

Franco zeffereelli and
baz luhrmann film
productions of romeo
and juliet



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The two versions of Romeo and Juliet from directors Baz Luhrmann and Franco Zeffirelli are very different from each other as they enhance the theme of the productions using very different methods.

To achieve this, both directors use very different elements to create an enjoyable experience for the viewer. An example of the effects would be how the prologue was introduced as Zeffirelli creates a tranquil environment as opposed to Baz Luhrmann's idea of a very aggressive start to engage the viewer. Franco Zeffirelli has presented his production of Romeo and Juliet very close to the medieval age. The scene is set in the streets of Verona. This sets the original, visual feeling of the story as well as the sounds that were used.

The language is kept loyal to Shakespeare's original text. Franco Zeffirelli seems to have targeted the audience of young children from the year 1968 but today's young audiences prefer Luhrmann's production as it is more appealing to them. Baz Luhrmann's production has conveyed Romeo and Juliet completely different to Zeffirelli as his version is much more modernised with the uses of cars instead of horses, guns instead of swords and many more props. Because of this, it is easier for the target audience of teenagers to visualise the story better.

The audience can also relate to the characters and situations with a better understanding however Zeffirelli keeps his version more loyal to the script and theme with an extreme long shot of the landscape that is shown at the start of the film, this immediately sets the impression of simplicity and the natural surroundings at the time it was based. This may seem unappealing

for a young audience but they later manage to understand the lifestyle better from a visual perspective. Meanwhile, as a male narrates the prologue, tracking is used as a visual device which makes the camera move from the landscape higher to a sun using a panning shot. It ends with the audio sounds of instrumental music playing in the background and fades away softly into the opening scene. The first scene begins with a traditional, instrumental music fading and diegetic sound of a natural market place rush begins. As this happens, the title of the film appears on the screen in bold fonts to make the title stand out.

There is a good usage of mise en scene where the setting, body language and position of things all relate together. The prologue introduces the matter of the play in a sonnet addressed to the audience. It tells the feud between two families and how the death of their children ends the family feuds. On the other hand, because of the way Baz Luhrmann presents his version, the audience is likely to be aware of the trouble that will happen in the following scenes because in the prologue the audience is made clear of the sort of things that they will see in the film.

As the narration is being said, visual scenes are shown in the background in colours of black and red, representing hate and feud and giving the viewer an idea of a negative theme. Baz Luhrmann has presented his prologue with loud, high tempo opera music set in the background and this sets the dramatic atmosphere. Scenes are shown with quick flashes of images and filmed negative scenes such as arguments, gunfights and so on. All this is preparing the audience for the next scene, in which the argument between Tybalt and Benvolio takes place. In the opening scene, there are three men
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that are identified as Montague boys as identified from their car licence plates.

They behave in a loud and rude manner as they make their way to the petrol station, which is replacing the market place in the Zeffirelli production. The argument then begins as the Montague boys bite their thumb at the Capulet's. Tybalt then enters wearing formal wear so the director could identify the difference between the characters of the two households. Tybalt is portrayed as an aggressive character and is filled with hatred towards Montague's. Baz Luhrmann attempts to make the production more appealing to the audience by adding tension and more action packed scenes. There are significant differences in both productions.

One of these is when Franco Zeffirelli begins his version of the movie with a quiet and soft introduction which is set in the medieval age to show what Verona was like during the period where the original Romeo and Juliet is based but Baz Luhrmann introduces it with a more dramatic and loud way to make the film seem more appealing to the younger generation. In this version, the introduction makes the film look like more of an action movie than romance. The director of the 1996 production adds mise en scene and includes it as nuns at the petrol station for a comical effect. The scene of Verona beach varies from the Zeffirelli production as the location for the movie is very different.

Zeffirelli takes more of a traditional approach by adding tension and creating a sense of danger for the audience by filming the scene in a public place, where it is busy and there are a lot of people. Zeffirelli captures these

quick shots of danger using a variety of shots to exaggerate the danger of the duel. The addition of mise en scene is critical for both directors as this allows the audience to set apart the age and location setting. Luhrmann wanted to add more comedy to the production to show that the Montague's did not care about their behaviour as it would increase the sense of danger for the dual as it was in a petrol station. In the 1996 version, adding comedy effects in the scene of the petrol station decreases the sense of danger so the viewer seems more comfortable with a background of the movie.

Luhrmann presents the characters of the Montague house as hoodlums that wanted to pick a fight. The clothes they wear also show this. Although the Capulets are shown to be more of a threat because they are shown as gangsters and they add even more danger to the scene to engage the viewer. For example, when the characters enter, a low angle shot shows one character crushing a cigarette in the petrol station and adding more danger to this scene. The prologue also helps to engage the viewer because of the fast scenes and non-diegetic music. Baz Luhrmann made the credits like a soap opera as the strong choice of music and flashing images during the prologue.

The two families are shown to be very aggressive as the prologue draws the audience into the movie to get them interested. This gives the viewer the idea that this movie is going to be interesting and exciting as the dramatic changes help the characters to find the production more appealing whereas in Zeffirelli's production, is found calmer and slower so that the viewer can see the beauty of Verona where the story is based. Zeffirelli's version is

much calmer and peaceful compared to the Luhrmann film because Zeffirelli
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made sure that the audience experienced the full beauty of Verona as he uses a panning shot to capture these in the scene and he then zooms into the sun. The credits continuously achieve to make the film appear old because of the choice of fonts used to introduce it; this helps the viewer to adjust so that they feel that they are in another age. This production is very different compared to the other version as this one is set in a market place although he still manages to achieve a sense of danger.

Zeffirelli uses various shots to capture the different aspects of danger involved. The shots used in the productions play a great part in the modern version as opposed to the one based in medieval times as Zeffirelli included very little shots. The director has added nuns to the production to add comedy effects/ in the scene at the petrol station, the two households are shown arguing. Luhrmann creates a sense of danger by adding elements such as a cigarette being crushed at a petrol station to increase the sense of danger.

This is very different to Franco Zeffirelli as he adds tension by using the mise en scene. An example of this is the marketplace and the town's people being around. When the two households fight, they are in a public place; the market. This shows that there is danger as the towns people are in danger.

This is how Zeffirelli's production contrasts with Luhrmann's modern version. Luhrmann creates the credits very much like a soap opera; the sound and fast moving shots help to achieve this. The opening prologue begins with a blank screen; a TV screen then appears to introduce the story of the Shakespeare production in a more modern approach. It then zooms

into the screen and this aids the audience of the younger generation to understand the concept of the movie better. The audience are shocked yet engaged by the continuous changes of images, fonts and sounds.

Luhrmann adds different sizes for fonts to create a more appealing effect. This makes the audience very uncomfortable with the production because the eerie music represents problems. At the start, the scene shows helicopters to show that there is corruption and danger on Verona Beach. The non-diegetic sound gives the viewer a sense of discomfort and is used to let them know what they are going to experience throughout the film. The credits of Zeffirelli's version, unlike Luhrmann's, is presented much calmer because he ensured that Verona's beauty was captured by the audience using a panning shot and then zooms into the sun for effect.

The credits make the film appear old because of the style of fonts used. This aids the viewer to visualise themselves into another age. There was also a voiceover which introduced the prologue, this is a non-diegetic and the sound is parallel. Luhrmann presents the characters very differently compared to Luhrmann's version because they are described as punks, mainly due to their behaviour and this is shown by the way that they dress.

The two directors tried to achieve a standard of detail and importance into the films. The elements I enjoyed about the Zeffirelli version is that there is more authenticity in it as the director stayed loyal to the Shakespeare text and age that it was based in. Luhrmann's on the other hand, was working towards making Shakespeare more appealing to the younger generation using a more unique approach but Zeffirelli was working towards his aim of

keeping with the original content which is why various themes were applied.

I think that Luhrmann's production is better as it is more appealing to people of my age range but still keeps perception of the Shakespeare story.