to wait until this observation is tested in a larger population and in a study that is not handicapped by severe confounding and by an inability to determine who received the "treatment."

Martin A. Tanner
University of Wisconsin
Clinical Cancer Center
Madison, WI 53706


[Joseph A. Murray from Dublin, Ireland, also wonders how many adolescents actually saw the shows. How can we know? ed.]

To the Editor: I believe that before one can compare the supposed effect or lack of effect on suicide rates among young people of televising fictional stories about suicide, one must take into account the probable audience actually watching such films. Phillips and Paigh do not make any references to the time the films were shown either in Pennsylvania or California. It is possible that the lack of effect on these states may have been due to differences in the numbers of young people viewing the movies. It is important that all studies of this type take into account the television ratings for the particular movies studied in the various locations.

Joseph A Murray, M.B., M.R.C.P.I
St. Laurence's Hospital
Dublin 7, Ireland

VERONA AND ROMEO AND JULIET

IN SEARCH OF JULIET'S VERONA

As the following humorous travelogue mentions, the story of Romeo and Juliet may have been originally placed in the countryside of Lombardia (that state of northern Italy controlled for 200 years by Teutonic invaders, the Lombards), and not the Tuscany of Siena or the Veneto of Verona. By placing it in the streets of Verona, the developers of the story (notably Shakespeare) opened the door for a Veronese cottage industry selling everything from apocryphal stories about houses and tombs of Juliet, to trinkets and crystal renderings of the lovers, and even a burgeoning nonprofit business in advice to the lovelorn.

A club, made up in part of international graduate students, will answer mail in many languages addressed to "Juliet" (Capulet or Montague or neither)—or even "Romeo"—"Verona, Italy." The writer Barbara Ascher fluently weaves into her description of the sights and some of the joys of Verona the gradual movement of the principals to a glorious outdoor performance of Verdi's opera Aida, which climaxes with the duet of the dying lovers, Radames and the noble Aida, who, like Juliet, chooses to join her man in death and echoes her own lamentation.

FROM BARBARA LAZEAR ASCHER. "TRYING TO AVOID ROMEO AND JULIET: IN VERONA FOR THE OPERA, A VISITOR FINDS THERE IS NO ESCAPING THE CITY'S MOST FAMOUS COUPLE"
(New York Times, Sunday, May 12, 1996, pp. 11-12.)

ROMEO E GUILLETTA! Tomba di Giulietta. Casa Giulietta. Albergo Giulietta Romeo. Romeo e Giulietta Flamenco to be performed tonight by Luisillo's Spanish Dance Theater... The advertisements and signs start appearing in the outskirts of Verona, where modern apartment buildings, car showrooms and cinder block hotels could make us forget that we are approaching what the guidebooks tell us is the "city of love"—a city where, they promise, the atmosphere of that ancient romance will enliven our own.

Are we jaded, aging and churlish? Neither my husband nor I is feeling
the least bit romantic on this cold, rainy day in late August. We're disgruntled and decidedly lost as we search for a way inside the city walls surrounding the medieval center they once protected. The "Centro" signs seem to be sending us in circles and we begin to wonder if that's what "centro" really means. Verona has spent centuries keeping foreigners out. The Romans built the walls; in 312 Constantine laid siege to them. The Goths were next, in 402, and their leader, Theodoric, plundered stones from the Roman arena to build new walls. The Lombards, whose power lasted two centuries, from 568 to 774, were followed by the Scaligers, or Della Scala dynasty, referred to by Ruskin as the central light of Italian chivalry. During the 13th and 14th centuries they fortified and maintained the red brick crenelated walls, watch towers and battlements that keep us out today. Penetrating the city remains a battle of wits.

We stop at Juliet's Cafe to ask directions. Nobody speaks English. My spotty Italian falters as I struggle to explain my destination. The waiter shakes his head sadly. He summons his co-workers, who make sympathetic clucking sounds as they huddle over my crumpled map. After much discussion and head-shaking among themselves, a young cook who has wandered out of the kitchen suggests brightly in Italian, "But you're very close to Juliet's tomb."

Said sweetly, to soothe a tourist's growing distress, to urge her gently toward this particular Veronese enthusiasm. I'm the wrong tourist. I was told before I left the States that Juliet's tomb is probably nothing more than an old horse trough. That even the city fathers know this, but it makes people happy. Nobody complains. I don't want romance: I want a hot bath. Sorry, they shrug and hold up their arms in a gesture of helplessness.

After six more stops for directions we cross a stone bridge spanning the Adige River, which, unlike us, knows exactly where it's going as it flows greenly from Alps to Adriatic. We make smaller and smaller circles through increasingly dark, car-width streets until we come to a halt in Piazza Sant'Anastasia. There is the looming Gothic brick facade of Sant'Anastasia, and there on the adjacent corner is the Due Torri Hotel. We've arrived.

As we go through the doors I begin to resign myself to the fact that there is no escaping this city's romantic clutches. The lobby, once the courtyard of a 14th-century Scaliger guesthouse, is a frescoed, tiled, gilded and columned fantasy. Our room is furnished in mid-19th-century mahogany extravagance, the moldings are gold leaf, and the tub in the pink marble bathroom has a Jacuzzi. There is a basket of fruit tied with pretty ribbons placed on a small table next to a settee designed for sog

gestive reclining. Unfortunately I failed to pack the requisite Jean Harlowe negligee.

You can measure a city's soul by how it takes you in out of the rain. Following our concierge's directions and accepting the loan of his umbrellas, we head for Caffe Dante and a late lunch. We wander down streets so narrow that as a young woman approaches from the opposite direction we all fold up our umbrellas in order to pass. Within 10 minutes we are at the Piazza dei Signori. There is something about a cool, gray day in a medieval square that makes you believe you are there not as a tourist but as a citizen in the time before the rush of light that was the Renaissance. The sense of dark enclosure is especially keen as we are surrounded by the somber 12th- and 13th-century buildings in which the Scaligers, or Scalas, lived and governed from 1262 until 1390, overseeing a period of flourishing art and chivalry.

Two gentlemen of Verona, Catullus and Pliny the Younger, perch on top of the Palazzo del Consiglio, and a statue of Dante, exile from Florence and frequent house guest of Cangrande della Scala, appears out of the mist. In 1865 the sculptor Ugo Zannoni captured the poet for all eternity in the pose favored by 20th-century authors—hand beneath chin conveying deep thought. He won't be interrupted today. The square spreads before him empty and silent. Then there is a moment when I am certain I hear a hushed "Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita . . ." ("In the middle of the journey of our life . . ."). I glance at my husband to see if he's heard it, but he's already heading for the refuge of a warm cafe.

We shake our umbrellas, stamp our boots and leave the damp gloom behind as we open a heavy, varnished oak door and enter what was early in the century Verona's favorite reading room. It maintains that ambiance although it is now a restaurant. Patrons sit on brocade chairs or curl up on green banquettes softened with fringed, pink pillows. They read their newspapers, opera librettos and novels by the light of crystal sconces and chandeliers. Frescoed Piedmont kings and heroic soldiers stare down from the ceiling and appear to read over the shoulders of those who sip espresso and dream. It is clear that you are welcome for as long as you care to remain. On a day like this, who would want to leave the warmth of peach stuccoed walls, the perfume of fresh truffles grated over homemade pasta? We determine to settle in for the duration.

Are we here for the opera? Our waiter asks the question that is standard between July and early September, when fans arrive from around the world to be present for opera performed outdoors without microphones in the first-century Roman Arena. When we say that we are, he hands us the after-opera dinner menu and invites us back.

As the sky clears and we have had our fill of pasta, pastray, blackberries and wine, we walk back to the hotel via the Piazza delle Erbe, which
adjoins the Piazza dei Signori. As cars are prohibited in both squares and the weather has discouraged pedestrians, the only sound is our own footsteps against stone. We pass beneath the large whale rib that gives the Costa archway its name. No one knows for sure why or how the rib got there, but we are learning to shrug off vexing facts, Veronese style.

Piazza delle Erbe, larger and brighter than its neighbor, was the forum when Verona was part of the Roman Empire. It is still circus-shaped and is probably the oldest continuous shopping center in the world. Its essential purpose remains unchanged, gossip and goods. Small statues and snow globes of, you guessed it, Romeo and Juliet, have replaced the herbs sold during the Middle Ages. My favorite is completely white but for the bright red lips of the kissing lovers. Romeo's aim is off.

I return to the piazza early the next morning to be here when Verona comes out to do its own business, rather than that of tourists. In the center, surrounded by red brick and ochre marble palazzos, and below a 14th-century clock tower (Verona's first), merchants create a ceiling of white canvas umbrellas above their stalls. Today they offer caged doves and goldfish as well as porcini, leeks, peppers, garlic, zucchini blossoms and eggplants. The air has taken on the woody scent of wild mushrooms and the sweetness of fennel. Sounds of commerce and cooing doves echo off the walls. The proprietor of a poultry stall holds a plucked chicken aloft for a woman who shakes her head and demands, "Plumper, plumper." She scolds him in a motherly you-can-do-better-than-that tone, and this being Italy, he responds with boyish obedience. They kiss on both cheeks once she is satisfied and she walks off, affectionately patting the bird's stiff feet sticking out of her wicker basket.

Patrons stop to wash their plums and pears in the 10th-century Fountain of Madonna Verona, named for the third-century Roman statue of a woman that stands above it. A dog leaps up and sits beneath one of the four angry heads that spew water thought to come from a Roman bath. A young man, after eating a particularly luscious peach, dunks his head in the great circular basin.

Verona's history is encompassed in this square. The Roman statue is a reminder of the prosperity the city enjoyed within the empire when it was strategically situated on the strada postumia, the major road from Rome to Germany. Behind the fountain a solid block of marble bears a winged lion and the memory of the time, in 1404, when Verona came under the control of Venice, where it remained until Napoleon's invasion in 1797. And everywhere here, as in the rest of the city, are reminders of the glory days of the medieval Scala dynasty.

The Lamberti tower in the corner of the square rises 273 feet, and an elevator ride to its top provides the best view of the city. From here you can see the rosiness of light reflected off red tiled roofs and peach marble facades, the full swing of the Adige River, the impressive might of the city walls and the fertile sweep of Lombardy plains stretching beyond them. Does it really matter that the guidebooks claim that the famous Lamberti family built the tower, even though there is no mention of such a family in the city archives? Remember, this is Verona. Suspension of disbelief is your passport to pleasure.

Bearing this in mind, I determine to venture to Juliet's house. I try not to be distracted by the glories of the Via Massini, a crowded and elegant pedestrian-only shopping street; Emporio Armani stands near Juliet's courtyard. I strive for the frame of mind that must have motivated the splash of graffiti on the red brick and peeling stucco walls of the 13th-century house with its Gothic door and charming balcony. "Daniela e Flavio," "Ila e Baby," "Laura is the Best." Near the rear of the crowded courtyard, Juliet stands demurely, forever nubile in bronze. Someone has left a note near the hem of her gown. It is written on a paper napkin stained with strawberry gelato. Shameless, I read it. "Dear Juliet, I was here but you were not." Indeed.

There seems to be an odd ritual involving this statue. Tourists, mostly young women in their 20's, line up to stand next to Juliet and have their photographs taken as they fondle her right breast. Because of the constant buffing it shines bright gold, while the rest of the statue has blackened with age. Later I ask about this practice when I meet Giulio Tamassia, director of the Club di Giulietta, which sponsors many Juliet-centered activities in the city and answers letters written to her by love-struck from around the world. Yes, he is aware of the breast fondling. No, he has no explanations. I suppose it's no stranger than many other cult practices.

Ruskin referred to the tale of the two young lovers, a 16th-century novella by Luigi da Porto adapted by Shakespeare and moved to Verona from the countryside, as "sweet and pathetic." Standing here watching the throng enamored of teen suicide and vigorously rubbing Juliet's breast, I see only the latter and determine not to fight the crowds clamoring to get into the house and up the narrow staircase to stand on the balcony for another photo opportunity. I head for San Zeno Maggiore, one of Italy's loveliest Romanesque churches.

Where Juliet's house failed to move me, the bronze reliefs on the church's main door do not. Standing here alone and in silence, I stare at scenes of Noah building his ark, of Hell and Limbo, all full of movement and energy. There is a terrifying beheading of St. John and a sinuous Salome dancing for that head. Experts are at odds as to the exact dates of these archaic and powerful panels, suggesting anywhere from the 9th to the 12th century.
The warm blush of the facade gives way to a cool, gray interior lightened by a 13th century rose window. The somber setting is reinforced by Mantegna’s painting of the Madonna and Child. Mary’s mournful expression is reflected in that of her plump and naked child. No amount of singing or lute playing by the angels that surround them can ease their sorrow.

As I leave the church by the back door, I find myself in the garden of red-and-white-striped brick cloisters. Vines reach from tiled roofs to the deep green of the lawns. A magpie swoops down in pursuit of insects that have flown in on the evening air. There is no other movement or sound.

Back at the hotel I discover that we have had the good fortune to procure tickets for tonight’s sold out production of “Aida.” Unlike seasoned aficionados, we had not ordered our tickets a year in advance, and relied on the particular magic of Veronese concierges to pull the best seats out of a hat and at the last minute. We are presented with poltronissima numerata, tickets for numbered and, most important, cushioned seats in the first section directly behind the orchestra.

Our particular magician suggests pre-opera dinner at Bottega del Vino, a 10-minute walk from the Arena, and a favorite with local vintners, who come to stand at the bar and taste any of 820 wines from the cellar of the owner, Severino Barazan. We leave the enthusiastic crowds pressing against each other in the bar at the front of the restaurant, and work our way toward a quieter back dining room. The walls are lined with bottles of wine, above which are ornately lettered tributes to the vine from Aristotle, Galileo and Dante. It is here that Veronese can be assured of their traditional dishes. Perhaps, suggests Mr. Barazan, we'd like to try pastissa de caval, horse meat? Gnocchi for me, thank you.

I prefer my horses prancing, which they do as the triumphal march proceeds across the stage of the Arena. Burning torches and extras in military garb adorn the marble seats rising some 100 feet above sphinxes, obelisks and arches. Twenty thousand people are here, all are rapt, and many hold candles, traditionally lighted during the overture and held as they slowly burn out while the drama unfolds. Should you clap at the wrong time, or whisper, you will be scolded. The Veronese take their opera seriously. And how can you not, as Radames and Aida sing out their last breaths in an amphitheater where gladiators once fought? Against such a backdrop of tempestuous, exotic history, who is to say that love isn't worth dying for?

LETTERS FROM THE LOVELORN

In the following article, also from the New York Times, Alan Cowell tells about the peculiar business of answering letters from the lovelorn that Barbara Ascher mentions are addressed to Juliet Capulet, or Juliet Montague, in Verona. Cowell paints a somewhat sardonic portrait of northern Italian business acumen, but could one not equally condemn the economic motives of a number of sham tourist attractions in the United States? Shakespeare might have been delighted with such operations. Besides, at least one could argue that the Veronese Club of Juliet has a scholarly side in producing accurate translation of a whole Mother Earth of romantic trouble.

FROM ALAN COWELL, “DEAR JULIET: LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT MY PROBLEM”

VERONA Italy—Oh Romeo Romeo. Wherefore art thou Romeo? Or Omer or Tony? Juliet’s not the only person who’d like to know.

Last year, some 2,000 letters from the lovelorn across the globe arrived in this northern Italian city that Shakespeare endowed with fame beyond its Roman antiquities addressed either to Juliet Capulet or, since she was secretly wed by the time she died, to Juliet Montague.

And many of them ask the same question, albeit modified for different loves, that Juliet posed four centuries ago in Shakespeare’s romantic tragedy set in this same town: Wherefore, or why, does love’s faithful vow so often bind together couples whose families do not want them bound? Why is romance so tricky?

To scholarly purists the Club of Juliet—a private organization that receives, translates and answers Ms. Capulet’s mail—may simply be perpetuating a myth that Verona has promoted since the late 19th century in the interest of drawing visitors to spend their money here.

Juliet’s Recent Residence

First there is what the official city guidebook assures the visitor is Juliet’s villa in Via Cappello: “Tradition has it that this was the house of the Capulets, the powerful Veronese family to which Juliet belonged.”

But according to Giulio Tamassia, the president of the Club of Juliet, the 11th-century edifice was deemed to be Juliet’s place only in the 1880’s or the 1890’s when a group of notables decided to purchase it.

“They wanted it to become the house of Juliet,” said Mr. Tamassia, the retired head of a confectionery business, “because the myth of Juliet seemed threatened.”

Even the street name seems to have been a bit of a guess. “Via Cappello
is similar to Capuleti,” Mr. Tamassia said, using the Italian name for the Capulets, Juliet’s family, which was locked in a feud with Romeo’s Montagues. Since the Italian word cappello means hat and since the building on Via Cappello is marked by a hatter’s emblem, he reasoned, “It could be the house of the Capulets—they could have been a family of hat merchants.”

**The Balcony Question**

Then came the vexing question of the balcony. “Romeo and Juliet” simply would not be “Romeo and Juliet” without the balcony even though Shakespeare’s text refers only to “Juliet at the window above” after Romeo vaults over a wall into the Capulets’ orchard.

The only problem was that the house on Via Cappello did not have a balcony until the 1920’s, when, according to Mr. Tamassia, one was taken from another building of the same period and affixed to “Juliet’s villa.” Even Juliet’s tomb is said by some to have been constructed from a horseshoe.

But the municipal legerdemain seems to have worked. In 1937, the first of 10,000 letters sent over the years to “Juliet, Verona” arrived from an Englishman.

At first, various Veronese took it upon themselves to answer the mail. Then, a couple of years ago, Mr. Tamassia conceived the idea of the Club of Juliet, and enlisted students from the university here to help with translation and replies.

“The writers are often lonely people,” said Laura Zanitti, one of two Italians who along with students from Mexico, Japan, China and Georgia read the heroine’s mail and sign their replies as “Juliet’s Secretary.”

“We ask ourselves: What do they need?” Miss Zanitti said. “We try to give a personal answer and try to understand the sender.” Sometimes they consult a local psychologist.

They also organized an annual competition for the best letter. The first prize was awarded in February to Chiara Cabassi, a 20-year-old Italian university student from Parma. Her letter described a more diffident Romeo than Shakespeare’s who “does not know how to speak to me of love” and whose “dark eyes” leave her almost speechless.

Of the 2,000 letters the club received last year, 600 were from Italy and the rest from all around the world. Four-fifths are from women troubled by a Romeo they have already met. None, so far, have been vulgar and the nature of their ardor reflects cultural influences, Mr. Tamassia said.

“The Turks are very serious,” Miss Zanitti said. “The Latin Americans are the most passionate. The letters from the Arab world are playful and superficial. They invite Juliet to big palaces where luxury solves every problem. They invite her to come and play their new Nintendo.”

Some letters recount stories reminiscent of the medieval Italian saga that scholars believe inspired Shakespeare.

“We seem to have something in common; we have fallen in love with men our fathers do not approve of us even to speak with,” a 15-year-old high school student wrote from Chicago. Her tale was grim: she was two months pregnant, she said, and her boyfriend, Tony, “the leader of a big gang,” is in jail.

“The reason he is in jail is stupid,” she said. “One day when his head was full of thoughts of him and me, he sold some drugs to an undercover police officer.”

**A Pakistani Feud**

A Pakistani woman living in Saudi Arabia wrote of her love for Omer, a man whose family had been locked in a feud with hers for two generations. “What should I do?” she asked.

The reply, Mr. Tamassia said, was simple: She and Omer should emigrate to the West, and be married.

Of all the letters, Mr. Tamassia said, only around 5 percent are addressed to Romeo, and they do not always have the silver-sweet sound of lovers’ voices.

“Why are you going to kill yourself for a Capulet?” an 18-year-old university student from Amman, Jordan, wrote to Romeo from a region steeped in intractable divisions. “She is your enemy. Remember you are a Montague, and Montagues hate Capulets. So that even shows that you are a lot sillier than I thought.”
RECENT ANALOGUES

Many articles referring to Romeo and Juliet describe the situation of lovers from two factions of a perpetual vendetta in the world’s great hotspots, such as the Near East, Bosnia, Northern Ireland, Tibet, and the Tyrolian Alps. In these places racial and national differences seem to play a secondary role to religious hatred in producing what seem to be irreconcilable disputes. In the following article, Bob Herbert describes a movie documentary on a situation in Sarajevo that seems to argue for a common humanity that would transcend vendetta and hatred.

FROM BOB HERBERT, “ROMEO AND JULIET IN BOSNIA”

If you watch “Frontline” Tuesday night on PBS you will see the story of two ordinary young people, Bosko Brkic, an Eastern Orthodox Serb, and Admira Ismic, a Muslim, who met at a New Year’s Eve party in the mid-1980’s, fell in love, tried to pursue the most conventional of dreams, and died together on a hellish bridge in Sarajevo.

The documentary, called “Romeo and Juliet in Sarajevo,” achieves its power by focusing our attention on the thoroughly human individuals caught up in a horror that, from afar, can seem abstract and almost unimaginable. It’s one thing to hear about the carnage caused by incessant sniper fire and the steady rain of mortar shells on a city; it’s something quite different to actually witness a parent desperately groping for meaning while reminiscing about a lost daughter.

For viewers overwhelmed and desensitized by the relentless reports of mass killings and mass rapes, the shock of “Romeo and Juliet in Sarajevo” is that what we see is so real and utterly familiar. We become riveted by the mundane. Bosko and Admira could be a young couple from anywhere, from Queens, or Tokyo, or Barcelona.

We learn that they graduated from high school in June of 1986 and that both were crazy about movies and music. Admira had a cat named Yellow that she loved, and Bosko liked to play practical jokes.

Admira’s father, Zijo, speaking amid clouds of cigarette smoke, says, “Well, I knew from the first day about that relationship and I didn’t have anything against it. I thought it was good because her guy was so likable, and after a time I started to love him and didn’t regard him any differently than Admira.”

Admira’s grandmother, Sadika Ismic, was not so sanguine. “Yes, I did have something against it,” she says. “I thought, ‘He is a Serb, she is a Muslim, and how will it work?’”

For Admira and Bosko, of course, love was the answer to everything. While Bosko was away on compulsory military service soon after high school, Admira wrote: “My dear love, Sarajevo at night is the most beautiful thing in the world. I guess I could live somewhere else but only if I must or if I am forced. Just a little beat of time is left until we are together. After that, absolutely nothing can separate us.”

Sarajevo at the time was a cosmopolitan city coming off the triumph of the 1984 Winter Olympics. With a population of Serbs, Croats, Muslims, Jews and others, the city had become a symbol of ethnic and religious tolerance, a place where people were making a serious attempt to live together in peace.

But civilization is an exceedingly fragile enterprise, and it’s especially vulnerable to the primal madness of ethnic and religious hatreds. Simple tolerance is nothing in the face of the relentless, pathetic and near-universal need to bolster the esteem of the individual and the group by eradicating the rights, and even the existence, of others.

When the madness descended on Sarajevo, Bosko Brkic faced a cruel dilemma. He could not kill Serbs. And he could not go up into the hills and fire back down on his girlfriend’s people. Says his mother, Rada: “He was simply a kid who was not for the war.”

Bosko and Admira decided to flee Sarajevo. To escape, they had to cross a bridge over the Miljacka River in a no-man’s land between the Serb and Muslim lines. Snipers on both sides threatened their lives. But they had to escape. Bosko died instantly. Admira crawled to him. She died a few minutes later. The area in which they were shot was so dangerous that the bodies remained on the bridge, entwined, for six days before being removed.

Only the times and places change, Bosnia today, Rwanda and Burundi tomorrow. Jews versus Arabs, Chinese versus Japanese, blacks versus whites. There are various ostensible reasons for the endless conflicts—ideological differences, border disputes, oil—but dig just a little and you will uncover the ruinous ethnic or religious origins of the clash.

The world stands helpless and sometimes depressed before the madness. Millions upon millions dead, millions more to die. It is not just the curse of our times. It seems to be the curse of all time.
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