

Romeo and juliet essay sample



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When Baz Luhrmann decided to make a modern film version of 'Romeo and Juliet', one of his main reasons for doing so was because he was such a big fan of Shakespeare himself. He wanted everyone else to enjoy Shakespeare's work as much as he did and he did so through the power of film. In other words he wanted to 'Re-reveal' Shakespeare to a modern society. But Luhrmann realised that the audience of today probably wouldn't appreciate Shakespeare's work if he made a film that was set in the old days.

So he came to the decision that the language of the play would be mostly kept the same, but the film would be set in a modern world and with a modern society, that would include modern icons and objects so that the audience, (Late 20th Century, Early 21st Century), could understand the film properly. But to make the film version more accessible, Luhrmann had to read and update the play which presented him with a few difficulties. For example, as the play is over 500 years old, many values and settings from that time no longer apply for a modern society.

Also 500 years ago religion was one of the biggest things to anyone's life at that time. But for the people of today, although religion still has some impact it doesn't have as much as it did 500 years ago. Therefore, Luhrmann had to show the audience how important religion is for the people in the play. One way he does this is by placing a statue of Jesus between the Montague's and Capulet's buildings that we see in the prologue. Also, the language that was used in the play has mostly now become archaic, meaning that it is not used anymore.

Therefore, most people in the audience are probably not that familiar with Shakespeare's language, so they could have trouble understanding the language, but because of the modern settings and surroundings they could pick up on what was happening fairly easily. For the remainder of the essay I will be writing only on what I see from the Prologue and Act One Scene One because I feel that these scenes first introduce us to a 'modern Shakespeare'. Luhrmann uses modern 20th century icons to put the audience at ease because they give the audience something they know and can relate to.

For example he uses a television to read out the prologue because I think that if he didn't, the audience wouldn't hold their gaze and take in what was said if it was another way. He also uses cars, which obviously had not been invented at the time the play was written, but everyone who watched the film would instantly recognise them as they play such a big part in the society of today. He also changes the settings to make them more suited for the modern audience. In the play of 'Romeo and Juliet' the first scene is set in a marketplace.

Considering that the audience would mostly be an American audience, Luhrmann had to change this as average Americans would have no idea what a marketplace is as they don't have markets in America. So Luhrmann used a petrol/gas station as the setting for the first scene as probably every American would recognise a petrol station as soon as they saw it. The fictional Verona Beach has replaced Verona in Italy. The Verona Beach we see in the film is actually Mexico City. The film was shot in Mexico City because it was cheaper than filming in a big city such as New York.

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This was because in a city like New York you had to get a license to film but in Mexico City this wasn't needed. From the prologue to the end of scene 1 we get a fair number of religious images flashing out towards us that are almost subliminal. These are here to make us further understand how religion was an important part of the play and to the characters lives. Some examples of these religious images are: The ' Sin' Mouthguard in Abra's mouth, the big statue of Jesus, Tybalt's bullet-proof vest that has an image of Jesus on it and the Cross shaved into the Montague boy's head.

There are many more religious images that you have to pick up on. Just after the prologue ends we are introduced to a number of characters from the Montagues and the Capulets, but also people who have some parts later on in the film. These characters are picked out easily for the viewer by the use of freeze frames and sub-titles. When the picture freezes, we get a sub-title of who they are and how they are related to Romeo or Juliet and what family they belong to. This makes it extremely easy for the audience to recognise who a character is next time they see them on screen.

You can also easily recognise who is who, by the way the character looks like and the way the character dresses. You can easily spot a Montague because they usually wear casual clothes like the Hawaiian shirts we see them wearing in the first scene. They look like young people just having fun perhaps about to go to the beach. You can easily spot a Capulet because they wear black suits or sport a goatee. They look like people that work in an office and look more serious about what they do. Tybalt is seen as a stereotypical ' gunslinger' or ' gangster'.

This means that he is shown as a criminal, someone who likes to be violent, disrespectful and someone who doesn't have a value of life or death, whilst the Montague boys are stereotyped as "beach bums", people who are just out to get some fun. 'Romeo and Juliet' can be classified as three different genres. The first one and most obvious would be Romance as the main story is situated around Romeo and Juliet's relationship. The second genre would be Action. I have chosen this because of the shootout and the explosion of the petrol station which are fast paced actions with lots of movement.

The third genre would be drama. The tension when we first meet Tybalt and the dramatic scenes later in the film with Romeo and Juliet support what I think. The film gives many references to old gangster and spaghetti western films. When we first see Abra and Tybalt they are dressed as old gangsters from films such as 'The Godfather'. When we see Tybalt close up lighting the cigar he looks like a character Clint Eastwood plays in the old spaghetti westerns. As the audience is mostly American they would most likely recognise these kinds of movies so they would understand what Tybalt is doing.

Comedy is also used in parts, to help the audience read the film. When Abra frightens the Montague boys, you are not expecting it, you expect him to get his gun or start a brawl, so you cannot help but laugh. In some way it also creates tension as you think how the other side will retaliate. Also when one of the Montagues is shooting the petrol sign, this is another moment of comedy as he is doing it in a middle of a shootout, so it seems pretty stupid to be doing that at a time where he could easily be killed.

The music and sound used in the film also helps the audience understand the film easier. In the opening scenes the operatic music we hear is actually 'Ride of the Valkyries' by Wagner. This piece of music is supposed to give the idea that two warrior clans are fighting each other and is supposed to symbolise violence, so I think that this piece of music is perfect for the war between the Montagues and the Capulets, which we are first introduced to in the opening scenes. The voice-over we hear in the prologue also helps us understand what the prologue means.

If the prologue was only the images, I think the audience would have had a hard time taking the entire prologue in and fully understanding it, so I think this is perfectly done by Luhrmann. When we are first introduced to the Montague boys, the music in the background is that of hip hop or garage music. I think that this music was chosen because these types of music were originally made on the streets, where usually violence and crime would take place. So to put this type of music with the Montague boys, gives us the impression that the Montague boys, although just looking for some fun, also can be violent if provoked.

There are also references to music from spaghetti western films, mostly from the shootout scene and especially when Tybalt is shooting. This is because Tybalt shoots like Clint Eastwood did in the old spaghetti westerns and Tybalt also copies the way Clint used to light a cigar. So in a way Luhrmann has paid respect to the old spaghetti westerns with the way he portrays Tybalt in the film. The sound effects used all around the petrol station creates a lot of tension. For example, when we are about to be introduced to Tybalt we get the swinging petrol sign in the wind.

This allows the audience to take in what is happening. The time delay gives us a chance to get ready for the introduction of this character. The build up to his introduction gives the effect that he is a very important character not only in the film but in the war between the Montagues and the Capulets. The sound made when the characters move quickly tells us the pace of the shootout and that to survive you have to be fast and observant. The camera angles used in the film give dramatic effects which help the film become more accessible.

Overall there are four main camera angles used throughout the first scene. The first camera angle is the close up. The most notable time we see this is when the Montagues and Capulets draw their guns. The camera zooms onto the bottom of each gun, which turns out to have a Montague or Capulet coat of arms. The close ups give us further detail as to who is on whose side and also give us detail that we probably wouldn't notice without the close up. The second camera angle is the medium shot. This is one of the most used camera angles, as it is used throughout scene one.

The medium shot is mostly when you see what you would see through your own eyes. An example is when the Montague boy is disrespecting the nuns. The third camera angle is the wide-angle. Wide-angle gives much more detail than other camera angles. We see use of the wide-angle when we see the statue of Jesus between the Montague building and the Capulet building. We see both the statue and the buildings all in one shot. The last camera angle is the low-angle. The low-angle shot we see in the first scene is when we are first introduced to Abra.

It looks as though the camera is looking at him from beneath him, pointing up towards him. This gives the idea that Abra is a threat to the Montagues. With all these variety of camera angles, you are allowed more understanding of the characters and their surroundings. You see things as if you are looking through the eyes of the Montagues. Misc en scene is also used to create strong and effective visual images. Misc en scene is the term for what you see through the camera. A good way misc en scene is used in the opening prologue is when the television begins to zoom in until it fills almost the whole of the screen.

Luhrmann also gives pace to parts of the film, which were not originally there in the play. This was done to speed up the slow bits of the play otherwise the audience would have grown tired with what was happening. When the Montague boy is being hit with the handbag, we see him in a few different shots just letting the woman doing it quite slowly, but then suddenly out of no where he grabs his gun and points it at her. This is an example of where pace has been injected into the film.

We learn from the petrol station scene, the destructive side of the Montagues and Capulets, when the petrol station is set on fire. The burning symbolises the hell that the Montagues and Capulets have not only made for each other, but also for the other people of Verona Beach. It is also an effective way to close the first scene, which has done its job of introducing the Montagues and Capulets. To make a modern version of 'Romeo and Juliet' possible Luhrmann had the tedious job of editing the language used in the play, to a language the audience could understand.

In some cases, objects in the film that we know, are not named as we know them, but are named after objects from the play that have been removed. In the film the characters refer to their guns as ' Swords' as that is the weapon they used in the play. They are supposed to be a sword series of guns, but Luhrmann has still kept the original language used in the play. As a sword and a gun are both weapons, which the audience knew, what Luhrmann did worked perfectly. In other words, Luhrmann keeps Shakespeare's language but uses visual images to help the audience understand.

Luhrmann also had to leave out many archaic references simply because a modern audience would not understand them. He did this by leaving out a joke about colliers from the play. He also puts more emphasis on certain phrases. The phrase I can think of that he uses like this is when Tybalt is talking about peace and why he hates the word. I think he might have put more emphasis on this phrase because of the fact that in a modern society of today there is no peace over the world, and many people over the world probably have the same beliefs that Tybalt has about peace.

Although we may not realise it, but the prologue is repeated three times. The first time we see it is on the television. Here we are first exposed to the language of the play with the newscast. We then meet a series of images overlain with someone also reading out the prologue. Without the images, it would be hard to imagine the words said in the prologue. Taking into account everything I have wrote so far, I think Baz Luhrmann has done a excellent job in making a more modern, accessible version of Shakespeare's ' Romeo and Juliet'.

With the use of various camera angles, sounds and visual effects, Luhrmann has made it so you don't have to know all of Shakespeare's language to understand the film. If anything people can learn Shakespeare's language by watching the film as it is broken down so well. The use of 20th century icons makes the audience feel at ease, watching a film version of a play that is over 500 years old. Luhrmann has successfully 're-revealed' Shakespeare into the modern society of today.

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