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William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* on Screen

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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Souhlasím se zapůjčením bakalářské práce ke studijním účelům.

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THESIS ABSTRACT

The aim of the thesis is to explore the film adaptations of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and to compare their thematic shifts of the adapted text. Primary focus will be put on Franco Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* (1968), Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* (1996), and Carlo Carlei's *Romeo & Juliet* (2013). This choice does not entirely exclude other adaptations, as they will be alluded to whenever some of their features become relevant to the discussion at hand.

The thesis is based on my reading of this tragedy and supplemented by secondary sources. It analyses three themes of the play, and subsequent adaptation issues, in order to introduce and compare the individual directors' readings of these particular instances and their overall narrative strategies applied in the films. The impact of the various renditions of the themes will be compared and examined in terms of its influence on the audience's perception of the plot. Currently, many people experience Shakespeare's plays through film and it is productive to examine what perceptions of the plays they form when encountering the playwright in this re-created manner.

Some of the questions that this analysis will address are: What visual means do the directors employ to establish new dimension to the adapted text? What is transmitted through the individual portrayals of the characters and their relationships? How can details in the individual films' renditions of central events impact the ultimate impression made on the audience?

The first chapter introduces the context of the respective film adaptations, and the methodology employed in studying them. The following focal section of the thesis is set to specifically examine the three themes as depicted on screen, specifically parental relationships, death, and final reconciliation. The themes are first considered within the

composition of the tragedy and then separately introduced in subchapters. The second chapter on parental relationships focuses on the formative relationships between the protagonists and their parental figures. The third chapter analyses the depictions of the theme of death and is divided into three distinct categories: death by combat, suicide, and the omitted deaths. The fourth chapter on the final reconciliation theme then follows from the previous analyses in order to determine how their renditions influence the catharsis of the films and the final impression made on the audience. The thesis concludes with a discussion on the possible cultural impact of *Romeo and Juliet* on screen and on the contemporary trends in adapting Shakespeare.

ABSTRAKT

Cílem této práce je prozkoumat filmové adaptace Shakespearova *Romea a Julie* a porovnat významové posuny, jimiž jednotlivé filmy vyvíjí adaptovaný text. Studované filmy budou jmenovitě *Romeo and Juliet* (1968) Franca Zeffirelliho, *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) Baze Luhrmana a *Romeo & Juliet* (2013) Carla Carleie. Tato volba zcela nevyklučuje zahrnutí dalších adaptací, které budou příležitostně zmíněny v případě jejich relevantnosti k posuzované problematice.

Tato práce je založena na mém čtení dané tragédie podpořeném sekundární literaturou. Práce se zabývá třemi stěžejními tématy hry a problematikou jejich převodu do filmového média, s cílem představit a následně porovnat interpretaci těchto témat jednotlivými tvůrci skrze analýzu narativních postupů, jež při ní uplatňují. Jednotlivá ztvárnění pak budou studována s ohledem na jejich vliv na divácké pojetí problematiky příběhu. Tento postup se zdá velmi relevantní vzhledem k současné sílící tendenci filmu být primárním médiem šíření Shakespearovy tragédie.

Hlavní otázky, na něž se tato práce snaží najít odpověď, jsou: Jaké vizuální vypravěčské prostředky užívají jednotliví tvůrci k otevření nových pohledů na adaptovaný text? Jaké významy naznačují jednotlivá umělecká ztvárnění hlavních protagonistů a jejich vzájemných vztahů? A konečně, jak mohou detaily ve vyobrazení stěžejních scén zápletky ovlivnit jejich vnímání ze strany diváků?

První kapitola představuje kontext jednotlivých filmových adaptací a metodologii uplatněnou při jejich zkoumání. Následující sekce práce se soustřeďuje na zobrazení témat rodičovských vztahů, smrti a závěrečného usmíření. Témata jsou nejprve zasazena do kontextu struktury celé tragédie a následně rozebrána v jednotlivých podkapitolách. Druhá kapitola se věnuje rodičovským vztahům se zaměřením na formativní vztahy mezi protagonisty a rodičovskými

figurami. Třetí kapitola analyzuje vyobrazení témata smrti ve třech samostatných kategoriích, smrt v boji, sebevražda a často opomíjené smrti. Čtvrtá kapitola na téma závěrečného usmíření vychází z analýzy předchozích témat ve snaze zjistit, jaký vliv má jejich ztvárnění na divácké vnímání závěrečné katarze. Práce je zakončena diskuzí o možném kulturním dopadu filmových adaptací *Romea a Julie* a o současných trendech v převodu Shakespearova díla na filmové plátno.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is to closely examine specific themes across three film adaptations of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, namely *Romeo and Juliet*¹ directed by Franco Zeffirelli, *Romeo + Juliet*² directed by Baz Luhrmann and *Romeo & Juliet*³ directed by Carlo Carlei and written by Julian Fellowes. These specific films were chosen based on being the most recent, because of their collective time span across fifty years and due to their specific alterations of the play. This choice does not entirely exclude other adaptations, as they will be alluded to whenever some of their features become relevant to the discussion at hand. The intended standpoint is based on theory of adaptation, film techniques used to enhance specific themes and on the differences between individual variations of the play as embodied in the film versions.

Currently, many people experience Shakespeare's plays through film and it is productive to examine what perceptions of the plays they form when encountering the playwright in this re-created manner. Due to easy accessibility of William Shakespeare's plays adapted for the screen and lack of access to or low interest in actual theatre productions, recently there has been an upward trend in the general public turning to film versions rather than the texts or performances. Douglas Lanier even asserts that with the advent of mass media, the theatre ceased to be the dominant performance medium.⁴ According to Russell Jackson, the filmed adaptations form a substantial part of the current market and often serve for educational

¹*Romeo and Juliet*, dir. Franco Zeffirelli, prod. BHE Films, 1968.

²*Romeo + Juliet*, dir. Baz Luhrmann, prod. Bazmark Films, 1996.

³*Romeo & Juliet*, dir. Carlo Carlei, writ. Julian Fellowes, prod. Amber Entertainment, 2013.

⁴ Douglas Lanier, "Shakespeare TM: myth and biographical fiction," *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Popular Culture*, ed. Robert Shaughnessy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 95.

purposes both for scholars and students.⁵ Film adaptations have become a part of our culture and their implications are indisputably relevant in the study of literary texts. Due to easy worldwide accessibility and globalised culture, the medium of film can impact larger audiences than any theatre production. Not only does this provide a platform supported by a number of relevant secondary sources, but it also allows us to explore how film adaptations interact, which ultimately creates a significantly larger field of interest. Additionally, the more film adaptations exist, the more it is possible to compare the details within and thus to achieve a deeper understanding of the adapted material.

The film industry always developed in unison with the progress of technology and Shakespeare has been part of the industry ever since its very beginnings in the era of silent film. According to Maurice Hindle, there had been about five hundred various Shakespearean film productions before ‘talkies’ even started to be produced.⁶ Russell Jackson states that at the beginning, films on Shakespearean topics were by no means financially successful, including films directed by and starring Laurence Olivier.⁷ It was not until the seventies and Franco Zeffirelli’s productions *The Taming of the Shrew*⁸ and *Romeo and Juliet*⁹ that Shakespeare was brought to mass cinema audiences successfully.¹⁰ After a rather fruitless interim period, the interest in Shakespearean adaptations seems to have been reignited in the nineties by Kenneth Branagh¹¹ and his *Henry V*,¹² and the variety and number of productions increased ever since. In the last twenty years, apart from more literal film adaptations, there

⁵ Russell Jackson, *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film 2nd Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 35.

⁶ Maurice Hindle, *Studying Shakespeare on Film* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 20.

⁷ Jackson 3.

⁸ *The Taming of the Shrew*, dir. Franco Zeffirelli, prod. Columbia Pictures Corporation, 1967.

⁹ *Romeo and Juliet*, dir. Franco Zeffirelli, prod. BHE Films, 1968.

¹⁰ Hindle 42.

¹¹ Jackson 4.

¹² *Henry V*, dir. Kenneth Branagh, prod. Renaissance Films, 1989.

have also been numerous film productions, sometimes termed ‘offshoots,¹³’ merely inspired by the plays: films based on *Romeo and Juliet – Shakespeare in Love*,¹⁴ the anime TV series *Romeo x Juliet*,¹⁵ the animated feature *Gnomeo and Juliet*,¹⁶ or the Bollywood films *Ishaqzaade*¹⁷ and *Ram-Leela*;¹⁸ films based on *A Midsummer Night’s Dream – Get Over It*,¹⁹ *Were the World Mine*,²⁰ animated *Strange Magic*;²¹ films based on *The Taming of the Shrew – 10 Things I Hate About You*²² or *Twelfth Night or What You Will – She’s The Man*.²³ These films often capitalize on utilising certain features of the plays in completely different contexts without necessarily acknowledging their relationship to their source texts and without classifying themselves as adaptations.

An adaptation is based on an antecedent work, and reworks its specific themes and characteristics. In this sense, most of Shakespeare’s plays can be considered adaptations. *Romeo and Juliet* in particular is based predominantly on Arthur Brooke’s poem “The Tragical History of Romeo and Juliet,”²⁴ which was derived from ‘Matteo Bandello’s adaptation of Luigi da Porto’s version of Masuccio Salernitano’s story.’²⁵ Shakespeare’s adaptations are never assessed based on their faithfulness to their sources, as they are perceived as independent works.²⁶ Shakespeare fashioned and modified his sources by

¹³ Ruby Cohn, *Modern Shakespeare Offshoots* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976) 3.

¹⁴ *Shakespeare in Love*, dir. John Madden, prod. Universal Pictures, 1998.

¹⁵ *Romeo x Juliet*, dir. Yukio Takahashi et al., prod. Chubu-nippon Broadcasting Company, 2007.

¹⁶ *Gnomeo & Juliet*, dir. Kelly Asbury, prod. Touchstone pictures, 2011.

¹⁷ *Ishaqzaade*, dir. Habib Faisal, prod. Yash Raj Films, 2012.

¹⁸ *Ram-Leela*, dir. Sanjay Leela Bhansali, prod. Eros International, 2013.

¹⁹ *Get Over It*, dir. Tommy O’Haver, prod. Miramax, 2001.

²⁰ *Were the World Mine*, dir. Tom Gustafson, prod. SPEAKproductions, 2008.

²¹ *Strange Magic*, dir. Gary Rydstorm, prod. Filmbox, 2015.

²² *10 Things I Hate About You*, dir. Gil Junger, prod. Touchstone Pictures, 1999.

²³ *She’s The Man*, dir. Andy Fickman, prod. DreamWorks SKG, 2006.

²⁴ René Weis, ed., “Introduction,” *The Arden Shakespeare Third Series: Romeo and Juliet* (London: Methuen Drama, 2012) 2.

²⁵ Gary R. Bortolotti and Linda Hutcheon, “On the Origin of Adaptations: Rethinking Fidelity Discourse and ‘Success’ – Biologically,” *New Literary History*, Vol. 38, No.3 (2007), 448, Project MUSE. 1 April 2016. <https://muse.jhu.edu/journals/new_literary_history/summary/v038/38.3bortolotti.html>.

²⁶ Bortolotti and Hutcheon 445.

recreating them into self-contained works adhering to his vision and using his unique literary style. Shakespeare's success and adaptation skills demonstrate how crucial it is for adapters to fully appropriate the source in order to adapt it. Based on the parallel with Shakespeare's creative process further adaptations of Shakespeare's works should be also seen as independent and not subordinate to the ultimate authority of Shakespeare.

Linda Hutcheon, one of the most prominent voices in adaptation theory argues that "fidelity" is not an adequate aspect to use in assessing adaptations' qualities, especially when considering every adaptation begins with appropriation and ends in re-creation into a new concept.²⁷ The fidelity discourse, which used to be a prevalent approach in analysing adaptations, aims to assess the validity of adaptations based on their faithfulness and always argues for the priority of the adapted text. Moreover, as Thomas Leitch posited, we cannot judge adaptations based solely on how they replicate their source texts as it would reduce their function.²⁸ Bortolotti and Hutcheon argue that 'the critical tendency has been to denigrate [narrative adaptations] as secondary and derivative in relation to what is usually (and tellingly) referred to as the "original."²⁹ All adaptations' merit is equal and all adaptations can provide us with new perspectives on the adapted text. Bortolotti and Hutcheon further illustrate that we should examine adaptations based on their inventiveness and consider all their sources as ancestry, and thus to move from evaluative discourse into descriptive.³⁰

The aim of this thesis is not to seek the illusive "ideal" version of *Romeo and Juliet* on screen while always preferring the adapted text. The intention is to consider the evolution of specific aspects, and the relationship between adapted text and film adaptation as a product. When

²⁷ Linda Hutcheon, *Theory of Adaptation: Second Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2013) 20.

²⁸ Thomas Leitch, *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents: From Gone with the Wind to The Passion of the Christ* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2007) 17.

²⁹ Bortolotti and Hutcheon 443.

³⁰ Bortolotti and Hutcheon 453-454.

transforming a play into the medium of film, there are necessary shifts to be made and observed. This thesis focuses on how specific themes are moulded and recreated for narrative purposes, how these strategic alterations impact the impression made on the audience, and thereby contribute to the general cultural perception. Adaptations can be viewed through the scope of how they narrow or extend the meanings within the source text without assigning superiority. Furthermore, the directors' choices can raise new interpretive arguments and ultimately enhance our understanding of the source narrative. Even if personal preferences are highly subjective when it comes to films, this thesis does not strive to establish a hierarchy in film adaptations, but rather to analyze and objectively comment on the points adaptations raise.

There are two types of film adaptations: the aforementioned offshoots that do not aim to recreate Shakespeare's plays and are only inspired by them, as for instance *Shakespeare in Love*, and the more conventional adaptations openly asserting their cultural heritage while usually relying on an abridged version of the adapted text. This thesis explores three conventional adaptations. In conventional Shakespearean film adaptations, the influence of theatre is always present: both media almost always use the original text of the play as a basis, and both are based on conventions stemming from one tradition. Moreover, films sometimes follow successful theatre adaptations.³¹ Whereas actors in theatre have to project their voices, use emphatic gestures and rely on words due to minimal sets, film actors depend on greater intimacy with the camera and can employ subtler acting techniques. However; in contrast to film, theatre productions are immediate and interact with the spectators, as the audience and actors co-exist within the theatre space. We perceive the actors not only as the characters of a

³¹ For instance Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* (1968) was based on his previous theatre production in 1960. For further detail, see, Courtney Lehmann, *Screen Adaptations – Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet: The Relationship between Text and Film* (London: Methuen Drama, 2010) 134.

play within its imaginary boundaries and theatre signs, but also as people with whom we form a certain relationship through meeting them in real life and seeing them exist in our reality.³² In comparison to theatre productions, which unfold in the audience's present time, film productions maintain more distance and the actors rarely break the fourth wall to address the audience.

Even though film enables the director significant influence over the final product, it also restricts the film audience more than it does the theatre audience. The medium of film provides directors with the possibility to enhance details for interpretation's sake, and thus enables them to transmit their perspectives with greater impact. Whereas a potential reader of a play essentially takes up the role of a director, choosing a setting, the characters' appearance and imagines the whole text performed, and audiences in theatres freely decide on what to focus their attention, in films, this is always decided for them by, as Maurice Hindle defines it: 'what the camera sees,'³³ i.e. what the director wants us to see. In contrast with theatre adaptations whose particulars may vary from night to night, the character of film adaptations remains invariable. Moreover, as Hindle asserts, a film offers unlimited and unconfined range of exterior and interior settings and instantaneous shifts between locations without prolonged breaks distracting us from the storyline,³⁴ which pertains to the sense of 'reality' one gets when watching a film uninterrupted. We are essentially immersed in the director's world of the adapted play and presented with his vision, which coincides with Hindle's comment about film using chiefly visual methods to communicate while theatre predominantly relies on verbal methods.³⁵ In film adaptations of Shakespeare, some cut lines often inspire the sets, costumes and visual metaphors, and thus remain present when not vocalised. Ace Pilkington

³² Andrea Hanáčková, *Základy teorie divadla* (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého, 2014) 28-29.

³³ Hindle 6.

³⁴ Hindle 9-10.

³⁵ Hindle 12.

was quoted to say, ‘the worst danger to the future of filmed Shakespeare is not insufficient funds but inefficient imaginations.’³⁶ Film productions certainly work with a larger budget than theatre productions, but no money can elevate a production without vision. Film directors’ technical facilities transcend the theatre in their range as they provide so many more opportunities to influence the final product and its impact on the audience, such as various camera angles, choice of pace, a variety of settings, and, most importantly enable the director and his team to deliver a final and unchanging product adhering to their vision.

As William Hazlitt was quoted to say about *Romeo and Juliet*, ‘Of all Shakespeare’s plays, this is perhaps the one that is acted, if not the oftenest, with the most pleasure to the spectator.’³⁷ The play is very easily marketable to younger audiences due to the protagonists’ age, as Juliet is only thirteen and Romeo about seventeen years old, and the absent explanation of the two families’ sustains the tragedy’s universality. Furthermore, the play’s language is uniquely adorned with the poetic form of the English sonnet, the composition of action is rather peculiar due to the intricate balance of tragic and comedic elements, and the play’s characters represent distinct individuals and constitute a believable society affected by the inauspicious conflict. Since this tragedy is considered to be one of the most acted and has been time-tested as one of the most universal ones when it comes to the possibilities of its adaptability, the myriad of its adapted depictions on screen is unsurprising. *Romeo and Juliet* is one of the most commonly known plays, yet there are also common misconceptions caused both by possible indifference to the play or by its depictions on screen and renditions in popular culture.

³⁶ Anthony Davies and Stanley Wells, eds., *Shakespeare and the Moving Image: the plays on film and television* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 14.

³⁷ Weis 53.

Due to the general notoriety of Shakespeare's works and their presence both in popular culture and in common discourse, it is virtually impossible to avoid experiencing the plays through someone's appropriation. Throughout the years, *Romeo and Juliet* in particular became rooted as clichéd and in some measure notorious, the lovers' names are often used to refer to couples or even set as an example of "true love." However, their tragic demise is completely omitted from this cliché, which not only fragments the play, but also creates an unavoidable preconception always present in encountering the play itself. Currently, it is film adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* that form most people's cultural perception of the play. Moreover, when one takes into account the variety of screen adaptations made where the resemblance is retained in mere fractions such as the lovers' names, there is no wonder the cultural perception remains limited. This thesis does not focus on such adaptations; nevertheless, what is necessary to acknowledge is that even though all Shakespearean film adaptations form separate entities, they are equally integral to the collective cultural memory.

The aim of this thesis is to compare three chosen films in terms of how they develop the adapted text, what interpretations of the text they present, what the individual director's inventions cause in the film's structure, and to what extent the inventions offer a new perspective. The respective directors' approaches are traced back to the play and their choices are analysed in the context of their films. Some aspects of the films have been additionally commented on by the directors, and these comments are to supplement critical opinions. The thesis will conclude with a discussion on the possible cultural impact of *Romeo and Juliet* on screen and on the contemporary trends in adapting Shakespeare.

1.1 THE THREE THEMES

Many secondary sources offer insight to the tragedy's representation of love, fickleness of fate, violence or Friar Laurence's political intentions. This thesis focuses on the themes of the

play that tend to be marginalised but are crucial in the layout of the plot, specifically parental relationships, death, and the final reconciliation. The present analysis will always begin by introducing the individual themes within the play and then examine the specific points across the selected adaptations.

In the scheme of the play, death and final reconciliation frame the action. The play's prologue introduces the plot, and foreshadows both Romeo and Juliet's deaths and the outcome for both families. Mercutio dies at the play's climax and so turns the hitherto comedy plot into a tragic mode, which ends in a catastrophe. The parental relationships predetermine the protagonists' actions, and all deaths ultimately contribute to the possibility of appeasement for all characters. The lovers' demise in combination with the other deaths gives rise to the reconciliation of the two feuding families. These three elements are closely tied and their depiction on screen influences not only matters within the plot, but also the catharsis and final impression made on the film audience. This thesis aims to compare the portrayals of the three themes and their depiction on screen in order to compare the individual approaches, inventions and coherence of the plot.

2 QUASI-PARENTAL RELATIONSHIPS

The cause of the open hostility between the Capulets and the Montagues is never explained, and the conflict itself defines the social context of the plot. It is precisely the unexpressed reasoning that enables the plot itself to be universally identified with by diverse audiences, and recontextualised in adaptations. Herbert H. Coursen counters the adapters' tendency to distance Romeo and Juliet by class and race in asserting that as both households are introduced as equal, the two families should never be distinguished by intentionally unequal portrayal.³⁸ The tension between the households is only amplified by culturally diverse societies in film adaptations such as the Puerto Rican immigration subtext in *West Side Story*,³⁹ or even the ethnically diverse Capulets contrasting with the pasty Montagues in Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*. Cultural recontextualisation never restricts the plot, and can only enhance it when premeditated. Romeo and Juliet are predisposed by their social context, and by the relationships to their parents, and their confidants in the Nurse, Friar Lawrence and Mercutio.

The play features Romeo and Juliet's interactions with their parents only sporadically, which is why any adaptation's point of view on the relationships enhances the adapted play by providing more insight into the social context, and illustrating the extent to which a reconciliation of the conflicting households would be impossible and thus extraordinary. Observing added details in individual adaptations provides more perspective on the tragedy itself, and facilitates one to perceive more of the respective directors' goals. In the play, both Romeo and Juliet have a somewhat distant relationship to their parents and have stronger

³⁸ Herbert R. Coursen, *Shakespeare Translated: Derivatives on Film and TV* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2005) 3.

³⁹ *West Side Story*, dir. Jerome Robbins and Robert Wise, perf. Natalie Wood and Richard Beymer, prod. Mirisch Pictures, 1961.

affiliation with Friar Laurence and the Nurse. Romeo and Juliet gradually mature, and the process is induced by the actions of their parents and confidants.

2.1 THE CAPULETS AND THE NURSE

Whereas Romeo's parents only have a few lines, the Capulets are very prominent. According to Weis, Lord Capulet's part is the fourth longest⁴⁰ after the third Friar Lawrence with 346 lines, the second Juliet with 571 lines and the first Romeo with 615 lines.⁴¹ The number of lines coincides with Lord Capulet's propelling role in the play. His agreement with Paris first forces Juliet to seek Friar Lawrence, and when he subsequently reschedules the wedding for Wednesday from the original Thursday, the time to deliver the Friar's letter to Romeo significantly decreases, and contributes to the lovers' deaths. The Capulets oscillate between caring and controlling, whereas the Nurse is Juliet's only friend apart from Romeo.

Initially, Juliet is very submissive to the will of her parents. When Lady Capulet approaches Juliet before the feast, Juliet primarily listens and then utters one sentence perfectly epitomising her obedience, "I'll look to like, if looking liking move, / But no more deep will I endart mine eye / Than your consent gives strength to make it fly" (I, iii, 98-100). When Juliet matures and begins to think independently of her parents' will, she is immediately reprimanded. As Juliet first shows her disobedience by refusing to marry Paris (III, v, 116-117), her father threatens to renounce her as his daughter (III, v, 191-196), and Juliet's mother chooses not to be involved and states, "Do as though wilt, for I have done with thee" (III, v, 204). When the parents leave, the Nurse urges Juliet to marry Paris, and disparages Romeo (III, v, 213-226). Juliet then internally rejects the Nurse's input, and their relationship disintegrates. After consulting Friar Lawrence, Juliet returns to apologise for her "disobedient

⁴⁰ Weis, "Introduction" 4.

⁴¹ Weis, "Introduction" 31.

opposition” (IV, II, 19) and agrees to marry Paris, in reaction to which Lord Capulet reschedules the wedding for the very next day (IV, ii, 39). During the night, Juliet feigns her death and never sees her parents again.

The Capulets often appear in Juliet’s absence. Lord Capulet appears with Paris to discuss Paris’ suit, and also in the opening scene of the play, where he wants to join the brawl. When Lord Capulet intends to join in, Lady Capulet mentions he should rather use a crutch than a sword (I, i, 74). This line correlates to Lady Capulet telling Juliet that she herself was a mother in Juliet’s age (I, iii, 73), and possibly to Lord Capulet’s line to Paris when asserting that Juliet is still too young to marry, “And too soon marred are those so early married” (I, ii, 13). Lord Capulet could be far older than Juliet’s mother, who was once informed of her upcoming marriage in the same manner she informs Juliet in the play. It can be presumed that Lady Capulet’s submissiveness to her husband is a view onto Juliet’s hypothetical future had she never met Romeo.⁴² The Capulet’s approach to Tybalt, Juliet’s cousin, further exposes their dominant tendencies, and their reactions to his death contextualise Tybalt’s character. When Juliet is presumed dead, all lament her and the Capulets express their love for their daughter openly for the first time.

Zeffirelli portrays Juliet’s parents as both distant and controlling, and depicts the Nurse to be the only person apart from Romeo that Juliet fully trusts and sheds social pretence with. Zeffirelli chooses to have Lord Capulet respond to Paris with, “Too soon marred are those who [marry] early,”⁴³ while he is glancing at his wife, thus hinting at their marriage to have happened too early and for them to have grown apart since. The disharmony of the couple is also strengthened by depicting Capulet as an elder man. When the Nurse calls Juliet to Lady

⁴² Northrop Frye.in, in Harold Bloom, ed., *Bloom’s Shakespeare Throughout the Ages: Romeo and Juliet* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008) 242.

⁴³ *Romeo and Juliet*, 11 min. 45 sec.

Capulet, Juliet composes herself,⁴⁴ and when she arrives, Olivia Hussey nervously clenches her fists. Juliet is portrayed as nervous in front of her mother, which further emphasises her distant relationship to her parents. Juliet's nervousness is in stark contrast with her beaming smile, when the Nurse joins the conversation,⁴⁵ and the warm embrace Juliet gives her. Juliet is closer to the Nurse, and looks to her, when her mother's question about marriage disconcerts her.⁴⁶ Zeffirelli depicts the Nurse as very hearty towards Juliet, and preserves her uncouth behaviour. The Nurse contrasts with Lady Capulet, who is rather cold and distant. All Capulets react to Tybalt's death very emotionally, and lady Capulet demands for the Prince to sentence Romeo to death for killing Tybalt.⁴⁷ When Benvolio recounts the deaths, all Capulets are enraged, and one of them even punches him. The morning after Tybalt's death, Lady Capulet informs Juliet of her impending marriage to Paris and for the first time, Juliet does not control her demeanour and emotionally expresses her disagreement.⁴⁸ Lord Capulet then arrives to Juliet's room already enraged, having been informed of Juliet's reaction.⁴⁹ Lord Capulet physically punishes Juliet, and then shoves the Nurse, who defends her charge. Lady Capulet obediently looks on, and as she is leaving⁵⁰ Juliet's room, Juliet desperately lunges at her, which prompts Lady Capulet to dismiss her. In the moment the Nurse advises Juliet to marry Paris,⁵¹ Juliet stops weeping and looks betrayed. After the Nurse further demeans Romeo, Juliet completely transforms, becomes cold in her demeanour and dodges the Nurse's comforting touch. As Juliet returns from the Friar's and asks for her father's forgiveness,⁵² Lord Capulet hugs her, but Juliet never reciprocates the gesture. In the morning, the entire

⁴⁴ *Romeo and Juliet*, 12 min. 55 sec.

⁴⁵ *Romeo and Juliet*, 13 min. 50 sec.

⁴⁶ *Romeo and Juliet*, 15 min. 30 sec.

⁴⁷ *Romeo and Juliet*, 89 min. 51 sec.

⁴⁸ *Romeo and Juliet*, 101 min. 53 sec.

⁴⁹ *Romeo and Juliet*, 102 min. 24 sec.

⁵⁰ *Romeo and Juliet*, 104 min. 20 sec.

⁵¹ *Romeo and Juliet*, 105 min. 13 sec.

⁵² *Romeo and Juliet*, 112 min. 46 sec.

Capulet household breaks down mourning.⁵³ The Capulets are all very impetuous, as is Juliet. Zeffirelli's Juliet is predisposed to rebel due to her parents' restrictiveness and shows that she is capable of emulating their aloofness, when she internally rejects the Nurse, distances herself and begins treating her former confidant like a servant. Furthermore, the Capulets' collective hateful approach to the Montagues endangers Juliet and Romeo, and prevents them from ever seeking the parents' consent.

Luhrmann depicts the Capulets as very eccentric, and the Nurse plays a smaller part than in Zeffirelli's depiction, as she is often reduced to a trustworthy messenger. As Courtney Lehmann remarks, Luhrmann's depiction of Lady Capulet getting ready for the feast references Zeffirelli's pampering scene⁵⁴ and reinterprets Lady Capulet as "a monstrous crossbreed of Southern debutante and Hollywood diva."⁵⁵ Luhrmann further emphasises the parody in Lady Capulet's unbridled behaviour by fast motion, which is typically used for humorous effect.⁵⁶ Lady Capulet is portrayed as vain, and Luhrmann's Juliet is never as docile in her obedience to her parents as Zeffirelli's. When Lady Capulet discusses Paris with Juliet,⁵⁷ Juliet's reply appears to be an empty phrase. Juliet is never aggressive when asking for the news after sending the Nurse to Romeo, and when the Nurse complains about her back pain, the amicable Juliet begins massaging her back. Their relationship is very close and caring, and the Nurse also accompanies Juliet to the wedding.⁵⁸ Luhrmann expands Lady Capulet's relationship to Tybalt as incestuous,⁵⁹ and thus underlines the issues in the family.

⁵³ *Romeo and Juliet*, 115 min. 4 sec.

⁵⁴ *Romeo and Juliet*, 12 min. 10 sec.

⁵⁵ Courtney Lehmann, *Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet: The Relationship between Text and Film* (London: Methuen Drama, 2010) 172-173.

⁵⁶ Roberta E. Pearson, and Philip Simpson, eds. *Critical Dictionary of Film and Television Theory* (London: Routledge, 2001) 91.

⁵⁷ *Romeo + Juliet*, 16 min. 53 sec.

⁵⁸ *Romeo + Juliet*, 56 min. 19 sec.

⁵⁹ *Romeo + Juliet*, 24 min. 21 sec.

Lady Capulet is devastated by Tybalt's death,⁶⁰ and appears broken and submissive from then on. Lady Capulet is kind to Juliet when imparting her husband's decision,⁶¹ but when Juliet frowns at the news and gets angry, Lady Capulet is first concerned and then afraid, as she glances to the door in panic. Luhrmann portrays the Capulets' marriage as miserable and the controlling Lord Capulet appears to be an abusive drunkard. Even in danger, Juliet defiantly speaks her mind, though she can anticipate her father's following physical abuse.⁶² Having also received a hit, the broken Lady Capulet then dismisses Juliet's pleading,⁶³ possibly in self-preservation. When the Nurse hurts Juliet with her advice to marry Paris, she appears afraid for Juliet, and does so with careful consideration. The Capulet's domestic situation heightens the contrast with Juliet's sincerity, and substantiates Juliet's reasoning for seeking secret love outside of her home, as she detaches herself from her family. Lord Capulet's chronically hateful demeanour within his family demonstrates his inability to change and to ever reconcile with the Montagues.

Carlei's depiction of Juliet's parents is in startling contrast to the two previous films, as the Capulets' relationship is portrayed as loving, and they are very affectionate towards Juliet rather than overly enclosing. Lord Capulet appears sincere, not threatening, and his composure in front of Paris is not atypical. The Nurse is depicted as decorous and her role in Juliet's family resembles a kind grandmother. When Lady Capulet pleads with Juliet to get ready faster, the Nurse dominates the interaction, as she corrects Lady Capulet's view on her daughter's age.⁶⁴ Juliet is not ordered to like Paris, but encouraged to explore her feelings to Paris at her own discretion. At the feast, Tybalt brings Romeo to Lord Capulet's attention.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ *Romeo + Juliet*, 70 min. 44 sec.

⁶¹ *Romeo + Juliet*, 82 min. 38 sec.

⁶² *Romeo + Juliet*, 82 min. 31 sec.

⁶³ *Romeo + Juliet*, 84 min. 29 sec.

⁶⁴ *Romeo & Juliet*, 9 min. 13 sec.

⁶⁵ *Romeo & Juliet*, 18 min. 15 sec.

Lord Capulet recognises Romeo, witnesses his romantic interaction with Juliet, and yet never shows any disapproval. The manner in which Lord Capulet prevents Tybalt from attacking Romeo indicates that Lord Capulet bears no grudge towards the Montagues. After Tybalt's and Mercutio's deaths, both sets of parents stand in a court-like setting in front of the Prince,⁶⁶ and both families remain calm throughout. In a newly invented interaction, Lord Capulet discusses his decision to marry Juliet to Paris with his wife,⁶⁷ and argues that they need to act now, so that their future and an heir to their fortune is secured as soon as possible. When Juliet is informed by her mother,⁶⁸ and subsequently reprimanded by her father, it seems that Juliet's lenient upbringing caused her to retort, and her father only now attempts to exercise authority over her. When Lord Capulet threatens Juliet with renouncing her, the actor portrays Lord Capulet as threatening, but in the context, the character appears desperate rather than menacing. When Juliet is found, the household mourns, and Lord Capulet delivers a speech of Juliet being wed to Death, who shall now inherit all.⁶⁹ This statement is often omitted, but in this film, it echoes Capulet's motivation for consenting to the wedding. In comparison to Zeffirelli's and Luhrmann's portrayals of the parents, Carlei's are the kindest and the closest to Juliet. Nonetheless, this particular depiction is also the most problematic for the plot of the film, as the Capulets' intentions are merely to marry Juliet, and because Lord Capulet never expresses any aversion to Romeo, a Montague. There is no impending threat to Juliet or her relationship to Romeo, and the tragedy seems to be caused by the lovers' secretiveness rather than the conflict of the two families. Juliet's parents only agree to her wedding to Paris in order to secure Juliet a husband, an heir to their fortune, and a continuation of their bloodline.⁷⁰ Juliet comes across as slightly spoilt, not oppressed, and thus it seems that there is

⁶⁶ *Romeo & Juliet*, 54 min. 3 sec.

⁶⁷ *Romeo & Juliet*, 61 min. 35 sec.

⁶⁸ *Romeo & Juliet*, 70 min. 23 sec.

⁶⁹ *Romeo & Juliet*, 84 min. 3 sec.

⁷⁰ *Romeo & Juliet*, 61 min. 35 sec.

no justifiable reason for Romeo and Juliet to marry in secret, and ultimately die, because their love never appears to be forbidden.

The Capulets' marriage serves as a deterrent example of arranged marriage, and further serves as a motivator for Juliet to seek love rather than a match. Whereas Zeffirelli and Luhrmann both portray the Capulets' marriage as miserable, Carlei shows it to be idyllic for both the parents and their beloved daughter. The Capulets' bliss is the reason Carlei needs to depict Juliet as headstrong initially, because she is never given any reason to detach herself from her parents. The Nurse exposes another side of Juliet's obedience in both Zeffirelli's and Luhrmann's film. Carlei's Juliet never transforms from obedient to self-reliant due to the Nurse's betrayal, and thus loses her multi-layered personality, and even appeal to the audience, because she never overcomes significant obstacles. Luhrmann's and Zeffirelli's impulsive and aggressive Capulets bear a grudge, and would never be convinced to marry Juliet to a Montague, which causes Romeo and Juliet to be secretive. In Zeffirelli's case, the Capulets' hate towards the Montagues enhances the singularity of their final reconciliation, and strengthens the film's catharsis. Carlei's Capulets are portrayed as liberal in Juliet's upbringing, and never restrict her, or express any underlying hate towards the Montagues, which causes the plot to appear less tragic and more as a miscommunication.

2.2 THE MONTAGUES

The Montagues are rather episodic characters, as Romeo never directly interacts with them and seeks out the Friar for help instead. The Montagues are never indifferent to Romeo. Lady Montague enquires after Romeo when she learns he was not involved in the opening fight (I, i, 114-115). In the Montagues' discussion with Benvolio, they describe Romeo as secretive and reclusive, and Lord Montague says they tried learning the reason for his sorrows without success and that they will gladly offer help, if they learn what Romeo needs (I, i, 153). After

Tybalt and Mercutio die, Lord Montague defends Romeo's actions. Romeo's mother shows the deepest involvement in her son's fortunes, when she dies of grief at Romeo's banishment (V, iii, 211). Weis asserts that the main difference in the Capulets' and the Montagues' approaches to their children lies in gender roles, as it would be unimaginable for Juliet to move about with the same freedom as Romeo.⁷¹ Furthermore, whereas Juliet is not able to express herself freely at first, Romeo's freedom and effervescence must appear the more enticing, and inspiring in her eyes.

Zeffirelli shows Lady Montague to be helping the injured from the opening brawl,⁷² while she, her husband, and Benvolio discuss Romeo. When the Montagues speak of Romeo or see him, they are only calm and loving, and their marriage seems harmonious. Romeo avoids interacting with his parents, and they do not force him.⁷³ The Montagues are peaceful, and respect Romeo. In the aftermath of Tybalt's and Meructio's deaths, both Lord and Lady Montague remain calm and in each other's embrace.⁷⁴ When Lady Capulet demands Romeo's death, the Montagues appear angered, but never verbally react. Lord Montague emotionally defends Romeo before Prince, as his wife nods in agreement.⁷⁵ Romeo's calm and loving family environment is the direct opposite of Juliet's, and further defines Romeo to be inherently conciliatory, and likeable.

Luhrmann's Montagues always remain in or near the safety of their car, and clad in formal clothing. When Lord Montague intends to join the opening conflict, Lady Montague successfully prevents it.⁷⁶ In their interaction with Benvolio, both Montagues are calm and worried about Romeo's reclusive behaviour. Romeo recognises his parents' cars in the

⁷¹ Weis, "Introduction" 4.

⁷² *Romeo and Juliet*, 7 min. 52 sec

⁷³ *Romeo and Juliet*, 8 min. 39 sec.

⁷⁴ *Romeo and Juliet*, 89 min. 2 sec.

⁷⁵ *Romeo and Juliet*, 89 min. 55 sec.

⁷⁶ *Romeo + Juliet*, 8 min. 46 sec.

distance,⁷⁷ and leaves in the opposite direction. Lord Montague asks Benvolio to keep Romeo company, but appears to be slightly aggrieved at Romeo's secretiveness. After Romeo kills Tybalt, the Montagues are sidelined by the grieving Lady Capulet and Benvolio's testimony.⁷⁸ Lord Montague attempts to plead for Romeo,⁷⁹ and saddened Lady Montague stands silently nearby. As Luhrmann never shows the Montague's house or behaviour towards anyone outside of their family, it is arguable, whether Romeo's upbringing differs from Juliet's. The Montagues are definitely more passive than Luhrmann's Capulets, and demonstrate great concern for Romeo's mental balance.

Carlei's transforms the opening scene into a tournament and a fight that ensues between the servants, while the camera focuses on Lord Montague and Lord Capulet to outline the conflict. Lord Montague challenges Tybalt in order to protect Benvolio,⁸⁰ Lord Capulet arrives and calls Montague old, and when Lord Montague slips, both wives jump to prevent any further fighting. After Tybalt's death, both Montagues calmly defend Romeo in front of the Prince.⁸¹ Romeo never appears in his parents' vicinity alive.⁸² However, Carlei shows Romeo to have a fatherly figure in Friar Lawrence. Romeo is detached from his parents, and is very self-assured in his demeanour, which can be appealing to Juliet.

As Romeo's parents are minor characters when it comes to lines, their presence is only necessary to provide contrast to Juliet's parents. As the Montagues are always portrayed as conciliatory, the reconciliation of the two families depends on the portrayal of the Capulets and the intentions of the directors. All adapters show honourable qualities in the Montagues, and never depict them as restrictive towards Romeo, which serves well to the plot in making

⁷⁷ *Romeo + Juliet*, 10 min. 59 sec.

⁷⁸ *Romeo + Juliet*, 70 min. 55 sec.

⁷⁹ *Romeo + Juliet*, 71 min. 52 sec.

⁸⁰ *Romeo & Juliet*, 4 min. 29 sec.

⁸¹ *Romeo & Juliet*, 54 min.

⁸² *Romeo & Juliet*, 108 min. 45 sec.

Romeo intriguingly independent in Juliet's eyes. Juliet's restrictive domestic situation contrasts with Romeo's freedom. Romeo is always influenced more by the people outside of his family.

2.3 FRIAR LAWRENCE

Friar Lawrence is Romeo's confidant and both Romeo's and Juliet's accomplice, but he is also a character with a political motive and partly at fault for the lovers' death. Whereas the Capulets openly assert dominance over Juliet to control her, Friar Lawrence's means of gaining control and achieving his intentions is far more cunning and covert. Susan Snyder likens the Friar's manipulation of other characters' to other Shakespearean 'stage-managers' such as Oberon and Prospero.⁸³ Martha Rozett Tuck describes the Friar as 'an ineffectual manipulator' due to not being able to outwit Fate and prevent the inevitable tragic outcome.⁸⁴ Friar Lawrence is a mentor Romeo always seeks out for help. When Romeo confides in the Friar about his newfound love for Juliet, the Friar chides him at first and then agrees to help only because he presumes the outcome of Romeo and Juliet's marriage could ultimately reconcile the families' feud. The Friar shelters Romeo after he is banished, and provides the desperate Juliet with the means to feign her death. Even though the Friar promises to inform Romeo and to meet Juliet in the tomb around the time she wakes (IV, i, 115-116), which would save both Romeo and Juliet, he is tardy and arrives when Romeo is already dead. When Juliet awakes, Friar Lawrence attempts to persuade her to leave and he himself flees out of fear of the approaching watch before Juliet commits suicide. As the Friar's scheming backfires, he is found trembling in the churchyard, and then recounts the events as testimony

⁸³ Snyder in Bloom, 217.

⁸⁴ Martha Tuck Rozett, "The Comic Structures of Tragic Endings: The Suicide Scenes in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Summer, 1985): 156, JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2871190>> 25 March, 2012.

for the Prince. The Friar embodies the duality of his cleric position by stating, “And here I stand, both to impeach and purge, / Myself condemned and myself excused” (V, iii, 226-227).

Zeffirelli’s Friar Lawrence is introduced picking herbs in the early morning,⁸⁵ and when Romeo arrives, the Friar jestingly teases Romeo. When Romeo imparts his feelings for Juliet, the Friar seems outraged,⁸⁶ and chides Romeo for being so changeable. The Friar then changes his mind only after glancing⁸⁷ at a rood, but as his eyes remain fixated on the cross and never glance at Romeo, even when the Friar is agreeing to officiate, his intentions appear to be motivated by divine inspiration, and not by his relationship to Romeo. Before the wedding,⁸⁸ the Friar lectures Romeo, and Romeo finishes his sentences, as if he was indoctrinated with these statements. After Romeo is sentenced to banishment,⁸⁹ the Friar is furious at Romeo’s threat to kill himself, lectures him, and attempts to alleviate Romeo’s desperation by further scheming to ensure the parents’ consent to the marriage, and Romeo’s triumphant return. Before Romeo leaves, he hesitates and then kisses the Friar’s hand.⁹⁰ After being told to marry Paris, the desperate Juliet seeks out the Friar for counsel,⁹¹ when the Friar offers Juliet the potion, he is excited, not worried for Juliet, and appears almost Faustian in his laboratory. The Friar’s excitement also shows in his grin and inquisitive observation during Juliet being taken to the tomb on a bier.⁹² The Friar panics and flees, when the watch approaches the tomb,⁹³ and never returns, which characterises him as untrustworthy. The trusting Romeo depends on the unreliable Friar’s views and always relies on him and his

⁸⁵ *Romeo and Juliet*, 52 min. 45 sec.

⁸⁶ *Romeo and Juliet*, 54 min. 13 sec.

⁸⁷ *Romeo and Juliet*, 55 min. 12 sec.

⁸⁸ *Romeo and Juliet*, 67 min. 31 sec.

⁸⁹ *Romeo and Juliet*, 92 min. 40 sec.

⁹⁰ *Romeo and Juliet*, 94 min. 30 sec.

⁹¹ *Romeo and Juliet*, 107 min. 40 sec.

⁹² *Romeo and Juliet*, 116 min. 30 sec.

⁹³ *Romeo and Juliet*, 129 min. 42 sec.

counsel, but his affection to the Friar is also the only redeeming quality of Friar Lawrence's scheming in this film

Luhrmann's Friar Lawrence appears to be both a mentor and a friend to Romeo. Luhrmann's Friar Lawrence appears more understanding towards Romeo's young indiscretions, as he converses with Romeo without appearing patronising and wears casual clothing when introduced.⁹⁴ The Friar is divinely inspired to agree to officiate by a vision of possible reconciliation seen in news headlines. The Friar expresses his intention to turn the families' "rancour to pure love."⁹⁵ During the wedding the Friar seems to be sincere, not scheming, as his intentions appear to be to help the couple, not to control them.⁹⁶ When Romeo takes refuge with the Friar,⁹⁷ the Friar dresses Romeo's wounds and consoles him. The two part with a heartfelt embrace. Friar Lawrence is concerned for both Romeo and Juliet, but instead of going to Juliet's tomb, he attempts to re-send his letter to Romeo. Luhrmann's Friar appears to be a caring and trustworthy mentor, and his friendly interactions with Romeo verge on a familial bond.

Carlei's Friar Lawrence appears to be a friendly father figure to Romeo, but he never succeeds in reprimanding Romeo, because he is never authoritative. Romeo convinces the Friar to agree to the wedding by invoking divinely inspired love, and the Friar "sp[ies] a kind of hope to end the city's strife."⁹⁸ Prior to the wedding, the Friar warns Romeo of possible repercussions of overly intense and hasty love for all involved,⁹⁹ but he never lectures Romeo, and appears to be genuinely happy for the couple. After Romeo is banished, Friar Lawrence

⁹⁴ *Romeo + Juliet*, 46 min. 38 sec.

⁹⁵ *Romeo + Juliet*, 49 min. 15 sec.

⁹⁶ *Romeo + Juliet*, 56 min. 57 sec.

⁹⁷ *Romeo + Juliet*, 72 min. 30 sec.

⁹⁸ *Romeo & Juliet*, 33 min. 45 sec.

⁹⁹ *Romeo & Juliet*, 41 min. 13 sec.

chides Romeo for being ungrateful at not being sentenced to death,¹⁰⁰ and Romeo retorts that the Friar cannot judge him, when he himself cannot be in his situation. The Friar appears frustrated, and slaps Romeo for threatening suicide, but their parting is heartfelt and Romeo appears to have finally matured. When Juliet seeks out the Friar,¹⁰¹ he consoles her, and promises to meet her in the tomb when she awakes. The Friar arrives to the tomb immediately after Romeo's death, and utters, "my child, not him of all."¹⁰² The Friar is devastated when he finds both Romeo and Juliet dead after he attempts to stall the watch. Carlei's Friar Lawrence is very invested in Romeo's well-being and seems to have a very close relationship to Romeo, and though he has some influence over him, the Friar never manipulates Romeo.

Friar Lawrence is essential to the plot. All three films invariably portray the Friar as Romeo's mentor, but whereas Zeffirelli's Romeo's trust is blind, both Luhrmann and Carlei depict Romeo's trust as merited, and the relationship as reciprocal. Zeffirelli's boyish Romeo follows the puppeteer-like Friar Lawrence's will and worships him. In contrast to that, the other two films portray their Romeos as more assertive. Luhrmann features an authoritative and caring Friar, who treats Romeo as an equal, and a friend. Carlei's Friar Lawrence is the most lenient mentor, and almost fatherly towards Romeo.

2.4 MERCUTIO

Even if the connotations of Romeo's relationship to Mercutio could be hardly considered parental, the inclusion of their relationship is necessary to contextualise Mercutio's role in the tragedy. Romeo sees Mercutio as a mentor, and Mercutio's role in Romeo's maturing is just as crucial as Romeo's newfound love for Juliet. The close relationship between Romeo and Mercutio is essential for the plot, as it is the depth of Romeo's feelings for Mercutio that

¹⁰⁰ *Romeo & Juliet*, 57 min. 24 sec.

¹⁰¹ *Romeo & Juliet*, 75 min. 19 sec.

¹⁰² *Romeo & Juliet*, 93 min. 22 sec.

prompts Romeo's violent revenge on Tybalt. Without thorough exposition of the relationship, Romeo's actions are bound to fail in eliciting sympathy from the audience.

Romeo's language develops in the course of the play and it is a direct result of Mercutio's influence. In his very first scene, Romeo discusses the topic of love with Benvolio (I, i, 172-180), and his language is rather naïve and almost empty in comparison to when Romeo talks about his love for Juliet. Whereas in the beginning, Romeo is more infatuated with the idea of love itself rather than Rosaline, in the course of the play his language develops into dramatized love sonnets, culminates in him challenging Tybalt and then resounds with pessimism in his resigned determination to die at Juliet's side. Mercutio's language counters Romeo's initial perspective, and his verbal wit also facilitates the transformation of Romeo's language into more mature and foreseeing one. Before his Queen Mab speech, Mercutio duels Romeo with his salacious remarks about love such as "If love be rough with you, be rough with love; / Prick love for pricking, and you beat love down (I, iv, 27-28)." This interaction and the Queen Mab speech entice Romeo and essentially silence him till the end of the scene, where he delivers a succinct soliloquy prophetic of the twist in his destiny (I, iv, 106-113). Romeo matures because of his true love for Juliet, but also due to Mercutio's initial influence. Furthermore, it is Mercutio's tragic death that propels Romeo to seek revenge and ultimately fail to reunite with Juliet.

In Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet*, the relationship between Romeo and Mercutio is depicted as a very close one. When Romeo mentions having a dream before the Capulet's feast, Leonard Whiting portrays Romeo as almost vulnerable in his trust towards Mercutio and as very curious about Mercutio's input.¹⁰³ Furthermore, Romeo is afraid for Mercutio's well-being after Mercutio finishes his delirious Queen Mab speech, and Romeo consoles Mercutio by

¹⁰³ *Romeo and Juliet*, 18 min. 2 sec.

holding his face in his hands. Zeffirelli also shows plentiful friendly mocking beyond the text itself, as all of the supporting cast always laugh and echo, and thus create a feeling of natural companionship. When Mercutio dies, Romeo's desperate outcry seems a perfectly plausible reaction. Romeo idolizes Mercutio and their intimate relationship both influences his behaviour and propels him to kill Tybalt without Romeo appearing villainous.

Many critics point out the strong presence of the much discussed homoerotic undertones of the relationship between Romeo and Mercutio in the play due to Mercutio's inherently sexual language, which could be interpreted as insinuating feelings beyond friendship. Courtney Lehmann in particular interprets Zeffirelli's portrayal to be heavily homoerotic due to Mercutio's effeminate practical jokes, and perceives Romeo's reaction to Mercutio's death to be more passionate than all his interactions with Juliet. However, Lehmann's perception of the fight between Tybalt and Romeo is rather exaggerated, as she perceives their stripping of clothes in the heat of the fight to be sexual, rather than practical, and further implies that when dead Tybalt falls onto Romeo, there is sexual tension.¹⁰⁴ The portrayal of Romeo and Mercutio could be possibly perceived as homosexual to some extent, especially when considering critics often point to Zeffirelli's overt focus on male crotches and codpieces in his shots,¹⁰⁵ which William van Watson describes as Zeffirelli's 'homoerotic camera.'¹⁰⁶

Luhrmann's portrayal of Mercutio in *Romeo + Juliet* is probably the most distinct out of all three adaptations and the dynamic of the relationship between Romeo and Mercutio greatly differs from Zeffirelli's. Whereas Romeo is still the dreamer, Mercutio becomes a cross-dressing tempter with a temper. Mercutio first enters the scene wearing a drag costume consisting of gun holsters, a silver rhinestones embellished bra, a matching miniskirt and

¹⁰⁴ Lehmann 156-157.

¹⁰⁵ Jackson 222-223.

¹⁰⁶ Jackson 221.

heels;¹⁰⁷ all of which shows Luhrmann's emphasis on Mercutio's gender duality. Mercutio behaves in an effeminate manner during the 'party' when in costume and displays jealousy towards Romeo throughout the film, especially when Mercutio tries to get Romeo's attention by shooting his gun in the air when Romeo interacts with the Nurse.¹⁰⁸ The Queen Mab speech includes Mercutio offering Romeo a drug, and when Mercutio abruptly stops, Romeo's consoling touch startles Mercutio.¹⁰⁹ Mercutio reacts with a sombre speech featuring "vain fantasy," which further exposes his possibly homosexual feelings towards Romeo. After the interaction, Romeo foresees "a consequence yet hanging in the stars," which Luhrmann underscores with a foreshadowing very wide shot¹¹⁰ shot featuring Romeo walking down the church aisle to the seemingly dead Juliet.¹¹¹ It is possible that Romeo becomes prophetic due to being influenced by Mercutio's speech in a manner similar to the play. Romeo seems isolated from his hot-tempered friends with his escapist behaviour, as Luhrmann portrays him as the distinct lead overcoming the turbulent atmosphere of the feud. After discussing the wedding with Friar Lawrence, Romeo participates in the suggestive jokes with his friends.¹¹² Romeo appears to be very independent, yet shows a strong emotional connection to his friends, even though he never seeks their approval. It could be argued over whether or not Romeo reciprocates Mercutio's romantic feelings, but Luhrmann depicts their relationship to be very a close one either way. Though Romeo appears to be the mature leader of the group, and Mercutio is not in a mentor position, Romeo is influenced by Mercutio's attitudes in both his humour and audacity. Mercutio attacks Tybalt in Romeo's defence and ultimately dies in

¹⁰⁷ *Romeo + Juliet*, 19 min. 30 sec.

¹⁰⁸ *Romeo + Juliet*, 52 min. 53 sec.

¹⁰⁹ *Romeo + Juliet*, 22 min. 25 sec.

¹¹⁰ "Shot Types," *Mediacollege.com*, <<http://www.mediacollege.com/video/shots/very-wide-shot.html>> 27 July 2016. Web.

¹¹¹ *Romeo + Juliet*, 23 min. 25 sec.

¹¹² *Romeo + Juliet*, 51 min. 37 sec.

Romeo's firm embrace. Romeo's infuriation at Tybalt due to Mercutio's needless death perfectly coincides with Romeo's relationship to Mercutio on screen.

Carlei's portrayal of the relationship between Mercutio and Romeo in *Romeo & Juliet* is the only depiction noticeably devoid of emotional depth. Mercutio first appears in the opening jousting scene, where he is introduced as Mercutio of the house of Montagues.¹¹³ Both Benvolio and Romeo overshadow Mercutio even during the scene featuring Mercutio's Queen Mab speech that immediately precedes the Capulet's feast. Romeo is portrayed as rather serious, and afraid to come to the feast, as he foreshadows his fate before Mercutio ever talks of dreams. In his doubt of what is to come, Romeo mentions his own dream,¹¹⁴ and Mercutio reacts by derision. When Mercutio is not looking, Benvolio and Romeo grin at each other,¹¹⁵ and both of their reactions to Mercutio's abridged Queen Mab speech indicate that neither of them pay attention to Mercutio nor take his words seriously. The film does not show a close friendship between Mercutio and Romeo and the mentor-like capacity of Mercutio's part disappears. Carlei is the only director out of the three to show Mercutio during the feast, and portrays him to witness Romeo and Juliet's interaction, and their joint retreat into privacy.¹¹⁶ This is one of the additions that Carlei made that could potentially enhance the plot, and, unfortunately, is never referred to later on and ultimately remains a missed opportunity. Carlei's Romeo has his closest companions in Benvolio and Friar Lawrence, and only their deaths could realistically persuade Romeo to seek revenge on Tybalt. In this film, Mercutio is depicted as a mere Montague kinsman and Romeo killing Tybalt as a reaction to Mercutio's death is disproportionate to their relationship on screen.

¹¹³ *Romeo & Juliet*, 2 min. 43 sec.

¹¹⁴ *Romeo & Juliet*, 12 min. 10 sec.

¹¹⁵ *Romeo & Juliet* 12 min. 19 sec.

¹¹⁶ *Romeo & Juliet*, 20 min. 4 sec.

When Mercutio is portrayed as very prominent, his eccentricity can take the audience's focus off the lovers and disrupt the narrative, which is why it could be argued that reducing Mercutio's prominence could strengthen the adaptations' coherence. Carlei's approach to Mercutio appears strategic, but ultimately fails, as without Mercutio's influence, Romeo is never led to reconsider his naïve perception of love. By reducing Mercutio, Carlei never establishes the depth of Romeo's feelings for Juliet, and Romeo is consequently never shown as having matured throughout the plot. Furthermore, when Mercutio is not portrayed as a close friend of Romeo, Romeo loses the only justifiable reason to kill Tybalt in revenge. Whereas Zeffirelli's and Luhrmann's Mercutio pushes Romeo towards maturity and makes him cherish his true love for Juliet, Carlei's Romeo never transforms and never defies significant obstacles, and thereby never involves the audience in his fate to the extent of Zeffirelli's or Luhrmann's Romeos. Both Luhrmann and Zeffirelli portray Mercutio as Romeo's primary influencer, thereby emphasise the depth of their relationship, and perfectly illustrate the reason for Romeo's fit of rage following Mercutio's death.

3 DEATH

In *Romeo and Juliet*, death is omnipresent and inevitable ever since being foreshadowed in the Prologue. There are six deaths in total, and it is very rare for all of them to be included in both theatre and film adaptations. The Verona conflict is usually discussed with focus on the Capulets and the Montagues; but the third party, namely the Prince's family, is often omitted, even though the Prince deems himself responsible for choosing to overlook the conflict (V, iii, 294-295). Each of the three parties loses an equal amount of members, which further accelerates the resolution of the conflict as all participants are "punished" (V, iii, 295). The Montagues lose Romeo and Lady Montague, the Capulets lose Juliet and Tybalt, and Prince Escalus loses two kinsmen in Mercutio and Paris, both of whom are affiliated with one of the other families. Had not all three parties been equally stricken by the happenings, the amicable resolution would be far less probable. The omission of this final balance can complicate the possibility of catharsis integral to the tragedy genre.

The deaths in the play can be divided into various overlapping thematic categories, but this thesis will specifically discuss the following three categories: death by combat, suicide and the omitted deaths. Tybalt, Mercutio, and Paris all die in combat, but the subchapters 3.1 and 3.2 will focus only on Mercutio's and Tybalt's death scenes. The subchapter 3.2 specifically will be devoted to Mercutio, as his death frames the play's division into the first comedic and second tragic half. The subchapter 3.3 will focus on the often omitted deaths of Paris and Lady Montague, and the chapter will be concluded by subchapter 3.3 which will focus on the suicides of Romeo and Juliet. As the discussion on death is integral to analysing the final reconciliation variations on screen, the forthcoming analysis will go into descriptive detail.

3.1 DEATH BY COMBAT

Mercutio and Tybalt both die in combat, and their deaths occur at the pivotal point of the play. The situations are akin, as both characters are angry with Romeo, Tybalt for “the injuries” Romeo had caused him (III, i, 65), probably referring to Romeo’s attendance of the Capulet feast, and Mercutio for Romeo refusing to fight Tybalt after Tybalt insults him. The beginning of this act resembles the very first scene of the play, in which the servants from the two households fight to underscore the futility of the families’ conflict. Anger is Tybalt’s dominant emotion in all his scenes, he joins the brawl in the first act, then gets enraged seeing Romeo at Capulet’s house, and sends him a letter challenging Romeo to a duel. All of these actions unravel Tybalt’s character and foreshadow the actual combat. The fight between Tybalt and Mercutio itself can be portrayed in two ways, either Mercutio’s death disrupts the comedy in the scene, or we can perceive the fight as tragic from the start. In the play, Shakespeare precludes the conflict with setting the scene in a “hot” day (III, i, 2). When Tybalt enters looking for Romeo, Mercutio immediately responds with mockery in word play, provokes Tybalt and they start to fight only after Mercutio disapproves of Romeo’s conciliatory words. There are no lines for other secondary characters, but the text states Tybalt enters along with other Capulets. During the fight, Romeo tries to intervene and Tybalt kills Mercutio. After Tybalt flees, Mercutio downplays the extent of his injuries, exclaims “A plague a’ both your houses!” (III, i, 92), asks Benvolio to be taken away, and dies off stage. When Romeo is informed about Mercutio’s death, he seeks revenge, and kills Tybalt in a fight. The text offers various interpretations of the situation, which is all the more intriguing when acted out, as the actors’ styles and demeanour influences the audience’s perception and placement of guilt. Based solely on the play, it is possible to put blame on all three, as they all instigate the fights and have equal odds of death.

The portrayal of Mercutio's death usually coincides with the way Tybalt is characterised throughout the adaptation, and with the overall artistic tendencies of the respective films. This very scene is unusually telling of the films' styles, strengths, and even shortcomings. Zeffirelli based his rendition on the brisk exchange between Mercutio and Tybalt, as his film portrays the situation rather as an act of boredom, and comedy that takes a turn for the worse, which corresponds to Zeffirelli's emphasis on the sequence of disastrous accidents in the tragedy. Luhrmann sets the confrontation on a beach near a ruined proscenium arch, possibly symbolic of Luhrmann's tendency to break the boundaries of theatre and also an example of his typical use of visual metaphors throughout. The two rivalling multicultural groups mirror a gang setting slightly resembling *West Side Story*,¹¹⁷ while Luhrmann's characters never banter and fight without mercy. Carlei emphasises the architectural setting, and the main participants are eclipsed in a mass fight of no less than twenty other people. Mercutio dies without much glory, Romeo is villainised, and the added garrulous dialogue obscures rather than elucidates the characters' mindsets.

Zeffirelli's portrayal of the two fights between Tybalt and Mercutio or Romeo begins as a comedy, and it turns tragic with Mercutio's death. Zeffirelli portrays Tybalt, Mercutio and Romeo as immature and fallible, and uses supporting actors to encircle the three and to represent the two feuding parties. The conflict is foreshadowed by Tybalt noticing Romeo adoring Juliet's interactions at the feast,¹¹⁸ and being chided by both Lady and Lord Capulet for trying to stir up a fight. Tybalt is easily agitated and his demeanour coincides with Zeffirelli's emphasis on the quick-temperedness of the younger generation. Tybalt's entrance into the square resembles childish arrogant boasting in front of his peers, with no traces of

¹¹⁷ *West Side Story*, dir. Jerome Robbins and Robert Wise, perf. Natalie Wood and Richard Beymer, prod. Mirisch Pictures, 1961.

¹¹⁸ *Romeo and Juliet*, 26 min. 40 sec.

impending threat.¹¹⁹ Tybalt and Mercutio mock each other, while the Capulets and the Montagues laugh at all the teasing without siding with one party and thus there is no initial tension.¹²⁰ While Romeo is peaceful in his interaction with Tybalt, Mercutio perceives it as mockery while Tybalt is disgruntled at Romeo's disinclination to fight.¹²¹ Tybalt is portrayed as perpetually worried about how others perceive him. Even though he projects a confident persona, in the fight itself Tybalt's fear of being seen as weak is exposed. When Romeo takes Tybalt's hand and shakes it, Tybalt seeks his peers' approval when he acts nauseous and washes his hands in mock disgust. In his mockery, Tybalt angers Mercutio, who is sitting in the fountain, by splashing him.¹²² The angered Mercutio then challenges Tybalt, but the situation remains frolicsome until Mercutio disarms Tybalt, and leaves Tybalt with a pitchfork.¹²³ In that moment, Tybalt is noticeably aggrieved for being humiliated, and chooses to lunge back to the fight. In the ensuing chaos, Mercutio gets disoriented by Romeo's interruption and jumps onto Tybalt's sword.¹²⁴ Tybalt is remorseful and not entirely guilty, as the entire situation happens by mischance.¹²⁵ Tybalt is persuaded to leave by his peers, although he originally wants to remain and go to Mercutio. This remorse enables the audience to sympathise with Tybalt and prevents it from rejoicing at Tybalt's death. Zeffirelli's film reinvents the situation, but Tybalt's depth and vulnerability is realised mainly through Michael York's elaborated performance. When Zeffirelli's vengeful Romeo chases Tybalt to challenge him, the fight immediately turns into mortal combat that alters between sword and fistfight. The situation surrounding Tybalt's death puts blame on accident or fate rather than Romeo as he falls on the ground, and finally acquires a sword which the armed Tybalt runs

¹¹⁹ *Romeo and Juliet*, 72 min. 30 sec.

¹²⁰ *Romeo and Juliet*, 72 min. 34 sec.

¹²¹ *Romeo and Juliet*, 73 min. 58 sec.

¹²² *Romeo and Juliet*, 72 min. 30 sec.

¹²³ *Romeo and Juliet*, 78 min. 14 sec.

¹²⁴ *Romeo and Juliet*, 78 min. 47 sec.

¹²⁵ *Romeo and Juliet*, 78 min. 58 sec.

onto.¹²⁶ Zeffirelli generally shows Romeo to be a victim of fate rather than ruthless in any way, possibly in order for the audience to be able to identify with the protagonist. Moreover, Zeffirelli manages to significantly expand Tybalt's character, and by depicting the deaths as accidents, the characters' remorse enable the audience to identify with all protagonists. Zeffirelli attenuates the viciousness in all three characters, when he puts the blame on fate, and thus strengthens the audience's connection to the narrative while swiftly moving the plot into its second tragic half.

In comparison to Zeffirelli, Luhrmann portrays the confrontation between Tybalt and Mercutio as fatal from the start, there is no hint of mutual respect. At the party, when noticing Romeo, Luhrmann's Tybalt is clad in a horned devil costume, and accompanied by two Capulets wearing masks similar to the Mexican Day of the Dead costumes,¹²⁷ all of which substantiates the Capulets' typically aggressive behaviour in this film and Tybalt's unwavering intention to hurt the Montagues. Tybalt is unmistakably portrayed as a villain. Tybalt is prevented from confronting Romeo by the tipsy Lord Capulet and when the Montagues are leaving, Tybalt follows them outside to mutter a threat.¹²⁸ The Capulets' arrival to the beach resembles marching to battle and is accompanied by a dramatic musical underscore.¹²⁹ Even though Mercutio jestingly mocks Tybalt and his henchmen, the Capulets neither participate nor smile. Mercutio gets provoked by Tybalt's consorting accusation, and he and Tybalt are already about to fight when Romeo arrives.¹³⁰ Romeo's voice wavers with emotion as he attempts to reconcile with Tybalt, but Tybalt refuses and assaults Romeo. Mercutio gets enraged, leaves his mechanical gun and pursues Tybalt armed with a piece of

¹²⁶ *Romeo and Juliet*, 86 min. 21 sec.

¹²⁷ *Romeo + Juliet*, 27 min. 58 sec.

¹²⁸ *Romeo + Juliet*, 34 min. 49 sec.

¹²⁹ *Romeo + Juliet*, 58 min. 30 sec.

¹³⁰ *Romeo + Juliet*, 60 min.

wood.¹³¹ This abandonment of modern weaponry nicely coincides with the setting near a disintegrating theatre stage, as if the modernised plot was influenced by its origins, and as if the setting was forcing the characters into theatrical actions when in the vicinity of the stage. When Tybalt lies on the ground, Romeo attempts to prevent Mercutio from further combat, but Tybalt uses this opportunity to strike with a piece of broken glass and stabs Mercutio.¹³² When Mercutio delivers his final lines, Tybalt is exhausted and looks on. Even if Luhrmann's Tybalt is usually depicted as vicious, these moments are to be freely interpreted as remorseful or shocked to some extent. No matter the word choice, this reaction turns Tybalt from a clichéd villain into a believable multi-dimensional character. Luhrmann uses a cutaway shot of Juliet, who is expecting the arrival of her husband, between Mercutio's and Tybalt's deaths, and this insertion reminds the audience of the new circumstances of this rivalry, and thus makes the audience more involved in the following scene.¹³³ The enraged Romeo is shown in a dramatic slow-motion shot whilst in car pursuit of Tybalt. When the characters finally face each other, they both try to reach Tybalt's abandoned gun, and Tybalt manages to seize it first. Romeo then verbally confronts Tybalt, while Tybalt points the gun at him, though Tybalt never shoots. Romeo's blind rage also manifests in him momentarily holding the gun Tybalt wields to his own forehead,¹³⁴ unconcerned about the danger, and this nonchalant attitude appears borderline suicidal. Romeo pushes Tybalt to the ground, swiftly takes hold of the gun, and shoots the then-unarmed Tybalt multiple times. Romeo is immediately shocked by what he has done in the heat of passion. Although Tybalt is unarmed, the circumstances extenuate the crime. Luhrmann chose to portray Tybalt very negatively, but

¹³¹ *Romeo + Juliet*, 62 min. 24 sec.

¹³² *Romeo + Juliet*, 63 min. 11 sec.

¹³³ *Romeo + Juliet*, 67 min. 1 sec.

¹³⁴ *Romeo + Juliet*, 68 min. 47 sec.

none of his characters lose humanity, as the actors always show some underlying emotions behind the characters' actions.

Carlei and Fellowes expand the text of the play, but their inventions rarely enrich the characters or amplify their involvement in the plot. Carlei foreshadows the conflict between Mercutio and Tybalt in the opening scene, in which Mercutio wins a jousting tournament and Tybalt loses.¹³⁵ Tybalt angrily spits at the Montagues and Mercutio is introduced as Mercutio of the house of Montagues. This interaction contextualises the second confrontation between Mercutio and Tybalt later on. At the feast, Tybalt reveals Romeo's identity to the Nurse without being asked, and also warns Juliet after the guests leave. Tybalt sounds threatening and controlling throughout the interaction with Juliet even when imparting, "Cousin I love thee. (...) Your honour is as dear to me as life,¹³⁶" and Juliet's reaction to his words is very negative. Juliet looks utterly uncomfortable and reserved. Had this exchange showed more depth and love in Tybalt, it would resonate better than his menacing demeanour. Tybalt is shown preparing for fighting Romeo,¹³⁷ and when he enters the scene of the fight, it is through a cloud of dust in a slow motion shot and accompanied by the sound of sinister drumbeat.¹³⁸ Carlei's point of view features no jest, as both Tybalt and Mercutio deliver their lines with contempt. Tybalt delivers all his lines in a threatening voice, and though Mercutio derides the consorting accusation, not one of them needs to be provoked to fight. The development from the first adaptation to the third seems to be to reduce comedy in order to intensify the drama, but the latest rendition flattens the characters, as Carlei's Tybalt and Mercutio could believably fight to the death without any verbal instigation and possibly already at the very beginning of the film. Carlei's Tybalt attempts to provoke Romeo by

¹³⁵ *Romeo & Juliet*, 2 min. 16 sec.

¹³⁶ *Romeo & Juliet*, 24 min. 26 sec.

¹³⁷ *Romeo & Juliet*, 44 min. 6 sec

¹³⁸ *Romeo & Juliet*, 45 min. 59 sec

calling him a villain, but when Romeo angrily defends himself, Tybalt is struck dumb, and it is Mercutio who hits Romeo for his submission.¹³⁹ Mercutio then contemptuously spits at Tybalt's feet and draws. The ever-angry Tybalt joins in as do all his men, which significantly reduces the emotional import of the confrontation. The ensuing battle appears ill-choreographed, utilizes further-disorienting camera angles, and in the end seems as a forcefully added action sequence. After Tybalt intentionally strikes Mercutio,¹⁴⁰ he rejoices in his actions, begins retreating, further insults Romeo and teases him to fight.¹⁴¹ Even though Carlei added some moments to make Tybalt more involved in the plot, Tybalt's character ultimately comes across as inhumane. Carlei could have intended this appearance of Tybalt in order for Romeo not to be tarnished by becoming a murderer. However, the way in which Romeo ultimately kills Tybalt in this film makes it impossible for Romeo not to.

Carlei extends the chase by showing Tybalt further taunting Romeo,¹⁴² and by using multiple locations the characters pass through. Romeo is surprisingly calm, and not mourning or vengeful. When they fight, Romeo stabs Tybalt in the back, and thus Romeo suddenly seems less honourable. These details show both Romeo and Tybalt from an entirely different perspective. Whereas both Luhrmann and Zeffirelli chose to portray Romeo as rightfully enraged and impetuous and let Tybalt preserve some dignity, Carlei's Tybalt comes across as vacant and the calculating Romeo, who is in no immediate danger, becomes outright ruthless. In the following scenes, Romeo mourns his banishment and pities the unfolding situation he caused, but he never shows any remorse.¹⁴³ In addition to that, as the audience cannot possibly identify with Romeo due to the lack of his relationship with Mercutio on screen, and thus the lacking motif, his character essentially becomes the villain of the narrative.

¹³⁹ *Romeo & Juliet*, 48 min. 4 sec

¹⁴⁰ *Romeo & Juliet*, 48 min. 57 sec

¹⁴¹ *Romeo & Juliet*, 49 min. 35 sec

¹⁴² *Romeo & Juliet*, 51 min. 30 sec

¹⁴³ *Romeo & Juliet*, 57 min. 2 sec

The impact of the directors' choices fluctuates between interpretation and consumerist simplification. It seems befitting to employ adaptation theory by Leitch, who argues that adaptations should enhance the viewers' literacy and let the audience bridge intentional gaps through critical interpretation, and thus to achieve a closer connection to the audience in comparison to adaptations that are intended to be merely consumed.¹⁴⁴ Lindiwe Dovey distinguishes two modes of adaptation: 'appropriational' mode encompassing borrowing the plot and characters, and 'interpretive mode' with 'procreative approach' analyzing the plot while expressing the adapter's interpretation without asserting dominance over the adapted text. Dovey further argues that procreative adaptations are conducive to the audience's active literacy as they rather raise interpretive questions without 'settling' them.¹⁴⁵

Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* in particular answers a lot of interpretive questions with his emphasis on fate, therefore he seems to adapt in the appropriational mode. Carlei's and Fellowes' approach to *Romeo & Juliet* specifically seems to be asserting dominance over the adapted text with the extent of the inventions made. Moreover, as the film is very explicit both visually and verbally and leaves virtually no space for active literacy, it seems to be also adapted in the appropriational mode. In contrast to the other two directors, Luhrmann's approach to *Romeo + Juliet* is to constantly raise questions, for instance with the extensive visual metaphors mirroring and expanding the adapted text, the film urges the audience to watch critically; therefore it seems that Luhrmann adapts in the interpretive mode and procreative approach. Whereas Zeffirelli and Carlei seem to have made adaptations that are to be consumed, Luhrmann means to provoke reactions and individual readings. Based on these particular scenes and the significance of Tybalt's and Mercutio's deaths in the plot, it seems that when active literacy is conducted it makes the narrative more compelling for the audience.

¹⁴⁴ See, Leitch 1-21.

¹⁴⁵ Lindiwe Dovey in Leitch 19.

3.2 MERCUTIO: A FOOL BETWEEN COMBAT AND SUICIDE

Even if Tybalt's death gets Romeo banished, it is Mercutio's death that triggers the tragedy and induces Romeo's actions that ultimately result in Romeo and Juliet dying. Mercutio's death forms an individual category between death by combat and suicide. Although Mercutio is very virile and not truly suicidal, his voluntary involvement in the fight with Tybalt and the fact that the character needed to die in order for the plot to move further implies intent. Moreover, Mercutio's character propels the plot, and displays distinct properties of both a fool and an authorial figure of the tragedy.

Mercutio is not a licensed fool, but when considering Gareth Lloyd Evans's four basic criteria for recognising fools in Shakespeare's works,¹⁴⁶ Mercutio undoubtedly fits this classification. The fool is supposed to be classless and hard to place within a social hierarchy. Although Mercutio is a kinsman of Prince Escalus, we never witness any interaction, and he always appears with the Montagues. Mercutio's initial position is outside of the conflict, as he is not related to any of the two conflicting households, and intentionally involves himself later on. The fools are licensed to speak freely. Mercutio always speaks his mind and does never refrain from commenting on the choices of others. The fools are also more sophisticated in comparison to simple clowns. Mercutio's speech always includes puns, verbal duels, word play, and sexual innuendo, all of which makes it far from simple. This intricacy is distinctive in Mercutio's Queen Mab speech (I, iv, 53-94), which seems as if out of place in the play, but is still very much in keeping with Mercutio's turn of phrase. On the surface, the speech is constructed out of superficially appealing and picturesque description, but it consists mainly of mythic allusion and sexual innuendoes, and evolves into a covert general commentary

¹⁴⁶ Gareth Lloyd Evans, "Shakespeare's Fools: the Shadow and the Substance of Drama," *Shakespearean Comedy*, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies Vol. 14, Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer, eds., (London: Edward Arnold, 1972) 149-151.

which stands in contrast with the naïve ideal of the star-crossed lovers and possibly also with Friar Laurence's political scheming. Moreover, Mercutio's language is in stark contrast with the simple and rustic Nurse, who could be considered the clown of the tragedy. The fool and the clown interact only in one scene, in which the simple Nurse noticeably cannot keep up with Mercutio (II, iv, 98-138).

The last but certainly not least criterion Evans established is the term 'withdrawal syndrome,' which points to the fools coming from nowhere and disappearing to nowhere while being only peripherally involved in action. Mercutio is involved neither in the introductory fight between the Capulets and Montagues, nor in any of Romeo's interactions with Juliet. Furthermore, Mercutio disappears for the entirety of the Capulet's feast. Mercutio merely expresses his observations from afar and stands outside all the action until he gets involved only to die offstage, thus seemingly disappearing in the middle of the play. Due to all the aforementioned, it is valid to assume that Shakespeare used the fool as a universal character without always necessarily naming the given characters fools. According to Robert H. Bell, it is typical for Shakespeare to invent fools in plays whose sources do not feature such characters.¹⁴⁷ Shakespeare based *Romeo and Juliet* mostly¹⁴⁸ on Arthur Brooke's poem "The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet;"¹⁴⁹ and there were several significant changes Shakespeare made in translating Brooke's poem into drama. Namely, Shakespeare reduced the time span from several months into several days, utilised sonnet elements, and, most importantly, invented Mercutio in all his complexity from an unnamed character with only a few sentences in all previous versions.¹⁵⁰ Furthermore, Mercutio, a fool, likens love to "a great natural" (II, iv, 98), i.e. a fool, and further strengthens this metaphor by mentioning a

¹⁴⁷ Robert H. Bell, *Shakespeare's Great Stage of Fools* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) 80.

¹⁴⁸ Bortolotti and Hutcheon 448.

¹⁴⁹ Weis, "Introduction" 2.

¹⁵⁰ Jill L. Levenson, ed, "Introduction," *The Oxford Shakespeare: Romeo and Juliet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) 19.

“bauble” (I, iv, 99), which was a sceptre with a carving of a fools’ head, a typical attribute of court jesters.¹⁵¹ Martin Hilský asserts that these lines are the key to Mercutio’s part in the play, as Mercutio speaks of fools in a manner typical for fools.¹⁵²

Shakespeare’s use of genre throughout his works is by no means clear-cut. The genre of his tragedies and comedies is mostly determined by the play’s ending, either in marriage or death; but just as some of Shakespeare’s comedies, such as *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Twelfth Night* or *What You Will* or *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, seem to be leaning towards the tragedy genre at certain points, Shakespeare’s tragedies include some comic elements. *Romeo and Juliet* in particular is a play with a perfect division between comedy and tragedy, and its structure is framed by Mercutio the fool. According to Stephen Shapiro, Mercutio’s death occurs at the exact centre of the play,¹⁵³ and thus breaks the play into its two halves, first comedic, second tragic. Susan Snyder argues that *Romeo and Juliet* is the only Shakespeare’s tragedy that “becomes rather than is tragic,”¹⁵⁴ and also describes the second tragic half of the play as ‘full of imperatives’ in comparison to the ‘world of possibilities’ and ‘unrealized threats’ in the first half.¹⁵⁵ Whereas there is no real danger in the comedic half, Mercutio’s death triggers the second tragic half and directly causes the outcome. All comedic features cease to be comedic after Mercutio dies.

In addition to his fool properties, Mercutio also stands as the authorial figure of the play. As he exclaims “A plague o’both your houses!” (III, i, 99), Mercutio essentially predicts the

¹⁵¹ René Weis, ed., *The Arden Shakespeare Third Series: Romeo and Juliet* (London: Methuen Drama, 2012) 216.

¹⁵² Martin Hilský, *Shakespeare a jeviště svět* (Prague: Academia, 2010) 431-432.

¹⁵³ Stephen A. Shapiro, “Romeo and Juliet: Reversals, Contraries, Transformations, and Ambivalence,” *College English*, Vol. 25, No. 7 (Spring, 1964): 498, JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/373235>>, 9 Oct 2011.

¹⁵⁴ Snyder in Bloom 213.

¹⁵⁵ Snyder in Bloom 213-216.

outcome at the very peak of action while rising above it.¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, some of Mercutio's utterances such as "Now art thou sociable, now art thou Romeo, now / art thou what thou art by art as well as by nature; [...]" (II, iii, 84-85) and "Ask for me tomorrow / and you shall find me a grave man." (III, i, 97-98) seem to be expressing an unusual insight. Not only does Mercutio's death trigger the tragedy, but it also takes away the grasp on reality which Mercutio often gave Romeo with his comments. It is generally accepted that Mercutio needed to die for the sake of the plot,¹⁵⁷ and in 1672 John Dryden even claimed for Shakespeare to have stated that "he was forced to kill [Mercutio] in the third act, to prevent being killed by him."¹⁵⁸ Mercutio is insightful and prophetic, and gets intentionally involved in conflict, which directly causes his death precisely when he becomes obsolete for the plot. As Martin Hilský stated, Shakespeare did not need Mercutio in the second half, as the fool is not necessary to provide the contrast to Romeo's initial conception of love any more.¹⁵⁹ The second half of the play succumbs into relative chaos and one might assert it is so because of the lack of the prophetic authorial figure. As Mercutio's presence would prevent the intended outcome of the entire play, Mercutio voluntarily exits via suicide.

There is only one flaw in Mercutio's prophetic abilities and that is him being unaware of Romeo's relationship with Juliet. Even though there is a slight hint at Mercutio sensing some change in Romeo after Romeo meets Juliet (II, iii, 84-85), the insight is very limited and not at all specific to Juliet. One might claim that even here, Mercutio is foresighted, and that the limited view is necessary for the following course of the play. Bloom quotes Maynard Mack's assertion that the world of Mercutio never overlaps into the world of Romeo and Juliet.¹⁶⁰

Bell extends this by claiming that by keeping the two separate from Mercutio who challenges

¹⁵⁶ Shapiro 498.

¹⁵⁷ Bloom 40.

¹⁵⁸ John Dryden in Bloom, 43.

¹⁵⁹ Hilský 429.

¹⁶⁰ Maynard Mack in Bloom 131.

‘romantic attitudes,’ Romeo and Juliet remain true lovers as opposed to ‘fools for love.’¹⁶¹ Just as Mercutio needs to depart for the sake of the plot, he needs to remain ignorant to the nature of change in Romeo. Furthermore, Bell claims that Mercutio dies when he cannot perceive Romeo’s true nature anymore, as he is not acquainted with Romeo’s love for Juliet.¹⁶²

All of the three chosen film adaptations reflect some parts of this reading of Mercutio. Zeffirelli’s *Romeo and Juliet* indicates a division between comedy and tragedy, which breaks at Mercutio’s death. Mercutio and Tybalt do not take their fight seriously at its start and the film stops being comedic exactly when Mercutio is stabbed. Zeffirelli contributes to the genre division by making Tybalt join in Mercutio’s banter and by showing Tybalt as remorseful, which ultimately contributes to the abrupt change in tone when Mercutio dies. It is intriguing to notice that in all Mercutio’s scenes following the Capulet’s feast, Mercutio is equipped with a handkerchief, a standard prop of fools.¹⁶³ Furthermore, John McEnery emphasises all sexual meanings behind Mercutio’s words, and when he likens love to “a great natural” (II, iv, 98), he is theatrically pacing with the fool appropriate handkerchief.¹⁶⁴ The object is also prominent after Mercutio receives his fatal blow, as Mercutio uses the handkerchief to hide his wound, and only after it is taken off the body by Romeo do all of the Montagues realise the severity of the situation.¹⁶⁵ Romeo then uses the bloody handkerchief to challenge Tybalt by throwing it at his face. And thus, the object characteristic of fools becomes the most important prop symbolic of Mercutio, and it further propels the turn into tragedy. When Mercutio interacts with the Nurse, the contrast between the two characters coincides with

¹⁶¹ Bell 84.

¹⁶² Bell 83.

¹⁶³ Bell 110.

¹⁶⁴ *Romeo and Juliet*, 58 min. 12 sec.

¹⁶⁵ *Romeo and Juliet*, 81 min. 40 sec.

Mercutio being the fool and the Nurse the clown.¹⁶⁶ When Zeffirelli's Mercutio delivers his final monologue by climbing up the stairs and using them as a stage to deliver his prophetic "plague" (III, i, 99) curse,¹⁶⁷ all Montagues think he is merely jesting.¹⁶⁸ Mercutio thus resembles the authorial figure commenting on the action literally from above. Lehmann states that Zeffirelli chose to shoot Mercutio only with a hand-held camera and thus imbued Mercutio's character with unique energy.¹⁶⁹ Such emphasis on Mercutio by the camera only strengthens the authorial theory. Moreover, Mercutio instigates the fight and is fatally wounded by jumping onto Tybalt's sword,¹⁷⁰ which implies suicide and Mercutio's authorial voluntary exit.

Luhrmann's unorthodox yet meticulous approach to *Romeo + Juliet* is noticeable even upon consideration of the duration of the film itself, which exactly follows the quote "two hours' traffic of our stage" from the Prologue (line 12). In the play, Mercutio's "plague" line occurs exactly at the centre.¹⁷¹ At the sixty minute mark, Luhrmann shows Mercutio and Tybalt ready to fight and posing in the manner of western film gun fights, one opponent facing the other at a certain distance with their hands ready to draw their weapons.¹⁷² Luhrmann lets Mercutio show his comedic side, but the film itself is predominantly a drama, which sometimes verges on the parody genre. Lehmann specifically lists that Luhrmann references "the Western, the gangster movie, the kung-fu pic, the urban drama, the crime thriller, and the action comedy."¹⁷³ In an interview in *The Guardian*, Luhrmann stated that his intention was to mimic the Bollywood genre in being able to juxtapose low comedy to high tragedy in order

¹⁶⁶ *Romeo and Juliet*, 58 min. 40 sec.

¹⁶⁷ *Romeo and Juliet*, 80 min. 44 sec.

¹⁶⁸ *Romeo and Juliet*, 79 min. 30 sec.

¹⁶⁹ Lehmann 156.

¹⁷⁰ *Romeo and Juliet*, 78 min. 48 sec.

¹⁷¹ Shapiro 498.

¹⁷² *Romeo + Juliet*, 60 min.

¹⁷³ Lehmann 172.

to create a 'comic tragedy' in *Romeo + Juliet*.¹⁷⁴ The film certainly reflects this intention with Luhrmann's characteristically abrupt editing and composition in the film's first half, and the contrasting moods of various genres strengthened by the musical underscore. Luhrmann uses his constructed proscenium arch at the beach for both the Queen Mab speech and for Mercutio's theatrical delivery of the final monologue, thus gesturing toward the ancestral use of the text as a play. When Mercutio is intentionally stabbed by Tybalt,¹⁷⁵ Mercutio climbs up on the stage of the decomposing theatre, and delivers his lines with theatrical bravado while being able to insult both families with the glowering line, "A plague on both your houses!" (III, i, 99), as Tybalt momentarily lingers. This prophetic line is accompanied by the approach of a hurricane, which jointly foreshadows the rest of the film and the fate of both families. Mercutio exits the stage, and then ultimately dies offstage in Romeo's arms. This instance is one of Luhrmann's literal references to the text of the play where Mercutio dies offstage, without Mercutio being out of shot on film. Mercutio is not verbally linked to the Prince, but the two actors are the only two African-Americans in the film, which appears to intentionally connect the two characters. Mercutio also gets himself involved in the conflict between Tybalt and Romeo. However, Mercutio's death is depicted to be Tybalt's fault, and thus the death never resembles suicide.

The genre of Carlei's *Romeo & Juliet* is never comedic, as the film is shot in a very serious tone without the narrative intentionally eliciting any laughter from the audience. Mercutio is underutilized, even though the director and the scriptwriter jointly took much liberty with adapting the play and could have potentially expanded its universe further. The underlying problem is that many of Carlei's additions reach an impasse. Mercutio is initially assigned to

¹⁷⁴ Andrew Geoff, "Baz Luhrmann Interview," *Guardian* Sep. 7, 2001. Web. <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2001/sep/07/1>>.

¹⁷⁵ *Romeo + Juliet*, 63 min. 11 sec.

the house of Montagues,¹⁷⁶ which directly involves Mercutio in the feud, but never enriches the depiction of the character itself, as his blood relation to Romeo never creates any deeper emotional connection or any involvement beyond the family name. Furthermore, Mercutio is shown to witness Romeo and Juliet's romantic interaction at the Capulet's feast including their retreat into privacy.¹⁷⁷ This choice theoretically provides countless options for closer insight into the character and more interactions with Romeo, but Mercutio's awareness is never used again, as if the reverse shot¹⁷⁸ never existed. Even though the critics agree that it is essential for Mercutio to not be aware of Romeo and Juliet's relationship for the sake of the plot of the play,¹⁷⁹ the potential in his knowledge could have been an invaluable opportunity for a fresh take on the play on screen. Carlei's Mercutio becomes a mere kinsman stripped of both his close relationship with Romeo, and his typically entrancing wit the other characters are drawn to. Furthermore, as Carlei establishes Mercutio's and Tybalt's rivalry well before their mortal fight, no new motivation overshadows the pre-existing one when they duel. Just as Mercutio is not motivated by an insult to Romeo, so Romeo lacks sufficient motivation to kill Tybalt in revenge. Mercutio is sidelined only to die without his death serving any purpose in the structure of the plot.

When adapting *Romeo and Juliet* it is necessary for the directors to adhere to their vision and reading throughout. There is a plethora of possibilities in adapting Mercutio specifically and the cohesion of the plot on screen can only be harmed when the character becomes flattened and irrelevant without any compensation. Whereas both Zeffirelli and Luhrmann chose to portray Mercutio as an intriguing character vital to the plot, Carlei minimized Mercutio's involvement. Had Carlei and Fellowes persevered in retelling the play in an inventive manner,

¹⁷⁶ *Romeo & Juliet*, 2 min. 43 sec.

¹⁷⁷ *Romeo & Juliet*, 20 min. 4 sec.

¹⁷⁸ Pearson, and Simpson 565.

¹⁷⁹ See, Bell 83-84, and Mack in Bloom 131.

and markedly deviated from the adapted text, their film would have had far more potential. In Mercutio's case, they could have substituted their bland Mercutio for the innocent Benvolio. As Carlei's Romeo shows a far closer friendship with the significantly younger Benvolio, the death scene would resonate more had the enraged Tybalt killed the cautious Benvolio instead of the equally combative Mercutio. Because the fight between Tybalt and Mercutio never emotionally impacts the other characters in the plot, the emotional impact made on the audience is also reduced. Due to Romeo's negative portrayal and Mercutio's diminution, it would seem that simplifying principal characters without equalising measures subverts the plot enough to impact the audience's involvement in the entire film.

3.3 THE OMITTED DEATHS

In all performances of *Romeo and Juliet*, two deaths are very often omitted, presumably because of the films' limited running time; however, if preserved, both deaths serve a greater purpose in the scheme of the play. Shakespeare's balanced number of deaths in all three involved families influences the reconciliation and catharsis of the play. Lady Montague completes the even number of deaths, six overall and two in the Montagues' family specifically. Paris is both a kinsman to the Prince and Mercutio; and just as Mercutio associates with the Montagues, Paris intends to marry into the Capulets' family, and thus Mercutio and Paris complete a triad of casualties to both the Capulets and the Montagues while involving the political leader of Verona in the feud. Both Paris' and Lady Montague's deaths occur near the conclusion of the play and around the time of Romeo's and Juliet's suicides. Furthermore, both omitted deaths show new dimensions of other characters.

3.3.1 Lady Montague

Lady Montague's death is mentioned so briefly, that the argument for its frequent omission could be the fact that even if included, it might actually pass unnoticed by the viewer. The

event is mentioned in the aftermath of Romeo's and Juliet's deaths, as Lord Montague arrives to the tomb after the Capulets and states Lady Montague died of grief at Romeo's banishment during the night (V, iii, 211). Only thereafter do the parents learn the full story by Friar Lawrence. Though brief, Lady Montague accentuates the depth of a mother's love and further strengthens the polarity between the Capulets' controlling and Montagues' caring relationships to their offspring.

Only Alvin Rakoff's BBC Television Shakespeare film from 1978 includes Lady Montague's death.¹⁸⁰ As this specific film follows the text of the play very closely, the aftermath of the lovers' death is inspired by Lady Capulet's lines, "O, the people in the street cry 'Romeo,' / Some 'Juliet,' and some 'Paris,' and all run / With open outcry toward our monument" (V, iii, 191-193). The Capulets rush to the tomb after hearing the stir on the streets. Lord Montague informs the Prince of his wife's death as he arrives,¹⁸¹ and then enters the tomb and joins the mourning Capulets. The brief inclusion strengthens the tragedy by showing yet another casualty of the conflict without distracting from the two lovers' deaths. Rakoff uses the Capulets' exchange to set the social context while including a crowd of people gathering in front of the tomb as well, and uses two separate scenes around the tomb, so that Lord Montague's reference to his wife's death does not interfere with the visual impact of the dead Romeo and Juliet inside the tomb. Even though this arrangement works well, it also demonstrates the reasons for Rakoff's minimal deviations from the text eventually resulting in the record running time of 2 hours and 48 minutes.

Zeffirelli chose to portray the aftermath of the lovers' death by silencing the ever-present musical underscore and only utilising church bells to accompany the silent funeral procession.

¹⁸⁰ *Romeo and Juliet*, dir. Alvin Rakoff, prod. BBC, 1978.

¹⁸¹ *Romeo and Juliet*, dir. Alvin Rakoff, prod. BBC, 162 min. 57 sec.

This procession is interrupted by the Prince's monologue while all mourners stay silent.¹⁸² There is virtually no space left to mention another death, which would lessen the impact of the suicides, and it would be equally confusing to exclude Lady Montague from this scene without any explanation. Had Zeffirelli inserted another scene at the tomb, the narrative would be disrupted, and the choice to let Lady Montague live does not deprive the scene of emotional impact on the audience. Furthermore, as Zeffirelli chose to feature the Montagues enquiring after Romeo's well-being in the beginning of the film, their relationship on camera is well established and unnecessary to reaffirm during the aftermath.

In *Romeo + Juliet*, Romeo is always separated from his parents on screen, though they show concern when enquiring after his involvement in the opening fray¹⁸³ enough to delineate the nature of their relationship. After Juliet dies, the view slowly transitions into a news report. Before switching to the stylized TV broadcast, the mournful scene shows the silent parents, and the Prince's monologue. Again, there is no space to include Lady Montague's death, as any further lines by Lord Montague would sever the silent mourning, which directly contrasts with the aftermath of Tybalt's death, where both families plead with the Prince.¹⁸⁴ The disastrous emotional impact the lovers' deaths have on the parents is best exposed by keeping them shocked into silence, which in turn retains the film's potential impact on the audience. Together with Luhrmann's meticulous two-hours running time, it would be impossible to find more time for a transitional scene without disrupting the narrative.

Carlei shows the Friar's reaction when discovering both dead lovers, then switches to two architectural shots, first of Verona from afar and second of a church, and the following scene features both families standing in front of the church with Romeo and Juliet lying on separate

¹⁸² *Romeo and Juliet*, 132 min. 48 sec.

¹⁸³ *Romeo + Juliet*, 9 min. 48 sec.

¹⁸⁴ *Romeo + Juliet*, 70 min. 38 sec.

biers.¹⁸⁵ Even though Carlei dedicates significant time on screen to the mourners, he rather includes the Friar saying “Their own forbidden love did murder them” before the Capulets or Montagues ever speak. Following the Prince’s speech, the fathers interact only to reconcile. An inclusion of a separate interaction at the tomb and Lord Montague’s announcement would be disruptive, as it would require a seamless transition into the reconciliation moment Carlei intentionally set at a picturesque square in front of a church, and thus would unnecessarily dilute the ending. However, Carlei is the only director that shows no insight into Romeo’s relationship with his parents throughout the film. Carlei and Julian Fellowes probably chose to overshadow it by Romeo’s almost filial relationship to the Friar.

All three films have valid reasons for excluding Lady Montague’s death. Invariably, the films never show the parents’ arrival to the Capulets’ tomb and only use one setting for the aftermath of the suicides. Announcing Lady Montague’s death within the given settings is almost impossible. It works for Rakoff¹⁸⁶ and the play, when the death is announced in the transition from the view of the lovers into the Friar’s explanation and the final monologue of the Prince. However, its inclusion would be disruptive to the sequence of events resulting from the lovers’ suicides on screen in all three films.

3.3.2 Paris

In addition to Lady Montague, there is Paris, who dies while trying to prevent Romeo from disturbing the dead in the Capulets’ tomb (V, iii, 49-55). Romeo kills Paris at his most desperate moment, which expands our insight into Romeo’s train of thought before committing suicide. Due to Paris’ significance in the play, the omission of his death is

¹⁸⁵ *Romeo & Juliet*, 107 min. 45 sec.

¹⁸⁶ *Romeo & Juliet*, dir. Alvin Rakoff, prod. BBC, 1978.

relatively questionable. Even though there is the obvious reason of restricted running time as well, Paris impacts the play's events more than Lady Montague.

In the scheme of the play, Paris seems to be a mirror for other characters to manifest their personalities in reaction to his presence, but he remains rather one-dimensional as he revolves around the intended marriage to Juliet. Paris is the catalyst, because he seems eligible for Juliet in her father's eyes and continually pushes for arranged marriage. As Weis observed, Paris is introduced to the plot as Juliet's suitor before the audience first meets Juliet and before Juliet ever meets Romeo.¹⁸⁷ Paris pursues the marriage before the feast and Lord Capulet maintains that the ultimate decision is Juliet's (II, ii, 15-18). This courteous pretence in front of Paris contrasts with Lord Capulet's reaction to Juliet's refusal to marry Paris later on (III, v, 141-145), and shows Lord Capulet as more concerned for his reputation than Juliet's consent. The only verbal interaction between Juliet and Paris occurs before she asks the Friar for help (IV, i). Frederick S. Boas describes Juliet's demeanour to Paris as 'steeled to perfect outward self-control she answers with incisive badinage.'¹⁸⁸ Paris addresses Juliet as his wife and presumes that she loves him, even though Juliet verbally deflects his advances while covertly hinting at not being available, which seems overt to the audience, who perceives the dramatic irony in Paris' unawareness of Juliet's marriage to Romeo. After having internally rejected the Nurse's input, Juliet conducts herself with polite maturity and yet manages to expose her desperation through sharp-witted replies. Paris kisses Juliet goodbye (IV, i, 43) and expects a merry marriage. Consistent with limited perspective of the plot, Paris intends to stop the villainous Romeo at all cost.

The omission of Paris' death is understandable because Romeo's desperation is yet to be truly exposed in Juliet's tomb and is not necessary to be showed twice. However, Romeo's apathy

¹⁸⁷ Weis, "Introduction" 50.

¹⁸⁸ Frederick S. Boas in Bloom 126.

and faded personality indicate that Romeo is lifeless as he walks to his grave; as if he died in the moment he heard Juliet was dead. Romeo kills Paris because he is frightened of being prevented from ever seeing Juliet again, but he does not strike unexpectedly. Even in desperation, Romeo is not purposefully violent, at first it is him who urges Paris to retreat by saying, "Stay not, be gone; live, and hereafter say / A madman's mercy bid thee run away" (V, iii, 66-67). Paris is the one who strikes in an attempt to hand Romeo over to justice. Romeo's proposed mercy to Paris enhances Romeo's maturation, as it contrasts with his furious chase of Tybalt. When Romeo challenges Tybalt as revenge for Mercutio's death, he never hesitates (III, i, 124-131), whereas with Paris, Romeo pauses in order to prevent yet another death on his conscience, and verbally communicates the futility of the fight to Paris. Furthermore, Romeo tries to avoid the fight with Paris, even though he discovers his identity only after Paris is dead (V, iii, 74-75).

Out of the three considered film adaptations, two include the fight between Romeo and Paris to a certain extent, namely Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*, and Carlei's *Romeo & Juliet*. Apart from the time restraints and necessary cuts in adapting, there are various reasons for omission. Weis states that the inclusion of Paris' death in any production is problematic because it threatens to divert the audience's sympathy for the lovers to Paris.¹⁸⁹ Furthermore, it is rather risky to include the fight, as it might negatively alter the audience's view on Romeo should the portrayal be ambivalent. As this situation demands dialogue and skilful acting, its inclusion could potentially harm Romeo's appeal and lessen the audience's investment in his fate, and possibly in the overall outcome. This is the case with Rakoff.¹⁹⁰ Even though the scene¹⁹¹ is set outside of Juliet's tomb, and therefore never directly interferes with the setting of the lovers' suicides, it is disruptive to the narrative. Though Romeo attempts to persuade

¹⁸⁹ Weis, "Introduction" 82.

¹⁹⁰ *Romeo & Juliet*, dir. Alvin Rakoff, prod. BBC.

¹⁹¹ *Romeo & Juliet*, dir. Alvin Rakoff, prod. BBC, 151 min. 6 sec.

Paris to leave, and Paris strikes Romeo first, Romeo's fury during the fight shatters his deceptive composure, and suggests that Romeo's mercy was merely strategic, not truly compassionate. As the fight appears unnecessarily brutal to Paris, the scene takes the focus off the lovers and truly diverts the audience's sympathy. This diversion is only strengthened by including Paris lovingly speaking to Juliet before Romeo arrives,¹⁹² and by the slain Paris requesting to be buried with Juliet.

When Zeffirelli's Paris dances with Juliet, he adoringly glances at her,¹⁹³ but their interaction remains silent and empty in contrast to Juliet's passionate interactions with Romeo. Zeffirelli does not show Paris and Lord Capulet agreeing on marriage prior to Lady Capulet informing Juliet, and thus the audience shares Juliet's shock. Lord Capulet's furious reaction to Juliet's refusal contrasts with his polite manners in front of Paris and further emphasises the turbulent atmosphere in the Capulet household. The noticeably agitated Juliet then shortly interacts with the enamoured Paris at the Friar's and avoids contact with her supposed bridegroom.¹⁹⁴ The unaware Count Paris further upsets Juliet by invasively lifting her veil and kissing her on her forehead. In this film, Paris' beaming presence is a bad omen and emphasises Juliet being enclosed by the constant pressure stemming from her parents. According to Robert Hapgood, Zeffirelli omitted the fight with Paris in order for Romeo to remain innocent,¹⁹⁵ and probably not to divert the audience's focus from the sequence of accidents culminating in the lovers' deaths. Weis alludes to unfavourable reviews of Zeffirelli's original Old Vic production

¹⁹² *Romeo & Juliet*, dir. Alvin Rakoff, prod. BBC, 148 min. 43 sec.

¹⁹³ *Romeo and Juliet*, 24 min. 18 sec.

¹⁹⁴ *Romeo and Juliet*, 107 min. 47 sec.

¹⁹⁵ Robert Hapgood in, Linda E. Boose, and Richard Burt, eds. *Shakespeare the Movie: Popularizing the plays on film, TV, and video* (London: Routledge, 1997) 83.

pointing to Romeo killing Paris without proper sympathy in front of Juliet's bier,¹⁹⁶ which probably further validated the ultimate decision to cut the scene on film.

Luhrmann's Paris is introduced as 'The Governor's son' in the opening of the film,¹⁹⁷ and his status of an eligible bachelor is emphasised by the title page of 'Timely' magazine entitled 'Dave Paris: The Bachelor of the Year.'¹⁹⁸ As Juliet is not on the dance floor, she is delivered to dance with Paris by the excited Nurse.¹⁹⁹ While dancing with Paris, Juliet constantly searches for Romeo, whom she met before Paris, and is embarrassed by Paris' inept dance moves. In the course of the evening, Paris' presence is constantly forced upon Juliet by her mother and the Nurse. After Tybalt's death, Paris arrives to woo Juliet with a bouquet,²⁰⁰ and Lord Capulet decides to agree to the marriage. Paris pursues marriage to Juliet, but Lord Capulet controls the situation and decides independently, not based on Paris' urging. When Juliet arrives at the church, she is composed, and there are only slight traces of her disconcert.²⁰¹ Paris beams with happiness and kisses Juliet goodbye on her cheek. Paris appears vapid and it is virtually impossible to feel for his unawareness of the situation, as his presence is both threatening and irksome. Luhrmann never shows Paris again after the interaction at the church, as the plot is propelled and there is no more need for mirrors of other characters. Romeo demonstrates his mindset when acquiring his poison from the apothecary and when averting an intervention by the pursuing police²⁰² by taking a hostage in front of the church. This substitution serves a similar purpose in exposing Romeo's thoughts as his fight with Paris in the play. Romeo is desperate, but he hesitates before using the hostage²⁰³ to stall

¹⁹⁶ Weis, "Introduction" 81.

¹⁹⁷ *Romeo + Juliet*, 2 min. 18 sec.

¹⁹⁸ *Romeo + Juliet*, 13 min. 37 sec.

¹⁹⁹ *Romeo + Juliet*, 27 min. 40 sec.

²⁰⁰ *Romeo + Juliet*, 75 min. 54 sec.

²⁰¹ *Romeo + Juliet*, 86 min. 42 sec.

²⁰² *Romeo + Juliet*, 109 min. 2 sec.

²⁰³ *Romeo + Juliet*, 110 min. 15 sec.

any police action. Furthermore, Romeo shouts, “Tempt not a desperate man,”²⁰⁴ which is a line taken directly from Romeo’s dialogue with Paris (V, iii, 59). Luhrmann’s inclusion of the hostage substitutes Paris’ presence, which would not be plausible to feature in the night-time chase sequence. Romeo proceeds to shoot in the direction of the police forces, but never harms the police, nor his hostage, and purposefully uses them to reach the church. Romeo is never denigrated by any of his actions. The identity of Romeo’s hostage is irrelevant, and his inclusion enables Romeo to show his desperation without spilling any more blood. In this rendition, Luhrmann accomplishes the exact effect the play does without any more casualties, and demonstrates his ability to interpret Shakespeare in the ‘procreative approach’²⁰⁵ without being overly explicit about his reading, which would suppress the audience’s active literacy. Luhrmann uses Paris as a contrast to Romeo, but instead of having his choices constricted by building the scene around a prescribed fight, Luhrmann chooses to reinvent the scene without damaging his vision or the characters’ integrity. The audience’s sympathy for Romeo never wavers.

Due to Carlei’s and Fellowes’ tendency to expand the play’s text and to distinguish the film from its predecessors, the decision to include the fight between Romeo and Paris is unsurprising. The script makes Paris’ character become more involved in the plot, but he remains one-dimensional, and all of his interactions with Romeo portray Romeo as arrogant. At the Capulet’s feast, Paris speaks to Juliet, “Can I beseech thee that you will pity me enough to dance, and warm my evening with a heavenly smile?”²⁰⁶ Paris is mesmerised by Juliet, but his decorous pleading seems desperate rather than heartfelt or multi-dimensional. When Romeo takes Paris’ place during the dance, Paris protests and the boastful Romeo claims to

²⁰⁴ *Romeo + Juliet*, 110 min. 25 sec.

²⁰⁵ See, Lindiwe Dovey in Leitch 19.

²⁰⁶ *Romeo & Juliet*, 14 min. 59 sec.

“have a prior claim.”²⁰⁷ This daring assertion is intended to accomplish a magnificent union of an iconic couple, a union the audience is expecting and should be ecstatic about, and yet Douglas Booth’s delivery degrades Romeo to an impudent boy, instead of elevating him to a captivating protagonist. The film does not gradually construct Romeo’s personality in order to gain the audience’s investment, it presupposes it. When Paris arrives after Tybalt’s death, Lord Capulet immediately announces the wedding for Thursday.²⁰⁸ Lord Capulet manipulates Paris to his will, and even though Paris’ role is expanded, his involvement is merely reactive. When Paris arrives to marry Juliet and is informed of her supposed demise, he confirms this reactive function by asserting, “What? Are you saying she is dead?”²⁰⁹ This particular line does not enrich the character and makes him appear obtuse, especially when this seemingly explanatory line serves no purpose in informing the already informed audience. Later on, when Romeo arrives to the tomb, Count Paris introduces himself with, “I am Count Paris and I here defend the grief of she who should have been my bride,”²¹⁰ in a threatening voice. When Romeo attempts to persuade Paris to leave, Paris suspects Romeo of insincerity, “Shall I buy this proof of your concern,”²¹¹ and proceeds to push Romeo to provoke him. Romeo appears emotionless before he strikes,²¹² but when Paris is mortally wounded, Romeo utters, “May God bless you, Paris.”²¹³ Rather than repentant, Romeo’s statement seems to be an empty phrase. Romeo’s attitude to murder is analogous to his emotionless reaction to Tybalt’s death earlier in the film,²¹⁴ Romeo never shows remorse. Even though Carlei’s film takes liberties in adapting the play, the characters often appear flattened and less believable, which

²⁰⁷ *Romeo & Juliet*, 17 min. 17 sec.

²⁰⁸ *Romeo & Juliet*, 61 min. 34 sec.

²⁰⁹ *Romeo & Juliet*, 84 min.

²¹⁰ *Romeo & Juliet*, 96 min. 1 sec.

²¹¹ *Romeo & Juliet*, 96 min. 50 sec.

²¹² *Romeo & Juliet*, 97 min. 2 sec.

²¹³ *Romeo & Juliet*, 97 min. 44 sec.

²¹⁴ *Romeo & Juliet*, 57 min. 2 sec

is the exact opposite of what Carlei aimed to achieve.²¹⁵ It is possible that Fellowes and Carlei intended to strengthen the audience's investment in Romeo by degrading Paris, but due to their reported attempt at deeper insight into the characters, Paris' obtuseness appears to be collateral damage of an ill-conceived script.

If a director chooses to include Paris' death in his adaptation, attention to detail is necessary, and when it appears that the film would be harmed by this scene, the ultimate decision is certainly worth deliberating. Zeffirelli advisedly cut the fight between Paris and Romeo for the sake of the plot and due to previous experience with the complexity of the scene subverting his earlier theatre production. Luhrmann devised a rendition of the interaction with Paris without harming Romeo's character or disrupting his story line. Carlei's portrayal of Paris seems to have the potential to enhance the film, but ultimately confirms the assumption based on Rakoff's portrayal of Paris that when this scene creates unfavourable ambivalences of the protagonist, it serves better cut than retained.

3.4 SUICIDE

The lovers' impending death is announced in the Prologue, and the audience is constantly reminded of it throughout the play with Romeo's and Juliet's lines. Romeo and Juliet are characterized by their accepting approach to death, and the constant sense of danger and dread looming over them adds urgency to their interactions. Both Romeo and Juliet refer to death as to something they would welcome should they ever be separated, and both threaten suicide in

²¹⁵ "Do you go flash[i]er than Baz Luhrmann? Do you go more classical or bigger in scope than Zeffirelli? [...] Julian wanted to go deeper. For the first time, he wanted all the characters [...] to participate to this tragedy, and to function as an emotional conduit between the story and the audience." Carlo Carlei in, "Academy Conversations: Romeo and Juliet," 59 sec., <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8eZ1c6zTLU4>> 6 July 2016. Video.

an attempt to prevent harm to the other.²¹⁶ Romeo and Juliet foreshadow their deaths throughout the play,²¹⁷ and experience dreamlike visions presaging their deaths. Before Juliet drinks the sleeping potion, she has a vision of the dead Tybalt seeking Romeo (IV, iv, 55-56), reminiscent of one dead soul welcoming another and foreshadowing Romeo's fate. Romeo then speaks of his dream, in which Juliet finds him dead and revives him by a kiss (V, i, 1-9), the reality is then reversed and following a kiss, Romeo dies before Juliet is revived.

Friar Lawrence sends an explanatory letter to Romeo, but its delivery fails. When Romeo is informed of Juliet's supposed death, he immediately heads for Juliet's tomb and procures a poison from an apothecary on the way. At the tomb Romeo gives Balthasar a letter for his father, and orders him to leave under duress (V, iii, 32-39). He is then confronted by Paris and kills him. Ever since being informed of Juliet's funeral, Romeo is desperate and he only focuses on seeing Juliet once more before joining her in death. Even in desperation, Romeo attempts to prevent harm to both Balthasar and Paris. In the tomb. Romeo says his goodbyes to Juliet and kills himself moments before she awakes. Romeo's means of achieving death by poison is slightly emasculating in contrast to Juliet using a knife.

Juliet continually matures to the point of being able to reject the Nurse and act without relying on others' counsel. Furthermore, even if Juliet trusts the Friar enough to consult him in her dire need, Juliet's trust is never blind. Before Juliet administers the vial she previously

²¹⁶ Both Romeo and Juliet threaten suicide in front of Friar Lawrence. Romeo wants to stab himself for causing Juliet pain (III, iii, 102-107). Juliet threatens to use her knife against herself after the Capulets order her to marry Paris (IV, i, 50-67), because she wants "to live an unstained wife to sweet love" (IV, i, 88).

²¹⁷ During the balcony scene Romeo is not afraid of death but rather of Juliet not reciprocating his feelings (III, ii, 71-78), and then Romeo again alludes to death when stating that he is content with death if he can remain at Juliet's side and not leave Verona (III, v, 17-24). Juliet considers death to be a solution after she hears of Romeo's banishment, "And death, not Romeo, take my maidenhead" (III, ii, 137). Before Romeo exits, Juliet likens him to "one dead in the bottom of a tomb" (III, v, 56) due to his paleness and Romeo replies that he perceives Juliet to be pale as well, because "[d]ry sorrow drinks [their] blood" (III, v, 58-59). In an attempt to persuade Lady Capulet to delay her marriage to Paris, Juliet states, "'Or if you do not, make the bridal bed / In that dim monument where Tybalt lies'" (III, v, 201-202).

received from the Friar, she considers the possibility of the Friar trying to cover his involvement by killing her with poison (IV, iii, 24-29). Juliet develops from a docile child into a self-relying woman, and her perseverance transpires in Juliet's ability to commit suicide by stabbing. First, Juliet threatens to use her knife in front of Friar Lawrence, second she prepares her knife as an alternative plan in case the Friar's sleeping potion fails to work (IV, iii, 21-23), and ultimately, she kills herself with Romeo's dagger. In the tomb, Juliet awakes and sees Friar Lawrence, who informs her of Paris' and Romeo's deaths (V, iii, 155-156) and offers to conceal Juliet in a nunnery. Juliet resolutely refuses to leave, and sends the Friar away. She then finds Romeo's poison and realises that they missed each other by mere moments. Juliet further demonstrates incredible dauntlessness and tenacity by being able to physically kill herself under pressure of the approaching watchmen and by means requiring the utmost determination. Juliet's prominence in the play is only strengthened by the final couplet reversing the order in the play's title, "For never was a story of more woe / Than this of Juliet and her Romeo" (V, iii, 309-310).

In Zeffirelli's film, Romeo and Juliet are under constant pressure in trying for their relationship to remain secret. Romeo is very rash, whereas Juliet is more sensible, but both of them are very emotional and boisterous. Romeo appears unadvised until the moment he hears of Juliet's death, after which he seems resolute,²¹⁸ and Juliet transforms into a mature woman in defying the Nurse.²¹⁹ Death is alluded to multiple times, and both Romeo and Juliet threaten to commit suicide beforehand. Romeo tries to kill himself in front of the Friar,²²⁰ and is scolded for his "womanish" emotional demeanour. Juliet mentions brutal methods of avoiding the marriage but never directly threatens stabbing herself.²²¹ When Juliet is about to

²¹⁸ *Romeo and Juliet*, 118 min. 20 sec.

²¹⁹ *Romeo and Juliet*, 105 min. 13 sec.

²²⁰ *Romeo and Juliet*, 92 min. 40 sec.

²²¹ *Romeo and Juliet*, 108 min, 38 sec.

drink her poison, her soliloquy is shortened to, “Love give me strength,” and Juliet never doubts the Friar.²²² According to Weis, Zeffirelli reportedly said he chose to cut Juliet’s scene for the emphasis to remain on the lovers’ relationship, not them as individuals.²²³ The letter Friar Lawrence sends²²⁴ to Romeo is emphasised, as Balthasar passes a friar delivering the letter on the way to Mantua to inform Romeo of Juliet’s death,²²⁵ and both Romeo and Balthasar fatally pass him on their journey back.²²⁶ Here, Zeffirelli again chooses to put blame on fate and a sequence of accidents. When Romeo arrives to the tomb, he parts with Balthasar in a friendly manner,²²⁷ and proceeds to enter the tomb, there is no imminent danger. Romeo notices that Juliet is not pale in death,²²⁸ speaks in distress, proceeds to drink the poison²²⁹ with a toast to Juliet, kisses Juliet’s hand and consequently collapses on the floor. When Friar Lawrence arrives,²³⁰ he shortly mourns Romeo until Juliet begins to awake. The Friar composes himself to conceal Romeo, and as he hears the watch approaching, he attempts to persuade the drowsy Juliet to leave. Juliet then fully awakes when she accidentally sees Romeo. The Friar flees in panic crying, “I dare no longer stay.”²³¹ Juliet exemplifies her courage both by refusing to flee and by her determination to die. Juliet approaches Romeo, attempts to find some remaining drops of poison in the vial and on Romeo’s lips, and only then fully realises that she missed Romeo by mere moments. When Juliet hears approaching voices, she finds Romeo’s dagger, and resolutely stabs herself only to collapse on Romeo’s body with a tranquil expression. Zeffirelli’s dramatic finale centres on Romeo and Juliet, and foregrounds their personal traits. The Friar’s cowardice only emphasises Juliet’s intrepidity.

²²² *Romeo and Juliet*, 113 min. 47 sec.

²²³ Weis, "Introduction" 81.

²²⁴ *Romeo and Juliet*, 114 min. 20 sec.

²²⁵ *Romeo and Juliet*, 117 min. 31 sec.

²²⁶ *Romeo and Juliet*, 119 min. 9 sec.

²²⁷ *Romeo and Juliet*, 119 min. 54 sec.

²²⁸ *Romeo and Juliet*, 122 min. 49 sec.

²²⁹ There is no scene showing Romeo acquiring the poison.

²³⁰ *Romeo and Juliet*, 127 min. 39 sec.

²³¹ *Romeo and Juliet*, 130 min.

In comparison to Zeffirelli's *Romeo*, Luhrmann's *Romeo* portrayed by Leonardo DiCaprio is composed and mature, and *Romeo* appears desperate only in his turbulent reaction to the news of *Juliet*'s death. Luhrmann's *Juliet* is very sincere and cautious, and shows rage and defiance of her parents only after being told to marry Paris, and after seeing *Romeo* die. *Juliet* never transforms, as she appears mature from the outset, but her hardships and defiance of an abusive family, and the backdrop of raging gang violence help to construct her courageous personality. In addition to the turbulent atmosphere, *Romeo* and *Juliet* are in constant danger of being seen by the Capulets' security guards, and always closer to death with guns substituting thrusting weapons. *Romeo* never threatens suicide,²³² but *Juliet* does and also momentarily points her gun at Friar Lawrence as she demands his help.²³³ *Juliet* never doubts the Friar's intentions, but shows her fear of the potion's efficacy in praying in front of her personal altar. The Friar sends a letter to *Romeo*, and the postman attempts to deliver it twice, but always misses *Romeo*.²³⁴ When he is told of *Juliet*'s supposed death, *Romeo* is first devastated, but then his demeanour changes in into fatal resolution.²³⁵ *Romeo*'s journey to the church with *Juliet* is transformed into a car chase, in which *Romeo* is pursued by the authorities for his return. When *Romeo* is procuring his poison,²³⁶ he criticises money as more poisonous than the poison he acquires. When *Romeo* approaches the church, he parts with Balthasar and takes a hostage in order to get inside the church to *Juliet*.²³⁷ *Romeo* is desperate, but he avoids causing any more casualties. Luhrmann's death scene featuring one more interaction of the lovers is proverbial and elaborate, but ultimately not original, as it was employed by multiple adapters ever since Thomas Otway in 1680.²³⁸ In the church, *Juliet* lies

²³² *Romeo + Juliet*, 74 min. 3 sec.

²³³ *Romeo + Juliet*, 87 min. 53 sec.

²³⁴ *Romeo + Juliet*, 89 min. 30 sec.

²³⁵ *Romeo + Juliet*, 95 min. 13 sec.

²³⁶ *Romeo + Juliet*, 98 min. 34 sec.

²³⁷ *Romeo + Juliet*, 99 min. 38 sec.

²³⁸ Levenson, "Introduction" 72, 73, 75, 78.

on an altar-like bed surrounded by hundreds of candles, Romeo joins Juliet and lovingly strokes her. When Romeo is saying goodbye, Juliet stirs several times without him noticing, and fully opens her eyes before Romeo ever administers his poison.²³⁹ The misfortune is enhanced as Romeo drinks his poison a mere second before Juliet touches his cheek.²⁴⁰ Juliet kisses Romeo hoping to find some poison and Romeo only then utters, “Thus with a kiss I die.”²⁴¹ In her newfound solitude, Juliet never speaks, takes Romeo’s gun, points it at her temple, and shoots herself. Luhrmann switches to wide angle shot before Juliet shoots, and employs Dutch tilt, a slanted camera angle used to portray unease and desperation throughout the scene.²⁴² The film never shows a close-up of Juliet’s self-inflicted head wound, and after a montage of the lovers’ most joyful moments, the perspective changes from an intimate view of the lovers’ relationship into a depersonalised view of the unaware outsiders. Juliet’s means by pulling a trigger implies desperation more than bravery, which stands in contrast to the physical act of stabbing oneself. Luhrmann’s Romeo appears loving and content with death, and his Juliet is very determined in her decision to kill herself. Luhrmann’s portrayal of the church scene is very memorable due to its visuals, as Luhrmann again employs religious iconography which now markedly contrasts with the suicides. Both Romeo and Juliet commit suicide on an altar in a church, and in a notable absence of their Friar. Luhrmann’s decision to exclude the Friar creates an intimate setting resembling a dismal wedding, as Romeo walks down the aisle to Juliet, gives her a ring he previously received from her, and they both commit suicide at the place of their previous church wedding to reunite in death.

There is little sense of dread or imminent danger in Carlei’s *Romeo & Juliet*. The Capulets are not controlling, Juliet is self-reliant from the outset, and the lovers’ personalities do not

²³⁹ *Romeo + Juliet*, 106 min. 25 sec.

²⁴⁰ *Romeo + Juliet*, 106 min. 44 sec.

²⁴¹ *Romeo + Juliet*, 107 min. 40 sec.

²⁴² “Dutch Tilt,” *Mediacollege.com*, <<http://www.mediacollege.com/video/shots/dutch-tilt.html>> 27 July 2016. Web.

transform. Romeo also never changes in his demeanour towards others, and there is only a slight change in his behaviour when he is chided by the Friar for threatening suicide.²⁴³ Juliet's threat to kill herself appears an empty phrase and not at all serious,²⁴⁴ and relates to Juliet's slightly pampered personality, as she seems to use the threat in order to manipulate the Friar. Friar Lawrence sends the letter to Romeo by another Friar,²⁴⁵ and Carlei extends this into a separate storyline that is unnecessary and rather distracting to the plot. When Benvolio informs Romeo of Juliet's death, Romeo is disconcerted, and proceeds to procure his poison.²⁴⁶ Benvolio seeks out the Friar,²⁴⁷ who then hurries to the tomb, but misses Romeo by mere seconds. In the tomb, Romeo finally sincerely apologises to Tybalt's corpse, and to Juliet, he utters, "It is time to join you in eternity."²⁴⁸ Romeo then lies next to Juliet, says his goodbyes, and a second before Romeo drinks his poison, Juliet stirs. The dying Romeo then notices the awoken Juliet, and they share a passionate kiss. Juliet notices Romeo's vial of poison before Romeo dies, and the Friar arrives immediately after.²⁴⁹ The Friar is devastated, interacts with Juliet, stops her from attempting to drink from Romeo's vial. When the Friar tries to persuade Juliet to leave, she astutely promises to follow him after saying her goodbye to Romeo in order to be alone. Juliet kisses Romeo with the intention to find some lingering poison, and stabs herself with Romeo's dagger after hearing the watch approaching.²⁵⁰ The Friar then returns with the watch and is grief-stricken at the sight. Due to the Friar's devotion to Romeo, it is befitting for his reaction to the lovers' death to be shown on screen, and it is his mortification that amplifies the impact of the lovers' deaths on the audience. Juliet's desperation is exposed in her idea to convince the Friar to leave her alone to die. Carlei's

²⁴³ *Romeo & Juliet*, 57 min. 24 sec.

²⁴⁴ *Romeo & Juliet*, 75 min. 32 sec.

²⁴⁵ *Romeo & Juliet*, 80 min. 54 sec.

²⁴⁶ *Romeo & Juliet*, 92 min. 25 sec.

²⁴⁷ *Romeo & Juliet*, 97 min. 40 sec.

²⁴⁸ *Romeo & Juliet*, 99 min. 40 sec.

²⁴⁹ *Romeo & Juliet*, 103 min. 24 sec.

²⁵⁰ *Romeo & Juliet*, 106 min. 31 sec.

Romeo and Juliet finally appear to have matured due to their impending deaths, Romeo in apologising to Tybalt, Juliet in being able to execute her plan under pressure from the approaching Friar and the watch.

When it comes to adapting the two protagonists specifically, any changes to the lovers' personalities can impact the finale and the extent to which the audience is able to identify with the two. Ultimately, if the characters are not established through hardships, their suicides and marriage could hypothetically appear as caused by their immature understanding of love. Furthermore, suicide is the final illustration of the individual character's strength and emotional connection to their spouse, and the act seals the audience's perception of the characters. Both Luhrmann's and Zeffirelli's set of lovers emphasises their previously shown character traits, and Carlei redeems his lovers by finally elevating them into maturity.

3.5 DEATH: CONCLUSION

The Capulets, the Montagues and the Prince each lose two family members, and the balanced distribution of deaths enables for the final reconciliation to occur, as all three parties are impacted by the conflict and desire to make peace. This balance is alluded to in the Prince's speech from the closing scene, "And I, for winking at your discords too, / Have lost a brace of kinsmen" (V, iii, 294-295). It is intriguing to notice that even though 'brace' means two, most adaptations retain the line, even if the Prince predominantly loses only one kinsman. Lady Montague is omitted in all three adaptations.

Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet*²⁵¹ includes four deaths: Mercutio's, Tybalt's, Romeo's and Juliet's. Mercutio is a kinsman to the Prince, causes Romeo to mature and, possibly, intentionally causes his own death by jumping onto Tybalt's sword. Tybalt is a victim of fate,

²⁵¹ *Romeo and Juliet*, dir. Franco Zeffirelli, prod. BHE Films, 1968.

not a villain. Romeo kills Tybalt by accident, and also unintentionally contributes to Mercutio's death. Furthermore, Zeffirelli chooses to portray all deaths as results of accidents in order for the audience to remain sympathetic to the characters, as both Mercutio and Tybalt die by chance, and as Romeo misses his messenger and Juliet's awakening by mere moments. Romeo drinks the poison, and Juliet then stabs herself with his dagger after being offered to flee by the Friar. Both Romeo and Juliet consider suicide before, and never hesitate in their determination to join the other in death. As Mercutio is a friend of the Montagues and Tybalt is Juliet's cousin, there is a balance between the two losses suffered by the Montagues and the Capulets.

Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*²⁵² features the same four deaths, and additionally reinvents a fifth death scene. The possibly homosexual Mercutio is intentionally stabbed by Tybalt, who is then killed by Romeo in a fit of rage. Romeo takes a hostage in order to avoid another casualty, and demonstrates having drawn a lesson from his murder of Tybalt, which he is portrayed to immediately regret. Romeo and Juliet are enabled to interact once more, but their interaction is cut short by Romeo having previously drunk his poison. Juliet commits suicide in abrupt solitude by pointing Romeo's gun at her temple. Only Juliet threatens suicide before and even threatens the Friar when asking for a solution to her desperate situation. Luhrmann shows all of his characters as multidimensional. In this film, as Lady Capulet is involved with Tybalt and Mercutio is introduced as Romeo's best friend, and only probably related to the Prince, the film's deaths are balanced in the same sense as Zeffirelli's.

Carlei's *Romeo & Juliet*²⁵³ includes five deaths: the typical four and also Paris' death. Mercutio provokes Tybalt, who rejoices in killing Mercutio and both of them appear as one-dimensional fighters. Romeo chases Tybalt and kills him by stabbing him in the back, even

²⁵² *Romeo + Juliet*, dir. Baz Luhrmann, prod. Bazmark Films, 1996.

²⁵³ *Romeo & Juliet*, dir. Carlo Carlei, writ. Julian Fellowes, prod. Amber Entertainment, 2013.

though he is never close to Mercutio. Romeo does not exhibit remorse after killing Tybalt and shows hardly any for killing Paris. Romeo verbally offers Paris to flee, but ultimately kills him in an emotionless manner. Romeo is not easy to empathise with until the moment he apologises to Tybalt in the tomb. Romeo and Juliet shortly interact before Romeo kills himself, and Juliet proceeds to attempt to commit suicide once in front of Friar Lawrence and then successfully kills herself with Romeo's dagger after she persuades the Friar to leave. In terming Mercutio a Montague, Carlei assigns two deaths to the Montagues, two to the Capulets and one to the Prince.

4 FINAL RECONCILIATION

The final reconciliation of the feuding parties constitutes the catharsis of the play, as all familial bonds and deaths culminate in reconciliation. The reconciliation of the two households is extraordinary due to the context of the cruel feud, and the improbability of it ever occurring. The reconciliatory actions by Lord Capulet are out of the ordinary given his controlling and quarrelsome demeanour, and expose the depth of his remorse over his involvement in the tragic events. The aftermath of Romeo's and Juliet's deaths is essential in the scheme of the plot, and it is necessary to be carefully premeditated in order to impact the audience in the manner desired by the adapters.

In the play, after Juliet commits suicide, Paris' page and the watchmen discover the dead, proceed to summon the Prince, the Capulets and the Montagues (V, iii, 177-178) and find the distressed Friar Lawrence and Balthasar. When the Prince and the Capulets arrive, all are informed of the recent deaths, and the Capulets mourn their daughter's death before Lord Montague arrives. Upon his arrival, Lord Montague reveals that his wife died of grief due to Romeo's banishment (V, iii, 21-22). The Friar reveals the nature of Romeo and Juliet's relationship and acquaints everyone with the events surrounding the suicides. The Friar's testimony is then confirmed both by Balthasar and by a letter from Romeo to his father that Balthasar was assigned to deliver (V, iii, 275). As Paris' page recounts the events, the Prince reconfirms the verity of all statements, and alludes to the futility of the conflict and acknowledges his own guilt (V, iii, 291). The all-engulfing conflict has caused all the deaths of the play, and the Prince has lost two kinsmen, and thus is also punished for his indiscretion. Following this speech, the usually angry Lord Capulet addresses Lord Montague as a brother, and offers a conciliatory handshake as his daughter's jointure (V, iii, 296-299). Lord

Montague promises to erect a gold statue in Juliet's honour, and Lord Capulet promises the same in Romeo's. The Prince then delivers the final monologue,

A glooming peace this morning with it brigs.
The sun for sorrow will not show his head.
Go hence, to have more talk of these sad things.
Some shall be pardoned and some punished,
For never was a story of more woe
Than this of Juliet and her Romeo. (V, iii, 304-310)

The play never switches the setting and all events occur immediately next to the dead Romeo and Juliet. The parents reconcile next to their offspring, and the Prince's closing monologue involves the readers or audience as the impacted crowd, which further facilitates the catharsis of the play.

Zeffirelli's finale of *Romeo and Juliet* begins with a sorrowful procession,²⁵⁴ in which both Capulets and Montagues follow the bodies of Romeo and Juliet on separate biers. The Prince passionately delivers his first speech²⁵⁵ as all other characters remain silent throughout. The final speech is delivered by the narrator voiced by Laurence Olivier,²⁵⁶ as both families enter the church during the closing credits. As the characters enter, the reconciliation is suggested. The fathers walk in together, the mothers acknowledge each other, the Nurse hugs Benvolio, and thus the two processions gradually unite in one. The sorrow and silence emanating from the procession strengthens the catharsis, and facilitates a memorable conclusion not verging on a cliché. Zeffirelli's ending contrasts with the unbridled energy of his noisy opening brawl, in which the Prince needed a cavalry to halt the fighting to deliver his speech, and with the Capulets' indignation at Tybalt's death.

²⁵⁴ *Romeo and Juliet*, 132 min. 50 sec.

²⁵⁵ *Romeo and Juliet*, 134 min. 18 sec.

²⁵⁶ *Romeo and Juliet*, 135 min. 46 sec.

Luhrmann transitions from the view of the lovers into a TV news report. After Romeo and Juliet die, Luhrmann includes a cutaway montage of the two lovers' most joyful moments from the film, and then the perspective shifts from the insightful view of the lovers' relationship and the scene of their death by fading to white, into a depersonalised view of a news report camera as it focuses on the bodies being loaded onto a hearse.²⁵⁷ There are multiple cameras and reporters, and a faceless crowd stands behind the police tape. Both shocked mothers remain in the cars, and both fathers watch the undertakers, the families remain silent. The fathers stand as individuals and there is no definite closure to the feud. The Prince delivers his speech of blaming both the fathers and himself.²⁵⁸ The most pertinent quote of the scene is, "All are punished," which the Prince exclaims twice. The scene transforms to a news report, while the same newsreader who opened the film narrates the Prince's final speech, then reappears on a small TV screen in order to deliver the two final lines of the play. It appears as if the audience's initiated perspective abruptly ended with the lovers' deaths and forced the audience to realise their inherent distance from the plot. The camera zooms out as the television image displays static, abruptly closing the film. As the film is conspicuously framed by a news narrative, and alludes to the tabloid fetishization of personal tragedies, the missing closure and catharsis of the finale then relates to the news not providing any catharsis to the most shocking stories. Luhrmann achieves a metatextual reminder of the medium, as the audience is invited in by a news report only to realise their own distance from the depicted events.

Carlei ultimately undermines his final reconciliation, the most literal yet, in the inventions made to the plot. Carlei opens his film by a tournament and by including it in the Prologue which, after the first four lines, flows into, "And so the Prince called a tournament to keep the

²⁵⁷ *Romeo + Juliet*, 111 min. 35 sec.

²⁵⁸ *Romeo + Juliet*, 111 min. 50 sec.

battle from the city streets. Now rival Capulets and Montagues, they try their strength to gain the royal ring.”²⁵⁹ This tournament is however never again relevant to the film and the purported raging conflict between the households seems virtually non-existent in Carlei’s Verona. Lord Capulet and Lord Montague get involved in a tame fight only to be stopped by their wives.²⁶⁰ Lord Capulet never expresses any displeasure at seeing Romeo interact with Juliet at the feast,²⁶¹ and Romeo persuades the Friar to officiate his wedding to Juliet by stating, “What care I for quarrels of the past, or rivalries now buried in a tomb.”²⁶² The Capulets engineer for Juliet to marry only to procure an heir to their bloodline,²⁶³ and Lord Capulet seems to be only enraged at Juliet because of her unwillingness to solve their predicament. As there is no sense of irreconcilable differences prior to the reconciliation scene, the ultimate impact of the scene is anticlimactic and verges on a cliché. After Romeo and Juliet die, and Friar Lawrence discovers them, the film transitions to a scene of all being gathered in front of a church with Romeo’s and Juliet’s bodies on biers.²⁶⁴ The Prince opens the scene by pardoning all those involved,²⁶⁵ suggests that they learn from their mistakes and summons Lord Capulet and Lord Montague. The two fathers look at each other, Lord Capulet proposes a handshake, and the two embrace in reconciliation. Romeo and Juliet are then carried into the church by their spouse’s kinsmen for their memorial service during which the final speech is narrated by the Prince’s voice. As all mourners sit, Benvolio goes to Romeo and Juliet and joins their hands.²⁶⁶ The scene is problematic, as the plot of the film never shows any hint of a deadly conflict, and is reduced by the impact of depicting the Capulets as loving parents. Due to the film never establishing the lovers’ hardships, such as Juliet’s

²⁵⁹ *Romeo & Juliet*, 1 min. 31 sec.

²⁶⁰ *Romeo & Juliet*, 4 min. 29 sec.

²⁶¹ *Romeo & Juliet*, 18 min. 15 sec.

²⁶² *Romeo & Juliet*, 34 min. 54 sec.

²⁶³ *Romeo & Juliet*, 61 min. 35 sec.

²⁶⁴ *Romeo & Juliet*, 107 min. 45 sec.

²⁶⁵ Which is a spin on, “Some shall be pardoned and some punished” (V, iii, 308).

²⁶⁶ *Romeo & Juliet*, 109 min. 37 sec.

background, and the Capulets or Montagues never appearing hateful, the effect of the reconciliation is weakened, because the conflict is never threatening to the protagonists, and the reconciliation never appears impossible.

5 CONCLUSION

Analysing the individual approaches of the three respective film adaptations enables to observe the evolution of the tragedy's depiction in the time span of over 45 years. All three films enhance meanings within Shakespeare's play and contribute to the discussion. At closer inspection, all three films appear to defy expectations based purely on their first impressions.

Zeffirelli is often criticised for his polished Verona,²⁶⁷ but in comparison to the almost artificially enhanced Carlei's Verona, Zeffirelli's setting of *Romeo and Juliet* appears authentic rather than distracting. Luhrmann's postmodern rendition set in Verona Beach can initially appear shocking, but the adaptation itself pays ingenious homage to the adapted text and echoes its metaphors in stunning visuals without compromising the coherence of the plot. Luhrmann employs Christian iconography to the extent of it becoming omnipresent, even in the film's title, and uses extensive water imagery suggestive of baptism.²⁶⁸ Luhrmann combines parody and drama without any genre restrictions on the range of meanings he suggests. Carlei's overall concept is reminiscent of Zeffirelli's, but these two versions are inherently different in emphases. Carlei employs establishing shots of architecture in almost every scene, sometimes at the expense of the plot.

All three directors employ different narrative strategies and mould the adapted text to create their own interpretations of the adapted text. Zeffirelli chose to exonerate his characters by emphasising the role of fate in the sequence of events leading to the demise of the morally incorrupt Romeo and Juliet in order for the audience to empathise with all characters, and thus generate a powerful emotional and cathartic finale. Luhrmann contemporised the adapted text by defying the habitual approach to filming *Romeo and Juliet* by setting it in the 21st century,

²⁶⁷ Davies and Wells 164.

²⁶⁸ Lehmann 193-196.

in an eccentric materialistic society that is being torn apart by two rivalling gangs, which provide a tumultuous background for the two lovers. Luhrmann enhanced the impact of Romeo and Juliet's suicides by not providing an explicit reconciliation or closure in order to mirror the contemporary dramatisation of personal tragedies in the sensation seeking media, and by reminding the audience of their own distance by putting them in the role of the prying TV news viewers. Carlei aimed to present an innovative insight into all characters' mindsets by choosing to film with a rewritten script featuring newly invented interactions.²⁶⁹ Unfortunately, the inventions made to the plot appear ill-conceived due to flattening the individual characters and not showing how the protagonists overcome obstacles and mature in the course of the narrative. Furthermore, in an attempt to foreshadow the final reconciliation, Carlei and Fellowes presented the conflict as trivial, and thus reduced the film's ultimate impact on the audience.

All three films were targeted specifically at the younger generation. Zeffirelli created his film at the peak of the Hippie era,²⁷⁰ and showed a young couple struggling with the environment of constant conflict, a situation mirroring the late 1960s 'generational conflict' to Vietnam.²⁷¹ Luhrmann successfully used the rapid style of music videos to adapt for the so called MTV generation,²⁷² and portrayed Romeo and Juliet as mature idealists amid the chaos of the anger driven society of Verona Beach. Carlo Carlei emphasised his aim to bring Shakespeare closer to the new generations throughout all promotional materials,²⁷³ but his *Romeo & Juliet*²⁷⁴

²⁶⁹ Carlo Carlei, "Academy Conversations: Romeo and Juliet," 59 sec.,
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8eZ1c6zTLU4>> 6 July 2016. Video.

²⁷⁰ Weis, "Introduction" 79.

²⁷¹ Levenson, "Introduction" 93.

²⁷² Douglas Brode, *Shakespeare in the Movies: From Silent Era to Shakespeare in Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 56.

²⁷³ Hailee Steinfeld and Douglas Booth, "#RomeoJulietChat"
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C6PNL49Z3Zg>> 6 July 2016. Video.

²⁷⁴ *Romeo & Juliet*, dir. Carlo Carlei, writ. Julian Fellowes, prod. Amber Entertainment, 2013.

ultimately centred on the visuals²⁷⁵ while leaving the character development behind. Both Carlei and Fellowes misjudged what the younger generation seeks in films possibly due to their inability to bridge the generational gap and empathise with their characters to the extent Zeffirelli and Luhrmann did. Furthermore, the film presupposes the audience's investment in glorifying the couple and their interactions, instead of focusing on the lovers' context and emotional development in order to establish a connection to the younger generation.

The focus of this thesis was proposed before Carlo Carlei ever released any further information concerning his approach to *Romeo & Juliet*.²⁷⁶ Even if some of the filmmakers' choices seem questionable, the film provides new perspectives, and reinvents the narrative while adding new elements and preserving some of the play's features that were exclusively omitted before. The film's mise en scène and casting are not altogether unfavourable. *Romeo & Juliet*²⁷⁷ is not a faulty adaptation, but some of its shortcomings are very noticeable when confronted with the vision of the previous films. This adaptation was both a financial flop and critically not well received. With a reported budget of 24 million dollars, the film has earned only about 3 million dollars worldwide and its distribution to cinemas ceased after it was negatively reviewed.²⁷⁸ The lack of the film's success proves Ace Pilkington's statement quoted in the Introduction, 'the worst danger to the future of filmed Shakespeare is not insufficient funds but inefficient imaginations.'²⁷⁹

²⁷⁵ In an interview, Carlei stated that "the fact that [he] had such a good writer allowed [him] to focus on the visuals," and that "[he] was glad there was someone else taking care of the dialogue." Carlo Carlei in, "Academy Conversations: Romeo and Juliet," 3 min. 14 sec., <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8eZ1c6zTLU4>> 6 July 2016. Video.

²⁷⁶ *Romeo & Juliet*, dir. Carlo Carlei, writ. Julian Fellowes, prod. Amber Entertainment, 2013.

²⁷⁷ *Romeo & Juliet*, dir. Carlo Carlei, writ. Julian Fellowes, prod. Amber Entertainment, 2013.

²⁷⁸ Box Office Flops, "Romeo and Juliet," <<http://www.boxofficeflops.com/yearly-breakdowns/2013-2/romeo-and-juliet/>> 6 July 2016. Web.

²⁷⁹ Davies and Wells 14.

The only criterion for assessing film adaptations should be their inventiveness and the director's individual rendition of the adapted material. Shakespeare's works on film are necessary to be portrayed with clear intentions and an awareness of the target audience. There is a growing tendency to adapt *Romeo and Juliet* by defying the restrictions of the script, but even when the newest Carlei's rendition attempts to overcome these limits, it never takes enough liberties with the adapted text to alter the plot for its own narrative and interpretive purposes. There are certain advantages to adapting Shakespeare to offshoots, as the filmmakers' creativity is not limited by the expectations of audiences and film studios. Due to the increasing number of film adaptations, it is almost impossible for the new renditions to be original while focusing on how to revolutionise the material without actually altering it. According to Bloom, an original writer is the one who manages to present this archetypal story in a new way,²⁸⁰ and it seems that there is more space to adapt *Romeo and Juliet* by altering the plot in order to present a truly new perspective.

²⁸⁰ Bloom 251.

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