

Transfiguration: The Adaptation of Anglophone Literature into Music
(Transfigurare: adaptarea literaturii anglofone în muzică)

Alina Bottez

This course of lectures focuses on adaptation studies – one of the most topical and endeared fields nowadays – relying on theoretical works such as *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies* edited by Thomas Leitch. If the remediation of literature into film or even video games has already secured its place in academic syllabi, the adaptation of literature into music is less commonly included in university programmes, and that is why taking such a class can become an asset.

This course has won the Prize for the Best and Most Innovative Course of Lectures awarded by the Senate of the University of Bucharest in 2022. It is a workshop that investigates the step-by-step transfiguration of the literary discourse as it metamorphoses into music, aiming at familiarising students with the process through which the writer of the libretto refashions the literary text and the composer organically fuses it with the music. The literary genres that serve as starting points for the musical works under scrutiny are the theatre play, the novel, and the novella. The musical genres into which the selected literary sources are adapted are opera, semi-opera, operetta, musical, and the pastiche. The Anglophone authors of the original sources are English, Scottish, and American. The composers – English, American, French, Italian, German, and... Jewish-German-French, while the librettists (both men and women) are English, Australian, South-African, French, and Italian. The literature was written between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries, the music – between the seventeenth and twenty-first. Therefore, all the spectra are quite generous. Thus, this course presents the internationalisation of Anglophone masterpieces and their travels across national borders through music.

As most students have had no previous contact with the study of music, what we explore does not pertain to *musicological* analysis, obviously. Essentially, this course focuses on the transmediation of the theatre play into the libretto, that is, of the literary text of the play into the literary text of the musical work. Nevertheless, by watching the video versions of these musical works, students come to notice how the means germane to music – such as melody, harmony, timbre, vocal virtuosity, orchestration, etc. – express ideas and motifs that used to be conveyed

solely through literary means. Dramatism, lyricism, humour, conflict, love, hatred, tension can all be heard too, not only seen or described in words.

These adaptations evince the impact exerted by the cultural, social, political, and religious context of the time and place in which they were composed. Thus, this type of research also falls under the scope of the history of mentalities.

Except for two novels and a novella, the other bibliographical requirements are supposed to be already well-known to the students. Thus, the course tries not to overload them during their last semester of studies and strives to consolidate their literary acquisitions, while enhancing them through the study of adaptation. The assignments include a short primary and secondary bibliography, the libretti, watching/listening to the musical adaptations, making oral presentations and taking a final oral exam.

At the end of this course students discover a whole universe of music that they had not previously known, and that some had thought they might dislike. The *most* important purpose of this course is that they should earn a lifelong love of classical music and understand the phenomenon of literary afterlife through remediation. To use an appropriate metaphor, I would like them to see with two eyes instead of one. Last but not least, this journey of discovery can be great fun, and laughter can be both therapeutic and cathartic.

Classes:

1. Basic notions of music history and necessary musical terms
2. *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare vs. *Roméo et Juliette* by Charles Gounod (on a libretto by Jules Barbier and Michel Carré)
3. *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare vs. *Roméo et Juliette – de la haine à l’amour* by Gérard Presgurvic (on a libretto by Gérard Presgurvic)
4. *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare vs. *The Tempest* by Thomas Adès (on a libretto by Meredith Oakes)
5. *The Tempest* by John Dryden and William D’Avenant vs. *The Tempest* by Henry Purcell/John Weldon (semi-opera)
6. *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* by William Shakespeare vs. *The Enchanted Island* (pastiche on a libretto by Jeremy Sams, with music by

George Friedrich Handel, Antonio Vivaldi, Jean-Philippe Rameau, André Campra, Henry Purcell, Giovanni Battista Ferrandini, and Jean-Féry Rebel)

7. *The Bride of Lammermoor* by Walter Scott vs. *Lucia Di Lammermoor* by Gaetano Donizetti (on a libretto by Salvatore Cammarano)

8. *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe vs. *Robinson Crusoe* by Jacques Offenbach (on a libretto by Eugène Cormon and Hector-Jonathan Crémieux)

9. *Billy Budd* by Herman Melville vs. *Billy Budd* by Benjamin Britten (on a libretto by E. M. Forster and Eric Crozier)

10. *Marnie* by Winston Graham vs. *Marnie* by Nico Muhly (on a libretto by Nicholas Wright)

Primary Bibliography:

- 1) William Shakespeare: *Romeo and Juliet*
- 2) William Shakespeare: *The Tempest*
- 3) John Dryden and William D'Avenant: *The Tempest*
- 4) William Shakespeare: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
- 5) Daniel Defoe: *Robinson Crusoe*
- 6) Walter Scott: *The Bride of Lammermoor*
- 7) Herman Melville: *Billy Budd*
- 8) Winston Graham: *Marnie*
- 9) The libretti of the musical works

N.B. As far as possible, please use editions published by well-known publishing houses, with introductory studies and footnotes.