

A tale of the young for the young: romeo and juliet essay



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Throughout the 20th Century, there have been several attempts to transform William Shakespeare's famous works into a modern context, with *The Lion King* based on *Hamlet* and *10 Things I Hate About You* as a loose transformation of *The Taming of the Shrew*. Of course, there have been two successful transformations already based on Shakespeare's most famous tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet*; *West Side Story* and Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet*. *West Side Story* is an entertaining musical set in New York City with two lovers, from opposing gangs, while Zeffirelli made the play into a movie, keeping Shakespeare's verse and traditional clothing. This week, a modern take on the love-tragedy has been playing in cinemas all around the country, and has taken their audience to a whole new level of Shakespeare's work.

Director Baz Luhrmann has offered a contemporary and bold transformation of the classic love story with Leonardo DiCaprio as Romeo and Claire Danes as Juliet. He has integrated vigorous, modern imagery with an energetic soundtrack and popular actors, to form a passionate drama, so different from any films made before it. Luhrmann uses a collection of visual metaphors to manipulate his audience, just as Shakespeare did with verbal metaphors. It's about violence, hate and love at first sight. Two teenagers infatuated by each other at a costume party, forced to breach their parents and the law, and ultimately send themselves to their deaths. Baz Luhrmann's film of the star-crossed lovers is set in a modern, vivid world full of guns, drugs and hate.

It is set in the gangs and "gun culture" of Verona Beach, where the Capulet's and the Montague's are two rival corporate empires with generations of hatred and gang wars that continually erupt. Fast cars with
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booming engines replace horses, guns replace swords and drugs replace the famous Queen Mab. Luhrmann's modern take has successfully captured the minds of youths, his target audience today. Youths all over the country have responded well to the dramatic film with comments such as, " Shakespeare has never seemed so interesting and entertaining before, it was captivating we could actually understand what the characters were saying, even though they were speaking in Shakespearean language.

" Although the tale is moved into a modern context, Luhrmann courageously uses the original Shakespearean prose, with some cut out and rearranged. In this created world, the language seems common and blends in with the modern visuals. This is especially effective in the opening scene where the prologue is being read out as if in a news segment on TV. At this point the characters are introduced and we are thrown into the gang brawl at a petrol station, incorporating elements of " spaghetti western spoof", matador dancing and most obviously, gangster style.

Resulting in horrific flames and gunshots, Luhrmann sets the tone of his film; mocking and entertaining, but also loyal to the original work. " Shakespeare has never seemed so interesting and entertaining before" The camera is constantly on edge, rapidly moving and cutting between scenes with special effects, flamboyant colour and a fast, booming soundtrack. The frenzied camera successfully moves the audience through the film as the lovers head to their doom. This mixture of musical and visual styles clearly shows difference between gang violence, and the sensitive relationships throughout the film. Each of Luhrmann's characters have been transformed into modern

figures, whose personalities are cleverly portrayed through their new costumes, appearance and attitudes.

Romeo represents a rebellious youth, being a “ knight in shining armour”, while Juliet is seen as innocent and pure, wearing an angel costume to the ball. All other characters can be recognised similarly, with Friar Lawrence having tattoos and shirtless, showing that he is no regular priest, Tybalt always wearing black leather to show his evil passion and Mercutio always wearing black and white, having two very different personalities. This film is Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet, transformed into a new context for a new generation. The combination of a variety of technology, newspaper headlines, camera tricks, vivid colours, dramatic costumes and a very modern setting, compliment Shakespeare’s work in a contemporary manner and all appeal to the young audience of today.