

# The story of what might have been: Interrogating *Romeo and Juliet* under the Portuguese dictatorship

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## ABSTRACT

In 1969, Teatro Estúdio de Lisboa performed *Anatomy of a Love Story*, an interrogation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* for a generation politicized by their struggles against the dictatorship. This article delineates a narrative of what might have been if this incipient attempt to stage a more inclusive political theatre had prevailed, illustrating how attributions of success and failure to performances during this period need to be contextualized within the limitations imposed by censorship on the one hand, and, on the other, an evocation of a class-based popular theatre that excluded questions of gender and sexuality.

KEYWORDS: *Romeo and Juliet*; Teatro Estúdio de Lisboa; gender; class; popular theatre; Portuguese dictatorship.

### **La historia de lo que pudo haber sido: Interrogando a *Romeo y Julieta* bajo la dictadura portuguesa \***

RESUMEN: En 1969, el Teatro Estúdio de Lisboa representó *Anatomy of a Love Story*, una interpelación de *Romeo y Julieta*, de Shakespeare, dirigida a una generación politizada por sus luchas contra la dictadura. Este artículo traza una narración de lo que pudo haber pasado si este intento incipiente de representar un teatro político más inclusivo hubiese prevalecido. Ilustra cómo las atribuciones de éxito y fracaso de las representaciones llevadas a cabo durante este período han de contextualizarse dentro de las limitaciones impuestas, por una parte, por la censura y, por otra, por la evocación de un teatro popular basado en las clases sociales que excluía cuestiones de género y sexualidad.

### **A história do que poderia ter sido: Interrogar *Romeo e Julieta* na ditadura portuguesa**

RESUMO: Em 1969, o Teatro Estúdio de Lisboa encenou *Anatomia de uma História de Amor*, uma interrogação de *Romeu e Julieta* de Shakespeare destinada a uma geração politizada pelas suas lutas contra a ditadura. Este artigo desenvolve uma narrativa do que poderia ter sido se esta tentativa incipiente de criar um teatro político mais inclusivo tivesse prevalecido. Ilustra como noções de sucesso e fracasso na performance neste período precisam de ser contextualizadas, por um lado dentro das limitações impostas pela censura e, por outro na evocação de um teatro popular de classe que exclui questões de género e sexualidade.

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\* Translation into Spanish by Tamara Pérez-Fernández.



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PALABRAS CLAVE: *Romeo y Julieta*; Teatro Estúdio de Lisboa; género sexual; clase; teatro popular; dictadura portuguesa. PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Romeo e Julieta*; Teatro Estúdio de Lisboa; género; classe; teatro popular; ditadura portuguesa.

Ah, who will write the story of what might have been?  
If someone did, would this be,  
The true [hi]story of humanity!

*Original Sin*

(Álvaro de Campos, i.e. Fernando Pessoa)<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

In the extensive critical literature on Shakespeare and adaptation (Desmet and Sawyer 1999; Fischlin and Fortier 2000; Hutcheon 2006; Sanders 2006; Kidnie 2009), the central emphasis has been on challenging the hierarchy between Shakespeare source and adaptation. Such a hierarchy casts adaptation as secondary in relation to the Shakespeare original and reduces critical readings to analysis of how adaptations either follow or deviate from the Shakespearean source. Douglas Lanier's 2014 notion of the rhizomatic nature of adaptation and source text within a non-hierarchical circulation of cultural products has gone furthest in disrupting this binary. Yet there has been less critical attention to the horizontal, decentered multiplicity of the adaptation itself and its diverse textual, cultural and artistic roots. Similarly, how might the notion of the rhizomatic relationship between various cultural products approach instances where script, performance, televising of the performance and published play constitute temporally and intermedially distinct reiterations of a shifting cultural product in changed political circumstances? In 1969, the Portuguese independent theatre company Teatro Estúdio de Lisboa (TEL) performed *Anatomy of a Love Story*, an adaptation but also a version of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Its hybridity and critical perspective on the play render it an interrogation of *Romeo and Juliet* rather than a straightforward staging of the Shakespeare play or an adaptation, while the open-endedness

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<sup>1</sup> All translations from the Portuguese are my own.

of this interrogation encourages a view of the play as evolving rather than fixed.<sup>2</sup>

The play was performed in the company's Vasco Santana theatre in Lisbon and later in Coimbra. Both cities were centers of student radicalism during 1969 amid a growing police presence in the universities with the compliance of the university authorities. This politicization of university students compounded their opposition to a colonial war (1961–1974) and the conscription of young male students. International events such as May 1968 in France and North-American opposition to the Vietnam war provided an international context for the struggles of Portuguese young people against war and political authority. Culturally, Zeffirelli's 1968 film version of *Romeo and Juliet* with its young protagonists and their explicit nudity reflected this generational challenge and could be seen in cinemas around the world, including Portugal. Nevertheless, when Maurice Béjart brought his *Romeo and Juliet* ballet to Lisbon in 1968, he was thrown out of the country by the regime's secret police (PIDE). This was not because of the performance itself, although its encouragement to make love not war, parallels between the struggles of young people and the sacrifice of Christ, and thinly-veiled homoeroticism alerted the censors. Béjart was forcibly removed across the border into Spain because of a speech he made after the performance about the death of Robert Kennedy when he called for a minute's silence to remember the victims of fascism. The speech was enthusiastically applauded by the audience, but Béjart was removed immediately from the country for interference in national affairs. Following the dictator Salazar's bathetic death in August 1968 after falling off a chair, the new Prime Minister, Marcello Caetano had promised to open up Portuguese society. By the time *Anatomy of a Love Story* premiered in April 1969, few believed this promise. However, many were energized by the alternative possibility of dictators falling, wars being brought to an end and new forms of political and cultural transformation. Many women were involved in these oppositional movements and in the Portuguese independent theatre movement. However, as the struggle against the dictatorship was considered the primary locus of political

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<sup>2</sup> I am aware of the charge of using a term such as interrogation in the context of the dictatorship but it seems the best word to describe the way in which *Anatomy* questions the play it also stages.

opposition that would bring other transformations in its wake, few raised specific demands as women.

The Teatro Estúdio de Lisboa (TEL) was the only independent theatre company of the period run by women.<sup>3</sup> Luzia Maria Martins was a director, translator and dramatist who had returned to Lisbon after several years working for the BBC in London. While in London, she met the actress Helena Félix and on their return to Portugal they formed TEL in 1964.<sup>4</sup> Histories of the company suggest that the two were lovers as well as theatrical partners.<sup>5</sup> Their relationship was considered something of an open secret among theatre practitioners, but was never openly admitted.<sup>6</sup> While the work of TEL was respected by critics and there is no evidence that the two women were marginalized by other theatre artists for being either women or lesbians, the “form and pressure” (*Hamlet* 3.2.24) of the time meant that the particular experiences, struggles and voices of women and lesbians were played down within a context where unity against the dictatorship and the class struggle were seen as fundamental. This article analyses TEL’s *Anatomy of a Love Story* as an intermedial interrogation of *Romeo and Juliet* created against the backdrop of such

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<sup>3</sup> The National Theatre throughout this period was also run by a woman – Amélia Rey-Colaço – first with her husband Robles Monteiro and later on her own with her daughter Mariana Rey-Monteiro in a familial model that replicated but also subtly subverted traditional gender roles.

<sup>4</sup> The company are associated primarily with the introduction of a contemporary Anglo-American repertoire which included dramatists such as Arnold Wesker, Peter Schaffer and David Hare.

<sup>5</sup> A conversation between São José Almeida, Jorge de Sousa Costa and the author quoted in Yolanda Gonçalves’ *Luzia Quê?* suggests that “the relationship with Helena Félix, although not denied, was not overt. It was kept within the private sphere, although when confronted with the question, she [Martins] had no difficulty in telling the truth. It was the only known lesbian relationship in the intellectual circles of the time” (2016, 54).

<sup>6</sup> Eugénia Vasques was threatened with legal action by Martins’ sister and the actor-lawyer Morais e Castro for her suggestion in a 2000 obituary of Luzia Maria Martins in the *Expresso* newspaper that she was “a woman with two passions – theatre and the actress Helena Félix,” indicating her family’s attempts to prevent public acknowledgment of her lesbianism. Gonçalves claims that Martins’ papers and possessions are stored in a container in England but this curious narrative may well be a strategy invented by the family to discourage attention to Martins’ private life. Helena Félix’s papers are held at the Theatre Museum in Lisbon.

tumultuous events and oppositional energies.<sup>7</sup> It analyses in particular the play's innovative intersections between class, gender and sexuality in its framing of the play. While questions of class are clearly prioritized, *Anatomy* also challenges the heteronormative premises of the Shakespeare text. However, in critical accounts of the performances, questions of gender and sexuality were not mentioned. In the tension between, on the one hand, the prescriptions and obstacles of the dictatorship and, on the other, a criticism that placed a politically committed theatre at the heart of a transformed society, questions of gender and sexuality and their relationship with questions of class were either censored or deemed secondary. This article outlines "a story of what might have been" by assessing this play not as a failed experiment in popular theatre, but an incipient exploration of the links between class, gender and sexuality for a young, radicalized student audience engaged in questioning conventional lifestyles and politics.

### Dramaturgy

TEL's choice of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* was influenced clearly by the Zeffirelli film and Béjart ballet and their focus on the tragedy of the young lovers in an adult world torn apart by materialism, war and political authoritarianism. Martins herself explained the choice of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* as an attempt to appeal to new audiences. She explained that "we wanted to discuss certain problems and in order to do this for a wider audience, we needed a myth, for myths are an expression of the collective which shapes them and gives them a reality."<sup>8</sup> While *Romeo and Juliet* had been translated by the Portuguese monarch D. Luis I in the nineteenth century, the play had remained largely absent from the stage. The National Theatre in Lisbon performed it in 1961, but oppositional theatre groups avoided a play which was not seen as obviously political. The lack of a performance history perhaps explains the company's decision to combine a reduced version of *Romeo and Juliet* and their own critical

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<sup>7</sup> *Anatomy of a Love Story* was performed in the theatre and also shown on the main television channel, RTP. My discussion of *Anatomy* here complements and builds on Rui Pina Coelho's 2008 analysis of the play and the mechanisms of censorship.

<sup>8</sup> From the unpaginated introduction to *Anatomia de uma História de Amor* (1973).

perspective within the same play, although this was a technique they had used already in previous performances.<sup>9</sup> In *Anatomy*, the narrative of *Romeo and Juliet* is consistently interrupted with episodes that comment on the play from a class perspective performed by actors who played the Shakespearean characters as well as the generic roles of Actor/Actress or Man/Woman of the people.<sup>10</sup> The transitions between Shakespeare text and its historicization in the present were signaled to the audience through costume. During the Shakespearean sections, the performers wore period costume while



Figure 1. Performers from *Romeo and Juliet* in period costume.

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they appeared in modern dress to comment on the play (fig. 1). The simple black costumes in these latter sections indicated in themselves how radically different these performances were for audiences at this time. Besides a condensed *Romeo and Juliet*, the play also included an excerpt from *As You Like It* as well as three Shakespearean sonnets. Alone after the Capulet ball, Romeo recites Sonnet 15 “When I consider everything that grows” and when Juliet is planning the simulation of her death, she recites Sonnet 71 “No longer mourn for me when I am dead.” Soon after, Romeo recites Sonnet 66 “Tired with all these, for restful death I cry.”<sup>11</sup> The excerpt from *As You Like It* at

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<sup>9</sup> They had used a similar strategy in their ground-breaking *Bocage—Alma sem Mundo* (1967) about the Portuguese neoclassical poet Manuel Maria Barbosa de Bocage.

<sup>10</sup> This led to some intriguing doubling of roles. The actor playing the Prince, for instance, also played a servant and a beggar.

<sup>11</sup> All three sonnets emphasize the presence of death and *Anatomia* gives the figure of Death the last word. Beyond the connection with the tragedy of the lovers, Martins’

the end of the play is, unsurprisingly, Jaques' "All the World's a Stage" speech. Like the rest of *Anatomy*, these sonnets appear to have been translated by Martins herself. The inclusion of other works by Shakespeare does not really fulfil any dramatic purpose except to compress the action of the play through poetry. Their inclusion seems to respond rather to the company's desire to illustrate their knowledge of Shakespeare and to introduce as much as possible of Shakespeare to audiences who are not familiar with his works.

As the title of the play suggests, *Anatomy* interrogated the tragedy by taking it apart and investigating the social and political contexts of the events in the narrative. The notion of an anatomy of *Romeo and Juliet* suggests an examination of its implicit ideological premises while the demotion of the lovers within a more general love story places the emphasis on the society of the play rather than individual characters. As such, the play counterposed the sense of tragic inevitability in *Romeo and Juliet* and an interrogative, analytical approach to this apparent inevitability. As Martins pointed out, *Romeo and Juliet* had often made audiences cry but less often made them think about how the tragedy might have been avoided. However, this interrogative, political approach to the play sat somewhat uneasily with the passages that were translated almost word for word from the Shakespeare play. If these had been limited to the exchanges between Romeo and Juliet, this might have emphasized their difference from the world around them. However, they also included exchanges involving the Nurse, the Capulets and Mercutio which make the shifts between the Shakespeare play and the contemporary interrogation somewhat arbitrary. There is a desire to open up the play with a scalpel to examine its class and sexual politics but also a fear that straying too far from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* might alienate audiences as well as compromise the performance with the censors.

It was also true, however, that the cultural prestige of Shakespeare enabled the company to use these performances as something of a stalking horse to experiment with narrative and epic theatre techniques in an environment where more directly political plays such as those of Brecht and many contemporary Portuguese

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father, the scenographer Reynaldo Martins, collaborated with his daughter for the last time on these performances and died soon after. The published version of the play is dedicated to him and to Martins' mother and sister.

dramatists were banned from the stage.<sup>12</sup> The performance began with the ensemble pulling onstage a cart that included their props and costumes. This moment would have immediately brought to mind Brecht's banned *Mother Courage* for those aware of the reference and was enthusiastically applauded by the audience at the premiere.

Yet it was Piscator rather than Brecht who the company considered the main influence on their work, probably because the company had forged a personal relationship with him.<sup>13</sup> As John Willett has suggested, Piscator's theatrical techniques were based on the difference between "presenting 'the times' and trying to get under their skin" which echoes productively with TEL's anatomical approach. Willett notes that "faced with industrial society's assumption that the theatre exists for distraction, education or national prestige [...], theatre people need a spirit of inquiry, of involvement in outside affairs, and a sense of purpose. And these things Piscator could give" (1986, 111, 192). For an independent theatre like TEL, who were working under censorship and were keen to distance themselves from the commercial and state theatres, Piscator's techniques represented a means of affirming their aesthetic and political differences. Nevertheless, because censorship meant that knowledge of both Piscator and Brecht in Portugal remained fragmentary, there was not a clear separation between their differing views of political theatre for Portuguese practitioners. Both Brechtian epic theatre techniques such as actors commenting on events and characters, as well as Piscatorian techniques of historicization informed the notion of popular theatre that dominated discussions of theatre during this period.<sup>14</sup> In contrast to the folkloric, rural and religious notion of the popular promoted by the regime, the popular theatre envisaged by oppositional critics and practitioners was a politically committed, mainly urban theatre that explicitly sought social and political transformation. Indeed, popular theatre became a code for political theatre in a period where the mere mention of the

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<sup>12</sup> Brechtian drama was banned on stage but could be read in fragments. It was the live encounter between performers and audiences that worried the censors most.

<sup>13</sup> They had invited Piscator to direct their 1967 *Bocage – Alma sem Mundo*, but his death in March 1966 prevented this collaboration. Nevertheless, this suggests the existence of a relationship between the company and Piscator.

<sup>14</sup> The program for the performance explicitly credits both Brecht and Piscator in its comment that the performance "is a performance of epic or narrative theatre."

word political attracted the censors' attention. As Márcia Regina Rodrigues has noted, as well as seeking the effective participation of the audience, such theatre aimed "to lead the spectator to analyze and criticize the social and political context and, above all, recognized theatre as an instrument of intervention and cultural and political struggle" (2010, 21).

## Censorship

There are two scripts of the play in the censorship records held at the Torre do Tombo in Lisbon which include permission for the performances and for the television broadcast of the performance by the state channel RTP. One script is more heavily censored than the other, with passages crossed out in red ink rather than pencil. The more lightly-censored script appears to have prevailed, indicating a hierarchy between the different censors. Although performances of *Anatomy* were approved with cuts for audiences aged twelve or over, an ominous note on one of the scripts reads "the literary and dramatic interest of this comedy [*sic*] is, in my opinion, non-existent. The question of whether it is worth subsidizing (supposing such subsidies indeed exist) the company performing it, therefore, should be considered."<sup>15</sup> This kind of sinister comment was designed to threaten practitioners with the removal of funding should they step across the lines established by the censors and to encourage self-censorship by practitioners themselves. The scripts also illustrate the politicization of questions of sexuality by the regime. Any innuendo or explicit mention of sexuality was not tolerated. A filmed sequence of Romeo and Juliet's sexual encounter which included them "rolling in the grass" was removed by the censors, even if Zeffirelli's film, with its far more daring sexual scenes, could be seen in Portuguese cinemas. The Nurse's sexual innuendos and Mercutio's Queen Mab speech were also cut because of their sexual suggestiveness. The fact that the scripts end with the epigraph from Fernando Pessoa that is quoted at the beginning of this article indicates that when submitting the play, the company sensed the distance between what the performance might have been and what they suspected it would become in the context of the dictatorship.

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<sup>15</sup> Document number SNI/DGE 8830 at the Torre do Tombo, Lisbon.

## Performance

TEL's interrogative approach to *Romeo and Juliet* can be integrated within a wider tendency to emphasize the feud over the love story. As James N. Loehlin has argued:

In the latter half of the twentieth century, *Romeo and Juliet* was transformed, in production and perception, from a play about love to a play about hate. Modern productions have tended to emphasize the feud over the love story and have used it to comment on a variety of social ills (2002, 66–67).

Near the beginning of *Anatomy*, the Actress demands “what is the main theme of *Romeo and Juliet*, love or hate?” (1973, 20) and invites audiences to formulate their own responses. Yet, as the play unfolds, it is hatred and the tragic consequences of that hatred that are made responsible for the death of the lovers. *Anatomy of a Love Story* focuses extensively on the question of “aggression” and the ways in which it leads to the tragedy.<sup>16</sup> Building on Piscator's use of documentary to inscribe the historical narrative within contemporary events, the performances began with a film. It showed “reports of rebellions, scenes of latent violence, police repression of demonstrations [...] an image of the aggression of the current period” (1973, 15) in Europe and the USA. The censors correctly intuited that this was also a comment on the regime's violent reaction to student and political opposition in Portugal and demanded these images be removed from the performance. However, the company's apparent legitimization of protest against authoritarian regimes in the film was balanced by a more psychological, evolutionary approach in the play which universalized aggression as a tendency inherent to all human beings from the time they were forced to live in society. The exchanges between the Actress and the Actor at the beginning of the second half of the play, for instance, include the assertion that “aggression exists and will always exist because it is not possible to eliminate instincts that are not channelled, through appropriate social systems, into

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<sup>16</sup> The choice of the word aggression rather than the word violence in the play was occasioned by the banning of the word “violence” on stage by the censors but was also the result of Martins' reading of ethologist Konrad Lenz's 1963 *On Aggression* and other works in the area of psychology and anthropology. Similarly, Porto's use of “historical” and “psychological” was occasioned in all likelihood by the banning of the word “political” in published criticism.

constructive ends” (1973, 41). This dialectical tension between a historically-situated and a wider anthropological understanding of violence rendered the performance’s stance on the matter ambiguous in a context where the violence being used against those who contested the dictatorial regime was anything but ambiguous. Although the Actor adds that “the most beautiful as well as the ugliest human inclinations are not part of a fixed, biologically received human nature but are part of the social processes that form human beings” (1973, 59–60), this tension between universalizing violence and recognizing the social processes that shape its expression complicated the communication between performers and their radicalized audiences.

The play’s contrast between the lives of the noble characters with the harsher lives of the people was more successful. *Anatomy* included a popular counterpart to the Capulet ball that took place in the street rather than in the lavish interior of a noble house. At this impromptu ball, men and women of the people used their hands to create music for their dances in an explosion of physical energy.<sup>17</sup> This gestic episode illustrated how the sumptuousness and luxury of the noble ball was only accessible to a small section of the population but also suggested the resilience and inventiveness of popular forms of entertainment.<sup>18</sup> The Woman adds that:

It is with our hands that we knead bread, it’s with our hands that we help to give birth, it’s with our hands that we caress those we love and it’s with our hands that we wrap in shrouds those Death has stolen away from us. (1973, 46)

This comment indicated the existence of wider pleasures and tragedies beyond those dealt with in the Shakespeare play. These popular characters also introduce a class and gendered perspective on the deaths of Mercutio and Tybalt. The Woman comments unsentimentally “if men gave birth, they would know that creating life is more difficult and more beautiful than provoking death. You all need to give birth to understand this [...] Let us dance for the deaths

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<sup>17</sup> A short excerpt from the television broadcast of the film can be found at <https://arquivos.rtp.pt/conteudos/peca-de-teatro-anatomia-de-uma-historia-de-amor/>

<sup>18</sup> It is also something of a validation of the work of independent theatres such as TEL who worked with few resources to create theatre during this period.

of these two useless individuals” (1974, 46). This barbed assessment of the relative lack of importance of the deaths of Mercutio and Tybalt to their wider society introduces a class-based perspective on questions of life and death that counters Shakespeare play’s elevation of the centrality of the two nobles. The comment also prioritizes the importance of giving life and its association with women over male honor in death. Later, in another class-based rewrite, Romeo convinces the Apothecary to sell him poison by correctly sensing that he is too poor to refuse rather than because of some moral fault of character.

As the Woman’s comments on women and childbirth suggest, there is a gendered perspective on events in *Anatomy of a Love Story*, even if it is expressed in somewhat essentialist terms. Lady Capulet, for instance, harangues Juliet for seeking a happiness in marriage she has never been allowed herself in her own dynastic marriage. She complains “who asked me if I wanted to marry who I married? A man who was too old for me and who I did not know [...] Did anyone ask me if I could love this man?” (1973, 51). In the performance’s anatomy of aggression, there are suggestions that violence is gendered male. The Actress criticizes the fight between Capulet and Montague servants as “that ridiculous scene characteristic of immature men who only know how to resolve their supposed quarrels through violence” (1973, 42). The Actor also comments on this incident, suggesting that men in groups are more prone to aggression. He wonders aloud “do they have the courage to die because they lack the courage to live? If I make this gesture (*exemplifies*) do they feel offended? What if I make another gesture?” (1973, 23). Interestingly, this second gesture does not materialize as another actor prevents him from completing it. The speech is crossed out in red ink in the script sent to the censors with a question mark beside it. This erasure reveals the regime’s sensitivity to critiques of male violence in the context of the colonial war, but also the censor’s difficulty in dealing with this unspecified gesture. In Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* and in *Anatomy*, the first hostile gesture is biting one’s thumb, but in *Anatomy* the second, apparently even more contentious gesture, remains unclear. In the performance of the play, this gesture could range from repeating the gesture of biting

one's thumb to more contemporary and more radical gestures of contempt for the regime.<sup>19</sup> As Graça dos Santos has noted:

These kind of improvisations and unexpected fleeting asides were like winks from the actor to their audience that represented for them incursions of a reality external to the performance. These allusions created an intrinsic complicity between the performers and the audience who understood perfectly the signs directed at them. (2004, 279)

Unfortunately, there is no record of the gesture made in the performances or in the compulsory performance for the censors that preceded them. Yet even if the performers used one particular gesture before the censors, there was no guarantee that future performances would not change the gesture to a more provocative one and that both the gesture and the prevention of its completion might be understood as critiques of the regime by the audience. Such corporeal instability in performance was profoundly threatening to the censors.

## Criticism

Criticism during this period played a crucial role in supporting and guiding practitioners towards a particular vision of popular theatre. In the later published version of the play, Martins argued that criticism of the performances in 1969 was “balanced and, in some cases revealed a total understanding of the problems the play dealt with.” Reviews of the performances were generally encouraging, although some wondered why the oppositional potential of the opening filmed sequences was not carried through into the rest of the performance. Words used to describe the performance in these reviews such as “honest,” “dignified,” “generous” and “worthy” seem to damn it with faint praise and one wonders whether such terms would have been used to describe theatre work by male artists. It should be remembered, however, that theatre criticism was itself subject to censorship and the words that appeared on the page were

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<sup>19</sup> In the play, the dispute is broken up by the Prince who prohibits further fighting. This authoritarian response can be read in this context as the response of Portuguese authorities both to theatre and to student protest. In *Shakespeare's Body Language*, Miranda Fey Thomas teases out the history and class, national and gender implications of biting one's thumb and suggests that this scene is “almost a burlesque performance of masculinity, teetering between arrogance and timidity” (2020, 29).

unlikely to have been the words the critics wished to deploy. Carlos Porto's long review of the play is clear that the performance deserved attention and wider discussion. He argued that "this performance should be seen, seen again, applauded or booed, discussed" (1973, 98). However, he pointed to its contradiction between "historical" and "psychological" approaches to violence which, in his view, made the performance less successful as popular theatre.<sup>20</sup> While his critical advocacy of a particular form of class-based theatre is understandable in this particular political context, it also meant that the type of complexity TEL attempted to introduce into the discussion of violence by acknowledging a psychological, evolutionary dimension was dismissed as a confusing deviation from class politics. While Porto correctly identified the tendency to universalize and essentialize violence in this particular instance, his rejection of any psychological dimension to violence, including the ways in which such violence might be directed by men against women, illustrates how the downplaying of any personal or gendered understandings of political theatre during this period dismissed a wide array of lived experiences. Porto also suggested that the Brechtian techniques explored in the performance only revealed the actors and actresses' lack of familiarity and expertise with these techniques. What he found most positive, was the performance's sense of an ensemble and its direct appeal to the audience to debate the issues in the play.

Joaquim Benite echoed Porto's comments in his *Diário de Lisboa* review (1969, 7). He stressed the importance of using Piscator's narrative theatre to directly address the audience in a pedagogical way and argued that it was better for a performance potentially to reach a popular audience than to be aesthetically pleasing. He wondered, however, whether the language of the performance was too complex for a popular audience and, correctly in my view, identified the primary audience for the performance as young, countercultural students radicalized by the regime for whom the idea of the young lovers standing against the society created by their parents resonated.<sup>21</sup> Maria Helena Dá Mesquita (1969, unpaginated)

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<sup>20</sup> Porto asserts that "like all stories of absolute love, *Romeo and Juliet* is a story with revolutionary content as it questions irredeemably [...] established values" (1973, 100).

<sup>21</sup> Intriguingly, one of the words Benite felt a popular audience would not understand was "empathy."

felt that the performance simplified Shakespeare but that it was important to bring Shakespeare to popular audiences. She mentions the influence of Béjart's *Romeo and Juliet* and the hippie movement on contemporary understandings of the play. Urbano Tavares Rodrigues (1969, unpaginated) called the performance "almost an illustrated lecture" suggesting a rather static, excessively didactic performance. Tavares Rodrigues rejected the idea that this was popular theatre, although he did admit that it had attracted an audience that was "in the know," of radicalized students. He also reminded audiences of the role of Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* in recasting the play for new audiences. None of these critics commented on the links between class, gender and sexuality in the performances.

### Publication

The text of *Anatomy* was published in 1973, four years after the performances. In the year before the 1974 Revolution, practitioners were more explicit in their opposition to the regime and a degree of relaxation in censorship enabled the company to publish an unexpurgated version of their original script. Looking back on the 1969 performances in the introduction to the publication, Martins recalled a "genuine, although in certain respects, failed experience." Her assessment took into account criticism of the stage and television performances of the play as well as audience reaction in the theatre. Martins did not understand the play's failure in aesthetic terms or in terms of audience numbers. For her, its failure resulted from having written what could be said at the time under censorship rather than what she wanted to say. In other words, the sense of failure was directly linked to the political conditions in which the play was performed and the limitations it imposed. Self-censorship among theatre practitioners, where a notion of what the censors would allow them to say encouraged practitioners to censor their own work in advance rather than be censored later by the regime, was an important element of Portuguese theatrical practice and suited a regime that preferred such indirect strategies of control to direct censorship. As dos Santos has argued, in such instances "the individual acts in anticipation in the face of the potential action of the censor, incorporating it as a latent threat and imposing the prohibition themselves" (2004, 247). As the quotation suggests, however, acting

“in anticipation” of the censors sometimes meant that theatre practitioners censored their own work more extensively than the censors themselves. Such practices should be understood within the contexts in which practitioners were operating at the time, yet this indirection and caution, for Martins, also meant that audiences were unclear about the message the company intended to convey. She explicitly contrasts such caution on the part of the company with the later experience of their *Lisboa 72* (1972) where their criticism of the regime was more explicit, but which led for this reason to the censors banning the performances. Such invidious “choices” for practitioners, where they either censored their own work and staged a truncated version of a play or ran the risk of the censors banning their performances, which could mean extreme economic hardship and a difficulty in sustaining future theatre work, rendered the Portuguese experience of censorship an intensely psychological as well as economic and political phenomenon.

Prompted by the 2008 financial crisis, recent critical theory has explored the more positive connotations of failure. Jack Halberstam, for instance, in *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011) notes that notions of success are invariably built on heteronormative and capitalist premises and that “if the boom and bust years of the late twentieth century and the early twenty-first have taught us anything, we should at least have a healthy critique of static models of success and failure” (2011, 2). Notions of failure need, therefore, to be contextualized and historicized in particular theatrical and political circumstances. Martins’ caution and self-censorship in *Anatomy* and the tension between deconstructing and reaffirming the cultural value of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* can certainly be seen as imposed by the circumstances of the dictatorship and censorship. Indeed, looking back on the performances from the perspective of the present enables an assessment of some of the successes of the performances. While they did not attract a wider popular audience, they did appeal to the highly politicized students and young people who filled the theatre. They drew connections between the personal and the political, between questions of class, gender and sexuality and between theatre and cinema. While they did not entirely fit the formula for popular theatre advocated by opponents of the regime, they did suggest that there might be other ways of conceiving a political theatre that included the experiences, voices and bodies of women.

## Conclusion

In a chapter that focuses on performances of *Romeo and Juliet* under the Spanish dictatorship, Elena Bandín concludes that

an in-depth analysis of some of these productions reveals that “Shakespeare” is not a stable entity and that *Romeo and Juliet* is but a web of collusions, adaptations, appropriations that configure the entity we call “Shakespeare” and that reflect the political, social and cultural forces at work at the time. (2017, 205)

Unlike the plethora of elite and popular adaptations that Bandín analyses, Portuguese engagements with the play, to my knowledge, appear restricted to a mainstream national theatre production and this oppositional independent production. Yet the notion of “Shakespeare” as an unstable and paradoxical signifier and the connection between engagements with the play and political, social and cultural forces apply both to the Spanish and the Portuguese context. Through the recovery of an acknowledged theatrical failure by reading it within the different contexts in which it was produced and received, TEL’s *Anatomy of a Love Story* has been reconceived here as a learning experience in epic and narrative theatre techniques. The immediate context of censorship rendered it a failure both in terms of what the regime desired from theatre and what oppositional critics expected from it. Looking back on the performance and its reviews from a contemporary perspective, slightly different assessments of the performance might be advanced. Rather than reading and judging the performance solely in terms of a political theatre for popular audiences, it might be viewed instead as a successful attempt to stage Brechtian theatre without Brecht and to train Portuguese performers in the narrative techniques of Piscator through historicization of the events of the play. The performance’s supposed failures—a lack of expertise in such techniques and a tendency to stage an excessively didactic political theatre—were by no means exclusive to TEL during this period.

Despite the consistent invocation of a popular theatre for popular audiences, the primary audience for the work of the company and other companies of the time were the educated students “sacrificed” by a dictatorial regime which forced young men to fight in a colonial war in which few believed and squashed the ambitions of young women who wished to pursue their education. These students were a

privileged audience for a play that reflected their desire to change an existing order which silenced their voices, cracked down violently on their protests and did not even conceive of the possibility of the free expression of sexuality. As such, it is important to look back on the Shakespeare produced during this period of the dictatorship and re-examine the contexts and critical premises that determined its success or failure. That the company themselves seem to have internalized the performance as a failure only illustrates how difficult it was to create oppositional theatre in this period, let alone reconceive such theatre in more intersectional terms to include women and non-normative sexualities.

One wonders what Portuguese post-revolutionary Shakespeares might have been if their more inclusive model of political theatre had gained a greater hold during this crucial period for the post-revolutionary theatre that followed was overwhelmingly male dominated. Moreover, the hybrid form of the play, where a staging of *Romeo and Juliet* was simultaneous with its critical interrogation is more experimental than the more programmatic political theatre of the period, while the different formats in which it appeared—from censored script to performance to televised performance and critical reviews not only expanded its potential audience, but also created an open-ended, dialogical and intermedial form of political theatre that directly included that audience in its interrogation of the play.

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*How to cite this article:*

Rayner, Francesca. "The story of what might have been: Interrogating Romeo and Juliet under the Portuguese dictatorship." *SEDERI* 31 (2021): 73-92.

<https://doi.org/10.34136/sederi.2021.4>

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*Submission:* 24/04/2021

*Acceptance:* 09/06/2021