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## **Shakespeare. «Romeo and Juliet». Ballet Art.**

**Abstract.** *This article is devoted to describing of Shakespeare plays in ballet as «Romeo and Juliet», creative work in modern ballet by Rudolf Nureyev as choreographer. The aim of the article is to provide the reader some material on Shakespeare plays «Romeo and Juliet», its interpretation in ballet by Kenneth MacMillan, famous ballet dancer Rudolf Nureyev as a dancer and a choreographer. The authors draw to the conclusion a list of Shakespeare plays in development of world ballet art.*

**Key words:** Shakespeare, plays, ballet, ballet art, Rudolf Nureyev, Kenneth MacMillan, choreography.

### **I. Introduction**

There is just something that interests us with Shakespeare being incorporated in ballet. Shakespeare is known for its language while ballet is known for its very technical dance choreography. What happens to Shakespeare when it loses its very essence, its language? How do they integrate Shakespeare in non-verbal arts?

To watch ballet inspired by Shakespeare, in our opinion, you need to have at least an understanding or idea of the text. To better appreciate each pointe, turn, and lifts, the audience must know where these are inspired.

There are no words in ballet. Shakespeare didn't actually write for the ballet but Shakespeare plays are full of words.

### **II. Setting objectives**

The aim of the article to study Shakespeare's plays in ballet art and their interpretation.

For this purposes the main tasks are: 1) to study and describe some researches on this theme, 2) to give examples of interpretation Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet* in ballet art.

### III. Results

William Shakespeare never published any of his plays and therefore none of the original manuscripts have survived. Eighteen unauthorized versions of his plays were, however, published during his lifetime in quarto editions by unscrupulous publishers (there were no copyright laws protecting Shakespeare and his works during the Elizabethan era).

Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* can be arguable the greatest love story of all time and is one of the top ten greatest classical ballet of all time. Romeo Montague and Juliet Capulet are teenagers who fall deeply in love but their families are bitter enemies. It is believed that the play was first performed between 1594 and 1595. In the Elizabethan era there was a huge demand for new entertainment and the tragedy would have been produced immediately following the completion of the play [11]:

*Two households, both alike on dignity,  
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,  
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,  
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.  
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes  
A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;  
Whose misadventured piteous overthrows  
Do with their death bury their parents' strife.  
The fearful passage of their death mak'd love  
And the continuance of their parents' rage,  
Which, but their children's end, nought could remove,  
Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage;  
The which if you with patient ears attend,  
What here shall miss our toil shall strive to mend [8].*

These lines are very actual nowadays in our globalization “village” in the 21-st century.

Prokofiev in 1935 or 1936 composed *Romeo and Juliet's* score inspired by the classic tragedy of young love. This music has inspired many choreographers throughout time to try to put their own interpretation of both the story and the music. It is considered to be classical ballet, as it has remained its basic structure no matter who the choreographer is [2].

Prokofiev wrote an extremely detailed script, following the sequence of events in Shakespeare's play scene by scene. He assigned a musical theme to each role (there is a leitmotiv for Juliet, for Romeo, for Tybalt, for Mercutio and also for the Nurse) which returns every time the character appears, and even describes the changes going on inside each of them; the theme is developed in a different mode depending on whether it is a question of intense joy or despair [1].

The Brno Ballet in Czechoslovakia created *Romeo and Juliet* on the 30th December 1938, with a choreography by Ivo Vana Psota. Faced with the success of

the first performances, the Kirov Ballet bade the composer return, and the ballet was finally performed in Leningrad on the 11th January 1940. Leonid Lavroski's choreography, danced by Galina Ulanova and Konstantin Sergeyev, matched the dramatics of the music, emphasizing the implacable hatred that brought the Capulets and the Montagues into conflict, and achieving a gripping contrast between the grandiose or aggressive ensembles and the intimacy of the pas de deux.

After Lavroski's version, one of the most outstanding choreographies is that of John Cranko; written in 1958 for the Scala Ballet in Milan, with Carla Fracci and Mario Pistoni. Rudolf Nureyev was to retain his aspect of portraying the Italian Renaissance, staging youthful love sacrificed to the hatred of adults; the light-heartedness of Mercutio corresponding to the surly disposition of Tybalt as an echo of the quarrels between the two enemy families.

Kenneth MacMillan's version, one that Nureyev knew well as he created it with Margot Fonteyn at the London Royal Ballet in 1965, emphasizes the fatal character of the tragedy. The choreographer shows a particular interest in Juliet; this child that becomes a woman as the action progresses. Rudolf Nureyev highlighted this point even further, making Juliet a rebel prepared to brave the codes of her class. Full of ardour and noise, in a realistic Verona where squares swelter in the sun and serve as permanent stages for an entire quarrelsome, colourful population, his ballet which is extremely faithful to Shakespeare's text [1].

According to our research, we could present 4 videos: Lynn Seymour teaches *Juliet's solo* (dancer Tamara Rojo), then she teaches Tamara Rojo and Edward Watson *The Madrigal*, Donald MacLeary teaches *The Mandolin (solo)* (dancer Edward Watson), and finally Kenneth MacMillan said, that he wanted to show the lovers as youngsters at the mercy of a powerful patriarchal society [3].

Romeo and his close friends, Mercutio and Benvolio, were given bravura steps that distinguished them from the street fighters in Verona's market place and the stately aristocrats in the ballroom scene. MacMillan had hitherto avoided virtuoso steps because he thought them too conventionally balletic. Only Juliet and her girlfriends are on pointe: their choreography is contrasted with character dances and verismo crowd scenes. MacMillan broke the ballet conventions of the time by having the dancing evolve from naturalistic action.

The Capulets are giving a ball to mark Juliet's entry into Veronese society. Romeo and his two friends decide to crash it, wearing masks as a disguise. During the formal dances, Juliet and Romeo fall in love before she realises that he is a Montague, a family enemy. When his identity is revealed, Lord Capulet intervenes to prevent Tybalt breaking the laws of hospitality by starting a fight.

Take for example *Romeo & Juliet's* balcony scene, one of the most famous scenes in *Romeo and Juliet* where Juliet says "*O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo? Deny thy father and refuse thy name*". After the ball, Juliet is on her balcony, dreaming of Romeo, when he enters below. She runs to join him in an ecstatic pas de deux expressing their love for each other.

The audience must have an idea of the story to understand why such choreography or such music was intended for the scene. Romeo's choreography is also very enthusiastic, much like a kid – this is, after all, how Romeo is seen in the text. And of course the Capulet, Juliet marked by her very graceful and very cautious moves. *See: Act II of Prokofiev's Romeo and Juliet 1966 "Balcony Scene". Rudolf Nureyev as Romeo and Margot Fonteyn as Juliet. "It's more like a film score so you have pieces of music that are meant to underscore the action. You take away the music and you don't have the drama of the situation..." [2].*

In fact, the British choreographer designed the ballet for his favourite ballerina, Lynn Seymour (Juliet) and for Christopher Gable (Romeo). But just a few days before the première, the management of the Royal Ballet imposed the most famous couple of the time! Margot Fonteyn and Rudolf Nureyev, whom everyone wanted to see dancing and who guaranteed a ballet's success [4].

*Romeo and Juliet's* premiere, with Margot Fonteyn and Rudolf Nureyev in the leading roles, met with 43 curtain calls; the safety curtain had to be brought down to persuade the audience to leave the theatre [3].

But Nureyev was not satisfied with simply performing MacMillan's Romeo. He went on to choreograph his own version – far more complete from the musical point of view – which was tumultuous and impetuous, adding substance to the parts of Romeo ("Romeo is the story of a youth who becomes a man", he explained); Tybalt and Mercutio, focussing on the popular scenes with the spectacular duels between Capulet and Montague or the angry or excited crowds. The première took place in 1977 at the London Coliseum [4].

Nureyev's choreography based on the 52 movements that make up the complete score, Nureyev's choreography is composed of theatrical realism and historical sequence. Capulet and Montague oppose one another like rival gangs in the market place, knocking over fruit and vegetables, and lewd gestures abound. Mercutio's death is extremely well done. In his duel with Tybalt, Mercutio pretends to be wounded only to recover ever more insolent, making his friends laugh.

Tybalt's death brings with it another very intense effect. In other versions, it is Lady Capulet who comes to weep over the body of her nephew. Here, it is Juliet who is the focus of attention. She appears suddenly as if carried along in a nightmare: Romeo who she has just secretly married has become the murderer of her cousin. This irreversible action and the sight of widespread blood sends her into a state of "shock"; her gestures are those of someone trying to free themselves from this blood bath, a blood that is slimy and sticks to the skin. And, blaming the two families for their fatal quarrels, she cleaves the air with her arms in semblance of slapping both parties around the face.

Death is omnipresent; both materially and figuratively speaking. The curtain rises, at the very beginning, on a funeral procession: it is the early hours and some monks are pushing a cart of corpses, beyond the town walls, taking away the bodies of those who killed one another the day before.

Then, in front of the house of the Capulets, Romeo, Mercutio and their friends are having a good time mimicking the guests as they make their entrance, when a beggar calls out to them holding out his hand. Romeo allows himself to feel sorry and gives him a gold coin. On receiving this unexpected charity, the unfortunate man suffocates and dies.

Romeo “means well”, but “born under an unlucky star” (symbolized at the opening and closing of the show by the group of four men of Destiny playing dice) each time he makes a move, it results in death: the beggar, Tybalt, Paris and Juliet.

Nureyev provides many personal touches that are just not to be found in the versions by other choreographers. One instance, he portrays Juliet whose parents are forcing her to marry Paris, not knowing in her confusion what to choose: the dagger with which to kill herself, or the potion, given to her by Brother Lawrence, which promises after a deep sleep making believe she is dead, to then bring her back to life. Dreaming, she sees the ghost of Tybalt appear holding out the dagger (suicide), and that of Mercutio inviting her to drink the potion (to stay alive).

Fonteyn's en pointe skills are exquisite in this performance. When Paris (Derek Rencher) comes courting after Romeo's departure, Fonteyn's Juliet rises to her toes and slips away from him, backing across the room en pointe, straight armed, and head cocked, her posture and movement portraying a fragile thing caught in an impossible trap, and she ends by looking longingly toward the window through which Romeo had departed. When they dance together, she and Nureyev meld into one being, his graceful athleticism working with her fluid yet pinpoint-perfect phrasings. Sometimes you see Nureyev misstep, and that's fine because that's part and parcel of ballet, the most athletic of the arts. More often, though, he, she, and they will make your heart skip a beat as even simple steps say so much about their characters' emotions in the moment. The morning after the marriage scene is indescribable, except to say it might just be the most beautiful and perfectly performed dance you will ever see [5].

#### IV. Conclusions

According to our research, we can conclude that the plays of Shakespeare (1564–1616) have proved a rich source of character and plot for choreographers. Versions of *The Taming of the Shrew* include Béjart (mus. D. Scarlatti, Paris, 1954), Cranko (mus. D. Scarlatti, arr. Stolze, Stuttgart, 1969), and L. Falco in *Kate's Rag* (1980); versions of *Romeo and Juliet* include Eusebio Luzzi (Venice, 1785), Galeotti (mus. C. Schall, Copenhagen, 1811), Nijinska (mus. Lambert, Monte Carlo, 1926), Bartholin (mus. Tchaikovsky, Paris, 1937), Psota (mus. Prokofiev, Brno, 1938), with other versions of Prokofiev's score including Lavrovsky (Leningrad, 1940), Ashton (Copenhagen, 1955), Lifar (Paris, 1955), Cranko (Stuttgart, 1962), MacMillan (London, 1965), van Dantzig (Amsterdam, 1967), Neumeier (Frankfurt, 1971), Smuin (San Francisco, 1976), Vinogradov (Maly Theatre, Leningrad, 1976), Nureyev (London Festival Ballet, 1977), and Grigorovich (Moscow, 1979); later versions to other scores include T. Gsovsky (mus. L. Spies, Leipzig, 1942), Tudor (mus. Delius,

New York, 1943), *Skibine* (mus. Berlioz, Paris, 1955); versions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* include M. Petipa (mus. Mendelssohn, St Petersburg, 1877), also to the same score Balanchine (New York, 1962), Ashton (*The Dream*, London, 1964), Neumeier (mus. Ligeti and Mendelssohn, Hamburg, 1977), and Bigonzetti (mus. Elvis Costello, 2000); versions of *Twelfth Night* include Tudor (in *Cross-Gartered*, mus. Frescobaldi, London, 1937) and Howard (mus. Grieg, Liverpool, 1942); versions of *Hamlet* include Francesco Clerico (mus. by himself, Venice, 1788), L. Henry (mus. W. R. Gallenberg, Paris, 1816), Nijinska (mus. Liszt, Paris, 1934), Helpmann (mus. Tchaikovsky, London, 1942), V. Gsovsky (mus. Blacher, Munich, 1950), Sergeev (mus. Chervinsky, Leningrad, 1970), Neumeier (in *Hamlet: Connotations*, mus. Copland, American Ballet Theatre, New York, 1976), MacMillan (in *Sea of Troubles*, mus. Martinů and Webern, London, 1985), Paepfer (mus. Klatzow, Cape Town, 1992), and P. Schaufuss (mus. Black Sun and R. Langgaard, Elsinore, 1996); versions of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* by Bourmeister and I. Kurilov (mus. V. Oransky, Moscow, 1942); versions of *Much Ado About Nothing* by V. Boccadoro (mus. T. Khrennikov, Moscow, 1976); versions of *Othello* by S. Viganò (mus. various, Milan, 1818) and Lubovitch for San Francisco Ballet and American Ballet Theatre (1998), Limón in *The Moor's Pavane* (mus. Purcell, New London, Conn., 1949), Chabukiani (mus. V. Machavariani, Tblisi, 1957), Němeček (mus. J. Hanuš, Prague, 1959), Lifar in *Le Maure de Venise* (mus. Thiriet, Amsterdam, 1960), Darrell (mus. Liszt, Trieste, 1971), and Brandstrup (mus. I. Dearden, London, 1994); versions of *Macbeth* by Le Picq (mus. Locke, arr. Barthélémon, London, 1785), Galeotti (mus. Schall, Copenhagen, 1816), H. Henry (mus. Pugni, Milan, 1830), and Pistoni (mus. R. Strauss, Milan, 1969); versions of *Antony and Cleopatra* by Noverre (Stuttgart or Ludwigsburg, after 1761), Aumer (mus. Kreutzer, Paris, 1808), and dell'Ara (mus. Prokofiev, Milan, 1971); versions of *Coriolanus* by S. Viganò (mus. Weigl, Milan, 1804); versions of *The Tempest* by Coralli (mus. Schneitzhoeffter, Paris, 1834), F. Taglioni (in *Miranda*, London, 1838), Howard (mus. Tippett, London, 1964), Eck (mus. Sibelius, Helsinki, 1974), Tetley (mus. Nordheim, Ballet Rambert, 1979), Smuin (mus. Chihara after Purcell, San Francisco, 1981), and Nureyev (mus. Tchaikovsky, London, 1982). Other ballets based on Shakespearian material include Lacotte's *Such Sweet Thunder* (mus. Ellington, Berlin, 1959, also Bintley's *The Shakespeare Suite*, Birmingham, 1999, set to the same music) and MacMillan's *Images of Love* (mus. P. Tranchell, London, 1964) [12].

In the early- and mid-twentieth century, the three major Tchaikovsky ballets – *Swan Lake*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, and *The Nutcracker* – were viewed as the three greatest full-length ballets. Not surprisingly, they were also more popular by wide margins than all other works in the genre. By the latter quarter of the century, however, Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* had entered the trio's select company and remains exceedingly popular today. Some have even asserted it is the greatest of full-length ballets.

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