

End Stage 5 English student work sample – Grade B

Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet is one of the all-time great classic plays. The characters, events and particularly the themes will go down in history as some of the greatest ever written and performed. But particularly the themes Shakespeare used are fantastically strong, and due to this strength they have been used in recontextualisations throughout the decades, and my company's version is what I am here to talk about.

There are many different ways you can recontextualise Romeo and Juliet, and as Baz Luhrmann proved, it is possible to bring this classic play into the modern era. With my concept for Romeo and Juliet, I also want to bring the play into the modern era, but keep the themes, characterization and language of the play as they were in the original. My recontextualisation is set in Venice because I believe Romeo and Juliet should be set in a beautiful yet mysterious location. Venice is full of gorgeous architecture, beautiful canals but also old, dark buildings and mysterious pathways. I also want to keep the setting of the play in Italy, just to preserve some of the original atmosphere and culture.

The Capulet family is still seen in the public eye, but in my company's version they are portrayed as celebrities, movie stars. They lead a public life, everyone can see them and they are wealthy beyond measure, living in lavish houses in Venice and often throwing huge parties. They are also a very conscientious family, they believe in workers rights, they promote the environment and they feel very strongly against pirating music and especially movies. Juliet is the daughter of Capulet and Lady Capulet, their only one. Nurse is now a maid, almost like Juliet's servant or nanny as her parents are often shooting movies. For the purpose of maintaining the originality of the play, Tybalt is still a cousin of Juliet, but also a body-guard like figure. I have also adapted all the servants roles so now not only are they servants, they too are body-guard like figures to the Capulet family. I believe this modernisation of the Capulet family fits the classical Capulet family, because in my opinion, a modern Juliet would fit better into a posh, politically correct family, rather than what my idea for the Montague family is.

My view on the Montagues was that they were a bit more rebellious and bad, not on the right side of the law. I mostly got this impression from the text and Baz Luhrmann's modernised film version, where the Montagues were always adrenaline charged. From this I developed my concept for the Montague family. My company will portray the Montague family as an underground, almost mafia type family. They will generate their reputation through word-of-mouth and folk tales in the city. While they will be as rich as the Capulets, their methods of income are far less orthodox. The Montagues are shady businessmen in the underground world, dealing and scheming to make their money, and not caring what happens on the way. They are a "bad-boy" esque family, and their most public way of making money is to sell pirated DVDs which are often films that star the Capulet couple. I picture Montague and Lady Montague as a flamboyant couple, living a similarly lavish lifestyle in a large, expensive home, while others do their dirty work. Romeo is still their only son, but he is a bit reckless, and his Casanova-esque personality often attracts attention. Like the original he starts the play filled with unrequited love from Rosaline, who I have portrayed as a close friend of the Capulets and an actress herself. I picture Mercutio as a leader of the underground, the second in command if you will, and Romeo's best friend. He is reckless, impulsive and similarly bold as he is in the original. His actions speak louder than words, but he is very close to the higher-up Montagues. For the purpose of this adaptation, Benvolio will act as another henchman, similar to Mercutio, and also a close friend of Romeo. However he will possess a calmer demeanor and a level-headedness that isn't in sync with the other Montagues.

So already you have the two families, both alike in wealth and social awareness: one politically correct and perfect, the other obnoxious and uncaring. And so as a result, problems are created. Naturally the Capulet family wouldn't want their only daughter to marry a shady business person, especially one ripping off their work. This is where Paris comes in, who will be portrayed as an up-and-coming actor, supremely famous, think of a Robert Pattinson person. Likewise, the Montagues wouldn't want their heir to be involved with someone in the public eye, someone who they feel almost envious of; they would prefer him to exist at a lower level and not draw attention to the mafia-esque family.

Confidently offers an original interpretation of the play and explains some of the differences emerging as a result of the adaptation – for example, in the representation of the Capulet family

Evaluates how original ideas and perspectives can be used to shape meaning such as in the representation of the Montagues

To help you picture my concept more effectively I have chosen 2 scenes to explain and use as examples for my company's recontextualisation. The first scene I have chosen is the opening scene, scene 1 act 1, which introduces the minor characters into the play and gives a taste of the rivalry between the families. Here the stage would be set in a public place, most likely a piazza type area. The lighting would reflect day and all costuming would be modern but of different styles, ordered and crisp for the Capulets and bold and ruffled for the Montagues. In the original text, this scene introduces the Capulet and Montague servants; they argue and insult one another and then fight. In my concept, the Montague's will be represented by the small time criminals at the base of the families organization, while the Capulet servants will remain, but remember they also act as body-guard like figures for such a public family. I believe all Shakespearean oriented plays should be performed with great drama and my concept will be no different. I will have both sides dramatise their actions with loud, intense vocals, purposeful body language and wild gesticulating. Although I will keep the original text, like Lohmann, I will reduce and change it minimally to place greater emphasis on the words. I will also use different vocal techniques to distinguish between the families, posh and flowing for the Capulets and loud and obnoxious for the Montagues. They will engage in the scenes normal manner, until the climax involving the fight scene, where I will enhance the performance with emotion provoking music, of both classical and modern variety. The lighting will remain constant in this scene but fade at the end when the Prince arrives. It is also noteworthy that like Lohmann, I will give the Prince a chief police-esque role, emphasizing his control over the city.

The second scene I have chosen is the party scene also in Scene 1 but act 5. I believe this scene would emphasise the differences between the two families, as the Capulets throw a large media related party, and the "bad" Montague boys sneak in and gatecrash, something well known in modern society. The stage would be set as if in a large ballroom, with lavish tables and seating, as you would expect for a formal party. As custom to most Venetian parties, a mask would hide the identity of the person, keeping in tradition to the original play. The lighting would reflect a party atmosphere with a moderately dark area, and a spotlight would focus on Romeo and Juliet separately then join together to heighten their first moment together. Once again the voices and dramatization would reflect each family's individual character, highlighting their differences and allowing the audience to distinguish between them on the low lit stage. The music would be soft in the background and a mix of different styles, reflecting the mood of the party and climaxing at the moment Romeo and Juliet meet. In this scene I want the actor and actress playing Romeo and Juliet to overdramatise and accentuate their new found love, allowing them to stand out from the crowd. Mercutio should also stand out; showing his bold and special character. I feel this is the first scene that sets the tone for the film and therefore it is essential that it is performed and perceived rightly.

Romeo and Juliet have a tragic ending to their love, one which will live forever in drama. Shakespeare's writing was so bold and ahead of his time, it has allowed directors like myself to adapt his classic plays for a modern audience such as yourselves. This means we can enjoy a fantastically written production, in a context we can understand and relate to, and this I feel is the essence of my recontextualisation. Thank you for listening and I hope you look forward to the New Shakespeare Theatre Company's Romeo and Juliet.

Demonstrates increasing insight and understanding of the ways in which composers can transform ideas into new texts by considering dramatic techniques and staging

Grade Commentary

Huong has demonstrated a thorough understanding of composing a persuasive speech. The concept is well explained and shows creativity. Appropriate language choices and a strong awareness of the audience enhance the effectiveness of the speech. An insightful knowledge of the text is displayed, and the selected scenes support the imaginative recontextualising of the play. The speech has a clear purpose using some persuasive techniques. Intertextual and modern cultural references are integrated to assist in persuading the audience. Further editing and time management skills are needed as the concept was explained in detail for only one scene before the time limit was exceeded.

Huong's response demonstrates characteristics of work typically produced by a student performing at grade B standard at the end of Stage 5.