

Whose “Womanish Tears” Are These?: Performativity in (William Shakespeare’s) Romeo and/+ Juliet

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Abstract

This paper examines the ways in which Baz Luhrmann’s William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet explores the gender concerns addressed in the original play. Luhrmann’s film picks up on the theme of performativity—a term that this paper uses in the manner of Judith Butler—that runs throughout Romeo and Juliet and foregrounds the ways in which Romeo and Juliet perform a feminine and masculine gender, respectively. Their first meeting in the text acts as the impetus for a permanent performance; they are agents of change in each other’s lives. Romeo chooses a feminine performance to inhabit more fully the identity of the Petrarchan lover that he prefers, while Juliet enacts masculinity to gain more agency over her own life. Luhrmann takes this preoccupation of the text and amplifies it in his film. His changes and casting choices also help to highlight the issues of performativity; Leonardo DiCaprio’s more feminine appearance and Claire Danes’s peculiar mix of naïveté and intelligence telegraph the message Luhrmann hopes to send. In addition, Luhrmann chooses to make the families part of rival gangs who divide the city based on race and socioeconomic class. Juliet’s family is Hispanic, which adds another layer to her defiance of patriarchal values. In the past, the film has been dismissed by many scholars as “just a teen film,” but it is clear that Luhrmann’s careful attention to the thematic concerns of the text demand a reconsideration of the film’s place in adaptation studies.

Baz Luhrmann has had a difficult time as an adapter of Shakespeare. At first glance, he has a number of strikes against his name: to produce 1996's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*, he teamed up with fellow Australian Rupert Murdoch, someone who has been quite vocal in his anti-English establishment opinions; Luhrmann has spent his career making spectacles, some of which have fairly silly-sounding plots; and most importantly, because he relies on both mise en scène and dialogue to tell his stories, his style requires a great deal of audience attention to the film rather than knowledge of the play. In a Luhrmann film, there is as much silent acting as loquaciousness. He feels that much can be accomplished with a look, an evocative setting, or creative editing. This is a potentially problematic pairing with some of the greatest speeches an actor can deliver. Because Luhrmann is so atypical in terms of Shakespeare adaptations, he had a number of naysayers from the beginning—and, though he has gained some important critical attention, an overwhelming number of scholars are still decrying Luhrmann's contribution. What these critics fail to recognize, however, is that by updating the setting to make it more familiar to contemporary audiences, he places more emphasis on the intricacies of the story. Luhrmann's adaptation is concerned with the words Shakespeare gave us and what they tell us about his characters; the goal is to replicate these people and their concerns as accurately as possible. Though some critics may disagree, Luhrmann succeeds in the majority of his efforts—his water imagery and exploration of Romeo and Juliet's religion of love are highlights—but his best connection to the text is the way in which the film explores gender. Though *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* is generally either dismissed by critics or simply examined in light of its clear postmodernity, the real value of the film lies in its interest in performativity.¹

Whether or not he did it consciously, *Romeo and Juliet* was an opportune place for Shakespeare to explore gender concerns; any text that deals with teenagers and their attempts to carve out their own identities independent from their parents and larger societies will engage gender performance at some point. It forms the basis of a number of teen television dramas today; in fact, some series are exclusively concerned with how their characters negotiate gender. While the play may not seem at first glance to engage gender performance in any significant way, a closer examination of Romeo and Juliet leads to some interesting conclusions. First, consider Romeo: though his name has become synonymous with a romantic, daring lover—a young man who would do anything for his beloved, even risk death—his actions in the play do not present him as such. Romeo, though the elder of the pair, still functions very much as a child who is attempting to understand the complexities of being a man. From the beginning, his appearances are guided by others' need of him; his first scene comes about because his parents are concerned about him and send his cousin Benvolio to find him. In typical teenage fashion, he resists his parents' invitation to come home and chooses to continue his brooding over Rosaline. While this resistance and commitment to following his own interests might mark Romeo's performance as

¹ I am, of course, using Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* as my reference point, particularly her ideas about gender being a "stylized repetition of acts" (179) that is real only to the extent that it is performed.

masculine, his subsequent decisions show these initial moments to be discrepancies in an otherwise feminine performance, one that he ultimately chooses for himself, though others often feminize him.

After his parents leave him with Benvolio, Romeo shows the audience who he has been up until this point: a moping teenager, convinced he is in love with Rosaline but not really doing anything about it beyond consistently ruminating on his situation. Even worse, his musings are taken from stereotypical expositions on thwarted love, something Shakespeare draws primarily from Petrarchan conventions. He is a "lover languishing over his hopeless infatuation for his lady" (Pearson 291), who not only rejects him, but is quite severe in doing so. As a result, Romeo spends much of much of Act I complaining—and not creatively. We can infer that these verses are subpar because Romeo's love for Rosaline is not true. Still, Benvolio—and the audience—is subjected to them in the first scene.

ROMEO: Here's much to do with hate, but more with love.

Why then, O brawling love, O loving hate,
O anything of nothing first create,
O heavy lightness, serious vanity,
Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms,
Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health,
Still-waking sleep that is not what it is.

This love feel I that feel no love in this. (1.1.173-80)

Romeo's verses about Rosaline's rejection are rather pedestrian; however, familial bonds—and perhaps Benvolio's general good nature—lead to commiseration rather than the rebuke or outright hilarity Romeo receives from his other friends, specifically Mercutio. However, this scene serves to illuminate something crucial about Romeo's character at the beginning of the play: he is not an active agent in his own life, and that passivity marks him as feminine. He fell in love with Rosaline sometime before the action of the play and was rejected for a reason that truly has nothing to do with him: Rosaline intends to live chastely. She would turn down any suitor. Instead of recognizing this, Romeo mopes about what he has lost. It never occurs to him to accept what he cannot change and move on. In fact, he only attends the ball that will change his life because he wants to prove to his friends that Rosaline is the only one he will ever love. Though he takes a more proactive role in his pursuit of Juliet, one that reduces his reliance on Petrarchan conventions, at his core, he still remains the Petrarchan lover, one who maintains that "most essential characteristic of Petrarchism [...] adoration of the loved one" (Pearson 252).

When Romeo meets Juliet, one might assume that truly being in love would lead to a more masculine performance, one in which Romeo begins to make his own choices rather than reacting to the choices of others. With the exception of going to Juliet's window—admittedly, a brave act, since there is a real threat of death in doing so—this is not the case. Romeo encounters Juliet, just as he planned, but she quickly turns the meeting to her advantage. While Romeo appears to have intended simple wooing, Juliet extracts a marriage proposal by the end of their assignation. After this, Romeo's entire life is inverted because

of his love for Juliet; for Romeo, love leads to effeminacy rather than a more masculine performance, something that is commented on throughout the play. His first meeting with Tybalt after his marriage to Juliet is tinged with Romeo's reluctance to fight, for which he blames Juliet: "O sweet Juliet, / Thy beauty hath made me effeminate / And in my temper softened valour's steel!" (3.1.115-17). Friar Laurence is frustrated with Romeo's reactions to distress, noting with disappointment Romeo's tears and immature behavior over his banishment and Juliet's reaction to Tybalt's death when, as a newly married man, he should be concerned with protecting his wife, not weeping over the injustices done to their love. Romeo's attempt to stab himself proves to be the Friar's breaking point.

FRIAR LAURENCE: Hold thy desperate hand!
Art thou a man? Thy form cries out thou art.
Thy tears are womanish, thy wild acts denote
The unreasonable fury of a beast.
Unseemly woman in a seeming man,
And ill-beseeming beast in seeming both!
Thou hast amazed me. By my holy order,
I thought thy disposition better tempered.
.....
Fie, fie, thou sham'st thy shape, thy love, thy wit,
Which, like a usurer, abound'st in all,
And usest none in that true use indeed
Which should bedeck thy shape, thy love, thy wit.
Thy noble shape is but a form of wax
Digressing from the valour of a man.... (3.3.107-26)

Friar Laurence sees Romeo as casting off a preferred masculine performance for a feminine one. This weeping and moping around is "womanish" and unbecoming; it even denotes a possibility of hermaphroditism as Romeo becomes an "unseemly woman in a seeming man." Most importantly, Romeo rejects his divine formation—as someone graced with an attractive male form, he is expected to perform an admirable type of masculinity. His feminine acts, along with his cowardice, are shameful. Thomas Moisan notes that, in the Friar's remarks about Romeo's feminine performance, there "is the fear that frequents much of the literature of Petrarchan love, the fear that for a man to worship a woman is to deny his masculine self" (130). Romeo is concerned about this denial early in the text, but comes to accept it as the type of man he is meant to be; loving Juliet is worth any changes she forces in him.

Romeo and Juliet are the agents of change in each other's lives, though the change she brings to him is less drastic than the one he brings to her. Her gender performance shifts over the course of the play, like Romeo's, but instead of being mildly feminine with masculine tendencies—the reverse of which is true of Romeo—Juliet begins the play as a young woman who is hiding her preference for masculine performance in order to protect herself in a social order that only allows female agency within marriage—and even then,

only a very small degree. From her first entrance, Juliet is shown to be inwardly resistant to her parents' wishes while outwardly acquiescing to their requests; her mother must call for her multiple times before she appears, apparently frustrated to have been pulled away from what she was doing. Still, she responds prettily to Lady Capulet's questions about courtship, while using her rhetorical skill never actually to agree to marriage itself. Her answer to her mother—"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" (1.3.98-100)—is just a nod to convention. Lady Capulet, spun by Juliet and the Nurse's quick wits, forgets that her original purpose was to persuade Juliet to look favorably upon Paris. This is how Juliet has to deal with her parents; she is powerless in this society, but she still knows what she wants. Marriage is on her horizon, but she wants to choose for herself.

Juliet's rhetorical ability is clearly her most masculine trait, and it is one in which she seems to develop and delight, though in Shakespeare's time, it was patently unfeminine. Lynette Hunter and Peter Lichtenfels explain that

Juliet's own skill with words and rhetoric would mark her out, in Elizabethan society, as having masculine traits. Such skill was supposed to be found and encouraged only in men, and one argument is that it was recognized that men were socially formed, while women were "natural." A person being "natural" does not need rhetorical devices to present themselves. On the other hand, this is a convenient theory to prevent women from entering into social discourse. (134-35)

Juliet knows very well that her wit will be seen as unnaturalness on her part, and because her safety is entirely predicated on being a good, natural daughter, she goes through her life only exhibiting that wit when she needs to steer her parents in another direction. Juliet is intelligent enough to understand that her world is one of patriarchal power, and she must be careful not to challenge her father's wishes overtly, so her cleverness makes rare but powerful appearances in her first scenes. However, when she meets Romeo, her rhetorical skills emerge in full force. Falling in love with Romeo sets her free; she is no longer a daughter but a young woman contemplating marriage. She feels like an adult and therefore should finally be herself. Her first conversation with Romeo is a battle of wits, during which the audience is treated to some of Shakespeare's most interesting conceits. Romeo begins his pursuit by comparing Juliet to an object of worship, calling her a "holy shrine" (1.5.92); while Elizabethan society would expect his beloved to simply accept the object position and listen, Juliet breaks into Romeo's speech with her own contributions, admonishing her "good pilgrim" (1.5.96) and eventually helping to form a sonnet that is enriched by her continuation of the religion of love conceit. Juliet's masculine skill with words is obvious to Romeo, and he encourages her to exhibit it in their courtship.

However, there is one aspect of Juliet's verbal dexterity of which Romeo does not seem to be aware. Mary Bly has pointed out that, after meeting Romeo, Juliet's rhetorical skill involves another unfeminine aspect: erotic innuendo. Generally, when this is exhibited by women, it is reserved for more marginal characters, like the Nurse, who seems to fall back on it as a matter of course; after all, she swears by her "maidenhead at twelve year

old” (1.3.2)—the last time she had one—to attest to Lady Capulet that she has already bid Juliet to attend her mother. This type of wit is certainly not typical of young, virginal heroines, as it would be unbecoming for a lady of the aristocracy to speak this way. Why, then, is Juliet’s masculine expression of desire appropriate? Bly’s interrogation of the text proves helpful here: “If a blunt expression of lust is an inappropriate statement for a virginal heroine, what is the position of a witty expression of desire? The nature of the expression is clearly important. . . . If desire is revealed in clever puns, does that wit protect the heroine from a charge of immodesty?” (53). It could be argued that because these erotic puns are an expression of Juliet’s wit and made in soliloquy, they are not potentially immodest; after all, Romeo speaks of Juliet in more worshipful terms, calling her beauty “too rich for use” (1.5.46). Juliet obviously disagrees. It is Juliet’s masculine rhetorical ability that allows for a more overt gender performance, so that lines such as “What’s Montague? It is nor hand nor foot, / Nor arm nor face nor any other part / Belonging to a man” (2.2.39-41) can be delivered with a knowing smile without hurting Juliet’s status as virginal heroine. At this point in the play, the audience is a little more comfortable with Juliet’s more masculine tendencies and she can exhibit them comfortably in her next encounter with Romeo.

In the window scene, Juliet’s unconventional performance of gender comes into full focus. While Romeo seeks Juliet out, it is she who rules their conversation. Her masculine mindset steers the scene and the speeches they make to each other. While Romeo simply intended to come woo Juliet, she wants something more permanent and makes sure she gets it. Juliet is mature enough to know that she cannot risk her father’s wrath for a mere dalliance. She tests Romeo to see if he is the man she hopes he is, a man who truly loves her for who she is and who will accept her performance of masculinity, rather than the flighty lover he appears to be. She begins by using her words to feminize Romeo; Hunter and Lichtenfels note that her lines feature metaphors that tie him to common symbols of women’s sexuality and frailty, the rose and the moon (134). When these prove acceptable to Romeo, Juliet moves to a more assertive position, telling Romeo what must happen between the two of them—marriage, not the tryst Romeo seemed to be envisioning. She speaks of herself as the falconer and Romeo as her bird, though she is ever mindful that though Romeo seems to accept her more dominant position, larger society will not. When she acknowledges this and moves to a more modest position as a “wanton,” Romeo still casts himself as in her thrall.

JULIET: ‘Tis almost morning. I would have thee gone,
And yet no farther than a wanton’s bird,
That lets it hop a little from his hand,
Like a poor prisoner in his twisted gyves,
And with a silken thread plucks it back again,
So loving-jealous of his liberty.

ROMEO: I would I were thy bird.

JULIET: Sweet, so would I,
Yet I should kill thee with much cherishing.

Good night, good night. Parting is such sweet sorrow
That I shall say goodnight till it be morrow. (2.2.176-85)

Shakespeare's bird imagery places Romeo and Juliet firmly in their categories; she is the masculine, assertive partner while he is more passive and feminine, a relationship that Hunter and Lichtenfels call "part of a reciprocal relation that challenges accepted gender definitions of male and female" (134). Juliet's performance has become cemented. Her love for Romeo has confirmed her desire to perform a masculine performance regularly and she does so throughout the rest of the play.

Juliet chooses to enact her chosen gender more powerfully after she meets Romeo—when she finally finds something she wants for herself. After her marriage, she does not abandon this behavior; in fact, her actions more directly mirror those of the men in her life, though she marries those decisions with the maturity most of them lack. While Romeo will risk all for love, Juliet is more careful in her pursuit of happiness. Romeo's immaturity leads him to engage in some fairly dangerous behavior; climbing up to the window of the daughter of his family's sworn enemy is not the smartest thing to do. Juliet reminds him of this, but Romeo shrugs off her warnings.

JULIET: How cam'st thou hither, tell me, and wherefore?

The orchard walls are high and hard to climb,
And the place death, considering who thou art,
If any of my kinsmen find thee here.

ROMEO: With love's light wings did I o'erperch these walls,
For stony limits cannot hold love out,
And what love can do, that dares love attempt;
Therefore thy kinsmen are no stop to me.

JULIET: If they do see thee, they will murder thee. (2.2.62-70)

Juliet is frustrated with Romeo's refusal to see the truth of their situation, though she does not dismiss him for it. This sets the tone for their relationship; Romeo makes rash decisions that indicate his immaturity—coded as feminine in the text—and Juliet makes more measured ones, though even she falls prey to too-quick reactions. Still, she understands that to get what she wants, she must enact a masculine gender performance; this is true even when she exhibits more feminine attributes, such as when she goes to see Friar Laurence after her father tells her she must marry Paris. While she weeps with desperation, Juliet's purpose in seeking out the Friar is not to cry, but to make a plan. She begs him for an answer—any answer will do, as long as she can do something. Again, Juliet is an active agent in her own life. Friar Laurence also points out that this agency is a necessity. Whereas he encourages Romeo to act as the man God made him, the Friar admonishes Juliet to avoid "womanish fear" (4.1.119) in her deception of her parents. For him, masculine performance seems to be the only way for those who defy Veronese society to survive it.

Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* takes a similar position and develops these aspects of Romeo and Juliet's performances of gender. Though the film is often dismissed for what critics see as a refusal properly to adapt the play—the updated

setting and the guns are generally the targets of this criticism—it does have a place in the canon of adaptations of Shakespeare. Patricia Tatspaugh asserts that the anachronistic elements actually qualify Luhrmann’s work as a good adaptation, writing that “directors must also place *Romeo and Juliet* ...in a social context that illuminates their characters and mediates between the Renaissance play and the target audience—and between the Renaissance play and the extended audience watching in film archives and videotape” (135). Douglas Brode agrees, explaining that films such as Luhrmann’s do important cultural work, bringing Shakespeare back down to the people and proving that his stories are timeless (57). Why, then, are some critics still reluctant to recognize the film as a good adaptation?

The answer lies in prejudice against the teen film, a category that outwardly traces the many attempts contemporary teenagers make to amuse themselves or rebel against their parents but is truly, at its core, devoted to portraying various ways in which young people struggle to create an adult identity. *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet*, a multi-genre postmodern piece, fits into this genre much more neatly than any other. Luhrmann creates a world that feels like Miami, Los Angeles, and Mexico City all at once and is characterized by gang violence, drug use, and excess. Above all, however, this world feels real to teenagers—not real in terms of spectacle and theatricality, but in how it deals with the limitations of a world built to satisfy one’s parents rather than oneself and the ways in which teenagers work to define themselves apart from their families. *Romeo and Juliet* struggle against outside forces that control their lives but care little about the effect it has on them; in response, they come to their own understanding of what it means to be a functional adult. In showing this, Luhrmann handles the thematic material of the text quite deftly; from casting to final editing, the film examines a number of integral issues in *Romeo and Juliet*, though none perhaps as well as gender performance.

Because *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet* was marketed as a teen film, even its preproduction was crafted to appeal to teenage girls—the genre’s primary focus—so that they would anticipate the film’s release, regardless of its Shakespearean source. By casting teen idol Leonardo DiCaprio as Romeo, Luhrmann ensured that teenage girls would track the film throughout its production and flock to its premiere.² However bankable DiCaprio was at the time—and still is—the real impulse in casting him lies in his physicality. In 1995, DiCaprio was twenty-one years old and still looked like a teenager, something that would continue well into his twenties; part of his appeal in the 1990s was that he fit into the prevailing aesthetic created by designers like Calvin Klein, who used male models with androgynous looks. Until his late twenties and early thirties, DiCaprio kept a rather feminine appearance, with blue eyes, blond hair worn a little long, a fairly thin body, and features that could only be termed “pretty.” Luhrmann found a perfect Romeo for all of his purposes: he could believably play seventeen years old; he was a physical type the audience

² And flock, they did: in the US alone, the film made \$11,133,231 on its opening weekend and \$46,338,728 overall. The film’s budget was an estimated \$14,500,000 (Jackson 5). Luhrmann certainly chose some bankable stars.

would find appealing, enough so that Juliet's feelings for him would make sense to them; and most importantly, his feminine appearance created a space in which Luhrmann could more easily highlight the play's concerns with performativity.

In the director's commentary to the Special Edition DVD of the film, Baz Luhrmann explains his inspiration for Romeo: "He's a rebel without a cause who is also an ultra-romantic. So he's a bit like James Dean, he's a bit like Byron, he's a bit like Kurt Cobain—we're constantly ratifying this message. He's a sort of universal antihero" (Luhrmann). One point that Luhrmann does not address is what these figures have in common—unconventional gender expression. James Dean is often conflated with his most famous role, *Rebel without a Cause's* Jim Stark, a figure often noted in film criticism as marking a change to a more sensitive, sometimes feminine hero; Lord Byron's personal life is full of moments that demand examination from a gender studies scholar; and Kurt Cobain had a well-known penchant for cross-dressing. Romeo may be Luhrmann's rebel without a cause, but he is more obviously a figure of difference, one whose expression of gender is in direct contrast to those around him, particularly his friends, who generally help construct a young man's idea of correct gender performance.

From Romeo's first entrance, Luhrmann draws attention to his difference. While his friends had opened the film with a shoot-out sequence reminiscent of a John Woo film or a Sergio Leone spaghetti Western—using guns and boasting to emphasize their masculinity—Romeo's first scene shows him in a rather opposite way. In *Shakespeare on Film*, Judith Buchanan identifies the moments that can be coded as feminine in this scene:

Sentimentally lit by the dawn light, he sits perched on the edge of a broad stage lost in an indulgent reverie as, in internalised voice-over, he rehearses his paradoxical platitudes about his love for Rosaline.... It is a moment that iconises the particular variety of fragile, almost androgynous, sex appeal that characterised its star.... This is, in effect, the first moment of peace in the film.

Taken by the poeticism of his own lacklustre words, Romeo even jots them down in a notebook for future reference. (232)

The staging of this scene makes it clear that Romeo would have been terribly out of place in the gas station gunfight. Even his costuming marks him differently; his friends have wild-colored, punk-reminiscent hair³—one has none at all, choosing instead to have a tattoo of Ted Montague's company logo on the back of his head—and Sampson even sports a residual black eye, presumably from a previous fight with the Capulets.⁴ In the pool hall scene, we see that even Benvolio, a more moderate character, constantly wears his guns—he has a tan line from the holster. In contrast, Romeo wears a black suit and a white shirt. Through costuming, we see that Romeo takes life more seriously than his friends, even

3 It should be noted that Benvolio's hair is an orangish red; while still bright, it seems to be actor Dash Mihok's natural color. The combination of Mihok as Romeo's blood relative and Brian Dennehy as Ted Montague—each parent has been given a first name; Romeo's mother is called Caroline—leads one to speculation that the Montagues are meant to be an Irish gang in contrast to the Capulets' clear Hispanic origins.

4 Luhrmann and Pearce's screenplay misspells Samson's name and puts him and Gregory on the side of the Montagues; it also makes Abraham into Abra Capulet.

Friar Laurence—their everyday clothes are shorts and unbuttoned Hawaiian shirts.⁵ Other than his suit, the only thing that codes him as masculine—particularly in the teen film tradition—is that while he broods about Rosaline, a slim cigarette hangs from his mouth, a traditional signifier of a “bad boy.” This seems to be mere posturing, a gesture toward a more traditional masculinity while he indulges in feminine reflection; the cigarettes only reappear when he writes in his journal again in exile in Mantua.

While the play presents Romeo as different, even special, this film also shows Romeo to be fundamentally opposed to the other male characters’ performance of masculinity from his first appearance. He is much more comfortable alone in the Sycamore Grove beach playground than he is in his interactions with other men, even with his group of friends. Even though it is obvious that they love each other, there is always a tension between Romeo and the Montague gang, particularly with Mercutio. Harold Perrineau adds an underlying tone of rage to Mercutio’s character so that every decision Romeo makes that does not express the prevailing type of masculinity leads to conflict between the two of them.⁶ Mercutio’s reactions are always too big for the current situation; when the Nurse comes to Sycamore Grove to give Romeo a message from Juliet, Romeo leaves his friends for a moment to speak with her. Mercutio deems a gunshot in the air the necessary means of regaining Romeo’s attention. The disappointed look he receives in response makes it clear what Romeo thinks about Mercutio’s posturing and bravado. Even when Romeo is not around, his friends are shown to be enacting a problematic masculinity. This showy, antagonistic expression causes nothing but trouble, as evidenced by the opening scene. Without Romeo as an indicator of how the audience should feel about this fight, Luhrmann inserts comedy to show the absurdity of the gang’s conflict; Sampson tries to war valiantly, but in attempting to hide from Abra’s gunshots, he takes refuge in a car full of women, one of whom beats him about the head with her purse because of the trouble he is causing her. This is no way to express one’s masculinity, and because—with the exception of Friar Laurence—this is Romeo’s example, he chooses to eschew their performance altogether and pursue a more feminine style.

This tension between Romeo and other male characters is also explored in the additions and deletions that Luhrmann makes to the text. One of the most significant changes comes in Romeo’s confrontation with Tybalt; this scene is given an entirely different tone. While the text specifies that Romeo fights Tybalt on the strength of his “fire-eyed fury” (3.1.126) at Mercutio’s death and makes quick work of the struggle between them, DiCaprio’s Romeo is powered by grief and the incident stretches over three minutes, a significant length for a filmic version of this scene. Until this point, he has taken a great deal of abuse from Tybalt—not just the verbal abuse the play indicates, but a painful physical beating that leaves him with bruises, cuts, and cracked ribs. In Luhrmann’s vision, Romeo and Tybalt’s

⁵ They are Dolce and Gabbana Hawaiian shirts, however. Still, the only time Romeo’s Hawaiian shirt is unbuttoned is when he plays a form of solitary baseball during his banishment in Mantua.

⁶ This is very interesting in light of the film’s portrayal of Mercutio as a drag queen; the organization of his party performance makes it clear that he does this often. However, this topic deserves its own examination elsewhere.

duel is marked by emotional pain; John Leguizamo even plays Tybalt as seemingly sorry for the outcome of his fight with Mercutio, as if Tybalt is just a young man playing at violence and not really aware of the potential effects of this feud.⁷ As Romeo pursues Tybalt in a high-speed car chase and catches up to him at the base of a statue reminiscent of Rio de Janeiro's Christ the Redeemer, tears are streaming down Romeo's face, left over from his weeping over Mercutio's prone body. Even as he corners Tybalt, there is no shift to rage or even satisfaction; instead, DiCaprio's eyes glitter with tears as he shoots Tybalt. He looks shocked, as if he had not realized he was emptying a clip into the young man. Another change comes in the tomb scene; whereas Romeo kills him in the text, this Paris does not make an appearance beyond his visit to the Friar to arrange his and Juliet's wedding, and he is apparently alive by the end of the action. This removal of intentional, rage-driven violence further serves to feminize Romeo. Luhrmann's changes show Romeo to be more comfortable with a more passive, feminine performance of gender.

Luhrmann's Juliet also prefers an unusual expression of gender, though for different reasons. Unlike Romeo, she is not reacting to the performances around her but creating a performance that enables her to navigate her isolated world. *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* makes Juliet the privileged only daughter of an Hispanic gangster, hidden away from the world and highly prized by her father for what she can bring him, not for who she is. In reaction to this, Juliet cultivates a masculine gender performance to help her in her dealings with others. As portrayed by Claire Danes, Juliet is a delicate beauty, generally costumed in white or an extremely childlike, innocent rendition of a Catholic uniform because this is the image her parents wish her to present. However, underneath this is a young woman who is very certain about what she wants and how things should go; one could even term Danes's portrayal stubborn. This is a natural understanding of the subtext of the screenplay; both of her parents are written as determined to get their way. Even her first appearance, after her mother runs throughout the mansion calling for her, is on her own terms. Juliet is in the bath, daydreaming under the water, and comes to her mother when she feels like it, a mildly irritated look on her face. She was busy, her expression says. Fulgencio and Gloria Capulet also seem to recognize their daughter's rhetorical ability in Luhrmann's vision; for example, when Juliet's response to Gloria's request to consider Paris is "I'll look to like, if looking like move. But no more deep will I endart mine eye than your consent give strength to make it fly" (Luhrmann), Gloria huffs, rolls her eyes, and storms out, realizing that Juliet is evading her question. It is clear that though the play's Juliet has a great deal of verbal acumen, this Juliet has wielded her words against her parents many times. Gloria does not seem surprised at Juliet's response. Juliet's moments of submissiveness are just for show; she is more comfortable directing her own life.

The most interesting aspect of Danes's performance, however, is that her Juliet is both the most innocent and one of the most mature characters in the film, something that grows from her decisive nature—and by extension, her masculine gender expression. Luhrmann

⁷ His earlier gunfight only left a Montague wounded in the shoulder. Tybalt and Benvolio are shown in a standoff before Captain Prince calls an end to the brawl.

illustrates Juliet's difference through a number of filmic techniques, the most common of which is to situate her first appearances among people with loud, frantic personalities; Romeo receives this treatment to a lesser degree because Benvolio is a calmer presence. In her examination of the film for *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*, Barbara Tatzpaugh offers a careful reading of Romeo and Juliet's relationship, contending that

Romeo and Juliet alone possess a stillness and serenity, which Luhrmann conveys through symbols associated with them (the tiny cross Juliet wears on a chain about her neck and an engraved ring), by filming their scenes in softer focus and longer sequences, by making their theme a lyrical torch song and by contrasting their love with the absence of love in Verona Beach and Sycamore Grove. (143)

Romeo does have a certain serenity in his character, though this is sometimes disrupted in Juliet's presence, and he does not begin the second act as innocently as Juliet. He enters her father's party in an ecstasy haze and has to retreat to the washroom to clear his head. After dunking his head in a sink full of water, Romeo looks up and sees Juliet through the aquarium that separates two rooms. Now that he has been cleansed—baptized, really—he is worthy of Juliet's presence. Still, he is presented as clumsy in comparison to Juliet's stillness and grace. In the balcony scene, Luhrmann highlights Juliet's maturity and serenity in comparison to Romeo; whereas Juliet quietly descends from her room on the second floor in an elevator that opens out onto the pool area, Romeo comes to her window only after tripping the motion-sensored lights and breaking a lamp near the pool.⁸ He mistakenly begins his soliloquy to the Nurse and reels away in disgust, having to cling to the rose trellis or plunge two stories to the patio below. Romeo's expressions in these moments are comical. In contrast, Juliet glides out of the elevator, sighing prettily and launching into a careful consideration of her situation. Romeo is frozen against the trellis, quietly asking himself whether or not he should interrupt her. This attitude makes sense in light of their earlier meeting, where Juliet makes it clear that her opinions on their relationship's direction matter just as much as his—truthfully, they matter more.

After Juliet meets Romeo, he attempts to steer their interaction, as this is the accepted nature of courtship. Juliet, however, does not agree; she is accustomed to being in charge, something that Romeo sees bubbling to the surface even during her dance with Dave Paris. When he is able to get close enough to her to talk—holding her hand from the other side of the pillar she is resting against—she quickly responds to his teasing seduction, matching him line by line and delighting him with her quick mind. However, Romeo is also a seventeen-year-old boy, and Luhrmann adds more physical intimacy to their flirtation, having Romeo try to kiss her in the middle of the courtship sonnet, before the text indicates it should happen. Juliet reinforces her assertive personality here as well, denying him this kiss because she is not finished talking. She is interested in Romeo physically, too, dashing about the party to find a secluded place to extend their time together. Later, during the balcony scene, Romeo seems to feel this initial agreement extends to all of their time

⁸ According to the director's commentary, Leonardo DiCaprio did this accidentally, but Luhrmann found it so fitting that he kept it in the final cut of the film (Luhrmann, Martin, Pearce, and McAlpine).

together, an inclination Juliet quickly squashes. Whenever he reaches for her, Juliet brings the conversation back to love. Ultimately, she wants adult interaction, not adolescent lust. When Romeo asks, "O wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?" (Luhmann), Juliet gives him a mildly incredulous look, an amusing interpretation on Danes's part.

Even in their more sedate conversation in this scene, Juliet emerges as the more mature partner, fully enacting masculinity in order to move her life in the direction she chooses. She has decided that she wants to marry Romeo, and she takes steps to make sure that happens. First, she moves into the typically male position of protector. Juliet's home is atop a hill and surrounded by a large fence, trees, and various shrubs; this proves fairly easy for Romeo to scale, and though he makes a great deal of noise, Juliet is still surprised when he appears. This turns to fear when she realizes that the Capulets' security cameras will have picked up Romeo's visit, and she works to hide him from both the cameras and the guard that appears when they fall into the pool. Juliet tries to make Romeo realize the danger he is in, asking him how he even got inside her father's compound. The actors' delivery of these lines makes Romeo and Juliet's attitudes clear. Danes' tones are hushed and urgent, while DiCaprio loudly declares Romeo's disbelief that the Capulet's guards could keep him from her, only quieting when Juliet drags him underwater, hiding him from the security guard that hurries to check on her. It is only Juliet's quick thinking that saves him. At the end of their encounter, she firmly gives him instructions on how their relationship might continue and Romeo simply smiles in acquiescence. He is perfectly all right with Juliet holding the reins if that is what it takes to be with her. The actors' interpretations of the text serve to help illuminate the characters' respective expressions of gender.

Luhmann's changes to the text give clues as to Juliet's preferred gender performance as well. This is particularly evident in the events that follow her marriage, when her masculine expression becomes even clearer to those around her as she becomes more outwardly assertive. In the text, Juliet agonizes over what Tybalt's death means for her and Romeo's marriage, pouring her heart out to the Nurse. The film's Juliet is alone for all of this, though the Nurse's dialogue shows that she has witnessed at least some of Juliet's mourning. But Juliet's most revealing speech is done in secret—and internally, using a voiceover through Juliet's prayers to the Virgin Mary. Juliet does not need a mediator for her thoughts; her own counsel is enough to help her understand her situation, though she hopes the Virgin hears her and offers aid. This comes up again in her confrontation with her father; Juliet is determined to be heard and knows that if her father will only listen to her, she might find a way out of this situation. To draw Fulgencio's attention, Juliet treats him as he treats everyone else—she releases her opinions in anger, screaming at him while he screams at her. When tears come, she forces them away, wanting her father to notice only her assertive, masculine performance. Only when she is left alone with the Nurse does she cry in earnest; still, her first question to the Nurse regards what could be done to prevent these things.

This enaction of a more assertive, masculine performance is not limited to Juliet's family. Her encounter with Friar Laurence is shortened when compared with the play, as is most of the film's action, but what is interesting here are the words Luhmann chooses

to excise. Whereas in the play Juliet enters Laurence's cell saying, "Come weep with me, past hope, past cure, past help" (4.1.45), Luhrmann's Juliet begins by asking how she may circumvent her marriage to Paris. She storms into his cell angrily, pulling a gun from her purse and putting it to her temple—a much more startling action than the play's simple showing of a knife, and a more masculine weapon in the world of the film. Pointing it at the Friar, she mirrors her cousin Tybalt's posture with a firearm as she continues to rant, screaming in a way that the play does not call for

FRIAR LAURENCE: Hold, daughter!

JULIET: Be not so long to speak! *I long to die!*

FRIAR LAURENCE: I do spy a kind of hope,
which craves as desperate an execution as
that is desperate which we would prevent.
If, rather than to marry with this Paris,
thou hast the strength of will to slay thyself,
then it is likely thou wilt undertake
a thing like death to chide away this shame. (Luhrmann)

Compare this to the original text, where Juliet, though armed with a knife, simply pleads with the Friar to find her any alternative to marrying Count Paris; the knife is a last resort.

JULIET: Be not so long to speak. I long to die,

If what thou speak'st speak not of remedy. (4.1.66-67)

Also, Luhrmann has made another small but crucial change in this scene. Friar Laurence does not tell Juliet to avoid "womanish tears," but simply asks if she has the will to kill herself; in fact, in Romeo's first visit, the Friar's lines about Romeo's mischosen gender performance are gone as well. This production does not need this interference from him; here, Romeo and Juliet's chosen gender performances are not something that needs encouragement or permission.

In *Baz Luhrmann's William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*, audiences are given an adaptation that attempts not simply to film the text, but bring it alive on screen. In pursuit of this, Luhrmann highlights the play's thematic concerns, particularly the ways in which performativity is addressed. Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet are clearly marked for Elizabethan audiences as enacting unusual gender performances; Romeo's passivity and posturing are indicative of a more feminine expression while Juliet's performativity comes from a society that only grants agency and purpose to those who enact masculinity. Juliet's rhetorical skills are her most obvious masculine attribute, and the feminized Romeo revels in her abilities and submits to her will. In Luhrmann's adaptation, the physicality of Leonardo DiCaprio does much to lend credence to a more feminine performance, but the film itself also makes it clear that Romeo is rejecting the problematic masculinity he sees enacted among his friends in favor of enacting femininity, something he finds both more effective and comfortable. Romeo gladly lets Juliet steer him and their relationship, and she uses her inclination to masculine performance to help her navigate her closed, patriarchal world and exert her will where she sees fit. Ultimately, both Veronas cannot tolerate the

performances that Romeo and Juliet choose; they are not set up to allow teenagers truthful expression, and the lovers die in their quest to pursue their relationship as well as a more honest gender performance.

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