Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*: theatricality of reality against true love?

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Abstract

Post-modernist film adaptations of Shakespeare often deconstruct the Shakespeare myth, as do Baz Luhrmann's prolific *Romeo + Juliet* (1996), Lloyd Kaufman's low-budget *Tromeo and Juliet* (1996) and Fumitoshi Oizaki's anime production, *Romeo × Juliet* (2007), all of which draw on pop pastiche. Reducing reality to an imitation of signs these films inflate signs that are deprived of their essence. Placing Romeo and Juliet into a world that continually references itself through an abundance of signs, these films ask how true, authentic love can be experienced.

Introduction

Post-modernist film adaptations of Shakespeare often deconstruct the Shakespeare myth, as do Baz Luhrmann's creative *Romeo + Juliet* (1996), Lloyd Kaufman's low-budget *Tromeo and Juliet* (1996) and Fumitoshi Oizaki's anime production *Romeo × Juliet* (2007), all of which draw on pop pastiche.

All three adaptations exploit intertextuality and intermediality when they reference other film and art genres, thus questioning whether the only reality left is the imitation of a fictitious reality. More so, these adaptations pose the question how reality can be created and perceived, in a society that continually references itself, especially, how can language represent reality? Reducing reality to an imitation of signs as the titles indicate – Luhrmann's "+" and Oizaki's "×" – the films inflate signs that are deprived of their essence. The films leave no blanks between medium and audience, but on the contrary, fill these blanks with signs that force the audience to critically reflect on these signs rather than being lulled in by a romantic love story. These films examine whether true love still has a place in a self-referencing society.

Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*

Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*, made for the "Gen-X audience"[1], a "movie movie"[2], initiates a new era of Shakespeare on film[3]. His adaptation starts with an act of theatricality: on the viewer's TV screen a zoomed-in image of a TV emerg-

es. Once both TVs – and thus both realities – have become one, the viewers share «communication through screen and image» that differs little «between our experience of reality and its media representations»[4]. Shakespeare as well as Shakespeare's story become what Maurice Hindle calls an «"item" on a TV news programme»[5]. Reality and representation of reality fall together, allowing the viewer to be immediately drawn into the story. While this at first reduces the distance between the viewer's reality and the fictional reality of the film, this is only seemingly so since Luhrmann seeks to create distance through other means.

In Luhrmann, the story begins when the white noise on the inset TV suddenly cuts to an anchorwoman – the Chorus. This gives Luhrmann's adaptation a definite beginning point, yet one that appears to be created out of nothing – the white noise. Since Luhrmann ends his adaptation the same way it starts – with white noise – he offers both a definite beginning and a ending. However, since both beginning and ending seem to blend into each other, even are identical, he undermines this definiteness, creates *his* Romeo and Juliet myth and lends a cyclic nature to the love story.

In this world that re-creates the myth of Romeo and Juliet anew, signs and their references play a vital role. Luhrmann's fast cuts that create an «up-to-the-minute ambience»[6], continuously zoom in on something, rendering a visual signification. Images and signs, rather than language transport the story. Luhrmann opts out of what Trevor Nunn has called a typical approach to Shakespeare on film, i.e. «shooting the text»[7], and, one could say, Luhrmann is "shooting the image" instead.

The first zoom is on a gigantic Jesus statue that parts two skyscrapers which signify the two households. This shot installs religion as a means of division rather than union. And with division comes death since the accompanying credits claim that «a pair of star cross'd lovers» will «take their life», with the *t* in *take* being replaced by a cross: «†ake»[8]. Although religion might not cause death, it is still powerless against fate, which further underscores the real tragedy of the story. Luhrmann's rendition of the film title, *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*, features an addition sign linking both names, rather than a cross. Nevertheless the likeness of the two graphemes – the addition sign and the cross – create a certain ambivalence in understanding Luhrmann's title and also indicate that death is the only union possible for Romeo and Juliet.

Further signification comes in the form of branding. When the households' members are introduced, the Montague and the Capulet boys, one of the Montagues has the name Montague tattooed to his back head, similar to a gang member. This image is underscored by the text that «the quarrel is between our masters» to which another character responds, «and between us, their men» (3:08-10). Signification is identification and comes through possession and ownership. Image and language are further aligned with Shakespeare's "swords" that have been replaced by automatic weapons, inscribed with the manufacturer's model, «Sword 9mm series S» (5:13). Shakespeare's

text, «Put up thy sword» (1.1.68)[9], has been translated into an image that links Shakespeare's world to today's world.

Again Luhrmann transports the story not via language since Luhrmann's signification suggests that the world can be perceived only if sign and signified are to be visually aligned, i.e if the signified is inscribed into the sign. Otherwise, communication and experience of reality is futile since image and text are no longer congruent. That this reduces the experience of reality to a non-authentic experience becomes clear when Luhrmann empties other signs of their meaning. Romeo and Juliet are surrounded by religious paraphernalia that separates rather than unites them: the gigantic Jesus statue that separates their houses; Prince Escalus, Head of the Police Force, who announces strict punishment for any further clash between the Capulets and Montagues, while sitting in front of a sign that reads «in God we Trust»; a sheer infinite amount of Jesus and Madonna statues, candles, neon-lit crosses and angels; and not to forget, Friar Lawrence, the only "sign" of religion that emerges as a means of reconciliation. When we first meet Friar Lawrence, the film cuts from a shot on the Jesus statue to a shot on Friar Lawrence. Immediately after Romeo has announced his desire to be married to Juliet, both Romeo and Friar Lawrence direct their views upwards to heaven, with the camera passing a Madonna statue. The female Christian element, Maria, more than the male Christian element, Jesus, is expected to bring salvation and union between the houses, which is supported in the film by Juliet's connection to the Madonna. Her room is dominated by Madonna statues. Similarly, Romeo's and Juliet's wedding ceremony is underscored by a boys' choir singing about true love and self-determination (*Everybody is free*), implying heavenly consent for their marriage. A white dove, set free at the moment when the lovers kiss heavily underscores divine consent for this marriage. Ironically, Romeo will later kill Tybalt right at the foot of the gigantic Jesus statue which renders religion, faith and peace as void.

It is only in the couple's death scene that an experience of reality emerges which is freed of self-referentiality. Literally embedded in religious paraphernalia, Romeo and Juliet have a short moment of reconciliation in death. Significantly, Juliet does not reiterate Shakespeare's words «oh happy dagger» (5.3.168) since words cannot express, neither original nor referential, the authenticity of their love; only silence can. This recalls their first meeting that was also marked by silence. The only way to engage in true love, the film appears to suggest, is to experience the moment without signs – verbal or non-verbal. The authentic, non-referential expression of true love therefore in this production is the absence of reference – silence.

Intertextuality

It is however not only signification – or lack thereof – that finds ample use in Luhrmann's adaptation, but also intertextuality and intermediality. Similarly as

the preponderance of religious signs, intertextuality annihilates any personal experience of reality: reality becomes a copy or a reproduction.

One main genre that Luhrmann copies is the Western film. The Montague boys – beach boys in Hawaii shirts – are contrasted with the Capulets – young men of Hispanic background in gangster outfits with cowboy boots including the mandatory silver heels and cigars. Underlined further with music typical of Quentin Tarantino's spaghetti Western films, one of the Capulets, is introduced to us not with a shot on his face, but on his boots, i.e. on the silver heels, with which he stubs out a cigar at a petrol station. Only then do we see his face and those of the other Capulet, one of whom – Abra – wears silver braces with the word "sin" engraved into them.

Equally Romeo's and Juliet's worlds are reproduced realities. Romeo, set outside the feud, depicted as the loner, is connected to the world of theatre: sitting at a theatre ruin, which immediately reminds the viewer of the Globe Theatre, he is caught in between the fictional world of theatre and the world outside theatre. This image also asks the viewer to differ between reality and performance. When Romeo utters the words «any thing, of nothing first create» (10:16; and again, 12:41), Luhrmann references the initial scene of the film when the viewer encounters the white noise; at the same time, it anticipates the ending of Luhrmann's adaptation – and as such, the cyclic nature of Romeo's and Juliet's story.

When Luhrmann connects both worlds – Shakespeare's theatre world and the late twentieth-century cinema world – his adaptation, Maurice Hindle suggests, becomes a «commentary on what it means to film Shakespeare in a post-theatrical, post-cinematic and postmodern period, when mass culture is so dominated by screen-mediated versions of reality that it is hard for the performative of "real life" to find a location for expressing itself»[10]. Luhrmann hints at his referentiality further with adds that are placed in Romeo's world, whose slogans are taken from other of Shakespeare's plays such as *The Tempest* – «such stuff / As dreams are made on» (4.1.156/7)[11], an add for Scotch Whiskey (47:46)[12]. This ultimately also signals the lack of reality, as Romeo is placed in a surrounding in which he merely performs a part, yet not where he experiences any reality.

This lack of authenticity also precludes authentic love. When Mercutio, dressed up as a drag queen to go to Capulet's ball, renders a violent description of love, he elaborates on the film's main theme, nihilism. Romeo's reaction furthers the image that love is a false emotion – «[t]hou talk'st of nothing» (1.4.96) – which is underscored by Mercutio offering drugs to Romeo. The scene ends in fireworks going off, a sign which supports the sexual innuendo of the scene – love and lust become interchangeable. That this is in fact true becomes clear at the Capulet's party where lust and debauchery prevails and which is facilitated by everyone wearing a mask and thus assuming a false identity – and again referencing a different self.

That true love counts little in this world is also supported in the conversation between Old Capulet and Paris. When Old Capulet signals to Paris that he will win Juliet's consent for the marriage, this conversation not only becomes a match, but also a hunt as the conversation takes place amidst Capulet's hunting trophies. Love is a hunting game and Juliet the deer, to be hunted.

In the midst of the unauthentic masquerade, Romeo and Juliet are shown both as seeking their true identity and with that, finding each other. Romeo's and Juliet's first encounter "through" a fish tank, cuts out the haste and noise of the illusive world around them. In this moment of deceleration, Shakespeare's language supports the authenticity of their love, and for the first time, the signs and the signified match: they need not be inscribed, nor do the language and image need any alignment.

Kaufman's *Tromeo and Juliet*

Luhrmann's Hollywood production of *Romeo and Juliet* initiated a wave of «teen-orientated flicks», as Douglas Brode calls them[13]. Yet, Kaufman's production has received hardly any attention in the academic world; few critics mention his production, then only in passing and usually not favourably[14]. The lack of attention that Kaufman's production has received is surprising for two reasons: firstly, other adaptations of Shakespeare that are as loosely based on Shakespeare as Kaufman's production is, very well caught the attention of academia[15]; and secondly, Kaufman takes a similar spin on Shakespeare's play as Luhrmann does as far as intertextuality is concerned. Since Luhrmann's production has received much attention in criticism, a reading of Kaufman's production against Luhrmann's appears constructive. The reason for the silence on Kaufman's production in academia must therefore lie not in the looseness of the adaptation but in the genre of the production. *Tromeo and Juliet* is a trash movie and a spoof. Troma themselves advertise the production as offering all «the body-piercing, kinky sex, and car crashes that Shakespeare wanted but never had […] in search of climactic love, violence, and the American Way»[16]. Kaufman's production then is hardly a representative of «orthodox Shakespearean films»[17].

Even the first shot of Kaufman's adaptation references Luhrmann: it shows two towers, corresponding to Luhrmann's skyscrapers. Kaufman's Chorus is played by Lemmy, lead singer of the band Motorhead, who initiates the story in modern English while standing between two towers. With Lemmy, Kaufman immediately directs the attention towards a particular genre: to punk and heavy metal, and gangs. Kaufman erases fate and the star-crossed lovers as a motif and instead moves the gang milieu further into the foreground than Luhrmann: it is revenge that the two houses seek. Once the words «revenge» and «murder» have been mentioned (00:30-34)[18], the film cuts to scenes in which exaggerated violence and badly done stunts, typical of B-class movies,

are shown: people are thrown over railings of staircases, are shot in the crotch or have their limbs cut off by the most bizarre incidents and much blood is splattered all over the place.

Kaufman's Chorus sets a tone on religion that is different from that of Luhrmann's Chorus. When Lemmy assumes the place of Luhrmann's Jesus statue – the symbol separating both houses – religion is replaced by a subculture in Kaufman. Since Lemmy also closes the adaptation, and Kaufman's adaptation ends happily, this subculture is shown able to bring the couple together, unlike religion in Luhrmann's version, which utterly fails. Although Kaufman uses only little religious paraphernalia he is still able to invalidate religion since he still empties religion of its value: Kaufman's friar is a pedophile. The Friar's motivation to unite the two lovers stems little from his Christian conviction but from his perverted sexual fantasies and, seeing himself as a victim of society, he is at least determined to help the lovers to fulfill their desires.

The main source for Kaufman's adaptation is Luhrmann's film. Kaufman similarly introduces the two towers, the characters through freeze-frame shots and the gang milieu. Equally, Kaufman employs a Chorus who is set outside the story and thus frames the story. That Kaufman copies Luhrmann's intro and fade-out, but changes Shakespeare's story, indicates that his version is based at least as much on Luhrmann as it is on Shakespeare. Equally, with the last lines of Kaufman's production, the story becomes a cycle, but not only this, it becomes a story that is inherently connected to our time: the Chorus concludes that «this is the dawn of the 21st age/ where love ever rules and all is insane/And all of our hearts free to let all things base go/As taught by Juliet and her Tromeo» (1:38:07-38:19).

Kaufman also claims possession of the story. On screen, the audience first sees Shakespeare's title, *Romeo and Juliet*, yet not like Luhrmann with a "+", but with and "&" that again might be read as spoofing Luhrmann. Having "Tromeo" sprayed over Romeo's name, Kaufman signals possession and authorship: he makes it a Troma production.

Language, emptied signs and lack of referentiality

Kaufman opted out of presenting his adaptation in Shakespearean English which gives him the freedom to insert Shakespeare's lines to signal the disruption of sign and signified. The authentic presentation of a sub-culture (rave parties, piercing studios, tattoo studios, drugs) is continually broken when Kaufman quotes and references not only Luhrmann but also Shakespeare. Shakespeare is even incorporated into this subculture when he becomes an icon for pornography – Shakespeare's head is taken from the First Folio and becomes a porn company's emblem, Shakespeare's play titles are adapted to pornographic titles (such as *As You Lick It*), or Juliet, who is a student of English literature owning a Yale Shakespeare edition.

One prominent example of the disruption between sign and signified is Old Capulet calling Monty, Old Montague, a «kidnapper of youth» (24:04-16), obviously punning on Prince Hal's chastisement of Falstaff as the «misleader of youth», *Henry IV*, 2.2.462[19]; he then references the play title and the act and scene, looks directly into the camera and waits for his applause. Kaufman thus misquotes Shakespeare, changing "misleader" for "kidnapper" to align reality with language. Yet the frame, the referentiality, remains and is even marked as referentiality when Old Capulet becomes aware of himself as an actor. Kaufman thus not only borrows from Shakespeare but also mocks Luhrmann. Yet while Luhrmann inserts his borrowed material rather subtly and if not subtly, artistically, Kaufman does so by a tour de force act, in Brechtian style as it were, having his actors fall out of their roles.

Following this scene, a father explains to his young daughter this: «sidewalk safe, street dangerous» (24:25-34), but is proven wrong when he, standing on the sidewalk, is killed by Monty's car that races down the sidewalk, completely out of control. While one reading of this scene links this to the typical comic elements of the trash movie genre, another reading of this scene shows that the verbal and the visual image no longer correlate.

While Luhrmann suggests that the absence of sign and signified allows man to experience and express authenticity, Kaufman seemingly reverses this: having most of the adaptation in modern English, Kaufman has the choice to use Shakespeare's text to signal something specific, and he does so repeatedly in his adaptation. The most significant episodes are:

– Tromeo and Juliet's first meeting
– Juliet's discovery of Tromeo's identity
– the balcony scene
– the wedding night
– their discovery that they are siblings

When Tromeo and Juliet meet for the first time, their true love is underscored by both of them falling into Shakespearean English, seemingly spontaneously, admitting their love for each other. Love at first sight, the viewer assumes, is thus only expressible if done in Shakespeare's English. In Shakespeare's «I ne'er saw true beauty till this night» (1.5.53) the sign (Shakespeare) and the signified (true love) are aligned in today's world. The experience of authenticity is confirmed when Tromeo unmasks himself, to act not as a copy of himself any longer, and continues to quote Shakespeare – «holy palmers' kiss» (1.5.100) to which Juliet, also with Shakespeare's lines, responds. This offers a deceleration, similar to Luhrmann's version. Since both Tromeo and Juliet quote large parts of Romeo's and Juliet's dialogue (32:03-37:25), the deceleration extends for a rather long time. This is also the longest passage of Shakespeare's text in the adaptation, which further highlights its significance. Yet, unlike a holy kiss of pilgrims, Tromeo's and Juliet's action becomes dislocated from the language, since their initial shy kiss develops into passionate

petting (hence the movie being x-rated) which is of course significant because the Montagues and Capulets both have a flourishing business in the sex industry. In Tromeo's and Juliet's dialogue, Shakespeare's words are gradually deprived of their meaning since language and image fall apart. True love, Kaufman seems to suggest, cannot be expressed appropriately by language since as soon as language is translated into action (once the «holy palmers' kiss» becomes passionate petting), the action begins to undermine the word. Kaufman also seems to question whether Tromeo's and Juliet's desire for each other is based on true love.

Yet, both Tromeo and Juliet do not notice any difference between love and lust. When Juliet learns that Tromeo's is a Capulet she laments that her «only love is sprung from [her] only hate» (38:00-03), which shifts the focus onto love rather than lust. On the other hand, Juliet reverts to quoting Shakespeare's original text and seems to quote rather than truly express herself. This recurring incongruence between sign and signified is underscored when the next shot on Juliet, after she pondered about her «only love», is a nightmare that she has about Tromeo. When the nightmare reaches its climax and Juliet's swollen stomach explodes with popcorn (40:16-28), Tromeo greedily digs into the popcorn. In the same instant that Juliet's stomach explodes, Kaufman cuts to a Yale Shakespeare Edition, lying next to Juliet on the bed. In this nightmare Juliet's worries about Tromeo's identity manifest themselves: the dysfunctional pregnancy leads to an absurd «off-spring» – the popcorn – which alludes to Tromeo's intention to create a «new era of grace» with Juliet as being a failure (40:00-02). Although Shakespeare and his language are present through a standard Shakespeare edition, neither Juliet nor Tromeo use Shakespeare's language. This coveys an understanding that reality cannot be expressed by Shakespeare's language. Shakespeare is muted. This muting is taken further when later in the film Tromeo tries to kill Juliet's father with that very same Yale edition (1:30:19-21). Shakespeare's text becomes a weapon.

The lack of congruency between image and language also dominates the balcony scene. Here, Juliet is locked into a cage of plexiglass by her father who, we learn, has been abusing his daughter ever since she had turned eight. Tromeo's lines, again from Shakespeare, express reality on the one hand, but only to a certain degree; on the other hand, they signal that Tromeo does not fully understand his reality. Hence Tromeo does not speak of a light that comes «through yonder window» (2.2.1), but of «light of yonder plexi glass» (46:05-9). This seemingly romantic tone is a farce since Tromeo fails to understand that Juliet is a victim of domestic abuse and locked into a cage. Tromeo continues to misread the image when he claims that Juliet «leans her cheek upon her hand» (2.2.23), because Juliet does not lean her cheek on her hand, because she ponders, but because she is handcuffed and thus Tromeo's perception – his reality – and the words – the expression of his reality – once more fall

apart. While Shakespeare's lines in Kaufman initially signal true love between Tromeo and Juliet and as such are an expression of an authentic feeling, they now become signals of a failed comprehension of reality. Of course, it being a Troma production, this is not only about a serious discourse of language and reality, but it is about amusement. So when Juliet says to Tromeo that «[p]arting is such sweet sorrow» (2.2.184) he responds with a profane: «it totally sucks» (1:01:29-31). Tromeo now breaks from the romantic language he earlier employed as it no longer allows him to express authenticity.

When Tromeo and Juliet learn that they are brother and sister, their love is threatened not only by society's intolerance but also by biological complications. Neither Tromeo nor Juliet worry much about that. Juliet, looking quizzingly at Tromeo whether he shares her feelings, cheekily asks: «Well?» which Tromeo reiterates, «Well». Their consent to stay together is underscored by quoting Shakespeare, but not from *Romeo and Juliet*, but rather from *As You Like It* and *Much Ado about Nothing*. Juliet's claim that «[s]weet are the uses of adversity, / Which like the toad, ugly and venomous, / Wears yet a precious jewel in his head» (2.1.12-14) is originally said by the exiled Duke, and Tromeo's answer, «[l]et every eye negotiate for itself / And trust no agent» (2.1.178-9) by Claudio who wrongly believes to have lost his love, Hero[20]. Although one of Tromeo's friends is irritated by these references, «[w]hat are you guys talking about» (1:34:10-14), this intertextuality indicates a rejection of *Romeo and Juliet*'s ending and empowers Tromeo and Juliet as self-determined agents. This self-determination is echoed in Juliet's final action: she dismisses all prejudice, cheekily throws in a «fuck it», runs of with Tromeo to her car to drive away, leaving puzzled bystanders behind (1:35:53-36:29). The scene ends with music setting in, underscoring a new holiness of Tromeo's and Juliet's love: «Sacred love the world they show, Juliet and Tromeo» (1:36:30-40).

This allusion to the holiness of love is significant for several reasons: firstly, it re-connects to their first meeting at the ball and installs their earlier lust as true love; secondly, it spoofs Luhrmann's adaptation that is overburdened with sacred, yet empty signs. Conversely, Kaufman inscribes holiness into Tromeo's and Juliet's love, simply by making it unacceptable. And thus Kaufman's story has a happy ending. The final shot shows Tromeo and Juliet, 6 years later, surrounded by their children, all of which are physically deformed. Yet, so the image signals, all of them are happy. When the Chorus, i.e. Lemmy, demands that «all of our hearts [are] free to let all things base go/As taught by Juliet and her Tromeo» (1:38:08-19), Kaufman quotes Luhrmann's choir boy scene (*Everybody is free*) and signals that his adaptation indeed allows Tromeo and Juliet to emerge as self-determined agents. In the «new era of grace» that Juliet perceived in her nightmare, the couple is united yet this unity is physically deformed. Lemmy's final words therefore appear shallow as the incestuous relationship between Tromeo and Juliet clearly leaves its marks on the next generation.

The last word so to speak is given to Shakespeare himself who comes to life at the end of the adaptation (1:38-20-32). But like the Yale edition, Shakespeare is muted as he does not say anything but rather breaks out in laughter.

Oizaki's anime production *Romeo × Juliet*

Comic, cartoon and manga adaptations of Shakespeare are yet another form of what some critics call "offshoots". Didactic approaches have recently turned to graphic novels, labeling them as an easy access to classic literature for teenagers and children alike. Oizaki's anime production *Romeo × Juliet*, with its 600-minute running time, features 24 episodes of each about 25 minutes, including not only Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* but also several other Shakespearean characters and plots.

Gonzo, a well-known Japanese production company of anime films that are specifically directed towards children and teenagers, has established itself as an important film company in the animation business and has won several Japanese awards[21]. So far, Oizaki's *Romeo × Juliet* is his only collaboration with Gonzo. As far as I know, non-Japanese criticism has not dealt with *Romeo × Juliet* yet[22]. That Shakespeare in graphic novels and manga has recently gained popularity cannot be overlooked[23]. Emma Hayley, Managing Director and Publisher of SelfMadeHero, a publishing house that is «committed to producing ground-breaking work in the graphic novel medium»[24], claims that graphic novels, manga and animations can help to «breathe a new life into the classics»[25] such as Shakespeare's plays. Hayley admits that her manga Shakespeare series is clearly indebted to Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*, mostly to Luhrmann's use of «visual imagery [that] refashion[s] the story for a contemporary audience»[26]. Hayley implies that Shakespeare's original language can be made accessible today only if the image that transports the story has been refreshed.

Unlike Hayley's English Shakespeare manga, most Asian Shakespeare manga uses neither Shakespeare's original English nor official Japanese translations of Shakespeare's text. Similarly, Oizaki's adaptations had only the story and title from Shakespeare; the text is modern day Japanese[27]. Like Luhrmann and Kaufman, Oizaki claims possession of Shakespeare's play: the viewer is informed that it is «Based on the Play by William Shakespeare» and that it is an «Anime Adaptation by Gonzo × Sky Perfect Well Think»[28]. When the music theme begins (*You raise me up in Japanese*) two coats of arms are shown which merge by the help of the multiplication sign, "×", which is the same sign as in the credits earlier. Gradually, the coats of arms are overwritten by the title proper, *Romeo and Juliet*, and the coats of arms change colour, from gold to blue (Romeo) and pink (Juliet). Then, both coats of arms intermingle and each of them features an angel's wing (Prologue); thus they not only allude to religious motifs but also to eternal love and, more so, to an inter-dependence between both houses.

That indeed religion predominates is confirmed with the next episode's title, claiming «that prayer transcends time» which coincides with a shot on two towers, then the gap between the towers is zoomed in onto and the credits "Animation Production Gonzo" emerge between the two towers. Oizaki does not fill the gap between the two houses with any connotation such as religion or a subculture, but instead places the production company in the middle. From this shot, Oizaki zooms into the blue sky, and from that, back to earth, onto a green meadow where Romeo and Juliet are lying next to each other. This ultimately suggests that Gonzo Production functions as a uniting means and alludes – wrongly – to a happy ending.

The adaptation is set in the distant past in Neo Verona, in which all was once well, but «ever there are times when the folly of earthly desires is present» (Prologue, 0:22). Oizaki thus places the lovers into a similar setting as Kaufman – ambition and revenge – and signals that fate is not the reason that Romeo and Juliet cannot come together. Shakespeare's Duke of Verona, Escalus, becomes in Oizaki a mysterious power to nurture the city, i.e. the tree of life which holds the city together and alludes to the tree in Paradise. The biblical motif however appears tainted. As in Luhrmann and Kaufman, religion is futile and can establish neither justice nor help love to thrive. Accordingly Juliet must notice that her hope for God's help – «what are we to do?» shot next to an angel statue (Episode 5, 1:42:40) – is futile. Once the Friar is exposed as a spy for the Montagues, church and religion are devalued, as they are in Kaufman's adaptation. When Oizaki's friar admits his treachery, claiming that «there are times when one must sell his soul» (Episode 5, 1:48:50), he exposes the church, sign of religion, as selfish, corrupt and incapable of uniting the houses.

The quest for private love between Juliet and Romeo, i.e. eros, is replaced by the care for a whole society, i.e. caritas. Here, Oizaki clearly directs the sympathies to Juliet's family. As in Kaufman's production, the motif of revenge predominates over fate. The basic plot is Juliet's battle against her personal desires and the re-establishment of social and political order by the fall of the House of Montague, thereby aligning the story more with *Hamlet* than with *Romeo and Juliet.* Being the only surviving descendant of the House of Capulet, Oizaki's Juliet is cast to be a warrior rather than a lover. That private love in this production is depicted as futile and selfish, implicates that the adaptation will not feature a happy ending. Curio, a supporter of the Capulet House, accuses Juliet of risking her life for her private love, which is futile and egotistic: «Idiot! Do you really think that dying will make our lives easier? You leave us behind to clean up your mess? For fourteen long years we toiled and laboured in your name. We thought you would bring justice to the people. If you die tomorrow, Lancelot and the Red Whirlwind will have died for nothing. I've survived these many years so that I might protect you in the name of hope. What would you dare to survive for? Love? If that's what you require – fine. But what use is love if you won't live another day?» (Episode 15, 15:00-15:40).

The romantic as well as tragic aspect that Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* contains is therefore reduced to nothing and it becomes clear that Oizaki rejects eros in favour of caritas.

The feeling of guilt in Juliet that asks her to repress love in favour of the vendetta, already features in Kaufman's adaptation. Kaufman's Juliet falls into a delirium from the potion from her apothecary, a Jamaican drug dealer. In this delirium she is visited by all those who have died in the Montague-Capulet feud, who accuse her of having caused their deaths and wish her death as well (1:22:27-23:45). This accusation of people having died in vain in the cause of the feud is echoed in Oizaki's adaptation when Curio accuses Juliet of being egotistic and having lost interest in justice.

This is not the only similarity to Kaufman's adaptation. Like Kaufman, Oizaki draws heavily on intertextuality with the key source being Shakespeare's plays. Yet, he does so with an artistic twist: William Shakespeare is a character in the story. Shakespeare struggles with writing plays as they don't meet the taste of his audience and so he complains that «no-one appreciates the genius of my work» to which Juliet responds that the plays are simply «too difficult to follow» (Episode 1, 9:40-45).

Although Oizaki's production aims at viewers who differ greatly from Kaufman's viewers, both productions use Shakespeare as an icon: in Kaufman Shakespeare symbolizes the sex industry and, at the end of the adaptation, assumes the position of a meta-commentary. In Oizaki, Shakespeare assumes the position of a meta-commentary throughout the adaptation since he is a main character. More so, in Oizaki, Shakespeare becomes a protagonist who is depicted not only in his function as an author of plays, but also as a secret agent, helping the House of Capulet to regain power. Shakespeare as a meta-commentary however is not new: *Shakespeare in Love* or Roland Emmerich's *Anonymous* placed Shakespeare as a character into their story, showing Shakespeare not only composing the plays but also commenting on plays' conception[29]. These films however are biographical pseudo-documentaries and unlike Oizaki, their message is more direct and less disguised. That Shakespeare features as a character within the fictional world, is not new either. As a matter of fact, there is a whole Shakespeare fan-section that produces fiction which incorporates Shakespeare as a character[30].

When Oizaki's Shakespeare claims that in this world «love is not enough» (Episode 14, 24:35-42), he becomes a metadramatic comment not only on his own works, but also on the world as presented in Oizaki's adaptation. Oizaki offers a second level of interpretation of love when Shakespeare is shown writing *his* version of *Romeo and Juliet*. So when Shakespeare asks Juliet to show him a miracle, «[t]ake my star-crossed couple and conjure a happy ending for them» (Episode 14, 34:49-52), he becomes the means that transcends his own fiction. In the world of the fictional play, Shakespeare argues, a happy ending should be possible. Juliet interprets this as to be true for her life as well. Ac-

cordingly, when asked to forget Romeo, Juliet refuses to since «I'm his, till all is dust» (Episode 14, 36:12-13). Thus, for Shakespeare to perform at his best – write a love story that catches his audience's attention and moves them – his own inspiration is not enough and he therefore must copy from reality. As it is pointed out in the anime, the reality comes from his friend, Juliet.

Hamlet's play within the play, the Mousetrap, has a prominent place in Oizaki's adaptation. In order to see where people's loyalties lie, Shakespeare stages his version of *Romeo and Juliet* – more akin to the Shakespearean original than Oizaki's adaptation. The story of Romeo and Juliet gets enacted, by child actors, and this, while the story of Oizaki's Romeo and Juliet takes place in another fictional reality. Reality and fiction merge as Shakespeare makes asides, commenting on the unexpected entry of Juliet who disrupts the play within the play and so hinders Shakespeare's play from having an ending, any ending. And so the different levels of fiction and reality merge. Noticing that «this is no longer a tale of revenge. This is the beginning of a revolution» (Episode 19, 9:48-50), Shakespeare admits that «reality often transcends fiction» (Episode 19, 11:57). This is comic as Shakespeare in Oizaki's adaptation is of course also not real; at the same time, this is the crux of the adaptation. As in Kaufman and Luhrmann, reality is based on the reference to other realities – and to fiction. Yet Oizaki admits more clearly than Kaufman or Luhrmann that this referentiality exists; he even comments on it quite deliberately. Further, Oizaki's Shakespeare explains the need for fiction: «people need stories of romance to navigate reality; to endure the truth» (Episode 19, 12:04-06). Indirectly, this adaptation appears to suggest that reality is distinctly connoted negatively – after all, Oizaki will also deny their production a happy ending and thereby "quoting" Shakespeare. Referentiality cannot be avoided, Oizaki seems to suggest.

Eventually, Juliet's aspiration to lay a new «foundation of this new world» (Episode 20, 40:28) echoes Kaufman's «era of grace» but is also a world that erases all Capulets and all Montagues. This new world, signaled by the multiplication sign, is connected to death as much as to life. When both Romeo and Juliet literally merge with the tree of Escalus, both Juliet and Romeo "blossom" – they become the flowers of the tree Escalus – and thereby nurture the city of Neo Verona. Their love is thus the artery of life for the citizens. With Shakespeare left behind, it is also clear that Shakespeare will retell their story and thus continue the cycle of referentiality. Oizaki's final scene authorizes Shakespeare as the one who will re-tell the story.

Conclusion

The three adaptations have taken Shakespeare's myth of the two lovers and placed it into self-referential worlds. They also lift Shakespeare out of an elitist understanding and, by creating a version for a specific type of viewer – teenag-

ers, young adults, fans of graphic novels – revitalize Shakespeare. Is pop-pastiche then the only reality of today to which young(er) viewers can be attracted to Shakespeare? Or do these adaptations claim that young(er) viewers need to be attracted to the questions of real love?

Luhrmann presents a self-referential context of a would-be gangster milieu that is based on the intertextuality of MTV clips, rap music and Western films. Kaufman adds even more intertextuality as he not only quotes Luhrmann – and with it, what Luhrmann already quoted such as Franco Zeffirelli's production – but in doing so he ridicules this reference to Luhrmann: he destroys any serious notion of this context by setting the story into the trash scene. The anime production takes this intertextuality even further. Here, the context is placed into the world of fantasy fiction. Romeo and Juliet are no longer separated by a quarrel, but by a lethal power struggle. The surreality is supported by Shakespeare himself being present in this world, trying to bring his plays to life.

The sanctity of these two lovers – visualized, particularly in Luhrmann and Oizaki's productions, through iconographic Christian emblems such as statues of angels, of Christ and Madonna, a vast amount of crosses – appears out of place. Luhrmann's innocent and angelic beings, Romeo and Juliet, are rendered unable to act; Kaufman's Tromeo and Juliet become literally illegitimate partners, placed in domestic abuse scandal – and turn out to be siblings. Oizaki's version of the mythical couple is burdened with a revenge story, a private vendetta, with Juliet, having to act yet any of her actions will automatically destroy her lover. While Luhrmann's lovers are driven by love, Kaufman's lovers are driven by lust (but then emerge as the true loving couple, facing the consequences of deformed children–and as such, a deformed future) and Oizaki's lovers are metamorphosed into two heroes, fighting against common evil rather than seeking private love.

Luhrmann's "+" thus signals that true love is an addition of two lovers, but the households themselves and their off-spring in whatever form will never thrive. Oizaki's "×" signals that only the multiplication of Romeo and Juliet, an amalgamation as it were, in which no separation is possible – made visible through them both merging with the tree of life – is the only way to guarantee continuity. Only the original rendition of Shakespeare's title with the sign "&" in Kaufman renders a happy ending. Yet the offspring of the "&" undermines its own message – should Romeo and Juliet better not have come together?

While Luhrmann's "+" suggests finality, the anime's "×" suggests a duplication, which signals continuity. In this union, supported by the multiplication sign, there is growth and this growth transported through the tree of Escalus. The barrenness which Luhrmann presents is replaced by life. Although Kaufman already hints at life and continuity, it is nevertheless life that is deformed. Yet, taken into consideration that the anime production is a genre of fantasy, it undermines its own message of continuity, as the only survivor really

is Shakespeare, whose job is it to re-tell their story in a, yet again, un-real condition. The anime's meta-commentary on itself and on love therefore also must be read as pessimistic: love cannot take place, not even in a fantasy fiction. Ultimately, this suggests that all three adaptations of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* deny the existence of true, authentic love in postmodern society.

Notes

1. D. Brode, *Shakespeare in the Movies. From the Silent Era to Today*, Berkley Boulevard Books, New York 2001, p. 56.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Luhrmann himself however rejects the idea that his film is designed in MTV style; rather he sees it as fast-lived entertainment that Shakespeare would have approved of. See www.romeoandjuliet.com.

4. M. Hindle, *Studying Shakespeare on Film*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills 2007, p. 178.

5. *Ibid.*

6. Brode, *Shakespeare in the Movies*, cit., p. 55.

7. See Hindle, *Studying Shakespeare on Film*, cit., p. 234.

8. *Romeo + Juliet*, dir. Baz Luhrmann (1996, Twelfth Century Fox, 2002).

9. W. Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare. The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, edited by G. Blakemore Evans, J. J. M. Tobin, 2nd ed., Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston 1997, pp. 1101-45.

10. Hindle, *Studying Shakespeare on Film*, cit., p. 182.

11. W. Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare. The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, cit., pp. 1656-88.

12. *Ibid.*

13. Brode, *Shakespeare in the Movies*, cit., p. 244.

14. See R. Burt, *The Love That Dare Not Speak Shakespeare's Name. New Shakesqueer Cinema*, in L. E. Boose, R. Burt (eds.), *Shakespeare. The Movie*, Reprint, Routledge, London 1999, pp. 240-68. Burt refers to Troma's production under the aspect of homosexuality, referencing it as one example of how «gay and popular Shakespeare» is these days utilised «within the present struggle over gay representation in general». The screen-shot that features in Burt's article consequently shows Juliet and her lebsian Nurse. See pp. 243-4; also see R. Burt, *Unspeakabel ShaXXXspeares. Queer and American Kiddie Culture*, St. Martin's Press, New York 1998; also compare to T. Howard, *Shakespeare's Cinematic Offshoots*, in R. Jackson (ed.), *Shakespeare on Film*, Reprint, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007, pp. 303-23. Howard calls Troma's production an «emetic teen-flick» with much sex, p. 306; also see G. A. Steinberg, *No Exit? Shakespeare's Feminine Endings: Disfiguring Death in the Tragedies by Philippa Berry; Unspeakable ShaXXXspeares: Queer Theory and American Kiddie Culture by Richard Burt; Shakespeare on Love & Lust by Maurice Charney*, in "College Literature", 28, 3 (Fall), 2001, pp. 148-54; also see P. Armstrong, *Shakespeare in Psychoanalysis*, Routledge, New York 2001.

15. Brode mentions the adaptations *O* and *Near in Blood*, both of which have transported Shakespeare's story – *Othello* and *Macbeth* – into settings, removed from Shakespeare's original settings: a highschool for *O* and a football club for *Near in Blood*. See pp. 254-5.

16. http://www.troma.com/films/tromeo-and-juliet/.

17. Howard, *Shakespeare's Cinematic Offshoots*, cit., p. 304.

18. *Tromeo and Juliet*, dir. Llyod Kaufman (Troma, 1997).

19. W. Shakespeare, *1 Henry IV*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare. The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, cit., pp. 884-927.

20. W. Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare. The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, cit., pp. 436 e 261-98.

21. www.gonzo.co.jp/.

22. www.gonzo.co.jp/works. At the *Shakespeare and Japan* conference, held at De Montford University, Leicester, this year, Ryuta Minami delivered a paper on «When Pokemon meets Shakespeare: How Shakespeare is Reimagined and Abused in Japan», addressing recent Japanese Shakespeare adaptations in the Japanese manga culture. Also see www.dmu.ac.uk.

23. A quick search on Amazon draws up several different editions of Shakespeare's plays in graphic novels, with *Romeo and Juliet* appearing to be adapted most often. Interestingly, SelfMadeHero, a UK publishing house launched in 2007, which has been awarded with several prizes, released several Shakespeare adaptations, including an adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* which plays in contemporary Tokyo. See www.selfmadehero.com.

24. www.selfmadehero.com.

25. E. Hayley, *Manga Shakespeare*, in T. Johnson-Woods (ed.), *Manga. An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives*, Continuum, New York 2010, pp. 267-80. Here p. 267.

26. Ivi, p. 270.

27. The version used for this article is the dubbed version, aired in Great Britain.

28. *Romeo × Juliet*, dir. Fumitoshi Oizaki (Gonzo × Sky Perfect JSAT Corp., 2007).

29. *Shakespeare in Love*, dir. John Madden (Miramax Films, 1998); *Anonymous*, dir. Roland Emmerich (Columbia Pictures, 2011).

30. Similar incorporations of Shakespeare as a character within a fictional story can be found in various sorts of media: Graphic novels such as Neil Gaiman' *The Sandmann* (Vertigo, New York 1989-1996) or Anthony Del Col and Conor McGreery, *Kill Shakespeare* (IDW, San Diego 2010-2011) in which William Shakespeare converses with his own characters. Various TV series have featured Shakespeare as a "visitor" in their world: for example both Homer Simpson and Bugs Bunny meet Shakespeare see http://simpsonspedia.net; *A Witch's Tangled Hare*, in *The Looney Tunes*, dir. Tex Avery *et al.* (Warner, Los Angeles 1959).