‘What tongue shall smooth thy name?’ Recent Films of *Romeo and Juliet*

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AS HIS USE, adaptation and often blending of sources in *Romeo and Juliet* indicates, Shakespeare’s is a richly intertextual narrative culture. Nonetheless, it seems unlikely that he and the other actors would have asked themselves ‘How shall we produce *Romeo and Juliet*?’ There is no evidence that there was a producer or even an actor-manager in the later senses in Shakespeare’s theatre: no formal mechanism for deciding how this presentation of a play would be shaped as against other presentations, as an *interpretation*. Writing back begins at once (Fletcher’s *The Tamer Tamed* as riposte to *The Taming of the Shrew*); drastic adaptation of a text (as with Tate’s *Lear*) follows within a couple of generations. By this time anyone who decides to put on one of Shakespeare’s plays is likely to do so with the conviction that he is a great English writer and with the consciousness of a tradition: a repertoire of ways of doing him on stage. The tension between the claims of a classic (for faithfulness; for intense interpretative reflection) and the weight of a tradition upon the ambitious practitioner, responsive to the feelings and climate of his own day, can be acute. A striking moment in this history is Dr Johnson’s appeal to his own and the public’s embrace of the ending Nahum Tate gave *King Lear*, even as he sits down to the task of editing Shakespeare’s. It is appropriate to think in terms of *agon*, of an element of contestation with the past, in many productions.

These remarks schematise a long stretch of complex cultural history. Adaptation from stage to screen adds another level of complexity, a formal one. It is true that films in their medium can do virtually anything that texts or stage productions can do: they can, if need be, create interior monologue, point of view, and so on; they can make you forget that the performing bodies are not literally present in the viewer’s space and time

*I should like to thank Nicole Prunster for her help and encouragement.

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by the almost overwhelming immediacy of their presentation of bodiliness. Nonetheless the difference of medium makes for tensions; to mention only one source for these, the visual and auditory resources of film can threaten to overshadow the visual and auditory effects and suggestions of a text as read or as produced theatrically. And there is still, with films, the weight of tradition as an invitation or a provocation to contestation: how does a film make it new, how does a film make it different (from other films, from stage productions, and indeed from the *Romeo and Juliet* read and written about in high school)? Franco Zeffirelli makes a gently humorous comment on these matters in his autobiographical film *Tea with Mussolini*.[1] The young Zeffirelli is being taught English by his kindly nurse-cum-foster-mother (who has herself tragically suffered lost love in her youth, as we have seen a little earlier in the film – as if in allusion to the Nurse's loss of Susan and of her husband). Adult and child read the balcony scene together, manipulating little puppets in a toy theatre: the great director's first production of the play.[2]

In the remainder of this article I discuss two contemporary films of *Romeo and Juliet*: those made by Zeffirelli in 1968 and by Baz Luhrmann in 1996, and *Shakespeare in Love* (1998),[3] a humorous fantasia on the story of the first-ever production, which was not a production at all but, as the film sees it, the first and maybe the last time when you could simply go for it and hope that it would be all right on the night, or rather afternoon. The focus is on names and naming: a famous, almost a notorious, trope in the film, so that someone who knows nothing else about the play probably knows 'What's in a name?' as a catchphrase.

The play's treatment of the trope is arguably vital; names can be smoothed, echoed, wounded, refused, lopped ('Here comes Romeo! | Without his roe': 'Meo', presumably; the infant Juliet was called 'Jule'); they are continually called, summoned, invoked, replaced (Romeo becomes 'a Montague', 'villain', 'boy', 'my Romeo').[4] The lovers, 'unimportant' persons as protagonists of a tragic story,[5] have to make the names Romeo and Juliet embody and signify their love for each other, and

[1] *Tea with Mussolini*, dir. Franco Zeffirelli (MGM, 1998).

[2] The film of *Romeo and Juliet* was preceded by a notable London stage production by Zeffirelli. Peter S. Donaldson, *Shakespearean Films/Shakespearean Directors* (Boston 1990) p. 149.

[3] *Romeo and Juliet*, dir. Franco Zeffirelli (Paramount, 1968); *William Shakespeare's 'Romeo + Juliet'*, dir. Baz Luhrmann (Twentieth-Century Fox, 1996); *Shakespeare in Love*, dir. John Madden (Universal, 1998).

[4] All references are to the Arden Shakespeare: *Complete Works* (London 2000); 'without his roe': II. iv. 37–8; 'Jule': I. iii. 43; 'a Montague': I. v. 54; 'my Romeo': II. ii. 163.

[5] Frank Kermode, *Shakespeare's Language* (New York 2000) p. 52.

in doing this, moving into an assertion of their intense meaning for each other, in a secret space of love (the balcony, the night, the secret marriage), they have to move past their surnames, which always recall the feud which, however, remains arbitrary, an emphatic difference whose origins are forgotten, a difference without a reason to it. In a Shakespearean tragedy, naming is often thematically vital (as with Coriolanus; or think of 'This is I: Hamlet the Dane', where Hamlet also names his father[6]), and so it is here, in the complex relations between Romeo and Juliet on the one hand and Montague and Capulet on the other, and one condition for this is that in theatrical narration characters need not be named as they are in a novel. They are on stage, embodied, made into persons less by a name in the narrative and more by the audience's reception of what they say and do. In cinema, we are dealing with a medium in which things can be very richly shown as well as named,[7] and whose formal resources, auditory as well as visual, can make the calling and summoning of names echo and compete. These are formal matters, having to do with the resources (which can be opportunities or temptations) of the medium; but here I also hypothesise a more general cultural factor. This is the way in which the Romeo and Juliet story has come, in the Western cultural imaginary, to stand for the political tragedy of ethnic, religious, or some other collective difference and its effect on the individual. If the outward differences between Montague and Capulet are not very obvious in Shakespeare or his Italian predecessors ('What's in a name?'), they become crucial in this popular allegorisation of the tragedy: the Croat girl and the Serbian boy, and Catholic and Protestant lovers in Northern Ireland (or should that be Ulster?). How do the films treat this difference, central to the myth of Romeo and Juliet but absent from Shakespeare's play?

Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* is a very active and noisy film. Much of this is as we would expect when contrasting a film with either a stage production or a reading of the text. The text is much cut in the film, but the visual works its own effects of patterning and suggestion. Romeo first appears, after the violence and vigour of the opening brawl (a wrecked market-place, at least three nasty stabbings to be glimpsed in the turmoil), strolling along a quiet

[6] *Hamlet*, V. ii. 255–6.

[7] In his 1971 film of *Macbeth*, Polanski expands and alters the role of Ross in order to intensify his grim picture of the politics of this Scotland: this person is the third murderer, he later disposes of the other two murderers, he betrays Lady Macduff, he deserts to the English camp at just the right moment and is finally on hand to place Macbeth's crown on Malcolm's head. But only viewers very well acquainted with Shakespeare will name this character as Ross; the rest must find some more expressive label, for instance, 'the little guy with the shifty smile'. *Macbeth*, dir. Roman Polanski (Playboy Productions, 1971).

lane, carrying a bunch of wildflowers he has evidently been collecting. The flowers stand for the flowery Petrarchan speeches about love, almost all of which are cut; visually, they link with the wild flowers the Friar is collecting when we first see him (though his meditation on their meaning is cut), which he catches sight of in the later scene when Juliet is pleading with him for some recourse, thus getting the idea of the dangerous draught. These two images of wild flowers, themselves making a contrast, can then be contrasted with the roses which first Lady Capulet and then the other ladies of the household cast on Juliet's bier when it rests for a moment at the entrance to the family's monument: blood red, and certainly cultivated rather than wild flowers. Again, a reader struck with the poignancy of Romeo's remark to Paris after he has killed him, 'One writ with me in sour misfortune's book', may well recall Lady Capulet's elaborate extended comparison of Paris to a richly illustrated volume when she was recommending him as a possible husband (V. iii. 82; I. iv. 81–92). Both speeches are cut in Zeffirelli, as indeed is the killing of Paris. Perhaps the viewer responds to the business with torches in the film's suicide scene by recalling 'she doth teach the torches to burn bright', which Zeffirelli emphasises as Romeo's first response to the sight of Juliet (by cutting some of the preceding lines). Might this viewer also recall the frightening way in which the corpse of Tybalt falls on Romeo as he lies in the dust, or the corpse of Juliet (dying with the same shocking abruptness) falling on Romeo? But all this appertains to those general qualities we expect from a successful film.

Some discussion of the way Zeffirelli uses sound will take us closer to what he does with names and naming, and also to his interpretation of the tragedy.[8] Sound in this film runs the gamut from noise to music: we have the senseless roaring of crowds, mobs indeed; the chanting of groups; laughter, singing, calling, weeping. Mercutio punctuates his irritable, barely controlled, heat-harassed jokes about Benvolio's love of fighting with 'Blah, blah, blah, blah'. We have the inarticulate noises of the body and, in particular, the breath: panting (Romeo and Tybalt in their fight, a very bodily affair, with running and stumbling, wrestling and punching), groaning (Mercutio with the pain of his wound, heard not seen); Juliet has to pause in her enthusiastic kissing of Romeo at one point during the balcony scene, grabbing a breath as if coming up for air. She has a throaty adolescent chuckle; we hear her laughter about the house before we first see her. Indeed, the film has a kind of sonic structure: laughter in its first half, weeping in

[8] Zeffirelli had personal reasons for being interested in proper names; he was illegitimate, and, following Italian custom of the time, his rather poetic surname ('little zephyrs') was chosen for him: 'Zeffiretti' mistranscribed to 'Zeffirelli': Donaldson, *Shakespearean Films*, p. 146.

its – much cut and frighteningly speeded-up – second half. The laughter can express the joy or simple vitality of an individual, as with Juliet, or the enjoyment of a community (there are shots of joyous laughter as the moresco begins – a communal dance in which the participants put bells on their fingers and make the rhythm), but it can also express the out-of-touch and almost deranged incomprehension of a mob (the crowd around Mercutio after he is wounded does not realise that the fun has stopped; indeed, they still laugh even after he has died). The weeping is first hysterical (Juliet, the nurse, Romeo), then, in the final scene, silent and heart-rending.

Just as we are aware of the naked as against the clothed body,[9] the hair in a tight glossy bun or loosened and tousled (Lady Capulet at the ball in contrast to Lady Capulet pleading for revenge over the corpse of Tybalt), so we are aware that articulate, structured speech – which in this text is, of course, wonderfully eloquent and patterned, if also punning and exclamatory – happens against, or intertwined with, inarticulate sound. It is as if the body is the medium in which people live and which they perhaps transcend. This is a remark that will need to be qualified, since the film's sensuality is vivid and enjoying, but let us first look more closely at its treatment in the balcony scene.

The scene of the Capulets' ball ends with the sleepy calling of Juliet's name, cutting (but the montage seems like a merging) to Romeo's drunken friends calling out his name. To achieve this, Zeffirelli has omitted the second chorus ('Now old desire doth in his deathbed lie'), taken a line allotted to Benvolio (II. i. 3) and given it in altered form to the group of friends, who say 'One, two, three . . . *Romeo*'; next we have a version of Mercutio's call ('Romeo! Humours! Madman! Passion! Lover!', l. 7) but the rest of this speech, and his bawdy interchange with Benvolio, is cut, so that we go at once to Romeo's 'But soft, what light . . .'. What follows is shortened (Zeffirelli's practice here and elsewhere is to cut or abbreviate extended similes and metaphors), but the whole of Juliet's 'wherefore art thou Romeo?' meditation on names is retained. The effect is to bring it all closer to the calling out of their names, the way the world continually seeks the lovers in affection or demand; and, of course, the Nurse's calling of Juliet towards the end of the scene is retained.[10]

[9] Early viewers were struck by the lovers' nakedness as the dawn comes in (III. iv). This is less startling now; we note, however, that we see a good deal more of Romeo's naked body than of Juliet's; we might recall the earlier glimpse of his back when he was wrestling Tybalt, and even follow Peter Donaldson (*Shakespearean Films*, pp. 154–5), who notes how the camera dwells on the Capulets' codpieces as they swagger into the piazza.

[10] But Romeo's 'It is my soul that calls upon my name' and the speech to which this is a response are omitted.

Zeffirelli's (or the actors') main additions to the script[11] are exclamations and name-callings – the Nurse repeats 'Juliet' and 'make haste' when summoning Juliet to the conversation with her mother about her marriage; the crowd repeats 'the Prince', 'the Prince' over the sound of his approaching trumpet during the first brawl. Some additions underline the director's carefulness (as when Capulet is made to introduce 'My niece, Rosaline' to the other guests that we may know whom to keep an eye on in the rest of the scene). Others are more daring, as for instance the cry of 'You coward' from one of the crowd when Romeo is, rather courageously, trying to break up the fight between Tybalt and Mercutio.

More notable is the added song which accompanies the first touches and kisses of Romeo and Juliet in the ball scene, and unites everyone who is present (except Tybalt[12]) in romantic sentiment:

A rose will bloom
It then will fade
So does the youth
So does the fairest maid

The themes of death ('death will come soon'), love and the name of the rose thus echo through the scene: the verse is reprised, the tune picked out on a lute, at the moment of their kiss, and the tune reappears in the death scene in the Capulets' monument.[13]

Seen in its own time, Zeffirelli's film belongs to a moment of double realism (or conventions of realism) in Shakespeare films: like Polanski's *Macbeth*, Brook's and Kozintsev's films of *King Lear* (1971 and 1970), and, to a lesser degree, Richardson's *Hamlet* (1969), we have both an emphatic bodiliness (the youth of Olivia Hussey's Juliet, the sexiness of Jon Finch and Francesca Annis as the Macbeths), and a kind of return to the social realities of the time in which the given story is imagined to be set, depicted usually as rough and robust, if not primitive and brutal: before Banquo retires for the night, we have a glimpse of Fleance shifting a big hunting dog out of the road in the straw bedding to make a comfortable spot for his father, and this will serve for many effects in these films. In this context, Zeffirelli's film is notable for a kind of evenness. We have the dust, heat and exposure of 'the

[11] The screenplay is credited to Franco Brusati and Masolino D'Amico; here changes are ascribed to the director, as the person ultimately responsible for the shape of the film.

[12] Zeffirelli has Tybalt engage in angry exchanges with Lady Capulet as well as Capulet, and also has the Nurse find out Romeo's name from Tybalt ('Go ask his name', I. v. 134), and we observe Juliet's heartfelt response to the information.

[13] Luhrmann makes similar use of a four-note motif, picked out on a guitar this time.

public haunt of men' (III. i. 49), an imagination of the thronged Renaissance city, but the city merges with the country, fields and flowers are not far away, and Zeffirelli conveys both the frightening distance that opens between the lovers and the rest of their world, and that there is a community to be chastened, and, perhaps, to knit again. The film ends with a sombre funeral procession that does seem to involve the community as a whole. The painfulness of the lovers' suicides is not stinted but it is defined, it is given sharp edges, whereas in the other films from this moment (most notably in Brook's *Lear*), the tragic bleakness or harshness is general and undefined, given no edges. In this Zeffirelli is, in effect, resisting that powerful uniformity of effect – *mise-en-scène*, soundtrack, acting, actors' bodies, imagery – that is a potential of film even more than of stage production.

Luhrmann's 1996 film is an aggressive updating and also postmodernisation of Shakespeare's play. Both the film and the society it depicts reflect the notion that there is no clear division between high and low culture – between classic and kitsch – and both reflect the notion that there is no clear centre of value, but a competition of diverse values. The updating reaches far beyond clothes, guns and cars into cultural conditions, and conditions of signification. In assessing the film's success and effects it is important to avoid the trap of assuming that someone like Luhrmann, who is quick, not to say frenetic, and clever, not to say flashy, is not also highly intelligent and insightful. There is not space for a full assessment here; such a task would need to register how the film's characteristic and pervasive imagery of soft and hard, fluid and solid, wet and dry, flesh and metal – concrete, asphalt, dust, blood, tears, rain – conveys a sensuous intensity and vulnerability; it would need also to register how the film's rendition of the tragic amounts to a bleak interpretation of the conditions of contemporary life in which, finally, individual vitality and expressiveness, whether it be a matter of falling into romantic love and scrawling poems in one's notebook, or of wearing tropical shirts and driving round with the radio turned up loud, succumbs to the looming concrete impersonality of the city. We can, however, more succinctly illuminate how this reinterpretation inflects the film's treatment of names, and this is best done by noting its textuality and its involvement with kitsch. The moment of Zeffirelli's film (that is, the moment of the notable Shakespeare films of the 1960s and 1970s, as sketched above) is evidently one in which a certain iconoclasm (for instance, making Juliet actually look like a 13-year-old) can be part of a general and confident movement to resist the given, the weight of traditional Shakespeare. For Luhrmann, the given is everywhere – in contemporary culture almost more than in traditional Shakespeare – so that how one resists or succumbs to the givenness of things is a direct concern of the film.

The early scene in which Benvolio and Romeo talk about his love melancholy is set in a snooker parlour, and Balthasar at one point takes the chalk and writes up the name Rosaline, accompanied by a heart with an arrow through it. Hearts, religious and romantic, are everywhere in the film: in the music ('young hearts'), in stained glass windows in the Friar's church, on shirts, hanging by way of a charm on the instrument panel of Captain Prince's helicopter. This pasting of a symbol and image in a huge variety of contexts is a sign of kitsch, and the film revels in kitsch: rings, tears (from the tears of glossy plaster virgins to the tear that makes its way down Romeo's face after his death, and then down Juliet's face as she decides to follow him), hearts, flowers (a hibiscus on Romeo's shirt; lilies in the hands of the supposedly deceased Juliet, depicted as a teen bride for Death – but the flowers are usually tropical, as tropical flowers carry associations of the exotic and over-rich). What is the effect of all this? It needs to be seen in context, as a set of bright, indeed over-bright, gestures against the looming grey concrete of the city, most oppressive here in the giant statues of Christ and the Virgin, which are definitely not kitsch, whatever their qualities as art.

It can certainly be seen as overwhelming Shakespeare's imagery at times. 'Speak again, bright angel' (II. ii. 26) is lost – indeed it is cut – in the plethora of angels on screen: Juliet's angel costume at the ball, glimpsed flitting from room to room on high as Romeo and his friends are leaving, echoed on the sound track; her room is crowded with statues of angels. But it can also be argued that it makes a contemporary space for the emotional directness and richness and excess of Shakespeare's story. Celeste Olalquiaga has indeed argued that kitsch, and specifically Hispanic religious kitsch of the sort that Luhrmann utilises, can have this effect, returning emotionality to a high art otherwise become self-conscious and conceptual.[14] The test case is the ending of the film, where, as in Zeffirelli, we lose the death of Paris, the roles of the Friar and – except minimally – Balthasar, and the populace crying the lovers' names in the street.[15] Instead, we have candles and crosses, lilies, and an intimate, very emotional, focus on Juliet's ring as her hand twitches in awakening, on the tears of the two lovers, on Juliet's echoing sob as she realises what has

[14] See ch. 3 of her *Megalopolis Contemporary Cultural Sensibilities* (Minneapolis and London 1992).

[15] In Shakespeare's text, the people call out Paris's name as well as those of Romeo and Juliet (V. iii. 191–3). Shakespeare involves as many others as can be involved – Paris, Balthasar, the Friar, the watchmen, Lady Montague. Both the films discussed so far cut most of this; it is as if only in the more comic *Shakespeare in Love* that this social variety, in which everyone asserts a claim to a story, can be given scope.

happened to Romeo, and, at last, as the camera regards the two corpses on their bed, a rendition of a baroque painting of miraculous flight (the lovers seem to float at the top of the screen). Then we cut outside to the city, the ambulances, and Captain Prince shouting 'All are punished' into his megaphone. Here, it is arguable, the kitsch imagery makes way for the almost overpowering emotional intensity of the events and of Shakespeare's text. Yet it is a sign of Luhrmann's grim view of contemporary life that the distance between the lovers and the community, the lovers' fates and those of others, is much wider than in Shakespeare or in Zeffirelli.

The film's use of kitsch is most easily illustrated by reference to its colourful iconic imagery, but it is also true that words, brands, and labels are written everywhere over the surface of the scene. This aspect, which is here labelled textuality, will introduce an assessment of what's in names in Luhrmann's film.

We can see it at work in the opening sequences, which rapidly convey who everyone is and what the feud is. Here Luhrmann, following both *West Side Story* and the popular usage of the tragedy of divided lovers to which reference was made above, is emphasising difference. The Montagues and Capulets, rival construction firms, are ethnic rivals; the Montagues are Anglo and the Capulets are Italian, or, more broadly, Latin, and the difference is expressed in style. The Montagues wear Hawaiian shirts and drive beach buggies and have blonded haircuts; the Capulets wear sharp black and cuban heels, and drive long, low, black cars. Indeed the feud, though violent enough, and spurred, as in most versions, by Tybalt, has migrated or metamorphosed into style, and it is as if every detail of dress and self-presentation expresses it while no one can remember why it began. This emphatic differentness, in being a matter of style, is not thereby a trivial matter. Differentness is pervasive: Mercutio is different in being black, and perhaps gay, though since he is still the Prince's kinsman the Prince, now Captain Prince the chief of police, is also black. Paris is distinctly characterised – handsome, too readily smiling, goofy but determined to exploit the way in which Capulet favours him. As in Zeffirelli, there are hints that Lady Capulet is having an affair with Tybalt; and hints also that she is a southern belle, acquired by Capulet in some earlier diplomatic move.[16] But this differentiation, most vivid in the stylistic rivalry of the Montague Boys and the Capulet Boys, is not, here, the clue to a tragedy of ethnic division.

[16] There are traces of a southern accent, for instance, in the scene in which she praises Paris to Juliet.

The whole society is divided – fragmented would be a better term – and the whole society is frantically stylish. The stylishness is symptomatic of a pervasive powerlessness, the equivalent of buying a lot of designer handbags or DVDs because some mysterious shift in the global financial market might turf you out of your job next week. More on this in a moment; here we need to notice how Luhrmann employs textuality to convey the texture of social differentiation.

The film is full of captions, labels, names, brand names, logos, icons, bits of pseudo-heraldry, personalised plates. The guns are 'Sword', 'Longsword', 'Rapier'; the cars are 'MON 005' and so on, and Prince's helicopter is similarly labelled; there are places signed 'Sycamore Grove', 'Globe Theatre', posters advertising 'The Merchant of Verona' and 'L'Amour'. The two families have icons that are displayed on the tops of the buildings they have constructed (that of the Montagues is a stylised fox, and this is perhaps picked up in the mask that Romeo wears to the Capulet ball). The Capulets, perhaps more nouveau, have a kind of coat of arms that appears on their gun butts and also on the brass doors of the lift in front of which Romeo and Juliet first kiss, and in front of which Lady Capulet coldly rejects Juliet's appeal against marrying Paris. All this provides amusement for the viewer, and probably accords with the knowledge of Shakespeare that many will bring to the film. One can notice that the space for the addressee on the 'Haste Post Haste' express that the Friar sends to Mantua is headed 'Local Habitation and Name'; among the babble of the raucous Montagues' singing and rapping as they drive into the gas station before the spectacular opening brawl one can make out 'Bubble, bubble, toil and trouble'. This, however, is not simply amusing; Verona Beach is an over-signified world, and the plethora of signifiers – many of them words or fragments of words, or allusions – is spread across a very active but almost chaotic scene that resists these meanings, or leaves them outmoded, or pulls them out of context.

It is in keeping with this that Luhrmann overloads the names of the characters, which are given to us in captions early on, when the film segues out of the initial TV report.[17] The characters are given forenames: the Capulets are Fulgencio and Gloria; the Montagues, perhaps in allusion to

[17] This is perhaps an 'instant history' docudrama; it reappears for a moment at the very end of the story, as if the whole film has been something cobbled together by the station a few hours after the events, as for instance happened with programmes about the Waco tragedy. The producers have come up with an icon for the tragedy: a ring. There are excellent comments on the endings of all three of the films discussed here in Yong Li Lan, 'Returning to Naples: Seeing the End in Shakespeare Film Adaptation', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 29/2 (2001) pp. 128–34.

the Kennedys, are Ted and Caroline; Paris is Dave, and so on. Only Mercutio is left his single name.

There is clearly a danger that this inventiveness will drown out what the text also has to do with names, and with signifiers more generally considered, especially as the effects of Luhrmann's inventions are often quick rather than resonant (the pleasure for the viewer of Paris's name being Dave is quick rather than resonant). This does not happen. When he needs to, Luhrmann clears a space for Shakespeare's names to resonate. When Balthasar hurries to a desolate Mantua (actually, a sparsely populated, poverty-stricken mobile-home park) and informs Romeo of Juliet's death, Romeo cries 'Then I defy you, stars!'[18] into the murky red sunset, then yells Juliet's name, and slumps to his knees in the dust, a small and lonely figure. Luhrmann has added the cry of 'Juliet!' and cut much of the rest of the scene; the moment works because all the calling of names, discovery of names, meditating on names earlier in the play has made its way effectively through the din and net of names and other signifiers, the voice of Shakespeare's text making itself heard amid this general urge to signify and label.

There are particular reasons for this. One is that 'What's in a name?' is given to Claire Danes, who is perhaps the best speaker of Shakespeare's verse in the film, the actor who can make the tempo slow a little to accommodate the speeches. The other is that all the games with names (and other signifiers) that Luhrmann has added to the text do encourage an alertness in the viewer. We can notice, for instance, how Lady Capulet responds to Tybalt's name: when his death is mentioned in the negotiation with Paris over his marriage to Juliet, she says 'I loved him, too', and when his death is brought up by the hysterical Juliet after her father has forced the marriage on her, it appears to be Tybalt's name that precipitates her cold rejection of her daughter. It is not exactly that lovers can reimagine the beloved's name so as to reconnect it with the person, the body, that they love, after first acknowledging its arbitrariness, which is arguably what does happen in Shakespeare's play. Names in Luhrmann's film seem triggers, stimuli, prompting a desperate affirmation of attachment.

But to end these summary comments on the film in this way would be to suggest a kind of reduced bareness in it that would be misleading. The conditions of expression and signification in the film's world are complex

[18] James Loehlin feels that this echoes James Dean's 'You're tearing me apart!' in *Rebel Without a Cause*; he suggests that the film recalls earlier teen tragedy films that are themselves based on the Romeo and Juliet template (young lovers as the victims of the insensitivity of the old). See '"These violent delights have violent ends": Baz Luhrmann's Millennial Shakespeare', in M. T. Burnett and Ramona Wray (eds.), *Shakespeare, Film*, *Fin de Siècle* (London 2000) p. 123.

and strict ones. Shakespeare's poetry has no particular privileges; it has to make its way to our attention, if it can, in a context thronged with other kinds of expression and signification. This need not mean that it is 'just' another kind of expression and signification among the throng, since at its best the film does not treat any one kind as just another kind. The film cuts violently to Juliet's 'Come, Romeo' (the beginning of III. ii) in the midst of Romeo's pursuit of Tybalt after the death of Mercutio, with its sudden onset of night, and images of Romeo's almost diabolic face howling with rage; and having done so, it manages to settle into the meditation, with its setting of her child's bedroom, with its angels, candles and soft toys, against and apart from the scene of the two men. The verse strikingly establishes itself in this context of hysterical violence and allusions to car-chase movies. That it has to fight to establish itself in this way is a reflection of Luhrmann's pervasive sense of the desperate conditions of contemporary culture: the perennial intertextual *agon*, whereby Luhrmann might be seen as fighting to assert himself against Shakespeare and the Shakespearean tradition, is of less account here.

John Madden's *Shakespeare in Love* rounds off recent adaptations of the play with a riot of allusion, an enjoyment of intertextuality as opportunity rather than *agon*, and some comments on its treatment of names can serve as coda. The story here returns to its beginning, or rather a beginning of a kind. We learn the origin of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in the young poet's tragic affair with Lady Viola de Lesseps. By this the film can insert the tragic difference that is now an expected part of the story as popular myth, while departing from the complex of street gangs, the tragedy of youth and impulsive suicide which has nourished Zeffirelli's and Luhrmann's adaptations. In this film the love of Will and Viola is a means of their maturation, or at least of Will's, since Viola is perfect already. The love crosses social boundaries, because Will is a poor player and Lady Viola is the daughter of a rich merchant who sells her off to the Earl of Wessex, a character who may be seen as a combination of the worst features of Paris and Tybalt. The lovers are parted for ever,[19] Will to proceed, saddened and matured, to a career as a great dramatist, Lady Viola to a mysterious, solitary arrival on the sea coast of America, a conclusion as unlikely but beguiling as her namesake's arrival in Illyria in a later play. The point made by this tragic, or, at least, sad story of difference is unmistakable, but playful; the film mixes tragedy, a version of the historical, and the comic.

[19] Although they are forgiven by Queen Elizabeth herself, here playing the role of just but finally ineffectual ruler given to Della Scala / Escalus in earlier versions of the story, and mobilising the contemporary audience's knowledge of Elizabeth I as a just ruler, as the novellas called upon their audience's similar knowledge of Della Scala.

The 'two houses' whose rivalry the play actually acknowledges are two playhouses, the Rose and the Curtain; 'I say a plague on both their houses' orates the fanatic preacher,[20] having just asserted that the Rose smells something ranker, and referring to the plague which has temporarily closed the theatres. And the fanatic preacher is predictably converted into adoring fan by the triumphant first performance of *Romeo and Juliet* which closes the film.

In returning to the point of origin of the play (1593, as a title notes at the beginning), the film would seem to have avoided the problems and missed the opportunities of updating, so important with Luhrmann's film. This is not so; the 1590s themselves are, in effect, updated. In general, anachronism is easy; it can happen without our trying, or noticing it. The film-makers here make a game of an inevitability. A complicated series of jokes appeals to as much contemporary knowledge as the audience is inclined to mobilise: jokes, for instance, regarding the fact that Gwyneth Paltrow, who plays Lady Viola, is American, and that Wessex owns estates in Virginia and believes that tobacco has a future. Henslowe is described as 'a businessman with a cash-flow problem', which takes us into the 1990s; but de Lesseps and Wessex, alluding respectively to the builder of the Suez canal and the novels of Thomas Hardy, take us into the 1890s, and this might well be right for their story, which reminds us of the cynical marriages between impoverished English aristocrats and rich American heiresses that happened at that time.

It might be objected that the effect of all this is to universalise the play: the story exists neither in Renaissance Italy, nor in Elizabethan England, nor in the 1990s, but in a perennial realm where clashes of class always exist, where money always rules (whether for Wessex and his mortgaged estates, or Will selling the same unwritten play twice over, or Henslowe signing a bond under duress, the first of a series of signatures in the film), and where the theatre always thrives in a state of cheerful improvisation – thence a variety of running jokes and tropes (the actor who is never drunk when he is working, the ludicrous stammerer who becomes miraculously orotund on the opening night, the ingénue who steps into the leading role at the last second, and more).

All this amounts to a kind of scandal, as regards recent criticism and theory, and an invitation to the audience which is potentially reassuring. The scandal is that the play flouts almost every currently ruling assumption or assertion about textuality and authorship: that the figure of

[20] This preacher seems to have wandered in from a comedy by Jonson or Middleton. Even as it evokes the poignancy and cross-dressings of Shakespeare's romantic comedies, the film is perhaps acknowledging that the future is with this robust satirical comedy of social types.

the poet as loveable, romantic dreamer is irrelevant or pernicious; that authorship is not ever, and was not in the conditions of the Elizabethan theatre, importantly a matter for the individual; that to think in terms of the relation of fiction to life in its messy, hard-to-recover dailiness and occasional specialness is to involve oneself in naive fallacy; that Shakespeare's queerness was of crucial importance; that Shakespeare as cultural and educational institution is somewhere between a fiction and a menace. It is all the more scandalous in that it does this cheerfully and without polemic. As regards the audience, we can begin from solid ground in saying that a very different audience from that which Luhrmann envisaged is invited and joked into existence. It seems possible – though all arguments about audiences are hard to substantiate – that this is a distinctly middlebrow audience.[21] It is certainly instructive to remember that large numbers of people now study *Romeo and Juliet* in the final years of high school, and that significant numbers study the text for university arts degrees. It seems likely that it is this kind of audience – which is not in any case wholly distinct from either a teen audience or an academic audience – which can appreciate jokes about Hamlet and skulls, but also the irony that *The Massacre at Paris*, mentioned in the film as Marlowe's latest, may have had a 'good title' as Will says, but was not a very successful play, or that John Webster might well have been the kind of young person who enjoyed feeding live mice to his cat.

The result is certainly a fresh approach to what can figure as a problem for film-makers: Shakespeare's language. From decisions about language, there stems a variety of effects with signification more generally considered. In *Shakespeare in Love*, the language of the love affair between Viola and Will is, broadly speaking, modern. This does not mean that it is always more or less banal whereas the language into which Will translates what he is experiencing, or overhearing, that is, the language of Shakespeare's text, is not banal. Viola has her own eloquence, as when she speaks of love like a riot in the heart, love that has never yet been in a play. Even her cynical father, comparing his daughter to a mule, can talk of there being rubies in the saddlebag.

[21] It is said that when the king of Sweden came to present William Golding with the Nobel Prize for literature, he mentioned that he had enjoyed studying *Lord of the Flies* for the Swedish equivalent of A-levels. Whether authentic or apocryphal, the story reminds us there is now a large global audience which is neither simply part of teen culture, like the movie-goers Loehlin discusses in connection with Luhrmann's film, nor to be identified with academic preoccupations such as Richard Burt discusses in relation to Madden's: Loehlin, 'These violent delights', p. 131; Richard Burt, '*Shakespeare in Love* and the End of the Shakespearean: Academic and Mass Culture Constructions of Literary Authorship', in Burnett and Wray (eds.), *Shakespeare, Film, Fin de Siècle*, pp. 203–31.

But the overall effect is that the language of the framing, originary love affair between Will and Viola is a – generously conceived – version of the common language of our day, which is also the language into which scriptwriters will tend to fall anyway, even when they are writing for a different period. If 'What's in a name?' is by now threatened with banality, as a kind of empty tag that can mean almost nothing, *Shakespeare in Love* acknowledges this threat by a comic assault on it: every scrap of common knowledge, every factoid dimly remembered from somewhere (high school, first-year English literature) is joked about or played with. The film's humorous, irresponsible but inventive anachronism sets the context for its play with names.

Will meets and dances with Viola at her parents' house – a scene that will be presented later in the film, translated into the Romeo and Juliet story, only in the form of a couple of scraps of rehearsal.[22] Here, in the frame story, when Will asks one of the musicians who that beautiful woman is, he is answered, 'Viola de Lesseps – dream on, Will.' Of course, when he dances with her he finds himself tongue-tied, a poet with no words as Viola says. Then he is seized and threatened by Wessex, playing the role of Tybalt at this point (approved suitor to Viola, but more Tybalt than Paris), and, when asked his name, almost tongue-tied again, manages to say 'Christopher Marlowe'.

Shakespeare's own name, here very luckily concealed, has been the subject of a series of jokes in the film. We first see Shakespeare engaged in writing, and, as he writes, the title of the film, 'Shakespeare in Love', appears in an imitation of Elizabethan script, and we are then allowed sight of what he has been writing, which is a blotted page of different spellings of his name. This reminds the audience of familiar facts – that Shakespeare spelt his name in many different ways, and that, according to a flourishing legend, he was not the author of his own plays anyway; as well, it initiates the theme of Shakespeare (a notably prolific author who, according to Ben Jonson, wrote almost too easily[23]) as suffering from writer's block. The writer's block is resolved by luck, love, the eloquent Viola as muse. The threat from Wessex to Shakespeare, though not the threat from Wessex to Viola, is diverted to Marlowe, seen in the play as the more successful playwright with his legion of fans, the name on literally everyone's lips, and thence, at this moment, on Shakespeare's. What's in a name? Wessex assassinates Marlowe, by mistake for Shakespeare, so the

[22] Viola, disguised as a boy actor and playing Romeo, messes up the dance because she is used to the woman's part. She forgets her lines in the rehearsal of the pilgrim sonnet, though the effect is still romantic and tender.

[23] Katherine Duncan-Jones, 'Why, then, O brawling love!' *Times Literary Supplement*, 5 Feb. 1999, p. 18.

film here makes a darker allusion to the familiar question, which reverberates through the jokes about Shakespeare's own name and authorship, and those about what began as 'Romeo and Ethel, the Pirate's Daughter', and endured a short spell as 'Romeo and Rosaline' before the latter betrayed Will with the Master of the Revels, and was nudged closer to its destined form by Marlowe's judicious approval ('Romeo is Italian, always in and out of love').

How might all this bear on the parallel stories of Will and Viola, Romeo and Juliet? One way of sketching an answer is to refer to the film's presentation of Lady Viola. Here its characteristic mode of excess works in a different key. Lady Viola is not a real person; her affair with Will does not mature her because she is beyond maturity already: at once Will's muse, the prophet of a new future for the theatre and for women, his beloved, his fan, the actor who plays Romeo and the actor who plays Juliet. Thence the mysterious way in which she slips out of the film at the very end. Another way of sketching an answer is to refer to the enactment of the play we have seen at the Globe moments before: both a skilled performance towards which the whole film has led and an affirmation that the story has so much potential that virtually any version, no matter how stereotyped or improvised, updated or radicalised, will move its audience.

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