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"BY LOOKING LIKING":
BAZ LUHRMANN'S *WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S ROMEO+JULIET*

Abstract

Twenty years since its release onto the big screen, Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo+Juliet* continues to attract viewers, divide critics and remain unchallenged, in a league of its own, when it comes to film adaptation of Shakespeare's plays. This article begins with taking stock of reception directions which still dispute the field of film adaptation. Cued by Worthen's "Performance Paradigm", my argument positions Luhrmann's film (his second at the time and the one to propel the Australian director into Hollywood fame) firmly in the cinematic and sees the film narrative not as opposed to the textual and/or spoken one, but as a complex citational practice developed at the level of oral, visual and written discourse.

Keywords: *Romeo and Juliet*, adaptation, citation, suture, fragmentation, surrogation.

Classical adaptation criticism discusses Shakespeare films – as Jack Jorgens (1991: 8) argues – "by measuring their relative distance from language and conventions of the theatre", with the purpose of analysing the shift from powerfully *said* to "powerfully *seen* to be effective on film". Most reviews of Luhrmann's 1996 film *William Shakespeare's Romeo+Juliet* largely discuss it against textual authority and therefore classify it as a bad translation of the text into a twentieth-century context, full of inconsistencies and incoherent in interpretation. Even when the film is more appropriately located within its own field, cinematography, film criticism still finds it faulty, this time by comparing it to previous film versions of *Romeo and Juliet*, such as Cukor's theatrical version (1938) and Zeffirelli's realistic cinematic mode in 1968.

By placing the film in the field of citational practice, I follow W. B. Worthen's argument that dramatic/film performance "is engaged not so much in citing the texts as in reiterating its own regimes; these regimes can be understood to cite – or, perhaps subversively, to resignify – social and behavioural practices that operate outside the theatre and film and that constitute contemporary social life" (1998: 1098). Therefore, to understand theatre/film as a perlocutionary medium will inevitably limit the production to a direct consequence – and the only consequence – of the performatives inscribed in the text. Any production of Shakespeare uses the texts, but to assume that by that the texts authorise productions will mistakenly classify film adaptation as "a hollow, even etiolated, species of the literary" (Worthen, 1998: 1098). My analysis of Luhrmann's film adaptation will go beyond the traditional criticism's assertion of the film "as object, as practice, as a means of scholarly dissemination", to borrow Worthen's words, that displaces the film from its field of manifestation. I will argue that in method, as well as in purpose, most critical reviews of Baz Luhrmann's production judge the film "against texts, textuality, and the textualising

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practices" and in doing so unjustly relocate it in relation to the "text-bound structure of the academy and its traditional system of authorisation" (1098–99).

With no claim to resolving the issue, I want to analyse the film's means of challenging the prejudice/dogma that "the Performance Paradigm simply is pitted against the Textual Paradigm" (Worthen: 1100). In this sense, I will explore to what extent the Performance Paradigm is useful in de-centring the text without discarding it. Moreover, accepting the policy as well as the double nature of film artefact, my reading of Luhrmann's 1996 film will attempt to reconcile the not necessarily antagonistic terms "to *tell* and *sell* a story more amenable to contemporary viewers" (Boose and Burt, 1997: 1).[2]

I would like to argue that the film narrative is not seen as opposed to the spoken one, but as a complex citational practice developed at the level of oral, image and written discourse. Unlike traditional film criticism, my study will argue that the image is no longer an accessory that illustrates or restyles the text. Its new function is to interact and develop an interdependent relationship with the story, and not to be subordinated to it, either qualitatively or quantitatively. To do so I will analyse the ways in which the film explores the potential of the eye. Be it the camera, the actor's, or the spectator's, the eye becomes a means of signifying itself, both independently and in relation to other visual means. Focusing on how in Luhrmann's film the Shakespearean word becomes the carrier of meaning beyond its spoken form, I will highlight the ways in which *William Shakespeare's Romeo+Juliet* reconfigures the notion of authority – both of Shakespeare and of film – as being subjected to continuous negotiation, redefinition and change. The three main assertions of the film: to see, to be seen, and to be seen seeing, become – I argue – a new form of reading, understanding, communicating and ultimately saying.

Text-authority *versus* Text-alterity

While contemporary filmgoers talk about *seeing* Shakespeare (in the same way in which Elizabethan playgoers *heard* a play), much – if not all – film criticism still stumbles over the assumption that a Shakespeare film must be judged by the extent to which it adheres to the original, that is, the spoken text.

The critical approaches to *William Shakespeare's Romeo+Juliet* can be grouped into three main categories. The first measured the film's success insofar as it was faithful to the text and to the traditional theatrical mode, thus denying its filmic mode. The second sensed the film's purpose of distancing itself from the text, yet accounted for Luhrmann's strategy only simplistically. These critics accepted the film's contemporary context, yet as a peculiar, but necessary ingredient that served what Boose and Burt (1997: 12) term the "liberal tradition of noblesse oblige": delivering Shakespeare to a twentieth-century audience. The third category of critics managed to overcome the limits of conventional film criticism and approached the film on its own ground and in its own right. They did so by analysing what the film does without focusing on what it doesn't (that is, deliver the full text theatrically) or, more importantly, on what it doesn't aim to do.

The most conservative critics "balked" at the "over-determined commodifications" of Shakespeare's text in Luhrmann's film, as Barbara Hodgdon points out, and mourning the cuts, these critics "have produced resisting readings tied to notions about verse-speaking protocols" (1999: 90). Unlike Kenneth Branagh, who uniquely "undertook the monumental challenge of filming a complete-text version of Shakespeare's longest play" (Crowdus, 1998: 16), Luhrmann and his co-screenwriter Craig Pearce were accused by critics (who objected to making film from theatre) of having "jettisoned most of Shakespeare's text retaining just enough to provide a reasonably coherent story-line"; what 'little verse' 'remains', according to them, has been poorly served" (Crowdus, 14). Their reviews appreciated for the effort Claire Danes (Juliet) and Vondie Curtis-Hall (Captain Prince), who seem to understand their lines and handle them with authority, while Pete Postlethwaite (Father Lawrence) and Miriam Margoyles (The Nurse) might have done better if the film had not stripped them of most of

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2 My italics.

the characters' lines. At the opposite pole, insofar as their lines are audible in the film, the critics place: Harold Perrineau (Mercutio), who doubtfully ever understands his lines; Leonardo Di Caprio (Romeo), whose line reading is often lifeless and uninflected; and John Leguizamo (Tybalt), killed just in time to save Shakespeare from "the film's worst mangler of the text" (Welsh, 1997:153). Overall, my survey of reviews which appeared shortly after the film's release indicates that the mainstream criticism subscribes to the opinion that at the level of line-reading *William Shakespeare's Romeo+Juliet* reaches the artistic success of a good high-school presentation.

In contrast, however, some critics, such as Peter Matthews, credit the film as a postmodernist production and regard it as "the most radical reinvention of a classic text since [Kurosawa's] *Throne of Blood*" (1997: 55). When the text, both written and spoken, is the issue at stake, Matthews approves of the way in which the film denies the academic expectations of how the text will be privileged. However, he approves of it for the wrong reason, namely "to package Shakespeare as a big tempting box of candy for those who won't swallow the medicine otherwise" (55). Even when congratulated for eliminating unnecessary descriptions, "hopelessly arcane references, or excessive ornamentation" (Crowdus, 13), which it usually transposes into image for relevance and time economy, the film is then accused of stripping out Shakespeare's poetry and eliminating both characters and scenes all together. Such critics rarely accept the final script as a creative decision working along the citation method of the film. In this sense, both critical directions presented so far remain indebted to a traditionalist interpretation of film adaptation, too close to theatre practice.

When the film manages to escape from such textual-imperialist criticism and is approached in its cinematographic rights, the words are no longer considered the *raison d'etre* of the film, as Jose Arrojo points out, but are treated in the complexity of the postmodernist discourse: as performed, heard and seen dialogue. This type of film criticism acknowledges Baz Luhrmann's option to challenge the text instead of choosing to restyle the Shakespearean story in a modern context or to search for academic and theatrical authority and approval (as Al Pacino repeatedly does in his 1996 *Looking for Richard* – albeit at times tongue-in-cheek-lu). Whether spoken in standard English or declamatory style (by Vondie Curtis-Hall's Prince), with Italian or Hispanic accent (by Paul Sorvino's Fulgencio Capulet, John Leguizamo's Tybalt or Miriam Margolyes's Nurse), Shakespeare's language is equally poetic for these critics. Moreover, the actors' genuine accents add – in Jose Arroyo's view (1997: 8) – "a racial and ethnic dimension to the characterisation, arguably richer, more relevant to contemporary culture". They argue that the method of de-historicising and re-historicising delivers a more realistic and accessible citation of Shakespeare's language.

The clearest indication that "Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo+Juliet* doesn't salaam to Shakespeare's language" (Arroyo, 6) and that the filmmakers' focus is not dialogue in the theatrical sense are revealed in the film's end credits which "list only one dialogue and speech coach, and a non-Shakespearean specialist at that", while there are dozens of technicians for "special effects, visual effects, stunts, car design, gun design, fashion design, and digital animation" (Crowdus, 15). Luhrmann's film adaptation, I argue, is preoccupied neither with the myth of the *original text* nor with its dismissal, but attempts to resituate the production of Shakespeare within film, re-signifying the authority the (source)text is conventionally invested with. Because it is not concerned with the classical discipline that prioritises the text over production, the film does not appoint itself as the anti-discipline either. On the contrary, I suggest that it openly makes good cinematic use of both in a straightforward mode of citation, one "that reconstitutes the meaning of the text instead of being determined by those meanings" (Worthen, 1097), and which I will tentatively call interrogation.

Interrogating the text

Simultaneously "an act of memory" that summons textual, theatrical and film authority, and "an act of creation" (Worthen, 1101) itself claiming authority, Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo+Juliet* places itself in the field of surrogation. In this respect, it creates

a sense of *proximity* to the text and other productions by means of citation[ality], in which the text and its understanding are not the cause, but the consequence of the performance, its aim being not to replay the authorised text, but "to construct that origin as a rhetorically powerful effect of performance" (Worthen, 1101). Luhrmann's film adaptation uses surrogation as a continuous "process of being unmade (as an object) and remade (as a text and as memory)" (Grigely cited in Worthen, 1101) based on the performance textual alterity and not on a simple iteration of the text – presumed faithful to the original. The film is freed from the fixedness of the source text, which is as illusory as the fixedness of an interpretation, and asserts itself not as a field of stabilities, but as one in which "instabilities are both made and made manifest" (1101).

Less preoccupied with the theatrical citation, the film focuses on televisual citation. While there is a nervousness and reluctance when dealing with Shakespeare's language, there is no resistance in using visual imagery in the film, either to compensate for textual cuts or to embellish a particular interpretation, but never simply to translate the text into image. In Luhrmann's 1996 film adaptation, image is heightened to the level of interplay between generating the story and the Shakespearean icon, or simply becomes a means of literalising the language. The director and his company are more concerned with "concocting a visual style" (Crowdus, 14), using all the creative energy to develop the film's visual styling.The film's visually saturated dimension performs Shakespeare's language by means of televisual citation that enters into dialogue at times with Shakespeare's text, but more importantly, with the teen audience the film targeted. Directed by Baz Luhrmann, whose success was confirmed – at the time – by his (only) previous film *Strictly Ballroom* (1992), and staring Leonardo Di Caprio (as Romeo), whose previous star credits included the sit-com *Growing Pains*, *What's Eating Gilbert Grape* (directed by Lasse Hallstroem, 1994)[3], *Basketball Diaries* (director Scott Kalvert, 1995) and $32 million *The Quick and the Dead* (director Sam Raimi, 1995), and Clare Danes, star of MTV's *My So-Called Life*, the film established itself as a teen film, and cultivated its image as such even before being released in the cinemas. It is replete with MTV clips citation – reminding perhaps, as technique, of *West Side Story*, the musical adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, but also about Luhrmann's own work: his only other film, the low budget *Strictly Ballroom*, and his directorial interpretation of Benjamin Britten's opera version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1993 Sydney, 1994 Edinburgh Festival Prize). Finally, the film also makes heavy use of internet discourse (in its early life at the time) and of news reporting, especially in cutting and editing the film, and promoting it.[4]

As Arroyo argues, "if most other Shakespeare films nullify the expressive power of *mise en scene* by subordinating it, in the service of language, the Australian director elevates Shakespeare cinematically" (6). Pictorially, the film emphasises the ritual performance of the play's "ancient grudge" (Prologue, 3) as one of its themes. It (re)creates an imaginary world which, by resembling ours, allows the recognition of the actions depicted. The mode of the film operates allegorically: viewers are faced with multiple levels of decoding the newly constructed world, its commentary on ours and, moreover, its commentary on its own world. The film opens with a blank television screen on which 20th Century Fox presents Baz Luhrmann's production. Starting with a black anchor-woman delivering the Prologue from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the TV news report is immediately replaced (for credibility) by the camera's report itself, accompanied by a voice-over (both a reverential wink and a mocking reiteration of Zeffirelli's opening of his film adaptation with British Shakespeare stage and film star Lawrence Olivier delivering the Prologue) that repeats the Prologue and continues the story. In a quick series of shots the report both anticipates and replays key events in the film, functioning at once as shorthand introduction to the play's plot and news style retrospective documentary interspersed with live footage. In quick succession, viewers

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[3] Di Caprio's performance won a string of film awards for best actor in a supporting role, an Oscar and a Golden Globe nomination.

[4] As the director comments, the promo clip designed for the meeting with the producers in order to secure the budget for the film became the film's version of the play's Prologue and was also used as its trailer. For more information, see Pam Cook's *Baz Luhrmann*, 58–82.

watch the violent conflicts between the two families, the love story between Romeo and Juliet, their marriage, as well as their death. The entire history of the two families' feud is summarised on the news and most events are on the front page of the newspapers. Similarly, Romeo finds out about the fight in the gas station from a TV news report and the ball to take place at the Capulets' mansion is again advertised on TV. Relying on audience familiarity with news reports, the film borrows its iconography, yet introduces the source play's universal themes that (may) have lost their value in contemporary world, values such as religion, the institution of marriage, filial duty, family honour.

At once solving theatrical issues of authority and Aristotelian unities by replacing the Chorus's Prologue with a news report, the film also sets up its cinematic and cultural authority and discourse. This cinematic Prologue combines the real with the imaginary (that is, the selective omniscience of the camera), but it also inscribes the news in a quasi-mythical time and space, through what ultimately constructs a past depiction (Shakespeare's "lay" (Prologue, 2) turned into Luhrmann's "laid our scene" is a case in point). Confronted with a changing perspective, the viewer has to adapt to multiple and incomplete points of view, evoked and at the same time dismissed as symbols of authority. The film's three endings complete each set of conventions used at the beginning and match the triple delivery of the Prologue (from Shakespeare's play). A series of cuts from the film almost identical to the ones used by the camera's version of the Prologue – the fish-tank scene, a close-up of the inscription inside the ring, the marriage consummation scene and the pool scene) reiterate "the two hours' traffic" (Prologue, 12) between the private world of the two lovers and its enemy public one. The calm and loving atmosphere of the former is replaced by shockingly realistic shots: the two bodies are taken out of the chapel in black bags, Capulets and Montagues are mourning the dead, while the police, ambulances, helicopters and news reporters go about their business.

The play's epilogue is delivered by the same anchor-woman in a TV news report. Overall, what results is a "tabloid TV montage of quickly edited images of chaos: some from a helicopter, some out of focus or falsely attributed to different objects (such as the one attributed to the statue of Christ), some zooms and quick wipes to be reversed at the end of the film" (Arroyo, 8) in order to remind the fictionality of a false past event, as it was one in the making in front of us. Indeed, the spoken language may get lost in the action, but it gets performed: by the "director, cinematographer and other film-makers as well as the actors" (8).

Reading the eye

While critics considered the contemporary *mise en scene* of the film a peculiar context for the Shakespearean story, "postmodern kitch" and "headache Shakespeare" (Welsh, 153), when confronted with the two lovers' story in the film, they happily admit its Shakespearean nature. One could argue that the film is tied to the word and curiously literal, but not by means of speech. It is not a modern restyling of Shakespeare's play, but a genuine interpretation of the text (with)in the eye of the postmodern. Based on the flexibility as well as on the admitted non-omniscient perspective of the camera eye, the film reads itself and the text through the metaphor of the eye. Strongly tied to the eye and various metaphors of it, subject identity is found and lost in the visual image. The viewer's first encounter with Juliet is a distorted image in an impossible shot under the water, which finds her in the privacy of a world chosen to deny her surrounding reality.

Fig.1. *Enter* Juliet (16:06 screengrab)   Fig. 2. Romeo clearing his head (24:26 screengrab)

The close-up focusing on her eyes and the perspective one gets when looking through water, separating two sequences in which the camera rushes to present the Capulets' preparations for the ball, reinforce the two opposing worlds. The following sequence brings Juliet into her mother's chamber and the exchange of retorts between the two is centred on the same syntactic chain. While describing Paris's beauty as "written in the margent of his eyes" and "in many's eyes" sharing "the glory" (I.3.87, 92), Lady Capulet reveals the real purpose of the ball when asking Juliet whether she can "like of Paris' love' (I.3.97). Juliet's answer, mentioning the superficial look, that which is incapable of generating real love: "I'll look to like, if looking liking move. / But no more deep will I endart mine eye" (I.3.98–9), will be literalised and given new significance in the fish-tank scene to follow.

In a similar attempt to get away from the world whose noise and eroticism are augmented by drugs, Romeo douses his face in water to clear his head, and the same shot beneath the water (from the bottom of a sink and thus equally impossible to achieve) strikes the viewer, especially due to the resemblance of the two faces. Giving up his mask and woken up from the world of (drug induced) dreams, Romeo sets out to follow Benvolio's earlier advice: "By giving liberty unto thine eyes / Examine other beauties" (I.1.227–8). As Romeo approaches the fish-tank, the viewer can see both the angel-fish he watches and his own reflection into the glass. He is unaware of being watched until the camera eye decides to reveal the other side of the fish-tank and attribute the gaze to the eye that startles Romeo and the viewers: Juliet's eye. Consciously violating their privacy and taking the role of the voyeur, the camera falls for the *suture* effect[5] even when openly non-functional: for e.g., Romeo watched from behind at the same time with watching his reflection facing the camera is an impossible view from the other side of the fish-tank. Although physically separated by glass and water, the lovers' mirrored reflections meet and their desire is condensed in an exchange of looks. The impossible shot (at 26:05) supplies an image that presents both sides of the fish-tank and identifies the two lovers as inhabitants of the same world: private, fictional, impossible, in which the eye communicates how they want, feel, long and suffer. Catching sight of one another through the fish-tank, following each other with a gaze at the ball and later in the pool scene, are shots which establish that their private moments are achieved at the level of eye contact and mediated by water. Their shared experience as well as

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[5] The suture effect is generally defined as a shot-reverse shot sequence in which the first shot attempts to give the viewer an objective image. By reading the film, the viewer discovers the frame (i.e. realises that the camera, by showing some images, hides others) and his/her former possession of the image fades out. S/he acknowledges that s/he is authorised to see what happens to be in the axis of the glance of another spectator, who is absent. The reverse shot attributes the glance to somebody/something that occupies the absent-one's field, and thus the image becomes subjective. In this sense, the second shot constitutes the meaning of the first one, and the system of suture makes a cinematographic statement out of the pair of shots. For more information see Silverman, K. 1983. *The Subject of Semiotics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 201–15 and Bothman, W. 1992. "Against the System of Suture." In Mast, G., Cohen, M. and Brandy, L. (eds.), *Film Theory and Criticism. Introductory Readings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 192–98.

ours is visual.[6] In antinomy with Romeo and Juliet' world, the external world is dominated by fire – as in the conflagration in the gas station, fireworks in the ball scene, or heat – as in all the scenes on the beach.

Alongside the discursive system of spoken language, the Luhrmann's film employs a postmodern *figural* para-logical system of representation, mainly characterised by what it does, and not by what it means. The film develops visual modes of representing the eye of the camera which outcasts the look as well as the gaze, attributing them to a character or a spectator in an explicit suture method. All the more signifying and creating conflicts and anti-suture effects, the points of view taken by the camera establish themselves as signifiers when cut off from events, persons or concrete objects – such as the gaze attributed to Christ and then dismissed, or to the Prince's helicopter, suggesting that both authorities ineffectually loom over the inhabitants. Embodying the postmodern, the eye has no zero point and no fixed reference; it is everywhere and nowhere, as in the case of the shots beneath the water or in impossible close-ups, the film's favourite technique and one it employs used in various situations – from showing Tybalt's heels, to Lady Capulet's mouth, Mercutio's dancing shoes, the only bullet in Tybalt's gun when challenging Romeo, the engraved pistols and the tattoos on Father Laurence's back or Abra's head, to name but a few. In this sense, the camera eye freely shifts from one perspective (often of former authority) to another. Following the logic of a hybrid, the camera does not hide its oxymoronic function: selective, and by this *exclusive*, it mocks and absorbs all forms, trying to encompass everything. It plays with a wide range of modes, varying from looking and accidentally seeing, to reflecting, inspecting or retrospectively narrating. The reality of the text fades out, but not for the sake of a contemporary packaging of it into image; what the film asserts is the fact that "the electronic image is the only sign of reality that counts" (Denzin, 1991:55).

Both the viewer's and the camera's curiosity and frustration are satisfied by the inventiveness in the game of perspectives. The camera eye is the star in this film, not the actors, and its top task is to expose cinematic trickery. Repeated changes of focus, angle and speed establish the camera as a real character in the film, endowed with extraordinary qualities in playing the narrator of the story as well as in operating at the level of intermediality. For example, instead of using characters in motion, the director prefers to attribute this quality to the camera, ultimately for the same purpose: motionless actors are approached and inspected by the camera eye up to the point when their looks meet; then, the focus shifts immediately. At The Sycamores Grove Theatre (a derelict fairground), Romeo is writing his thoughts for his beloved Rosaline. From slowly approaching Romeo, when he catches and returns the gaze, the camera suddenly shifts to a close-up of his eyes, then immediately changes focus to his diary, as if checking his speech against the written/authoritative form. The same technique is used in the scene when Mercutio delivers his Queen Mab speech. Following and then chasing the disjointed movements of the actor, the camera stops for a close-up of his face. As if caught spying on something terrible, when Mercutio returns the gaze, the camera changes focus to the orgiastic display of fireworks at the Capulets' ball – a possible illustration of the passionate speech just delivered, or a writing of the figurative "blow-up" of Romeo's mind (under the effect of the drug and speech). The two lovers (Romeo and Juliet) are caught kissing, and the camera movement around them (a technique Luhrmann uses repeatedly in *Strictly Ballroom Australia* and *The Great Gatsby*) turns into a dance, integrating them into the general euphoria at the Capulets' ball. Later on, camera chase in the ballroom and in the elevator is transformed into hide-and-seek game with the camera, the latter being denied omnipresence, as when the doors of the elevator shut (the lovers' kiss from view) to open on the next floor, perhaps paralleling visually the entrapment of the two lovers in the sonnet that frames their first encounter.

At times, the camera eye gives up the main action, as in the case of the fight between the Capulets and the Montagues in the gas station, randomly picking up ads, car plates, tattoos, icons on T-shirts, names of clubs, pubs, and marginal characters, such as the nuns and

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[6] This went on to become a signature Luhrmann technique – see *Moulin Rouge*, *Australia* and more recently *The Great Gatsby*.

the boy in the gas station scene, or the prostitute and the old man paying her erotic dance on the beach. What may at first appear random choices turns out to be another series of citations – from other Shakespeare plays and characters – offered almost as tongue-in-cheek clues to Shakespeare aficionados. The change in speed operates comic effects, as in the scene where Lady Capulet, getting dressed (as Cleopatra) for the ball at high speed, is interrupted by the normal speed of speech. At other times, as in the case of all the stunts performed by Tybalt and Abra, the change from quick movement to slow motion no longer has comic effect, but "evokes the beauty of anticipating the horror to come" (Arroyo, 8). The same tragic outcome is intended when the camera slows down to show Tybalt drawing his weapon on Benvolio, then putting out his match, but not his cigarette which causes the fire, his move being anticipated by the camera in a close-up of the gas station slogan "Add more fuel to the fire" – another Shakespeare quote, this time from *3 Henry VI* (5.4.70). Predicting the tragic, Romeo's mad car chase ends in a slow motion death of Tybalt. The change in speed or angle allows the camera eye to make use of cataphoric references, as in the sequence of shots in the Prologue that anticipate the events to take place, or in Father Laurence's vision of the mock funeral when describing to Juliet the effect of the potion. While the former case gives the viewer access to future events to be confirmed later in the film, in the latter a (fictional) desired happy ending is made available to the audience: the shot of the two lovers reunited is followed by one presenting Capulet and Montague shaking hands. At other times still, the same changes endow the camera eye with anaphoric power, as in Romeo's nightmare reprising Tybalt's death, or in the sequence of happy past events – the fish-tank scene, the ring, the bedchamber and the pool scenes – from which the camera slips back into reality, presenting the grieving family at the funeral, at the end of the film. In this sense, it is only after experiencing "the two hours' traffic" of Luhrmann's film the viewer can complete the interplay of anaphoric and cataphoric self-referencing at work from the beginning to its end: in Luhrmann's version, the play's Prologue is in fact Friar Lawrence's confession-narration of the events (his the voice, the only British actor's, we heard as the voiceover delivery of the opening sonnet) and the news-bulletin-Prologue a retrospective look made of visual snippets collaged together by a curious (camera) eye busy documenting and whose often un-attributable gaze – one sees, but only retrospectively – turns out to be attributable.[7]

As illustrated in this article, Baz Luhrmann's film invites reading in terms of the eye so that the film suits its subversiveness "which unravels the cinematic eye, showing its distortions. The ways in which the third order of the simulacrum is constructed" becomes central, so the film judges and compares 'the real against its representations and reproductions" (Denzin, 155). By exposing the secrets of the camera, this film adaptation unmasks the truth of the simulacrum, for – as Baudrillard put it – "the simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth […]. The simulacrum is true" (1988: 169).[8] The traffic between verbal and visual imagery reads at times as "anti-Shakespeare culture panache" (Hodgdon, 89). At other times, as in the case of literalising the look, it is curiously and over-explicitly tied to the word. Mercutio's silver bra and garter belt materialising Mab's "moonshine's wat'ry beams" not only punningly embodies the fairy Queen but out-masquerades Lady Capulet's Cleopatra, "marking his own extravagant artifice in terms of her even more parodic bodily display" (89) Juliet's white dress and feather wings flesh her out as Romeo's "bright angel," integrating her into the image of the fish-tank populated with angelfish. In turn, Romeo's costume literalises Juliet's "true knight". By means of costumes, the story of the two lovers is situated within medieval Christian romance -- as cited by Petrarchan sonnets (both forms which Shakespeare employs and subverts) – that makes it all the more alien a myth for the others and for its context. Exploring the syntax of the playtext even further and making it

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[7] While the voice that pieces together the story – we discover – belongs to Friar Lawrence (Pete Postlethwaite, the only British actor cast in this film), the "eye" piecing together the details story is Romeo's (Leonardo DiCaprio).

[8] Baudrillard's statement itself makes use of *citation*, which endorses *Ecclesiates* without literally quoting it, much in the same way in which Luhrmann's film adaptation relates to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.

part of the screen, Dave Paris's astronaut costume metonymically connects him to the heavenly Juliet, but also "spaces him out to the margins of the story" (Hodgdon, 89). Equally alien and Shakespearean are Capulet's gold and purple toga-ed Antony and Lady Capulet's bright and parodic Cleopatra. Also saturated with signs is Luhrmann's Tybalt: his pointed face, neat moustache, black disco outfit, red devil's horns and vest at the ball code him as a the macho Prince of Cats (as he is cast as in the credits at the beginning of the film). His sidekicks (one of whom has the word Montague tattooed on his scalp) dressed as white-faced skeletons at the ball, foreshadow his violent death.

Moreover, when not playing the playtext straight, the film initiates a Shakespearean tongue-in-cheek-ness and "restyles textual culture as fashion or fetish and writes it onto the actors' bodies or their props" (Hodgdon, 89). The two families' feud is represented by their names on top of the skyscrapers that dominate the city; the youngsters of both families drive cars which have personalised plates – "MON005" and "CAP005" respectively.[9] Instead of long, sharp swords, the two families are armed with 9millimetres inlaid daggers inscribed with the word "sword"; when Montague calls for his "long sword", he actually reaches for his automatic rifle labelled Longsword from his car, and Tybalt carries a Madonna engraved pistol. Transformed into a violent exchange of retorts – where the characters literally "bite [their] thumbs" (I.1.41) at one another – and a waste of bullets, the opening scene is set in a gas station, for where else the line "Add more fuel to the fire" (from *3 Henry VI*) would have been more at home? The same type of visual in-joke is used when the messenger that delivers Father Laurence's letter to Romeo is replaced by Mantua's "Post-post haste" dispatch van.

Many words of the playtext are represented visually as labels and very often as typed words. Nearly half of the Prologue, transposing Shakespeare's language into popular TV-news discourse at the beginning of the film, appears in print headlines and/or graphic poster art. When repeated by the male voiceover, the prologue of the play fragmented further "through flash edits slammed at the viewers." (Hodgdon, 89) Slow motion shots culminating with close-ups of the actors, to which the printed names of the characters as well as the actors who play them are added, interrupt the fast, action-like illustration of the Prologue in a very ingenious manner of introducing the casting at the beginning of the film (a technique Luhrmann experimented with in his earlier film *Strictly Ballroom*) – a cinematic rendering of the play's *Dramatic Personae*. More to the point, besides the "fleshing out" technique used as textual and televisual citation, the film is saturated with allusions to Shakespeare the author and cultural icon. The Montague "men" of the playtext (that is, "servingmen") cast in the film credits – like their enemies, the Capulets – as "the boys" — (mis)quote from *Macbeth* in the line "hubble, bubble, toil and trouble" with which they mock the nuns in the opening scene; the pool hall which Benvolio and Romeo frequent is called The Globe; the camera briefly pick on a sign for "The Merchant of Verona Beach" and the name Prospero scrawled on a fence. "I am thy Pistol and thy Friend" (from *Henry IV.2*), Gloria Capulet's Cleopatra and Fulgentio Capulet's Antony outfits, are but a few of the random Shakespearean details caught by the camera eye.

As suggested by Worthen (1998), the film extends beyond *Romeo and Juliet* and encompasses Shakespeare-the-author and Shakespeare-the-icon, tracing and re-placing the signs of its origin. On the one hand advertising itself as a product of global capitalism, Luhrmann's film adaptation knowingly advances itself and deals with how contemporary culture has been consuming Shakespeare. Moreover, Luhrmann's bizarre parallel universe also comprises twentieth century icons and turns out to be an inventive journey into the cinematic canon. Not afraid to claim its hybrid identity and being overtly referential, the film quotes and borrows from everywhere. Early versions of *Romeo and Juliet*, such as Cukor's and Zeffirelli's, but also *West Side Story*, are only part of the wide range of influences exploited. The film accommodates techniques from *Rebel without a Cause* to Busby Berkley musicals, Clint Eastwood-Sergio Leone spaghetti westerns, and Ken Russell's or Fellini's

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[9] While the "boys" sport car plates with the family names in shorthand, the "men" make a full display of the family names: MONTAGUES appears in full on Mercutio's sports car plate as well as on Romeo's father's limousine plate.

surreal spectaculars. the film was prior to Di Caprio's Oscar performance in *Titanic* and Danes success in *The Hours*). While it overtly borrows from spaghetti-western (in its construction of Tybalt's character, for example), it also sends to contemporary releases in the western genre – as in 1996 DiCaprio had only recently starred in *The Quick and the Dead*; it cites, in equal measure, gangster movies and TV detectives – after all, it is Verona Beach New York, the gangs' haven, and Fulgentio Capulet is played by Paul Sorvino (the 1990s portrayal of Paul Vario in Martin Scorsese's *Goodfellas*, and NYPD Sergeant Phil Cerreta in the television series *Law & Order*). Freeze-frames identifying the characters recall Luhrmann's earlier *Strictly Ballroom* as well as the recent, at the time, *Trainspotting*. The shift from high speed to slow motion, a cinematic device introduced in *Bonnie and Clyde* and characteristic to action films, finds its place in Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo+Juliet* next to music video. One such example is Mercutio's performance of 'Young Hearts Run Free' (the 1976 disco hit, written by David Crawford and recorded, originally, by American soul singer Candi Staton), a performance which is at once citing and mocking another icon – pop queen Madonna; another is the choirboy (Quindon Tarver) performing a cover version of 'When Doves Cry' (the top selling single of 1984, written and recorded by Prince for this *Purple Rain* album).

Fig. 3. Driven to the ball (22:57 screengrab)   Fig. 4. Performing *Young Heart* (23:27 screengrab)

"What's in a name?"

As this article has argued, Baz Lurhmann's film adaptation *William Shakespare's Romeo+Juliet* runs through a whole series of culturally and cinematographically overdetermined narratives and shows the same adaptability to them and willingness to continuously substitute one for another, establishing fragmentation as its basis. In citing Shakespeare as text, icon and author, as well as in using televisual citation, Luhrmann's film engages in a mode of surrogation explicitly set aside that of theatrical performance (and against which it is often judged in spite of the film's explicit references to departure from stage practice and codes, as, for example, in the derelict stage whose curtain parts to reveal a cinema screen on which the countdown is projected; viewers encounter Romeo for the first time sitting on the edge of the same derelict stage, writing his love lines to Rosaline while facing the "real" sunrise as the backdrop for the scene; Tybalt, too, takes the stage to deliver his curse on "both houses" while the sizzling summer sun gives way to an ominous storm). The film's engagement with the dynamics of surrogation begins with its title. Although Shakespeare's name is part of it, as if claiming his authority over a non-authentic artefact, the title *Romeo and Juliet* never appears in the film. Instead, the film uses in its title and in its promotional and advertising material, a large red cross between the two names, invested with complex significance as a religious sign, but also as adolescent street graffiti. The Australian director who casts American actors and encourages them to speak with their genuine accents (American, Hispanic, African), while on the other hand does not miss any chance to reinforce every Shakespeare cultural symbol, evokes, recalls and yet replaces by choice of title the canonical (Shakespeare's) *Romeo and Juliet* play. The film turns out to be preoccupied not with restyling Shakespeare in a traditional manner, but focuses on questioning Shakespeare

film practice and the act of consuming Shakespeare in an end-of-the-twentieth century context.

The film's most sophisticated aspect becomes its alertness to the process of "surrogation: its simultaneous invocation and displacement of the 'original'" (Worthen, 1104). In the dynamics of surrogation, the film approaches the postmodernist discourse in its complexity, thus positioning itself in opposition to previous productions of *Romeo and Juliet*. Performing the playtext cinematographically, Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo+Juliet* locates it in a citational environment: verbal, visual, gestural, behavioural, as well as of media-governed youth culture. By making use of such means, the film is not a betrayal of the play (as too often accused), but assumes its surrogate Shakespeare identity insofar as it memorialises a past (albeit partially invented) and constitutes a new work. Once again, it proves that "dramatic performance, like all other performance, far from originating in the text, can only cite its textual 'origins' with an additive gesture, a kind of '+'" (Worthen, 1104), which chooses to be cinematic film profit in Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet.*

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