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World’s End: A *Romeo and Juliet* Production Concept

*The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet* is seen as a story of the tragedy of a couple who found love at first sight and could not drive themselves away from it, despite knowing it would be fatal. Act one of the play displays this purely with Romeo and Juliet meeting each other and loving instantaneously. The song “Can’t Help Falling in Love” by Pierre Barouh and George David Weiss, covered by Haley Reinhart highlights this emotion in relation to the play. In act one of Romeo and Juliet, both Romeo and Juliet see each other and instantly fall in love, as if they cannot help “fallin’ in love” (Reinhart 0:53) with each other. Romeo thinks of Juliet as “a rich jewel” (Shakespeare 1.5.46) with “beauty too rich” (Shakespeare 1.5.47) to gaze upon and Juliet feels lost in the fact that her “only love” (Shakespeare 1.5.138) is Romeo, an enemy to her family whom she had just met. Thus, the song’s lyrics correlate to Romeo and Juliet’s instantaneous affection with each other, as neither Romeo nor Juliet could really stop themselves from falling in love with each other as they clearly felt affectionate for each other upon first sight. Romeo and Juliet are also said to be “star-crossed lovers” (1. Prologue.6) meaning that their love and eventual tragedy was simply “meant to be” (Reinhart 1:14). Thus, the lyrics of the song match some of the key points mentioned in act one and characterize the love of Romeo and Juliet well.

The pacing of this song also helps to develop the theme of act one. The song is slow paced and has a piano instrumental, making the song feel like a true expression of love. The piano notes played are long and smooth, provoking feelings of love and affection within the listener’s ears. However, the song also has a mix of sad, low notes which foreshadow the eventual tragedy of Romeo and Juliet and the sorrowful fact that their love cannot exist due to the divide within their families.

Thus, the lyrics and pacing of this song go to develop the romantic emotion and tragedy of Romeo and Juliet discussed in act one of the play.

Act two of Romeo and Juliet is often characterized by love, romance, and marriage. For this reason, the song “Perfect” by Ed Sheeran represents the emotions of this act very well. In this romantic act, Romeo and Juliet decide to get married with Friar Lawrence being their priest. “Against all odds” (Sheeran 2:16-18), such as the threat of either family figuring out or something in the plan going wrong, the marriage goes soundly with both Romeo and Juliet speaking of each other as though they “look perfect” (Sheeran 1:31-33). Juliet even feels as though her love is as powerful and worthy as the “sum of half my [her] wealth” (Shakespeare 2.6.34). To Romeo and Juliet, their love seems perfect, like how the song lyrics discuss of a person who believes that their lover is perfect.

“Perfect” by Ed Sheeran also fits into other sections of the act, with one such example being the balcony scene. Regarded as one of the most romantic sections of the whole play, Romeo, and Juliet both confess their love for each other extensively in this scene. Romeo believes that “Juliet is the sun” (Shakespeare 2.2.3) and even feels like she is “an angel” (Sheeran 3:51-53). Likewise, Juliet sees Romeo as perfect, saying that even if he were to lose the title Montague, he would still “retain that dear perfection” (Shakespeare 2.2.46). Romeo and Juliet confess in such a manner that shows they find each other perfect and find that their love is great among them. Thus, their confessions fit with the idea of the song.

Slow songs are usually associated with love, and such is the case with this song. The song has long, slow notes that are upbeat and joyful that represent the immense joy both Romeo and Juliet feel in their love. The song thus leaves the listener with this sense of joyous love that represents how Romeo and Juliet view each other.

Therefore, “Perfect” by Ed Sheeran fits the beautiful love expressed in act two of Romeo and Juliet.

Act three of Romeo and Juliet is characterized by the climactic fight between Tybalt, Mercutio, and Romeo. This energetic fight is well represented by the song “You Know my Name” by Chris Cornell with its flow of lyrics and general tempo. The fight begins with Tybalt, feeling beyond angry that an enemy to his family would infiltrate his family’s party, challenging Romeo to a fight to the death in Verona’s streets. However, Romeo wishes not to fight a member of the family he just married into, reasoning to Tybalt that if he is to “take a life” (Cornell 0:17-19), and begin fighting, the prince would punish them with something and that they “won’t like what it is” (Cornell 0:25-27). Mercutio, astounded by Romeo’s “vile submission” (Shakespeare 3.1.70) and reluctancy to fight, decides to step in and fight Tybalt on behalf of Romeo. However, Tybalt, being chaotic and having the “coldest blood” (Cornell 1:27-29) running through his body, slays Mercutio without regret and flees. But Romeo does not let him get away, insisting that Tybalt “arm yourself [himself]” (Cornell 1:00) and have either him, Tybalt or both die in a fight to “keep him [Mercutio] company” (3.1.126) as he ascends into heaven. In the resulting fight, Romeo slays Tybalt, making him “meet your [his] end” (Cornell 2:15-17). The song’s lyrics represent the conversations that the characters have before and during the fight begins, as well as representing aspects of the fight, such as how Romeo pressures Tybalt into arming himself into a fight to give Mercutio company. The composition of the song also characterizes the fight as the song has three main bursts of sound, representing each of the key plot points during the fight: the death of Mercutio, the death of Tybalt and the banishment of Romeo. The song’s energetic composition also contrasts the grief and sadness that this act shows, with the death of many key players, masking this point of grief with a thrilling song.

Thus, the song “You Know My Name” by Chris Cornell is a representative song of act three of Romeo and Juliet.

The tragic situation Juliet feels herself in during act four is well displayed by the song “Skyfall” by Adele. Following Romeo’s banishment, Romeo and Juliet feel as though they are “a thousand miles” (Adele 2:06-8) apart from each other and are desperate to reunite with each other. Juliet believes that “God joined my [her] heart and Romeo’s” (Shakespeare 4.1.55) and that they are together in love, resulting in her being willing to do anything to unite herself with Romeo. In desperation to do this and escape a binding marriage to a man she does not like, Juliet decides to enact a series of events that will lead to a disaster by letting the “sky fall” (Adele 1:23-25) to lure Romeo back to Verona and make them be “together at sky fall” (Adele 1:45-49). “Skyfall” (Adele 2:01) in this case represents a difficult and deadly situation that Juliet would be causing to lure Romeo back to Verona to be with him. In the original song, Adele sings about her lover being thousands of miles apart and wanting to reunite with them at sky fall. Romeo and Juliet are in a similar situation, with Romeo being in Mantua and Juliet being in Verona. They both want to reunite but physical barriers are stopping them from being able to, as is the case in the song.

Certain sections of the song also contain clear audial similarities to emotions felt throughout act four. The song is a continual loop of two notes, repeated over and over: an upbeat note and a depressing note. The repetition of this duo of notes represents the situation that Juliet feels herself in; desperate to escape her situation, but hopeful that her plan will work to fix her situation. Furthermore, nearing the end of the song, the song dramatically increases in sound, as a hint to the audience that the end of the song and ignition of the plan marks the beginning of the end and the start of the tragic sequence of events that would follow and lead to Romeo and Juliet’s death.

Thus, many aspects of the song “Skyfall” by Adele fit the theme of act four of Romeo and Juliet.

Romeo and Juliet meet their end in act five of the play, killing themselves to be together and prove that not even death could stop their love. In the last minutes of their ill-fated relationship, Romeo feels as though he is “suffocating” (Smith 1:34) at the prospect of Juliet being dead and decides to “give it all up” (Smith 1:41-43) and take his life “to my [his] love” (Shakespeare 5.3.119). Juliet then wakes up from her rest, seeing Romeo dead, realizing that her and Romeo’s fate was sealed; that a higher power “thwarted our [their] intents” (Shakespeare 5.3.154) to love, as if their tragic shortcoming was written into fate and that every action they had made was because the “writing” (Smith 1:53) was “on the wall” (Smith 1:54). In this figurative expression from the song, “Writing’s on the Wall” by Sam Smith, the wall represents the course of fate; immutable, durable, and everlasting. In the case of Romeo and Juliet, a higher power had made sure their tragedy be written into fate, written into this wall, and set to always occur regardless of the choices any person made. The lyrics of the song also match emotions that Romeo has before his death, experiencing grief for the death of Juliet but also willing to end his life to be with her forever. Romeo is willing to give up his life, like how the song dives into how someone is willing to “give it all up” (Smith 1:41-43) to feel love.

The song “Writing’s on the Wall” by Sam Smith also has a distinct tempo that fits with aspects and events in act five. The song is another slow piano mixed with minor keys, depicting a sad romance and tragedy. However, this tempo is not kept throughout, as there are two portions of the song where an energetic blast of loud saddening keys escalates to an immediate drop in sound and notes that match the melancholy feeling of Romeo and Juliet’s deaths and pairs well with the events that occur between their deaths.

Therefore, both the tempo and lyrics of “Writing’s on the Wall” by Sam Smith match the tragic end of Romeo and Juliet in act five of the play.

Following the death of their children, the Capulets and Montagues arrive at the Capel’s monument and see both of their children at the whims of death due to their own strife. Both families, upon hearing what had happened from the friar’s account, had really “fallen for a lie” (Eilish 1:35-38) of not knowing what either of their own children were doing. The prince reasons to both the Montagues and the Capulets that the death of their children was “laid upon your [their] hate” (Shakespeare 5.3.292) and that the blood their families were bleeding was just “the blood you [they] owe” (Eilish 0:50-51) to each other and Verona’s citizens for fighting in their streets and causing chaos. For this reason, the song “No Time to Die” By Billie Eilish captures the essence of emotional distraught either family feels after the death of their children. They were oblivious to the fact that any of these events were occurring, like how Eilish speaks of how she had fallen for a lie in a relationship she was in. The section on revenge in the form of blood is also significant since the Montagues and Capulets had caused chaos in Verona’s streets due to their constant fighting and the death of their children was simply the way of karma setting in.

The tempo of the song is extremely tragic as well, featuring low, woeful notes that continue throughout the course of the whole song. These notes leave a depressing impression on the listener and result in this song being perfect for the end of act five, as the end of this act is the most woeful part of the whole play, where the conflict is resolved at the cost of the protagonists’ lives. The lyrics in this song are also chosen to invoke woe in the listener’s ears as they are all associated with negative meanings. The way Eilish decides to sing the notes also leaves this the listener with sorrow, as she says them with little to no energy to further sadden the tone.

Thus, “No Time to Die” by Billie Eilish is an excellent song choice to represent the tragic aftermath of the deaths of Romeo and Juliet at the end of act five.

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