“That which we call a rose”:

Adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* in the Evolution of a Musical Tradition, 1839-1938

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Abstract

Drawing upon Bortolotti and Hutcheon's use of biological language in adaptation theory, this paper examines the intersection of literature and music, specifically tracing Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in classical music, ballet, and opera from 1839 to 1938. The cross-section of works includes Berlioz's dramatic symphony, Tchaikovsky's *Fantasy-Overture*, Gounod's opera, and Prokofiev's ballet. An investigation into the compositional history of each work reveals the evolution of the narrative, with a focus on how the four composers engaged with Shakespeare's original play (if at all), encountered other adaptations of the tragedy, and interacted with each other. This particular selection of *Romeo and Juliet* adaptations reflects broader historical mindsets and debates about classical music, as well as the state of the art(s) and the demands from major cultural institutions throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Then, I analyze how Tchaikovsky and Prokofiev portray the main tension between the themes of feuding families and young love. These two works demonstrate the parameters and limitations of instrumental music and ballet in communicating a narrative and its major themes. This examination of cultural history and canonical works in classical music leads to further questions about contemporary classical music culture, our continued engagement with long-standing artistic traditions, and how we can revitalize and transform knowledge of narratives for audiences today and in the future.

Introduction

Romeo and Juliet needs no introduction. Themes of forbidden love and feuding families are perennially interesting, and the image of star-crossed lovers is deeply rooted in cultural memory. Shakepeare's play has countless adaptations, and in the history of Western art music, there is a tradition of adapting stories to the performing arts, of storytelling in classical music, ballet, and opera. I investigate four *Romeo and Juliet* adaptations: Hector Berlioz's dramatic symphony, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's *Fantasy-Overture*, Charles Gounod's opera, and Sergei Prokofiev's ballet. These works constitute a segment of this musical tradition and reflect how four composers interpreted, adapted, and sowed the seeds for continued engagement with Shakespeare's tragedy. This cross-section of *Romeo and Juliet* adaptations did not emerge in isolation, but rather in fertile interaction with other iterations of *Romeo and Juliet* and powerful cultural forces (like performing arts institutions, governmental agencies, and debates about art). Thus this selection of adaptations is one part of a larger *Romeo and Juliet* cultural ecosystem of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, an ecosystem that remains popular and well-received today, whose influence is still felt across performing arts genres and national borders.

Framework: Approaching Adaptations' Ancestry

By studying these four works in the evolving *Romeo and Juliet* cultural ecosystem, I am participating in a long-standing and ongoing scholarly conversation in adaptation studies that approaches literary and musical adaptations with a biological analogy. In "On the Origin of Adaptations: Rethinking Fidelity Discourse and 'Success'—Biologically," Gary R. Bortolotti and Linda Hutcheon argue that biological language provides a necessary shift in perspective regarding adaptations, thus cultivating a more prosperous environment for the future of

adaptation studies. They "propose […] a homology between biological and cultural adaptation. By homology, we mean a similarity in structure that is indicative of a common origin: that is, both kinds of adaptation are understandable, as processes of replication."[1] This homology between biological and cultural adaptation has become the conceptual foundation of my own interpretation and analysis of the four *Romeo and Juliet* adaptations. Bortolotti and Hutcheon emphasize how "stories, in a manner parallel to genes, replicate; the adaptations of both evolve with changing environments."[2] In addition to the fundamental biological metaphor, my examination of the state of the art(s) in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries reveals the exact "changing environments" and the shifting views on classical music of the era. Historicizing these adaptations in this way allows for greater understanding of how these works bloomed and how the *Romeo and Juliet* narrative evolved over the course of a century. Lastly, Bortolotti and Hutcheon argue that "by revealing lineages of descent, not similarities of form alone, we can understand how a specific narrative changes over time."[3] I agree with the idea of tracing ancestry, of mapping exactly how a narrative develops and evolves over time. However, rather than imagining these four adaptations in a one-way line of succession through musical history, I propose the imagery of a web for this cross-section of the *Romeo and Juliet* cultural ecosystem. The interconnectedness of a web more accurately represents the interactions between composers and the formative role of other forces in adapting and propagating the *Romeo and Juliet* narrative.[4] My critical vocabulary and rose garden metaphor has roots in Shakespeare's play. In Act 2, Scene 2, Juliet famously asks, "O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?,"[5] emphasizing his individual name. She uses the imagery of a rose, calling upon him to shed his

[1] Gary R. Bortolotti and Linda Hutcheon, "On the Origin of Adaptations: Rethinking Fidelity Discourse and "Success"—Biologically," in *New Literary History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 444.
[2] Bortolotti and Hutcheon, 444.
[3] Bortolotti and Hutcheon, 445.
[4] Julie Sanders, "What is Adaptation?," in *Adaptation and Appropriation* (London: Routledge, 2006), 33.
[5] William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. Peter Holland (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 2.2.33.

family name and to stop adhering to tradition so strictly: "Deny thy father and refuse thy name [...] O, be some other name!/What's in a name? That which we call a rose/By any other word would smell as sweet."[6] In response to the inherited tradition of the blood feud between their families, the two lovers weigh the possibility of breaking with (and subsequently transforming) this tradition in their own lifetimes. By using a similar metaphor of a rose garden and studying a musical history of adaptation and (re)creation, specifically a historical era with so much creativity and cross-pollination, I strive to highlight the resulting evolution and growth of the *Romeo and Juliet* cultural ecosystem and the necessity of renewal and new varieties in the transformation of musical traditions. My examination of a specific musical tradition and its development throughout nineteenth- and twentieth-century history serves as a starting point for further inquiry into contemporary classical music culture and the possibilities for dynamic engagement with and informed revitalization of storied art forms. With Shakespeare's play as the common origin of all four works, biological language and the metaphor of a rose garden provide a productive conceptual framework for understanding how these adaptations, their compositional backgrounds, and other prominent cultural forces are intertwined and related. Close analysis of Tchaikovsky's *Fantasy-Overture* and Prokofiev's ballet provides even more insight into the thematic tension between the Montague-Capulet feud and the young lovers' romance, the flower in the narrative that blossoms repeatedly across genres, time periods, and national borders. A nuanced understanding of the history of the performing arts and the relationships between various *Romeo and Juliet* adaptations prepares the soil for cultural institutions today to preserve, communicate, and transform beloved stories across genres. In this web of four *Romeo and Juliet* adaptations from 1839 to 1938, biological language is a fruitful way to trace the evolution of

[6] Shakespeare, 2.2.34-44.

Shakespeare's tragedy throughout history and to propose how the arts can continue to blossom both today and in the future.

The Romantic Era: New Institutions, New Ideas, New Iterations

I have selected four adaptations from 1839 to 1938, a notably rich moment in musical and cultural history. While there are recent and (arguably more) famous adaptations like Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story* or Baz Luhrmann's 1996 film, I chose to focus on works that involve live performances in a particular type of space: large brick-and-mortar performing arts institutions like concert halls, ballet theaters, and opera houses. The compositional history of this cross-section coincides with the emergence of major performing arts institutions and spaces across Europe, when thousands of audience members could watch live performances. For example, the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow became a government institution in the early nineteenth century and was later enlarged in 1856 so more than 2000 audience members could be seated at once.[7] Similarly, the famous Palais Garnier in Paris began construction in 1861 and can seat nearly 2000 audience members.[8] This era was the advent of "modern musical organizations, modern concert life and concert halls and music education,"[9] further demonstrating music's formative role in nineteenth-century cultural life. The timeline of the *Romeo and Juliet* cross-section falls within the Romantic era of music, which spanned the nineteenth century and bled into the twentieth. During the nineteenth century, classical music became "king of the arts, the position it would occupy for the rest of the century."[10] In contemporary times, classical music is perceived as a dying art form, grappling with aging audiences, dwindling numbers, and budget

[7] *Britannica*, s.v. "Bolshoi Theatre," 2024, *Encyclopedia Britannica.*
[8] *Britannica*, s.v. "Opéra," 2023, *Encyclopedia Britannica.*
[9] Jan Swafford, *Johannes Brahms: A Biography* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 251.
[10] Swafford, 16.

cuts. Two hundred years ago, however, major figures in classical music relished the lingering excitement of personally knowing musical titans like Ludwig van Beethoven and being in the center of the Western artistic world, and they were furiously debating the future of the art form.[11] This classical music debate was so intense that it is likened to a war: the War of the Romantics. On one side, radicals like Richard Wagner and Franz Liszt championed program music, or music that communicates a particular narrative:

> For both Liszt and Wagner, the underlying doctrine was *the unity of the arts*—literary, visual, music. For Wagner that meant making his operas into *music drama* and his theater productions into a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a "total work of art" uniting music, poetry, drama, and the visual arts. Liszt's path was to base his instrumental music on literary or visual-art foundations, with the cross-fertilization of arts creating freer forms, fresh harmonies, new kinds of musical organization.[12]

Liszt and Wagner realized that the Romantic obsession with the past—fanatic worship of Bach, Beethoven, and Mozart—would detract from attention on living composers and how classical music could develop and evolve. They advocated for program music and connecting all art forms as the future of classical music. On the other side, however, conservatives like Johannes Brahms and Clara Schumann viewed program music as excessive and ostentatious. Instead, they stuck to traditional forms and opted for absolute music, or music for music's sake. Absolute music consists of "forms and tonal patterns crafted powerfully enough to stand on their own," without additional non-musical narratives or explicit connections to stories and emotions.[13] While such a debate may seem silly and self-important in retrospect, this tension between program and absolute music was central during the Romantic period, and my chosen selection of *Romeo and*

[11] Swafford, 254.
[12] Swafford, 66.
[13] Swafford, 206.

Juliet adaptations reflects this tension. Overall the cross-section leans closer to the program music side, given their position as *Romeo and Juliet* adaptations. However, there is a spectrum between program and absolute music: two works adhere much more closely to Shakespeare's play, whereas the other two works reflect the Romantic emphasis on emotional intensity. All four works, however, are rooted in and sprouted from debates happening during the Romantic era and the central position held by classical music at the time.

Berlioz in Bloom: Cross-Pollination and the Start of the Cross-Section

While Wagner and Liszt spearheaded the program music side in the War of the Romantics, it was Hector Berlioz (1803-1869) who was their inspiration. The French composer's opium-fueled *Symphonie Fantastique*, with its clear storyline and recurring melodic ideas, was instrumental in establishing program music's potential as the future of classical music. After *Symphonie Fantastique*, Berlioz chose to adapt Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* into orchestral music. Cross-pollination from several sources led to Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette*, op. 17: the Shakespeare play, David Garrick's edited version of the play, Vincenzo Bellini's *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, and a moving performance of Juliet Capulet by Irish actress Harriet Smithson. Many of the other Romantics revered Shakespeare for his "highly personalized expression,"[14] highlighting the cultural environment in which this web of descent is planted. In his *Mémoires*, Berlioz gushed about Shakespeare, saying that "the lightning-flash of his genius revealed the whole heaven of art to me, illuminating its remotest depths in a single flash. I recognized the meaning of real grandeur, real beauty, and real dramatic truth."[15] Berlioz attended a performance

[14] James M. Keller, "Selections from *Roméo et Juliette*, Dramatic Symphony after Shakespeare's Tragedy, Op. 17," program notes for New York Philharmonic, *Saturday Matinee Concert*, Courtney Lewis, conductor, April 22, 2017, David Geffen Hall, New York, NY, 31.
[15] Edward Downes, "Romeo and Juliet, Dramatic Symphony, Opus 17," program notes for New York Philharmonic, Daniel Barenboim, conductor, December 18-20, 1980, Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY, 3.

of Garrick's edited version of the play, however. Garrick's sentimentalized *Romeo and Juliet*, in which the two lovers speak to each other before they die, was first staged in 1748 and remained the standard for a century.[16] The role of Garrick's *Romeo and Juliet* in the evolution of Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette* reveals the complexities of this web of descent; though it may initially appear that Berlioz directly drew upon the Shakespeare play, the *Romeo and Juliet* cultural ecosystem is vast, often leading to adaptations of adaptations. Conversely, dissatisfaction with adaptations of a narrative can significantly influence new adaptations. In late February 1831, on his way to Rome as a Prix de Rome winner, Berlioz attended a performance of Bellini's *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* in Florence. The opera is not an adaptation of Shakespeare's play but instead draws upon Italian Renaissance sources on the story. As reflected in the title, the conflict between the two families—a full-blown war in the opera—has taken over the romance between the two young lovers.[17] Berlioz was unsatisfied with Bellini's opera, and from his dissatisfaction he was able to define and refine his own adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*.[18] Lastly, Berlioz's personal and romantic life had an integral role in *Roméo et Juliette*'s compositional process. Harriet Smithson played Juliet in the performance of Garrick's play attended by Berlioz, and Berlioz was infatuated by Smithson, imagining himself as "the *real Romeo*, the Romeo that Shakespeare created, that is me, yes me, I shall be there at the feet of my Juliet, ready to die, ready even to live if she wishes it" in January 1833.[19] Berlioz's own romance with Smithson, though it ended tragically in divorce, exemplifies how personal emotions play a role in the blossoming of a creative work. Four different sources—reverence of Shakespeare, Garrick's play, dissatisfaction with Bellini's opera, and infatuation with Smithson—were a part of the planting, cultivating, and

[16] "Stage History," Royal Shakespeare Company, accessed August 12, 2024, https://www.rsc.org.uk/romeo-and-juliet/about-the-play/stage-history.
[17] "I Capuleti e i Montecchi," Opéra national de Paris, accessed August 3, 2024, https://www.operadeparis.fr/en/season-22-23/opera/i-capuleti-e-i-montecchi.
[18] David Cairns, *Berlioz* (London: Allen Lane, the Penguin Press, 1999), 178.
[19] Cairns, 14.

blooming of a new rose hybrid: Berlioz's own take on *Romeo and Juliet*, which loosely follows the original plot but is ultimately more focused on the intensity of the characters' emotions. The genre of a dramatic symphony in itself is a hybrid; Berlioz was inspired by Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 and the "dramatic potential of the symphonic medium,"[20] reflecting the Romantic belief that genre is not strictly defined but rather something malleable.[21] In contrast to an opera or oratorio, the dramatic symphony combines symphonic music, vocal solos, chorus, and drama. Ultimately, however, the role of the orchestra dominates. For example, in *Scéne d'amour* or Love Scene, Berlioz was determined to do something new and innovative: Romeo and Juliet's impassioned declarations of love are given to the orchestra. The two lovers' emotions are exclusively expressed by instrumental music, because Berlioz believed that only music had the power to communicate the "sublimity of this love."[22] His decision to do so reflects the superior status of classical music during the Romantic era, and as an influential figure on the side of program music, Berlioz advocates for the capacity of classical music to portray emotions. Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette*, the first rose in this *Romeo and Juliet* web of descent, was the result of cross-pollination from several literary, musical, and personal sources and demonstrates the pivotal role of cultural environment in hybridization.

Tending Tchaikovsky's Soil: Fertilizing the *Fantasy-Overture*

A few decades later, in the wake of Berlioz's efforts, Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet Fantasy-Overture*, TH. 42 bloomed. With the success of both *Symphonie Fantastique* and *Roméo et Juliette*, Berlioz firmly planted himself on the side of program music in the War of the Romantics, and he had a major influence on other proponents of program music throughout the

[20] Cairns, 178.
[21] Cairns, 200.
[22] Downes, "Romeo and Juliet," 4.

Romantic era, including Mily Balakirev. A powerful figure in the mid-nineteenth-century Russian music scene, Balakirev looked up to both Berlioz and Liszt,[23] and he wrote an overture to Shakespeare's *King Lear*,[24] further highlighting the Bard's immense importance in the cultural environment of the Romantic era. Balakirev first suggested *Romeo and Juliet* to Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) while the two were on a walk with critic Nikolai Kashkin.[25] Beyond the initial suggestion, Balakirev remained a central part of Tchaikovsky's compositional process. He provided input on the piece's key, harmonic structure, rhythm, and he even sent Tchaikovsky four measures of the opening if he were to write such a piece, suggesting that offbeat chords represent sword clashes.[26] Hands-on like a gardener, Balakirev sowed the musical seeds, fertilized the composition, and ultimately watched the work blossom. When Tchaikovsky sent the principal musical themes, Balakirev responded with scathing criticisms; he noted that the opening had "the character of quartet themes by Haydn, that genius of petty-bourgeois music," when instead it "ought to be something like Liszt's chorales […] with an ancient Catholic character resembling that of Orthodox [church music]" in order to properly portray Friar Laurence.[27] Balakirev's detailed description reveals Liszt's lasting influence on both composition and the cultural environment during the War of the Romantics: successful musical portrayal of a particular narrative or character was a compositional priority. Tchaikovsky was receptive to Balakirev's suggestions and edited the opening (now the famous Friar Laurence introduction), the stormy theme for the conflict between the Montagues and the Capulets, and the soaring love

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[23] Francis Maes, *A History of Russian Music: From Kamarinskaya to Babi Yar*, trans. Arnold J. Pomerans and Erica Pomerans (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 54.
[24] Herbert Weinstock, *Tchaikovsky* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1944), 72-73.
[25] James M. Keller, "*Romeo and Juliet*, Overture-Fantasy," program notes for New York Philharmonic, Lorin Maazel, conductor, January 9-14, 2003, Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY, 29.
[26] Michael Steinberg, "*Romeo and Juliet, Fantasy-Overture After Shakespeare*," program notes for New York Philharmonic, Kurt Masur, conductor, May 29-31, 1997, Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY, 20D.
[27] David Brown, *Tchaikovsky: The Early Years, 1840-1874* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), 183-184.

theme accordingly.[28] While programmatic like Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette*, Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet Fantasy-Overture* is loosely based on the plot of the play, instead emphasizing the conflict between the core emotions of tumult and passionate love and thus highlighting the Romantic focus on music's emotional content. However, the 20-minute orchestral work is even more abstract than Berlioz's dramatic symphony, highlighting how several musical works can both create a spectrum and exemplify the tension between absolute and program music. It remains one of Tchaikovsky's most beloved pieces, demonstrating the role of individual works in conserving and propagating the narrative, as well as ensuring the longevity of the larger *Romeo and Juliet* cultural ecosystem.

Gounod in the Garden: Taking Liberties with the Libretto

While Berlioz and Tchaikovsky loosely adapted *Romeo and Juliet* for instrumental music, there are also several adaptations in ballet and opera that adhere more closely to Shakespeare's play—thus more on the program music side of the spectrum, much closer to Wagner's ideal of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Ballet unites music, dance, and staging; opera unites music, libretto, acting, and staging. As a result of this cross-pollination of genres and performing arts, ballet and opera have different capabilities and parameters than instrumental music. In opera, the libretto, or the literary text of an opera in a printed or manuscript book, allows for literary analysis to sprout alongside musical analysis.[29] The opera *Roméo et Juliette*, with music by Charles Gounod (1818-1893), stems directly from the Shakespeare play, more obviously than other roses in the *Romeo and Juliet* web of descent. The libretto was written by Jules Barbier and Michel Carré, two experienced librettists who included direct parallels to scenes and metaphors in

[28] Keller, "*Romeo and Juliet*," 29.
[29] Richard Macnutt, "Libretto," in *Grove Music Online*, accessed August 5, 2024, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.

Shakespeare's tragedy, sometimes quoting the play verbatim. No single translation has been cited as the source for the libretto, though there were several French translations of *Romeo and Juliet* available in the 1860s.[30] The availability of French translations of the play demonstrates both the size and health of the *Romeo and Juliet* cultural ecosystem; despite national, cultural, and linguistic borders, the narrative continued to spread in its literary form and subsequently propagated into other genres. More so than other composers in this web of descent, Gounod highlights Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* as the common origin of his adaptation. Still, there was cross-pollination of influences during the compositional process, and Berlioz's dramatic symphony left quite an impression on young Gounod, a fellow Frenchman and Prix de Rome winner. Gounod attended rehearsals of Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette*, and he

> recalled forty years later the excitement of the preparations for the symphony in the Conservatoire Hall (where often before, hurrying out of Halévy's composition class, he had slipped in unnoticed and "listened intoxicated to Berlioz rehearsing his strange, impassioned music, which opened up new and exotic horizons"). "I was so struck by the sweep of the great finale, the Reconciliation of the Montagues and Capulets, that when I left the hall I had the whole of Friar Laurence's superb 'Jurez tous par l'auguste symbole' in my head…[31]

Ironically, despite Gounod's praise for the reconciliation between the two feuding families in Berlioz's ending and the libretto's otherwise close adherence to Shakespeare's play, his own opera ends with a tragic proclamation of love between Romeo and Juliet before the two lovers die. This is a different type of "great finale" than the one he praised Berlioz for and a distinct departure from Shakespeare's ending, but it is not an unfamiliar ending. Gounod followed David

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[30] Steven Huebner, "Roméo et Juliette ('Romeo and Juliet')," in *Grove Music Online*, accessed May 28, 2024, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.
[31] Cairns, 194.

Garrick's ending rather than Shakespeare's,[32] so Garrick's influence can be seen in two different works in this web of descent: Berlioz's dramatic symphony and Gounod's opera. With Berlioz's influence on Gounod, direct quotes from Shakespeare, and Garrick's ending in the opera, Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette* exemplifies the interconnectedness of the *Romeo and Juliet* cultural ecosystem across time periods and genres, ultimately leading to a new variety of rose in the operatic tradition.

Prokofiev Under Pressure: the Proletariat and Propagation

Like opera, ballet as a genre has different parameters than orchestral music. While the libretto allows for literary analysis in opera, dance choreography in ballet is intimately intertwined with the music and can similarly express emotions. The question of genre, coupled with cross-pollination from various sources and the particular cultural environment of the Soviet Union in the 1920s-30s, led to another rose hybrid: the ballet *Romeo and Juliet*, op. 64 by Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953), the final work in this web of descent. This rose bloomed during a particular season in musical history, when artists were obliged to create art in support of an official doctrine. Prokofiev's time in the Soviet Union was "a period marked by the marshalling of musical activities under the auspices of the All-Union Committee on Arts Affairs,"[33] standing in stark contrast to the cultural environments of the mid nineteenth century and the early Romantic period. Under the watchful eye of the State, Prokofiev's adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* bloomed slowly. Decades after Tchaikovsky took Balakirev's suggestion to adapt *Romeo and Juliet*, Prokofiev met with dramatist Adrian Piotrovsky to discuss future works. After

[32] Steven Huebner, "Roméo et Juliette Synopsis," Sarasota Opera, accessed August 12, 2024, https://www.sarasotaopera.org/romeo-et-juliette-synopsis-background.
[33] Simon Morrison, *The People's Artist: Prokofiev's Soviet Years* (New York, 2008; online edn, Oxford Academic, 1 Jan. 2009), https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195181678.001.0001.

Piotrovsky mentioned Shakespeare's famous tragedy, Prokofiev "immediately blurted out: a better subject cannot be found."[34] Prokofiev then began to discuss with Sergei Radlov, who worked on the libretto and consulted Piotrovsky and Prokofiev on the decision "to update Shakespeare's play along proletarian lines."[35] While Gounod's ending includes a conversation between the lovers before they die, Prokofiev's original ballet dismissed the famous tragic ending entirely and opted for a happy ending instead: Romeo and Juliet live. The Soviet doctrine of Socialist Realism encouraged optimistic endings to ballets,[36] and the State prioritized the people—audience reactions and the proletariat's ability to understand art were at the forefront of discussions about the performing arts. Sergey Dinamov, an advisor on the Central Committee of the Communist Party and a member of the repertoire board of the Bolshoi Theater, supported the happy ending. After hearing the first three acts and in a discussion regarding the fourth act, he said: "Personally I'm for changing the finale […] Ballet is ballet. People need to leave the theater afterward feeling joy…Hence I conclude that in Prokofiev's work the two main characters of Shakespeare's drama must not die."[37] The debate over the ballet's ending continued, and the plans for a premiere fell through, despite the contract between Prokofiev and the Bolshoi Theater.[38] In addition to pressure from government forces, the specifics of ballet as a genre significantly influenced the evolution of Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet*. The logistics of ballet choreography also favored a happy ending; as Prokofiev wisely noted, "living people can dance, the dying cannot."[39] Years later, however, Prokofiev revealed why he reverted back to the tragic ending:

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[34] Morrison, *People's Artist*, chap. 1.
[35] Morrison, *People's Artist*, chap. 1.
[36] Harlow Robinson, "Selections from *Romeo and Juliet*," program notes for New York Philharmonic, *Slava & Friends*, Mstislav Rostropovich, conductor, April 3-5, 2003, Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY, 37.
[37] Morrison, *People's Artist*, chap. 1.
[38] Robinson, "Selections from *Romeo and Juliet*," 32.
[39] Morrison, *People's Artist*, chap. 1.

> What really caused me to change my mind was a remark someone made to me about the ballet: "Strictly speaking your music does not express any real joy at the end." That was quite true. After several conferences with the choreographers it was found that the tragic ending could be expressed in dance and in due course the music for that ending was written.[40]

Prokofiev highlights the collaborative nature of ballet, the ability of dance to communicate tragedy and death, and the precise relationship between music and dance that allows for the communication of emotions—and thus the propagation of a narrative. Echoing Romantic sentiments about music's ability to communicate emotions (and in this case, joy), Prokofiev decided to rework the happy ending after criticisms about the music's distinct lack of joy. His wording—"in due course''—is crucial here. Dance dictated *Romeo and Juliet*'s revised ending, and the music followed, demonstrating the precise order of genes in the rose's development and the influence of genre on the work's evolution. Prokofiev's engagement with Soviet cultural ideologies and ballet's capabilities as a genre highlights the formative roles of external parties and genre on the evolution of both individual adaptations and the broader *Romeo and Juliet* narrative.

Analysis: Two Russian Works, Both Alike in Themes

The longevity of the *Romeo and Juliet* cultural ecosystem begs the question: what makes the story so compelling throughout the changing seasons? Which themes and ideas take root and bloom, regardless of "where we lay our scene?"[41] Rather than dismiss Romeo and Juliet's romance as cliche or scoff at the pettiness of the fight between the Montagues and the Capulets, I

[40] Morrison, *People's Artist*, chap. 1.
[41] Shakespeare, line 2.

argue that it is the tension between these two central themes that draws audiences back again and again. Each work in this web of descent explores the tension between feuding families and young love differently, and in Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet Fantasy-Overture*, the tension between these two themes is reflected both musically and structurally. Of all the works in this web of descent, the *Fantasy-Overture* adheres the least to Shakespeare's play. The title and genre gives it away; in contrast to overtures to ballets or operas, fantasy-overtures are independent concert pieces, and "fantasy" in the term refers to Tchaikovsky's imaginative approach to interpreting Shakespeare's famous tragedy.[42] Rather than writing direct parallels to the original play, Tchaikovsky focused on the main conflict and condensed it into the binary structure of sonata form.[43] There are three main sections in sonata form: exposition, development, and recapitulation. In the exposition, the primary and secondary themes are introduced, and usually there is a distinct change in character between the two themes. In Tchaikovsky's *Fantasy-Overture*, one theme represents the intense animosity between the Montagues and the Capulets, and the other theme expresses the passionate romance between Romeo and Juliet—the famous love theme. Following the establishment of the two themes in the exposition, the tumultuous families' theme grows during the development, signaling the mounting pressures the two lovers face from their families. In the recapitulation, the melody of the love theme travels around the orchestra and soars over repeated triplets in other sections of the orchestra, until the distinctive quarter-sixteenth-sixteenth-eighth note rhythm of the feuding families' theme suddenly interrupts in measure 441. The two themes alternate each measure until measure 446, when the stormy familial conflict takes over. The entire orchestra plays the same rhythm, and the harsh, almost militaristic uniformity of the family theme's rhythm at measure 446 stands in

[42] Hugh Wolff, "Tchaikovsky: Fantasy-Overture, Romeo and Juliet," program notes for New York Philharmonic, *Young People's Concert*, Hugh Wolff, conductor, February 4 and 8, 1989, Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY, 6.
[43] Maes, 73.

contrast to the richly layered love theme only a few moments prior (measures 389-440). A distinct change in orchestral texture occurs alongside the change in musical character and the thematic collision. My musical analysis, with its exclusive focus on formal and structural elements of Tchaikovsky's *Fantasy-Overture*, highlights the work's absolute music nature (relative to the more programmatic works in this web of descent). During the Romantic era, conservatives like Brahms believed in the strength of musical form alone to convey emotions, and beyond including *Romeo and Juliet* in the title, Tchaikovsky does not need extensive program notes or additional narrative content to communicate the story's key emotions. With his creative approach to sonata form alone, Tchaikovsky successfully portrayed the collision of familial and romantic priorities, the primary challenge that the two young lovers face.

In stark contrast, Prokofiev's ballet is more akin to the radical ideal in the War of the Romantics, bringing together literature, music, and dance together in a three-hour ballet. Still, during Romeo's failed effort to stop a fight between Tybalt and Mercutio, Prokofiev portrays the same tension between two major themes in the *Romeo and Juliet* narrative: the quarrel between "two households, both alike in dignity" and the young lovers' impassioned romance.[44] Ballet, with the combination of music, dance, and staging that is intrinsic to the genre, allows for a nuanced portrayal of this tension. Structurally, the play's five acts and 24 scenes were reworked as 52 episodes in the ballet, equal in length and ultimately resulting in a "rapid, 'montage-like' dramatic structure." Prokofiev's experiences writing film music and his previous five ballets (also episodic) likely influenced his approach to *Romeo and Juliet*.[45] The themes for each character return, collide, and evolve throughout the ballet, and in Act 1, Scene 2: "The Young Juliet," Juliet is first introduced. The strings' flitting sixteenth notes and pizzicati in measures

[44] Shakespeare, line 1.
[45] Robinson, "Selections from *Romeo and Juliet*," 37.

1-26, as well as the solo clarinet's open-hearted melody in measures 27-34, express her youthful energy. In Act 2, Scene 3, Romeo's friend Mercutio begins to fight with Juliet's cousin Tybalt, signaled by the return of the belligerent Dance of the Knights in measures 21-37. However, Romeo steps between them, trying to prevent a larger conflict. This scene and its music is the most analogous moment to Tchaikovsky's *Fantasy-Overture*, because of the tension between the themes of familial conflict and passionate young love. The parameters of ballet as a genre allow for the communication of several emotions through staging, dance, and music. Because of his movement across the stage between Mercutio and Tybalt, audiences understand that Romeo enters during a moment of high tension between the two, and the choreography highlights his efforts to de-escalate the situation. The music, however, offers far more insight into his motivations: in measure 81, the solo clarinet begins to play the sweet, gentle melody from Act 1, Scene 2, evoking Juliet during this contentious moment between the boys. Remembering Juliet and realizing both the personal and sociopolitical implications of an open conflict between the Montagues and the Capulets, Romeo tries to calm his friend and Juliet's cousin. The story's main conflict is represented musically, alternating between the thunderous Dance of the Knights and Juliet's innocent melody while Romeo tries to stop the fight, but to no avail. Similar to Tchaikovsky's *Fantasy-Overture*, there is a change in orchestral texture along with the switch between the musical themes. Several sections of the orchestra simultaneously play the fierce, accented rhythm of the Dance of the Knights, signaling the blood feud between the two families. In contrast, Juliet's theme is smoothly passed from soloist to soloist while Romeo intervenes, a notable shift from the heavy musical texture while Mercutio and Tybalt size each other up. The prominence of Juliet's theme in this pivotal moment reveals Romeo's hopes of their

relationship's survival—further reinforcing the central tension between familial obligations and youthful romantic hopes, the true tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Conclusion

Berlioz's dramatic symphony, Tchaikovsky's *Fantasy-Overture*, Gounod's opera, and Prokofiev's ballet are a part of a larger *Romeo and Juliet* cultural ecosystem, and these four adaptations reflect a long tradition of interpreting and adapting stories for the performing arts. Drawing upon previous scholarly work in adaptation studies, my use of biological language, the term "web of descent," and the metaphor of a rose garden allow for the rightful inclusion and consideration of influential individuals and cultural forces in the conception and evolution of these works. Thus I look beyond Shakespeare's play as the sole common origin of the works, and I analyze the role of cultural environment and historical schools of thought in the cultivation of these adaptations and the subsequent propagation of the narrative. With the *Romeo and Juliet* cultural ecosystem and four adaptations in a web of descent as my case study, my survey of nineteenth- and twentieth-century musical history raises several questions about classical music in contemporary society. How does the modern day fit into webs of descent that have spanned centuries, especially with inevitable changes in tastes and the rise of technology? While the *Romeo and Juliet* story does not seem to be in danger of extinction anytime soon, how can we revitalize, conserve, and transform other narratives and their cultural ecosystems? Which narratives are compelling to the general public in the twenty-first century, and which cultural forces are influencing such narratives, their propagation, and their evolution? What is the nature of our current cultural environment, and how are performing arts institutions engaging with and responding to it, if at all? My application of a homology between biological and cultural

adaptation serves to explain how several *Romeo and Juliet* adaptations are intertwined both historically and musically, thus fostering questions about our current cultural environment, how we engage with storied performing arts traditions, and our collective potential for mature, informed musicianship.

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