

Romeo and juliet was written by shakespeare english literature essay

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



Critical Review Romeo and Juliet was written by Shakespeare and was one of his second tragedies, written between the years of 1594 and 1596. The focus throughout the play is a domestic tragedy that involves the fate of two lovers which ultimately leads to their death. This is arguably one of Shakespeare's most famous tragedies and has been adapted into both films and television programmes. However, the most recent adaptation is the film *Romeo and Juliet*, directed by Baz Luhrmann. H. R Coursen describes the process of adaptation between Shakespeare's play *Romeo And Juliet* and Baz Luhrmann's film as being part of a 'unconventional process'[1] that reflects a somewhat positive 'inner maturity and strength of character'[2]. Coursen holds a view that the adaptation is 'marvellous' and brings Shakespeare into modern day life. He also states that Luhrmann is able to downplay the role of fate within Shakespeare's original play using a different technique that uses flashbacks and flash-forwards. According to Coursen, Luhrmann's film is described as 'postmodern montage'[3] in that it pays 'homage to Shakespearean works'[4] for example, the rundown town within the film is called The Globe. Coursen states the setting within the adaptation is an important factor as it has been 'cleverly fitted to suit the modern day Shakespeare with a twist'[5]. An example of this can be seen at the very beginning of the adaptation, in scene one. It shows a television news reader that projects prologue from Shakespeare's original script in both voice and text as we are introduced to the setting, Verona Beach and the cast of characters. Thus implying to the audience that it is Shakespeare but a 'modern version that's appealing to all audiences.'[6] Furthermore, Tori E Gibbs supports the view that *Romeo And Juliet* is a postmodern adaptation,

but his argue differs as he states that it is through the religious imagery and setting throughout the modern adaptation that makes it a postmodern montage rather than the indication of homely Shakespearean factors.

Throughout Luhrmann's film the priest (Friar Lawrence) has a tattoo of a cross on his back that is frequently shown throughout the adaptation and it is evident that religious statues such as angels loom ominously over the action that takes place within the film. ' Religious imagery suggests that religion is highly represented throughout by the pre penetrance of religious icons that are inadequate in explaining the confusion of postmodern life'.

[7]In addition David Ansen also holds the view of Coursen in that ' the fantastic adaptation reflects the strength of the characters and the focus of their inner maturity rather than the naivety as in the original'.[8]He states that, their fate is always decided throughout the story, but their inner modern maturity gives the audience a ' fascinating new outlook on the original play'[9]. He also states that, Luhrmann is able to incorporate Shakespeare's original jokes and illusions of historical events into his recent pop culture, in order to stay faithful to the original text, in a language sense. He says that the faithfulness of using original references and language can be seen by the fact that both Shakespeare and Luhrmann ' endeavour to delight their audience and also portray basic morals that are inherent in the original story'[10]. In addition to this, although Ansen praises the cultural similarities claiming there are certain aspects that stay faithful to the original play, he also praises and recognises vital differences in which the adaptation has such a setting, costume and props, and thinks these are all an important positive factor in modernising the original Shakespeare. This can be seen

during act one scene one within the adaptation, here the 'Montague boys' speed down the freeway in a yellow convertible car it shows them smoking, laughing and they then pull into a gas station. This is an interesting modern adaptation as none of these were 'conventions that were conceived or popular during the time that Romeo and Juliet was written or performed.' [11] When the 'Capulet boys' show up, the Shakespearean aspect of biting one's thumb is still present within the adaptation. However, as Ansen states the characters are 'possessed with guns with the name of the respective houses engraved within them, however, the exchange of the word sword for gun never happens and the dialogue remains as it is in the original text' [12] showing to the audience that it is somewhat faithful to Shakespearean language aspects whilst still being able to modernise other factors. Whilst being on the subject of change Jorgens argues that Luhrmann's adaptation is one of the 'best Shakespearean adaptations,' [13] with differences that not only catch the audience's ears as Shakespeare intended but also their eyes. He argues that there is no proof of English or Italian language nor accents for that matter were used within the adaptation. He states that using these accents would fit to the original setting and cast of the play. He argues that this is a good thing as 'During the time that Shakespeare wrote his plays they were all written for an accent that was much more of an American sound, and this adaptation shows when you do Shakespeare with an American accent it makes it very strong, and very alive.' [14] Whilst Coursen, Gibbs, and Ansen's arguments towards the Romeo and Juliet adaptation are lauded with praise, this view is negatively broken by much criticism of the modernised adaptation by Graham

Holderness and James. R. Keller. The crux of Keller's argument against the adaptation holds the opposite view of the positive argument of Gibbs who states ' Baz Luhrmann's set Romeo And Juliet in a somewhat created world, a collage of both modern and classical images and also technology and pop culture.' [15] Even though he does not disagree with this view, he states that it is not and can never be seen as a positive aspect of a Shakespearean adaptation. Keller thinks this is a negative thing as ' Juliet and also Romeo, are placed in the centre of a cluttered created world of gangs and dysfunctional families, in which the adapted Verona Beach creates a meaningless collage of human experiences and emotion.' [16] It is seen as negative as the two young lovers are angry and somewhat rebellious against the world around them, feeling nothing but bitterness and hatred towards their society. He holds the view that ' the adaptation is a somewhat bad and twisted interpretation on language and it ruins the beauty of Shakespeare's work.' [17] Graham also states that he is against the adaptation and also holds a negative view against it. He sees the ' modernised Western Romeo and Juliet as turning a beautiful love story into a violent, aggressive and murderous adaptation.' [18] His view is that it gives out the wrong impression to its intended audience. He states on an educational level it appears to be the younger generation that will be interested in the new modernised adaptation and the fact that the cast within the film is extremely young which makes it problematic. The blood, violence, prostitution, nudity, gang related deaths and car assaults that take place within the adaptation are giving out the wrong impression to the younger generation of today. He relates his argument and the adaptation as being a cause of violence and

murders that happen within today's society. ' if teenagers are made to watch adaptations such as this and learn them off by heart for exams it gives some the impression that factors such as gang abuse and car assaults are ok to commit.'[19]He also states that the setting is a bad thing unlike Coursen and Gibbs as the backgrounds hold mostly billboards that advertise liquor, drugs and cigarettes.'[20]Again giving out the impression to a young audience that is not correct. Many critics disagree with this view as they believe that it is a modernisation of a 16th century love story and the intention is none of the above but only to ensure that ' Shakespeare stays popular.'[21]In conclusion, there are more than a thousand words to describe the diversity of the original play and Luhrmann's modern adaptation. In my view there is going to be a massive diversity between the two, and the major changes as the world has changed over and over since the Shakespearean era. Despite this, it stands clear that whether opinions are good or bad, both versions tell the same story in two different ways that are able to get the social morals across to the audience. Traditionalists such as graham will obviously be more compelled to keep Shakespeare's original play alive, whereas Luhrmann's modernised film will whisk people away that enjoy change and want to enjoy his disputable talent. However all differences and similarities aside, there is a common thread that still ties them together and that is the story of the true love and tragedy. BibliographyBurt, Richard (Aug 2003) Shakespeare, The Movie II: Popularizing the Plays on Film, TV, Video and DVD, Routledge; 2nd Edition. Davis, Anthony (Oct 1994) Shakespeare and the Moving Image: The Plays on Film and Television, Cambridge University Press. Gibbs, E. Tori (2010), Baz Luhrmann's ' Romeo And Juliet' Compared With Shakespeare's

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