Star Cross’d Lovers in Song and Verse: An Interdisciplinary Engagement with *Romeo and Juliet* and *West Side Story*

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Standard critical essays often involve the comparisons of texts organized both as source and adaptation. There are many possible motivations behind such an approach but, generally, the methodology (and therefore the possibility of the comparison) is rooted in the ability of a critic to adequately address both source and adaptation. This approach enables *intra*disciplinary work, such as the source criticism evidenced in the prefatory material in at least one collection of Shakespeare’s work, but also frustrates attempts to undertake *inter*disciplinary work. Some studies look at works from two distinct disciplines, but they do not engage both fields at the same level of academic rigor. Gary Taylor, for example, uses multiple incarnations of the Romeo story (the Shakespearean text, *West Side Story*, Tchaikovsky’s ballet) to create a *Romeo and Juliet* unit for his class, but he does not discuss film as a film critic, nor ballet as a dance or music critic. Rather, he looks at each piece through the focusing lens of a literary approach to Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. There is nothing wrong with this; any opportunity to bring a wider range of materials under the lens of the literary critic will only expand our understanding of the world of art in its many forms. However, a different kind of benefit can be found by undertaking an intensive (if not exhaustive) examination of multiple artifacts from different disciplines on (and through) their own terms.

In order to explore the benefit of true interdisciplinary work more clearly, this paper will apply the techniques of musical analysis as well as poetic analysis to expand what is a fairly standard critical endeavor: an exploration of the relationship between Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* (*Romeo*) and the series of adaptations within which it exists. Specifically, the paper will focus on the relationship between Shakespeare’s play and *West Side Story* (*WSS*), the musical by Leonard Bernstein, Arthur Laurents, Jerome Robbins, and Stephen Sondheim. Before beginning in earnest, it is important to set some criteria for
this comparison. Since the genres of these two pieces are so different, it might be wise to add in a third term of comparison, to establish a movement of critical focus with the momentum necessary to push across boundaries of discipline. This can be accomplished by beginning with a brief examination of the relationship between Romeo and Arthur Brooke’s *The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet* (Romeus), which will provide a pattern for the later pairing of Romeo and *WSS*.

It is commonly acknowledged that the source for Shakespeare’s *Romeo* was a verse novel written by Arthur Brooke. In no way can this be more efficiently demonstrated than by comparing the Argument of Brooke’s poem to the overall plot of Shakespeare’s play:

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Love hath inflaméd twain by sudden sight,
And both do grant the thing that both desire.
They wed in shrift by counsel of a friar.
Young Romeus climbs fair Juliet’s bower by night.
Three months he doth enjoy his chief delight.
By Tybalt’s rage provokéd to ire,
He payeth death to Tybalt for his hire.
A banished man he ‘scapes by secret flight.
New marriage is offered to his wife.
She drinks a drink that seems to reave her breath:
They bury her that sleeping yet hath life.
Her husband hears the tidings of her death.
He drinks his bane. And she with Romeus’ knife,
When she awakes, herself, alas! she slay’th.
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The similarities between the Brooke and the Shakespeare should be immediately apparent to anyone with even a passing familiarity with *Romeo*, but the most productive work to be done when comparing two retellings of the same story is to examine differences between a particular pair. Because of the extremely high degree of similarity, the only substantial plot difference is rather easy to spot: “Three months he doth enjoy his chief delight.” Shakespeare’s story takes place over only a few days—there is no time for three months of anything. Using this difference in plot as the basis for the ‘new’ (Shakespearian) adaptation, it is possible to begin examining the pair in terms of difference in focus or theme.

One way to begin is by looking at how (or if) this change in plot is manifested in the change of genre from verse novel to play. Though Shakespeare does stretch the Aristotelian ideal of the unities of time and space in some of his works, he does not do much of that here. The action takes place over several days, and most if not all of the important events happen onstage. This change in form might in and of itself be enough to mandate the compression of time that happens when the story is transferred from Brooke to Shakespeare, but even if that were the cause, it would be prudent to examine
what work this compression of events did in the ‘new’ adaptation, and how, if at all, this work is supported by further differences between the two adaptations.

In the opening pages of *Romeus*, the author’s intent is made clear: “to describe unto [the reader] a couple of unfortunate lovers, thralling themselves to unhonest desire; neglecting the authority and advice of parents and friends…finally by all means of unhonest life hasting to most unhappy death.” From this, the ‘message’ should be equally clear: indulging in romantic love is bad, and disobeying your parents is also bad. Turning to the opening lines of *Romeo*, one can find a similar statement of purpose from Shakespeare. The language of the Prologue is full of words of rash and violent impulse: “break,” “mutiny,” “misadventured,” “overthrows,” “death,” “strife,” “fearful,” “rage,” and others are all found in the first 10 lines of the play. If one continues through to the end of the Prologue, one finds that this plot “is now the two-hours’ traffic of our stage”—even the chorus is illustrating the same sort of rushing that compressed the original plot from months down to days, and which has compressed the near-limitless time it could take to read a book into the business of only hours.

This temporal compression can be seen happening in the very first scene, and it is here that Shakespeare first shows the audience the reason behind the compression. What begins as a squabble between servants of the houses of Montague and Capulet escalates, in the space of seventy-four lines, into a town brawl involving lieutenants of each house, the heads and ladies of said houses, the citizens of fair Verona, and even the Prince himself. This snowball-effect can be seen as a preview for the overarching interactions of love, impulse, false surmises, and rash poison-drinking that make up the rest of the play.

In no way does this exhaust the available differences (a book could be written on the change from printed poetry to performed drama all by itself), but it has at least presented a working example of the method that will be used to analyze the *Romeo/WSS* pairing. Furthermore, it has also provided a relatively easy (because familiar) material upon which to carry out the demonstration. It is now possible to examine the pairing that is the focus of this paper by following the same procedures.

The parallels between *Romeo* and *WSS* are numerous and precise because Arthur Laurents, while writing the book for the Broadway play, was very consciously remaining true to the plot of Shakespeare’s play. Joan Peyser observes that there is really only “one big plot difference: Juliet dies, and Maria lives.” One result of this is that in 1962 *WSS* was used as a teaching aid for a high school English class. While it was evidently a useful pedagogical tool, its value was severely underrated when it was turned into a kind of “CliffsNotes” for Shakespeare. More importantly, this shows a misunderstanding of both *Romeo* and *WSS*—though similar, they are not identical.

There is that one hugely apparent difference referred to above. The reason for this change, as Peyser noted, was that “most Broadway veterans believed that if after Riff and Bernardo [Mercutio and Tybalt] died, both hero and
heroine died, the show would be unable to attract any of Broadway’s traditional audience.” There is little reason not to believe that this is the real motivation for the change, given how very carefully almost every other aspect of the plot is transposed into the new adaptation. This is, however, a fairly radical difference from the Shakespearean version, and if the reasoning behind this departure is that the “new” adaptation is observing the standards of its genre, then it is important that the genre itself be understood. The genre issue becomes confusing, because of the filmic adaptation of the Broadway play and the multiple sound recordings. Simply sorting these issues out is a project in itself, worthy of serious scholarly exploration. For now, however, it is enough to simply state that this paper will be working with WSS, contradictions and all. The work will be treated as a Broadway adaptation, even though the primary source is a release of the filmic version on DVD, and the score from which musical examples will be drawn is as Bernstein revised it for the Deutsche Grammophon recordings. It is possible that this mixing of sources could be seen as a mixing of works, but the counter to that argument is the idea that these various facets constitute a body that is, in its entirety, West Side Story, and it is that body that is the subject of the current examination.

The genre of Shakespeare’s work would be “drama”, which would often be considered “poetry” as well—in either case, the medium and aesthetic focus would be language, and this is how Stephen Greenblatt sees Romeo. He contends that “it is principally by means of the incandescent brilliance of its language that Romeo and Juliet has earned its place as one of the greatest love stories in world literature. Shakespeare makes linguistic power actually figure thematically in the play,” and it is this statement upon which this paper models its approach to WSS. As an example of a Broadway Musical, music figures primarily into the aesthetic presentation of the work. To parallel Greenblatt’s observation, it is principally through the superbly crafted score that WSS has earned its place as a favorite love story of America, and the world. This is because Bernstein’s music, along with Sondheim’s lyrics, manages to represent and advance the thematic concepts that drive the play, differentiating WSS from Romeo in form as well as content.

These thematic concepts, rather than plot details, embody the major differences between the work of Shakespeare and Romeo. In Romeo, the chorus informs us that these “two households, both alike in dignity” are on more or less equal standing in terms of the laws of Verona. The Jets and Sharks of WSS are most definitely not alike. This is shown in their costumes and their speech and demonstrated by various incidents throughout the play, but it is enacted through the score, and this is where the focus of this analysis will be. The score is responsible for enacting this difference because the score, even when being sung by the characters, is separate from the characters, determining their voicing, and cannot be affected by them. It preexists them by virtue of being present in the form of the overture as the curtains are raised (or, in the case of a film, as the title sequence rolls), and outlasts them when the bows music plays and the actors step out of the characters to accept the compliments of
the audience (or, for film, the credits roll). The characters do not create the score—they can only react to it and respond with it.\textsuperscript{14}

The best example of the way the score clearly differentiates between the Jets—the Anglo gang—and the Sharks—the Puerto Ricans—is in the “Dance at the Gym”.\textsuperscript{15} This is not the earliest appearance of the musical differences, but it is probably the moment of sharpest musical contrast. Though members of both gangs and their girls are present, the focus is definitely on the Jets as the scene opens. The music is in 12/8 time, giving four beats per measure, each consisting of three eighth notes. The instrumentation has the percussion on traps (drum set) and vibraphone. This gives the piece the feel of late big band swing, heavily influenced by the blues. Both of these were, at the time \textit{West Side Story} was written (1956), very much a part of American pop culture, and would have been recognized as “domestic” elements. More importantly, they are idioms that thrive on rhythms based on triplets—a beat divided into three equal parts. At measure seven, the tempo indication is “Rocky,” and in the previous bar an idiomatic trumpet lick begins in the third trumpet part with an octave smear from the Bb in the staff to the Bb one octave above the staff, which is doubled in unison or octaves in all three trumpets, and anticipated in the bass sax, bassoon, F horn, and trombone lines. This relatively uncomplicated harmonic and rhythmic writing continues throughout the number. The brass parts fill the piece with energy with sparingly accented lines, effects such as smears and shakes, and a significant amount of time spent in the exciting-sounding upper register. This is matched with choreography that features the Jets, associating them firmly with the musical features that identify them throughout the film. These features are the triple rhythms and mildly dissonant, blues-flavored harmonies.

Soon after the “Dance at the Gym”, the Sharks get their chance to dominate the dance floor with “Mambo”.\textsuperscript{16} The percussion section is using bongos, xylophone, timpani, timbales, and cowbells in addition to drum set. The first eight measures are percussion only, with the winds joining in the ninth measure. The rhythm as established by the percussion section is based on dividing the beat into four equal parts, and is highly syncopated. The wind parts are rhythmically similar and heavily accented. The harmonies are highly dissonant, using many minor and augmented seconds. The Sharks are the featured dancers, but both gangs are still present. The vocalists enter in the twelfth (Sharks) and thirteenth (Jets) bars, with shouts of “Mambo!” The Sharks, the Puerto Ricans, are at home in the Latin-influenced music, and their shouts land on the second half of beat two and the first half of beat one of the following measure. The Jets, acting from a familiarity with the type of music heard in the “Dance at the Gym”, shout on the first and second halves of beat two. Though the gangs shout, “Go!” in unison, the Jets have only one beat of rest between their previous syllable and that of “Go!” while the Sharks have two and a half. Both gangs’ shouts are syncopated, but the syncopation of the Sharks is much stronger, showing a connection with the music that the Jets do not have access to. The identifying characteristics of this type of music are the
duple rhythms, strong syncopation, and an abundance of non-traditional harmonic content.

It is only natural that when the two groups are butted up against one another that the distinguishing features of their respective musical aesthetics should be heavily showcased. In order to be certain that these features are indeed indicating these things, it is necessary to examine the music of the conflicting parties in relative isolation. The “Jet Song” indicates in its title that it is the song of the Jets. The lyrics of the song focus on what it means to be a Jet, and the music demonstrates it with the rolling 6/8 time, which is at times felt as two beats of three eighth notes, and at other times one beat of three quarter notes, demonstrating the triplet feel associated with the Jets throughout the work. This can stand by itself as the establishment of the rhythmic feel, as well as the tendency towards more traditional (jazz and blues) harmonies, as no one is sharing this scene with the Jets and they are only interacting with their own conception of their gang. Furthermore, they are interacting with an idealized version of it, created to excite them for the coming fight.

This conception stays intact even after the death of Riff, the leader. In the film, “Cool” is a ballet sequence with some vocal input from Ice, the new leader of the gang. The gang is facing challenges—they have lost a leader, and are uncertain of the second-in-command’s whereabouts. This is shown by the fact that this piece is in cut time—a halved version of a duple meter. The gang maintains their rhythmic identity, however, in the way in which the eighth notes (two per quarter or four per beat) are executed. The song is marked as “Solid and boppy,” and in true bebop style, the eighth notes are lightly swung. This means that while there are two notes that appear even on the page, two uneven notes are actually produced. The first eighth note of each quarter is held slightly longer than one half of the quarter, and the second eighth must be shorter to compensate for it. The result is a ratio of nearly two to one in terms of time spent per eighth note. This reference to the jazz music of the first song, and of the “Dance at the Gym,” is complimented by the exclusive use of the blues scale for the first several measures. The empirical rhythmic and harmonic evidence is further supported by the presence of vibraphone and drum set, as well as a featured trumpet melody played in a cup mute—the mute that is characteristic of the sound of Dizzy Gillespie and other bop players of the 1950s and 1960s. As a whole, it reinforces the identity of the Jets as 50s/60s hipsters, despite the recent tragedy.

Finally, the theory that the Jets have a common musical aesthetic (triplets, blues-influenced harmonies) must be tested against the point in the score which has the Jets singing in strict duple meter—“Gee, Officer Krupke”. The percussion part consists of the bass drum on the first half of both beats one and two and snare on the second half of both beats, creating the “boom-chick” feel that is often associated with big-top circus marches. The number is indicated as “Fast, vaudeville style,” and the entire piece reeks of the burlesque style. The action of the song is a series of impressions of different authority
figures, including Officer Krupke, a Judge, a Psychologist, and others. In each verse, Riff tries to explain his situation to the Jet impersonating the Judge/Cop/etc., and is summarily dismissed and passed off to the next figure in line. Here, the music is obviously out of sync with the usual Jet aesthetics, but it is perfectly aligned with the content of the scene that contains it: ridiculing authority figures, and asserting distance from the mainstream of society. In acting in the aesthetic of a straight (non-syncopated) rhythm in a heavily sarcastic manner, the Jets are actually working to subvert the mainstream duple feel.

It is much more difficult to find a moment when the Sharks are alone with their musical identity—besides the “Mambo” scene, they have only one song of their own, and that is hardly something that can be used to conclusively define their musical aesthetic. The closest they come is in a moment on the roof of an apartment building when there are only the Sharks and their girls physically present. “America” alerts us with its title that it will not be a song of identity for the Sharks in the same way that the “Jet Song” was for the Jets. That is not to say that it is not a song about identity, only that it is a song about identity that is not just in flux, but that is also being actively challenged. The score makes up for the relative scarcity of Shark songs by packing a great deal of meaning into a single number.

The name of the song is “America,” and as such it can be assumed that it is already aligned against the Puerto Rican immigrants, given the racist and xenophobic attitudes common in America at the time. This assumption is immediately called into question by the tempo marking: “Moderato, Tempo di “Seis”,” with its importation of Spanish language. The score goes further by calling for claves, guiro, and Spanish guitar, all adding Latin flavors to the orchestra. One more instrumentational favoring of the Puerto Ricans is the absence of saxophones, generally considered American instruments (at least, in aesthetic). The claves begin the piece with a standard clave pattern, simple and rhythmic but strongly syncopated. At first glance, this appears to be a very traditional Latin piece, but in bar three the guiro enters playing a pattern of quarter note triplets of which every other note is accented. The result is a hemiola-like effect, with two groups of triplets happening at the same time as the duple-based clave pattern. By the fourth measure, the theme of rhythmic conflict has been firmly established, and is reinforced by the knowledge that the triplet figure has by now been firmly associated with the Jets—the Americanized gang—through the “Jet Song” and the “Dance at the Gym.” This is the perfect setting for Anita’s melodic line, which switches back and forth between triple and duple rhythmic feels as she smilingly vents her loathing for Puerto Rico, all while the orchestral rhythms continues to demonstrate both duple and triple features.

At measure forty-six, the tempo and time signatures change. The tempo is indicated as “Tempo di Huapango (fast),” which is another introduction of Spanish into the text of the score itself. The time signature is indicated as 6/8(3/4), meaning that the time switches back and forth between 6/8, which
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consists of two beats of three eighth notes each, and 3/4, which consists of three beats of two eighth notes each. The conflict between duple and triple feel recalls the hemiolic polyrhythms of the introductory material, though the actual and intentional change of meter does reduce the rhythmic stress. Both of these meters allow simultaneous impressions of duple and triple rhythms, and the fact that they are in flux only adds to the confusion. The lyrics are equally conflicted. Assertions of America’s greatness and promise are immediately met with resistance and qualifiers. In the film version, the Sharks’ girls are singing the praises of America while the Sharks are the detractors. By the end of the song, the Sharks and their girls are on friendly terms again, but the question of what America means to the Puerto Ricans is still up in the air. The general impression seems to be that the immigrants are having a difficult time creating a workable, self-consistent identity within America. In fact, it seems that the most defined musical identity presented on behalf of the Puerto Ricans occurs during the Mambo scene—in direct opposition to the American Jets.

There is, however, a time when the Jets and the Sharks, as well as Anita, Tony, and Maria, all manage to work together to present a cohesive (though dense and confusing) musical impression in the “Quintet”. Oddly enough, it is a song that is designed to balance the aesthetic trademarks of the rival gangs so well that neither seems to be present in abundance. This gives the impression of neutrality, though the Jets are granted the first word. Gradually, the Sharks enter, followed by Anita, who begins transforming the opening melody of the number. Tony’s entrance brings the melody back to the “Tonight” sung on the fire escape, which is where Maria enters. Schrank and Krupke pass across the screen, but are not allowed any part in the music. When the vocals begin again, it is quickly established that the Sharks and Jets are forming the base on which Anita, Tony, and Maria are singing. Anita seems to come through, but the most prominent sound is the “Tonight” melody, sung by Maria and Tony. Even with the threat of impending violence, the musical setting seems to give its most optimistic impression at this point, both in the way the peaceful, beautiful melody of “Tonight” is able to carry over the rest of the company and in the way the entire company is allowed a complex, integrated voice.

One final musical selection must be examined before the focus is allowed to shift to other concerns. It ought to go without saying that the musical analyses presented here are far from complete or definitive—they are not meant to be either, but merely a cursory examination of the way a difference in genre can be made to express a difference in theme—in this case, questions of identity rather than issues of rash actions and their consequences. The final example is exceedingly simple, and requires no knowledge of music theory, and only a passable ear. At the end of the War Council scene, Lieutenant Schrank rudely evicts the Sharks from Doc’s candy shop. As the Sharks leave, Bernardo and his gang whistle “My Country ‘Tis of Thee,” ending with a long, sarcastic fall on the “sing” note. The final irony is that the song “My Country ‘Tis of Thee” is in 3/4 time, a meter the leaves itself open to both duple and
triple rhythmic feels. In appropriating that particular tune in that particular meter, the Sharks are executing a subversive act similar to that enacted by the Jets with “Gee, Officer Krupke.”

Up to this point, this paper has presented a strong case for the proposition that the \textit{WSS} adaptation of \textit{Romeo} is concerned (in addition to other things) mainly with questions of identity as opposed to the tendency of events to snowball out of control, and has done so using the tools of analysis native to the respective disciplines of the two pieces. Now that we have gone through the process of finding similarities and then differences, and have considered in fair turns the pieces in their native environments, so to speak, it is possible to begin to make this endeavor truly interdisciplinary, when up until now it has been only dual-disciplinary. This can be done by once more examining the texts for any similarities, using the newfound understanding of \textit{WSS} to inform the reading of the Shakespearean text.

Having spent so much time thinking about the idea of identity, there is a line from \textit{Romeo} that seems to be particularly suited for inclusion in this paper: “That which we call a rose / By any other word would smell as sweet.”\textsuperscript{22} Here, in the first scene of act two, is the famous balcony scene. The scene itself is fairly long, stretching nearly two hundred lines, but the question of identity is present for a paltry twenty lines—and does not arise as a real question (as opposed to fact) for the rest of the play. In addition, the treatment here is extremely simple and shallow, as should be expected from two teenagers. The belief (perhaps “wish” is a better word) is that there is nothing substantial behind a name—or identity—because it is only the individual that matters. Juliet believes of Romeo that “‘Tis but they name that is my enemy. / Thou art thyself, though not a Montague,”\textsuperscript{23} but then goes on to say that a name “is nor hand, nor foot, / Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part / Belonging to a man.”\textsuperscript{24} One way this could be read is the traditional way, in which Juliet understands that a label means nothing, only a person’s real merits or faults are of import. Another, more cynical reading, is that Juliet does not know where a name (or identity) resides, and the rhetorical question “What’s in a name?”\textsuperscript{25} ceases to be rhetorical and becomes nothing more than a question she is unable to answer. This seems to be the more appropriate reading, as it is clear through Juliet’s wishes that Romeo would “deny [his] father and refuse [his] name,”\textsuperscript{26} and her promise that for his love “[she’ll] no longer be a Capulet”\textsuperscript{27} that she understands fairly well the reality of the problems attached to a name, though she may not understand the mechanics of them. For his part, Romeo takes her at her word, saying “Call me but love and I’ll be new baptized. / Henceforth I never will be Romeo.”\textsuperscript{28} A dozen lines later, the question is already forgotten.

How is it that Shakespeare’s lovers seem to move past questions regarding the misfortune of their identity so easily? The answer to that question lies mainly in the prologue. There, the lovers are identified as being from “Two households, both alike in dignity.”\textsuperscript{29} While the fact of their differing heritage is irrefutable, there are no concrete and persistent reminders of it as there are in
As Marjorie Garber observes, “the dactylic rhythms of MON-ta-gue and CAP-u-let echo each other, as do the names of RO-me-o and Ju-li-et. In terms of prosody there is indeed no difference between “Montague” and “Capulet”.” The only real difference is in the sounds of the names – Romeo Montague with its consonant vowel sounds and Juliet Capulet with a full rhyme – which seem to indicate, in the case of Juliet, her stationary relationship to her name (after all, it is she who first wishes Romeo would disown his ancestry) and in the case of Romeo, his readiness to part with his heritage. The very fact of the symmetrical presence of these prosodic features is yet one more way in which the two houses are indeed alike.

That the households are alike could be poorly paraphrased as the households being “equal” or “the same,” which would make any love between the offspring of the feuding families almost proper. Additionally, the Prologue goes to some lengths to label the loins of the foes as “fatal” and the lovers as “star-crossed”, which seems unusual, given the way in which the prologue condenses such a large amount of material from the Brooke novella. The audience is in on the secret that, though the lovers are not yet aware of it, there are much greater obstacles in store than a simple problem of last names. Perhaps it is this fatal force surrounding them and rushing them towards their deaths that pushes them past the deeply interesting question of identity.

In any case, casting a glance back through the texts brings to the forefront another difference: as stated above, the characters in Romeo spend very little time discussing identity as a construct, while the characters in WSS spend a great deal of time on the subject of the opposed identities of the two gangs. There are entire songs dealing with the issue (“Jet Song,” “America”), as well as moments when the characters seem to be groping around identity roles (when Bernardo says to Maria “Some day when you are an old married woman with five children, then you can tell me what to do! But right now, it is the other way round.” and Anita comments, “Sure. He is the old married woman.”), and sometimes even trying to erase them (when Tony sweetly begins the process of learning Spanish during the Balcony/Fire escape scene). Perhaps this is because there is an actual difference between the groups, symbolized by the language divide Tony is trying to bridge. Then again, Tony is trying to bridge it, and when this attempt leads to his self-conscious buenos noches to Anita, she responds by correcting him rather than shutting down his attempts. Maria is obviously supportive of Tony’s changing language, helping by taking his Americanized “Tony” and transforming it into the rich, Romantic, and foreign “Anton”. Her own English is quite polished, a sign that she has worked hard to fit into her new home. Her readiness to mingle Spanish with English speaks to her confidence in her position, a confidence that symbiotically feeds and is fed by Tony’s own readiness to abandon his Anglo-American English. The heightened and hybridized language of the lovers, working together, is what gives the “Tonight” melody the power it has to soar over the rest of the ensemble, as described above.
While Tony and Maria are working through song and language in order to bring two groups closer together in their own speech, Romeo and Juliet use a similar process to separate themselves from the rest of their fairly homogeneous linguistic community. Garber observes that many of the supporting characters “seem to relapse, as tragedy closes in upon them, into an older language of melodrama” and cites such instances as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Lines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>She’s dead, deceased, She’s dead, alack the day!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capulet’s Wife</td>
<td>Alack the day, she’s dead, she’s dead, she’s dead!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>O day, O day, O day, O hateful day…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capulet</td>
<td>O child, O child, my soul, and not my child!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In contrast, Garber states that “[t]he language spoken by Romeo and Juliet themselves is increasingly a powerful, original, and allusive blank verse,” as is evidenced as early as in their first words to one another. Just as Tony and Maria work together to build the beautiful “Tonight”, Romeo and Juliet work together to create the equally famous masquerade sonnet in which Garber observes that “[t]he sonnet tradition of unattainable or unrequited love is turned inside out, and the artifice of conventional language goes with it.” The “conventional language” Garber is speaking of is the language of the traditional love poetry, until recently spoken by Romeo in describing his feelings for Rosaline:

Here’s much to do with hate, but more with love.  
Why then, O brawling love, O loving hate,  
O anything of nothing first create;  
O heavy lightness, serious vanity,  
Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms,  
Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health,

Garber describes this as “a “Petrarchan” sonnet that could have been produced by rote.” The recitation of opposing pairs would have been clichéd and ineffective even in Shakespeare’s day, a fact evidenced by Mercutio’s assumption that, having spent the night away from home, Romeo is sexually spent and “Now is he ready for the numbers that Petrarch flowed in.” In direct contrast is the oft-quoted sonnet at the ball in which the lovers meet and combine their language (a prefiguring not only of the kiss which the text speaks of, but also to the combining of their spirits in marriage and their bodies in consummation) to speak in a way that is outside of the clichés used (and expected) by the rest of the cast.
It can be seen that in both texts, the lovers have their own language, a language that finds utterance in the discipline of the text itself—i.e., the sonnet and the song—but for different reasons. Romeo and Juliet are trying to rise above their linguistic surroundings. Tony and Maria are working not to transcend the languages in which they live, but to combine them. This may be because in the West Side of New York, there is a real basis for the feud that is not transcendent, undeniable, or “fatal”—the string of fights recited in Doc’s Candy Store is impressive in its simplicity and precision. It is not the creator of the identity issue, but rather the earliest consequence of it. The next step is to use the same technique already employed to compare aspects of the two different texts in order to compare issues of identity between the two groups within this text—if the question of identity is resting on what is different between the two groups, what is there that is shared?

The answer seems to be that both groups have difficulty getting along with society at large as represented by Lieutenant Schrank and Officer Krupke. At the close of the opening brawl, the two gangs present a united front against the policemen. At the Gym, and later at Doc’s Candy Store, they are willing to get along in order to avoid giving the police a pretense to interfere. At Doc’s Candy Store Schrank is abusive to the Puerto Ricans, offering to side with the Anglo gang in order to clean up the streets, until the Jets refuse to cooperate with him. On meeting their resistance, he begins hurling personal insults and threats at the boys, trying to bait them into giving him an excuse to arrest them. It seems that the issue of opposing identities could be caused in part by the marginalization both groups have gone through at the hands of mainstream adult culture.

Finally, let us return to the earlier consideration of Shakespeare’s play. If Romeo is concerned with the way events can quickly gain momentum and spiral out of control, is there a way to examine that same issue in WSS? It seems certain that there is, given that there is a song named “Cool,” the lyrics of which suggest that the Jets try to control their impulses in order to get through the tragedy of losing Riff, and that there are characters with names such as “Action” and “Ice.” Furthermore, Maria herself is absolutely insistent that Tony put a stop to the rumble, and Anita observes that there is about the way the boys dance that makes it seem “like they have to get rid of something, quick...Too much feeling.” The rumble itself is a powerful illustration of how difficult it is to fight the momentum of events: Tony talked the leaders into a one-on-one fist fight rather than an all-out brawl, was almost drawn into a fist fight himself, and was actively trying to pull Riff out of the knife fight until just seconds before Riff was killed. However, once Riff handed the switchblade to Tony, it took Tony only a moment to kill Bernardo and re-ignite the flame of the rumble. Afterwards, he wants to turn himself in, but Maria will not let him, insisting that they stay together. Given Tony’s several failed attempts to stop the snowball, the next step is to turn back to Romeo to see if there are any matching (or differing) actions in the earlier version of the story in a way similar to that which has been demonstrated above.
The back and forth between *Romeo* and *WWSS* may seem confusing, but there is an important point to be illustrated: once an investigation of two distinct texts from two distinct disciplines actually engages both disciplines simultaneously, thereby becoming truly interdisciplinary, the way in which the texts can be made to work on each other can (and should) be constantly re-determined. This approach allows scholars to view one text in light of another, without necessarily creating an issue of disciplinary precedence. More importantly, it allows almost limitless interaction between texts without assuming that there is one particular discipline upon which the rest draw, and from which they must be drawn in order to be considered worthy objects of study. Instead, a system presents itself which is almost limitless in application, and which can become as subjective or objective, narrow or broad, as the scholar decides.

In closing, it seems appropriate to suggest a few projects that might help to better demonstrate the potential of the way of working with multiple disciplines that have been demonstrated in this paper. Much time has been spent in analyzing the ways in which the music of *WWSS* interacts with the action of the drama. The justification for this comes through comparing the use of music in *WWSS* to the use of language in *Romeo*, and it might be profitable to see just how far that parallel holds true. If one were to define several poetic/dramatic/linguistic techniques that seem particularly significant, and then compare them to the usage of musical techniques, one might discover something interesting about the composition process of Shakespeare, or perhaps a better way to articulate a meaningful difference between the way music can be used to affect an audience and the way language can. Another interesting project might be to examine the changes made in transposing *WWSS* from Broadway show to motion picture to (eventually) home video. In this case, knowledge of the disciplines of theatre, cinema, as well as literature and music, could be profitably employed.

Once an interdisciplinary approach becomes part of the standard scholarly toolbox, it becomes possible to look into more wide-ranging problems without having to justify oneself by adapting older forms of inquiry. At the same time, “traditional” tools of literary analysis – close reading, biographic inquiry, and historic contextualization, to name a few – can remain viable. This is because varying disciplines do not need to be in competition with one another just because they are in play concurrently. Rather, the combination of distinctive disciplinary approaches makes it possible to make connections and reach conclusions that would have been impossible to come to through a single set of disciplinary tools. This broadening of the toolset constitutes one of the ways in which it is possible for scholars to continue making original and substantial additions to the body of knowledge on their chosen subjects, regardless of the discipline in which those subjects are thought to exist.
Notes


3 See Evans, p. 1101.


5 Brooke, p. lxvi.


7 Prologue.12.


9 Taylor, p. 484.

10 Peyser, p. 263.


12 Greenblatt, p. 866.

13 Prologue.1.

14 It is true that the actors have an opportunity in the performance of the piece to imbue the text with their own style and nuance, but for the purposes of this essay, the focus will be on the score as a received text. It would, however, be extremely profitable to examine the ways in which an actor in a production of Romeo and an actor in a production of WSS are able to use different discipline-specific methods to influence the final product. Unfortunately, such an undertaking is beyond the scope of this essay.


16 “Mambo” appears in the score as number 4b at p. 99.

17 “Jet Song” appears in the score as number 2 at p. 34.

18 “Cool” appears in the score as number 8 at p. 212. This is not the same place it appears in the film, where it occurs after “The Rumble” (which appears in the score as number 11 at p. 294).

19 “Gee, Officer Krupke” appears in the score as number 14 at p. 389.

20 “America” appears in the score as number 7 on p. 168.

21 This effect would actually be closer to an instance of *sesquialtera* (an interpolation of triplet rhythms to duple meter), but typically the word “hemiola” is used to refer both to this and to actual hemiola (interpolation of duple rhythms to triplet meter), as well as many 2:3 or 3:2 polyrhythms.

22 2.1.85-6.

23 2.1.80-1.

24 2.1.82-4.

25 2.1.85.

26 2.1.76.

27 2.1.78.

28 2.1.92-3.

29 Prologue.1.
31 Garber, pp. 208-9.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Garber, p. 194.
35 1.1.168-73.
36 Garber, p. 192.
37 2.3.34-35.

Other Works Consulted
