

The Bard Is no Longer What It Used to Be (or not to Be): Reinterpreting Postmodern Discourses in Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996) and Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000)

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'Being true' to Shakespeare constitutes a highly fallacious consideration in our post-modern cosmovision, as the notion of the text itself is no longer a stable solid category but a space where a wide range of writings intermingle and blend. Thus, both Baz Luhrmann and Michael Almereyda deauthorise Shakespeare and appropriate the Bard's texts—*Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*—in order to construct post-modern multifaceted products that fuse contemporary cinematic devices with the editorial intention of transposing the adapted work's universality in order to be understood and digested by the post-popular and glo-cali-zed 21st century culture.

Keywords: Shakespeare; cinema; postmodern; glo-cali-zation; commodification.

Ser fiel a Shakespeare constituye una consideración falaz desde nuestra perspectiva postmoderna, ya que la noción de texto en sí misma ha mutado desde el convencimiento de ser una categoría estable para convertirse en un espacio en el que un amplio abanico de textos se fusionan. De esta manera, tanto Baz Luhrmann como Michael Almereyda se apropian de los escritos del Bardo—*Romeo y Julieta*, *Hamlet*—para construir productos postmodernos poliédricos que fusionan los mecanismos visuales del cine contemporáneo con la intención editorial de trasladar la universalidad de la obra adaptada para que ésta pueda ser entendida y digerida por la cultura post-popular y glo-cali-zada del siglo 21.

Palabras clave: Shakespeare; cine; postmoderno; glo-cali-zación; consumo.

If Shakespeare were alive today, he would be writing film scripts.
R. Shaughnessy, *Shakespeare on Film* (1998)

If Shakespeare was writing a screenplay, it would be... *Something about Mary* set on the *Titanic*.
Baz Luhrmann, *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*. Special DVD Edition. (2001)

1. Why Reshaping Shakespeare?

The Shakespearean self-perpetuating canon originally ascertained that the Bard ought to be dealt within a serious, elevated microcosm accessible only to a selected intellectually-gifted audience that could relish its true essence and universal value. However, the distrust of the grand narratives and constant questioning of the self-established socio-cultural systems as mere discursive constructs appearing throughout Postmodernity have progressively caused the

colossal unattainable Shakespearean universe to collapse producing a sheer convulsion in the Bard's popular reception in recent decades. Thus, when adapting Shakespeare to the screen, we may wonder why any approach to the Bard should be always solemn and high-browed, and not irreverent, gross and popular instead. Yet more importantly, we accept that there is a void regarding the authority to judge what constitutes the most appropriate way to understand and receive the Bard, foregrounding consequently that it is Shakespeare's world-proclaimed universality that enables its being subject to cultural reshaping and recycling to match our everyday reality.

Both Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996) and Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000)—products of the filmic *fin de siècle*—defy the exhausted discourse of 'being faithful to Shakespeare' as a strict constriction to atemporal portraits of the Bard's works, in order to transpose the text to the 21st century reality, highlighting the editorial intention of assembling the filmic adaptation of a literary work as a construct that projects the mood and sensibility of the historical period in which it is shot. In that sense, based on our postmodern apocalyptic condition regarding artistic hybridity, authorial instability and the crisis of socio-familiar structures, both filmmakers present a parallel approach in their experimental rendering of the two well-known Shakespearean tragedies: *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*. However, we do not intend to produce a deep study of how both filmmakers adapt the Shakespearean texts to the moving image—something on which plenty of critical material has been notably devoted—but we will focus on analysing how certain concomitant elements interact in both productions to construct a common perspective in the way to approach, appropriate and reshape the Shakespearean text so as to produce a cultural product for the 21st century viewer under the light of the postmodern theoretical viewpoint.

2. Setting the Landscape: Contemporary and Postmodern

Both adaptations are set in the contemporary world, determined by the oppressive triumph of late capitalism, epitomised in the thirst for power of the great corporations, new technologies and the global market. Moreover, due to their interconnected fragmented portrait, pastiche and emphasis on the falsified nature of any representation of reality, they have also been assigned the label of being 'postmodern', a taxonomy most of the time provided by their detractors, who dismiss Luhrmann's film as a "violent swank-trash music video that may make you feel like reaching for the remote control" (Gleiberman in Hamilton 2002: 123).

The pastiche emerges as the main visual technique, based on the postmodern impossibility of creating stylistic innovation outside the emphasis on the falsity and superficiality of any mode of representation. These notions interact with a feeling of *déjà-vu*—the already seen or felt—and *déjà-lu*—the already read—which correspond to the main visual devices in the very first takes of both films, introducing the main pillars of the contemporary re-appropriation of Shakespeare in terms of provisional readings of the already read—or seen—material.¹ Almereyda's *Hamlet* shows the leading character's

¹ 'Déjà-lu' is a term taken from R. Barthes's *S/Z* (1974).

inner thoughts in a black and white home made video (the 'already felt' as the 'already seen'), paralleling Luhrmann's swift summary of the film through interconnected fragments *à la* MTV, to anticipate what viewers will contemplate later on, also particularly interesting regarding the popularly well-known nature of the work as being "distinguished by a long line of almost exclusively literary, rather than oral, transmission" (Lehmann 2002: 131).

An intended popularising pastiche effect surrounds the very first take in both productions, regarding the new technologies, the mass media—TV, press—the hectic musical—Carmina Burana MTV rhythm (in Luhrmann)—and the easily recognisable contemporary capitalistic world dominated by skyscrapers and limousines, so that the main pillars of the film are condensed in the first minutes. Postmodern fragmentation and collage aesthetics heavily permeate the films' shooting technique, through a shot/response (shot-countershot) structure that provides narrative fluidity and dynamism as it allows a high rate of takes per minute.

In the case of *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*, the two opposed households—Montagues and Capulets—are mapped to two different branches of the capitalist dominion in a contemporary recreation of Verona as 'Verona Beach' (probably standing for Venice Beach in Los Angeles), represented by a bizarre ethnic blend where "[t]he Montagues are a motley crew with a kind of *Apocalypse Now* dress code, army surplus Hawaiian shirt and semi-punk hair. The Capulets are smooth, sleek, groomed and feline, Latin cowboys in close-fitting black, accessorized with silver trimmings and images of the Virgin Mary" (Hawker 1997: 6). We visualize once again the pastiche in the urban characterization of the two sides in terms of intertextual borrowings that—withstanding their ethnic, racial, or gang connections—also spring toward a homage of the history of cinema and visual myths of violence, "the western, the gangster movie, the kung-fu pic, the urban drama, the crime thriller, the action comedy" (Hawker 1997: 6). Hence, the intertextual mappings constitute another hint of the postmodern disheartening feeling that everything has been done before and that there is no room for innovation except through collage and pastiche of existing discourse ontologies.

This condensation in the first takes and the transposition to a late 20th century mood are also paralleled in *Hamlet*, where we find the contra-cultural main character absorbed in the epitome of capitalism (Manhattan), using new technologies (video-cameras, television set) as the devices to interact with the reality around him. The mapping of every element in Shakespeare's play to our contemporary era makes of Denmark a great corporation, King Hamlet its recently dead president, Claudius its new Chief Executive Officer, and Elsinore a luxurious hotel. In that sense, Almereyda departs from any psychological-psychoanalytical rendering of the Bard's text, presenting its protagonist as the corporation's legal ruler, who has been illegitimately neglected from the 'throne'.

3. Rendering Reality: Images, Mass Media, and Trademark Consumption

Taking as a starting point the postmodern belief that reality is completely inaccessible as such, and that only a hint of the real can be grasped through mediation and representation, we recognise that the overwhelming power of the (moving) image constitutes the central visual device either to reflect, store, or

(re)create reality in both films. Luhrmann opens his enterprise with a television news report that functions as the classical chorus, in which a black TV broadcaster provides the spectator with the filmic framing contextualization, followed by the hasty progression of newspaper headlines concerning the never-ending revolts between Capulets and Montagues. Placing the TV set in a void enables a hint of how the image, in this case television, creates meaning out of itself, leaving the spectator the uncomfortable feeling that there is nothing beyond the image; the moving image constitutes our only link to the real. Following this fashion, *Hamlet's* first minutes spin around a filmed home-made video—through which Almereyda commodifies Hamlet's first soliloquy (I.ii.129-58)—interwoven with a string of images of collective memory threaded on violence—war planes, selective air bombing—and animal hunting instincts, symbolised in the dinosaur. Curiously enough, Claudius's speech once he is king (I.ii.1-40) is rendered through a press conference to which Hamlet attends, recording not his uncle but the journalists and the cameramen. The mass media—TV and newspapers—become the only means to render reality, always approached through an indirect contact, and constantly falsified and artificially represented through human discursive constructs.

Not only do the mass media devices open the filmic discourses, but their role as frame contexts for the narration enables their resurfacing at the end, so that the TV switched on in Luhrmann's film—as a device to mark the spectator's engagement in the show—is switched off once the film is over, creating a cyclical Chinese-box structure that marks a simulation of reality—the film itself—self-justifying the spectator's 'suspension of disbelief', as Luhrmann himself stated that "television is the chorus of our lives" (Adamek 1997: 14). It seems quite relevant that many concomitances arise between this TV framing-enclosing device for Luhrmann and how Fortinbras' final victory to gather Denmark's throne is set in terms of a TV news report in *Hamlet*. Almereyda takes this tool a step further, so that we witness the TV conductor reading the words of the report directly from a screen, highlighting that not even such an artificial rendering of reality is original, but an automatized copy of another discourse, that is, a mere textual discourse on its own. It is at that point where we can start to round up the production's aims regarding the role of images as an independent discourse, parallel to Derrida's notion of *différance*, so that signifiers refer to multiple signifiers in an endless vindication for the artificiality of any discourse—as words in television refer to other words or images to other previous or forthcoming images—especially the human language, as an artefact beyond which there is a void.

The immense strength of the image in its interaction with reality is thus explored in a multifaceted range of formal possibilities, condensing television, the press, photographs, home-made videos, even surveillance cameras.² Moreover, its functional patterns also present ramifications in terms of simply reflecting a simulacrum of reality as such—television, press, the mass media resources—the image modifying and perverting reality—the film within a film—the image as the device to store and refresh memory—Hamlet's home-made

² Polonius talks to the surveillance cameras as a cohesive linker to his role as official spy when looking at Hamlet's videos. In the same way, Romeo and Juliet escape from surveillance cameras in the swimming pool scene, in this sense symbolising the oppressive control of the status quo over them. The image in this sense exercises control over the individual, recording and storing reality.

videos—and the image creating reality itself, being the only visible layer with no physicality available whatsoever—like Fortinbras's existence only through images, never becoming a flesh and blood character. This landscape can be understood in terms of the notion of simulacra according to the French social theorist Jean Baudrillard, in his most influential work *Simulations*, underlying the image creating reality on its own:

Whereas representation tries to absorb simulation by interpreting it as false representation, simulation develops the whole edifice of representation as itself a simulacrum. These would be the successive phases of the image:

- 1 It is the reflection of a basic reality.
 - 2 It masks and perverts a basic reality.
 - 3 It masks the *absence* of a basic reality.
 - 4 It bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum.
- In the first case, the image is a *good* appearance: the representation is of the order of sacrament. In the second, it is an *evil* appearance: of the order of maleficence. In the third, it *plays at bearing* an appearance: it is of the order of sorcery. In the fourth, it is no longer in the order of appearance at all, but of simulation. (Baudrillard 1983:170)

This devotion to the image as the constructive axis of any reality in postmodernity is also analysed by means of the scattered references to different brands, which become the visual symbol of the global consumerist late capitalist society. Lurhmann explores the trade name market through travestying world-known brands—and mottos—such as the case of “L’amour”, a parody of Coke®, and extensively rewriting the written mass media—press and magazines—such as *Verona Beach Herald* (*Los Angeles Herald*), *Verona Today* (*USA Today*), *People’s Eye* (*People Magazine*), *Verona Beach Life* (*Life Magazine*), *Timely* (*Time Magazine*) and *Prophecy* (*Prophecy Magazine*). However, the consumerist brand thirst as a prestige mark absorbs many other elements to become items to be consumed. Both Montague and Capulet become commodified as brand names with their respective logos paralleling a mock-heraldic coat of arms, and the swords in the play become “Sword” or “Dagger” as a gun’s brand. Even Shakespeare’s works are perverted into potentially consumed objects through quick, almost subliminal intertextual references, such as “The Merchant of Verona Beach” (mimicking *The Merchant of Venice* as a beach pub-bar advertised with a neon sign) and “Such stuff as dreams are made on Prospero Scotch Whiskey” (a travesty of the magic properties of Prospero’s books in *The Tempest*).

Almeryda resumes this hectic condensation of the consumerist world on the brand market through original recognisable trademarks, such as the ghost-devouring Pepsi machine, the Panasonic screen in the opening section, the Blockbuster video shop for Hamlet’s ‘to be or not to be’ soliloquy (III.i), the dollar sign on Polonius’s balloon—when attempting to ‘buy’ Ophelia—or *USA Today*. Hence, the mapping of the Shakespearean text to contemporary reality attempts to be complete in a totally hyperrealistic adaptation approach. Curiously enough, the press is conceived in both films as the demonising artefact that engenders allies related to consumerist fusion: Fortinbras becoming the menace for Denmark appearing on *USA Today*’s front page, and

Dave Paris in a 'man of the year-like' figure in *Timely* threatening Juliet's pure love for Romeo and simultaneously being an opportunity to economically expand the Capulets' firm.

4. Private or Public?: The "Wooden O" and the Techniques of Memory

As the (moving) images control the development of both films, Sycamore Grove ruins—the commodified "Wooden O" (*Henry V.* Prologue. 14)—constitutes "a blasted-out cinema palace" (Rowe 2003: 45), or "a dilapidated, almost post-holocaust wreck of an amusement park" (Hamilton 2002: 162) where we witness—as a simulacrum of a public performance—Romeo's Petrarchisms, Mercutio's drag dancing and singing and the Western-like scene when the latter is slain by Tybalt. In such a visual culture where the mass media controls the Capulet and Montague fights, a vehicle for making the private conflicts public, we may not find strange that Almereyda's Hamlet's memories are presented as self-recorded home-made black and white videos, the play-within-a-play (III.ii) becomes a filmic production (a film-within-a-film), and that "to be or not to be" (III.i) is uttered in a Blockbuster video shop.

Almereyda uses metafilmic devices to develop the *Mousetrap* in a blend of disconnected heterogeneous images as a homage to the history of cinema (as Luhrmann in the petrol station section or in the Fellinian dance at the Capulet's party) intermingling the aesthetics corresponding to the 1950s film noir, silent movies, pop art and even porn productions. We are shown the process of how a film is made in the same way Shakespeare reflected on the insights of Elizabethan drama in *Hamlet's* play-within-a-play (III.ii). *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* parallels this film-within-a-film device in presenting anticipations and repetitions (*déjà-vu*) of its own filmic material in order to refresh the audience's memory and coordinate the different parts of the production in a hectic narrative rhythm—as Almereyda proposes with Hamlet's remembering his life in black and white images once he's been poisoned—as in the opening summary section, the anticipation of Juliet's funeral, or the *Love Story*-like summary of the lover's relationship at the very end of the movie. Thus—as is done by MTV video clip culture—the film does not give any concession to the viewer's boredom, that—remembering we are enclosed in a TV news report that deals with the story of the 'star-crossed lovers' in two hours—would make us change the channel, pointing towards the nature of the film itself as a product to be sold and generate profits. The image constitutes the surface and deep structure of every aspect of life, as it condenses the way we perceive and recreate reality, so that our lives could be summarised in a few disconnected images meaningfully intertwined with our unique personal experience. Meaning is thus temporal *différance*, multidirectional and utterly dependant on the viewpoint through which it is constructed.

The assumption that only the image is able to communicate is brought to the utmost consequences in Almereyda's *Hamlet*, so that the past is only recoverable through editing and manipulating the image in self-recorded videos. Colour versus black and white mark the boundaries between the representation of current and past reality, showing media technologies (videos and photos) as the way to refresh and recover memory for Hamlet and Ophelia respectively. Digital cameras, laptops, internet, televisions, microphones and telephones—in

the “nunnery scene” (III.i)—invade the new generation as simultaneously dehumanising artefacts and gateways to their perception, apprehension and storage of reality.

The metafilmic and intertextual references to the brand market already analysed in both films serve as the soil for understanding the “to be or not to be” soliloquy in the Blockbuster shop. Triggered by the ‘inter-be’ Buddhist monk interview in a TV programme, the setting of the best known soliloquy by Shakespeare—and probably the most widespread quotation of English literature in popular culture—can be seen in a threefold perspective.³ First, it seems obvious that the ‘action section’ connects with the dichotomy in Hamlet’s mind regarding whether to take action or remain isolated (not to ‘inter-be’). The visual output intermingles with the verbal medium, as most of the core of the soliloquy—dealing with the protagonist’s obsession with avenging his father—has been elided, and the main conflict presented is precisely that of taking action. Second, ‘Blockbuster’ could be seen as the quintessence of the image worldwide corporation, the absorption of the individual under the triumph of the brand market. Third, the visual intertexts are explored in terms of the film displayed in the shop’s TVs, *The Crow: City of Angels* (Tim Pope, 1996). As a hint to the 20th century spectator, together with the film poster on the left—*Deep Impact* (Mimi Leder, 1998)—we are bound to reflect on Hamlet’s internal turmoil considering the revenge of a main character (King Hamlet-The Crow) that comes from the afterlife in order to look for revenge. Thus as Courtney Lehmann mentions:

Like Hamlet’s own status as a ‘sequel’ to his father, this sequel to *The Crow* (Alex Proyas, 1994) relentlessly invokes the father-film which, significantly, is not only about revenge but also about the capacity of postmodern technology to restore a dead actor to virtual life—in the very real event that an action-film actor dies ‘in action’. In an uncanny ‘cinematic happening’, the star of *The Crow*, Brandon Lee, was killed on the set, leaving the filmmakers with no other choice but to recycle and manipulate previous footage of Lee in order to complete the film. (2002: 97)

Almereyda’s Hamlet’s internal struggle is polarised in terms of the power conflict to dominate the corporation and the rage for his mother’s early marriage to Claudius. Both sections in Hamlet’s psyche are divided between the public self (his fight to get the power, dealt in the outside, under the imprisoning influence of the skyscrapers) and his inner self (the time of his soliloquies and manipulating his home made videos), usually dealt with indoors. However, this clear-cut split is blurred in the *Mousetrap* and the Blockbuster section, as Hamlet’s inner conflicts are made public in both cases exorcised by the power

³ Hamlet watches a Buddhist monk talking in the TV set about the necessity for the human being to interrelate with nature and other human beings in order to be part of this world. The controversial placement of the “to be or not to be” soliloquy—whose location in the play has been a matter of discussion for decades—is triggered by this sequence, which is rendered by means of the overwhelming presence of the moving image. Moreover, the aforementioned soliloquy is commodified as it is linked not only to the idea of suicide—through Hamlet putting a gun in his mouth—but related to the clash between being individualistic (to ‘be’) or taking action and interrelate with this world (to ‘inter-be’), paralleling the socio-political clash represented by Hamlet’s grunge aesthetics and the capitalist isolation.

of the image. We witness how Almereyda emphasizes the clash that contemporary society presents between what is public and what is personal, so that the public and the personal fuse mediated by the image, as we witness in everyday sensationalist press and programmes.

5. The Pop and the Grunge Lovers: Religion and Love as Artificial Discourses

The pairs of lovers also constitute an element to be analysed in parallel terms in both films, especially linked by their contracultural attitude and their symmetrical intertextual relationships. Luhrmann's choice for Leonardo DiCaprio as Romeo enables an automatized young pop aesthetics reaction in the spectator, who initially witnesses a languid character under the devastating influx of Petrarchan paradigms. However, after experiencing the effect of a hallucinatory pill, he encounters Juliet (Claire Danes), and both lovers resurface as the representatives of true love against capitalistic desire. In an analogous approach, Hamlet (Ethan Hawke) represents the grunge-rebel, mimicking James Dean's *East of Eden*, shown on TV during the film, or Kurt Cobain's aesthetics, in the same way as Ophelia (Claire Danes), as we notice in her almost shabby apartment. Both pairs of lovers enact the existing generational gap between the older generation, based on traditional and fixed values, and the innovative rebellious young generation, which is submitted to technology but simultaneously despises capitalist advances.

Water becomes the connective device between the lovers, glimpsed from the very onset of the productions: Ophelia and Juliet's first appearance is linked to the liquid element, Juliet inside her bath, and Ophelia next to a fountain. Romeo and Juliet's interrelation through water is introduced by the scene in the aquarium, where both lovers glance at each other in a distorted but realistic perspective, once again hinting at the deceitful nature of human perception. Moreover, a swimming pool is used by Luhrmann as the private space for the lovers to escape outside the boundaries of society rules and give free rein to their passion. In contrast, Almereyda uses a swimming pool as the setting for Act II, scene ii, where Polonius argues about the causes for Hamlet's madness and Ophelia is forced to betray Hamlet. The swimming pool may be seen as a symbol of the commodity culture for the old capitalist generation, foreshadowing Ophelia's tragic suicide. Thus, water enacts a bipolar medium where lovers isolate—a symbol for regenerating life—but simultaneously originates death—Ophelia's drowning, Romeo and Juliet's suicide through a liquid poison, also intertwined with King Hamlet's death by ear poison.

Death being caused by water (or by any liquid element) is a recurrent element in both plays, and hence finds their commodified equivalent in the films. Moreover, it is a motif that finds its connection with the overwhelming presence of religion in Luhrmann's production, highlighted in the figure of Christ presiding over the city with His arms outstretched as on a cross. Luhrmann sets Act III, scene i at the beach, so that Mercutio is slain by the shore and Tybalt falls into a fountain at the basement of Christ's statue while it starts to rain. Romeo kills Tybalt with the latter's gun (ornamented with religious motifs) linking death, water and religion in terms of symbolically killing in the name of God—or at least with a gun imprinted with religious imagery.

The high-angle shots on the Jesus Christ-like figure recurrently appear as articulating the filmic narrative, in the way religion provides a teleological explanation to compensate for our insignificant existence in daily life, something which *Almereyda* transposes to the skyscrapers and the scattered images of churches in Manhattan. Religion controls the city from the top, blending with the commodity consumerist society materialized in the “Pick and Go” supermarket—which *Almereyda* parallels in “Keyfood”. In those terms, religion is levelled to capitalism like any of the grand narratives which are constructs of themselves, created *ad hoc* and self-perpetuated to be consumed, never questioned nor destabilised about their position as core ‘natural’ pillars in mankind’s structural development. Religion (made physical by its symbolic representations throughout the film) apparently remains detached, but we recognise how it articulates and creates cohesion among the disjointed bits of postmodern narration. However, we also infer that religion, as such, is simply brought to life by means of the aforementioned representations (idols, symbolic neon and kitsch paraphernalia) but remains absolutely devoid of any meaning for our contemporary existence. Love (which is initially triggered by artificial hallucinatory pills—with a heart drawn in the middle—symbolising its parodic commodification into contemporaneity) and religion are commercialised and commodified under the light of consumerist MTV pop culture, which condenses the search for meaning into the enactment of the representation of the real. As Hamilton mentions:

The cathedral dominates the landscape and the montages establishing this city, itself dominated by the giant statues of Mary and Jesus. This society, permeated by violence, drugs, adultery, and revenge, is undoubtedly Catholic and matches Shakespeare’s Verona (not to mention Protestant England) for hypocrisy in the duty paid to this faith...This is a Catholicism virtually unrecognisable to the contemporary adherent: neon-lit crosses; choral versions of ‘Prince’ songs accompanying the mass; a priest with tattoos, Hawaiian shirts, and sinister relationships with his young charges. (2002: 162)

Religion can be thus seen as “a media icon or a brand name or a badge, connecting Montagues and Capulets in a realm outside of the fighting and hatred” (Donaldson 2002: 62). Yet, we may also infer that Romeo and Juliet’s relationship is built up around religion, with the overpowering presence of the cross as the symbol for their union or their split (as in Juliet’s funeral). The cross appears in the film’s title, as a marker of young love and drawing attention towards the axiomatic role of religion in the production. Crosses also appear in both the Montague and Capulet cars, and both families wear crosses around their necks. A religious network operates around the cross and its symbolic link with Christ as an image of sacrifice, paralleling Romeo and Juliet, who are the “star-cross’d lovers” (I.i.6-10), as Christ-like roles in their families—sacrificing themselves for the eventual peace between Capulets and Montagues.

6. Conclusions

Through Luhrmann and Almereyda's approaches we witness how Shakespeare can be located in the age of digitalization and "glo-cali-zation", meaning by that "the collapse of the local and the global into the 'glocal' and the retention of 'Cali' (or Hollywood, California) as the centre of the film industry" (Burt 2003: 15). We recognise how Shakespeare's film adaptations involve deconstructing traditional structures as the "distinctions between local and global, original and copy, pure and hybrid, high and low, authentic and inauthentic" (Burt 2003: 15). In most terms, we notice that Luhrmann sets the path for Almereyda to digest the Shakespearean corpus in order to fit late 20th century concerns and aesthetics. Thus, on the one hand both films are intended to create very 'popular' filmic productions, addressed to a mass audience, but on the other hand they defy the Shakespearean canon in terms of re-enacting the universal dimension of Shakespeare's masterpieces from a new contemporary-experimental viewpoint.

At certain points of both adaptations we infer a vision that is not so apparently strident and experimental, but as something somehow quotidian, highlighting the absolute defamiliarization and commodification of the conventional as the way to look for some meaning in our contemporary world, reflecting on human dehumanization and absorption within the consumerist system. Thus, Hamlet's and the lovers' (Romeo and Juliet) deaths under this context exemplify the failure of one of the few attempts to preserve authenticity, privacy, originality and rebelliousness against the extreme mass global culture created by the postmodern condition. Shakespeare's universality can only be rendered in postmodernity in terms of reality being commodified into a disconnected string of fragments, which can only convey meaning through the active participation of the spectator and the repetitive pastiche connections of signifiers and signifieds.

Shakespeare has become familiarised and commodified to the point of intermingling 'original' and 'copy', so that what young people know about Romeo is that he was played by L. DiCaprio, as we see in *Orange County* (Jake Kasdan, 2002) where "a high-school English teacher asks his students who comes to mind when they hear the names 'Romeo' and 'Juliet'. One student responds, 'Claire Danes', and another adds 'Leonardo DiCaprio'" (Burt 2003: 14). Similarly, *Hamlet* "is not only the world's greatest play, but it was made into a great movie—*Ghostbusters*" (Homer Simpson, in *Tales of Public Domain*, episode 283, season 13), and nowadays Romeo is just the name of one of the Beckham's children.

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- Hamlet* (Michael Almereyda, 2000)
- Orange County* (Jake Kasdan, 2002)
- The Simpsons* (Matt Groening, 1989-)
- Something about Mary* (Bobby Farrelly and Peter Farrelly, 1998)
- Titanic* (James Cameron, 1997)
- William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (Buz Luhrmann, 1996)