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Juliet – A Role in Four Movies



Anthony Leo Quinn

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis 'Juliet – A Role in Four Movies', is entirely my own work. Any quotations or references are noted in the 'Works Cited' section and attributed to the original publication/source. This work has not been submitted previously for any degree or other professional qualification.

Signature.....

Date.

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List of Abbreviations Used

MGM - Metro Goldwyn Mayer

MPPC – Motion Picture Production Code aka The Hays Code

MPPDA – Motion Pictures Producers and Distributers of America

NIDA - National Institute for Dramatic Arts

PCA - Production Code Administration

PR – Public Relations

Introduction

Over a period of sixty years, between 1936 and 1996, there were numerous filmed versions of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, but four in particular were made for and obtained a worldwide commercial release. George Cukor's lavish production of 1936 with Norma Shearer as Juliet was the first feature length, big budget, 'talkie' of Shakespeare's play to be made by a major studio and aimed at the cinema going public. Shearer remains, to this day, the only actress of the modern age who was a major film star when cast in the role of Juliet. In direct contrast to this, Renato Castellani's Anglo Italian neo-realist, retrospective 1954 adaptation featured an unknown Susan Shentall, who had never acted before filming and, on completion of the film, retired and never acted again. Franco Zeffirelli's sweeping 1968 production with Olivia Hussey as Juliet was a worldwide commercial success and is still revered by many as being the authoritative film experience of the play. Baz Luhrmann's 1996 version, with Claire Danes playing opposite Leonardo DiCaprio, was initially decried as an affront to Shakespeare's masterpiece and the director was accused of sacrificing the text for a highly stylised and bombastic shallow content. It is only recently that this film has been viewed by critics and academics alike in a more sympathetic and positive manner. These films, taken individually, present to us a particular performance of the 'Juliet' of Shakespeare's text; but in addition to this they allow us a comparative study of the portrayal of Juliet as a celluloid reflection of the idealised woman shaped by the progressive demands of the contemporary phallogentric society in the western world. Patricia White examined this reflection theory in *Feminism and Film* and, in turn, referred to the studies of Molly Haskell and Marjorie Rosen in the early 1970s, and quoted them on the basis that film 'reflects social reality, that

depictions of women in film mirror how society treats women, that these depictions are distortions of how women “really are” and what they “really want” (White 118). The theory explores the supposition that women are repeatedly and systematically portrayed in a catalogue of images that compels the viewer to see and accept them in a typology of roles which, according to White, reinforces the phallogocentric ideology of women as an array of ‘virgins, vamps, victims, suffering mothers, child women and sex kittens’ (White 118). A question that therefore arises and which is central to this thesis is how, specifically, has Juliet been portrayed in film? Has the Juliet of the screen been nothing more than an object of visual stimulation, an object of the scopophilic gaze and male sexual fantasy? If this is the case, how does this vary in each of the filmed versions listed? We must also consider how Juliet exists in relation to other characters in the play beyond her direct involvement with Romeo. Juliet’s role is pivotal within the play even though she does not have the most lines.¹ She has a direct influence on Mercutio and *his* relationship to Romeo, even though Juliet and Mercutio fail to exchange a single line of dialogue in the entire play. Juliet’s relationship with Romeo is altered dramatically in the aftermath of Mercutio’s death. Juliet’s life is also influenced by her relationships with others such as the Nurse and Friar Laurence, each of whom will abandon her at some point in the play. How are these relationships played and interpreted in each of the films in question? One cannot write extensively of Juliet if one limits oneself to writing exclusively of her. Each of these characters and how they are portrayed needs also to be examined. So too must the directors, all male, be examined in some detail. How much do they alter the Juliet of Shakespeare’s text and for what purpose?

¹ Juliet has approx. eighteen percent of all the lines in the play, compared to Romeo who has just over twenty percent

Dympna Callaghan, in the introduction to *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*, writes how Shakespeare's plays 'may reflect real women as well as how they help produce and reproduce ideas about women that then shape, perpetuate, or even disturb prevailing conditions of femininity' (Callaghan, introduction, xii). In order to examine this we must consider how Juliet was portrayed long before the evolution of Hollywood and indeed, long before the emergence of feminist film theory; which, although in existence previously, came to the fore of academic thinking in the latter half of the 20th Century. As Callaghan observed "'woman" is never an already accomplished, cold, hard, self-evident fact or category, but always a malleable cultural idea as well as a lived reality that, to use a Derridean formulation, *always already has a history*' (Callaghan, introduction, xii). Such is the case with Juliet, a role so universally known in both world cinema and on the stage that over-familiarity leads to an acceptance of a cultural reflection of the idealised woman at the time of the portrayal. This is not to say that any of these portrayals has been 'wrong'. *The Sourcebooks Shakespeare – Romeo and Juliet*, a book collating various aspects of the origin and development of *Romeo and Juliet*, quotes director Peter Brook on the importance of updating Shakespeare and the question of what is 'right', and what is 'wrong':

If a play is revived, changes must be made...When Garrick played *Romeo and Juliet* in knee-breeches, he was *right*; when Keane staged *The Winter's Tale* with a hundred Persian pot carriers, he was *right*; when Tree staged Shakespeare with all the resources of His Majesty's, he was *right*...Each was justified in its own time, each would be outrageous out of it. A production is only correct at the moment of its correctness, and only good at the moment of

its success. In its beginning is its beginning, and in its end is its end
(Bevington “et al” 9).

This may well be the case but each of these ‘beginnings’ and ‘ends’ is locked in the past, making analyses difficult and conclusion, to a certain extent, speculative. There is no doubt that a degree of relativism is needed when discussing previous incarnations of the play. We must attempt to see beyond our own contemporaneity, for although we can read of specific performances of the play and analyse them accordingly, we cannot experience the time of the performance itself, or the social reality in which it existed. We can only quote from the past, we cannot live in it. There is, of course, another view of this, that the relationship between literature and history may be such that a performance may *not* be a true reflection of the society in which it was performed. It could also be argued that any subversion or dissent to authority would be suppressed, either consciously or unconsciously. In this way we do not see a ‘true’ reflection of society in any performance, but rather we see a society filtered through the cultural superstructure of the social and economic context in which a performance is made. In this we must contemplate another problem, for just as we may never see a ‘true’ reflection of society we must question whether we can ever see a ‘true’ reflection of Juliet. Although Shakespeare is the name most associated with the authorship of *Romeo and Juliet*, he is far from the sole contributor in the Juliet canon. We will study the evolution and portrayal of Juliet through the countless stage productions over the centuries, and through the re-evaluating of the character’s qualities in the Victorian age, the silent movie era, and finally within the confines of Western, mainstream cinema.

The main part of the thesis will be close analysis of the four major films listed on the opening page, where particular focus will be brought on the social, moral, political, economic and cultural state of affairs existent at the time in question and how these influenced each adaptation. The progression of gendered politics throughout this sixty year period will also be mapped through the execution and interpretation of each individual film's direction. Relevant within this will be the history, philosophy, ambition, and personal outlook of those who directed each film and, to a lesser extent, the film companies that employed them. A key point in this will be how each film was marketed and promoted through newspaper articles before and shortly after each film's release. Contemporary reviews in film magazines, newspapers, Sunday supplements and international magazines such as *TIME* and *Vogue*, will be used to gauge the immediate response and interpretation of each film. The memoirs and personal papers of those involved will, where available, be used, to detail and record personal assessment and achievement. Comparative evaluation of academic works by authors such as Claire Colebrook; Douglas Lanier; Mark Thornton Burnett; Jonathan Goldberg; Kenneth Rothwell; Laura Mulvey; Roland Barthes; Philippa Berry; Kate Chedgzoy; Russell Jackson; Tanya Modleski and many others will be used to argue salient points. Finally, an assessment will be made as to where Juliet goes from here; what might the future hold for the main protagonist in Shakespeare's ever evolving play? What this thesis will not attempt to do is to assert itself as the definitive history and fount of all knowledge on Juliet, for to attempt such a thing would be folly. Within each chapter it will become apparent that certain areas would benefit from further detailed study and whilst this is of great personal interest, it has been necessary to prune back certain areas of study in order to allow others to flourish. The question then arises, 'where to start?' The origins of *Romeo and Juliet*

are to be found in the various Italian sources of the play in the tales of Masuccio, DaPorto, and Bandello. These, however, will be examined in detail in the chapter dealing with the 1954 version. So we begin with Shakespeare's text of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Even such an apparently straightforward task of beginning with Shakespeare's text is problematic as the text itself is a complex matter. The introduction of the Arden Shakespeare edition of *Romeo and Juliet* (London 2002, ed Brian Gibbons²) notes that the First Quarto was printed in 1597. A Second Quarto appeared in 1599 and carried in its heading 'newly corrected, augmented, and amended' (*Romeo and Juliet*, introduction 1). This was intended as a replacement of the first quarto, which has since gained the popular title of 'The Bad Quarto'. Matters become complicated further from this point. The Arden continues,

After *Romeo and Juliet* Q1 (1597) and Q2 (1599) there are no further substantive editions, that is, editions having independent authority or suggesting access to new evidence of what Shakespeare wrote. Subsequent derivative editions are Q3 (1609) reprinted from Q2; Q4 (1622) reprinted from Q3, with occasional consultation of Q1; and Q5 (1637) reprinted from Q4. The Folio text is based on Q3 with the exception of a number of passages which follow Q4 (*Romeo and Juliet*, introduction 2).

The various differences between these editions are then discussed in detail. It is a subject that demands more study and space than can be accommodated in this thesis.

² All direct quotes from the text are taken from this edition.

Perhaps the complexity of the matter is best described by Courtney Lehmann who wrote,

The truth is, although we know more than ever before about the relationship between Shakespeare's early quartos and Renaissance printing practices, we are still building castles in the sand and 'chasing imaginary pirates' when it comes to determining the exact provenance of such texts (Lehmann 29).

This is an important point. If we cannot determine the exact provenance of Shakespeare's text then we must face difficulties in determining the exact provenance of Juliet herself. There is no 'absolute' or 'pure' Juliet, free from literary augmentation, correction or editorial alteration. The character of Juliet is in many ways an approximation based on prior versions which are themselves based on previous accounts of a story penned by authors other than Shakespeare. This evolving and mutable aspect of Juliet should be retained in mind when we examine the various interpretations and adaptations of the play over the centuries.

Juliet's Age

The age of Juliet, so clearly specified by Shakespeare, has been one of the key problems whenever the play has been produced for both stage and screen. It was a point examined by Harley Granville-Barker, who ruminated on how Juliet moves from being sixteen years of age in Arthur Brooke's poem to not yet fourteen years of age in Shakespeare's play. He wrote:

it has been held that Shakespeare may have taken her age from a later edition of Brooke's poem in which the XVI had perhaps been transformed by the

printer into XIV; also that he may have reduced her age to suit the very youthful appearance of some boy-actress. This is at any rate unlikely; fourteen is not distinguishable from sixteen on the stage. Moreover, he has other almost as youthful heroines: Miranda is fifteen, Perdita sixteen (Granville Barker 92).

Shakespeare is explicit in detailing both Juliet's age and her date of birth, 'Come Lammas Eve at night shall she be fourteen' (1:3:17). A question that should be asked is why Shakespeare is so specific about Juliet's date of birth and why did he chose Lammas Eve? Indeed, why use the term 'Lammas Eve' and not 'July 31'? The footnotes in the Arden Shakespeare (2002, ed. Brian Gibbons) mention Hosley's suggestion that Shakespeare, inheriting a heroine's name Juliet, may have felt compelled to give her a birthday in July. There is also the suggestion that the word *Lammas* derives from *Lamb* and *Mass* which accounts for the nurse's pet name for Juliet, 'lamb'. There is also the prospect that by giving Juliet a birthday at the end of July, she would have been conceived at the end of October and this, by linking her birth to the festival of Halloween, lends an association of impending death. There is, however, another possibility to be considered. Both the Arden and the Oxford Shakespeare (ed. Jill Levenson, 2000) mention that Lammas-tide, August 1, was a feast celebrated by the early English church as a Harvest Festival. This may have been relevant when one considers the link between Harvest Festival and Lammas, and the associated festivals and fairs that traditionally marked them.

According to Steve Roud's *The English Year*, a guide to the customs and festivals of England, the word *Lammas* is a derivation from the Anglo-Saxon *hlafmaesse*, 'loaf mass', due to the breads made from the first cut corn from the harvest (Roud 260-261). Lammas was also a day for paying rents, settling debts and

changing jobs and as such, was a very popular day for fairs (Roud 261). Contracts were also drawn up at Lammas time and these could take the form of marriage contracts. *Maypoles Martyrs & Mayhem*, by Quentin Cooper and Paul Sullivan, sheds further light on this aspect and states that ‘Taking a sexual partner for the 11-day duration of the fair was common practice’ (Cooper/Sullivan 217). Another reference to this trial marriage can be found in *A Calendar of Feasts – Cattern Cakes and Lace*, by Julia Jones and Barbara Deer. In the entry for Lammas – August 1 – we read again that a trial marriage for the period of the fair, usually eleven days, was undertaken by young couples. At the end of this period, if the couples had found that they did not get on, then they were free to part (Jones/Deer 90). By Elizabethan times Lammas meant little more than the date on which pastures were opened for common grazing but the association of the ripening of crops, sexual maturity and marriage is still considerable. Is it not possible that the date chosen for Juliet’s birth, with links to a festival that incorporated trial marriages and actual marriage contracts, is an early indication to the audience that Juliet has reached maturity and that marriage is something that should be considered at this time in her life?

The suggestion of marriage comes from Juliet’s own mother, ‘Younger than you/Here in Verona, ladies of esteem/ Are made already mothers. By my count/I was your mother much upon these years/ That you are now a maid’ (1:3:69-73). There is no suggestion of impropriety or coercion in the proposal that a girl not yet fourteen years of age should consider marriage. In fact, it is encouraged by Juliet’s surrogate mother, the nurse, who suggests that a sexual relationship will add to Juliet’s life, ‘Go, girl, seek happy nights to happy days’ (1:3:105). The fact that Juliet’s sexuality sits so uncomfortably within a modern setting raises the subject of how this came about and how this has influenced film and stage productions. The age, or more accurately, the

perceived age, of the actress undertaking the role has had a direct effect on how Juliet is accepted by the audience as being either sexually active or passive. It should be noted, however, that there is no exclusive correlation between age of the actress playing the role, perceived or actual, and the degree of sexuality that she brings to it.

To this end consider the portrayal by Olivia Hussey in Zeffirelli's 1968 production who, although only fifteen at the time, combines a childlike innocence with an unnerving sensuality which is at odds with the virginal and passive interpretation given by Norma Shearer, who was some twenty years older at the time of Thalberg's production in 1936. The question of an actress's age being a barrier to playing the role is dismissed by actress Dame Peggy Ashcroft, quoted in Judith Cook's *Women in Shakespeare*:

But when we get to Juliet there is the ludicrous theory that you can only play Juliet in your teens. I think it is nonsense because any actress who is capable of playing Juliet can preserve that quality of youth into her thirties...youth is something you characterize, that you play (Cook 90).

Problems do arise however when we question what is meant by 'that quality of youth'. How is it defined and does each generation, on both stage and screen, reinvent the definition to suit contemporary cultural society? There are unmistakable qualities in Juliet's youthful character that we witness early in the play. When Juliet's mother asks about the possibility of marriage, she replies, 'It is an honour that I dream not of' (1:3:66), and when prompted to look upon Paris as a possible husband, continues, '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 (1:3:97-99). These responses are evidence

of both innocence and child-like obedience in a girl who we know is not yet fourteen. Her life, however, will change dramatically over the next few days. The unquestioning obedience of a child will be replaced by the independent actions of a strong woman, and child-like innocence will give way to the combined, intimate experiences of love, marriage and death. These intense experiences mean that Juliet's character is incredibly complex, as was noted by Anna Brownell Jamieson (1794-1860) in volume one of her work, *Characteristics of Women, Moral, Poetical and Historical* (1832) in which Juliet is the first of Shakespeare's women gathered under the heading, 'Characters of Passion and Imagination'. Jamieson described her as follows, 'Such in fact is the simplicity, the truth, and the loveliness of Juliet's character, that we are not at first aware of its complexity, its depth and its variety' (Jamieson 89). It is a shameful truth that the complexity of Juliet's character has, for the main part, been simplified, trivialised, and shaped over the centuries so that what we see on stage and screen is not the Juliet of Shakespeare's text, but rather the personification of the idealised woman at the time of each performance. This, however, is something that can be said for many female roles within Shakespeare and for Shakespeare's plays themselves, with successive generations voicing and inserting their own ideals onto each role. Jonathan Bate uses the 'longstanding popularity of Nathun Tate's *King Lear* with a happy ending' (Bate 4) as an example of the excesses of variance in adaptation. The popularity of *Romeo and Juliet* is such that it is inevitable that centuries of performance will have resulted in variations in character interpretation both consciously and unconsciously. As Michael Anderegk put it, 'This fascination with *Romeo and Juliet* is not surprising: of all Shakespeare's plays, it is probably the most frequently performed, most often filmed, and most likely to be re-written, transformed, parodied, bowdlerized, or burlesqued' (Anderegk 57). Even so,

and allowing for the inevitable idiosyncrasies of performance and interpretation, the role of Juliet within the play itself has suffered. Carolyn Brown wrote of how ‘Shakespeare’s Juliet has received divergent critical appraisals. Early criticism, in particular, of *Romeo and Juliet* largely overlooks Juliet, viewing the play as being primarily about Romeo and treating Juliet as a subsidiary, underdeveloped character’ (Brown 333). The convention of presenting and assessing Juliet in such a manner can be traced from early stage productions, such as that of George Anne Bellamy in the early 1750s, all the way to the latter half of the 20th century. In this we must examine a few important productions of the play throughout the centuries. Given the huge number of recorded productions, and the limitations of space in this thesis, it is necessary to be selective in our choices.

Early Stage and Screen Productions

Jill Levenson, in her book, *Shakespeare in Performance: Romeo and Juliet*, refers to the first performances of the play and considers what about them appealed to an Elizabethan audience

So *Romeo and Juliet*, first performed in this venue, originally wooed a large audience from a bare and level platform in the open air. For a theatre which privileged actor and poet, it offered verbal and prosodic displays: continual word-play and changing poetry which not only point a melancholy narrative with unexpected ironies, but also characterise the dramatic personae (Levenson 11- 12).

Levenson also refers to one of the early revivals of the play, Thomas Otway’s 1679 production, which incorporated certain changes to the plot, ‘where the heroine – like

the protagonists in some Renaissance novellas – awakes before the hero dies’ (Levenson 18). It was not only the changes to the plot that distinguished Otway’s production as Levenson points out that it was Otway’s version of *Romeo and Juliet*, rather than Shakespeare’s version, that came to dominate the stage. ‘Otway’s alterations excite less interest than the stamina of his rendering, which monopolised the stage for over six decades’ (Levenson 18). Levenson then makes reference to another significant and influential adaptation, that of David Garrick. She notes that Garrick’s revival ‘which opened at Drury Lane on 29 November 1748; played over 329 times at Drury Lane and Covent Garden between 1748 and 1776; held the stage for ninety-seven years’ (Levenson 18). This prolonged run was partly due to Garrick’s business acumen and the fact that he altered the text to please his audience, ‘He shortened the tragedy, cut out its bawdiness and other puns, and turned it into the equivalent of pathetic drama, the popular form of drama in his period’ (Bevington “et al” 4). Garrick, like Otway, had Juliet awaking in the tomb before Romeo dies and sharing some prolonged dialogue (**Figure 1**). It is interesting to note that amidst the pathos and sentimentality of Garrick’s changes, Juliet’s first line to Romeo when she awakes is ‘Where am I? Defend me!’ (Bevington “et al” 301), fulfilling the role of the helpless female awaiting rescue by her leading man.

It was during this run that another popular revival took place. In September 1750, whilst Garrick was performing as Romeo at Drury Lane, the actor Spranger Barry, performed *his* adaption at the nearby Covent Garden theatre. A comparison of the two ‘rival’ Romeo’s performances can be found in Gamino Salgado’s *Eyewitnesses of Shakespeare, first Hand Accounts of Performances 1590-1890*. Salgado quotes Francis Gentleman who wrote a comparison of both performances for *The Dramatic Censor*:

Having seen this play three times at each house, during the contention, and having held the critical scale in as just an equilibrium as possible, but not only my own feelings but those of the audience in general, I perceived that Mr Garrick commanded most applause – Mr Barry most tears: desirous of tracing this difference to its source; I found that as dry sorrow drinks our blood, so astonishment checks our tears; that by a kind of electrical merit Mr Garrick struck all hearts with a degree of inexpressible feeling, and bore conception so far beyond her usual sphere that softer sensations lay hid in wonder (Salgado 190-191).

The author of the piece makes much of the two actors being rivals in the role of Romeo. He offers comparisons of their looks, ‘Mr Barry had a peculiar advantage in this point; his amorous harmony of features, melting eyes, and unequalled plaintiveness of voice, seemed to promise everything we could wish’ (Salgado 189). He praises Garrick for ‘the vivacity of his countenance, and the fire of his expression’ (Salgado 189) and goes as far as to judge who was better in each individual act. What is very noticeable, and in keeping with Carolyn Brown’s comments, is that although there is a great deal about the actors who played Romeo, there is not a single word about the actresses in the role of Juliet: George Anne Bellamy opposite Garrick, and Mrs Cibber opposite Barry. It is evident that Romeo was regarded as the key role within the play and the critical success or failure of the production was measured against the leading man’s singular performance. It is therefore ironic that in the next notable revival of the play, the role of Romeo was played by a woman.

Charlotte Cushman (1816-76) really demands to be allocated far more space in the history of *Romeo and Juliet* than the limitations of this thesis can afford. Her decades long portrayal of Romeo, opposite various women cast as Juliet, plays a central role in matters relating to sexuality, gender, censorship, and social morality in Shakespeare in the Victorian age. Cushman was also the key figure in reinstating Shakespeare's original text on the London stage. The fact that Cushman was a woman playing Romeo is not of paramount importance in itself. Lisa Merrill points out that this was not a unique situation and that other women had played male Shakespearean roles prior to this. Sarah Siddons had famously played Hamlet (Merrill 113), Ellen Tree Kean had played Romeo (Merrill 113) as had Ann Waring Sefton, with whom Cushman had previously acted (Merrill 285). Cushman had also worked with Mrs Hamblin Shaw who, in addition to playing Romeo, had starred as Hamlet opposite Cushman's own Gertrude (Merrill 285). Jill Levenson points out that there had already been a number of female Romeos and at least sixteen actresses performed the role in the United States during the mid-nineteenth century (Levenson 32). Cushman's portrayal of Romeo at the Haymarket Theatre London in December 1845 caused a sensation, but it was not the first time she had played the role, having made her debut as Romeo in Albany in 1837 (Merrill 41). The performance in London years later, however, was notable for a number of other reasons. Firstly, it was this run that ended Garrick's own reworking of *Romeo and Juliet*. Cushman, however, had not been averse to using Garrick's version herself. Levenson points out that of her previous performances 'evidence hints that she employed the Garrick script' (Levenson 33). Levenson details that Cushman had first tried out Shakespeare's text for a performance in Southampton on 20th December 1845, some nine days before she performed it in London (Levenson 33). It is not conclusive which version of

Shakespeare's text she used although Levenson notes that 'One admiring but unidentifiable review, 13 January 1846, in Cushman's scrap-book at the Library of Congress, suggests that she consulted the first Quarto itself (Levenson 33).

Cushman's return to Shakespeare's text meant that much which had been presented within the play for almost a hundred years, and had proven to be popular, was suddenly cut. As Levenson noted, 'Cushman's production restored the Shakespearean plot...Garrick's additions – the lovers' final dialogue, Juliet's funeral scene, the dirge – disappear, accompanied by their pathetic sentiments' (Levenson 33).

This return to Shakespeare's text was met with some hostility from the Haymarket actors at the time. Merrill writes that during rehearsals they objected to those who 'insisted on following Shakespeare's original text instead of the familiar, watered-down David Garrick version of the play that they were accustomed to performing' (Merrill 114). In order to placate the players, the manager of the theatre released a statement saying that the reason for the change back to the original text 'was because one Miss Cushman could not bring another Miss Cushman out of the tomb' (Merrill 114). The reference to 'another Miss Cushman' relates to Susan, Charlotte Cushman's younger sister, who was playing Juliet. The play was a huge success, with *The Times* reporting 'it is enough to say that the Romeo of Miss Cushman is far superior to any Romeo that has been seen for years' (Merrill 115). Cushman's importance lies also in her sexuality and how this, in turn, was perceived by the press at the time. That Cushman was gay is well documented today, but such matters were not deemed appropriate for the readers of Victorian newspapers and so this scenario was carefully avoided. By all accounts, Cushman's Romeo was full of passion. Henry Chorley wrote, 'Never was courtship more fervent, more apparently sincere, more reverential, and yet more impetuously passionate' (Merrill 116). This

passion, however, was interpreted as being nullified on the grounds that Charlotte was a woman. In fact, in keeping with the widely held belief that any expression of passion between a man and a woman was both improper and immoral, Merrill writes that 'in many ways being a female Romeo was an asset' (Merrill 124). Merrill points out that since nineteenth-century 'respectable' women were generally believed to be sexually chaste, any expression of passion on stage between Cushman's Romeo and her sister's Juliet was likely to be taken as innocent. Any passion perceived on stage was likely to be excused on the grounds that this was merely a 'performance of gender' (Merrill 124). Any suggestion of moral transgression could be easily dismissed on two grounds; that what was witnessed on stage was taking place between the fictional characters of Romeo and Juliet and not between the corporeal entities of a 'real' man and a 'real' woman. Furthermore, the possibility of any sexual passion existing between these fictional characters was further diminished by having the characters played by two sisters, who were themselves interpretations of the aforementioned entities of a 'man' and a 'woman'. This was an innocent portrayal of a pure love suitable for respectable Victorian audiences and devoid of immorality or lust. The critic of *The Britannia* was even driven to write, 'females may together give us an image of the desire of the lovers of Verona without suggesting a thought of vice' (Merrill 124). This denial of any 'real' ardour between the characters meant that where Romeo was afforded an *imitation* of passion, which had been purified through the stage performance of a woman, Juliet was *denied* passion and was pushed further into the persona of a chaste, romantic interest. This idealisation of a benign, passive Juliet, existing solely as the purest of love interests of a romantic, passionless Romeo was one that was reinforced throughout the Victorian age and was found in various representations in art and literature.

Romantic paintings of Romeo and Juliet by such artists as Ford Maddox Brown and Sir Frank Dicksee fed this image and sat comfortably alongside such Victorian writing as Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare: Designed for the use of Young Persons* (1807) and Caroline Maxwell's *The Juvenile Edition of Shakespeare: Adapted to the Capacities of Youth*. These popular interpretations introduced Juliet as an impractical and piteous young girl in a world largely bereft of the moral, psychological and tragic complexities of Shakespeare's text. Another work of fiction which proved to be popular was Mary Cowden Clarke's *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* (1850-2) which satisfied the Victorians' boundless appetite for melodramatic romantic fiction and which saw Shakespeare's heroines given such descriptive titles as *The Rose of Elsinore*, for Ophelia and *The White Dove of Verona*, for Juliet. However, the most significant 'retelling' of Shakespeare's characters and plays was the *Characteristics of Women: Moral, Political and Historical* by Anna Brownell Jamieson. This was primarily a treatise on the characteristics of women in contemporary 19th century society and used the supposed idealized characteristics of Shakespeare's heroines as a template for their behaviour. In this, Jamieson writes of Juliet:

The love that is so chaste and dignified in Portia- so airy-delicate, and fearless in Miranda – so sweetly confiding in Perdita – so playfully fond in Rosalind – so fervent in Helen - so tender in Viola - is each and all of these in Juliet (Jamieson 91).

The celebrated actress, Ellen Terry (1847 -1928), had her own forthright view on how the character should be played. Terry enjoyed a long and successful career on the stage playing many of the great Shakespearean roles and was for many years in theatrical partnership with Sir Henry Irving at the Lyceum Theatre. Here she played such parts as Portia (1879), Beatrice (1882), Juliet (1882), Lady Macbeth (1888), Queen Katharine (1892), Imogen (1896), Volumnia (1901), Ophelia (1878), Desdemona (1881), and Cordelia (1892) (Britannica.com, “Ellen Terry”, 2013. Web). As an esteemed actress of the Victorian era, Terry gives us an invaluable insight into how Shakespeare’s women were portrayed on stage in the 19th century before being sealed in celluloid in the 20th. This insight is of use because, although early film versions of *Romeo and Juliet* are hermetically sealed in that they are a permanent record of what was filmed at a particular point in time, they are not hermetically pure. By that I mean that in addition to recording a particular performance, they also allow us a glimpse of the influences upon that performance. Because the film industry was so new, it automatically drew on the knowledge of what had gone before. John Collick refers to this issue and quotes from Robert Hamilton in the introduction of his work, *Shakespeare Cinema & Society*. He writes

One persistent criticism that is levelled at early films is their ‘theatricality. The directors of the first Shakespeare movies are especially liable to attack for their ‘unfortunate misunderstanding of their medium which led to unoriginal reproduction without proper transformation, of stage action and stage business’ (Collick 7).

Terry was direct about how the role of Juliet should and should not be played on stage. Judith Cook quotes Terry stating how she despised the ‘vulgar idea of Juliet - that the all-beautiful and heaven-gifted child is a lovesick girl in white satin’ (Cook 89). Instead, she brought focus to Juliet’s courage:

She is fearless when she marries Romeo, fearless when he is banished and she has to face dangers and difficulties alone ...during the brief time between her marriage and her death, her situation is indeed terrible but it does not break her spirit (Cook 89).

Despite this impassioned and articulate defence of Shakespeare’s Juliet, history shows that as the Victorian stage gave way to silent film, portrayals of Juliet echoed the popular romanticism formed in the Victorian age. Films that were made without sound had to rely on imagery and so Juliet became synonymous with the image of a pretty girl on a balcony.

A detailed examination of the numerous silent versions of *Romeo and Juliet* that were made between 1900 and Cukor’s Hollywood film in 1936 is a fascinating field of study. It was normal for early silent movies to last no more than a single reel, so Shakespeare ‘films’ at this time were really not much more than a visual tableaux, intended to bring respectability to the relatively new science of cinema. It was also helpful to early film makers that Shakespeare was not copyrighted and so his plays were ideal for filming. It was not until 1908 that something more approaching a serious attempt to film the story was made. This was Vitagraph’s *Romeo and Juliet*, starring Paul Panzer as Romeo and Florence Lawrence as Juliet. (**Figure 3**). Judith Buchanan refers to a promotional pamphlet released by Vitagraph in 1911 that carried

a version of the company's mission statement, 'The Vitagraph Company is noted for its elaborate feature films, sparing no amount of pains and expense in their production.' (Buchanan 107). Buchanan adds that Vitagraph believed 'their films were to be known not just as entertainment but as pictures simultaneously able to perform a socially edifying function – to inform, educate and inspire' (Buchanan 108). The 1908 Vitagraph is notable for being a more serious attempt in filming the story. Robert Hamilton Ball notes that it was advertised with the statement, 'This, the most beautiful of Shakespeare's plays, has been magnificently staged, gorgeously costumed and superbly acted by a large and competent cast' (Ball 44). This film was 915 feet in length and lasted approximately fifteen minutes. This approach was in contrast to many of the silent shorts being filmed around this time where the instantly recognisable balcony scene meant *Romeo and Juliet* was ripe for short comedy interpretations. Sometimes the content had little nothing to do with the play and so we find such gems as *Romeo Turns Bandit* (1910) (Ball 115), and even *Romeo and Juliet at the Seaside* (1910), (Ball 115). Ball also lists an animated version: *Romeo and Juliet* (1919), in which a cartoon Charlie Chaplin plays Romeo trying to woo a cartoon Mary Pickford as Juliet (Ball 265). It was not until 1916, the three hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare's death, that an attempt was made to make a true feature film of the tragedy. In fact, there were two such films made that year and they were made in competition, or as Ball put it, 'The houses of Metro and Fox from ancient grudge now broke to new mutiny' (Ball 236).

Metro's film was a lavish and spectacular production designed as a star vehicle for Francis X. Bushman, who was a huge star at the time. He was the first person to be given the nickname 'The King of the Movies' and although this title eventually passed to Clarke Gable, it was engraved on Bushman's gravestone

(IMDB.com “Biography for Francis X Bushman”, 2013 Web). Bushman’s co-star was Beverley Bayne (**Figure 4**). Her performance was described in the Moving Picture World as follows: ‘Miss Bayne is a rare Juliet. Kindly endowed by nature in figure and feature, she has entered into the interpretation of the role of the heroine with marked sympathy and feeling’ (Ball 237). Judith Buchanan notes that this version of the story, released on October 22nd, 1916, ran to ‘an unprecedented eight reels’ (Buchanan 203).

Fox’s film starred Theda Bara as Juliet (**Figure 5**). Bara was a major star at the time and one of Fox’s most bankable actresses. This being the case, the film was designed as a star vehicle for her. Advertising for the film focused on Bara at the expense of her co-star, Harry Hilliard, and many advertising Posters carried her name, and her name alone, in promoting the film (**Figure 6**). Bara’s previous big success had been in *A Fool There Was*, the year previously. In that film she was billed simply as ‘The Vampire’, and played the part of a predatory woman who seduced and ruined men (IMD.com “A Fool There Was” 2013.Web). Ball notes that Bara was photographed with ‘skulls and snakes and labelled “vamp” from this point onwards’ (Ball 239). (**Figure 7**) In keeping with her image as a sex symbol at the time, Bara declared in a signed statement designed to generate publicity for her film, that ‘Juliet lived in a period of passionate abandon. Italy, in the days of Romeo and Juliet, was no place for a Sunday school girl’ (Ball 240). After her venture into Shakespeare, Bara returned to the role of femme fatale in such films as *Cleopatra*, *DuBarry* and *Salome* (Ball 239). In what Judith Buchanan describes as a ‘strategic coincidence’ the Fox version of *Romeo and Juliet*, which was a shorter film at five reels, was also released on October 22nd, 1916 (Buchanan 206).

Both versions of *Romeo and Juliet*, being of the silent era, were shot using nitrate film. As with so many films from this period, all copies of each version are now 'lost'. This being the case, it is almost impossible to give a definite assessment of how these two versions align to each other and how each film reflected and interpreted Shakespeare's play. Judith Buchanan explores this point thoroughly and is able to identify certain aspects of each of these important films. From her research Buchanan is able to confirm that, in a move that preceded Baz Luhrmann by eighty years, the Fox version had Juliet (Bara) awaken before Romeo dies (Buchanan 207). Buchanan also writes of Bara 'kissing the bottle of poison sensuously and extracting it later from her cleavage' (Buchanan 211). As the first feature films made of *Romeo and Juliet*, each of these films are of tremendous importance but it would appear, from what has been written, that each film treated Juliet as an idealised male fantasy, albeit at opposite ends of the spectrum. Bayne's Juliet appears to have continued the way of the Victorian ideal, passive, benign, and sympathetic. Her Juliet is the chaste object of Bushman's devotion, a fetching ornament to decorate the set whilst not upstaging her male co-star. Bara's Juliet, in contrast, appears to be the opposite of this. Buchanan notes that the popular contemporary publication, *Motion Picture World*, reported that both productions were playing to full houses and were even 'turning people away' (Buchanan 213). The fact that both films are now 'lost' is a genuine blow to the history of *Romeo and Juliet* on film. As it turned out, it would be another twenty years before another feature length *Romeo and Juliet* would be filmed and made available to a mainstream cinema audience and it is here that we begin the major part of our study.

Chapter One

1936 - Juliet in the Modern Age

Claire Colebrook, in her book, *Gender*, questions the status of gender before and after modernity. She raises important issues concerning the essence of gender and sexuality and whether or not it is ‘essential or conventional, grounded in the world or produced through culture’ (Colebrook, 115). Colebrook stresses the point that this is not just a question that has various answers historically but is also, of itself, a historically specific question. Colebrook’s reasoning can be transposed so that it can also be made within the period of film making that occurred after the introduction of sound. This period, from the late 1920s onwards can be viewed as the cinematic equivalent of modernity. The dawning of the age of cinematic modernity was fundamental in creating an idealisation of gender reflected in the contemporary social reality of the time. Whilst there is much to explore on how cinema has, over the decades, done little more than present women in general as a collection of the various stereotypes mentioned in the introduction, given the constraints of this thesis I will be focusing on how commercial cinema, specifically Western cinema, has shaped and reduced Shakespeare’s Juliet and moulded her to exist within the predetermined margins of this ideology. We must examine how and why this occurred.

Sarah Werner, in her book *Shakespeare and Feminist Performance*, quotes Alan Sinfield when she writes ‘The answer to Sinfield’s Riddle, “When is a character not a character?” is “when he or she is needed to shore up a patriarchal representation”’ (Werner, 34). In Shakespeare’s play, when Romeo sees Juliet for the first time at the Capulet ball, he speaks the line; “O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright” (1:5:43)

The line is used to express Juliet's incandescent beauty and although this is suggestive of a Petrarchan sonnet inasmuch as it expresses an idealised love for an unobtainable and ethereal object of desire, it can also be taken as an indication that Juliet, like the flame of a torch, is also a generative source. This is because Juliet is responsible for much of what is central to the play. Indeed, it is Juliet, and not Romeo, who drives the narrative, and she does this by her own actions, not by occasioning the actions of a male protagonist as happens in the case of other tragic heroines such as Desdemona or Ophelia. It is Juliet who decides that the lovers should marry, it is Juliet who openly defies her family, and it is Juliet who displays great courage by firstly drinking the potion that mimics death and finally by plunging the dagger into her body which induces the actuality of death itself. Whilst there is a strong argument for decrying how cinema has presented little more than a collection of clichéd and aberrant caricatures to embody the role of women in society, there is at least an equal perspective which asserts that Shakespeare's Juliet is the antithesis of this convention. Anna Brownell Jamieson expounded upon Juliet's character with the words, 'in her bosom love keeps a fiery vigil, kindling tenderness into enthusiasm, enthusiasm into passion and passion into heroism' (Jamieson 95). These characteristics are largely missing from the 1936 film. Instead, we are presented with a Juliet who matched seamlessly the cinematic ideology of femininity at the time of the film was released. This depiction of Juliet by Norma Shearer in MGM's 1936 film was the first commercial western version in the era of cinematic sound. As Frank S. Nugent, writing a commentary for the *New York Times* stated, 'There is no precedent for his version, no stage or screen tradition to guide us in our consideration of the picture. Logically, if not chronologically, it is the first Shakespearean photoplay' (Nugent, 12). Metro Goldwyn Mayer went to some lengths to emphasise this claim. As part of a

huge publicity campaign, a twenty-five cent souvenir brochure was sold exclusively in theatres that were showing the film. The brochure was very ornate and projected a sense of cinematic grandeur. In addition to this, its contents served to give the film a self-serving historical licence. The brochure was of magazine size, twelve inches by nine inches, but printed on high quality card. It contained a number of articles about the story of *Romeo and Juliet*, the making of the film, and numerous photos of the stars alongside a series of monochrome reproductions of key scenes in the film. In a further attempt to promote a small sense of luxurious exclusivity, a note was printed on the back cover in which it is referred to as a book, not a magazine or a brochure. Alongside this was a note stating it could only be sold in theatres showing the film. Inside the brochure was a central photograph of Norma Shearer surrounded by eight smaller photographs of notable actresses who had each played the role of Juliet on stage. These included: Julia Arthur; Mary Anderson; Mrs Patrick Campbell, and Maude Adams. Although these actresses were highlighted for their previous interpretations of the role, it was Shearer who was afforded the telling narrative, ‘The first screen Juliet, 1936’. (Anon, MGM *Romeo and Juliet*, 1936) (**Figure 9**). This statement echoes Nugent’s earlier claim that whilst this is chronologically incorrect, it was logical to accept it as such for cinematic audiences of the time. MGM’s 1936 Hollywood production, however, was clearly not the first version of the film to be made for a western cinematic audience. Neither was it the first feature length version of the play, nor the first to have a major Hollywood star in a lead role, being preceded by the two major silent productions of 1916. In fact, the 1936 version was not even the first time Norma Shearer had played the part of Juliet on screen. She and John Gilbert acted out the balcony scene in MGM’s *Hollywood Revue of 1929*, (**Figure 10**) a plotless and episodic film designed to showcase the studio’s stars in a variety of

roles. The film was made for theatrical release in America only and was part of an agenda to promote the transition to sound in movies. Shearer's balcony scene was played firstly as a serious interpretation of Shakespeare's text and then played a second time as a comedic update, using modern dialogue and renamed *The Neckers*. The director in the scene was played by Lionel Barrymore, whose younger brother, John, would later play the part of Mercutio in 1936. The film itself is difficult to obtain but the balcony scene clip was recently posted on YouTube (Hollywood Revue 1929, Web). So there is no doubt that, chronologically speaking, the 1936 film cannot in any way be described as the first film adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*. Nugent's claim regarding the 'logic' of the claim, however, stands up well to scrutiny.

A New Genre

Julie Sanders, in her book *Adaptation and Appropriation*, states that adaptation is 'a specific process involving the transition from one genre to another' (Sanders 19). The medium of film had been around for some time but that same medium had itself recently undergone a pivotal change with the introduction of sound. This fact meant that film could not only expand upon what had gone before, but it could offer a brand new form of adaptation. On this point, Colin MacCabe refers to Andre Bazin and Francois Truffaut in his book *True to the Spirit: Film Adaptation and the Question of Fidelity*. He refers to Truffaut's interpretation and expansion of Bazin's earlier work on the adaptation of text to film. MacCabe examines cinema's ability to produce 'a completely new kind of adaptation that claims that the source material is being faithfully translated into a new medium' (MacCabe 5). He claims that Bazin was someone who understood this most clearly and it was his insight that the combination of a source text and film produced an ideal construct and that this 'was not the copy of

one medium by another or a substitution but the production of “a new dimension” (MacCabe 6). Truffaut, according to MacCabe, was heavily influenced by Bazin’s writings and argued that there existed the means of producing a new form of adaptation ‘in which film develops and expands on the source text’ (MacCabe 6). The pivotal change in the medium of film with the introduction of sound meant that the medium was, in effect, a completely new version of itself. Nugent was correct in stating that there had been no precedent for the 1936 film. A possible comparison of seismic change that could be made with the introduction of sound in film would be with the introduction of stage lighting in the 19th century, a point examined by Sarah Hatchuel in *Shakespeare From Stage to Screen*. Hatchuel states that the introduction of gaslight in 1817 and then electric limelight, from 1885 onwards, completely transformed stage performances. ‘It allowed the actors to be seen perfectly even at the back of the stage, and focused the spectators’ concentration in a way unmatched until then’ (Hatchuel 11).

MGM’s film, through the introduction of sound, completely transformed film performances in the 20th century. It showed that a new dimension in adaptation of one of Shakespeare’s most popular plays had been reached. This ‘new dimension’ meant that not only could Shakespeare’s language be heard by a cinema audience, but that the projection and diction of that language would be markedly different from that used in a stage production. This point is explored by Roger Manvell in his book *Shakespeare and the Film*. Manvell quotes from a debate on 23rd October 1936 in which George Bernard Shaw spoke on the speaking of Shakespeare’s language in film. When asked if he thought if it were possible to do justice to Shakespeare’s verse through the medium of film, Shaw’s answer was quite illuminating;

I should go so far as to say that you can do things with the microphone that you cannot do on the ordinary stage. I want again to emphasise the fact that you are dealing with a new instrument and that in speaking on the screen you can employ nuances and delicacies of expression which would be no use spoken by an actor on the ordinary stage in the ordinary way (Manvell 33).

There is also room to argue that the 1936 film was not only unprecedented in adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet*, but also that it could be considered the first ‘proper’ adaptation of any Shakespearean film in the modern age. This is despite the fact that Max Reinhardt’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* had been released a year earlier in 1935 and Sam Taylor’s *The Taming of the Shrew* six years prior to that, in 1929. Courtney Lehmann discusses this point when she writes;

Romeo and Juliet seemed predestined to make history as the Hollywood studio system’s first ‘legitimate’ Shakespearean masterpiece of the sound era. From Thalberg’s purist perspective, earlier adaptations did not qualify as truly ‘Shakespearean’: the Pickford/Fairbanks *Taming of the Shrew* (1929), for example, relied too heavily on interpolated dialogue;³ likewise the Reinhardt/Dieterie (1935) *Midsummer Night’s Dream* compromised its status by casting contract actors who had no classical training, such as James Cagney and Mickey Rooney (Lehmann 87).

There is no doubt that the 1936 film was a new form of adaptation and historically important from that perspective but we must also look at the origins of the film, the

³ There is a popular belief that the film has the credit ‘Additional Dialogue by Sam Taylor’ but the credit actually states ‘Adaptation and Direction by Sam Taylor’

purpose behind its inception, and the constraints, social, technical and political that shaped it and how that, in turn, shaped future presentations of Juliet in years to come.

The production of *Romeo and Juliet* had been championed by Irving Thalberg who had intended the film as a star vehicle for Shearer, his wife. To this end, he had telephoned studio executive Howard Dietz and suggested making the film with Norma Shearer as Juliet. Roland Flamini, in his biography of Thalberg, writes that Thalberg convinced Dietz that Shakespeare was not box office poison and that with Shearer playing the lead, “it will be a cinch” (Flamini 218). Thalberg’s proposal was, crucially, supported by Louis B. Mayer and so the film was given the green light. The timing of the film, however, was to coincide with events which were to prove enormously important to Hollywood in general and to Shearer’s Juliet in particular. The hierarchy of Hollywood in the personages of Irvine Thalberg, Norma Shearer, and Louis B. Mayer were, within a very short time, to come into direct conflict with the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in America, and this would result in an uneasy alliance that was overseen by the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA). This was to have a profound effect on both the actress playing Juliet, as well as how the character was depicted on screen. These are two concurrent but nonetheless separate issues and so an element of detachment is necessary when examining them in detail. Censorship, up to and including what became commonly referred to as The Hays Code, is often restricted to little more than a footnote in studies of Cukor’s 1936 film, but I would argue that its influence and power were so strong and manipulative that it demands much closer examination. Only then will we fully understand the presentation of Juliet within the 1936 film and, subsequently, those versions which were to follow.

Censorship

The strict adherence to the ‘Hays Code’ and its overwhelming influence in the 1930s as the film industry’s accepted censor in the United States, a position it would hold for over thirty years, marks the 1936 film as significantly different from other adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet*. The subject of censorship in Hollywood during this period is examined in detail in Stephen Tropiano’s book, *Obscene, Indecent, Immoral, and Offensive – 100 Years of Censored, Banned and Controversial Film*, which is recommended reading for anyone with a particular interest in this field. Tropiano devotes the entire second chapter, ‘Movies, Morality, and (Self-) Regulation of the Hollywood Film Industry’ to detailing the origins, influence and development of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA). He explains that MPPDA had been in existence for a number of years, and had itself succeeded a series of self-regulating but ultimately ineffective or ignored bodies. It began to have a considerable impact on film production only from 1934 onwards. Will Hays (1879 - 1954) had been appointed in 1922 as president of the new, industry sponsored, MPPDA.

The MPPDA’s purpose was twofold: to improve the image of Hollywood which had suffered public scandal, due partly to the Roscoe ‘Fatty’ Arbuckle rape case in 1921; and, more importantly, to protect and promote Hollywood’s ties with Washington. This second point came about partly as a consequence of a Supreme Court Case in 1915, of the Mutual Film Corporation versus the Industrial Commission of Ohio (236 US 230). The case centred on the protection of free speech within the Ohio constitution which was deemed to be very similar in concept and structure to the First Amendment to the US Constitution. This was that Congress shall not make or

pass any law abridging the freedom of speech. The interpretation of the meaning of the word 'speech' was to prove crucial as it was argued that it could be both visual and non-verbal and should include 'silent' movies. In the end, the Supreme Court ruled by 9-0 that the movie industry was a business that was conducted for profit and as such, could not be considered an equal to the press, or as an organ of public opinion. It ruled that the movie industry could be used for evil and therefore they deemed that censorship of movies could not be deemed as being beyond the government's duty (Mutual Film Corp.v Industrial Commission of Ohio, 2013,Web). The MPPDA were essentially self-governing and had no comprehensive legal endorsement to force censorship on films and existed largely as a means of deflecting the threat of government censorship. This lack of legal accountability meant that, in reality, the MPPDA was in a position to exert as much, or as little, control as they saw fit. On paper, the MPPDA did a satisfactory job. Hays adopted a code of conduct that had been devised by two people: a Jesuit priest, Daniel J. Lord, and Martin Quigley, editor of the trade paper *The Motion Picture Herald*. Hays worked with both Lord and Quigley and the heads of several film studios, including Irving Thalberg, and after a few amendments, the code was officially accepted in 1930. A key stipulation of the code was to avoid the interference of government censorship. The year 1934, however, saw a major change in how the already existing regulations were enforced after a series of films were passed that exceeded the provisions of the code, but which proved to be box office successes. *Public Enemy* (1931) starred James Cagney as a sexually amoral, emotionally disturbed, violent racketeer with a disconcerting mother fixation. Cagney's portrayal was, nonetheless, magnetic and this, combined with the luxurious lifestyle of his character, was seen by committed supporters of the code to condone a criminal way of life. *Red Headed Woman* (1932) starred Jean Harlow, who

ruins the marriage of the son of her wealthy boss. She also enjoys a sexual relationship with him before they themselves were married. Later she indulges in a series of affairs, which includes an elderly family friend (60) who is also the family chauffeur. This was seen as endangering marriage, encouraging sex before marriage, and as promoting sexual favours as a means of advancement in society. *Baby Face* (1933) starred Barbara Stanwyck as a seductive and sexually predatory woman who sleeps her way, floor by floor, from the basement to the boardroom in the banking world.

What is often overlooked by students of the 1936 *Romeo and Juliet* is that during this period, Norma Shearer herself had often played a sexually adventurous and seductively dressed woman. In fact, Shearer's sex appeal was used to promote her films through the release of press and publicity material that showed her in an array of gowns that were seductive, alluring and designed to show the curves of her body (**Figure 11**). Many of these costumes were created by MGM costume designer, Gilbert Adrian, who would later design her outfits in *Romeo and Juliet*. In the film *A Free Soul* (1931), Shearer starred with her future Romeo, Leslie Howard, in which she plays an independent woman who chooses to have a sexual affair with a gangster (played by Clark Gable in his breakout role). In *Strangers May Kiss* (1931) Shearer starred as a woman who has a relationship with a man who, unknown to her, is married. When he leaves the country to go back to his wife, she leaves for Europe where she engages a string of lovers to help her forget. In *Their Own Desire* (1929) Shearer starred as a daughter who is initially angry at her father divorcing in order to marry a younger woman, but who herself ends up having a relationship with the woman's own son (played by Robert Montgomery). The film is notable mainly for the succession of sleek Adrian evening gowns worn by Shearer and also for the fact that,

although nominated for a best actress Oscar, Shearer lost out to herself that year when she won for her role in *The Divorcee*. Shearer's choice of roles and her projected sexuality was noted in an article in TIME magazine in 1931; regarding the performances and influence of America's leading actresses, it stated:

If, as is generally supposed, the cinema has an important influence upon the behavior of cinemaddicts [sic], there will presently be a large increase in the total number of U. S. strumpets. Norma Shearer, Constance Bennett, Elissa Landi, Helen Hayes, Claudette Colbert, Tallulah Bankhead, Evelyn Brent, Greta Garbo, Ruth Chatterton, Marlene Dietrich and Genevieve Tobin have all in recent pictures attractively performed functions ranging from noble prostitution to carefree concupiscence. . . . prove that the typical 1931 cinema heroine is a bad example (TIME.com Cinema- New Pictures 1931, Web)

According to Searle Kochberg, these films and many of the same genre, resulted in the Catholic Church in America forming the 'Legion of Decency', whose 'oath of obedience' not to attend condemned films was recited by millions across the country during Sunday Mass (Kochberg 42). In this, Kochberg is only partly correct. The 'oath' was actually a pledge, which was signed not recited. Pledge cards were made available in churches and the congregation were asked to sign up. The tone of the pledge was quite definite and contained, amongst others, the following comments:

I wish to join the Legion of Decency, which condemns vile and unwholesome moving pictures. . . . I condemn absolutely those salacious motion pictures, which, with other degrading agencies, are corrupting public morals and promoting a sex mania in our land. I shall do all I can to arouse public opinion against the portrayal of vice as a normal condition of affairs, and against

depicting criminals of any class as heroes and heroines.... Considering these evils, I hereby promise to remain away from all motion pictures except those which do not offend decency and Christian morality. I promise further to secure as many members as possible for the Legion of Decency. (Tropiano 287-288)

The Legion later changed the oath to a more ecumenical wording in order to encourage members from other churches to join, and changed its title from *The Catholic Legion of Decency* to *The National Legion of Decency*. A new wording was incorporated which moved away from merely protesting about and objecting to certain films, to actually promising to boycott them and the buildings in which they were shown:

I condemn all indecent and immoral motion pictures, and those which glorify crime or criminals. I promise to do all that I can to strengthen public opinion against the production of indecent and immoral films, and to unite with all who protest against them. I acknowledge my obligation to form a right conscience about pictures that are dangerous to my moral life. I pledge myself to remain away from them. I promise, further, to stay away altogether from places of amusement which show them as a matter of policy (Tropiano 288).

Although it may be difficult to comprehend in today's modern age, the influence of the Legion of Decency cannot be underestimated in this matter. It was to prove to be one of the most important factors in Hollywood for decades to come and was pivotal in how women would be portrayed in films during this time. Tropiano explains how The Legion was founded by the Archbishop of Cincinnati, John T. McNicholas.

Although an Archbishop of the Catholic Church, and Irish by birth, McNicholas saw

himself also as a patriotic American and reminded his congregation during the 1928 election that US Catholics owed no civil allegiance to the Vatican State. Tropiano writes that although McNicholas saw his work for the benefit of all Americans, it was at the urging of the Apostolic Delegate to the US, Amleto Cicognani, in 1933 that he began the organisation. This is traced to a speech made by Monsignor Cicognani (October 1st 1933) to over four thousand delegates at a Catholic Charities Convention in New York. In the speech Monsignor Cicognani spoke passionately of how he felt a decadent and immoral movie industry was having a negative effect on society in general and on Catholics in particular. His speech proposed a call for direct action as the moral duty of all Catholics:

An example in our day is moving pictures, with its incalculable influence for evil. What a massacre of the innocence of youth is taking place hour by hour! How shall the crimes that have their direct source in immoral motion pictures be measured? Catholics are called by God, the Pope, the Bishops and the priests to a united and vigorous campaign for the purification of the cinema, which has become a deadly menace to morals (Tropiano77).

The impression taken from this speech was that it was a directive from Rome for all Catholics to act in accordance with what was said. As Tropiano explains, the fact of the matter was that the speech did not come from Rome but from the Monsignor himself, and the section quoted above was actually written and inserted by Joseph Breen, a former journalist, diplomat and active member of the Catholic Church. The Legion's target was to reach out to America's twenty-two million Catholics (Tropiano 79), along with anyone of Protestant or Jewish faiths who wished to join. For all its intentions to influence the film industry, The Legion may well have struggled to

muster widespread support in its infancy had it not been for a seemingly unimportant article written about it in *TIME* that was, in due course, to result in a swelling of the Legion's ranks and a hardening of its attitude towards Hollywood. The article stated that 'Their journals have crusaded. But for all their zeal the churches have accomplished very little. Last week, led by members of the Roman Catholic Church, they were embarked on a new crusade, brandishing a new weapon—the boycott' (TIME.com "Legion of Decency, 11th June 1934, Web). The article stated that The Legion had condemned the films *The Trumpet Blows* starring George Raft; *Finishing School*, starring Frances Dee; *Glamour*, starring Paul Lukas and Constance Cummings; and *Riptide*, which starred Norma Shearer as a married woman who has an affair with an old flame. This unremarkable and largely forgotten film riled The Legion to such an extent that they saw fit to make a direct attack on both Norma Shearer and her husband, Irvine Thalberg. This, in turn, set off a series of actions and counteractions that were to have a direct effect on Hollywood in general, and on the 1936 version of *Romeo and Juliet* in particular. The article mentioned a poster that had appeared in numerous Catholic churches a fortnight earlier. The poster expressed the view that *Riptide* was:

unfortunately typical of the pictures that have been built around Norma Shearer, the much publicized wife of Irving Thalberg who picks her plays and her roles. It seems typical of Hollywood morality that a husband as production manager should constantly cast his charming wife in the role of a loose and immoral woman....We advise strong guard over all pictures which feature Norma Shearer... Protest...Protest. (TIME.com "Legion of Decency, 11th June 1934, Web).

In this the poster was only partially accurate; Shearer was exclusively a film actress and had never appeared on the Hollywood or Broadway stage, although it was true Thalberg did exercise substantial influence in choosing her roles, including that of Juliet. These slight inaccuracies aside, however, the article provoked a direct response from Hollywood producers and the following week the same magazine ran a second story relating the film industry's response to the first article. On Monday June 18th, 1934, *TIME* reported 'After a series of conferences, Hollywood producers were reported last week to be raising \$2,000,000 to educate cinemagoers, by means of paid advertising, against "censorship" and "professional reformers"—i.e. the Legion of Decency sponsored by the Roman Catholic hierarchy' (*TIME.com* "Legion of Decency- Contd", 18th June 1934, Web). The article also highlights how the Catholic hierarchy were encouraging people to register their protest by staying away from all picture houses. Tropiano writes that immediately following this, in July 1934, representatives of Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish clergy converged in New York and voted in favour of spearheading a united, nationwide Legion of Decency. Cardinal Dougherty garnered support within his diocese of Philadelphia with the result that pledge cards were sent to each parish along with a letter from the Cardinal stating that, through Hollywood movies, a "vicious and insidious attack" was being made "on the very foundations of our Christian civilization" (Tropiano 78). In New York, volunteers were enlisted to do door to door in the five boroughs collecting signatures of support, and in Chicago, fifty thousand school children held a mass protest in Michigan Boulevard (Tropiano 79). The boycott produced dramatic results. *TIME* reported the following month that 'Censor Breen's staff will be increased, his powers widened so that his edicts can be vetoed only by the directors of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America'. In the same issue they reported that

‘Philadelphia exhibitors, whose business has been cut up to 40%, begged Denis Cardinal Dougherty to lift the boycott he had urged upon all films’ (TIME.com “Legion of Decency- Contd”, 2nd July 1934, Web). A fortnight later the same magazine reported that the MPPDA, under special convention, reported that any producer who passed a film without Breen’s authorisation would be fined \$25,000. They also reported that in Philadelphia, the Independent Motion Picture Theatre Owners Association threatened to close down their 475 theatres within two weeks unless the boycott was lifted (TIME.com “Cinema: Cardinal’s Campaign”, 16nd July 1934, Web).

These actions led to a stark realisation in Hollywood that there was far more at stake than a debate on film censorship, morality, and freedom of speech. Despite the previous ruling in the Supreme Court Case in 1915 in which it was ruled that censorship of movies could not be deemed as being beyond the government’s duty, this had not occurred and no government film censorship had been introduced. What did occur was that the Legion of Decency organised its members into taking action that proved so effective that the film industry in Hollywood realised that it was in its own interests to coexist with, rather than confront, the Legion’s imposed ideology of censorship. The US government may not have felt that its hegemony was sufficiently under threat to introduce censorship but Hollywood was in a precarious position and could not afford to avoid the matter. In a web article on cinema attendance and political economy for Elon University, North Carolina, Michelle Pautz states that cinema attendances in America had been falling steadily since the onset of the Great Depression. As unemployment in America climbed to 25 %, the movie industry initially escaped much of the hardship as people sought emotional refuge and escapism in the movies. By 1934, however, attendance was declining as economic

conditions worsened. Pautz states that whereas 65% of the American population visited the cinema on a weekly basis in 1930, this had fallen to 40% by 1934 (Pautz, - The Decline in Weekly Cinema Attendance : 1930-2000, 2002, Web). The very real threat of a widespread, sustained boycott was simply not acceptable to Hollywood. It was the need to ward off further financial hardship, *not* an acceptance of responsibility for upholding public morality that was to prove the most effective tool in Hollywood implementing change and acceding to the Legion of Decency. In 1934, a separate censorship body that worked within the confines of the MPPDA was set up under the stewardship of Joseph Breen. This new censorship body was known as the Production Code Administration (PCA) and was in response to ‘the perceived steady decline of moral standards in motion pictures’ (Tropiano 52). Although the PCA was a secular organization, under the stewardship of Joseph Breen it adhered to a moral overview influenced heavily by the Catholic Church. As Tropiano points out, under the heading “General Principles” the PCA stated “No picture shall be produced which will lower moral standards of those who see it. Hence the sympathy of the audience shall never be thrown to the side of crime, wrongdoing, evil or sin” (Tropiano 52-53). It was not the existence of the PCA code *per se* that was to prove so significant for the film industry. There had, after all, been various censorship guidelines in place beginning with ‘The Formula’ in 1924; ‘The Don’ts and Be Carefuls’ of the MPPDA in 1927; and the Motion Picture Production Code (The Hays Code) in 1930. Rather, it was the rapid adherence by those within the film industry to a new form of censorship that came into being without due governmental process or national debate that was to prove so significant. The representative identity of women in Hollywood films was altered from this point onwards and the PCA became one of the most powerful voices within the industry for decades to come.

Dympna Callaghan writes of how ‘Feminist Shakespeareans no longer consider themselves as purely literary scholars but as cultural historians who are especially interested in women’s own representations of themselves’ (Callaghan, introduction xiv). With Joseph Breen implementing strict adherence to a code of Victorian morality, not only were women denied any demonstration or representation of themselves on film, the depiction of women was now encoded to the extent that that they would only exist on film within a narrow spectrum of sanitised idealism that the PCA code endorsed and that Hollywood willingly accepted. PCA endorsement was given at the personal behest of the director, Joseph Breen who signed and issued a certificate as director (Tropiano 56). Breen believed that the code was primarily a moral undertaking. In a letter to a member of the MPPDA, he wrote:

This Code is a moral Code. Its principles, for the most part, are built upon the basic concepts of Natural Law. No other industry, so far as I know, has undertaken to pattern its products in conformity with the basic tenets of decency and morality (Tropiano 58).

This is a revealing admission by Breen. The Natural Law to which he refers is part of the teachings of St Thomas Aquinas, one of the most revered theologians and philosophers in the Catholic Church. Aquinas taught that Natural Law exists in conjunction with Eternal Law. It is both impracticable and unnecessary to enter deeply into the philosophical and theological arguments of Aquinas in this thesis, but a (very) brief summation is helpful.

Aquinas believed that, as part of Natural Law, rulers must rule for the sake of the governed, that is, for the good and well-being of those subject to the ruler. The first practicable role for the ruler is that good should be done and pursued, and evil

avoided (Aquinasonline.com “Thomistic Philosophy Page.” 1999, Web). Humans actively participate in the Eternal Law, the governance of existence, by using reason to discern what is good and what is evil. It is paradoxical that Hays, who had created the MPPDA in order to avoid the interference of governmental censorship, was now giving Joseph Breen, a strict conservative and a man dedicated to implementing the authoritarian morality of the Catholic Church, absolute control over all film content. With Breen at the helm, the PCA became the prefecture of morality *not* legislature. With the adoption of the PCA seal of approval, films for an international audience were not censored or graded according to what they contained, but rather by the interpretation of the intention behind that content and whether or not that intention was ‘good’ or ‘evil’. This ensured that Joseph Breen’s own philosophy, the strict moral codification of the Catholic Church, governed the depiction of women in all Hollywood films. It had been no coincidence that Catholics were asked to take the pledge to the Legion of Decency on December 8th, the feast of the Immaculate Conception (Tropiano 79). With Breen in charge, representations of women were henceforth generally cast in the composite moulds of fidelity, chastity, pre-marital virginity, monogamy, unsurpassed devotion, compassion and submission. This led to the exaltation of sanctified femininity to such an extent that women were placed above nature and above mortality, so that they became both suppressed and venerated at the same time. The speed with which the PCA was fashioned and implemented, and the manner in which it wielded its power, meant that it initiated a practice whereby Hollywood moved to contain, rather than depict, women on film. Hays’ original aim to avoid excessive interference from government had been realised, but in appointing the PCA he had relinquished any constraints of legislative regulation and replaced them with the more restrictive philosophy of Breen’s Victorian morality.

Casting *Romeo and Juliet*

It was within this environment that MGM was building the framework of an ambitious film version of *Romeo and Juliet*. The results were to prove far reaching. The casting of MGM's top female star was crucial to the film being given the green light, but despite her star status Shearer did not, on first consideration, appear to be the most obvious choice for the role. In her mid thirties, she was some twenty years older than the character of Juliet and had just given birth to her second child. She had not performed on stage in a leading role before, nor ever performed in any Shakespeare production. As such, publicity was geared to show that no favouritism had been shown and that Shearer had been given the role purely on merit. On the casting of Juliet, the programme states:

Here a phenomenon occurred that will be more than amusing to film students and fans. Accustomed to the egotistic vagaries of female film stars, film fans would guess that the producer was deluged with offers to play the part of Juliet. Just the opposite happened. In the face of the inevitable comparisons with all the great Juliets of the past, with Sarah Siddons, Mary Anderson, Modjeska, Ellen Terry, and the Katherine Cornells, Jane Cowls and Eva Le Galliennes of the present, the greatest of the film stars hesitated. Fortunately, when the news that Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer was about to film the picture was made public, thousands of letters poured in, insisting that Norma Shearer's work in "The Barretts of Wimpole Street" designated her as the screen's first Juliet (Anon, MGM, *Romeo and Juliet*, 1936).

This was a well-structured piece of PR on a number of levels. Firstly it placed Shearer alongside a list of some of the great stage actresses of the past, as well as more recent,

successful Juliets. The mention of Katherine Cornell was particularly useful because she had starred in the original and highly successful stage version of *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* in New York in 1931, as well as a recent production of *Romeo and Juliet*. The film version of *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* (1934) had been produced by Irving Thalberg. It was nominated for two Oscars: Best Picture and Best Actress in a Leading Role. The programme claims that Shearer, despite her popularity and unquestionable talents as an actress, was told that she would still need to be screen tested for the role, at which point she supposedly asked for a deferment in order to research the part fully. This presents to the public a story of a professional actress intent in researching the Juliet of Shakespeare's text and being determined to give the role the respect and dedication it demands. The souvenir brochure continues to promote Shearer's dedication to researching the role:

Then began one of the most rigorous novitiates since the time of Ignatius of Loyola. Miss Shearer retired into the Italy of the 15th century. She read books on the etiquette of the day, instructions on the deportment of a young girl of the time. She studied the costumes of the period and looked at hundreds of copies of the works of painters of the time. Practically nothing that a girl of 16 (sic) of that day would have thought, known, or done remained foreign to Miss Shearer (Anon, MGM, *Romeo and Juliet*, 1936).

This short extract betrays a great deal of the image that the studio was keen to project. Shearer is portrayed in a framework of studious devotion and innocence. The reference to Ignatius of Loyola is a curious one and was perhaps undertaken to appease Joseph Breen, whose middle name was Ignatius. Ignatius was the founder of the Jesuits, (the *Societatus Jesu* - in English, *The Society of Jesus*), the same Catholic

order that had taught Breen and instilled in him his fierce sense of the need to uphold public morality. The wording also projects an image of Shearer undertaking the training, habits, discipline and self-denial of a strict religious order. In the brochure she is always referred to as Miss Shearer, as that prefix suggested the actress was both a member of the Hollywood elite (where all top stars were habitually prefixed with ‘Mr.’, or ‘Miss’) and retained the qualities of youth and innocence. Here, as elsewhere in publicity material or interviews, when any reference to Juliet’s age is mentioned, the age given is sixteen, not fourteen. We are also informed that after Shearer had researched the part thoroughly ‘her screen test made it impossible for Mr Thalberg to refuse her the part’ (Anon, MGM, *Romeo and Juliet*, 1936). We see also the same fawning attitude to Shearer’s co-star, Leslie Howard as Romeo:

Thousands of screen tests were made all over the world. But the choice inevitably fell on the one man, possibly the greatest romantic actor of our day, Leslie Howard. Curiously enough, he was very reluctant to play the part. He had just finished a picture for another company, and was about to descend on Broadway in a great Shakespearean role, Hamlet (Anon, MGM, *Romeo and Juliet*, 1936).

Howard had, in fact, accepted the role reluctantly; he had never played Shakespeare before and thought himself too old to play Romeo, whom he described as, “A boy, a rather tiresome, headstrong boy at that” (Flamini 246). He agreed because the money he was offered allowed him to finance his own production of Hamlet on Broadway. Howard, despite what was publicised, had not been an automatic choice and succeeded only after others had turned down the role. Thalberg had originally wanted a British actor to play the part and chose Brian Aherne, whom he held under a

personal contract to himself (Flamini 246). Aherne screen-tested for the role but thought himself too old for the part. Laurence Olivier was then offered a screen test as part compensation for being fired from the film *Queen Christina*. Olivier had been dismissed at the insistence of his leading lady, Greta Garbo, over his supposed inability to appear passionate on screen. His lack of screen personality in this film was such that he later described himself in his autobiography as “a mouse to her lioness” (Olivier 160). In the end Olivier declined the role. The reasons given for this are not exact although he suggested there was a certain degree of snobbery at the time where certain stage actors frowned upon film work, the suggestion being that it was beneath theatrically trained actors. The wording he used at the time was “I don’t believe in Shakespeare on the screen” (Olivier 160). The studio subsequently offered the role to Howard whose refined blond features offered a photogenic balance to Shearer’s beauty.

The casting of Howard to play Romeo opposite Shearer’s Juliet was of some importance yet the significance of the choice has generally been overlooked. In *A Woman’s View - How Hollywood Spoke To Women 1930-1960*, Jeanine Basinger examines how women in film at this time were confronted with the aspect of duality in their love life. Although Basinger mentions that there were countless variations of this scenario, there were only three basic patterns:

- 1-Two different leading women, related or unrelated, demonstrate two different ways for women to live their lives, with one following society’s plan and one not following it.
- 2-One woman has within herself two conflicting personalities, or goals, that need to be resolved in order for her to find happiness.

3- One woman must choose between two different ways of life with these ways represented either by two men who love her or by two female companions who advise her differently. (In both these cases the woman is choosing between two supporting characters, because the men in these films are seldom front and center) (Basinger 84).

The third of these patterns fits Shearer's situation in *Romeo and Juliet*, and describes well the position of Howard as Romeo and Ralph Forbes as Paris. Forbes, in keeping with the rest of the casting, was a mature forty years of age when the film was released. He was never an A- list actor but did the rounds, typically playing a supporting role in popular costumed romances of the time.⁴ Howard, on the other hand, had had a more successful career but was still somewhat typecast and usually played the part of the honourable, foppish gentleman in such films as *Devotion* (1931); *The Woman in His House* (1932); and, most notably as Sir Percy Blakeney in *The Scarlett Pimpernel* (1934). He had worked with Shearer before, in *A Free Soul* (1931) and also *Smilin' Through* (1932). Howard had also worked opposite some of Hollywood's most prestigious leading ladies of the time, including: Marion Davies in *Daughter of Luxury* (1931); Myrna Loy in *The Woman in His House* (1932); Bette Davis in *Of Human Bondage* (1934) and *The Petrified Forest* (1936), and Merle Oberon in the previously listed *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1934). Howard was undoubtedly a leading man in Hollywood circles but is still best known for the role of Ashley Wilkes in *Gone With The Wind* (1939), where he played the second lead male role to Clark Gable's Rhett Butler. Of that specific role, and in relation to her thoughts on duality in the films of this period, Basinger writes of how women have to make a

⁴ Forbes played the youngest brother in the silent *Beau Geste* (1926) and appeared in other costumed films such as *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* (1934); *The Three Musketeers* (1935) and *Mary of Scotland* (1936).

choice between a man who is considered bad, and a man who is considered good. She writes:

Perhaps the most famous example is the case of Leslie Howard (good) and Clark Gable (bad) in *Gone With The Wind* (1939). They are particularly useful examples because, as it turns out, Howard is good, but bad because he's weak, sickly and also loves some-one else; his temperament doesn't match that of fiery Scarlett O'Hara. Gable is bad, but good. He's a wicked man who kicks down doors, hangs around with whores, runs guns illegally; but he's good for Scarlett because he can tame her and match her passion. He understands her; they're two of a kind. Here is duality. Leslie Howard's Ashley Wilkes represents marriage, home, children, fidelity, and respectability. Gables' Rhett Butler represents the opposite in all areas. He is the supreme projection. Is there any woman alive who would choose Howard over Gable? Everyone knows this is the major flaw of *Gone With The Wind* (Basinger 108-109).

This example transposes well to the 1936 *Romeo and Juliet* but with Howard's role reversed from good to bad. Here Ralph Forbes' Paris is good because he is a nobleman, a kinsman of the Prince. He is wealthy, handsome, and offers much the same that Howard's Ashley Wilkes offers Scarlett O'Hara: marriage, home, fidelity, children, success and respectability. He is also 'bad', however because he lacks the masculinity and film star quality often associated with 1930s leading men: Clark Gable; Gary Cooper; Errol Flynn. Even in a Hollywood period romance where all the men dress rather ostentatiously, his ornate costumes and stilted dancing at the banquet panders to a suspicion that his presence is one of decorative frame filling. He is also, in the eyes of Juliet, completely lacking any attraction or hint of passion. Howard's

Romeo is bad because he is the son of her father's sworn enemy. The duality that exists in *Gone With The Wind* (1939) exists too in *Romeo and Juliet* (1936) but there is a considerable difference in the actors who play the 'bad' roles. Leslie Howard, with his fine features is no match for the darkly handsome Gable, and yet Howard is cast in the role that makes him a match for Juliet. This is because, as Gable's Butler matches Leigh's O'Hara, Howard's Romeo matches Shearer's Juliet. They are indeed two of a kind. In order for Shearer's Juliet to be portrayed as virtuous and virginal, her Romeo must be devoid of any lustful passions that would threaten this representation. The qualities that that were needed in Shearer's Romeo were characteristics that a Hollywood audience of the 1930s had witnessed Howard play before.

In *Berkley Square* (1933), a film cited by Basinger, Howard plays a time traveller who allows a woman he loves to see the future. Basinger writes,

This is a kind of liberation, a transporting of the woman to the world in which society will provide her more freedom than she has, if not enough....(He gives her history instead of sex.) Their love becomes a love of souls, or a kind of justification for no sex (Basinger 289).

Basinger describes some of the qualities of what she terms the asexual husband,

They ask for nothing. They are just *there*, representing an all-consuming love, an unquestionable commitment. They do not criticize, and they do not take away. They are totally parental, in the best sense of the term.... No sex. Or not enough to matter. They allow a woman *not* to make a choice but to have her cake (a safe marriage) and eat it too (Basinger 289-90).

A Safe and Controlled Romeo

Howard, as an asexual Romeo, helps verify the purity of Shearer's Juliet by not seeking, or even wanting, a sexual love. Consider the morning parting scene, after Romeo has climbed up to Juliet's bedroom and spent the night with her as her husband. After a collage of shots of roses, stars, moonlight on the water, and finally birds singing, all to a sweeping romantic score, we see Romeo lying half on top of the bed with his head resting on Juliet, who is under the protective shielding of the bedclothes but with both his feet on the ground. Both Romeo and Juliet are fully clothed in the same outfits they were wearing the night before. Juliet has not even removed her jewellery and neither she nor Romeo has a hair out of place. Romeo awakes and looks round in surprise. The impression given is that he has inadvertently fallen asleep. This is most definitely not the morning scene of a newly married couple who have stolen a night of passion, as is suggested in Zeffirelli's 1968 version. Here, even the first kiss is shielded from the viewer by Romeo's shoulder. Any kisses thereafter are modest and respectful pecks on the lips. The message here to both the audience and the censor is that there is nothing of a sexual nature here. This is an asexual marriage where there is love, romance, devotion and respectability but no sex. Russell Jackson refers to the shooting of an earlier 'test' version of this scene and quotes from a letter from Joseph Breen to Louis B. Mayer in which he urges caution to ensure that nothing of a sexual nature can be construed from what appears on screen. The test scene, he advised, had caused 'anxiety' and he thought it 'ill-advised'. Fearing that the scene may fall to the censors' scissors he stated, 'We therefore earnestly recommend to you that you play this scene so as to omit all action of them lying on the bed, fondling one another in a horizontal position, and pulling one another down, etc.' (Jackson 251). The scene as it was altered and appeared on screen

also works on another level. Not only does an asexual Romeo promote a virtuous Juliet, a passive and unthreatening Howard becomes more reactive than proactive in his exchanges with Shearer.

Here, in the morning after their night together, Juliet tries to convince Romeo that he has heard the nightingale singing and not the lark, 'It was the nightingale and not the lark / That pierc'd the fearful hollow of thine ear / Nightly she sings on yond pomegranate tree / Believe me, love, it was the nightingale' (3.5.2-5). This is because the nightingale's song is more associated with the night whereas the lark's song is associated with the early morning. Carolyn Brown suggests that Juliet is trying to 'tame' Romeo here. Brown notes that after a hunt it was traditional to place a hood over the falcon. This was to fool it into thinking that it was dark for the simple reason that the bird would be more likely to sit still and this 'gives the falconer some degree of control' (Brown 351). To place the hood on the falcon was to 'hoodwink, or fool, it into thinking that day is night' (Brown 351). Brown states that Juliet is taming Romeo to her command and draws a comparison to Petruchio taming Kate in *The Tempest*. Romeo at first disagrees with Juliet and insists the bird is the lark, but he submits to Juliet's edict and agrees it is the nightingale

I'll say yon grey is not the morning's eye,

'Tis but the pale reflex of Cynthia's brow.

Nor that is not the lark whose notes do beat

The vaulty heaven so high above our heads.

I have more care to stay than will to go.

Come death, sand welcome. Juliet wills it so (5.3.19-24)

Although Juliet agrees that the bird Romeo heard was indeed the lark and not the nightingale, ‘She admits to the truth only after she imposes her will on Romeo’ (Brown 352). Brown explores further the element of control that Juliet seeks to hold over Romeo. She writes ‘On a primary level, Juliet develops an affection for Romeo because she meets a soul mate. But on a subtextual level, she is attracted to Romeo because he is malleable and controllable’ (Brown 338). She suggests that Romeo is ‘like a falcon in that he figuratively flies above the concerns of the feud and is oblivious to the dangers that might ensue from his appearance at his enemy’s house’ (Brown 338). Juliet, in comparison, ‘can be seen to resemble a falconer – a person consigned to the earthy element, keen-witted and aware of reality (Brown 339). The imagery is prevalent throughout the earlier balcony scene with Juliet saying ‘Hist! Romeo, hist! O for a falconer’s voice / To lure this tassle-gentle back again.’ (3:2:158-9). The Arden Shakespeare edition of *Romeo and Juliet* carries substantial footnotes on these two lines, noting that the falcon could be lured back the falconer with a specific call, in this case ‘Hist’. It is also pointed out that ‘tassle-gentle’ refers to a male peregrine falcon (*Romeo and Juliet* 134 footnotes). Brown points out that normally it was males who trained female falcons but that here ‘Shakespeare reverses the gender roles, as he does in other parts of the play, and has Juliet assume behaviour typically assigned to men’ (Brown 334). Just as Juliet tames and controls Romeo in the play, so too does Hollywood star Norma Shearer tame and control Leslie Howard in the film. As a major Hollywood star and the wife of Irving Thalberg, everything was done to ensure that Shearer’s presence onscreen would outshine all others. As Howard’s function within the film is to adore Shearer completely, so the audience is encouraged to do the same. This ensures that Shearer retains her star placing and

commands the greater part of the limelight. In doing so she tames Howard into the secondary screen role of Romeo.

Howard's casting and how he portrayed Romeo, were two of the many aspects of the film engineered to ease Shearer in the role and to make her feel more comfortable. George Cukor was hired as director. Cukor had worked successfully with some of Hollywood's leading actresses. Prior to *Romeo and Juliet*, he had worked with, amongst others, Katharine Hepburn (*A Bill of Divorcement* - 1932; *Little Women* - 1933; *Sylvia Scarlett* - 1935), Kay Francis (*The Virtuous Sin* - 1930; *Girls About Town* - 1931), Myrna Loy (*The Animal Kingdom* - 1932 - which also starred Leslie Howard; *Manhattan Melodrama* - 1934), Jean Harlow (*Dinner at Eight* - 1933), Constance Bennett (*Our Betters* - 1933) and Joan Crawford (*No More Ladies* - 1935) (IMDB.com "George Cukor Filmography" 2013. Web). In addition to Cukor, Thalberg also hired Constance Collier, an experienced British stage actress residing in Hollywood, as Shearer's personal acting coach. Collier was a great tragic actress of the early 1900s and had worked with Beerbhom Tree in *Antony and Cleopatra* and starred in Tree's ill received *Macbeth* in 1916 (Higgins, Sydney, "The Golden Age of British Theatre" Web). Also hired by MGM, and credited in the cast was Professor William Strunk⁵ from Cornell University (Anon, MGM, *Romeo and Juliet*, 1936), a renowned Shakespearean academic who had advised Katharine Cornell in the role of Juliet in the successful stage production of *Romeo and Juliet* that ran on Broadway from December 1934, to Feb 23rd 1935. Katharine Cornell too was hired. TIME magazine, in reviewing Cornell's Juliet on Broadway in Dec 1934, wrote,

⁵ He is actually credited in the cast as Professor William Strunk Jr and listed as 'Literary Consultant'

she presented herself in the tragedy that has brought more woe to more ambitious actresses than any other single play. To the satisfaction of critics and public alike, Katharine Cornell proved herself, once & for all, the First Lady of the U. S. Stage' (TIME.com "Theatre: Supreme Test", 31st Dec 1934, Web).

Cornell's inclusion worked on a number of levels. As an acclaimed staged actress she, like Strunk, bestowed a sense of academic validity on the film. Also, as a friend of Shearer (Shearer reputedly named her daughter 'Katherine' after Cornell), Cornell was ideally placed to encourage the Hollywood actress in a Shakespeare role. Furthermore, Cornell's recent, successful role as Juliet on Broadway, whilst in her early forties, went some way in convincing an American public that Shearer was not too old to play the part herself. Actually, Cornell's age had long been misrepresented. Many sources give her date of birth as Feb 16th 1898 but when the actress was in her seventies she corrected the year as 1893. It appears that she herself had given the 1898 date in her early years as an actress in order to appear younger. This was confirmed in her obituary in the New York Times on June 10th 1974 when a portion of an interview with the actress was printed in which she said "When an actress is younger she likes to lower her age, but when she is older she likes to add to her years."(NYTimes.com "Obituary: Katherine Cornell is Dead at 81", Web). Basil Rathbone, who had played Romeo opposite Cornell's Juliet, and whom TIME referred to as 'Capable but less distinguished' ("Theatre: Supreme Test", TIME Web), was cast as Tybalt. The matter of Shearer's age was therefore, on the surface, of no great consequence and each of the leading characters in the film was portrayed by a person of comparatively similar years. Leslie Howard as Romeo was in his early forties and John Barrymore as Mercutio was fifty-four.

Although there was no real issue with the age of the actress playing Juliet, the age of the character herself was of great consequence and, as noted earlier, steps were taken to suggest that Juliet's age was sixteen, not nearing fourteen. When asked about the general approach to the film by journalist Frank Small, George Cukor is quoted as saying 'We didn't worry about the censors', (Small 100) but MGM, being fully aware of the power inherent within the PCA and having invested a lot of money into such a prestigious film, would have been very much concerned about what the censors thought.

Thalberg

Irvine Thalberg himself was sensitive to the issue of censorship and when at Universal had sacked the director Von Stroheim from *Merry-Go-Round* (1923), accusing him of overspending, insubordination and the "flagrant disregard for censorship, and your repeated and insistent attempts to include...situations and incidents so reprehensible that they could not by any reasonable possibility be expected to meet with the approval of the Board of Censorship" (Flamini 35). It seems likely, however, that Thalberg was using the excuse of the film offending the Board of Censorship as a means of attacking a high profile director whom he apparently despised whilst simultaneously advancing his own career. This proved to be an important move in Thalberg's career as he was seen as a young man (still in his early twenties) who would not submit to tyrannical or profligate directors. The episode also showed, however, that Thalberg was fully aware of the importance of the censorship issue in Hollywood and the penalties that could be imposed for not taking such matters into account. We find a reference to censorship of the 1936 *Romeo and Juliet* in *The New York Times* in an article by Frank S. Nugent. Writing a commentary on the film he

noted how MGM had shaped the script. “Metro has translated the play into sheerly cinematic terms. It has omitted about a fourth of the verse- sometimes at the behest of the Hays office, which disapproves Elizabethan English. . . .”(Nugent, 12). The result of all of this is that the script is edited of puns and sexual innuendo, and Juliet remains resolutely virginal throughout the entire film. According to Roland Flamini, Thalberg’s biographer, ‘Thalberg regarded the production code as a necessary inconvenience. He had after all, helped set it up and realized its value in keeping at bay outside control that would be even stricter’ (Flamini 223). After the revision and implementation of the new censorship agreements, Thalberg altered *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*, (1934), which also starred Norma Shearer, so as to moderate and lessen the suggestion of an incestuous fixation between father and daughter (Flamini 217).

Irving Thalberg, unlike many other studio executives of the time, was a modest, unassuming, family man but one who possessed a voracious appetite for work. He was perhaps best described by screenwriter Budd Schulberg in his book *Moving Pictures – Memoirs of a Hollywood Prince*:

The two top intellectuals in town were Irving Thalberg, the sickly saint who never drank, who worked twenty hours a day, and was faithful to his beautiful bride Norma Shearer and to his mother who continued to live with them – frail, self-contained Irving who burned with a Jesuitical faith in the world religion of motion pictures; and B.P.⁶ a more profound reader and a more original mind but with all the traits Irving piously disavowed: drinking, gambling, and wenching (Schulberg 304-305).

⁶ B.P. is Schulberg’s own father, studio mogul Benjamin Pervcival Schulberg

Thalberg's position in MGM, in conjunction with his personal involvement in virtually every stage in the creation of *Romeo and Juliet*, demands consideration. Thalberg was not a studio head at the time of the film. By 1936 he was a powerful but nonetheless independent producer at MGM, having been replaced as head of production whilst convalescing after a massive heart attack in December 1933. As a producer in what has been retrospectively called 'The Golden Age of Cinema', he worked at a time when films were being produced with an inexorable regularity on the conveyor belt of Hollywood. He is credited with referring to films as 'the product'; something that was made to make money, not something that was produced merely as a presentation of creative expressionism. The souvenir brochure lists Irving Thalberg as being at the centre of virtually all important decisions regarding the creation of the film. In addressing the question as to why a major film production of *Romeo and Juliet* had not been undertaken before, it states that there was an element of fear at attempting the film on the back of a tradition of popular stage productions that were widely praised. It states

To face comparison with this unbelievably rich stage tradition was a challenge only a great producer would accept, one of taste, experience, artistic resources, and one who had vast faith in his medium. It was left for Irving Thalberg to take the great artistic dare involved in bringing "Romeo and Juliet" to the screen" (Anon, MGM, *Romeo and Juliet*, 1936).

As a producer, Thalberg would also have been involved heavily with securing studio funding for the movie, but it appears that he was involved in the casting of the picture far beyond the allocation of the role of Juliet to his wife.

That the film was Thalberg's dream and not Cukor's is made clear in the same souvenir booklet which was on sale in cinemas showing the film. Such programmes were normally reserved for gala openings, but MGM, and Thalberg in particular, were determined that *Romeo and Juliet* would be seen not just as a movie, but as a celebration of Hollywood and as a desired social event. The introductory page of such programmes is usually given over to the director, who tends to explain his reasons for making the film, and the meanings behind it. In the programme this platform is given over to Irving Thalberg. The page is headed 'Footnote To the Filming of a Classic'. Here Thalberg tries to justify marrying the academic and cultural substance of Shakespeare's work with the medium of mass entertainment. He explains,

A work of creation only becomes a classic by consent of an enormous number of people over a long stretch of time. To win such wide popular approval, the work, whether written, painted or played, must have had, in addition to the orthodox requirements, beauty and technical perfection, the quality of excitement, an excitement felt by the masses. The notion that a classic is as dry as dust is in most cases mistaken. Certainly it is in the case of *Romeo and Juliet* (Anon, MGM, *Romeo and Juliet*, 1936).

Thalberg continues with a theme that will be repeated by future directors, by claiming that Shakespeare's best medium is the modern cinema screen. 'It is especially appropriate to present Shakespeare on the screen because his dramatic form is

practically that of the scenario'. Thalberg concludes with "That is why the picturization [sic] of *Romeo and Juliet* is the fulfilment of a long cherished dream" (Anon, MGM, *Romeo and Juliet*, 1936). Thalberg may have succeeded in getting the film to the cinema screen, but this was only still part of his dream. The marketing and promotion of the film, on top of the budget suggests that it was hoped that the film could acquire a mantle of cultural authority and become a social event, something that audiences wanted to participate in. Jostein Gripsrud wrote of this phenomenon when he stated that the 'encounter between audiences and films share the idea that it is through the existence of an audience that film acquires social and cultural importance' (Gripsrud 203).

This may be so, but it is through the acceptance and approval of a large audience that a film acquires the mantle of success. Thalberg had to sell the film and the idea that Shakespeare on screen would not only be comprehensible to the core cinematic audience of the time, but also enjoyable. He did this in a number of ways. The trailer for *Romeo and Juliet* heralded the film as 'One of the greatest triumphs in screen history'. It also altered the paradigmatic audience expectations and possible prejudices by referring to the two main stars as 'The Sweethearts of "Smilin' Through"' who come smilin' through again in William Shakespeare's glorious love story'. *Smilin' Through* was a sentimental film made in 1932⁷ and its inclusion in the trailer highlights the fact that *Romeo and Juliet* was being promoted as a piece of romanticism, and that Shakespeare was being classified as suitable fare for the American cinema going public. Clark Gable and Nelson Eddy were included in the trailer, praising the film's brilliance. Clark Gable goes as far as to say that "Romeo and Juliet makes me proud to be a member of the motion picture industry".

⁷ Based on the 1919 play written by Jane Cowl and Jane Murfin under the pseudonym Allan Langdon

(Youtube.com “Romeo and Juliet (1936) Trailer” Web.) To further promote *Romeo and Juliet* as a popular film as opposed to a piece of elitist theatre, Norma Shearer was billed as ‘The First Lady of the Screen’, and Leslie Howard as ‘The Passionate Dreamer and Romantic Lover’. Thalberg knew that a romance could succeed at Hollywood box office and that Shearer’s name would appeal to a certain section of the potential audience; but he also knew that for the film to succeed it had to be marketed so that it did not exclude that core audience, the so called ‘avids’, who attended the cinema the most often. In order to appeal to that lucrative audience it was necessary to allay suspicions that a Shakespeare play was beyond their interest, beyond their intellect, and more importantly, beyond their enjoyment.

To this end, the souvenir programme carried three full pages explaining the story of *Romeo and Juliet* which included faux Shakespearean dialogue and explanations of plot written in modern colloquial speech, ‘At the awesome word ‘Draw’, swords would flash, Montague would pit himself against Capulet and blood would besmirch the market place and city square’ (Anon, MGM, *Romeo and Juliet*, 1936). Later in the programme Benvolio’s urging of Romeo to attend the Capulet ball takes on a distinctly modern tone that would not have appeared out of place in the film segment ‘The Neckers’ in which Shearer had spoofed the balcony scene in *Hollywood Revue of 1929* (1929) :

So, inspired by a desperate attempt to cure Romeo of his futile affection, Benvolio counselled: “Get over this love, Romeo! Forget Rosaline! Come with Mercutio and me tonight to the Capulets. They are giving a ball. We will disguise ourselves, put on visors and crash the party. I’ll show you girls there who eclipse Rosaline a dozen times”. Reluctantly, Romeo accepted the

invitation and half-heartedly set out that night on this mad prank (Anon, MGM, *Romeo and Juliet*, 1936)

This was followed up with a faux interview with Shakespeare himself. It is titled ‘Down Memory Lane with William Shakespeare’ and carries an apology to Louis Sobol. Louis Sobol was a popular Broadway columnist whose regular show business column, “New York Cavalcade” appeared in the *New York Journal*. The article is interesting on a number of fronts. It is used to promote Shakespeare and his work, most notably *Romeo and Juliet*, as not only being approachable, but relevant to a contemporary cinema audience. The inclusion of a portrait of Shakespeare at the centre of the piece is a rather clumsy and laborious attempt to infuse the film with an undeniable provenance. It begins with Shakespeare’s spirit explaining how he, at first, reluctantly agreed to participate in the making of the film. It is infused with contemporary references and progresses in a jovial manner to the point where the spirit of Shakespeare gives the film crew and production team his seal of approval:

Talking through a medium is just about as pleasant as using a bum stenographer, and automatic writing just doesn’t work. I thought that possibly my latest collaborator, Talbot Jennings,⁸ might help me with the job. He is the man, you know, whom Metro-Goldwyn Mayer used to adapt “Romeo and Juliet” and practicably the last man on earth I’ve had dealings with (Anon, MGM, *Romeo and Juliet*, 1936).

⁸ Talbot Jennings was credited with the screen adaptation of the film. He was also credited for *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1935); *The Good Earth* (1937); *Northwest Passage* (1940), and *Anna and the King of Siam* (1946).

Next, the ‘spiritual voice’ of Shakespeare makes direct reference to Irving Thalberg, the film’s uncredited⁹ producer:

With my first real production, “Romeo and Juliet” in the offing, I can’t very well go back on a four hundred year old habit. I have to be regular even if it hurts. So here’s the story, and you can blame it on my first producer and my last, James Burbage and Irving Thalberg (Anon, MGM, *Romeo and Juliet*, 1936).

In the ‘interview’ Shakespeare further identifies with his audience by relating how he and his gang got arrested for poaching and had to leave Stratford to escape prison. He refers to Irving Thalberg as his last producer, to himself as ‘Bill’, and to the audience as ‘the mob’. He recalls a piece of advice given to him by James Burbage:

“ Bill,” he said, “you’re a young fellow and I want to give you some good advice. You’re in show business now. No matter how good a play you write, you’ll never be a Dramatist. Leave that for the university wits like Ben Jonson and Marlowe. Don’t forget that you’re only a success when the box office says so; and don’t ever turn a producer down when he needs a publicity story (Anon, MGM, *Romeo and Juliet*, 1936).

Here the resurrected Shakespeare is echoing and reinforcing Thalberg’s own already proclaimed idea that this is not only the first real film production of *Romeo and Juliet*, but is actually the first real film production of *any* Shakespeare play. It is interesting

⁹ Thalberg rejected screen credits for all his films but received a posthumous credit for *The Good Earth* (1937)

to note that whereas MGM, Talbot Jennings, Irving Thalberg, as well as Basil Rathbone, Norma Shearer, and even Katherine Cornell are all featured, at no time does the film's director, George Cukor, merit a mention. This is not as anomalous as it initially appears. Although Cukor's body of work would include numerous memorable and highly acclaimed films: *The Women* (1939); *The Philadelphia Story* (1940); *Gaslight* (1944); *Adam's Rib* (1949); *Pat and Mike* (1952); *The Actress* (1953); *A Star is Born* (1954); *My Fair Lady* (1964 – Best Director Oscar), all of these occurred after *Romeo and Juliet*. Much the same could be said for the emergence of Cukor's individual stylised motifs: panning through ninety degrees combined with tracking shots (*Pat and Mike* – 1952, *My Fair Lady* – 1964); vertical pans to roofs of theatres (*The Actress* - 1953; *A Star is Born* – 1954). Cukor's earlier work, to which *Romeo and Juliet* belongs, reflects his theatrical background. The directing is somewhat transparent and featureless and there is a lack of cross cutting. The framing of extravagant sets takes priority over the directing which is often flat and uninspired. Cukor developed distinctive personal visions that permeate his more celebrated films, but these are facets into which he grew and which were not to the fore when he was appointed to direct *Romeo and Juliet*. Cukor was assigned because he was a competent director who would be unlikely to deviate from the studio's vision. This vision, to produce a film that would transcend normal cinema going and become an acclaimed social event, was maintained through tight control of a sequence of appointments, decisions, personal interventions and a meticulously organised publicity campaign, all of which was overseen by Irving Thalberg. In an interview with *Photoplay* magazine in September 1936, Cukor spoke of how the film was Thalberg's aspiration, not his,

Well, it wasn't any sort of an easy job. When Thalberg announced that his dream of ten years – the production of 'Juliet' – was to become a reality, and I was assigned to direct it, I realised I was facing the challenge of my life (Small 99).

The assigning of this film to Thalberg and not Cukor is also commented upon by Russell Jackson,

Cukor had a reputation as a fine director of actors – in particular of women – but it would be misleading to describe this as his film. The supervision of preparation and post-production was primarily the responsibility of the producer. For better or worse, this is Thalberg's film for MGM (Jackson 130-131).

A final comment comes from Courtney Lehmann who described Thalberg as 'the watchmaker who oversaw every aspect of the film' (Lehmann 87).

The purpose of the multi-pronged publicity campaign, carried out in a mood of constant jovial affability, was to persuade the public that the play, and therefore the MGM film, would be an enjoyable experience for a mainstream audience. We see this approach in other areas; 'World's Greatest Love Story', and 'Greatest Love Story of All Time' were placed atop posters and articles publicising the film. The trailer for the film proclaimed it as 'one of the greatest triumphs in film history'. With this, the studio was trying to market the film as a social event not to be missed and great pains were taken in convincing the public that the spectacle of the film made for an attraction that they would be wrong to dismiss. In order for the film to be seen,

however, it first had to have the certificate of approval signed by Joseph Breen at the PCA. As noted earlier, much of the dialogue was cut from the movie, including any Shakespearean bawdiness that could be deemed offensive. This still left the significant problem of one of the main pillars of the play, namely that of a young girl, not quite fourteen years of age, enjoying the intimacies of a sexual relationship through marriage.

Virginity and Christian Iconography

Juliet Dusinberre, in *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*, wrote ‘It is difficult to feel anything about virginity nowadays except that it is beginning to be as unmentionable as sex was to the Victorians. There is no modern ascetic parallel to the sixteenth century Catholic ideal of virginity’ (Dusinberre 40). Whilst this is encompassed largely in an historical context, in cinematic terms there is no modern adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* to equal how the 1936 version depicted and revered virginity in the form of The Virgin Mary. The presentation of Juliet as virginal was not solely to appease the censor, for although there was an audience demand for ‘bad girls’ in American popular cinema, the role of Juliet was deemed to be contrary to this genre. Juliet was to be presented to an American audience as the epitome of love and romance, unsullied by lesser feelings of passion and lust. Juliet’s purity, her virginity was deemed important enough for journalist Frank Small to comment on how he felt Norma Shearer portrayed it on screen:

Miss Shearer’s beautiful Juliet is persuasively virginal, her genuine ability here reaches a new height even in the most casual of scenes. She imparts to the role, which for generations has been handled with coy reserve by portly women, a lyric romantic quality that is close to perfection (Small 53).

The association of Juliet and the physical state of the virginity, and the spiritual association of virginity with heavenly purity, and the subsequent portrayal of heavenly purity in the form of The Virgin Mary has a long and interconnected history. The expression of Juliet's virginity in the 1936 film would eventually manifest itself in the presentation of Juliet as the Virgin Mary. The association of Christian feast-days and the Christian Liturgical Calendar, linked with Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is a topic that is explored extensively by Philippa Berry in *Shakespeare's Feminine Endings* in which she forges links in Shakespeare's play to festival days in summer close to Juliet's birthday. Berry suggests that 'Shakespeare's decision to accord a specific temporality to his tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* draws upon this residual Catholic culture of holy days' (Berry 35). She makes much of the feast of St James the Apostle on 25th July and that 'A catalogue of fairs in 1661 showed that 58 towns had fairs on James's day, 28 on Lammas; it was probably no coincidence, also, that James I and his queen, Anna were crowned on 25th July' (Berry 35). Berry also highlights that there were two churches in Warwickshire in Shakespeare's time dedicated to St James 'one on Stratford-on-Avon itself, and another in his grandfather's village of Snitterfield' (Berry 35). There is also a link made to the name of the church in the play where Juliet is to marry Paris, St. Peter's. St. Peter was rescued from his prison shortly before he was to be executed and Berry links this to Juliet being liberated from a forced marriage:

St Peter, to whose church Juliet is to be dragged by Capulet in order to marry Paris, 'on a hurdle', like a condemned traitor or recusant priest going to his death, had 1 August or Lammas as one of his feast days, when his miraculous

liberation from prison was commemorated by the feast of St Peter-in-Chains (Berry 36).

One can find similar such links elsewhere in the play. There are thirteen usages of the word 'saint'; thirty-three of the word 'heaven'; and thirty-four of 'God' within the text but this is of no particular relevance since one of the mainstays of the plot is the marriage of two lovers in a Catholic society, a setting where such words would normally be used. Berry is not alone in highlighting Christian links within the play. Juliet Dusinberre refers to the Christian act of pilgrimage in the flirtatious yet formal response from Juliet to Romeo in Act 1 which 'enabled Shakespeare to smile at Romeo's worship of Rosaline....while couching the first encounter of Romeo and Juliet in a sonnet celebrating the worship of pilgrims at a shrine' (Dusinberre 175). The lines in question make this plain to the reader.

Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,
Which mannerly devotion shows in this;
For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,
And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss (1:5:96-100)

Dusinberre also points out that there is a symbolic reading in that the people of the city of Verona, through the sacrifice of the deaths of Romeo and Juliet, can now love again. This inspires Montague, through a combination of grief, guilt, and love, to promise to build a statue of pure gold in Juliet's likeness

For I will raise her statue in pure gold;

That while Verona by that name is known,
 There shall be no figure at such rate be set
 As that of true and faithful Juliet (5:3:299-302).

Dusinberre comments that this action, the building of a golden statue in some-one's image can be taken not only as symbolic of a token of their love, but also as an act of idolatry, and recalls Romeo referring to Juliet as 'This holy shrine'(1:5:93). Juliet, however, is not a saint and is not portrayed in the play as such. Neither is Juliet's love for Romeo limited to one of chaste purity. This is recognised by the Nurse when she encourages Juliet to enjoy the physical aspects of life when she urges 'Go, girl, seek happy nights to happy days' (1:3:105). Later, when Juliet speaks the line, 'Hunting thee hence with hunt's- up to the day', (3:5:34) she is making reference to the traditional morning song, the 'hunt's-up', used to awaken a newly married wife. In addition to this, the play is riddled with bawdy references and jokes pertaining to sexual activity. This aspect of Juliet's desire and fulfilment through the physical aspects of marriage, along with the behaviour of others in the play, most notably the Nurse, as well as Sampson and Gregory's comedic bragging of thrusting maidens to the wall and cutting off their maidenhood, would undoubtedly have exasperated the PCA.

As it was, the scene in the 1936 film concerning Sampson and Gregory was extensively changed so that it was played for light-hearted laughs instead of bawdy humour. Sampson and Gregory are replaced in the scene by Peter, the Nurse's servant, a role played by Andy Devine, a popular comedic character actor of the time. The scene with Sampson and Gregory is further sanitized by occurring, not in the earthy commotion of the market place, but at the closing of a grand parade,

undertaken by both families as they flaunt their grandeur and wealth as they head towards the town's imposing church. The rewritten scene works well insofar as it engaged the audience in a light-hearted manner and then progressed to an extended sword battle that wouldn't have been out of place in popular Hollywood films of the day, such as *Captain Blood* (1935) or *The Three Musketeers* (1935). Thalberg's strategy of appealing to a core American audience is again made apparent here as he seeks to adapt Shakespeare's play so that it is expressed in horizontal (contemporary) cinematic values, rather than being locked in the vertical (historical) values of the theatrical past. This approach is also evident in the scene where Romeo fights an energetic duel with Paris. Thalberg initially thought of cutting the scene but changed his mind after it got a positive response during a sneak preview of the film where, according to Leslie Howard, 'an audience in a 'very tough spot called Pomona in California, populated mainly by fruit canners' persuaded him to keep it in' (Jackson 131).

Such changes to minor characters such as Samson, Peter, or Paris in order to appease a cinema audience were inconsequential in comparison to how the character of Juliet was presented. These went far beyond any act of compliance with the newly founded PCA. In an orchestrated effort to move focus away from Juliet the earthly lover, MGM brought the entire film round to focus extensively on Juliet's beauty, chastity, and virginity. The first part of this strategy, turning Juliet into a beautiful Hollywood star was relatively easy to achieve. There is no description in the text as to Juliet's physical appearance. We do not know Juliet's height, the colour of her hair or her eyes. The only indication of her physical appearance in the entire play is when Friar Laurence indicates that Juliet is light and dainty of foot:

Here comes the lady. O so light a foot
 Will ne'er wear out the everlasting flint.
 A lover may bstride the gossamers
 That idles in the wanton summer air
 And yet not fall; so light is vanity (2:6:16-20)

Norma Shearer was a beautiful woman and a leading Hollywood actress, so the promotion of Juliet being beautiful was not really an issue. What could have been an issue was how to make Shearer's Juliet appear to be virtuous and innocent of the ways of physical love. Because the private lives of Hollywood stars were given a great deal of magazine and newsreel footage in the 1930s it is likely that most Norma Shearer fans would have been aware of the fact that she was married to Irving Thalberg and the mother of two children. This did not sit well in conjunction with the character of Juliet as a young, virtuous girl and so a decisive effort was made for the star to appear young and innocent on screen. This was achieved by a number of ploys.

As mentioned earlier, Thalberg ensured that all persons playing a major character in the play were of relatively mature years. This meant that everyone looked of a similar age group and Juliet did not appear conspicuously older. Next he employed lighting expert William Daniels to photograph the film and his wife sympathetically. The film was shot in a manner specifically to disguise Shearer's age by use of a soft white light suffused upon her whilst the other actors were shot often in shadow. This caused Mrs Patrick Campbell, who had herself played Juliet opposite Forbes-Robertson's Romeo in 1895 and who had a small part in the film, to refer to the cast as 'Norma Shearer's Ethiopians' (Flamini 249). To further disguise Shearer's age, film stock was used that was slightly over exposed. This was then compensated

for by giving the negative reduced development which resulted in a less contrasting print. MGM and RKO both championed this practice, which is why many films of the later 1930s have a distinctly ‘pearly’ effect compared to earlier films (Salt, 257).

Romeo and Juliet (1936) is distinctly ‘pearly’ in appearance as opposed to possessing the rich black and white lustre usually associated with cellulose nitrate film which was used in virtually all commercial films of the 1930s. Cellulose nitrate film contained a high silver content which allowed an exceptional sharpness and contrast between light and dark. MGM at this time also made use of a ‘rifle light’ which had a large 1KW tungsten bulb, sealed in a hemispherical metal reflector which had a fluted surface that resulted in a softer light than arc floodlighting and was used to produce an attractive, soft-edged shadow on the face (Salt 265). The combination of altered film stock and soft, fluted lighting went some way to successfully disguising Shearer’s age. This no doubt pleased Norma Shearer who was renowned for possessing a professional vanity about her youth and reputedly declined the lead in of *Mrs Miniver* (1942) because she thought the character, having a grown up son in the film, would make her appear too old (Fristoe. “Turner Classic Movies: Mrs Miniver”, Web,).

Cukor had stated he wanted a set to reflect ‘the most charming period of the Renaissance, with all its gorgeous reaction to the dreary straight-laced era that preceded’ (Small 99). To this end money was spent on thousands of props and costumes which included, amongst other things, twenty-five knitting machine operators, twelve boot makers and two hundred and fifty seamstresses (Small 99). Set designer Oliver Messal was called from London and sent to Verona with two cameramen where they spent three months photographing old buildings, windows, balconies, ruins and statues, ‘everything that might have a place in the film’ (Anon, MGM, *Romeo and Juliet*, 1936). For all the determination to have as ‘authentic’ a

film as possible, it is worth noting that beside the list of props and faithful reproductions of museum pieces was a note for ‘five hundred lipsticks’ (Anon, MGM, *Romeo and Juliet*, 1936). This small point is a clear indication that although there was a concerted effort to promote an acceptable reproduction of the Renaissance world, retaining the ‘fidelity’ of the period in which the play is set the intention was to adapt and present it within a contemporary Hollywood context. This is not dissimilar to the summarising of key aspects of the play in contemporary language, as was witnessed in the souvenir brochure. There was also a concerted effort to promote the luxurious costumes and setting of the film, something which Cukor had intended from the start; “When the wealthy and noble Capulets invite their powerful friends to a banquet, it’s a *banquet* –with all the trimmings” (Small 99). The souvenir brochure made a point of expressing how much effort was made to ensure that the screen would be adorned in riches, ‘Luxury ran riot. The world was combed for materials, silks, satins, velvets, and cloth of gold, jewels which beautify and adorn their women (Anon, MGM, *Romeo and Juliet*, 1936). This is in keeping with Basinger’s comment:

During the golden era of Hollywood film, audiences, both men and women, were drawn to the movies partly by the luxury they saw on the screen. To satisfy these audiences, Hollywood was always willing to depart from any sense of credibility where fashion and furniture were concerned (Basinger 114-5).

At the centre of this recreation of Renaissance Italy, however, was the Hollywood recreation of Juliet. Combining the necessity to appease the PCA, and to give Shearer a makeover from ‘bad girl’ to the virtuous, romantic ‘good girl’, the film was infused

with aspects of religious imagery that ultimately presented both actress and character within the spiritual association of heavenly purity. This was achieved through a variety of connections with angels and, ultimately, the Virgin Mary. The first clear indication of this importation of Christian virtue and chastity was from a publicity photograph that was circulated to the press and used to promote the forthcoming film. The photograph highlights the hairstyle Shearer was to adopt in portraying Juliet in the film (**Figure 12**). Details printed on the reverse of a surviving photograph confirm that the hairstyle was deliberately copied from the angel Gabriel in Fra Angelico's painting *The Annunciation*, (**Figure 13**) a point which served not only the sought-after sense of historical authenticity but also promoted the essence of Juliet's heavenly purity, something that would appease the Legion of Decency and their followers. The detailed similarity to the angel in the original painting is striking (**Figure 14**)

The artist, Fra Angelico (c 1395- 1455), was born Guido di Pietro, and was a Dominican friar. He is renowned for painting a number of religious frescoes and paintings and returned repeatedly to the subject of the Annunciation. The same fresco from which this detail was taken features prominently in the 1954 version of *Romeo and Juliet*. By adopting the hairstyle and the pose of the angel in the painting, Norma Shearer immediately consents to the comparison and identifies herself and Juliet as obedient, pious, purified, and removed from temptations of the flesh. These qualities are the very ideals which Louis B. Mayer approved, and which Thalberg was now utilising to promote the new screen image of his wife. According to Neal Gabler, in his book on the origins of Hollywood, Mayer presented the Capulet family in Thalberg's film exactly as he wanted his own family to be, 'where the father was the absolute monarch, the mother his deferential helpmate, and the daughters demure, chaste and obedient' (Gabler, 107). If we note the composition of Fra Angelico's

painting, (**Figure 15**) we see that it distinguishes between the beauty of the angel and the severity of the architecture. Sir John Pope-Hennessy, one of the foremost authorities on Italian art, recognised this as a feature of Leon Baptista Alberti's (1404-72) theory of architecture, distinguishing between beauty and ornament. He concluded that in Fra Angelico's fresco, 'the Virgin and Angel are treated like a sculptured group, restrained and motionless' (Pope-Hennessey, 23). This is exactly how Juliet is portrayed in the 1936 film, being restrained sexually by the phallogentric idealism of woman as virgin. The importance of the painting lies not only in the depiction of the meeting between Mary and the angel Gabriel, but what that meeting signified.

In the Bible, the angel Gabriel appears before Mary in Nazareth and greets her with the words 'Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women' (Holy Bible, Luke 1:28). Prior to this, Gabriel has appeared to Mary's cousin, Elizabeth, who becomes the mother of John the Baptist. Later, when Mary visits Elizabeth, she is greeted with the words, 'Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb' (Luke 1:42). The combination of these two greetings spoken to Mary were to become the opening words of the prayer, 'Hail Mary'. When Gabriel informs Mary that she is to give birth to the son of God, Mary becomes worried and asks how this can be since she is a virgin? Gabriel then explains that Mary will be visited by the Holy Spirit. This is, according to The Bible, the moment when the girl, Mary, begins her transformation to The Virgin Mary, mother of God who will, eventually become the iconic representation of chastity and purity within the Catholic Church.

There has been a great deal written from the psychoanalytic point of view with regards to women and sexuality. Laura Mulvey writes that in this sense:

the female figure poses a deeper problem. She also connotes something that the look continually circles around but disavows: her lack of penis, implying a threat of castration and hence unpleasure. Unfortunately, the meaning of woman is sexual difference, the absence of the penis is visually ascertainable, the material evidence on which is based the castration complex essential for the organisation of entrance to the law of the father. Thus a woman as icon, displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look, always threatens to evoke the anxiety it originally signified' (Mulvey, 844) .

The anxiety that preceded the 1936 film centred round the presenting of a story that included a sexual relationship between a very young woman and her husband. The concern was that this would be construed as being immoral and offensive and therefore would fall foul of the PCA who are, in this case, the 'controllers of the look'. Here, the cut of the censors' scissors evokes the threat of castration, and any subsequent boycott of the film would lead, not to symbolic, but to real economic 'unpleasure'. Mulvey continues,

The male unconscious has two avenues of escape from this castration anxiety: preoccupation with re-enactment of the original trauma ...or else complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous (Mulvey 844).

Here, in the 1936 film, we see all threats of a sexual nature eradicated by removing any physical longings Romeo may have for Juliet, and by turning Juliet herself into the most reassuring and venerated female form – the Virgin Goddess. As with each film in this thesis, the initial impression of Juliet upon the audience is significant. In the 1936 production the audience is introduced to Juliet when she is sitting in a garden, dressed in white, wearing a garland of flowers and feeding a pet fawn. She is sitting in a garden of roses which, along with the lily, are the two flowers most often associated with the Virgin Mary. There quickly follows a soft focus close up of Juliet, immaculately crowned with the hairstyle of the angel Gabriel. As Juliet is called by the Nurse, she pauses and smiles before running merrily to her mother. The scene is undoubtedly intended to portray Juliet as young, innocent and chaste. When Juliet is asked to express her views on marriage, she replies, ‘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’ (1:3:97-99). The visual detail at this part in the film is worth noting.

During this exchange with her mother, Juliet kneels in supplication and obedience. As she does so, she picks up a bow and arrow and holds it as if an archer. The imagery can be interpreted as symbolic with Juliet being portrayed as Diana, the virgin goddess of hunting who, in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, turns Acteon into a stag after she is seen bathing naked by him. Diana is also the moon goddess, and the moon, in turn, came to symbolise chastity and virginity. The early Christian church absorbed the planetary symbolism of the moon and associated it first with the church itself, and later with the Virgin Mary. By the middle ages, the Virgin Mary and the moon were closely identified as symbols of virginity and chastity. As Marina Warner wrote in her study of the Virgin Mary, ‘The moon has been the most constant attribute of female divinities in the western world, and was taken over by the Virgin Mary because of

ancient beliefs about its functions and role, which Christianity inherited' (Warner, 256). In Diego Velasquez's painting *The Immaculate Conception*, the Virgin Mary as the epitome of womanhood stands on a floating moon (**Figure 16**). This symbolism can be found in many such paintings depicting the Virgin Mary.

The audience of the 1936 film were presented with a Juliet who was demure, beautiful and virginal. Juliet, as the lead female of the film, was portrayed as reassuring, with no physical desires of her own and in no way threatening or dangerous in terms of sexuality. Shearer's Juliet is no threat to Romeo and no threat to the male hierarchy at MGM or the PCA. The absence of threat to Romeo continues throughout the film. As with the text, Romeo first encounters Juliet in the banquet scene which, in keeping with the style of the film, is lavish and over-elaborate. In the scene as filmed, Romeo and his friends, accompanied by an assortment of torch bearers, musicians and tumblers, disguise themselves with masks and gain entry to a lavish celebration of dancing, feasting and merriment. There is a mock jousting contest before the guests and a display of dancing on the ballroom floor. Two dwarves wrestle playfully with each other; "What revels are at hand!", cries Capulet. The celebration of wealth and majestic hospitality at the banquet is, according to Russell Jackson, representative of the how the studio saw itself, 'In this respect the entertainment that Capulet offers his guests is also what MGM offers its public' (Jackson138). This overbearing focus on continual acts of prandial jocundity could be seen as an ideal world where men exist in harmony without having to endure the threat of women. The representation of woman as spectacle, and Juliet as Virginal Goddess, is highlighted shortly afterwards.

In a departure from the text, Romeo encounters Rosaline, an uncredited Kathryn de Mille (Jackson139), playing a parlour game with some young men. The

physical introduction of Rosaline echoes Metro's own 1916 production in which Rosaline, credited to Ethel Mantell, also makes an appearance. Here, Romeo makes himself known to Rosaline and she spurns him. Rosaline, although the initial focus of Romeo's infatuation is present in Shakespeare's text in name only. The physical introduction of Rosaline is a telling moment in the film. By presenting the audience with Rosaline, knowing that she will soon be replaced in Romeo's affections, the audience automatically makes a comparative judgment between the two characters, and that judgement is made largely in accordance with MGM's and the PCA's views on the social acceptability of women in society. In the 1936 film we are presented with an attractive Rosaline, dressed lavishly, and somewhat seductively, and wearing a magnificent headpiece (**Figure 17**). The ornate costume and the glamour of the exotic in such a beautiful and mysterious woman can be interpreted as being evocative of another female cinematic icon of the time, the *femme fatale*, which, at the time of filming, had recently been denounced and condemned by the PCA. This suggestion is strengthened when we see how Rosaline dismisses Romeo. As Rosaline partakes in a game of 'Blind Man's Bluff', Romeo grabs her and holds her close as he removes his mask. As Rosaline removes her own mask, we see Romeo look at her beseechingly but she does not respond to his pleading. Instead she frowns slightly, lowers her eyes and without a word, callously turns away before smiling and running into the arms of two partying males. The suggestion is clear; this woman has toyed with Romeo and now that she has no further use of him, she dismisses him. Romeo, left alone and humiliated, replaces his mask to hide his shame. The audience is aware that Rosaline will be replaced by Juliet who, being portrayed by an actress of Shearer's standing in Hollywood, they subconsciously accept as being 'superior', not only in looks but also

in moral standing. Here virtue and chastity are presented as qualities more apposite to a woman and more deserving of a man's love than sexual allure.

The moment Rosaline spurns Romeo is a clever manipulation of the audience for it allows both sympathy for Romeo and admiration for Juliet's innocence and purity. The camera then follows Romeo to the top of the ballroom where both he and the audience step into another film entirely, one more suited to a Florenz Ziegfield movie than a Shakespeare one, but which nonetheless centres entirely on Juliet. This is emphasised in that Juliet's arrival at the banquet is heralded by a change in music and the entrance of pages carrying gilded, ornamental foliage. What then follows can only be described as a scene of Hollywood splendour and musical pageantry. As an unseen choir sing a chorus of 'Blessings on You', the pages move to either side of the floor and are followed by fourteen hand maidens, dressed almost identically in lightly coloured, long, flowing gowns with dark brocade embellishments. Their heads are covered by ornamental garlands and veils. They are immediately followed by a radiant Juliet who wears a white, off the shoulder, high-waisted silk dress festooned with sparkling gems. The high waist design, common throughout the movie, was apparently to disguise Shearer's short stature in comparison with the other women in the film (Jackson136). The dress is topped with chiffon and a sparkling collar in the style of a necklace, whereas all the other women's necks are bare. The scene, of Juliet in virginal white, making a striking entrance on the cue of music being accompanied by ornately dressed maidens offers a favourable comparison to a bride arriving at her society wedding (**Figure 18**). In Christianity, the Virgin Mary is often referred to as 'the bride of Christ'. This is because Mary is often referred to as the mother of the church, which is itself deemed to be the bride of Christ. The other dancers present in this scene, all female, dance in

homage to Juliet who is often seen in close up. They surround her as she stands motionless, smiling benignly. They form arches for her to dance through, they kneel before her in adoration as if she were indeed the mother of Christ, and finally she is handed a single white rose. The rose, in symbolism in art, is a flower often associated with the Virgin Mary, who is often termed 'the rose without thorns', meaning being without sin. The white rose symbolizes purity. (Hall, 268.) As the male guests enter the dance floor and, as the other dancers bow before her, Juliet moves forward, looking from left to right as she holds the rose at shoulder height before seeing the ornately dressed Paris. Juliet offers him the rose and as he removes his mask she sees Romeo who has witnessed the dance with open mouthed adoration. They lock gazes as Paris kisses Juliet's hand and leads her back to the dance floor. The sequence, which lasts just short of three minutes, was choreographed by Agnes De Mille and serves partly as a lavish celebration of two icons; Norma Shearer as Hollywood star, and Juliet as the Virgin. The banquet sequence is the singular most lavish scene in the film and makes Romeo's line, 'What lady's that which doth enrich the hand of yonder Knight?' (1:5:41) and the servant's reply, 'I know not, sir', (1:5:42) rather redundant. Who else but the daughter of the household would be afforded such an extravagant stage to showcase her beauty and wealth, and who else but a Hollywood star of the first order could command such a scene? The scene is a good example of what Mulvey meant when she wrote 'The presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation' (Mulvey 841). Although there is nothing erotic here, the scene itself being a symbolic benediction to female virginity, the introduction of a scene within the scene freezes the narrative almost completely.

Another allusion to both virginity and the Virgin is in the dress that Juliet wears for her own wedding for this ‘is practically copied from that in the painting “The Betrothal” by Michele da Verona’ (Anon, MGM, *Romeo and Juliet*, 1936). The same paragraph also confirms that all the costumes had to be approved not only by Oliver Messel and Adriane but by Irving Thalberg himself. This is another allusion to Hollywood seeking a form of cultural authority and authenticity in the film by linking the film with the past. Michel da Verona was an Italian artist (1470-c1540) who repeatedly returned to religious themes in his paintings. One of his paintings, *The Betrothal* shows a young groom about to place a ring on the right hand of his bride (copyright image). The painting, like so many of the time, is a representation of the Marriage of the Virgin. This is the symbolic marriage of the Virgin Mary to God or to the church and was a popular theme with many artists. Paintings with the same theme and symbolism, and showing the ring about to be placed on the right hand, were painted by, amongst others, artists such as Raphael, Albrecht Durer, and Perugino (**Figure 19**). According to Warner, the symbolism of the bride in Mariology ‘stands for the new era of the Church, the break with the past, the pure, beautiful creation of God, free of all the taint and strife of what has gone before’ (Warner 124). So too is Shearer’s Juliet a break from the morally corrupt past of Hollywood through the pure, spotless creation of Thalberg and the PCA.

The trailer had described *Romeo and Juliet* as a ‘Supreme Dramatic Romance’. This was because Thalberg could sell a romance to the public a great deal easier than he could sell tragedy, and so this aspect became the key marketing point of publicity. The balcony scene was used extensively to advertise the film in posters, lobby stills and postcards. The scene and its place in the history of great literary love scenes is described in the souvenir brochure as ‘One of the most famous love scenes

in literature, the famous Balcony Scene between Romeo (Leslie Howard) and Juliet (Norma Shearer)' (Anon, MGM, *Romeo and Juliet*, 1936). An enormous and detailed set was built so that when Romeo drops over the orchard wall, leaving behind his friends who have departed into the night whilst singing in perfect harmony, he finds himself not in an orchard but in a sumptuous and elaborate garden. Stone steps lead down to a flagstone walkway between two long, ornamental pools of water. He makes his way past large potted plants and cherry blossom trees in full bloom before spotting the heavily ornate balcony on to which Juliet appears. Orchestrated music accompanies Romeo as he makes his way to the balcony and continues to play as he speaks his first lines, the music stops just before Norma Shearer sighs; "O Romeo, Romeo wherefore art thou Romeo?"(2:2:33).

Although music (Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet*) is reintroduced towards the end of the scene, the effect of the cessation of a score at this point isolates the scene and gives it prominence above all other scenes in the movie. This was intentional and the scene itself was given particular focus in interviews to publicise the film. Frank Small wrote:

Next day, however, he [Cukor] suddenly decided to make the dreaded nine minute and fifty-three seconds long "balcony scene" ... So the set was closed as tightly as a leper colony It would be impossible to describe the tremendous tension, the almost tangible nervousness of everyone present before the cameras started. Finally, when Norma Shearer and Leslie Howard stepped on the set, waited for the signal and proceeded to live the entire scene through without a single hesitancy , a single flaw – relief flooded down and

expressed itself in the congratulations, in laughter a little too high pitched to be real' (Small 99).

This was another story released through MGM, this time designed to promote the balcony scene as the product of the skilled performance of two accomplished actors. From this particular point of view the balcony scene was the most important scene in the film simply because it was the one scene above all others that was likely to be instantly recognisable to an American audience. Publicity material included artistically drawn images of the scene as filmed which were posted outside theatres to encourage the public to enter. The image used shows Romeo gazing upwards with his right hand outstretched towards his love's desire, whilst Juliet smiles down from an extremely ornate balcony (**Figure 20**). Variations of this image were used extensively to promote the film. It appeared in posters and press photographs. It appears three times in the souvenir brochure including a full page drawing of the scene in the inside back cover. There is a significant difference in the drawing that appears on the inside back cover of the brochure, which was on sale *after* the film was released, and the drawings used for publicity before the release date. In the drawing used before the film was released, Shearer's right arm is resting on the balcony, whereas in the brochure drawing she is reaching down to Romeo. There is also a slight difference in the detail of the balcony, but the biggest difference is in Shearer's gown and Shearer herself. In the earlier drawing Shearer is wearing a thick, layered gown. It is rather shapeless and buttoned to the neck (**Figure 21**). The drawing used after the release of the film has Shearer wearing a flimsy, semi transparent gown. Furthermore, the neckline is different and Shearer's breasts are enhanced and drawn in a manner that accentuates the curves and exposes cleavage (**Figure 22**). The reason for the

difference is unexplained. This may have been a deliberate slight to the PCA as the brochure was on sale after the film was released and therefore was not under the scrutiny of the censor's eye. On the other hand, it may have been nothing more than artistic licence, but the fact remains that the depiction of Juliet before and after the release date is quite noticeable. Whatever the reason, the fact that so much attention and publicity was brought on the balcony scene confirms that it was the primary visual identifier with both the film and the play. This being the case, it was the one scene that MGM was keen to be perfect and it is therefore foolish to believe that the filming was decided on the spur of the moment by the director, or that Shearer and Howard captured the scene in one take. Roland Flamini discussed the shooting of the balcony scene with MGM film editor, Margaret Booth. "I had five versions of it...One with tears, one without tears, one played with close ups only, another played with long shots only, and then one with long shots and close ups cut in"(Flamini 248). Careful examination of this scene confirms that more than one take was used.

After Romeo has entered the garden, he makes his way down towards the balcony. As he is passing two trees, he notices that a shutter is being opened behind the balcony. This can clearly be seen in the top right hand corner of the screen where the darkness of the balcony is suddenly illuminated by the light from within the room. It is this burst of light that causes Romeo to hide behind one of the trees. The shot that immediately follows, a close up of the balcony, shows the shutters being opened a second time. When the camera returns to Romeo as he speaks the line, "But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?" (2:2:2), he is hiding behind a solitary tree. Towards the end of the scene, what appears to be a wedding ring can be glimpsed on the third finger of Juliet's left hand. There is no hint of sexual tension or desire in the scene, Romeo keeps his gloves on his hands and his feet firmly on the ground. Juliet

is dressed in an exquisitely designed but shapeless gown that is buttoned to the neck. After a few quietly spoken words both players deliver their lines with a level of volume that would alert the sleepest of guards. But it is all too theatrical, too rehearsed and too clinical. There is no hint of danger or nervousness of being discovered, or indeed of any all-powerful emotion at all. In the end, a scene that is often harnessed to show the magnitude of the lovers' feelings fails to achieve this. In the end, Juliet does little other than alternate wistful gazes between Romeo and the middle distance. Even this action can be interpreted as an indication of the Virgin Mary. As Warner says of a Giotto panel of the Virgin:

Her eyes, as in so much Marian iconography, gaze out beyond the picture frame to gaze upon an inner landscape of the soul, where tragedy and triumph are bound together, and her countenance is therefore wistful. Wistfulness seems also a natural quality of the feminine, a part of modesty and grace, a suitable expression of wonderment at her own beauty and mystery, a kind of hesitancy and humility that is hardly ever present in images of masculine beauty and goodness (Warner 335-336).

Balcony as Pulpit

The balcony itself is a major point of focus within the scene. It is the setting which is used to exhibit Juliet not only to Romeo, but to the audience. It is the frame that is used to showcase the film. This is not surprising as the balcony scene is possibly the most visually recognisable scene in all of Shakespeare's plays. By repeatedly bringing focus to the balcony scene, and to Shearer within that scene, the audience is guided towards accepting this particular adaptation as having historical authenticity and, in

doing so, they accept Shearer as Juliet. The balcony plays a significant part within the context of the play as it keeps the lovers apart, forcing them to express their love through heartfelt words. Within the context of the film, however, its presence is overstated. As the visual centrepiece of the most important scene in the film, it acquires significance far beyond that of a mere prop. MGM had openly boasted about the amount of research they had undertaken:

Messel and his men had spent three months in Italy taking pictures. They photographed old buildings, windows, balconies, ruins, statues...They took in all 2,749 pictures. With their precious cargo, they returned to the studios and plunged into active work. These pictures served as the research base for their ideas... From the 200 drawings that were drawn of the settings, fifty-four models were made to exact scale' (Anon, MGM, *Romeo and Juliet*, 1936).

As the central iconic vision of the film, a great deal of time and planning was spent on its appearance and in the end, a balcony was made that was a copy of a work that was built by the Italian architect and sculptor, Michelozzo di Bartolomeo Michelozzi (1396–1472) and decorated by Donatello (c 1386 – 1466). Surprisingly, the work in question is not actually a balcony at all but an external pulpit commissioned for the Cathedral of St Stephen in Prato, Italy (Duomo di Patro) (**Figure 23**). The balcony, as seen in the film, has two decorative slim columns added, but is otherwise a faithful copy (**Figure 24**). Although St Stephen was the first Christian martyr, it is not for this connection that the choice is notable, rather it is that the pulpit was commissioned to exhibit a holy relic. The relic in question is the *Sacra Cintola*, the supposed remains of a girdle – a long strip of cloth tied around the waist- that was worn by the Virgin

Mary. The story is that the girdle was in the possession of St Thomas and eventually ended up in Prato sometime in the twelfth century. It was then donated by a rich merchant who, in turn, had inherited it as part of a dowry when he married a Palestinian woman in 1141 (“Prato and its Province” 2013 Web). The relic, whatever its origins, still exists and is still exhibited from the pulpit amidst much pomp and ceremony to the public five times a year on days associated with The Virgin: Christmas Day; Easter Sunday; May 1 (the month of May is traditionally dedicated to Virgin Mary); August 15 (Assumption of Virgin Mary) and September 8 (Nativity of Virgin Mary) (“Prato and its Province” 2013 Web). This is a remarkable and direct link between Shearer’s Juliet and the adoration of the Virgin Mary. The pulpit, titled ‘The Pulpit of the Sacred Girdle’, which was commissioned and built to display a relic of the Virgin Mary in Italy (**Figure 25**) was meticulously rebuilt in order to showcase an image of the virgin Juliet in Hollywood. The result is that 1936 we are presented with a Juliet who is ornate, beautiful and chaste, even in death.

In the death scene, Juliet is filmed in repose, lying on a tombstone which is covered in a full, white lace, veil, with garlands of flowers strewn upon the floor. The tomb is large, well lit and has a vaulted ceiling. The tombstone on which Juliet lies, her hands joined as if in silent prayer, is bordered by four tall lit candles in a manner reminiscent of a church altar. When Romeo removes her veil we are presented with an image of Juliet very similar to the image we were presented with at the beginning of the movie. She is ornately dressed in a white dress, with an exquisite matching tiara. The scene of Juliet awakening is beautifully lit and filmed in soft focus close up. The effect of this is that the audience is presented with a scene more akin to a contemporary and popular Hollywood film than a theatrical Shakespearean play from the past. It is another shift from the vertical aspect of film adaptation to the horizontal,

reformatting a bygone tragedy as a contemporary romance (**Figure 26**). The death scene that follows is filmed in much the same manner. In a change from the order of the text, Juliet stabs herself before uttering the line 'There rust and let me die', even managing a wistful smile between plunging the blade and resting her tearful face next to that of Romeo. As with the subject of love in the film, the subject of death is one of stylised romance and beauty. There is no evidence of any powerful emotion, be it fear, love, or unremitting and unbearable loss. This is Hollywood in the golden age and we are presented with Hollywood star to worship and adore. In the end though, there is little progression from the Juliet we are introduced to at the beginning of the film; beautiful, chaste and virginal. Juliet here is not shaped by Shakespeare's text. Instead, we have a Juliet who is shaped by the immediate and powerful influences of the time the film was made. Adherence to a strict code of film censorship resulted in a Juliet who reflected the feminine ideal shaped by an industry that itself was economically dependent on the morality and ideology of the PCA. Here we are presented with a Juliet whose chastity and virginity reflects a love that is romantic, passive, and unthreatening. It is perhaps harsh to state that this reflects entirely the subjugation of women in film in the thirties. It can be stated that although we are presented with an ideal of Shearer in the dual typography of Juliet the virgin, and Juliet: The Virgin; this was not undertaken solely to please the PCA and censorship bodies within Hollywood. It was also designed to please the targeted audience who regularly attended cinemas at that time. *Romeo and Juliet* will always appeal to a certain audience as primarily a love story as opposed to a tragedy. For a western cinema audience of the 1930s, a romance starring a leading Hollywood actress in a major studio film was perhaps the only realistic version that would have seen the light of day.

Chapter Two

1954 - The Forgotten Juliet

Of the four films in this thesis, three are fairly familiar to cinema audiences whereas Castellani's 1954 adaptation is, by comparison, far lesser known. The 1936 version of *Romeo and Juliet* was launched in a blaze of publicity and remains to this day, if not a Shakespearean tour-de-force, an enjoyable and easily accessible film from the Golden Age of Hollywood. The widely acclaimed 1968 version directed by Franco Zeffirelli and starring Olivia Hussey, remains for many the definitive film version of the play. Baz Luhrmann's 1996 version was a huge commercial success and helped launch the careers of Claire Danes and Leonardo DiCaprio. By comparison, the 1954 film directed by Renato Castellani and starring an unknown Susan Shentall, has all but been consigned to the dustbin of public awareness, being viewed today for the most part by academics and film buffs. This becomes more intriguing when we consider that on its release the film was regarded by many as a critical success. It was nominated at the BAFTA awards in the combined Best Film and British Film category, and Castellani himself was nominated in the Best British Screenplay category, losing out to George Tabopri and Robin Estridge for *The Young Lovers*. (BAFTA Awards Search, "Romeo and Juliet", 2013 Web). Castellani's film won the Best Cinematography Award from the British Board of Cinematographers, and Renato Castellani won the Best Director Award from the highly respected American Board of Review. The most celebrated prize, however, was when the film beat Visconti's *Senso*, Fellini's *La Strada*, Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai*, and Kazan's *On the Waterfront*, to pick up the coveted Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival (IMDB.com, "Romeo and Juliet 1954 Awards"). Since then, however, the film has fallen from favour and, in many cases, recognition. It received a short lived re-release

in the wake of the success of Zeffirelli's 1968 film but, at the time of writing, is not readily available in either celluloid print or DVD format¹⁰. The sense of temporal and cultural isolation of the film is furthered by the director never again matching the commercial or critical success of this film, as well as the actress playing Juliet, Susan Shentall, retiring from acting immediately after filming and her subsequent reluctance to talk about her experience. The question remains, however, why this film fell from popularity so quickly?

It could be argued that the film failed for many reasons. Some contemporary critics, mostly British, suggested that the director failed to engage fully with the complexities of Shakespeare's text and that this alone was reason for condemnation. As we shall see, this is a point that was oversimplified at the time of the film's release. A film adaptation of any of Shakespeare's texts does not necessarily need to adhere to Shakespeare's words in order for it to be considered a 'good' adaptation. There are countless non English adaptations of Shakespeare's plays which are not only considered good, but are considered classics: Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (1957); *Ran* (1985), and Konzentsev's *King Lear* (1971) to name but three. Strong arguments can be made for adding several other adaptations to that list so there are other reasons that need to be considered. Castellani reduced or removed certain key elements within the play to such an extent that the main pillar of the story was supported by a virtual solitary theme of conflict. Also, Castellani's preoccupation with such diverse themes as neo-realism, architecture, the Italian origins of the story, Renaissance art, 1950s Hollywood cinematic convention, and an undue and overbearing interest in Technicolor, detracted from, rather than enhanced the finished film. The vagary of his casting and his failure to allow Juliet to develop beyond the phallogocentric ideology of

¹⁰ Pirate copies, sourced in the Far East, are readily available from the internet. These are of very poor quality. A limited official DVD release was made, restoring the vivid Technicolor of the original. Susan Shentall's daughter owns a rare celluloid print that requires some restoration

a 1950s Hitchcockian blonde meant that, as a serious presentation of Shakespeare's tragedy, this film was unlikely to succeed in anything other than the short term. Although released to initial acclaim, history and critics have not been kind to Castellani's film, and there remains a whiff of suspicion that the Golden Lion awarded in Venice was undeserved, particularly when one considers the films that were in competition that year. Both the film and the director are omitted from a history of the Festival on the webpage of *The Venice Biennale*, the umbrella arts forum to which the Venice Film Festival belongs, when it states

After the first neo-realist films were shown at the Festival...a number of foremost Italian figures were recognised as leading talents in the '50s and '60s: Fellini, Antonioni, Rosi, Olmi, Bertolucci, Pasolini, Vancini, De Seta, and Zurlini. The fact that Lucino Visconti did not receive the Golden Lion award for *Senso* in 1954...led to a heated debate (labiennale.org. 'The 40s and the 50s' Web).

The omission of Castellani from this list, and the comment specifying Visconti's *Senso* being denied the Golden Lion award in the very year that it was given to *Romeo and Juliet*, suggests a selective amnesia regarding the film's initial reception and how it is now viewed in retrospect. In order to fully understand the background and circumstances in which the film was made, as well as the warm reception on it received on its release, it is important to have an understanding of both the director's involvement in the neo-realist movement and the optimism that existed in relation to this particular school of film making at the time in question.

Castellani and Neo-realism

Castellani's first film, as screenwriter only, was in 1941. He had directed some half a dozen films by 1954, including what is referred to as his neo-realist trilogy. The first of these was *Sotto il sole di Roma* (Under the Sun of Rome 1948), which the director co-wrote with Sergio Amidei, who had co-written *Rome Open City* with Federico Fellini in 1945. This film features a character who lives in a makeshift camp in the Coliseum in Rome, an early visual indicator of the director's keen interest in architecture, which he had studied in Milan (nytimes.com. "Renato Castellani" Web). The film also incorporates another theme that was close to Castellani's heart, and one that was popular within the neo-realist movement of the time; that of the *vagabondaggi*, in which much of the story unfolds and takes place during 'wanderings' in the city. These *vagabondaggi* highlighted the protagonists' struggles in an urban context. In such movies, the architecture, spaces, and public areas of the city form a medium through which the conflict and struggles of the characters are concluded. It was a theme that Castellani was to bring to his version of *Romeo and Juliet* in 1954 and which resulted in much criticism when the film was released.

Sotto il sole di Roma was nominated for the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival but lost out to Olivier's *Hamlet* (labiennale.org. Cinema: Awards. Web) Castellani's next film was *E primavera* (The Spring, 1950). Again Castellani co-wrote the screenplay, this time with Suso Cecchi D'Amico and the renowned neo-realist Cesare Zavattini, who was nominated for an Oscar in the same year for *Ladri di biciclette* (The Bicycle Thieves). Castellani's third film in this trilogy was in 1952, with *Due soldi di speranza* (Two Pennyworth of Hope). This time he declined to share any writing duties and wrote both the story and the screenplay himself. This film was the most successful of the trilogy and was nominated for a BAFTA (BAFTA.org :

“Awards 1954 Nominees” Web) and tied with Orson Welles’ *Othello* for the Palme D’Or at Cannes (IMDB.com “Cannes Film Festival Awards1952” Web). This award, tying as it did with Welles, is worthy of note. Margueritte H. Rippy writes of Welles’ Shakespeare adaptations that he ‘tended to refocus his cinematic interpretations on contemporary themes, whether or not those themes were considered central to the original Shakespearean text (Burnett “et al” 17). The dual issues of contemporary cinematic themes and the adherence to the original Shakespeare text were matters which were to be discussed in some detail by journalists on the release of Castellani’s *Romeo and Juliet* just two years later and will be discussed in this chapter. So we see that although Castellani was relatively unknown to a commercial film audience outwith Italy, he was already an award winning director who had worked with some of the most successful and respected screen writers of the Italian neo-realist movement. An understanding of the director’s background in this area is absolutely critical if we are to have a proper understanding of the 1954 *Romeo and Juliet*. This involvement in the neo-realist school is often mentioned only as a footnote, or is acknowledged but dismissed as inconsequential, or is sometimes ignored altogether. To adopt any of these approaches would be neglectful. Without an understanding of this particular school of film, it is impossible fully to comprehend the cinematic ambitions of the director and his personal remoulding of *Romeo and Juliet* in a contemporary Italian environment.

Italian neo-realist cinema is a complex issue and it demands too large and encompassing a discussion to give justice to its history than can be properly achieved within the limitations of this thesis. Simona Monticelli gives an insight into the subject when she writes:

In the immediate post-war years, Neo-Realist films provided an immediate response to the desire to wipe out the material and ideological legacies of fascism. They denounced the horrors of the war and/or dealt with themes central to the agency of Reconstruction such as poverty, unemployment, shortage of housing, and social strife (Monticelli, 455).

The term 'neo-realism' is difficult to pin down in origin. *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory* states that it was first coined as *neorealismo* in the 1920s and was a translation of the German *neue sachlichkeit*. It claims that the first film to be generally described and accepted as neo-realist was Luchino Visconti's *Ossessione* in 1942 (Macey, "Neo-realism", *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory*). Monticelli claims that film editor Mario Serandrei was amongst the first to use the term when he used it in a letter to Visconti in reference to *Ossessione* (Monticelli, 456).

Interestingly enough, *Ossessione* was a remake of the French film *Le Dernier Tourant*, aka *The Last Turn* (1939) which was directed by Pierre Chenal and was based on James M. Cain's novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. It is difficult, therefore, to give an exact date as to when neo-realism came into place or to give an all-encompassing definition. This was a problem that Roberto Rossellini, a founding father of the movement and director of, *Roma, citta aperta* (Rome, Open City), admitted when asked about it:

...neo-realism, but what does that mean? You know, there was a Congress in Parma on neo-realism, and they discussed the term for a long time, but it remained undefined. Most of the time it is only a label. For me, it is above all,

a moral position from which to look at the world. It then became an aesthetic position, but at the beginning it was moral” (Overby, 1).

The morality that neo-realism sought in opposing fascism, poverty and social strife meant that, in the beginning at least, there was a strong political aspect present.

Monticelli writes that:

Neo-Realism was construed as constituting a radical (sic) break from practices and values which had informed film production during the fascist regime.

This, in turn, depended upon the almost wholesale condemnation of the Italian cinema produced during the regime which was mostly dismissed as vacuous entertainment (e.g. ‘white telephone’ comedies) or bourgeois formalism (e.g. calligraphic style) (Monticelli 455).

At the heart of this new cinematic reality was a social reality and an endeavour to reflect the human condition and suffering of the Italian people, particularly under German occupation during the war. This extended not only to capturing the social reality of the situation, but also to the actors depicting that reality.

As part of the rejection of all that had gone before, there was a fashion for employing non-professional actors based on the way they looked, the thinking being that those chosen benefited from having no preconceived ideas of the parts they were to play. This hunger for reality was not absolute and it should be noted that Rossellini had used two excellent, professional actors, Anna Magnani and Aldo Fabrizi, when making *Rome, Open City* in 1945. *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory* further undermines the portrayal of projected reality in this film by pointing out that the

outdoor sequences are actually reconstructions, and not documentary footage (Macey, “Neo-realism”, *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory*). This disparity within the neo-realist school, an ongoing argument of what was realist and what was not, was one of the many splits within the philosophy of neo-realism that was never fully resolved. Monticelli writes that:

critical discourse of the 1950s was dominated by a concern with the commercial and political bastardization of Neo-Realism. From the late 1940s onwards, new generic strands of the sentimental comedy (i.e. ‘pink Neo-Realism’) and melodrama (i.e. ‘popular Neo-Realism’) were at the forefront of the commercial resurgence of the domestic product (Monticelli 458).

Referring to the great neo-realist director, Cesare Zavattini, Monticelli wrote how Zavattini believed that, ‘the aim of neo-realism had to be to rediscover, without embellishment or dramatization, the dailiness’ of people’s lives’ (Monticelli 458). He argued that the most minute and apparently insignificant detail of these lives was full of poetry as well as the ‘echoes and reverberations of the human condition’ (Monticelli 458). There are undoubted difficulties in attempting to define precisely what is meant by neo-realism when there are differences of opinion between the practitioners of the neo-realist school itself. There is, however, a factor that is common throughout, namely that the ‘realism’ in the term refers to the portrayal of the human condition and *not* simply the perceived authenticity or the stylised setting in which the film is shot.

Castellani, in an attempt to bring to the fore the portrayal of the human condition of the characters within Shakespeare’s play, brought close focus on the feud

between the two families. This approach, although successful in bringing a neo-realist framework in which to showcase the film, sacrificed other aspects of the play which, in turn, resulted in some criticism. With the feud taking centre stage for much of the film, characters outwith the direct conflict are left unexplored. Chief amongst these is Juliet herself who, for much of the film exists in a passive role, secondary to the role of Romeo. Mercutio too is reduced in stature as is Friar Laurence whose costume is afforded more detail than the role itself. Also, although the feud is brought to the very forefront of the film, it is itself left teasingly unexplored. For all of the director's focus on the continuing feud and its realization on the suffering of the human condition for those involved, it was never examined by the director in either the Italian folk tales which eventually led to Shakespeare's play, or the play itself. Castellani's approach to the play and his intention to showcase it in a neo-realist frame, with the feud and conflict at the centre of the story, is detailed in the souvenir programme that was commissioned for the world premiere of the film in London in 1954. In the programme, a question was asked of the director which produced a revealing answer:

While making "Romeo and Juliet" he was often asked if he had turned his back on realism for this historic drama. "Certainly not," was his answer. "The only difference between my last three films and 'Romeo and Juliet' is the title – the theme of conflict is the same' (Anon, Rank Souvenir Brochure, Romeo and Juliet 1954).

This illuminating response makes clear the director's close focus on a solitary theme within the play whereas other major themes; the love, passion, courage and humanity of the main characters, are each reduced to a decidedly secondary role. Despite being

shaped within a neo-realist framework, the conflict in Castellani's film is overwhelmingly physical. The combination of focusing on the physical conflict between the families, whilst simultaneously attempting to preserve a sense of historical 'realism' within the setting of the story, resulted in one of the film's most notable cinematic weaknesses when the director banned swords from being used in any of the clashes between the warring families. He explained his reasoning for this in a newspaper article when interviewed by John Gay for *The Empire News* on September 19th 1954. Castellani stated that 'the Duke in Verona at the time had issued an order – to keep down brawling – that nobody must wear their longswords. Only short swords' (Gay). On hearing this reply, the journalist is perplexed but he notes that 'In Renato's mind there could be no argument about the matter' (Gay). Although this may have been intended to reflect a sense of projected reality in the lives of this who lived under direct rule, it resulted in some unimaginative scenes of staid, passionless conflict. By instructing the actors to use only daggers, or short swords that could be hidden under the cloak, Castellani reduced the action scenes to a series of clumsy, rushed skirmishes. The effect of this was an undoubted lessening of what was intended to be the main focal point of the film. It doing this, Castellani also diminished another aspect of Shakespeare's play in that the text makes numerous references to sword play. Mercutio refers to Tybalt as 'a duellist, a gentle man of the very first house, of the first and second cause' (2:4:24) and makes several references to laws of fencing artistry and ceremony. Although these references, and others, are missing from Castellani's film, it is the visual medium that suffers most. During the confrontation in the market place, no swords are used and so no-one is urged to 'draw thy tool' (1:1:30). No-one's 'naked weapon is out' (1:1:32) and no-one is challenged

to ‘draw if you be men’ (1:1:59). Instead, we witness a grubby brawl where a servant is clubbed with a wooden log.

In the film, Benvolio does not urge the others to ‘put up your swords’(1:1:61) which makes Tybalt’s question ‘art though drawn amongst these heartless hinds?’ (1:1:63) redundant, for Benvolio has no sword and his dagger is not drawn when this is said. In fact, the opening scenes are visually inappropriate because no-one is wearing, or carrying, a sword, even though the Prince does not make his proclamation until *after* the brawl. The confrontations that take place throughout the film are much the poorer visually because of Castellani’s decision. When a petulant Romeo kills a sluggish Tybalt, who then falls unconvincingly on a set of stairs outside the cathedral, he does so by simply running up behind him and stabbing him once with a dagger. This does not compare well to Shakespeare’s text where it is Romeo’s uncontrollable fury that results in him losing his self control and subsequently killing Tybalt. ‘Away to heaven respective lenity, And fire-eyed fury be my conduct now!’(3:1:25-26). That Castellani would make conflict the centre pillar on which to build his film, and then undermine it so significantly by banning swords, the very implements through which physical conflict is expressed within the play, was a costly decision. The reasoning that the decision was based on historical authenticity is debatable in itself because the story is a work of fiction. It is possible, however, that in banning swords Castellani was making a reference to generic, historical feuding between Italian families. In Italy there is an expression, ‘a ferri corti’ which literally means ‘at irons short’. ‘Irons’, in this instance, means daggers. The closest English equivalent of the phrase would be ‘at daggers drawn’. To show the two feuding families, literally, at irons short certainly infuses the dispute with a distinctive Italian flavour. Whatever the reason though, be it a stubborn adherence to historical ‘authenticity’, or a reference to the

Italian origins of the play, the result is that the conflict that was placed at the centre of his production is realised through a series of insipid episodes of unconvincing theatricality. Not only was Castellani's adherence to his own interpretation of 'historical realism' damaging to his film, it was inconsistent and inaccurate throughout. At approximately seven minutes and thirteen seconds into the film, immediately prior to Benvolio entering the frame to give chase down the alleyway, there is an edit that results in a passer-by at the top left of the screen appearing further up the alley than he was previously. Benvolio and his companion then have to avoid two modern stone traffic bollards that are placed halfway down the alleyway at an intersection. We can tell it is an intersection partly from the light and also because both actors look cautiously to the left and right before crossing over, suggesting that Castellani had not closed off the street to traffic prior to shooting. The same stone bollards are seen later in the film when Romeo runs down the alley on his way to Juliet's tomb. There appears another set of restrictive bollards to the right of the church, clearly visible as first Friar Laurence, then Juliet and the nurse approach the church prior to the wedding. There is also what appears to be a page from a magazine stuck on the wall of Friar Laurence's cell which is clearly visible for about seven seconds at 54:09. The shadow where the paper has come away from the wall shows that it is most definitely not a painting or a fresco.

It should be remembered that Castellani's film was made at a time when there was optimism and confidence in the Italian film industry as well as a belief that the cultural identity of film making itself was being redefined. Italian film studios were, according to TIME magazine, very industrious at this period, producing 152 films in 1954 alone, almost two thirds of the combined output of Hollywood in the same year (TIME.com. "Cinema – The Year in Films" Web). The hiatus that Italian studios were

enjoying at this time may explain Castellani's initial plan to infuse the film with a neo-realist bearing. It was reported that his original intention was to use only the Italian source material of the play. In an article in the *Manchester Guardian*, 'Shakespeare Too Big To Miss', it was reported of Castellani:

At first he had intended to work entirely from Shakespeare's Italian sources (chiefly the stories of Bandello and Luigi DaPorto), but then found it was impossible to ignore Shakespeare's play. When travelling from London to Rome "one must go through Paris – it's too big to miss" (Anon, Shakespeare Too Big To Miss).

This is corroborated in John Gay's article in the *Empire News* on Sept 19th 1954 when he wrote that not only did Castellani study the Italian sources of the play, but that 'He wrote his own translation' (Gay). Furthermore, it emerged that not only had Castellani originally intended to write his own screenplay based on the earlier Italian versions of the story, there were to be two versions of the film, one in English and another in Italian. In an interview in the *Manchester Guardian* given almost two years before the film's release, when Castellani was in England on a casting trip, the newspaper reported his intentions:

It will be in colour, will use no studios and will be available in Italian as well as in English. The Italian version will use the same cast as the English and the dialogue will be dubbed. Mr Castellani himself has done the basic Italian translation- in prose- but the final version will have to be an intricately

designed one in which every sentence in Italian is exactly the same length as the line it translates (Anon, *Slow Casting for Romeo and Juliet* 1954).

Italian Sources and Cultural Authority

By attempting to film *Romeo and Juliet* in Italian, within a neo-realist framework that would express the suffering of the human condition, Castellani would be stressing the Italian cultural authority of the play as well as highlighting a moral reality of the story. This was certainly a departure from the romantically idealised and sweetened version of the 1936 film. This echoes what Zavattini meant when he spoke of neorealism and the hunger for reality as opposed to a sweetened version of the truth. This original intention to abandon the beauty and poetry of Shakespeare's text in favour of a greater focus of the early Italian sources of the story was seen by some as proof that Castellani was dismissive of Shakespeare's play, a point that appeared to rankle with some British journalists.

The question of Shakespeare's cultural authority is another complex issue and is inexorably linked to the fidelity of the text. The screen image has sought to establish itself as the proper authority since the invention of film itself. Certainly the design of this sought after authority has changed with the progressive changes in film-making and audience expectations, but each decade has produced adaptations of Shakespeare films which they have sought to present the 'proper' version. In the six years prior to Castellani's film there had been a flurry of major film adaptations. Olivier's *Hamlet* in 1948 was nominated for seven Oscars and won four (IMDB.com. Awards for Hamlet. Web). Shortly after this, Republic Pictures released Orson Welles' *Macbeth*. Orson Welles returned to Shakespeare with *Othello* in 1952 and the following year saw the release of Joseph Mankiewicz's *Julius Caesar*. So, the late

1940s to mid 1950s (Olivier's *Richard III* would be released in 1955) was very much a golden time for Shakespeare on film. During this period the film industry, and by that I mean the mainstream, western branch of it, strove to establish itself as the 'true' cultural authority on Shakespeare. Castellani was to make his film at the peak of this boom time but, by announcing his intention to abandon Shakespeare's text and replace it with his own script based on Italian sources, and to have a version of the film entirely in Italian, challenged the existing and accepted cultural authority of many academics head on. Castellani's intention of placing Italian sources of *Romeo and Juliet* at the centre of the film directly questioned the fidelity of Shakespeare's text, the consequence of which would reassign the cultural authority of the tale back to Italy. By doing this Castellani was, in the eyes of certain journalists, seen to be disrespectful by questioning the accepted method of filming Shakespeare's plays, as well as the role of Shakespeare himself in *Romeo and Juliet*. From an academic point of view, this is an entirely acceptable. Mark Thornton Burnett refers to *Romeo and Juliet* as 'a global commodity' (Burnett, Shakespeare and World Cinema 2013, 195) and when examining non English, non Western adaptations argues that 'Adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* are intertextually respectful and interrogative, suggesting that neither Hollywood, nor the English language can be the default positions for the Montagues and Capulets of the contemporary world' (Burnett, Shakespeare and World Cinema 2013, 197). This, however, was not, a commonly shared view with the audiences who saw the film on its release. I use the word 'audiences' as opposed to 'audience' because the views of those who saw the film in Italy were likely to differ from those who saw the film in America or the UK. Here, we experience the difference between 'knowing' and 'unknowing' audiences in cinematic adaptation, a topic discussed by Linda Hutcheon in her book *A Theory of Adaptation*.

Hutcheon makes the point that in order for a film to be seen as an adaptation, ‘we need to recognise it as such and know its adapted text, thus allowing the latter to oscillate in our memories with what we are experiencing’ (Hutcheon 120-121). If we know the adapted text then we become part of a ‘knowing’ audience and our expectation will involve that text. If, however, we do not know the text then we become part of an ‘unknowing’ audience. One of the major problems faced by Castellani on the release of his film was that audiences in Italy could be termed as a ‘knowing’ audience, being familiar with both Shakespeare’s play and the Italian folk tales on which it was based, whereas those outwith Italy could be termed as both a ‘knowing’ and ‘unknowing’ audience *at the same time*. This is because those audiences would know the story of *Romeo and Juliet* from Shakespeare’s play but would be unlikely to know much, if anything, of the Italian tales on which it was based. Hutcheon states that ‘for unknowing audiences, adaptations have a way of upending sacrosanct elements like priority and originality’ (Hutcheon 122). It was not only the audiences outwith Italy who could be classed in this way, so too could many of the journalists and film critics who reviewed and critiqued the film. For them, Shakespeare was sacrosanct and his version of the story was held to be the original. As such, Shakespeare was expected to be afforded priority above all else.

The act of advancing the significance of Italian folk tales at the expense of Shakespeare’s text caused conflict and was something that a number of critics found either frustrating or impertinent. This was duly reflected in some articles at the time of the film’s release. John Gay’s article in the *Empire News* labelled Castellani as ‘The man who snubbed Shakespeare’ (Gay). Beverley Baxter in her review in the *Leicester Mercury* stated that Castellani’s ‘Neapolitan phlegm and his architectural realism drain the piece of its poetry’ (Baxter). Paul Dehn, in his review ‘Wherefore IS this

Romeo' for *The News Chronicle*, was quite acerbic about the Venice jury whom he described as 'either ignorant of Shakespeare's work or just plain deaf' (Dehn). A critic who voiced despair at an Italian audience's appreciation of the film was Campbell Dixon of the *Daily Telegraph*. In his review 'A Shakespeare Mosaic', he mused:

I expressed my own opinion of this film when it was shown in Venice. It won the Grand Prix there partly because the jurors were men capable of appreciating beauty when they saw it; partly, perhaps because most of them were incapable of understanding English when they heard it (Dixon,).

Even though the first screening of the film at the Venice Film Festival took place without Italian subtitles, there was still a suspicion that an Italian was not the right choice to direct a Shakespearean film. Contrary to what may have been voiced Castellani had not 'snubbed' Shakespeare for he had altered his original plans so the screenplay was updated from the 14th to the 15th century with Shakespeare's text brought back on board as the primary source; but damage had already been done and Castellani and his Italian approach to the film was viewed by many with suspicion.

An Untrained Actress

The casting of an unknown and untrained actress in a film adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* was another break from tradition but was very much in keeping with the philosophy of neo-realism. This was a rule that Castellani had followed throughout his entire career, having only worked with non- professional actors in his previous films. Susan Shentall's casting has, over the years, been the focus of various debates. It has

been suggested that as an inexperienced actress she was unable to carry the role or give it the gravitas it required. At the time of the film's release, Shentall's performance was met with mixed reviews. *The Leicester Mercury*, on August 19th 1954 offered an anonymous quote, 'so it has already been stated in print that Susan Shentall's performance is a "sensation"... that she responded "brilliantly" (Anon. A Juliet Sensation). Paul Dehn described her performance, along with Laurence Harvey's as 'very middling' (Dehn). Harold Conway, in his review 'Beguiled by a Beautiful Picture', in *The Daily Sketch* said that her performance was 'not a triumph, which would have been miraculous. But neither is it a failure' (Conway). The fact that this untrained actress was English generated a huge amount of publicity in the British national press. Many articles were written telling the tale of how an eighteen year old girl was spotted eating in a restaurant and subsequently plucked from obscurity and given a lead role in *Romeo and Juliet*. This story became so widespread and seemed so unlikely that, subsequently, doubts began to rise as to its authenticity. A journalist, writing an article titled 'Typist or Star' cast suspicion on the tale by kindling a rumour that the story was a publicity stunt. It was suggested that Susan Shentall was actually a rather ambitious actress who had secured the part through contacts of her father, a wealthy company director. The unnamed journalist wrote:

Unfortunately, a concurrent rumour spread abroad to the press circles several weeks later which sounded more like the truth. It appears that somebody told somebody that Janni was a very good friend of the Shentall family ... You see, despite the big "I don't care about films act", which is assumed to counteract the critics' blast, Little Sue is a very determined Miss, never to be fooled by

her English placidity; beneath the fine blonde hair and the candid blue eyes, lie the steely grit of the most hardened professional' (Anon. Typist or Star).

The family of Susan Shentall have, however, dismissed this version of events categorically and stated that Joseph Janni was not a friend of the family and that he was not even known to them prior to film (Transcript, Interview with Susan Shentall's Family. Unpublished). Susan Shentall's life prior to her casting was pleasant but unremarkable. She was born on the 21st May, 1934, and lived in the family home at Old Brampton. She attended Lawnside and St James', Malvern schools. After that she took a course in domestic science and spent time in a placement with a French family in Paris before returning to England (Transcript, Interview with Susan Shentall's Family. Unpublished). At eighteen years old, she was studying at secretarial college in London. Her visiting parents took her for a meal at *The Caprice* restaurant in Mayfair, a restaurant favoured by Castellani, who had been brought there by Lord Rank when he was in the UK at the time on a casting mission. The maitre'd of the restaurant, Mario Gallati, detailed how Castellani shared his thoughts with him regarding the problems he faced in casting the role of Juliet. Gallati states that Castellani had left instructions to keep a lookout for a girl who fitted the description of his ideal Juliet. He was quite specific explicit in what he was looking for:

Ideally, Juliet should be played by a woman of sixty, for only a woman of that age has the experience for this great role. In my view the only other way the part can be played is by a girl with no experience whatever—someone who can be moulded. She must be between sixteen and eighteen, blonde and blue-

eyed, as they are in Verona even today, and she must look simple, innocent and unsophisticated (Gallati 132).

Shentall met all these requirements. According to Lionel Lambert, writing in *Photoplay* of July 1954, she had other qualities that may have been helpful in securing the part:

I think it was first and foremost that she fitted Castellani's conception of Juliet. She had looks, beauty and poise. She had breeding, good manners and education. She spoke with a voice which charmed, her speech was clear and refined. She had intelligence, good humour, and something Castellani had almost lost hope of finding - patience. When she did her first test she sat quietly reading the script, listening and watching. There was no outward sign of emotion, no nerves. When she went before the cameras she did what was required of her, and got the part (Lambert 54).

Although the episode of the casting of Susan Shentall is often relegated to little more than an interesting anecdote regarding a young girl's journey from obscurity to fame, or as an example of a director's whimsy being allowed to run unchecked, it is primarily an example of the neo-realist practice of placing non-professional actors at the centre of a film production. This then raises the question as to why Castellani then chose to cast Laurence Harvey in the role of Romeo? Harvey was a professional actor and had recent experience of playing Shakespearean roles, having spent a year at Stratford, where, amongst smaller roles he had played opposite Margaret Leighton in a production of *As You Like It* in 1953. Although he was not what could be termed a

top star, he was far from unknown and his performance in *As You Like It* was televised and shown as part of the BBC Sunday Night Theatre season on 15th March 1953 (IMDB.com. “BBC Sunday Night Theatre: “As You Like It” Web). According to Gallati, however, Harvey’s casting had nothing to do with his acting experience and was also down to a chance sighting in the very same restaurant. He wrote:

Strangely enough, Castellani had first seen his Romeo in the Caprice. Young Harvey, erect and handsome, had entered the restaurant one lunch-time when I was talking with the director. ‘There’s a young Romeo’, I said, nodding towards Harvey. The Italian director looked at him and exclaimed: “You’re right. That’s the boy I want!’ And, sure enough, Harvey was cast in the role only a few days later. ‘Now find me a Juliet!’ commanded Castellani’ (Gallati 130-131).

By casting a completely untrained actress opposite a seasoned professional, Castellani brought an imbalance to the central characters that reflected in the finished film. This was noted by Dilys Powell who commented in the *Sunday Times*:

... the overruling emotion must come from the lovers, and here it is that the film fails. Laurence Harvey’s Romeo has been much criticised, and it is true that this obviously experienced young man has little of Shakespeare’s languishing, romantic boy. Nevertheless, Mr Harvey, with his interesting voice and his trained gifts does not seem to be the one to blame: the error surely was in balancing a polished young actor against an untrained, inexperienced Juliet and thus creating discord out of Shakespeare’s harmony (Powell).

In what is one of the few comments made at the time that made reference to the neo-realist format of the film, she continues:

Castellani is known for working wonders with non-professionals. But it is all very well to use non-professionals in Italy, where every man is an actor, and in the realistic, colloquial film, where emotion need not be discovered in the artificial cadences of verse....No doubt Castellani has once again worked a wonder. But Shakespeare has his own wonders, and personally I prefer not to have them obscured by a director's caprices (Powel).

Even foregoing the pun on *The Caprice* restaurant, this is an interesting comment and shows a difference in the critical perspective to the premise of using untrained actors. Whereas the neo-realist approach could be taken by directors in Italy who, in all likelihood, would be lauded for doing so, the same approach garnered little, if any, praise within the UK. What Powel described as the director's caprices was evident in his preconceived ideas about Juliet for, before casting, he had already decided on Juliet's physical appearance and that the character should exude an air of innocence and chastity. This was evident from an interview that appeared in the *Manchester Guardian* on September 23rd 1954. In this article Castellani stated that the portrayal of Juliet in his film would centre on her chastity, "But most important of all, Romeo and Juliet are very young and their story is the story of the cool wonder of chaste, first love" ('Anon. Shakespeare Too Big To Miss'). By determining this, Castellani immediately curtailed the progression of the character of Shakespeare's text where Juliet makes a rapid progression from innocent child in Act One, to a strong,

independent woman in Act Five. This determination to show the character as predominately chaste and pure was in keeping with how Juliet had been portrayed in 1936. It was clear that neither Juliet, nor the actress who portrayed her, was to be allowed any individual expansion. Jill Craigie, in the magazine *Everybody's Weekly*, in Sept. 25th 1954, wrote:

Like many Italian directors, Castellani prefers working with “naturals”. He maintains that they have learned no tricks of the trade. These, he claims, are magnified by the camera with a resulting insincerity. Above all, he finds that he can mould “naturals” into playing characters as he sees them. “Make your mind a blank and I will tell you how I see this part”, is one of his favourite edicts. (Craigie).

In addition to adhering to the precepts of the neo-realist school, we have noted how Castellani was very keen that his film should reflect the Italian origins of the play. This aspect was to permeate the film in many areas. The director cut a great deal from Act One alone, including all of Mercutio's ‘Queen Mab’ speech. According to the article in the *Manchester Guardian*, Castellani saw Mercutio as a ‘beautiful flaw’ within the play. He used this as a reason for severely reducing the role of Mercutio within the film, “If the audience weep for him it will not weep over the hero and heroine” (Anon. Shakespeare Too Big To Miss). This appears to be nothing more than a pretext by Castellani to allow him to bring the film round so that it reflected more the earlier Italian versions of the story. Mercutio, although present under the guise of Marcuccio in the works of Matteo Bandello and Luigi DaPorto, as well as being present in Brooke's narrative, is developed to such an extent in *Romeo and*

Juliet that he becomes a virtual creation of Shakespeare. Castellani, already thwarted in his plans to film the story without Shakespeare's text, showed that he still wanted to remain as close as possible to the Italian origins of the play. Mercutio's role was therefore cut which was to have a direct effect on Romeo's relationship with Juliet, for by lessening the relationship between Romeo and Mercutio, the audience is forced to focus more on Romeo's relationship with Juliet.

Castellani had earlier said in an interview, 'When a palace or a great house is needed, cameras will *go* to a palace or a great house' (Anon, *Slow Casting for Romeo and Juliet* 1954). This echoes George Cukor's statement of the 1936 film 'When the wealthy and noble Capulets invite their powerful friends to a banquet, it's a *banquet* – with all the trimmings' (Small 99). Both directors appear keen to suggest that the inclusion of the spectacle of banquet adds a sense of historical verisimilitude to their version of the play. As we have seen, however, Cukor, despite the many claims of cultural authenticity used in promoting the film, presented Juliet in the mould of a prominent Hollywood icon of the late 1930s, that of cinematic virgin. It seems ironic, therefore, that despite Castellani's spoken intention to create an authentic Juliet of the fifteenth century, the eventual outcome was the iconic representation of a stereotypical woman of 1950s Hollywood. By remoulding the central female character within Shakespeare's play to replicate aspects of women in contemporary popular cinema Castellani, like Cukor before him, treats Juliet as an object of visual spectacle which, in this case, was the Hitchcockian blonde.

The Hitchcockian Blonde

The 'Hitchcockian blonde' is a title commonly used to describe a popular aspect of 1950s Hollywood cinema. Although Hitchcock and Shakespeare may appear to have little in common, the depiction of Juliet in Castellani's film shares some common ground with the contemporary Hitchcockian blonde of the 1950s. Like many Hitchcock films, the audience's first glimpse of Juliet is voyeuristic, as we see her being bathed by her servants. It could be argued that Shentall's Juliet, like many Hitchcockian blondes, has an overbearing mother, a suppressed sexuality, and is ultimately a victim. It can also be argued that the contribution of Shentall's Juliet within the movie is limited largely to spectacle. Laura Mulvey used the films of Hitchcock and Sternberg in order to support her arguments on woman being treated as spectacle and how this can distract from the film to such a degree that it slows the narrative. I have shown how this occurred in the 1936 version of *Romeo and Juliet* where at one point Juliet forsakes her role in a Shakespearean tragedy for the lead role in a miniature Zeigfield musical which, in effect, stops the film for some ten minutes. Mulvey's argument can also be made of the 1954 version of the film with the films of Hitchcock being of particular relevance. Tania Modleski, in her essay, 'The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock And Feminist Theory', challenges Mulvey's views in relation to *Rear Window*. I will endeavour to show that although Modleski makes some valid points, Mulvey's views on how women were treated in film remains true, not only in *Rear Window*, but also in *To Catch a Thief* and the 1954 version of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Voyeurism and subsequent scopophilia is a key element of *Rear Window* with this prominent aspect of James Stewart's character being later defended by Hitchcock in an interview with Francois Truffaut:

He's a real Peeping Tom. In fact, Miss Lejeune, the critic of the *London Observer*, complained about that. She made some comment to the effect that *Rear Window* was a horrible film because the hero spent all of his time peeping out of the window. What's so horrible about that? Sure he's a snooper but aren't we all? (Truffaut 216).

Truffaut responds to this comment with his own which confirms the change in Stewart's role from participant within the movie to voyeur, spying upon it, "We're all voyeurs to some extent, even if only when we when we see an intimate film. And James Stewart is exactly in the position of a spectator looking at a movie" (Truffaut 216). What is unusual in this section of the movie is that although both audience and Stewart are indulging in the scopophilic pleasure of observing a beautiful woman through a window, the effect is not intended to be one of overt eroticism. Instead we are witness to a strong female lead acting against convention by driving the narrative forward under her own direction, for it is Kelly's character who decides to enter the flat and search for evidence, a feat she accomplishes by scaling a fire escape and making an athletic entrance of the window high above the ground.

The female lead is, at this point, substituting the part of the male lead by displaying a combination of leadership, athleticism and physical heroics. It was this combination of characteristics which made Modleski question Mulvey's judging of the female character's role in the film:

In *Rear Window*, however, the woman is continually shown to be physically superior to the hero, not only in her physical movements but also her

dominance in the frame: she towers over Jeff in nearly every shot in which they both appear. Given the emphasis on the woman's mobility, freedom, and power, it seems odd that an astute critic like Mulvey sees in the image of Lisa Freemont only a passive object of the male gaze" (Modleski, 853).

I would suggest that Mulvey's judgement is not 'odd' but altogether correct, for although Modleski is accurate in her observations, these observations are limited in scope and fail to alter the final depiction of women within the film. Kelly's character, Freemont, does indeed possess the qualities of mobility, freedom and power but only on a strictly limited and temporary basis. Furthermore, she is denied the traditional heroic status reserved for these same qualities when found in a male character, and she is continually undermined throughout the film.

Kelly is allowed to use her physicality only as a direct consequence of Stewart's temporary lack of mobility. The audience is made aware that Stewart's injury is purely temporary and not life threatening as early as the opening shot of a plaster cast on his leg. When Stewart's character indicates that he is proud of what Kelly's character has done after she has athletically gained entrance to a neighbour's flat, he is in effect giving his consent and authorization for her behaviour. Her character, however, is not afforded the status of hero and is still treated as a fairly helpless female. Kelly's helplessness is emphasised later when she is caught in the apartment and screams for help, something no male hero would be allowed to do. Paradoxically, Stewart's character screams later in the film when he is being manhandled out of the window by the killer. This, however, is because his physical helplessness identifies him with the female victim murdered previously and for whom he now substitutes. This is emphasised by the fact that this particular scene is the only

instance when the film changes its point of view. By moving the camera outside and showing the audience the viewpoint from the courtyard, the scene alters its subjectivity. Up to this point the film has been structured almost entirely from Stewart's lead character's point of view, as well as his opinions and his control. With the change in camera angle so that we see things from the courtyard looking in to the apartment, which is how the killer across the courtyard would view things, Stewart's character loses his power to control. By being attacked by the same person who is identified as the murderer, Stewart's character loses his masculinity and dominance and he now takes the place the helpless female victim.

Female imprisonment within the confines of the phallogocentric society is confirmed at the end of the movie when Kelly is dressed in traditional male attire of trousers and a shirt instead of the designer gowns she has worn previously. She is reading what is regarded as a 'masculine' book, 'Beyond The High Himalayas', but as she looks to Stewart and confirms he is asleep, she deposits the book and picks up the fashion magazine 'Harpers Bazaar'. As she smiles and the film ends, we are left in no doubt that despite her recent diversion into the male world of heroism and adventure, her character remains, and more indicatively, is happy to remain, in her 'rightful' position of female subservient domesticity. *Rear Window* was written by the same screenwriter who wrote *To Catch a Thief*, John Michael Hayes, and also stars Grace Kelly. We can see certain similarities in how Grace Kelly is filmed in *To Catch a Thief*, and how Susan Shentall is filmed in *Romeo and Juliet*.

In each film we see a beautiful blonde seemingly in a position of wealth, independence and power. As each film progresses we witness the eradication of each woman's independent identity until she exists only in relation to the male lead. In *To Catch A Thief*, the audience's introduction to Grace Kelly is similar to that of Susan

Shentall in *Romeo and Juliet* with each character being portrayed as a prisoner of circumstance, and both women filmed to highlight physical beauty but to isolate it from any suggestion of sexual agency. In *To Catch a Thief*, Kelly is portrayed as a sophisticated blonde whose beauty is distant and cold and who is a victim of her circumstances. She is presented on screen purely to be looked at and to be judged accordingly by both the lead male character and the audience. Although Kelly's chaste appearance is found later to be misleading, it is nonetheless the deliberate casting of a woman in one phallogentric ideology only for her to be replaced in another. A more direct example of Hitchcock's categorizing of Kelly in the movie is the scene where she and Grant share a conversation in a hotel suite after a private dinner. The scene is framed and lit so that what we see is Kelly's lithe body exhibited in a tight fitting, off the shoulder dress. The dress is topped by a diamond necklace but Kelly's face is completely in the shadows. **(Figure 27)** As Grant is staring at the diamonds, the scene is shot so that the audience has no alternative but to stare at Kelly's body. Kelly has no purpose in the shot other than to be the object of a predatory male gaze and that gaze does not fall upon the face, the natural focus point when a person is framed alone whilst in conversation, but on the body. The portrayal of Kelly's character in the film is structured to portray her in keeping with the phallogentric ideology of women being portrayed as virgin and whore. In the film Kelly remains incarcerated within these categorizations and has no real place in society until she is rescued by the leading male actor. We find this premise also present in Castellani's *Romeo and Juliet*.

Juliet in 1954 is portrayed as a victim because, like many women in 1950s films, she is a prisoner in her empty and unfulfilled life. Where Grace Kelly waits to be rescued from the tedium of her life by Cary Grant in *To Catch a Thief*, so too does

Susan Shentall wait to be rescued by Laurence Harvey in *Romeo and Juliet*. Like Kelly, Shentall is beautiful, blonde, remote and pristine, and both women share a strong physical resemblance (**Figures 28 & 29**). The 1950s saw a definite shift in the cinematic profile of the ideal leading lady. In 1953 the Oscars were televised for the first time, and Grace Kelly was nominated for Best Supporting Actress in *Mogambo* (IMDB.com Awards for *Mogambo*. Web). In 1954 Kelly was again nominated for Best Actress, this time winning for *The Country Girl* (IMDB.com Awards for *The Country Girl*. Web). Best Supporting Actress that year was Eva Marie Saint for her role in *On The Waterfront* (IMDB.com Awards for *On The Waterfront*. Web). Both Kelly and Marie Saint share the same ice cool beauty that can be thought to suggest both innocence and sexuality. Susan Shentall shared these same qualities and it is perhaps unsurprising that MGM offered the actress to take over Grace Kelly's contract when she left the film business to marry Prince Rainier of Monaco (Transcript. Interview with Susan Shentall's Family, Unpublished).

Juliet Imprisoned

When we first see Juliet in the 1954 film, we find her being attended by three servants and her nurse in a poorly lit, low beamed room. The servants dry her feet, lay out her clothes and dress her.¹¹ Juliet is dressed in white, signifying both virginity and purity. Her hair is pulled away from her face, suggesting innocence. She is without make up and is dressed plainly and we are informed that she is not yet fourteen. Her demeanour in the presence of her mother is one of shyness and obedience. She clasps her hands in front of her and looks demurely towards the ground when the subject of

¹¹ Castellani originally intended for the first shot to be of Juliet rising naked from the bath. Susan Shentall's father, on hearing this, thought it improper and so the scene was changed - (Transcript. Interview with Susan Shentall's Family, Unpublished)

marriage is raised, replying nervously, 'It is an honour that I dream not of' (1:3:66). The shot is framed so we see her standing alone for the first time and are drawn to view Castellani's Juliet as an obedient, demure child leading a sheltered life of physical confinement and sexual innocence. Although there is laughter and playfulness in the scene, the impression given is one of physical confinement. This is one of several scenes which have already guided the audience to surmise that this Juliet is not the carefree child of her celluloid predecessor but a prisoner trapped, not only by circumstances, but also by the very city itself. Castellani made the decision prior to finalising the script to pursue his vision of realism by filming *Romeo and Juliet* entirely on location. By doing this, however, he overwhelmed the narrative with intrusive details. This is partly explained by his desire to imprint his own identity as a film maker on the play, concentrating on visual beauty at the expense of the splendour of the text. Castellani's interest in architecture was such that the piazzas and streets of Siena, Venice, Montagna and Verona, along with the confined alleyways, became unspeaking characters in the film. We see this as early as the first shot of the fortified city of Verona, guarded and policed by sentries. Kenneth Rothwell suggests that this 'establishing shot signals that it [the city] will not only rival the young lovers for prime billing, but also imprison them within its walls, its alleys, its confused masses of people, its feuds and its anxieties' (Rothwell, 120).

As mentioned earlier, these feuds and anxieties within the context of a city were present in Castellani's previous films. Castellani's stylised and repeated use of architecture in his 1954 film is not only symbolic of Juliet's imprisonment within the city, but also of the character being denied her liberty to develop within the play, and instead is incarcerated within Castellani's film. Throughout the film Castellani repeatedly returns to the visual motifs of stone and iron to suggest claustrophobia and

imprisonment in much the same way as Orson Welles turned to cold stone and the pressing recesses and low ceiling rooms in *Macbeth* in 1948. Castellani's reluctance to depend on Shakespeare's text can be traced from the beginning of the film. Shakespeare's name may appear on publicity material for the film but it is absent from the credits and is referred to only by the opening shot of John Gielgud's oddly costumed Chorus, who bears a passing resemblance to the popular image of the author. Russell Jackson suggests that in doing so he is, 'lending the film the joint authority of Shakespeare and himself' (Jackson 168).

'Authorship', however, is a complex and divisive issue. Paul Watson discusses the matter and states. 'we cannot assume that authorship means the same thing in every context' (Watson 134). He notes that 'at the heart of various complexities associated with authorship lies the idea that films are valued when they are deemed to be the work of an artist, traditionally identified as the director' (Watson 135). He also notes one of the paradoxes of director as author is that there are so many areas of input and influence in making a film that 'it becomes possible, even desirable, to identify to identify multiple authorial agencies within a film (Watson 148). In this case, *Romeo and Juliet* in 1954, the case the authorship is complex. It goes beyond Shakespeare to include those credited with the Italian folk tales on which the story is based. Other creative forces could also include the presentation of the film within a neo-realist framework. The influence of 1950s mainstream cinema also has a creative input in the inclusion of the Hitchcockian blonde, as discussed earlier. And, of course there is the direct, controlling, input of Castellani as director. Whereas Shakespeare is held by the majority to be the creative author of the character of Juliet in text, Castellani is the filmic author of her presentation on screen in 1954. As much of Juliet's lines are omitted, the character's role is reduced by Castellani to the extent

that she becomes little more than the object of Romeo's gaze, moulded in the form of the classic passive female of 1950s cinema and perfectly illustrating Mulvey's quote of Boetticher:

What counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance (Mulvey 841).

Whereas Juliet is imprisoned in her house behind bars (**Figure 30**) and allowed out only under the supervision of her mother or the nurse, Romeo, being male, has no such restrictions and is free to come and go as he pleases, either in the city or beyond its boundaries. The first sight we have of Romeo is of him sitting well outside the city walls. Throughout the film he moves quickly and independently through the city, entering doors to areas where he has been excluded and opening grilles to enter the very property where Juliet is held captive. The film is shot and framed in such a way so as to encourage the audience into accepting Romeo's independence and Juliet's imprisonment. Romeo also contrasts with other cast members in other ways and is often filmed alone and in close up, adopting a theatrical stance before delivering his lines in an overt lyrical style similar to that witnessed previously in John Gielgud's Chorus. This contrasts with the delivery of other actors, some of whom are dubbed and some of whom adopt a more realistic and natural approach to the lines. One result of Harvey's affected delivery is that it separates Romeo from the other male characters and gives him the necessary isolation of a typical distraught hero of the

1950s cinema. He appears deeply troubled and obviously doomed, the very qualities inherent in the hero of many western movies of the time.

Romeo Unbound

As with the western hero, Romeo is a dominant male figure in a competing social order who is complex and fallible and who will eventually be compelled to put his pacifism aside in order to redeem himself before rescuing the helpless female lead. We see this most notably in the banquet scene. Immediately prior to this scene, Romeo leaves his comrades and runs down the same high walled, flagstone alleyways that were previously the locale of violence between Montagues and Capulets. Symbolically he is alone, unarmed and unrestricted by the company and judgement of comrades as he freely enters an area he knows to be manned by his enemies. At this stage the camera follows him to a small entrance hall where he hides furtively behind a pillar before exiting out to a courtyard.

This courtyard is very different from the romantic opulence of the 1936 production or the lush greenery of Zeffirelli's later 1968 production. Here, the courtyard is small and functional rather than ornate, serving as a means of communication from one part of the household to another. Here, Romeo pauses at the heavily fortified stairway and balcony which links the courtyard to the chambers where Juliet is once again being attended by a servant and the nurse. Juliet is wearing a heavily ornate dress which is white with occasional embossed floral motifs in green. There are flashes of deep red at the shoulders and at the neck, around which she wears an ornate necklace. Her hair is tied away from the neck and shoulders and hidden under an ornamental silk head band. The head band matches the dress which is pulled tight at the waist before flowing out to a small train. Here, Juliet is the focal point of

the shot and the image, much like that of Shearer in 1936, is reminiscent of a young woman in her bridal gown, a point underlined by the nurse's parting remark, 'Go, girl, seek happy nights to happy days' (1:3:105), a comment tellingly absent from the 1936 production. As Juliet is led down a darkened corridor, we cut to see Romeo easily opening an iron grilled door and walking down a darkened corridor at the end of which he opens a second door and enters the banqueting hall.

As with the 1936 version, the banquet scene is used to introduce Juliet in all her splendour to the audience, and subsequently to Romeo. In this film, however, everything is much lower in key. The hall is smaller, there are fewer guests, and there is a noticeable absence of elaborate and luxurious splendour. Heavy, unadorned stone pillars crowd upon the central occupied floor space, and imposing iron grilles bar the high windows. This banqueting hall is far removed from the magnificent finery and grandeur of 1936 and serves to remind the audience that we are at the centre of a fortified and secure stronghold. What is also noticeable at this point is that virtually everyone in the room is dressed in lush, deep red robes. Although this allows a sharp contrast to the virginal white of Juliet's gown, the uniformity of colour, if not costume, is reminiscent of the uniforms of the guards at the city gates and serves to remind the audience that Juliet is at the centre of a regimented, controlling society. Juliet curtseys to her mother who takes her hand and motions her towards Paris. Juliet's mother then extends her other hand towards Paris and, by way of a nod of the head, invites him to take Juliet to the dance floor. The scene is reminiscent of a guard being given his next charge and it carries with it similarities of the scene in *To Catch a Thief* where Cary Grant is invited to make a pass at Grace Kelly by Kelly's mother.

As the music continues, Juliet takes her position in the dance which has started without her. Her path is initially blocked by the other guests and as she

eventually takes her place, she is symbolically imprisoned in the circle and held there by her gaolers. Her dress contrasts brilliant white, signifying virginity, against the lush deep red of the guests' costumes. As Juliet is led towards the foreground of the camera, she keeps her eyes down in an act of submission throughout (**Figure 31**). In an echo of the 1936 film, we are introduced to Rosaline at this point, who is given a speaking role and who approaches Romeo with words of warning, 'Put on the mask and leave this place at once'. The Rosaline of 1954 is in contrast to that of 1936. Here she is tall, with her height exaggerated by an ornate period headpiece which piles her black hair upon her head like an architect's dome (**Figure 32**). This is a *balzo* and Anthony R. Gunerante, identifies it as being 'modeled on Pisanello's fresco of *St George and the Princess of Trebizond* in Verona's church of St. Anastasia' (Gunerante 53). She is dressed conservatively in a dark flowing dress and is engaged in polite, reserved conversation with a male guest. Although she may be the focus of Romeo's gaze, she herself is focusing on another male. Rosaline is beautiful but has a slightly dour manner and is certainly older than Juliet. Her words to Romeo are spoken with a tone of sympathy and concern but there is nothing, in either action or word, to suggest any passion either exists, or has ever existed between the two characters. The physical introduction of Rosaline is slightly underwhelming here. Just a few moments earlier we have witnessed Romeo not only pursuing Rosaline to the banquet, but dispelling warnings from both Benvolio and Mercutio by singing her praises with lines from Act one, Scene two, 'One fairer than my love! The all seeing-sun/ Ne'er saw her match since first the world begun' (1:2:94-95). These lines sit a little uncomfortably here, coming so close to when Romeo will sing the praises of Juliet in a similar manner 'O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright' (1:5:44). The two lines are just over six minutes apart in the film, compared to being just under ten

minutes apart in the 1936 film. The greatest contrast between them, however, is that in the 1954 film the lines are spoken sequentially by Romeo. He speaks the first line just before entering the banquet and says nothing else until he speaks the next line after he sees Juliet. Romeo's previous declared adulation of Rosaline disappears in an instant. The complete and sudden contrast in the object of his desires highlights the point that what Romeo felt for Rosaline was not love, but infatuation. This is a point made later in the play when Romeo reminds Friar Laurence that he himself has previously chided Romeo for loving Rosaline. 'For doting, not for loving, pupil mine' (1:2:78), replies the Friar. The line is absent from the 1936 film but is spoken in the 1954 version. The introduction of a speaking Rosaline in the 1954 film firmly establishes this film as partially independent from its Shakespearean source. Kenneth Rothwell quoted Bosley Crowther regarding Castellani's prioritising making a movie out of the play over the task of simply transposing the text to the screen, "The lyrical language of Shakespeare... was plainly secondary to his concept of a vivid visual build-up of his theme" (Rothwell 120).

Visually, everyone takes a secondary role to Romeo at this point. Here, Romeo is given cinematic precedence over everyone else in the room, including Juliet. Where Romeo has numerous solo shots and is filmed in close up for virtually all of his dialogue, the opposite is true of Juliet who is filmed almost exclusively in the company of others and often only in the background. There is no point of view shot from Juliet and no sharing of the screen on an equal basis. Here, Juliet is very much the passive subject of Romeo's gaze. In fact, we have to wait until after the banquet is over for Juliet's role to be exclusively centre stage, and even then it exists only in reference to Romeo and after she has been told of his identity. When Juliet speaks the line which reflects her despair, 'My only love sprung from my only hate' (1:5:137),

the nurse leaves the frame and Juliet steps forward towards the camera. Leaning against a pillar, Juliet delivers her line and receives her most intimate close up in the film so far. The sparse use of close-ups of Juliet in the film to this point is quite noticeable and is very much in contrast to the multitude that were bestowed upon Norma Shearer in the 1936 film. A few fleeting close-ups during the dance sequence follow but on each of these occasions Juliet is being held as a link in part of a controlling human chain. By shooting the film this way and allowing Juliet her only prolonged close up when she reacts to the news of Romeo's identity, the director guides the audience to see Juliet solely in relation to, and as an extension of, Romeo. Not only this, but by framing the shot so that Juliet appears with her eyes tearful and cast obediently downwards whilst leaning on a stone pillar, (**Figure 33**) we are reminded that she is a prisoner, some-one who needs to be rescued.

In contrast to how Juliet is filmed, each time Romeo is about to speak his lines he is given a closely cropped frame where he stands alone, often beside a pillar (**Figure 34**). Sometimes it is the same pillar, for although Romeo is seen moving forward, he approaches the pillar next to the musicians on three occasions. When Romeo is shot in either three-quarters or in close-up, any distracting candelabras or human characters that should be behind or beside him are removed from the frame. The luxury of this visual exclusivity is not extended to either Capulet, the head of the household, nor Tybalt, who each suffer the actors' ignominy of having extras cross in front of them as they are delivering lines of dialogue. Although it could be argued that this was to facilitate dubbing, that particular problem could have been overcome by editing, cutting, or changing the point of view of the camera. Also, it is noticeable that whenever Romeo speaks, the sound level changes so that music is no longer intrusive. Romeo is also afforded the melodramatic practice of looking meaningfully into the

middle distance before delivering his lines in the faux theatrical convention of a classical leading man. In fact, here are moments in this film where Laurence Harvey appears to be attempting to copy the vocal mannerisms of John Gielgud.

Compare this sequence of events to the various shots of Juliet in the same scene where she is given only one fleeting close up. In each of her other shots she shares the screen with other characters and is frequently filmed in either in medium and long shot. The visual supremacy of Romeo is furthered by him sharing a partnered, as opposed to group, dance with Juliet, something missing from the other three films. This is another break from the text because we know that Romeo does not partake in the dance because Juliet asks the nurse, 'What's he that follows here, that would not dance?' (1:5:131). As the scene progresses and the dance is about to begin, Romeo emerges from behind a pillar, mask in hand, to take a position beside Juliet. In a theatrical twist of identity, Romeo is wearing the very mask that was thrown to the floor by a fuming Capulet earlier and which was picked up and handed to him by Rosaline. By wearing Capulet's mask to dance with Juliet, Romeo assumes the identity of the alpha male in the room, replacing both Capulet as the controlling force in Juliet's life, and Paris as her intended mate. Rosaline, by handing Capulet's mask to Romeo, symbolically bestows upon him his male superiority and assents to her own inferior position to Juliet as his chosen prize. In this single scene, Romeo, after entering the household unchallenged, claims Juliet as his prize and verifies his position as the prevailing male presence in the film, and in doing so, affirms the phallogocentric ideology of 1950s cinema.

Castellani's Vision

From the very beginning of the film where the title *Romeo and Juliet*, shares the screen with the line *Colour by Technicolor*, and is followed by *Adapted for the screen by Renato Castellani*, we are prompted to view this as Castellani's film first, and Shakespeare's play as a rather poor second. After Gielgud's rather laborious Chorus, we are greeted with an opening shot of Verona's fortified walls. We follow some traders as they stroll through stone arched alleys on their way to a walled market place whilst guards make idle chatter about buckets and birds and exchange pleasantries about the weather. All this reinforces the primacy of the visual and channels the audience to accept that the proper setting for this story, the 'real' medium in which to experience it, is film. Castellani, in common with directors of other Shakespeare films, is telling the audience that *his* vision of the story is the one that will bring the tale to life. With his opening shots focusing so strongly on the walls, alleyways, and public places, he makes the city an integral part of the play. The featured use of real streets and real buildings, and setting a real market place in a real city (the market scene in Verona was shot on location beside the cathedral in Siena) was a direct attempt to bring a sense of authenticity and truth to his vision. This did not go unnoticed and was not welcomed by all. Paul Dehn was rather blunt in his criticism of the film. Bemoaning the prioritising of the visual over the narrative, he wrote of Castellani's academic interest in structural design and wrote that this, 'presumably entitles him to preside over one of the most architectural Shakespearean messes that the cinema has been privileged to witness since Orson Welles rebuilt 'Macbeth'' (Dehn). This barbed criticism, predating some of the viciousness that would append itself to Luhrmann's version of *Romeo and Juliet* some forty two years later, was nonetheless unintentionally prophetic in a link between Welles and

Castellani. Margueritte H. Rippy examines closely Welles' *Macbeth* and the consequences of the director's distinctive approach. She noted that Welles' highly stylised use of camera angles and rapid cuts was deployed 'to the point of disorientation' (Burnett "et al" 24). Rippy writes that 'Welles begins to fracture the marriage between sound and word that was so central to Hollywood films of this era and, by exploring this division, he secures his exile from the mainstream studio narratives of the mid-twentieth century (Burnett "et al" 24). Castellani, by pursuing his own individual approach to such a popular Shakespearean play, and exploring the origins of the story and incorporation neo-realist aspects of film making, helped to engineer his own exile from mainstream cinema in the aftermath. Dehn also stated in the same piece that, 'the temple that was 'Romeo and Juliet' has become an abattoir of textual butchery' (Dehn). Dehn's comments were published on September 22nd, 1954, prompting a defensive Castellani to reply in an interview he gave to the *Picture Post* on 9th of October, "It is not butchery but surgery performed with exacting care" (Anon. 'Much Ado About Romeo'). There is no doubt that the visual aspect of the film does indeed take precedence over the textual and we see this not only from the use of architecture but also on the deliberate focus on Renaissance art. This point is made by Kenneth Rothwell who wrote:

Renaissance painting and sculpture, as well as architecture, support the movie's visual splendour. Among the fifteenth-century artists who provided ideas for costumes and props Meredith Lillich catalogs such names as Uccello, Piero della Francesca, Fra Filippo Lippi, and Carpaccio. The Empress Helena in Piero's fresco of the Holy Rood in Rizzo inspired Lady Capulet's hairstyle; the Luca della Robbia sculptured singing gallery in Florence, the five boys

singing at the Capulet ball;¹² Raphael's portrait of the pope, Capulet in his study, and so forth'(Rothwell 122) .

It is, however, Castellani's use of, and repeated references to, the works of the artist Fra Angelico that gives us a unique insight into how the director viewed the role of Juliet in this film. Dilys Powell wrote in *The Sunday Times* of 'Friar Lawrence living in Fra Angelico surroundings and handing out Madonna lilies' (Powell). We know from the article in the Manchester Guardian on 20th December 1952 that Castellani studied various Shakespearean productions when he was casting for the film. He saw Gielgud's *Much Ado About Nothing* at Stratford , as well as *Romeo and Juliet* at the Old Vic, and Gielgud's *Richard II* at the Lyric Hammersmith. He is also reported as having studied Cukor's 1936 version in which Norma Shearer had her hair deliberately styled to match that of the angel who is portrayed in Fra Angelico's fresco *The Annunciation* (Anon, Slow Casting for Romeo and Juliet. 1954). Anthony R. Guneratne notes that Castellani 'went so far as to claim that he entered filmmaking as a result of his disgust with MGM's *Romeo and Juliet*' (Guneratne 21). What is remarkable is that the very fresco that aligned Juliet with the most treasured female virtues of 1930s Hollywood cinema, and which appeared in a film adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* that apparently disgusted him, features prominently in Castellani's own 1954 version.¹³

When Friar Laurence breaks the news of Romeo's banishment, he does so with the fresco framed in the background and with the angel clearly in shot (**Figure 35**). The use of the fresco simultaneously links the two films and yet highlights their differences. The fresco recognises and celebrates those qualities used to present Juliet

¹² He miscounts here, there are actually six boys in the scene

¹³ The same fresco is also glimpsed in Jean-Luc Goddard's *King Lear* (1980) (Gurantne 53)

to the public as virtuous and virginal. It is also here, in front of the fresco that Romeo speaks the line, 'Heaven is here, Where Juliet lives' (3:3:29-30). A publicity photograph, taken to promote the film before its release, shows Susan Shentall as Juliet, kneeling in front of the fresco (**Figure 36**). The photo is all the more interesting because it does not correlate to any scene in the film and appears to have been structured to promote the film in much the same manner as the photograph of Norma Shearer's hairstyle copied from the Angel in the same fresco. A similarity in style was spotted by film critic Arthur Knight who, writing in the *Saturday Review of the Arts*, described Shentall's Juliet as, 'blonde and placid as a Fra Angelico madonna' (Knight 26.). In the balcony scene, the shaping of Juliet's character to the dual representations of virgin and victim is made more comprehensive. We see Juliet once again dressed in white flowing gown as she kneels and prays in front of a painting of the Madonna and Child. When she stands we see that the nightdress which, whilst possessing the slightest of ornamental embroidery, is more functional than alluring. Romeo enters the courtyard by climbing over a high wall. This is despite the fact that earlier in the film he has already gained access to this very courtyard by walking through an unlocked and unguarded door. As noted earlier, this courtyard is far removed from the ornate opulence of the 1936 movie. Juliet's balcony is heavily fortified, with the upper part of an external stairway locked behind yet another iron grille. This was always part of Castellani's intention to create a sense of periodic realism to the scene. As early as 1952 he was reported to have wanted to alter the traditional balcony scene to something more authentic:

because he knows that a window with an iron grille would be more authentic for the period. But Shakespeare's lines are inflexible on this point and in the

film there will be, for the famous love scene, something recognisable as a balcony, but called a loggia (Anon, *Slow Casting for Romeo and Juliet* 1954).

The impression that is left in the viewer's mind is that the scene confirms that Juliet is physically locked away and that her only contact with the outside world is Romeo.

This echoes Carolyn Brown's exploration of the falconry imagery that is used extensively in the balcony scene and which was discussed in the 1936 chapter. Here, in the 1954 film, Juliet may have transformed Romeo 'from a "flighty", impracticable man of fancy' (Brown 334) who regaled in his relative freedom, but she herself 'is presented as having less liberty than a man and as being bound to earth' (Brown 339).

The barred grille of the loggia is a visual marker for Juliet's physical imprisonment but Juliet's captivity goes beyond this. As Brown states, Juliet is 'Constrained by a patriarchal society from expressing her thoughts and controlling her own life' (Brown 339). Perhaps, though, the most revealing sign of Juliet's captivity and subdual in this production occurs when the nurse encourages her to abandon her marriage to Romeo in favour of Paris.

This has come immediately after the scene where Lady Capulet has gone to Juliet to inform her of her father's arrangement for her to marry Paris. In the early part of that conversation, where Lady Capulet is discussing vengeance on Romeo for Tybalt's death, Shentall modulates the tone of her voice and shows how much she loves and longs for Romeo. As she speaks the lines 'O, how my heart abhors / To hear him nam'd, and cannot come to him / To wreak the love I bore my cousin / Upon his body that hath slaughtered him' (3:5:99 – 102), there is a deliberate inflection in references to Romeo which are spoken softly and with tenderness. A harsher tone is

then added with a glance to her mother in an effort to try to disguise her love. As viewed, Shentall stresses Juliet's words as follows:

(rising from chair - softly spoken – looking away) O, how my heart abhors

To hear him nam'd, and cannot come to him

(harsher tone – looking at Lady Capulet) To wreak the love I bore my cousin

(softly spoken – looking away) Upon his body

(Harsher tone – looking at Lady Capulet) that hath slaughtered him.

The emotion and love that Juliet struggles to disguise here is lost by what follows shortly afterwards in her scene with the nurse. Here, we again witness imagery of birds in relation to the object of Juliet's love. When the nurse speaks the lines 'O, he's a lovely gentleman / Romeo's a dishclout to him. An eagle madam, / Hath not so green, so quick, so fair an eye' (5:3:218-220), she is using the same imagery to convince Juliet that she is entering a better marriage. The suggestion is that Paris is superior to Romeo in the same manner that an eagle is superior to a falcon. At this point in the play, when Juliet has her pleas rejected by both her father and her mother, Jamieson states:

Juliet throws herself upon her nurse in all the helplessness of anguish, of confiding affection, of habitual dependence... The old woman, true to her vocation, and fearful lest her share in these events be discovered, counsels her to forget Romeo and marry Paris; and the moment which unveils to Juliet the weakness and the baseness of her confidante, is the moment which reveals her

to herself. She does not break into upbraidings, it is no moment for anger; it is incredulous amazement succeeded by the extremity of scorn and abhorrence which take possession of her mind. She assumes at once and asserts all her own superiority, and rises to majesty in the strength of her despair (Jamieson 95).

In Castellani's film, however, Juliet is denied such a response. Here, when the nurse has spoken to Juliet and tried to convince her to marry Paris, Shentall sits almost motionless. She wipes away a tear from each eye and then, in an alteration of the text, enters her father's room and begs for his forgiveness. There is no hint of the love she feels for Romeo and which she struggled to hide from her mother just a few moments earlier. There is no fight, no sign of courage and instead of showing her strength and rising 'to majesty in the strength of her despair' (Jamieson, 95), Juliet capitulates and exhibits a submissiveness that confirms that in Castellani's version, she truly is a victim.

Technicolor

Another diversion by the director, and one that is at times particularly distracting, is the detailed attention given to the use of Technicolor. Whereas much has been written about the visual aspect of the film, in particular the focus on architecture and Renaissance paintings, little, by comparison, has been written about the visual opulence of the costumes and how this affects the film. Juliet in 1954, like Juliet in 1936, is costumed in a manner that reflects virginity, chastity and purity. Her night attire is virginal white, changing to mild pink after she marries Romeo. Throughout the film, Juliet is often seen kneeling in prayer, her head bowed in supplication. Castellani made some very revealing comments about the importance he attached to

the costumes and the time he spent choosing the precise colour schemes he intended to shoot. This was the first time he had shot a film in colour and it brought with it unforeseen delays. In an interview at the time of the film's release, he said article in *Empire News*, "I had six or seven boxes of cards in all the colours of the rainbow – every tint. Then, with my script I worked out a colour chart" (Gay). The article continues 'Even with his big crowd scenes, containing hundreds of people, he matched the colours of the extras on the background, so that at no time did a magenta costume cross a bright green' (Gay). In the article, Castellani claims that this alone took him a month. This excessive commitment to colour coding, a by-product of the use of Technicolor, meant that the colours of the costumes obtained an importance that sometimes overshadowed the film itself. With the framing and filming of costumes taking such priority, the film incorporated an extensive and unwarranted number of costume changes that can be distracting to the viewer and disruptive to any perceived timeline. This can be noted from the very beginning of the film when Benvolio (played by Bill Travers) is first present during the brawl in the market place. He is seen entering from the left wearing vibrant green tights and a long green houppelande with purple lining (6:25). As he heads to attend the murdered servant, a reference to Masuccio's earlier story, we see that he is also wearing a short tunic, a variation of the doublet but without buttons. It is designed in alternate matching green and black, broad horizontal stripes which taper from the sides downwards at an angle of around 45 degrees and merging in the centre. Benvolio, on seeing the dead servant, gives chase to Gregory and Sampson until he ends up beating on the door of the Capulet household. This is at odds with the Benvolio of Shakespeare's text who tries to stop the conflict before it occurs and is not an instigator of violence. As the brawl reignites outside the Capulet household, Tybalt emerges, wearing an outfit in bright

tangerine (07:58) and engages in the fray. After the brawl has subsided there is a fade out to the Prince's palace (09:34) where the Prince instructs both Capulet and Montague to keep the peace. Benvolio is also present here, but wearing a completely different costume, this time in a plain, pale orange and black outfit that matches the colours worn by Montague and the servants present. Montague has also changed his costume from that worn in the previous scene, as has Capulet and Tybalt. The household staff of each family can be seen wearing outfits which compliment the outfits worn by the respective head of the family. This scene ends with a lengthy fade to black (10:30) and is followed by Benvolio approaching Romeo outside the city just as a clock chimes nine. This reference to the time is present in Shakespeare's text. Here Benvolio is wearing a third costume, this time in a pale green and black. Castellani, by changing the actors' costumes and using fade outs between scenes, and then confirming it is still only nine o'clock in the morning, creates the impression of a lengthy period of time, days perhaps, between each scene.

Another example of this is when we see Romeo change his costume entirely between leaving the banquet hall and exiting the Capulet home, an act that is continuous in the play. As we witness Romeo leaving the banquet by means of a side entrance, after being warned by Rosaline to do so, he is wearing a plain, black tunic with decorative, puffed sleeves that are slashed to show a red shirt underneath. This colour scheme matches exactly that of Rosaline. The theme of matching colour schemes between Romeo and his intended love will occur again later in the film when he marries Juliet. During the banquet, Romeo wears a three strand, plain silver chain around his neck. His leggings and footwear are black (32:39). As he leaves the banquet, Castellani again uses a fade to darkness to suggest a passage of time. This is followed by a short scene in which we see Juliet kneeling in prayer in a chaste, white

nightdress. As she stands and crosses to the balcony area, we cut to see Romeo exiting from a cloister. He is now wearing a dark green cloak with a blue tunic underneath (33:32). As he walks past and sits on a low wall we can see that he has also changed his leggings which are now blue, as are his newly acquired matching ankle boots (33:32). This preoccupation with costumes continues almost immediately when Benvolio, Mercutio and friends arrive on the scene. Both Benvolio and Mercutio are wearing the same yellow and black outfits they were wearing before. This scene is perplexing, not just because Romeo has changed his costume completely whilst the others are unchanged, but also because neither Benvolio nor Mercutio were present at the Capulet banquet. Castellani's film shows Romeo entering the Capulet household on his own after he has bid his companions farewell as they tried to stop him attending the banquet. Mercutio, in this scene and like his predecessor, John Barrymore in 1936, is reduced to little more than a court jester, which in turn reduces his relationship with Romeo from beloved friend to amusing but intrusive and unwelcome acquaintance. Castellani, in deference to the Italian origins of the play, did not deem it necessary to give Mercutio the prominence in his film that Shakespeare afforded him in his play.

Later in the film, when Romeo slays Tybalt, Benvolio is present and is wearing a plain green tunic and cloak (63:08). In another departure from the text, Tybalt's body is taken to the Capulet household where Lady Capulet decries that 'Romeo slew Tybalt. Romeo must not live' (3:1:183). The scene continues with lines from Act 3 Scene 2 between Juliet and the nurse before a cut transfers the scene to the Prince's courtyard. Here, we see Benvolio in a completely different outfit. This time he is wearing a yellow and black combination and is in the postured act of closing a defence argument before the Prince's court. The clear intention is to show a passage of time between the slaying of Tybalt and the subsequent judgement of the Prince.

The effect is that Benvolio's defence of Romeo is staged and rehearsed, and does not reflect the impassioned and spontaneous beseeching of Shakespeare's text. Castellani also has Lady Capulet say the line 'Romeo slew Tybalt. Romeo must not live' (3:1:183) a second time as a means of recapping what has happened. This gives the impression of a judicial summing up at the end of a lengthy trial. Another anomaly to Shakespeare's time frame occurs when Castellani adds a day to when the marriage of Romeo and Juliet takes place. In the play the marriage takes place in the afternoon after the lovers have met. This is referred to in 2:3:60 when Romeo asks 'That thou consent to marry us today', and again at 2:4:176-177, 'Bid her advise some means to come to shrift this afternoon'. The nurse repeats this to Juliet at 2:5:67 and Juliet, under pretence of seeking forgiveness for disobeying her father, leaves that same afternoon and marries Romeo. In Castellani's version, even though Romeo does indeed ask Friar Laurence to marry them that day, the nurse repeats this message to Juliet but alters it so that she enquires if Juliet has permission to go to church *tomorrow* (53:15). This is immediately followed by another fade to darkness followed by a shot of the church bells pealing and birds singing in a nest, a trick that Castellani uses earlier in the film to signify the beginning of a new day. We then cut to Romeo and the Friar in the cell. Romeo is wearing a completely new costume, a yellow and blue combination which, apparently, is his wedding outfit (53:40).

The Marriage and Friar Laurence

Castellani films the marriage between Romeo and Juliet, something that occurs offstage in Shakespeare's play. In the film Juliet kneels in front of a heavily gridded window and looks out to a cloister where she sees Romeo and Friar Laurence. The Friar conducts a short wedding ceremony through the iron grille and the couple are

married. Symbolically, much can be read into the iron grille separating the lovers. Rothwell notes the similarity to the lovers Pyramus and Thisbe proclaiming their love through a hole in a wall. He also makes some effort to explain the unusual camera angles incorporated for this scene:

Castellani's wedding scene ... underscores the irony of the forlorn marriage by putting an iron grille between the lovers during the exchange of their wedding vows. In medium shot, Juliet looks through the network of bars, while in low angle, Romeo stares down at her from the opposite side of the barrier. A medium shot of Juliet receiving a flower through the bars follows a two-shot of Romeo and the Friar...Romeo and Juliet's sealing of the matrimonial vows with a kiss through the barriers of iron faintly echoes the *Pyramus and Thisbe* play in *Midsummer Night's Dream* (Rothwell 120-121).

There is certainly a great deal of symbolism in this scene but I feel it has nothing to do with *A Midsummer's Night's Dream*, and indeed, little to do with Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Castellani, although thwarted in his attempts to make an Italian version of the story, still managed to infuse the film with as much material from the earlier Italian folk tales as he could. This can be clearly witnessed in the wedding scene where he makes direct connections to the earlier versions of the story. Here, Castellani includes a scene that is absent from Shakespeare's play but which appears in all three Italian sources, being mentioned briefly in one and described in some detail in the other two.

In Masuccio's version the reference is brief, merely stating the couple bribed 'an Augustan friar' (Masuccio "et al" 17), who married them in secret. In DaPorto's

version the couple are married in a confessional, with Romeo on one side of the grate and Juliet on the other (Masuccio “et al” 31). The friar removes the grate for the ceremony, allowing the newlyweds a single kiss, before replacing it immediately afterwards. In Bandello’s version of the tale, the couple are again married in a confessional, with the Friar removing the grate (or ‘wicket’ as it is termed), allowing the newlyweds to kiss, before replacing it immediately afterwards (Masuccio “et al” 64). Castellani echoes these Italian sources but alters them slightly. The film shows the couple being married through the iron grate of a window in the side of the church, with Juliet inside and both Romeo and Friar Laurence outside. This is unusual in the extreme. To have a better understanding of this, we must look again at the scene, the setting, and how it was shot.

A partial record of the shooting schedule of the film exists in the form of a ‘diary’ supposedly written by Susan Shentall. Titled ‘Diary of an Italian Summer’, it comprises a number of sheets of typed foolscap paper and is the property of Susan Shentall’s family. Although the personal aspects of the diary appear constructed in certain areas, suggesting that the diary may have been the work of someone involved in the making of the film, the diary itself gives a first-hand account of the shooting schedule and locations used. From the diary we know that the marriage scene was shot at the church of Sant Andrea, in Sommacampagna, ten miles north of Verona, sometime between August 26th and September 4th (Anon. Diary of an Italian Summer 9. Unpublished). The scenes of the Franciscan monastery, including the scene described between Romeo and Friar, were filmed at San Francesco del Deserto, an island in the Venetian lagoon, in late June (Anon. Diary of an Italian Summer 6-7. Unpublished). The footage from these two locations was then edited together to appear in the finished film as if they are one and the same place. In the film, Romeo

meets Friar Laurence in a room that is joined to a small garden. Friar Laurence picks a lily from the garden and then he and Romeo leave the cell, cross the courtyard and arrive at a grilled window at the side of the church where Juliet is already waiting. Juliet has entered the upper chancel of the church with the nurse, who is also present. The marriage scene as filmed, bears a striking resemblance to an illustration created for DaPorto's version of the tale. The illustration, by Giambattista Gigola, shows Romeo and Juliet kissing through the opened grille (**Figure 37**). In the illustration we can see an extended hand on the left of the frame and can assume that this belongs to the friar who has conducted the wedding and removed the grille. Susan Shentall even has her hair styled in the same manner as Juliet in the illustration and is wearing a mantilla, a traditional Christian head-covering for women, in the same style. The inclusion of a scene that is present in DaPorto's story, but which takes place off stage in Shakespeare's text, coupled with how Shentall is positioned and costumed, strongly suggests that Castellani was using this particular scene in order to strengthen claims on the Italian cultural heritage and origins of Shakespeare's work. As we have seen, any identified departure from Shakespeare's text was likely to invoke the ire of those who accepted Shakespeare as the sole, true author of *Romeo and Juliet*. What Castellani was doing was quite in practice with adaptations of literature throughout the world. As Julie Sanders, quoting Derek Attridge, noted, 'The perpetuation of any canon is dependent in part on the references made to its earlier members by its later members (or would-be members)' (Sanders 8-9). Castellani was not snubbing the Shakespeare canon, instead he was referring to the larger *Romeo and Juliet* canon, of which Shakespeare was the most famous and revered contributor. Shakespeare was not, however, the sole contributor to this canon. By immersing himself in the literary

predecessors of *Romeo and Juliet*, Castellani was celebrating the story itself, not dismissing it.

As the marriage scene continues, it forms an image that is similar to another painting, this time by Fra Angelico, whose *Annunciation* has already featured in the film. In the painting, *St Lawrence and the Gaoler*, a man is seen kneeling beside a friar, as viewed through the iron grille of a cell door (**Figure 38**). In the film, we see Shakespeare's Friar Laurence being replaced by Fra Angelico's St. Lawrence, whilst Romeo, who kneels before him, takes the role of the gaoler (**Figure 39**). This can be depicted not only as another reference to Fra Angelico's work and an insertion of Christian iconography into the film, but also as another example of Castellani utilising architecture to suggest the theme of imprisonment. It is also worthy of note that it is Friar Laurence, and not Romeo, her intended husband, who hands Juliet the flower and that the flower in question is a lily. This is significant because in art symbolism the lily is a symbol of purity, particularly associated with the Virgin Mary (Hall 192). Russell Jackson writes that, according to the script, this is the Friar's only lily (Jackson 174). He also notes that Juliet 'stands holding it as if she were indeed a saint or the Madonna herself with the flower symbolising chastity' (Jackson 174). Doris Hunt in her book *The Flowers of Shakespeare* comments on the white lily, '...its purity and sweet perfume made it a symbol of the Virgin Mary and it appeared in many paintings in churches and monasteries, hence it became known as the Madonna Lily' (Hunt 24). These comments echo Dilys Powell's earlier comments in *The Sunday Times* about Friar handing out 'Madonna lillies' (Powell). The lily is also associated with the Dominican order who use it as a symbol of their own chastity and their devotion to the Virgin Mary (Hall 106). St Dominic, the founder of the

Dominican order, is often painted or sculpted holding a lily and a book, which represents the gospels (**Figure 40**).

When Juliet receives the lily from the Friar, she is kneeling in front of the grilled window, which is positioned next to a carving of the crucifixion. Juliet is wearing a mantilla and the image and pose is symbolic of the Virgin Mary kneeling before the cross (**Figure 41**). The linking of Juliet to the Virgin Mary in 1954 is not as direct as in the 1936 version, but it is still prevalent and is apparent here and elsewhere in the film. Juliet is frequently seen entering and leaving a church or monastery and is seen kneeling in prayer in front of a votive candle and a painting of the Madonna and child immediately after the banquet (32:43). Art symbolism through the use of flowers is employed throughout the film. A single rose in a vase is seen at the very beginning of the film (2:08) when John Gielgud appears as the Chorus. A single rose is seen again, this time in a vase on Juliet's table just as she is about to leave for the banquet (22:08). Moreover, it is placed in front of a painting of the Virgin and Child, which the nurse, later in the film, approaches to light a votive lamp and to bless herself (100:11). This image of the Virgin and Child is the only painting on the walls in Juliet's room. In a final act of adornment, Juliet has a single rose placed on her chest as she rests on the tomb. When she awakens, she holds it close to her heart (127:46). Both the rose and the lily, linked in this film with Juliet, are symbolic in art as representing purity and are often associated with the Virgin Mary.

Religious symbolism, although already present in the vestments of Friar Laurence, is manipulated in order to bring emphasis to the Italian origins of Shakespeare's play. In Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Friar Laurence is listed as 'of the Franciscan Order'. In Masuccio's version of the story, the character is simply described as being an Augustan Friar (Masuccio "et al" 17). DaPorto has the character

belonging to The Minor Order of Osservanza (Masuccio “et al”. 31). In Bandello’s narrative he is described as belonging to the Minor Brotherhood. (Masuccio “et al” 62). In Shakespeare’s play, Friar Laurence, as a Franciscan, would wear the easily recognisable habit that Franciscans still wear today. It is clear that in Castellani’s film Friar Laurence is not wearing this habit. Instead, he wears a white habit, with a long pointed hood, and a brown scapular covering. This is not an easily identifiable habit and does not match any of the existing orders in the Catholic Church. According to the office of the Secretariat of State in the Vatican, the habit worn by Friar Laurence in Castellani’s film suggests that he is a Dominican, but that the habit is not completely authentic (**Figure 42**). The response notes that the Friar Laurence character wears a white habit like a Dominican, but also a black scapular like a Benedictine, and black cloak that is similar to, but not exactly matching, a Dominican cloak. The Vatican response concludes that the combination of vestments worn confirms that the outfit is ‘fantasy’ (Cushley, Personal email to author. Unpublished). It is possible of course that the unusual habit afforded Friar Laurence is exactly that, a fantasy of the film studio and another example of Castellani’s zeal in colour matching for Technicolor. This would seem a bit redundant, however, for all the habits, Franciscan, Dominican, Benedictine, are fairly similar and any change between brown and black is unremarkable, particularly in a film where Technicolor plays such a prominent role. The response from the Vatican stated that, technically, Friar Laurence should be dressed as a Franciscan. As such he would wear a simple, coffee-coloured habit, with a short hood and an undyed rope cincture at the waist with three knots at the end of it, which represent the monk’s three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience (Cushley, Personal email to author. Unpublished). It is clear from Castellani’s film that Friar Laurence is not dressed as a Franciscan, although he does

wear some of the vestments associated with Dominicans. This is interesting when we consider how the frescos of Fra Angelico, himself a Dominican, and his monastery feature in the film. The reply also mentions a similarity to the Benedictine order. The Benedictines were founded by St Benedict (c 480-550) (Lawrence 18) and as such, are a much older order than the Dominicans, who were founded by St Dominic in the early thirteenth century (Lawrence 254). The Benedictines were a very learned order and had acquired a standing for copying and preserving the works of classical authors that would otherwise have been lost (The Middle Ages Website “Benedictine Monks”. Web).

C.H. Lawrence in his book, *Medieval Monasticism*, states that in the ninth century the Benedictine monasteries of the Meuse and Rhineland ‘played a major role in transmitting the literary culture of antiquity to the medieval world’ (Lawrence 33). It is possible that Castellani was deliberately suggesting that he, like the Benedictines, was preserving the works of classical authors such as Bandello, DaPorto, and Masuccio that would otherwise have been lost, by copying them into his retelling of Shakespeare. This suggestion, that Castellani was deliberately portraying Friar Laurence as he appears in earlier Italian versions of the play, rather than as he is in Shakespeare’s text, gains credence when we examine the scene where Friar Laurence unveils his plan for Juliet to be reunited with Romeo. In Shakespeare’s text Friar Laurence explains to Juliet, ‘In the meantime, against thou shalt awake/ Shall Romeo by my letters know our drift/ And hither shall he come, and he and I/ Will watch thy waking, and that very night/ Shall Romeo bear thee hence to Mantua’ (4:1:113-117). In Castellani’s version, the lines are changed significantly, detailing a completely different plan. The lines Friar Laurence speaks in the film are:

In the meantime, against thou shalt awake,
 Shall Romeo by my letter know our drift
 Then I will watch thy waking
 And secretly hither bring thee to this cell
 Until the Chapter Day,
 Which we in Mantua each year do hold at Easter time
 With all the friars confused, our habits wearing,
 I'll bear thee hence to Romeo (93:23)

In both the play and Castellani's film we are told that Juliet's birthday is almost upon us in the middle of July. By introducing this plan of hiding Juliet in the cell until Easter and then smuggling her out disguised as a monk,¹⁴ Castellani infers that Juliet will hide in Friar Laurence's cell for a period of around eight or nine months. To suggest that a monk could reside with a young woman hidden in his cell, within a monastery, for such a lengthy period of time without discovery is difficult to accept. This often overlooked detail of Castellani's film demands closer inspection, particularly in relation to the Italian origins of the play.

The change that Castellani introduces lends itself particularly well to DaPorto's version of the story where events unfold during Lent.¹⁵ Juliet makes an excuse to attend confession during Lent, (Masuccio "et al". 31), and later asks to attend a second confession, stating that she would like to attend at Easter "which is in May"(Masuccio "et al" 37).¹⁶ Two days later, Juliet is accompanied by her mother, not the Nurse, to Friar Lorenzo. When they are alone, Juliet requests poison to kill

¹⁴ The date of the Christian feast of Easter varies but invariably falls at the end of March or in the month of April, as calculated in the Gregorian calendar.

¹⁵ Lent is a period of forty days immediately prior to Easter Sunday.

¹⁶ DaPorto's tale takes place before the adoption of the Gregorian calendar in Italy in 1582 which would account for Easter being in May

herself in order to escape an arranged marriage to the Count of Ladrone. The Friar refuses to administer poison but explains his plan where Juliet will drink a potion which will convince everyone she has died. He explains:

You will then without doubt be considered as having passed from this world, and will be buried in the tomb of your ancestors. When the time shall have expired, I shall be there to take you away and convey you to my cell until the time of our Convocation, which will be held shortly in Mantua, and then, disguised in a monk's habit, I will conduct you to your husband (Masuccio "et al" 38-39).

The changing of the wording in Castellani's film, and the references to Chapter Day and Easter time, alongside disguising Juliet in a monk's habit, clearly lifts the story from Shakespeare's text and resets it firmly in the earlier Italian versions of the tale. It could be surmised that Castellani, by altering Friar Laurence's habit from Franciscan to a cross between a Dominican and a Benedictine's habit, is giving further emphasis to this transposition and he, like the Benedictine monks, is preserving the work of classical authors that would otherwise be lost.

This detailed insight into the origins of the Friar Laurence character is, regrettably, not fully extended to his role in the Shakespeare play. Castellani is not alone in this and it could be argued that the character has never been fully detailed in any adaptation in this thesis. Here, in 1954, Friar Laurence is seen as acting with a sense self interest for he abandons Juliet when she needs comfort most. He makes no offer, 'Come, I'll dispose of thee / Among a sisterhood of holy nuns' (5:3:156-7), an offer that is actually missing from all four films. Instead, he stands and watches as

Juliet prepares to kill herself and does nothing to intervene. George Cukor's 1936 film shows the Friar to be a rather bumbling, benign old man who flees at the sound of the approaching watch. Both the 1935 and 1954 representations of the Friar's behaviour fall short of the tearful and positively panic stricken Milo O'Shea's reaction in Zeffirelli's film where, at the first sound of the approaching Watch, he speaks the line 'I dare no longer stay' (5:3:59) four times before running from the scene in fright. Questions over Friar Laurence's sense of guilt have never been fully realised in any film adaptation. Certainly, in the 1936, 1954 and 1968 film it appears that his primary concern is his own safety. It could suggest that he is afraid that his role in the secret marriage will be discovered and that he will be punished. It may also be that he has concluded that his intervention was a vainglorious folly to resolve a feud between the two families and that he feels responsible for the deaths of Romeo and Juliet. This is acknowledged in the Shakespeare play where he admits to the Prince his part in the marriage and exclaims, '...and if aught in this / Miscarried by my fault, let my old life / Be sacrific'd some hour before his time / Unto the rigour of the severest law' (5:3:265-8). It is unfortunate that Pete Postlethwaite's Father Laurence, who shows himself to be a compassionate and dedicated man, is absent from the tomb scene in Luhrmann's 1996 film.

Timescale

Castellani not only changes the calendar dates in which the story is set but, in doing so, he also alters timescale within those dates and this, in turn, dramatically alters the impact of Shakespeare's tragedy. Adrian Poole, in *Tragedy, Shakespeare and the Greek Example*, refers to the 'fearful passage' of time in *Romeo and Juliet*. He writes, 'Tragedies are themselves fearful passages in so far as they require the audience or reader to live them through' (Poole, 2). Part of the essence of *Romeo and Juliet* is the

very short passage of time that passes between the beginning and the end of the play, during which the two previous lives of the protagonists are replaced with one full life, united in love, passion, marriage and ultimately, death. This timescale of five days in Shakespeare's text can be easily tracked. At the beginning of the play Romeo is referred to as having been seen walking in a grove of sycamores at dawn. When Romeo leaves the Capulet's orchard near the end of Act 2, Scene 2, it is nearly morning again. When he descends from Juliet's window after the wedding night, it is again dawn. The fourth dawn occurs when Juliet's drugged body is discovered by the nurse; and the fifth and final dawn arises when the Prince makes his comments over the dead bodies of the lovers at the end of the play. This period of five days is a crucial element of Shakespeare's play and to alter this timescale is to change a fundamental element of the tragedy. As Poole also stated, 'In tragedy, time is pressing not 'free'' (Poole 36). This alteration of the time from five days within the play, to approximately nine months as taken from Castellani's altered lines as spoken by Friar Laurence, vastly reduces the dramatic and tragic element of the lovers' untimely death. This raises the dual question as to why the short period of time within the play is so important and why Castellani altered it?

The short timescale between Juliet's life altering completely through her meeting with Romeo, and her death, is very important. Important too is the fact that Juliet meets Romeo on the very day that her mother and the nurse have urged her to consider marriage to Paris. This suggestion comes in Act 1 Scene 3 where Juliet is advised by both her mother and her surrogate mother that the time of her childhood is at an end and that her life as a woman is about to begin. This part of Shakespeare's play is often played with a strong focus on the intrusive and bawdy behaviour of the Nurse. These behaviours *are* present in the scene and there is no doubting that the

Nurse *is* overbearing, vulgar, and unintentionally impudent; but one of the purposes of the scene is to show how Juliet's mother and the nurse allude to Juliet the expectant path of her future life. Not only that, the expectation is that Juliet will understand and accept this way of life, "Well, think of marriage now, Younger than you/Here, ladies of esteem/Are made already mothers" (1:3:69-71). Castellani, like his predecessor in 1936, follows in the tradition of focusing on the Nurse's boisterousness. He even adds a jaunty soundtrack for comedic effect. This is an opportunity lost for it is in this scene that the seeds of Juliet's tragedy are sown. Juliet is not only advised and encouraged on the subject of her marriage; her life's expectant course is revealed and sanctioned by her two closest companions, who are themselves representatives of the progressive stages within that course with Lady Capulet being a wife, and the Nurse being a widow. Both the Nurse and Lady Capulet make reference to their own memories of being Juliet's age. The Nurse cannot swear to being a maiden at thirteen, and Lady Capulet reminds Juliet that she herself was a mother by the time she was her daughter's age. A suggestion that can be taken from this conversation is that it is from this point that Juliet begins the transition from child to young woman. Shakespeare tells us virtually nothing of Juliet's life before this point outwith the comic anecdotes of the nurse, and even then, those same tales are used primarily to highlight the nurse's wandering mind. Shakespeare also makes a suggestion with regards to a major change in Romeo's life when he asks 'Did my heart loved til now?' (1:4:51).

This still leaves the question, why does Castellani alter the period within the play from days to months? We have seen that this was partly because the director was intent on referencing the Italian sources of the play. The lengthening of the passage of time, however, can also be taken as yet another precept of the neo-realist school of cinema. David Overby refers to comments by the renowned neo-realist director,

Roberto Rossellini and speaks of the importance of rhythm and of waiting in neo-realist films:

The only thing that is important is rhythm, and that cannot be learnt; you carry it inside yourself.... Neo-realism consists of following someone with love and watching all his discoveries and impressions; an ordinary man dominated by something which suddenly strikes a terrible blow at the precise moment when he finds himself free in the world. He never expects whatever it is. What is important for me is the *waiting* (Overby 97) (my italics).

This designation of the importance of timing here fits Romeo's situation extremely well. Castellani, by lengthening the time between Romeo and Juliet meeting, falling in love, and eventually dying, presents us with a more rational time scale that reflects the Italian origins of the play within the tenets of neo-realist cinema. Castellani's change to the time elapsed within the plot is, however, in direct conflict with Shakespeare's text. The overbearing tragedy of Juliet is not a forbidden love that ends in the death of one so young; it is the fact that when death comes, it is alarmingly adjacent to the inception of the love that propels Juliet through her life's passage at an overwhelming pace. With Juliet's life having run its expectant course, and having progressed from child, to woman, to wife, to lover, and finally to widow; the only stage to which Juliet can now advance is death itself. Juliet's death signifies that her life has progressed to its natural conclusion, but this occurs not over a period of decades, but over a period of five days. The greatest tragedy of Shakespeare's play is that Juliet's natural life progression is encased in such an unnaturally brief life span. It is unfortunate that the

death of Juliet is treated in a manner by Castellani so that it appears to intrude upon, rather than be the focus of, the final act of Shakespeare's play.

Final Scenes

In the final part of Castellani's film we are presented with a Juliet imprisoned in the tomb which Romeo has to physically smash before descending to a small, low roofed and darkened chamber. This scene is notable for two points, firstly the killing of Paris and secondly, the fact that the tomb entrance itself is actually a stone sarcophagus. The first point highlights something that is commonly found in neo-realist films, namely the suffering and anguish of the main protagonist. This is Romeo mired in human conflict. The scene as shot, however, portrays Romeo in an unsympathetic light. The act of killing Paris, although present in Shakespeare's play, can diminish Romeo in the eyes of an audience and is a difficult scene to shoot. This may explain why it was omitted from both the 1968 and 1996 films. Here, it is not so much the killing of Paris that is problematic to the audience but the manner in which he is killed. Romeo, in a departure from Shakespeare's text, takes a large candlestick from the church, a minor act of desecration in itself, and uses it to smash at the covering of the sarcophagus. When he is interrupted in this action, instead of engaging in a fight with Paris, Romeo suddenly brings the candlestick down upon his head, killing him. It is a violent act that is uncomfortable to watch. In Shakespeare's text Romeo then shows remorse for his act and fulfils Paris's dying wish by laying his body next to Juliet.¹⁷ This act of remorse does not occur in the 1954 and Paris's body is left where it falls. The second notable point of the scene is that, although Castellani's tomb entrance, which Romeo has to prise open, may add a touch of drama and tension, it is entirely inappropriate as an entrance to a family vault. In Shakespeare's text Romeo

¹⁷ Friar Laurence finds both bodies beside the drugged Juliet.

brings along tools to force open the rotting jaws of the tomb, suggesting the tomb has solid doors or gates that, once opened, will offer the audience a view of Juliet.

Castellani's tomb offers an entrance to iron rungs built in to the wall. It is implausible to suggest that Juliet's body, and the bodies of those who already rest in the tomb, had to be manhandled down this ladder before being laid to rest. Inside the tomb Juliet lies unadorned with neither veil nor flowers save for a single red rose which rests upon her wedding gown of gold brocade. As has happened throughout the film, we see Romeo shot in close up as he takes centre stage. In a departure from the text, Romeo stabs himself with a dagger before collapsing behind a pillar. When Juliet awakes and speaks, her voice resonates and echoes slightly in the stone confines of the tomb, as does the voice of Friar Laurence later in the scene. Romeo's voice, however, does not echo in this scene. The sound quality here is such that it appears that Romeo's lines have been overlaid whilst no-one else has been afforded this privilege. It is impossible to say for certain why this would be the case. Sound quality throughout the film is variable with a few Italian actors, most notably Ubaldo Zollo as Mercutio and Enzo Fiermonte as Tybalt, quite clearly having been dubbed. Why Laurence Harvey should have his lines in the final scene overlaid is not entirely clear although the effect is that, once again, Romeo is afforded a greater screen presence than other actors with whom he shares a scene. Since Romeo stabs himself in this version instead of taking poison obtained from the apothecary, many of Juliet's lines become obsolete and so they are cut. Indeed, Juliet's death scene is cut to the extent that she speaks only two lines of dialogue before stabbing herself in a theatrical and unconvincingly painless manner.

Once Romeo ceases to live there is no reason for Juliet to continue in the role, and so she is despatched as quickly and as effectively as possible. Juliet departs from the film overshadowed by Romeo's presence and almost ignored by the director. In

another departure from the text, Friar Laurence witnesses Juliet's death. He sees her thrust the dagger to her breast in the first of three stuttering attempts to kill herself but does nothing to intervene. Juliet even has time to speak her final lines 'This is thy sheath. There rust and let me die' (5:3:169), without Friar Laurence making any attempt to stop her. By shooting the scene in this manner, by letting Juliet die without any attempt at intervention, Castellani makes it clear that in comparison to Romeo, Juliet's life and death is somewhat inconsequential. In this Castellani echoes the comments made by Carolyn Brown that early criticism of the play appeared as being primarily focusing on Romeo and that Juliet was treated 'as a subsidiary, underdeveloped character' (Brown 333). In fact, Juliet's death here acts as little more than a link to the next scene in which the Prince takes the leading role in an unashamedly stage managed finale.

As Juliet takes her final breath, we fade to a long shot of the interior of the cathedral looking towards to the two main doors and the large rose window. This is the San Bernardino church in Verona (Anon. *Diary of an Italian Summer* 7. Unpublished). As if on cue, the doors are opened by two altar servers wearing matching soutans and surplices. Staff from the Prince's household enter through the doorway and stand on either side, allowing the Prince to make a solitary, grand entrance. The Prince enters, followed by a servant walking about six steps behind. As he descends the stairs we witness a scene of well co-ordinated stagecraft as, simultaneously, he is joined by twelve bishops, wearing mitres, entering from the right, and a similar number of female mourners entering from the left. The bishops are robed as if to concelebrate a high funeral mass. Here we see Castellani's obsession with colour matching as well as his showcasing of Italian art. Juliet's dress, which was intended as her wedding dress, was copied from Botticelli's *Flora* (Rothwell 122)

and had twenty thousand imitation pearls sewn on, making it so heavy that Susan Shentall had to be physically lifted on to the funeral bier (Anon. *Diary of an Italian Summer* 7. Unpublished). The bishops' purple vestments with gold edging, which perfectly match the purple of the dresses of each the female mourners, were copied from Carpaccio's painting *The Funeral of St Ursula* (Anon. *Diary of an Italian Summer* 7. Unpublished) (**Figure 43**). This may also be a reference to the two lovers' initial meeting, for the full title of the painting is *Martyrdom of the Pilgrims and the Funeral of St Ursula*. As all three parties march ceremoniously down towards the camera, more female mourners enter from the left, again dressed identically in long purple dresses and black veils. No words are spoken and the only sound we hear is the mournful pealing of a solitary church bell. The bishops and female mourners stop at the top of the stairs as the Prince makes a dramatic descent to the prone bodies of Romeo and Juliet, who have been removed from the tomb and brought here. We hear sobbing and see Capulet and Lady Capulet grieving. We also see Montague accompanied by Benvolio although no explanation is offered as to the absence of Lady Montague who, in Shakespeare's text, has died during the night. Behind Montague and Benvolio stand three more bishops, each attired as the others. The film ends with a dramatic flourish when, after berating the families over their conflict, the Prince makes a sweeping exit to the rising throng of choral music as the bishops descend, single file, towards the bodies of Romeo and Juliet. The entire scene is stage managed on a vast scale and again differs from the timescale of Shakespeare's text which places this scene as a continuation of the death scene in the tomb. The inclusion of so many high ranking church officials causes Jackson to comment 'One wonders whether the burial of a citizen's only daughter, however great and rich the family might be, would merit such a formidable ecclesiastical presence' (Jackson 176). It

certainly conflicts with the claim in the programme for the world premier that ‘This is not photographed theatre but a film peopled with real characters’ (Anon, Rank Souvenir Brochure, *Romeo and Juliet* 1954). This brings us back to the questions raised at the beginning of this piece. Why did Castellani’s film fall from popularity so quickly after a comparative explosion of interest on its release?

The reasons for this are manifold. Ed Overbey, in the introduction to his book *Springtime in Italy*, recalls a story which illustrates the role of available capital in neo-realism films. He refers to a scene from the 1963 film *Caccia alla Volpe* (After The Fox) in which Victor Mature plays a Hollywood star visiting Italy. The film was directed by Vittorio De Sica, who had directed *Ladri di biciclette* (The Bicycle Thieves). The screenplay itself was a collaboration between Neil Simon and Cesare Zavattini, one of the great theorists in the field of neo-realism. In the film, Tony Powell (Mature’s character) receives a proposition by telephone to appear in a neo-realist film. When Victor Mature’s character hears about the proposition, he asks, “What’s neo-realism?” to which his manager shouts back “No money!” (52:05). It is a joke of course but not one without truth or relevance to Castellani’s *Romeo and Juliet*. The fact that the comment is made in a film directed by Vittorio De Sica, in which he appears as himself, adds biting wit. Neo-realist films were mostly shot on a shoestring budget which helped convey an element of social strife and the struggle against poverty and fascism. They also tended to use non-professional actors to assist in reflecting the reality of daily life and the struggle of the human condition. Each of Castellani’s previous films had adhered to these principles, all being shot with non-professional actors and all on a shoestring budget. When he was given the task of directing *Romeo and Juliet* for Rank, a film to be shown to an international audience, Castellani was given a budget reportedly of £500,000 (Conway), a huge outlay in

1954. This may well have proven to be a burden instead of a boon and, instead of being beneficial may have had a direct and detrimental effect on the finished film. Although the director shot the film in real locations this was the only true cinematic constancy he maintained with the neo-realist school. The film became a collection of staged shots to highlight the visual opulence of Renaissance Art. Although the sets were real insofar as filming was done in actual buildings and courtyards in Italy, the settings, props and costumes were such that they reflected not poverty or suffering but luxury and wealth, the very elements that neo-realism spurned. The costumes, discussed in detail throughout this chapter, were glorious in style and abundant in number partly because Technicolor proved to be a distraction to the director. The casting of the two leads proved an unhappy coupling, with Shentall's naturalistic Juliet clashing with Harvey's studious and theatrical Romeo. Shentall's representation of a youthful, innocent woman encountering love and its subsequent wants and privations was, despite some criticisms, generally accepted as being commendable. On this casting Jackson states that 'Castellani may have been ahead of his time – and demanding too much of his demure English seventeen-year-old' (Jackson 180). Harvey's Romeo, however, was generally regarded as wooden and unconvincing, completely lacking in passion or anguish. His overtly theatrical approach and distinctive melodious delivery of lines proved to be distracting and at odds with delivery of the rest of the cast. Russell Jackson refers to comments on Harvey's RADA training and quotes that he was 'an actor not without the vices of recitation and a little inclined to "sing" when speaking Shakespeare's verse' (Jackson 166-167). Jackson also comments 'Harvey's Romeo remains one of the chief obstacles to an English-speaking audience's enjoyment, and his stagey speech removes any vocal sense of ardour and animation from his physically restrained and self-conscious

performance' (Jackson 179). Despite the neo-realist framework in which the film was constructed, it remains emblematic of mainstream films of the 1950s with the female role existing as both an object of the male gaze and as a serving conduit through which the hero can express his importance to the narrative. Numerous continuity errors also detracted from the film, as did the director's adherence to his own interpretation of 'historical reality'.

Perhaps the film's greatest difficulty, however, was the how the director was perceived to have been 'disrespectful' to Shakespeare's play and to Shakespeare himself. This, as we have shown, was partly due to the conflict between a 'knowing' and 'unknowing' audience. Where Castellani was celebrated in Italy for referring back to the Italian tales on which Shakespeare's play is based, he was condemned elsewhere for that same fact. Russell Jackson refers to 'a degree of nationalistic hostility' (Jackson 187) and how 'The British press treated the film as a failure to make the kind of Shakespeare film they expected' (Jackson 187). Also, as the film moved away from Castellani's original vision his inconsistent approach resulted in a degenerative form of neo-realism. His many self-induced distractions meant he lost focus with the very source of humanity and conflict that neo-realism held so vital. In this he echoes Rossellini's description of the development of neo-realism when he claimed that although it was originally moral, it later became aesthetic. Castellani started off with a moral approach to the film but gradually moved towards the aesthetic which he subsequently embraced. The aesthetic itself, however, held little interest or captivation for the majority audience beyond the novelty of seeing *Romeo and Juliet* in Technicolor and shot in the streets of Italy. There can be no doubt that Castellani's original intentions were good and that he made a determined attempt to film a ground-breaking version of *Romeo and Juliet*, but intentions are seldom enough

and the finished film proved to be neither an innovative neo-realist interpretation of *Romeo and Juliet*, nor a critical or commercial success. Castellani's film, however, gives a fascinating insight into a bold and original exploration of one of Shakespeare's greatest plays and its origins, and as such it deserves greater consideration and viewing than it is generally afforded. It was not until Franco Zeffirelli directed his 1968 version, however, that *Romeo and Juliet* enjoyed the worldwide critical and commercial success that Castellani had been chasing.

Chapter Three

1968 - Juliet Conquers the World

‘Anything wrong and everything right with recent Shakespeare films should be blamed on Zeffirelli’ (Daileader 187). So wrote Celia Daileader in *Nude Shakespeare in Film and Nineties Popular Feminism*. The more it is read, the more astonishing both the claim and the inferred meaning become. It is astonishing because what Daileader is saying is that everything in modern filmed Shakespeare is, to a certain degree, influenced by or measured against Zeffirelli’s *Romeo and Juliet*. Franco Zeffirelli’s 1968 production of *Romeo and Juliet*, starring Olivia Hussey and Leonard Whiting, remains the most successful and lionized film version of the play to date. It won two Oscars – for best costumes and best cinematography - took fifty million dollars at the box office which, from an initial investment of eight hundred thousand dollars, was the largest profit return in Paramount’s history (Zeffirelli 240; 229; 225; 229). According to Zeffirelli, the film virtually saved Paramount and allowed them to go on to make *Love Story*, which retained a recognisable imprint of *Romeo and Juliet*. Although the derivative link between the story of *Romeo and Juliet* and the film *West Side Story* (1961) is well documented, it is interesting to note how Paramount, keen to repeat the success of their 1968 blockbuster, simply transposed much of the generic theme of *Romeo and Juliet* to a modern setting in *Love Story*. Both films centre on the passionate but ultimately doomed relationship between two young lovers which is vigorously opposed by the head of the family. Both *Love Story* and *Romeo and Juliet* have similar opening scenes. Both films begin with a lush, romantic score as the camera pans in from high above, whilst a male voice-over informs the audience that the film concerns the retelling of the short life and untimely death of the female lead. The male and female leads in both films bear physical similarities, with Leonard

Whiting and Ryan O'Neal being blond and blue eyed, and Olivia Hussey and Ali McGraw being brunette and brown eyed. Ali McGraw even adopts Olivia Hussey's hairstyle which had become popular after the success of Zeffirelli's movie. The success of Zeffirelli's 1968 film made Olivia Hussey a worldwide celebrity and this in turn gave the character of Juliet a popular profile far outstripping that achieved in any previous cinematic incarnation. Although the 1936 film made great efforts to make *Romeo and Juliet* immediately accessible to a thirties Hollywood audience, it failed ultimately to accomplish this. The 1954 film emerged in a fanfare of celebration before falling from grace very quickly when its uneven mix of Italian neo-realism and fifties Hollywood failed to endear itself to an international audience. Zeffirelli's film, on the other hand, was both a commercial and critical success and its popularity was such that it transposed the character of Juliet from the world of academia and theatre to the very forefront of modern popular culture. In this it was unique amongst the films studied in this thesis.

In *Shakespeare in Modern Popular Culture*, Douglas Lanier explores Shakespeare's position in both 'high' and 'popular' culture as well as documenting the differences between both categories. Lanier makes the point that most observers see Shakespeare 'as *the* icon of high or 'proper' culture' (Lanier 3). In contrast, he refers to popular culture as 'aesthetically unsophisticated, disposable, immediately accessible and therefore shallow' (Lanier 3). He also likens popular culture to 'commercial entertainment in mass produced media addressed to a general public' (Lanier 5). The fact that Zeffirelli's film was made specifically for a worldwide cinematic release, and that it achieved huge commercial success means that under Lanier's distinctions, the 1968 *Romeo and Juliet* can easily be listed as belonging to modern popular culture. The film, however, outgrew this categorization. Zeffirelli's

film was so successful that, in the eyes of many, it transcended popular culture and became part of the ‘proper’ cultural heritage of Shakespeare. People who saw the film came to believe that this was how a Shakespeare film ought to look. They believed that Olivia Hussey *was* Juliet. The sumptuous beauty of the film, which also celebrated the physical attractiveness of both leads, was enhanced by a sweeping score by Nino Rota. The visual and aural senses of the audience were indulged in a manner never experienced before in watching a Shakespeare film. This was not the militant patriotism of Olivier’s *Henry V*, nor the stark black and white expressionism of his *Hamlet*. Capturing the mood of the teenage generation of the 1960s, Zeffirelli’s *Romeo and Juliet* became a celebration of all things young and beautiful. The popular appeal of the film was not a matter of chance, rather it was something that Zeffirelli had consciously worked towards. Universal popularity, however, does not guarantee universal approval.

Ramona Wray examines some of the criticisms directed at Zeffirelli from those ‘Inside Shakespeare circles’ (Burnett “et al” 144). She notes that ‘In the first instance, censure focuses on the director’s self-confessed popularism, his pride in his films’ marketability and international appeal’ (Burnett “et al” 144). There is no doubt that the film was a worldwide commercial success and that those who saw it witnessed Shakespeare presented as a stunning visual experience. The question arises, though, to what degree did the beauty and popularity of Zeffirelli’s film sway many to equate the film with greatness in terms of how it interprets and presents Shakespeare’s play? The easy willingness of public and critics to accept Zeffirelli’s *Romeo and Juliet* as ‘proper’ Shakespeare is something that I will expand upon further in the 1996 chapter. For now, we must ask the question, why did Zeffirelli succeed so spectacularly where others had failed? To understand this and to gain an insight into

Zeffirelli's approach to film making and his evaluation of Shakespeare in general, and *Romeo and Juliet* in particular, we must begin with an analysis of the man himself and his background in opera, stage and film.

Zeffirelli Before Juliet

Franco Zeffirelli had a great love and respect for Shakespeare's work, but in addition to this, he was the recipient an exceptional cinematic education obtained at first hand from Italian film director Luchino Visconti, whom Zeffirelli would later describe as 'probably the single most important person I have ever known' (Zeffirelli 62).

Visconti was one of the most prominent figures of the neo-realist movement, having written and directed *Ossessione* (1943) which is often credited as being the first neo-realist film. Whilst staying in Paris, Visconti was taken under the wing of fashion designer Coco Chanel. It was Chanel who introduced Visconti to Jean Renoir who hired him for the position of third assistant for the film *Une Partie de Champagne* (A Day in the Country 1935) (Zeffirelli 63). Zeffirelli, a budding actor in 1946, met Visconti whilst working as a junior assistant to a scenic painter in the Teatro della Pergola in Florence (Zeffirelli 62). According to Zeffirelli, Visconti was having a tantrum because he could not find a mad old lady to play the part of a mad old lady in his production of *Tobacco Road*. Visconti did not want someone made up to look the part, 'He wanted the real thing. This was neo-realism in its most extreme sense' (Zeffirelli 65). Zeffirelli found someone suitable and brought her to Visconti. As a reward, Visconti promised to watch Zeffirelli rehearse in his play the following evening (Zeffirelli 67). This was a pivotal moment in Zeffirelli's life and his autobiography reflects records his joy at this point, 'I'd done it. I'd broken the barrier and caught the attention of the most interesting man in Italian theatre at the time'

(Zeffirelli 67). It was from this point that Zeffirelli became involved in both a professional and personal relationship with Visconti that was to shape his future. Zeffirelli is honest enough to suggest that at this period in his life, when he was trying to break into the acting world, being good looking was a definite advantage. He wrote:

How someone enters the professional theatre and then goes on to succeed usually makes a fascinating story...In my case the pure accident of my being young and good-looking helped me on my way. If this sounds vain, I am sorry, but that is the world of the theatre. The public wants attractive actors and actresses, so inevitably we are conscious of our looks and tend to make a narcissistic appraisal of our qualities (Zeffirelli 67-68).

This valuing of youth and beauty was to become an important factor in his film version of *Romeo and Juliet* many years later. His many years with Visconti, and its importance to him, is well documented in Zeffirelli's autobiography, but it was the acrimonious ending of the relationship that was to prove the catalyst for the rapid development in Zeffirelli's artistic career. The psychological aspect of the break up, and the lasting impression it made on Zeffirelli's mind, were of greater significance than the occasion that led to the split. It was to this particular chapter in his life that Zeffirelli would return in later years whilst deliberating whether or not to direct *Romeo and Juliet* for the first time. The matter of the split was a hugely important point in Zeffirelli's life and one which he details at length in his autobiography. It was the point at which he reassessed his life and determined to follow his own creative path in the arts rather than follow in the slipstream of someone else. What occurred

was that Zeffirelli was living with Visconti in Rome when Visconti's sister visited in order to spend some time with her brother. Zeffirelli was subsequently moved out of the shared bedroom and into an attic room for the duration of the visit. It was during this time that the flat in Rome was burgled and some expensive Cartier watches stolen (Zeffirelli 109-110). The police were called and interviewed Visconti as a matter of course. Visconti, being sensitive to the prospect of his sexual lifestyle being leaked to the press, listed Zeffirelli as merely another member of the household staff. Zeffirelli, along with the rest of the household staff, became a suspect and was subsequently removed from the premises and detained in a police cell. This act of disownment hurt Zeffirelli enormously and he felt utterly betrayed. It was, however during this short period in police custody that he gave serious consideration to the way his life had unfolded and in what direction he would like it to progress. He considered his current existence in the shadow of Visconti and considered what options were available to him:

...the day had passed slowly with little to occupy me except my increasing anger...I sat in that dismal room and tried to weigh up the past five years: I had broken with my family, I had some incredible chances in the theatre and had lived in a style and among people beyond my earlier imaginings, but what did it all add up to except that I was the gilded creature of a famous man? I had nothing of my own – no reputation other than as his assistant and no money, for he gave me none. I had been happy enough, because I had not questioned his attachment to me (Zeffirelli 110-111).

Zeffirelli recalled how Visconti had physically struck him during rehearsals for *As You Like It*, and, for the first time, Zeffirelli faced up to an earlier episode that had hurt him so deeply that he had deliberately suppressed it. Zeffirelli had directed a revival of Bertolazzi's *Lulu*, and suffered the bitter humiliation of jeering and laughter from the invited audience at the dress rehearsal. It was whilst he was detained by the police as a suspect in the break in that Zeffirelli forced himself to face the truth of the matter.

When the play ended, I joined Luchino and his friends in the foyer. There seemed to be a lot of nudging and whispering among them, but I tried not to be bothered by it. It was only then, in that room in the police station, that I allowed myself to admit what I had really known all the time – that Luchino had led the jeering and he and his cronies had gone to my first production to laugh at me (Zeffirelli 111).

Zeffirelli wrote that he used this short period of detainment in the police station as the impetus to break from Visconti's domination and make his own way in the arts world. Had this point of reflection not occurred then it is possible that Zeffirelli would never have embarked on the path that would eventually lead to his celebrated 1968 *Romeo and Juliet*. Although their personal relationship had come to an end, Visconti and Zeffirelli still worked together. In fact, Zeffirelli's first job after this split was to work as the set designer for Visconti's stage production of Chekov's *Three Sisters*. It was here, for the first time, that he consciously tried to bring his own identity to a production. His idea for the set was:

to create not so much a Russia as known to a Russian of that time, but rather a dream Russia, one correct in its details but with a remote, ethereal air. I was trying to develop my own style by paying attention to cultural truth as I'd learnt to do from Luchino, but giving my own imagination free reign. After all, this Russian play was to be spoken in Italian in Rome, scarcely very realistic (Zeffirelli 115).

This distinction between what was real and what was accepted as real was an important development for Zeffirelli and one that was to serve him well in the future. He believed that if there was a lot of detail within a set or a shot then it was more likely to be accepted as being 'real' without actually being so. This process had first come to his attention when working with Visconti on the set of *La terra trema* (The Earth Trembles) in 1948. He wrote:

This is my main debt to Luchino in film-making, his passionate attention to detail. Everything was always researched to a point far beyond the needs of the actual scene. You immersed yourself in the period, the place, its culture, so that even though the audience might not take in every detail, they would be absolutely convinced of its essential 'rightness' (Zeffirelli 85-86).

A good example of this is the difference in duelling scenes in Castellani's 1954 film and Zeffirelli's 1968 version. We have seen in the previous chapter how Castellani, in an attempt to lay claim to the cultural authority of the play and to instil a degree of historical accuracy, had his actors fighting duels with daggers instead of swords, 'a ferri corti', 'at irons short'. The result was that the action scenes in the film, the

visual realisation of the fierce conflict Castellani wanted to emphasise appeared insipid and wooden. In contrast to this, Zeffirelli was aware that if he were to push for historical authenticity in the fight scenes then the protagonists should use foils. These, however, did not register well on screen so he deliberately altered this so that heavier swords were used. Michael York, who played Tybalt in the film, wrote of this decision in his autobiography, *Accidentally on Purpose*:

Franco decided to dispense with the authentic graceful foils of the period and use heavier weapons that registered more on film – and as it turned out, on body. Moreover, on the day of shooting, he capriciously changed the sites and sequences of our patiently learned routines so that we now fought each other on a gravely hill. This gave the duel its own mad momentum, provoking an alarming spontaneity and, especially as we were fighting with both sword and dagger, a real sense of danger (York 154).

The result of this deviation from what was historically more accurate and less authentic than Castellani's approach, nonetheless bestows an evocation of realism that is readily accepted by the audience as being 'true'. This ability to introduce an accepted reality and a feeling of an essential rightness to his sets, was something that Zeffirelli had developed through his opera productions and which was to prove fundamental in directing *Romeo and Juliet* on both stage and screen in later years.

It was the application of this principle in the stage production of *Cavalleria Rusticana*, that Zeffirelli was directing at the Royal Opera House in London in 1959 that was lead to him directing *Romeo and Juliet* at the Old Vic in 1961. Although this was not the first time Zeffirelli had directed either opera, he wrote that at this

particular time in his life, *Cavalleria Rusticana* brought him a sense of innovation. Zeffirelli wrote of the origins of the story within the opera as well as the opera itself, and the infusion of vigour that inspired him in his own adaptation, ‘the piece has a pleasing freshness, an explosive inventiveness and passion. I wanted to harness that, to recreate Sicily, the feel of it on stage, that special light at dawn, a fresco of peasant life in the last century’ (Zeffirelli 155). The opera was a great success, being granted a Royal Command Performance for Queen Elizabeth, The Queen Mother (Zeffirelli 155). It was, however Zeffirelli’s desire and ability to infuse the stage with a tangible sense of Italy that was to lead directly to him being asked to produce his famed stage production of *Romeo and Juliet* at the Old Vic. After the opera had concluded its run, Zeffirelli travelled to Palermo to produce Donizetti’s *La Fille du regiment* (The Daughter of the Regiment). It was at this point that he received a call from the Old Vic regarding the possibility of him presenting Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. Zeffirelli expressed how he thought it was a joke because he could not believe that the most revered of English theatres would allow an Italian to direct such a national institution as Shakespeare. A second call, this time from Michael Benthall himself, the director of the Old Vic, was also dismissed by Zeffirelli who believed it to be the actor Victor Spinetti conspiring with his friends to deceive him. It was only after a letter arrived that Zeffirelli realised that the request was genuine (Zeffirelli 156).

Zeffirelli’s wording of this episode is interesting in that he does not actually state that he was asked to direct the play. Of the phone call he writes, ‘The general manager, Michael Benthall...would on his return like to meet me to discuss the idea of my *doing* Shakespeare for them’ (Zeffirelli 156) [my italics]. With regards to the letter he writes, ‘A few days later a letter arrived and bang, I realized what a fool I’d been. They really did want me to *produce* Shakespeare, and *Romeo and Juliet* at that’

(Zeffirelli 156) [my italics]. Having flown to London to meet with Benthall, Zeffirelli expressed his fears that he had never directed Shakespeare before, not even in Italian, and that the thought of doing so at the Old Vic filled him with terror. Michael Benthall explained that what the Old Vic wanted in their production was exactly what Zeffirelli had achieved in *Cavalleria Rusticana*. By this he meant that what he was looking for was for Zeffirelli:

...to bring to the production the feel of Italy, not the Victorian interpretation that still dominated the English stage but something truly Mediterranean: not heavy, carved furniture and velvet drapes, but sunlight on a fountain, wine and olives and garlic. New, different, real, young (Zeffirelli 157).

This sentiment echoes strongly comments made by George Cukor, director of the 1936 film. Patricia Tatspaugh refers to comments made by Cukor explaining why he thought his film, which had been nominated for four Academy Awards, had fallen from grace. She quotes Cukor saying, ‘Perhaps it was ‘too stately’, its lovers ‘too stodgy’, it should have looked ‘more Italian, Mediterranean...Given the chance to film it again, ‘I’d know how. I’d get the garlic and the Mediterranean into it’ (Tatspaugh 136). Although Michael Benthall’s words encouraged Zeffirelli, for this vindicated his conscious decision to pursue and create a ‘sense of Italy’ for these productions, he was still unsure of the proposal to undertake *Romeo and Juliet*. It is a matter of record that Zeffirelli had never attempted to direct any play since Visconti had humiliated him when he led the jeering from the audience at his production of Bertolazzi’s *Lulu* and the production was subsequently savaged by the press (Zeffirelli 111). The hurt that he had felt at this episode and the impact it had on his self

confidence may well have run deeper than he wished to admit for Zeffirelli had concentrated exclusively on operatic productions from that day onwards. It is this point that makes Zeffirelli's next move all the more surprising, for it was to Visconti that he turned for advice and support in the matter. The meeting between the two men took place in Rome and was not an agreeable encounter. It prompted Zeffirelli to write:

Sadly, that night, when I needed his impartial advice, his fair judgement, perhaps even his encouragement, he gave nothing. On the contrary, he played on all my fears – let's face it: I had only done one play and not successfully, no Shakespeare, not even in Italian, the Old Vic was the pinnacle of world drama, a flop there would cripple me for ever and the chances of succeeding were too slim to risk (Zeffirelli 157).

Zeffirelli, despite Visconti's misgivings, decided to take the risk. This was the second instance when a dismissal by Visconti acted as a catalyst that spurred Zeffirelli to move purposely to the next step of his creative and artistic career.

Old Vic Production

It is well documented that the success of the Old Vic production of *Romeo and Juliet* was a major stepping stone for Zeffirelli as a director. The play was scheduled for the autumn of 1960, the heyday of the kitchen sink drama, 'when anger and a sullen air of rebellion were thought to be the spirit of the times' (Zeffirelli 160). Whilst acknowledging this sense of rebellion in the theatre, he also maintained that there was a sense of youthful enthusiasm at the time which he hoped to bring to the play.

Whereas Zeffirelli undoubtedly brought an air of freshness to the Old Vic stage production of 1960, the actual extent of his involvement in the direction of the play remains imprecise. There is no doubt that he had interplay with the actors during the latter part of the rehearsals, but there exist some inconsistencies of timing and input on this subject that have been accepted without question, or suitably ignored, and which benefit from closer scrutiny.

One of Zeffirelli's peculiarities for this production was to insist that his cast wore no wigs. He notes in his autobiography of his explanation to the assembled cast:

I told them I didn't want make-up, no gilded columns, no balconies with dangling wisteria. This was to be a real story in a plausible medieval city at the opening of the Renaissance. So no wigs, they would have to grow their hair long – girls *and* boys. This was 1960, before the Beatles, and at first the boys were embarrassed, they wore their hair under berets on the underground and were galled by the jokes their friends made. But when they started to act they saw the point – instead of the posing that a wig brings with it they acted freely, moving their heads like lions tossing their manes' (Zeffirelli 163).

This simple and innocuous statement may well be intended to show the director's attention to detail in pursuit of artistic excellence. It is, however, an important point and one that demands close examination, in particular with regards to the timing of the comment. We know from Zeffirelli's autobiography that he was directing the opera *Eurydice* in Florence in the summer of 1960.

There was however to be one last major opera before London and by one of fate's more curious twists this was to be the first opera of all, Jacopo Peri's *Eurydice* which was to form the major open-air set piece of the Maggio Musicale in my home town of Florence...This was in summer 1960, just before the bandwagon of interest in early music got underway (Zeffirelli 158-9).

He then makes reference to going to Rome. This was during the summer Olympics and Zeffirelli notes how the games made an impact on the city. 'I've never seen the city like it since: everywhere you looked there were cheerful faces and a feeling of togetherness that affected even the most cynical bystander.' (Zeffirelli 160). The opening ceremony for the Rome Olympics was August 25th 1960 (Olympic.org. 2013. Web.). Zeffirelli makes no mention of being at, or witnessing, this ceremony so we can reasonably assume he was in Rome some time after this date. He makes reference at this time of his shared apartment and the difficulties of keeping his pet dogs there (Zeffirelli 160). It is probable that Zeffirelli spent at least a few days in Rome at this time, possibly longer. Although these may be minor points, they offer us a first-hand account of Zeffirelli's timeline prior to his visit to London and this becomes a relevant issue. Immediately after his visit to Rome, Zeffirelli took his annual holiday and sometime in late August or possibly early September, he headed out to a house he had rented at Castiglioncello off the Tuscan coast. There is no specific mention in the autobiography as to how long Zeffirelli spent on holiday but there are indications that it was at least a few weeks. He states that he rented the house, which suggests a stay of weeks as opposed to days. He also mentions how his aunt reacted to the various boys who visited, "Thank God there are such nice boys round here", she would say. "Girls only make trouble'" (Zeffirelli 161). He also uses the broad term 'that

summer' to refer to his time there, 'It was that spirit of youthful high spirits that I'd been enjoying, first at the Olympics *and then* throughout that marvellous summer' (Zeffirelli 161)[my italics]. This, combined with the reference to a variety of people coming to stay, suggests that Zeffirelli was in Castiglioncello for a couple of weeks at the very least. After his holiday, Zeffirelli then flew to Rome and then on to London. He makes comment that after Rome and Castiglioncello 'London seemed grey' (Zeffirelli 161). Even if Zeffirelli had not stayed in Rome for anything more than a couple of days, and took only a few weeks for his annual summer holiday, this means the earliest he could have returned to London would have been sometime in mid-September. The programme for the London stage production states the first performance of *Romeo and Juliet* was October 4th 1960 (Anon, *Old Vic Company - Romeo and Juliet*). Zeffirelli indicates that *Romeo and Juliet* had not been cast when he arrived and that he wanted two newcomers in the leads. He describes how Michael Benthall took him round various productions to view potential cast members:

There was a crop of young talent in the late 50s and early 60s and Michael Benthall was one of the first to see that someone should seize the opportunity to use it. I doubt I would have had the nerve to suggest that we dispense with the normally obligatory great names and cast two newcomers in the title roles if I hadn't been aware that this was precisely what he wanted to hear (Zeffirelli 162-3).

The suggestion here is that it was this desire, *his* desire, that led to Judi Dench and John Stride being given the roles in the Old Vic production. This is a conflicting piece of evidence or, at best, an exaggeration on Zeffirelli's part. It is difficult to accept that

the Old Vic Company, or any senior professional company could go from a position of complete unpreparedness, with no director present, no cast assembled, and no rehearsals, to an opening night performance of *Romeo and Juliet* between mid September and early October, a period of less than three weeks. Neither does the suggestion that it was Zeffirelli's resolve to cast Judi Dench and John Stride in the roles, or that they were both 'newcomers', stand close inspection. Both Dench and Stride were already members of the Old Vic Theatre Company when Zeffirelli arrived in London and Judi Dench had accrued very significant experience of playing Shakespeare on stage. Since joining the Old Vic in 1957 she had played, amongst other parts: Ophelia in *Hamlet*; Juliet in *Measure for Measure*; Maria in *Twelfth Night*; Katharine in *Henry V*; and the Queen in *Richard II* (Dench 295). We also know that it was Michael Benthall, and not Zeffirelli, who discovered Dench and gave her her big break, a point to which Dench refers in some detail in her autobiography, *And Furthermore*. Dench wrote that at the end of her third year at the Central School of Speech and Drama, the students had to put on a show at Wyndam's Theatre in the West End. She performed Miranda's speech from the *Tempest*, 'Alas now! Pray you, work not so hard' (3:1:15-16). The performance was well received and she was invited to audition for the Old Vic. At the audition she was approached by Michael Benthall who told her he was going to cast her as Ophelia (Dench 14). John Stride, by comparison, although not new to acting was new to the Old Vic, having been invited to join for the 1960-61 season. Stride was twenty four when he played Romeo opposite Dench as Juliet and both were already members of the Old Vic theatre company before Zeffirelli had arrived in London from Italy. The suggestion Zeffirelli makes in his autobiography is that both Stride and Dench were teenagers and both

unknowns at the time and, although recommended by Michael Benthall, were cast at his behest:

He suggested that Judi Dench and John Stride, both just starting out, would be ideal for the play. And how right he was. He took me to see a production of *The Seagull* with Tom Courtney and suggested we use him somewhere. As Courtney was very much the young man of the moment and the star of the play I assumed this meant giving him a major role – but no, Michael suggested Balthasar for him. I was shocked (Zeffirelli 163).

In the end, however, Tom Courtney played Abraham, and Balthasar was played by Laurence Asprey (Anon, *Old Vic Company - Romeo and Juliet*). The ‘no wigs’ ruling by Zeffirelli also appears to be questionable. The period between Zeffirelli touching down in London, and the opening night some three weeks later would have been insufficient time for any of the cast to grow their hair long. Photographs in the programme of the performance and surviving publicity stills confirm that the lead actors were indeed without wigs. They also show, however, that neither John Stride nor Tom Courtney (Abraham) nor Alec McCowen (Mercutio) had long hair. This is in itself inconclusive as photos of the actors in question may have been taken months previously. There is, however, a credit in the programme that reads ‘Wigs by Wig Creations’ (Anon, *Old Vic Company - Romeo and Juliet*). These points taken in isolation may appear to be little more than chronological nit-picking or the favoured memory lapses of a proud director. Taken in conjunction with other conflicting aspects of the production, however, they form part of a progression of circumstances that collectively lead us to ask the question, how much direct involvement did

Zeffirelli have in this famed Old Vic production, and how much credit actually belongs to an anonymous surrogate? Judi Dench writes in her autobiography, ‘Michael Benthall was never really given the credit that was due for his achievements at the Old Vic, nobody has written about him in the way he should have been written about’ (Dench 25).

Benthall was not only the director of the Old Vic, he was very experienced in directing Shakespeare. Zeffirelli makes the point that not only was Benthall a great influence on who was cast, but that he kept an overall influence on the production, ‘But Michael was no fool – it was one thing to have an enthusiastic newcomer but quite another to risk a major production with someone who had only a passing knowledge of the English stage’ (Zeffirelli 163). This is an important point and reflects back to Zeffirelli’s solitary experience of directing a play - Bertolazzi’s *Lulu*. Zeffirelli’s autobiography was written in 1986, some twenty six years after the Old Vic production. On describing aspects of the stage production’s success, he writes:

What was especially nice was that young people came in droves and, by a strange coincidence, at the end of the run the fashion for long hair was in full swing so our curious cast came to seem even more and more in tune with the youngsters who packed the gallery and the gods. *Romeo and Juliet* slotted neatly into the world of the Beatles, of flower-power and peace-and- love (Zeffirelli 164).

This is a strange association to make for a play performed in October 1960. The Beatles did not have a hit record until *Love Me Do* in 1962, and the term ‘flower-

power' was not coined until circa 1965 and only became a popular term of usage in American counter culture from around 1967 onwards.

Comparisons With Film Production

In his autobiography Zeffirelli details how his implementation of his 'no wigs' directive actually changed the casting of the role of Juliet in his 1968 film. He explains how the role of Juliet was cast to another actress who was hired primarily for her looks and, in particular, her hair, "My first choice was a really beautiful girl who stood out because of her sensational hair, a golden cascade that was her best feature"(Zeffirelli 225). Unfortunately when the actress was recalled for a second screen test, she had had her hair cut short and was immediately dismissed. Although she begged to play the part in a wig, Zeffirelli, in keeping with the rule that he claims to have imposed during the 1960 stage production, dismissed the actress on the grounds that 'she could never cope with the role in such an artificial way' (Zeffirelli 225). Zeffirelli declines to mention who this actress was but it is interesting to realise that, as with the 1936 production, Juliet's hairstyle should be held to be of such importance; another example of how the visual appearance of the woman playing Juliet can take precedence when casting the role. Zeffirelli's descriptions and recollection of his 1960 Old Vic *Romeo and Juliet*, as written in his autobiography, match perfectly the themes incorporated into his film some seven years later, but are at odds with the rather staid programme notes for the stage production that he himself wrote. In his programme for the Old Vic, Zeffirelli wrote, 'times have changed in Europe and people of different backgrounds can easily work together for creating a new European conscience' (Anon, *Old Vic Company - Romeo and Juliet*). In the same article he also wrote of young people becoming, 'new Europeans'. Jill Levenson

quotes Zeffirelli's thoughts on Europe at this time when she wrote, 'he praised the young actors both for their 'professional enthusiasm' and for their ideology: 'they are not only remarkable actors but are proving to be indeed the kind of "new Europeans" I was mentioning before' (Levenson 85). The emphasis here appears to be linking a commonality on resolving of conflict, whether it be in Shakespeare's play or in the modern world. There is no mention of youthful passion or love and the notes for the Old Vic stage production reflect more a concern with the political conflict in Europe that, within a year, would result in the construction of the Berlin wall. When we compare what Zeffirelli wrote in 1960 with what he noted in the souvenir programme for his 1968 film, we see a marked contrast. Here we read:

'Romeo and Juliet' has everything. It has love and truth and beauty and sex. It has hate and drugs and misunderstanding and death. They're the star crossed lovers of Verona, but they could also be the love children of Haight-Ashbury or the East Village (Anon, The Franco Zeffirelli Production of Romeo and Juliet).

The tone of Zeffirelli's comments regarding both productions is completely different, with the latter focusing on the passions and concerns of a contemporary teenage audience, as opposed to the former which deals exclusively with encouraging harmony in areas of conflict. What Zeffirelli appears to be doing in his autobiography is retrospectively transposing his ideals for the 1968 film onto the stage production of 1960. This raises the questions as to why would he do this and what purpose does it serve?

It is possible that Zeffirelli, by suggesting that the themes and aspects of his film in 1968 were purely a natural progression of the same ideals as the stage

production in 1960, is consolidating his place in history as the main dramatic influence on the celebrated 1960 Old Vic stage production. By retrospectively redefining the 1960 stage production - a production which appears to have been driven at least partly by Michael Benthall - Zeffirelli is presenting himself as both prophet and acolyte of Shakespeare in modern cinematic society. He, in effect, portrays himself as being ahead of his time in his ideologies but is now being justifiably celebrated. By negating, through retrospective re-evaluation, the influence of Michael Benthall in the 1960 stage production and then reappraising his own influence on that production and setting it as the direct forerunner of his 1968 film, Zeffirelli asserts himself in the role of modern cultural authority on *Romeo and Juliet*. In this he echoes what Castellani had done with his own film some fourteen or fifteen years earlier. The 1960 play which was associated with the political conflicts of the Cold War is reborn as the beginning of the summer of love, with Zeffirelli himself as the spokesman for the emerging, celebrated counter culture. In doing this he places both his stage production and film production of *Romeo and Juliet* as the centre of that culture. Douglas Lanier pointed this out when he wrote of Zeffirelli's film:

References to the anti-war movement and sexual revolution are everywhere: Romeo first appears holding a flower and without a sword, a flash of nudity (controversial at the time) makes unmistakable that the teen lovers consummated their relationship, Zeffirelli's 'make love, not war' interpretation showed how Shakespeare might serve as a voice of the counter culture (Lanier 69).

There is no doubt that Zeffirelli *was* involved in directing the actors close to the opening night of the stage production. Judi Dench makes comment on his involvement.

 Franco was quite unlike any director I had ever worked for. I was used to them being down in the stalls, and asking you to make a certain move from out there. He rehearsed the scenes with Romeo and Juliet separately from the rest of the cast, and would tell us what to do, and you would be doing it (Dench 26)

What is certainly of interest is that Dench makes specific mention of the look of the set:

 He put a fantastic passion into it and the whole production had a hot Italian atmosphere about it, using dry ice to create what looked like a heat haze, people putting towels and sheets out over balconies, and boys lying asleep on the fountain – it looked absolutely beautiful (Dench 26).

Again we are brought back to Zeffirelli's involvement with the look of the production as opposed to its dramatic content. It is often overlooked that Zeffirelli was also listed in the programme as the set designer. It was what he had been trained in since his youth and it was when he was painting a set that he first met Visconti. It was Zeffirelli's set design in his production of *Cavalleria Rusticana* that caught the eye of Michael Benthall and resulted in him being invited to produce *Romeo and Juliet*. Benthall had said he wanted the flavour of Italy for *Romeo and Juliet* and this is exactly what Zeffirelli produced. After the first night, however, the reviews were

poor. Zeffirelli wrote that, ‘The London drama critics savaged our production in terms so damning they beggared belief’ (Zeffirelli 164). Dench is less descriptive simply stating ‘I did not get good notices for that, at least at first, and most of the critics hated it...’ (Dench 26). What is interesting here is that after the first night reviews, it was Michael Benthall, not Franco Zeffirelli, who gathered the cast on stage and gave a stirring pep talk before the second night’s performance. In fact, Zeffirelli writes in his autobiography that after reading the reviews he decided to flee the country and it was only at the intervention of Benthall that he was persuaded to stay. ‘I rang Michael Benthall and told him I was leaving. He barked at me not to be so stupid and to be at the theatre before that night’s performance’ (Zeffirelli 164).

Zeffirelli’s spirits, and those of the cast, were buoyed by Kenneth Tynan’s review which appeared in *The Observer* on October 9th. The review was a turning point in the success of the production and as testament to its importance it was singled-out and appeared in Caterina Napoleone’s book *Franco Zeffirelli – Complete Works, Theatre, Opera, Film*.

Last Tuesday at the Old Vic a foreign director approached Shakespeare with fresh eyes, quick wits and no stylish preconceptions; and what he worked was a miracle. The characters were neither larger nor smaller than life; they were precisely life-size, and we watched them living spontaneously and unpredictably (Napoleone 117).

Whereas the dramatic aspects of the production were poorly received until this review appeared, the set design at least was great success. It is the sumptuous beauty of Zeffirelli’s set designs that are his hallmark, both in dramatic productions as well as

operatic. There is another pointer that indicates that Zeffirelli's dramatic contribution to the production may have been limited. In his autobiography, Zeffirelli consistently recounts tales of celebrity gossip and insights into the behaviour of his leading performers during rehearsals. He describes how Maria Callas always placed a photograph of Audrey Hepburn on her dressing room mirror. He talks of how an intoxicated Richard Burton recited Shakespeare's fifteenth sonnet backwards to a dumbfounded Robert Kennedy. On set we are informed how Leonard Whiting was reluctant to take direction and how, in contrast, there is no-one better to work with than Michael York (Zeffirelli 133, 218, 228). Zeffirelli's book is packed with many such anecdotal tales, but there is not one word about working or interacting with any of the actors in what is regarded by many as one of the most important stage productions of *Romeo and Juliet* seen on the London stage. What is generally accepted as the cornerstone in Zeffirelli's career is given comparatively scant coverage by Zeffirelli himself. The indications are that Zeffirelli's involvement with the Old Vic production was weighed towards the visual aspects of the production. It is the beauty and opulence of an idealised Italian Renaissance, rather than the dramatic interpretations of the stage play, that were recreated by Zeffirelli in his film some seven years later. The only aspects that survived intact from the transfer from The Old Vic in 1960 to the Paramount film in 1968 were Nino Rota's contribution of the score and Zeffirelli's visual, masterful imagery.

A comparison of the balcony scene between Zeffirelli's stage production and its celluloid successor highlights this visual consistency whilst showing disparity in dramatic interpretation. It can also be seen as an indication of the changing social and political situation of the time. A still from the original theatre programme shows Judi

Dench, as Juliet, standing to the left of a strong, fortified balcony (**Figure 44**). She is holding out her right arm and is touching the hand of Romeo, John Stride, who has climbed to the level of the balcony and is holding his outstretched hand towards Juliet, where they touch, significantly, 'palm to palm'. Consider Dench's posture, hair and costume at this precise moment. She is standing erect, her hair tied up on her head, and she is wearing a white, long sleeved gown not dissimilar to the costume worn by Susan Shentall in the 1954 film. Her body language is slightly reticent and she appears to be unsure of her proximity to Romeo. The visual impression given is one of restrained and hesitant formality. Romeo too appears restrained. He is wearing a padded, striped doublet and is gazing onto the eyes of Juliet as he leans forward. Juliet, in turn, is holding his gaze but she is not leaning towards him, in fact she appears to be recoiling slightly, putting distance between herself and Romeo. This is the moment that Jill Levenson noted the specific direction given to John Stride who had to 'clamber up the tree as they spoke their vows of love – not touching, just trying' (Levenson 89-90). Note too that there is no smile upon Dench's face and so her hesitancy takes on a defensive air. There is very little in this still which reflects youthful passion. There is no hint of sexuality and Juliet's chastity does not, in any way, appear to be under threat. Instead, the scene resonates as an echo of the lovers using the intricacies of the sonnet to initiate a formal courtship; as in the text where the motif of palm touching is entwined with pilgrimage and purity, 'For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch / And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss' (1:5:98-99).

If we now study the balcony scene as shot in Zeffirelli's film (**Figure 45**), we see that it initially appears almost identical to its stage predecessor. Closer inspection however shows a marked difference which injects a suggestion of sensuality absent

from the first. Firstly there is Juliet herself, here portrayed by Olivia Hussey. Her hair is loose and is left tumbling around her shoulders, which are bare. Her costume is somewhat revealing insofar as her gown is not buttoned to the neck, as in previous films, as well as in the 1960 stage production. Rather it incorporates a low neckline which does much to bring the viewers' focus towards her tightly bound and uplifted breasts. Immediately prior to this scene we have seen Juliet lounge on the balcony with the camera focusing on her partially clothed upper body in classic voyeuristic style. When Romeo speaks the line, 'See how she leans her cheek upon her hand', (2:2:23) Juliet is positioned so that she is leaning towards the camera and so our focus is pulled towards her breasts. Continuing with the comparison of the two stills, we note that the position of Whiting's Romeo is similar to that of Stride's. Even the stripped doublet is similar but there is, however, one major difference. Here, Romeo is entwining his fingers with Juliet's and she is reciprocating. Here, Juliet is leaning towards Romeo, not moving away from him. She is not only holding Romeo's gaze, she is returning it. Zeffirelli's film shows Juliet returning Romeo's amorous advances and incorporating a youthful sexuality never before witnessed in a screen adaptation of the play. This aspect of the film, Juliet's emerging sexuality, heralds a landmark in film presentations of the play. Whereas we can only guess at the voyeuristic titillation that Theda Bara may have afforded a viewer in the early part of the last century, here, for the first time in the modern cinematic age, we witness a Juliet who is more than just a projection of romantic idealism. The balcony scene in the 1968 film makes clear that whereas previous directors masked or ignored the intertwined taboos of Juliet's age and her sexuality, Zeffirelli did not follow them in their retreat. Not only were these aspects of Juliet's character acknowledged, they were explored. This is encapsulated perfectly in the scene where Juliet is presented at the banquet as an

object of spectacle. This is not the first appearance of Juliet in the movie, but it is the first appearance of Juliet emerging as a woman. As such it is of particular interest.

Juliet – Spectacle and Beauty

Laura Mulvey used the first appearance of Marilyn Monroe in *The River of No Return* (1954) as an example of the introduction of an element of spectacle into the narrative and used this to demonstrate how such a move destroys the illusion of depth of ‘the Renaissance space’ and renders an element of ‘flatness, the quality of a cut out or icon rather than verisimilitude to the screen’ (Mulvey 842). Thus the calculated introduction of an erotic image of woman on screen detracts from the scene itself and holds up the narrative. The scene from *The River of No Return* where Marilyn Monroe parades before the audience and the actor who eventually falls in love with her, stands considerable comparison with the banqueting scene from Zeffirelli’s 1968 version of *Romeo and Juliet*. In *River of No Return*, when the film is barely a few minutes old, the audience is already introduced to a town/trading post where there is violence in the streets. We hear gunshots and see a man brawling in the mud as an uninterested observer, Robert Mitchum, enters the saloon in search of someone and is surprised to see a woman dressed provocatively in a red dress as the centre of attention. Compare this to *Romeo and Juliet* where, also in the first few minutes of the film, the audience is introduced to a town where there is brawling in the streets. We see a distracted and uninterested Romeo, vaguely in search of someone else in a manner similar to that of Robert Mitchum when he entered the saloon searching for a child. The main difference at this point is the portrayal of the image of the woman on screen. Both films follow the same practice of presenting the woman to the audience prior to exposing her to the gaze of the leading male actor who will share the scene and so, as

Mulvey points out, ‘the gaze of the spectator and that of the male characters in the film are neatly combined without breaking narrative verisimilitude’ (Mulvey 842). Although the practice is the same, there are differences in the degree of visual exploitation. In *The River of No Return*, the woman is presented as an erotic image in an overtly sexual manner. She strides to the centre of the stage wearing an off the shoulder, red bodice dress, slit to the thigh, and which clings tightly to the contours of her body. Monroe’s character is engaged in the reverse formation of scopophilia and takes pleasure in being looked at. She preens and poses and deliberately exposes her leg through the slit in her dress for the erotic enjoyment of both audience and actors sharing the scene.

Compare this to the scenes where Romeo first sets eyes on Juliet in Zeffirelli’s *Romeo and Juliet* in 1968. Firstly, the 1968 film also conveys an image of eroticism but does so in more subdued and subtle manner. The audience at this point has already seen Juliet playing with her nurse and skipping to her mother’s bidding in the fashion of an innocent, happy child. The audience has also seen her answer her mother’s questions on the subject of marriage, where she frowned and placed her hands behind her back in a show of both obedience and slight trepidation. In the 1968 version Juliet is clearly described as being not yet fourteen years of age when Lady Capulet tells the nurse, “She’s not fourteen” (13:13) and the Nurse replies shortly afterwards “Come Lammas-eve at night shall she be fourteen” (13:26). Juliet is portrayed early on in the film as an obedient and happy daughter. In the banquet scene the audience are witness to Juliet’s first presentation to Romeo’s gaze and the astounding effect this has on him. In the scene Romeo has been watching the dancing in the hope of lifting his spirits. This is a departure from the text for in this version there has been no direct reference to Romeo being out of favour with Rosaline. Much of Act 1 Scene II has

been cut, there is no meeting with Peter the servant, no discovering Rosaline will be present at the banquet, and no cajoling by Benvolio to, ‘Take thou some new infection to thy eye/ And the rank poison of the old will die’ (1:2:49-50). Nonetheless, in a repeat of both 1936 and 1954, we are presented with a Rosaline character. As Capulet greets guests arriving at his house, two women enter together. He greets the women with the line, “My lovely Helena, my lovely niece”. Helena, along with Rosaline, is one of the names on the guest list which Romeo reads for the servant Peter in Act 1, ‘My fair niece Rosaline and Livia / Signor Valentio and his cousin Tybalt/ Lucio and the lively Helena’ (1:2:71-73). Having entered the banquet, Romeo, urged by Benvolio, shows interest in pursuing Helena. He abandons this and fixes his gaze upon the woman with whom she entered the banquet, the Rosaline character, (**Figure 46**). This character is flirting and dancing with several young men in a manner reminiscent of Rosaline in 1936. Romeo watches her as she dances and the camera subsequently follows suit. Romeo is wearing a mask which is placed away from his face on the top of his head and which, in the context of the play, is a plot device required for gaining entrance to the Capulet household. Here, however, it can be interpreted as an instrument of fetishistic scopophilia, allowing him the opportunity to gaze anonymously upon the women on display before him. The Rosaline character, as in 1936 and 1954, is again beautiful and enjoying the company of other male guests. She has neither the coldness of her 1936 counterpart nor the dourness of her equivalent in 1954. Here she is playful, confident, flirtatious and smiles to Romeo as she dances. She then dances towards the camera and, as she turns, her flowing gown briefly obscures our view. What happens immediately afterwards becomes the defining trait of Zeffirelli’s film.

The music, which has been steadily building to a crescendo, stops suddenly with the effect of simultaneously isolating and highlighting the moment. As we hear the introduction of a more tender melody, Juliet appears in a full length shot, symbolically and physically replacing the departed Rosaline character. Here, Juliet is wearing a long crimson gown and her face is framed between two male guests, one of whom actively encourages the household, as well as the audience, to applaud her entrance. Juliet is presented in a moment of ceremonial, resplendent triumph as an object of spectacle for all to exult (**Figure 47**). The entrance here is somewhat different from that in *The River of No Return* insofar as Juliet has been led to the centre of attention from behind a pillar. Compare this to the Monroe character who emerges from behind a curtain and who enters unaided into the room, striding purposely and unwaveringly to the centre stage. The most obvious difference between these moments though, is the degree and manner of sexuality they portray. Marilyn Monroe plays the part of a saloon singer; mature, overtly sexual and revelling in the erotic image she willingly puts on display for strangers in a public saloon (**Figure 48**). Olivia Hussey, in complete contrast, plays the part of a young girl, who is literally taken by the hand and placed tenderly and affectionately at the centre of attention to receive tributes of admiration from her family and friends in the confines and safety of her own home. With the emergence of Olivia Hussey, the pace of the film changes and we cut momentarily to Romeo who stands speechless and who moves his mask higher on his head so as to obtain a clearer view of Juliet. Olivia Hussey is then framed and shot in such a manner that she becomes the sole focus of the determining male gaze. She is initially seen in long shot, which is gradually replaced by medium shots and then close ups, firstly of her face and then, more intimately, of her eyes and mouth. This methodical, progressive focus is the very blazon of Renaissance love

poetry, where the body is broken down into parts for individual praise before the focus is brought to the face, and then rapture poured forth on the beauty of the eyes and lips. Zeffirelli uses the same method here but in a cinematic sense. By moving the camera ever closer to Hussey, we are drawn to her face, her mouth, and her eyes so that we are, in effect, seduced by them in the same manner that Romeo is. Later in his career Zeffirelli made reference to the importance of focusing on the eyes which he declared were, 'always central to any screen performance' (Zeffirelli 281). According to Michael York, Zeffirelli attempted to enhance the visual magnificence and splendour of the scene where Romeo and Juliet first meet by having gold dust sprinkled into the air:

A literally brilliant idea of Franco's was filling the air with gold dust that shimmered in the candlelight as the lovers came slowly, irresistibly, hand to hand.... It was almost all too photogenic. At least Vogue thought so- they published an unprecedented eight pages of her color photos (York 155).

The ploy was not altogether successful for the gold dust is virtually unnoticeable on screen but the scene remains one of the most crucial in the film. Unlike the other women in the scene, Hussey wears no rings on her fingers and the simple cross which adorns her neck is symbolic of her piety and chastity. In this we see echoes of a chaste Norma Shearer and an innocent Susan Shentall. Hussey exudes innocence by concentrating on the formal steps of the dance rather than focusing on her dance partners. Yet as the scene continues, the series of close ups has the effect of gradually progressing the image of Juliet from a girl of chaste beauty to one who evokes an erotic contemplation, a blending of romantic idealism with a suggestion of sexual

attraction. As if to remind the audience of this, Romeo pulls down his mask to hide his arousal and so becomes voyeuristic in his observations. Roland Barthes, in attempting to explain the appeal of Greta Garbo, wrote that she:

...still belongs to that moment in cinema when capturing the human face still plunged audiences into the deepest ecstasy, when one literally lost oneself in a human image as one would in a philtre, when the face represented a kind of absolute state of the flesh, which could neither be reached nor renounced (Barthes 589).

Such a moment is recaptured here in Zeffirelli's film. Olivia Hussey is framed and shot in such a fashion that her beauty becomes the most prominent characteristic of Juliet. More than this, though, is that this particular scene confirms that beauty itself becomes the principal component of the entire film. As the dance continues, the depth of field is altered so that Juliet's face, and her face alone, is in sharp focus (**Figure 49**). As Mulvey wrote of such situations:

The beauty of the woman as object and the screen space coalesce; she is no longer the bearer of guilt but a perfect product, whose body, stylised and fragmented by close ups, is the content of the film and the direct recipient of the spectator's look (Mulvey 844-5).

This framing of Hussey's face was a deliberate act by the director to bring the attention of the audience to focus solely on the eyes and mouth of his actress. It is in effect a reversal of how Grace Kelly was filmed in *To Catch A Thief*, where her face

was completely in shadow and the audience was gradually compelled into arousal by focusing solely on her body (**Figure 27**). Here the focus is entirely on the head and the beauty of the face and the audience arrive mentally at a place where, as Barthes wrote of Garbo, ‘the flesh gives rise to mystical feelings of perdition’ (Barthes 589). This focus was further accentuated by the clothes the actress was wearing, a point Zeffirelli made when being interviewed by Polly Devlin for *Vogue* magazine, “‘You will notice that all the attention in the costume is directed towards the head’” (Devlin). Hussey’s combination of innocence, beauty and underlying sexuality was quickly acknowledged by critics at the time. John Coleman, film critic in the *New Statesman* newspaper noted, ‘Miss Hussey’s Pre-Raphaelite beauty, black curtains of hair hemming eyes, nose and mouth that live vividly in the present, is very open to expressing purity one second, a pre-sexual knowingness the next’ (Coleman). Indeed the portrayal of Juliet in the banquet scene combines a childlike innocence with an unnerving sensuality which is at odds with the previous portrayals by Norma Shearer in 1936 and Susan Shentall in 1954. The banquet scene in Zeffirelli’s is of particular importance because it is the first time the viewer is forced to acknowledge Juliet as a sexual object. Furthermore, as the scene progresses and we see Juliet firstly returning Romeo’s gaze as they dance, and then stopping in her tracks before going back to seek him out after the dance is over, we are also forced to acknowledge her as a sexual *subject*, capable of her own longings and desires and of acting upon them.

We see this by how she reacts when Romeo grabs and kisses her hand from behind the pillar. Instead of a show of indignation or surprise in response to a breach of protocol, as seen in 1936 and 1954, we see a close up of Juliet’s face as she slowly closes her eyes and sighs in sensual pleasure. Shortly afterwards we see Juliet flirting with Romeo, freely allowing him to kiss her. This scene is quite different from both

1936 and 1954 films. In the 1936 production we see Romeo and Juliet in a medium shot. They kiss, but Juliet is almost motionless; she appears reluctant to allow Romeo to kiss her and she does not respond as this would challenge the purity of her image. In the 1954 production, although Romeo and Juliet are filmed in close up, they do not actually kiss, but merely bring their lips close together before being interrupted by the nurse. Here, in the 1968 production, not only do we see the lovers in close up as they kiss, but we are aware of a slight shift in the camera angle so that we see only Juliet's face. We witness her initial hesitation and wonderment as she brings her fingers up in front of her lips. Then she smiles and responds enthusiastically and brings both her hands up and around Romeo's shoulders and exchanges a greedy and shared kiss. The banquet scene in this film is a presentation of Juliet emerging from the innocence of childhood into the world of womanhood. The symbolic linking of Juliet's birthday with the feast of Lammas is apparent here. As the crops have grown and reached maturity, so too has Juliet. The scene as shot is both an announcement and a celebration of Juliet progressing from one stage of life to the next, from girlhood to womanhood. It is also an acknowledgement that the character can be viewed as both sexual object and sexual subject. The inclusion of this aspect of the play was ideal in marketing the film to a teenage audience in the late 1960s.

Youth and Beauty

Paramount, who had funded the film to the (revised) tune of \$1.5m, (Zeffirelli 229) was keen to indulge Zeffirelli in his promotion of all things young and beautiful. This however, was not a meeting of artistic minds, it was undertaken for the far more worldly reason to make money. Paramount marketed the film directly to a teenage audience in order to secure a return on their investment. They released Nino Rota's

soundtrack, along with excerpts of dialogue from the film, in album and cassette form. They also mounted an impressive advertising campaign which focused on the action sequences and the sexual themes within the film. A trailer was released which was split between two and a half minutes of cinematic clips, which contained shots of exciting swordplay along with four separate shots of Juliet lying on her bed. This was followed by over one minute of written quotes praising the film, encouraging a teenage audience that the film was worth watching. The *New York Times* calls it ‘A Joy to watch’ and refers to the film as, ‘Franco Zeffirelli’s ‘Romeo and Juliet’’. Judith Crist of *New York Magazine* reports it as being ‘Ablaze with personal passions’. *Newsweek*’s anonymous reviewer also refers to it as ‘Zeffirelli’s Romeo and Juliet’ and describes it as, ‘A glowing film that jams back in as much idealism, sex, love, hate, desire, recklessness, passion as the human mind, body, heart and soul can contain’. In a direct reference to Zeffirelli’s audience, the review ends with, ‘By adding teen power to the immortal tragedy, each successive scene becomes maddeningly heartbreaking’. Teenage magazine *Just Seventeen* appealed to their own core audience by naming it their ‘Picture of the Month’ and calling it ‘a film to cherish’. It was, however, the inclusion of the review from *Playboy* that was the most telling. Its succinct appraisal that, ‘The entire film is a poem is of youth, beauty, love and violence’ (All quotations - IMDB.com. Trailer Romeo and Juliet, 1968 Web) was much in keeping with that of *Newsweek*. The inclusion of the *Playboy* comments is interesting not only for its content, but for the film’s voluntary and direct association with a product that is defined by its objectification of women. A similar occurrence is noted by Deborah Cartmell where she makes reference to the trailer for Zeffirelli’s previous Shakespeare film, *The Taming of the Shrew* (1966) in which the voiceover explains, ‘this is a motion picture for every man who ever gave the back of his hand to

his beloved and for every woman who deserved it' (Cartmell 217). Cartmell states that *The Taming of the Shrew*, like *Romeo and Juliet*, enjoyed widespread popularity due to the appropriation of a historical, albeit fictitious, story and presenting it in a modern cultural context. Hussey and Elizabeth Taylor both wear sixties hair and make-up and are very much portrayed as women of that period. Although it is unclear how much input, if any, the director had over the making of the trailers, it is clear that there was no hesitancy in promoting each film through the combined phallogentric ideologies of oppression, inequality, violence and the objectification of women that existed in the sixties. The objectification of Juliet in this manner, as defined almost entirely by her looks, was championed by the film's marketing department.

As with the 1936 production, a souvenir brochure was published for sale in theatres showing the film, the front cover of which showed the young lovers lying partly nude on the wedding bed. Inside, covering the first two pages was another picture of the lovers in bed. This same picture was used on both the official press campaign booklet (**Figure 50**) given to theatres to promote the film, as well as the album and cassette cover. This was a celebration of youthful passion between two beautiful teenagers. The prioritising of youth and beauty over acting ability was never anticipated by the director as causing problems. His defence of this approach echoes the suggestion made earlier in this chapter that his involvement with the 1960 Old Vic production was focused not so much on the dramatic, but on the artistic:

I had to keep reminding myself that that Michael Benthall had brought me in precisely because I was not imbued with the classic Shakespearean verse drama tradition which still adhered to the Victorian view that a correct

speaking of the immortal lines was of more importance than any dramatic impact the author may have intended (Zeffirelli 162).

He also suggested that his views on the importance of youthfulness over verse speaking would have been met favourably by Shakespeare himself, ‘Shakespeare used a fourteen-year-old boy to play Juliet and even in his day such boys can hardly have been much good at verse speaking – to the author, youth was more important than enunciation’ (Zeffirelli 162).

Although the choice of casting was to play a very important part in the overall look of the movie, neither of the leads were first choice for the film. It was reported in the souvenir booklet, and quickly taken up by journalists, that Olivia Hussey had been spotted after appearing in a stage production of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, (Anon, The Franco Zeffirelli Production of Romeo and Juliet) where she had played the part of Rose Stanley, whose intense beauty in one so young tempts the art teacher, Teddy Lloyd, into an illicit affair. This, however, is only partly true. As will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, Zeffirelli went to see Hussey in this role *after* she had failed her audition for the role of Juliet. The souvenir brochure describes Hussey as ‘a shy, petite, brunette’ and as ‘Classically beautiful with a husky voice and mesmerizing eyes – perfect’ (Anon, The Franco Zeffirelli Production of Romeo and Juliet). It also, in an example of cultural objectification, publishes her height and weight, ‘She is a fraction over 5’3” tall and weighs 100 pounds” (Anon, The Franco Zeffirelli Production of Romeo and Juliet). This is in marked contrast to Zeffirelli, referring to her in her first, failed audition, as ‘unfortunately overweight, clumsy looking and bit her nails constantly – hardly the delicate Juliet I dreamt of’ (Zeffirelli 225). As stated earlier, Zeffirelli’s original choice for Juliet was dismissed after she

had had her hair cut short. In desperation, the director called back some of the actresses he had previously rejected and was amazed at the transformation in Olivia Hussey:

She was a new woman: she had lost weight dramatically. Her magnificent bone structure was becoming apparent, with those wide, expressive eyes and her whole angular self. She was now the real Juliet, a gawky colt waiting for life to begin (Zeffirelli 226).

The phrase, that Zeffirelli uses here, ‘a gawky colt waiting for life to begin’, is an apt way of describing the Juliet of Shakespeare’s text, a young girl on the cusp of womanhood. It also serves to remind us of the correlation between Hussey’s emerging beauty and Juliet’s growing maturity. It alludes to the sexual development of a young woman and anticipates the predatory male gaze. In short, it permits us to evaluate this particular Juliet in terms of innocence and beauty, but also as the potential object of the controlling male fantasy.

The casting of Romeo again reflects Zeffirelli’s determination to target a teenage audience. In 1967 he, rather surprisingly, offered the role of Romeo to Paul McCartney. In 1967 *The Beatles* were approaching their zenith in terms of world popularity and McCartney, at twenty-five years of age, was very much an international icon of youth and beauty (**Figure 51**). Zeffirelli’s earlier comment that ‘*Romeo and Juliet* slotted neatly into the world of the Beatles, of flower power and peace-and-love’ (Zeffirelli 164) is, like the comment regarding wigs, far more relevant to the 1968 film production than its 1960 stage predecessor. McCartney was

to refer to the offer several years later in a concert programme in which he recounted some of the more unusual episodes from his life. In a double page spread titled ‘Late ‘60s, Psychedelic Explosion, Sgt Pepper and the Summer of Love’, he described the offer made to him:

During that period Franco Zeffirelli came over to London and he offered me the lead in *Romeo and Juliet*. I said, I can’t do it man, you’re kidding, I’m just a musician. He said, “No, I really know you could do this. You look absolutely how I see Romeo, it would be perfect. Come to Rome and we make a film. It will be beautiful (Anon, *The Paul McCartney World Tour*, 52).

The comments made by McCartney highlight precisely how Zeffirelli valued looks and beauty above acting talent when it came to casting his productions. Zeffirelli’s courting of the teenage market in this manner was to resurface when he tried to cast the Beatles in a film based on the life of St Francis of Assisi (Zeffirelli 239). In a similar manner, several years later, Zeffirelli surprised the world by casting Mel Gibson, at the time dismissed as being little more than a heart throb action hero, in the lead in his version of *Hamlet*. The look of *Romeo and Juliet* was certainly all important. Just as Castellani had paid meticulous attention to colour charts to ensure that no costumes clashed with each other in his 1954 film, so too did Zeffirelli take a great interest in what occurred in the background of his 1968 vision. The emphasis this time, however, was not on costumes but on faces. He discussed this with Polly Devlin in her interview for *Vogue*, where he gave a detailed insight into the importance he placed on physical appearance.

Discussing the extras, he stated “I took thousands of photographs of all the people I might use as extras and examined them and chose out the ones I wanted and then looked at them in life again. Then I made my final choice. And this is what I was looking for – I wanted to establish the two breeds, the two prototypes. The first is gentle and noble, the fair or dark nobility of the crusades, with their fine and chiselled features. The other is the stream of peasants – young, blooded, dark beautiful gothic faces, with burning eyes and heavy cheekbones (Devlin).

This comment shows that Zeffirelli was treading a common path in suggesting a collective difference between the two families. This is a common facet of artistic licence where a director introduces some sort of visual differentiation between the families in order to assist the audience in identifying which members of the cast are Capulet and which are Montague. We know from the very first line of the play, however, that both families have very little, if any, differences, ‘Two households both alike in dignity’ (1:1:1). Zeffirelli was simply continuing with a variation of an idea that other directors had also incorporated into their own films. George Cukor, in 1936, offered an understated distinction by casting an array of English acting personnel in the Capulet household: C. Aubrey Smith as Capulet; Violet Kemble Cooper as Lady Capulet; and Basil Rathbone as Tybalt.¹⁸ This was in contrast to an American line up in the Montague household: Robert Warwick as Montague; Virginia Hammond as Lady Montague; and Reginald Denny as Benvolio. Renato Castellani, in 1954, uniformed his actors in a series of flamboyant costumes that emphasised the

¹⁸ Rathbone was actually born in South Africa but moved to England as a child (IMDB.com. Basil Rathbone. Web.)

distinction between the households. The disparity that generates the feud between the two families, and which lies at the centre of the tale, remains unexplained by Shakespeare and the authors of the Italian tales on which *Romeo and Juliet* is based. In Salernitano's thirty-third novel, there is no great feud between the families and the Romeo character, Mariotto, begins his descent into tragedy when he is exiled because he wounds 'an honourable citizen' in an argument and who subsequently dies (Masuccio "et al" 17). DaPorto dismisses the feud's origin by stating, 'Between these houses there existed a most cruel and ferocious enmity ...the cause of which is of no great importance' (Masuccio "et al" 26). In Bandello's narrative, the feud between the Montecchi and the Capelleti is again fierce and bloody but the only explanation is that it exists 'for some reason or other' (Masuccio "et al" 54). Despite the oft repeated use of artistic licence on this point, there is little in Shakespeare's text, or in any of the earlier Italian origins of the play, to suggest anything other than bitter animosity on a personal level being at the heart of the ongoing feud between Montague and Capulet. The popular and widespread acceptance that the feud has its origins in the mists of long forgotten history, and has been handed down from generation to generation, rests largely on the line, 'From ancient grudge break to new mutiny' (1:1:3). This is often accepted as meaning something archaic, lost in the mists of time. The term 'ancient grudge', however, could be taken in the subjective context of the elderly years of the heads of the 'two households' mentioned in opening line. The word 'ancient' is used throughout the play in this manner to refer to some-one's elderly years. The Prince refers to Verona's 'ancient citizens' (I:I:90) to describe the elderly people of the town. Friar Laurence refers to his own 'ancient ears' (2:3:70), and Mercutio mocks the Nurse by calling her an 'ancient lady'. In fact, any suggestion that there is a tribal hatred between the families is diminished when we consider that at the beginning of

the play it is made clear that Romeo is involved with Rosaline, herself a Capulet, and that this does not incur warning or even surprise from any of his friends. Neither does Friar Laurence see that relationship as a means of bringing peace between the two families. When Prince Escalus breaks up the brawl in act one, he refers to previous, similar, brawls being caused by words spoken between the two individuals. He makes no reference to any historical or political reason for the fights. Furthermore when Capulet is discussing the Prince's judgement with Paris, he speaks the line, 'But Montague is bound as well as I/ In penalty alike, and 'tis not hard I think/ For men so old as we to keep the peace' (1:2:1-3). This suggests that the feud can be resolved by both men on a personal level. Paris' response, 'Of honourable reckoning are you both / And pity 'tis you lived at odds so long (1:2:4-5) again suggests that the feud is of a private nature.

Zeffirelli, however, splits the families quite distinctly and accepts the feud as being 'ancient' in the etymological sense of it having originated very, very long ago. In the Paramount Souvenir programme we read, 'Zeffirelli envisioned the members of the Montague family as far more cultivated, artistic and peace-loving than the nouveau-riche Capulets who were quarrelsome, ill-mannered and uncouth' (Paramount Souvenir Programme –Production Notes). The production notes also make it clear that although Zeffirelli split the families between 'old' and 'new' money, and differing in forbearance; he also wanted them to look different ethnically:

Therefore when looking for extras to play the rival factions for his film, Hen engaged number of sleek, patrician-looking students from the Rome Dramatic Academy to play the Montagues. For the Capulets, he put one single

advertisement in a Rome paper, and also a Rome English-language publication (Anon, *The Franco Zeffirelli Production of Romeo and Juliet*).

The production notes do not disclose the wording used in the ad but they record that the result was ‘A flock of longhaired, “beatnik” types, many of them foreigners, eager for some summer employment, responded to the ad’ (Anon, *The Franco Zeffirelli Production of Romeo and Juliet*). The use of the word ‘beatnik’ is significant for although the audience is presented with lavish Renaissance costumes in rich, bright fabrics, they are intended to recall an array of Nehru jackets, caftans, bell bottoms, headbands and love beads. By pursuing vigorously a policy in the late 1960s that so celebrated the cult of youth and beauty, Zeffirelli virtually guaranteed that his film would be a commercial triumph. Although he was mining a rich seam of commercial success, it would prove to be shallow one and the relentless prioritising of the visual over the narrative would raise criticism over time. There are numerous examples of Zeffirelli sidestepping elements that crave explanation but which go teasingly unanswered.

In an interview in *TIME* in October 1968 he stated “The story is of two urchins crushed by a stupid, banal quarrel with origins even the adults don’t know. In love the young couple found an ideal – one they could die for - and youth today is hungry for ideals” (*TIME.com Virtuoso in Verona*). This is Zeffirelli’s own, completely justifiable, interpretation of an aspect of the tale which has varied throughout its many incarnations. This, however, is slightly at odds with Shakespeare’s text where the lovers do not sacrifice themselves defending an ideal. In Shakespeare’s version of the tale their deaths are not a noble gesture intended to inspire others to follow suit. The lovers are not pursuing a romantic conviction or indulging in an act of mawkish,

gothic symbolism. They are instead, surrendering to the insurmountable grief that their lives have reached a tragic conclusion. It could be argued that this end may have been fated, the result of ‘Some consequence yet hanging in the stars’ (1:4:114), or that it is the consequence of the protagonists’ own actions. What cannot be argued is that neither Romeo nor Juliet are willing to die in the etymological sense that they are eager to do so. They are, however, *prepared* to do so because they can see no other way of controlling or overcoming the situation that they are in. By the time we reach the end of the play, Juliet has progressed from maiden, to wife, and then to widow, and Romeo has returned from banishment in defiance of the Prince who has ordered that should he return, ‘that hour is his last’ (3:1:197). In addition to this he has killed Paris, a crime for which he will need to answer. The love that Romeo and Juliet have for each other is the sole, all important, element that drives their lives forward. Romeo’s purpose in life is lost through news of the death of Juliet, and similarly Juliet’s purpose is lost when she realises that Romeo has killed himself. This is not an ideal that either was *willing* to be part of. Both Romeo and Juliet have been disavowed of purpose by both their families’ feud and through the acts of banishment and burial. Their deaths are not - as has come to be widely accepted partly due to the success of this very film – a symbolic act of eternal and unconquered love, the very core of a ‘weepy film’, but rather the ‘lamentable tragedy’ incorporated into the play’s title.

Zeffirelli’s direct focus on youth, beauty, and idealised young love meant he presented his version of *Romeo and Juliet* in such a manner that it bordered on a cliché of teenage romance. That this was presented within the magnificent tableau of a highly successful and much loved film should not deter us from making such a

criticism. The *TIME* article was also accurate in describing certain aspects of Zeffirelli's directorial style that attracted criticism:

Zeffirelli's reputation was established at La Scala in Milan.... It was the beginning of the Zeffirelli style – the flamboyant baroque settings, the epic brio that could turn a war horse into a steeplechaser. Although triumphant in opera he has been somewhat less successful on the dramatic stage. His incoherent *Othello* was throttled by reviewers at Stratford-on-Avon. After seeing Zeffirelli's Broadway production of *The Lady of the Camellias*, *TIME*'s critic called him “a director who needs a director”. Even the movie of *Romeo and Juliet* will not please everybody, since it clearly reflects Zeffirelli's idiosyncratic opinions. “Mercutio” he insists, “is a self-portrait of Shakespeare himself, and a homosexual” (*TIME.com*, *Virtuoso in Verona*, Web).

Zeffirelli's Homoerotic Camera

Zeffirelli's remarks concerning Mercutio are indeed a betrayal of his ‘idiosyncratic opinions’. The relationship between Romeo and Mercutio, and the investigation of any homoerotic attraction between them is one that, once suggested, would benefit from further discussion. Zeffirelli, however, declines to expand upon this point and any homoerotic frisson that exists within the 1968 film is implied more than it is explored. Given Zeffirelli's comments, this may be viewed as an opportunity lost. Jonathan Goldberg discusses homosexual aspects within Shakespeare's play in *Queering the Renaissance* and examines certain points raised by Zeffirelli but not fully explored. Goldberg makes the claim that, ‘...at the opening of the play, Romeo

is in love, but not, as it happens, with Juliet, rather with Rosaline...'(Goldberg 221). Goldberg takes the view that not only does Romeo love Rosaline, but that Juliet is merely a substitute and 'Seen in that light, Juliet as a replacement object is inserted within a seriality rather than as the locus of uniqueness and singularity (Goldberg 221). This 'seriality' is a complex matter, and Goldberg suggests that Rosaline herself is part of a continuance stretching back to the unknown 'beauties rose' male of Shakespeare's Sonnet 1. He then links the 'beauty's rose' of the sonnet to the name 'Rosaline', suggesting that Rosaline succeeds the unknown male of the sonnet and Juliet, in turn, succeeds Rosaline.

If Rosaline is, in this respect, in the place of the young man of the sonnets, the connection is furthered by her name, for it is possible to suspect that in the sonnets her name is his; in the very first poem he is named "beauty's Rose" (1.2) Hence, when Juliet ponders the name of the rose – a name that might well be hers or his – her lines operate in this sphere of gender exchange too (Goldberg 224).

Goldberg brings further backing to his argument of gender exchange when he quotes Shakespeare's play, 'And wish his mistress were that kind of fruit / As maids call medlars when they laugh alone / O Romeo, that she were, O that she were / An open-arse and thou a popperin pear' (Goldberg 229 quoting 2:1:35-38). Goldberg, states, 'The medlar, whose other name, open-arse, is this secret now pronounced is a member of the rose family (check Webster's if you don't believe me)' (Goldberg 229). Indeed, Goldberg is correct in that the medlar is a tree of the rose family and that its dialect name is 'open-arse'. 'Medlar', however, is also the name given to the fruit of that tree.

The Arden Shakespeare version of *Romeo and Juliet* details in its footnotes that the fruit is ‘never good til they be rotten’ and that they are thought to ‘resemble the female genitalia’. The notes also suggest that ‘medlar’ is a play on words for ‘medler’, meaning sexual intercourse and that ‘popperin pear’, a reference to a type of pear, is also a play on ‘pop her in’ (*Romeo and Juliet*, Arden 126). In this context it is an example of Shakespeare bawdy – that she were a vagina and you would pop her in.

Although Goldberg’s argument is well structured, his findings are more inferred than they are proven. His proof is inferred because it results from a precise and limited interpretation of certain words or phrases within Shakespeare’s play. These interpretations are far from definitive. Goldberg also bases much of his argument on the premise that at the beginning of the play Romeo is in love with Rosaline. This is something I have already addressed in the 1954 chapter and argued that Romeo is not in love with Rosaline, but merely infatuated with her. The elaborate continuation of Romeo’s supposed love for the unnamed boy in Shakespeare’s Sonnet 1 is based on the acceptance of linkages that Goldberg suggests exist between: ‘rose’; ‘beauty’s rose’; ‘Rose’; ‘Rosaline’, and ‘Juliet’. This is worthy of closer study.

Katherine Duncan Jones’s book *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*, examines in detail the term ‘beauty’s rose’ within this sonnet and notes that the rose was ‘often associated with female beauty and, more specifically, female genitalia’ (Duncan Jones, 112). Jones also notes that the rose may signal ‘a metaphysical ideal of beauty’ (Duncan Jones, 112) and that it may also symbolize the Tudor rose and that ‘there may also be a reminiscence of the widespread desire, in the first half of her reign, that Elizabeth I should marry and reproduce’ (Duncan Jones, 112). Goldberg’s argument is logical in that a conclusion can be derived from the premises of that argument, but I would counter that those same premises are themselves open to varying interpretations.

There is no doubt, however, that references to homosexual longing can be taken from both Shakespeare's text as well as Zeffirelli's presentation of that text.

David Robinson of *The Times* made thinly veiled comment regarding the matter of the physical appearance of the teenage males in Zeffirelli's film. On the 7th March 1968, in an article titled 'Apollos of Verona', he wrote that the film:

...reminds me inescapably of an Edwardian story for boys which ended its innocently romantic description of its hero, "...in short, he would have won a prize at a boy show". Zeffirelli uses young men as Busby Berkley's musicals used girls. As far as the eye can see, Verona is full of Apollos with Denmark St haircuts (Robinson).

There is little doubt that Zeffirelli uses the camera to focus on the beauty of Romeo and the many youths who populate the film. It is a point Deborah Cartmell refers to when she speaks of Zeffirelli's 'homoerotic' or 'sodomizing camera' (Cartmell 221). It may be necessary to differentiate between 'homoerotic' and 'sodomizing' here, for the one is not automatically inclusive of the other. The lingering, adoring camera as it drinks in the prominence of male beauty in the film can certainly be termed as homoerotic. Perhaps the most celebrated example of this is when the audience's gaze is brought to bear on the naked and beautifully lit buttocks of Romeo in the bedroom scene. Russell Jackson writes of this, 'Critics have not failed to point out the homosexual gaze represented by the camera's having dwelt on Romeo's neat backside' (Jackson 209). Jackson suggests that censorship issues of the time may have been responsible for Zeffirelli focusing on this 'safely nonerogenous zone', and that

‘to accept the queer dimension of the film is to recognise a valuable asset’ (Jackson ‘Films’ 209). Jackson refers to Peter Donaldson’s views on the homoerotic focus within the film but concedes that ‘other sequences sophisticate rather than simplify the effect’ (Jackson 209). He quotes Donaldson who wrote, ‘Zeffirelli creates a spectatorial position neither simply male or female nor simply identificatory or detached’ (Jackson 209). The bedroom scene is all of these things. The bedroom scene is certainly filmed as to appear post-coital with the result that the scene is often viewed within a sexual frame. That sexual framework can be viewed as either heterosexual or, with the shots of Romeo’s naked buttocks, of having homoerotic or homosexual overtones. There are, however, other aspects of the scene that ‘sophisticate’ rather than ‘simplify’ these interpretations. Romeo’s buttocks can also be viewed as being a celebration of youthful beauty and love, as distinct from an exclusive celebration of youthful sexuality.

Germane Greer in her book, *The Boy*, writes of how youthful male beauty has been represented in art and literature. Greer writes of how the beauty of boys was portrayed in art in Renaissance times. She writes, ‘The male human is beautiful when his cheeks are still smooth, his body hairless, his head full-maned, his eyes clear, his manner shy and his belly flat’ (Greer 7). This description fits Leonard Whiting’s Romeo well. Greer also writes in response to Aphra Behn’s poem *In Imitation of Horace*, that ‘beauty in a boy is identical with the beauty of a girl. Both should have radiant and unblemished, brilliant eyes, entwining tendrils of hair and a slender, graceful form’ (Greer 50). This particular description fits well the beauty of both Whiting and Hussey. In a chapter on the youthful male as a passive love object, Greer writes ‘A love object is the wooed, not the wooer. Whether male or female it is by definition passive, it’s function not to do love but to allow love’. She adds ‘The

easiest way to reduce a boy to passivity is to immobilize him utterly in sleep' (Greer 105). Here, in the bedroom scene, Romeo is immobilized and naked in sleep. His function is more than to be simply the object of the camera's gaze, whether that gaze is interpreted as heterosexual or homosexual. Romeo's naked body not only allows love, it inspires love and that love encompasses more than just the sexual. Zeffirelli employed a similar shot to express love, as opposed to sex, in his next feature film, *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*. In the film, Graham Faulkner plays St Francis of Assisi. In a scene where he renounces the material world for the spiritual, he strips naked in a packed courtyard, exposing his toned, unblemished body. When the bishop orders Francis's naked body to be covered, he removes his cope (a long, liturgical cloak that is open at the front and fastened with a clasp at the chest) and has it wrapped around the naked Francis. Francis moves over to his friend in the crowd and envelopes him so that they are both encased in the cope. This act of enveloping his male friend under a shared garment where he himself is naked can certainly be interpreted as homoerotic. Francis then steps away and parades slowly to the town gate. The camera is used in long shot as his naked form is witnessed by all in the crowd, including the character of St Clare (Judi Bowker). As he nears the gate, the camera cuts to a medium shot and the audience is presented with a lingering shot of the character's naked body as seen from the back. This entire sequence, which lasts just under four minutes, can easily be described as homoerotic and of engaging the homosexual gaze. This, however, would be an oversimplification of the scene. Here, Faulkner's nakedness does more than represent the rejection of the material world. He is the passive love object that allows and inspires love in others, which in this case is a spiritual love. The camera may be homoerotic but it is not 'sodomizing'. Similarly, the shots of Whiting's naked body, passive and immobile as he sleeps in Juliet's bed, is easily identifiable as homoerotic

but not sodomizing for it also serves another purpose. Romeo's nakedness allows the audience to act as witness to the intimacy and love between the two characters. As a result of this deeply personal glimpse into their lives, the coming tragedy of their deaths is brought sharply into focus and allows us to grieve more fully at their passing.

Perhaps the closest the film comes to including evident, as opposed to veiled, homosexual yearning is just after Mercutio has made his disturbed rendition of the Queen Mab speech. Ramona Wray points out that the shooting of this scene mirrors the first kiss of the lovers (Burnett "et al" 164). She also refers to Courtney Lehmann who notes that John McEnery's performance here has since shaped 'subsequent renderings that suggest Mercutio's homoerotic attachment to Romeo' (Burnett "et al" 164). Wray points out that the camera work here, including a series of two-shots, results in Romeo and Mercutio bringing their heads close together with the implication that a kiss is about to take place. The moment, however, does not last and 'Romeo and Mercutio are pulled apart, and, as longing looks are exchanged, the charged nature of the encounter is definitely underscored' (Burnett "et al" 165). Why is this scene played as such, to suggest a homosexual frisson between the Romeo and Mercutio, and then stopped before execution? Were Zeffirelli's remarks regarding Mercutio's homosexuality little more than bravado in front of the press to generate publicity, or was this a serious intent that failed to reach fruition?

Zeffirelli may well have had the intention to examine homosexual desire within the play but this could have been constrained by the very real fear of losing financial backing from Paramount studios as well as incurring the wrath of those he had called the 'guardians of the true flame' (Zeffirelli 156) when he had undertaken the play at the Old Vic. The dependency on approval from the financial backing of

major film studios in the 1960s meant that it would have been unrealistic for Zeffirelli to expect funding for a film in which homoeroticism and homosexual desire were central, or even conspicuous, in an adaptation of Shakespeare. It must be remembered that Derek Jarman's *The Tempest* was still a dozen years away, and even when that film was made, it was done so on a small budget and did not emerge from any major film studio.

Kate Chedgzoy, writing in *Shakespeare's Queer Children* wrote that Derek Jarman's key achievement was 'to appropriate the richest and most prestigious resources of the cultural past and to make them a highly politicized and intensely pleasurable intervention in the present' (Chedgzoy 180). Chedgzoy links Jarman to Oscar Wilde's 'narcissistic and deliberately anachronistic appropriation of the culture of the past, in the service of legitimising contemporary gay participation in the making and interpretation of culture' (Chedgzoy 180). Chedgzoy also discusses in some detail Oscar Wilde appropriating Shakespeare's sonnets in *The Portrait of Mr W.H.* She writes how

Desire between men generates the work of art, and the notion of the lovely young man as the inspiration of Shakespeare's art, the incarnation of Shakespeare's dreams, crystallises a particular conjunction of homoerotic desire, its object and its representation in a form it has held ever since (Chedgzoy 136).

She argues that this appropriation was a means of self-fashioning a form of, at the time, modern homosexual identity. She continues:

Wilde's appropriation of Shakespeare is thus a founding moment of a particular version of gay identity which is constructed with reference to notions of performance, genius and the aesthetic. This act of appropriation is wilfully anachronistic: it seizes on the past precisely in so far as it can be made to illuminate or intervene in contemporary concerns. Wilde is not attempting to reconstruct the historical formation of male homosexuality in the Renaissance; rather he uses Shakespeare's Sonnets to celebrate and sustain a self-conscious culture and discourse of male homosexuality in the late nineteenth century (Chedgzoy 138-139).

This appropriation by Wilde can easily be conveyed to Zeffirelli. Where Wilde used Shakespeare's Sonnets, Zeffirelli utilised *Romeo and Juliet* to celebrate desire in the homoerotic male gaze. Chedgzoy writes:

and just as Wilde suggests that the young man holds the 'key to the mystery of the poet's heart', so the questions of desire and identity raised here will provide the keys to my reading of Wilde's appropriation of Shakespeare... the suggestion that a perilous secret lurks behind the door – within the closet perhaps? – to which the Sonnets are the key; the notation of a delight which is simultaneously aesthetic and erotic in the beauty of the youthful male body (Chedgzoy 135 -136).

This is precisely how Zeffirelli uses his 'Apollos with Denmark St. haircuts'. They are the physical embodiment of the 'fair youth' of Shakespeare's sonnets transposed to *Romeo and Juliet*. Zeffirelli, despite his bold declaration that both Mercutio and

Shakespeare are homosexual, is restricted both culturally and financially and cannot actively illustrate homosexual desire in *Romeo and Juliet*. Instead, he adopts a less confrontational approach and infuses the film with the aesthetic beauty of his Apollos. The wildly anachronistic pairing of gay identity in the Renaissance and late 19th century by Wilde is repeated between the Renaissance and the late 1960s by Zeffirelli. We do not know with any degree of certainty if the director altered his conviction on Mercutio's sexuality, or if he simply could not hope to expand on this in the work of such a highly treasured and fiercely protected national icon, particularly when he was entirely dependent on funding from a major Hollywood studio.

Youthful Casting and the Growth of Juliet

Robinson's earlier comment of 'Apollos with Denmark Street haircuts' goes hand in glove with Zeffirelli's own linking of the film to the world of the swinging sixties. Denmark Street was the hub of London's teenage fashionistas and musicians at this time and received much the same mythic veneration in London as Haight-Ashbury achieved in San Francisco. *Lonely Planet* notes on its web guide that in the 1960s Denmark St. was home to a number of prominent music shops and publishers that were frequented by, amongst others: The Rolling Stones, Jimi Hendrix, Pete Townshend, Jimmy Page and The Kinks (Lonelyplanet.com. "Denmark St and Soho – London's Tin Pan Alley, Web). In fact it lists Denmark Street at a respectable number twenty-eight in its 'Top 40 Rock'n'Roll Travel Sites', and lists Haight-Ashbury at a lowly thirty-three (Lonelyplanet.com. "Top 40 Rock'n'Roll Travel Sites Countdown", Web.). The Kinks wrote a song titled 'Denmark Street' which includes the lyrics, 'You got to a publisher and play him your song/He says 'I hate your music and you hair is too long/ But I'll sign you up because I'd hate to be wrong'

(Lyricstime.com “Kinks- Denmark St – Lyrics”, Web). The nature of the lyrics is that the young are misunderstood by the older generation and the reference to hair relates to both the hairstyles seen in Denmark St and the number of fashionable hairdressers that were located there. Zeffirelli, utilising the link between teenagers, music and popular culture, featured the song *What is a Youth?* in his film to further target that particular audience. The song was sung at the Capulet feast with the singer breaking the invisible barrier between audience and film by staring directly into the camera as he sings. The lyrics were unashamedly romantic and focused on the passing of youth and beauty,

What is a youth? Impetuous fire

What is a maid? Ice and desire

The world wags on,

A rose will bloom

It then will fade

So does a youth

So does the fairest maid

Patricia Tatspaugh noted that Zeffirelli ‘juxtaposes the interpolated song and the listeners’ expressions with Romeo who pursues Juliet around the circle of listeners and grabs her hand on ‘so does the fairest maid’ (Tatspaugh 147). Tatspaugh makes the entirely valid case that the casting of such young actors in the lead appealed directly to the youth culture and placed the film in a context of generational conflict that existed in the 1960s. She quotes Sarah Munson Deats who pointed out that the film was ‘particularly intended to attract the counter-culture youth, a generation of young people, like Romeo and Juliet, estranged from their parents, torn by the conflict between the youthful cult of passion and the military traditions of their elders’

(Tatspaugh 146). Leonard Whiting, resplendent in his own Denmark St haircut, is undoubtedly a 1960s teenage Romeo, rejecting the violence of his parents' generation and pursuing the counter culture of celebrating peace, love and beauty. Whiting, like Hussey, was chosen largely because his looks would appeal to the teenage audience and he was described by Zeffirelli as being 'beautiful in that Renaissance page-boy way that was revived during the sixties' (Zeffirelli 225). He adds, almost as an afterthought, 'he could probably act' (Zeffirelli 225). Later, when describing some difficulties he had with Whiting on set, he stated, 'his looks were perfect for the role; he was the most exquisitely beautiful male adolescent I've ever met' (Zeffirelli 228). Zeffirelli's choice of Whiting based almost entirely on his looks echoed his comments made earlier about how his own career was aided by the good fortune that he himself was young and good looking. Again we return to the approach of prioritising physical appearance over ability and the veneration of the visual above all else, something that permeates the 1968 film. This point was point noted by Richard Burton who had starred in Zeffirelli's *The Taming Of The Shrew*. On seeing a private viewing of *Romeo and Juliet* before release, he told the director, "You've got problems with the verse...But perhaps it doesn't matter – you're probably right. It certainly looks great". (Zeffirelli 228).

Although Burton was right on both points, Zeffirelli's fervour was not limited to the costumes and sets, but extended to the youthful beauty of the actors who wore those costumes and populated those sets. In his interview with Polly Devlin he made a telling comment about the death of Tybalt (Michael York) and the physical beauty of his followers, "*That* is the end of an era. Tybalt is killed. These gorgeous young men, the braves, the young bloods, these gallants are finished. How beautiful they are..."

(Devlin 74). The extent of his fixation with the physical qualities of youth becomes more apparent as the article continues,

I'm obsessed by youth and life and death, by that whole cycle. I'm horrified when I see the flesh of my young Romeo and Juliet and think of them being touched by death, of their muscles weakening, their heart slowing (Devlin 110).

This clear obsession with youthful beauty above all else, including the text, meant that the young actors who were cast became easy targets for the press. David Robinson in his *Times* article made much of the attractive profiles of both leads and extras.

Robinson makes the not uncommon criticism that the sheer youthfulness of the leads meant that they had relatively little experience in verse speaking, and were therefore lacking in this department. He wrote of Hussey, 'Juliet looks very well, but she is a fearful gabbler', and he accuses Whiting of having 'new-standard English pronunciation' (Robinson). Neither of these comments are of themselves damning and the author fails to suggest how the actors could, or should, have altered their approach. It is nonetheless an example of distrust arising from placing the words of Shakespeare into the mouths of such relatively young leads. Although this was not an uncommon viewpoint, it is perhaps a one sided approach. As Kenneth Rothwell pointed out with regards to the relative youth of the two leads, Zeffirelli's problem in casting was not unique:

Generations of directors had acknowledged the impossibility of finding adolescent actors with the dramatic talent to play Romeo and Juliet and had

fallen back, as did George Cukor and Irving Thalberg, on aging matinee idols like Norma Shearer and Leslie Howard. Zeffirelli boldly rejected the superstar route and cast unknown teenagers, Leonard Whiting and Olivia Hussey (Rothwell 127).

Although Zeffirelli was guilty of pandering to youthful beauty, and choreographed a procession of beautiful, brooding males through his Verona, it would be wrong to suggest that he failed to focus on the love story between Romeo and Juliet. What is unmistakable, though, is that in his film Juliet is depicted as being a lesser character and as secondary to Romeo. Her existence is defined almost entirely by her beauty and what this provokes in the character of the leading male. Hussey brings to Juliet the dual characteristics of intoxicating beauty and, later, an emerging sexuality. These phallogocentric ideologies are used to seduce Romeo and subsequently, the male audience. They are used to raise Romeo to triumphant completion whilst, at the same time, eradicating any further character development within Juliet. It would appear that Zeffirelli did not think the character merited anything more than this. We can gain an insight into his thoughts on the character through his response to questions put to him and by his own voluntary comments on both Hussey and Juliet. Polly Devlin was curious as to what made Zeffirelli choose Hussey for the role and drew attention to the impression given by the actress before and after donning costume and make up. She wrote:

In everyday clothes she is unspectacular. She has a beautiful face, a mature face, but she's still shy and gentle with some puppy fat, a *narrow* little mature face, long black hair, which glows and palpitates, and a surprisingly lush

body...In her everyday clothes one can see that she is beautiful, but what made Zeffirelli say “yes! her” is not apparent. Then suddenly, confoundingly, she appears in costume, in the red velvet, slashed sleeves, pearls in her hair. There is no way of describing her beauty or of looking long enough at it. Her face has few shades of expression – the primary emotions leave their mark, but her beauty has little to do with expression. It is cool, classic, severe, etched, as well as being young, soft, unformed. Zeffirelli saw it all when it was only gym-slipped potential (Devlin 110).

The description given by Devlin of her reaction is somewhat predictive of the reaction when Hussey makes her entrance at the banquet dressed in this costume, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Surprisingly, given this reaction, the fact is that at her audition, Hussey made a poor first impression on the director who, as was noted earlier, thought she was ‘hardly the delicate Juliet I had dreamt of’ (Zeffirelli 225). Although in the interview Zeffirelli claimed to be pleased with Hussey’s acting ability, when asked about character identification he replied, “Identification? If I’d wanted identification I’d have got a skilful actress’ (Devlin 110). This barbed comment is telling for not only does it reveal the director’s priority of appearance over dramatic content, it also, critically, limits and then halts the development of Juliet as a character within the film. The description given by Zeffirelli of Hussey’s ugly-duckling transformation also needs to be examined in detail, for it suggests that his reasoning for giving her the part was based entirely on her looks.

This is in stark difference to Hussy’s own recollection. In an interview in January 2008 Olivia Hussey recalled how she was called to the stage door and was surprised to find Franco Zeffirelli and Dyson Lovel waiting to see her. Zeffirelli told

Hussey that she was to train with a dialogue coach and that when he returned from Rome in six weeks she would test for the part. Hussey recalls that she tested for the part along with an array of blue eyed blondes, (Grouchoreviews.com. “Olivia Hussey – Romeo and Juliet” Web) which lends support to Zeffirelli stating the part had originally being given to a woman with a ‘golden cascade’ of hair. When Zeffirelli asked Hussey how she thought Juliet should look, she replied ‘long blonde hair and blue eyes’ (Grouchoreviews.com “Olivia Hussey – Romeo and Juliet” Web). This appears to have been the preferred choice at the time, a common acknowledgment of what a beautiful woman should look like in the late 1960s. If the original choices for casting had been retained, the unnamed blonde and the unlikely Paul McCartney, there would still have been a pairing of blonde and brunette leads. This stylised pairing, although reversed, was maintained for the final cast. This may have been why Hussey was paired for the balcony scene with Leonard Whiting at this rehearsal. When Zeffirelli saw Hussey, he said ‘That’s my Juliet, and that’s what she has to look like. Now let’s see if Olivia can act’ (Grouchoreviews.com “Olivia Hussey – Romeo and Juliet” Web). The scene did not go well with Zeffirelli telling her that he was not impressed. According to Hussey’s interview she replied that she was doing her best but that she did not believe the balcony scene was a good choice for an audition. When asked if she knew the play, she replied that she had studied it whilst at school and had actually played the part of Romeo. Zeffirelli asked her to choose another scene to audition with and Hussey chose the potion scene (Grouchoreviews.com “Olivia Hussey – Romeo and Juliet” Web). A third, filmed, audition was set for a fortnight’s time at 60, Sixteenth St. in London. In the run up to the audition, Hussey worked with a dialogue coach in order to master an English accent, and rehearsed the potion scene in front of the other girls in the ‘Brodie Set’ at the Windham Theatre.

The girls were, according to Hussey, her ‘harsh critics’ but they were very impressed with her performance. On the day of the third audition, Zeffirelli arrived with Michael York and three ‘Paramount men’. The audition was a success and Hussey was informed that she would be cast as Juliet. Hussey states in the interview that all through the filming of *Romeo and Juliet* she kept asking when the potion scene would be shot. Eventually Zeffirelli informed her that the potion scene would be cut down to a single line “We have to make it one line, so that it just doesn’t take away from the whole feeling of love that Romeo and Juliet have”

(Grouchoreviews.com “Olivia Hussey – Romeo and Juliet”, Web). Hussey was, understandably, heartbroken that one of Juliet’s key speeches had been reduced to a single line. Many years later, Hussey met Anthony Havelock-Allen, one of the producers of the film, and he informed her that Zeffirelli had said that he did not allow the potion scene to be shot because “if she does this potion scene, it will – she’ll get all the attention. The film won’t be *Romeo and Juliet* – it will be “did you see Olivia Hussey in that scene?”” (Grouchoreviews.com “Olivia Hussey – Romeo and Juliet”, Web).

This is, I would suggest, another opportunity lost. This is the scene where Juliet acknowledges that she may face madness, disease, or even death. The scene also shows Juliet’s astuteness when she considers the possibility that Friar Laurence may be deliberately acting to kill her so that he will not face punishment over his role in her marriage to Romeo. The scene highlights Juliet’s maturity and courage. Juliet contemplates all these trials, including having to face Tybalt’s vengeful ghost, and yet she decides that she will confront all and every peril if it means that she will have a chance of living her life with Romeo. The scene is central to Juliet’s development and shows a woman breaking with tradition and taking independent action to control her

own life's destiny. The scene embodies the very essence of Juliet's character which is why it remains a perennial favourite auditioning scene for budding actresses to this day. The cutting of this scene lead directly to some criticism of Hussey's understanding of its importance within the play. Penelope Houston, writing in *The Spectator* was rather dismissive of the scene as filmed and likened Hussey's actions to 'taking a quick swig of after-hours cocoa' (Houston). The cutting of the scene, however, is consistent with Zeffirelli's approach to directing. Ramona Wray, who listed 'populism' as the criticism of choice of Zeffirelli's detractors and even quoted Ace G. Pilkington awarding him the 'dangerous moniker of 'populiser-in- chief'', noted that the second form of censure directed at him was that of 'ruthless cutter' (both Burnett "et al" 144). Wray again refers to Pilkington and notes that of Zeffirelli's three Shakespeare films he retained only 'thirty percent of *Shrew*, thirty-five percent of *Romeo and Juliet*, and thirty-seven percent of *Hamlet*' (Burnett "et al" 145). The fact that he cut such an iconic part from the female lead's role is not unique in Zeffirelli's adaptations. Anthony R. Guneratne notes that when he was directing his film version of Verdi's *Otello*, Zeffirelli cut Desdemona's most famous aria, *Willow Song*, which is her only solo aria in the opera and generally considered one of the most beautiful moments in the entire work (Guneratne 15).

Sexual Juliet

Whereas Zeffirelli's film has, with justification, been praised for being the first to present Juliet as more than a one dimensional male fantasy, this point needs to be qualified. The professed advancement of Juliet within this film, the progression from girlhood to womanhood, is not undertaken purely as a concession to Shakespeare's text, but can also be viewed as a marketing ploy where displays of beauty, sexuality

and eroticism appeal greatly to a teenage audience. Whereas the balcony scene in the 1936 movie became the pillar on which the dual themes of love and romance were presented to the audience, and the film marketed as such, so the balcony and post-balcony scenes in 1968 became Zeffirelli's pillar on which his own themes of youthful beauty, passion and eroticism were exhibited and sold. Zeffirelli deliberately, and repeatedly, introduced aspects of sexuality and eroticism that were absent from previous filmed versions of the play, as well as being absent from Shakespeare's text. This can be viewed as either a positive or a negative thing. To those purists who occupied Zeffirelli's mind when he was staging the play in The Old Vic and who regarded Shakespeare as a sacred flame to be defended at all costs, it may well have been a bad thing. To those who were experiencing the play for the first time and who were perhaps drawn by the celebration of youthful beauty and passion, it was likely to be viewed in a far more positive light. The presence of a sexual element here, regardless of whatever individual judgement may be made of it is, however, undeniable. Consider the design of the Capulet's garden in which Juliet's balcony is set and, more significantly, consider how it is filmed.

Up to this point in the film Verona has been depicted as a dry and arid town surrounded with sun bleached stone where street brawls throw up sheets of scorched dust. This echoes Judi Dench's description of the set for the 1960 stage production, '...the whole production had a hot Italian atmosphere about it, using dry ice to create what looked like a heat haze' (Dench 26). It is not only the visual tapestry that is noticeable in the balcony scene, but also the editing. Zeffirelli, in a successful attempt to make the poetry of Shakespeare more 'real' for a teenage audience, refrains from focusing solely on the main characters as they speak. He often interjects lines with extraneous dialogue or sound effects, or cuts away from the speaker. This was noted

by Jill Levenson who highlighted how the use of sound and editing have a direct effect in the lead up to, and execution of, the balcony scene. Levenson details the interjection of sounds off screen as Romeo enters the orchard.

Romeo. He jests at scars that never felt a wound

Mercutio (*off*). Romeo, it's all right

(*dog barking*)

Romeo. But soft,

(*dog barks*) ... what light through yonder window breaks?

(*crickets in*) (Levenson 113)

A similar strategy device is used during Juliet's contemplation of Romeo on the balcony.

What is Montague?

(*off*) It is nor hand..

(*off*) ...nor foot,

(*off*) Nor arm nor face...

Nor any other part

Belonging to a man. O. Be some other name

(*off*) What's in a name?

That which we call a rose

By any other name would smell as sweet (Levenson114).

As Juliet speaks these words, the camera leaves her and focuses on the wonderment of Romeo as he listens intently. The visual breaking of the speech allows a teenage audience to accept it as more natural and less 'stagey'. This air of naturalness is enhanced by allowing Juliet to wander along a balcony that seems to have no boundaries and encompasses the whole frontage of the Capulet property. The direct

appeal to a teenage audience is strengthened by shots of the couple kissing passionately and a deliberate focus on Juliet's cleavage. Celia Daileader points out:

Although Olivia Hussey's Juliet is arguably less corseted than subsequent romantic heroines, in this scene it is very hard to ignore the contraption which makes a spectacle of her pubescent bust, strategically targeted by the camera as she leans over the balcony... The corset is technically an item of clothing, yet it creates a type of nudity; in its redesigning of the female figure, the corset winds up offering more cleavage to the eye than might be available when a woman is naked. When the corset-wearer in question is scarcely a woman at all, like the fifteen-year-old Hussey, this enhancement effect becomes even more striking (Daileader 188).

The image of Hussey's breasts, tightly bound in a corset, is indeed striking and it undoubtedly draws the attention of the audience to Juliet's advancement from child to woman (**Figure 52**). It is immediately after this deliberate offering of Juliet's breasts to the cameras that we encounter the Capulet garden. As Romeo runs through a copse of verdant greenery, we are confronted with an abundance of lush foliage which is symbolic of Juliet's awakening sexuality. Such is the profusion of this symbolic imagery that the shot of Romeo running and leaping joyously as he leaves that the shot lasts over thirty seconds. Juliet, in the hub of her bountiful Garden of Eden, is very much the centre of fecundity and sexuality in an otherwise barren and arid landscape.

Juliet as sexual subject is explored, or exploited, further in the wedding-bed scene. In the scene, Romeo and Juliet appear in close-up, in bed, sleeping. As the

camera pulls back we see that Romeo is lying face down, on top of the bedclothes, naked. Juliet is lying under the sheet, her breasts partially covered by her long dark hair and Romeo's encircling arm. As already noted, this particular scene, with the lovers lying sleeping beside each other, was used extensively on publicity stills, souvenir programmes and posters to promote the film. The audience is clearly invited to accept that the lovers have consummated their marriage in a night of exhaustive passion. If we compare this image with the MGM promotion of the 1936 production (**Figure 20**) we can see how Zeffirelli added a dimension to the character of Juliet and how the general theme of the lovers' relationship has moved from one of chaste romanticism to one of physical love. Juliet's near nakedness however, has the effect of halting the character's own development. This scene is a progression from what we have witnessed at the banquet. What the audience is guided to see is the transformation of an innocent Juliet at the banquet, to an erotic and sexually aware woman, resplendent in her recently accrued carnal knowledge. The wedding-bed scene completes the transformation of Juliet from one male typography to another and the unattainable virginal Juliet from earlier films is replaced by a sexually active and willing lover in Zeffirelli's film. When Romeo moves to leave the chamber, he turns and sees Juliet lying naked in the bed. He throws himself upon her, pulling the sheet from her and kissing her passionately. As we have noted earlier, Zeffirelli presents a Juliet who is neither ignorant nor shy of sexual matters and he is the first film director to show the character as being capable of her own desires and longings. This is indeed commendable but the director, having done so, makes little effort to move beyond this typography. In fact, the opposite can be said. The brief glimpse of Juliet's naked breasts locks the character in an erotic and sexual mould that permeates the rest of the film. Celia Daileader writes of the consequences of this scene in this and other films

and initially labelled it as little more than a marketing ploy and ‘evidence of the lengths to which modern directors must go in “selling” Shakespeare to mass audiences’ (Daileader 183). Just as Daileader is quoted at the beginning of this chapter in suggesting that anything wrong and everything right with recent Shakespeare films should be blamed on Zeffirelli, so too does she charge him as being the pioneer of interpolated love scenes in future Shakespeare movies. Daileader ponders the suggestion that ‘more nudity equals less Shakespeare’ (Daileader 183) but then dismisses this as facile. She does this, however, when considering the overall scope of all Shakespeare cinema, as well as comparing nudity on stage with nudity on screen. For the purposes of this chapter we must consider the same question but in relation to this particular film. In doing so, the answer to the question ‘does more nudity mean less Shakespeare?’ must be a resounding ‘yes’. Juliet’s development within Zeffirelli’s film is unquestionable and the character progresses further than in any of the previous films in this thesis. Here, she is allowed a degree of sexual maturity absent from her cinematic predecessors but this development is, nonetheless, still constrained within the phallogocentric ideology of male fantasy. This is made apparent by not only what is in film, but by what is absent from it. Juliet’s progression from innocent child to sexually aware woman is undertaken in a predominantly voyeuristic manner to satisfy the intruding and predatory male gaze. We see this clearly throughout the film, beginning with how we witness her reaction to Romeo’s kiss at the banquet. Daileader writes ‘Olivia Hussey’s touch to her lips, her soft guttural noises during the kiss and after, and that ineffable, almost drugged quality of her gaze, more effectively connote the surprise of adolescent sexual discovery’ (Daileader188).

The frame in this scene is cropped so that we see Juliet largely in close up and alone, with the effect that the camera appears to be intruding on a deeply intimate moment and that it is doing so to satisfy the voyeuristic gaze of the male audience. The balcony scene which follows has already been examined in how it is constructed so that the male gaze is brought sharply towards Juliet's breasts. The wedding bed scene, already the focus of pre-release film marketing, includes a brief but deliberate shot of Juliet's exposed breasts, which serves no other purpose than mild titillation for the male heterosexual viewer. All of this serves to present Juliet within the confines of an idealised fantasy woman of the swinging sixties who is beautiful, sexually active, and available to satisfy male desires. The manner of passive, sensual longing in which Juliet is filmed when she is asleep in the wedding-bed scene, is repeated almost exactly when she is dead in the tomb later in the film. This is rather fitting because Zeffirelli's film makes it clear that once Juliet has progressed to accepting and fulfilling the sexual aspect of her life, her development is over. The fact that a brief, semi-nude scene was incorporated into Zeffirelli's production, and this was then used extensively to promote the film, is an indication of how Shakespeare's text can be modified by performance and how that performance can be seen as a reflection of the society in which it is formed.

In another, somewhat minor, moulding of Hussey into icons of phallogentric ideology, the souvenir programme described her as 'the youngest actress ever to play Juliet professionally', and 'the daughter of an Argentine opera singer (who died when Miss Hussey was two years old) and an English mother' (all quotations, Anon, *The Franco Zeffirelli Production of Romeo and Juliet*). Appearing alongside these comments is a photo of Hussey looking beautiful, sorrowful and at her most appealing. The claim of her being the youngest actress ever to play Juliet

professionally is not true. In the introduction to this thesis I have noted that Theophilus Cibber (1703-58) played Romeo opposite his fourteen year old daughter Jenny's Juliet, and that Charlotte Cushman (1816-76), took the lead role of Romeo opposite her fourteen year old sister, Susan, as Juliet. There are others if one cares to dig a little deeper. The point here is that the claim made in the souvenir programme is false. So too is the claim about Hussey's father dying when she was two years old. In an interview with Richard Barber that appeared in *You Magazine* on December 23rd 2001, Hussey referred to her parents' divorce and how she felt bitter towards her father and pursued fame 'to spite him' (Barber). Ironically, it was the success of *Romeo and Juliet* that prompted an invitation from the Argentinean government that resulted in Hussey returning to Buenos Aires and commencing reconciliation with her father (Barber). Speaking in 2001, Hussey described him as follows, 'He's 74 now although he looks 60. He's tremendously handsome, one of the last three Tango singers working in the world' (Barber). Hussey's father had never been an opera singer and had walked out on his family when Hussey was seven years old. One effect of the comments in the souvenir programme regarding Hussey's youth and tragic circumstances is that the reader is encouraged to see her as young, beautiful, and virginal; the 'gawky colt' on the cusp of womanhood as described by Zeffirelli. By falsely stating that she has also suffered the Victorian melodrama of her artistic father dying when she was only two years old, the reader is further encouraged to see Hussey in another iconic role of women in film, that of a suffering, helpless victim. The promotion of Hussey in one iconic manner or another is seen throughout the film. We see this again in the tomb scene in the final part of the film where Juliet's beauty plays a central role.

Juliet's Beautiful Tomb Scene

The first images we witness here are not of Juliet, instead we are presented with the rotting corpses of the Capulets interred previously. This has the effect of contrasting with, and therefore highlighting, Juliet's beauty which we see in two close ups of her head, much in the same manner as she was filmed asleep next to her husband after her wedding night. As Romeo takes a conveniently placed flaming torch into the tomb we can see that he is no longer in possession of his sword. Whether this is a continuity error or a determined act to align Romeo to passivity is not clear. The result, however, is that there can be no fight scene to encroach on the sepulchral mood of the film at this point. By omitting the scene where Romeo kills Paris, Romeo's own purity is preserved. This, in turn, validates and sanctifies his worship of Juliet. Once inside, the tomb, Romeo places the torch on the wall, out of shot with the result that the tomb is instantly bathed in a soft, amber light. Here, the flaming torch is quite obviously replaced by an artificial light source that bestows a soft glow upon the skin of both of the young lovers, highlighting their beauty. The lighting here is not accidental. Deborah Cartmell noted how Zeffirelli, used lighting to give specific look to his Shakespeare films. She wrote,

On the set of *The Taming of the Shrew* John Francis Lane found cameraman Ossie Morris studying a book of Correggio reproductions in preparation for the lighting of a shot and the vivid primary colours with the golden lighting of Italian Renaissance painting are unmistakably recreated in the two 1960s films of Shakespeare; certainly the look of the production takes precedence over the words of the plays (Cartmell 216).

Antonio Corregio (1489-1534) was a Renaissance artist renowned, like Fra Angelica, for his religious paintings, many of which featured the Virgin Mary. He is described in *The Oxford Companion to Art* as developing a style of ‘sentimental elegance and conscious allure with soft sfumato and gestures of captivating charm’ (Osborne 283). The effect of sfumato is that the light bathes the subjects and softens their features. The description of his work lends itself well to how Zeffirelli shoots Olivia Hussey in this scene. Juliet’s costume here is similar to the one she wore at the banquet scene inasmuch as it brings the focus to her head, with particular focus on her sensuous mouth (**Figure 53**). Juliet’s beauty is sanctified by death and retains an ingrained and photogenic sensuality which lends greater credence to Romeo’s lines,

Ah, dear Juliet,

Why art thou so fair? Shall I believe

That unsubstantial Death is amorous,

And that the lean abhorred monster keeps

Thee here in dark to be his paramour? (5:3:101-5)

These lines are immediately followed by yet another close up of Juliet’s face. It is noticeable that here in the tomb, Juliet’s head rests upon two stone supports, as opposed to all the other bodies that are afforded only one. This allows her profile to be raised and photographed more elegantly. Juliet receives another two close ups before Romeo takes the poison and dies to the accompanying crescendo of Nino Rota’s orchestrated score. When Juliet awakes, she is dazed and weak and needs to be helped to her feet by Friar Laurence, but this does not stop her from removing her cap which has been tied around her chin, allowing her hair, a lustrous hazel mane, to fall forward

and frame her face. When Juliet discovers Romeo dead, she smothers him in kisses whilst simultaneously covering his face with her hair as she weeps uncontrollably and clasps his head in both of her hands. Hussey's death scene here echoes that of Norma Shearer in 1936 in that the dagger is inserted into her body in an unconvincing manner before she lays her head close Romeo's body and emits what sounds almost like a sigh of contentment. Juliet's death scene actually echoes most of her scenes in the film in that it is filmed in a manner that is visually beautiful, bringing a sensuality to the most innocent or sombre situations which often leaves us uncertain how to react. The fact that the film was a huge commercial success and won two Oscars meant that it gained a legacy that perhaps allowed it more respectability than some would say it merits. Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* viewed as a film, as opposed to a 'Shakespeare film', is a beautifully shot, well presented, enjoyable experience. Nonetheless, such was the worldwide commercial success of the film that there emerged an unspoken acceptance that Zeffirelli's 'Juliet' was somehow definitive. Moreover, it was a belief that the public and many critics were reluctant to renounce, ensuring that Baz Luhrmann's 1996 version would be met with distrust and, in some cases, open and blistering hostility.

Chapter Four

1996 - Romeo + Juliet

Baz Luhrmann's 1996 version of *Romeo and Juliet* was given a harsh time by the critics on its release. Lucy Hamilton in 'Baz vs. the Bardolaters, Or Why William Shakespeare's *Romeo + Juliet* Deserves Another Look', collected some of the most eviscerating condemnations and presented them in her introduction. She quotes Mick LaSalle describing the film as a 'monumental disaster', and Owen Gleiberman calling it a 'violent swank-trash music video that may make you feel like reaching for the remote control'. Gleiberman continued with what must be one of the most wounding critiques ever afforded a Shakespeare adaptation; 'there are "bad films", there are "worst films of all time", and then there's Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo and Juliet*' (all quotations Hamilton 118). There were other critics who were keen to write off the film with barely concealed contempt. Alexander Walker introduced his critique of the film in *The Evening Standard* by writing, 'How do I get my point across to Luhrmann, the staggeringly vulgar Australian director... Will he understand it if I say this *Romeo and Juliet* sucks?' (Walker). He dismissed Leonardo DiCaprio's performance as Romeo by describing it in the manner of 'a pin up from a pre-teen magazine' (Walker). He included in his condemnation a personal and spiteful remark, referring to DiCaprio as 'this little wimp with the girlish face' (Walker). He ended his article in judgemental condemnation:

The talents involved in this campy extravaganza don't give a damn about Shakespeare – only for the chance his play offers them to dumb down his eloquence, rubbish his poetry and shove the greatest love story in literature into the format of a restless pop video for Generation X's morons (Walker).

This denunciation laced with personal spite is worth investigation for it shows more than simply a critique of a film. The assessment no longer appears to be objective but subjective, with DiCaprio and Luhrmann being targeted on a personal level. This prompts the questions: why did this happen and what does it mean in terms of how society assesses, and then judges, Shakespeare on film in general, and *Romeo and Juliet* in particular? The acrimonious comments of Alexander Walker are of particular interest because he was one of the most influential and respected film critics of his day, being named three times as Critic of the Year in 1970, 1974 and 1998 in the British Press Awards (Standard.co.uk. "Alexander Walker Dies" Web). Walker was an academic before he began his career, graduating in political philosophy from Queen's University, Belfast. He also studied at College d' Europe in Bruges, and at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, where he was a lecturer in political philosophy and comparative government (Standard.co.uk. "Alexander Walker Dies" Web). In a highly respected career, he was the critic for the *London Evening Standard* for more than forty years before his death in 2003. Famously caustic, his film critiques often provoked a hostile defence. His critiques, however, were never rash and his obituary quoted him as saying that he never made snap judgments as he "let it stew" (Standard.co.uk. "Alexander Walker Dies" Web.). He was government appointee to the board of the *British Film Institute* and the *British Screen Advisory Council*, and in 1981, he was honoured in France with the Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (Standard.co.uk. "Alexander Walker Dies" Web.). He was also an author of a number of film-themed books that included: *Hollywood, England: the British Film Industry in the Sixties* (1974), as well as biographies of Elizabeth Taylor (1990), Greta Garbo (1980), Marlene Dietrich (1984), Bette Davis (1986), Joan Crawford (1983) and Audrey Hepburn (1995) (Guardian.co.uk. "Obituary –

Alexander Walker” Web.). Acclaimed though he was, Walker’s choice of subject matter in his biographies betrays a love of what is often termed the Golden Age of Hollywood. A favouring towards nostalgia for this era was to be a common denominator in many who instinctively dismissed Luhrmann’s film on its release. Before exploring that particular route, however, we should continue the practice of studying the origin of the film as well as the background of its director as this invariably sheds light on the rationale behind the making of the film and considered objectives in undertaking the task in the first place.

Baz Luhrmann was born Mark Anthony Luhrmann on September 17th 1962 in Sydney,¹⁹ Australia. The family moved to Herons’ Creek in New South Wales where his father was a farmer but also became involved in other projects in the town. An online fan site quotes Luhrmann talking about this time in his life and how it influenced him.

What kind of kid was I then? The same kind of kid I am now. Extremely busy. My father was a bit mad, you see. He thought that we had to be the renaissance kids of Herons’ Creek. We had to learn commando training as well as photography, how to grow corn as well as how to play a musical instrument. We were up at 5 in the morning, and then we just went until we dropped. The town consisted of a gas station; a pig farm, a dress shop and a movie theatre - and we ran them all (Bazthegreat.com. “Facts About Baz” Web).

¹⁹ He legally changed his name to Bazmark Anthony Luhrmann circa 1979

Whilst his mother ran a dressmaking shop and taught ballroom dancing, Luhrmann's father, who had been a photographer in the Vietnam war, and who knew how to work a projector, became directly involved in operating the movie theatre when the owner died of a heart attack. The running of the cinema nurtured an interest in film and acting in Luhrmann and when he was seventeen he applied to enrol at the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA). He was unsuccessful. Undeterred, he took some sporadic acting jobs until a further application was eventually accepted. Luhrmann had by this time decided to concentrate on directing and he wrote, starred, and directed in a thirty minute stage production of *Strictly Ballroom* that was later revived and toured Australia in 1988 (Bazthegreat.com. "Facts About Baz" Web). Luhrmann had also nurtured a long interest in opera and this led to him directing a production of *Lake Lost*. It was during this production that he met Catherine Martin who would become his production designer in *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*, and later his wife. He also directed a successful production of Puccini's *La Boheme* at the Sydney Opera House which later transferred to New York. Luhrmann managed to secure backing and turned his previous stage version of *Strictly Ballroom* into a film which was released to great success in 1992 (Bazthegreat.com. "Facts About Baz" Web). *Strictly Ballroom* was first of what became known as the 'Red Curtain Trilogy' which would include *William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet*, and *Moulin Rouge*. It should be specified that the term 'trilogy' here refers to film technique and style, and not plot or episodic sequels. There is no narrative connection between any of these three films. *Strictly Ballroom*, however, cut a unique and exhilarating style and the template was used in the making of *Romeo + Juliet* in 1996. There was also a consistency of key personnel which was a crucial element in the film. In addition to Luhrmann directing and writing the screenplay for both films, they also list Catherine

Martin as production designer (also listed as a Title Designer on *Romeo + Juliet*); Jill Bilcock editing; John ‘Cha Cha’ O’Connell as choreographer; Martin Brown (Art Direction 1992, Co-Producer 1996) and Craig Pearce as co-screenwriter (IMDB.com. “Full cast and crew for Strictly Ballroom” Web). The costumes in both of these films are rich and detailed, and there is a shared heightening of reality that incorporates elements of popular Broadway musicals, the Western, and elements of comedy interwoven with the drama. Both films also carry a similar theme of youth finding love and rebelling against the protocols of their parents’ generation. In addition, both films share an unmistakable, vibrant style and it was this very style that was to cause such heightened hostility in Luhrmann’s *Romeo + Juliet*. Like his cinematic predecessors, Luhrmann’s film was, to a large extent, shaped by the casting of the two leads.

Luhrmann wrote in some detail of his initial impression on meeting the actress who was to play the role of Juliet in his 1996 film. In the printed version of the screenplay, he wrote:

When I met Claire Danes, I was really struck by her. Juliet is written as a very smart, active character. *She* decides to get married, *she* resolves to take the sleeping potion, *she* really drives the piece. The extraordinary, unmissable characteristic about Claire is that here is a sixteen year old girl with the poise and maturity of a thirty year old. (Luhrmann 1997, Introduction).

Be that as it may, the fact that Danes had been the star in the highly successful TV series *My So-Called Life*, which was billed and marketed as the definitive American adolescent teen drama of 1994, was helpful in raising the profile of his film. In the TV

series Danes played Angela ‘Angel’ Case, a brooding, introspective and angst ridden fifteen year old who has to navigate her way through the trials and tribulations of life in high school whilst forming an alliance with her friends against her parents and their controlling generation. By the time she was cast as Juliet, Danes had already made five feature films and had won a golden Globe for her work in television (TIME.com. “Cinema: Her So-Called Big-Deal film Career” Web.). Danes and her high profile with an American teenage audience meant she was perfect for selling the film to its target audience. DiCaprio, with his androgynous good looks coupled with a background of commercial and critical success in such films as *This Boy’s Life* (1993), *What’s Eating Gilbert Grape* (1993) for which he had been nominated for an Oscar, (IMDB.com. “Awards for What’s Eating Gilbert Grape” Web), and *The Basketball Diaries* (1995) meant he was ideal casting for the role of Romeo.

Luhrmann’s distinctive styling was evident from the very beginning of the film with the repetition of the prologue, firstly spoken by the newsreader and then immediately afterwards by the actor who plays Friar/Father Laurence, Pete Postlethwaite. This is intercut with a variety of quickly edited shots that both startle and hold the attention. In this, the opening echoes the beginning of another Shakespeare film of the same year, Richard Loncraine’s *Richard III*. Both films faced the ongoing challenge of engaging a new audience when adapting Shakespeare’s plays from the medium of theatre to the medium of cinema. Barbara Freedman explains how Loncrain’s *Richard III* was shaped in the opening sequence:

In the first ten minutes of *Richard III* they managed to draw in fans of action films, period drama, musicals and even, with the entrance of Robert Downey,

Jr.; light comedy....That all the targeted audiences were kept satisfied as the film progressed was a major cause of its popularity. For such audiences, the allusions to popular films are obvious – Richard’s heavy breathing in a Darth Vader mask, the action film’s Rambo-like bold red letter title and opening scene, scenarios from *Sophie’s Choice* to *Bladerunner* (Freedman 66).

The repetition of the prologue in Luhrmann’s film captures the attention on more than one level. Initially it exposes the audience to the pentameter of Shakespeare’s speech. When it is spoken the second time, however, it is done so over a composite montage that moves beyond the summation of background information of the plot by means of incorporating newspaper and media excerpts. As the montage progresses, the audience is confronted with a hyper-reality of action films, police shoot outs, garishly choreographed musicals and, in a prophetic vein, they are also shown clips of the tragedy that is about to unfold.

This prophesying the tragedy and part of the text was a deliberate ploy and it is something that Luhrmann commented on in the commentary for the DVD special edition (2002). He spoke in some detail of the foretelling of the forthcoming tragedy and how he used it more than once. In the film as shot, whilst Romeo hesitates in attending the banquet and speaks of his misgivings and of a preordained fate that will result in his untimely demise, the audience is shown what is effectively a teaser trailer for Juliet’s death. Luhrmann explains the reasoning behind this method,

I really love this device of Shakespeare, we used it in *Moulin Rouge* and it is something to do with what we call comic tragedy which is you *must* be made aware, you know they’re going to die. You know that the two lovers are going

to die at the end. And what you do is, every ten or fifteen minutes – and Shakespeare does it brilliantly - is that you remind the audience ‘you know you’ve got about an hour and a half and they’ll be dead’ and, and instead of *hiding* that as a piece of plot, you’re constantly setting off alarm bells ‘Not long now!’ I mean at their, at the height of their greatest joy – the two lovers- you remind the audience once again that they’re going to die (Luhrmann DVD Special Edition. Commentary 22:12 - 22:41).

This ‘setting off’ of alarm bells is constant throughout the film and the audience is presented with a stream of visual and textual warnings that takes Luhrmann’s interpretation of *Romeo and Juliet* beyond the limiting realm of earlier cinematic adaptations. This was not, however, the first time the foretelling of the tragedy had been incorporated into the telling of the tale. Ramona Wray noted that Zeffirelli incorporated a similar, albeit far more subtle method of forewarning. Wray referred to Jack J. Jorgens who reflected on the use of mist, fog, and the filtering of light through windows and diaphanous fabric. She lists, amongst other examples, the muslin drapes around Juliet’s bed, the sun filtered through clothing or windows, the gauze through which we witness Juliet drinking the potion, and the shrouds which adorn the corpses in the crypt (Burnett “et al” 158-159). Although this can signify barriers that prevent contact, Wray points out that they are also suggestive of prolepsis ‘attached to a mist that that looks forward to a funeral sheet’ (Burnett “et al” 158). This manner of forewarning of death had been undertaken even before Shakespeare had written his version of the tale. Courtney Lehmann noted that,

Bandello might be the first to employ conspicuous foreshadowing of Romeo and Giulietta's ill-fated end, by referring to Romeo, for example as someone who 'drank in draughts of the luscious poison of love', and, shortly thereafter, as one who 'had become deeply impregnated with love's subtle poison' (Lehmann 17).

Luhrmann's direct approach allows, for the first time in Western mainstream cinema, the play to be seen primarily as a great Shakespearean tragedy expressed through the medium of a love story. Each of the previous cinematic incarnations had taken a different approach, primarily that of 'the greatest love story ever told' expressed through the medium of a popular woman's weepy. Although the three previous films in this thesis each trod differing paths; with the 1936 version being a star vehicle for one of Hollywood's biggest female stars, the 1954 version experimenting with Italian neo-realism, and the 1968 film incorporating the cultural ideologies of the Flower Power era, each of these three versions placed the dual themes of love and romance ahead of tragedy in the telling of the tale. Luhrmann forewarns his audience from the very beginning of his film that his version is, first and foremost, a tragedy. A great deal of this cinematic warning occurs in the first twenty minutes or so of the film and, as such, this period of the film demands the closest attention.

The explosion of visual extravagance, stylised violence, camp comedy, kitsch parody and bombastic music that is encountered here is a complete departure from any previous film adaptation and it is this, with the addition of one other particular scene, which turned critics such as Alexander Walker against the film. This raises the question as to why Luhrmann chose to go down this path in the first place? Why stun the audience with what is effectively a cultural slap in the face when, by the mere fact

that they are already watching a Shakespeare film, the director already has their attention and to a certain extent, their trust? I would suggest that Luhrmann took this approach because he thought it was necessary. On the DVD Special Edition of the film, Luhrmann makes reference to ‘Club Shakespeare’. One of the extras on the DVD shows him giving a talk two years after the release of the film. During this talk he told an audience why he thought it was necessary to make *Romeo + Juliet* the way he did and why he moved away from how he felt the world had viewed Shakespeare on film previously. He began by describing Shakespeare’s approach to presenting a play in Elizabethan London. He told the audience,

In a city of four hundred thousand people, that’s London, he had to get an audience of four thousand, mostly drunk, yelling, screaming, ticket buyers into the theatre every day...so Shakespeare firstly had to tell his story in such an aggressive, sexy, noisy, rambunctious way that he could shut them up, and at the same time, reach out and touch every kind of person from every kind of background.. and, you know, I truly wanted to learn from this guy who lived four hundred years ago and I instinctively felt that a funky Shakespeare would and could work (Luhrmann, DVD Special Edition) .

Luhrmann goes on to state how much of Shakespeare on film comes from 19th century interpretations, or, as he put it, “lots of round vowels and tights” (Luhrmann, DVD Special Edition). Luhrmann felt that the audience needed to be removed from their comfort zone in order to see the play in as much of its original rambunctious (a word Luhrmann returns to often when describing Shakespeare) setting as it had originally been performed. He envisaged that the personal love story and subsequent

tragedy within the play is more effective if viewed and experienced through the maelstrom of such a setting. Luhrmann, quoting Don McAlpine, said “If you survive the gas station and the first twenty minutes, you’ll survive the rest of the film” (Luhrmann, DVD Special Edition, Commentary 01:38:19).

Breaking From the Past

In the same DVD, Luhrmann explains his reasons his approach to the making of the film. He adds,

What we were doing was absolutely disregarding the accumulation of what I call ‘Club Shakespeare’ which kind of dates back to the Victorian period. We just wanted to get it back to the kind of violent, direct, passionate, musical, free, energetic, bawdy, savage, rambunctious storytelling that it was when this author brought it to the stage (Luhrmann DVD Special Edition).

The ‘Club Shakespeare’ that Luhrmann referred to in his talks is the Victorian society which created an image of idealised woman in relation to 19th century morals. This was the filter through which each major film version of the play so far had passed its own treatise on idealized female characteristics and which produced a Juliet moulded from a contemporary portrayal of women in the society at the time each film was made. In 1936 we were presented with Juliet as being chaste, obedient and virginal in accordance with the both the Hollywood star system of the time and the powerful influence of the Production (aka Hayes) Code. In 1954 we were presented with Juliet as a victim very much in the style of the Hitchcockian blonde; helpless, beautiful, subservient and awaiting rescue by her dominant leading man. Then in 1968 we were

presented with Juliet as a contemporary teenager; a flower child using her new found sexuality as a catalyst for inducing action from the male, reflecting the newly celebrated sexual freedom and self confidence of women of the 1960s. As Mulvey stated, cinema ‘satisfies a primordial wish for pleasurable looking’, (Mulvey 840), and there is no doubt that *Romeo and Juliet* has had a tradition of being presented in a lavish style that fulfilled that yearning. Cukor’s 1936 Hollywood film was constructed with the principle of spectacle so firmly to the fore that it overpowered certain aspects of the play. Castellani’s 1954 film indulged the recently fashioned Technicolor to such a degree that it too became an overbearing presence. The 1968 film struck a perfect balance between visual beauty and aural pleasure and its universal success meant that a generation of the cinema-going public, and certain critics, unconsciously revised their perceptions of Shakespeare’s play to coincide with Zeffirelli’s presentation, and in doing so, accepted the 1968 production as being definitive. By doing this, however, the same cinema-going public also accepted the romanticised idealism that permeated Zeffirelli’s film. Although Zeffirelli went further than any of his predecessors in exploring Juliet’s sexual awakening, there still remained at the centre of the film a dated cultural transposition where the female role existed primarily as a love interest of the male. Zeffirelli’s film, by concentrating on the aesthetic beauty of the protagonists and the loss of love as opposed to the loss of life, embraced that aspect of romanticism and presented it in cinematic splendour. This aspect of presenting the story in such a manner was accepted by a great many of people who saw the film as being ‘right’.

José Arroyo, writing about the 1996 *Romeo and Juliet* in *Sight and Sound*, partly explained why this was so, why Zeffirelli’s film was ‘right’ and Luhrmann’s ‘wrong’. “*Romeo and Juliet* is set in a ‘constructed’ world, one that is different

enough from a ‘real’ one to allow for different ways of being and knowing, but with enough similarities to permit understanding” (Arroyo, José, 1997). Arroyo explains that this idea is one commonly used in comic books but is usually limited to particular film genres such as sci-fi, horror, fantasy and, to a lesser extent, the musical. By repositioning the story in a modern setting, Luhrmann takes the story from its ‘real’ world, the world constructed by Zeffirelli, and retells it in a counterfeit one. This resulted in some critics identifying the film as being about *Romeo and Juliet*, but not to accept it as a ‘real’ version of Shakespeare’s play. That Zeffirelli’s film had been criticised on its release for promoting imagery over poetry was largely forgotten. What was important, or taken to be important, was that Zeffirelli’s imagery was loved and accepted as being ‘right’. Any questioning of this accepted reality was bound to be received with suspicion. Luhrmann was bold enough not only to question that acceptance, but to challenge it head on, and he did this from the opening frames of his film.

This act of romantic heresy brought forth the ire of countless Zeffirelli fans, some of whom were now film critics. Where Luhrmann was charged with trespass into the guarded realms of Zeffirelli’s Shakespeare ‘reality’, he was also found guilty of an intrusion into the personal recollections of countless fans and of being disrespectful to a collective, treasured memory of romance. The flower children who watched transfixed as Hussey and Whiting exchanged longing looks to Rota’s sweeping score now looked on with disbelief as DiCaprio and Danes exchanged sensual kisses in a swimming pool and explored their love amidst gang-land shoot-outs, police chases, and a soundtrack of raucous nineties chart hits. That some of these flower children of the 1960s grew up to be film critics did much to warrant the widespread anguish, mock or otherwise, that greeted film’s release. In a telling clip on

the DVD Special edition, two unidentified television reporters are seen sitting in a cinema and are heard to review the film. The woman is clearly unimpressed with the film.

Woman: ‘They don’t speak the text, they speak a tenth of the text and they speak it into the wind’

Man: ‘They didn’t do that in Zeffirelli either, they cut it out...’

Woman, interrupting: ‘Oh please, Zeffirelli, you’re talking about a great moment in my life.’ (Luhrmann DVD Special Edition)

The final comment that the film was ‘a great moment in my life’ is significant because it shows that, for many people, Zeffirelli’s film became more than simply another version of *Romeo and Juliet* but became a treasured part of their past. As we have seen, when Irving Thalberg and MGM were promoting *Romeo and Juliet* in 1936, they went to great lengths to convince the public that their film was more than simply a cinematic experience. The extensive publicity undertaken at the time was in order to proclaim the film a social event, something of significant importance that could not and should not be missed. Where Thalberg and MGM failed, however, Zeffirelli and Paramount succeeded. This accomplishment was described in Paramount’s souvenir booklet of the film as follows:

On the evening of June 25, 1967, 80,000,000 television viewers in 18 countries in the world watched Franco Zeffirelli rehearse the wedding sequence for his film in the Church of San Pietro in Tuscania. The sequence was Italy’s contribution to the first

ever global satellite telecast, which was transmitted live around the world (Anon, *The Franco Zeffirelli Production of Romeo and Juliet*).²⁰

Although intended to showcase Italy to the world, the ‘global preview’ elevated Zeffirelli’s forthcoming *Romeo and Juliet* to being seen as a world event. The subsequent success of the film bestowed a sense of legitimacy and gravitas which, in turn, acted as provenance to the film’s authenticity and ‘rightness’.

It is from this perspective that the majority of the criticism of Luhrmann’s 1996 film originates. Subsequently, the 1996 *Romeo + Juliet* was assailed by critics, not because of Luhrmann’s treatment of Shakespeare but because of his treatment of Zeffirelli. The Zeffirelli generation of fans and critics were highly critical of Luhrmann’s film style which was in complete contrast to what had been seen by the world in 1968. When Kenneth Rothwell described Luhrmann’s film as having ‘been filtered through John Woo’s Hong Kong action movies, and the hip hop gangsta rap of MTV’ (Rothwell 229), it was not meant merely as an observation. Neither was it merely a humorous description of style and soundtrack, rather it was meant as a chastisement. The overwhelming reaction to Luhrmann’s film was that it was little more than a loud, flash, unpardonable marketing ploy, made by a director intent on dumbing down Shakespeare to the level of a teen pop video with no other purpose than chasing a fast buck. The verdict of most critics was that they had witnessed a generational decline in the art of Shakespearean film making. The feeling was that the younger generation – Luhrmann’s generation – had overstepped the mark and had not only failed to understand the very essence of Shakespeare’s play, but had belittled it. The inherent beauty of the play which had been so exquisitely expressed by the older

²⁰ Coincidentally, Paul McCartney, who had earlier been offered the part of Romeo in the film, took part in the same live broadcast when, as part of Britain’s contribution, The Beatles performed *All You Need Is Love*.

generation - Zeffirelli's generation - had been defaced. The prosecutors ranged from those who were basking in the last golden rays of cinematic Bardolatry, and those who had written a new crime into the annals of Shakespeare, the crime of heresy against the cult of Zeffirelli.

The condemnation of Luhrmann's film can be viewed as unjust and harsh. Luhrmann's visual approach does not belittle Zeffirelli's previous, highly accomplished film, and neither does it spoil or detract from Shakespeare's play. In fact, I would suggest that once we have attuned to the visual aspects of the 1996 film, in much the same manner in which we are expected to attune to the aural aspects of Shakespeare's plays, we see that this is not a weakness to be overcome but rather a strength that should be celebrated. The distraction resultant from this aspect of the film, however, was formidable. Furthermore, none of Luhrmann's cinematic predecessors had to face as harsh a visual scrutiny that he himself endured. As mentioned in the 1936 chapter, George Cukor's direction was somewhat transparent and he had not yet developed his own distinctive style. The film, however, was generally celebrated rather than condemned at the time and Cukor's direction was not really an issue. As mentioned in the 1954 chapter, Castellani's neo-realist approach did prove to be problematic to some critics but this was not seen to be an isolated folly. Other aspects of his film were held to be equally, if not more, distracting. Zeffirelli's lavish style in 1968 was generally accepted as being very much a positive contribution to the telling of the tale, as opposed to anything negative. Luhrmann's own style was seen by many to be so distinctive and frenetic that it created a barrier to both the shooting and viewing of one of Shakespeare's most popular plays. I would suggest, however, that this visual approach did not detract from Shakespeare's story, rather it pushed the audience down a path where they were forced to re-examine the

story. Over-familiarity with the plot had lulled generations into accepting *Romeo and Juliet* as a bland, romantic love story, and now they were being forced to reassess it for what it actually was, a perilous, passionate tragedy. This is laid out from the very beginning of Luhrmann's film. There is no stately introduction into the 1996 film, no equivalent of the grandiose trumpeted herald that greets the viewer of the 1936 version. There is no studious address by the bard himself, as in 1954, and no melodious and poetic verse by Olivier, as in 1968. Instead we are greeted by a matter-of-fact newsreader, proficient in the art of faux sincerity that is required of those who are the bearers of bad news. The prologue is used as a means of informing the audience of the facts, rather than encouraging them to embrace the romanticized ideology that has grown around the play. From this moment we are hurled headlong into a frenzied montage – or 'opening overture' as it is described on the commentary – that jolts us and forces us to reassess our preconceived ideas. The montage does more than give the background to the story. The entire content of the film, with the exception of the final frames of the death scene, is played out in one minute and twenty seconds before our eyes. This is the first of the alarm bells of which Luhrmann speaks, a screaming reminder of what lies ahead, and it contains a wealth of details that require the closest examination.

We begin with the newsreader's prologue. This is actually brought to a premature end through the use of abrupt editing. Her last spoken lines before the cut and zoom to the opening montage are, 'And the continuance of their parent's rage/Which, but their children's end, nought could remove/ Is now the two hours traffic of our stage' (Prologue 10-12). As the camera zooms in, it is clear that the news-reader is still speaking and that the lines 'The which, if you with patient ears attend/ What here shall miss, our toil strive to mend' (Prologue 13-14) have been

edited out. It is unclear if this is a deliberate edit which serves as an introduction into the accelerated hyper reality of what follows, or if it signifies something else. The opening montage after the news-reader's interrupted announcement is of such bombastic style that it was the presentation of the film, rather than the content, that became the focus of much discussion and criticism.

This montage is important for it not only forewarns the audience of story of *Romeo and Juliet*, it also seals it firmly in the past. Part of what makes Luhrmann's film so different from the others that have preceded it is the timeline. By this I do not mean the timeframe, the five days in which the play takes place, but the linear timeline in which the audience experience the story. The altered timeline of Luhrmann's film means that the audience do not see the story unfolding in a normal progressive manner, but rather witness it again in its retelling. The previous films worked from a position of informing the audience of the outcome of the story and then filling in the narrative blanks. This is also what happens in the text but it does not happen in Luhrmann's film. What is made clear from the very beginning of this film is that that there are no blanks to be filled in, rather that every aspect of the story has already happened and what we are seeing is simply the story being retold as a means of expressing the loss of what has occurred. It is what Kate Chedgzoy refers to as 'the violence of mourning for an object that has always already been lost' (Chedgzoy 49). In this case the object that has been lost is lives of the two main protagonists within the play. In addition to this, however, what is also lost is the traditional presentation of the play itself.

The presentation of Luhrmann's film and the all-knowing, all-prophesying performance within the film is both a reminder and a celebration of what has been lost. Chedgzoy leads in to this assumption by making reference to 'the always

thwarted human desire to recapture the bliss most of us experienced as infants' (Chedgzoy 49). This is what an audience resplendent in memory of Zeffirelli's picturesque film experiences when confronted with Luhrmann's explosive opening montage. The wish to recapture the visual beauty and magnificence of Zeffirelli's film, and the bliss experienced when watching it, is thwarted. The failed attempts at recapturing Zeffirelli's lost film, and the frustration this provoked, can be seen in various reviews of Luhrmann's film.

Two Early Scenes

The gas station shoot out was one of two key scenes that turned critics such as Alexander Walker so vehemently against Luhrmann's film. The hostility again, however, is not so much in reaction to the content of what is on screen, for all adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* have included a violent affray at this point, but on the presentation of that content. By the end of this short scene, the audience is punch drunk with the pitch, pace and rapid-fire editing that assaults the senses. The pace is such that it carries with it a sense of surrealism that challenges the audience to obtain a reasonably coherent unfolding of the plot. One needs to be already familiar with what will happen as a result of this scene for the scene itself to be taken on board easily. The accusation of using rapid-fire editing for cheap cinematic effect was one that stuck with the film. Virtually every critic made a point of listing this early in their review and it became an untruth universally accepted that the editing in Luhrmann's film betrayed a lack of experienced professionalism as both a film maker and Shakespearean scholar. The general consensus was that such rapid-fire, quick-cutting, pans, zooms and wipes belonged elsewhere, to another genre that lay somewhere between the vacuous pop video and the derisory chock-socky kung-fu, straight-to-

video action flick. What no critic seemed to notice, or at least highlight, was that the pace of the film gradually slows as the story progresses. The gas station scene is indeed hectic by anyone's standards. From the challenge, at 05:00 minutes into the film, when Abra confronts Samson in relation to the thumb biting, and Sampson's response about having a better master, to the ending of the gas station affray with the arrival of the police helicopters at 08:03, there are approximately one hundred and five editorial cuts. That averages out at thirty-four edits per minute over a three minute burst, a truly astonishing rate. If we compare this, however, with the finale of the film, from when Romeo closes the door of the church against the pursuing police at 1:36:46, to the echoing of the gunshot that ends Juliet's life at 1:45:44, there are approximately eighty-one cuts. This works out at approximately nine cuts per minute over a nine minute period. The reversing of the cinematic trend of building up to a finale in a film, especially in a film where gun play between rival factions is a major part of the story, is lost entirely amidst the undue attention focused on the rapidity and on the number of cuts in the gas station shoot-out scene earlier.

There was one particular scene, however, that did more than any other to turn critics against Luhrmann's film and that was the now infamous rendition of 'Young Hearts Run Free' by a glammed-up, bewigged, mini-skirted, stockinged, high heeled Mercutio. This scene brought forth the undisguised contempt of critics who, almost unanimously, dismissed the character of Mercutio within the film by labelling him with a disdainful nomenclature which, in turn, denuded him of his pivotal role in both the play and the film. Derek Malcolm writing in *The Guardian*, began his review with:

Anyone willing to accept Mercutio as a black disco queen who turns up at the Capulet's masquerade ball in a white wig and a spangled miniskirt to sing a musical number on the stairway ought to have no problem with Baz Luhrmann's contemporary version of *Romeo and Juliet* (Malcolm).

Derek Malcolm initially showed some positive thoughts regarding the film when he stated that despite 'constant mental tut-tutting (especially at the beginning when the general hustle and bustle makes the whole thing look like an MTV music video) you find yourself gradually being drawn in' (Malcolm). Although he went on to compliment the cinematography, production design and costumes, he concluded, 'Despite the fact that Luhrmann uses the Bard's words, or at least the remains of them, there are times when you might otherwise be confused as to who actually wrote the greatest love story in the world' (Malcolm). He was not alone in singling out this musical number and using it as a critical club with which to attack the film.

Howard Feinstein, also writing in *The Guardian*, described Mercutio as 'a high heeled blond-wigged African American drag queen' (Feinstein). Geoff Andrew, in *Time Out*, wrote of how 'the film departs conspicuously from the cinematic norm of Bardic adaptations, bombarding at breakneck speed with images of apocalyptic urban detritus, drag queen disco raves' (Andrew – *Labour of Love*). Returning to the subject in the same publication a fortnight later, he wrote, 'Mercutio becomes a drag queen in a silver bikini and fright wig' (Andrew – *Heart to Heart*). James Delingpole in *The Sunday Telegraph Review*, begins what is essentially a complimentary review of the film with a tongue-in-cheek dismissal of the modern setting:

I can see the GCSE English Literature essays already, "... then Romeo sees Juliet through a glass fish tank and falls in love with her because he has been

given a pill called Queen Mab (which is like Ecstasy) by his black, transvestite friend, Mercutio” (Delingpole).

Tom Shone, writing in *The Sunday Times*, is more caustic and outraged in his labelling. Taking issue with the full title of the film, *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet*, which he suggested made it sound like some maths problem, he coupled the film to one of the UK's most popular and successful drag artists when he wrote:

It could, for instance, just as accurately have been called ‘Lily Savage’s *Romeo and Juliet*, the money Luhrmann saved on a writer’s fee having clearly been diverted into a budget for disco lights, eye glitter, fireworks, and as many sequins as can reasonably be packed into a movie under Luhrmann’s magpie eye (Shone).

In the same piece he also labels Tybalt a ‘snarling pimp’, and Mercutio ‘a black drag queen proffering not love potions but Ecstasy pills’ (Shone). Alexander Walker, in the same review quoted earlier, describes Mercutio in the following, particularly disparaging manner, ‘Mercutio (Harold Perrineau) is now a black transvestite drag queen in spangles out of some all night disco’ (Walker). The focusing on, and condemnation of, this particular scene not only voiced a frustration at the trashing of Zeffirelli’s treasured memory, it also highlighted a collective, and at times deliberate, misunderstanding of the character of Mercutio in Luhrmann’s film. Mercutio is neither a drag queen nor a transvestite. What is omitted from these judgemental condemnations, and what makes a decisive difference is that Mercutio plays the part of a drag queen for a fancy dress party. Mercutio is singled out and widely described by critics as a drag queen whereas no other character is described as belonging to their

chosen costume. Lady Capulet is not identified as Cleopatra, nor Capulet as Caesar, nor Tybalt as the devil. The decision to strongly equate Mercutio with the costumed identity he adopts for the fancy dress party perhaps betrays an aspect of Freudian sexual hysteria within the mind of the critics who wrote of him as such. This we will probably never know; whatever the reason, though, this equating Mercutio with the costume he wears and the subsequent condemnation that followed meant that an important aspect of the film was missed at this point. Mercutio, by entering fully into the mood of the party as a carnival experience, embraces totally what Chedgzoy describes as ‘the Bakhtinian notion of the grotesque body’ (Chedgzoy 64). Chedgzoy states that carnival itself is a ‘permissible rupture of hegemony, a contained popular blow-off as disturbing and relatively ineffectual as a revolutionary work of art’ (Chedgzoy 64). The fancy dress party is a carnival *within* a carnival. Luhrmann’s film is of itself, a ‘free spirited rebellion by the marginalised against the centres of power’ (Chedgzoy 64). It is Luhrmann’s own vision that is marginalised and he is directing it against the centre of accepted power that is ‘Club Shakespeare’. All of this was missed by critics who, instead, singled out Mercutio’s fancy dress character as a sexual grotesque that undermined all that, to many, was sacred in Shakespeare. This is despite the fact that the party is full of surreal sexual grotesques. Gloria Capulet’s lascivious Cleopatra is described by Anthony Gunerante as being ‘in all her leering Ptolemaic decadence’ (Gunerante 246). We also witness a groin exposing and tongue flicking Capulet as an orgiastic Roman Emperor, the very motif of sexual overindulgence and notoriety.

What James Delingpole in *The Sunday Telegraph* inadvertently touched upon in his review but failed to explore, was that what we are seeing on screen is not actually taking place at all but is instead the visualisation of Romeo’s hallucinogenic

trip. Mercutio's rendition of *Young Hearts Run Free* (the only enacted song and dance number in a film crammed with music) is no more real to those present than Banquo's ghost is to those guests in the company of Macbeth. Even within the constructed alternate reality of Luhrmann's film, it is made quite clear that what we are seeing is the result of the induced hallucination that follows on from Romeo's announcement that 'these drugs are quick'. This line is in itself a form of guided misrule as it is a transposition of the line at the end of the play (5:3:120), spoken by Romeo after he has taken the apothecary's poison. Here, in reversal to the original consequence, Romeo's life begins after he has taken the drug, instead of ending. The alternative to this, to accept that what Romeo is seeing is actually real, means that Mercutio has suddenly enhanced his costume with a larger wig, eye make-up, a cape, gloves, a thick choker necklace and stockings - none of which he is wearing when he enters or leaves the party. He would also have had to painstakingly rehearse, costume, and choreograph the accompanying dancers beforehand. The carnival episode of the ball is used by Luhrmann to again prompt the audience on what will happen, because it already *has* happened. We see Tybalt dressed as demon, flanked by two associates dressed as skeletons. They are standing directly in front of a large painting of the twelfth Station of the Cross - 'Jesus Dies on the Cross' (**Figure 54**). The stations of the cross are also known as the *Via Dolorosa* - *The Way of Sorrows*. *The Via Dolorosa*, however, is also a real street that still exists in the city of Old Jerusalem. It is the road that Jesus walked after he was sentenced by Pontius Pilate on the way to his death on the cross (goisreal.com "Via Dolorosa" Web). This is yet another premonition of death, not of Romeo's death, but of Tybalt's. Tybalt will die under a statue of Christ with his arms outstretched in much the same manner as Christ on the

cross. This image of Christ symbolizes the role religion plays in this film, as is apparent from the opening montage.

Here, the huge statue of Christ both separates and links the huge Montague and Capulet buildings (**Figure 55**). The statue is a symbolic peacemaker between the families and it is this passive link that Friar/Father Laurence will attempt to use as a conduit later in the film in an attempt to secure peace between the families. The framing of the statue in this scene suggests that the authority of religion is being squeezed out by the encroaching secular power of the two family-owned skyscrapers. The similarity of the buildings and their positioning so close to Christ shows that the families are indeed 'both alike in dignity'. This positioning and posturing echoes the symbolic parading of both families to the cathedral at the beginning of the 1936 production. Where the cathedral was at the centre of the film in 1936, and where church architecture played such a large part in 1954, so does the statue of Christ in 1996. All traffic, and the flight path of the police helicopters, are shown leading out from the central point of the Christ statue. The introduction of helicopters and the statue is reminiscent of the opening of Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*, where a large statue of an open-armed Christ is carried by a Bell Sioux helicopter over the city of Rome. In Fellini's film the authority of the Church is being eroded by modern lifestyle where pleasure and self indulgence take priority. Where much of Fellini's film is viewed through the eyes of a journalist, so is much of Luhrmann's film presented through the media. The moneyed aristocracy and their failed pursuit of true happiness is a theme that runs in both films. The Christ statue in Luhrmann's film, a model, is featured throughout *Romeo and Juliet*. The Montague limousines are filmed as if from Christ's viewpoint, and, as noted earlier Tybalt will meet his death at the base of the same statue. During the montage at the beginning of the film, between the fifteen seconds

from the cut away from the wording ‘In Fair Verona’, to the mock newspaper headline that outlines both the Montague and Capulet dynasties, the camera will return to the statue of Christ no less than six times, with the statue of the Virgin Mary atop the church where Romeo and Juliet will marry and later die, shown twice. The use of religious iconography features heavily throughout the film, suggesting different meanings depending on context. At the same instant that we see the statue of Christ standing between the Montague and Capulet skyscrapers, we glimpse the first sighting of a ‘L’amour’ poster at the bottom left of the screen. This is a reminder that although the film and the story of *Romeo and Juliet* itself is being presented in a boldly stylised, self-referencing and ultimately brash fashion, it is ultimately ‘the real thing’.

Imagery of Violence and Death

The police helicopters that we see flying over the city are Bell 212 models, which are commonly used in law enforcement and military operations in many countries (**Figure 56**). The distinctive sound of the helicopter, the constant undulating reverberation of the twin blades, is played over the prologue, which is spoken twice as a means of attuning the audience’s ears to the rhythm of Shakespeare’s language. The twin blades of the Bell helicopter give it an unmistakable rhythmical sound that also lends itself to this purpose. It also, however, plays another role. The sound of these helicopters is instantly recognisable as being synonymous with conflict and war. The Bell 212 is a manufactured descendent of the vast array of Bell helicopters used by the American forces in the Vietnam War. The most recognized of these is the Bell 204 UH-1 Iroquois model, commonly known as the ‘Huey’. This model was the most common helicopter used by the US military during the Vietnam War era (Helis.com. “Bell 204/205 H1 Iroquois Huey” 2013. Web) This model, being widely

deployed in transport, battlefield command, reconnaissance, and medical evacuation, was a common sight in American households on news reports during the war. Its familiarity was compounded when it featured extensively in Francis Ford Coppola's 1979 film *Apocalypse Now*. One of the most famous scenes in the film is the massed helicopter attack by the 1st Air Cavalry Division which strafes and bombs a beachfront village whilst Wagner's *The Ride of the Valkyries* is played through loudspeakers. The visual image of police helicopters flying low over a populated area, with armed officers leaning from an open doorway is immediately reminiscent of one of the most iconic images of warfare through film and media. Luhrmann's cinematic allusion to the Vietnam War also works as a warning that his film will be quite different from the flower-power infused Zeffirelli version of *Romeo and Juliet* in 1968.

The number '001' painted on the side of the helicopter seen in the montage suggests two things. Firstly, that use of a three digit identification system means that there are a significant number of such helicopters in use by the police, which in turn suggests that violent disruption and the need for armed intervention is commonplace. The second point is that this particular helicopter is the one used by the most senior officer, Captain Prince. The attendance of the senior police officer at these civil disturbances alludes to the severity of the problem itself and its direct effect on the populace within his jurisdiction. We see a succession of brief images which move so quickly that they become blurred and impossible to focus upon. What was almost universally derided as slapdash editing more suited for an MTV pop video is no such thing. What we are seeing during this montage is an expertly constructed piece of condensed cinematic storyboarding that explains all that has already happened and is still yet to come. Firstly, the newspaper and magazine coverage of the ongoing feud. Front page headlines on the 'Verona Beach Herald' read 'Montague Vs Capulet'. This

bold headline confirms that although the feud is limited to only two families, it is important enough to be given front page coverage. The photos showing DiCaprio and Danes as a much younger Romeo and Juliet suggests that the feud – never explained – has been ongoing for many years. These photos also confirm Romeo and Juliet as being central characters in the scenario and not simply detached onlookers. The footage of armed police running to the helicopter is taken from a scene at the end of the film, another of Luhrmann's 'alarm bells' of what is about to unfold. There follows what can only be described as an inventory of Shakespeare quotes embedded in the various newspaper, advertising and magazine headlines.

We see the headline from the *Verona Today*. The letter 'o' in the title is replaced by a badge for the Verona Beach City which itself incorporates the Montague and Capulet buildings separated by the statue of Christ. The headline 'Ancient Grudge' is edited so that it appears on screen at the same time we hear it spoken in the prologue. The newspaper is an 'Extra' edition which reinforces the importance and newsworthiness of the fray. Next we see Benvolio holding the same gun he will use later in film, his Sword 9 mm. The story written under the headline 'New Mutiny' although displayed too briefly to be consciously noticed, is a subliminal assist to the cadence of Shakespeare's language. There are more of these subliminal assists as words and phrases, some of which are not entirely coherent, dotted throughout the news stories. The day is given as a Friday and we are given a brief description of what has already occurred, 'Violence erupted yesterday on the streets of fair Verona Beach as the kinsmen of Capulet and Montague. T'was a bloody fray.' Given, from the text that it is 'a fortnight and odd days' (1:3:15) to Lammas Tide, and that Juliet's birthday is the day prior to this, it is a teasing possibility that

Luhrmann has intentionally set this conflict on Friday 13th, a day synonymous with bad luck and ill fortune.

The third newspaper, *The People's Eye* keeps in time with the prologue and has a headline 'Civil blood makes civil hands unclean'. It carries a photograph of Tybalt and Benvolio surrendering to the police in a scene that, again, takes place later in the film even though this has apparently taken place 'yesterday'. This is in keeping with Chedgzoy's writing that we are recreating what has already been lost. The artificiality and contradiction of superimposing the spoken word of this, and other, Shakespeare plays as a visual background tapestry of headlines, posters and neon signs is a postmodern technique that is repeated throughout the film. The effect not only highlights the artificiality of the linear timeline within the film, it also fuses together the high culture of Shakespeare's plays with the popular culture of modern cinema. The fact that three newspapers are used gives credence to Captain Prince's words later in the film when he expresses in exasperation 'Three civil brawls, bred of an airy word/ By thee, old Capulet, and Montague/ Have thrice disturb'd the quiet of our streets' (1:1:87-89). Amid stylised news footage of armed police and riot torn streets, we see four people hurry across a smoke filled, concrete landscape where, in the foreground, we see a torn poster for the aptly named *Prophecy Magazine*. This magazine appears sporadically throughout the film and its cover always refers to a story that has already happened and will happen again. This shot fades into another of magazines on a display rack. One is *TIMELY Magazine*, bearing a picture of Benvolio holding a gun, his 'Sword 9mm' that we see later at the gas station. The words 'Montague Vs Capulet' appears in the same font as in the *Verona Beach Herald* glimpsed earlier. Beside this is the cover of another magazine. It carries the dramatic picture of an unidentified male falling back, as if shot. His face cannot be seen but he

wears the religious iconography favoured by both families. He wears a cross round his neck and has a Sacred Heart tattoo above his own heart. He wears a white shirt and black trousers but he cannot be identified as either Romeo, Tybalt, or Mercutio. The magazine cover has the heading 'Feigned Ecstasies' (sic) which is a reference to the line spoken by Saturninus in act four of *Titus Andronicus*, 'But if I live, his feigned ecstasies/ Shall be no shelter to these outrages' (4:4:21-22),²¹ a reminder perhaps of the inescapable fate that ultimately awaits Romeo, Tybalt and Mercutio, all of whom will die as a result of the feud. Not even Romeo's new found love will save him. The magazine also has the headings 'Venom'd Vengeance', 'Music frightful as a serpent's hiss', and 'They bleed on both sides'. These three lines allude to *Troilus and Cressida*, 'The venom vengeance'd ride upon our swords/ Spur them to ruthless work, rein them from ruth' (5:3:49-50), and, from *Henry VI, Part 2*, 'Their softest touch as smart as lizards' stings/ Their music frightful as the serpent's hiss/ And boding screech-owls make the consort full/ All the foul terrors in dark-seated hell' (HVI 2, 3:2:327-330). And finally, from *Hamlet*, 'They bleed on both sides – how is it my lord?' (5:2:248). The effect of these subliminal messages is that the acts of violence, counter violence, and revenge will result in multiple tragedy. It is inescapable because it has already happened and will happen again. It is noticeable that the publication in question is titled *Prophesy Magazine*.

Catherine Martin, production designer on *Romeo and Juliet*, gave credit on the DVD commentary to Tania Burkett for designing the *TIMELY* magazine featuring Dave Paris that is seen in the film (Tania is listed simply under 'other crew' on the film credits). Whereas the concept of including the Dave Paris cover may well have been hers, the constant references to the unfolding story throughout the film by means

²¹ Quotes from all Shakespeare plays outwith *Romeo and Juliet* are taken from the Norton Shakespeare

of clever, and at times abstract, usage of Shakespeare quotations suggests a pedagogic and intentional purpose beyond merely engaging in a scattergun attack of visual puns. Time after time we see Luhrmann bringing the audience's attention to Shakespeare's words through a plethora of literary garlands that decorate the frame at key moments within the film. This begins in earnest at the gas station which highlights Luhrmann's intention of foretelling the tragedy that is inevitable through the utilisation of Chedgzoy's notions of carnivalesque inversions and the rupture of linear structure. The magazine next to *TIMELY* on the shelf is *Bullet* magazine with an advert for 'Thunder Bullets' accompanied with the by-line 'Shoot forth thunder'. This alludes to the lines, again from *Henry VI Part 2*, spoken by the Earl of Suffolk, 'O that I were a god, to shoot forth thunder/ Upon these paltry, servile, abject drudges!' (4:1:104-105).

This particular advertisement appears again in the film in the form of a billboard seen on the beach as Romeo walks away when he spots his father's limousine. As the montage speeds to a climax, with the prologue making another appearance in the film in the form of a progressive sequence of words flashed up on the screen, we move to the affray which, in Luhrmann's film, takes place in a gas station. As the Montagues drive, shout and preen on the highway, we see a large sign for Montague construction with the slogan 'Retail'd to posterity by Montague construction'. This works on two levels. By linking the Montague/Capulet feud to the construction industry Luhrmann sets the play within the framework of modern day organised crime. Both families may well be alike in dignity but that dignity is nothing more than the thin veneer of legitimacy that glosses over the involvement of the criminal underworld in the construction industry. The Shakespeare quotation is from *Richard III*, 'Methinks the truth should live from age to age/ As 'twere retail'd to all posterity (3:1:76-77). Although spoken by Prince Edward in the play, the line that

follows, spoken by Gloucester, is somewhat prophetic in regards to the unfolding tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*, ‘So wise so young, they say, do never live long’ (3:1:79).

We see numerous recurrent examples of the tragic core of *Romeo and Juliet* being prophesied in quotes from other Shakespearean plays throughout Luhrmann’s film. At roughly eight minutes and eleven seconds into the film we see Capulet sitting at his desk working in his office. His self importance and crass ostentation is highlighted by the Capulet coat of arms being displayed on a folder on his desk. On hearing the news of the shooting at the gas station and the subsequent affray, he turns to adjust the volume on the television where the newsreader/chorus is reading the bulletin. On his desk is another magazine referring to Verona City on the cover. The lead headline is ‘Who Preferreth Peace’. This is a line from *Henry VI, Part 1*, ‘And for dissension, who preferreth peace/ More than I do?--except I be provoked. (3:1: 33-34). This is an apt description of Capulet himself and echoes not only the self justification of his attitude to Montague, but it also prefigures his volatile reaction later in the film when Juliet declines to marry the man he has chosen as her husband. ‘How? Will she none? Is she not proud? Doth she not count her blest?²² Unworthy as she is, that we have wrought/ So worthy a gentleman to be her bride’ (3:5:142-145). His explosion at this point and the very real threat of physical violence, not just to Juliet but also to Lady Capulet and the Nurse, all originates in his incontrovertible self-belief that he has striven to do the right thing. Not only has he striven, he feels that he has done the right thing, but he has been unjustly provoked beyond peace. The fact that Capulet appears to be monitoring calls on a police radio scanner is, like his association with the construction industry, another allusion to matters criminal.

²² Luhrmann omits ‘Doth she not give us thanks’

Luhmann populates the film with such visual signals. A succession of Shakespearean quotes is used at the gas station to forewarn of impending violence, and this is followed by a second wave of visual warnings at the pool hall; this time to foretell that the violence will end in tragedy and the death of Romeo and Juliet.

At the gas station, we see a telling quotation from Shakespeare during the pregnant pause between Benvolio trying to defuse the situation and the calculated intervention of Tybalt as he, instead, urges confrontation and violence. At this point we see a metallic sign swaying in the breeze. Here the audience is moved, for the first time, into a stylised and camp pastiche which is recurring motif within the film. As the soundtrack changes to a stylised spaghetti western theme, we read the words 'Add More Fuel to Your Fire' displayed on the sign. These words are taken from *Henry VI Part 3*, 'I need not add more fuel to your fire/ For well I wot ye blaze to burn them out/ Give signal to the fight, and to it, lords!' (5:4:70-72). Another indication of upcoming violence has already been witnessed prior to this by the taunting behaviour towards the school girl occupants of the minibus. The words used to mock the girls are 'Hubble, bubble toil and trouble', a deliberate misquotation from *Macbeth*, 'Double, double toil and trouble/ Fire burn and cauldron bubble (IV:I:10-11). The words of Shakespeare that are used to decorate this scene indicate approaching violence and tragedy.

The references to other Shakespearean plays act as a reminder that what we are seeing is a reliving of what has already occurred and will happen again. As Abra leaves his car at 04:36, we see a poster on the wall with headlines relating to a Montague and Capulet brawl that has already occurred and will happen again. At 07:11, Tybalt kneels in front of a parked taxi cab as he goes through the stylised ritual of placing his gun in his shoulder holster, removing his jacket then retrieving his gun

and clipping on a telescopic sight which he keeps on his waistband. The taxi is advertised as belonging to 'Argosy Cars'. An argosy is a term for a flotilla of ships and is used in *The Merchant of Venice*. The term is also used in *Henry VI Part 3* and it is here that the reference is more relevant. The line is spoken by King Edward IV as part of Act 2 Scene VI :

Now breathe we, lords: good fortune bids us pause,
 And smooth the frowns of war with peaceful looks.
 Some troops pursue the bloody-minded Queen,
 That led calm Henry, though he were a king,
 As doth a sail, fill'd with a fretting gust,
 Command an argosy to stem the waves.
 But think you, lords, that Clifford fled with them? (2:6:31-37)

These words are spoken in the presence of the Marquis of Montague, another link to the feud in *Romeo and Juliet*, and solicit the following response from his brother, the Earl of Warwick, 'No, 'tis impossible he should escape / For, though before his face I speak the words / Your brother Richard mark'd him for the grave / And wheresoe'er he is, he's surely dead' (2:6:38-41). It is a reminder that neither Tybalt nor anyone else in the play can escape their predestined and already experienced death. As the flames catch hold of the petrol and the gas station is engulfed in flames, we see yet another newspaper headline, 'A Rash Fierce Blaze of Riot'. This is taken from *Richard II* and is spoken by John of Gaunt, 'His rash fierce blaze of riot cannot last / For violent fires soon burn out themselves/ Small showers last long, but sudden storms are short' (2:1:33-35). The play on words is further expanded upon by a cut back to the sign

‘Add More Fuel to Your Fire’ which also reminds us of the cyclical nature of these events.

There is also a succession of Shakespearian related prophecies of violence and death in and around the pool hall, the aptly named and converted Globe Theatre that we see early on in the film. Just before entering the pool hall, Romeo and Benvolio pass a poster advertising the ‘Rosentcrantzky’ beach bar, which will feature later in the film. The poster has the slogan ‘let a cup of sack be my poison’. The line is from *Henry IV Part 1* and is spoken by Falstaff, ‘An I have not ballads made on you all and sung to filthy tunes, let a cup of sack be my poison’ (2:2:I:41-42). The line foretells Romeo’s death through drinking poison. Whilst in the pool hall we see another prophesy of death. At 13:56, when Benvolio is asking Romeo, ‘Tell me sadness who is it that you love’ (1:1:197) he is standing in front of a poster for a hand gun. The gun is the Sword 9mm which features throughout the film and is the very weapon that Juliet will use to kill herself. The poster is framed so that the barrel of the gun, in a chilling foreshadowing of Juliet’s death, appears to be placed against Benvolio’s left temple. The tag line for the poster is ‘I am the Pistol and thy friend’ (**Figure 57**). The line is taken from Act V, scene III of *Henry IV Part 2* and is spoken by the character Pistol to Falstaff. Just after this is a shot of a poster for ‘Sack Good Double Beer’. Sack was a form of sweet wine fortified with brandy, a fore runner of what today is sherry. Sack is mentioned in a number of Shakespeare plays but the most telling reference appears in *Henry IV Part 2*, spoken by Falstaff, ‘Welcome, Ancient Pistol. Here, Pistol, I charge you / a cup of sack; do you discharge upon mine hostess (2:4:95-96). To which the reply from the aptly named Pistol is, ‘I will discharge upon her, Sir John, with two bullets’ (2:4:97). Although the context within *Henry IV Part 2* is one of bawdy, when associated with Luhrmann’s *Romeo and Juliet*, it takes on a

more menacing and prophetic perspective. In a short few seconds the audience has witnessed references as to how both Romeo and Juliet will die, and in each instance the visual indication has been accompanied by a prophetic line from another Shakespeare play.

The small poster for Sack Double Beer appears under a small warning sign forbidding handguns. At this very point in the film, as they are discussing Romeo's fixation with Rosaline and her defence of her chastity, Romeo speaks the line, 'A right good marksman; and she's fair I love' (1:1:204). Again we see a bawdy line take on a more menacing tone through a change in context. As they prepare to leave, we see three identical posters in the stairway for what appears to be a forthcoming concert. The name of the band is Venom'd Vengeance, which has already been seen on the cover of a magazine. As Romeo and Benvolio leave the pool hall, they obtain their guns from the pool hall manager. This character replaces the apothecary in the film and so he is the person to whom Romeo will return later in order to buy the poison with which he will kill himself. Although the pool hall manager looks disdainfully at Romeo and Benvolio as he hands over the weapons, he himself will be sporting a shotgun when next he and Romeo meet. This small indication of hypocrisy will repeat itself when he removes the sought-after poison from the base of a holy statue. As Romeo and Benvolio leave the pool hall, after overhearing of the upcoming Capulet feast on the television, they move to their car which is parked in front of a long fence. The fence is covered in gangland style graffiti, much of which has been painted on top of older slogans. One line of graffiti, spread over two levels in very large gothic letters is obviously older in comparison and has been overwritten in some places by fresher graffiti. The line is still decipherable, however, and forms part of the line from *Timon of Athens* 'Would thou wert clean enough to spit upon' (4:3:351).

The manufacture and use of the quote at this point is interesting. Unlike other visual references in the film, this is not a poster or a magazine cover, or something that could be created fairly easily through the clever use of Photoshop. Here we see a Shakespeare quote that demanded some physical labour to create. The fence would have to have been meticulously painted, then aged, then painted over and aged again. Its stature and visual prominence signifies that this is a premeditated and significant visual reference. As it is, the line will take on added significance later in the film after the death of Mercutio.

Imagery: Religion, Carnival, Water

The littering of religious iconography around the pool hall office is another indication of how this permeates the film. Like the proliferation of Shakespeare quotes used as a backdrop to certain scenes in the film, the profusion of various religious paintings, statues and iconic imagery also serves a purpose that goes beyond the thin veneer of simple decoration. The image of the Christ statue emerges at the very beginning of the film but the use of religious imagery continues throughout and is evident early on in the film at the gas station scene. Here, in a foretaste of Romeo seeking the attention of an angelic Juliet from under the watchful gaze of a rotund Nurse, we see Montague and Capulet family members preening to attract the attention of convent schoolgirls guarded over by a rather stern and rotund, nun. We can see from the wording on the minibus that the girls are students at 'St Martin's Ladies College'. 'St Martin', in a Latin/Hispanic context will almost certainly refer to St Martin De Porres (1579 – 1639) who was a member of the Dominican Order and who was canonized in 1962 by Pope John XXIII. He is regarded as the patron Saint of social justice and those seeking interracial harmony (Saints.sqpn.com. "St Martin de Porres" Web). He was

also an associate of St Rose of Lima, which becomes relevant later in the film. Although religious iconography permeates the 1996 film on both a direct and indirect manner, it is nuanced differently from its predecessors. Whereas in 1936 and 1954 there was a distinct correlation between the portrayal of Juliet and the Virgin Mary, here Juliet is likened more to an angel. The association differs not only in the object of Juliet's correlation but also in its significance. Here, the prominence of religious artefacts generally does not allude to devotion to a spiritual life or chaste existence. Often it is merely stylised kitsch masquerading as an observance of religious devotion. There is also a distinctly childish quality to Juliet's religious associations. We see Juliet wearing the wings of an angel for a fancy dress ball. We see pictures of cherubic angels in Juliet's room and angel statues that are more akin to a child's playthings. Many of the religious images on show, particularly in the Capulet household, are more akin to expressing the social, cultural and historic traditions of the family. The stylised accent of both Capulet and The Nurse, and the exaggerated mannerisms of Tybalt, coupled with gaudy displays of religious iconography, present the Capulets almost as a cinematic caricature of Latino/Hispanic origin. Although Shakespeare makes it clear that there is no noticeable difference between the Montagues and the Capulet families, Luhrmann separates them by race and also into 'old' and 'new' money. The Montagues appear as White Anglo Saxon, as opposed to the Latin American Capulets. Both families are rich but the Capulets are noticeably vulgar and crass, veritable caricatures of modern day gangsterism. The Capulet men are macho and heavily accented, the mother has the laconic drawl of a southern belle, whereas the nurse has a rich, thick, unspecified accent. The mimicry instilled in these roles is effective in that it shows Luhrmann following Zeffirelli in introducing an aspect of ethnicity into the film. He too uses a difference in clothing as a visual

indicator to separate the young men of the two families, with the Montagues wearing a uniform of Hawaiian shirts and the Capulets wearing an assortment of jackets and waistcoats that are garishly decorated with religious images. Such religious imagery is used to reference themes, plot and subject matter within the film which we see on a number of occasions.

The Nurse passes before a portrait of a nun as she enters Juliet's bedroom. The portrait shows a nun on whose head is about to be placed a crown of thorns. The portrait is identifiable as St Rose of Lima (**Figure 58**). St. Rose of Lima is the Catholic patron saint of South America and was the first American to be canonized. Part of her reputed history concerns her exceptional beauty. The story is that when her beauty was commented upon at an early age, she took exception to this and placed a wreath upon her head that cut deeply into her scalp, which is why she is often portrayed in iconic paintings as wearing a crown of thorns. Apparently, she was an obedient daughter in all ways but rebelled against her parents when they tried to force an unwanted, arranged marriage upon her at an early age (Catholic.org. "St Rose of Lima" Web). This painting can be seen as a foretelling of Juliet's arranged marriage to Paris and is seen later in the film when Capulet confronts Juliet over her refusal to acquiesce to his demands to do so. Later in the film, the Nurse will once again engage in a scene in front of a religious painting that signifies forthcoming events in the play. At 51:39 as Juliet descends the stairs to meet the Nurse, a picture of Leonardo's *The Last Supper* is in the immediate background, foretelling Juliet's betrayal by the nurse. Shortly afterwards, at 53:40, the Nurse expresses her joy at Juliet's forthcoming wedding by embracing her directly in front of the same painting. These instances, like the array of Shakespeare quotes we see throughout the film, foretell of what will happen because it already *has* happened. The visual signposts foretelling of what will

happen does not, however, place these actions within a spiritual framework. These are not examples of 'prophecy' in a religious context. Religious iconography, although prevalent throughout the film, is mostly a visual aid to highlight other aspects within the film and carries little spiritual ideology. The statues and images of angels already seen in Juliet's bedroom are no more objects of devotion than the dolls we see on the shelf next to the bed. In this context, such icons are little more the playthings of a child. They are not the objects of devotion venerated by adults in prayer, such as with Susan Shentall in 1954. In equally kitsch fashion, we see portraits of Christ on waistcoats, tattoos and on walls. We see crucifixes in cars, and icons in helicopters and ambulances. We also see images of the Virgin Mary on the handle grip of a gun. Although these forms of religious iconography appear as the products of corporate commercialism, they remind the audience of the constant and immediate proximity of death. There is also a curious distinction between how religious artefacts are portrayed in relation male and female characters in the film. Whereas Juliet is associated with angels, St Rose of Lima, and the Virgin Mary, males in the film are almost exclusively associated with the image of Christ which, in turn, is associated with ascendancy and power. We see the image of Christ on bullet proof vests. Police helicopters radiate out in a direction from the Christ statue that dominates the city. We see Tybalt die at the foot of this same statue where his extended arms mimic the passion of Christ but supplant it with the passion of his own violent death. There are icons of The Sacred Heart in the armed police helicopter and in Montague's limousine where he keeps his 'Longsword' gun. Such displays, where religious iconography is used as decoration devoid of devotion, cheapens the very concept of faith in general and Catholicism in particular. The families may immerse themselves in religious imagery but seem devoid of spiritual life. Here, religious iconography is often

debased in its presentation and represents the profane rather than the sacred. Replacing the sacred with the profane and debasing the spirituality of religious life is in keeping with the licensed misrule that permeates this film. It is, in effect, a resistance to what is generally accepted as right and proper. Luhrmann's film challenges the accepted notion of Zeffirelli's film being definitive, and that *Romeo and Juliet* is a romance as opposed to a tragedy. The foreboding presence of death is also suggested by the soundtrack. Where Zeffirelli's soundtrack for the 1968 film, consisted of a lush, orchestrated score, repeating the thematic love song, *What Is A Youth*, to emphasise the young love of the characters; Luhrmann presents us with a soundtrack which reminds us of the fact that that death is their ultimate fate. Song titles such as *Angel*; *Lovefool*; *When Doves Cry*; *You And Me Song*, by the aptly named *The Wannadies*, and the final haunting track, *Exit Music (For A Film)*, infuse the movie with a sense of melancholic foreboding and funereal premonition.

This returns us to Chedgzoy and the reference to Mikhail Bakhtin's thoughts on the carnival grotesque. Julie Sanders also referred to Bakhtinian carnivalesque when discussing the film *Black Orpheus* (1959). *Black Orpheus* was based on the play *Orfeu da Conceicao* by Vinicius de Moraes, which is itself an adaptation of the Greek tale of Orpheus and Eurydice. Here, like *Romeo + Juliet*, the film gives a very old story a modern setting. Another connection is that both films have strong carnival elements within. In fact, the story of *Black Orpheus* takes place during the famous Rio carnival. Sanders refers to Bakhtin's theories in relation to the film and how carnival can both subvert and celebrate through the use of chaos and humour and 'the temporary release of carnival' (Sanders 72). Like the audience of *Black Orpheus*, the audience of *Romeo + Juliet* become participants of the carnival as they too become 'swept up in the passion and excitement of the moment' (Sanders 72). I have

described the banquet/fancy dress/carnival scene in *Romeo + Juliet* as a carnival *within* a carnival, but what of the outer, all encompassing carnival itself, by which I mean the film? Luhrmann's production challenged the 'Club Shakespeare' that accepted Zeffirelli's film as, if not definitive then at least representative of Shakespeare's work in general, and *Romeo and Juliet* in particular. In this Luhrmann becomes political, challenging the appropriation of Shakespeare's cultural authority by those who lavish unconditional praise upon his work whilst simultaneously conditioning it to meet their own personal ideology. Luhrmann's film is political insofar as it is a response in opposition to those whom he believes undertake and support this self serving practice. This in itself was enough to bring forth the wrath of those who belonged to that particular fellowship, but it blinded them to the other aspects of Luhrmann's film, most notably the progressive adherence to the core values of the Shakespeare's text. This can be seen throughout the film where we see sections of the production strutting brazenly in the high camp, carnivalesque world of the despised MTV music video. This was quickly identified and condemned by critics, but what was missed in the generic articulation of opprobrium was that this carnival, this celebration of licensed misrule, is abandoned at key moments of the film and a steadfast adherence to Shakespeare's text takes its place. This is an important point for without such a change in direction, the film could easily have become what it was often accused of being, namely nothing more than a, frenzied, stylised, camp, and above all, deficient interpretation of Shakespeare's play. We can spot this adherence to Shakespeare's play at key points in the film, even when the sense of carnival misrule is at its most extreme.

The gas station clash quickly moves from a spaghetti-western, comic-book shoot-out, to a violent, uncontrollable riot from the moment the petrol is ignited by

Tybalt's dropped cigarillo which results in the petrol pump exploding in a ball of fire. The warnings of the Shakespeare quotations have gone unheeded and the posturing has escalated into something far more deadly and serious. We find an equivalent at the banquet scene, that very carnival within the carnival, where misrule is abandoned and a strict adherence to Shakespeare's play returns. At the banquet the moment is made apparent when, in a visual confirmation that the carnival is over, Romeo removes his mask. Crucially, he neither sees Juliet from behind a mask, nor wears one to meet with her. This is in marked difference to each of three previous films. In 1936 Romeo is wearing the mask when he meets Rosaline and then Juliet. On each of these occasions he removes his mask in order to make his identity known. In 1954, although Romeo is not wearing a mask when he sees Juliet for the first time, he puts on the very mask thrown away in temper by Capulet and handed to him by Rosaline before he meets her. In 1968, Romeo sees Juliet and then lowers the mask on to his face to hide his astonishment at her beauty and his arousal. The removal of the mask by Romeo in the 1996 film signifies that he will encounter Juliet without the false reality of licensed misrule. From that point we see both Romeo and Juliet as they 'really are'. Romeo has removed his mask and, as the ablutions at the sink suggest, has removed the drug from his body. He is now back to his real self and is no longer under the influence of the pill given to him by Mercutio.

Whereas Romeo is back in the real world, we are faced with the suggestion that Juliet, whilst being part of the world, is slightly removed from it. The first glimpse of Juliet occurs during the frenetic preparations for the fancy dress ball. Whilst others run and panic and rush to prepare, we see Juliet in the detached sanctuary of her bath. This is far removed from the structured presentation of Norma Shearer in 1936, or the pampered attendance of Susan Shentall in 1954, or the striking

portrait of the perfectly made-up and framed face of Olivia Hussey in 1968. Instead, we see Juliet's face immersed in a bath of water, looking down towards the camera and apparently blissfully unaware and unconcerned with what is taking place. Juliet's introduction to the audience here, however, is every bit as structured as it is in the previous films. Firstly, there is the immediate change in soundtrack, and without thinking or noticing any inference, the audience are nonetheless moved from one knowing in-joke to another as the notes of Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* Overture are replaced by the song *Angel* by Gavin Friday. This has often been commented on as a reference to both the costume that Juliet will wear to the ball as well as the lines spoken by Romeo in the balcony scene, 'O, speak again, bright angel! for thou art / As glorious to this night, being o'er my head / As is a winged messenger of heaven' (2:2:26-28). This connection is supported by the costume worn by Romeo, that of a knight in shining armour. Secondly, in addition to this is Juliet's address to the Nurse regarding Romeo's banishment, 'O, find him! give this ring to my true knight/ And bid him come to take his last farewell' (3:3:142-3). There is, however, a third inferred reference that identified Juliet with the target audience of the film. The character played by Danes in *My So Called Life* was named Angela 'Angel' Chase. One of the photos used to promote the T.V. series, and the one that appears on the DVD cover, was taken from the first episode where Danes dyes her hair (**Figure 59**). The relevance of the change to Angel's hair is explained by the character herself in the narration during the opening of the pilot episode, "So when Rayanne Graff told me my hair was holding me back, I had to listen 'Cause she wasn't just talking about my hair. She was talking about my life" (*My So Called Life*, DVD. Pilot Episode 02:38). Just as the life of the character in the T.V. series references a major point of change in her life from a moment the audience sees her with her face in a sink of water (**Figure**

60), so too is the change in Juliet's life referenced from the moment we see her face submerged in a bath. Juliet emerging from a bath also echoes the 1954 film where we see Susan Shentall in a similar first viewing. The difference here is that Juliet in 1996 is not attended to by a variety of servants who simultaneously wait upon her and manage her routine.

Water and water imagery is commonplace throughout the film and has been the focus of much well intentioned but misdirected academic deliberation. Kenneth Rothwell refers to the baptismal symbolism of the balcony scene 'that immerses Romeo and Juliet in the Capulet swimming pool (presumably to emerge reborn from the sacred waters)' (Rothwell 231). Courtney Lehmann writes about 'the abundant baptismal and, simultaneously, womb-like water imagery, unanimously considered by critics to be the most innovative aspect of Luhrmann's film' (Lehmann 178). Initially, the evidence seems irrefutable; when we are first introduced to Juliet she is in a bath, when we are first introduced to Romeo he is by the sea. Romeo submerges his face in a basin of water where he removes his mask, and Juliet spies on Romeo through a fish tank. As has been noted, however, it is the removal of the mask, signifying the abandonment of the carnival that is important in this scene, *not* the casting of the mask into water. The symbolism of water as a purifying and regenerating agent in ancient Greek and Christian cultures fits all too conveniently into Luhrmann's film. We see the lovers fall into a swimming pool which can be linked to the birth of Aphrodite, the Greek Goddess of love, fertility, and sexuality, who was born of the sea. That this occurs in the film at the very moment where, in Shakespeare's text, Romeo should speak the words 'Call me but love, and I'll be new baptised' (2:2:50) can also be taken an indication of rebirth. In the film we watch Mercutio as he dies by the sea, and witness Tybalt as he falls into a pool of water at the base of the Christ

statue when he is shot and killed by Romeo, who then has his sins symbolically washed away by the baptismal waters of the pouring rain. An interpretation and attaching of ancient Greek and Christian symbolism to the use of water in Luhrmann's film is understandable. It is, however, a misunderstanding of what the use of water actually *does* symbolize. In an interview with Paul Adamek, in November 1996, Adamek raised the question of water scenes within the film and received a lengthy and detailed reply as Luhrmann explained the reasoning behind the extensive use of water imagery in the film:

Adamek: There are a lot scenes of water in this film, what are the ideas behind that?

Luhrmann: 'In truth, with Romeo and Juliet I've dealt with their world as if their parents are like a Busby Berkley musical on acid and it's coming at them all the time and it won't shut up. When you get to Paul Sorvino in a dress you just think please - no more. Next thing, Romeo is under water - click - silence. It's not a big symbolic thing, but Romeo and Juliet escape into water. They use water for silence and peace and their 'There's a place for us' moments. That final image when they kiss under water - it's just silence. It comes from a personal experience of mine. My father used to talk a lot and we'd be in the pool and I'd just go underwater to hide from him. It was always so peaceful. That's where that comes from. It's a theatrical device. Everything is about telling the story. The alchemy or the power or the magic is something the audience has and there is a gap or a distance between the experience that audience has, which can be profound, and the act of making it, which is ultimately mechanical. It's motivated by a heartfelt spirit, and obviously you

tap things within your own mind, but ultimately it's mechanical
(Peggy8_8.tripod.com. "Interview with Baz Luhrmann" Web).

So despite the fact that the imagery of water was intentional, it was not intended to represent death or rebirth. It may have been perceived that way because the film has shown itself eager to deploy symbolic language and visual imagery elsewhere. The imagery of water *is* symbolic, however, insofar as it represents escapism, privacy, tranquillity and intimacy between the two lovers. In fact, the balcony scene in the film is the prime example of this.

Balcony and Banquet

The use of water as a physical barrier, replacing the balcony between the lovers, works extremely well. It also isolates them and cocoons them in a world that is removed from the partisan and brutal conflict of the two families. Luhrmann utilises the qualities of a water filled environment to act as a conduit between Romeo and Juliet, instigating an intimacy that in turn awakens the profound love between them. This is achieved initially without Shakespeare's spoken word. When Romeo takes off his mask and throws it into the water, he leaves behind the world of misrule embodied by the carnival and enters the world of structured reality where he will confront the tragedy he has already foreseen. Romeo throws away his mask at 24:40 and is distracted by the fish tank, but it is almost a full minute before he sees Juliet (25:35). The pace of the film has been slowed down considerably at this point by the introduction of the song, *Kissing You*, sung by Des'ree to an enraptured and noticeably immobile and unnaturally attentive crowd. This clumsily stage-managed scene (there are numerous continuity errors with the number of musicians on stage

changing from four at 25:12, to nine at 26:44 and ten at 27:43) utilises the slow rhythm of the song to bring the film back to a gentle pace after Mercutio's frenetic drag act. It also acts to direct focus away from the conflict of the story and on to the popular romanticized aspects that has always been the staple ingredient of the marketing of each of the *Romeo and Juliet* films. Here, Romeo spies Juliet through the fish tank as she, in turn, is spying upon him. The restriction of the water barrier obliges the couple to initiate a bond through that most intimate of means, the utilisation of close and concentrated eye contact. The intensity of this moment and the frisson generated solely through the exchange of eye contact is highlighted by the director focusing on the love song being sung at this point. As the camera centres on the singer, the lovers are placed in a position where they are not allowed to interrupt or speak over the soundtrack. This means that when the camera cuts back to them, the audience is compelled to watch them engage in a series of silent, flirtatious exchanges that brings them closer together.

Even though the pace of the film is slowed dramatically at this point, the impetus that brings Romeo and Juliet closer together is more apparent here than in any of the previous films in this thesis. The time that elapses between Romeo seeing Juliet for the first time, and then actually speaking to her is significantly shorter here than in any of the previous adaptations. In comparison, in 1936 there was a gap of 5:56 between Romeo seeing Juliet at the banquet before speaking to her. In 1954 this gap was almost identical at 5:50. In 1968, the film that is generally accepted as showing the lovers at their most headstrong, passionate and impatient, the gap goes up to 8:52. Here, in 1996 the gap is reduced to a mere 3:45. This shortened period is achieved despite the slow pace of the film because of the intimacy, isolation and

escapism that is experienced by the couple through the 'there's a place for us' moment that is made possible through Luhrmann's utilisation of the medium of water.

Luhrmann directs these key scenes in a manner that allows the couple to be intimate without being sexual. The water acts as a barrier and prohibits the couple's intimacy progressing to a physical level. Intimacy without sexuality is achieved through the simplest and most obvious of devices, the kiss. In conjunction with the unbroken eye contact that Romeo and Juliet maintain after they have learned that they are part of the two feuding families (the 'piece of string' as Luhrmann describes it on the commentary), the couple kiss on a number of occasions. This repeated kissing allows the couple to express both intimacy and love. It is a simple but effective ploy. Romeo kisses Juliet first at 29:38 at the Capulet fancy dress party, then again in the elevator, then many times after that. In all there are nine separate occasions (not nine separate kisses) of kissing from the moment Romeo sees Juliet for the first time, to the end of the balcony scene. Most of these occurrences take place in the swimming pool. The combination of constant eye contact coupled with repeated kissing in the provocative setting of a swimming pool, where Juliet's night attire clings to the contours of her body, creates an immediate sense of shared intimacy. The accidental plunging into the swimming pool results in a natural interplay between the couple as they struggle to overcome their mutual surprise and displacement. This, in turn, allows a more instinctive, natural, and unaffected speaking of Shakespeare's prose as it does away with the traditional staging of theatrical presentations that often results in a Victorian caricature of Shakespeare's most famous, and over familiar, scene.

A comparison between the styles of the balcony scene of 1936 and its counterpart in 1996 illustrates this point perfectly. The transposition of the balcony scene to a swimming pool, which forces the abandonment of social protocol, allows

Juliet to be more than the unattainable object of Renaissance love poetry. Although Danes has been seen dressed as an angel, we know that this is more of a kitsch fashion costume than a religious reference. Juliet here is not the beatific virgin who is brought forth for exposition as in 1936, and neither is she the prisoner locked behind an iron grille in 1954, nor the pouting and tightly corseted sexual prize of 1968. Instead, here we see Juliet placed, literally, on equal footing with her Romeo. This rejection of the traditional presentation of the scene works well in allowing Juliet to develop as an independent character as opposed to a stylised icon of phallogentric imagery. In this, and compared to the other films in this thesis, Luhrmann's film is unique. Juliet's strength and confidence, so evident in Shakespeare's play but usually absent from film adaptations, begins to show itself in this scene. Danes brings a maturity, strength and understanding to the role which had previously been absent. Her wry smile when she speaks the line '...nor any other part belonging to a man' (2:2:41-42) suggests a welcoming understanding of her own sexual desires which is a key aspect of the aquatic balcony scene.

The bravado of Romeo as he capers in the water and proclaims a disregard of discovery suggests the inauguration of an aquatic mating ritual. Juliet, by hiding Romeo from discovery shows a commitment to his love. As the couple engage in flirtatious conversation, their kissing moves from being initially tender to becoming more and more sensual. Juliet places her arm around Romeo and as the kisses grow she expresses a manner of decorum by turning her back on him. As their embraces continue, however, and become more intimate, it is apparent that Juliet is physically aroused. It is at this point where Romeo backs his prey against the steps at the edge of the pool that Juliet asserts herself as a strong willed and independent woman. Breathless with arousal, she raises her right arm above her head and reaches back for

the handrail whilst simultaneously pushing Romeo away with her other hand. In a moment of increasing erotic tension, Juliet leaves the pool and heads towards the elevator and her bedroom. This frames Romeo's next line "wouldn't thou leave me so unsatisfied" (2:2:125) as a sexual joke, playing on lust rather than on romantic love. Juliet both teases him and asserts her new found authority by challenging him with the response 'What satisfaction canst thou have tonight?' (2:2:126). It is illuminating to compare this scene, and this same spoken line, with how it is played in Zeffirelli's 1968 film. Here, Danes' delivery of the line carries the dual implication of virtue and self-assurance. If there were any thoughts of the kissing leading to a sexual conclusion, in either Romeo's mind or in the collective mind of the audience, they are quashed at this moment. Here, Juliet confirms herself as progressive part Act 1 Scene 3, discussed earlier, as she takes on the mantle of 'maiden' but begins to move towards to Lady Capulet's 'wife' and the Nurse's 'widow'. Although Juliet rebukes Romeo's sexual advances, confirming her independence, she has already acceded to the first part of her predestined tragedy.

By comparison, in 1968, Olivia Hussey speaks the same words but does so with mock surprise and a coy acknowledgement of the underlying sexual innuendo. Hussey's Juliet's eyes are wide open at this point with what Daileader describes as 'the surprise of adolescent sexual discovery – itself a strange combination of the infantile and the precocious' (Daileader 188). She then offers a sharp intake of breath before lowering her look and returning her gaze in a show of feigned innocence that causes Romeo to apologetically explain his intention with, 'Th'exchange of thy love's faithful vow for mine'. (2:2:127) It is a performance from Hussey that combines innocence and a knowing response to sexual innuendo which both encourages and rejects Romeo's advances. The manner of her response presents a suggestion that had

Romeo pursued the more sexual meaning to his words, then she may well have been willing to accommodate his desires. There is no such ambiguity in Danes' performance. When Romeo speaks the same line in 1996, there is a dismissal of any such possibility and consequently we witness an assertion of Juliet's authority. The inflection of voice used by Danes here is significant in what separates her portrayal of Juliet from any previous screen incarnation. Daileader is critical of Danes in this scene. In comparison with Hussey's portrayal of sexual precociousness, she writes 'Luhmann's Juliet does not approach this aura of erotic surrender: Claire Danes is too controlled and, ironically, too mature' (Daileader 188). Daileader, although accurate in her observation, is erroneous in her critical interpretation. The key word here is 'surrender'. Danes' Juliet recognises her own desires and her willingness to satiate Romeo's longings, but to do so at this moment would be to subjugate herself to his control. Luhmann shows here that Juliet recognises that she has a choice and that by asserting her decision to overcome her own desires, she conveys her own self determination. This is Juliet 'taming' her Romeo as suggested by Carolyn Brown. The act of refusing to be subjugated by Romeo's advances paves the way for the audience to accept Juliet's decision to reject any coercion by her family in determining her future. This, in turn, moves the film away from projecting Juliet as simply another idealisation of male fantasy and desire. How else does Luhmann do this? How does he avoid falling into the same trap as his cinematic predecessors and portraying Juliet as the latest in a list of male fantasies that have seen Juliet on the balcony move from sacred virgin, to enticing lover in a tightly bound corset, via a helpless prisoner awaiting rescue? The answer begins not only with Juliet at all, but with Rosaline.

Rosaline is referred to but is absent from Shakespeare's play. Despite this, we find that the character is physically present in each of the three previously filmed

versions. Rosaline rejects Romeo's advances at the banquet in the 1936 version as she flirts and dances with other revellers. She is given a speaking part in the 1954 version and warns Romeo to leave the banquet, and in 1968 we see how Romeo is smitten by the smiling, beautiful Rosaline character as she dances in the circle only moments before being symbolically replaced by Juliet. On each of these occasions the audience is presented with an idealized, romantic beauty of the time only for her to be replaced by a progressively more beautiful and more captivating woman. Tellingly, Rosaline is physically absent from the 1996 version, her name only appearing when chalked up on a blackboard in the pool hall scene (**Figure 61**). This is in keeping with Luhrmann's practice of bringing emphasis to Shakespeare's text. He does not follow the practice of including Rosaline in his film in order for her to be supplanted by a flawless Juliet, for to do so would suggest that the ideal of female perfection, in the eyes of Romeo and the audience, does indeed exist. To do this would be to accept the cinematic subjugation of women, for even if a woman is judged as being perfect she must first of all be judged, and this very act of judgement, the evaluation of a woman's qualities as decreed by her physical beauty, confirms and reinforces the sexual imbalance in a phallogocentric society commonly promoted in film. Luhrmann, by having Rosaline's character presented as a written word chalked up on a board, distances himself from this practice and allows Juliet more independence than his cinematic predecessors.

As noted earlier, it is made clear from the very beginning of the film that Juliet appears to be in the world of her parents, but not altogether of it. When quizzed by her mother and the Nurse about her views on marriage, she rolls her eyes in the manner of one who is embarrassed about being asked such questions. She is a respectful child but compliance is given by way of humouring, rather than obeying,

her mother. This embryonic sign of individuality is seen to grow through various aspects and visual indicators throughout the film. Although a member of the heavily accented Capulets, Juliet herself speaks with neither the Latin American accent of her father, nor the southern drawl of her mother, nor the distorted inflections of the nurse. Neither do we identify Juliet with the prostitutes in the streets or the bikini clad bimbos on the beach vying for the attention of the alpha males. We see a sign of Juliet's independence where she spies upon Romeo as he looks at the fish in the fish tank. This individualism is underlined because it is the male who is the object of the female gaze. Here, in a reversal of the norm, we are witness to an act of scopophilic voyeurism undertaken by a female upon a male. When discovered, Juliet, in an act which is evocative of Leonard Whiting in 1968, initially backs away but then meets the inquisitive gaze and returns it. (**Figure 62**). The scene is indeed innovative in how it allows Juliet to be her own character and not the habitual fantasy of the longing male gaze. We see this reinforced immediately after this scene, when Juliet returns to the banquet and mingles with the guests.

Of the four film versions studied in this thesis, Luhrmann's 1996 production is the only version where the banquet scene is not utilised to present Juliet as the central attraction to the collective male gaze of those present. Here there is no extended solo dance sequence to halt the narrative, as occurred in 1936. Neither is there a ceremonial presenting of Juliet to a formal dance, as occurred in 1954. Neither is there a presentation of Juliet to adoring spectators who, like the audience, are encouraged to celebrate her courtly entrance, as in 1968. In fact, the 1996 film is the only version where not only does Juliet fail to dance with Romeo, but where she has to be cajoled into entering the dance floor in the first place, something she does to humour her mother. Here, at the banquet, Danes wears comparatively little jewellery

compared to the other women. Danes, like Hussey in 1968, wears no rings on her fingers but does wear a simple cross around her neck. The image of the simple cross is perhaps the only instance in the film where religious iconography denotes something more than kitsch fashion or vulgar decoration. Juliet will present this cross to Romeo in a sign of love and devotion when she drops to him it from the balcony. He, in turn, will wear it around his neck and, later in the film, place his wedding ring on the same chain. The cross itself is used in the title of the film so that it appears as *Romeo + Juliet* as opposed to *Romeo and Juliet* or even *Romeo & Juliet*. Used in this context, the cross is not merely another addition to the catalogue of religious tat masquerading as a sign of spiritual devotion, rather it symbolises the unconquered and eternal bond of love uniting Romeo and Juliet. It also suggests that the lovers are, indeed, ‘star crossed’. These small details highlight that Romeo and Juliet’s lives exist independent of the wealth and power that feature are central to the lives of their parents.

We see Juliet’s independence at its foremost where she is abandoned by both her mother and the nurse after she has defied her father in the matter of her marriage to Paris. It is at this point in the film that we see the portrait of St Rose of Lima for a second time. When Juliet appeals to her mother for support and is rejected, she instinctively turns to her surrogate mother, the nurse, only to find that she too has abandoned her. There is no act of submission as in 1954, or the wide eyed shock of Olivia Hussey in 1968, instead we witness a response of measured stoicism. Judging her love for Romeo to be more important to her than anything else, more than family, honour or social acceptance in the role of obedient daughter, she realises and accepts that her own happiness can only be achieved by yielding to the destiny that her love for Romeo will bring. There is neither fear nor panic nor hysteria and instead we witness what Mrs Jamieson described as, ‘the moment which reveals her to herself...’

She assumes at once and asserts all her own superiority, and rises to majesty in the strength of her despair'. (Jamieson 95). The Juliet of Luhrmann's film will not allow herself to be victimised or vanquished. She will not be forced into an arranged, bigamous marriage. Although Juliet suffers a temporary lapse in her self confidence in Shakespeare's play when she utters the line, 'Come weep with me, past hope, past cure, past help', (IV:I:45), which are spoken in each of the three earlier films, these are omitted from Luhrmann's film. Here, in 1996, when Juliet visits Father/Friar Laurence, she takes a gun from the folds of her coat and places it to her head threatening to take her own life in what is a premeditated act to wrestle back control of the situation where she feels that all else is lost. The placing of the gun to Juliet's head echoes the scene in the pool room where a poster image of a Sword 9mm gun appeared next to Benvolio's head. Juliet placing the gun to her head is a second foretelling of the tragedy will unfold to her later in the film.

Mercutio, Homosexual Longing

The character development afforded Juliet in this film is, to a degree, repeated in the character of Mercutio. Mercutio was played largely as a comedic distraction in 1936 and was, for the most part, overlooked in Castellani's 1954 film. Zeffirelli's 1968 production saw the character given a more meaningful role, but it is really in Luhrmann's 1996 production that Mercutio is allowed to assert the full influence of the character in the play. Luhrmann utilises the role of Mercutio to channel many of the major themes within his film. Mercutio is used in this film initially as a vehicle for Luhrmann's licensed misrule of the carnival. His rendition of *Young Hearts Run Free* is such an eye catching number that it explodes on the screen, momentarily stopping the audience in its tracks and forcing them to run for cover. I have shown that the

impact of this one scene did much to form the opinion of many of those journalists who found it difficult to move beyond this episode. This was unfortunate because Mercutio is not only the driving force of the Luhrmann's misrule, he is also a key figure on the sexual dynamics of the film and the principal herald of death. Mercutio's death is the catalyst that compels Romeo to kill Tybalt which, in turn, brings the tragic element of the play to the fore and, within that, the tragedy of Juliet is fully expressed

Just as the overt posturing at the gas station preceded the uncontained and violent affray that followed, and the camp rendition of *Young Hearts Run Free* at the banquet preceded the meeting of Romeo and Juliet, so too is the cataclysmic death of Mercutio foretold by a sustained episode of the misrule of the carnival, only this time the chosen medium is homoerotic kitsch. From approximately 55:38, where Mercutio is preening and showboating on the beach, to the second appearance of the quote from *Timon of Athens* after he has been fatally wounded, the audience is subjected to a sustained onslaught of heavily stylised homoerotic imagery. A succession of musclemen, sailors and leather clad bikers are constantly paraded across the screen in the background. The imagery is reminiscent of the work of Finnish artist Touko Laaksonen (also known as Tom of Finland) who was noted for his erotic portraits of leather clad bikers and policemen, as well as muscled sailors in tight clothing. His popular imagery has become synonymous with late twentieth century gay culture (**Figure 63**). Amidst this, the inflection placed on Shakespeare's words and the non verbal actions of the two main protagonists in the beach confrontation infuse the scene with a far stronger flavour of homoerotic sexual chemistry than anything witnessed in Zeffirelli's film. Mercutio adopts a highly camp manner when replying to Tybalt's introductory greeting 'A word with one of you?' (3:1:38) by responding, 'Couple it with something/ Make it a word.... and a blow' (3:1: 39-40). The outrageously camp

manner of Mercutio's reply, his inflection on the word 'blow' and how it is framed with a pause both before and afterwards, makes this an obvious referral to the sexual slang 'blow job'. The inference is clear. Here, in the middle of a beach packed with iconic homosexual caricatures, Mercutio is responding to Tybalt's exaggerated masculine posturing by ridiculing him in front of his friends and family by questioning his sexuality. Mercutio then dismisses Tybalt by parading on a short victory dance as his joke solicits laughter from those around him. The barb of Mercutio's jibe riles Tybalt who bristles with the counter threat, 'You shall find me apt enough to that sir, and you will give me occasion' (3:1:41-42). He emphasises the word 'will' in an attempt to reassert his dominance and masculinity but this just plays to Mercutio's thread of implied homosexuality and as he replies with the line, 'Could you not take some occasion without giving?' (3:1:43) he lifts his shirt tails to present his buttocks to Tybalt. The homosexual inference is clear and this solicits even more laughter. Tybalt, now aware that that his authority and standing is suffering under this public humiliation replies in kind with, 'Mercutio! Thou...uh *consortest* with Romeo' (3:1:44). The inflection on the word 'consortest' makes this an undisguised and derogatory accusation of a sexual relationship between Mercutio and Romeo. Here, the word 'consortest' echoes the use of the word 'converse' spoken by Romeo to Giulietta in DaPorto's version of the tale. As Courtney Lehmann noted, 'When Da Porto's Romeo indicates he wishes to 'converse' with her (slang for sexual consummation), Giulietta becomes indignant, and refuses to grant him his wish until they become properly married' (Lehmann 14). The inflection used by Tybalt reminds the audience of another suggestion of possible sexual longing between Romeo and Mercutio made only five minutes earlier in the film, this time by Mercutio himself. When Romeo is approached by the Nurse who informs him of Juliet's plans for a

secret marriage, Mercutio acts in a manner that suggests he feels threatened. He fires his gun into the air in an act of a petulant child and speaks the line, ‘Will you come to your father’s?’ (2:4:138). The emphasis and questioning intonation used changes the meaning of the sentence from an enquiry to one of earnest pleading. Mercutio is not asking Romeo to go to supper at his father’s, rather he is beseeching that he does not go to Juliet. It is a masterful example of how an actor can bring emphasis to a certain topic or theme by controlling how the lines are spoken.

By bringing such a telling inflexion on the word ‘consores’, Tybalt’s insult strikes a nerve and Mercutio replies with a similar verbal joust, ‘Consort? What, dost thou make us minstrels?/ And thou make minstrels of us, look to hear nothing but discords./ Here’s my fiddlestick, here’s that shall make you dance’ (3:1:45-47). The meaning here is changed from that in the text where Mercutio is angered at being insulted about being a musician, a menial hired hand to serve and entertain his master. Here Mercutio makes it clear that by ‘minstrels’, he means lovers, and by ‘fiddlestick’ he means his penis. The insult has its desired effect and Mercutio, who has been dismissive of Tybalt’s challenge up until now, rises to the bait. Mercutio gestures to his shoulder holster and gun on the word ‘fiddlestick’ and the pair indulge in a bristling dance of bravado. The air of macho posturing when they confront each other is augmented by the sight of more ‘Tom of Finland’ sailors and bikers scurrying for cover in the background. The kitsch imagery continues when Mercutio collides with a waitress who wears a red, one-piece bathing suit. With a band in her black hair and manner in which she is carrying her tray, she is reminiscent of the kitsch classic advertising logo used for ‘Ruby’s Diner’ (**Figure 64**). The increasingly aggressive confrontation continues until Romeo arrives on the scene and then, like the gas station and the banquet, the masquerade is succeeded by a profound moment in the play.

Mercutio intervenes when he sees Romeo refusing to defend himself from Tybalt's violent attack. He intervenes and attacks a startled Tybalt who, in a moment of panic and fear, lashes out at Mercutio and wounds him with a shard of glass. As Mercutio realises the severity of his wound and his own, inevitable demise, he screams to all around him 'A plague o' both your houses' (3:1:108). This is the second time that he speaks the line – he has already spoken it at 01:51:52 - and he will do so again as he lies dying on the beach. The emphasis on this curse in Shakespeare's play is worth attention for its sense of looming tragedy and inescapable death is generally lost on a modern audience.

Naomi Conn Liebler points out that the first stage performances of *Romeo and Juliet* would have come hard on the heels of a devastating outbreak of plague in London in 1593. Liebler makes reference to John Leeds Barrol's *Politics, Plague and Shakespeare's Theatre: The Stuart Years*. Liebler points out that Barrol's book states that the population of London at this time was around 123,000 and of that total at least 15,000 died of the plague, a little over twelve percent of the population (Liebler 312). She states that 'Aside from the very real impact of city-wide mortality on Shakespeare's audience, such decimation leaves a profound after-effect on the collective psychology of the survivors' (Liebler 312). Shakespeare, by having Mercutio curse a plague upon the houses of Capulet and Montague on three separate occasions, is not only venting the character's emotions at his own imminent death, he is also striking fear into his audience by rekindling their own collective dread. He is making it clear that what will follow is an all encompassing tragedy that will touch everyone. Again, it is a significant identifier in Luhrmann's film of oncoming, imminent and unavoidable tragedy. As Mercutio's words echo and everyone realises the gravity of his wound and the consequences that will follow, the wind rises and

topples over a magazine trolley which allows us to see the same line of graffiti from *Timon of Athens* that we have seen before, 'Would thou wert clean enough to spit upon' (4:3:351). Here the words take on the air of a prophecy foretold, for in *Timon of Athens* the words are spoken as part of a duel of insults between Timon and Apemantus. Where Timon and Apemantus trade only insults, however, Mercutio and Tybalt have traded blows which results in the former's death. This act leads to Romeo killing Tybalt in an uncontrollable fury and it is from here that tragedy becomes inevitable.

The precise nature of Mercutio's sexuality and his relationship with Romeo is questioned in Luhrmann's film but is never fully answered. Mercutio is surrounded by grotesque bodies of the carnival of misrule at the banquet, but he himself is undoubtedly a body beautiful. At the beach he is surrounded by icons of homoerotic imagery and flies into a fury when Tybalt mocks him with an insinuation of that he is having, or has had, or wishes to have, a sexual relationship with Romeo. What is interesting about this confrontation is that it is not made clear to the audience if Mercutio's boiling anger is because Tybalt's accusations are false, or if they are true. What if Tybalt's gibe angered Mercutio because there was an element of truth in what he said? Does Mercutio have homosexual longings for Romeo, latent or otherwise, and if so, is Romeo responsive to those longings? Does Romeo's fury at the death of Mercutio stem from this? This is of particular interest because *Romeo and Juliet* is a play that many regard as the greatest heterosexual love story of all time, with Juliet the focus of the play. In each of the film versions prior to Luhrmann's, Juliet has been portrayed as an iconic fantasy of phallogentric ideology, the undoubted focus of the male gaze. As noted earlier, this approach has been challenged by Jonathan Goldberg who ponders on the possibility of Romeo loving Juliet as a substitute for Rosaline,

who herself substitutes for a beautiful boy, the 'beauty's rose', in Shakespeare's Sonnet 1. He also raises the question of 'Romeo and Paris as possible husbands, still fighting over the body of Juliet in the final scene of the play...Romeo and Tybalt as enemies and yet as lovers, joined and divided by Juliet'(Goldberg 220). Here, Luhrmann asks a similar question, but of Romeo and Mercutio. The fact that Mercutio is played by a black actor in a film in which ethnicity is brought to the fore, raises another issue. Mark Thornton Burnett writes,

One experiences discomfort, for instance, in being forced to acknowledge that Mercutio, played by a black actor, bears the brunt of the film's homoerotic subtext. By the same token, both Romeo (Leonardo DiCaprio) and Juliet (Claire Danes) speak in a linguistic register that is divorced from an easily identifiable ethnic attachment; further, their pale skin tones place the two protagonists above their racially freighted surroundings and suggest a correlation between whiteness and unadulterated romanticism. Luhrmann may strive to produce a multicultural Shakespeare, but his methods are, at times, in danger of reinforcing precisely those myths of elitism from which his film wishes to escape (Burnett 2006, 268).

Luhrmann, by bringing up the possibility of a homosexual Mercutio, raises the question of how this equates with Mulvey's theory of the significance of the ubiquitous and all powerful male gaze. Here, Luhrmann is, in effect, asking the question 'what if the male gaze is not heterosexual?' The presumption of universal heterosexuality in the male gaze is discussed by Chedgzoy who writes,

Mulvey's formulation of the sexual dynamics of cinematic pleasure is in no way dependent on the notion that the gaze of the camera enacts the controlling gaze of a heterosexual male auteur, yet this often seems to be presumed in applications of her work (Chedgzoy 212).

So it is with the audience of *Romeo and Juliet* where there has tended to be an assumption that the core audience for the play is heterosexual. Luhrmann not only challenges the socially accepted and traditional understanding of Shakespeare's play, he also challenges the socially accepted and traditional understanding of Shakespeare's *audience* for this play. Luhrmann forces the audience to challenge how they have viewed the play and to confront their own prejudices, be they academic, cultural or sexual, and in doing so view the play anew. In viewing the play anew we are therefore forced to experience a fresh emotional involvement with the tale even though we know what is going to happen. Luhrmann succeeds in convincing the audience that there is more to the play than the adoring love story that we think we know so well. The brutal, disturbing death of Mercutio jolts the audience away from benignly accepting *Romeo and Juliet* as a romance, and instead forces it to see the play as tragedy. Mercutio's death, and the emotional turmoil it generates in Romeo, prepares the audience for the oft heralded death of Juliet, which is managed differently in Luhrmann's film than in any of its predecessors.

Juliet and her Death

Even forgoing the fact that Luhrmann's film has a contemporary setting, there are a number of notable differences between how the tomb scene is presented in 1996 compared to previous filmic incarnations. Firstly, Juliet is not in the tomb and her funeral has not yet taken place. Instead, she is lying in the chapel for the vigil which,

in the Catholic faith traditionally takes place the evening before a funeral. Not only does this explain why Juliet is on a catafalque as opposed to being interred in a tomb, it also suggests to the audience that the story has not yet reached the end and that Juliet's tragic death is still a slight distance away. This way the audience is faced with a measure of dramatic irony whilst clinging to a fragment of hope. We know, through our familiarity of the plot that, although not yet dead, Juliet cannot escape death. We know this also because Luhrmann has pointed us towards this ending from the very start of the film. We know it because in Luhrmann's telling of the tale, we are merely witnessing what has already happened. We have even viewed this very scene through Romeo's eyes as he foresaw it earlier. The lead up to, and presentation of this scene, is not one of romantic grandeur and is instead one of desperation, loss and tension. The tension has been injected by Luhrmann's inclusion of a lengthy, action packed police pursuit of Romeo.

The police chase, involving cars, helicopters and riot police, builds a sense of tension through the use of action and editing that echoes the shoot out at the gas station earlier. In a short period of just under three and half minutes, from 1:33:20, where we hear the ticking of Father Laurence's watch, to the slamming of the church doors at 1:36:45, there are approximately 115 edits amidst a cacophony of sounds including gunshots, helicopter blades, sirens, car crashes and a non-musical score that builds tension and apprehension within the viewer. All of this is preceded by Romeo's cry of anguish into the evening sky which brutally reminds us that tragedy that awaits both audience and participants. As fear befalls Father Laurence, we enter the premonition already seen by Romeo as armed riot police run to board a helicopter. The film is cleverly edited so that the urgency in Father Laurence's voice is intercut with the increasing whine of the helicopter engine as it prepares to take off. The sound

of the helicopter blades is intercut with the ticking of Father Laurence's watch which acts as a countdown as Romeo races to face the inevitable tragedy that the viewer knows awaits. As Hatchuel points out 'Luhmann constructs Romeo's return as an episodic sequence, showing successfully the car starting off in the desert, arriving in town, and being tracked down by helicopters' (Hatchuel 72). As Romeo is pursued by the police, he takes a hostage of the Friar John character. His cry of 'tempt not a desperate man' (5:3:59) is therefore not made to Paris, who is absent, but to the armed police in pursuit. Releasing his hostage, Romeo locks himself inside amid a hail of gunfire. The silence that follows isolates this moment and gives it a greater dramatic effect. Romeo, fearful, opens the door to the main part of the chapel and looks in amazement at the multitude of candles and illuminated crosses which draw his eyes to the altar area on which lies the body of Juliet. The scene that presents itself is one that confounds Romeo. It is a display of vulgar religious imagery, with dozens of neon crosses and an overwhelming collection of floral tributes that reflects the vainglorious and crass displays of wealth we associate with the Capulets. The neon lights and kitsch fashion expounds a lack of spirituality and contrasts starkly with the simplicity and unexpected beauty of the candles that illuminate the cathedral and recall Romeo's lines in the text, 'O no, a lantern, slaughtered youth / For here lies Juliet, and her beauty makes / This vault a feasting presence, full of light' (5:3:84-6). This is the last time Romeo will see Juliet and the scene also recalls his words spoken the very first time he saw her, 'O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright' (1:5:44). On each of these occasions there is reference to Juliet being a source of light.

Romeo's bewilderment can be seen as he moves down towards Juliet, whom he focuses on intently. When he reaches the altar, he casts his eyes upward in the direction of a large statue, now out of shot but earlier clearly visible to him. The statue

in question is of The Virgin Mary holding the child Jesus and being guarded by two angels. Romeo holds this gaze for five seconds, which emphasizes the emotion of the moment. Here, in the church, the very heart of religious life, Romeo appears to reject all vestiges of religious faith that surround him. To him there can be no justification for Juliet's death and neither God, nor Mary, nor the angels have been able to protect her. Romeo appears to see the religious iconography in the church as nothing more than an extension of a foolish indulgence of those who use religion as flag of convenience, an assertion that 'God is on our side' to justify their own indulgences in violence. A series of close ups of both the lovers follow as Romeo speaks his lines and DiCaprio's inflection shows a sincerity missing from previous Romeos. The result is that we feel that we are witnessing something private, an intimate farewell that belongs only to the two lovers. Romeo takes the wedding ring from a chain around his neck, places it on the third finger of Juliet's left hand and kisses it. The simple cross etched into the ring, symbolising their own love, is placed on top, directly visible to the camera. Here, in a change from the earlier films and the text, we witness Juliet stir slowly and awaken before Romeo's moment of death. Juliet's slight movement brings hope to the audience that perhaps the tragedy can be avoided. Just as we have witnessed Juliet on the catafalque as opposed to interred in a tomb, when we grasped at the straw that she is not yet dead, so too do we grasp at the hope that Romeo will notice her moving and the tragedy can at last be averted. Sarah Hatchuel focuses on this moment. 'Editing here generates dramatic irony emphasizing the tragic bad timing as Romeo fails to notice what is happening. Cross-cutting makes the audience almost believe that an alternate, happy ending might be possible' (Hatchuel 41). Juliet raises her hand and gently brushes Romeo's cheek at the very moment the poison passes his lips. Romeo stares, unbelieving and in shock, as the dual realities of

his wife's living existence and his own imminent death registers on his mind. We see an extreme close up of Juliet's eyes as she awakes fully and we witness her look of happiness turn to horror as she realises that Romeo has taken poison and is dying. Romeo in turn suffers the agony of seeing his wife alive whilst he draws his last, laboured breaths. It is from this point that we see a marked departure from previous films on how Juliet is both portrayed and filmed in her final scene.

Juliet's face twists with anguish and tears as she realises that everything she has striven for is lost. Romeo speaks the line 'Thus with a kiss I die', (5:3:120) as Juliet cradles his head in her hands. As he dies, Juliet can do nothing but look on in horror as she realises that there is nothing she can do to prevent her husband's death. Her breathing races in panic and fear and she pulls herself up and looks around at the surrounding ornamentation of death. This small detail, a tangible sense of panic and fear, goes some way in transforming this final scene from the overtly theatrical to the intensely personal. The feeling of loss and abandonment felt earlier by Romeo is intensified as Juliet sees that she has been forsaken by all. Here we sense that Juliet feels that she has been abandoned by everyone, her parents, her nurse and even Father Laurence who, in a departure from the text, is absent. Romeo, by drinking the poison and leaving none for Juliet has also, in effect, abandoned her, cheating her of the opportunity of following him in death.

Juliet lets out a series of short, spluttering cries which echo in the empty cathedral. Her face contorts and twists into the disfigurement of heart breaking grief and there is no attempt to add glamour or beauty or melodrama to the moment. There is nothing here that resembles any of the previous films where Juliet's final moments were presented as the climactic episode of stylised beauty of a traditional women's weepy. The brutality of Juliet's loss is evident to all through the use of unflattering

close ups. She raises her hand to her eyes and we see the wedding ring on her finger, placed there moments before by her now dead husband. The statue of an angel, another token of abandonment, stands as mute witness to the final act of courage from Juliet (**Figure 65**). Despite the preceding police chase to the cathedral amidst sirens, helicopters and gunshots, there is only silence. There are no police hammering on the door and there no sense of urgency. This emphasises that time is not an issue here and that Juliet's unfolding actions are not induced by panic. Here, Juliet steadies her breathing, looks around and picks up Romeo's pistol, which is the Sword 9mm seen earlier in the poster in the pool room. We see Juliet consider her position and then summon the courage to regain control of her destiny. The audience here is not presented with a theatrical, unconvincing, and aesthetically rewarding death scene. There is to be no dramatic plunging of a dagger into a heaving bosom, followed quickly by a sigh and a swooning faint. Here the audience is confronted with the terrible prospect of a real and very violent death. The moment is isolated by the complete lack of musical score and the silence is emphasised by the echo of the hammer of the gun as the trigger mechanism is pulled into a cocked position. The audience can only look on in horror as the stark reality of what is about to happen is made clear. Juliet slowly places the gun to her temple, looks to the heavens in despair and pulls the trigger, bringing her short life to a violent and tragic end.

The shot echoes through the cathedral as Juliet falls and lies next to Romeo. We cut to a crane shot of the lovers lying together, finally at peace, with a wash of red blood on both their faces which fulfils Mercutio's curse of a plague on both their houses. To an excerpt from Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*, the camera rises in a manner that is symbolic of their souls departing the bodies. As the camera continues upwards in unison with the rising soundtrack, we are shown a series of flashbacks of the

lovers' brief life together. We see them staring at each other through the fish tank and laughing together at the party. We see the wedding ring with the symbolic cross and the words, *I love thee*, inscribed. We cut back to the lovers lying dead in the cathedral and then return to a sequence of shots which show them cavorting and laughing in their wedding bed, finally kissing underwater before the frame freezes and suspends the couple in eternity. Sarah Hatchuel comments on the use of flashbacks here. 'With this journey into the past, Luhrmann constructs the idea of eternal love, continuing even beyond death' (Hatchuel 42). The scene itself demands close attention for it reminds us that Juliet's tragedy is not limited by her death, but that her life has run its course. Not only has Juliet progressed from obedient child to strong courageous woman, she has progressed through the three stages of her life indicated in Act 1, Scene 3 when the topic of marriage was first raised by her mother and the Nurse. In a short, intense period Juliet has progressed from maiden, then to wife, and finally to widow. Juliet's tragedy is fully realised in that she ends her life here because her life's journey has reached its natural end. Her love may be eternal but her life is over. The music here is well chosen, Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*, the last lines of which translate as : *to drown, to founder – unconscious – utmost rapture*. The imagery of Juliet falling dead upon Romeo is reminiscent of Isolde falling dead onto the body of Tristan and the final underwater shot of the couple (**Figure 66**) fits perfectly with both the lyrics and Luhrmann's use of water imagery to isolate the lovers from the world which they inhabit. The stories also have much in common, both being iconic tales of eternal, passionate love and death. As Wagner wrote in a letter to Liszt in 1854:

As I have never in life felt the real bliss of love, I must erect a monument to the most beautiful of all my dreams, in which, from beginning to end, that love

shall be thoroughly satiated. I have in my head 'Tristan and Isolde', the simplest but most full-blooded musical conception; with the 'black flag' which floats at the end of it I shall cover myself to die (Hueffer 45).

This would appear to be a perfect match with Luhrmann's film; achieving for the first time, and very much at odds with initial critical reaction from journalists, an interpretation of the play that results in a fitting Juliet. Whereas each of the previous three filmed versions has presented Juliet as, in Mulvey's words, 'an intrusive, static, one-dimensional fetish' (Mulvey 847), this is clearly not the case here. Danes' Juliet is not stylised and fragmented by flattering close ups, neither is she the perfect product of mainstream cinema, nor the glamorised or sexualised fantasy engaged in an erotic and all controlling male gaze. Here, for the first time in mainstream Western cinema, we see a Juliet who is not merely spectacle, but actual.

Conclusion

This thesis began by referring to Peter Brook's assertion that stage productions of Shakespeare are both justified and 'right' at the time of their performance, but can seem 'outrageous' out of it. So it is with each of the four *Romeo and Juliet* films examined within this thesis. It is a relatively undemanding task to compare and contrast what differs between these four films. This, however, does not give us the reasons why. The 'why' is far more interesting in that it shows how these particular films came to be shaped in the manner they were and how they reflected certain aspects of how Juliet, and to a certain extent women in general, were portrayed in the contemporary society in which they were made. What is more, it becomes apparent that these depictions were not merely the result of an unconscious and unrecognised absorption of gender identity and position existent in society at the time in question; rather they were the result of a conscious reinvention of Juliet in a modern cinematic age. Although we can look back on these films as variations of the same historical story, that story has its own variations and has grown from more than one source. The films themselves were part of a progressive and conscious strategy to present a new Juliet that would be popular with a contemporary audience. The juxtaposition of presenting a 'knowing' audience with a Juliet they believed they knew, and an 'unknowing' audience with a Juliet, unfamiliar to them in anything other than the broadest terms, is reflected in these films. The films, although using Shakespeare's words for the most part, present more than just the Juliet of Shakespeare's text. They also present the Juliet of our own modern myth. Linda Hutcheon writes that 'David Selznick did not worry about adhering to the details of the novel *Jane Eyre* (1847) when adapting it in the 1940s because an audience survey determined that few had read it' (Hutcheon 122). It is a reasonable assumption that a great many more people

are aware of the plot of *Romeo and Juliet* than have actually read it. For many, this is enough and they feel that they ‘know’ Juliet even if they do not. The distance in time between each of these films also influences what people believe they ‘know’ of Juliet, and this subsequently influences each succeeding adaptation. *When* a film is made has a decisive influence on *how* it is made.

Linda Hutcheon argues that in adaptation, change is inevitable. She argues that adaptation ‘as a *product*’ (Hutcheon 142) retains a certain structure, but that each adaptation will also have differences and that there will be many reasons for this.

This means not only that change is inevitable but that there will also be multiple possible causes of change in the *process* of adaptation made by the demands of form, the individual adapter, the particular audience, and now the contexts of reception and creation. This context is vast and variegated (Hutcheon 142).

The context of influences on each of the four films discussed in this thesis is indeed vast. Censorship, politics, and changes in society in everything from the expansion of the film industry beyond the Hollywood studio system, to the emergence of feminism and gender politics in mainstream academic thinking, have all impacted how these films were presented in contemporary society.

The 1936 film of *Romeo and Juliet* was shaped by a powerful censorship body that had expressed outrage at what they deemed to be the salacious content of Hollywood films in general, and Norma Shearer films in particular. The cuts and omissions to the text may have appeased Joseph Breen and the PCA, but resulted in a Juliet who was devoid of any passion or physical desires of her own. More than this,

however, Norma Shearer's Juliet was deliberately sculpted to echo the virtues associated with the Christian mythology of the Virgin Mary. A passive Shearer demonstrated spectacle, chastity and beauty, but little else. The presentation of Juliet in this manner meant that the film was always going to be limited in how the character would be played.

The 1954 Juliet highlighted the clash between two cinematic cultures as well as a revisionist assessment of Shakespeare's text that sought to return the cultural authority of the play back to Italy. The director, Castellani, infused the film with elements of Italian neo-realism that played uneasily when placed close by the side of Shakespeare's text and popular mainstream cinema. Cuts to the text, and an overwhelming focus on the issue of conflict within the play rendered Juliet as little more than a supporting player to Romeo. Juliet here, blonde, cold, and submissive, was a creation that would not have been totally unfamiliar to fans of Alfred Hitchcock. The visual motifs of stone and iron instilled a sense of claustrophobia and incarceration that encouraged the audience to accept Juliet as a prisoner. Castellani portrayed Juliet here somewhat as a victim defined by her association with her leading man.

Zeffirelli's 1968 film deliberately altered the political emphasis of the famed stage production at the Old Vic in 1960, and replaced it with an homage to the summer of love and flower power of the 1960s. The visual splendour of the film in general, and of Olivia Hussey in particular, meant that Juliet's character was encompassed and finally overwhelmed by her beauty. Zeffirelli, although allowing Juliet greater character development than any of his predecessors, deliberately halted that progression. Although Juliet was no longer the entirely passive object of the male gaze, she was nonetheless still assessed in accordance with that gaze and her ability to

satisfy male fantasies or desires. The worldwide success of the film, however, meant that the filmic template of Juliet's character as one that would be difficult to dislodge from the minds of cinema audiences.

It was not until 1996 that a film audience was presented with a Juliet who was afforded more of an equal footing within the story. This was achieved by a director who moved away from the accepted behaviour of presenting Juliet in a variety of typographies and fantasies over the previous decades. Although this was entirely within the remit of a director to do this, the film was initially received as being 'outrageous'. Many journalists condemned Luhrmann's film partly because it flew in the face of the traditions they were familiar with. It is also true, however, that some condemned the film because it flew in the face of Zeffirelli's 1968 version which was generally accepted as being not just 'right', but definitive. The film is now being revisited and being seen in a more forgiving and progressive light. The abrasive and at times confrontational style of Luhrmann's film should not detract from its content. Here, finally, is a Juliet who asserts her independence rather than waiting for it to be measured and granted in a manner acceptable to a phallogocentric ideal. All of which brings us back to Peter Brook and his assertion that a production can be 'right' for its time but wrong without it. Each of these Juliets was 'right' for their time and it is inconceivable that they could have existed out of it. There is no definitive Juliet and no interpretation can ever be awarded the title of 'best' or 'definitive'. The presentation of different Juliets from the 1930s to the 1990s reflects differences in contemporary society during the same period. This then raises a question 'what of Juliet in the future?'

At the time of writing (August 2013) a new version of *Romeo and Juliet* is due for release in the coming months. Directed by Carlo Carlei, the new film will star Hailee Steinfeld as Juliet, and Douglas Booth as Romeo. The youthfulness of the actors in the film, a focus on tribal conflict, and a physical resemblance to a recently successful film franchise means that where Baz Luhrmann's film was described as *Romeo and Juliet* for the MTV generation, it is likely that Carlei's film will be referred to as *Romeo and Juliet* for the *Twilight* generation. The *Twilight* films examined the conflict of a young woman at the centre of an 'ancient grudge' between vampires and werewolves. As such, the young leads in *Romeo and Juliet* (2013) are intended to appeal to the same core audience that flocked to see human Bella Swan (Kristen Stewart), conflicted in her love for troubled vampire Edward Cullen (Robert Pattison). The setting of Renaissance Italy in conjunction with the ubiquitous presence and overwhelming success of Zeffirelli's film means that, visually at least, *Romeo and Juliet* (2013) appears to target the audience of the *Twilight* series but presents them with a reimagining of *Romeo and Juliet* (1968) (**Figures 67, 68, 69**). Whatever the reception of this latest version of *Romeo and Juliet*, the only thing of which we can be certain is that it will not be the last. The popularity of the story means that it will continue to emerge in different versions with different interpretations and even in different formats.

Amongst recent presentations there has been the distinctive *Romeo and Juliet* – *The War*, a vibrant graphic novel by comic book supremo Stan Lee. Here the story is set in the future, with the Montagues being cyborgs made with artificial DNA, and the Capulets genetically enhanced humans. The theme of tribal conflict may be to the fore but even here we see a return to the idealised Juliet of Olivia Hussey, particularly when we compare the similarity between Zeffirelli's wedding bed scene (**Figure 50**)

and Stan Lee's futuristic reimagining (**Figure 70**). Even in this futuristic retelling of the tale, the twin themes of youth and beauty appear to be central to what defines Juliet, who appears to have been modelled on Olivia Hussey's iconic image. In the introduction I referred to Dame Peggy Ashcroft who said that, 'when we get to Juliet there is the ludicrous theory that you can only play Juliet in your teens' (Cook 90). This was a point taken onboard by Sean O'Connor in his play *Juliet and her Romeo*.

In his version of the play, O'Connor has the central characters, played by Sian Phillips and Michael Byrne (**Figure 71**), as institutionalised senior citizens whose families are facing financial difficulties. In doing this, and by using mostly Shakespeare's dialogue, O'Connor instantly removes the twin pillars of youth and beauty on which this play is commonly hung. This was a deliberate act by the author who, in an exchange of emails, expressed how he wanted the advanced age of the leading players to be central to the love story²³. There was also a political element of the play in which the financial burden of looking after the elderly in modern society is examined (O'Connor, Personal email to author. Unpublished).

I would end with a quotation from Derek Jarman. Kate Chedgzoy refers to notes Jarman made in 1976 in reference to *The Tempest* in which he described Shakespeare's play as 'a continuing changing mirror in which we can see ourselves reflected' (Chedgzoy 195). It is a quotation that could equally refer to *Romeo and Juliet*. The first three films in this thesis portrayed Juliet not only as a reflection of women in contemporary society, but as the *ideal* woman in each progression of a largely phallogentric society. The 1996 film challenged those accepted ideologies. This does not make the 1996 film 'right' and the others 'wrong', rather it shows how

²³ Sian Phillips was 76 at the time of performing. Michael Byrne was 67.

interpretations of the play change, as does society and the various reflections of that society. Change is constant but there remain elements of the play that are fixed in the minds of many. There will always be productions of *Romeo and Juliet* where Juliet is little more than Terry's 'lovesick child in white satin', simply because there will always be an audience for that particular type of presentation. That is the Juliet they 'know' and expect. We are, however, now seeing *Romeo and Juliet* begin to move beyond the traditional stereotypical love story and being used to highlight problems in society, be they political, social or economic. As such, the play will always be relevant and will continue to be reinterpreted in productions on stage and screen. Juliet is no longer automatically portrayed in a supporting role, existing purely in relation to Romeo or as part of a male idealised fantasy. Instead, Juliet is often at the centre of the performance, driving the production and engaging the audience in one of the greatest tragedies ever written. As a conclusion I would say that there can be no real conclusion because *Romeo and Juliet* will continue to be filmed, performed, and interpreted for as long as film, stage, and critical analysis exist. Those presentations and interpretations will change and differ, and in some cases outrage, but ultimately they will bring fresh testament to a longstanding and rich discussion which, to paraphrase Ben Jonson, shows that Juliet is not of an age but for all time.

Illustrations

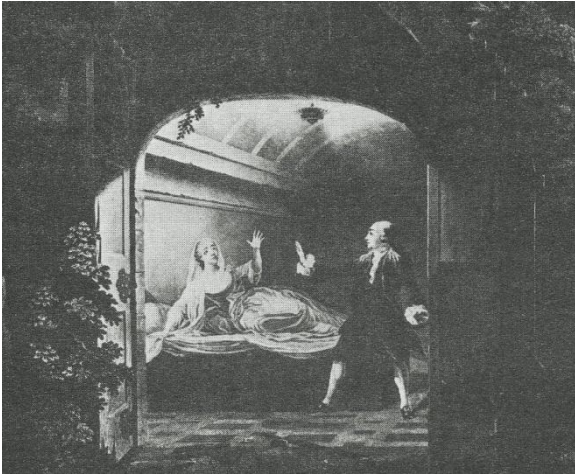


Fig 1 – George Anne Bellamy 1753



Fig 2 - Charlotte Cushman 1846



Fig 3 – Florence Lawrence 1908



Fig 4 – Beverly Bayne, Francis X. Bushman, 1916



Fig 5 – Theda Bara with Harry Hilliard 1916

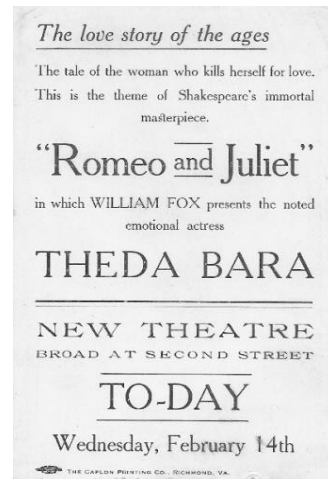


Fig 6 – Theda Bara without Harry Hilliard, 1916



Fig 7 – Theda Bara, ‘Vamp’ 1915

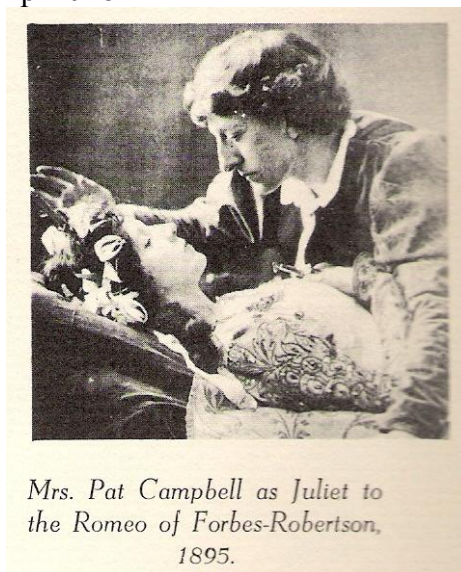


Fig 8 - Mrs Pat Campbell, 1936 brochure



Norma Shearer
The first screen Juliet, 1936.

Fig 9 - 'The First Juliet' 1936



Fig 10 – Juliet, *The Neckers* (1929)



Fig 11 – Shearer before Juliet.



Fig 12 – Shearer Hairstyle for Juliet

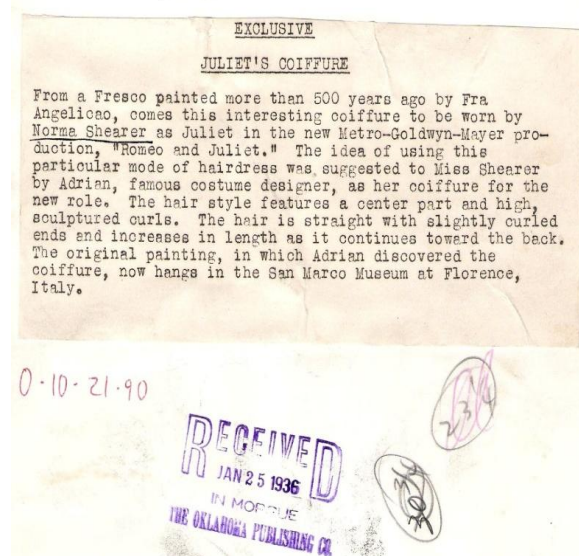


Fig 13 – From Fra Angelico Angel



Fig 14 – Fra Angelico Angel

Fig 15 – Fra Angelico's *The Annunciation*



Fig 16 – Velasquez's
The Immaculate Conception



Fig 17 – Rosaline 1936



Fig 18 – Juliet 'Wedding' Pose



Fig 19 – Perugino’s
Marriage of the Virgin



Figure 20 – Balcony image 1936

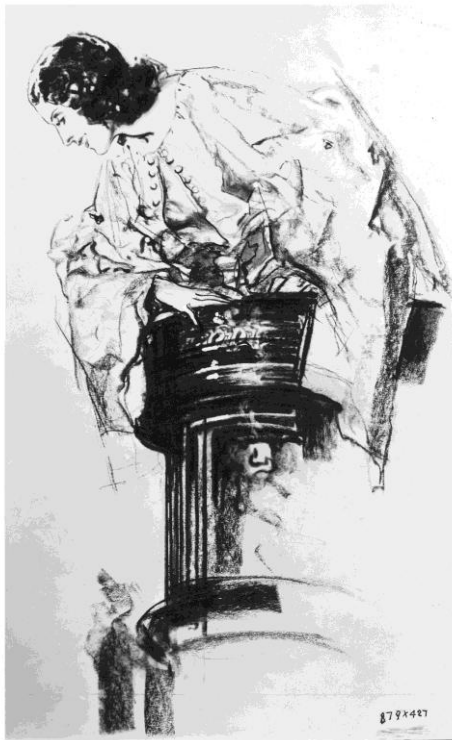


Figure 21 – Juliet before release



Figure 22- Juliet after release



Fig 23 – External pulpit, Prato, Italy



Fig 24 – Pulpit as balcony 1936



Fig 25 – Exposition of relic, Prato



Fig 26 – Juliet awakes in tomb 1936



Fig 27 – Grace Kelly, focus on body. *To Catch a Thief* (1955)



Fig 28 – Grace Kelly, *High Noon* (1952)



Figure 29 – Susan Shentall, *Romeo and Juliet* (1954)



Fig 30 – Juliet imprisoned in house



Fig 31 - Eyes cast downward



Fig 32 – Rosaline 1954



Fig 33 – Juliet at pillar



Fig 34 – Romeo solo shot



Fig 35 – Fra Angelico's *The Annunciation* in 1954



Fig 36 -Publicity shot in front of
The Annunciation 1954



Fig 37 - Giambattista Gigola's *Romeo and Juliet*



Fig 38 – Fra Angelico's
St Lawrence and the Gaoler



Figure 39 – Romeo as gaoler 1954



Fig 40 – St Dominic with lily and book Fig 41 – Juliet kneels before cross with lily



Fig 42 – Franciscan and Dominican habits



Fig 43 – Carpaccio's *The Funeral of St Ursula*



Fig 44 – Zeffirelli's balcony, 1960



Fig 45 - Zeffirelli's balcony, 1968



Fig 46 – Rosaline 1968



Fig 47 – Juliet is presented 1968



Fig 48 – Marilyn Monroe presents herself



Fig 49 – Olivia Hussey. Focus on face

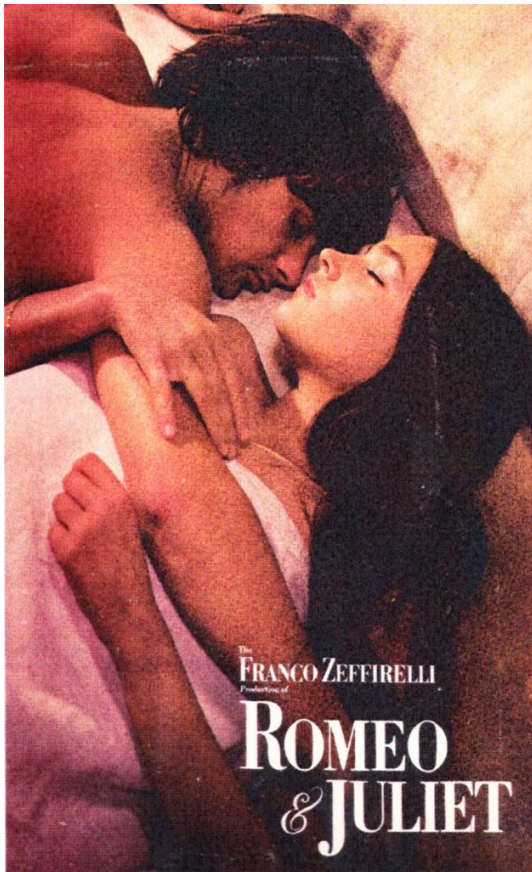


Fig 50 - Publicity material 1968

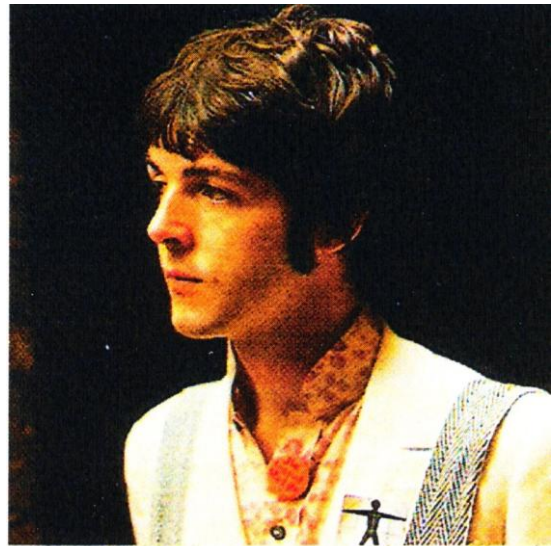


Fig 51 - Icon of youth and beauty 1968



Fig 52 – Juliet as woman 1968



Fig 53 – Juliet in tomb 1968



Fig 54 – In front of 12th Station – Jesus dies on the Cross, 1996



Fig 55 – Statue of Christ 1996



Fig 56 – Police Bell Huey Helicopter

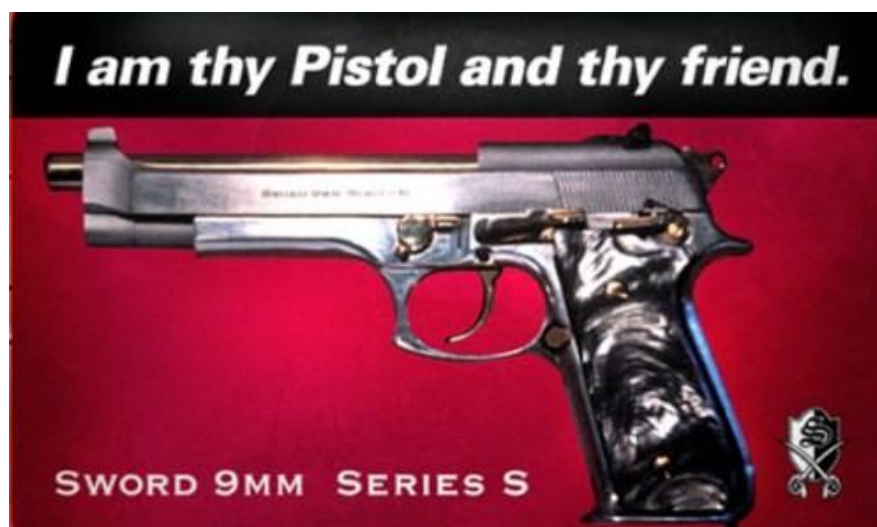


Fig 57 – I am thy Pistol and thy friend



Fig 58 – St Rose of Lima

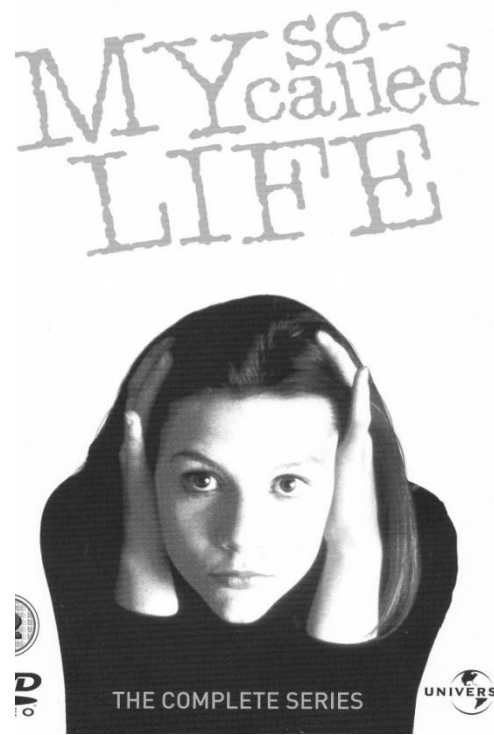


Fig 59 – My so-called Life



Fig 60 – Juliet in bath, 1996

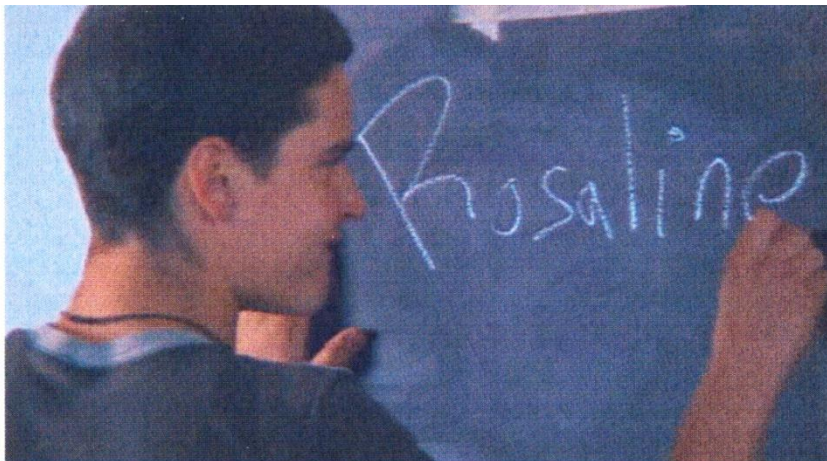


Fig 61 – Rosaline 1996



Fig 62 – Juliet watches Romeo 1996



Fig 63 – Touko Laaksonen - kitsch homoerotic imagery



Fig 64 – Ruby's Diner



Fig 65- Juliet in the Cathedral



Fig 66– *Romeo and Juliet* (1996)



Fig 67 – *Romeo and Juliet* (1968)



Fig 68 – *Breaking Dawn*- (2012)



Fig 69 – *Romeo and Juliet* (2013)



Figure 70 – *Romeo and Juliet – The War*



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Fig 71 – *Juliet and her Romeo* (2009)

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