

Romeos Aplenty, Juliets Galore



2. Hitting for the Fence

June 27, 2024

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THIS CLASS MOVES AWAY FROM ROMEO AND JULIET AS INDIVIDUALS to study the later transformations of the play as a whole; you might call it **Romeo-and-Juliet's Galore**. There are at least two levels of transformation. One is when a director performs Shakespeare's text as written, but recontextualizes it by moving it out of the original locale or time-period, generally but not always by updating it to the present. A second type of transformation involves translating the play into a different medium, such as film, opera, or ballet. While these derived works may also stay close to Shakespeare's original, as we saw in the previous class, they too may be recontextualized just like the play itself.

A further transformation takes place in those works marked "after" or "inspired by" Shakespeare. With these, there are no rules and no limits. But there are a lot of them out there; we can only look at a few. *rb.*

A. Updates and Adaptations

A quick overview of what is to follow in the class, and discussion of the factors involved in Shakespeare updates and adaptations.

Broadway 2014: opening and ball scene (Don Roy King, *director*)

B. Two Films

A paradoxical comparison: the celebrated 1996 film by Baz Luhrmann set amid the gangs of Los Angeles, and the lush 2015 movie made for television by Riccardo Donna. One is totally updated, but is scrupulous

in retaining Shakespeare's words; the other uses an entirely new text, but is equally scrupulous in its adherence to period detail.

Luhmann 1996: opening and Romeo's revenge (Leonardo di Caprio)

Donna 2015: credit sequences (Alessandra Mastronardi, *Juliet*)

C. Opera Trauma

Mere entertainment is seldom enough for modern opera directors; they seem to want to make their productions relevant to some vital contemporary concern. So we have a production of Gounod's 1867 opera set in a war zone, and an interpretation of Bellini's 1830 version that turns out to be about child abuse and psychological restraint.

Gounod: *Roméo et Juliette*, opening (Amsterdam 2016; Olivier Py, *director*)

Bellini: *I Capuleti e I Montecchi*, overture and finale (Zurich 2015; Joyce DiDonato, *Romeo*; Olga Kulchynska, *Juliet*; Christof Loy, *dir*)

D. Other Openings and Other Shows

Three more versions of the story, each illustrated with a clip from the opening of the show and a scene from further into it. Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story* is already the classic updating of the story; Gérard Presgurvic's *Roméo et Juliette* turns it into a musical theater spectacle; and Matthew Bourne's reworking of the Prokofiev ballet creates a piece of music theater that is both exhilarating and terrifying.

Bernstein/Robbins/Laurents/Sondheim: *West Side Story* (1956): opening and balcony scene (Film 1961, Jerome Robbins and Robert Wise, *directors*; Richard Beymer & Natalie Wood, *R&J*)

Presgurvic: *Roméo et Juliette, de la Haine à l'Amour* (2001): opening and potion scene (Cécilia Cara, *Juliet*)

Bourne: *Romeo and Juliet* (2019), opening and balcony scene (Cordelia Braithwaite, *Juliet*; Paris Fitzpatrick, *Romeo*; Dan Wright, *Tybalt*; music by Prokofiev)

E. Outliers and Oddballs

From the many *Romeo and Juliet* spin-offs out there, we select but two: a juke-box musical based on the premise that Juliet survives to pursue other lovers, and a Bengali movie of infectious verve but only the most tenuous connection to Shakespeare!

Max Martin: *& Juliet* (2019): trailer

Film: *Romeo vs. Juliet* (2015), excerpt (Ankush Hazra, *Romeo*; Mahiya Mahi, *Juliet*; Savvy Gupta, music; Ashok Pati, *director*)

See also the course website: www.brunyate.com/RomeosAplenty
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