

From Empathy to Activism: The Friar and Getting Unstuck in 21st Century Graphic Adaptations of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*

This paper explores three twenty-first century graphic novel adaptations of Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet* and depictions of the characters as they confront and react to suicide. Teen suicide is a serious problem and the chain reaction of suicides called "suicide clusters" is an issue that teens, parents, and teachers deal with on a daily basis. In these novels, neither Romeo nor Juliet can think past the other's existence, creating such a "suicide cluster." They are "stuck" in the act of suicide.

Shakespeare and the adapters also present the Friar's perspective. As a more knowledgeable other, he is both responsible for bringing the lovers together and for creating the situation for their suicides. He is an adult, but cannot get past his despondency and failure to prevent their deaths and is "stuck". In two of the novels, the Friar remains "stuck" and is simply a messenger who informs the families. In the third novel, however, the Friar gets "unstuck" and becomes the advocate for peace between the families as a model of empathy and activism.

The graphic novel artists chose a variety of techniques to depict this act of being "stuck". They use a combination of panel frames, sizes, and viewpoints; word balloons and captions; and emanata conveying actions and emotions. The three graphic novel adaptations are Gareth Hind's *Romeo & Juliet* (2013), published in 2013, Matt Wiegler's *No Fear Shakespeare: Romeo & Juliet* (2008), and Max Work's *Romeo and Juliet: the War* (2011), illustrated by Skan Srisuwan & Studio Hive.