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«STIRRING UP THE ASHES»:
SONY LABOU TANSI'S ADAPTATION OF *ROMEO AND JULIET*

ABSTRACT

This article presents an English translation of an adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, explaining the background to the play and its writer, the Congolese novelist and playwright, Sony Labou Tansi. Best known in the West for his novels, he wrote and directed several plays which were performed in France and the Republic of Congo. This play is an updated and racially aware version set in South Africa which focuses on the endless violence perpetuated by families in a world with no functioning political state.

KEYWORDS

Sony Labou Tansi, Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, adaptation

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1. Introduction

The impetus for this project came from a mention in the World Shakespeare Bibliography. A performance of *La Resurrection Rouge et Blanche de Romeo et Juliette* by Sony Labou Tansi was staged on board a boat on the Congo River. Although it was only a mention, I was intrigued. What was this adaptation? Who was Sony Labou Tansi? And why on earth would anyone be staging a play of any kind on the Congo River?

Having come across the announcement, I researched the adaptation itself and found that it was published in a French journal called *Auteurs* in 1991. I looked for an English translation with no success so I decided to translate it and include it in my project on first and second wave post-colonial adaptations. It seemed to fit in with my work on Shakespearean post-colonial adaptations in different stages.

Once the colonial powers had left, writers began to confront a more complicated sense of themselves in the new political order. Their work began to move away from the overtly political *cri de coeur* of the colonized subject who wanted to be recognized on his own terms. What Terry Eagleton called 'the ideology of the aesthetic' became more of a concern. Writers who had been educated in their own countries, and did not rely on a colonial education, began to challenge their current situations primarily through language. Much of the work

that produced during this period, that of Henri Lopes, Amadou Koumorona and Sony Labou Tansi, for example, was compared to the magical realism of South American writers. These parallels are useful though not entirely accurate. Although the combination of language with absurd and magical happenings is an important element in these authors' works, the addition of a sense of absurdity sets them apart. Absurdity and hyperbolic violence against the human body and by extension, the body politic, for example, is at the heart of Sony Labou Tansi's work. This creates a fascinating issue for the translator who is forced to maintain both the intelligibility and the hyperbole of the original.

This is not a great play, however. It has little narrative drive and less character development. It certainly is not an arresting drama in the same sense as *Romeo and Juliet*. We are never quite sure enough about how much of the characters' profession of love is valid or how much is an expression of regret at their useless and violent society. There is no confusion or last minute rush to Juliet's grave. There are a lot of insults thrown by members of each family and then almost as much hyperbolic concern with love as with death. The 'love that kills' is one of the key motifs of the adaptation. Romeo's delay in returning to Juliet, for example, is held responsible for her death-like swoon. The feud gets even more ridiculous when the Prince's suggested tennis match to settle it brings it to a sort of climax. In one scene, a whole list of deaths from disease and natural causes are blamed on the other family's devilry.

Again two reasons mandated the inclusion of this play in my project. Firstly, it is an example of contemporary, urgent, political theatre from the developing world. Despite the availability of funds and the consciousness raised about artistic inclusion or diversity, Congolese plays are seldom performed in the West. The move towards recognizing cultural output from the developing world needs to extend its reach from the English speaking worlds to other ex-colonies, even when they do not write in English. I hope to have contributed to that end.

Secondly, because of an almost universal code of silence that exists around the Republic of Congo. Politically insignificant and geographically dwarfed by the much bigger neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo, the Republic of Congo alternated between economic bankruptcy, violent civil conflicts and indirect rule by the former French Oil giant ELF Aquitaine. It is through writers such as Sony that attention can be brought to the dilemma of small and endlessly manipulated countries. Sony wrote for his people, as the performances on boats and tours through rural areas illustrate. Theatre was for him a vital and living language with which to exchange with an often barely literate audience. While he staged plays and published novels in France, he never studied or lived there, remaining close to his own Kongo community. In many ways his political activism was also a sign of his commitment to his country. Working with the opposition Member of Parliament, Bernard Kolelas, Sony was in constant danger and was arrested on several occasions. Furthermore, his later writings contained a rather xenophobic slant, moving towards a position of superiority for the Kongo tribe at the expense of the country's minorities. What we know for sure is that theatre was an important part of his life and Sony's work deserves to have as wide a readership as possible.

2. Analysis

Sony Labou Tansi (5 July 1947-14 June 1995) was born in Bas-Congo, part of what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo and moved 'across the river' to Brazzaville, the capital of the Republic of Congo, when he was twelve. He lived in the city until his death. Sony was a novelist, poet, playwright and dramaturge as well as a political activist.

La Résurrection Rouge et Blanche de Romeo et Juliette (*The Red and White Revival of Romeo and Juliet*, all translations from the original French are mine) was published in a special edition of the journal *Acteurs* in 1991. It is a play set in South Africa in the early nineties where the cast list has the characters identified by race or racial mix.

The tableaux into which Sony divides the play speaks to stasis not action. It is more like a series of snapshots than a narrative. Sony's play is so different from the original that it seems only to retain a «whiff» of Shakespeare (as Sony himself put it) that comes from the characters' names and their thwarted love story. There are certain pieces of dialogue (Romeo's and Juliet's soliloquies) and additional characters (such as the Nurse) that call Shakespeare's play to mind, however, the main take-away of Sony's play is the monstrous absurdity of a political system that venerates violent death.

In the first scene, 'Tableau 1' a «Montaigu»¹ talks about cultivating some legitimacy stating that «law is the thermometer of civility» (lines 15-16). The law appears as a ghostly voice, a spectral force which appears and disappears without any obvious rationale. The nature of its appearance and its «apparitions» color the law itself. Color is a key motif in the play, in the explicit racial casting as well as in the blue and red colors that the members of each house wear. There is an illusion of the rule of law but being seen, behaving in a certain way, is most important. One Montague describes politics as «the art of snacking on the future in small pieces» (Scene 1, lines 47-8), the implication being that one's political actions affect one's future wealth in both material and political senses. What happens to the law in a dictatorship is an overwhelming focus on documentation: proofs, parchments and depositions. The Prince figure (the voice of authority) speaks only through a spokesman, never directly. He is as mute as the law that has to be articulated through the voices of others.

In the scene «The Second Morning» the trappings of the law are presented: the ghost dressed in «the law's colors», a bugle, the declamation of what is on the parchment and the violations which have been committed, «addition to the basic law of March 22nd – May disposition. Exposure to banishment with loss of job, goods and nationality. Contraveners of the law on co-existence, notably articles 15 and 16, lines 3, 4 and 5» (Scene 2, lines 9-11). Every time a fight breaks out, he wanders around in the aftermath, giving his 'decision' through a spokesman, and another fight begins as the two sides continue to apportion blame. At the end of his tether, the Prince decides on a tennis match in which the winner can claim the loser's goods. The loser relinquishes his nationality and is banished. The feud gets

¹ 'Montaigu' is what Sony uses in French version: I have kept for this version, rather than Anglicize it.

even more ridiculous when the Prince's tennis match, originally intended to settle it once and for all, brings it to a new climax. In one scene, a whole list of deaths from disease and natural causes is blamed on the other family's devilry. Despite the characters of the Prince and the Voice of Authority in the play, there is no sense of reason operating within its society. Every action is a reaction to the previous set of insults, injuries and deaths.

The collocation between civil war and sport is used several times in Sony's work. Here it is a tennis match, in another work, a football game. There is much to be said on the parallels between dictatorial rule and competitive sports, not least in the area of permitted and ritualized violence. The farce-like nature of the play counteracts the violent seriousness of the content. The over-played tennis match, the Prince's righteous anger and Romeo's desire for death highlight the absurd position of the post-independent state.

Romeo is searching for an end to hate: «I'm dying to love while all around me enflame and cultivate hate. Everywhere smells of iron, fire and powder» (Scene 4, lines 27-9). It is Balthazar who reminds Romeo that Juliet thinks of him and that he can go to make love to her at the Capulet party that evening. The feud feeds off itself so that every death is another reason to continue and every death leads to a further death. That is why Romeo yearns for a way to love, an alternative to the vicious cycle of death in which he is trapped: «she [Juliet] sends some rays of hope to lift up my broken body. She extinguishes this weariness in which my soul is bogged down» (Scene 4, lines 35-6).

Although women suffer from many creative and varied forms of violence in Sony's work, they are also its perpetrators and have to share responsibility for the cyclical violence that pervades his novels and plays. Papa Capulet tells his wife: «hate finishes by being tedious and boring» (Scene 5, line 35) but she revels in it, responding: «this hate fits me like a velvet dress» (Scene 5, line 44). Only at the end of the play does Juliet's mother show any remorse, collapsing over the news of her daughter's death. Sony's inclusion of hate appears as a feminine characteristic, which is passed from generation to generation in a kind of intra-uterine flow and adds to the sense of political violence as an unending and interminable cycle.

Absurdity and hyperbolic violence against the human body and by extension, the body politic, is at the heart of Sony Labou Tansi's work. Romeo dies by his own hand just as in Shakespeare's play but not because Juliet is dead; instead he kills himself as vengeance for all the deaths that have preceded his. There is a strong sense that Romeo does want to die that particular death. Death is the only factor over which the citizens have a choice. In a totalitarian state, the only element of choice may be the way in which you are able to die. Sony consistently plays with this idea: choosing death, specifically the «right» kind of death, is an important theme in nearly all his work.

The environment in which the characters operate is one defined by death: Juliet calls it «a country of the dead» containing «cockroaches and toads» and «these fields of skulls» (Scene 14, lines 1- 4). The link between love and death has a political dimension. Romeo is not a martyr to his love for Juliet but to his desperation over the «necro-society» in which he lives. The choice to die is the only choice that the members of this claustrophobic and hopeless society can make. Sony argues that if we can choose the manner of our deaths, we are not powerless but

resisting beings who can reclaim some sense of agency through a sacrificial action. According to Sony, we are caught between «parentheses of blood» and our death is the only part of life over which we have control. Some of the most powerful words in this play are «spoken» by Romeo and Juliet *post-mortem* through their testaments. Romeo's testament is written to Juliet, urging her to use his death to live better and more freely «choose laughter over tears as I chose death to live» ('Romeo's Testament', line 25). Juliet tells Romeo that she is unable to consider life after he is dead. She addresses the senseless quarrel, reminding those involved that «you don't need me to give you hate for you to hate» ('Juliet's Testament', line 30) There is no reconciliation, only a sense of loss: «the tragic tax» that the two families have paid.

Theater was for Sony a vital and living language through which to exchange ideas. It was also a means to communicate with people in rural areas, often illiterate, who were the key constituency for Sony's political and social activism. It is unclear when and where this play was performed. However, there is anecdotal evidence from Sony's letters of his theater group traveling to remote areas of the country, putting on plays and providing health education to the rural population. Such strategies not only remind us of Shakespeare's traveling players but also of the urgency of theater, then and now.

THE RED AND WHITE REVIVAL OF ROMEO AND JULIET

Written by Sony Labou Tansi, after the work of William Shakespeare

Cast of characters

ROMEO: great tennis player, only son of Montaigu. He is mixed.

PAPA MONTAIGU: father of Romeo, mortal enemy of Capulet. Red is the colour of his house. Big boss of rubber and oil producing plants. He is white.

MAMA MONTAIGU: wife of Papa Montaigu, mother of Romeo. Moneyed middle-class. Beautiful mulatto.

PAPA CAPULET: father of Juliet, mortal enemy of Montaigu. Brother in law of Princeville's mayor. Blue is the colour of his house. Large, white merchant.

MAMA CAPULET: wife of Papa Capulet, businesswoman, mother of Juliet, an Asian mulatto.

JULIET: daughter of Capulet. She writes poetry and sings. She's white.

THE CHIEF OF POLICE: the voice of authority.

BALTHAZAR: Juliet's cousin, Romeo's friend. Nicknamed Jazzman, he is mixed.

CHRISTIAN PRIEST: He is black.

NURSE: Juliet and her mother's confidante. She is Chinese.

TYBALT: Papa Capulet's cousin. He is mixed.

DOMESTIC SERVANTS: White and Black.

THE INVITED GUESTS: they are white.

THE CROWD: white and black.

BALTHAZAR'S BAND: mixed.

The scene takes place in Princeville and Soweto

Shakespeare is not only for me a way to stir up the ashes of an insipid world where we push towards a place where all hopes are upside down. The fear of difference is the most beautiful invention of our time. Absurdity and mediocrity are a failure of hope. The material hum consumes the first faltering steps of intelligence and reason. It is no more than our rigorous savagery deserves. This adaptation of Romeo and Juliet is a confidential letter to those who remain human in a world more and more savage. Much of it comes from South Africa. It's in South Africa above all that

these crimes against difference are elaborated every day in our sick world, it's even proof that our future is screwed up, humanity is screwed; knowledge, economics, world management, all is screwed. But can I speak in a few words of a gigantic enterprise where mediocrity and open stupidity, hand in hand, work towards 'cosmocide'? Life murders itself. A page in human civilization is in the process of being turned. The hand turning it is not military. It is not that of the hopeless politicians. The hand is that of the merchants. One must speak now with the morals (and the words) that convince. Capitalism (even state capitalism) is a crime against humanity and its future. Something else must also be said with urgency and maximum frankness: if the world of the haves does not stop creating conditions of death in the so-called poor countries, it will be swallowed by millions of naked human grasshoppers who seek to live by any means. This is more serious than demographics. What's called demographic imbalance could trigger the disappearance of the human dinosaur. Theatre remains the fastest way to speak to people. Because of this urgency, I have created this modern version of *Romeo and Juliet*, the Mixed.

Sony Labou Tansi 1990

TABLEAU 1: The First Morning of the Devil

A feast of smells. Not far from a rubbish dump, a market that oozes and stinks. It starts to rain. Flies and mosquitoes proliferate. All dressed in their house colors, the Montaigu slaves parade to celebrate the 950 millionth anniversary of their house. The parade is seen as a provocation by the Capulet slaves who run to get themselves dressed and parade, singing of the dishonorable Montaignus.

FIRST MONTAIGU: Fakes. All. Insidious. They are going to copy us as they always copy us. It's those bags of meat, the Capulets.

ANOTHER MONTAIGU: We'll gut them this time, they'll flinch. Last year of the devil. They came back in shorts and we had to return to loving your neighbor to get out. We did it, the law saw us with its big eyes. But this time if they look for the edge of our buttocks, we'll show them.

FIRST MONTAIGU: Let's sing. As if they don't exist. Ho! They exist. Let's lynch them with our words without a break.

ANOTHER MONTAIGU: We did the same thing last year. They ended up believing that we were... we were afraid. Like last year, they'll try to spirit our sense of self away with the law's claws. Dirty mouths.

FIRST MONTAIGU: We must guard our house jealously. Whatever our inner feelings we must adopt the colours of peace. Peace before the law. And above all peace in front of opinion. Keep up appearances.

ANOTHER MONTAIGU: They're coming back. My blood's boiling. I can't seem to calm down. Seeing them makes my brain swarm. And termites in my soul. That itch.

FIRST MONTAIGU: We're dressed in red. Red clothes are best for serenity and peace. (*Abruptly*) My heart misses a beat. It's too much. The devil. They cross the line. It's unpardonable to us.

ANOTHER MONTAIGU: A little more than last year. They've had a year to clean up their stink. What arrogance! I'd prefer to be insulted by all the world's monkeys than have my eyes abused by the crow-like gestures of these idiots.

FIRST MONTAIGU: Careful! We must put the law on the side of our house. No unintelligent or brutal reactions. We must wear the guise of beauty.

ANOTHER MONTAIGU: (*angrily*) Brr! Brr! These grasshopper eaters! These peasants who don't even know how to return a daughter to bed. You see how they laugh at us. Let's tear out their bagpipes. Let them know that even a Montaigu slave is taken as the pride of a Montaigu. Aie! It kills me: They spat. My feet are dying to walk on the ground where their saliva rests. Gut them. And no more talking.

FIRST MONTAIGU: My speech is dulled. A fierce hate circulates within my saliva. But we must persuade the law to be on our side. We are civilized beings. Law is the thermometer of civility.

ANOTHER MONTAIGU: Let's have the patience to court legitimacy.

FIRST MONTAIGU: I don't know anymore. The world's become so disloyal. All necessary precautions must be taken.

ANOTHER MONTAIGU: I've an idea. Let's ask our people to turn their backs on these fools. That way we will believe they're knocking at our backs.

FIRST MONTAIGU: Let's get revenge immediately. They're still spitting at us.

ANOTHER MONTAIGU: But not before having cultivated some legitimacy.

FIRST MONTAIGU: What's your idea?

ANOTHER MONTAIGU: Find a game: boxing or perhaps a cock-fight, football or wrestling. Let's build the game of revenge behind a legal situation. Then we can digest our revenge tastily and very slowly.

FIRST MONTAIGU: In my eyes, you're crazy.

ANOTHER MONTAIGU: How come?

FIRST MONTAIGU: You've had the same dirty idea since you were two. We're going to get thrashed like donkeys. (*He shows his scar*) See the result of your quirky ideas. A result that leaves scars. It's a strategic problem.

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ANOTHER MONTAIGU: Let's trick them because we can't get them any other way.
(*a pause*) You know Papa Montaigu well? (*Silence*) You know him well right?
There's nothing in the world that he places above his hatred for Capulets. You
get me?

FIRST MONTAIGU: Ah! They're still spitting. My heart is unleashed. I'm stricken.
(*He shouts*) They've stricken me.

ANOTHER MONTAIGU: Bring them Papa Montaigu to wager his goods against a
Capulet victory in the cock fight. Cupid as we know him, Papa Capulet will
not hesitate to expose his goods in the hope of seeing them multiplied on
account of his mortal enemies.

FIRST MONTAIGU: Engineer of tragic chores! My brother, see what you are.

ANOTHER MONTAIGU: I break my balls to serve my masters in an absolutely loyal
manner. But from time to time I think of myself and my poky existence.

FIRST MONTAIGU: Funny loyalty! What will you do if our house loses the bet?

ANOTHER MONTAIGU: I'm a political servant. But politics is the art of snacking on
the future in small pieces. (*Abruptly*) Careful. Here's Papa Montaigu. Let's
play the beat.

(*The two men play out a pre-determined farce accusing the two Capulets opposite
without any movement. Real statues of salt in their blue gandouras*)

PAPA MONTAIGU: OK you show me the devil but I've decided to be peaceful today.
Because of the age that curves my spine. And because of the festival.

FIRST MONTAIGU: They have spat on your house. A big piece of snot, arrogant and
hard.

ANOTHER MONTAIGU: The venom of their spittle floods your name and our dignity.

PAPA MONTAIGU: What I have seen then and now proves that my aversion has
healed. I am another man. I've gained some wisdom. I, the old boiling wildcat,
today says long live peace.

FIRST CAPULET: We have drunk enough of your provocation. We have drunk it
down to the dregs.

ANOTHER CAPULET: You have exceeded the limits of what is tolerable.

FIRST MONTAIGU: Turn off this broken squeaking. Close your deflowered female
pipes. We'll speak to your master. You're nothing but an ax.

ANOTHER MONTAIGU: (*to Papa Montaigu*) Listen to their cackling. It kills our ears
when they speak. Give us the order to finish them off.

FIRST MONTAIGU: See how they are sown up with self-importance. Father! Papa! Master! Defend your innards when they are pounded when they are raped. When they are sliced. When they are toasted.

FIRST CAPULET: Can you not measure the words your snouts spread on the peaceful artisans of redemption? (*to his neighbor and low*) Do you believe that we have done enough for the law to whiten our consciences?

ANOTHER MONTAIGU: They plot. They build misfortune. Let's act. You see that discussion doesn't work.

FIRST MONTAIGU: They have death written into their hearts. It's unacceptable.

FIRST CAPULET: You have insulted the uniform of our house. It's something that only blood can wash away. We'll fight you until the end.

FIRST MONTAIGU: You have only achieved the goal of inciting our anger. It's written on your faces. It's written in your silence just now. It's written in your gestures.

ANOTHER CAPULET: You're only here to bait us. Band of You ask us to rip you, that we hoe your wives and daughters that we have burned your goods. It's bad, sirs, to push peaceful gentlemen into behaving like beasts.

ANOTHER MONTAIGU: (*with a fleshy laugh*) In the matter of hoeing, sir, in which pair of sleeves will we find your dear chick.

ANOTHER CAPULET: It crosses the line. Let me draw blood against these backs. These barbarians. These fuckheads. These hopelessly thick ones.

PAPA MONTAIGU: A formal ban on tearing each other's guts out, gentlemen. Come back and let these hicks use up their dribble. That's my order. Respect the white hairs that flow along the banks of my baldness.

FIRST CAPULET: He treats us as peasants. What does the law say?

ANOTHER CAPULET: Leave him to finish the stalemate.

ANOTHER MONTAIGU: Father! Papa Montaigu! We are outraged. We have been dishonored. Push them in the stomach and make them all jump.

FIRST MONTAIGU: Leave them to take the bait. They make mistakes and swim in compromise up to their shoulders.

PAPA MONTAIGU: Let's put respectability in our camp. We have to bite them but it's their fault. But not on this blessed day where joy bathes my soul.

ANOTHER CAPULET: Law, pay attention to the law. She always has two blades and two eagle eyes.

FIRST CAPULET: They have numbers with them. That gives us a legitimate defense.

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ANOTHER CAPULET: Papa Montaigu never directly dirties his hands. *(the other Montaigus arrive)* They come in legions. Warn the base. Careful! We are killed. We are stabbed. We are gutted. Careful!

(First Capulet sounds the bugle. A crowd of Capulets appear with lances, scythes, rakes, clubs, arrows. Loud Montaigu laughter)

FIRST CAPULET: What? You want to vanquish us with laughter? We are no longer in the century of David and Gorbath.

(More Montaigu laughter)

ANOTHER CAPULET: The law can kiss us now. It's proved that they laugh at us with derision.

FIRST CAPULET: It's necessary to make them show us their weapons. The law will have no more to prove that they came out against our peaceful natures.

FIRST MONTAIGU: Make them commit these insults with weapons.

ANOTHER MONTAIGU: The law has a big stomach with all that we've already given her to eat and drink. She should thank us.

FIRST MONTAIGU: We must bring the law to sleep and pee in our camp. Like that she'll allocate her perfume to the house.

FIRST CAPULET: They're plotting. They're violating us, these enemies of peace.

ANOTHER CAPULET: It's against our house that they're scratching their heads.

FIRST MONTAIGU: And you want us to leave them under the 'phallacious' pretext of safeguarding the outlines?

ANOTHER CAPULET: They look for us from noon to two but...

ANOTHER MONTAIGU: Never will our house fall into shame. My hands are thirsty. It's been many years since I've kicked out. It's stronger than me. My legs are itchy.

(He throws himself on the first Capulet. Soon the brawl spreads. Everything breaks. They fight. They tear. They set alight. They smash. They crush. It explodes until the evening. When calm returns, one can hear the dogs howling ceaselessly. Calm night. Long. Smoky. Burning.)

The Second Morning

A ghost dressed in the law's colours walks among the debris. He goes, he comes back. It looks like a tree where there are thousands of red doves. The silence is complete. The ghost sounds a bugle. Out come the Capulets, then the Montaigus. They arrange themselves into columns face to face and at a distance. From the

other side enters a man dressed all in red. The man strangely looks like Mao Ze Dong. It's the voice of the Prince followed by the Chief of Police. Long silence. Then the bugle starts again. The ghost moves forward. Each of his steps is an objet d'art. The Police Chief collects proofs of guilt from one and the other. Everyone is dressed in deerskin.

THE PRINCE'S MEGAPHONE: You've given yourselves over to barbarity, stupid beings and insignificant beasts. Can't you, ugly and base beings, leave me to enjoy sleep and rest? Why do you pray for me to feed you the 67 articles of the law? We've abolished the death penalty. See how you've excited us to revise that. You show yourselves to be ignorant of my clemency. Damned Montaigus! Damned Capulets! How long will you try my patience? Until when will your feet lick the edges of my sleep?

(He raises his hand. The man who advanced behind him opens a red parchment and reads.)

POLICE CHIEF: *(reading)* Addition to the basic law of March 22nd May disposition. Exposure to banishment with loss of job, goods and nationality. Contraveners of the law on co-existence, notably articles 15 and 16, lines 3, 4 and 5. *(silence)*. Masters, gentlemen and citizens who have troubled the intelligence and the house in our town.

THE PRINCE'S VOICE: *(solemnly)* That's it. That's how it will be. Go home.

(He turns around, walks in the same manner, then disappears behind the ramparts of his castle. Long silence).

FIRST MONTAIGU: They've awoken his anger. These louts!

ANOTHER CAPULET: They've provoked his indignation. That's not surprising. They have a natural inclination to engender shame.

FIRST MONTAIGU: It's been years and years that we've watched them insult our house and we've said nothing.

FIRST CAPULET: Their injuries and their invective have assassinated Papa Capulet. Is it possible that a man of his age and wealth... sick as a dog. And with what? A vexation of the brain?

FIRST MONTAIGU: It's their venom and their speech that killed Sarah Montaigu. She could have lived 50 more years. The poor thing. She loved joy. When I think of the way she cracked a man despite her age. *(he shouts)* Assassins! Killers!

ANOTHER CAPULET: You've eaten Benoit Capulet. There's no reason that he should be killed at 57 without complaint. You are hit-men.

FIRST MONTAIGU: He drank and smoked like a chimney. You cannot blame us for his disappearance.

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FIRST CAPULET: I write the death of Maxime Capulet on your conscience. He died of an aggravated heart condition and repression.

ANOTHER MONTAIGU: You cannot prove that Benjamin-Claude Montaigu was not taken by your crap to revisit his past every morning. He died in the prison of injuries that you built for him.

ANOTHER CAPULET: And you? Can you show us that the tender Armene Capulet did not catch TB from your mania for looking at her provocatively? Your envy and your jealousy killed her.

PAPA MONTAIGU: Stop throwing deaths at each other. You're going to awaken our prince's anger once again.

FIRST CAPULET: Who doesn't know what you have done to show discord?

FIRST MONTAIGU: Have your mouths ever spoken a peaceful word? Were you not created to inspire hate? It spills out everywhere making it contagious, epidemic and endemic. Selling it and buying it?

FIRST CAPULET: We talk of our house and you assault my character.

(The prince's spokesman soon reappears in the same place and explodes with anger.)

PRINCE'S SPOKESMAN: *(the Prince can only speak through the voice of his spokesman)* Indigent beings, rebels, inveterate profaners who doesn't hear you? For what reason do you think my anger caresses you? Bury your petty quarrels. Convert your rage. No longer ask me to sacrifice yourselves and your goods to the cause of peace, what devils! My patience is frantic. But my old hand is slower to decide, it prevaricates. It fails to follow its logic. When will you stop imploring me to destroy you?

(The spokesman leaves; the others insult each other by eloquent gestures. Another brawl escalates. Then each house collects the dead and injured. That goes on interminably. Late at night, the prince appears with a storm lantern in his hand. He looks at the damage saying nothing. Then he explodes)

THE PRINCE'S SPOKESMAN: Montaigu, Capulet listen. As your hearts are as hard as stone and as your hands are prompts to shame, as for the numerous chances that you've been given. Here each of your houses will choose a representative. You'll have a tennis match. The winner will take the goods of the loser. The prize will be decided by me. The loser will then be banished, forbidden to return to my land. At least then the winner will decide to follow the magnanimous rules and the loser will bend to the requirements of peace. I speak for the prince.

(Silence)

MORNING'S END

Public place. Lit with lampposts, assembled crowd.

THE HIGH VOICE: Go, Cross-Medallion. Prove that you made the Indies and Indo-China. Let's show Capulet how your blood boils. Pull out the innards. Defile the reproductive organs. Pull out the heart and eat the eyes.

THE BLUE VOICE: Mazidoc-Medoc, stand up for yourself. You have the strongest blood in the world. Be fixed. Open the chests of these dirty mouths. It's a worthy task. Show these Catholic Montaignus that you have a top quality soul. Pierce the consciences. Crush their techniques. Tell them that you were not made for these trifles.

THE RED VOICE: What a hassle! What devils! You never show the river to an old fisherman. Let's go. Pierce the oil bags. Pluck the natural cowardice of the Montaignus. Stab them all. It's the night of the conqueror.

THE BLUE VOICE: Sir, weigh the words that you throw at your rooster. Fear that they will not attain our peaceful natures.

THE RED VOICE: I'm speaking to my roosters, Sir. To my roosters. How does that bother you? We came here to see the battles. We bet on the beasts that you're talking about.

THE BLUE VOICE: Your insinuations go past the borders of the beast.

THE RED VOICE: I take account of my descendants, the provocations that defy the rooster's competences.

THE BLUE VOICE: Each of us here represents a house. And I'll fleece you if you continue to play roosters.

THE RED VOICE: (*laughing*) And I, sir, would deflower you with joy if... whatever. What's this place where we've lost the right to laugh, the laughter that suits the shape of the teeth?

THE BLUE VOICE: I'm going to tear you apart if you continue to look for the toughness of my mouth. I would defend the colors of my house to the depths of my soul.

THE VOICE OF VOICES: Your Graces. Look at the roosters and arrange your mouths. The law is clear: You sell the goods of those who fight on this land. You banish the next one who uses his bestial instincts against the weak citizens.

THE HIGH VOICE: You've heard how this viper has pushed his venom into my poor soul? Never would the people of my house turn a hair at an old-fashioned man like him. I am a man of peace. I know, alas, that peace has to be defended centimeter by centimeter with the means of peace.

THE BLUE VOICE: You'll find who causes it, friend.

THE HIGH VOICE: Small, conceited men. I will cut open your carapace.

THE VOICE OF VOICES: Stop men of your own ruin. Stop gutting yourselves like beasts. Think about the Prince's words today. Poor brutes. Don't use your swords instead of your words, and don't disturb the peace in which our town is sleeping. Throw up your diabolic behavior. Dismissed, sirs, and quickly before my anger takes away your life. And those who have too much energy in their arms can grow sesame. Oust the swordsmen, oust the ironmongers. Return to your cages and let the silence be. We'll publicly immolate the next one who uses his hands as a means of slaughter.

(Very long silence, then hurrahs and cheers)

THE THIRD MORNING

Romeo is lying in a hammock. He is humming while outside the insults fly past.

ROMEO: I'll win the match. But after? *(Silence)* I'll crush them. I'll force them to swallow the deepest, blackest humiliation. *(Silence)* He'll drink to the dregs the sticky shame that my hand gives him. *(A moment)* The prince is right. We've taxed his patience. We've never stopped importuning him. *(Silence)* If I'm beaten... these beasts can continue to bite each other. Why oh destiny, have you chosen me as the manager of their arrogance. Child of love, crucified to hate. Sold to the bastard of bastards. Why?

(Enter Balthazar)

BALTHAZAR: Have you heard the Prince's decisions? Romeo do you know what misfortune threatens us?

ROMEO: We've importuned the prince many times. I say for our families of course. Our houses are out of date, sewage, decaying from their magnificent death. He is so good and so patient.

BALTHAZAR: Destiny is so cruel to us. Romeo, my friend, I'm afraid.

ROMEO: No one can prevent anything.

BALTHAZAR: Your hand can get us out of the impasse. We have two days to change our destiny. *(a pause)* I know mine is to host Tybalt at the match. And if that animal wins, he'll impose unlivable conditions on the vanquished. Under these conditions a hate more luxurious than our present hate will be produced.

ROMEO: Let's find the prince. Let's propose some changes to his judgments.

BALTHAZAR: He won't react. He's been so patient.

ROMEO: All you learn here is to hate. All destines you to disgust. We are the inheritors of an existence without salt. Rotten. Programmed.

BALTHAZAR: Give us the energy to remain outside their multi-secular hate. That will be our only chance to seed this land with a new dream. Amongst this noise of mediocrity, let's show another way of being. Let's light fires of mercy everywhere. Let's love, that's beautiful.

ROMEO: I don't know anymore. Everyday my body freezes into a block of doubt. I'm dying to love while all around me enflame and cultivate hate. They're at each other's throats. They destroy each other. They eviscerate each other in front of my eyes. Everywhere smells of iron, fire and powder. The earth itself has the knowledge of injuries and mistakes. How can you, Balthazar, love, make love, in a basket of grass snakes?

BALTHAZAR: In the middle of hell a flower smiles and amuses itself in the direction of your heart. A young body full of innocence and milk walks the same path as you –my cousin, Juliet, every day that God makes, is full of thoughts about you –her lips speak your name constantly and her soul sings of the flowering of your virtue.

ROMEO: She, yes, my sun shines in the mud. She sends some rays of hope to lift up my broken body. She extinguishes this weariness in which my soul is bogged down. I would like to lick her name and sleep in peace on the infinite walls of her young being. Live in her. For her and of her. Sweeten each of my days with the uproar that is your presence. Survive at the base of each of your gestures without doubt to aggravate her limpid lips. I imagine her delivering me of my coat of pigginess dressed in tenderness and thoroughness. Tasty Juliet, carburetor of their fiery voices.

BALTHAZAR: You'll have beautiful children; they'll live in peace amongst the wreckage of our quarrels- Whore! Times change. Things too. We are pitiful. Our children will be the stars; they'll sort out our despair. Get up Romeo. In place of dying on the cobblestones of traditional hate, go run and show the depths of your soul to Juliet who's waiting for you.

ROMEO: Help me to enter my star's house. I would like to cast my eyes upon the angelic lips another time –touch the milk that ripples on her honey skin –taste her eyes. Yes, my friend, I'd like to drink her voice and eat her silences, fill up with her perfume of ripe guava, I'd like to make up for my blood, spread myself over her breasts while counting the stars, to get drunk tenderly on the fires that live in her stomach. Let me, wandering in her luminous hand, become the soul of her body, passionate light that disturbs her quivering buttocks.

BALTHAZAR: I know that every part of her young body waits for you.

ROMEO: Let's wait until the night to do it. This day will be a century for my poor heart. The sky will look like a large raincoat of sadness. Every minute will fall on me like a beam of regret. I know they'll teach her the hate that'll convince her to refuse me. What my soul is yelling, she'll use to deceive me. My own energy for love will force her hands into the blackest depths of my despair. My

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tears will be laughter in her eyes. God! All my whining will become for her mute jubilation.

BALTHAZAR: Let's wait for the night to say that. Dumb hearts unfortunately can't judge. Love, heavens, what a stupid beast!

ROMEO: I'm not going. I'll never survive her refusal.

BALTHAZAR: A big party's being held tonight at the Capulet's. We're going. On the grounds of friendship that unites us, that'll start to cultivate some dedication. You go in with the orchestra; no one will doubt your presence. Once on the ground of your dearly beloved, I hope you won't be awaiting my advice before acting any longer. At least I could put a rhythm to your sighs on a good jazz pillow.

THE FIRST EVENING

MAMA CAPULET: With these Montaignus you never know. Count the butlers, name, enumerate the cooks. Don't forget the gardeners, carriage drivers, guards, plumbers, the governess, our friends, closeness is the strength of the house. Re-do the guest list, check all of them. A Montaignu is still a Montaignu that can infiltrate anywhere, they're everywhere these Montaignu bugs. I'd like the party tonight to be an unparalleled success.

PAPA CAPULET: It's been several days since I came across our daughter Juliet. I don't even know if she sleeps and gets up. Has she gone away without telling me?

MAMA CAPULET: She's enamored with poetry and silence. She's shut herself up in her room. All the noise our enemies make must be hurting her ears. I reacted exactly the same way at the time when my breasts began to quiver. The critical age – where dreams put the devil in the body – and your flesh suddenly shivers tenderly. And your organs smile without stopping. (*A pause*) Nurse! Nurse! Where are you? Put together the high-level guests. The VIPs too. Come, let's look together at the list, this place is full of codgers and twits. Let's add some beautiful women to light up the evening; some gallant sires can add some sauce. Good dancers, male and female. We can't fill the house with old crusties whose feet trail in mud and who come only to dirty my floor instead of cheering up my guests. How many are coming with Balthazar? That adorable child whose music moves the whole world. What talent! What art! What perfection! How many are coming?

NURSE: Between four and seven.

MAMA CAPULET: Ask him before this evening if it is four or seven. We would be very wrong to neglect security. (*a moment*) The list, where's the list? (*she takes the list and reads*) Sir Martino, his wife, his daughters, his niece. General Anselme and his charming sisters. The widow of Sir Vitruvio. Sir Plucentio

and his friendly nieces. Mericio and his daughters. Valentino. My uncle Capulet, his wife, his daughters, my pretty niece Rosaline; Nina; Sir Valentino and his cousin Tybalt, Lucio, the lively Helena. All the beauties who live under the shadow of Sir Boudo-Nisa.

PAPA CAPULET: My heart finds itself rushing to show a hand to my enemies. Just on occasion of this anniversary.

MAMA CAPULET: Pray God, Papa Capulet that your heart will be far from my nails. I'd eviscerate it without trial. You don't open the sheep pen to wolves. And when, my god, the day when we want to have a few too many to celebrate living!

PAPA CAPULET: Hate finishes by being tedious and boring. Believe me, Blanche.

MAMA CAPULET: You'd turn the other cheek so that a Montaigu can piss his pox on you? Tasty? Don't spoil my enthusiasm; leave the party in my heart. Leave me this day, I beg you. (*a moment*) Don't leave my soul to the flies. The hate that I have for the Montaignus swims beautifully through my whole being. I'm enraged by their passivity and all that touches them. I'm really proud to possess this rage and it shows a loving part of the whole of a tender aversion. (*to the nurse*) Hey nurse, what we are at the height of our abjection. Hey that our degradation suits us like something splendid in the same way that spring suits the trees. (*to Papa Capulet*) This hate fits me like a velvet dress, I beg you, don't dirty it.

NURSE: We have the cunning air at the heart of this old quarrel. Because, without doubt, of the legitimacy that we've always given to our outrageous situation.

MAMA CAPULET: Where's my sweet Juliet? My heart asks that this evening she can understand the wishes that the handsome Tybalt secrets for her beauty. Juliet! Juliet! My God, she disappears every day at this time.

NURSE: Juliet! Juliet! Where is my little flower –ah proud bitch! Juliet! For three days she hasn't left her bed. She moans –she shakes from who knows what – no, madam she doesn't have a fever. Her health is radiant. Only her lips dare to mention a strange melancholy –a dream by acrobatic movements on her little breasts, caresses her eyes, illuminates her nostrils, lifting her pupils. She has that purple colour women have who are going to love.

JULIET: Who calls?

NURSE: Your mother, she's looking for you everywhere.

JULIET: I'm here, Mother. What is your desire? What can I do for you?

MAMA CAPULET: To speak like a mother to her daughter. Nurse, leave us, we're going to tell secrets. No, stay Nurse, better that you know. You can be my extra ears. As you can see my daughter has reached a good age. Her breasts are firm.

They are round, tender. Her stomach is growing up like a flower that listens to the sun.

NURSE: She's ripening well, Madam. The shape of her body suits her age.

MAMA CAPULET: She'll be fourteen. She looks at least sixteen.

NURSE: (*sad*) My Susan. So small. Fragile in the mouth of death, she would have been too. So delicious, was Susan. She's there fourteen years in the arms of the good Lord, without doubt spending her days playing with the good angel, Gaby, between the Virgin and Saint Nicholas. My sweet Susan. It's good to be fourteen. (*a moment*) I remember like it was yesterday. Sweetheart, where are you? I didn't want her to see what I was doing with the plumber, Casimir behind her father's back. Donkey – penis head, Casi. One of those men who can put thunder in your stomach. It gives such pleasure at the time. I didn't want my Susan to see... She knew how to walk already... just over three. The age of enchantment. Susan was just like our Juliet, Madam. They resembled each other like two drops of milk. (*a moment*) The sky is unjust. One time she had a bump in front when she fell down the stairs. Casi had one of those blue skins. Then my poor husband, God rest his soul, it was the last time they talked «You fall now on your nose, one day when you have better judgment, my pretty, you'll fall on your back» he said while laughing as only he knew how to laugh. And by all the gods the little bitch stopped her whining and I heard her say «yes, like Mama on the back of Casi».

MAMA CAPULET: Shut up, Nurse, please.

NURSE: Think about it, Madam. I struggled to stop myself laughing... What an idea. At her age. She already knew the meaning of the verb. Ah, if you 'd have been there, Madam, to hear her «yes». Just at the moment when....

MAMA CAPULET: Nurse!!!

NURSE: OK. That's all. I'll be quiet (*to Juliet*) the good god keep you –you've never had Casi's crap –live well for two. I fed you for Susan and for me. I've paid a lot for my sin with Casi –he's dead now of course. And if one day you have the chance to be married, be happy, for two. A little for her, my Susan. A lot for you. Don't trust the plumbers and locksmiths who come to the house behind the owner's back.

MAMA CAPULET: Nurse!!!

NURSE: OK! I'm shutting up. (*a pause*) The man for whom your thighs quiver will find in you the taste for two. Susan. My heart. My love. The good taste of a unique woman.

MAMA CAPULET: (*to Juliet*) Your body's growing. Your gaze is getting larger too. Juliet, my daughter, my love. How is your soul prepared for the eventuality of bearing a child?

JULIET: I have not yet thought of that honor, my mother.

NURSE: Sucked wisdom from the tit. She's fourteen according to her body and twenty in her mind. Pretty Juju! She speaks like an angel.

MAMA CAPULET: I was a mother at the age at which you are still a girl. But to be brief and clear, a man, handsome in body and soul has asked us for your hand, Mr. Tybalt has fallen for your charms. He has a good soul which his widower hood has turned a little bitter. But you can count on the purity of his virtue.

NURSE: Mr. Tybalt is a nice guy. The caliber of husband that I would have advised for my poor Susan. What a good horse! Nice tip. Nice size. Well-built. All the women in the country would fall over themselves to have him see their smile. Mu Juju! How lucky you are to have lit up such a Hercules. He's as strong as an ox and despite his fifty something years, the naughtiest toms will have to wait a century to root out his beauty.

MAMA CAPULET: He's a flower, you rarely find amongst men.

NURSE: A beautiful flower with some grey hairs. Perfumed. A petunia on which all the petals are open to loving adoration and the art of being guaranteed. A good soul, beautiful and sharp.

MAMA CAPULET: What sharpness with the laziness and general mediocrity of men today. You'll see him tonight at our party, my daughter. How fascinating he is. Nothing gives away his age. He's a gem, Mr. Tybalt. A soul like a lost star in a physique as clean as a virgin. The beautiful being. He makes all of Princetown and Soweto drool.

NURSE: Women. You can say that even our neighbors are courting him.

MAMA CAPULET: Shine this evening, be beautiful with him, for him. Honor the sky that has written on your two scorching bodies the most beautiful peace. Hire the earth to be an immense bed for your two souls.

NURSE: Yes, miss... eat in the hands of your combined ages, the juice, fruit of a beautiful alliance.

MAMA CAPULET: Add your two beings together into one in a dream where you will drink nectar during the day and honey at night. And your lives will ripen like...

NURSE: Marry the experience of a well-ripened man. Give yourself access to his goods. Drink in the emptiness of his days, the radiance that his hands have taken fifty years to build.

MAMA CAPULET: He glistens, in fact.

NURSE: Yes, miss... Mr. Tybalt glistens with gold and integrity. He holds the four pins of virtue, his presence alone hunts vice in our town. (*she crosses herself*) Sweet Jesus! That this marriage kills all the multi-secular hate that the house

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of Capulet wallows in. You can say that to maintain his manly virulence which never ages, the beautiful Tybalt arrives gleaming for the...

MAMA CAPULET: So, my sweet, how do you find the idea of loving Mr. Tybalt? How in your heart are you prepared to accept the glow of his soul?

NURSE: He's an absolutely marriageable man, if my advice can help to love him.

MAMA CAPULET: On his heart nature has written a magnificent promise of tenderness and...

NURSE: ... that finishes with a little intimate chapter. Mr. Tybalt often gives himself to brandy as will no doubt be the case this evening.

MAMA CAPULET: Shut up nurse. Who in this century of alcohol and doubt can avoid a little accidental holiday at the bottom of a beer glass?

NURSE: You piss beer, but brandy pisses you.

MAMA CAPULET: Nurse! (*a pause*) To his beauty is added the velvet of a well-taught soul, clear and generous which are all the bases for a fierce pride.

NURSE: Madam's right... Mr. the beautiful Tybalt has an ample soul and a doctorate in comparative Marxism, wreathed in talent from the University of Bologna; all the time that remains, he will take to strengthen your little fragile soul. He'll force-feed the sap of your being every evening and the sticky juice of a science that his hands have completely mastered.

MAMA CAPULET: Aren't you speaking, Juliet?

NURSE: What does Mr. Tybalt's love mean to you? Philosopher, scholar, wise man, a man unlike others, courageous... who lives simply in the harsh climate of Princeville who will prevent you from sleeping to catch up on lost love and who will love you until death (*softly*) that you can see on the horizon. But who will love you day and night, with the violence of old passion.

MAMA CAPULET: Has the idea of love removed your voice, sweet Juliet? My loving heart? Have you suddenly become mute?

JULIET: Of whom were you speaking, Mother? And you, nurse? (*pause*) Of a man? A lover? A spouse. I will see. Maybe he'll marry me if that gives you pleasure as you think. I will see him this evening. My heart will say what it thinks.

NURSE: I will be astonished if not... Mr. your future master adores argument and tearing. He loves what nourishes the spirit with a muscular tenderness.

JULIET: Until this evening, Mother. I'm going to prepare my body and heart for the man, my future Spring.

NURSE: A polished season, Mr. Tybalt.

MAMA CAPULET: It's a sea of love...it's constant waves sing refrains of gold and silver. In every corner of his being flames the splendor of a soul conceived like a party. And, you, my daughter, by marrying him, you will access the wealth of his spirit and that of his body. Your small and fragile body will have the delicious duty to make happy a man already destined to be happy. Do you accept, my daughter, the love of our Mr. Tybalt and the delicious fire that bleeds from his being?

JULIET: I will consider loving him. But towards him my heart will not do more than your encouragement authorizes. Now, mother, give me the time to expose my fears.

A SERVANT: The first guests are here. They are calling you. They're asking, madam, your daughter to open the ball. The evening promises to be beautiful. Please, come immediately.

MAMA CAPULET: We are coming. Juliet, my delicious, my dear, Mr. Tybalt the mayor is waiting for us. Don't forget my advice. Prepare your eyes to drink in the beauty and grace of a man who is ready to guide your body towards the highest joys in the world.

NURSE: Love him as much as you can. Don't forget to be a spouse for two: one part for yourself and one part for Susan.

All leave.

EVENING'S END

Balthazar's orchestra play. The masked ball. Several couples already dancing.

FIRST SERVANT: What beautiful people. They haven't stopped arriving despite the late hour. Ahh these beautiful idiots with fat stomachs. These paunches, these chubby cheeks, hair cropped. The whole gang, my god! Held up by four pins. Pigs, all of them. Big, fatty minds. Dull souls, with a heart that's slowly going moldy. Why do you think they hide their faces? So as to hide the ugliness that's eating away at them. Ugliness of soul and bodily baseness go well together.

SECOND SERVANT: They spend it all for mountains of nobility... in reality they're all stuffed up with infinite smallness.

THIRD SERVANT: Instead of elaborating on philosophical treatises, you'd better clear away. Scrape them clean and scrub them. Pick up the stools. There are still people coming. All of Princeville will be here tonight. Rinse the bottoms. Don't wait like you are waiting there. Go straight away to the door and let our concubines in. And you, Antoine, look after the chocolate mousse instead of staring at the dancers legs. You're paid to cook –Andouille Bertin– keep your eyes from guzzling Monsieur's guests –they're waiting for you in the banqueting hall. Let's get a move on, children. Go provide food and drink to

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Monsieur's guests –to please his wife– and to smell the hope of promotion. God grants you that for scrubbing, scraping, rinsing and tidying (*laughs*) Don't laugh! Sneezing that's easier. If not grumbling. Because grumbling is the laugh of those who have no reason to laugh because those who laugh...

SECOND SERVANT: Look out Monsieurs. Stools, the tables arrive. Mr. door man quick to your post. Don't forget your ranks. And you, Monsieur, commander of silverware, don't fool around anymore. Work your bollocks off for the grandfather and the founder of the Capulet blood. Stay close to events.

THE SERVANTS SUPERVISOR: Enough of the charivari, sirs. Monsieur's guests are not going to work on your culinary vociferations and your talk. The stomach is a hole no verb can fill...

SECOND SERVANT: But like Mr. Decuper, certain types of men must be content with a stomach that eats only words and smells...

SUPERVISOR: Stop grumbling, I'm telling you. Work as a cardinal virtue makes a man happy and free.

SECOND SERVANT: You've had enough of me... If not I'd say that the bees and the ants who work harder than the man who can't become...

SUPERVISOR: No dialogue, please or talk to the toothpicks and the dishes.

THIRD SERVANT: You're right: certain people must bust their life to merit a small amount of mercy.

SUPERVISOR: We pay you to cook and scrub –not to moan and groan.

Enter Papa Capulet

ALL: Master!!!

PAPA CAPULET: (*to the dancing couples*) Gentlemen, make yourselves at home. These women are your women. They need a twisted thread. (*Laughs*) My dears. Don't save your lovely corselets, give some real work to these men –two hundred years will party like two hundred years. (*to new arrivals*) You're welcome, Monsieur. This house is the sheepfold of peace. In old times, I knew how to dress well, and I knew how to talk to women, the things they love to hear. It was a long time ago. All that's long ago now. (*to the new arrivals*) I said that I knew how to talk to women... I danced like a top even during the world war –the first I say –the only one that deserves the name, not your crap about vengeful Austrians.

He makes some dance steps while singing.

The war is over sirs,
Finished, it's finished
Let's go back home
In our holes

In our nest
Let's dance and sing
That the war is punished.

What shame in sitting down cousin Maurice Capulet. How is it at university? With the huge invasion of beauties that you have at the arts fac who study Racine in jeans –that must be sweet to study *Phaedre* or *Andromaque* in blue jeans? No? (*a pause*) You're right. Instead of being a well of conscience, the university has become an ocean of asses... you understand. In our time that would have been hard... Don't forget to celebrate the two hundred anniversary of the founding of our house. It at least has done some acts which call for the respect of us all, a house, a fortune. Devil! We're giving out a tasty human warmth – put out the fire – we'll breathe better – you, my dear Bernard, stay sitting down. We're too old for dancing. Tell me – how many years is it since we've used our legs to talk to women by means of dancing.

BERNARD: Thirty years, at least, dear cousin.

PAPA CAPULET: Ah no, my dear. Not that long. It was at the Prince's last marriage, Before the last farmer's festival.

BERNARD: He's been married ten months, your Prince.

PAPA CAPULET: Bernard, then! Haven't you finished with sedition? What shame at your age, (*enter Juliet without mask*) Ah, there's my sun, my pride, she reminds me of how I was handsome before.

ROMEO: (*who is with the musicians and dressed like them*) I would like... gods, hold onto my heart that is broken.

BALTHAZAR: Don't give anything away. They take it as provocation. Go and take the hand of your moon to dance with her.

ROMEO: She shines. She throws her sparkles at her. She kills me. Her hand can swallow me I become pregnant from her breaths.

BALTHAZAR: Readjust your mask. We don't want to create a scandal.

(*Tybalt takes Juliet's hand and invites her to dance*)

ROMEO: Another man soils her hand. You must dance my moon. It covers all clumsiness and awkwardness – kills the gods – an insipid arm around her waist – who is that arrogant who holds the hands of my star?

BALTHAZAR: It's Tybalt the *metis*. A being as rough as a piece of iron, I hate it, I feel it by his humble awkwardness.

ROMEO: Tell me what does the beast hope for? Look gods, how thickset he is. The 'brute'. He kisses the hand of my light. I'm dead. I'm gone.

BALTHAZAR: Stop your anger. This is not the place to be angry. Fear the law and the Prince's reprisals.

ROMEO: Shine, sun of your closed flesh. My heart celebrates. My flesh wants to roll over into your flesh. Definitely. Rowdy flesh. Arrogant... Shine on always, black sun of my darkened days, gleam, flame, shine – that's so beautiful. No ugliness can extinguish you, my constellation. Bring together your shapes.

BALTHAZAR: Yes friend... Delight, that's smarter than anger.

ROMEO: She outshines the torches. Her beauty licks the night. Her limpidity pierces the shadow like the reflection of a jewel, you see? She is made like a precious stone. From the end of this dance, my hand could have brushed her skin –and I would be blessed. My eyes, my heart, have you never loved? No! We can see her from far away, this gem. She illuminates all our dreams; here she is posted at the entry of our being to remove our sense.

(When the dance stops, Romeo, like a zombie moves towards Juliet)

JULIET: From where did you fall, piece of comet, who are you? What woman drinks to your beautiful dreams? Who eats your eyes? How do you appear, full of grace? Where do you live?

ROMEO: She tries her voice in my ears. Who is she talking to? Her mouth, what a combination! And what delicacy at the end of her hand! What mischievousness from every angle!

TYBALT: Be brave, sirs. Someone has come to disturb our happiness –sirs, they have pissed on our party. They have pushed forced bitter wine into our mouths – what a crime, a Montaigu has come to deride us, he has sprawled on the bed of our honor –he has ridiculed our blood. I'm going to gut him. Someone bring me my sword. Oh! He dares, covered in his field mouse smell to come to the heart of our party –his grotesque braying. Our poor ears... By all the tips of my race, I'm going to make a corpse of him – *(He leaps on Romeo; Juliet gets in the way)* leave it cousin so I can make a fried egg of this monster. This house is a tomb for all Montaigus. Don't waste time. Raise up his corpse to the top of our right. And the gods can gorge on it.

PAPA CAPULET: What dance are you doing, my dear cousin Tybalt? With what music?

TYBALT: I would like to dance to gut the villains and provocateurs –as long as they die legion. In my house I want to give the rascals the lesson they deserve.

PAPA CAPULET: If the food can keep, why not the hate and the anger? We hate our enemies after the party. And believe me, dear cousin, that will be softer –and then Romeo is no body. He has a gentleman's manners and all our region is proud of this virtuous seed. I don't want, for all the riches in the world, that he is offended in my house. Be patient. Don't pay attention to his presence. For

the respect of all my guests, without exception, you must replace your policeman's air and that tawny mouth with a friendly air.

TYBALT: Did you invite these knifemen so I could make a peaceful face before my shame?

PAPA CAPULET: Do I have to remind you that we are at my house?

TYBALT: I would never allow the house that had brought up my ancestors to shelter the black sheep. It's a shame, dear cousin that I cannot stand.

PAPA CAPULET: In the present circumstances you are the shame. Blind brutality! *(Tybalt brandishes a razor blade)* Let's go, little gentleman. I'm the master here or is it you –Mr. Whippersnapper. You want a scandal in the middle of my guests. Pay attention to your manners.

TYBALT: The coming of this intruder will bring bad luck, I'm sure. And the offence you have done me will be revenged. *(He leaves)*

ROMEO: *(takes Juliet's hand)* Here, Madame, a hand which is offered with the intention of blessing. Kill it or let it live. It will not defend itself.

JULIET: What is this sun, Sir that you put in my hand? In what soft flavors have you buried my age? Towards what saintly areas have you pushed my body. Ah I feel so fragile.

ROMEO: Come, Madame, we need to be alone, to say the things that only the right ears can hear.

(They move away from the dancers)

JULIET: What sugar is sweetening my lips? What salt comes to my mouth?

ROMEO: Oh Saint of Saints. Leave your lips the soft liberty of quenching my thirst. Leave in my hand the joy of gathering your speech at its source. Leave my eyes the leisure of organizing your chest and your breathing. Don't speak more, my saint. Be still and glowing silence, unmoving; leave my breath to enter your delicious soul, such a delicious reproach. Fish in my saliva the savage wine of our audacity so high and so proud.

JULIET: You know how to kiss ... You have in your hands all the science of touch. You have mastered the universe of loving. My love. You know with a hand that trembles how to dress the wounds of the soul.

NURSE: *(who appears)* Madame your mother wants to talk to you.

(She pulls away from Romeo)

ROMEO: *(alone)* I have just drunk the cruelest sweetness of my life –yes Romeo, my friend– you 've just eaten the most terrible poison in the world. Even death is insipid in front of the taste that destiny has poured down into your mouth.

SONY LABOU TANSI'S ADAPTATION OF 'ROMEO AND JULIET'

Your only hate gave birth to your only love. My desire is dead, an ardent love is its legacy –the beauty who has made me moan and cry ceases to be beautiful I love and I am loved despite the gods misfortune –the sorceress that has bewitched me. I dance in the bars of her glance trembling to know that she will also be the prisoner of my eyes. At the heart of our souls, the costumed, proud hate struts about –thick, haughty and blonde. Its flames lick the hard edges of a dream that I have never dreamed. The night brought a shimmering agony. They collect our sighs, our shouts, our oaths, our wishes, our obstacles –our hopes. My heart still sings for my beloved. I soothe all her body's joy and place it on the misfortune of having loved on the back of hatred.

Large crowd around a tennis court. Romeo faces Tybalt. Shouts, hushes, encouragement. Every point is applauded with an incredible fervor. One group of spectators wear red, the other blue. They sing. They hold the arquebus. They release clouds of balloons. They wave palm fronds. The multi-coloured flags –100 music pieces, 100 hymns, 100 slogans. The match lasts all morning and evening without a winner. It continues at night under 100,000 multi-coloured lights. Finally, we see the red defeated. Taunts and mocking shouts.

TABLEAU TWO

First night.

ROMEO: Lost! Lost for the best –my house has lost; the Capulets didn't give us any gifts –mine are in mourning –the Prince has agreed to give us several days to leave Princeville. The law is without appeal. And I leave her my Juliet...

BALTHAZAR: I'll try to convince Papa Montaigu, other punishments than banishment can be negotiated –the Prince will not forget your virtue.

ROMEO: Mr. Tybalt is much loved and listened to by the Prince –he'll use his position. He'll get revenge for the humiliations that I caused, that his uncle made him suffer the other night.

BALTHAZAR: Don't give up hope, friend. Our situation may be hard but not irreparable. Trust in your love and the certainty of your heart. Cast off that gloomy mood. With all your energy, invoke the glory of your beloved. Leave the smell of death where your being is dying, invoke your Juliet and your soul, bring together the brightness of her eyes and the strength of her teeth, caress in thought her scarlet lips, her refined foot, her fine leg, her trembling thighs and all those beautiful places that she sits on that vibrate and live in her, be drunk. Face all the demons for her, wade in her charms. Feed yourself with the uproar of her young existence.

ROMEO: See how at night, doubt covers the heart of stars, see how the moon doubts its dress. My blind love gropes towards that of my beloved –fate how cruel you are! How can I lose this pain that my hand has just brushed? Me who watched the day as if I was going to marry the darkness?

BALTHAZAR: The Prince likes jazz. In addition to my music, he listens to me and I am going to use that to convince him. Go already with peace, in the eyes of your mistress love her profoundly, take all the rays that open on her breast. For what remains, deign to count on your old friend Balthazar –A black man knows the esteem in which you hold him–go scam! Run off in the night, it'll cry for you.

Same night

ROMEO: World, why are you so empty?

Silence
What sinister soldiers are brandishing
Their wings.
I'm injured at every moment
That passes
Romeo, friend Romeo
We have come here
These whole nights
To hear
The concert of your soul.
This other night
Another time
We come to drink
The wounds
I come
To this exact spot
Where before you came
To celebrate your wounds
I came
Wait to see her face
At that window
The night envelopes
Your muscles –
Come my soft sweet star
This time can ooze out of your heart
Your dreams overturn
Lift yourself into the sky
Like a sigh
Chase the grey clouds
Where your thoughts reside.
Pin to the sky
Little marvel
The light of flesh
Come loved one
I drink your head.

JULIET: From what star does this voice appear?...

SONY LABOU TANSI'S ADAPTATION OF 'ROMEO AND JULIET'

ROMEO: From what comes this ray of light? What angel's breath brings together these delicious words? Is it you, Juliet? And who are you talking to?

JULIET: Hell bathes my ears –Romeo. My Orient, in this sky of hate where our fathers float around, how can you embrace me without fear of being stabbed?

ROMEO: My pale sun. My beloved. Your light floods my heart. You take night away with your smile o beautiful Juliet, I would like to be your gloves to sweep your cheeks every minute and taste the rigor of your skin.

JULIET: Romeo! Romeo! This name, my shame, my trouble. This name that lifts my heart. My heart. My despair and my loss. Romeo Romeo, I would like to un-baptize your blood. To love you, straight up, without having to pay for this hate that eats up our houses.

ROMEO: You that the moon is jealous of, you made of such paleness that hurts my eyes. My whole love. Your gestures push me to female silence –your skin gets up with mine. Your breasts give milk to my face. The day pales in shame at the brilliance of your cheeks –to whom do you speak luminous angel? Silver clouds. Who do you look at behind the spitting of your water. My bright black lit-up concert of bronze. What verb disturbs my dream? Which words has your mouth eaten?

JULIET: Romeo, Romeo... Why are you Romeo? Deny your father, refute your name and your ancestors or if not, Sir, swear to love me and I'll stop being a Capulet. Black girl broken down. Our names are our enemies. Montaigne is not you. Capulet is not in my heart, nor in my breast where you like to rest, nor even in my foot –take some other name. A rose is still a rose if you don't call it a rose. You will keep this proud perfection that is yours when I would have called you monster. Romeo leave your name completely and come completely to take me. I will feed you from my dream. Leave the banks of your name. Retire yourself. Come live with me. Learn by heart the fires where my soul is tied down.

ROMEO: Oh my turbulent beauty! The wings of love carry me to you. No, I do not fear your parents or my name. It's what a loving heart has created, nothing can destroy it. My dream is to be a superfluous body.

JULIET: I tremble that they don't see you here and kill you. Dear love. Hide your days from their enraged claws. Go!

ROMEO: The only death that I fear is that which your eyes can give me. Look at me tenderly and let my hand drink yours –permit my cheek to taste your lips. I know now to hide in your hair so that no sword can come to take me. Let's love here, even...

JULIET: Go love. So they don't see you here.

ROMEO: I am in the court of love. And then, if you don't love me enough, it doesn't matter if they find me. Better that their hate roots out a life than you cease to be my sun.

JULIET: Who then carries your steps towards my window? This world swarms with bitter traitors. Who has followed you?

ROMEO: Love, madam, I gave all so that I could borrow its eyes. For months already I come under this window to listen to your shadow behind your window pane. Go to the other end of the world and you will see me arrive at your feet, with the sea waves or with the wind –every morning I will awake for you like the sun.

(He kisses her)

JULIET: Night has covered my face so you cannot see my huge shame. We have not respected the customs and traditions. You can see that I almost died for you. You can say that I'm a burned soul... a bee or even a butterfly. I would like to deny that I love you, see you multiply your perishing, ask you a hundred times that usual question: do you love me? To hear one hundred times a well-cooked yes that I could taste. But pledges are also broken. My love, tell me loyally until when your heart sings my song? Do you think me too easy to take? Tell me that I dance and play the coquette, waiting for the *mijote* that was slow-cooked in my heart. I'm in a hurry, good Montaigu because I burn for you. Don't judge me severely –I'll leave you quickly. Believe me only when I say: I want to eat you like you eat a pear... taste all your sweetness, add salt to your salt. I've wanted so much to wear your lips. No, dear love I'm on the point of hypocrisy in hiding my flames from you. Men love it when you love them coldly, slowly for the good of customs –they wait while you resist their words. If that's the way you are, divine Romeo, excuse me, my love has no lightness, it weighs as much as all the oceans, the sky and the earth. It crushes my body.

ROMEO: Sing to me as you wish. I believe all and I assure it by that moon which hastens to our eyes.

JULIET: Take care that you aren't swearing on the inconstant moon of which the contours fall and rise. Fear that your love will not marry its variations. Don't swear that will be better. Be my ray and that's enough. Don't fill me up with an oath taken lightly. You make me afraid. Now, sweet visitor, we have drunk from our fires –we have almost eaten the buds of our love...go delicious love, go delicious body. Good night, good night. That the peace of your heart comes to be enthroned in mine.

ROMEO: I cannot leave so unsatisfied.

JULIET: What remains to be taken?

ROMEO: Give me a piece of your wish...swear a faithful love to my open eyes.

JULIET: Go and don't bother me anymore. Juliet will love you until the sky and all the stars will fall.

ROMEO: Tell me once again this couplet.

SONY LABOU TANSI'S ADAPTATION OF 'ROMEO AND JULIET'

JULIET: I versify completely in your body and forever, my ocean- you dissolve me. I hear someone coming –go! (*calls to the nurse, low*) She thinks I'm still at the breastfeeding age. (*loud*) I'm coming good nurse. Delicious Montaigne, don't forget your promises: stay a moment. I haven't had enough of your shadow. I'll speak to her and return. (*She leaves*)

ROMEO: Liquefied night bathe all my bones. Tell me dear moon that I didn't dream these flames. Tell me that her fragile lip will not be used and my heart, her teeth have risen will not vanish. Assure me, frivolous night, that her body will not be facing other men. (*Juliet returns*) Let's turn the pages on this blessed night.

JULIET: Three words, dear Romeo and this time good night for real. If your heart is ready to take the true vows of marriage let me know who I will send to you. All my destiny rests in your feet my sweet master. (*Calls to the nurse*) I com... I'm here for you. Dear soul. Nurse, stop running in front of me. Tomorrow I will send a messenger and some words. A thousand good nights.

ROMEO: What are my nights without your brilliant rays? A book of sadness. I will turn the pages and the hours of waiting will be still between your hands. I leave greedy for your lips, greedy of life. I leave you my soul. (*He leaves*)

JULIET: (*alone*) The sky has gone out. Romeo! My insides sleep. Speak another buttered word from the butter of your voice.

ROMEO: Beloved moon.

JULIET: What time are you at home tomorrow. I'll come to the window.

ROMEO: Don't come. My wolves are more carnivorous than your Capulets. I would die if anything bad happened to you.

JULIET: If you see that the time is too miserable without you- we'll arrive in the morning. Look as if you have forgotten time, dear adored one. I would like you to leave, like this captive kite that a child holds by the wire. I would like to kill you with caresses and attention. Go attain my heart, my desires and my patience.

ROMEO: Fasten peace at the bottom of your breast, my love.

(*He leaves*)

ANOTHER MORNING

NURSE: This dog. This beggar. This cake. Plague take him from feet to snout and his broken flesh be given to all the flies of the world.

JULIET: Why do you fulminate, Nurse? Have you not found the being that I sent you to see, the whole of my heart?

NURSE: All the birds in the sky peck out his rotten bits.

JULIET: What are you talking about, Nurse?

NURSE: The monster, him. My poor little... I'm in a rage. I'm dying of indignation.

JULIET: Have you seen my man, tell me. My heart is squeezed.

NURSE: Yes, miss I've seen your monster...

JULIET: My beautiful monster? My Romeo?

NURSE: That moldy being, this rotten Montaigu –this heap of horror has conquered your soul only to throw it into the fire of hate where the dregs of his ancestors lie.

JULIET: is it my Romeo that you speak of, Nurse?

NURSE: It is. We have fallen into a terrible trap. You don't know how to choose a man.

JULIET: What happened to him? Speak!

NURSE: Oh nothing really. The animal who last night kissed your milky white hand has been in love with another –a type of dry crab, without charm or flesh or flavor, named Rosaline and who is a rose with dry thorns, cloven, deserted. Romeo is a fermenter of women.

JULIET: What are you talking about? Nurse.

NURSE: Your unlucky Romeo left loving you and a used mammal by the name of Rosaline. As you ordered I went to him with your message and your tenderness. I hid so as not to be remarked on– like a grass snake I glide through the garden, then behind the kitchen –I was disguised as a Montaigu servant, the doors opened and who did I see? Him –God! He's there under my poor gaze –in the process of letting Rosaline kiss his hand, the hollow from which your age had drunk hope. (*Juliet faints*) Yes, Madam –these men are all demons- they are all bearded with frivolity. As long as you resist them, they stay in love –as soon as their foul smell has invaded your body you'll see that they go to sin with other females without even remembering the fresh smell of promises that they planted in your stomach. The plague take them all. Rabies crush them. I hate them. (*She sees Juliet on the ground*) Hey miss. I don't know more than I've suggested. I said only that he brushed her hand.

JULIET: (*in the apples*) Nurse Nurse

NURSE: That's it. He brushed Rosaline's hand, yes, with his lips, I don't know whether it was courtesy or love. My god – she's the color of a corpse. Miss – please... think about it. Put things in their correct places. I didn't say Rosalind had taken the lips of your lover that he had tasted her heart.

JULIET: Nurse... I feel empty in my flesh.

NURSE: All men are monsters on this subject. They stay faithful to us as long as it takes to take our virtue. Once the mistake is made, they fly off like this butterfly or this bee that runs from the flowers. When they say I love you don't you hear always «as clarity blinds the eyes» Men's hearts, in effect, love only the conquest of our fall. Miss, I beg you –the pernicious Rosaline, sure, made use of your beloved's hand –but...

JULIET: Fever has taken my limbs. I'm dying, Nurse, save me.

NURSE: I don't know if my eyes saw what they saw. I think even that her name was bitter on his lips. No really I don't know.

JULIET: Yes, truly: my soul is bitter to my body. The heart that you see, Nurse, has scolded my reason what you told me has made me love my monster even more foolishly –this delicious injury of the soul one day hit me. I'm lost, Nurse, I'm looking. What a horrible game! Who leads this delicious torment? Who am I? Romeo, monstrous Romeo, give me back my heart –put my hand at the base of her tender innocence, give her virginity to my mouth. Delicious monster, rebuild my hate as it was. Come injured heart, walk, go to find Tybalt – go and in his faithful love wash off the injuries of the unfaithful Montaigu who injured us. My body is failing.

(She leaves unsteadily)

NURSE: By God! Miss, let's be patient. Let's wait for the heart of the problem. «We will eat the moldy hare-meat of a rotten old hare. Let's not advance our paunches; the hare's time is always cut in ten. Let's keep our fingers intact. My Susan will not be there. There're too many ripe men in paradise. Susan you must be cold in your stomach. *(Seeing Juliet)* Where's she going my gods? Romeo of all our bad luck, with your incoherent Rose-machine... If it goes badly with the sweet daughter of my masters, you'll hear from me by all the gods –I'll throw my old bones at you –and if energy leaves me, dirty lout, I'll find someone to punish you. Don't take me for an accomplice. I can become a buffalo, me too. Never will I accept that a vagrant will be at ease with Susan's natural double. *(a pause)* Where are you Juliet? Miss...I'm vexed to the root of my intestines... I shiver I boil. Where is she, the poor little one? At her age... since the time that ignoble vagabond gave her a taste of fool's paradise from the first night. Trust a Montaigu to produce such a dirty incongruity –a betrayal of morals that deserves assassination and give his heart to the dogs –that will dissect him.

ROMEO: *(who arrives)* What are you talking about, blessed nurse? You who my Juliet venerates has sucked wisdom with the milk.

NURSE: My mistress is dead. Assassinated. I'll thrash you. You hide your cruelty under the appearance of a lamb –you walk around with a false perfume of gentleman. You promise your heart here and have mortgaged it elsewhere –

what do you come here to see the sadness of our angel Juliet? Go and spread your toad stench somewhere else.

ROMEO: Calm down, Nurse. Remove this unfair anger.

Nurse: Go and shine your lies on Rosaline. Don't come here to rekindle the demolition of my poor Juliet. Leave us to calm the death that your ugliness has lit in her soul.

ROMEO: Where is she?.my tranquility, my nirvana, where is the equilibrium of my body.

NURSE: She has gone far from the sun's eyes, to nourish the cuts that your insouciance has inflicted –poor delicate child- you've killed her without much pain in planting in her chest the one thousand times cursed name of her rival. She drank this poison –leave her at least the peace to die without witnesses.

ROMEO: Stop killing me Nurse. Infuriate, please the march of chaos into the enclosure of my soul. I desired Rosaline before with my eyes. I'm here newly made-up loving for better or for worse – I was ecstatic for Rosaline, here I'm cooked in boiling oil on account of the mean Juliet – my star, my life – Nurse, where have you hidden her? Show me my goddess of bronze. Take this note in recompense. Tell my distracted heart.

NURSE: Come, good knight. Follow me. She's dead behind these walls. Perhaps she's already cold. She was the sweetest of souls, the most crystalline of bodies.

ROMEO: Shut up nurse and walk.

NURSE: When she was only a little fragile gem – she too, without presumption, had her little green buttocks felt by a billy-goat named Tybalt. I tell you, Sir, he made me want to leap at his throat. You've seen nothing like the arrogance that illuminated his unhealthy fangs. Even today this old desire has not left his hands. Reassure yourself, young man, I watched closely this messing around. Miss wasn't in favor of it – she would have voluntarily married a rotten mackerel than feel for a Tybalt. To put her in a bad mood I only had to say that Tybalt looked like a man. At your intentions, Miss built a citadel of delicious wishes that you would be happy to hear. Every evening before going to sleep, she released your name to the windows, took a shower in blessed words while thinking of your person-she became as radiant as a gemstone –her eyes began to sparkle her lip trembled her little breast quivered and began to dream.

Romeo: Nurse, address my love pangs on foot to your mistress.

NURSE: Come, Sir, by here. Cure the troubles and doubts that imprison her. Promise her millions of times all the depths of your heart.

THE EVENING TO COME

JULIET: (*in her bed –she is revived*) Is the sun still in the sky? Tell me Nurse, – the hours have lost their wings. Our world has already changed to vague liquid? Romeo, my prince Romeo, have you betrayed me deeply and ultimately? Where can I put this wretched soul that sickens in a corner of my body? On what side? On what root against what suffering can I press my despair?

NURSE: A minute, Madam. Find soon a joy to fill your heart. Romeo has been here for hours to die with you. He only went away to convince the father to come marry your corpse to his misfortune. Romeo, madam, gave his oath to be married to your remains before being joined with you in the death that soon will take you prisoner. Ah, miss if you had seen how Romeo had fallen into difficulties for you, you would love him and be proud of him endlessly. He lamented like an old mother, invoking all the angels in the sky, if you had seen his young soul all covered in dust, tears and grief, your heart would have given him its most precious depths without limit and its most noble privacy.

JULIET: He pleads for me, you say Nurse? With what depth of being and sincerity? Not a formality destined to valorize in the most tender manner my rival. At any part during his act did he put in place of my name that of Rosaline?

NURSE: Be fair to his heart, Madam. Respect the limpid sincerity. He really does venerate you. I can swear to you on the seventy-one red hairs of Casimir's beard and on the three grains of beauty that emphasize the iron chin, my husband.

JULIET: Just like men, Nurse, who give me their lips, their heart reserved for my rival?

NURSE: His love is a magnificent blade I tell you. It would cut the world in four for you – that he's good at heart I will defend him until death in front of your hesitation. And by my fifty-two years I've never seen a more loving man. What limpidity in suffering and what a dense way of desiring. For your lips his life is hanging by a thread – (*seeing Romeo arrive with Father Lawrence*) It's time, Sir, go defend your case with your own arguments. Love only believes what it embraces –lovers, alas, only believe the true eyes of their blindness. I leave you together, decide with your hearts.

JULIET: Stay, Nurse! You can sponsor my misery if the infidel is cruel.

NURSE: I don't want to be witness to your unhappiness.

JULIET: You told me he'd die for me.

NURSE: I don't want to live your death –my bones are leaving –I'm going.

JULIET: You leave me as if something's wrong Nurse. If you've lied to me to tear me away from death, kill me with one blow, show me the monster as he is...

NURSE: My bones, my poor old bones.

JULIET: I would give you mine for a word.

NURSE: I'm as old as the hills.

JULIET: Take my youth, speak who is my monster? How did he answer you? With what attitude did he consider my declaration to marry him?

NURSE: Sweet Jesus! What a bitter mission!

JULIET: I will drink it all, dregs included, tell me Nurse, with what words has he killed me?

NURSE: Wait for his own mouth. They're climbing the walls. Be patient. I've already run around all afternoon on my poor old legs. You could give me a little second to stop wearing me out.

JULIET: Get to the point, give me the *coup de grace*. Kill quickly Nurse, instead of letting me languish.

NURSE: My legs! My old legs – my old flesh. Next time you give your messages yourself.

JULIET: You have enough energy to complain ...and not enough to speak clearly?

NURSE: My back my spine! My head. You're not old enough to understand how flesh can sulk when the bones don't work. Ah ah , my feet. I'm giving out. My head's hurting so much it's going to break into pieces. You! You. Ye! Ye! Ye! And when I think I'm too old to be climbing the walls.

JULIET: Suffer with less declaration. Appease my heart that sent you running so far – what does Romeo think of our marriage?

NURSE: You sent me to look for death I've no breath left. I am dead. My bones are banging. (*Briskly*) Devil! I didn't put out the ladder for those good sirs to climb – wait madam while I help your love to climb to paradise.

JULIET: (*holding her*) No nurse, tell me if he's coming to make me live or to kill me.

NURSE: As the saying goes: hearts are blind. Yours, I think has made a mean choice – Romeo, a man? Without doubt. He has a passable face for all that, reasonable legs – you could even say they were pretty. The hands, the feet, the size and smile all excellent. His appearance is, in a word, exquisite – in terms of courtesy, Romeo... They'll be getting impatient, wait while I go to put out the ladder, because your beloved cannot climb with these wings of love up to the nest of the turtledove. The wings of love are not wings that can make light work of twelve metres of rock. I'll go do my duty with my old bones: Climb, jump, grovel, go up, carry – I'll kill myself voluntarily for your pleasure –I'm your Persian horse, carry-all. But tonight, if you don't mess it up, miss, it's you who'll be moaning under the burden. (*she leaves*)

JULIET: How obscure she is! My heart, what are we doing? Who will enter death or life?

LATE AT NIGHT

ROMEO: Climb. It's your turn, Father. Pay attention. The ladder's missing a few steps. Roll up your cassock.

FATHER: If I wasn't your friend, Romeo you would make me enter a climber's paradise without merit.

Romeo: Don't waste your energy speaking – you'll need it.

FATHER: Guarantee me a good hot coffee on our arrival.

ROMEO: Don't get your clothes dirty; don't forget your blessing tools.

JULIET: Nurse! Nurse! I'm dying.

ROMEO: (*surprised*) She's alive. Death has taken his eyes off her. I'm here, beautiful star. I'm bringing you fresh prayers and a husband to make you a wife.

JULIET: I'm dead, Nurse! He's killed me.

FATHER: Oof! This is the sharpest marriage of my career – I've left a whack on my habit.

ROMEO: Do it quickly, Father.

FATHER: She breathes? You swore to me that she was dead!

ROMEO: I thought she was dead. It's better living – I marry her immediately, give us your blessing. Confirm these fires that mangle my veins, legalize before God the sweet desire that comes to dance in our dreams. Father let's go, I adore her for better or for worse.

JULIET: What are you doing, sweet Romeo?

ROMEO: I bind my days to yours. I add my soul to yours. I change our destiny into an alloy of ardent motivations. And your young, delightful loving heart, I plant an immortal grain, sweetly, very sweetly I mix your flesh with mine my hand will get to know the rhythm of your shape I'll recreate part of me in you that is lost – I thought I was marrying a corpse – dear love when I left here you were not breathing, your skin was pale and the light in your eyes had gone out and your beauty had sown a curious fascination. I return, you breathe, you speak, you smile at me. I'm covered with the joy and peace of love. With the help of Father Christian, our friend, I'm going to amend your state before God.

FATHER: Not here! Let's go where the holy act can receive the consent and the smile of the sun – before the future makes you pay in tears.

ROMEO: Join at least our hands. Bless us my father – so devouring death can come; she'll find nothing – when I said to my black moon «you are mine» no death can come to kill me.

FATHER: Be careful Romeo, violent desires have violent ends. The fire and powder can consume us by kissing us – love more wisely, the world is so thoughtless.

ROMEO: I will consume her by kissing every moment that remains, Juliet love, combine your joy, put your dreams in life smiling upon us, profit from delights that she has put in the palm of our hand – be mine – you, delightful female and me, bitter male, let's build the noise at the heart of our silent flesh, let's raise the joy and love among us.

FATHER: Come to St. Église to make you two one soul.

(They leave)

THE FIRST MORNING OF DEATH

MAMA MONTAIGU: Death to all the rats. In the air of inhuman wishes of police, death to all the police on earth...

PAPA MONTAIGU: Even old women keep a sour judgment. Consider in your proposals what we have lost. The law of losers demands that we remain calm for a time.

MAMA MONTAIGU: The Capulets have bought the prince, they've bought justice, the law, the right. They've even bought our son with the malice that's locked in the thighs of their daughter. I refuse this defeat. It is distorted in front of my conscience.

PAPA MONTAIGU: Don't mix your conscience it's an ample piece of cloth for your sharp curves.

MAMA MONTAIGU: I'll show them that I have a real pair of buttocks. That I don't know any way to sit down.

PAPA MONTAIGU: Knowing how to sit down is an art, I swear perhaps even a science.

MAMA MONTAIGU: Put the arts and the sciences in the order which enchants you. I'm crazy with rebellion. I break the balls of the first Capulet that shows up. I rise up against their vulgar cheating. No, I cannot accept it, they provoke a fight and it's to them that the law gives the right to chase us out of here. Gosh, when they come I'll be waiting on my two sticks. *(She sees Romeo)* You can come and run and make me crazy. You agree with our worst assassins. You lick their boots, stuff yourself with their insults, feed yourself on that which their snouts throw out, what shame. You indigent phallic traitor. Go and show the exploits

of your inconstancy that will bless the enemy that kills us –and be happy for that cause.

ROMEO: Stop confusing things Mother.

MAMA MONTAIGU: What a day, cheeky son stop confusing biting and kissing –up to where will your naivety push the blindness, they kill us, they gut us and you dance.

ROMEO: We are sufficiently and quite profoundly torn apart, mother, it's time to dream new dreams. What purpose does decay serve as the base of a decayed hate? What is served by maintaining death against all the knowledge of existence? Mother!

MAMA MONTAIGU: You have to be a fool to kiss a razor. –our blood is together but our interests divorced. Choose rebel son between interest and blood that serves your cause. Me, I don't prevaricate, I answer honor's call. Philosophize my son, me, I choose to breathe. I'm going to show the Capulets the depths of my anger.

(She leaves)

THE FIRST NOON OF DEATH

BALTHAZAR: Again a bloodless corpse that howls its ugliness to the sun. You see the teeth, the nostrils, the intestines, the dead eyes –the coffin waits in its beautiful dress of red wood. This corpse belongs to Dame Montague, I beseech you, good God, take it seriously, it's not a kid's game to massacre yourselves to the quarrel's length. It was hot, Dame Montague wanted to tell the enraged Capulets that she was a lucky bastard these ones showed her with a whip that they know how to destroy a woman, they agitated her blood to the point of killing her and this poor blood called already another blood. What butchery, my ancestors – hot anger boiling in the chests where long ago inextricable passions slept – we hate each other, we eviscerate each other and we chase each other. Romeo, Juliet, two full souls like an egg and who wish to dream in a place full of quarrels in place of empty heads or those filled with dirty –the empty head is the large specialty of our time, it's sold everywhere, you rent it and pass it on like lice –the empty head is the supreme merit especially in the best city dwellers. It's accompanied by little sparks of luck sprinkled with incontrovertible contagious ideas and then exchanged everywhere, it's prodigious. We are the children of the empty head – nailed to the depths of an empty heart all that is above my energy, sweet Romeo rotten friend who dares to dream of having a soul and a love. I laugh at you from the nostrils, sleep in the arms of the beautiful kid while they gut your mother dribble out of your genitals while your mother ejects all her blood – drink the lips of your beloved at the same moment that Mama Montague drinks her troubled injuries. What

on earth even the son is sewed up with blood the river washed along with tons of insults it waters the interminable and really petty provocations and it goes on and on, on the bundle of injuries. All that to live with an empty head and empty heart. No Romeo trusty friend I run to revenge that which keeps us proud – bury me if they kill me, that’s better than living insulted. Love, yes, love but how to love in the stomach of a cadaver so dense? How to bury the arrogant deprivation that you see in their eyes? This is my testament if Tybalt kills me if he sends my spirit into the clouds, protect my cousin Rosamunde.

ROMEO: Keep your pain, bury the teeth of your hate, we must kill our quarrels or they will kill us all, Balthazar my friend my brother knew that the reasons that we have to love are better than my reasons to kill.

BALTHAZAR: Have you counted all the deaths that they’ve planted in the stomach? Open your ears and drink these cadavers that no one can bury. Mercutio, Escalus, Paris, Maurice Montaigu, Benvolio, Mantoue, Emilien Montaigu, Alphonse Montaigu, Marien Montaigu.

ROMEO: Count their deaths too, you will see balancing out hate solves nothing. The art of biting, the science of civets, the weakness of being. I beg you sweet friend, shut your mouth. Let me dream another dream!

THE FIRST EVENING OF DEATH

TYBALT: Cowards are always the luckiest in love. Romeo, fragile insect, you can run, shame eats your hand, oozes from your steps.

ROMEO: oh sweet Juliet, your love has made me a woman.

TYBALT: What are you saying rotten swine? You are only fit to be eaten by verse.

ROMEO: Living, triumphant, the animal who has just drunk all the blood of my friend. Hesitation, morbid moderation. Leave me, the instant of madness. Anger, be my wife for the night. Give me your iron hand of all the devils. Balthazar’s soul has returned to wangle my blood. You’re not a man if it pleases you to see a criminal cradling his crimes. I will kill you Tybalt or you will kill me so my indignations will be decided.

TYBALT: And so my dear lout, my sword is making you a path to paradise.

ROMEO: Mine will send you to hell. *(They fight, a long pause –then Tybalt falls shouting)* My hand, we are vanquished once by hate and once by luck. Let’s leave these soiled places.

(The crowd arrives with torches)

MAMA CAPULET: Again a bunch of corpses. Who was killed?

A VOICE: Tybalt has just killed Balthazar.

SONY LABOU TANSI'S ADAPTATION OF 'ROMEO AND JULIET'

THE POLICE CHIEF: (*at Tybalt's body*) Stand up Mr. Killer, I arrest you in the name of the prince – obey walk in front of me.

PRINCE: Insipid souls, when will you stop cursing my rest? Who in my city dares still to wake up sleeping quarrels? Who brings killing to my feet?

POLICE CHIEF: The same ones, Monsieur that have always sown disdain in your city –they have once again preferred offence to unity –Tybalt has killed Balthazar after Mercutio and Benvolio... Romeo came to finish this sordid butchery by killing Tybalt.

MAMA CAPULET: Prince! My house claims reparations –Romeo has killed Tybalt. He must no longer live.

PRINCE: All this blood spilt for little things –your hate affects me. Because of your offences I impose on Romeo immediate exile. If he's found here, the hour that he is discovered will be the last of his life. Mercy kills when she pardons a murderer. Temperance, when she eats with crime turns into cowardice. Disperse and let my wishes be respected.

POLICE CHIEF: Souls without souls, you have heard the prince's words, go think about them, make them known all over the area over which his respect keeps watch. You are all his arms and his will, his eyes and his ears that justice will be done for the Prince and the law. On my command, push off!

THE FIRST SOWETO MORNING

JULIET: Nurse, we are lost. You could say in a country of the dead, that the dust, the wind and the sun –that the ashes and the carbon. Even the stones burst with heat. No, really, sweet. Romeo cannot live here with the cockroaches and the toads –he had to go to another desert. Look, Nurse, these fields of skulls, you could say we are no longer in the world.

NURSE: The missive is categorical. Romeo comes here to lift your sadness.

JULIET: Look at these zombies, you could say their eyes extinguish the light, their stomachs are those of pebbles –Romeo my delicious love, in what body are you hiding here –under what sand between what ruins? What aridness profanes your hands and what thirst wanders across your lips? Romeo, Rome... Oh what dust gilds your eagle eye? And what game simmers in your stomach –what silence bellows from your tongue? What night drinks your shadow and what day lights it up? What ghost ruins your age Romeo what snakes amuse themselves under your steps? Here's my voice, it calls you at the exact time of our loving rites. My body wants you, my flesh calls you at the top of its voice– come you want me to lose by winning at the virginity game. The blood rushes through my veins like a wild beast. Come, Romeo my day hunts the night who rules me. We have loved fiercely but have not had the time to consume the

fruits of our passion. Where are you, hiding under what stone? What's my mouth saying?

NURSE: My poor bones, my poor moldy old bones. What acrid, hard sticky dust – who has built this hell just on the back of our hands. Water! Help!

JULIET: Who has raised this desolation on this tortured earth that maintained these corpse-like huts? Oh misery who nourishes you that you stagnate with so much arrogance, what milk with what breast –oh what conceit powders the teeth of silence supremely fierce this backlog of notorious death that you force-feed with nourishment always new? Who puts in your rotten mouth this redoubtable shining and the lover's dream?

NURSE: You will bury me if during these hours your cruel heart makes me run.

JULIET: Look again Nurse, let's drink some more sips of this arid earth, let's look for my peace and the rhythm of my breathing –here my sky fell - here dies my part of the world and all my hopes. Here, even under a tendentious pebble sleeps a pure soul, a man who killed himself to kill a basket of grass snakes. I came to cry, Nurse, the one who offered his days to our adversities 100,000 times buried and disinterred. He, this adored angel who chose to enter the service of an earthworm –wanted to be the prince of silence having pulled out his mouth from my kisses he offered it to the turbulence of the grave – in place of giving me his hand he chose to whine. In this way he thought to open a future to those here, what star, what sun what god can guide my bitter feet to his tomb?

(The Chief Inspector arrives followed by several constables)

CHIEF INSPECTOR: The gods live and thank then, miss these days that we try to have your news. Our prince has fallen into the trap of influence of your young body he waits for you, run Madame before his feet collect his mercy and the delicious juice of ardent reparation.

JULIET: Tell me, have you found Romeo?

CHIEF INSPECTOR: His body, yes Madame, not his soul to extinguish all our old quarrels Romeo has opened his blood to the new dream that they wish the people here to dream. He gave himself in sacrifice. Our prince's magnanimity of posthumous titles offers him the highest distinction of our county which will assure him eternal praise.

NURSE: My bones, my poor bones, my head....

JULIET: Tell the Prince that I will take here my posthumous title kisses. I will not move from here.

(Balthazar's orchestra arrives and plays a requiem. Other people and crowds arrive without stopping, singing)

Romeo's Testament:

Beloved, when you read these words I will already be married to other sufferings. I will perhaps speak the language of hell. I know that I break your heart in killing my soul and the love where we must live condemns me. I know, shining star that I lessen your light in making the choice that stays with me. I would like to survive to explain to you things one by one under the lights of kisses to fix with you each angle, each corner of original doubt. Juliet, love, I kill the body that your heart has as a temple. I pay my blood in the game of discord. Be strong, venerated love, and understand if you can that the centre of our soul is the courage to measure to the limits of the heart even to pay homage to that which you have vanquished. Our road sweet love remains the master of our fragile nature; to vanquish oneself is to vanquish 1000 times to become the master of this swarming matter that bellows in us, austere, barbarous and brutal –if although when I say I love you those simple words include all the suns of the universe in my mouth they resume the measure of things. Be strong if you can, my wife of a few hours –I had to choose between my death and the death of my enemy or furthermore I had chosen to kill myself with Tybalt to put an end to an odious blood roulette now that all who must die are dead. Love, lover, spouse allow that on our land another dream can be dreamt in the name of all the botched blood in the name of love broken or patched up don't forget to cultivate the life that I leave –bless your body and your heart restore my conscience for the good of this race of backward and impious people. Sometimes when the mood takes you take my name on your immaculate lips, resound your virginity on another man than me - live as one is living in this way you will build my joy and happiness. Now I am hidden in your eyes at the heart of every word you read. Juliet window of my blood in the world do not close. I fenced off the hate in the double disappearance of Tybalt and myself have I said this strange word that disturbs my conscience. «Transparition» give it the meaning that your body wants –it's the ring of my breath tied together with yours. Know Juliet or knew it our delicious marriage continues. Choose laughter over tears as I chose death to live –don't look at me as a murderer our ground is broken and I have repaired it with my two ranks, it's better like that.

(Balthazar's orchestra plays this testament in music for Juliet dressed as a bride)

Juliet's Testament:

Dear love, I've drunk your words and I die of them because your flesh is condemned to mine by a chain of iron that connects us, how can I breathe under a dull sky under the eyes of a collapsed sun. Your blood includes mine your corpse requires mine –we married for a few hours must carry our bodies towards the same fatal flower. I must remove the living costume to meet the crystalline nudity of your soul. How could I do otherwise– Romeo broken sun, ardent corpse, I come to you in this outfit put on yesterday in front of God and the Holy Church. With what other temerity could I dress myself or have the heart to keep the mean body that I promised you. My love, leave this sick sky to the impure, be truthful to the same dream, let's read the same chapter in the

book of death, the knowledge of our measured community –in our communal destiny where my heart ran aground. Romeo, delicious corpse, open your silence, let me drink at the source of dull lips the changing of the world and the passion that we loved together. How can I use otherwise my legs and this virgin stomach with all its fire? What energy would I have to live with a dull soul and a closed body? What can I do with a heart already fenced off? I will offer my virginity at the feet of your dead dreams. What taste would my life have after your flaming kisses on my nubile lips, punished pupil of nature? You were the salt of my days, my only meaning, the sky of my obsessions you were the only star I would not go to extinguish and look for another death than yours. It is enough for us, it is vast enough for two, I dull that bitter soul where your body came to sojourn stupidly being the pain and the virtue. I exchange my destiny against all the hopes that your smile of death lit in me. Let's be united in the arms of trespass, drink together the ardent curse of the universe in this bitter group of cells.

Romeo, Juliet, suns crushed to extinguish hate. Here's the end mission, my love, take the contours of your silence by the hips, it's better like that- you will not have dear love, left the decision to live with a posthumous title. What a farce you played with me Romeo, I waited for you tonight in front of the ladder to my bedroom. I came since your heart chose to wait for me in Paradise. I drank without letting the bottle touch my lips these farewell words though I need another poison to kill me –Love, my beloved, speak in my flesh, light up my trembling breast silence come stitch up my closed thigh; my rebellious hip. Men of this place once more buzz, cement your damned quarrel, eat our death. You are hungry for intrigue, be as fat as it suits you, start off another quarrel to kill other innocents once more seem to be human: crush, botch, burn, gut fragile souls –alas you don't need me to give you hate for you to hate. I go virgin behind the bars of the love who married me –Romeo wait for me to close my lips and I'm there.

(Silence)

MAMA CAPULET: Where is she, gods Juliet, my innards where are you hiding? You are on the point of grief for our dear Tybalt that an angry wolf has killed.

PAPA CAPULET: Close your hate you will see no more a wolf or a ewe, death together married them. Go to church to cry for two bodies in flowers dressed in the smile of a prince.

MAMA CAPULET: My legs can't hold me my body leaves me. Are you saying someone killed Juliet?

PAPA CAPULET: We have sacrificed these poor angels to our blindness, their two bodies accuse our house and that of Montague. The same death embraces them the same silence sucks their lips –it's the tragic tax that our two houses pay for arrogance and its paid in cash.

MAMA CAPULET: My blood has left my bones have gone, give me my nerves, you say that I have drunk my heart. *(She collapses)*

SONY LABOU TANSI'S ADAPTATION OF 'ROMEO AND JULIET'

PAPA CAPULET: No Maryse. You at least stay who will lift my old days if you fail.
Come back Maryse, don't die so stupidly.

MAMA CAPULET: You say that my heart drinks me...

PAPA CAPULET: No Maryse, love, stay. I will lend you mine the heart the time to
shut up all the shutters on our discord, stay. I'll supply, you don't die. I'll lend
you, my old life.

*(She opens her eyes, he kisses her, the two get up and leave unsteadily as if they
had been drinking)*

END