

# Shakespeare's romeo and juliet – film comparison

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There are many differences between the directors techniques used in both films. The choice of location is evidently different. Baz Luhrmann in his 1997 version of the film presents Verona as a modern city, dominated by scenes of chaotic urban violence. He uses panning shots across the metropolis with police cars and helicopters darting about, and human casualties strewn across the ground. This would be quite different to Shakespeare's original setting in a rural Italian town. Verona beach is the cities name, and this is used thorough pathetic fallacy to create a darker feel to the film - Mercutio's death cry " A plague, on both your houses!" seem to take immediate effect as a storm is called in.

In Zeffirelli's 1968 film, Verona is a closer representation to what Shakespeare might have had in mind in the late 1500's - a small town, with only a few icons - such as the Church and the marketplace, instead of a whole city as in Luhrmann's film.

Baz Luhrmann uses wide, panning aerial shots of the city, with quick changes - for example the introductory scene when flashes of newspaper headlines are transposed with writing from the chorus of the play. These camera shots create a sense of urgency and impending doom. He uses stills on the characters faces to emphasize emotions, and also on key features - to highlight their importance to the audience. For example: the statue of Christ with his arms outstretched, the heads of both families & archive footage of the previous brawls.

The camera shots in Franco Zeffirelli's film differ though his more extensive use of close up action shots - such as the marketplace brawl between the

Montagues and the Capulets. The diegetic sounds add realism, and so the audience feels like a participant in the action, rather than an onlooker. Zeffirelli also places the camera in the centre of the two families, to create a sense of equality and balance - emphasising the "Both alike in dignity," quote from the chorus.

The two directors have interpreted the mood differently, and this is shown in numerous ways - clothing, accent and attitude are all contributing factors. In Luhrmans film the Montagues are all shown with Hawaiian shirts and army haircuts, but they turn out to be the weaker, more submissive family when faced with the prospect of fighting without their masters.

The Capulets however are completely different. With dark leather jackets and sunglasses they radiate malice, this is also shown through the music, as normal noises are heightened and western type music slowly plays. The sunglasses could also be a disguise, hiding their eyes and their background roots as Latin people. Latino's were considered to be an inferior race in America, and so they are trying to hide this by acting more aggressive and violent towards anyone who could be a threat.

Zeffirelli uses bright and colourful costumes in his film for the Capulets - they are more laid back, almost like practical jokers with nothing to do. The atmosphere that they create lacks any kind of malice. It is almost the same with the Montagues in this film, but they wear more neutral colours, such as dark blue, and black to suggest their scholarly upbringing.

There is also the underlying subject of the fate that is controlling Romeo and Juliet: For example just after Romeo kills Tybalt he shouts, " I am fortunes fool!" As a character I think Romeo is just trying to blame his own misfortune on something else to be free of guilt.

Dramatic irony also plays a key part in both films, whereby the audience know vital pieces of information that the characters do not. For example in Luhrmann's film when Mercutio is stabbed, he puts on a brave face to his friends but reveals his true pain only to the camera when he turns around. Also in Zeffirelli's film, when Tybalt stabs Mercutio, only he and the audience can see the blood on his sword.

## Part 6

I think the audience response to each film would have been from an entirely different perspective. In Luhrmann's version both families are shown as if they had played an equal part in the death of Romeo & Juliet because of changes throughout the film - for example in the opening scene, the Montagues start the fight by biting their thumbs at the Capulets, instead of the other way around. This film would be suited for a modern audience, as Luhrmann has omitted some of Shakespeare's original language, making it accessible to a wider range of people.

In the opening scene of the newer film, I think Luhrmann chose a modern city as the setting for the film, to present a hectic urban world familiar to a 20th century audience. The media coverage of the feud makes the play's events seem more realistic as they watch violent videos of the chaos on the

streets of Verona. The updated and renamed Verona Beach is a clever mechanism by which peaceful and violent worlds collide.

Franco Zeffirelli's opening to the film was much slower and spread out with a gentle beginning; he introduces the film with the main chorus and then goes on to the marketplace scene - the Capulet's are the main cause of the trouble and the audience take an instant dislike to them. I think this is a terrible way to start the film as the audience usually judge the main characters within their first few scenes, and Capulets are always the troublemakers.

I personally prefer Baz Luhrmann's modern version of the opening scene, as it is more direct and engaging towards a modern audience with better special effects - such as the petrol station explosion; it has enhanced sound effects and a wide choice of music. It appeals to me more than the Zeffirelli version, which even though is more accurate and faithful to the original script, it now comes across to me as outdated.

Luhrmann's omissions from the original script are vital into understanding what kind of film he wanted to demonstrate: for example he cut a lengthy dialogue between the Capulets Sampson and Gregory in favour of a more explosive and dramatic opening to the 3rd brawl in the petrol station.

Many of the omissions are also to do with sexual hints or jokes, which would be perfectly ordinary in Shakespearean times, but a modern audience, would not understand or approve of them. Luhrmann also changed the timing of Juliet's scene to after Mercutio's death to show the change in attitude that

Romeo has gone through, from being more faithful to his wife than his friends - to the exact opposite.

In the end I think each film's outcome was decided by what kind of film the directors wanted to portray to the audience - With Baz Luhrmann going for a modern love story / action film, and Franco Zeffirelli opting for a more traditional retelling of the classic play. This influenced how the characters would be portrayed, the location of the films, the scenery and most importantly, the language in their retelling of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet.