



# “Romeo and Juliet”

ON THE STAGE.

With Portraits of  
Mrs. POTTER as “Juliet”  
and  
Mr. KYRLE BELLEW as “Romeo”  
by H. W. Barnett.  
 (“FALK” STUDIOS.)

*By* Austin Brereton.

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## P R E F A C E.

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*The interest aroused in this city by the appearance, on the 25th inst., at the Theatre Royal, of Mrs. Potter as Juliet and Mr. Kyrle Bellew as Romeo, has induced me to issue this record of the stage-history of Shakespeare's powerful and pathetic tragedy. I have traced the notable performances of the play from the period of the Restoration down to our own time. It has been my endeavour to give, where possible, an idea of the manner in which the characters of Romeo and Juliet have been acted by the principal impersonators of these parts on the English stage. It is my hope that the little book will prove of value to the Shakesperean student as well as a pleasant souvenir of the acting of the artists mentioned. The portraits of Mrs. Potter and Mr. Bellew in character have been specially taken and printed for this publication by Mr. H. Walter Barnett, "Falk" studios. This is the first attempt which has been made to write a critical record of "Romeo and Juliet" on the stage.*

A. B.

Sydney, October 29, 1890.



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## “Romeo and Juliet” on the Stage.

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THE history of the English stage contains few plays which possess so interesting a record as that of “Romeo and Juliet.” In the measure of its success on the theatrical boards, this tragedy ranks next to “Hamlet,” the most frequently acted and the most popular of all the pieces in the range of the Shakesperean drama, and, as a consequence, of all acted works. As every player of tragic pretensions essays the character of the Prince of Denmark at some time or other in his career, so every actress who aspires to the serious walks of the drama is ill-contented until she has appeared as the lovely Juliet. If there were no other cause to recommend them, “Hamlet” and “Romeo and Juliet” would, therefore, never be abolished from the stage. But both pieces are so fine that they are invariably welcome, apart from any great attraction in the matter of acting. The history of “Hamlet” recalls a long line of illustrious players, while that of the earlier-written tragedy teems with famous actresses who have represented Juliet. It also brings to mind more than one noted Romeo and two brilliant Mercutios. The first authentic mention of “Romeo and Juliet” on the stage occurs in 1662. On March 1st of that year it was acted at Lincoln’s Inn Fields.

The Romeo was Joseph Harris, a versatile actor who played this part, Sir Andrew Aguecheek in "Twelfth Night," Cardinal Wolsey in "Henry VIII.," and Henry V., equally well. The Mercutio was Thomas Betterton (1635-1710), a great actor, and one of the earliest impersonators of Hamlet. He was also famous as Othello, Hotspur, Brutus, and Macbeth. The Juliet was pretty Mistress Saunderson, whose name is doubly interesting, inasmuch as she was the first female representative of Juliet. Soon after her appearance as Juliet she was married to the Mercutio of the occasion, and for thirty years afterwards she impersonated the chief Shakesperean heroines. Mrs. Betterton was a good woman, as well as an excellent actress. She was some time instructress of elocution at Court, and on the death of her husband, Queen Anne settled upon her a pension of five hundred pounds a year in testimony of her worth. It should be noted that the tragedy was played in its proper form in 1662, but it was shortly afterwards altered by one James Howard, who preserved the lovers alive. The tragedy was subsequently performed, on alternate days, in its original state and with its "happy ending." The cast mentioned contains a character not in Shakespeare, "Count Paris' wife," but who she was, or what relation she had to the play, is not known. The Restoration "Romeo and Juliet" was followed, in 1678, by a tragedy called "Caius Marius," about one-half of which was taken by Thomas Otway from Shakespeare's immortal tragedy. The scene, in this strange patchwork, is transferred from Verona to Rome. The hero is re-christened Marius, junior; Juliet is turned into Lavinia, the daughter of a Roman Senator; while Sulpitius speaks

Mercutio's "Queen Mab" speech. The potion scene from "Romeo and Juliet" is retained, and in this, the great Mrs. Barry, as Lavinia, made a sensation. Betterton played the title-rôle. This mutilation was partially done away with on September 11th, 1744, when, during a brief and unlicensed tenancy of the Haymarket Theatre, "Romeo and Juliet" was presented by Theophilus Cibber, the son of Colley Cibber, sometime Poet-Laureate, and the author of the first critical book on the English stage. Young Cibber played Romeo, his sister, Jenny, being the Juliet. To Theophilus Cibber belongs the credit of having restored "Romeo and Juliet" to the stage, but his version contained much of Otway's work as well as speeches from "The Two Gentlemen of Verona," and other plays by Shakespeare.

The year 1748 brings us to an important period in the stage history of "Romeo and Juliet." In that year, the tragedy, as altered by David Garrick, was given at Drury Lane Theatre, with Spranger Barry, most celebrated of old-time stage-lovers, as Romeo. His success was so great that the play was then acted for nineteen times in succession—a long run in those days. Barry's success led to his secession from Drury Lane. Going over to Covent Garden, he was announced to appear there, as Romeo, on September 28th, 1750. On the same date, David Garrick played Romeo at Drury Lane, the respective Juliets being Mrs. Cibber and the ill-fated George Ann Bellamy. Rich, the manager of Covent Garden, introduced a lugubrious funeral procession and a dismal dirge. On the opening night, "silver-voiced" Spranger Barry delivered a prologue, in which he attacked David Garrick, insinuating

that he was driven from Drury Lane by Garrick's arrogance and selfishness. The Drury Lane manager replied to this in a lively epilogue, saucily delivered by Kitty Clive. The tragedy ran for twelve nights at Covent Garden; Garrick, out of bravado, continuing it for one night longer. Barry was the handsome, tender, musical-voiced lover, the critics lauding him for his harmony of feature, his melting eyes, and the unequalled plaintiveness of his voice. The balcony scene, the farewell scene, and the first portion of the tomb scene, were his most effective parts. Garrick's great hits were in the scenes with the Friar and the Apothecary. It was said of Barry that he was an Arcadian lover, of Garrick that he was a fashionable one. During this season, Garrick acted Romeo but nineteen times, while Barry played it for twenty-three nights. Miss Bellamy, the Drury Lane Juliet, was only nineteen years of age and in the perfection of girlhood. Rapturous descriptions are given of her soft blue eyes and of her ravishing beauty. In the softer scenes, she was an ideal Juliet. On the other hand, Mrs. Cibber, then considered the first tragic actress of her time, was nearly forty years old when she played Juliet. Nevertheless, her figure was so symmetrical that it was as impossible to view it and not to think her young, as it was to look in her face and not think her handsome. Her voice was plaintive and musical beyond compare, but powerful withal, and she could express, with equal ease, pity, rage, complaisance, or disdain. Garrick's version of "Romeo and Juliet" is deserving of more than passing reference, since it held the stage until comparatively a few years ago. All reference to Romeo's passion for Rosaline was omitted from it, and it was disfigured by a number of

*"there shall no figure at such rate be set,  
As that of true and faithful Juliet."*

ROMEO AND JULIET—ACT V., SC. 3



H. WALTER BARNETT.

"PAIK" Studios, Sydney.

MRS. POTTER AS "JULIET."



indifferent lines taken partly from Otway, partly from Congreve's play, "The Mourning Bride." Garrick's chief alteration, however, was in the last act, where he made Juliet awaken before Romeo's death. This alteration is so curious, allusion to it is so often made, and its language is so good a sample of the rubbish which our forefathers endured, that I give it here in full :

*Rom.* Soft—she breathes and stirs ! [JULIET wakes.

*Jul.* Where am I ?

*Rom.* She speaks, she lives ! and we shall still be bless'd !  
My kind propitious stars o'erpay me now,  
For all my sorrows past—Rise, rise, my Juliet,  
And from this cave of death, this house of horror,  
Quick let me snatch thee to thy Romeo's arms ;  
There breathe a vital spirit in thy lips,  
And call thee back to life and love

[Takes her hand.

*Jul.* Bless me ! how cold it is ! who's there ?

*Rom.* Thy husband ;  
'Tis thy Romeo, Juliet ; rais'd from despair  
To joys unutterable ! Quit, quit this place,  
And let us fly together——

[Brings her from the Tomb.

*Jul.* Why do you force me so ?—I'll ne'er consent—  
My strength may fail me, but my will's unmov'd, —  
I'll not wed Paris,—Romeo is my husband——

*Rom.* Romeo is thy husband ; I am that Romeo,  
Nor all the opposing pow'rs of earth or man,  
Shall break our bonds, or tear thee from my heart.

*Jul.* I know that voice—its magic sweetness wakes  
My tranced soul— I now remember well  
Each circumstance — Oh, my lord ! my husband !—

[Going to embrace him

Dost thou avoid me, Romeo? let me touch  
 Thy hand, and touch the cordial of thy lips—  
 You fright me—speak—oh, let me hear some voice  
 Besides my own in this drear vault of death,  
 Or I shall faint—support me—

*Rom.* Oh, I cannot ;  
 I have no strength, but want thy feeble aid.  
 Cruel poison !

*Jul.* Poison ! what means my lord? thy trembling voice !  
 Pale lips ! and swimming eyes ! death's in thy face !

*Rom.* It is indeed—I struggle with him now—  
 The transports, that I felt to hear thee speak,  
 And see thy opening eyes, stopp'd for a moment  
 His impetuous course, and all my mind  
 Was happiness and thee ; but now the poison  
 Rushes through my veins—I have not time to tell—  
 Fate brought me to this place—to take a last,  
 Last farewell of my love, and with thee die.

*Jul.* Die ! was the Friar false ?

*Rom.* I know not that—  
 I thought thee dead : distracted at the sight,  
 (Fatal speed) drank poison, kissed thy cold lips,  
 And found within thy arms a precious grave—  
 But in that moment—Oh !—

*Jul.* And did I wake for this !

*Rom.* My powers are blasted ;  
 'Twixt death and love I'm torn—I am distracted !  
 But death is strongest—And must I leave thee, Juliet !  
 Oh, cruel curst fate ! in sight of Heav'n—

*Jul.* Thou rav'st—lean on my breast.

*Rom.* Fathers have flinty hearts, no tears can melt them :  
 Nature pleads in vain—Children must be wretched—

*Jul.* Oh, my breaking heart !—

*Rom.* She is my wife — our hearts are twin'd together—  
 Capulet, forbear—Paris, loose your hold—  
 Pull not our heart-strings thus—they crack, they break—  
 Oh, Juliet ! Juliet ! [Dies.

*Enter* FRIAR LAWRENCE, with Lanthorn, Crow, and Spade.

*Fri.* St Francis be my speed : how oft to-night.  
 Have my old feet stumbled at graves ! who's there  
 Alack ! alack ! what blood is this, which stains  
 The stony entrance of this sepulchre ?

*Jul.* Who's there ?

*Fri.* Ah, Juliet awake, and Romeo dead ?  
 And Paris too !—Oh, what unkind hour  
 Is guilty of this lamentable chance !

*Jul.* Here he is still, and I will hold him fast,  
 They shall not tear him from me—

*Fri.* Patience, lady—

*Jul.* Who is that ? O, thou cursed Friar ! patience !  
 Talk'st thou of patience to a wretch like me !

*Fri.* O, fatal error ! rise, thou fair distress'd,  
 And fly this scene of death !

*Jul.* Come thou not near me,  
 Or this dagger shall quit my Romeo's death !

[Draws a Dagger.

The few Shakespearean lines retained at the conclusion of this scene will be readily recognised. What Garrick's object was in making Juliet awake ere her Romeo died is a mystery which I cannot solve. The action of the piece is not improved by it, and Garrick's language does not justify the alteration. What a wide difference is there between the lines given to the waking Juliet in the respective versions ! The text says :—

“O comfortable friar ! where is my lord ?  
 I do remember well where I should be,  
 And there I am:—Where is my Romco ?”

Juliet's thorough awakening after her deep sleep is instantaneous. Her thoughts immediately fly to her lover and to the task which she has undertaken so that she may be united to him. The depth of her love, and the fearlessness of her nature, are excellently expressed in these few words. How tawdry beside them stands Garrick's :

" Bless me! how cold it is! who's there?"

Yet this kind of stuff was endured for many years on the stage. The Garrick ending to "Romeo and Juliet" is a fair sample of the disfigurement to which Shakespeare was subjected in the last century. The Garrick version made Juliet eighteen years of age.

After the Garrick and Barry seasons of "Romeo and Juliet," the tragedy, although occasionally acted as a stock-piece, was not played by any one of great distinction until 1789, when Mrs. Siddons astonished her admirers by playing Juliet for her benefit. This celebrated actress was then in her thirty-fourth year. It seems that she only played the part once, from which it may be gathered that her Juliet was not a gigantic success. It is not easy to imagine this actress, whose style was cold and formal, playing the passionate Italian girl. Lord Byron was of opinion that, of all the actors he had seen, George Frederick Cooke was the most natural; John Philip Kemble (Mrs. Siddons' brother) the most supernatural; and Edmund Kean the medium between the two. "But Mrs. Siddons was worth them all put together." It must, however, be remembered that Mrs. Siddons excelled in the more stately characters such as Volumnia, Hermione, and Lady Macbeth. Mrs. Siddons had a son, Henry, who became an actor, although he is described

as being deficient for the calling in his voice form and face. But Henry Siddons married an actress of genius, Miss Murray, whose name must be included in the list of famous Juliets. The third and greatest connection between "Romeo and Juliet" and the Kembles, lies in Charles Kemble (1775-1854), whose Mercutio was a notable performance.

Edmund Kean, immeasurably great as Shylock, Richard the Third, and Coriolanus, failed as Romeo. An actor of his undoubted genius could not be bad in any part he undertook. If his performance was wanting as a whole, it was sure to possess some flash of inspiration which in great measure made amends for its faults. A general deficiency was redeemed by some collected and overpowering display of energy or pathos, which electrified at the moment, and left a lasting impression on the mind afterwards. Such, for instance, were the murder scene in "Macbeth," the third act of his "Othello," the interview with Ophelia in "Hamlet," and the scene with Friar Lawrence and the death scene, in "Romeo and Juliet." It may be instructive to show wherein Kean failed as Romeo, in which character he was seen at Drury Lane in December, 1814, by reprinting a portion of Hazlitt's criticism on the performance: "Of the characters that Mr. Kean has played, Hamlet and Romeo are the most like one another, at least in adventitious circumstances; those to which Mr. Kean's powers are least adapted, and in which he has failed most in general truth of conception and continued interest. There is in both characters the same strong tincture of youthful enthusiasm, of tender melancholy, of romantic thought and sentiment; but we confess we did not see these qualities in Mr. Kean's performance

of either. His Romeo had nothing of the lover in it. We never saw any-thing less ardent or less voluptuous. In the balcony-scene in particular, he was cold, tame, and unimpressive. It was said of Garrick and Barry in this scene, that the one acted it as if he would jump up to the lady, and the other as if he would make the lady jump down to him. Mr. Kean produced neither of these effects. He stood like a statue of lead. Even Mr. Conway might feel taller on the occasion, and Mr. Coates wonder at the taste of the public. The only time in this scene where he attempted to give any thing like an effect, was when he smiled on over-hearing Juliet's confession of her passion. But the smile was less like that of a fortunate lover who unexpectedly hears his happiness confirmed, than of a discarded lover, who hears of the dissapointment of a rival. The whole of this part not only wanted 'the silver sound of lovers' tongues by night' to recommend it, but warmth, tenderness—every thing which it should have possessed. Mr. Kean was like a man waiting to receive a message from his mistress through her confidante, not like one who was pouring out his rapturous vows to the idol of his soul. There was neither glowing animation nor melting softness in his manner; his cheek was not flushed, no sigh breathed involuntary from his overcharged bosom; all was forced and lifeless. His acting sometimes reminded us of the scene with Lady Anne, and we cannot say a worse thing of it, considering the difference of the two characters. Mr. Kean's imagination appears not to have the principles of joy, or hope, or love in it. He seems chiefly sensible to pain, or to the passions that spring from it, and to the terrible energies of mind or body, which are necessary to

grapple with, or to avert it. Even over the world of passion he holds but a divided sway: he either does not feel, or seldom expresses, deep, sustained, internal sentiment—there is no repose in his mind: no feeling seems to take full possession of it, that is not linked to action, and that does not goad him on to the phrenzy of despair. Or if he ever conveys the sublimer pathos of thought and feeling, it is after the storm of passion, to which he has been worked up, has subsided. The tide of feeling then at times rolls deep, majestic, and awful, like the surging sea after a tempest, now lifted to Heaven, now laying bare the bosom of the deep. Thus, after the violence and anguish of the scene with Iago, in the third act of 'Othello,' his voice, in the farewell apostrophe to Content, took the deep intonation of the pealing organ, and heaved from the heart sounds that came on the ear like the funeral dirge of years of promised happiness. So in the midst of the extravagant and irresistible expression of Romeo's grief at being banished from the object of his love, his voice suddenly stops, and falters, and is choked with sobs of tenderness, when he comes to Juliet's name. Those persons must be made of sterner stuff than ourselves, who are proof against Mr. Kean's acting, both in this scene and in his dying convulsions at the close of the play. But in the fine soliloquy beginning, 'What said my man, when my betossed soul, &c.'—and at the tomb afterwards—'Here will I set up my everlasting rest, and shake the yoke of inauspicious stars from this world-wearied flesh'—in these, where the sentiment is subdued, and profound, and the passion is lost in calm, fixed despair, Mr. Kean's acting was comparatively ineffectual.

There was nothing in his manner of delivering this last exquisitely beautiful speech, which echoed to the still sad music of humanity, which recalled past hopes, or reposed on the dim shadowings of futurity.

“ Mr. Kean affects the audience from the force of passion instead of sentiment, or sinks into pathos from the violence of action, but seldom rises into it from the power of thought and feeling. In this respect, he presents almost a direct contrast to Miss O'Neill. Her energy always arises out of her sensibility. Distress takes possession of, and overcomes her faculties; she triumphs in her weakness, and vanquishes by yielding. Mr. Kean is greatest in the conflict of passion, and resistance to his fate; in the opposition of his will, in the keen excitement of his understanding. His Romeo is, in the best scenes, very superior to Miss O'Neill's Juliet; but it is with some difficulty, and after some reflection, that we should say that the finest parts of his acting are superior to the finest parts of hers—to her parting with Jaffier, in *Belvidera*—to her terror and her joy in meeting with Biron, in *Isabella*—to the death-scene in the same character, and to the scene in the prison with her husband, as Mrs. Beverley.”

The most famous Juliet of the early part of this century was Miss O'Neill, who, born in 1791, in Ireland, was the daughter of a strolling player. She made her debüt in Dublin, at the Theatre Royal, Crow-street, in 1811, playing the Widow Cheerly in Andrew Cherry's comedy, “*The Soldier's Daughter*.” She subsequently acted *Volumnia*, *Constance*, *Lady Teazle*, and *Juliet* there. While playing in Dublin, she had the good fortune to meet John Philip Kemble, one of the famous

Hamlets of the stage, who made her the offer of a liberal engagement of three years at Covent Garden Theatre. Miss O'Neill closed with the offer, and in the year 1814, the year of Kean's failure as Romeo, she made her first appearance on the London stage in the character of Juliet. Her illustrious predecessor, Sarah Siddons, had retired from the stage, but not without leaving many warm admirers of her acting, as is testified by Byron, who never saw Miss O'Neill, "having made and kept a determination to see nothing which should disturb or divide my recollection of Siddons." The poor actress was unheralded, and the manager was by no means sanguine of her success. The audience, however, quickly detected the merits of the new Juliet. The enthusiasm, easily aroused at the outset, culminated in the great scene of the fourth act—the potion scene—which, according to a newspaper account of the day, elicited "six distinct peals of applause," and a rapturous ovation at the fall of the curtain. So signal was her success that the immense theatre of Covent Garden was packed night after night whenever she played Juliet. Her interpretation drew much praise from the critics. Even Hazlitt, Siddons worshipper though he was, was forced to admit that there was much merit in her rendering of the character:—

"Miss O'Neill, more than any late actress, reminded us in certain passages, and in a faint degree, of Mrs. Siddons. This young lady, who will probably become a favorite with the public, is rather tall; and though not *of the first order of fine forms*, her figure is of that respectable kind, which will not interfere with the characters she represents. Her deportment is not particularly graceful: there is a heaviness

and want of firmness about it. Her features are regular, and the upper part of her face is finely expressive of terror or sorrow. It has that mixture of beauty and passion which we admire so much in some of the antique statues. The lower part of her face is not equally good. From a want of fullness or flexibility about the mouth, her laugh is not at any time pleasing, and, where it is a laugh of terror, is distorted and painful. Her voice, without being musical, is distinct, powerful, and capable of every necessary exertion. Her action is impressive and simple. She looks the part she has to perform, and fills up the pauses in the words by the varied expression of her countenance or gestures, without anything artificial, pointed, or far-fetched.

"In the silent expression of feeling, we have seldom witnessed any thing finer than her acting, where she is told of Romeo's death, her listening to the Friar's story of the poison, and her change of manner towards her nurse, when she advises her to marry Paris. Her delivery of the speeches in the scenes where she laments Romeo's banishment, and anticipates her waking in the tomb, marked the fine play and undulation of natural sensibility, rising and falling with the gusts of passion, and at last worked up into an agony of despair, in which imagination approaches the brink of frenzy. Her actually screaming at the imaginery sight of Tybalt's ghost, appeared to us the only instance of extravagance or caricature. Not only is there a distinction to be kept up between physical and intellectual horror (for the latter becomes more general, internal, and absorbed, in proportion as it becomes more intense), but the scream, in the present instance, startled the audience, as it preceded the speech which explained its meaning.

Perhaps the emphasis given to the exclamation, 'And Romeo banished!' and to the description of Tybalt, 'festering in his shroud,' was too much in that epigrammatic, pointed style, which we think inconsistent with the severe and simple dignity of tragedy.

"In the last scene, at the tomb with Romeo, which, however, is not from Shakespeare, though it tells admirably on the stage, she did not produce the effect we expected. Miss O'Neill seemed least successful in the former part of the character, in the garden scene, &c. The expression of tenderness bordered on hoydening and affectation. The character of Juliet is a pure effusion of nature, it is as serious, and as much in earnest, as it is frank and susceptible. It has all the exquisite voluptuousness of youthful innocence. There is not the slightest appearance of coquetry in it, no sentimental languor, no meretricious assumption of fondness to take her lover by surprise. She ought not to laugh when she says, 'I have forgot why I did call thee back,' as if conscious of the artifice, nor hang in a fondling posture over the balcony. Shakespeare has given a fine idea of the composure of the character, where he first describes her at the window, leaning her cheek upon her arm. The whole expression of her love should be like the breath of flowers."

Leigh Hunt said of her in this part that "Love, tenderness, and sorrow were never represented with more effectual truth." In the first scene in which Juliet appears, she made a fine distinction between her reverence for her mother and her fascinating condescension to her nurse, never forgetting in either instance that she was the child of a noble house. In

the balcony scene we are told that previous representatives had lacked engaging softness; they were too forward—too light in their manner, but Miss O'Neill was all fervour and delicacy. Her elaborate business in coaxing the nurse to deliver her message was new to the audiences of the time. She made a fine picture upon the line :

“ Shall I of force be married to the Count ? ”

by the determined air with which she drew the dagger, her eyes glaring with despair. Her potion scene was universally admired, although, as we have seen, Hazlitt took exception to her shriek, which she repeated when, in her excited fancy, she sees Tybalt's ghost seeking out her husband. In her first representation it was objected that her business was too long after drinking the potion; “but,” adds the critic, “the exquisite portrait was such a feast to the eye, as to make the memory forgetful of the time.” This business was afterwards modified. Her last scene was highly praised; the cold, vacant gaze with which she rose from the grave, the wildness of her joy when she found Romeo by her side, her agony of despair, and her wild embraces as he fell dead in her arms, were admiringly pointed out. Most of the critics considered that she was too light and playful in the garden scene; but in the latter part of the play she gave “full glorious vent to the tide of love and sorrow.” Her highest effort, perhaps, was in portraying a tremulous rapture bordering on frenzy, an inspiration of delight portentous of sudden and fearful disaster. She was worthy to express all the best sympathies and noblest triumphs of her sex. In the delineation of

*"stony limits cannot hold love out,  
And what love can do, that dares love attempt!"*

ROMEO AND JULIET—ACT. II., SC. 2.



H. WALTER BARNETT.

"FAIR" STUDIOS, Sydney.

MR. KYRLE BELLEW AS "ROMEO."



confiding love, of generous rapture, of feminine elevation of soul, she is said to have had no equal.

Miss O'Neill's fame was so rapid that she soon received seventy-five pounds a night in her starring engagements in the provinces. At the end of five years, she had amassed the sum of thirty thousand pounds. She then retired from the stage, married in private life, and, in 1872, died at the age of eighty-one years, having witnessed several Juliets of almost equal fame to her own. The next Juliet of note is Miss Fanny Kemble who, in October, 1829, made her first appearance at Covent Garden, as Juliet to the Mercutio of her father, Charles Kemble. Her Juliet seems to have been a success rather on account of her name and family than by reason of its own merit. Her acting possessed much passion and power. But she exaggerated and posed considerably. In the potion scene, for instance, she used to rush from the back of the stage right down to the footlights, as though she were driving the apparition of Tybalt before her, and then fall on one knee in an attitude which some poetic admirers designated her "Canova." She suffered from self-consciousness, and apparently never forgot that she was acting. So unequal were her performances of Juliet that her mother would sometimes take her in her arms crying "Beautiful, my dear," while at other times her judgment was "Your performance was not fit to be seen." This record would be incomplete without a reference to the Romeo of Charlotte Cushman. Miss Cushman played this part, for the first time in London, at the Haymarket Theatre, on December 30, 1845. She is the only actress who has achieved celebrity in the part. Her success in London was so

great that the tragedy was performed for eighty consecutive nights. Her sister, Susan, was the Juliet.

On June 24, 1863, a young actress from the Comédie Française, Mdlle. Stella Colas, appeared at the Princess's Theatre, and, notwithstanding the adverse criticisms of such profound thinkers as George Henry Lewes and Professor Henry Morley, achieved a great success as Juliet. Unfortunately, the performance of Mdlle. Colas was before my time, but a trustworthy critic has thus described her acting:—"A young, *petite* blonde, with a lovely face, charming in repose, yet capable of every tender and passionate expression, she created a highly favourable impression on her first entrance, and, in spite of her strongly marked accent, this feeling rose to enthusiasm in the balcony scene; her acting was French rather than Italian, it lacked the deep-souled intensity that has scarcely ever been given to the scene; some of the business was too coquettish, as when she peeped at Romeo through the cluster of roses gathered about the window; but she had soul and fire, *abandon* yet perfect purity, and that natural ardour which can alone infect an audience with a corresponding enthusiasm. In the more tragic parts, she was even finer. Full of power and variety was the scene where she was informed of Romeo's banishment, her burst of anguish at the first news, her flush of hatred against her cousin's slayer, with the instantaneous revulsion of feeling upon the Nurse's censure of her husband, carried the spectators by storm. Even finer was the scene with the Friar; the agony of excitement in which she rushed to him with her terrible news, her frenzied recapitulation of the horrors she would go through rather than marry Paris, pausing between each as though

searching in her mind for some image more dreadful than the last. The potion scene was splendidly played." Mr. Lewes, in his rare book, "Actors and Acting," admitted that Mdlle. Colas was pretty—"very pretty"—and that she possessed a powerful voice. But he found nothing save condemnation for her acting. Professor Morley, in his "Journal of a London Playgoer," waxes very wroth indeed against the young actress, rebuking her most severely for the shriek in the potion scene, which, as we have seen, was introduced by an English actress. On the other hand, Mr. Clement Scott is enthusiastic about the Juliet of Stella Colas. He declares that he has never seen a better Juliet before or since. "Through all these years," he wrote in 1884, "has been treasured the memory of an enchanting performance." The next of the famous Juliets is the beautiful and lamented Adelaide Neilson, who made her first London appearance at the Royalty Theatre in July, 1865, playing the character in which she afterwards earned fame throughout England and America. Juliet remained her finest impersonation until the termination of her career. Of beautiful countenance, with soft, musical voice, large lustrous eyes, she looked the part to perfection, and, if her performance occasionally lacked refinement, its passion was genuine. The glamour of her balcony scene, the high comedy of the "tiff" with the nurse, the potion scene, and the death scene, were the finest points in a performance of rare depth, poetic insight, imagination, colour, and power. The Juliet of Adelaide Neilson is one of my happiest recollections of the stage.

The first of the latter day revivals of "Romeo and

Juliet" was that given by Edwin Booth, on the opening of Booth's Theatre, New York, on February 3, 1869. Thanks to Booth's intelligence and artistic spirit, the tragedy was then acted, according to Shakespeare's text, for the first time in America. Booth was the Romeo, Miss M'Vicker—afterwards the wife of the tragedian—being the Juliet. So successful was the revival that it ran for sixty-eight consecutive nights. In the autumn of 1885, the tragedy was revived, with great scenic splendour, at the Union Square Theatre, in the same city, with Miss Margaret Mather as Juliet. Another New York representation of "Romeo and Juliet" occurred in November of the same year, when Miss Mary Anderson played Juliet at the Star Theatre. Apart from the acting, the occasion was made memorable by the artistic nature of the scenery. Whoever looked upon the scenes here provided, "has listened," it was said, "to the rustling of leaves in the scented air of the Southern night and heard the nightingale sing in the distant, dusky Italian woods." Miss Anderson had previously played Juliet at the Lyceum Theatre, London, on November 1, 1884, to the Romeo of Mr. William Terriss. Mr. Irving's revival of the tragedy took place, at the same theatre, on March 11, 1882. Mr. Irving was the Romeo and Miss Ellen Terry the Juliet, Mr. Terriss then acting Mercutio. Mr. Irving's production was acted for one hundred and sixty times. The Lyceum manager restored the allusions to Rosaline which Garrick had suppressed. Another London revival of "Romeo and Juliet" should be mentioned for the sake of the Mercutio. At the Court Theatre, in March, 1881, the celebrated Polish actress, Helena Modjeska, appeared as Juliet. This actress, who was supremely clever in

“Adrienne Lecoureur” and “La Dame aux Camélias,” failed conspicuously as Juliet. Her impersonation lacked youth and truth, nature, freshness, poetry and passion. Wilson Barrett’s Mercutio was, however, a matchless performance. He was the brave, buoyant, light-hearted character to the life. At the beginning of this century, Charles Kemble held the field against all others in the character of Mercutio. Barrett’s Mercutio has not been equalled in my time. I have seen dozens of Mercutios, but not one to be compared to Barrett.

The latest performance of Juliet by a noted actress is that given by Mrs. Potter, who has played the part in America and Australia. Mrs. Potter makes Juliet more high-spirited than is usual on the stage, and she consequently plays the first scenes with gaiety and *abandon*. Her balcony scene partakes greatly of the spirit of comedy, a conception which has its pleasing effect on the audience. For my part, I prefer the actress in the later scenes of the tragedy. Her treatment of the scene in which Romeo leaves the bridal room is exceptionally graceful. It is easy to make this scene coarse and repulsive. As played by Mrs. Potter, it is realistic—full of suggestion, but it is never vulgarised. It abounds in the deep tenderness of a woman in her regret at the departure of the lover-husband of a few short hours whom her “ill-divining soul” tells her she will never see again. There is great and significant beauty in this difficult scene, which is played with such delicacy of feeling that even Mr. Gilbert’s sensitive “young lady of fifteen” might witness it without a blush. Another artistic success made by Mrs. Potter, is in the well-known scene in which Juliet soliloquises before taking the sleeping potion. How many Juliets

have torn a "passion to tatters" in this scene, working it up into an hysterical nightmare and bringing the house down with a terrific shriek on the words, "Stay, Tybalt, stay," forgetting that the real climax to the scene is Juliet's soul-satisfied expression of perfect love and trust, of hope and peace, "Romeo! I come. This do I drink to thee!" Mrs. Potter gives proper vent to the horror which a girl would feel at thoughts of the charnel house, but she never loses sight of the fact that Romeo, not Tybalt, is uppermost in Juliet's mind. The potion scene is the crucial test by which the impersonation of Juliet must be judged. To succeed in this difficult scene is a high proof of the keen intelligence and dramatic instinct of this artist. Mrs. Potter's Juliet has the additional charm of being youthful in appearance, invariably graceful in action, and always refined in its conception. She looks Juliet, and that is saying a great deal. Her acting of it is a credit to the best living representative, Sarah Bernhardt and Modjeska not accepted, of Marguerite Gauthier, or, as Dumas' heroine is better known in this country, Camille.

The Romeo of Mr. Kyrle Bellew cannot, in my estimation, be eulogised too highly. It is no exaggeration to say that Mr. Bellew's Romeo is that of Shakespeare. It is the very living, human, passionate lover that is depicted in the pages of the dramatist. The character is acted as it is drawn by the author. And how few exponents of Shakespeare realise this perfection in their acting! Here is a Romeo who is consistently good, always the character, and at times absolutely brilliant. Mr. Bellew catches the idea of fate as suggested by Shakespeare. He remembers Romeo's "And we mean

well in going to this mask, But 'tis no wit to go," in the first act, together with Juliet's "I have no joy in this contract to-night." On learning of brave Mercutio's death, Romeo says "This day's black fate on more days doth depend; This but begins the woe, others must end." From this point, Mr. Bellew plays the part with the abandonment of a man who has resigned himself to destiny. That this is the key-note of the character is further proved by Romeo's "Then I defy you, stars!" when Balthasar brings him the sudden news of Juliet's death, just after Romeo's dream has presaged "some joyful news at hand" Romeo in his weakness, his irresolution, is akin to Hamlet. It is satisfactory to find a Romeo who has the intelligence to grasp this side of the character, and to make it prominent. Mr. Bellew, in acting, as well as in appearance, is a perfect representative of the handsome, irresolute, romantic Romeo. He has the requisite youthfulness for the part, combined with the fire, the energy, and the experience demanded from the actor of it. He is appropriately moody in the first act, while his playing in the love-scenes, is manly and tender. He rises to a tragic height in the scene in which Romeo kills Tybalt. He fully brings out Romeo's reluctance to fight with Tybalt, but, when he hears of Mercutio's death, reason seems to suddenly desert him. The few lines given to Romeo on the re-entrance of the taunting Tybalt are not spoken. They are literally hissed at him as Romeo snatches up the sword of his murdered friend and attacks Tybalt. The fight is short and sharp. It is an inspiration, a flash, and all is over. The passion of a lifetime, and the wild lust for revenge, are

compressed into a few brief seconds at the end of which the lifeless body of Tybalt is stretched on the stage. The concentration of the whole thing is marvellous. It is one of those happy hits which an actor makes once in a lifetime. It is electrical in its effect. It is a splendid theatrical feat, but, best of all, it is in accordance with the author. It stirs the audience so immediately and so deeply that the act must end with the fight in order to give the spectators breathing time. Of course, it does away with Romeo's line, "O, I am fortune's fool," but the line can be spared for the sake of the effect. Mr. Bellew's Romeo, whether it be in the impassioned love-scenes or in the tragic, despairing ones, is simply admirable. It is as perfect a realisation of the character as could be imagined.



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THEATRE ROYAL.

Sydney, May 17th.

[Copy]

TO MR. FALK.

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