



The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Music

Christopher R. Wilson (ed.), Mervyn Cooke (ed.)

<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190945145.001.0001>

Published: 2022

Online ISBN: 9780190945176

Print ISBN: 9780190945145

CHAPTER

42 ‘More hits than you can possibly imagine’: The Music of Baz Luhrmann’s *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet*

Jan Butler

<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190945145.013.42> Pages 1153–1188

Published: 14 February 2022

Abstract

This chapter explores the role of music as a tool both to interpret Shakespeare for a modern young audience and to balance the conflicting demands and mythic tensions generated by creating a Hollywood version of *Romeo and Juliet* in Baz Luhrmann’s *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet* (1996). Although much of the focus on this film has been on the inclusion of pop music, the film soundtrack consists of a varied mixture of pre-existing and commissioned orchestral music and popular songs, crossing a wide range of genres and mixed in innovative ways; the big hits, when they came, mostly occurred after the film was released. The chapter analyses how Luhrmann and his team attempt to ‘translate’ the text through the use of music, arguing that Luhrmann uses familiar musical structures and rhythms to support the language and drama of the play for an audience new to the language of Shakespeare, while also drawing on the cultural connotations and flexibility of the musical score to interpret the text and play with the possibility of a Hollywood-style happy ending.

Keywords: William Shakespeare, Baz Luhrmann, film music, film soundtrack, pop music, *Romeo and Juliet*, pre-existing music in film

Subject: Musicology and Music History, Music

Series: Oxford Handbooks

Collection: Oxford Handbooks Online

Pam Cook argues that Baz Luhrmann’s career prior to making *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet* (1996), which had encompassed work in theatre, opera, and film, was marked by the question of how to be ‘original’ when working with pre-existing, often mythic narratives.¹ In choosing to make a teen-oriented version of *Romeo and Juliet*, Luhrmann was effectively taking on two well-known narrative structures at once, that of the play itself and also the expectation at the time that teen romances should have a suitably positive Hollywood ending.² Cook suggests that Luhrmann’s solution to the question of how to be original is to focus instead on innovative recombination and exaggeration of pre-existing forms.³ Another theorist, Courtney Lehmann, suggests that this innovative play with existing forms in response to the legend of Romeo and Juliet connects Luhrmann directly to Shakespeare artistically, and effectively ensnares him even further in

the inevitably tragic nature of the Romeo and Juliet myth.⁴ This chapter explores the role of music as a tool Luhrmann uses to maintain control over and interpret his disparate materials, and also as a means of balancing the mythic tensions generated by creating a Hollywood version of this particular Shakespeare play.

p. 1154 The choice of *Romeo and Juliet* with Shakespeare's original language for Luhrmann's Hollywood debut was risky, both financially (for the studio, Twentieth Century Fox) and artistically (for Luhrmann). Artistically, Luhrmann had to rise to the challenge of making a distinctive film of one of Shakespeare's best-known plays, which in turn had already received a well-loved, youth-oriented film adaptation by Franco Zeffirelli in 1968. Luhrmann also had the problem of making the language of Shakespeare intelligible and appealing to a young audience. To get the film made, he had to persuade the studio that the language and the unhappy ending would not alienate the youth audience on which box-office success depended at the time. His proposed solution to both problems was to give the film a hyper-real contemporary setting, rich in recent cultural intertextual references to explain the world of Romeo and Juliet, and to make Shakespeare relevant to a young audience.⁵ A key element of this approach was the suffusion of the film with popular music, which would appeal to his core audience, aid in translating the language and narrative, and crucially offer another income stream to boost the finances of the film.⁶ As Luhrmann explained in an interview in 1998, he promised that the soundtrack would contain 'more hits than you can possibly imagine' as a key part of his pitch to Twentieth Century Fox in a desperate attempt to overcome their apparent unease about the use of Shakespeare in the original language.⁷

Financially, the gamble paid off. *Romeo + Juliet* ranked number one at the box office in its opening weekend in November 1996.⁸ The original soundtrack album, released a few days before the film's release, was also extremely successful commercially, reaching number two in the Billboard Albums chart and eventually achieving triple platinum in the United States.⁹ After three singles releases, a second soundtrack album was released in March 1997, featuring more of the instrumental sections of the music track, a few including excerpts of songs from the first soundtrack mixed in, interspersed with excerpts of dialogue.¹⁰ This was also very successful, entering the chart at number 27, while the first album held position at number 31.¹¹ Many critics, however, were generally less enamoured with the film than its youthful audience, complaining that its 'MTV aesthetic'—featuring bright colours, fast editing, and inventive cinematography—combined with the pop songs in the film obscured the Shakespearean text that Luhrmann had taken such pains to retain.¹² As Leah Guenther notes (quoting from Donald Lyons):

Luhrmann includes Shakespeare's name in the film's title merely in order 'to distinguish it from *Garbage's Romeo and Juliet* or *Butthole Surfers' Romeo and Juliet*, these being the names of rock bands heard, and heard more loudly than any Shakespearean verse, in the course of the film'.¹³

As Mervyn Cooke more sceptically notes, this decision also followed ‘the contemporary fashion for including the name of the author of “classic” texts in the film’s title—presumably so that no unsuspecting cinema-goers could reasonably ask for their money back afterwards’.¹⁴ Kay Dickinson has argued that the term ‘MTV aesthetic’ was effectively a shorthand for many critics and academics seeing the inclusion of pop songs and aesthetics as a ‘disruptive cash in’, causing them to overlook the fact that, for some younger audiences, a pop song is a point of identification among the potentially alienating Shakespearean language.¹⁵ She also argues that objections to the inclusion of popular music within film scoring in general are not new, suggesting that the ‘closed unit’ of a pop song makes it stand out in comparison to the more malleable orchestral score.¹⁶ Jeff Smith has argued that, despite this structural limitation, popular music can be effectively used to carry out all the usual functions expected of orchestral film scoring with the added benefits of being able to comment on the action through the inclusion of lyrics.¹⁷ In addition, for an informed audience, the extra-musical allusions to ‘the larger spheres of society and culture’ that particular pop songs (or indeed well-known classical pieces) carry, either as individual songs or as representatives of genres, can also ‘suggest the director’s attitude towards the characters, settings, and themes of the film’.¹⁸ This chapter explores how, in this particular film, Luhrmann extends the ability of pre-existing music to comment on and support the Shakespearean language, by breaking down the closed units of pop songs and recomposing them into more malleable film scoring, either through using re-mixing and sampling techniques borrowed from the trip-hop genre, or by using songs and their structures as the basis for sequences of orchestral scoring. Through this flexible treatment, the pre-existing music can function as an effective support for the Shakespearean text as well as a means to handle the weight of both the existing story and the expectations of the Hollywood romantic tradition.

MTV Aesthetic or Postmodernism?

For all the critical fuss about the use of popular music in the film, few authors who engage with the film consider the use of music in detail, instead reading the film as more broadly postmodern in style, and focusing on other aspects of Luhrmann’s intertextuality—links to other film genres, other specific films, other Shakespeare texts, other versions of *Romeo and Juliet*—although music is often mentioned in passing. Indeed, Andregg argues that ‘Luhrmann draws on a far richer range of allusions and on a wider variety of stylistic choices than can be encapsulated by a reference to MTV.’¹⁹ Music is most often mentioned as part of discussion of three particular sequences: the opening ‘Prologue’, scored with a choral pastiche of Carl Orff’s ‘O Fortuna’ (entitled ‘O Verona’) from *Carmina Burana*, closely followed—after a brief interlude of pastiche Beastie Boys music, which includes a chorus of the Montagues singing ‘I am a pretty piece of flesh’ (1.1.27)—by a gas-station sequence which draws on the cinematic and musical style of spaghetti Westerns: whistles, squeaking hinges, pan pipes, and mariachi horn with chorus arrangements.²⁰ The sequences built around covers of Prince’s ‘When Doves Cry’ and Candi Staton’s ‘Young Hearts Run Free’ are also sometimes discussed, perhaps because they most closely resemble music videos in style and thus are most emblematic of the sections of the films where the music interrupts or overpowers the Shakespeare.²¹ These were also two of the songs in the film that had music videos of their own which served to publicize the film and the soundtrack simultaneously, drawing attention to themselves outside the experience of the film itself.

Of the two theorists who do address the use of music in some detail, Guenther argues that the pop songs in particular are a crucial element in the artistic and commercial success of the film. She is particularly focused on the use of song lyrics as a translation device, although the lyrics that she quotes are not actually heard in the film at all. Like Dickinson she suggests snobbery is at play, causing most critics to overlook not only the popular music in the music track but also the use of pre-existing classical music. For Guenther, the inclusion of pop songs that have a life outside the film offer multiple ways into the text for a young audience, literally enlivening the dead language of Shakespeare through a version of the idea of extra-musical allusion suggested by Smith.²² James N. Loehlin also focuses on the role of the music, arguing that the film's elaborate sound design and inclusion of lines from the play in songs such as One Inch Punch's 'Pretty Piece of Flesh' used in the prologue is highly effective, and, in conjunction with the unusual visuals, forms an effective aural replacement 'for the lost poetry [which] dies in his teen actors' mouths'.²³ Loehlin also briefly addresses the use of classical music in the film, arguing that the inclusion of Wagner in the tomb scene romanticizes the death of the young lovers by linking them to ideas of courtly love.²⁴ This is also briefly discussed by Walker, who otherwise largely ignores the role of music in the film.²⁵

Beyond Loehlin and Guenther, the most detailed accounts of how the music operates in *Romeo + Juliet* come from Luhrmann and his music team themselves in the special 'Music edition' DVD of the film released in 2015, which includes three different commentaries on the music track, as well as documentaries and the ability to jump directly to specific songs included in the soundtrack.²⁶ Rebecca Coyle has investigated the working practices of Luhrmann's approach to music, and finds that he has a particularly interventionist role in the sonic style of his film-making, collaborating with composers who are willing to follow his overall vision and working method.²⁷ In the case of *Romeo + Juliet*, the music track was unusual in being created not by a single composer, but by a musical team who had never worked in film before. The team included Craig Armstrong, a composer who at that time was best known for specializing in string arrangements for pop artists, Nellee Hooper, best known at the time as an award-winning producer in the trip hop style, and Marius de Vries, who had produced and programmed for several well-known artists. The three men had worked together previously in various combinations on other artists' work, particularly Björk, Massive Attack, and Madonna, so they knew each other's working methods.²⁸ In combination, the team had the expertise and skills needed to help Luhrmann realize his envisioned music track comprising 'such wide-ranging materials as "triphop" tracks, choral numbers [...] wild exaggerated-beat techno dance numbers and "anthemic" orchestral pieces performed by the London Session Orchestra'.²⁹

The resultant music track is unusually dense, and seems almost constant over the film's two-hour duration. There are only twenty minutes of short interludes with no music, most of which are between thirty seconds to two minutes in duration, and the longest of which are two four-minute absences of music: the first to foreground the first famous balcony-scene speeches, the second to highlight the moment of Romeo's death and Juliet's suicide. Surprisingly little of the one hour and forty minutes of music consists of pop songs in the form that they appeared in the original soundtrack album; the only song which appears uncut is the love theme, 'Kissing You' by Des'ree, which is then reworked into the orchestral score. The final, end-credit song, 'Exit Music (For a Film)' by Radiohead, does not appear on the soundtrack albums at all. The overall impression, though, as evidenced by the initial critical response, is still of a film saturated by popular music. This is because the design of the music track used the team's different strengths to treat the commissioned or selected songs as raw materials for the overall music track, remixing and re-editing pre-existing music, both popular and classical, and combining them seamlessly with newly composed beats, loops, and orchestral scoring. Unusually the final music track was constructed like a record—mixed and to some extent composed live to playback of the film, an intense process overseen by Luhrmann that allowed great flexibility and control over the role of the music in support of his overall vision for the film.³⁰

Far from desecrating Shakespeare with his use of popular music,³¹ Luhrmann has explicitly argued that the use of music of all types was central to his cinematic vision: partly as a financial argument on the popular music side, but mainly as a dramatic device founded in authentic Shakespearean practice, as an effective way to translate iambic pentameter, and an efficient means of explaining Shakespearean youth culture to a modern audience. Luhrmann argues that Shakespeare made use of any aspect of musical culture that his audience would have been aware of, from choral to instrumental to 'street', in order to keep their attention on the drama.³² Beyond trying to follow Shakespearean practice, Luhrmann had the difficulty of keeping an audience's interest in the story because of the use of Shakespeare's text, and he argues that every aspect of the film needed to illuminate and unlock the language.³³ He suggests that the music in the film played a crucial role in this process, both through its rhythmic function, helping people follow the 'very, very fast storytelling' and as a structural device.³⁴ Structurally, Luhrmann and also his musical collaborator De Vries state that they used an operatic structure as a framework for the music, and Luhrmann extends this argument to his description of the second soundtrack release as 'a contemporary opera that excerpts techno and rock and classical forms'.³⁵ Luhrmann's idea of the operatic structure of *Romeo + Juliet* is helpfully summarized by Coyle as consisting of

[T]he overture, the introduction of the 'boy' and 'girl' themes, the interweaving of those themes as the characters' relationship develops, a pause on any new music as the story evolved, a mix of earlier themes toward the final tragedy, and a final choral climax constructed with simple but effective musical elements.³⁶

In the materials on the music-edition DVD of *Romeo + Juliet*, these overall elements of the music design are made explicit by the commentators, but other comments made in passing, and my own analysis, suggest further important relationships between the music track and the Shakespearean text. Although Luhrmann makes this argument about the music's overall operatic structure, and the relationship of music and speech rhythm, other more passing comments and close analysis show that he and the composition team have also used music to support the existing structure of the play, and to help viewers interpret the tragic ending. In particular, the music works hard to support what Luhrmann calls the 'Shakespearean device' of maintaining the audience's awareness that the lovers will die at the end by reference to the ending at regular intervals throughout the play. According to Luhrmann, every ten or fifteen minutes, even at the greatest moments of the lovers' happiness, the audience should be reminded of the inevitable tragic ending in order to enhance the 'comictragedy' of the drama.³⁷ Shakespeare of course does this directly through the language, with many references to death made more or less directly throughout the play.³⁸ In cutting so much of the text, Luhrmann has lost some of the more passing references, and instead uses recurrent thematic music to regularly link moments of foreboding and death sequences together. As well as exploring the use of music to directly support the spoken text, the following analysis shows that Luhrmann's musical choices in response to the lovers' deaths when they come hark back to two important themes established as part of Luhrmann's imposed operatic structure, arguably helping him balance the tragic denouement of the play with the weight of the expectation of a conventional Hollywood romantic ending, in which the lovers should overcome impossible odds and live happily ever after.

Language and Characterization

Luhrmann argues that Shakespeare used highly rhythmical language to enable the audience to follow the poetry, and surrounded it by familiar musical styles to help tell the story, and suggests that he uses music in a similar way to support the language in his film.³⁹ However, Luhrmann's extensive cutting of Shakespeare's text and decision to allow the actors to speak naturally disrupted its rhythms and reduced almost all the speeches to 'snappy chunks' of text.⁴⁰ This was one of the most controversial aspects of the film, and perhaps explains the hostility to the use of pop songs (and pop beats) which were perceived as obscuring any poetry that remained: 'Shakespeare's language is barely recognisable as verse and its rhetorical and poetic richness almost entirely obliterated. Shakespeare's language—its sounds, wordplay and rhythm is the victim of this film, consistently cut, mumbled or swamped by the insistent soundtrack.'⁴¹

Luhrmann, then, is clearly not using rhythmic speech the way that Shakespeare did to clarify the text. Instead, my analysis shows that he uses rhythmic musical types that the audience were already familiar with to suggest the poeticism and in some cases highlight the meaning of Shakespeare by placing the poetry within a new rhythmic framework—frequently transposing it into a version of song lyrics. He simultaneously takes advantage of musical allusions to provide (almost instant) information about the nature of the characters.

Romeo

Judith Buchanan has explored the way that Luhrmann acclimatizes the audience to Shakespeare's text in some detail, looking at visual and dramatic methods used rather than considering the music. She first explores the Prologue, which is repeated three times—first spoken with no accompaniment by a newsreader, then repeated in more Shakespearean tones over the 'O Verona' music, during a hectic visual montage of the feud between the Montagues and Capulets, interspersed with important lines of the prologue text written on screen. Buchanan argues that:

p. 1161

For all the crazy pacing of the visual introductions and the headily operatic insistence of the sound track, the processes of immersion in Shakespearean language are therefore gradual [due to repetition and inclusion as text] and surreptitiously repetitive in ways that help acclimatise the ear gradually to the non-naturalistic nature of the language.⁴²

(And, if audiences are conversant in Latin and listening closely, the prologue can apparently also be heard in a fourth, musical version, in Latin translation sung by the chorus.)⁴³ Buchanan notes that the introduction of Romeo, which comes after a reprise of the orchestral prologue music over scenes of chaos across the city caused by the feud between Montague and Capulet, offers audiences a space to consider the use of Shakespearean language in the film, a point we will return to. As De Vries points out, musically the introduction of Romeo is the first moment of calm in the film, and coincides with the first inclusion in the music track of a pre-existing pop song, in this case a rock song by Radiohead, 'Talk Show Host'.⁴⁴ This was a B side to the single 'Street Spirit (Fade Out)' which had been released in Australia and the United Kingdom, but not the United States, early in 1996. So although the US audience may have recognized the sound of Radiohead, it is unlikely that they would have known this particular track prior to the film. This is also the first moment that popular music is used to clarify Shakespearean speech as well as using musical allusion to help us understand the character of Romeo.

p. 1162
'Talk Show Host' was remixed for inclusion in the film, and fades in and out of a quietly moody, orchestral wind sequence, apparently based on Mozart's Serenade No. 10 for Thirteen Winds ('Gran Partita'), K. 361/370a.⁴⁵ The original song has a roughly AB repeating structure, with the B section extended each time it returns by insertions of increasing numbers of an additional two-bar sequence (C). The whole song is tied together by a distinctive repeated two-bar guitar riff (see Ex. 42.1),⁴⁶ which is first heard in the introduction and forms the basis of the A section. The song is closely tied to Romeo in this sequence, and is used to structure our introduction to the character, running in mildly remixed form under the scene, with just one statement of the riff cut, and different elements of it featuring more or less predominantly in the mix. In particular, much of the main vocal line containing the lyrics in the original version has been removed altogether or pushed much lower in the mix for much of the time, emerging at key moments to punctuate the scene. The way that the song gradually enters the scene, and is increasingly synchronized with it, both visually and through the placement of speech, can be interpreted as a form of 'audio dissolve'.⁴⁷ Usually applied to the soundtrack of film musicals when characters shift from 'real life' to a performance number, the audio dissolve occurs as the music on the soundtrack gradually takes over the visual elements, appearing to control them rhythmically as the usual diegetic sounds fade from view. Altman terms this unusual dominance of music over the action 'supradiegetic'.⁴⁸ The music continues to dominate the soundtrack until the 'performance' has ended and we return to 'real life' and the normal relationship of sound to the diegesis.⁴⁹ In the heightened setting of *Romeo + Juliet* there is little distinction between performance and real life, but the transition into a short musical sequence—here introducing Romeo—does have similarities with this process, and effectively eases us into the idea that Shakespearean speech has youthful rhythm in much the same way as pop song lyrics do. To demonstrate this, I shall talk through the scene in some detail here. (See Table 42.1 for the structure of the original song and the way it works in this scene.)⁵⁰

Ex. 42.1



Radiohead, 'Talk Show Host', guitar riff.

Table 42.1 ‘Talk Show Host’ map.

Radiohead lyrics			Shakespeare (with audible Radiohead lyrics in bold, words with sync points underlined)	
Song structure	2 bars	2 bars	2 bars	2 bars
A section intro	Riff	Riff	C: (Right) <u>glad</u> I am he was not at this fray. B: Madam, underneath the Grove of Sycamore So early walking did I see your son. M: Many a morning hath he there been seen ...
A (Ex. 42.1)	I want to	I want to be someone else or ...	M: ... With tears augmenting the <u>fresh morning’s dew</u> . C: Away from light steals home my heavy son And private in his chamber pens himself,
A	... I’ll explode	Floating upon the surface for ...	C: Shuts up his windows, locks fair daylight out, And makes himself an artificial night.	(C looks worried. R seen from a distance sat on stage on the beach) Floating upon the surface for ...
B1 (Ex. 42.2, bb.1–4)	... The birds	The birds	(Cut to Romeo front view, camera glides up from his feet to his head)	(Turns to profile in sync with): The birds . R: Why then, O brawling love,
B2 (Ex. 42.2 bb. 5–6)/A	The birds	2-bar riff in song (cut in film)	The birds . R: O loving hate, O anything, of nothing first create!	

A	You want me	Fucking come and find me	(see lyric writing over R's shoulder) R: O heavy lightness, serious vanity,	R: Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms, <i>(R looks up into the camera, apparently synced to music)</i>
A	I'll be waiting	With a gun and a pack of sandwiches and ...	<i>(R's parents watch him from the car)</i>	<i>(R stands and lingers onstage)</i>
B1	Nothing	Nothing	Nothing <i>(R walks away across stage towards the beach)</i>	Nothing <i>(R, in close-up, turns towards camera in slow motion while walking)</i>
B2/C	Nothing	Rising warm pads	Nothing <i>(R looks down again)</i>	<i>(R disappears from view as camera moves past buildings)</i>
B2/A	Nothing	2-bar riff	<i>(R reappears in the distance, still in slow motion)</i>	<i>(R pauses, turns, sees man watch a prostitute dance in slow motion, apparently synced to wilder drums)</i>
A	You want me?	Well come on and break the door down (mellotron harmonies only)	You want me? <i>(R moves away left across the screen, cut back to Montague car)</i> M: Black and portentous must this humour prove ...	M: ... Unless good counsel may the cause remove.
A	You want me	Fucking come on and break the door down (harmonies only)	B: So please you step aside ...	B: ... I'll know his grievance or be much denied.
B1	I'm ready	I'm ready	M: Come, Madam. Let's away.	<i>(R looks up slowly into camera; his full face is seen clearly for the first time)</i>

B2

**I'm
ready**

(Quick fade out)

I'm ready

(R seen from behind; shift to Benvolio POV)

B: Good morrow, cousin.

Starting with just the newly composed wind section as we see the Montague cars drive past (0:09:36),⁵¹ the distinctive opening guitar riff fades in as Romeo's mother, Caroline, starts talking about Romeo, establishing a connection between him and the Radiohead riff (0:09:52). The first bass notes appear to pick up on the rhythm of her speech, then the riff (without accompanying singing) continues under the speech

p. 1163 until it again appears ↵

p. 1164

↵

p. 1165 ↵

to pick up the rhythm of Montague's words 'fresh morning's dew'.⁵² The talk between the Montagues sits fairly evenly within the rhythm established by the riff, although each character speaks across the bar lines. After Caroline has described Romeo's behaviour, the words of the song fade in, although sounding distant in the mix, for the B section (see Ex. 4.2.2), with fuller accompaniment and percussion ('floating upon the surface for the birds') and we see Romeo close up for the first time, sat smoking on the remains of an abandoned theatre on the beach, although we are yet to see his face clearly. Romeo and the music are now more clearly and closely connected as he appears to move in time to the music in the sections with audible lyrics, and his speech intermingles with them, sitting more neatly within the bar lines than his relatives did. The camera pans slowly up his body over the words 'for the birds', he turns to profile in time to the music on the repeat of 'the birds', then we hear him speaking in 'internalised voice over',⁵³ interpolating Shakespearean verse into the impressionistic lyrics of the ongoing Radiohead track: 'Why then, O brawling love, (the birds) O loving hate, O anything, of nothing first create!'. The next A section of the song begins, and the singing voice disappears. Romeo now replaces the existing lyrics of the song with a new verse of his poetry, lasting four bars, during which a cut shows us a close-up of his hand clutching his cigarette and ↵

p. 1166 writing the words in his notebook. Both musically and visually, it is suggested here that the spoken Shakespeare is in effect a form of song lyric. Romeo breaks off writing as the A section repeats, and we have another lingering shot of him facing us, head down with greasy blond hair obscuring his face before he looks briefly up into the camera, again apparently in time to the music. Throughout this section, Romeo is backlit—we are yet to see his features clearly. The song moves into the next B section and the camera shifts to view Romeo again from a distance, perhaps reflecting his parents' point of view as they have now arrived and seen him from their car. As the lyrics return ('and nothing') the camera is on Romeo, maintaining his link to words set to music: he appears to move with the music through the following section. We see him get up, perhaps because he has seen his parents' car arrive, and walk away from us in slow motion towards the ocean, matching the dreamy feeling of the accompaniment of the B section. After the second 'nothing' we see Romeo in relative close-up again, this time walking past the camera, and as the music rises, he looks sideways towards us and we see him clearly for the first time, before he looks down again on the third 'nothing'. The inserted C section of the song interrupting the lyrics matches a pause as the camera loses Romeo from view before we see him again, now from a distance for the fourth and final 'nothing'. He continues to seem to move to the music, pausing to look at a man ogling a prostitute apparently wiggling in time to the drums before continuing towards the beach as the beginning of the third verse starts, this time with more driving drums and bass and the words 'You want me?' The camera switches back to the Montagues in the car, and, as Romeo is out of shot, the lyrics leave the song again (although the ghostly mellotron harmonies of the song remain in the mix). The Montagues decide what to do next, now with the Shakespearean language sitting more neatly in the two-bar riff motif, their rhymes emphasized by the rhythm of the music. The worried parents decide to leave in the B section, and the camera finds Romeo again in time for a lingering close-up as he slowly looks directly up into the camera again as the lyrics repeat 'I'm ready'. We see Romeo once again for the final 'I'm ready', now from behind, before the song quickly fades out and the camera focus shifts away to Benvolio's cheerful 'Good morrow, cousin!', returning us to 'reality'.

Ex. 42.2

The image shows a musical score for the 'birds' section of Radiohead's 'Talk Show Host'. It is presented in two systems. Each system includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in 4/4 time, key of B-flat major, and features the lyrics 'the birds...' and 'the birds'. The piano accompaniment consists of chords and melodic lines in both hands.

Radiohead, 'Talk Show Host', birds section.

This three-minute introduction of Romeo, including the speech in voiceover, is an addition to the play by Luhrmann, interpolating lines here for Romeo which he will soon repeat in their correct position in the text. This sequence also does not appear in the published screenplay, suggesting a later addition to the film, providing space to establish Romeo's character using multiple intertextual references, and also to take the time to establish the concept of framing Shakespearean speech with popular-music structures for the audience.⁵⁴ Buchanan interprets Romeo's framing by a proscenium arch as a commentary on both the deliberate artificiality of his first lines (which, in the Shakespeare play, draw attention to his failings as a poet), and more broadly to emphasize the artificiality of Shakespeare in a staged setting.⁵⁵ In terms of film references, this sequence has been compared to the introduction of James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) as a way of explaining Romeo's character,⁵⁶ but the framing of Romeo by rock band Radiohead suggests a more contemporary musical cultural reference.⁵⁷ The combination of greasy blond hair obscuring the face that we see initially, and the cigarette in the hand writing what the music rhythmically suggests are lyrics in the notebook, are reminiscent of Kurt Cobain, a doomed youth icon of the rock world who had killed himself in 1994, just two and a half years before the film was released. The combination of these visual references with the positioning of the speech as lyrics suggests that Romeo is introduced here not just as the amateur poet that he is in Shakespeare, but also as the modern equivalent, a wannabe rock star, perhaps writing lyrics about the feud (brawling hate) that we have just seen unfolding.⁵⁸ This speech, first presented here as potential lyrics for a song, is later spoken without any musical underscoring to Benvolio in what seems, in the context of Romeo discovering the preceding fight on a television, to be him trying out his response to the feud again as prose.

The repetition of this speech in the film has been interpreted by Buchanan as part of Luhrmann's commentary on the difficulty of Shakespearean adaptation. In the original, Romeo just spouts these 'paradoxical platitudes'⁵⁹ as he explains his imagined love for Rosaline to Benvolio, then interrupts himself to ask Benvolio 'Dost thou not laugh?' In the context of the film, we know Romeo is pleased enough with his words to write them down; but, as Buchanan observes, 'Benvolio can scarcely suppress a snigger', and Luhrmann takes advantage of this moment to diffuse any residual discomfort the audience might have about the use of 'heightened language in the context of a hip movie'.⁶⁰ Buchanan suggests this response 'implies there is something contrived-sounding and inauthentic about such phrases'⁶¹ when used away from the artifice of the stage, but I would argue that it is the lack of musical accompaniment that is more relevant here—the platitudes seemed fine moments earlier in the context of being lyrics, but less so when used unaccompanied in speech without the cushion of music to help their rhythms. Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* has been interpreted as being a play exploring poetical structures, and different types of poet, but here Luhrmann presents Romeo as a poet only able to be taken seriously when accompanied by music, while also suggesting that popular music is an appropriate vehicle for Shakespearean speech.⁶²

p. 1168 After this sequence establishing the idea of Shakespeare as lyrics, and the failure of Benvolio to appreciate Romeo's couplets when they are free from musical accompaniment, all the interactions between the young Montagues are accompanied by rock songs or trip-hop beats for the rest of the film, with the repetitive beats giving rhythmic support to the more unfamiliar structures of Shakespeare. Romeo in particular is usually accompanied by grunge/alt rock music, which could be argued to become his 'boy theme', in Luhrmann's quasi-operatic structure. The Radiohead track definitely functions as a clear motif for Romeo—it reappears, this time without any singing, to frame him once again jotting down his musings on love to amuse himself in Mantua, this time imagining Juliet reviving him from death with the power of love (1:32:28). This is the last time a pop song fragment appears in recognizable form in the soundtrack until the end credits, which are again accompanied by a full track by Radiohead, this time the specially commissioned 'Exit Song (for a Film)'.

Juliet

Juliet's relationship to music is more complicated. She is introduced amid the frenetic activity of her mother preparing for the Capulet ball, musically encapsulated by the edited opening of a pre-existing recording of the first movement from Mozart's Symphony No. 25 in G minor, K. 183.⁶³ We first see Juliet briefly as the camera looks up at her submerged face from underwater (0:16:29), a moment of stillness among the movement and bright colours around her when bb. 45 and 46 of the Mozart are replaced with a brief echoey quotation (a treated sample) of the opening two notes (and word) of Gavin Friday's song 'Angel' (see Ex. 4.2.3). Her first speeches after this are accompanied by the Mozart as she is caught up in the matchmaking plans of her mother. We hear the opening of 'Angel' properly once her mother has left, and Juliet, admiring the fireworks which take us from the day to the night of the party, imagines 'happy nights to happy days' as encouraged by her nurse (0:18:47). We only see her for a few seconds here, though, now literally dressed as an angel for the party, looking out from her balcony. The male voice, singing falsetto, is soft and gentle with a glistening timbre and sings the lines 'Angel, hold on to me, Love is all around me', accompanied by a twinkling sound which reflects the sparkling lights in the sky. This song has a flexible, additive structure, but unlike 'Talk Show Host', it is heavily cut to match the editing here, while maintaining a seamless beat pattern giving the impression of a continuous track. The musical repeat of the first two lines of the song is cut and, as the camera travels through the showers of light from the mansion to Romeo and his friends at Sycamore Grove, we hear the next section of the song, featuring the cool hardness of a repeated high piano riff over a smooth bass and gently pulsing beats which match the contrast of the fireworks and the velvety night sky. The song moves into the next section in which the singing continues 'to me, / Don't go', and utters 'Don't leave me' as the camera comes to rest on Romeo, also looking up at the fireworks (0:19:10). The song therefore connects the lovers before they have met, and, although Luhmann describes this as Juliet's theme, her visual association with it is very brief.⁶⁴ The echoey 'Angel' quotation appears just once more when the lovers are submerged after their first fall into the pool together in the balcony scene, suggesting a reading that it is more a motif connecting the two, or to do with Romeo's impression of Juliet as an angel, than a 'girl theme' per se.

Ex. 42.3

The image displays two systems of musical notation for Mozart's Symphony No. 25, first movement, measures 44-47. The first system includes parts for Oboe, Bassoon, Horn in Bb, Horn in G, Voice, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The second system includes parts for Oboe (Ob.), Bassoon (Bsn.), Horn in Bb (Bb Hn.), Horn in G (G Hn.), Voice, Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), and Violoncello (Vc.). The key signature is B-flat major. The voice part in the second system includes the interpolated text "An - - - gel".

Mozart, Symphony No. 25, first movement, bb. 44-47, with 'Angel' interpolated.

After Juliet has met Romeo, she has only one speech accompanied by a recognizable song, the ‘Gallop’ speech in which she looks forward to the consummation of her marriage with Romeo. This speech is the only significant soliloquy from the play that Luhrmann has kept in the screenplay for Juliet (although it is still heavily cut), and its subject matter and form would be more usually expressed by a male protagonist.⁶⁵ If Romeo were not at this very moment chasing Tybalt to avenge his best friend’s death (Luhrmann moves this speech to just prior to Tybalt’s death), it is likely that he would be longing for a night with Juliet. For this reason, perhaps, Juliet is musically given the role of a female rock-poet equivalent of Romeo’s ‘boy theme’, with Romeo’s more dynamic ↪ rock accompaniment replaced with a gentle female singer-songwriter track accompanied with acoustic guitar (of the type that many girls who liked rock music may have strummed in their bedrooms in the mid-nineties). This apparently tranquil track, ‘Little Star’ by Stina Nordenstam, previously released in 1994, appears to be about two lovers separated by death, possibly suicide, and was possibly picked partly for this reason or, as Loehlin has argued, because the song’s title relates to Juliet’s line ‘and cut him out in little stars’. Like Romeo’s framing by Radiohead, fragments of the track surround and punctuate Juliet’s speech with obscure lyrics occasionally breaking through: the female singer has a delicate, fragile sounding voice, singing the line ‘Little Star’ (which through her pronunciation sounds like ‘wait or stay’, which would also fit the scene where Juliet is waiting for Romeo) which cuts into the silence after the end of Mercutio’s Requiem and introduces the speech (1:07:00). The speech is accompanied by a loop of the opening gently strummed acoustic guitar riff (F, C, B♭) and punctuated with two lines from the song—‘you must have wanted him to know’, which comes in immediately after ‘Give me my Romeo’, perhaps a commentary on Juliet’s longing for Romeo here. At the end of the first verse of the speech (‘garish sun’) and at the end of it (‘wear them’) the sample of the line ‘Little Star’ is heard again, p. 1171 marking the structure of the poetry and also marking the ↪ beginning and end of this sweet interlude presenting a marked contrast to the huge musical and tragic forces unfolding outside the safety of Juliet’s bedroom in Romeo’s murderous response to Mercutio’s death.

The sample and loop treatment of ‘Little Star’ is much more fragmentary than the treatment of Radiohead that accompanied Romeo, which did not significantly alter the overall song structure; and, after this, Juliet’s accompaniment by songs is broken down almost completely to form the basis of atmospheric soundscapes with only the occasional recognizable fragment surfacing in the mix. While Juliet is acting to avoid her marriage to Paris, she is mainly accompanied by sinister ghostly chords and moans that seem to allude to the deep echoes of the cathedral where she will die (1:26:32). These are based on manipulations of what became the first hit single of the soundtrack, ‘#1 Crush’ by female-fronted rock band Garbage. This song had already been released as the B side of the band’s debut single in 1995 and was remixed by Hooper and De Vries for inclusion on the soundtrack album, selected at least partly perhaps because it is about one lover prepared to die for another. However, like ‘Little Star’, the song is reduced in the film to a few elements—a base of sinister synth pads with the occasional distinctive vocal ‘ah-ah-ah-ah’ breaking through the texture (e.g., at 1:27:27) and, when Juliet tries on her wedding veil for her wedding to Paris, we briefly hear a slowed and distorted version of the female voice singing ‘I would die for you’, the first line of the song (1:29:50). This reworking of Garbage gives a powerful sense of dread to the soundtrack, and continues to accompany Juliet with female rock singers, but does nothing to offer Juliet rhythmic support as her delivery of speech also increasingly breaks down into shrieks and depressed murmurs as she seeks escape from her impending second marriage.

Mercutio, and the Turn Towards Tragedy

Mercutio shows the greatest mastery of poetic speech in Shakespeare's play,⁶⁶ and is also more integrated with popular music than Romeo and Juliet in the film, often appearing to shape his own musical accompaniment. This can be clearly seen through his introduction in drag, 'performing' to a cover of the disco song 'Young Hearts Run Free' produced especially for the film by Hooper with De Vries. The track combined a version sung by Kim Mayzelle, which was released on the first soundtrack album, with additional sections sung by actors Harold Perrineau (Mercutio) and Paul Sorvino (Capulet), released on the second soundtrack album. This song, originally a disco hit in 1976, perfectly summarizes Mercutio's cynical attitude to love. If the audience cannot understand his playful Shakespearean language, they can understand his feelings ↴ through the lyrics and his character through his interaction with the disco-infused high-energy dance track.⁶⁷ Unlike Romeo, whose words emerge from a haze of half-obscured Radiohead lyrics, while the beats seem to structure his thoughts and actions, Mercutio literally brings the music with him and appears to shape it to his needs. He arrives with the horn fanfares and pounding beats of the opening of the song blaring from his car, triumphantly announcing his presence (0:19:29). Mercutio's first utterances, singing along to the Mayzelle version of the track still playing from his car, are 'Ending up just another lost and lonely wife' (0:19:50). The song continues with the line 'you count up the years and they will be filled with tears' as he hands out invitations, then the rest of the verse and pre-chorus are cut after the next line to go directly to the chorus as he approaches Romeo, singing along 'Young hearts run free, never be hung up, hung up like Rosaline and thee' (instead of 'my man and me'; 0:20:00). As Mayzelle completes the line, repeating 'my man and me', Mercutio utters his first Shakespearean line: 'Nay, gentle Romeo, we must have you dance' (0:20:12). Romeo laughs and demurs. The song is edited to shift abruptly into the looped mid-section as if Mercutio has made it wait while he works on persuading Romeo—each young man's riposte starts roughly on the first beat of a bar as they verbally dance around each other. As Mercutio appears to win the argument, the horns rise as if to return to the chorus, and on to the party (0:20:38).⁶⁸ But in the brief silence just before the chorus hits, Romeo refuses to go ('But 'tis no wit to go!') and the song stops altogether as Mercutio tries to find out the cause of Romeo's concern (0:20:50). He then turns to the greater persuasive powers of an ecstasy tab and the Queen Mab speech in a section that is scored orchestrally (0:21:04), including a motif (Ex. 42.4) that we next hear when Mercutio is about to die (1:03:38). This is the first moment of musical foreshadowing.

The Queen Mab speech is followed, as in the original, by Romeo's uneasy premonition of 'some consequence hanging in the stars' (0:23:00). As Loehlin notes, this more obvious Shakespearean foreshadowing is translated cinematically by Luhrmann with a brief flashforward of Romeo walking 'among the shimmering candles and dying flowers of Juliet's tomb' (0:23:17).⁶⁹ Romeo half staggers towards the camera along an aisle of flowers, candles, and neon blue crosses, a gun hanging limply from his hand—but the viewer cannot be sure where he is or what he is moving towards. In fact, he is clearly wounded, and one might think that it was only his own death that he is foreseeing. It is not until the end of the film, when Romeo peers inside the tomb and we watch him walk up the aisle in profile (1:42:00), that it is clear that this was a direct premonition providing a different visual angle on later events. From the moment the premonition speech begins, we can hear an eerie female voice singing over a cavernous echo, at first in a style reminiscent of religious chant, then as the voice gradually fills the soundscape now accompanied by strings, and as Romeo decides to ignore his misgivings ('But he that have ↴ steerage of my course / Direct my sail!') the voice and strings move together to follow a rising minor scale, holding on the seventh note for maximum tension as we see him pause with the ecstasy tab on his finger, intercut with more of the tomb scene, before taking the pill on the final note of the scale (0:23:36). Like the visuals, the music here is a direct allusion to the later tomb scene, but 'heard' from a different angle—the scoring here is made of remixed echoey fragments of a longer, more continuous vocal piece that accompanies the much longer walk towards Juliet's funeral byre at the end of the film.⁷⁰

Ex. 42.4



The 'Queen Mab' motif foreshadowing Mercutio's death.

Fireworks break the mood again (0:23:45) as the drug takes effect and 'Young Hearts' returns—the musical equivalent perhaps of Benvolio's 'Strike, Drum!' (1.4.112)—now sung falsetto by Mercutio himself in a trip-like sequence as he and his music take charge of Romeo and they go to the Capulet ball, where, after Romeo whispers 'Thy drugs are quick!', Mercutio eventually performs a final and fully choreographed sequence of the chorus of 'Young Hearts', now over a Latin beat, to the ball attendees who move in unison with him, also under his music's spell. Mercutio's apparent ability to control his accompanying music can also be seen in his later appearances: when he is imagining a duel between Romeo and Tybalt, for example, not only is he accompanied by his own distinct bass loops and trip-hop beats but also the rhythms and pauses of his speech are emphasized by cool guitar interjections and pauses for effect (0:50:05–25). More dramatically, he can interrupt other character's music: in the sequence following the marriage, in a reversal of the 'Young Hearts' sequence, Romeo appears in his car bringing with him a rock song by Everclear (0:51:33). Apparently commissioned for the film, this song ('Local God') plays continuously albeit quite low in the mix under Romeo's wordplay with Mercutio, which again falls relatively evenly within the patterns of the repeated riffs. This time Romeo, now truly in love, and supported by his signature rock music, is a better match for Mercutio and their exchanges speed up across the bar lines until they are interrupted by the arrival of Juliet's nurse at the end of the verse. The music suddenly becomes more prominent in the mix after she requests 'some confidence with you', with the song chorus's lyrics now suggesting to the audience how Romeo and his friends feel: 'I feel just like a local god when I'm with the boys, we do what we want, yes we ...' (0:52:30). Before the chorus can finish, Mercutio interrupts the last line ('do what we want') and 'quite literally, shoots the song off the screen'⁷¹ to get Romeo's attention (0:52:49). The sudden silence emphasizes Mercutio's hurt and the seriousness of the following conversation about marriage, although on p. 1174 the word 'shrived', as Romeo pauses ↵ for effect, his rhythm is emphasized by the appearance of another exuberant rock song ('Lovefool', by The Cardigans), this time explicitly about love (0:53:34). Mercutio literally gets his groove back again in his next appearance in an exchange with Tybalt (0:57:54). Although his beats are interrupted by Tybalt's slower western-infused accompaniment, he stops the music short on the word 'blow' (0:59:08) and later brings driving drum rhythms with him as he decides to join the fight which ultimately leads to his death (1:02:45). His death is marked by a two-minute choral requiem incorporating slow industrial beats (1:04:45). This also marks the death of the unaltered pop song in the music track, with the rest consisting largely of distorting remixes and recombinations of earlier material. Going back to Luhrmann's quasi-operatic structure, it seems that it is not the meeting of the lovers that marks the end of new musical material in the soundtrack, but the shift of the play from a potential comedy to tragedy which Mercutio's death brings about.⁷²

Love Theme: Ball

It is to the meeting of the lovers at the ball that we now turn. In the play this, the balcony scene, and the alba (morning-after) scene are the moments where Romeo and Juliet perform love duets in the form of sonnets. In the film, as remarked by most critics, the relationship of the lovers is consistently framed in water imagery.⁷³ Less often remarked upon is their repeated musical accompaniment by variations of 'Kissing You' by Des'ree, a 'lyrical torch song'⁷⁴ and one of two new songs she submitted as potentially suitable for inclusion in the film.⁷⁵

The moment of the lovers' meeting was understandably focused on by critics, some of whom pointed out that they meet several times before actually speaking the sonnet, which means that we already know they have fallen in love.⁷⁶ One critic described this as evidence that 'every emotion is overdetermined' and explicitly brought the music into this: 'When they fall in love we're told so by the film on the level of music, colour and camera as well as dialogue'.⁷⁷ We have already seen a musical connection between Juliet and water, specifically with the use of fragments of 'Angel' when she is submerged. ↪ For Romeo, a musical link with water is made as he emerges from a similar submerged shot—the echoing piano opening of 'Kissing You' emerges with him as he lifts his head out of a basin in which he has washed Mercutio's love drug out of his system (0:25:34). Again, Romeo alone provides us with a moment of musical calm in which we can admire a beautiful tropical fish tank with him. The song is revealed to be a diegetic performance by a soul singer, and the full four minutes of it are heard before the lovers actually speak to each other, during which time, as in the play, they move from flirting to falling in love. De Vries asserts that this inclusion of the full song was considered very important by the team to demonstrate that nothing could interrupt the falling in love process.⁷⁸ Once fixed in the audience's mind in this way, the song is then used as the basis of an orchestral love theme to accompany all remaining instances of Romeo and Juliet's lovemaking, verbal or otherwise, across this, the balcony scene, and the alba sequence.

The lovers' interactions at the ball are carefully choreographed by the music, which seems to sweep them along until the sudden tragic realization of their relationship to the feuding families. Romeo and Juliet first see each other through the fish tank on the word 'pain' in b. 10, perhaps another example of musical foreboding (0:26:35).⁷⁹ Two bars later, in the enriched chord sequence in b. 12 which prepares for the 'Kissing You' section, and which will later come to symbolize the deepening of their feelings (Ex. 42.5), Romeo raises a quizzical eyebrow, and Juliet quickly looks down and then makes eye contact again, a slight smile on her face (0:26:46). At the words 'I'm kissing you' in b. 13 (0:27:00), the two begin clearly flirting through the glass, bumping noses on the tank in the second repeat of 'kissing you' in b. 16 (0:27:17). They are interrupted by the Nurse (0:27:25), who whisks Juliet away, but by now the connection between them is cemented and they are in love. The song continues to express their feelings for each other from b. 17 as other aspects of the drama unfold and a string accompaniment comes in, composed to complement the song by Craig Armstrong, which will form the basis of the string arrangement of the theme to come. Paris dances with Juliet from b. 19, and Tybalt spots Romeo through the crowd in b. 21 (0:27:44) and is prevented from accosting him by Capulet. From b. 25, tensions rise between the Capulets: 'I'll not endure him'; 'He shall be endured!' (0:28:22). This moment of tension coincides with the addition of string flurries to the bridge section's urgent high piano pattern (which De Vries compares to *The Exorcist*!⁸⁰). At the end of the bridge, over a long-held A minor chord in b. 30, Romeo speaks to himself to confirm to us he is in love: 'Did my heart love till now?' (0:29:00). He continues over the singing of the gentle coda with 'Foreswear it, sight. For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night'. (See Ex. 42.6 for the movement from bridge to coda.) We then watch with Romeo from b. 33 until the end of the song at b. 38 as Juliet dances with Paris while looking for him in the crowd. The song finishes on a relatively weak cadence to A ↪ minor (0:30:00), an ambiguous ending that will be capitalized on later. For now, 'Kissing You' is firmly established as Romeo and Juliet's love theme, and from this point it moves from the real performance at the ball into the orchestral score to return repeatedly to underscore their poetical and literal lovemaking. Its first return in the underscore is almost immediate and will be discussed in detail here. (See Table 42.2 for a map of the interrelation between music and Shakespeare.⁸¹)

Ex. 42.5

The image shows a musical score for the song 'Kissing You'. It is divided into two systems. The first system (measures 11-15) is in 12/8 time and features a vocal line with lyrics 'Oh, oh, the' and a piano accompaniment. The piano part includes a triplet of eighth notes. The second system (measures 15-20) is in 15/8 time and features a vocal line with lyrics 'ach - ing!' and a piano accompaniment. The piano part includes two triplets of eighth notes.

The enriched cadence in Des'ree's 'Kissing You' (bb. 11–12).

The applause at the end of the diegetic performance gives Romeo his chance,⁸² and as soon as he takes Juliet's hand and starts his sonnet, a rich string arrangement of 'Kissing You' starts from the beginning of the chorus (b. 13) and repeats once again straight through to the end of the bridge (0:30:26). The first part of the sonnet exchanged by the lovers is underscored by the first four-line, eight-bar section of the chorus (bb. 13–20), which audiences may recognize as the 'Kissing You' music from earlier. Their kiss to end the sonnet, which we would expect on the first beat of the bar of the return of 'I'm kissing you', is interrupted and slightly delayed until they are safely in the lift halfway through b. 21, where the kiss lasts for what would have been the entirety of the words 'kissing you, oh' in the vocal version of the track. At bb. 23–24 they quickly exchange more words punctuated with another brief kiss—'Give me my sin again' (kiss); 'You kiss by the book'—before the lift opens and they run out of the lift at the bridge (b. 25). At this point in the play, p. 1177 Romeo discovers from the Nurse that Juliet is a Capulet, but here in the film the lovers have several more bars of innocent musical lovemaking. Their tragic realization is delayed through the bridge, which has lost the *Exorcist*-like piano, leaving only a variation of the original string scurries, hesitant and gentle at first then more continuous as Juliet pushes Romeo into the lift again and they kiss with more passion from b. 27. They are interrupted again at the end of b. 28 by the Nurse, who draws Juliet away. Romeo runs after her, smiling as the strings glissando joyfully into the triplets of b. 29. On the final A minor chord of b. 30, Juliet joins her mother at the top of the stairs and only then does Romeo's joy turn to confusion as he realizes she is a Capulet (0:32:39). The expected coda is not heard, replaced instead by the opening of another pre-existing track, this time a concert work by Armstrong, *Slow Movement* for string orchestra (1994): see Ex. 42.7. Various sections of this work are stitched together to underscore the two lovers' increasing desperation and longing as Romeo leaves the party. Repeated sections of this work are also often used after this to capture the emotional turmoil of the relationship between Capulets and Montagues, another note of musical foreboding for what is to come, reflecting again Shakespeare's reminder of the inescapable tragic ending.

Ex. 42.6

The image displays a musical score for the song 'Kissing You'. It is divided into two systems. The first system shows the vocal line starting with the word 'Yeah,' and the piano accompaniment. The second system shows the vocal line with the lyrics 'yeah, yeah. Where are you now?' and the piano accompaniment. The piano part features a consistent harmonic accompaniment in the left hand and a more active melodic line in the right hand. The score concludes with a double bar line and a final chord in the piano part, marked with a '3' indicating a triplet.

The original ending of the bridge moving into the coda in 'Kissing You' (bb. 29–31).

Table 42.2 ‘Kissing You’ map.

Bars	Section/lyrics	Sonnet sequence
1–4	[Intro.]	(Absent—instrumental version starts from b. 13)
5–8	Pride can stand a thousand trials, the strong will never fall. But watching stars without you, my soul cried:	
9–11	Heaving heart is full of pain. Oh, oh, the	
12	Aching! ... [enriched cadence; Ex. 42.5] ... 'Cause	
13–20	I'm kissing you, oh. I'm kissing you, oh. Touch me deep, pure and true; A gift to me forever.	R: If I profane with my unworhiest hand This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this. My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand to smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss. J: 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. R: Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too? J: Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer. R: O then dear pilgrim let lips do what hands do, They pray: grant thou, lest faith turn to despair. J: Saints do not move, though grant for prayer's sake. R: Then move not while my prayer's effect I take. <i>[Interrupted by 'ding' of lift and parents' approach]</i>
21–24	I'm kissing you, oh. I'm kissing you, oh.	<i>[Now in the lift, they kiss at length]</i> R: Thus from my lips, by thine, my sin is purged. J: Then have my lips the sin that they have took. R: Sin from my lips? O trespass sweetly urged, give me my sin again. <i>[They kiss.]</i> J: You kiss by the book.
25–28	[Bridge: piano riffs/string scurries]	<i>[They leave the lift, see the parents, then go back into the lift (b. 26): more kissing, Nurse opens the door ('Madam!') and J leaves the lift again]</i>

29– [Bridge: Triplet-effect chords to final cadence ending on minor chord] [R follows, she looks back whilst being pulled away; R's look of love turns to confusion on minor chord]

(Ex. 6)

31– [Coda:] Where are you now? (Absent)

Oh where are you now?

Cause I oh I'm kissing you

I'm kissing you oh.

This entire lovers' sequence carefully maps elements of Romeo and Juliet's courtship and growing passion onto the structure of the 'Kissing You' song, drawing on the fact that the audience has been invited to hear all the words in the first run through, so can interpret the feelings of longing or association with kissing which it may be related to (assuming that the connotations of genre and strings did not do this for them!).

p. 1178 In ↵
p. 1179

↵

particular, the orchestral version of the song takes advantage of the harmonic features of two passages: First, the enriched cadence in b. 12 approaching the first 'I'm kissing you', which musically describes the aching in the lyrics and which returns to good effect in the balcony scene (Ex. 42.5). The second instance is the ambiguity of the final A minor chord of the bridge—the pause on this chord the first time the song is sung through builds tension which is resolved into the sweetness and delicacy of the final coda (Ex. 42.6). The second time through it acts as a moment of unresolved tension as the future of Romeo and Juliet's newfound love is already uncertain. These elements of the theme will be used for particular effect again when the theme returns in the balcony scene.

Ex. 42.7

The musical score for Ex. 42.7 is presented in two systems. The first system is in 12/8 time, featuring a piano accompaniment with a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a steady eighth-note bass line. The second system is in 4/4 time, showing a melodic line in the right hand and a sustained bass line with long notes.

'Kissing You' interrupted by *Slow Movement*.

Love Theme: Balcony

The start of the famous balcony scene (from 0:35:55) is the longest sequence in the film without music, which enters after four minutes of dialogue and interaction between Romeo and Juliet (apart from the aforementioned brief interjection of 'Angel' as they fall in the water together at 0:38:56). 'Kissing You' returns when the lovers are safely returned to the water after the security team has lost interest, first in a hesitant piano variation which reflects the harder acoustics and blue lighting on the swimming pool, and perhaps also Juliet's awareness of the danger they are in (0:40:00). As Juliet dares ask if Romeo loves her, a string variation of the 'Kissing You' section is introduced and continues in an extended version throughout the rest of the scene (0:41:00). Although there are some additions to the theme here, based on the chord sequences established in the song, two of the key passages familiar from the ball are used prominently. First, the enriched cadence from b. 12 is heard when Romeo offers to marry Juliet (0:42:39), prompting her to jump back in the pool for the underwater kiss that will later re-emerge as the last image we see of the couple in the film in a flashback after their death (0:42:53). This prefiguring of the death scene is accompanied by a brief musical reference to *Slow Movement* (the descending three-note motif seen in the final two bars of Ex. 42.7), last heard at the end of the ball scene underscoring the lovers' realization that their situation is complicated and reminding the audience again of the inevitable tragic ending. Interrupted once more by the Nurse, the moment of musical foreboding is broken off and they emerge from the pool together to a return of a variation of 'Kissing You'. As they plan their marriage, 'Kissing you' returns in the exact form of the string variations heard at the ball, this time played from b. 17 onwards (0:43:19). The use of the now familiar second half of the 'Kissing You' string variations (already heard twice previously almost uninterrupted by speech) here allows the music to play with the audience's expectations of the ambiguous cadence at the end of the bridge, which previously marked the lovers' realization of the fact their love may be doomed. By the end of the 'Kissing You' section, they have apparently said their goodbyes between kisses and from b. 25, the bridge, Romeo starts to leave (0:44:10). She calls him back in b. 27, they make more arrangements, and they whisper 'goodnight' to each other in b. 29, which features the falling/rising triplet motif that moves us towards the final cadence and expected minor chord (0:44:45). Here, though, as the lovers prolong their goodnights as much as possible, we are given for the first time in the film a strong and beautiful musical cadence in a major key. The distinctive triplet motif is extended first by repeating down an octave another two times before moving into an ascending C major broken chord as Juliet, filled with hope for tomorrow, utters the lines about parting being such 'sweet sorrow'. The music ends on a final, sweet, and full C major chord which underlines the two lovers' happiness as they appear to have set in motion their perfect Hollywood ending (Ex. 42.8; 0:45:00). But of course, as the music has kept reminding us, this happiness is not meant to be, so I shall turn now to the ending.

‘Let Zidler keep his fairytale ending’

As we have said, the ending is of course known from the beginning, and Luhrmann works hard to maintain Shakespeare’s device of keeping the audience aware that there is a tragic ending throughout, most often with musical foreshadowing in the form of denied or interrupted cadences or the intrusion of *Slow Movement* into the musical texture. However, Luhrmann also had to work with the Hollywood convention that a teen romance should have a happy ending.⁸³ As the inevitable approaches, Luhrmann defers the moment of the lover’s death further than Shakespeare, allowing them to meet in life one last time as Juliet wakes just before Romeo dies. Luhrmann’s version of the ending harks back to both earlier versions of the myth, and to later Victorian performance tradition, but Castaldo argues this is also a response to the Hollywood context. Luhrmann creates a space where audiences can believe things could be different this time, ‘the lovers will [do the Hollywood thing], succeed against impossible odds and ride off into the sunset’.⁸⁴ By offering the possibility that Romeo will see Juliet stirring if he would only look down at her before he drinks the potion (1:46:26), and allowing the lovers to speak directly to each other before they die (1:46:50), Luhrmann is playing with the expectations of the audience in relation to both pre-existing story structures in his dramatic treatment of the ending.⁸⁵ We are not totally sure how it will end until both bodies lie dead on the altar. As discussed by several commentators, even this tragic finality is somewhat undercut. Visually, the violence of the tragedy is not dwelt upon: the camera cuts quickly away when Juliet kills herself.⁸⁶ The camera then cranes higher and higher, providing ‘a painterly bird’s eye view of th[e] dead bodies surrounded by a multitude of candles, neon crosses, and rose petals’.⁸⁷ The slow movement of the camera is interrupted by brief interjections of flashbacks of the lovers’ brief happiness, ending on the underwater kiss, the bubbles surrounding and screening the lovers, who freeze in that moment of peace, beauty, and happiness as the screen fades to white before the end of the film—a final brief speech by the Prince and return to the newsreader.⁸⁸ As Lehmann points out, Luhrmann has nonetheless been unable to avoid the demand of the legend that the story end tragically in death.⁸⁹

Ex. 42.8

‘Kissing You’ extended final cadence (balcony scene).

p. 1182 The musical ending, though, is more ambiguous about the finality of death, extending other possible readings of the double suicide throughout the death sequence and beyond until the very end of the credits, keeping open multiple routes of interpretation of the lovers’ death for the audience. The film ends with music that draws on themes and motifs established through the soundtrack, bringing them together to confirm that this was the moment the musical foreboding has been pointing towards, while also introducing new voices singing from beyond the grave.

In an interview describing water as Romeo and Juliet's special place for peace and belonging, Luhrmann says, 'that last image when they kiss under water—it's just silence'.⁹⁰ This is not true, however. The shuddering gunshot and subsiding echoes of the tomb are allowed to ring in relative silence, inviting us to contemplate the full horror of the deaths, but only for nine seconds before the 'just silence' is replaced for the remainder of the scene by 'just Wagner', namely the last few bars of the 'Liebestod' which ends the opera *Tristan und Isolde*.⁹¹ In the documentary later made about the film's music, Luhrmann explains the inclusion of *Tristan und Isolde* as an acknowledgement of the mythical history of the Romeo and Juliet story that predated Shakespeare and as a 'very appropriate way' to 'send them to the heavens'.⁹² Commentators that noticed the use of Wagner have also usually read it as a general reference to the Tristan and Isolde myth, but rarely consider the details of the piece of music used or how it interacts with the visuals or the other sounds around it.⁹³ A closer reading of the music in the death sequence suggests that as well as its more general connotations of doomed Romantic love, the choice of this particular section of Wagner's music and the way that it relates to other music in the soundtrack also helps resolve the musical tension between the Hollywood and Shakespearean endings that has been evident through the use of musical foreshadowing elsewhere in the film.

Sonically, the death sequence starts with the silence of the tomb as Romeo shuts out the noise of the police chase and fragmentary reprise of 'O Verona' outside—a rich echo gives depth to the silence (1:41:08).⁹⁴ As he turns towards the inner door of the crypt, we hear an extended version of the female vocal piece that we heard echoes of in the first moment of musical foreshadowing immediately prior to the Queen Mab speech (1:41:40). Here, though, the ascending minor scale is expanded into a full orchestration imitating overlapping cascading tolling bells, with the long seventh held as Romeo climbs the steps and reaches Juliet's apparently lifeless body. Having built to a climax, the music fades away as Romeo starts his final speech, allowing the suppression of music to highlight the words 'my wife' (1:43:51). The silence is soon broken again by a familiar section of *Slow Movement*, which underscores the rest of the sequence from the word 'conquered' (1:44:03), through Juliet's frantic attempts to share the poison, confirming that this is the tragedy that its earlier appearances have been pointing towards. *Slow Movement* fades out and the rich echo of the tomb returns briefly for Romeo's last words ('Thus with a kiss I die'; 1:47:49) before cadencing on a sustained C as his life ends (1:48:00). We are then returned to the deep echoes of the tomb for Juliet's reaction, allowing the terrible sounds of her single sob, her fumbles with the gun's safety catch, and the final gunshot to ring out, echoing around the tomb as the camera begins its ascent away from the bodies.

And this is where Wagner comes in, in the form of a pre-existing recording featuring soprano Leontyne Price (1:50:12).⁹⁵ The use of this particular part of the 'Liebestod' is significant, including as it does the final moments of Isolde's Transfiguration as she dissolves into the musical 'world-breath' and joins her love, Tristan, in death, having reached him just in time to witness his demise, much as Juliet has done with Romeo a moment earlier. As Luhrmann and others have noted, Wagner's version of the story of Tristan and Isolde has many parallels with Romeo and Juliet.⁹⁶ The work explores a forbidden love between two characters that is doomed from the beginning, can only flourish in the night, and ultimately is only consummated musically in the beautiful cadences that finish the opera—in which the famous opening 'Tristan chord' sequence, containing the 'desire' motif, is finally resolved after almost four hours of music. It is just these final cadences, including the 'most beautifully orchestrated B major chord in the history of music',⁹⁷ that Luhrmann chooses to grace the bodies of Romeo and Juliet.

Although the inclusion of Wagner here seems abrupt, there are elements that help it sit in the rest of the music track, both in terms of its existing cultural meaning and its musical features. The music is faded in from the final quaver of the bar to allow the full word *versinken* (go under) to be heard before the music comes up to full volume for *unbewußt* (unconscious), *höchste Lust!* (ecstasy),⁹⁸ perhaps suggesting to audiences aware of the text a more positive reading of the lovers' deaths. Timbrally, the female operatic voice takes us back to the ascending sequence with female voice that accompanied Romeo's walk up the aisle towards the body of Juliet, both just prior to his death, and in his vision of the tomb before the Capulet party. For avid followers of Wagner scholarship, Luhrmann's decision to cut the two bars containing the final instance of the desire motif from the recording (bb. 9–10 of Ex. 42.9) may seem significant.

p. 1184 Traditionally ↪ Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* has been thought to be about the impossibility of true love, but more recently, Vazsonyi has argued that it is in fact about the impossibility of the end of desire in general—except through death. Part of this argument revolves around the fact that the desire motif, first introduced as part of the Tristan chord in the opening prelude, is only eventually resolved in these final bars as Isolde dies.⁹⁹ The removal of this final instance of the desire motif might suggest that Romeo and Juliet are given a more universalized version of the music, with the most arresting reference to the possible meaning of *Tristan und Isolde* lost, replaced by a more general reference to a musical story of doomed lovers, united only in death. Or perhaps the cut merely hastened their movement to that beautiful cadence.

Ex. 42.9

The section of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* used in the film; bb. 9 and 10 (containing the 'desire' motif in the oboe) omitted.

p. 1185 The idea that the lovers are united, or perhaps just eternally together through the myth of their love, is also suggested through the brief flashback intercuts of scenes of their happiness which are carefully choreographed to uplifting moments of the music—noses bumping the fish tank on their first meeting (1:50:39), running together, then the ring Juliet gave Romeo (1:50:44) on the final long sung note of ‘Lust’ (i.e., ‘ecstasy’ in the Wagner), a brief glimpse of them smiling at each other in the tent of sheets from the alba scene as the violins rise to the final resolution, then a slow-motion clip of the underwater kiss as they submerge in the pool on the first B major chord (1:50:56), bubbles rising and fading to white as the harp glissandos on the second chord before the whiteness resolves to the sheet wrapping a body as we are gently brought back to the reality outside the tomb on the final chord (1:51:26). For audiences who have no knowledge of Wagner, the inclusion of the underwater kiss from the balcony scene on the final major chord may visually encourage another musical connection suggested here, harking back to the extended version of ‘Kissing You’ that offered the possibility of a happy ending at the end of the balcony scene (Ex. 42.8). Notwithstanding the much greater harmonic and orchestral complexities of Wagner’s writing, the removal of the desire motif has reduced the phrasing of the final cadential passage from the last sung note, ‘Lust’, to a similar phrase shape to that offered at the end of the balcony scene: three repeated phrases, followed by an ascending variant with gradually augmented rhythm leading to the final gentle major chord (compare Exx. 42.8 and 42.9). The similarities between these two musical endings for the lovers suggest that although the weight of the myth of Romeo and Juliet meant that they were inevitably doomed from the start, Luhrmann perhaps manages to achieve an alternative happy ending for them in music through the transfigurative power of Wagner. This reading of the relationship of the Wagner to the ‘Kissing You’ extended major cadence also suggests perhaps a more specific operatic structure at work in Luhrmann’s soundtrack than the one he lays out in his commentary—the Transfiguration is a recapitulation of music first used in the night-time love duet of Tristan and Isolde in Act Two of the opera.¹⁰⁰

After the Wagner chord fades away, there is one final unison on C as the Prince starts to deliver the closing speech, which quickly fades to silence as we are returned to grainy TV footage (1:51:40).¹⁰¹ After a beat the credits begin to roll and we hear the final implied recurrence of a musical theme in the score, with the return of Radiohead, this time with their ‘Exit Music (For a Film)’ (1:53:11).

The song was written by Radiohead’s Thom Yorke in response to a rough cut of the end of the film after months of chasing by the film’s music team and arrived just in time when the soundtrack was being completed.¹⁰² Yorke’s response to the film reminded him of the feelings he had as a teenager when he saw the Zeffirelli production, wondering why the lovers didn’t just run away together ‘before the bad stuff starts’.¹⁰³ So, the song was a comment on multiple exits—the literal exit of the film, the exit of the lovers into death, and the alternative exit that they could have had from the unhappy ending. Sonically, the song takes us back into both the echoing intimacy of the tomb and to the rock genre used to accompany the young couple’s early individual speeches, Yorke’s close-miked voice over an acoustic guitar suggesting intimacy, surrounded by rich echo. Harmonically, we also return to the tomb with the key of B finally established by the end of the ‘Liebestod’ (albeit now B minor) gently strummed on a solo acoustic guitar. This guitar accompaniment also harks back to the gentle guitar riff of ‘Talk Show Host’, when Romeo first imagined how love might be expressed in lyrics and later wrote of the joy he hoped for when he and Juliet were to be reunited. It also is reminiscent of the fragments of ‘Little Star’ that accompanied Juliet’s last moment of joy in the Gallop speech. The return of Radiohead here thematically links us back both to Romeo’s ‘boy theme’ and Juliet’s ‘girl theme’, inviting us to imagine them singing this song about the futility of their death from beyond the grave.

The music also continues to play with expectations of a final ending until the very end of the credits. The song becomes increasingly impassioned in the bridge, climaxing with the first lines of the final verse: 'Now we are one in everlasting peace', snarled in anger. The song quickly calms down again for the final lines, 'we hope that you choke, that you choke', repeated three times with reducing accompaniment, gradually returning us to the silence of the tomb. The song ends with Yorke's echoey voice high in the mix over the acoustic guitar, which is now much quieter and surrounded by accompanying sinister ghostly swirls reminiscent of the ringing echo of the sobs and gunshot in the tomb.¹⁰⁴ Like the other music accompanying the lovers, this song ends on an open-ended weak cadence, offering no closure. The rest of the credits are accompanied by the string version of 'Kissing You' that accompanied the lovers' first conversation, returning us once again to their earlier happiness but inevitably ending the film on the unassertive cadence to A minor (Ex. 42.7, b. 2) that was undercut with *Slow Movement* to mark their first loss of innocence, leaving us once again with an ambiguous ending.

This close analysis of the music track suggests that Luhrmann was successful in his goal of using pre-existing music to help tell the story of Romeo and Juliet for viewers. Even if not everyone was convinced that he clarified the Shakespearean language per se by surrounding it with beats, his positioning of the words as lyrics, a play on the contemporary practice of many young people of using or writing songs to express themselves, was probably a factor in the ability of young audiences to relate to the film (and the fact that they then bought the soundtrack albums in droves also suggests that they felt these songs did capture something about their emotional experience). Perhaps more effective, though, was Luhrmann's decision to combine disparate sources of music into an 'operatic' structure to give cohesion to the play. As we have seen, beyond his claims of inclusion of themes for the characters, the music team also used references across the score to different pre-existing music to maintain the Shakespearean device of undercutting moments of happiness with hints of tragedy to come by drawing on music with unassertive cadences. This repeated denial of musical resolution, which famously has precedent in the specific operatic structure of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, marks moments of musical foreshadowing, but also enabled Luhrmann to balance the tension between the inevitable, tragic outcome and the strength of the expectation of a Hollywood-style conclusion until the very end. Although Luhrmann could not quite overcome the weight of the myth of Romeo and Juliet to give us a fairy-tale ending, his musical treatment of the film does offer extra layers of resonance that invite us to keep re-reading *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*.

Bibliography

Altman, Rick. *The American Film Musical*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.

[Google Scholar](#) [Google Preview](#) [WorldCat](#) [COPAC](#)

Anderegg, Michael. 'James Dean Meets the Pirate's Daughter: Passion and Parody in *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* and *Shakespeare in Love*'. In Richard Burt and Linda E. Boose (eds.), *Shakespeare, The Movie, II: Popularizing the Plays on Film, TV, Video and DVD*, 56–71. London and New York: Routledge, 2003.

[Google Scholar](#) [Google Preview](#) [WorldCat](#) [COPAC](#)

Castaldo, Annalisa. 'The Film's the Thing: Using Shakespearean Film in the Classroom'. In Courtney Lehmann and Lisa S. Starks (eds.), *Spectacular Shakespeare: Critical Theory and Popular Cinema*, 187–204. Cranbury, London, and Mississauga: Associated University Presses, 2002.

[Google Scholar](#) [Google Preview](#) [WorldCat](#) [COPAC](#)

Cook, Pam. *Baz Luhrmann*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

[Google Scholar](#) [Google Preview](#) [WorldCat](#) [COPAC](#)

Cooke, Mervyn. *A History of Film Music*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

[Google Scholar](#) [Google Preview](#) [WorldCat](#) [COPAC](#)

Coyle, Rebecca. 'Love Is a Many Splendored Thing. Love Lifts Us up Where We Belong. All You Need Is Love. Baz Luhrmann's Eclectic Musical Signature in the Red Curtain Trilogy'. *Screen Sound* 4 (2013): 9–30.

[Google Scholar](#) [WorldCat](#)

Cranny-Francis, Anne. 'Canonical Iconoclasm: William Shakespeare's *Romeo + Juliet*'. *Screen Education* 48 (2007): 125–130.

[Google Scholar](#) [WorldCat](#)

Downing, Crystal. 'Misshapen Chaos of Well-Seeming Form: Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*'. *Literature/Film Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (2000): 125–131.

Dreyfus, Laurence. *Wagner and the Erotic Impulse*. Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2010.

[Google Scholar](#) [Google Preview](#) [WorldCat](#) [COPAC](#)

Groos, Arthur, ed. *Richard Wagner: Tristan und Isolde*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

[Google Scholar](#) [Google Preview](#) [WorldCat](#) [COPAC](#)

Guenther, Leah. 'Luhrmann's Top 40 Shakespeare and the Crisis of Shakespearean Consumption'. *Journal of American Culture* 22, no. 1 (1999): 17–24.

[Google Scholar](#) [WorldCat](#)

Heldt, Guido. *Music and Levels of Narration in Film: Steps Across the Border*. Bristol: Intellect, 2013.

[Google Scholar](#) [Google Preview](#) [WorldCat](#) [COPAC](#)

Hodgdon, Barbara. 'William Shakespeare's *Romeo + Juliet*: Everything's Nice in America?' In Gordon McMullan (ed.), *Norton Critical Edition: Romeo and Juliet*, 384–398. New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2017.

[Google Scholar](#) [Google Preview](#) [WorldCat](#) [COPAC](#)

p. 1188 Lehmann, Courtney. 'Strictly Shakespeare? Dead Letters, Ghostly Fathers, and the Cultural Pathology of Authorship in Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*'. *Shakespeare Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (2001): 189–221.

Loehlin, James N. 'These Violent Delights have Violent Ends: Baz Luhrmann's Millennial Shakespeare'. In Mark Thornton Burnett

and Ramona Wray (eds.), *Shakespeare, Film, Fin de Siecle*, 121–136. London: Macmillan Press, 2000.

[Google Scholar](#) [Google Preview](#) [WorldCat](#) [COPAC](#)

Pearce, Craig, and Baz Luhrmann. *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet: The Contemporary Film, the Classic Play*. New York: Bantam and Doubleday Dell, 1996.

[Google Scholar](#) [Google Preview](#) [WorldCat](#) [COPAC](#)

Rokison, Abigail. *Shakespeare for Young People: Productions, Versions and Adaptation*. Arden Shakespeare. London: Bloomsbury, 2013.

[Google Scholar](#) [Google Preview](#) [WorldCat](#) [COPAC](#)

Rose, Phil. *Radiohead and the Global Movement for Change: 'Pragmatism Not Idealism'*. Lanham, MD: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2016.

[Google Scholar](#) [Google Preview](#) [WorldCat](#) [COPAC](#)

Rutter, Carol Chillington. 'Looking at Shakespeare's Women on Film'. In Russell Jackson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*, 2nd ed., 245–266. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

[Google Scholar](#) [Google Preview](#) [WorldCat](#) [COPAC](#)

Tatspau, Patricia. 'The Tragedies of Love on Film'. In Russell Jackson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*, 2nd ed., 141–164. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

[Google Scholar](#) [Google Preview](#) [WorldCat](#) [COPAC](#)

Walker, Elsie. 'Authorship: Getting Back to Shakespeare: Whose Film is it Anyway?' In Diana E. Henderson (ed.), *A Concise Companion to Shakespeare on Screen*, 8–30. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006.

[Google Scholar](#) [Google Preview](#) [WorldCat](#) [COPAC](#)

Walker, Elsie. 'Pop Goes the Shakespeare: Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*'. *Literature/Film Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (2000): 132–139.

Notes

- 1 Pam Cook, *Baz Luhrmann* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 73–75.
- 2 Annalisa Castaldo, 'The Film's the Thing: Using Shakespearean Film in the Classroom', in Courtney Lehmann and Lisa S. Starks (eds.), *Spectacular Shakespeare: Critical Theory and Popular Cinema* (Cranbury, London, and Mississauga: Associated University Presses, 2002), 187–204; 193–194.
- 3 Cook, *Luhrmann*, 77.
- 4 Courtney Lehmann, 'Strictly Shakespeare? Dead Letters, Ghostly Fathers, and the Cultural Pathology of Authorship in Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (2001): 189–221; 198–204.
- 5 See numerous interviews, commentaries, and extras included on the DVDs *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet: Special Edition* (Twentieth Century Fox, 2002) and *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet: Music Edition* (Twentieth Century Fox, 2007).
- 6 For a summary of the relationship of pop soundtracks and music videos to film finance in the 1990s, see John Mundy, *Popular Music on Screen: From Hollywood Musical to Music Video* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 225.
- 7 See 'Director's Gallery: Pitching', *Romeo + Juliet: Special Edition*.
- 8 Statistics from <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/release/rl2305590785/weekend/> (accessed 13 December 2019).
- 9 *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet: Music from the Motion Picture* (Capitol Records CDP 7243 8 37715 0 9, 1996).
- 10 *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet: Music from the Motion Picture Vol. 2* (Capitol Records 7243 8 55567 2 2, 1997).
- 11 Chris Morris, 'Soundtracks Offer Sweet Relief to Retail', *Billboard* (26 April 1997).
- 12 For discussion of the MTV aesthetic, see Kay Dickinson, 'Pop, Speed and the "MTV Aesthetic" in Recent Teen Films', *Scope* (June 2001); <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/scope/issues/2001/june.aspx> (accessed 14 January 2020).
- 13 Leah Guenther, 'Luhrmann's Top 40 Shakespeare and the Crisis of Shakespearean Consumption', *Journal of American*

- Culture* 22, no. 1 (1999): 17–24; 20. The quotation is from Donald Lyons, ‘William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*’, *Commentary* 103 (1997): 57.
- 14 Mervyn Cooke, *A History of Film Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 179. Cooke points out in this connection that in answering a newspaper’s youth quiz published in the 1980s ‘the majority of participants stated that *The Tempest* was written by pop star Kylie Minogue’ (ibid., 180).
- 15 Dickinson, ‘Pop, Speed and the “MTV Aesthetic”’.
- 16 Ibid., 6.
- 17 As the soundtrack contains a wide variety of popular music genres, for simplicity’s sake I have used the general terms ‘popular music’ and ‘pop song’ when discussing the songs in general (as do other theorists discussed here), with more genre-specific terms used where appropriate when discussing individual tracks.
- 18 Jeff Smith, *The Sounds of Commerce: Marketing Popular Film Music* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 166.
- 19 Michael Anderegg, ‘James Dean Meets the Pirate’s Daughter: Passion and Parody in *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet* and *Shakespeare in Love*’, in Richard Burt and Linda E. Boose (eds.), *Shakespeare, The Movie, II: Popularizing the Plays on Film, TV, Video and DVD* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 56–71; 59.
- 20 See, for example, Judith Buchanan, *Shakespeare on Film* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2005), 231–232; Rebecca Coyle, ‘Love Is a Many Splendored Thing. Love Lifts Us up Where We Belong. All You Need Is Love. Baz Luhrmann’s Eclectic Musical Signature in the Red Curtain Trilogy’, *Screen Sound* 4 (2013): 9–30; 23. See also James N. Loehlin, ‘These Violent Delights Have Violent Ends: Baz Luhrmann’s Millennial Shakespeare’, in Mark Thornton Burnett and Ramona Wray (eds.), *Shakespeare, Film, Fin de Siecle* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), 121–136; 125–126. An article for educators was even based entirely on this sequence: Anne Cranny-Francis, ‘Canonical Iconoclasm: William Shakespeare’s *Romeo + Juliet*’, *Screen Education* 48 (2007): 125–130.
- 21 See Barbara Hodgdon, ‘*William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet*: Everything’s Nice in America?’, in Gordon McMullan (ed.), *Norton Critical Edition: Romeo and Juliet* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2017), 384–398; 395–396; Dickinson, ‘Pop’, 3.
- 22 Guenther, ‘Luhrmann’s Top 40’.
- 23 Loehlin, ‘These Violent Delights’, 123–124.
- 24 Ibid., 130.
- 25 Elsie Walker, ‘Authorship: Getting Back to Shakespeare: Whose Film Is It Anyway?’, in Diana E. Henderson (ed.), *A Concise Companion to Shakespeare on Screen* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 8–30; 22.
- 26 They do not refer to the film as postmodern or as having an MTV aesthetic. Instead, Luhrmann describes the music as having a crucial role in making the play intelligible to the audience.
- 27 Coyle, ‘Love’, 16.
- 28 Marius de Vries, audio commentary, *Romeo + Juliet: Music Edition*, 0:40:00.
- 29 Coyle, ‘Love’, 18.
- 30 ‘London Mix Featurette’, *Romeo + Juliet: Music Edition*.
- 31 Baz Luhrmann et al., director’s commentary, *Romeo + Juliet: Special Edition*, 0:23:00.
- 32 Luhrmann states this in many of the interviews, documentaries, and commentaries made for the DVD releases of the film. See, for example, ‘*Romeo + Juliet: The Music*’ (*Music Edition*) and ‘Director’s Gallery’ (*Special Edition*). See also Pauline Adamek, ‘Baz Luhrmann’s *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet*’, *Cinema Papers* 114 (February 1997): 10–14; 10. Available at <https://issuu.com/libuow/docs/cinemapaper1997febno114> (accessed 14 January 2020).
- 33 Luhrmann, director’s commentary (*Special Edition*), 0:7:00.
- 34 Ibid., 0:16:30.
- 35 Quoted in Guenther, ‘Luhrmann’s Top 40’, 20.
- 36 Coyle, ‘Love’, 25.
- 37 Luhrmann, director’s commentary, 0:22:00.
- 38 See, for example, Susan Snyder, ‘*Romeo and Juliet*: Comedy into Tragedy’, in McMullan, *Norton Critical Edition*, 202–211, which discusses how references to death change as the play moves towards tragedy.
- 39 ‘*Romeo + Juliet: The Music*’, 0:04:30.
- 40 Buchanan, *Shakespeare*, 15.
- 41 Abigail Rokison, *Shakespeare for Young People: Productions, Versions and Adaptation* (Arden Shakespeare; London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 46.
- 42 Buchanan, *Shakespeare*, 231.
- 43 Marius de Vries, ‘*Romeo + Juliet: The Music*’ (*Music Edition*), 0:09:00.
- 44 Ibid., 0:9:30.
- 45 In the screenplay, ‘Mozart’s Serenade for Winds’ is specified to accompany our first sight of Sycamore Grove and *Romeo*: see Craig Pearce and Baz Luhrmann, ‘Screenplay’, in *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet: The Contemporary Film, The*

- Classic Play* (New York: Bantam and Doubleday Dell, 1996), 17. De Vries explains in his audio commentary (0:10:00) that the team incorporated a 'Mozartian [...] woodwind serenade flavour' in the Radiohead song, although on listening it is only the very opening intervals and the wind orchestration that is at all recognizable.
- 46 All 'Talk Show Host' examples and interpretations of how the riff fits into the bar divisions are based on Thomas Yorke, Colin Greenwood, Jonathan Greenwood, Edward O'Brien, and Philip Selway, 'Talk Show Host', Warner Chappell Music Ltd sheet music (1996); <https://www.scribd.com/document/233071044/Talk-Show-Host> (accessed 8 July 2020).
- 47 A term coined in Rick Altman in *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 62.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 71.
- 49 Different forms of audio dissolve are summarized in Guido Heldt, *Music and Levels of Narration in Film: Steps Across the Border* (Bristol: Intellect, 2013), chapter three.
- 50 The movement of Shakespeare and action across bar lines has been neatened up slightly in Table 42.1 to help listeners follow the interactions between song and narrative.
- 51 All timings for the film refer to the *Music Edition* DVD.
- 52 Unless otherwise specified, quotations from the Shakespeare play are given as they appear in the film's screenplay.
- 53 Buchanan, *Shakespeare*, 232.
- 54 The screenplay quickly introduces Romeo visually in a couple of shots as his parents comment on his behaviour. He only speaks once Benvolio finds him. (Pearce and Luhrmann, 'Screenplay', 17–19.)
- 55 Buchanan, *Shakespeare*, 232–236.
- 56 Loehlin, 'These Violent Delights', 123; Anderegg, 'James Dean', 60.
- 57 Luhrmann, director's commentary, 0:11:20.
- 58 Compare the portrayal of Ferdinand as an androgynous quasi-rock star in Julie Taymor's film of *The Tempest*, discussed by Mervyn Cooke in Chapter 43.
- 59 Buchanan, *Shakespeare*, 232.
- 60 *Ibid.*, 232–233.
- 61 *Ibid.*, 233.
- 62 For explorations of poets and poetry in *Romeo and Juliet*, see Gayle Whittaker, 'The Sonnet's Body and the Body Sonnetised in *Romeo and Juliet*', in McMullan, *Norton Critical Edition*, 211–228, and Crystal Downing, 'Misshapen Chaos of Well-Seeming Form: Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*', *Literature/Film Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (2000): 125–131; 127. Luhrmann does the same thing in reverse in his next film *Moulin Rouge!* (2001), where Christian is only perceived as a 'great poet' when he sings the words of love songs such as Elton John's 'Your Song'; when he merely recites them, other characters gape at him in incomprehension.
- 63 Listed in the credits as Wolfgang Mozart, *Symphony no. 25*, Capella Istropolitana, Naxos of America.
- 64 Luhrmann says this is the 'girl theme' (audio commentary, *Music Edition*; 0:18:54).
- 65 Whittaker, 'The Sonnet's Body', 218.
- 66 Gordon McMullan, 'Introduction', in *Norton Critical Edition*, xvii.
- 67 Loehlin briefly discusses 'Young Hearts' as a transmutation of Mercutio's character and the Queen Mab speech into a musical dance sequence ('These Violent Delights', 128).
- 68 Luhrmann makes this point in his audio commentary (*Music Edition*), 0:20:30.
- 69 Loehlin, 'These Violent Delights', 124.
- 70 De Vries describes this premonition as a remix, not a different scored section of music: see his audio commentary (*Music Edition*), 0:23:18.
- 71 De Vries, audio commentary, 0:52:50.
- 72 Snyder, 'Romeo', discusses Mercutio's death as the simultaneous death of comedy and the birth of tragedy in the play.
- 73 For example, Hodgdon, '*William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*'; Loehlin, 'These Violent Delights'; Lehmann, 'Strictly', 210–218; Elsie Walker, 'Pop Goes the Shakespeare: Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*', *Literature/Film Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (2000): 132–139.
- 74 Patricia Tatzpaugh, 'The Tragedies of Love on Film', in Russell Jackson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 141–164; 148.
- 75 '*Romeo + Juliet: The Music*', 0:22:00.
- 76 For example, Tatzpaugh, 'Tragedies'; Loehlin, 'These Violent Delights'.
- 77 José Arroyo, 'Kiss Kiss Bang Bang', *Sight and Sound* 7, no. 3 (1997): 6, 8–9, 3.
- 78 De Vries, audio commentary, 0:28:00.
- 79 All bar numbers refer to sheet music of 'I'm Kissing You', composed by Des'ree and Tim Atack, from Des'ree, *Supernatural*, Sony/ATV Music Publishing (1998); <https://www.musicnotes.com/sheetmusic/mtd.asp?ppn=MN0056690> (accessed 11 July 2020).
- 80 De Vries, audio commentary, 0:28:38.

- 81 As with Table 42.1, the movement of the Shakespeare text across implied song lyrics has been neatened up slightly here to help listeners follow the interactions between music and speech.
- 82 De Vries, audio commentary, 0:30:20.
- 83 Craig Pierce (co-writer of the screenplay) talks about this in the director's commentary (*Special Edition*), 1:43:00. The studios particularly liked the Victorian alteration by which both lovers survive. The line 'Let Zidler keep his fairytale ending' is spoken by the Duke in *Moulin Rouge!*, a film which also plays with the audience's expectations of whether lovers will be kept apart by external forces.
- 84 Castaldo, 'The Film's the Thing', 194.
- 85 *Ibid.*, 194.
- 86 Carol Chillington Rutter, 'Looking at Shakespeare's Women on Film', in Jackson, *Cambridge Companion*, 245–266; 262. See also Lehmann, 'Strictly', 218; Loehlin, 'These Violent Delights', 130; and Walker, 'Authorship', 22.
- 87 Walker, 'Authorship', 22.
- 88 Loehlin, 'These Violent Delights', 130; Walker, 'Authorship', 22; and Lehmann, 'Strictly Shakespeare?', 218, all consider the lovers' ending to be romanticized in Luhrmann's version.
- 89 These flashbacks were apparently added at the request of Fox after test screenings, again showing the power of the demand of a happy ending in Hollywood. Cook, *Baz Luhrmann*, 79. For Lehmann's discussion of legend and death, see 'Strictly', 218–220.
- 90 Adamek, 'Baz', 10; <https://issuu.com/libuow/docs/cinemapaper1997febno114> (accessed 14 January 2020).
- 91 As recognized, for example, by Kenneth S. Rothwell, *A History of Shakespeare on Screen: A Century of Film and Television*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 231; Walker, 'Authorship', 22; Loehlin, 'These Violent Delights', 130.
- 92 Luhrmann, in '*Romeo + Juliet: The Music*', 0:41:00.
- 93 Loehlin, 'These Violent Delights', 130; Walker, 'Authorship', 22.
- 94 Armstrong describes the echo of the tomb as music in itself in his audio commentary (*Music Edition*), 1:43:00.
- 95 According to the track details in the second soundtrack album, the recording is Richard Wagner, 'Liebestod' from *Tristan und Isolde*, performed by Leontyne Price on *Prima Donna Collection Highlights* (BMG Classics/RCA Victor Red Seal).
- 96 Indeed, in letters Wagner connects his Tristan directly to seeing Bellini's opera based on the Romeo and Juliet story. See Laurence Dreyfus, *Wagner and the Erotic Impulse* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2010), 56–57. For further on Wagner and Shakespeare, see Chapter 19.
- 97 Description attributed to a 1946 diary entry by Richard Strauss: see Dieter Borchmeyer, *Richard Wagner: Theory and Theatre*, trans. Stewart Spencer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 367.
- 98 Translation taken from Nicholas Vazsonyi, *Richard Wagner: Self-Promotion and the Making of a Brand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 148.
- 99 Vazsonyi (*Richard Wagner*, 127–150) explores this idea in detail.
- 100 See Joseph Kerman, 'The Prelude and the Play', in Arthur Groos (ed.), *Richard Wagner: Tristan und Isolde* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 53–58, and Thomas Grey, 'In the Realm of the Senses' (*ibid.*, 87–93), for explorations of this relationship in *Tristan*.
- 101 De Vries states that this note was included to annoy Wagner's estate(!): see his audio commentary, 1:51:48.
- 102 Discussed in various features on both DVD releases.
- 103 Jonathan Hale, *Radiohead: From a Great Height* (Toronto: ECW Press, 1999), 149.
- 104 These swirls are apparently samples of children's voices, and have also been interpreted by Phil Rose as representing swirling water, another return perhaps to the happier underwater world of Romeo and Juliet, even when the song in most despairing. See Phil Rose, *Radiohead and the Global Movement for Change: 'Pragmatism Not Idealism'* (Lanham, MD: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2016), 82.