their muscles to compare them to their mates.

The way they shyly start reading the script: "What the fuck is this?"...  
"Bro, it's sword, not blade."

The look on a boy's face. He doesn't speak Italian but tries his best to understand what is going on and tells us: "Bye mum, Albania, via Padòva."

"Is there someone who can speak Albanian to him?"

"My cellmate. They talk sometimes."

And I think: "I hope they get along, or else it will be a hassle. Imagine being able to speak with just one person, who is a dick."

Lisa asks me to tease H., and he closes his eyes and keeps his mouth shut to keep calm.

I think: "I've got the feeling this won't end well."

When Lisa hugs them, drags them around and holds them, their bodies change.

They get softer. They get freer, less confined, more human.

Before they go away, they shake our hands and kiss us on the cheek. You can tell it is important for them.

"I feel like I'm watching First Dates."

They laugh.

I hear them laughing and swearing, as they go away.

Silence.

## Scene 5. The Cell

*Romeo is in his cell. In the cell there are the signs we painted during our masterclass with Peter McCaughey.*

*Romeo:* Romeo... wherefore am I Romeo? Why me? But, in the end... What's a name? What's Montague? It isn't a hand, or foot, or arm, or face. Maybe it's just a dream. It can't be true.

What did I do? What the hell did I do?

I couldn't leave Mercutio in the shit. Yes, he'd have done the same for me.

But now, I'm just like them. A murderer. Just like the people I hate. Just like my family.

Cursed be our families, and cursed be the blood, running through my veins.

Capulets, Montagues, they are all the same shit.

What will Juliet think of me? I'm so sorry, Tybalt, my brother. But for fuck's sake, not Mercutio. Not him. What did I do? My hands are shaking, covered in his blood.

I didn't mean to. I swear, Tybalt. I didn't mean to kill you. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, everyone.

I thought I was different, but maybe I'm not.

I can still smell his blood on me. I never thought it would have such a sweet scent.

And your eyes, as they were leaving this life. They still haunt me. It's my punishment.

Cursed be the blade that killed you, and the one that hit Mercutio.

What's going to happen, now? Will they put me to death? No more deaths. No more.

Is it not enough? Maybe they'll understand why I did it. The shrinks seemed understanding.

Juliet. The love of my life, where are you? I wish you were here. I'm scared. I'm so scared.

Help me. I'm just a boy. I'm just a boy and I'm going nuts.

Or maybe I was already nuts. Or maybe the entire city has gone crazy, we all have.

This cell is so small.

I'm scared.

## Scene 6. Do You Bite Your Thumb at Us, Sir?

*This scene is taken from Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet (1.1) and it includes the Prince's entrance and speech.*

## Scene 7. Acting, Running, Stepping Outside the Box

*Two students who took part in the workshop, Michela Segato and Debora Frascini, compete in a frantic dance fight, a mix of classical ballet and modern dance, to the tune of Run Boy Run by Woodkid.*

Run boy run! This world is not made for you  
Run boy run! They're trying to catch you  
Run boy run! Running is a victory  
Run boy run! Beauty lays behind the hills  
Run boy run! The sun will be guiding you  
Run boy run! They're dying to stop you  
Run boy run! This race is a prophecy  
Run boy run! Break out of society  
Tomorrow is another day  
And you won't have to hide away  
You'll be a man, boy!  
But for now, it's time to run, it's time to run!  
Run boy run! This ride is a journey to  
Run boy run! The secret inside of you  
Run boy run! This race is a prophecy  
Run boy run! And disappear in the...  
Tomorrow is another day  
And you won't have to hide away  
You'll be a man, boy!  
But now. It's time to run, it's time to run!  
Tomorrow is another day

## Scene 8. The Witnesses

*The entrance and identification procedure are repeated every time somebody is called to the stand.*

*The Judge:* The Court will hear all the evidence presented by the parties. Counsel, you may call the first witness to the stand.

*Benvolio enters.*

Please, you may sit. Good evening, Benvolio. We will now identify you. You will be heard as a witness in this trial and must tell the whole truth. Remember that perjury is a felony punishable by law. Please, answer the questions the Prosecutor is going to ask you.

*Prosecutor:* Benvolio, where were you on 1 November 2018, when the Montagues and the Capulets clashed on the streets of Verona? Who were you with? Who took part in the fight and what caused it? I urge you to provide detailed information, leaving nothing out.

*We play the video of Benvolio's statement. It was recorded in the "blue room," inside the prison. Benvolio is played by W.*

*Benvolio:* Get off me!

I said, let me go!

I saw nothing.

Can I smoke?

I was drunk.

We were at Juliet's party.

We shouldn't have been there, I know. It was a mess.

I swear to God, if you don't get your hands off me.

Leave me alone!

Who was I with? Some friends.

Mercutio, Romeo ... and some others.

I'm not going to snitch on 'em. I never have, so I'm not starting now.

Are we done? If I don't have a fag, I'm going to lose it.

We were all drunk and high. We went out. We wanted a burger.

Tybalt started teasing Mercutio.

How? He was staring at him.

Mercutio was stoned. He was restless. When he acts like that, it's impossible to stop him.

It got out of hand.

You must get off me, I'm serious.

*(He raises his voice)*

Let me go... I didn't do anything... fuck.

Mercutio went nuts.

Romeo got in the way.

He tried to stop 'em.

It was a mistake... fuck.

Can I go, now?

*(He calms down, and speaks to himself)*

Tybalt killed Mercutio. He pounced on Romeo.

Romeo fought back. Tybalt died.

He had it coming.

Can I have a fag, now?

*We play the video of Balthasar's statement. It was recorded in the "blue room," inside the prison. Balthasar is played by F.*

*Balthasar:* We went clubbing.

It was someone's birthday.

I was with Romeo and Mercutio.

We were going back home, it was 4.30 am.

That's when the fight started.

Next to a food truck.

The fuck do I know?

Hey! Stop recording me.

At some point, a bloke showed up.

He was a show off.

He called us names, and Mercutio punched him.

Tybalt punched him back.

Mercutio hits his head on the ground and dies.

Romeo stands between the two and pulls a knife out of his pocket.

He stabs Tybalt a couple of times.

And Tybalt dies.  
Romeo didn't know what to do.  
So, a dude got killed.  
That's about it.

*We play the video of K's statement. It was recorded in the "blue room," inside the prison. K. is played by K. He only speaks Albanian. Giorgia, a cultural mediator, translates his lines.*

*Giorgia:* I'm Giorgia, a cultural mediator, and I'm here today to translate K.'s statement.

*K.:* Në rregull. Ishte e martë, binte shi dhe nga Puka morra një autobus që më la në Milano, saktësisht në rrugën Padova.

*Giorgia:* All right. It was Tuesday, and it was pouring outside. I caught a bus that would take me from Puka to Milan, and I got off in via Padova.

*K.:* Në rregull. Vendosa të shkoja në një supermarket për të marrë një kaçavidë.

*Giorgia:* Okay. I went to a store to buy a screwdriver.

*K.:* Kisha në mendje një nga marifetet e mia, por kur dola nga supermarketi e gjeta veten në mes të një përleshjeje midis dy të rinjve. Nga frika se mund të arrinte policia, vendosa të iki.

*Giorgia:* I was planning one of my stunts, but when I left the store I saw some dudes fighting. I was afraid the police would come, so I ran off.

*K.:* Fatkeqësisht nuk ua pashë fytyrat dy të rinjve, ndaj nuk di t'ju them më shumë.

*Giorgia:* Unfortunately, I didn't get a look at their faces. That's all.

*We play the video of Tybalt's statement. It was recorded in the "blue room," inside the prison. Tybalt is played by Y.*

*Tybalt:* I was at a friend's place, and we hung out there till 6 am, then I had to go home.

We drank a lot and listened to music.

Walking home, I smoked a joint.

But when I got to the square, I saw some Montagues.

They were talking trash about us.

I swaggered up to them.

Mercutio started riling me and calling me names.

Romeo tries to separate us and says something I don't understand.

He tells me something along the lines of "I love you and care about you."

But I hit him and push him over.

Mercutio jumps at me and hits me in the face.

We start fighting and Romeo

Tries to stop us

But as I hit Romeo to push him out of the way

I knock Mercutio down.

I spit at him and leave.

*We play the video of Mercutio's statement. It was recorded in the "blue room," inside the prison. Mercutio is played by G., who performs the Queen Mab speech.*

## Scene 9. Breaking News

*Our correspondent from Verona, Beatrice Cionti, speaks on video.*

*Beatrice:* Good evening. I am speaking from Milan's Juvenile Court, where at this very moment Romeo Montague is being tried for the murder of Tybalt Capulet, also known as Prince of the Cats. It's not the first time this criminal offender has come before the court. His clan are notorious for their violence, deviant behaviour and drug use. It appears that on the night of the murder, the suspect was high on drugs. The trial is still underway,

but we all hope justice will be done, and that this dangerous killer will be granted a life sentence. That's all for now, back to you, Paul.

### **Scene 10. *Angel and Devil*, a Rap Song by Kristian Sefgjini**

*Judge (to Romeo):* Tell us about your family. How's your relationship with your parents?

*Silence*

What would you like to do with your life? What do you want to be? What are your hobbies?

*Silence*

Have you heard of probation? Has anyone told you what it is?

*Silence*

Probation is a programme you could benefit from, if you are willing to give it a try. You will be supported by experts. But you must make a real effort, if you really want to change, and leave your old self behind. You must show us that you are more than the crime you have committed, and that you can still be a productive human being who follows his dreams and obeys the law. Are you willing to try this new experience? You will have to leave home and stay in a community where some decent people will help you get through it.

*Silence*

Do you have anything you want to say?

*Romeo starts rapping Angel and Devil by Kristian Sefgjini. Romeo is played by the author.*

*Romeo:* Talking about life and my family keeps me alive  
I left them behind to live on the streets  
Sorry mum, just another bad choice.  
I was scared, I was hungry, and I met some lying rats  
But I am what I am, charmed by the devil – charmed by the devil.  
I live my life just as I like. You don't have a say. God will be my judge.  
He already spoke and I paid for what I did, I know that I was wrong.

I grew up on the streets, far from my mum, far from my home  
 I thought I could help, but I only broke her heart  
 At first, I was in heaven, but that money looked like poison  
 I got a few smiles, only for a while, but I felt like my heart was withering  
 inside

This life took my smile, drops of blood on my face

When I look in the mirror, I see my crappy self

As I look at these bars, I can't catch my breath

I lie on my bed, trying to get some sleep

The dreams I dream, they make me lose my mind

Thinking I'm outside, while I'm still caged inside

Tears are in my eyes, I want to disappear

In a dark and distant place, a deep dark void

My ghosts, they keep screaming

I spent all my days looking at the clock, and sometimes I thought I  
 wouldn't get back.

I've wondered in the dark, trying to give my life a purpose

The devil speaks, the angel looks and weeps at the evil in my heart.

I've wondered in the dark, trying to give my life a purpose

The devil speaks, the angel looks and weeps at the evil in my heart.

Running from a world on fire, looking for a light in the darkness

I must try; I must fight with all my strength I must rise up

All the scars on my body that those devils left on me when I died

I've buried this devil, I go with the light, never looking back, I keep my  
 head up

I thank the Lord, I have a chance, I can start anew

I live my life with a quiet heart, I don't want to suffer thinking of that  
 poison

I know I saw an angel, and I've kept smiling ever since

Being free, living free, that's all I ever wanted.

Money isn't everything, I saw that in a dream

Money can't buy all the love that now I need.

As I smoke and think of all the mistakes that changed my life

I keep my head up and look in the mirror, and I see the man I became

And I know I've wasted time. I've wasted so much time.

Angel and devil, that's how I was born...

## Scene 11. Logbook. *For Them, For Us* by Alessandra Romeo

*Alessandra:* I've been thinking about it all week. I've been thinking about this day, my last Tuesday visiting the prison. And I've been thinking of all the people I've met along the way, and all the moments I hold in my heart. This Tuesday was magical: W. was all dressed up, he had cut his hair and was wearing glasses, which made him look smart. F. is complaining about his hair, he says he didn't style it properly, and he is ashamed. Yes, F. is a lamb, asking for love, who hides behind some huge tattoos to look tougher. What happened on Tuesday was special. G. was really looking forward to starting to act, he was ecstatic; K., who doesn't speak a word of Italian, let his smile talk; another boy sings a song he wrote: "All I want from you, mum, is a prayer. I know dad isn't proud of me" – that's how it ends. It's really moving. I tell him, and he says no one has ever told him that. Fuck, I think, they are really good! They are all so good, and I get angry – angry because I know they didn't have the same opportunities as me; they didn't have someone who believed in them or motivated them. The last goodbye. They hug us like they are saying goodbye to all their hopes. The air grows quite heavy, full of things to say, tears to shed, moments to spend together, and laughs to share. For them, for us.

## Scene 12. The sentence

*After a short discussion, the judges return to the courtroom.*

*Judge:* After hearing social services, who have illustrated the feasibility of the programme to be implemented in the probationary period, the court rules as follows.

*The Judge reads the Court Order:* The probationary period means the judge will defer his decision for a period that, in the case of a serious crime like this one, will be three years. If everything goes smoothly, the charges will be dismissed, and the trial will not resume. On the contrary, if this test is not passed, the trial will resume, and the boy will probably be sentenced to prison.

We all agreed on a three-year probationary period, which means that during this time the defendant, Romeo Montague, will attend a rehabilitation programme which has been drawn up by social services and approved by the judge. There's an intensive theatre workshop in this programme, and a lot of Shakespeare!

Romeo, it will be tough, but you must try.

We believe in you. It's never too late to change.

We have also scheduled some mid-term reviews. These will be one-to-one interviews with the honorary judge every three months to check on your progress during the probationary period.

Thank you, everyone.

## Epilogue. At the Very Bottom

by *Dimitri Patrizi*

*Nick Bottom (played by Kristian Sefgijni):* My name, governor? Yes, that's it, guv. That's right. But friends call me Nick. Nick Bottom. You know, Nick Bottom, like Shakespeare's character. Never been to the theatre? No? Why? You can go, so you should, guv. You have a serious job that pays well, and a uniform: you should go, seriously! It'll do you good, guv. It can change you... Bottom, yes, Bottom: it means "the lowest part of something" in English. You don't speak English, guv? Guv, you must study English: if you know English, you can go anywhere! You could climb up the ladder and end up working for Interpol, rather than staying here, squashing cockroaches. With all due respect, guv! I bet you don't know Nick Bottom's story. Of course, you don't, you never go to the theatre. Sure, I've been to the theatre. Once. Nope, just once. I couldn't go back. I wanted to... but I had other things to do. Know the story, as I see it, guv? This is how it goes, listen carefully, I'm talking. You can't go on like this, guv, you're a real shit. It's the story of a fucking nobody. Sorry for that word, but it is what it is. He was someone who stayed at the very bottom. "Bottom," got it? At the bottom of the list, down at the bottom, where no one could see him. Someone who

lived at the very bottom and then started to go up. What? You want to know how it goes? Alright, this is Bottom's story.

That time at the theatre, a bloke told us the story – they were actors, and they were working, and one of them had to tell us things – this is what I heard.

Nick Bottom is an ordinary bloke, just like many of us. He is somebody who works whenever he can, and when he can't he finds something else. He is a weaver. Someone who makes cloth and clothes, I guess. Now, clothes are made in Chinese factories – so we can say goodbye to our jobs. You need to find your own way, pal. I'm a bricklayer. One of Bottom's friends was a bricklayer. Peter. Yes, he was unemployed, too. They can't find work, so they say: let's try acting. You know, there's this rich bloke, guv. He is someone important, guv, a lot more than you. No offence. He is the big boss, the one who lays down the law and forks out. This rich bloke is getting married. There's going to be a party. So, he wants some music and someone who can tell a few jokes. He's got money, guv, he can afford to laugh. And so, Bottom and his friend, Peter, go: we can make him laugh. "Get your head out of your ass, Peter, we're not good actors!" "Sure, but he pays well, and we could set ourselves up for life. We've had enough of living like this..." Yeah, so they give it a go. You do what you can, right? I did. But I had no luck. So, I ended up at the very bottom too, got it, guv? Down, at the very bottom, where you get splattered in mud, and nobody sees you. And you cry for help, fuck, pull me out, would you please help me get out of here? Nope, no luck this time, guv. Nobody gives a shit, you know. 'Cos you're at the bottom, fuck. Nick Bottom. Sank to the bottom. Got it, guv?

That night, when I got to the theatre, the bloke who knows everything was telling the story like this. I got in because... because it was better than staying outside, where nobody could see me. Got it? You know how things are at the theatre, right? You get in and the lights go down. Sure, like the cinema, but we are real people. While you're in the dark. And I needed to be in the dark, you know? At the bottom, in the dark. It was my place.

Then, Bottom and his friend Peter – you can tell they're friends and have been through a lot together, and Peter knows him really well – they say, "Let's try acting," and Peter tells Bottom "You'll have to be the hero of the story!" "What hero?" says Bottom. "What good am I, when my dad used to make clothes, and now the Chinese do it instead?." Something like

that, right? Okay, he doesn't mention the Chinese, guv, you're right. But Peter insists: "You know, the hero gets the girl..." "Girls only like wealthy men, pall." "That's not always the case, Bottom. If you change your mind, and start believing, you'll get a girl too!" I don't know. We'll see. So, they decide to start acting, right? You know, when you're still you, but pretend to be someone else, and if you really believe it, you can be a hero or get a girl. And suddenly, you leave this dark, claustrophobic space, all smelly and dank, you forget the stains on the walls and the renovations that everyone says will start soon but never do because there's never enough money. No: you go: "Now, we're in the woods..." and trees are growing, with branches and leaves, and a nice breeze is blowing, taking away that stench. Can you smell how clear the air is, guv... come on, at least pretend! I know you can only smell the toilet from here, because the door doesn't close proper, but you've got to believe, because we're in a theatre... and here the tiles stay put and don't crack. Look at the grass, so fresh and soft that it makes me want to lie down right here and have sex with my girl... Do you have a girl, guv? Got it, sorry, none of my business.

Well, this is how magic works in a theatre. And Bottom is happy, you know. He likes it. He can see he's changing – Peter, his friend, was right. He's always been right. And so, something strange happens to him – maybe he's fallen asleep and now he's dreaming. Maybe not. Who knows? He is in the woods, and when he turns round, he sees... gorgeous! A girl so gorgeous the world has never seen before – a girl who looks at him, sees him. Yes, him, who nobody has even noticed before, because no one has ever looked at him and seen him and... she grabs his hand! She takes Bottom's hand, can you believe it, guv? Bottom can hardly believe what is happening: "You're holding my hand? Nobody has ever held my hand. They've always left me there, in the dirt, because who cares about Nick..." ... but she didn't... no, she didn't look the other way! She saw me, fuck. She saw me. Those eyes of hers looked for me and found me. That patch of blue sky, because that's what it was, guv, a patch of blue sky like in the songs, it came looking for me, in the dark... and... "It could be a whole different story, you know, Nick?" A different story, where I can hold her hand and run away, free, or fly up in the sky, up there. Fuck, guv, it would be a whole lot different from being here at the bottom. No, now you're a hero – and you fly, fly, fly away. You fly over this shitty city, over those motherfuckers who don't want to see

you, over the job you can't find – and even over the Chinese. Yes, even over those guys who see you up there with your girlfriend, happy, while they are down there, surrounded by grey concrete and you fly in the blue sky of her eyes... got it, guv?

That was magic, and she was a fairy... or maybe a dream. Or... who knows? All I know is that Nick was happy. I've never been this happy.

Alive. With her.

What then? I don't know, guv.

Then, you came along and took me away.

And they say you can trust the theatre...

Well, you got it, right? My name is Nick Bottom.

I still haven't hit the bottom, but... if you help me, I can get back up, pal.









## Logbook

And before we know it, the show is on. We all have the same red marks on our faces and wear the same black dresses that make us look identical and recognisable. The audience is looking at you, but you don't even notice, because all that matters is your friends next to you and those on stage giving their best performance ever. The first scene is so well-designed and exciting that I am completely captivated, as if I were seeing it for the first time. Everything goes smoothly.

Who would have thought? I never thought I'd be so emotional. It is so full. Full of everything. In the blink of an eye, we're already at the end. We all stand together as the audience bursts into applause. And in that moment, we are like a family. That's what we've become in such a short time. I have to say goodbye to the people who made me laugh and helped me open up, who have been with me all the way. Some of them I'll probably see at the uni, others I won't.

Kristian and A., with whom I've become closer than ever today, have left a permanent mark on my heart tonight.

I will remember this experience forever.

Beppe and Lisa taught us so much without us even realising it. They've put themselves in our shoes, been very patient and made their voices heard.

Our teachers showed us a playful and more human side of their character. The distance you have to keep from them at uni was somehow closed, and that was a breath of fresh air.

And with these last hugs, I'm taking with me the excitement of the night and the love I feel for all the people I've worked with. We all came in as separate individuals, but we leave as a group, as parts of a whole.

Mara Isotta, 1 December







# ABOUT THE PROJECT



# Milan University's Involvement in Correctional Facilities

*Stefano Simonetta*

(Milan University)

DOI: 10.54103/st.227.c431

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3004-4755>

## **Abstract**

This chapter describes the framework of the experience at the centre of the present book. It focuses on Milan University's Prison Education Programme – by far the biggest in Italy and one of the largest in Europe – a programme the author has directed since it began in 2015.

**Keywords:** Education; rights; inclusion; pedagogical methodology; equal opportunities; prison education project.

The project described in this volume – though unique – is one of several cultural activities (courses, seminars, photo exhibitions, poetry competitions, stage plays, documentaries, round-table discussions, conferences and book signings) endorsed by Milan University, to let people know about prison life. Since 2015, these initiatives have been implemented at the university and in several prisons across the city – with the help of those who live there. That year, thanks to my intervention, a framework agreement was signed between the University of Milan and PRAP (the regional board for prison administration), for which I am a representative. One of the provisions of this agreement is that Milan University organise a series of educational activities at our Prison University Centres in Milano-Bollate and Milano-Opera prisons. In addition, some initiatives were also set up at the “Cesare Beccaria” Youth Detention Centre and, recently, at the detention facility of San Vittore.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As previously happened in other Prison University Centres in Italy. See V. Friso and L. Decembrotto eds., *Università e carcere. Il diritto allo studio tra vincoli e progettualità*, Guerini

The model proposed by the leaders of the workshop *Romeo Montague: Innocent or Guilty?* is a perfect example of the spirit which from the very start informed the university programme. The space allotted for my contribution in the present volume gives me the opportunity to give an account of what our work has meant for prisons in Milan in the four years since the agreement was implemented. First, I think it necessary to make something clear: the University of Milan, represented by the teachers leading the project, as well as students who every year take part in the workshops, are not on a charitable mission, nor do they want to commiserate and pity those who are inside. Their goal is to restore the rights (which, as the law decrees, shall not be infringed, nor compromised) of the people detained because they have committed a crime. They aim to make sure that art. 27 of the Italian Constitution, which states that “the punishment for a crime shall not be contrary to our sense of humanity,” be respected. To this end, prisons should rehabilitate people who have committed crimes, so that they can be reintegrated into the social system from which they have been separated for violating the social pact that underlies it. All of our work aims to make prisons “not places where you end up but rather places where you can start over:”<sup>2</sup> facilities which are not intended to mortify the body and mind of those inside but can rather be of service to them.

We are attempting to restore an incarcerated individual’s right to study and have a proper education, and also all the rights that incarcerated individuals have as students:<sup>3</sup> the right to carry out scientific research, the right to culture, the right to dialogue and to share ideas<sup>4</sup>, the right to socialise and interact with others, and to keep contact with the outside world, the right to

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Scientifica, Milano, 2019, and F. Giordano, F. Perrini, D. Langer and L. Pagano eds., *Creare valore con la cultura in carcere. 1° Rapporto di Ricerca sulle Attività Trattamentali negli Istituti di Pena a Milano*, EGEA, Milano, 2019.

2 L. Castellano-D. Stasio, *Diritti e castighi. Storie di umanità cancellata in carcere*, il Saggiatore, Milano, 2009, pp. 13-17, 95.

3 See A. Sbraccia-F. Vianello, “I poli universitari in carcere. Appunti e note critiche a partire dalle esperienze in corso”, in *Università e carcere*, cit., pp. 133-4 and F. Prina, “I processi di implementazione delle norme: dai diritti di carta ai diritti sostanziali”, in A. Cottino (ed.), *Lineamenti di sociologia del diritto*, Zanichelli, Bologna, pp. 299-336.

4 To find out more about prison as a place to foster critical thinking and a positive intellectual debate see S. Simonetta, “Vecchi compagni di strada: filosofia, utopia e carcere, da Atene a Ventotene”, in S. Simonetta (ed.), *Utopia e carcere*, Editoriale Scientifica, Napoli, 2015, pp. 7-11 and S. Simonetta, “Raccogliere la chiave gettata via. Lezioni di filosofia

make use of their talents (prisons, especially the ones where young-adults are housed, are full of raw talent and untapped potential) and to develop new skills. These things are also made possible by letting incarcerated people share their experiences with others.

The work of the departments at Milan University involved in this project is part of the so-called “first mission:” their teaching goal. Yet, this mission is not only about providing people in prison with a good education, but also about giving them a chance to grow, and to make plans for their lives. This can only be achieved if they change the way they think about themselves, other people, and the outside world.<sup>5</sup> This transformation is encouraged by fostering a positive interaction with other citizens during educational activities. This gives incarcerated individuals the possibility to reconnect with the outside world, which is often seen as bewildering, staggering and inexplicable to those who receive these “visits.”

Here lies a second aspect of the educational activities we organise in prison: the involvement of the university in these institutions was formally established by including the hours teachers spend there in their official timetable, by opening these courses to all students enrolled and by including them in the academic calendar and also giving attending students certified ECTS. By doing so, we wanted to make clear that these activities are not to be seen as volunteering (as noble and useful as it may be), but rather as a commitment which does not depend on individual goodwill or the positive relationship between teachers and prison staff.

We also deemed it important to allot some rooms at these facilities for teaching and study purposes: places which would be managed by the university, so that when incarcerated students used them, they would feel like they were really attending a university class. Some of these areas were turned into theatres, so that incarcerated people who are interested in these activities would see them as something apart from the prison for the entire duration of the class.

From what we’ve learnt so far, the activities carried out by Milan University at these penal institutions do not have a corrective purpose. As much as they can contribute to the rehabilitation of incarcerated persons,

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entro le mura delle carceri”, in C. Cappelletto (ed.), *In cattedra. Il docente universitario in otto autoritratti*, Cortina, Milano, 2019, pp. 283-312.

5 See Decembrotto, *Educazione, carcere e diritti* cit., pp. 77-84.

this should not be their main function.<sup>6</sup> The ultimate goal is, indeed, that of allowing those people who have been convicted to exercise their rights, no matter how serious the crime they have committed. The right to study should not be impinged by the criminal proceedings, nor should it be discretionary. These rights should be granted to all those who meet the requirements, irrespective of their behaviour while in prison. The right to study should not be a prize for good behaviour, nor should it depend on the crime committed, the criminal charges that led to the arrest, or the length of the sentence. Nobody who is taken into custody (a beautiful expression which means: entrusting someone with something precious) should be left to “rot in prison.” We must ensure none of the teachers (and likewise none of the students and the administrative staff) who take part in this project see their teaching programme only as a means to rehabilitate the individuals in prison. They must be prevented from believing that these activities are only intended for those who really “believe in the cause,” while those who enrol simply to have an opportunity to leave their cells, do something different or meet someone different, should be left out.<sup>7</sup> It’s not unusual that incarcerated people who start studying as a diversion or to escape a tense situation end up really liking it. These students might find a model in Socrates or Shakespeare and embark on an unexpected journey (even a rehabilitative one). This is why, from the very beginning, we tried to involve in our activities not only an elite group of incarcerated individuals who are already highly educated, but also all those who are potentially interested in studying. This way, we reach a wider audience and help them develop new knowledge and skills. To this end, we also encourage incarcerated people to help each other out, in and outside the classroom. In many cases, those who have engaged in our activities before completing their secondary education have been so captivated by our university that they chose to enrol after finishing school.

One last feature makes the workshop *Romeo Montague: Innocent or Guilty?* fully and pragmatically part of the teaching activities available in prison within the Milan University prison education project: the methodology

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6 A. Di Martino, ““Rivoltarsi nella feccia di Romolo”. Lessico di legge, situazioni di stallo, aporie del ‘trattamento’”, in *Utopia e carcere*, cit., pp. 82-7.

7 F. Vianello, “L’istruzione in carcere, tra diritto e privilegio”, in E. Kalica and S. Santorso (eds.), *Farsi la galera. Spazi e culture del penitenziario*, Ombre corte, Verona, 2018, pp. 100-10.

used. The mock trial of Romeo Montague, performed on the stage/law court of the theatre by the incarcerated minors at the Youth Detention Centre, Milan University students and actors from the Puntozero company, follows the same procedures we've used for other prison activities. I'm thinking, for instance, of the compilation *Classics vs Dike*, performed at the Bollate Detention Institution in May 2018 at the end of our philosophy workshop *Rethinking Justice*. Workshop participants were divided into small groups. Each group, then, worked on a famous lawsuit found in myth or literature (Antigone, Sisyphus, Socrates) and built a case around these stories' protagonists. Another example is *The War of Words*, which the Conference of Italian University Rectors (CRUI) recently promoted. On this occasion, college students and incarcerated individuals faced each other in a panel discussion at the San Vittore Detention Facility. Here, they debated the impact of public opinion on our contemporary society, arguing for or against this tendency.

More generally, for our philosophy workshops in prison, we've adopted a pedagogical methodology similar to the one applied at university since the 12<sup>th</sup> century (but also at the first law schools, and nowadays in many law firms in several English-speaking countries). I'm very well versed with this methodology since I'm a Medievalist. I'm talking about the *quaestiones disputate*, a teaching and learning model which saw students at different stages in their education challenging each other in a sort of academic joust. They would discuss, under the supervision of their teacher, a tricky case which was usually drawn from books on the syllabus. As they were busy challenging each other's arguments, students were invited to switch sides to better understand the *pros* and *contra*, the strengths and weaknesses, of the arguments used during the debate. Our activities in prison often mirror this mediaeval methodology. The key factor we've inherited is their ability to raise doubts and question traditional and established beliefs. As a result, all of those who take part in this collective knowledge-building experiment – whether they be people living behind bars or people coming in from the outside – undergo a transformation: when they leave, they're less confident but more human.



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## Logbooks

I learned to put myself out there and to work in a team. This workshop taught me to exceed my limits, to see above and beyond appearances and stereotypes. This experience has helped me look at things from a different perspective, which I'll certainly make good use of in my life.

I've met new people who've made me like the project even more and have shown me that being different is amazing.

Martina Fisichella, 1 December

Even though I don't fully grasp the complexity and the contradictions of the juvenile criminal system, I've had the chance to see how humane these young men are. Beppe and Lisa's commitment, persistence and devotion really are part of a "mission" and are nothing, but impressive. It's only by seeing what the starting point of this project is, the one we witnessed during the chaotic first meeting inside the blue room, that I could really grasp the transformative power and quality of this initiative. Seeing Kristian put his heart into this project, knowing that he started from "ground zero," is really satisfying for those who walked this path alongside him, not ahead of him.

Mirko Preatoni, 3 December

I didn't think I would get so emotional.

I didn't think I would grow so fond of them.

I've had so many mixed feelings from the first moment I stepped into the prison, with its dreary and overly colourful corridors, to the last one, when we all hugged goodbye, and I felt proud: proud of the project, proud of the people that made all of this possible, and proud of me too.

I'm also left with a bitter aftertaste because, in the end, while I sit here writing these lines, those boys keep looking at the sky through their barred windows. The only thing that makes me feel better is knowing they lived this experience as something more than just an activity they did in prison. I hope this will be a starting point, or even a turning point for them because no one should be defined by their past actions.

Giorgia Leone, 1 December

It's already December 1st, and the crazy thing is that I'm not freaking out. I've always been afraid of being judged by others, but this time is different because I'm not alone on stage. By my side, there's a group of people I've come to know and appreciate for their amazing talent and kindness. I am so grateful that out of all the workshops at my uni I chose this one because it not only did it teach me a lot, but it was also fun. I mean, I got to sing, paint, freely express myself, improve my writing skills and my social skills. It was a well-rounded experience, and I enjoyed every single moment of it. I'll cherish even the most stressful ones, because they made the challenging moments even greater. For example, preparing the press materials for the deadlines was extremely hard because we, the media people, were working as a team, but at the same time we did not have the opportunity to meet and work together 24\7, so it was a non-stop exchange of thousands of checked and proofed emails that were never quite right, no matter how hard we had worked on them. At one point, I thought I was going mad, but our hard work paid off.

I felt so proud and fulfilled when several journalists decided to write about our project and, especially on the night of the premiere, when I saw the theatre filling up and said to myself, "We did it!" People came to see our play on Saturday night. I hope that at least one of them will leave the show thinking that people deserve a second chance, especially young people.

Everyone deserves the chance to make up for what they have done. Indeed, we're not perfect, but we can improve and learn from our mistakes.

Marta De Tomasi, 1 December



# “So Many Stories”. Some Pedagogical Reflections on the Workshop

*Silvana Vaccaro*

(Bicocca Milan University)

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## **Abstract**

The author had the chance to be a privileged observer of the workshop activities. The workshop was not only an educational and artistic experience for the participants, but also a life experience that triggered a positive change in them. For the university students, it was a way of changing their perspective on a world that is often surrounded by prejudice and stereotypes and whose representation rarely corresponds to reality. In contrast, for the young boys at the Bekka, the workshop was a way of challenging their knowledge and learning more about something they would never otherwise have studied. The author noticed how pivotal the learning environment is for those boys, many of whom never finished school and reject it as something superfluous and a constant reminder of their failures and inadequacy.

**Keywords:** Education; intercultural relationships; situated learning; empowerment; obeying the law.

## **The “Outside” Inside. The Educational Value of a Meeting**

Their experience “inside” the prison has a double effect on the university students: it allows them to see what happens inside these closed spaces, spaces that are regulated by laws (laws which dictate punishments and precautionary measures, or alternative measures, etc.) and by internal rules that regulate everyday life in the prison. These rules are usually unknown to the students, as they are often undisclosed. On the other hand, the way students

interact with the young people at the institution has a profound emotional impact on the students. They learn to see the boys who live inside simply as people of their age, with different backgrounds and experiences, who share the same fears about the outside world and their future.

At first, the university students worked inside the theatre, a welcoming space that makes you wonder if you are really inside a prison; the mood inside the theatre makes it impossible to understand where it is located. The first two meetings with the educator and the coordinator of the education sector were an important learning opportunity both for the students and the minors in prison. The latter were admitted into the theatre as of art. 21 of the penal code – that is, without the supervision of prison officers: the topics discussed during these meetings were really captivating for the students, who listened to the lectures very attentively. The first one focused on the legislative aspects of correctional facilities, while the second, sought to show what life in prison is like and illustrate the activities implemented to rehabilitate the boys who are detained at the Beccaria.

Things radically changed when some students started working inside the prison, even if they had already been told what to expect. From their log-books and what I had the chance to observe in the “blue room,” I detected a radical emotional change in them. This change is the result of a series of factors. First of all, they are asked to leave their phones and all their personal belongings inside the lockers at the prison entrance because, as instructed, all personal items must be left “outside.” After, they are faced with the gates and the clanking noise they make when they close behind you. After a long walk, they get to the “blue room,” where they can meet the minors who aren’t allowed in the theatre, the boys who are not even allowed to walk around the prison, without the supervision of prison officers.

While the theatre almost makes you forget where you are, the “blue room” gives you a real sense of the place you are in: a prison. Meeting the boys of the Beccaria inside the “blue room” is a whole new experience. That space has the power to alter your perspective on things. It’s as if the boys allowed in the theatre are not actually in prison.

During the workshop, students learn how to look at things with fresh eyes; they start asking questions and trying to find answers, and they change the way they interact with people who are different from them. Everyone deserves a chance. “It’s easy to put things into boxes and pretend

everything's fine," a student writes in her logbook as she relates how important and emotionally fulfilling these weeks have been. Therefore, this workshop wasn't just a chance to put on a show or to get some ECTS, and an opportunity to think and to engage in a dialogue. An exchange that allowed both sides to change.

This shift in perspective led our students to see the boys at the Beccaria in a new light as they engaged and exceeded their expectations. This change is also reflected in the students' logbooks, where many express their surprise at discovering how deeply sensitive these boys can be. They were particularly impressed by the boys' ability to read and interpret Shakespeare – an experience completely new to most of them.

## What Happens Inside?

Interacting with the students wasn't easy for the boys in prison, but they soon got over their circumspection and decided to trust them. They started sharing their thoughts and opened up because, thanks to the way the setting was arranged, they understood the students were there for them and were willing to grow with them. The interpersonal interaction that was initially frustrating for the boys at the Beccaria ultimately allowed them to unlock their potential, thanks to the peer education system led by Giuseppe Scutellà.

Shakespeare. Romeo. One of the first things one of the boys said was: "I can hardly read this, how the f... am I supposed to understand this?." Well, it's certainly different from the elegant language you use! We laughed. The others were as puzzled as he was, but they had decided to trust the process. Even though working on such a difficult script wasn't easy, they did their best. Notwithstanding their cultural and educational limits – some of them struggle to read – the boys started asking for help and relied on the students, who welcomed them without judging.

All the boys were involved in the task, even those who could hardly speak Italian, and the students made sure everyone could contribute. There was an Albanian boy who didn't speak a word of Italian; but one of the students just happened to be from his country, and not only did she help him get involved, but she also managed to teach him part of the script; she became the go-to girl for him. It's clear how important the workshop and theatre in

general were for the boys. The script is full of words or expressions which can be difficult to grasp, so being in a group makes learning easier. This collective work can trigger a positive response, and help the boys become really passionate about these texts. Thanks to this workshop, they had a chance to work on texts they would have never read on their own or would have probably not been interested in, had they studied them at school. The cathartic power of theatre is not the only thing that makes it the perfect activity for these boys. It can also be an opportunity to find new interests and motivations, a perfect example of “Situated Learning.”

The boys and girls who took part in the workshop chose each other and bonded spontaneously but always under the supervision of the leaders, who acted as facilitators or mediators of this experience. This working method was pivotal for acquiring linguistic skills, especially for the non-Italians. For them, the workshop provided a chance to master the Italian language and learn how to write and communicate. What is even more staggering is that these boys showed a sincere interest in reaching those goals set by the adults they worked with. They learned to read and write, to enjoy positive interaction with the adults, with their peers and with the students, and to develop social skills and self-control because they felt it necessary; something changed that made them see all of this as a necessity and not just as an obligation imposed by the educators. They were willing to learn, read, and get to the workshop knowing their lines and not just the first ones. They wanted to find out more about the play and its cultural background. They put a lot of effort into looking good: they were always smart and clean. They were curious and asked students what they were doing at university, and they were surprised to learn that sometimes the students spent more than eight hours a day studying. So, they looked at each other, giggling and saying they would never be able to do that. But then, they spent the whole evening and sometimes even part of the night studying the script in their cell and asking the officer not to turn off the lights.

This experience was precious. It was an occasion to learn more about these boys. It allowed me to observe the acquisition process that allows them to develop new abilities and social skills from the people they work with, something which is hard to observe in other activities.

The workshop ran from 27 October to 1 December, every Tuesday (in the afternoon and sometimes in the evening) and Saturday (all day). It was

a rather short period, but full of emotion and ideas. The final performance was an opportunity to get closer to these boys and to assess the value of the expression “obeying the law” through Shakespeare’s play *Romeo and Juliet*.

## Logbooks

Saturday at the theatre: creative and fun moments, when I felt we were doing something valuable from the very first moment.

Tuesday in prison: the mood is different. We go from being happy to feeling hopeless and giving up. It is as if nothing could be done.

I have so many questions. I wish I could see these boys and get a sense of who they are. They are indeed young, and they shouldn't be affected by their past mistakes. But it is also impossible to pretend they did nothing.

Ilaria Greppi, 1 December

The Puntozero association plays a significant role in these boys' lives. It teaches them how to love themselves and their former life that betrayed them. And I think there's nothing better than this. Everyone should have a second chance, because humans make mistakes, and we can learn a lot from our mistakes.

Khristina Karabin, 1 December

Since my house is not far from the prison, I decided to go there by bike one day, and I took it inside the theatre.

At the end of the day, I was with Kristian, and I had my bike with me. As soon as he noticed the bell was broken, W. started telling me all about his work: he repairs bicycles. So, he said he would bring me a brand-new bell and adjust it with a screwdriver.

I was impressed and thanked him, but I would have never imagined he would do it! He thought of me and my broken bell.

Sometimes W. still texts me asking if I need some help with my bike. We became friends unexpectedly, by chance.

Letizia Ceriani, 12 December



# Romeo onstage at the Teatro Puntozero Beccaria

*Albarosa Camaldo*

*(Hystrio)*

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## **Abstract**

The following is a review of the show *Romeo Montague: Innocent or Guilty?* performed at the Teatro Puntozero Beccaria on 1 December 2018.

There are no metal detectors or security to go through to access the Teatro Puntozero Beccaria, situated inside the Cesare Beccaria Youth Detention Centre. You just need to sign up online and you can get in, as you can access any other theatre in Milan. Once you climb the stairs, which are decorated with drawings and props, you are welcomed into a large theatre. The place is packed with young people: some of them are in the audience, others onstage, and among them are a lot of students from Milan University. For more than two months, this theatre was their school. Under the supervision of British theatre teachers Mariacristina Cavecchi and Margaret Rose, they had a chance to work and interact with minors in prison and actors of the Puntozero company. Giuseppe Scutellà and Lisa Mazoni have worked together for thirty years to rehabilitate the boys at the Beccaria through theatre, thus carrying out a programme of social inclusion involving professional actors.

Using an original script written by the group, the Puntozero company put on a show, *Romeo Montague: Innocent or Guilty?* in which they built a court case against Romeo, following the procedures of juvenile criminal law. As a result of a clash between the two rival groups of Capulets and Montagues, Tybalt Capulet kills Mercutio, Romeo Montague's best friend. The young Montague then decides to avenge his friend by stabbing Tybalt to death.

In this retelling, after Tybalt's murder, Romeo is tried for murder: in Shakespeare's play, at the time of the events, the boy is underage, like the

boys who work with the Puntozero company and who often know what it means to lose control and engage in gang fighting. The show starts with the Capulets, dressed in blue, and the Montagues, in red, facing each other in two lines in the changing room of a gym: the boys and girls in the two groups are fighting and cursing each other; a state of affairs that unfortunately still happens in schools, clubs, or on the streets often as a result of bullying.

However, the core element of the show is the trial. It is set on a slightly tilted platform stage, which helps the audience feel part of the debate, as they are called on to judge what unfolds before their eyes. This mock trial is faithful to a real one, thanks to the talks during the workshop by law teachers who helped make the trial realistic and accurate.

It's quite a unique version of *Romeo and Juliet*: there's no balcony, no forbidden love affair, and what is most striking, the two lovers don't die at the end. The focus is, instead, on Romeo's life after Tybalt's murder. Following the procedures and the educational purpose of the Puntozero company, the actors are given different roles: some act as prosecutors, others as defence lawyers, lay judges and witnesses. There is even somebody who plays a psychologist, seeing this is a juvenile trial.

The trial retraces the events that led up to Tybalt's murder to decide whether Romeo is guilty or not. The accused then takes the floor and, in a long monologue, explains how difficult it is to understand the severity and the consequences of one's actions in such a dramatic situation. As he sits alone in his cell, he goes through the events again and blames himself for what he did. He is scared because he doesn't know what is going to happen to him, and he wonders what his beloved Juliet is going to think of him. He goes back to the moment he killed Tybalt and says he will never forget the look in his victim's dying eyes.

One of the most interesting aspects of the trial is the prosecution's psychological report, which provides a detailed analysis of the two gangs' deviant behaviour: Mercutio is aggressive, Benvolio does drugs, Romeo is cynical. At one point, there is also the psychological evaluation of Romeo's behaviour, which the Prosecutor uses to demonstrate that Romeo acted impulsively and out of rage. The defence, on the other hand, wants to prove that Romeo's behaviour was a consequence of the violent environment he

grew up in, and that ultimately affected his actions. Romeo is put on probation at the end of the trial, as Italy's juvenile law allows.

Particularly moving are the videos of the young men who did not have permission to leave the prison but were allowed into the "blue room" where, under the supervision of prison officers, they participate in the workshop and interact with the students. In these videos, they tell their stories and explain why they were convicted in the presence of the students who act as lawyers or social workers. This glimpse of the reality of prison life shows how an irresponsible choice can compromise a person's life. The words they use, and their general interpretations reveal how fragile and disoriented they are, even if they may act tough and confident. Their language reflects the way young people talk, especially when they use slang or cuss. This makes the situation seem more real.

The actors, university students and imprisoned boys seem at ease as they walk on stage. They act, dance and re-enact moments of their lives, thus showing how solidarity and coexistence are possible no matter how different people are.

I would say, then, that this experiment was a success: it is possible to use Shakespeare's works as an excuse and a starting point to talk about the boys and girls who commit serious crimes. *Romeo Montague: Innocent or Guilty?* is an original script that seems a sequel to Shakespeare's famous tragedy. It questions what would have happened to Romeo, had he not died and omits all the other elements of the original play. Shakespeare is still our contemporary; his works make us question our behaviour, which has not changed since he wrote his plays.

The performances by the Puntozero company show how people from different backgrounds can work together in a positive environment. None of this would be possible if it weren't for the educators and actors who work with them, for Lisa Mazoni, who takes care of them on stage, and Giuseppe Scutellà, who is strict but also acts as a big brother to them.

The workshop is a positive alternative to traditional university education. It allows young students to experience the harsh life of their peers in prison, while providing them with the educational tools they need. In addition, the participants were all involved in the project in different ways: some wrote the script, others built the set, acted, made videos, or worked in the media office to promote the final event. This was an opportunity for both

students and inmates to live and grow together, but also for the inmates to atone for the crimes committed in the past.

After a standing ovation, the actors flock to the stalls to greet the audience. They hug each other, and you can see that they are really moved because they know that this is the end, although they don't want it to be over.

## Logbooks

I wish I could hold the world in my hands  
And show it to you, so true  
So beautiful  
So full of colours and opportunities,  
So distant from any crime and the grey hopelessness  
Of a life that has already been written.  
We are wandering poets,  
Writers of our own destiny,  
And we won't let these chains choke our hearts,  
Our voice will forever roam this earth  
If only we try to break the constraints of the unknown.

I wish to give you hope  
And the will to fight for it,  
Because everyone has the right to slip up  
And learn from their mistakes  
And start anew,  
And be Free.

Michela Segato, 20 November

Shenjat që kam në trup të bera nga demonët kur vdiqa  
Unë këtë demon tashmë e kam varrosur, ndjek dritën,  
mbrapa nuk kthehem. Ngre kokën lart, falenderoj  
qiellin, kam një mundësi, rinis nga zero. Jetoj jetën  
me zemrën e qet, nuk dua të vuaj duke mendur për helmin.  
E di që engjëllin një ditë e pashë e nga ajo ditë në  
fytyrë kam gjithmonë një buzëqeshje  
Të jesh i lirë, të jetosh i lirë, prej sa kohe është që e  
kam dhëshiruar  
Paratë nuk janë gjithcka, e kisha parë në një ënderr,  
me paratë nuk mund të blej gjithë dashurinë për të  
cilën kam nevoj.

Kristian Sefgjini, 20 November

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21. Backstage. “Hip Hop Shakespeare!” workshop led by Akala. Teatro Puntozero Beccaria. 14-15 November 2016. Courtesy Puntozero. Artist Kingslee “Akala” Daley – poet, rapper, founder and artistic director of The Hip-Hop Shakespeare Company (London) – worked on *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* with a mixed group of students from Milan University and Puntozero as part of a Prison Shakespeare workshop (14–15 November 2016) at the Beccaria Youth Detention Centre.
22. An art therapy workshop with Laura Ridolfi. Teatro Puntozero Beccaria. November 2018. Photo by Veronica Liuzzo. In the workshop “Dreaming, Writing, Drawing, and Performing: From Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* to Our Dreams Today,” Laura Ridolfi, co-founder and director of “Imagine...Therapeutic Arts” (Stroud, UK), deftly guided participants through a creative art therapy process (Teatro Puntozero Beccaria, November 2018).
23. Lella Costa and Giuseppe Scutellà. Teatro Puntozero Beccaria. 11 November 2018. Photo by Sara Nicoli. Renowned actress Lella Costa was the patron of the performance *Dreaming, Writing, Performing: From A Midsummer Night’s Dream to Today’s Dreams* (Teatro Puntozero Beccaria, 11 November 2018) and the judge, alongside Giuseppe Scutellà, for the Writing for Theatre competition (2017–18), open to all University of Milan students.
24. *Shakespeare and the Law: ‘Imagine you see wretched strangers...’*, Teatro Puntozero Beccaria. 2 December 2019. Photo by Tommaso Bezzi. The workshop “Shakespeare and the Law: Imagine You See the Wretched Strangers...” provided a platform for participants to reinterpret *Sir Thomas More* in the context of their own experiences, reflecting on themes of justice, hospitality and legality. It culminated in a performance titled, *Imagine then you see those wretched strangers, with babies on their shoulders...* as part of the study day, “Sir Thomas More, from Page to Stage,” organised by IASEMS (Italian Association of Shakespearean and Early Modern Studies) in memory of Shakespearean scholar Mariangela Tempera (Teatro Puntozero Beccaria, 2 December 2019).
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53. *La Statale al Bekka*. Project by Statale Urban Island for INTERNI. Human Spaces. Milan Design Week 2019. Milan University. 9 April 2019. Photo by Claudia Cavecchi.
54. Audience members outside Teatro Puntozero Beccaria. Courtesy Puntozero.
55. Audience members at Teatro Puntozero Beccaria. Courtesy Puntozero.





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Curtain down!







# Romeo Montague Behind Bars

A Shakespeare Prison Theatre Workshop

Led by Mariacristina Cavecchi, Lisa Mazoni, Margaret Rose, Giuseppe Scutellà

Milan, November 2018. A group of boys and young men at Milan's "Cesare Beccaria" Youth Detention Centre, students from Milan University and young actors from the Puntozero theatre company took part in a Shakespeare prison workshop. They decided to put Romeo Montague on trial for the murder of Tybalt Capulet, following the current Italian Juvenile Criminal Procedure Code. The present volume includes the script of the fictional trial and an investigation by specialists and practitioners into what is a compelling experience of prison theatre.

Edited by Mariacristina Cavecchi & Margaret Rose

Cover: © Davide Forti, 2018, *In fondo*



**Studi teatrali**