

To what extent does baz luhrman succeed in engaging

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" Romeo and Juliet" by Baz Luhrmann is an adaptation of the play written by William Shakespeare. It is quite new and had a star-studded cast and was screened in cinemas worldwide however the producer Luhrman kept to the script of the original Shakespeare play so that it does not lose any authenticity, by doing this he had to try and make it modern in other ways therefore he used many different aspects of the play to engage a 21st century audience such setting the film in a big city and using new technology yet those same aspect can be argued deterred a modern audience whom have a negative view of Shakespeare as they see his work as outdated in today's society, in my opinion Luhrmann succeeds in engaging a 21st century audience.

Firstly, the play is set in a metropolitan city with vast skyscrapers and many flashy lights. In modern times this is a typical urban view as urbanisation has engulfed many rural parts of the world to create huge cities. In the film the two families of the Montagues and Capulets are shown to be business rivals, this is done by Luhrmann by putting two huge towers which have their names on them facing each other and he places the towers right in the middle of the city. By doing this, it seems to split the city into two parts; a Montague area and a Capulet area.

Such a huge place is directly affected by the rivalry of these two families and this shows that they have a big influence on the running of the city. This engages a modern audience because in modern times huge tycoons such as the Capulet's and the Montague's normally can flex their financial muscles. In addition, in order to engage a modern audience, Luhrman varies the

settings used in the opening of the film Romeo and Juliet. In the beginning the first few lines of the film are said by a news reporter on television showing that the situation of the rivalry is dominating the thoughts and news of the city Verona.

Television is the relevant medium of conveying news in modern times. Furthermore, the big city with 2 huge sky scrapers opposite each other with the family names on them are similar to 2 huge corporate firms which rival each other in business. The audience can start to comprehend the fierceness and severity of the animosity. On the other hand, the beginning of the play can deter a modern audience. When Romeo is introduced into the play the shot was a very predictable pan upwards. His feet were shown first and the camera went up until it reached his face.

The introduction of a main character in modern days is seen as a spontaneous event that happens naturally, however in this film Romeos introduction starts with his short piece of music that is exaggerated. Furthermore, Romeos formal clothes and the general costume of most the cast can deter a modern audience. Romeo wears a suit whereas his cousin Benvolio wears surfing shirts along with his friends . This gives the audience the image that Romeo is a " fish out of water" in terms with the character of his kinsmen Benvolio and the other men of his age in the play.

Similar clothing between the families is an indication of which side they affiliate with, Romeo's difference gives away the way he feels about the fighting and family loyalty. In modern times it is too predictable if a character

is physically shown to be different especially if the theme of a film is Romance. Moreover, Luhrmann uses many aspects of the costume of the two families to show and suggest their differences. Firstly, he gives both families a colour; blue for Capulet and red for Montague. Romeo is the only one that does not oblige to the dress code and wears a suite.

By being different, it shows the audience that he stands at neutral ground because he is not wearing his family colours which could show that he is not really involved in the family disputes. Different clothing could be engaging to a modern audience because it is easier for the audience to mentally acknowledge which side all the characters are from. However, Luhrmann uses props to engage a modern audience. Many props are used in the beginning of the play to show the differences between the two families and their status. In the film, the exact wording of Shakespeare is used and when confrontations happen it was mainly with swords.

Luhrman overcame this problem by ingeniously using guns with the brand name SWORD. By doing this, it instantly makes the film more engaging as this is the main weapon of modern warfare and gang violence. Guns are very controversial items and normally modern audiences are attracted to controversy because of its opposition of main stream society. As well as that, guns can make the fighting scenes much more dramatic as there is the possibility of death to anyone not just the people fighting, also the audience can relate to guns but swords have become museum artefacts with regards to the weaponry available now.

In addition, the cars driven by the Montague's and Capulet's were the colours of their respective families and had their names on the number plates; this shows the audience their pride but also keeps reminding the audience of the difference between the two families. Using props such as the colour of the cars and the number plates, Luhrmann is able to help the audience get the "gist" of the rivalry and status of the two families without a protracted period of the play being used to explain such a simple matter.

Being shown this straight from the beginning makes the audience want to know what will come of the problems and when they will tip over. Sometimes props are used to reflect someone's character. Romeo has a pen and paper that he uses to express his opinions, therefore the audience can see from this that he is a very sensitive character that would rather express his emotions through writing poems instead of fighting like the rest of the main characters. Also, the techniques that Luhrman uses to engage the audience are not always obvious and some of the can be very subtle.

Luhrman also uses different shots to engage a modern audience. Extreme close-ups are used to show details of the face which convey emotions. In the fighting scene, there is an extreme close up of Tybalt's face which shows the hatred he has for Benvolio and how angry he is, the close-up also shows a pair of blood-thirsty, sadistic eyes. Without this close-up the audience would not know exactly how he felt thus might not understand why he was so hell-bent on fighting them. There is a point-of view shot when Romeo is writing in his diary, this makes the audience get into his shoes.

This doesn't only mean seeing the diary from Romeo's perspective it also means seeing the other things that Romeo looks at. This makes the audience seem as if they have something personal with Romeo and might feel for him if he is being misunderstood by the other people. Finally, another shot that is used on Romeo is a high angle shot. In this shot, there are many average-sized objects that seem huge in comparison to Romeo which makes the audience think that he is very vulnerable.

Penultimately, lighting is used in the beginning of the film to engage a modern audience. The lighting in the scenes of the film are widely varied. In the limo of the Montague parents it is dark and serene; this allows only a small amount of natural light coming through, by doing this it could show the secrecy of Romeo's parents who are the head of the Montague family. Being dark, this scene creates a tense atmosphere that shows something is in the air however the problem is not confronted directly.

The audience are left to ponder whether the uncomfortable looks from Romeo's mother are because she is worrying about him, worried about the conflict or anything else. This engages a modern audience because the problems are not entirely explained therefore there is a sense of ambiguity in the scene which pulls the audience's attention. Finally, it can be argued that the difference between a good film and a great film is the way it utilises sound to set a scene. In the beginning of the film Romeo and Juliet, to give the audience a feel of how the city is busy.

There are many exaggerated diegetic sounds such as the helicopter and car horns. When the Montague boys come into the film it is in a car with fast, boisterous music blaring out which reflects their attitude. However, when Tybalt is introduced into the play, all background music is stopped, and when he crushes the cigarette with his shoe it is exaggerated which emphasises his importance. As well as that, when all the background sound was stopped it shows that everyone is aware of the entrance of Tybalt and he is the centre of attention.

The audience can realise that he is an important character as he enters the play with everyone looking at him, the attention on Tybalt engages a modern audience because the exaggeration of Tybalt's boots and the whole surroundings stopping for him emphasises his status. As well as that, there is a piece of music that runs through all the calm parts of the film that are about to introduce Romeo which suggests something about his character like the fact that he is very calm and quiet.

In conclusion, overall I think that Baz Luhrman succeeds in engaging a modern audience because of his use of a modern setting. He sets the play in a busy city. As well as that he uses lighting, sound and a variety of settings to make this film very recent and a 21st century audience would watch the film regardless of the Shakespearean language which would normally negate a modern audience. On the other hand I think the introduction of Romeo to the play using very predictable shots and the costume of Romeo make the film a bit predictable and make it less unique.