

UNIVERZA V LJUBLJANI
FAKULTETA ZA DRUŽBENE VEDE

Alja Rupar

**Metatext in Movies: The Case Study of Baz
Luhrmann's William Shakespeare's Romeo +
Juliet (1996)**

**Metatekst v filmih: študija primera
Shakespearjeve tragedije Romeo + Julija
režiserja Baza Luhrmanna (1996)**

Diplomsko delo

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Alja Rupar

Mentor: Red. Prof. Dr. Hanno Hardt
Somentorica: Red. Prof. Dr. Breda Luthar

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I am the master of my fate.
I am the captain of my soul.

William Ernest Henley

Metatekst v filmih: študija primera Shakespearjeve tragedije Romeo + Julija režiserja Baza Luhrmanna (1996)

Filmski jezik opisuje način na katerega film »govori« gledalcem. Zaradi zapletenosti medija, ki poleg besed uporablja še različne elemente kinematografije, se moramo naučiti kako brati ter razbrati pomen filmskega jezika. Za interpretacijo teksta moramo torej brati med vrsticami. Metatekst je potemtakem razlaga, saj nam predstavi pravila igre in nam pokaže, kako brati in razumeti film. Gledalcu razširi obzorje s tem, ko ponudi neobičajno vizijo teksta, ki ga kmalu zatem zamenja podoba na ekranu. Film nagovarja množice in spodbuja domišljijo bolj kot katera koli druga oblika umetnosti. Novodobna tragedija Baza Luhrmanna je priredba Shakespearjevega originala izpred 400 let, s katero se je lažje približal mladini, ki je bila tudi ciljna publika. Bistven element priredbe je pristop z drugačne strani in pod drugačnimi pogoji. Romeo+Julija, z uporabo stilistično bogate in sodobne kinematografije, vrhunsko prepleta prvoten 400 let star besednjak in popularno kulturo 20. stoletja. Režiser je posebno pozornost namenil prvotni in izvorni Shakespearjevi tragediji, ji dodal svoj avtorski pečat in jo izvrstno postavil v sodobno okolje.

Ključne besede: filmski jezik, metatekst, Romeo + Julija, izvirnost

Metatext in Movies: The Case Study of Baz Luhrmann's William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet (1996)

Film language describes the way film 'speaks' to its audiences and because of the complexity of the medium which is using not only words, but also different kinds of shots, angles and speeds, we have to learn how to read it and 'decode' its meaning from the elements of the mise-en-scene. So to interpret the text, we have to read between the lines. Metatext is therefore an interpretation, because it introduces us to the rules of the game and shows us how a film wants to be read and how it needs to be understood. It widens one's eyes by offering an unaccustomed vision of a text, which is soon replaced by an image on the screen. Film addresses the world and is a mass engagement of the imagination unlike any other art form. Baz Luhrmann's William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet perfectly intertwines the original 400-year-old vocabulary with the popular culture of 20th century, using stylistically rich and alluring modern cinematography. He has given considerable attention to taking Shakespeare's »original«, mix it with his directorial mark and making it work within the contemporary setting.

Keywords: film language, metatext, William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet, originality

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION	7
2 FILM LANGUAGE	13
3 FILM AS METATEXT	16
4 FILM ADAPTATION	20
5 CASE STUDY: BAZ LUHRMANN'S WILIAM SHAKESPEARE'S ROMEO + JULIET	24
5.1 VIOLENT OPENING OF THE FILM	26
5.1.1 'READING' THE TELEVISION	27
5.1.2 MOCKERY OF RELIGION and GLORIFICATION OF LOVE	29
5.1.3 SIGNIFIERS/LANGUAGE	31
5.2 THE GIST	34
5.2.1 THE SETTING	34
5.2.2 ROMEO + JULIET	38
5.2.3 COSTUMES AND MAKE-UP	42
5.3 EPILOGUE	45
5.3.1 'LIGHTING THE COLORS'	46
5.3.2 SOUNDTRACK	48
6 CONCLUSION	50
7 LITERATURE	55
8 SLOVENSKI PREVOD - METATEKST V FILMIH: ŠTUDIJA PRIMERA SHAKESPEARJEVE TRAGEDIJE ROMEO + JULIJA REŽISERJA BAZA LUHRMANNA (1996)	59
8.1 FILMSKI JEZIK	59
8.2 FILM KOT METATEKST	60
8.3 FILMSKA PRIREDBA ORIGINALA	60
8.4 ŠTUDIJA PRIMERA SHAKESPEARJEVE TRAGEDIJE ROMEO + JULIJA	61

TABLE OF PICTURES

Figure 5.1: Black newscaster delivering prologue in iambic pentameter.....	28
Figure 5.2: Statue of Christ looming over the City.....	30
Figure 5.3: »Wherefore l'amour?« imitating ad for Coca-Cola.....	32
Figure 5.4: Close-up - Sword 9mm Series S.....	32
Figure 5.5: The ruined Proscenium Stage is taken as a representative of a public arena in which films are viewed communally.....	36
Figure 5.6: Juliet.....	38
Figure 5.7: Romeo.....	40
Figure 5.8: Cleopatra dancing with the Devil.....	44
Figure 5.9: Tybalt ignites the fire of violence.....	48

1 INTRODUCTION

*»Film is one of the universal languages,
the other two: mathematics and music.«
Frank Capra(Think Exist Quotes)*

In 2005 the cinema celebrated a hundred and ten years of existence and of the first public film screening. Since 1895 it has grown and spread globally and, despite a decline in attendances world-wide, film watching is now more popular than ever, thanks to television and video. There are also new communication technologies and forms of entertainment that have undoubtedly affected the social and cultural activity. As such, film continues to attract enormous critical attention, in both popular discourses and academic fields of study. Nowadays film is one of the most widespread forms of entertainment and so much a part of our lives that it's hard to imagine a world without it. Also called motion pictures, film is an extraordinary entertainment medium and “a superb story-telling machine” (Elsaesser and Buckland 2002, 1), which offers us the world, unparalleled elsewhere and undreamt before the cinema was ‘invented’.

And everything started in Hollywood: “Hollywood has always been a cage ... a cage to catch our dreams,” as John Huston suggested. While the study of film may involve a concern with aesthetics, technology, ideology and audience, it is the study of film as an industry which remains central and is basic to all other cinema studies. The study of the film industry itself is complex, but it is simplified by one key historical fact. Since the 1920s one industry, known as Hollywood, has dominated the world. Therefore the history of the film industry begins with Hollywood, because it has forced all other national cinemas to begin by dealing with the power of Hollywood as an industry. As already said, Hollywood is first of all an industry, a collection of profit maximizing corporations operated from studio headquarters in the United States, and like all film industries, it consists of three basic components: production, distribution and presentation of feature films (Gomery in Hill 1998, 245).

But before I continue, let me explain the distinction between ‘film’ and ‘cinema’. Christian Metz (Metz in Hill 1998, 11) suggests that cinema implies the entire institution of filmmaking, film distribution, film exhibition and film viewing. Cinema is

therefore the series of activities involved in the production and reception of films. On the other hand, there is a film, also called moving pictures, which is what we see when we go to the cinema. It is made of light being projected on the screen through long and narrow celluloid strip. It is the actual 'film text' shown in cinemas or television. As moving pictures, the film is directly connected to reality, since it actually represents it. It's the medium that communicates something and it's the text that can be read and analyzed.

People have always been attracted to the unknown and mysterious, that is why the cinema has always been the object of interest and admiration. When going to the cinema, we feel like we're going on a two-hour magical visit through our imagination, through the life itself, with all these intense mixture of feelings and faces. Even Steven Spielberg agrees with that when saying: "when I'm going to a movie, it's magic, no matter what the movie is about." And exactly the combination of image, movement and sound is obviously something quite mysterious in its effects on human beings, because it offers us the form of immortality. Like a fascinating mirror reflecting our thoughts. But since there are two sides of a coin, the film can also present a danger to life, threatening to be its substitute and a replacement of a real life itself. It's a virtual world in which another reality, our reality, seems to change or even disappear – "[t]he cinema, a man-made world between total truthfulness and total falsehood" (Elsaesser and Buckland 2002, 1).

Besides that, films communicate ideas, information and they show us the places we might never visit and see for ourselves. They show us different ways of life, different stories and characters we come to care about, while the story develops. Therefore films take us on a journey of intense feelings and emotions, we can easily identify with. But it's no accident, right on the contrary. Films are designed and intentionally made to have effects on viewers, either to convey an idea or to merely entertain us. They are cultural artifacts created by specific cultures, which reflect those cultures, and, in turn, affect them. Consequently film is considered to be an important art form, a source of popular entertainment and also a powerful method for educating. But there are different opinions about whether film is an art or just an entertainment. Some people would say that high concept films (blockbusters) are only "entertainment", while films for narrower public (independent films and specialized experimental works) are true art.

For my case study I chose Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*, because it is a good example of post-classical pop culture blockbuster-on-the-rise movie, mixed with elements of 400 years old tragedy and stylistically rich and alluring modern cinematography. Since the commercial cinema is a viewing experience and films themselves are presented as spectacular intrusions into daily life of the viewer, the modern adaptation of the old tragedy seemed the right choice for my film analysis, not to mention the affinity for Shakespeare's works.

The two basic elements of the blockbuster are narrative and spectacle and Luhrmann's new age *Romeo + Juliet* has it all – the classical love story wrapped up in a flashy and extremely colorful action spectacle. Narrative is seen as a story-telling mechanism that serves, in loose and very general terms, to help to make sense of their world. This often involves a process in which difficult issues facing a particular group or culture are taken up and resolved in some imaginary way. Narrative and spectacle can work together in a variety of changing relationships and there is no single, all-embracing answer to the question of how the two are related. Spectacle may disrupt narrative and its elements, that seem to exist purely for their own sake rather than being integrated into the film as a whole, may take on the character of 'cinematic excess', as Kristin Thompson puts it (Thompson in King 2007).

The term 'high concept', or rather 'blockbuster', originated in the television and film industries, but it was soon adopted by the popular presses, who seized the term as an indictment of Hollywood's privileging those films which seemed most likely to reap huge dollars at the box-office (Wyatt 1994, 7). To be more specific, high concept is a form of differentiated product within the mainstream film industry. Blockbusters are reasonably coherent stories, even if they may sometimes be looser and less well integrated than some classical models (King 2007, 2).

According to Justin Wyatt, high concept can be also considered as a form of differentiated product within the mainstream film industry. On the other hand, art film or art cinema is a noncommercial and independently made film that is usually aimed at particular, small market audience, which means they usually have limited production budget. Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* is as much as blockbuster as is independent film. The film's budget was only around \$14,500,000,

which is still more than budget of any other independent film, but way less than actual blockbuster nowadays¹. But regarding box-office income, the same movie grossed around \$135,338,728 worldwide, which is nine times more than its estimated budget (IMDbPRO).

But money doesn't necessarily make the artist any less creative or the project any less worthwhile, cinema matters for its artistic merits (Hill and Gibson 1998, 4). And these artistic merits, like the visual elements for example, give motion pictures a universal power of communication. And what is more universal than language of film. Or is it? My focus point of the thesis will be the film language, or rather metatext in movies, particularly metatext in Luhrmann's 1996s adaptation of the 400 year old tragedy. In this film I will try to show the theory of film metatext and see if it is possible to 'read' a text between the lines; to analyze and understand the particular elements shown in the film.

According to Benjamin, (Benjamin in Hill 1998, 170) the film requires a mode of interaction that is public and collective. In other words, film turns the recipient potentially into a producer who plays an active rather than passive role in the shaping of his or her cultural environment. Fantasies and memories, as well as gender roles imposed by the dominant culture, play important roles in mediating the impact of the spectacle. Film has always been a transcultural phenomenon, having as it does the capacity to transcend 'culture' – to create modes of fascination which engage audiences in ways independent of their linguistic and cultural specificities. As the viewing of film doesn't require literacy in the traditional sense of knowing how to read and write, film signals the transformation of word-based cultures into cultures that are increasingly dominated by the visual image. Viewers can be interviewed about their own perceptions of the cinema-going experience. Between viewer and the text come numerous other mediations and meaning-creating factors. The broad social-cultural context imposes certain horizons of interpretation – limitations on the kinds of interpretations likely to be made. So do more particular contextual factors such as class, gender or racial

¹ For example the Hollywood's 2007 summer blockbuster Transformers movie's budget was around \$150, 000, 000, while the sequel Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen, which is scheduled for the screening this year, has budget around \$200, 000, 000. These two movies are both categorized as summer blockbusters, which is the big studios' marketing tactic, when is the right time to earn 'big bucks'. The motivations of the Hollywood film industry are structured around the creation of pleasurable and hence profitable movies, rather than being directly political or ideological in character.

background, or narrower group or personal histories. Viewers are far from entirely free to make their own individual readings of textual material. Promotional and other extra-textual discourses directly associated with the film industry; including trailers, adverts and reviews, also help to establish discursive frameworks within which viewers are encouraged to place individual films.

In Chapter two I will start with film language. Like literature, narrative rules also apply for the cinema. Although cinema has its own language and conventions, it is an art related to literature in having the common goal in telling stories, only the story is presented in moving pictures. Using the camera, the story will always be told in a certain point-of-view and it will always exclude more than reveal. Cinema is a particular language, because it uses cinematographic elements (angles, movements, framings, editing) to create meaning. It is exploring human sensibility with all those flashy images and intensive sounds at the same time, by presenting them in realistic looking setting and with various constructions.

In Chapter three I will write about the metatext theory. According to Elsaesser and Buckland (2002, 47), metatext introduces us to the rules of the game and shows us how a film wants to be read and how it needs to be understood. Film is particularly valuable as a metatext, because it combines the visual, the narrative and the interpretative. As a visual medium, the film shows us what the characters look like rather than leaving it to our imagination. As a narrative medium, it can show the development of character and in my case study, it uses this opportunity for extensive development of love story. As both a visual and a narrative interpretation, the film constantly has to fill gaps.

Chapter four will be about translation of the original play into film adaptation. Adaptation is a common process in cinema, which requires well-developed skills to re-write the 'original' anew. It is sort of an artistic composition, because anyone who changes the source renders it his own personal mark. I will examine how far Baz Luhrmann went in his filmic adaptation of Shakespeare's tragedy, 'till what extent the contemporary setting resembles Elizabethan era and where is his personal mark seen the most.

In Chapter five I will expand the theory from the previous chapters and show it on the particular case study of Baz Luhrmann's William *Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*. Writing only about a certain theory is nothing without projecting it onto a case study. Sometimes theory can be quite complicated and all the theorizing and reasoning must be supported with some kind of 'evidence' or show case in order to support the theory. Anyway, my theory about metalanguage will absolutely be supported with a case study, in order to explain any vagueness about the matter.

2 FILM LANGUAGE

“If you want to tell the untold stories, if you want to give voice to the voiceless, you’ve got to find a language. Which goes for film as well as prose, for documentary as well as autobiography. Use the wrong language, and you’re dumb and blind.”
Salman Rushdie(Think Exist Quotes)

A language is a semiotic process through which thought may be conveyed, but a language system (or linguistic system) enables a response to that thought using the degrees and kinds of signs and signifiers produced by the language (Stam and Burgoyne 1992).

Although a film is not a language, it is like a language. It’s not a language in the sense that English is, because it’s impossible to be ungrammatical in film and it’s not necessary to learn the vocabulary. Film uses not only words, but also different kinds of shots, angles and speeds; therefore, while the audience can react to a film’s semantic intent, that audience cannot address its concerns regarding the film in the same language the film used to convey its argument. But the more one studies film, the greater the potential meaning for the observer is, therefore in a way it is useful to use the metaphor of language to ‘read’ and understand a film.

“People, who are highly experienced in film, see more and hear more than people who seldom go to the cinema” (Monaco 1991, 159). But before we can enjoy the texts, we have to learn to read them first. And since film is like a language, there are some methods that are used to study language that might be also applied to film studies. And for that we use semiotics, which is a way of explaining how we make meaning.

Semiotics recognizes that all meaning is encoded in things that create meaning. When we see objects and images or hear and read words, we cannot perceive more than an idea. And exactly this idea is what we call ‘meaning’. We learn to decode this meaning as we grow up and become educated. Film language describes the way film ‘speaks’ to its audiences and spectators. Directors, producers and editors work to create meaning

from the moving images of film, video and television. Audiences ‘decode’ these meanings in a similar way that they interpret spoken and written language. As with words, but more so, the audience doesn’t only ‘read what they see’ – they bring to their interpretation of moving images a range of pre-existing expectations, knowledge and shared experiences that shape the meaning they take from what they see.

Christian Metz argues that:

one might call ‘language’...any unity defined in terms of its matter of expression...Literary language, in this sense, is the set of messages whose matter of expression is writing; cinematic language is the set of messages whose matter of expression consists of five tracks or channels: moving photographic image, recorded phonetic sound, recorded noises, recorded musical sound, and writing...Thus cinema is a language in the sense that it is a ‘technico-sensorial unity’ graspable in perceptual experience (Metz in Stam and Burgoyne 1992, 37).

Therefore as a result, the language of cinema cannot be answered by the language of literature because the two systems use different modes of expression. Language selects and combines phonemes and morphemes to form sentences, while film selects and combines images and sounds to form syntagmas, as suggested by Metz. Therefore, filmic texts form a structured network produced by the interweaving of specific cinematic codes, codes that appear only in the cinema, like shots and angles and sound.

An important aspect of film language is its compelling nature and its appearance of reality. Through these means, moving images work to entertain, inform and educate but also persuade us to see the world in a particular way.

In semiotics, a sign consists of two parts: the signifier and the signified. This analysis is already familiar from the literature, but I want to project it to films. In film the signifier and the signified are almost identical: the sign of cinema is a short-circuit sign. A picture of a book is much closer to a book, than the word ‘book’ is. A picture carries enormous relationship with what it signifies, while a word rarely does. And it is this short-circuit sign that makes the language of film so difficult to discuss (Monaco 1991, 159). As Christian Metz, a well-known semiotician, pointed out: “A film is difficult to

explain, because it is easy to understand.” This means that we can’t modify the sign of cinema the way we can modify the words of language systems. Therefore, the difference between the language systems and film is that in language systems there is a difference between the signifier and the signified, while in film there is no difference. “Film doesn’t suggest, but it states, and exactly here lies its power and danger that it presents to the observer – the reason why it’s useful or even crucial, to learn images well so that the observer can get some power of the medium. The better one reads an image, the more one understands it, the more power one has over it” (Monaco 1991, 159). The reader of a script invents the image, but the reader of the film does not, still both must work together well to interpret the signs they perceive in order to complete the process of understanding. The better they cooperate, the better the understanding of the text. According to James Monaco (1991), film is a continuum of meaning and it presents us with a language that consists of short-circuit signs in which the signifier nearly equals the signified; and also depends on a continuous, non-discrete system in which we can’t identify a basic unit and which therefore we can’t describe quantitatively.

The result is, as Christian Metz says: “An easy art, the cinema is in constant danger of falling victim to this easiness.” He also pointed out:” [w]e understand a film not because we have a knowledge of its system; rather, we achieve an understanding of its system because we understand the film.” Or put another way: “It is not because the cinema is language that it can tell such fine stories, but rather it has become language, because it has told such fine stories” (Metz in Monaco 1991, 159).

But film is not simply a story played out by actors; it’s also a series of shots and information through language, music and sound effects. While watching a film, we instantly react to particular aspects of it and, subconsciously, try to explain our feelings and thoughts. But we notice that our understanding differs from others and is not so clear. A reason for that is that in discussing our feelings about film, we sometimes fail to substantiate our comments, because feelings are rarely useful argument (Landy 2000). If we want to talk about films, we must begin with a description of what we want to talk about, namely films. But the specifically emotional quality of a film is only partly reducible to words and sentences. Semiologists would describe it as a metatext, by which they mean a byproduct of the first text. A metatext enables us to measure the

importance of data like style, shooting and editing. “If we want to understand the film, we must ignore its presence; if we want to discuss it, we must isolate it and examine it from a distance.” (Landy 2000, 56).

3 FILM AS METATEXT

“To read between the lines was easier than to follow the text”
Henry James (Think Exist Quotes)

“Metatext introduces us to the rules of the game and shows us how a film wants to be read and how it needs to be understood» (Elsaesser and Bucklan 2002, 47).

Metalanguage is the language used for the analysis of object language; therefore it can be thought of as a language about another language. A metatext is a text in metalanguage about a text in object language. As Kinsey suggests, metatext is interpretation (Kinsey 1990). It widens one’s eyes by offering an unaccustomed vision of a text, which is soon replaced by an image. Metatext refers to those works that exist alongside the text and it accommodates the text to new circumstances.

According to Metz (Hill 1998, 12) “the text can be defined as a coherent, delimited and comprehensible structure of meaning.” A text is something that contains a complex of events (images, words or sounds) that are related to each other within a context and can be a story or narrative. And all of the parts of the text work together towards a common goal of telling us something – a hidden message. But a text is also something physical, like a book, a painting and a television show and the entire process of watching television. Actually any event that makes meaning can be called a text if we can isolate and define its outside boundaries and its internal structure. But for a text to be completed, it must be seen, read or heard by someone.

Metatext makes it possible to expose the relativity of meaning inadequately represented in various embedded text-codes, and thus to reveal the curvatures of a semantic time-space continuum. Metatext focuses on the interrelation and interaction of the text-codes of various types of culture and consciousness. This interaction becomes a plot or a story, because plot – a paradigmatic structure – becomes syntagmatic in metatextual structures. The episodes of the composer's biography gradually unfold over the course of the plot, but there are also meanings – moving, conflicting and developing – that are expressed through the figurative language of the film (Avrutin 1997, 415).

The most important feature of the metatext is the differential codification of various parts of the text. The transition to a system of internal structure boundaries constitutes the basis for the generation of meaning. In the metatext, the role of the text's boundaries – both the external boundaries separating the text from the nontext and the internal ones demarcating different levels of codification – is highlighted. The boundaries are mobile; shifts in the text's orientation toward one or another code result in changes in the boundaries' structures in general. (Lotman 1994, 380). The artist, in creating a metatext, destructures the hypotexts in order to restructure them on a new artistic and semantic level, forming an advanced imaginary reality.

According to Metz, physical textuality, like so much else in the creation and reception of film, is subject to outside or external forces that make it difficult for us to define it as some essential or unchanging thing. Ultimately, the physicality of film, even the forms of its projection are less important than the effect it has when we view it. Therefore watching a film is more than any of its physical parts: it is an event that occurs when the physical thing becomes activated by human perception through some kind of projection. Metz says that as soon as a thinking and feeling person is present and is viewing the film, that same person's experience is carrying on the film's images, sounds and narrative (Hill 1998, 12). The viewer's experience and thoughts are the result of the culture in which he or she lives. Person's beliefs and values are all activated within the context of film viewing.

People were not able to create their own future, or be authors of their own fortune; they could not live their own lives. That goes for the creators of the film as well. They, too, are a major part of the text. Their values and understandings of what a film should be or

shouldn't be, the economic constraints that allow them to say and do only so much in any given film – these become textualized. But in order for a person to respond to a certain text, he or she needs a personal engagement with a text (Goodwyn 1998). By “personal” response some might still negatively interpret a merely emotional and also narrowly subjective response; however, there is no such thing as purely objective response. Any response is likely to be interpretative one, searching to clarify meaning and to create a sense of satisfactory understanding in the reader.

“Meaning is produced by the reader “(Steiger 1992, 3). Spectator thinks. It makes sense of a narrative film, the viewer must do more than perceive movement, construe images and sounds as presenting a three-dimensional world, and understand oral or written language. The viewer must take as a central cognitive goal the construction of a more or less intelligible story. The spectator comes to the film already tuned, prepared to focus energies toward story construction and to apply sets of schemata derived from context and prior experience. This effort toward meaning involves an effort toward unity. Comprehending a narrative requires assigning it some coherence. At a local level, the viewer must grasp character relations, lines of dialogue, relations between shots, and so on. More broadly, the viewer must test the narrative information for consistency. The viewer also finds unity by looking for relevance, testing each event for its pertinence to the action which the film, scene or character seems to be basically setting forth (Bordwell 2008, 34). In comprehending a narrative film, the spectator seeks to grasp the filmic continuum as a set of events occurring in defined settings and unified by principles of temporality and causation. To understand a film's story is to grasp what happens and where, when and why it happens. Thus any schemata for events, locations, time and cause/effect may become pertinent to making sense of a narrative film.

According to the German critic Walter Benjamin, “[f]ilm is unique among the arts, because of the fact that it is not unique” (Benjamin in Hill 1998, 12). Benjamin wrote that of all the arts, film is without ‘aura’, without a character, and it seems to have no origin: “[i]t is there, whole and complete, ready for our enjoyment or the enjoyment of anyone else with the price of admission, a monthly cable fee, or money for rental.” And exactly this lack of uniqueness and the ease of access make it the most social and communal of the arts.

Film addresses the world and is a mass engagement of the imagination unlike any other art form. Therefore the textuality of film is different from painting or a book, because it's less personal, yet more accessible. It's not unique or intimate, but it's still closer to the world we live in. And that same text without 'aura' becomes the text that resonates across many consciousnesses. As Hill suggests (Hill 1998, 13) in film we (the audience) are witness to a rich and often conflicting structure of imaginative, economic, cultural and ideological events. Since films are mostly made for profit, they want and try to speak to the largest number of people as possible, and by doing so, they have to appeal to what their makers believe are the most acceptable and common beliefs of audience. The only thing is that audience often responds differently from what filmmakers expect. The result is that the expectations and responses to a film text often lie in the cultural beliefs and individual norms and values. Therefore film text can be read and interpreted in many different ways.

And since metatext is both, a work of art and a manifestation of theoretical thought, I will try to show Luhrmann's theoretical thought in his work of art of *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*.

4 FILM ADAPTATION

Shakespeare is known for producing the plays, whose complexity and brilliance reflect the society of his time. Of course by now the context has changed, but the social functioning still remains the same. And exactly this is the main reason that Shakespeare's legacy had become a filmic appropriation as well. As we all know, filmmaking includes an outstanding technological apparatus, which is capable of many accomplishments, while at the same time, it also represents an artistic medium, which can address mass society. Film is not the only medium responsible for popularizing Shakespeare, but it certainly is the most accessible.

When talking about adapting art pieces, I'm implying to a translation of language, changing of medium that is inevitably creating a different product as a result. An adaptation is not a copy of its source. Adapting is creating a new original. It is understood as an original work that exists by itself and adapting it means being creative with it and using technical processes of distinguished nature. What really matters in an adaptation is its efficiency in translating to the new medium and its acceptance and appreciation as a film. The source might be present in the film in different stages, but mostly as an outside material to inspire creative ideas towards the construction of a personal and unique interpretation of the 'original'. Thus the basic element in adapting a story is not re-telling the source, but rather to approach it from a different perspective and under a different context. An adaptation therefore expresses the different ways in which it was made and offers a new 'product'.

Another important fact is that adaptation has a different author from that of the 'original', which is as important as the entire process of adapting the 'original', because he (the 'new' author) also gives his personal mark to the interpretation. In the process Luhrmann has produced a complex Shakespeare adaptation that can perhaps be said to be the most 'postmodern' of them all. He has given considerable attention to taking Shakespeare's play and making it work within the contemporary and modern setting. He desired from the first scenes, as Lucy Hamilton suggested, »[to] disarm the audience, many of whom thought they knew what to expect" and make them see the play afresh (Hamilton 2000, 45). The choice of name for Luhrmann's film gives an indication of his mission in trying to approach his story line to the »original«, by using his own 'touch'

and still not change it a lot. He tried to reclaim the play from its association as rarefied and stagy. Recognizing the noisy, sexy and violent elements to Shakespeare's storytelling was significant for Luhrmann in returning to the play's roots, since Shakespeare knew that he was providing entertainment even then. Luhrmann sees the driving force behind his work as "addressing the original Shakespeare," reviving the play by bringing it back from the snobbish Victorian age and showing the power of the Shakespearean tale to number of people (Hamilton 2000).

4.1 ORIGINAL LUHRMANN®

»My own view is that truly great story telling defies time, geography and the so called rules of right and wrong; the proof of its worth is that it lives on.«

Baz Luhrmann (Cineaste 1997, 48)

Baz Luhrmann, in the Cineaste magazine, observes that his adaptation of Shakespeare's tragedy avoids to change and to add words from the play. The director is aiming to keep the colour and taste of Shakespeare's language, just to reveal »his lyrical, romantic, sweet, sexy, musical, violent, rude, rough, rowdy, rambunctious storytelling.« (Luhrmann 1998, 66). Luhrmann refused to change the 'original' too much, because he believes in the rhythm and musicality of the Shakespeare's work, which he attempted to keep. Although he worked under different circumstances, he could not avoid the changes in the world he created on screen, having the pop music dictating the pace. Luhrmann took the liberty in restructuring and cutting the story, in order to keep the attention of the audience, »a very noisy, various, savage yet honest audience,« (Baz Luhrman), as was Shakespeare's audience more than four centuries ago, believes Luhrmann.

The Shakespeare's tragedy of Romeo + Juliet is a recontextualization or rather reinvention based on a set of new social relations and new media modes. Baz Luhrmann directed a very personal reading of the two lovers, which is especially noticed in contextual adaptation of the tale – his film is detailed translation of the everlasting love story.

As a performance, *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* puts more weight to television citation than theatrical, with the address to an MTV audience that is embodied in its urban setting, quick cuts, visual saturation, and pop-music soundtrack. Kauffmann (in Worthen 1997) sees Luhrmann as »in effect doing a translation, almost as if he had rendered the text into Finnish or Bulgarian, with a few English wisps remaining as souvenirs of the origin«. Despite the film's effort to distance itself from the Shakespearean »origin«, it still seems to try it in contemporary culture, to reenact ideas about Shakespearean authority in performance and to reflect on the relation among text, performance and citation. Thus the director's film is filled with visual innuendos to citations and stagings of the text.

The film's excessed mise-en-scene, with its colourfully chaotic culture is mixing with the old Elizabethan language and staying true to the story. Many words of the text are represented visually as words and/or labels. For example: the »swords« that Tybalt and Benvolio refer to in the opening scenes are elaborate, shiny pistols inlaid with religious icons: when Benvolio cries, »Put up your swords«, the camera focuses on his pistol and – more important – on the manufacturer's label, which is engraved on the barrel: Sword 9mm Series 5. Further on when Mr. Capulet calls for his »long sword«, he reaches above the door of the limousine where is an automatic rifle actually labelled Longsword.

Luhrmann's film is full of such texts or perhaps gags: the Grove of Sycamore, an abandoned movie theatre by the beach where Romeo wanders at the play's opening; the Post Haste mailing company that Friar Lawrence uses to contact Romeo in Mantua. Actually the visual texture of the tragedy is filled with hints that go beyond the lines of Shakespeare's play to the texture of Shakespeare the author and cultural icon: the Globe Theatre pool hall where Romeo hangs out; a sign for »The Merchant of Verona Beach«; the billboard slogan »I am thy Pistol and thy Friend«; »Prospero« drawn on a fence; maybe even Lady Capulet's Elizabeth-Taylor-as-Cleopatra costume for the ball.

According to Worthen, one of the most important aspects of the Luhrmann's modern tragedy is its alertness to the process of surrogation, its simultaneous appeal and displacement of the »original« (Worthen 1997, 26). The film marks its fidelity to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* at the precise moment that it marks its distance from it,

when it cites the text (like »long sword«) as text – a text that is replaced by performance and changed in clearly modern, non-Shakespearean visual content. In the modern tragedy, the text is considered both as cultural commodity and as an item in commodity culture (Worthen 1997, 26). Elizabethan language the actors speak is a part of wider texture that mixes with the »Shakespearean« vocabulary of advertising and connects the text to other media and discourses of film, music and video.

To put the Shakespeare into the play is to put down the ways that contemporary forms of cultural production can and do define their authority through the representation of Shakespeare and the ways that the Bard's text appears as the ghostly »origin« of a modern process of surrogation. When Luhrmann is referring to the cultural and verbal text of Shakespeare, he is presenting this version of Shakespeare's work not as a translation of the work but as a repetition of the work, a repetition that requests and transfers a textual »origin« by performing the text in a specific environment – the verbal, visual, gestural and behavioural dynamics of youth culture, of MTV. The text put into Luhrmann's film fails to transform the images into Shakespearean properties: like the word *sword* and the pistol it labels, text and image stand in a dialectical relation of difference (Worthen 1997, 27). Thus the performance of the text within the contemporary ways is not the betrayal of the old original play, but as it's shown in Luhrmann's film, it marks the ways that performance produces the terms of its authorization in performance.

As Worthen suggests (1997, 28) as a surrogate, »[t]he film memorializes a past (that it partly invents) and constitutes a new work. Romeo »+« Juliet makes visible what most performances try to conceal: that dramatic performance can only cite its textual »origins« with an additive gesture, a kind of »+«. Therefore, as Worthen concludes (1997), there is now a commonplace that no such thing as an »authentic« Shakespeare exists and that authenticity is identified with high culture opposed to modernization and translation.

5 CASE STUDY: BAZ LUHRMANN'S WILIAM SHAKESPEARE'S ROMEO + JULIET

The 1996s Hollywood version is an adaptation of 400 year old tragedy by William Shakespeare, as have been many others before that. The past 15 years or so, we have witnessed a number of new approaches to the ‘staging’ of Shakespeare on screen, thanks to the many creative and gifted directors (Baz Luhrmann, Kenneth Branagh, Peter Greenway). The adaptations produced by these artists deliver often irrelevant and richly re-imagined takes on their source material. They are very self-conscious and experimental in their deployment of filmic media, and challenge their audiences to rise to the occasion of their unusual presentation of plot and discontinuous approach to storytelling and character. The style they used is “[a]llusively rich, mixing popular and high culture idioms in ways that provide new avenues of access to Shakespeare for scholars and popular audiences alike” (Cartelli and Rowe 2007, 1).

The directors I mentioned above called attention to the archaism of speaking Shakespearean language in a hyper-modern setting, as Luhrmann did in *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996). The title highlights a generational turn in modes of adaptation shared by other Shakespeare filmmakers of this period. Auerism of the kind that Franco Zeffirelli launched in his groundbreaking *Romeo and Juliet* (1968) has become a received tradition. Where the directors reflect on that tradition, they tend to envision that Shakespeare text and its performances as a literary, auditory and visual archive ripe for reinvigoration.

For the current generation of moviegoers, Baz Luhrmann’s *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet*, which was far and away the most profitable and popular Shakespeare film produced in the last 30 years, has partially changed the iconic status of Zeffirelli’s film. Where the earlier film moved the play into a period street in a realist mode, Luhrmann sets it in a hyper-realist, surreal and modern cityscape. So in this case of the Shakespeare’s film adaptations, the audience must get used to the 400-year-old vocabulary, as we have seen it in Baz Luhrmann’s film.

In the process Luhrmann has produced a complex Shakespeare adaptation that can perhaps be said to be the most ‘postmodern’ of them all. The primary feature of

periodising mode is taking the story and characters of a Shakespeare play and transporting them completely into the cultural trappings and social dynamic of a distinctly recognizable historical period. This mode became 'popular' after 1990. Directors of 'updating' stage productions had long employed special costuming, sets, lighting and sound effects to 'periodise' them into evocative cultural or political settings aimed at making the drama more alive and relevant to a modern popular audience (Hindle 2006).

William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet is mostly aimed at young movie audiences. Luhrmann constructs the periodised socio-cultural setting for the adaptation of the play and is designed so that the audience can be entertained by the many flashy, sophisticated, loud and extremely colourful elements of popular culture. Luhrmann's movie perfectly intertwines the original 400-year-old vocabulary with the popular culture of 20th century, using lots of lights, colours, fancy cars, designer clothes and mostly MTV style of the new era. Luhrmann has given considerable attention to taking Shakespeare's play and making it work within the contemporary setting. He desired from the first scenes to "disarm our audience, many of whom thought they knew what to expect" and make them see the play afresh (Hamilton 2000, 45).

His very pop-version of the play contains a bombardment of imagery and music and is, according to Elsie Walker (Walker 2003) a postmodern assault of the scenes. He uses the narrative drive of modern mass-market movies, therefore creating a highly energetic and primarily visual method of story-telling. The scenes and speeches are divided into easily digestible fragments and sequences, and the impact, they cause, is supported by visual paraphrases, music and camerawork. But his filming method still allows him some of the interpretative freedom or in Loehlin's words: » [t]he film operates not so much as a series of textual exchanges, but through a pattern of interwoven and overlapping visual codes,« which are derived from popular culture including film intertextuality (Loehlin 1997, 78). With the use of film intertextuality, the director also creates much of his meaning of the film. By using references to other films in his *Romeo + Juliet*, he creates new frames of perspective through which to consider Shakespeare's work, new contexts that in turn highlight the different paces and genres within the single play. But of course, there is no film, no text that would exist in some sort of artistic vacuum. Within every film there are references, »quotes«, elements or

movements reminiscent of other films, made consciously or not. In Luhrmann's postmodern film, his references and elements are made in the highly conscious way in which he »quotes« various films of different genres.

In this sense Baz Luhrmann has made two films in one: the metacinematic elements, the plentifulness of popular culture signifiers determines ripples of association in motion, speaking to an audience which are not necessarily familiar with Shakespeare's works. Different elements of Luhrmann's adaptation (e.g. the popular culture references, the setting, music and the symbolism) build a combined art of story-telling. With these elements he rewards the attention of his viewers while ensuring that they will be altered to everything they need to know (Luhrmann 1997). Luhrmann's film not subtle in its effects and, as he mentioned in his radio interview, he felt justified in cutting parts of the original that slowed film's rapidity/speed in the interest of maintaining relation with his predominantly young audience. According to Robert Hapgood, Shakespeare was not just a popular artist but also a popularizer, » [t]ransferring from page to stage and from narrative to drama some of the central writings of his time.« (Hapgood 1997, 84). Therefore Luhrmann is a self-professed »re-popularizer« since he made the Bard's old tragedy popular again. William Shakespeare's *Romeo + Juliet* is not just an easy and mindless modernization, but a re-contextualization of the play. The director's interpretation of Shakespeare's tragedy pays homage to the primary source and to the filmic versions that came before.

5.1 VIOLENT OPENING OF THE FILM

The film begins with a television newscaster reading the prologue, which is then repeated in both voice and text as we are introduced to the setting, Verona Beach, and the cast of characters. It is a meditation on the nature of authority in a changing social order – one of which feudal state is still dominant but under challenge from the increasingly powerful bourgeoisie. The original Shakespeare's tragedy presents this conflict as between two feudal families under the jurisdiction of a feudal superior, Prince of Verona.

The central story characters and star-crossed lovers Romeo and Juliet convey the emotional impact of a social crisis that eventually affect all citizens. Luhrmann's new-age story deals with a similar crisis, only more modern. The conflict is between the institutions of the democratic state and the oligarchic power of wealthy and powerful families (Cranny-Francis 2007, 126). The bourgeois individualism that has created the democratic state reaches a sort of expression in just one powerful individual who decides to stand in a kind of romantic opposition to the state. As Anne Cranny-Francis suggests, » the film enacts the conflict through its profusion of intertext, imagery, repetition – the metatextual quality which characterizes it.« (Cranny-Francis 2007, 126).

5.1.1 'READING' THE TELEVISION

Like nothing else in history, the television has the power to manipulate ordinary people into confusing reality with fantasy to the extent of having them emotionally identify with celebrities that they have never laid eyes on, nor ever will (Rothwell 2004, 230). The film's blurring together of the multiple planes of perception in the world of the audience, the world of the movie, of the illusory television newscast, which is so easily confused with an actual newscast.

The whole substance and story of this film is 'contained' by its status as 'item' on a TV news programme, delivered from the screen of a 1970s style television set that appears in the centre of the frame at the very opening of the movie (Hindle 2007, 178). There is an audible clicking of the dial telling us the (click) 'Twentieth Century Fox presents' (click) 'A Bazmark production', a final click bringing up an African-American newsreader who speaks the play's prologue in iambic pentameter with the predictable blandness of modern TV reportage. According to John Hartley (1982), » [t]he newsreader 'frames' the topic at the beginning, then follows the presentation of images and 'actuality' from 'out there' at the street level,« in the form of dramatic two-hour long documentary. The story in a story; the story about the life of two families and the story the TV documentary is showing us. The first one depicts the world that film is about (diegesis) and the second is a plot (nondiegesis), an external element to the main story. According to Bordwell (2008, 76), the plot adds material to the story to additionally explain the story.

Figure 5.1: Black newscaster delivering prologue in iambic pentameter



Source: Courtesy of 20th Century Fox (2002)

Further, the same TV screen appears again in the center frame at the end of the film when the reporter returns to comment and relate the play's gloomy epilogue in the sad tones. This highly self-conscious presentation (Hindle 2007, 178) 'containing' filmic device suggests that communications through screen and image in modern culture are so pervasive that there is little difference between our experience of reality and its media representations. This suggestion becomes clearer in the opening scene when a slow zoom enlarges TV image to reveal over the newsreader's shoulder a projected headline icon, 'Star-Cross'd Lovers.' Next to this is an image of *Romeo + Juliet's* broken wedding ring, and as the woman speaks the line 'two hours' traffic of our stage' studio coverage 'goes live'. By watching all this, the spectator can actually mistake the opening of Luhrmann's tragedy for a real TV news, which was sort of an idea of the director. He wanted to show the importance and the impact of television on everyday lives of the predominantly young people, which the modern tragedy was mostly aimed at.

But television is not just a means of manipulation, but also a symbol for popular culture. Luhrmann is mixing popular culture with elements of high culture: Shakespeare is High Culture, television is Low. This High/Low culture divide is not simply a matter of aesthetics, but also the divide between the canonical and the popular, which problematizes the official construction of 'William Shakespeare'. According to John Storey, "The Shakespeare had been an integral part of mainstream culture in the nineteenth century, in the twentieth he had become part of 'polite' culture... The Bard had been transformed from a playwright for the general public, into one for a specific

audience – from popular culture to polite culture, from the property of ‘Everyman’ to the possession of a more elite circle.” Taking this into consideration, Anne Cranny-Francis suggests, that Luhrmann’s film “can be read as a challenge to mainstream, bourgeois ways of representing Shakespeare’s work, which are conventionally used to reinforce mainstream attitudes” (Cranny-Francis 2007, 130). It interrogates High Culture Shakespeare and the supposedly timeless values it represents, but instead the film challenges the spectator to examine those values. Consequently, Luhrmann integrated ‘polite’ culture into common culture by exploiting manipulative elements of television to draw closer to consumer mass-market audience. But not totally without putting his own artistic mark to the film, which he explicitly makes in the title of his film: *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet*. That is, the film is not *William Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet*, but Baz Luhrmann’s *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet*. This is kind of Luhrmann’s acknowledgement reflecting the metatextuality of this film. Rolling Stone critic Peter Travers observes, “It’s a good thing that Shakespeare gets his name in the title, or you might mistake the opening scenes for Quentin Tarantino’s *Romeo & Juliet*” (Travers 1996, 123). This brings us further to religious aspects of the tragedy.

5.1.2 MOCKERY OF RELIGION and GLORIFICATION OF LOVE

Another subject worth mentioning in the opening scenes and in the film in general is religion. In the story the attentive spectator can sense the mockery of a religion, which plays a constant and clashing role in Luhrmann's mise-en-scene.

During the fast-paced Promo, there is the obvious dominance of the cathedral over the landscape. The city of Verona is 'ruled' by the giant statues of Mary and Jesus. This society pervaded by violence, drugs, adultery, and revenge is undoubtedly Catholic and matches Shakespeare's Verona for hypocrisy in the duty paid to this faith. But all this has a deeper meaning in the story, regarding metatextuality. The Christian imagery used in the opening also relates to the main conflict in the story, again also because of the identification of Latino culture with Catholicism. The religion in the film is maybe unrecognizable and unfamiliar to the contemporary followers: neon-lit crosses, a priest with tattoos, Hawaiian shirts, and sinister relationships with his young charges.

Luhrmann's provoking of Christ in this context works to deconstruct this rhetorical construction of Christ as an 'authority', whose role is to validate US political decisions and their social and cultural consequences (Cranny-Francis 2007, 128). But this is just the 400 years old consequence, stemming from Shakespeare himself.

Figure 5.2: Statue of Christ looming over the City



Source: Courtesy of 20th Century Fox (2002)

According to Paul Siegel the long established traditional interpretation of Romeo and Juliet in original Shakespeare's time is that it is a drama of fate or of sheer misfortune in which the lovers are not at all responsible for the catastrophe they suffer. Christians would have regarded the lovers as guilty sinners rather than innocent victims (Siegel 1961) In the Shakespearean world, religion »[r]egulates and reaffirms certain understandings of the social and the self and their relationship to the cosmic and divine; through liturgies and sacramental offices it gives shape to time and meaning to space« (Ward 2003, 18). Graham Ward also mentions that Shakespeare's original play rouses the pre-modern understanding of religion as »piety, devotion, adoration and pilgrimage, rooted in a sacramental vision of the universe in which the sacred and the secular are bound together« (Ward 2003, 168). Therefore, the play is a kind of a witness to a crisis in the Catholic world-view and the beginning of a new, more modern understanding of religion. The final working out of this crisis is the shift towards a new understanding of religion, which is illustrated in Luhrmann's filmic production of Romeo + Juliet 400 years later.

The two young lovers have faith in love, their religion is love. But their love is reckless, tending to destruct itself, and yet still glorious. »*I long to die,*« are Juliet's words, when she is threatening to kill herself, which suggests that she is prone to suicide. According to Christianity, suicide is a sin and therefore ensures damnation. But if such love brings sorrow and death, it is nevertheless worth it. Friar Laurence has ambivalent feelings toward Romeo and Juliet's love, by saying: »*These violent delights have violent ends, and in their triumph die, like fire and powder, which as they kiss, consume.*« It is the lovers' paradise of the religion of love, not the after-life of Christian religion. If their love is destructive, it is also ecstatic and blind, since they do not think clearly.

Romeo and Juliet dramatizes this cosmic love manifesting itself through sexual love and working against strife and disorder in society. Everything around them is chaotic, but their love stands oppose to the hate and chaos of their parents and society. Still, ironically, it is the cosmic power of their love that helps to bring about their own destruction and, at the same time, ends the hatred between their parents. As Siegel mentions, that »[a]lthough the hero contributes to his own disaster, the main cause of it lies outside of him« (Siegel 1961). The lovers are young and may be reckless, but the guilt for them goes to their parents. Therefore the violent and swift passion of Romeo and Juliet is the answering force to their parents' furious and violent hate. And since it was the hate that at the end killed the lovers, it was the love that eventually restored the social order and brought peace to Verona. Love over hate – love conquers hate.

5.1.3 SIGNIFIERS/LANGUAGE

With entering Luhrmann's clearly postmodern mise-en-scene, we are tempted to 'read' what remains Shakespearean in contemporary remake. The spectator can notice different signs or the billboards, which dominate certain early scenes, like the »Globe Theatre Pool Hall,« »The Merchant of Verona Beach,« and »Out Damned Spot Cleaners,« as well as advertisements for consumable goods, such as »Pound of Flesh« fast-food, »Rosencrantzky's« restaurant, and »Prospero's finest whiskey: the stuff dreams are made of« and another billboard (shown above the Montague boys as they discuss going to the Capulet ball) displays the white words »Wherefore I'amour?« against a red background: the colours and script imitate and advertisement for Coca-

Cola. The point in these billboards is in the meeting of »high« culture (allusions to Shakespeare) and »low« (pop) culture. They refigure the high-cultural status of Shakespearean verse as an homage to postmodern consumer culture.

Figure 5.3: »Wherefore l'amour?« imitating ad for Coca-Cola



Source: Courtesy of 20th Century Fox (2002)

Luhrmann is similarly, self-consciously cheeky in his representation of the weaponry: the rapiers, swords and longsword of Shakespeare's text become guns with the words »rapier«, »sword«, »longsword« recast as trademarks.

Figure 5.4: Close-up - Sword 9mm Series S



Source: Courtesy of 20th Century Fox (2002)

According to Lehmann (2001, 203), »Luhrmann »feeds« on Shakespeare's words, seeking to »mix and divide« them into a kind of filmic mixture.« And when his camera fails to consume Shakespearean verse, Luhrmann brings an ironizing and literalistic approach to the language. For example, at the Capulet ball, Luhrmann playfully converts Juliet into Romeo's »bright angel«, as she appears masked in an angel costume. Luhrmann has even more fun with Shakespeare's memorable account of Paris as a »precious book of love« that only »lacks a cover«. In the contemporary adaptation, Paris is given a literal »cover« when »Dave Paris« is introduced to us as a coverboy, featured as *Timely Magazine's* »Bachelor of the Year.«² These cheeky visual variations are Luhrmann's desirable attempt to authorize the legendary version.

As Barbara Hodgdon puts it: »A filmed adaptation of Shakespeare posits two auteurs, two kinds of textual authority: in the play and in the 'directorial signature' (Hodgdon 1999, 33). Having successfully thwarted the legend of star-crossed love in his Romeo and Juliet spin-off, the director attempts to do something original with Shakespeare's »original« as the ultimate test of his auteurist aspirations.³ However, Luhrmann invents a whole new language to contain the twists and turns of his own need to keep one step ahead of the Romeo and Juliet legend, as the filmic action unfolds through the rhythms of whip pans, lightning cuts, super-macro slam zooms, static super-wide shots, tight-on point-of-view shots, and other vertigo-inducing angles courtesy of crash-crane camerawork.⁴ This highly texturized, frenzied mise-en-scene is the trademark, or what we might call – in keeping with the name of Luhrmann's production company – the »Bazmark« of his cinematic language. According to Luhrmann's fellow collaborator Catherine Martin, the director succeeds in leaving his mark on a film whose title insists only on the mark of William Shakespeare has left on the Romeo and Juliet legend:

² Of these provocative cinematic moves, Worthen remarks that »[t]he film sets the dramatic performance within a visible texture of verbal citation,« and, therefore, »far from being authorized by its script, [the film] produces the terms of its authorization in performance« (»Drama, Performativity, and Performance,« 89). Also discussing Luhrmann's punning vision of Shakespeare's text, Hodgdon observes that »Juliet's white dress and wings literalize her as Romeo's 'bright angel'; he becomes her 'true knight', a Boy King Arthur in shining armour – guises that situate the lovers within medieval Christian romance even as they send up that myth. Although Dave Paris's astronaut get-up connects him metonymically to the heavenly Juliet, it just as clearly spaces him out to the story's margin's...«.

³ Alexandre Astruc's concept of the auteur is a film artist who uses the camera as a figurative »stylus« or pen.

⁴ These camera movements are representative of Luhrmann's stylistic repertoire and are recorded throughout the screenplay. See Baz Luhrmann and Craig Pearce, *William Shakespeare's Romeo & Juliet: The Contemporary Film, The Classic Play* (New York: Laurel Leaf Books, 1996), 1-162

»Whether you love or hate the film, it's completely unique and very much a director's film – it has Baz's vision stamped all over it.«⁵

5.2 THE GIST

By now we have seriously walked into the gist of the film and the development of the story. The repeated use of images from the Prologue continues further on and takes us to the six-minute gas-station scene of the action, using a variety of different techniques that introduce us to members of the Montague and Capulet youth gangs in violent but witty confrontation. Luhrmann does this by imitating or parodying previous film styles (John Woo) and also quotes from the tough-guy acting styles and gestures of Clint Eastwood and Charles Bronson (Hindle 2005, 182). Through the Promo, fire has signified civil disruption and chaos and loss of control by state, which continues through the rest of the film, since the scene in the gas station works in a similar way. To situate the film's story of institutional authority and individual responsibility, the audience once again enter a series of intertextual references to other film genres (e.g. urban thriller, action, western and martial arts) as well as repeated images of religious icons (Christ and the Virgin), fire, cars, weapon and boots. All these icons and images bring the concerns of the Prologue into the story proper and also continue the film. Throughout the film, the setting or the landscape becomes even more clear and open, the characters become 'alive' and the whole story just 'falls into the right place', with all the colours and lights accompanying the whole mise-en-scene.

5.2.1 THE SETTING

The setting in Luhrmann's William Shakespeare's *Romeo + Juliet* was filmed in Mexico City and on the beaches of Veracruz (Verona Beach) and in Churubusco Studios (The Capulet's masquerade ball). As already mentioned above, Luhrmann presents the Prologues as a news bulletin that gives the events a feeling of immediacy – the urgency of an on-the-spot news report. Luhrmann emphasizes the setting as the Prologue ends.

⁵ Catherine Martin, quoted here from Bryce Hallet, »bryce Love Romeo and Leave Titanic,« Sydney Morning Herald, 21 April 1998, page 7.

The camera zooms forward to scenes of Verona, with the words »IN FAIR VERONA« flashing on the screen. Luhrmann presents Verona as a modern city, dominated by scenes of chaotic urban violence. Aerial shots pan across the cityscape as police cars and helicopters fly over the city, and human casualties are strewn across the ground. There is also an enormous statue of Jesus, 'watching' the happening. These opening shots of a city divided by violence set the scene for the subsequent action of the film. The film uses these graphic images of violence to communicate the 'contemporary' setting to the audience. Signifiers of the modern western world (emblems of mafia gang-land hostility: guns, fast cars, tattoos; emblems of lurid wealth, of consumer culture, excess and decay; gaudy colours, huge billboards, cheap ostentatious jewelry, a massive cityscape dominated by the skyscrapers of Montague and Capulet) set off a string of associations which constitute a metaphysical whole. Verona is imagined as a cultural mirror through which Luhrmann asks urgent questions about the western world of the nineties. His Verona is a place beset by urban violence, a media that assaults the senses with a barrage of information, oppressive consumerism, depersonalization, the suffocation of innocence, faithlessness and violence: patterns of oppression which may be seen in our modern world. It is a world where a regular American girl of Juliet's age can easily find a gun to kill herself.

The film's first six lines of the Prologue are repeated as a voice-over to accompany more news footage covering the latest outbreak of violence caused by the feud. Media coverage of the civil unrest stresses how the feud affects the entire city. As the voice reads, "*Two houses both alike in dignity,*" the camera pulls back to reveal the photographs of both families on the front page of the city's newspaper. The next two lines of the Prologue are displayed as newspaper headlines and juxtaposed with clips of riot police attempting to restore order on the streets. The media's presentation of the feud illustrates the impact of the "*ancient grudge*" on the city. In the opening scene, the city of Verona is renamed Verona Beach, evoking America's famous city on the beach, Miami, and also depicts both urban glamour and crime. The director clearly differentiates the downtown area from the beach, as he associates the city with the violence of the feud and the idyllic beach with love and peace. The beach and the sea, become a place for change as opposed to the concrete and unchanging nature of the city. It is not a simple matter of Luhrmann having placed the action in a recognizable nineties world. Luhrmann is concerned that the

landscape should not only say certain things within the context of the drama, but that it should actually be the natural world in which characters must assert themselves and find their definition (Davies 1998, 22).

Baz Luhrmanns use of beach can be 'read' as the place where the worlds of love and conflict clash when romantic Romeo encounters “fiery” Tybalt. Mercutio is also killed there, which is symbolizing a loss of innocence and a violation of peace. The director places a huge Elizabethan stage on the beach to acknowledge the film’s awareness of its Shakespearean heritage. According to Judith Buchanan it is the dramatically derelict ruined theatre on the beachfront (whose surviving arch still has written the words 'The Sycamore Grove') that stands for such a space in the terms of the film. The culturally decayed stretch of beach and the amusement park at Saycamore Grove, inhabited by drunks, whores, hustlers, the poor and marginalised, is a horizontal open space where the feud-entrapped Montague and Capulet boys can express their real dissatisfactions without interference (Hindle, 2007: 183). It is unlimited space ideally suited for them to 'play out' their own frustrated destiny, literally so on the ruined proscenium arch stage whose only audience is themselves.

Figure 5.5: The ruined Proscenium Stage is taken as a representative of a public arena in which films are viewed communally



Source: Courtesy of 20th Century Fox (2002)

The stage also provides several characters an alternative vehicle for expressing their emotional development, or lack of it. Here Luhrmann presents a youthful and, at that time, immature Romeo seated on stage, delivering his "*O brawling love*" speech as a voice-over. The speech sounds stilted, stiff, and staged as though Romeo were a young, incompetent actor who merely recites his lines mechanically without understanding their meaning (Buchanan 2005). Placing a ruined movie theatre among the washed up and messed up beach can seem perverse, according to Buchanan. The movie theatre is taken not as a general representative of cinema, but more precisely as the representative of a public arena in which films are viewed communally. Luhrmann's setting, the city itself, offers resistance to Romeo and Juliet who try to define a separate, personalized cinematic space for themselves. If, as Barthes insists, »the city is a discourse and this discourse is truly a language«, we should pay close attention to what Luhrmann's city »says« (Barthes 1976, 92). Luhrmann's setting could be a prototype for imaging a postmodern city as described by the architecture specialist David Harvey, The urban world of this film is a »collage« of highly differentiated spaces and mixtures. This stratling, eclectic »collage city« is comprised of the decrepit fairground, the ruined stage, the corporate cityscape flanking an immense statue of Christ, and the massive Capulet mansion which is comprised of Edwardian (a parquet floor, ionic columns, gardens structured into squares) and modern (Juliet's pink bedroom decor, the massive pool and security guard booth) elements.

The ruined stage, in particular, prompts a sense of spatial and metaphysical dislocation because it does not seem »real«, it does not appear as an integral part of the city but rather as an old fragment inserted into new context. At times, the use of Shakespeare's verse invokes a similar sense of dislocation placed, as it is, in such a modern, eclectic context. In the collage mise-en-scene, in the quoting of various films of diverse genres and the portrayal of the characters themselves (of various nationalities and colours, from the camp black Mercutio, to the Blanche Dubois Lady Capulet, to the spaghetti Western Italian Tybalt), Luhrmann presents and alludes to many kinds of cultures, »realities« and »texts« which collide, which interpenetrate explosively. The coexistence of many styles does not convey a sense of freedom of expression but overwhelming oppressiveness. The film's playfulness and the self-ironizing references to other films, its eclectic quotation, its »brutal aesthetics«; they all undermine metaphysical solemnities (Walker 2003).

5.2.2 ROMEO + JULIET

It's Romeo + Juliet that the whole story is about and they will also be the center of my story. They represent and emphasize the only good and pure that is left from the rotten city of Verona and the chaos of the society. They believe that they are able to guide their own destinies. The personalized close-up space of Romeo and Juliet, the solemnity of their love is juxtaposed, and is incomparable with the space of Luhrmann's city. The city is an »antagonistic, voracious world of otherness«, where different cultures, texts, architectures, and personalities clash and jostle for supremacy. Metaphysical absolutes, like the love Romeo and Juliet seek to create and preserve, have no place in this world. The close-ups on Romeo and Juliet sometimes »block-out« the setting, conveying some sense of a search for a fantasy world, the illusory »high« that takes them and us beyond immediate physical »realities« into pure imagination.

5.2.2.1 JULIET

She's very down-to-earth, she's very brave, she's very perceptive and she knows what's up. She's been sheltered, because of her parents and her title that she has... and it's sort of like she's locked in a tower. But she has a buddy nurse, who taught her a few tricks along the way and I think she's lonely. She doesn't have many friends and when she meets Romeo, it's just so exciting and wonderful. It's like a breath of fresh air (Claire Danes on Juliet's character, William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet, 2002)

Figure 5.6: Juliet



Source: Courtesy of 20th Century Fox (2002)

Luhrmann's Juliet is a picture of stillness, a body frequently lost in the frantic pace and »movement« of Luhrmann's film. At the Ball, when we first see her, she is masked as an angel with wings. In the postmodern frenzy of Luhrmann's film world, where images are devoid of depth or truth and »Christian symbols stripped of meaning and translated into designer ornaments«, Juliet's religious statues are empty signifiers: still and porcelain-like, they appear as empty extension of herself. Several critics who reviewed Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* do acknowledge that the film centers on DiCaprio's Romeo rather than Danes's Juliet. For instance, Jose Arroyo comments that »[i]t is Romeo who »bears the brunt of feeling« a »superb performance« (Arroyo 1997, 9). Michael Anderegg wittily describes her as »an ideal Victorian Juliet« who is »neither a contemporary teenager nor a Shakespearean heroine«. He also suggests that Luhrmann's focus on Romeo is, »in a sense, a reversal of the dynamics of Shakespeare's play, where Juliet is clearly the one who articulates much of the play's emotional texture« (Anderegg 2003, 349).

Luhrmann's camera transforms Danes's Juliet into a still, objectified body, and at moments where Shakespeare's play demands passion and energy, she is virtually erased from the spectator's gaze. In her introductory scene, the blatant colours, whirling operatic music and numerous pans and zooms through the Capulet mansion overwhelm the brief image of a young girl's face underwater. Lost in the apparent chaos of the Capulet household, Juliet is overshadowed by the impact of her mother's dramatic entrance. Gloria Capulet breezes into her daughter's bedroom on speeded-up camera; she talks emphatically about Paris and squeezes into her Cleopatra corset with all servants attending to her. With her daughter's gaze remaining fixed upon her, Lady Capulet instructs Juliet to »*speak briefly*« - and indeed she does, for the remainder of the film. Danes's Juliet is not only still: she is also frequently silent. Her character suffers most from Luhrmann's textual cuts, and her verbal expressions of passion are often weakened by the apparent denial of her screen presence. At moments where Shakespeare's Juliet is able to take control of the language, Danes is ignored by Luhrmann's camera as it repeatedly searches for Romeo. As she speaks her first lines of the shared sonnet in the ball scene, the camera does not rest on her face, but instead focuses on Romeo's in an extreme close-up, thus privileging his reaction over her expression of desire. As a result of her absence from the spectator's gaze, Juliet's lines in the shared sonnet lose all emphasis and control.

5.2.2.2 ROMEO

Obviously, Luhrmann concentrates mostly on male actions, as we enter the party scene through the skewed perspective of »Romeo's acid-addled gaze« (Hamilton 2002, 120). As Romeo enters past the guards, several extreme close-ups of Romeo's eyes are accompanied by the displacement of the line »thy drugs are quick«. The camera then reveals the »excesses« of the party from Romeo's perspective: Mercutio, in the bright lights of his drag performance, comes uncomfortably close to the camera with red-painted lips; Tybalt, dressed in devil horns, kisses Lady Capulet; and Lord Capulet, with sweating painted cheeks and his toga raised to his knees, sings in girlish squeals.

Figure 5.7: Romeo



Source: Courtesy of 20th Century Fox (2002)

Baz Luhrmann not only privileges male aggressions and actions, but his film also privileges Romeo's perspective. At the Capulet's ball, the drug-induced blurry visions imply a rejection of »weakened« masculinity it is quickly »saved« in the next scene, when Romeo takes off his mask, which is indicating the end of his distorted gaze. By doing so, he abandons the »abnormal« visions of his bad trip that for a second pose threat to his masculinity. The camera view normalizes, and Romeo beholds Juliet through the water of an aquarium, now with fresh eyes, recalling his line, »*Call me but love, and I'll be baptis'd*«. In a subconscious fashion, heterosexual love (Mercutio's obvious inclination towards Romeo) is »normalised« through the film's coded structures of seeing. Another important fact of Luhrmann's privileging of Romeo is when he enters

the tomb, where Juliet lies presumably dead. With the camera closely following Romeo's movements, Luhrmann's tomb scene emphasizes the need to look away from Juliet's »assumed corpse,« frequently positioning her body out of camera shot and instead drawing the viewer's gaze toward Romeo's reaction to the discovery of her body. A further irony is that because Romeo also fails to look on Juliet's body, he fails to see her waking up. He is so consumed by his own grief that he does not see her body begin to move. Although the spectator is made aware of this, Luhrmann's camera is likewise so preoccupied with Romeo's reactions and the impact of his suicide that Juliet's actions after her waking seem of little consequence: her absence from the camera's gaze erases the subjectivity of her body. When Romeo dies, everything ends in Luhrmann's film.

In contrast to this visual lament, Luhrmann's camera is dramatically distanced when Juliet kills herself with Romeo's gun. We hear the gunshot echo frightfully around the church, but all that remains visible of Juliet is her small white figure collapsing onto the bier.

Leonardo DiCaprio on *Romeo + Juliet* movie:

I thought to myself when I heard of this project why do another Romeo and Juliet? It's been done well before, so what's the purpose of doing it now? As soon as I met Baz [Luhrman] and he told me about the themes he wanted to bring [into the movie] I really felt like this is important... it needed that change, it needed this new, sort of, boost to it (William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet, 2002)

In a radio interview Luhrmann likened DiCaprio as Romeo to a kind of Rebel without a cause James Dean, or a young Marlon Brando in that the character is fighting against many things without exactly knowing what it is he is fighting against. Aspects of the story, as presented by Luhrmann, are linked to *Rebel* in that Romeo and Juliet are alienated from their elders and, in American teen movie fashion, battling against »society«. But there is a profound difference between the tone of *Rebel* and Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* because the former does implicitly suggest the possibility of a positive, alternative reality, the resolution of conflicts. In Luhrmann's production the possibility of an ultimate positive, in the portrayal of the lovers, is only fleetingly held out. But DiCaprio's Romeo »doesn't know what he's fighting against«; perhaps because the forces opposing him and Juliet are too big and multi-faceted to be contained in being

»named«. There is seemingly no possibility of an absolute enduring »positive« to counteract all the »negatives« Luhrmann presents in his collage city of gangs, drugs, violence, oppressive media, intergenerational conflict, warring corporate owners, faithlessness, destructive fragmentation, chaos and despair.

5.2.2.3 DEATH OF THE LOVERS

When Romeo takes his last breath, he also takes the last line of the scene: *»thus with a kiss, I die«*, leaving Juliet to act out her final moments in an oppressive silence. Luhrmann increases the tragedy of this scene by having Juliet wake up just before Romeo's death. But rather than injecting any dialogue between the lovers, Luhrmann's alteration robs Juliet of her final speech and cuts her lines after Romeo dies. At the end, all she does is sobbing helplessly like a child and, seeing Romeo's gun, she picks it up and blows her brains out. It is an act that is presented to the spectator as defeat rather than triumph, helplessness rather than control (Scott 2008). Some critics said, that Claire Danes doesn't give a bad performance in Luhrmann's film, but it is Luhrmann who gives a bad performance on film for Danes. For Luhrmann, Shakespeare's »story of woe« is very much one of Romeo, and his Juliet.

5.2.3 COSTUMES AND MAKE-UP

“We spent a lot of time in the computer, we take a photo of the actors and design something on paper and then we met that in to the person so the Baz [Luhrman] could see how it would look in that context. You need to support the word with the visuals with this piece, because we try to get the meaning of the Shakespeare out, that doesn't necessarily only have to follow the words. So think of ways how we can kind of show the words with what you see. I looked into the script mostly and got clues from what they said....and he [Romeo] calls her a bright angel and they call him a prince. And so it just seemed logical that that's what they could be. You can give people a broad

silhouette and then, at some point, subconscious's gonna focus on the little details which fill out the story. So you don't have to explain everything. I knew that there will be a lot of guns in the movie and I knew that we'd have to make them Rapiers or Swords, so we had to make them brand names. Of course I knew nothing about guns, so we bought hundreds of gun magazines, which explained what you could do and couldn't do and how a gun could look and couldn't look for it to function properly. I was allowed to go on and make them, which some of them Baz thought were hilarious and some of them good, so we just made them.” (Costume designer Kym Barrett, William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet, 2002)

Costumes and make-up are also elements of mise-en-scene, just like setting. In the modern pop culture tragedy the costumes and make-up are very colourful, especially regarding the Capulet's ball. But each actor has a costume that goes well with his or her character. The costumes and related clues both work to make the characters swifter to comprehend, and to detract as little as possible from the attention necessary to understanding the dialogue. The film creates visual and aural ripples of association for each character (Walker 2000). Gloria Capulet (Diane Venora) is a “Southern Belle” and the elements of '50s design to her clothing and a thick theatrical make-up comment on her nature of her role in her marriage. She wears a gaudy get-up of a Cleopatra, which suggests her desire for tragic grandeur, while the Old Capulet is a Mafia boss and wears the Ceasaric robes of an august patriarch, suggesting his desire for tyrannical control over wife, family and company (Walker 2000). Paris is characterized by his appearance as that all-American, clean-cut hero of the modern age – the Astronaut.

Figure 5.8: Cleopatra dancing with the Devil



Source: Courtesy of 20th Century Fox (2002)

Tybalt is depicted as being violent, menacing and sleek as a puma. At the Capulet's ball he is dressed as a devil and is shown growling. All the other Capulet boys are dressed as skeletons, which are an implication that they don't play a very important role in the movie; they are practically dead, since Tybalt is the one that dictates them what to do. The colour of his ball costume is black and red, which indicate that he is passionate and has a bad temperament. Tybalt with all his Marian tokens, has more than a little of the devil to him, not only in the styling of his hair and moustache, but also in his choice of masque costume. His gun-play is as exotically skilled as Mercutio suggests the original's sword-play to have been; links to the Western film are playfully suggested by musical accompaniment as well as posturing, not to mention the extreme focus on the grinding out of his cigarette (Hamilton 2000). On the other hand the Montague boys are dressed humorously – Mercutio as a drag queen and others as Vikings and Knights, in kilts and armour.

According to Jennifer L. Martin (Martin 2002) Luhrmann's costuming of *Romeo + Juliet* illuminates his projection of their personalities. Mercutio, who wears the sequined dress of a drag queen to the Capulet ball, is imagined as existing on the social fringe. This suggests the subversiveness of Mercutio's character: the costume emblematically reflects his position as a kind of outcast, seen as outrageous, and seldom taken seriously. We see him on the beach evoking Hamlet by literally taking arms against the sea of troubles, firing his gun into the sea. Romeo's and Juliet's costuming favours blues,

silvers and whites, remarkable for simplicity. In a way they are like “specters, the ones whose hold on life is the most tenuous,” and this is augmented by the degree to which the camera dwells on the gawky and often wounded vulnerability of Romeo (Hamilton 2000). Juliet is dressed as an angel, illustrating her innocence and purity. Romeo, on the other hand, is dressed as a soldier or knight, with chain mail suit, sort of a ‘warlike’ and is more reflective upon his actions. The Capulet’s masquerade ball is a pasture for the spectator’s eyes. There are so many colours with rich and magnificent costumes mixed together. It is obviously with a reason called the masquerade ball.

In general the clothing in the film is mostly comprised of simple geometric lines. There is little or no exaggeration found in these shapes. Even the cloth of the priest is ornamented simply with triangular forms in a simple and sparse pattern. The standard dress shown in this film is not highly tailored. Construction does not appear to be labour intensive or complex. Surface decoration of these standard garments is either non-existent or is of a decorative rather than plastic nature. The emphasis of importance is not on the person or on the garment. So in general I can say that the clothing of the Montagues is more colourful, with pink hair and tattoos and the clothes of the Capulets are mainly dark.

5.3 EPILOGUE

In the final moments the television newscaster delivers the epilogue and the lovers end as they began, the subjects of a rhyming epigram delivered in emotionless monotone. Their bodies, wrapped in white sheets, are shown being hoisted into an ambulance: the picture is slightly fuzzy, suggesting the footage of a documentary or a news broadcast. The kind of comic, self-conscious detachment invoked by the newscaster's delivery of the prologue becomes a poignant reflection on the media's ability to trivialize and, through glib sensationalism, to empty a tragic event of meaning. According to Elsie Walker (2003), Shakespeare's epilogue, in this rhythmic neatness, may seem to trivialize the tragic action but, in Luhrmann's film, the epilogue ironically heightens our sense of the story's grandeur: the contradiction between the newscaster's summary and the passion we have witnessed is marked. At the end, there were two subjects worth

mentioning, which put something extra in the film and without it, the film wouldn't be what it is; the colours and soundtrack.

5.3.1 'LIGHTING THE COLORS'

Much of the impact of an image comes from its manipulation of lighting. As Bordwell mentions “[i]n cinema, lighting is more than just illumination that permits us to see the action.” Lighter and darker areas within the frame help create the overall composition of each shot and thus guide our attention to certain objects and actions (2008, 124). Lighting and the use of colour are another conventional techniques of *mise-en-scène* that Luhrmann uses to his full advantage.

The Capulet Ball is bold and colourful in order to complement the dazzling spectacle of the party. The church is also stunningly bright, but colours are not so confronting and everything is bathed in a white light. The prominent colour in the unique pool scene is pastel blue. Soft blue light shines on the lover's faces and on the objects within the courtyard creating a gentle, romantic mood. The water in the pool is blue, as are Romeo's eyes and even the television screen of the security cameras! More effective use of colour occurs during the sequence leading up to the death of Mercutio. The scene is set on the beach at Sycamore Grove and, right from the beginning, we see that a storm is brewing. The sky is a rich mixture of orange and yellow while the sea is a dirty brown. When Mercutio is fatally wounded, the clouds darken and dust fills the air. The storm swells, the wind blows and the sea becomes black and angry. It is a stunning usage of computer imagery that boldly accentuates the tragedy of Mercutio's death.

But each colour in the film has its own meaning, for one they represent each family and they are consistent through the film. The colours even act as nonverbal layer of the plot, when as a visual pledge of his fidelity, Romeo begins to wear Capulet blue after he marries Juliet and kills Tybalt (Bellantoni 2005, 28). Hot yellow and cold blue mirror the oppositional relationship between the two families. And even more profoundly, because yellow and blue are the colours of the poison each of them takes, they represent the fates of the astrologically challenged young lovers. Juliet's 'poison' was Capulet blue and Romeo's was Montague yellow. Each, in the end, was poisoned by the colours of

their own family. The most meaningful and obvious colours in the film are red, yellow and blue. Red appears first in the title: the subtle »+« of the title, instead of the usual and, is in red. Bellantoni also mentions that red is the colour of rage, as well as passion. When Romeo sees Juliet for the first time, an intense red glows behind him signalling an ardour that will become consummated and sadly terminated before the sun sets twice. There is also one red fish in the fish tank filled with blues and yellows, when Romeo and Juliet first meet. It is as if the two see their ideal lives moving before their eyes. Another example is the gas station, where the Tybalt's match is that ignites the fires of violence and vengeance (literally and metaphorically).

Figure 5.9: Tybalt ignites the fire of violence



Source: Courtesy of 20th Century Fox (2002)

Another important and vivid colour is yellow. For the start, we have this really brightly yellow Montague car. Because it is quite visually aggressive, depending upon the story, can signal both obsessive and daring. But in this film it is also threatening because of the company it belongs to – the Montagues. Even though Romeo is a Montague, he is not in the car at the time of the 'fray'. He is defined by completely different yellow – the golden light (Bellantoni 2005, 30). He is backlit by a golden glow, while he sits writing poetry in a theatre. The theatre Romeo sits in is a hole blasted out of an old wall. Beyond him, silhouetted, stands an empty lifeguard stand. With this vision the director lets us see Romeo's inner nature. Luhrmann also shows us he is mortally defenceless in this wild world of Verona Beach. In essence, Romeo's poetic nature isolates him from

the gang mentality his friends are displaying. The romantic golden light sets us up emotionally.

The Capulets on the other hand have a blue coloured car, which radiates lots of energy and is perfect contrast to Monague's yellow. There is another significance of blue in the movie. The first time we see Juliet, her head is underwater and obviously the water is kind of an escape place for her. For Romeo underwater becomes a place of protection, since we see him several times hiding under the blue water of the Capulet's pool.

5.3.2 SOUNDTRACK

The film could not exist without its soundtrack. The music is an essential element of the film, present in most of the piece, cued in determinant moments. More than setting mood the music tells the story as well. This two hours long presentation could not exist without music, its power would have been lost. The tone of the music changes according to the dramatic implications of the scenes it needs to present. For instance, it is aggressive in the gas station sequence, enthusiastic announcing the beginning of the party, melancholic when Romeo and Juliet first meet, romantic in the balcony scene and gospel during the wedding of the two lovers. To produce a video-clip we need images and music, both working together to achieve an ultimate result. Perhaps this could be a definition for *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*: youth 1996's Shakespeare in motion picture and music, loud and angry rock 'n' roll.

The film made use of modern alternative rock and pop music coupled with a dramatic symphonic score by Nellee Hooper, Craig Armstrong and Marius De Vries. The film's soundtrack was also noted for featuring choral renditions of the songs "When Doves Cry" and "Everybody's Free (To Feel Good)" performed by Quindon Tarver. The soundtrack album to the film was issued in two volumes, with the first release containing most of the songs from the film and Volume 2 containing the original score. Although the film featured the Radiohead song "Exit Music (For a Film)" in the closing credits, the song did not appear on Volume 1; "Talk Show Host", a different Radiohead song also used in the film appeared instead. A number of hit singles resulted from the soundtrack, including "Lovefool" by The Cardigans, "Kissing You" by Des'ree,

“Young Hearts Run Free” covered by Kym Mazelle and Quindon Tarver’s remixed version of “When Doves Cry”. Tarver’s rendition of “Everybody’s Free (To Feel Good)” was later used in Luhrmann’s “Everybody’s Free (To Wear Sunscreen)” single. The final scene in the film contains the final bars from Wagner’s music-drama *Tristan und Isolde*.

The soundtrack was a popular and solid seller and was especially successful in Luhrman’s native Australia, where it was the second highest selling album in Australia in 1997, going five times Platinum in sales. A 10th Anniversary release of the soundtrack with bonus tracks also eventuated (IMDb.com).

6 CONCLUSION

»Maybe I'll live life to the ultimate high, maybe I'll die just like heroes die.«
Prince (Wikiquote)

Romeo + Juliet did exactly that – they have lived fast, they have died young, and they have done it all in iambic pentameter. It was like they have been waiting their whole life for only four days of true living and it's like everything they've done so far didn't even matter. Everyone knows the story of Juliet and her Romeo, but one gets completely new perspective on the old tragedy if he/she watches the Luhrmann's edition of Shakespeare's play. There is so much intense and bright colors, fast camera movements, interesting designer costumes that go well together with fast and fancy cars and the lifestyle the film story presents. It really is a perfect depiction of the new age popular culture lifestyles mixed with the old Elizabethan language of the original tragedy – already-seen story wrapped in the tasty new package with extras, one would never expect. This is exactly why I love this movie and why I chose to analyze it. Luhrmann's movie *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* is the proof that there are endless possibilities on how to make already-seen-stuff completely anew and very appealing: with lots of imagination.

Like nothing else in history, the television has the power to manipulate ordinary people into confusing reality with fantasy to the extent of having them emotionally identified with celebrities that they have never laid eyes on, nor ever will. The film is blurring together of the multiple and different planes of perception in the world of the audience, the world of the movie, of the illusory television newscast, which is so easily confused with an actual newscast, gets as wild as Shakespeare's own dramatic taste. Luhrmann inserts the sonnet prologue within the frame of a television screen which is spoken by the anchorwoman on the evening news. The anchorwoman's formulaic reading of the evening news replaces the formal Elizabethan sonnet as a symbol of oppression. When

Romeo says »O me, what fray was here?« he is actually witnessing a consequence of the rioting between Capulets and Montagues on a television monitor. The whole poetry is rooted in the language of television imagery and the perceptions it presents.

Every moment of the film assumes our eyes are goggle-box eyes, that long hours spent on the sofa have accustomed us to the splendor of commercials and the energy of music videos. Moreover, it takes for granted that we have all bought into a magnificent TV culture obsessed with physical style, where appearance is the only indication of the life. In consequence, many of the apparently decorative elements here – costume, hair, lighting, the lush short moments – are the main vessels of meaning, which Lurhmann cuts and pastes according to his own movie needs: it is there to make whole event colorful, but it is not the true centre of attention. In the final moment of *Romeo + Juliet*, a moving montage of the most intimate moment is followed by a television newscaster's summary. Everything begins and ends with television, which is also the base of Baz Luhrmann's postmodern tragedy. Luhrmann explores the American media's association with glamour, superficiality and corporate sponsorship (Hindle 2007). He has delivered the end he promised: to make a movie the way Shakespeare might have if he had been a filmmaker. *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* encourage the audiences to embrace the spirit of adaptation and give the opportunity to another author to entertain the crowds, because it is entertainment that we all need to escape from reality.

Shakespearean tragedy is commonly the tragedy of men and therefore the tragedy of masculine performance. Although Luhrmann adapted the story and set it into the contemporary world, he remained true to this discourse. He concentrated mostly on male actions and male reactions, only privileging Romeo's perspective, rather than treating Juliet as equal to him, even though she is also the main character. Even the use of guns is in the domain of men, which not only symbolizes patriarchal violence, but it also glamourizes it. Thus the director's focus on mostly 'male' elements and symbols can only mean one thing – Luhrmann's Shakespeare's »story of woe« is very much one of Romeo, and his Juliet (Scott 2008).

Luhrmann's 'created world' results in collage of modern and classic images, which are taken from religion, theater, folklore, technology and pop-culture. His intention was that this crazy chaotic mix would be familiar on some level, making it easier for the

audience to accept and comprehend the language. All the sets were designed to express information about the characters, who moved within them in the best possible way, so that audience would know exactly where they are. Also the costumes were to make characters faster to understand and to distract audience as little as possible from the language. Everything is about »revealing the language, making it less distant and more potent« for its intended audience (Hamilton 2002, 67). Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* perfectly intertwines theory of metatext with visual elements of cinematography, which in consequence opens up totally more appealing and symbolically rich sub-story. It is sort of parallel narrative to the one we actually see on the screen, except it is much richer with meaning. Even though my research study deals with each element of cinematography separately, using the theory of metatext to describe it, at the end we have to look the entire movie as a whole. According to Lilia Avrutin, metatextuality tends to be constituted not only as a dialogue on any possible topic involving text-codes, but also as a discussion of the central point of a culture: an unconscious trauma or the skeleton in the closet of a certain society (Avrutin 1997, 424). The arrangement of metatextual stratification is conditioned by a certain culture's need for a cleansing performance of deeper subconscious levels. The metatextual process is therefore »considered as kind of a ritualistic action of cultural self-reorganization performed through artistic activity« (Avrutin 1997, 424), and metatext itself is a generator of further texts and of future meanings, a structure of new artistic language and social thought.

In *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*, Baz Luhrmann 'dragged the cat out of its bag' by revealing the western world 'defects' that unfortunately still dominate in the contemporary society and they clearly manifest in his adaptation. Even after 400 years the society could not escape the chains of stereotypes, right on the contrary, it is still filled with them. The contemporary society therefore hasn't evolved much, but it still remains on the same level of morality. It seems like the violence is still present nowadays and it has become a common part of everyday lives; like 'nothing special'. It is still typically in the domain of men, just like it has been for so long, with the exception of becoming almost tyrannical, with no rules and no restraints. Actually it is very much a man's world, where women are only a patriarchal commodity. They are there only to take care of men and their needs.

Luhrmann's film packs the whole romance into two-hour long documentary, which is a part of the TV news. With the coming of television, the boundaries have been erased, thus what used to be private, has just become public. The most private and intimate things have become available to anyone who owns a television set, because media rules over people's lives and dictates the tempo and the way of life. According to Galtung and Ruge (Galtung and Ruge 1965) for the event to be worthy of becoming a news, it must include four important elements: it must be current and up-to-date, it must be connected to famous persons, it must be negative and surprising. And since the whole Romeo + Juliet tragedy is presented as an event within the TV news, all the elements of newsworthiness are there: the death of two very young lovers of ruling families shocked the entire Verona City. Because elite society and violence are bread and butter of every news, media is very cruel and merciless mechanism, thus only the strong (i.e. men) can dance on its floor. While contemporary society treats public sphere as the sphere of men, then the private sphere should be the sphere of women, which is complete opposite. They say that behind every successful man, there is a woman, but I would go further and say that behind every successful man, there is a love – for a woman! At the beginning Romeo was nothing, then after he met Juliet, he became something and when he died, to the media he was everything.

These are only a few important and interesting facts about Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*, but the discussion about metatextual elements doesn't end here. Cinema is 'moving pictures', a process of constantly changing images. Objects and figures constantly move in and out of frame, forcing spectator to remain focused at all times while watching film. The presence of the audience is thus an essential part of the very definition of the film, because spectator thinks and he makes sense of a story by reading the text. To make it easier for the spectator to read the text, there are certain 'rules' he needs to follow to understand the film language. Genres function in the way that any language systems does – offering a vocabulary and a set of rules which allow us to 'shape' reality, thus making it appear more coherent and contained, less random and disordered. Genres as 'language systems' perform two essential communicative functions: as structures used by those making meaning, both film-makers and spectators; as discourses for those who wish to talk about their response to the film: audiences, reviewers and critics.

As I already mentioned before, Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* is a postmodern tragedy. The postmodern film-maker is trying to make meaning from what appear as extensive and meaningless combination of detail – visual, verbal and musical signifiers – in contemporary culture. As Belton comments, »in transmitting the reality of their social and cultural context, they reproduce only its incoherence«. This can produce work which is superficially exciting, both thematically and stylistically, but which begs questions about any substantial meaning. I am still talking about Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*, but from the genre perspective, which is more like the topic for my next research regarding films.

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8 SLOVENSKI PREVOD - METATEKST V FILMIH: ŠTUDIJA PRIMERA SHAKESPEARJEVE TRAGEDIJE ROMEO + JULIJA REŽISERJA BAZA LUHRMANNA (1996)

Leta 2005 je kino praznoval sto deset let obstoja in prvega javnega predvajanja. Dandanes je film eden izmed najbolj razširjenih in dostopnih oblik zabave in tako pomemben del našega življenja, ki si ga brez njega težko predstavljamo. Prav tako je poseben medij zabave in »veličasten mehanizem za pripovedovanje zgodb« (Elsaesser in Buckland 2002, 1), ki nam ponuja svet, ki si ga pred iznajdbo kina nihče ni upal zamisliti. Je neposredno povezan z realnostjo, ki jo dejansko tudi prikazuje in s tem komunicira z občinstvom. Je tekst, ki ga lahko beremo in analiziramo.

Za študijski primer sem si izbrala Shakespearjevo tragedijo Romeo + Julija režiserja Baza Luhrmanna iz leta 1996. Film je dober primer stilistično bogate in privlačne kinematografije, ki prepleta elemente sodobne popularne kulture z elementi Elizabetinskega obdobja. Romeo + Julija je klasična ljubezenska zgodba, ovita v kričeč in raznobarven akcijski spektakel. Kako se filmski jezik in metatekst odražata v Luhrmannovi verziji, bom opisala v naslednjih poglavjih.

8.1 FILMSKI JEZIK

Jezik je temeljno sredstvo sporazumevanja, kjer s pomočjo besed lahko opišemo stvari, dejanja, pojme in tudi pripovedujemo zgodbe (Stam in Burgoyne 1992). Filmski jezik pa ni samo take vrste jezik, saj poleg besed uporablja tudi podobe in slike, ki jih vidimo na ekranu in s katerimi pripoveduje zgodbe. Ljudje, ki so bolj izkušeni pri filmih, vidijo in slišijo več, kot ljudje, ki niso redni obiskovalci kina (Monaco 1991, 159).

Vendar preden lahko uživamo v filmih, se moramo najprej naučiti, kako jih brati. In pri tem nam pomaga semiologija ali drugače povedano, veda o znakih. Semiologija preučuje različne jezikovne in ne-jezikovne znakovne sisteme. Christian Metz, najbolj znan semiotik, definira film kot »govorico brez jezika, kot način pomenjanja, ki se je razvijal v procesu narativizacije, 'pripovedovanja zgodb'« (Metz 1971, 551). Prav tako omenja, da so edini specifično kinematografski kodi tisti, ki se nanašajo na gibljivost filmske slike (gibljivost kamere, dinamični spoji med kadri, ipd.), saj so značilni le za film. Ker je torej film 'vizualna govornica', nam zgodbo pripovedujejo slike in podobe, ki jih kot gledalci 'beremo' z ekrana. »Film ni jezik, ki lahko pripoveduje zgodbe,

ampak je jezik, ker lahko pripoveduje zgodbe, » dodaja Metz (Metz v Monaco 1991, 159).

8.2 FILM KOT METATEKST

Metatekst je jezik s katerim se opisuje drugi jezik. Film pripoveduje zgodbo s prikazovanjem podob na ekranu, ki pa dobijo večji pomen s tem, ko jih posamezniki interpretirajo. Za interpretacijo teksta moramo torej brati med vrsticami. Metatekst je potemtakem razlaga, saj nam predstavi pravila igre in nam pokaže, kako brati in razumeti film. Gledalcu razširi obzorje s tem, ko ponudi neobičajno vizijo teksta, ki ga kmalu zatem zamenja podoba na ekranu. In ravno podobe in zvoki so pomemben element filmske kinematografije, katere skrivajo skrito sporočilo. Vendar to skrito sporočilo si gledalci lahko razlagajo na različne načine, ker je vsaka interpretacija subjektivna. Vendar še vedno obstajajo neka pravila, ki so univerzalna in ravno to bom poskušala pokazati tudi na moji študiji primera. Luhrmannov film pa ni v celoti avtorsko delo, ampak priredba originalne Shakespearjeve tragedije.

8.3 FILMSKA PRIREDBA ORIGINALA

Shakespeare je znan po stvaritvah, katerih zapletenost in odličnost zrcali družbo njegovega časa. Seveda se je do sedaj vsebina spremenila, ampak delovanje družbe ostaja enako. In ravno to je glavni razlog, da je Shakespearjevo zapuščino posvojila tudi filmska industrija. Kot nam je znano, filmska tehnologija je izvrsten mehanizem, ki je sposoben doseči marsikaj in hkrati predstavlja umetniški medij, ki naslavlja množice. Kljub temu da film ni edini medij, ki je odgovoren za popularizacijo Shakespearja, je pa vendar najbolj dostopen.

Ko govorimo o prirejanju umetniških del, mislimo predvsem na spremembo medija, ki posledično neizbežno ustvarja raznovrstne izdelke. Priredba ni kopija originala, ampak je stvaritev novega originala. Priredba izvirnega dela od posameznika zahteva veliko kreativnosti in uporabo posebnih tehničnih procesov. Primarni vir je v samem procesu nastajanja filma prisoten v različnih stadijih, vendar le kot dodatno gradivo, ki pripomore h kreativnosti režiserja. Osnovni element pri prirejanju primarne zgodbe je pristop z drugega vidika in pod različnimi okoliščinami, ki nam posledično ponudi nov 'izdelek'. Torej logična posledica priredbe je tudi drugi avtor, ki je prav tako pomemben, kot sama priredba, saj ji doda svoj avtorski in osebni pečat.

V procesu nastajanja filma, je Luhrmann ustvaril zapleteno Shakespearjevo priredbo, za katero velja, da je od vseh preteklih priredb najbolj 'izvirna'. Luhrmannova izbira naslova namiguje na režiserjev poskus približanja svoje 'izvirne' zgodbe samemu originalu in jo s tem kar najbolj približati množicam. Kljub temu, da je Luhrmann ustvarjal pod drugačnimi pogoji, se ni mogel popolnoma izogniti spremembam v svetu, ki ga je ustvaril na samem platnu in kjer popularna glasba narekuje tempo. Pretirana filmska mizanscena, ki prepleta kulturni kaos z elementi Elizabetinskega obdobja, ostaja zvesta zgodbi. Večina besed v zgodbi je izražena vizualno s podobami, kot naprimer »sablja« (ang. Sword), h kateremu se v uvodnem kadru zatečeta Tybalt in Benvolio in se nanaša na sijoče pištole, ki so vgravirane z religijskimi ikonami. Namreč v Shakespearjevem času so bile sablje izbrano orožje, dandanes pa so to pištole in ker je Luhrmann film postavil v sodobno družbo, se je spremenilo tudi orožje. Film je zvest Shakespearjevi tragediji Romeo + Julija v enaki meri, kot se od nje razlikuje – če neposredno citira Shakespearja z uporabo Elizabetinskega jezika, ga na drugi strani nadomešča s podobami, ki nič kaj ne spominjajo na Shakespearja.

8.4 ŠTUDIJA PRIMERA SHAKESPEARJEVE TRAGEDIJE ROMEO + JULIJA
Luhrmannova izvedba Shakespearjeve tragedije Romeo + Julija je predvsem namenjena mlajšim obiskovalcem kina, saj vsebuje veliko kričečih, pisanih in glasnih elementov popularne kulture. Prizori in dialogi so lahko prebavljivi in podprti z vizualnimi parafrazami, glasbo in hitrim tempom kamere/slike. Skratka, Luhrmann je uspešno priredil štiristo let staro tragedijo in jo v popolnoma novi preobleki popularne kulture 20. stoletja upodobil v stilu MTV generacije.

Kot nič v drugem v zgodovini, ima televizija moč manipulacije in cela materija (ang. Substance) filma je prikazana kot predmet (ang. Item) dnevnega televizijskega programa. Film se prične kot del televizijskih poročil, kjer prolog zgodbe v jambsem pentamtru odzvanja s televizijskega ekrana iz 70. let 20. stoletja. John Hartley (1982) pravi, da »napovedovalec na začetku 'strukturira' temo, ki ji sledi uprizoritev podob in 'dejanskosti' stanja z ulic v obliki dve-urnega dokumentarca.« Torej zgodba v zgodbi; zgodba o življenju dveh družin. Isti ekran se ponovno pojavi v središču kadra na koncu filma, ko se napovedovalec 'vrne' in poda zaključno noto zgodbe. Ta izvirnost uporabe televizijskega elementa napeljuje na to, da je medijska poplava podob in slik tako agresivna, da težko ločimo med samo realnostjo in medijsko predstavo le-te. Režiser je želel prikazati pomembnost vpliva televizije na vsakdanje življenje posameznikov,

predvsem najstnikov, katerim je film tudi namenjen. Vendar televizija ni le sredstvo manipulacije, ampak tudi simbol popularne kulture. Mizanscena, v katero nas popelje ta t.i. dokumentarec, je bogata z različnimi znaki in označevalci ali bolje 'oglasnimi deskami' (ang. Billboard), ki se pojavljajo skozi celoten film («Globe Theatre biljardnica», »Veronski trgovec» in »Prosperov najboljši whiskey: snov, iz česar so sanje«). Bistvo teh 'oglasnih desk' je srečanju »visoke« kulture (namigovanje na Shakespearja) in »popularne« kulture, ki preoblikujejo visokokulturni status Shakespearjevih verzov, kot poklon post-moderni potrošniški kulturi.

Lehmann (2001, 203) meni, da se režiser 'hrani' s Shakespearjevimi verzi, ker si jih prizadeva združiti v neko filmsko zmes. In kjer kamera ne uspe upodobiti teh verzov, režiser poskuša ironično pristopiti k interpretaciji jezika; naprimer: na zabavi, ki jo organizira družina Capulet, Luhrmann spremeni Julijo v Romeovega »svetlega angela« (ang. bright angel). Še več zabave si režiser privošči na račun Parisa, ko se v moderni priredbi pojavi na naslovni strani revije Timely Magazine kot »Samec leta« (ang. Bachelor of the year). Tudi v sami lokaciji filmske zgodbe je mnogo metatekstualnih elementov vrednih omembe in predvsem zanimivih za analizo. Film namreč uporablja zelo nazorne podobe nasilja, ker nam s tem želi pokazati 'sodobno' okolje. Označevalci sodobnega zahodnega sveta (mafijski simboli: orožje, hitri avtomobili, tatuji; simboli pošastnega bogastva, potrošniške kulture, ekscesov in razpadanja; kričečih barv, ogromnih oglasov, cenenega nakita, mogočnih nebotičnikov dveh družin) odlično poudarjajo niz asociacij, ki tvorijo metafizično celoto. Verona je zamišljena kot kulturno ogledalo zahodnega sveta, kjer 'vlada' urbano nasilje, poplava medijev, zatiranega potrošništva, depersonalizacije, brezvernosit, nezvestobe.

In v vsem tem nenadzorovanem kaosu, sta edini pozitivni bilki malda zaljubljenca, okoli katerih se vrti celotna zgodba. Romeo in Julija predstavljata in poudarjata tisto dobro in nedolžno, kar je še ostalo od razpadajočega mesta. Njuna absolutna ljubezen v tem krutem svetu nima prostora, saj kljub temu, da se pogumno borita proti 'mlinom na veter', je pritisk zunanjih elementov močnejši in ju na koncu kruto zatre. Posledično lahko rečem, da je divja in kaotična mizanscena Luhrmannov zaščitni znak oziroma 'blagovna znamka'. Režiser je s svojim filmom pokazal in dokazal, da se da odlično prirediti že videno, če le uporabimo kanček domišljije in se ne omejujemo z nekimi nenapisanimi pravili.