Movies And/As Literature: *Romeo and Juliet* and Contemporary Film Audiences
Movies are in integral part of modern culture. Before they were invented, only plays were performed on stage in the presence of live audiences. The introduction of film in the early part of the twentieth century stirred much discussion regarding the merits of both stage and film. Questions centred around their differences, the advantages and the efficacy of movies versus theatre and queries around the intensity and the emotional participation of an audience watching a drama performed on stage as opposed to a film adaptation. Numerous critics and theorists joined the discussion, some of whom are represented here.

Susan Sontag in her article “Theater and Film” indicates that because one can make a movie of a play but not a play of a movie, cinema had an early connection with the stage but concludes that “theatre remains the favoured candidate for the role of summative art” (90). Another theorist, Charles Eidsvik, in “Cinema and Literature,” observes that critics tend to forget that literature is an art comprised of more than one medium and that film is a medium for more than one art. Literature and film are two sorts of things, each capable of encompassing part of the other. Eidsvik indicates that film and literary critics alike confuse literature with its dominant medium, print, and confuse the medium of film with its dominant genre, the narrative” (306). He reminds his readers that literature began with poets, not paper, with performance, not print (307). Eidsvik observes that when we watch a movie, we do not look at but through the screen to what is communicated. “A medium is something we look through, not at, and it is what
we see through a medium that defines which art we are involved in” (307). An early theorist on film, André Bazin (1918-1958), and founding editor of the influential French film journal *Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1951, had two principal tenets according to David Cook: first, that the best films relied on mise-en-scène to create their moods and effects rather than montage editing, and second, that the best films bear the signatory stamp of their directors (529). Rather than create a fragmentary art through the overuse of montage editing, Bazin thought filmmakers should create as seamless a world as possible. Bazin pointed to the major Hollywood directors as examples of what all filmmakers should strive for. The second tenet of the journal was what became known as *auteur theory* (*auteur* is the French word for author). Making an analogy between film directors and writers, Bazin and the other writers for the *Cahiers du Cinéma* argued that filmmakers should inscribe their individual personalities, “controlling obsessions and cardinal themes” on their work and that with each successive film, they should grow “increasingly proficient and mature of vision” (Cook 529). In his article “Theatre and Cinema,” Bazin indicates that for those who like the presence of actors on stage, filmed stage plays do not give the degree of pleasure of live theatre. According to him, “The cinema calms the spectator, the theatre excites him” (179). Bazin predicted that “filmed theatre is basically destined to fail whenever it tends in any manner to become simply the photographing of scenic representation even and perhaps most of all when the camera is used to try and make us forget the footlights and the backstage area”(184). He observes that just as photography heightened the awareness of the pictorial technique, so too had “canned theatre” helped directors to become aware of the stage's own laws. “So the more successful the filmed theatre, the deeper its probes into the essence of theater, the better
to serve it, the more clearly it will reveal the unbridgeable gulf between stage and screen” (194). Louis Malle’s film *Vanya on 42nd Street*, Zeffirelli’s *Romeo and Juliet*, and Baz Luhrmann’s *William Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet* and many others, have proven him wrong, although we will grant him his preferences.

There are numerous other theorists on film and literature, but for the purposes of this essay there are a few more which are of note. Morris Beja in his article “Film and Literature.” quotes Bela Balazs who observes that “every picture shows not only a piece of reality, but a point of view as well” (38). Although film is limited to the camera eye at all times, procedures of cutting and editing permit the eye to shift its perspective with a frequency, completeness and suddenness no human eye can catch.

Literary classics are a rich source of adaptation for motion-picture directors. Shakespeare’s plays have fuelled the industry for decades and have inspired many a director. *Romeo and Juliet* was produced in 1936, 1954, 1968, 1983 and 1996. The 1968 and 1996 productions by Zeffirelli and Lurhmann respectively are highly memorable.

*Romeo and Juliet* (1596) by William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* (1968) by Franco Zeffirelli, and *Romeo and Juliet* (1996) by Baz Luhrmann, all present the same story, yet they differ in dramatic presentation, philosophical viewpoint on the nature of human beings and of society, morality, and romantic love. All three differ in their style of presentation, and are influenced by their times. All three productions are powerful
artistic expressions from which we can derive much understanding about ourselves, about romantic love and about our worlds.

Although educated people know the story, each artist presents the events very differently. *Romeo and Juliet* as a stage play follows the rules of presentation for the stage of the Globe Theatre in Shakespeare’s time. The stage for which Shakespeare wrote, with its medieval heritage and physical equivalents of heaven, earth and hell, invited the integration of the visual and verbal for thematic purposes. At the same time, the staging conditions imposed particular demands on the playwright, requirements which are accommodated, even capitalized in the play’s setting and dialogue (Dessen 88). In *Romeo and Juliet* at several points when the staging is particularly complex the language becomes vividly descriptive, helping the audience to imagine what would have been difficult to see. For example, at the start of the first balcony scene (2.1) Romeo focuses the audience’s attention on the appearance of Juliet above: “What light through yonder window breaks?” Such prompting is not necessary in film.

The camera and art of filmmaking allow for inventive ways of looking at plays. Although movies may not always be completely true to the text, the beauty, message, and timelessness is not lost. Hollywood has helped to shape Shakespeare in numerous adaptations of all his plays, including a number of films based on *Romeo and Juliet* as already mentioned. Textual interpretations such as George Cukor’s *Romeo and Juliet* (1936), Castellani’s 1954 production, a British production shot entirely on location in Italy, and the BBC production of *Romeo and Juliet* (1978) exist, but altered forms of the story also exist which often use music and dance as the main element such as *West Side Story* and *Dirty Dancing.*
Franco Zeffirelli’s version of *Romeo and Juliet* is perhaps the most famous film version and was revolutionary in its day. For the first time, Romeo and Juliet were acted by young actors, unlike those in Cukor’s film who were in their thirties and those of Castellani’s in their twenties. Never before had actual teenagers been permitted to play the protagonists, but in an era when *Hair*, the antiwar rock musical, had become the most successful show on Broadway, it made sense that Romeo and Juliet were at last depicted as teens who want to drop out of their parents’ world. Their fight is with an unfeeling system, but their idealism is destroyed. Zeffirelli clearly pleased viewers not only because of his admirable artistic qualities, but also because he recast a time-honoured tale appealing to 1968 audiences.

Zeffirelli not only crafted a beautifully flowing movie through camera work, but he also infused music into the film as well. The original Elizabethan performances of the play did not have the luxury of an underlying soundtrack, but modern film versions do, and Zeffirelli used this to his advantage. Numerous references to music within the text make the play musically inclined and a common Shakespearean technique is to have characters sing in the play. This is evident in Act II, scene iv, when Mercutio sings to the nurse during her meeting with Romeo. Kenneth Rothwell in his essay, “Zeffirelli’s *Romeo and Juliet*: Words Into Picture and Music,” examines how the play “invites musical notation” (326). Rothwell also cites numerous instances where Shakespeare weaves musical imagery into the text as “Romeo, Juliet, and Mercutio all rely on familiar musical conceits: “the silver sound of music”; ‘the music of sweet news’ and ‘run through the ear with a love song’” (326). Thus Shakespeare’s musical imagery leads to the appropriate use of music within the film interpretations. Luhrmann’s *Romeo and
Juliet uses 1970s rock n’roll and a palm-lined paradise to echo the violence and romanticism of the classic tragedy and makes it more accessible to today’s audiences.

Both Zeffirelli’s and Baz Luhrmann’s films are faithful to the action of the play, its theme and motifs, yet through cinematic techniques of camera movement, shot, setting, images and soundtracks, they dramatize different elements, they speak in different voices, and they have differing points of view which alter the meaning and interpretation of the play.

Zeffirelli’s setting captures the very texture of time and place, creating a sixteenth-century Verona (Umbria and Tuscany which have changed little in 500 years), white with the heat of the burning sun, resplendent with rich and courtly costuming, ablaze with personal passions. The camera captures the lusty, brawling feud of the two families, the vigour, fury and violence of the initial marketplace brawl as no stage production can. Shakespeare's classic romance comes to stunning visual life in a refreshingly modern interpretation, bringing new vitality and insight into one of the most lasting love story ever written.

The graceful and calm environment of Zeffirelli’s Verona is in sharp contrast to Baz Luhrmann's contemporary Verona Beach, an ultra-modern city packed with movement and evocative images. The TV anchor reports on the deaths of Romeo and Juliet while the logo "Star-Crossed Lovers" floats above her shoulder. Behind her on the studio video screen is a broken wedding ring, with 'I love thee' inscribed. Viewers then see newspaper headlines in fragmentary quotations from the Prologue's text ('In fair Verona', 'Ancient Grudge', 'New Mutiny') with photographs and news clippings from "Verona Today," the local paper. There is a fast montage identifying the leading
characters, showing the city of Verona Beach dominated by two towering skyscrapers, topped with neon signs reading "Montague" and "Capulet." And then viewers are plunged into a turf battle between the Montague Boys (one has "Montague" tattooed across the back of his scalp) and the Capulet Boys. When, in an early line of dialogue the word "swords" is used, there is a close-up of a Sword-brand handgun. The first image of the television, followed by "Twentieth Century Fox presents" is "A Bazmark production" clearly indicating that this film is Baz Lurhmann's version of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and possibly a reference to Bazin’s auteur theory of film.

Unlike the opening shots of Zeffirelli's version which takes us back to an agricultural society similar to that of Shakespeare's time, Lurhmann's portrays a highly technological one: the television, the cars, the modern buildings, especially the two high-rise buildings, (an ironic touch, since 9/11 had not yet occurred when the film was produced), the helicopters, and all the modern noises convey a chaotic, vertiginous world full of hustle and bustle. It is a world comprised of massive buildings such as the cathedral and the corporate towers, potent symbols conveying the powerful influence of religion and the market in a contemporary society of fast cars, prostitutes and nuns, police officers and gangsters. These buildings symbolize the forces that motivate, dominate and divide the characters in the story.

The costumes of both films are consistent with their settings. The attire of Zeffirelli's characters is rich in fabrics and vivid colours. The women are dressed in the style of the late sixteenth century with elaborate headdresses and long dresses, and the men in doublet and hose. Lurhrmann's characters dress in late '90s trendy fashion such as jeans and Hawaiian beach shirts, except for the Capulet ball. In Zeffirelli's ball the
participants are in their Sunday best, conveying the idea of giving importance to the historical time of the action of the play. The costumes of Luhrmann's ball, however, both reveal and comment. For instance, Romeo is dressed as a knight, echoing Juliet's words, "Give this ring to my true knight" (III.ii.142).

Whereas Zeffirelli's film focuses the mind in the sixteenth century, Luhrmann's invites analysis and critique. The condition of the actual world is very like the Capulet party where everyone is in costume and not a few are drugged, including Romeo who was given an LSD tablet by Mercutio. Romeo washes his face in the basin of the water fountain to awaken himself from the contemplation of his dreams the previous night. His ablution is the first watery image in the film where many others are to follow. Rather than Verona, Italy, the tale is set in Verona Beach, a created city, where the Capulets and Montagues are feuding conglomerates. Prince Escalus is now Captain Prince, Chief of Police, and handguns are engraved with the names Sword, Dagger, Rapier and Longsword rather than Glock or Smith and Wesson. Even the vehicles are stylized to simple boxes with wheels rather than recognizable brands. Modern-looking billboards emblazoned with Shakespearian messages - "Shoot forth Thunder" reads an ad for bullets. Numerous amusing allusions to other Shakespeare's plays abound. A pool hall in Verona is called "The Globe." The names of the shops and stalls are the following: "Mistress Quickly's", "Jack Cade's", "Rosencrantzy's Burgers", "The Pound of Flesh", "The Midnight Hags", "Wherefore L'Amour", and "Out, Out Damn Spot Cleaners". A fly-poster on a street advertises a performance of "The Merchant of Verona Beach"; Friar Lawrence pours a shot of "Prospero Whisky" which, says its label, is "such stuff as dreams are made on"; and he sends his ill-fated letter to Romeo in Mantua by "Post Haste
Post” on a form with space for the “local habitation and name” of the recipient. At the centre of the headboard of Juliet's bed is the carved face of a famous Elizabethan playwright. These are delightful touches contrasted with the serious notes in the film. The allusiveness of the film cannot be missed, nor the juxtaposition of high and low culture.

This technique of juxtaposition is an attribute of postmodernist art, but in the context of this play, the juxtaposition jogs the memory and reminds the viewer of the Chain of Being in medieval theology, which linked all created things.

It linked the highest with the lowest and simultaneously distinguished and united all the levels of existence. Since it was horizontal as well as vertical, it could be invoked to proclaim that as God is to the world, so is the sun to the heavens, the king to the commonwealth, the lion among the beasts, the oak to the forest, justice to the other virtues or the soul to the body. If one of these primacies was overthrown, the rest must follow it to confusion, because harmony, which was an essential guarantee of order, required the proper functioning of every part in its allotted place. Obedience, respect, degree, status or calling were among the terms by which men stated their conviction that the specialty of rule must be preserved in all its applications. (Reese 325).

The ubiquity of Christianity is immediately conveyed through the colossal statue of Christ in the opening shots, as well as in various key scenes, such as Friar Lawrence's studio with his acolytes, the sacristy with all the statuary and lit candles, the inside of the cathedral, the choir, the nuns in their sixteenth century dress, the neon-lit crosses, the flying doves and the statues everywhere. Even in Juliet's room, a statue of Our Lady is wreathed in light behind the curtains in the famous balcony scene. However, the statue by the pool is Graeco-Roman, an elegant Cupid that evokes the idea that in classical
Greece passionate love was regarded as madness, no less than in Christianity. The clutter of statuary is powerful in conveying the intellectual and religious climate of Elizabethan times, a climate still very alive in the twentieth century, although Christianity has been highly discredited in Western countries in the past two decades. The Christianity represented by Friar Lawrence with the tattoo of the cross on his back is caricature, a humorous touch which conveys the idea that Friar Lawrence's religiosity is only skin-deep but this detail can also be construed as conveying the idea that he is "just one of the boys," or again, the symbol can be construed as mordant satire given the present scandals involving sexual abuse of children by priests and members of religious orders. Monks, nuns and priests in the sixteenth, as in the twentieth century, did pride themselves in being in the world but not of it; unfortunately, nuns, monks, and priests no longer enjoy the respect they once did. Moreover, in contemporary culture, persons who wear tattoos are not part of the mainstream society and one associates such individuals as living on the fringe, and/or associated with the seamy side of life. Visually and literally, Luhrmann is iconoclastic philosophically and artistically, unlike Zeffirelli.

Luhrmann's film conveys an advanced technological society of the twentieth century which is still psychologically deeply permeated by medieval Catholicism, a message conveyed by the images of the Christ statue, the nuns, the Church scenes, and Friar Lawrence. The dichotomy of right and wrong in the worst sense of the terms is glaring, as is Christianity's essential sacrificial nature, a theme daily celebrated at Mass, also shown in the film. The Publicans and the Pharisees of Christ's day are merely transformed into Montagues and Capulets. The reasoning follows this line: "We are right" and "You are wrong," and for this you deserve to be punished, to be crucified.
Something or somebody has to be sacrificed to appease, please, or propitiate the reigning power, or deity. Divinely inspired knowledge versus the rationality of scientific inquiry are still at war in the human psyche. Similarly, romantic love may be said to be emancipated in the West, but we have not broken free from the philosophy of sacrifice. Zeffirelli’s film by contrast focuses on the visual, in the aesthetics of setting and style without comment. His film is akin to a painting, whereas Luhrmann’s is closer to a Schoenberg symphony.

The images not only convey sober ideas but they also highlight humorous ironies. The setting of the balcony scene, very different from Zeffirelli's long balustrade, ends in the swimming pool. The image of the Virgin Mary presiding over the dalliance of the two young lovers who will consummate their love in secret, conveys the double standard of Church doctrine: on the one hand, the Church elevates monks and nuns as superior Christians, and on the other, sanctifies marriage as a sacrament. Mary is both a virgin and a mother. The water conveys the washing away of original sin as in baptism as well as the vitality of sexuality. The message is confused. The original sin of Adam and Eve was that they ate of the tree of knowledge thus becoming suddenly aware of their sexuality and their humanity. The Cupid on the plaza draped in laurels and/or fig leaves evokes the image of Adam and Eve who covered their private parts after they had disobeyed God; the plants create a garden, and the guard represents God's authority, but so too does the Cupid convey the influence of Roman culture, a reminder that the Renaissance had accepted a vast bulk of medieval doctrine about man, his nature and his place in the universe, a traditional amalgam of Christianity and pagan philosophy. Continuity of intellectual belief provided a cosmological system which was definite in
Shakespeare's thinking was deeply influenced by the thought of his age. He believed in the unity and intimate correspondence of the whole of God's creation (Reese 323).

Water figures again in the fish tank where the lovers meet but are separated by glass and the beautiful images of fish swimming about in a constrained watery environment. The scene evokes the fragility of life as well as the invisible barriers which lurk to snuff life out; there is the Bacchanalian madness conveyed in the behaviour of the masked ball, and also observe Lady Capulet costumed as an imperious, vain, voluptuous Cleopatra, (possibly a reference to Anthony and Cleopatra, another pair of tragic lovers), insensitive to the tender feeling of Juliet but alive to the attentions of men and suitors. In this maddening throng, there is Mercutio, a black man dressed in drag as a prostitute dancer in white, Romeo as a knight in shining, silver armour and Juliet as a dove (not an angel because her wings are small and her dress short), a potent metaphor. A dove is associated with peace, an apt association with Juliet who does bring about peace between the two warring factions through her suicide. A dove is also a symbol of the Holy Spirit which alighted on the Apostles after Jesus's crucifixion whose death reconciled God and humankind. The succession of dove images in the film draw attention to the importance of this metaphor. That Juliet falls in love with a knight, and not with an American astronaut, accentuates medieval culture and juxtaposes both medieval and twentieth-century cultures. The vertiginous presentation of images creates the heady sensation of the changeability of identities, of time, space and the evanescence of life in all its glory. Amidst this multicultural, multi-historical setting, two young people speak to each other in Elizabethan English conveying the notion in this unusual setting that language
transcends time and space, as does all art. The juxtaposition also draws attention to the allusiveness of art. The Elizabethan idiom, unlike the naturalistic line of delivery in the 1983 version directed by William Woodman, may also suggest that it is time to move on from so much veneration to the Bard. Elizabethan idiom is out of place and comical, as some teenage viewers of this film commented. The visual jokes already mentioned within the film invite this suspicion as well as the film’s irreverent and playful style of representation. No such reveries are conjured up in Zeffirelli’s film which focuses on the magic of love, its beauty and its tragedy and not a love influenced by drugs.

The feud is the invisible wall which ruins all the relationships of the participants in the play and their society. After the events of 9/11, the two towers in the opening shots give depth and breadth to the meaning of the feuding Capulets and Montagues, over which one could superimpose many such feuds in history and dichotomies worldwide, not least of which is the current US versus Iraq. Does religion have something to do with these dichotomies and has mankind's refuge in churches and religious orders ever helped him to get out of these traps, or have they instead helped to push us into that ghostly tomb where Romeo and Juliet's lives are snuffed out? The images of the film evoke such thoughts and reverie.

The pathway to the tomb is marked by a thousand neon-lit crosses leading to Juliet's bier surrounded by thousands of lit candles, symbolic of thousands of prayers sent up to the Deity. Juliet awakens just after Romeo has drunk the poison he obtained from the Apothecary. In this famous scene, Romeo becomes aware of what could have been his -- but too late. This interpretation harks back to David Garrick’s interpretation in 1748, an actor noted for his “vivid and realistic portrayal of character in moments of
crisis.” (Wells 193) “He in turn followed Otway's *Caius Marius* in having Juliet wake in the tomb before her husband dies, an opportunity ignored by Shakespeare” (Jackson 193). Thus both Romeo and Juliet take their lives at the same time rather than consider living in a world where human passion, sincerity, beauty, admiration and devotion cannot thrive. Only obedience and docility survive in a patriarchal society, and love must also obey these rules.

Love is indeed viewed differently by the major characters in the play and the film adaptations. Romeo and Juliet view love as holy and solemn but Mercutio, kinsman to the Prince, and Romeo’s friend, ridicules the concept of an all-absorbing, exclusive passion. Happy, brave and mocking, he is not involved with family feuds, being a friend to both the Montagues and Capulets. When he has received a death-wound due to Romeo’s ineptitude, his vivacity shines through: “Ask for me tomorrow, and you shall find me a grave man.” But it is Mercutio’s final curse, “A plague on both your houses!” which speaks of the ominous events to follow.

The Capulets consider love as prudent. They are interested in "good" marriages and sensible choices. They are match-makers who believe they know best. For Lady Capulet love is a matter of worldly wisdom. She is never shown in a sympathetic relationship with her daughter nor her husband. It is Lady Capulet who promises Juliet that she will send someone to Mantua with poison to finish off Romeo. When Juliet appeals to her, she replies: “Talk not to me, for I’ll not speak a word./Do as thou wilt, for I have done with thee” (III.v.203-204).

The Nurse considers love as something natural and sometimes lasting, part of the routines of a woman’s life. Although she initially helps Juliet, when she realises the
trouble Romeo, a Montague, has caused, her loyalty is to the Capulets and not to Juliet’s moral ideal, namely that individual desires are above convention.

Friar Lawrence comes closest to sharing Romeo and Juliet's perception of love, but he also says, "These violent delights have violent ends" (II.vi.9-15). That Friar Lawrence would suggest to Juliet the potion as a solution to her dilemma struck me as utterly amazing as a fourteen-year-old when I read the play, and I reacted very like Juliet. Today, I am amazed for different reasons. First, it is striking that Friar Lawrence had such a vast amount of botanical knowledge, to the degree of knowing how long the effect of the potion took to dissipate. This is a highly scientific approach. However, that is not the emphasis which Luhrmann, who has titled his film *William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet*, wants to give his audience. The juxtaposition of a cleric and drugs, punks and drugs, a Capulet party with a Roman emperor presiding (reminiscent of Caesar), a party where drugs and alcohol flow abundantly, focuses the mind's attention to notice that this crowd is not sober and that viewers can expect trouble. On further reflection, one wonders what kind of leadership administers a drug, a poison, as a solution to the possible end of a feud? It is chancy, and we know the results. Luhrmann has initiated a critical evaluation of the premises of this play, and he does not leave his audience in doubt where he stands with regarded to the premises of Christianity, represented mainly by Friar Lawrence. Love of God, love in general, has been much tarnished by the Church, particularly in recent times. That Karl Marx said that religion is the opiate of the people, far more potent than drugs, does not make his philosophy better or correct, however. Clearly, in *Romeo and Juliet*, the collectivist mentality of patriarchal society, a replica of the Catholic Church's hierarchical and collectivist organization, individual
impulses which run counter to groupthink do not survive. History is strewn with such examples. Nevertheless, without the potion, there would not be a play. Juliet’s taking of the potion is a courageous act, an act of free will, an act which arouses pity and fear heightened by the irony that the audience already knows the outcome of the play.

*Romeo and Juliet* is far from being a domestic tragedy. It dramatizes the personal tragedy of all individual desires and aspiration repressed in youth by domineering parents and teachers who are so out-of-touch with themselves, they become automatons, callous, uncomprehending, insensitive and cruel. Their behaviour is predicated by the crowd, by the trendy, by what is deemed best by opinion leaders -- Paris, bachelor-of-the-year -- rather than by individual thought and reflection. Juliet's parents and the Nurse are completely socialized in the mores of their society which places status and respectability above what is heartfelt, nurturing and good for Juliet. The adult's image in society is all-important not their decency as human beings. So too is the state’s image of itself far “superior” to the desires of the populace. The Elizabethans would consider that Juliet's and Romeo's passion was not congruent with the laws of the universe, nevertheless they identified with their predicament, although its sinful nature was not aligned with the universal hierarchies and order of the universe according to God's creation. (This evaluation is the very issue that needs a fresh look and analysis.)

The violence of the opening scenes of this play, or the violence in the world, should not surprise anyone. In my view, this violence is a manifestation of people out of communication with each other, people who have betrayed their goals and ideals, people heavy with disappointments, disillusionments, losses and profound ignorance of themselves, of their needs as human beings and how best to create their organizations.
Like the Montagues and Capulets, prevailing modern values instruct youth to aspire to maintain the status quo, to be obedient, and not rock the boat. Rock'n roll music as well as Rap which form part of the soundtrack is particularly refreshing to hear in this context. In light of the debacle of the Soviet Union, the war in Iraq, the tragedies in our high schools and our streets, *Romeo and Juliet* presented by Luhrmann is highly germane and representative of the stresses of twentieth-century America.

Shakespeare always says it best though. He does not speak of people "out of communication" but of enmity between two families, a blood feud. The central conflict is the power relation, as Foucault would define it, between the Capulets and the Montagues, who are defined only in relation to one another as feuding families. In Foucault's words, "There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relation" (Foucault 27). Enmity is the truth between them. Love between any of their members destroys their image and their modus operandi. Love between Romeo and Juliet is therefore necessarily doomed. Were Romeo and Juliet to meet in secret without the context of the murdered Mercutio and Tybalt, and therefore the law, the story would not be a tragedy; the elder Capulets and the Montagues would simply have been angry parents. However, the whole weight of law and order bears upon these two groups, and places the personal lives of Romeo and Juliet in a social and political context. By the end of the play, there have been several murders, two suicides and one death offstage, Lady Montague.

Although the death Rome and Juliet is said to have ended the strife between these two families, we know that in reality that sacrifice of lives resolves nothing. The families
decide to erect two gold statues to commemorate the sacrifice of the young lovers – not unlike what the Church does to commemorate the lives of the saints; this focuses the mind on the same line of thinking. What would resolve the enmity between the Montagues and the Capulets is a change of ideas or new knowledge. The idea that sacrifice brings reconciliation between a higher power and a weaker one is ancient and at the basis of Christianity which the big statue of Christ at the beginning of Luhrmann's production reminds us. Christianity was born with the death of God's only Son in order to make it possible for mankind to be redeemed and be reconciled with the Deity. Thus Shakespeare endorses the conventional theology of his times.

The allusiveness of Luhrmann's film is enormously rich from beginning to end. The references to Christian theology and to other Shakespearean plays have already been noted, but there are numerous references to other films through various techniques as well, including Zeffirelli’s. When Juliet raises the sheets of the bed, the action reminds the viewer of the manner in which Mercutio played with the Nurse’s veil. The early shots of feet evoke the image of feet in Potemkin (1925), a film about World War II. The shot of the silvered heel snuffing out a cigarette butt harks to a similar action in High Noon where Gary Cooper as the Sheriff, literally just married, learns of the arrival of infamous outlaws coming to town. He sets out to find a posse but no one would help him. He defends the town against the outlaws who arrive on the noon train, alone. After he has won the battle, he throws his Sheriff's (tin) badge to the ground and stomps on it, a symbolic gesture of disrespect for the authorities of the town. The irony of this scene contrasted to that of Romeo and Juliet is that it is the life of two young lovers whose lives will be trampled on by the violence of the two gangs. The Prince, metamorphosed into
the Chief of Police, is not only ineffective in bringing order into the fray but dispenses justice summarily—not unlike the officials in *High Noon*. (Montague appeals to him by suggesting that justice had already been done. Tybalt killed Mercutio and Romeo killed Tybalt. However, Lady Capulet's strident declamations sway the officer and Romeo is banished.) Still another reference to another film occurs when Mercutio dies. The soundtrack is from the opening scene of *Amadeus* when Salieri attempts suicide. The images in that film contrast Salieri attempting to take his life with ballroom dancing at the palace. A young priest fully dressed in religious vestments enters the insane asylum where he is going to hear Salieri's confession. Salieri, who calls himself the Saint of Mediocrities, is crazed by the guilt of having caused Mozart's death. Mozart's funeral goes unnoticed by the glittering court whom he had entertained, and he is buried in a common grave. Blackness permeates the surroundings, everyone is dressed in dark clothing, the coach is black, and the sky is heavy with rain. This last scene is in sharp contrast to the luminescence of the resplendent and divine Juliet lying on her bier, protected from the rain, the apotheosis of a sacrificial victim. Her bier may as well be an altar. Light and dark images, the passing of day and night, are very evident in this film.

Indeed the sun features prominently in *Romeo and Juliet*. It is greeted by Friar Lawrence as the sober light that does away with the drunken darkness. In the dialogue of Romeo and Juliet, the bird of darkness, the nightingale, symbolises the desire of the lovers to remain with each other, and the bird of dawn, the lark, the need to preserve their safety. Mercutio's Queen Mab speech, brings light and dark imagery into focus: “And in this state she gallops night by night/Through lovers brains, and then they dream of love."
(I.iv.70-71). The lovers consummate their love whatever the dangers because to them this matters more than sunlit reality.

Images of darkness perform a variety of functions. They set the tone of the play as the tragedy proceeds with a dark and inexorable determinism. They reflect mood and character in the figures of Romeo, Juliet and Mercutio. They also act as a foil in images in which light represents the illumination of romantic love. Finally, they allow Shakespeare to elevate the dimensions of the tragedy to cosmic proportions. These are fully exploited in both Zeffirelli's and Luhrmann's films. The gathering clouds and tempest soon after Mercutio's fatal wound is a remarkable coincidence of Nature and Art in complicity in Lurhmann's film.

*William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet* gives the lie to the notion that civilized life, the kind of life we think we have in the West, has improved the effects of the Fall. Classical and Christian writers both describe the prelapsarian world as a time when human passions were naturally held in check by reason. However, at the Fall, humanity lost its natural temper with the consequence that it now occupied a unique position in the universal scheme of things, still retaining elements of a former god-like reason yet sharing with the beasts a propensity to obey natural impulses.

Luhrmann's film challenges conventions. He shows the world of *Romeo and Juliet* which he has created is very like that of modern times with similar stresses as those existing four hundred years ago. It is a world that viewers easily recognize. (Perhaps the medieval conception of the Chain of Being should be revisited.) The effect of this Director's work is that of loosening fixed ideas, mental images of earlier staged or filmed experiences of this play, and an invitation to view this well-known story in a fresh way.
Amidst all the real things of the world -- newspapers, helicopters, cars, guns, gas stations, beaches, swimming pools, music and dance -- there is the gloss of medieval thought modern audiences must find startling. Countless people seek the advice of the clergy, of the celibate monk with a tattooed cross on his back, as his way of being relevant in the modern world, a motif of post-Vatican II for religious orders. Medieval mentality minimized the importance of life on earth and glorified the afterlife, not unlike the mentality of Egypt. Did not Lady Capulet dress as Cleopatra? Although the Enlightenment did occur between the Middle Ages and today, the viewer of this film is amazed by the evidence that erroneous, outdated, very ancient ideas co-exist with technological advances and trips to outer space, which Paris reminds us in his astronaut's costume.

One of the most important issues in the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet is that of choice. Do the characters have the ability to choose what they want to do, or are they simply destined to participate in death and destruction? There is ample evidence of both fate (bad timing and coincidence) and free will in the play, and the presence of both greatly affects the interpretation of the plot and the characters. The characters believe that their lives are controlled by destiny and luck, and Romeo is a prime example of this. When Romeo and his friends journey to the Capulet’s ball in Act 1, scene iv, Romeo hesitates to go because he has a bad dream. Benvolio fears that they will arrive too late.

I fear, too early; for my mind misgives
Some consequence yet hanging in the stars
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date
With this night's reeks and expire the term
Of a despised life, closed in my breast,
By some vile forfeit of untimely death.

(I. iv. 106-111)
Romeo not only acknowledges the power of the stars, which tell what fate has in store through astrology, but he also believes that his destiny is to die. Romeo’s belief in fate also affects his interpretation of events. When Romeo kills Tybalt in Act III, scene 1, he claims that he is “fortune’s fool” by having contributed to his own downfall. There are, however, circumstances where the characters choose their actions of their own free will: the feud itself, the decision of Romeo and Juliet to marry each other, the fight in Act III, scene I, and the suicides of Romeo and Juliet. In medieval thought, man is the only creature with the power to move on the Chain of Being, either upward to the angels or downward to an animal or even a vegetable existence. Other natural agents are not free: fire must burn, a plant must grow, sun must shine. "Man is never viewed in isolation. He is treated always in his relation with the divine hierarchy, the physical universe and the world of animals and plants, all of which exist for his good and will, if he uses them rightly, lead him towards his goal of reconciliation with God. This concept of the universality of man was common to all serious writers of the age." (Reese 327) Thus productions of Shakespeare’s plays keep us connected with our history.

Shakespeare’s drama filmed by Zeffirelli roughly falls into the modernist mode in its depiction of a patriarchal society, its customs and the feud, and Luhrmann’s adaptation of the play falls into the postmodernist mode of representation. According to Brian McHale in his book *Postmodernist Fiction*, postmodernist texts ask the following questions:

What is a world? What kinds of worlds are there, how are they constituted and how do they differ?; ... What is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of the world (or worlds) it projects? How is a projected world structured? (10)
Another characteristic of the postmodernist mode of representation is a tendency to recycle past forms (Tschofen 2000). Having observed that all texts are made up of other texts, postmodernists attempt to innovate and create by drawing on, and reworking older materials. Tschofen indicates (25) that Frederic Jameson, a cultural theorist, refers to this activity as pastiche and that Charles Jencks explains the activity of repeating past forms thus:

Post-modernists look to the past and future equally and position themselves in the present, seeing time as a broken continuum in need of acknowledgement. They may not always try to heal the rifts in culture, but they do recognize the contradictory pressures at work today and aim to derive an art and politics from them. Hence their typical style—radical eclecticism—hence their characteristic tone—the double voiced discourse, which accepts and criticizes at the same time (6).

The above comments are amply captured in Lurhmann’s film.

Shakespeare speaks to modern audiences although four hundred years have passed since he wrote Romeo and Juliet. Retold in numerous art forms throughout these centuries, in the twentieth century, each decade fashioned it in its own image. In 1968 Zeffirelli’s Romeo and Juliet was a refreshing lyrical film which lulled us into the contemplation of the beautiful sadness of it all. Luhrmann's William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, on the other hand, fires a gunshot into the sky snapping us out of our stupor and hypnotic trances. These films based on the play of a playwright, whose plays are firmly structured around universal themes, inspire viewers and audiences into new reflections, fresh insights and new integrations between the relationship of art and life. A love such as that of Romeo and Juliet was necessarily doomed in a society governed by the right connections, the right image, and the right rank in their society. At least in
some parts of the globe, people have moved away from such an intellectual legacy. Whether William Shakespeare, Zeffirelli or Lurhmann had any intentions for instigating serious thought, no one knows, and *artistes* never tell. Whatever the goals, purposes or meanings intended, the journey has been a great delight.
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Abstract

This paper examines two film versions of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* by Zeffirelli and Lurhmann, in the context of dramatic and cinematic traditions. It illustrates how the cultural climate and dominant world view of the times influence artistic representation in to heighten communication with their respective audiences.

Key words:

Romeo and Juliet
Zeffirelli
Lurhman
Film Adaptations
Theatre