

Baz Luhrman's modern film interpretation of romeo and juliet

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Baz Lurhman's modern film interpretation of William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet has been a very successful transformation of the classic, original play to a modern context of Los Angeles gang warfare. Lurhman's film manages to relate the 16th century play to a modern audience while at the same time maintaining textual integrity of the play. He has retained the plot, and language of the original text at the same time as conveying Shakespeare's original thematic concerns of the purity of young love, and the dangers of family feud.

He achieves all this through the clever use of a variety of film techniques in three key scenes; the Capulet ball, the balcony scene and the fight involving Mercutio, Tybalt and Romeo. The theme of the purity of young love is first revealed in the costume ball scene. The scene is introduced after Romeo takes an ecstasy pill before he attends the Costume Ball. The scene begins with rapidly edited mid-shots and close-ups to emphasize the madness of the party and effects of the drug, which reflects the theme of youth versus age.

After the rapid cuts, a close-up follows it, on Romeo's face underwater, symbolizing the cleansing and purification of water. After Romeo ascends from the water, music is played to establish a calm and peaceful attitude juxtaposed against the party music, which is demented and crazy and is played in the costume ball lobby. In keeping with the tempo of the slow, embracing music that enhances the romance of the scene, Romeo moves over to the fish tank followed by a slow panning shot and stares at it meaningfully.

Shortly after Romeo meets the eye of Juliet, establishing the theme of the purity of young love as they are staring at each other through the water, which was earlier represented as a source of cleansing. Moderate cuts of close up shots establish that both Romeo and Juliet are infatuated with each other " Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight! For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night. " Lurhman has effectively used costuming in a symbolic way to represent Romeo, as a knight in shining armor of the medieval period, to epitomize him as a chivalrous and romantic man.

Alternatively, Juliet is costumed as an angel, which is to symbolize her purity and benevolence. Introduced in the balcony scene, is the theme of passionate love as Romeo scales the Capulet orchard wall to profess his profound love for Juliet. The orchard wall, is a symbol, as it separates and detaches Romeo and his ridiculed concept of love away from the cynical comments of Mercutio whom belittles love as the impulse of lust, ultimately making the Capulet orchard, an enclosure of love.

The scene is introduced with a wide shot, displaying the balcony and the pool clearly, it is also set at night, as Romeo metaphorically describes Juliet to be his light as he creeps through the Capulet orchard towards the balcony " It is the east, and Juliet is the sun. Arise fair sun, and kill the envious moon", a successfully conveyed example of pathetic fallacy as Romeo describes the sun and moon with human attributes and sustains the metaphor of light versus dark.

Comic relief is provided as the window opens and Juliet's maid appears before Romeo, as Juliet enters the scene through the elevator, thus

contrasting from the original text, as Romeo and Juliet met on the balcony, the use of the elevator creates another modern element of the scene " Romeo, Oh Romeo. For where art thou Romeo? Deny thy father and refuse thy name" a mid-shot is used as Juliet contemplates what makes Romeo such an enemy. The only reason Romeo is labeled an enemy is that he is of the Montague family " What's in a name? an upper-angle shot is used as Juliet stares upwards into the sky the during soliloquy as she shares her thoughts with the audience. After Juliet asks how did Romeo get over the high walls to the Capulet Gardens, Romeo replies that he flew on wings of love " For stony limits can not hold love out and what love can do" stating that love is an invincible force that can not be contained as both Romeo and Juliet circle each other in the water in a mid-shot that represents that their love is pure and united given that water is often used as a symbol of purity.

The scene that twists the play towards the road of tragedy, the fight between Mercutio, Tybalt and Romeo is first introduced with close-up shots of Benvolio and Mercutio along with two Montague family members, that are costumed in Hawaiian styled, open buttoned shirts " By my head, here come the Capulets" as they share contrasting expressions at the arrival of the Capulets who are costumed in the tight and dark clothing of Latinos. The fight is stirred by Tybalt's remark " Mercutio, thou consort'st with Romeo? " Mercutio starts pacing at Tybalt as Tybalt speeds away into a clearing.

The stirring fight is shortly intervened by Romeo's arrival in his car in the background of a low-angle wide shot of the scene " Peace be with you sir. Here comes my man. " as Romeo enters the scene shouting Mercutio's name

costumed in a suit which demonstrates that Romeo is more civilized than his companions, which also adds to the modern appropriation. As Tybalt challenges Romeo to a one bullet shoot-off, instead of loading his gun to one bullet, Romeo attempts to make peace " Therefore, farewell. I see thou know'st me not. " as moderate cuts of close-up shots, used to express the emotions that have been surfaced due to Romeo's plead.

A cut from a mid-shot of Tybalt beating Romeo rapidly averts to a close-up shot of Mercutio " O calm, dishonorable, vile submission! " as music is used to create an intense atmosphere of uncertainty, and suspense. As Tybalt continues to chase Romeo and beat him, a close-up shot of Mercutio is used as he draws his gun, and throws it into the sand, a symbol that Mercutio has decided to join the fight " Tybalt! You ratcatcher, will you walk? " as a high-angle shot is used as Mercutio jumps into the fight, symbolizing the vulnerability of these two men whose lives are now in the hands of fate.

After Romeo intervenes with Mercutio's killing strike, Tybalt attacks him with a shard of glass purposefully, that dealt a killing strike to Mercutio " A plague on both your houses! " which contrasts from the original text, where Mercutio was accidentally killed by Tybalt. Clearly Baz Lurhman's film has successfully represented Shakespeare's tragedy about the purity of youthful love, which defies even the hatred of a violent family feud. He has transposed Shakespeare's play to a modern setting by the clever use of costuming, sound track, sets, and camera angles.