Shakespeare’s Anti-Balcony Scene

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Appropriations of Shakespeare’s so-called “Balcony Scene” in *Romeo and Juliet* appear worldwide in novels, films, plays, social media and all kinds of popular outlets, ranging from the duets sung on the fire escape in the classic Broadway musical *West Side Story* to the fights in the martial-arts movie *Romeo Must Die*, the rock group Dire Straits’ 1981 power ballad “Romeo and Juliet”, in which a male singer “serenade[s]” his lover at her “window” with a “movie song” (Figure 1), or the Peabody-award-winning ice-dancing extravaganza *Romeo and Juliet on Ice*, starring the Olympic figure-skating medallist Dorothy Hamill.¹

Often such allusions are “attenuated”, to borrow Kathleen McLuskie’s term: attenuated references allude glancingly to a famous phrase, staging, or plot motif, and engage with

¹ *West Side Story*, directed by Jerome Robbins, Winter Garden Theatre, September 26, 1957; *Romeo Must Die*, directed by Andrzej Bartkowiak, Warner, 2000; “Romeo and Juliet”, written by Mark Knopfler, Vertigo Records, 1981; *Romeo and Juliet on Ice*, directed by Rob Iscove, CBS television, 1983. Thanks to Lucas Hatlen at the Peabody Collection, University of Georgia, for alerting me to the existence of *Romeo and Juliet on Ice*. 

Figure 1. Dire Straits, “Romeo and Juliet,” screen-shot from official music video, accessed April 17, 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W9MrPrCI
"Shakespeare" or the plays or poems themselves only to a very limited extent.² For example, the facetious, popular French high-school film Les Prof 2, or Serial Teachers 2 in English (2015), deploys the balcony scene from Romeo and Juliet as a synecdoche for both romance and England without ever uttering a word of Shakespeare’s text.³ Les Prof 2, the sequel to another equally lightweight comedy, both based on a popular French comic strip, Les Prof, transports a team of the so-called “worst teachers” and “worst students” in France to a Hogwarts-like academy in England as part of a scheme to tame the Queen of England’s shrewish granddaughter Vivienne. The teachers prove unsuccessful until Boulard, career student, romances Vivienne on a balcony. He chooses this locale because, he recalls vaguely, “those guys, you know, Romeo and Julien or somebody [sic]”, in an allusion to Shakespeare’s play joyfully recognized by the film’s viewers and excerpted on YouTube (Figure 2). Boulard’s mistake – calling the lovers “Roméo et Julien” – delightfully satirizes the heteronormative and patriarchal culture of the Montagues and Capulets by turning the love-story into an imaginary same-sex romance even as it alludes to the film’s own reworking of the star-crossed lovers motif and its rewriting equally of The Taming of the Shrew. Boulard is a charming loser and Vivienne is royalty; both are considered impossible students, but the intelligent Vivienne gains in wit and power throughout the film, unlike in Shakespeare’s play.

Figure 2. “Top 5”, “Les profs 2 blague Roméo et Julien”, screen-shot from user-excerpted video, accessed April 17, 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QbjMd0GCEck

The attenuated Shakespearean references in Les Prof 2 and other popular cultural texts communicate meaning only because audiences, storytellers, and lovers all over the world identify the scene in Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet instantly as an emblem of romantic love. The Two Gentlemen of Verona The Merchant of Venice, and Antony and


Cleopatra likewise include scenes in which lovers are separated by vertical distance on stage and engage in a kind of duet. This essay surveys Shakespeare's three romantic balcony scenes, identifies the key speech-acts and use of visual space that they share, and contrasts with them what I call an anti-balcony scene – the opening of Othello, in which Iago and Roderigo, below and without, roughly awaken Brabantio, upstairs and within, with the shouted news of Othello and Desdemona's elopement. I observe the power and translatability to world cinema of the opening movement of Othello and suggest we can likewise understand that scene and its ubiquity as an anti-romantic appropriation of the balcony scene in Romeo and Juliet, one that renders Othello and Desdemona's match instantly recognizable as a wooing gone awry. Finally, I speculate that the power of the romantic balcony-scene in Shakespeare stems from its folkloric origins, which eased its global translation into other cultures and modes.  

Above and Below, Within and Without

A 2014 discussion on the “Shaksper” electronic discussion list, and a subsequent article in the popular magazine The Atlantic, debated the extent to which we are justified in calling the archetypal scenario in Romeo and Juliet a “balcony” scene, given that Shakespeare nowhere uses the word “balcony” and Romeo and Juliet indicates from the dialogue that the heroine appears at a “window”. Yet balconies, called “galleries” or “terraces”, were present as architectural features in Italian and English buildings (OED gives “a gallery or balcony” as the earliest English sense for the word “terrace”, in 1515). Moreover, many instances in early modern drama present scenes where characters engage with each other along a vertical axis and where they emerge as if from within in order to speak to characters without. Stage-directions such as “aloft”, “above”, “on the walls”, “within”, “in the upper chamber” and so on indicate that the early modern public theatre is three-dimensional, allowing for action and dialogue not only up-stage and down-stage or stage-left and stage-right as in a picture-frame proscenium arch theatre but also vertically, as in a crowded city street. We are therefore justified in continuing to classify Juliet’s fictional “balcony” as a “balcony”, even if Shakespeare or his exact contemporaries might have called such a space in real-life a “gallery” or a “terrace” or a “hay-” or “bow-window” and the theatre where Romeo and Juliet was first performed did not include an actual “balcony”.

Alan Dessen and Leslie Thomson’s invaluable Dictionary of Stage Directions in English Drama, 1580-1642, documents that Shakespeare and others use the markers “above” and “aloft” to connote an upper playing space (probably above the tiring-house) in many situations, not merely in romantic contexts. Fumiyuki Narushima distinguishes between the idiosyncratic usage “aloft” (popularized by Shakespeare but rarely used by his contemporaries) and the more common term “above”. The former, “aloft”, when used in a

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6 On the underlying mythography of the parted lovers that antedates Shakespeare, see Balz Angler’s forthcoming essay, “On Gottfried Keller’s ‘A Village Romeo and Juliet’ and Shakespeare adaptation in general”, in Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation 11.2 (2018): “The words ‘Romeo and Juliet’ in the title of the tale do not refer to Shakespeare’s play, but to the myth we have come to name after it.”


play might connote not solely the upper stage but also gentlemen's galleries, the other galleries, and even "the gods", the author argues. Imagine deities descending from the heavens, Narushima suggests, especially in the smaller indoor theatres. "Above", he continues, connotes more narrowly what an earlier generation of scholars dubbed the upper stage and we are now more comfortable calling an upper performing space or a playing gallery above the tiring-house.

Narushima further breaks down the distinction between "above" and "aloft", suggesting that an upper playing area is usually evoked by the phrases "at the window" in tragedies or comedies, or "on the walls" in the histories. Leslie Thomson observes that the vertical distance between man and woman in such balcony scenes establishes the woman as heavenly, divine, celestial and so on, as the language then elaborates. In the cinema, Shakespeare's vertical plane can be enhanced or replaced with a movement from outside to "within", as we can see in several filmed versions of Romeo and Juliet. Renato Castellani's Giulietta e Romeo (1954) uses "architectural images of entrapment" — grilles, banisters, "enormous marble pillars" to separate the lovers; Franco Zeffirelli's Romeo and Juliet (1968) deploys extreme close-ups of bodies and body-parts (lips, hands, eyes) in order to move the viewer within the young lovers' personal erotic space; and Baz Luhrmann's William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet (1996) notably deepens the vertiginous distance between the lovers by having them literally "fall" in love, into a swimming pool. Mariko Ichikawa shows us that in this tendency film-makers are perhaps true to early modern stage practice, where "within" and "above" could be used interchangeably.

Like the serenade or serenata, the "evening music" under Sylvia's window in The Two Gentlemen of Verona iv.ii.17 that contrasts the aubade or dawn-song, the romantic balcony scenes coax that which is concealed indoors, outdoors, she who is within, without. They present a lover's desired intrusion into the hortus conclusus or walled garden, the zenana that keeps women indoors, at a distance, or veiled, in order to avoid or postpone or defer sexual expression.

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11 Cynthia Baron, "Acting Choices/Filmic Choices: Rethinking Montage and Performance", Journal of Film and Video, 59.2, 2007, p. 32-60, 35; see also Lindsey Scott, "Closed in a Dead Man's Tomb': Juliet, Space, and the Body in Franco Zeffirelli's and Baz Luhrmann's Films of Romeo and Juliet", Literature/Film Quarterly 36:2, 2008, p. 137-146, p. 138, which argues that the focus on Juliet's body emphasizes her role as actively desiring female subject.
Balcony scenes also establish such enclosed spaces as prisons from which lovers and friends require rescue. They allude not only to the folk tradition of the lover’s serenade beneath a window but also to the troubadour tradition and the legend of Blondel de Nesle and King Richard the Lionheart. The story identifies “Blondel de Nesle” with the thirteenth-century troubadour who wrote several songs (whom scholars now believe to have been either Jehan I or his son Jehan II of Nesle) with the legendary minstrel who discovered his master King Richard, secreted away by the Duke of Austria, by singing beneath the window of his cell and calling for the King’s response. The legend spread through the popular manuscript Récits d’un ménestrel de Reims [Tales of a minstrel from Rheims], usually dated around 1260. I give it here in a modern English translation by Robert Levine:

[Blondel] set about traveling through foreign countries for a year and a half, and could find no true report about the king... By chance he entered Austria and came directly to the castle in which the king was being held prisoner... One day, during Easter, while he was walking alone in the garden near the tower, Blondel looked around him, thinking that he might, by chance, see the prisoner. As he was doing this, the king looked through an archer’s slot, and saw Blondel. He thought about how to make him recognize him, and he remembered a song that they had made up together, which only the two of them knew.

He began to sing the opening words loudly and clearly, for he sang very well, and when Blondel heard him, he knew certainly that this was his lord. In his heart he felt greater joy than he had ever felt, and he left the garden, and went to his room, where he reclined, picked up his Vielle, and began to play, singing of his joy at having found his lord.15

Present-day scholars doubt both the legend of the rescue and the attribution of the famous troubadour verses to the character within the chronicle.16 Nonetheless, as Yvan G. Lepage recounts, the legend of the King’s capture and rescue “must have struck the imagination of his contemporaries and following generations to such an extent that, if the


account written by the Minstrel of Rheims some seventy years later transforms the facts, they are not, for all that, unrecognizable.” Moreover, the fact that the Poet Laureate John Skelton used a text called La chronique d’un ménestrel de Reims to teach the young Prince Henry (later Henry VIII) critical thinking and historical analysis further testifies to the persistence of this story that highlights a mutual recognition – from a distance, and through song or incantation – and a subsequent rescue.

**Questing, Hailing (Failing), and Surrender**

Shakespeare’s balcony scenes spatially and figuratively foreground the transcendent coming-together of lovers and the collapse of individual selfhood, of space and of time. In each of these cases, the lovers seek, hail, name (or fail to recognize, in tragic mode) each other, and the scene ends with the woman’s profession of absolute, sometimes abject, surrender. In the balcony scenes of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Antony and Cleopatra* this surrender takes the form of heteroerotic romantic love that Lawrence Stone long ago dubbed “companionate marriage”, while in the parodic or anti-romantic register companionate marriages are unmade (*Othello*). Sometimes this love can be fulfilled only posthumously, as in the case of *Antony and Cleopatra*, whose monument scene resembles Shakespeare’s best-known balcony scene in its movement up and down the vertical visual axis, as Alison Passe’s article in this issue observes.

This motif of discovering a lost or hidden beloved allows balcony scenes to function as anagnorisis or recognition-scenes. These moments of anagnorisis range from an instant of ambiguity or misrecognition – in *Romeo and Juliet* and in *The Merchant of Venice* – to the complete failure between the lovers on different stages to recognize each other (in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, which is an anti-balcony scene nested within a balcony scene). The balcony scene in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (IV.ii) includes the famous lyric, “Who is Silvia?”, an artificial or rhetorical instigation of the recognition-scene or, in this case, the disguised-identity plot. In both First and Second Folios the scene begins with a massed entry – “Enter Protheus, Thurio, Iulia, Host, Musitian, Silvia” – all characters listed

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37 “Les événements … ont dû frapper l’imagination des contemporains et des générations qui suivirent, si bien que le récit qu’en fit le Ménestral de Reims quelque soixante-dix années plus tard, s’il transforme certes les faits, ne les rend pas pour autant méconnaissables” (Yvan G. Lepage, “Blondeil de Nesle et Richard Coeur de Lion,” op. cit., p. 135). (My translation).


together at the beginning of the scene, but we can deduce Sylvia’s location through the dialogue’s repeated references to her “window” or “chamber-window” both in previous scenes where the plan is rehearsed by Proteus and revealed to Sylvia’s father (ii.i.34, iii.i.38, iii.i.82) and in this serenade-scene (iv.ii.17). Nicholas Rowe fixes the ambiguity and gives Silvia a clear entrance: “Enter Silvia above”.22

As we might expect, the language of this well-known song uplifts Sylvia as a creature who “excels each mortal thing / Upon the dull earth dwelling” (iv.ii.53-54). “[T]he heaven such grace did lend her” surmises line 43, playing on the theatrical heavens or height of the casement that might open from the third story of the theatre, the front of the heavens, rather than the upper-stage itself. Silvia continues to associate herself with the upper world as she refuses Proteus’s overtures by swearing on the moon, “this pale queen of night” (iv.ii.106) so that she herself is the goddess of chastity and the unreachable night sky.

In contrast, the faithless Proteus says he “creep[s]” upon the earth towards her (iv.ii.21), “Spaniel-like” (iv.ii.14; a favorite Shakespearean image for a lowly or abased creature). The poignant comments of Julia, physically in the same stage-space and plane as Proteus but emotionally distant, heighten the tragedy of misrecognition. Clothed in boys’ garb as Proteus’s page, she is “sadder than [she was] before”, notes the Host (iv.ii.56), and “cannot be merry” (iv.ii.30). Proteus gives voice to what ought to be his worst fear, the end of tragedy: “I grant, sweet love, that I did love a Lady, / But she is dead” (iv.ii.111-12). And Julia’s response takes us from the “dull earth” to the subterranean hell in which she now exists: “‘Twere false, if I should speak it; / For I am sure she is not buried” (iv.ii.113-14) In the idealized balcony scene, Julia ought to be exalted to the heavens, as is Sylvia, but instead she is below the ground.

The balcony scene from Romeo and Juliet ii.i hardly needs additional commentary, but notice how the lovers begin by identifying and interpellating each other from initial statements of non-identification: “[W]hat light from yonder window breaks?” (ii.i.2) and “What man art thou...bescrowned in night?” (ii.i.56) alongside its well-known elaborations upon hailing and naming (“Wherefore art thou Romeo? Deny thy...name” [ii.i.36-7]). In its celestial and lyrically transcendent imagery Juliet’s candle is the moon, she herself is the sun; her eyes are brighter than stars, the moon “tips with silver” even the fruit trees that are rooted in the earth (ii.i.112). When Juliet urges Romeo, “swear not by the moon” (ii.i.114), she seems to predict the tragic consequences of their love, especially when she contrasts it to her own love “boundless as the sea” (ii.i.138), of neither earth nor of sky. These large, expansive, unworldly metaphors express her release from the hortus enclosus or feminine region “within”. As James Black has noted, Romeo and Juliet itself relies upon the repetition of this visual motif in its staging of both balcony or window scenes and in the tomb scene.23 Juliet further elaborates her willingness to annihilate her selfhood and to join Romeo through spatial metaphors: “all my fortunes at thy foot I’ll lay, /And follow thee my Lord throughout the world” (ii.i.149-50). We may hear an echo or anticipation of the ending of The Taming of Shrew, where Katharina revives an obsolete wedding ritual in her willingness to “place [her] hands beneath [her] husband’s foot” (v.i.193).

22 The Two Gentlemen of Verona, First Folio, sig. C5r, p. 33, column 1.

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The balcony scene in *The Merchant of Venice*, II.v (in modernized editions, II.vi) supports Ichikawa’s premise that within and above are often interchangeable; the response to Lancelot’s “Ho, who’s within?” (II.vi.26) is in the first two Folios and the first quarto the stage-direction “lescza above”24 and Jessica’s first words express the need to confirm identity: “Who are you? Tell me for more certainty / Albeit I’ll swear that I do know your tongue” (II.vi.27-28) and generates what is on the page to the reader, if not to the audience, an eye-rhyme from her counterpart: “Lorenzo, and thy love” (II.vi.29). Less lyrical than its counterparts in *The Two Gentlemen or Romeo and Juliet*, the scene associates the woman with “Heaven” (II.vi.33) but the transcendent love we might expect appears in debased form: Jessica forgoes lyricism in favor of strictly economic rhetoric and actions, urging Lorenzo to “Catch this casket” (II.vi.34) and delaying her departure until she can “gild [her]self / With some more ducats” (II.vi.51-2). Juliet offers her fortune, too, but in a very different register.

**The Anti-Balcony Scene in Othello**

Balcony scenes evoke verticality, transcendence, liminality, and transgression, as the examples above indicate. The balcony scene can additionally function in both comic and tragic plots as the pivot, the volta, the point of no return, the point of escape. Contrast the opening of *Othello*, a scene that is most clearly an anti-balcony scene. The first quarto gives us “Brabantio at a window” and all the folios, “Brabatio [or Bra.] above”.25 The scene is both horrifying and comic: horrifying in Iago’s intemperate language and comic in Brabantio’s shocked recapitulation of the balcony-scene tropes such as recognition: “What are you?” (I.i.104), he says to Rodrigo, and “What profane wretch art thou?” (I.i.128) to Iago, who carefully does not identify himself. Instead of the language of exalted romantic love, we have the series of bestial sexual insults generated by Iago: “old black ram tupping your white ewe” (I.i.97-98), “your nephews neigh to you” (I.i.122), “your cousins for coursers”, (I.i.127), “the beast with two backs” (I.i.129), and so on. The high and low language of the vertical plane is replaced by references to inside and outside with Rodrigo’s insulting query, “Is all your family within?” (I.i.91) and Brabantio’s angered recognition, “I have charged thee not to haunt about my doors” (I.i.107). Brabantio makes his point more emphatically with “My house is not a grange” (I.i.118); a grange is a barn or unsecured farm building and, as Lisa Hopkins has observed, Iago brings the barnyard to the city, the wasteland into the civilized garden, the draughty grange to the city villa.26 And of course this anti-balcony scene includes the would-be lover Rodrigo serenading not his lady-love but her father, the *senex* or *pantaloon* who in comedy would successfully, perhaps uproariously, be dispatched or at least converted to the lovers’ cause.

An influential essay by Susan Snyder observes that the first half of *Othello*, and in particular the account of the lovers’ wooing, presents us with a “perfect comic structure in miniature”: the stock young lovers of New Comedy, separated by opposing forces including the *senex* or old man, succeed through trickery (elopement) and then anticipate

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26 Lisa Hopkins, “This is Venice: my house is not a grange: Othello’s Landscapes of the Mind”, *Upstart Crow* 20, 2000, p. 68-78.
a loving reunion or consummation in Cyprus. Snyder argues that the principles of comedy in Shakespeare “assume the value of engagement with a mate and with society at large, and the cooperation of forces beyond man... in achieving this mating and forestalling the consequences of human irrationality and malice, as well as plain bad luck.” Moreover, “Othello's story is deliberately presented as post-comic”: we have, we think, arrived at, or traveled beyond, the happy ending.

Snyder notes, however, the “seeds of tragedy” audible to playgoers through the “slightly disturbing” notes of danger in Othello’s account of his courtship, through Iago’s overt machinations and imagery of hell and monstrosity, and through the exaggeration of the qualities of difference between romantic partners that love must in comedy overcome. But love in the tragedies, Snyder lyrically writes, “explor[es] the contradiction” of such an “annihilation of the self”: the “destruction of self-sufficiency combined with continued isolation in the self”. Thus (I extrapolate) the “merry war” between Beatrice and Benedick in Much Ado About Nothing, the taming of Katharina in The Taming of the Shrew, or the re-education of Orlando by Rosalind/Ganymede in As You Like It become in Othello what Snyder describes as a “paradigmatic separation into black and white” in which the lovers’ “oppositions” become binary: old/young, militaristic/peaceful, male/female, experienced/naïve.

I suggest here that the early scenes of Othello evoke an additional convention of romantic Shakespearean staging – the Shakespearean balcony-scene. What makes the scene in Othello memorable and shocking is its intrusion of the exterior into the interior or protected world of the house or into the hortus enclosus or into the zenana, with hostile or aggressive intent, an anti-serenade or anti-romantic balcony scene. This kind of mock-serenade becomes the folk custom of the skimmington ride in England from the seventeenth century to the twentieth (or the European charivari). The charivari disrupts sleep, household, love and lovemaking and parodies romantic unions, as Iago does here and as Michael Bristol argues with regard to Othello (though not with regard to its balcony scene).

At the same time a strange romance emerges between the upper and lower stages in Othello: Rodrigo and Iago serenade Brabantio in favor of endogamy, marriage within the family or within the tribe, in a way that signals the exclusion of women from the traffic between men (except as the commodity that is trafficked). The Q Brothers’ 90-minute hip-hop opera Othello: The Remix uses the balcony or upper-stage to its utmost effectiveness in making this point. This adaptation removes Desdemona completely from the performance except as a haunting, melodic, recorded voice, and it uses the upper level as a platform for the DJ making the remix.

28 Snyder, "Othello", p. 127.
29 Snyder, "Othello", p. 128.
30 Snyder, "Othello", p. 128–129.
31 Snyder, "Othello", p. 140.
32 Snyder, "Othello", p. 136.
Public sexual shaming customs involving theatrical parody, such as the charivari, exist beyond Europe, so that the charivari elements of this anti-balcony scene make it instantly recognizable as part of Othello. So familiar are such customs that the anti-romantic use of an upper playing space for parody or for spectacular punishment is familiar, too. This anti-balcony scene or mock-serenade therefore becomes itself a trope of Othello as much as the transcendent serenade or balcony scene connotes Romeo and Juliet. Othello's afterlife in film provides several examples. Orson Welles's Othello famously begins with a sequence of the titular hero's funeral procession and with the encaged Iago being hoisted overhead (2.30-3.45). In ReadySetGo Theatre's web-series, the balcony scene is re-set to a New York fire escape. In Jayaraj's award-winning Malayalam art-house film Kaliyattam, even when we watch the scene without comprehending the language, the balcony sequence is instantly comprehensible.

The ubiquity and transferability of both the balcony scene in Romeo and Juliet and the anti-balcony scene in Othello in world cinema stem, I believe, from the widespread prevalence of both these visual motifs in the art and literature of nearly every continent: it corresponds most closely to Arne-Thompson-Thompson folktale classification 310, Rapunzel, or the maiden imprisoned in the tower. In its standard form, the maiden in the tower is often unnamed, and is imprisoned by an older woman, a witch or magical hag, who controls her; she may be rescued by her own agency or by a young man who destroys her female captor. I have space here only for a few examples from world folklore to add to Romeo and Juliet. In Greek myth, the maiden Danaë, secreted away by her father in a high tower, is visited by Jupiter in a shower of gold. The Persian princess, Rudabah, mother of the hero Rustom, lets down her hair as a ladder from her high window to let in her lover Kal (Figure 3); in the Sanskrit tale of Nala and Damayanthi, a golden swan sings Nala's praises and his name at princess Damayanthi's window (in some versions; in others, the swan enters an enclosed garden where the princess is playing with her friends); in a Kashmiri Buddhist tale the courtesan Vasavadatta falls irrevocably in love with the celibate monk Upagupta, glimpsed from her balcony; in the Mexican legend of the “alley

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40 For the tradition in art, see B. N. Goswamy, Nala and Damayanti, Niyogi Books/National Museum of Delhi, 2015.
41 There are many variants of the legend, some of which remove the vertical or vertiginous distance between the courtesan and the monk but that retain the motifs of sudden recognition, hailing and naming, and the woman's willed self-annihilation for love. In Rabindranath Tagore’s nineteenth-century poem about this episode, the courtesan stumbles over the sleeping monk in the marketplace. Common to all versions, too, is the reversal of the marketer and the marketed: the courtesan finds that her erotic wares are valueless within Upagupta’s spiritual economy. See John S. Strong, The Legend and Cult of Upagupta, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1992.
of the kiss”, the lovers Ana and Carlos embrace across an alley so narrow that they can lean out of upstairs windows to kiss across the street, and so on.42

In the balcony scene variant, I would argue, even – perhaps especially – in highly controlled, patriarchal, erotic environments, artists represent the following moments: Inquiry – who are you within/without, above/below? Recognition – I know you, I have met you before, I will never forget/ have never forgot you; Hailing and naming – you and only you, can be my love; Self-annihilation – all my fortunes I’ll lay at your feet (even if my love will ultimately kill me). These lovers are named: they are called out or hailed as individuals, not placeholders; and it is the woman who acts upon her desire, against the older men who would control her. For such lovers, marriage is not simply the assurance of the smooth transfer of property but a matter of life and death, something brought out amazingly well by the vertiginous sets of Éric Ruf’s production at the Comédie Française in 2015 that captured for present-day audiences the dizzying danger and fear of love under paternalistic dictatorship.43 Shakespeare’s paradigmatic balcony scenes then attempt to allow female characters to escape from the traffic in women, even if only temporarily, just as the language of these scenes allows women to escape the walled garden for the dangerous, infinite space of the stars.

42 The legend of the “alley of the kiss” (“callejón del Beso”) appears in many popular guidebooks to Guanajuato, such as the Eyewitness Travel Guide Mexico (London, Dorling Kindersley, 2017, p. 206), or the Michelin guide Mexico, Guatemala, and Belize (New York, Michelin North America, 2007, p. 227).