**Romeo & Juliet Moving Image Analysis**

Scene Analyzed: The Opening Sequence of the Baz Luhrmann directed ‘William Shakespeare’s Romeo & Juliet’ (1996) from the Introduction to the end of the Garage scene, or The Prologue.

The Baz Luhrmann directed ‘William Shakespeare’s Romeo & Juliet’ tells the Romeo and Juliet story using Shakespearean Language set in a modern day environment. Not all viewers would be familiar with the language of Shakespeare so the mise en scene as well as the actors’ movements are very important to make sure that the audience knows what is going on within the dialogue. This is the second film of Baz Luhrmann’s ‘Red Curtain Trilogy’, (the others being Strictly Ballroom and Moulin Rouge), a concept by which the director wants the audience to feel like they are watching a play on a stage, so they know not everything is real. Luhrmann’s ideas are emphasized here in the over saturated colours, clothes and sounds of the movie. Filmed in Mexico City, Vera Cruz, Los Angeles and San Francisco the natural sunshine gives the Verona, Italy feel. In this opening sequence of the film we are introduced to the main characters and to the feuding Montagues and Capulets.

Themes of the original play are still important here, love versus family hatred, youth versus age, transcend the four hundred year gap.

We are introduced to the movie by a newsreader on a TV, the newsreader acting as Shakespeare’s narrator. It is here too, that we are introduced to the notion that instead of having a bad postal system like Shakespeare did, Luhrmann uses our modern media to act as the medium for news to be spread. An example of this later would be where Romeo finds out about the party from Mrs Capulet, on TV. This one shot lasts thirty seven seconds although we zoom in towards the television and then zoom through the television screen to the next scene..

The bid to make sure everyone could understand the language comes into effect when we again hear a male voice reading the Prologue, while periodically words such as ‘In Fair Verona’ and ‘A Pair of Star Cross’d Lovers’ flash onto the screen to place emphasis on important pieces of information. We are also introduced to the leading characters using close up shots which come to a freeze frame. This is almost a cast list created with pieces of footage found later in the film. We also see skyscrapers with Montague on one side of the street and Capulet on the other side, this could symbolize the divide between the two families. Newspapers are used here again to show the feuding families have a history.

We are also surrounded by the tune of ‘O Verona’ by Craig Armstrong. Carmina Burnina’s O Fortuna is no longer available for license for film so a new ‘version’ inspired by the original was created. What is interesting here is that the prologue has been translated into Latin and that is what the choir is singing. The sonic environment here is all comprised of non-diegetic sound.

In this section, the editing is fast starting off. There are approximately 80 shots including titles. Most of the edits here are less than a second. When we are introduced to the characters the edits are longer so we can almost memorize who is who. As the minute and a half of this part of the sequence comes to a close, the editing speeds up, creating tension and anticipation. The most interesting thing I find about this piece is it was never scripted, never thought about, it was just something the editor, Jill Billcock, did.

The title ‘William Shakespeare’s Romeo & Juliet’ is then overtaken in a wipe from right to left reminiscent of a 70′s TV Cop Show. This introduces the Montague Boys. We first see them from behind while they are driving in their convertible car/beach buggy, wearing Hawaiian shirts. Their colours are bright and bold and almost Beastie Boy like, while the music which could also be diegetic, coming from the car stereo, also confirms a style of rock/rap gansta. They could be quite English in heritage. The music definitely changes then to be diegetic as the words ‘The Boys, the Boys’ are blasted. This part could almost be taken from a Beastie Boys video such as ‘Sabotage’. The editing in the sequence where the Montague boys go to the garage is all side swipe in style. The colours the Montague boys wear and drive are bright and day glo, almost Cartoon/Comic book-like in style which comes out more as the scene goes on. The colours also could relate back the Renaissance artists, when the Shakespeare actually wrote the play. In Renaissance art reds and blues seemed to be held in high esteem. The blue used in Romeo & Juliet is very similar to that used to represent the Virgin Mary in many paintings.

As the Capulets drive into the station, the first obvious reaction is that they look slicker than their rivals. The colours used are darker, perhaps even mirroring their Latin ethnicity The music changes the mood of the scene also and the genre of the piece seems to move to Spaghetti Western. The music used seems very inspired by Ennio Morricone especially his early work like ‘The Good, The Bad and The Ugly’ and ‘A Fist Full of Dollars’.

As we see the Capulet car drive into the station the camera shot turns almost as if it ran towards the car and then turned on its heel. We see Tybalt get out from his car, but the shot is only of his feet, putting out a cigarette. This is very Western in style and we can hear the scraping of this metal boot on the ground and the jangle of his ‘spurs’. As Tybalt enters the store we still see only feet, there is only one shot from when he gets out of the car until the shot cuts to the medium shot of the nun. Through that shot we also see the feet of the nun and students leaving the store and the feet of Abra also getting out of the car.

As the nuns and students go back to their vehicle we can hear the brash music associated with the Montague Boys come into earshot. As we see the nuns vehicle, the shot seems to have been done with a wide angle lens and with then Sampson, the depth of field is quite shallow as he teases the nun and students. Luhrmann then speeds up the scene slightly, for almost a comic effect, this zooms to Abra, whom the camera is looking up to, a sign of his authority in the scene.

When the Capulets seem to be in charge of the scene the non diegetic music changes back to Morricone in style. As the two families show their weapons the edits are fast, the sound is almost like that of a sword cutting the wind. The scene plays out shot of the Montagues, reverse shot of the Capulets. We then see the Capulet viewpoint of Sampson in the car mirror. As Abra reverses their car, the scene is very Cartoon like, with different colours it could be the Batmobile.

The scene progresses with more shot/reverse shot sequences and with matching shot framing. As the camera cranes up we are given a better vantage point of what actually happens. The sounds become more important. When the camera zooms in on the brand of gun Benvolio is carrying the Western style music reappears to add to the tension. Sampson gets banged on the head with a handbag, the rhythm and ‘bong’ noise associated with it are very children’s cartoon  like. The use of speeded up camera movements also give a comic feel.

When Benvolio holds the gun pointed at The Capulets, all sound seems to stop. We can hear though the wind starting to howl and the sign creaking, then showing us the sign, all we are missing from a western is a tumbleweed. The diegetic and non diegetic sounds are mixed well to create a feeling of suspense.

The camera then pans to Tybalt and back down to his boots where he has thrown a match, a slick looking Latino character, there are again close up shot/reverse shots exchanged with Benvolio. These are classic Western type camera shots. Also Tybalt is framed on one side of the shot while Benvolio is framed on the other side.

When Tybalt shows his gun the camera slowly tracks and zooms in to his holster. We again hear the wind to build tension. The camera shots then go to the western extreme close up with eyes only shot, and eventually back to Tybalt’s feet, where he puts out the match with his metal ground scraping boot.

The next few shots of Tybalt are very cartoon like he pulls his gun from his holster spins around, we can hear him spinning, saying ‘ Bang’ to the child. As he twirls the noises and sounds are very Cartoon superhero like as are the movements he as an actor makes, even the non diegetic music has changed slightly and includes a choir. It still takes its influence from Morricone but the tempo and movement of the piece have changed. The sounds of bullets ricocheting, little pops all create a heightened exaggerated sense of reality, almost preceding the drug taking later in the film.

The camera shots are also very comic, the sign spinning round, the cans popping off the shelves, the gun twirling Tybalt does. When he takes off his jacket it is almost a religious experience The camera shots also seem to be hand held and give the viewer a sense of realism.

As Tybalt takes aim with gun, the music yet again builds up, we see his viewpoint from gun viewfinder. His match drops in slow motion to ground hitting some petrol and sets it alight. The background music stops, all we can hear is noise from the traffic. The fire takes hold and we see copies of the local newspaper telling stories of Montagues and Capulets.

Luhrmann has made changes to Shakespeare’s story, changing locations of monologues, the trimming and paring of certain parts of the text, the vibrancy of colour and the frenzied editing. Luhrmann made a Shakespeare film for the attention span of the MTV generation. While this film is called ‘William Shakespeare’s Romeo & Juliet’ it is most definitely ‘Baz Luhrmann’s Romeo & Juliet’.

**Bibliography:**

DVD: William Shakespeare’s Romeo & Juliet © 1996 Twentieth Century Fox Directed by Baz Luhrmann