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Who Are These People?

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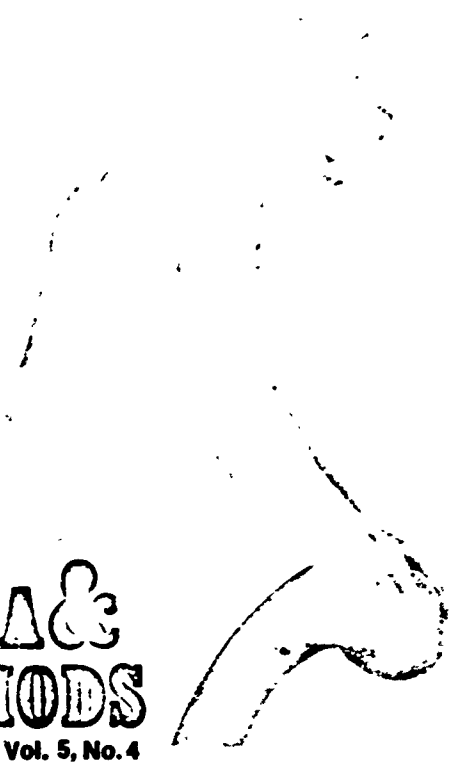
Franco Zeffirelli's film "Romeo and Juliet" is appropriate for classroom study because of its relevance to today's youthful rebellion, to current social pressures, and to the generation gap. After viewing the film and seeing the images and moods of the performers, the students are better prepared to read the play imaginatively. (Numerous questions to help stimulate and guide a discussion of the film are included.) (JS)



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How to read this issue The interrabang (or interrobang, we are told) pictured on the soup can label adorning this month's cover, serves as an apt symbol for modern man. The combination of the question mark and the exclamation point produces a character appropriate for both disbelief and astonishment. It is reserved for expressions like, "What the H's going on?" and who would argue that this doesn't express contemporary attitudes? Not content to merely describe the interrabang, however, we contrived to calculate its possible effects. We were quick to realize that it would revolutionize the alphabet soup market. It would also relieve writers of the necessity of using both the exclamation point and question mark jointly—always a dubious punctuational form.

20 The Futures of the Book, by Quentin Fiore (co-author with Marshall McLuhan of "The Medium is the Massage" and "War and Peace in the Global Village"), is a collage of elliptical projections on communications, and as communications go, so goes education. Witty, cryptically perceptive, the article is the result of week-end and late night sessions cramped between two busy schedules: those of M&M's managing editor and Mr. Fiore. The purpose of "The Futures of the Book," Mr. Fiore suggests, is to alter the ways in which people see very common environmental materials by placing them in new contexts. The sly juxtapositions that result are not only amusing but immensely informative.

27 Over the past months, you may have noticed in M&M a trend toward what are not strictly "educational" materials. We believe that a student's schooling should continue the same involvements he is bound up in outside of school—and school in this context should be an interpretive, analytic, reconstructive laboratory. For surely there is no special preserve of material which uniquely provides "learning." The kids are going in droves to see Zefferilli's **Romeo and Juliet**—it is a solid film and should be treated, interpreted, reconstructed in class.

36 Videotape—Thinking About a Medium, by Paul Ryan, fills a long standing need in literature on educational technology: what is videotape as a **medium.** Hardly anybody discusses that because it is difficult to think about the nature of a new medium. Mr. Ryan has his teeth into it, however, and his insights are unnerving.

44 We talk about kids a lot in M&M—and many people have objected to the use of the word, mostly because it suggests a kind of fraternizing thought inimical to the aims of education. But we use it deliberately, if not sparingly, to indicate that school should not be custodial. In any case, we are planning a kid-contributed issue for April, '69 and in **Participatory Education** ask for your help.

- ☐ George Brent and Vera Ralston in "Angel on the Amazon"
- ☐ Peter Kastner and Julie Biggs in "Nobody Waved Goodbye"
- ☐ Heloise and Abelard in "Monk on My Back"
- ☐ Keir Dullea and Janet Margolin in "David and Lisa"
- ☐ Leslie Howard and John Barrymore in "Romeo and Juliet"
- ☐ Lon McAllister and June Haver in "Scudda-Hoo! Scudda-Hay!"

WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE?






If you checked any of the boxes on the preceding page, you've missed the publicity for Franco Zeffirelli's "Romeo and Juliet." Starring 17-year-old Leonard Whiting and 16-year-old Olivia Hussey, the film has already reaped reams of critical acclaim. Of the film, Shakespeare might be tempted to say, "You see, there's life in them bones yet!"

BY TOM ANDREWS and JAN AUSTELL. William Shakespeare is alive and thriving in Franco Zeffirelli's film, *Romeo and Juliet*. It has an excitement and authenticity that communicates to the "now" generation. The language is Shakespeare's, the setting is mid-fifteenth century, the costumes are of the period, but director Zeffirelli and his youthful performers have pumped new life into Shakespeare's play, making it relevant to today, aptly demonstrating that the bard "was not of an age, but for all time."

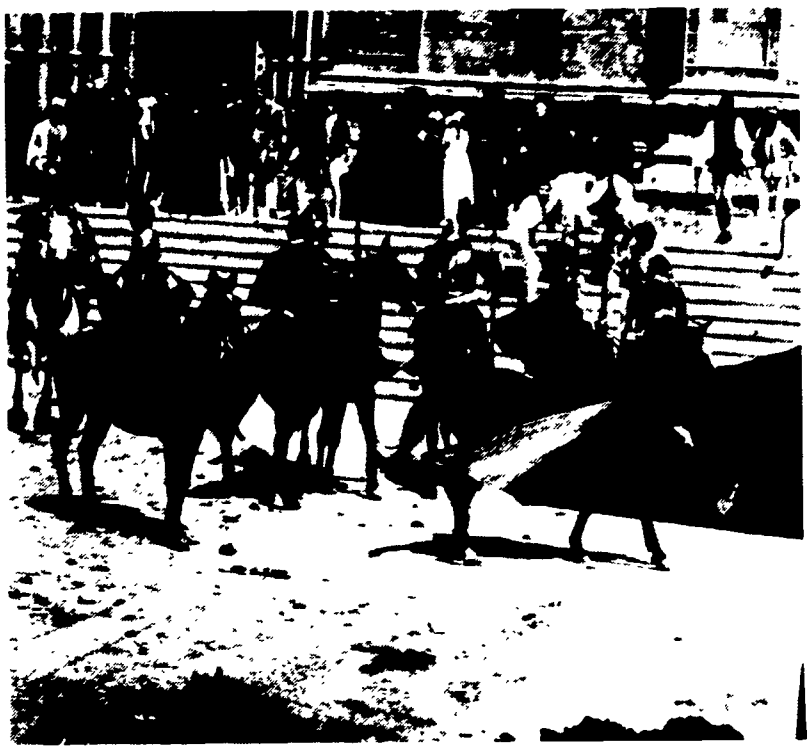
In terms of today's youthful rebellion, social pressures and generation gap, this film touches home. Played, for a change, by 15, 16 and 17 year-olds, Shakespeare's young men wear their hair long; they roam the streets eyeing and talking about girls: rival gangs brawl and somebody gets hurt—15th century "switchblades" were as real and longer than today's. Romeo and Juliet's youthful love challenges the traditional blind hatred between their families, the Capulets and Montagues, and threatens the social stability of the older generation. This hatred has long been accepted by the establishment; Romeo and Juliet's budding romance is out of order, and therefore must be carried on behind the backs of their parents. Juliet's defiance of her parents' choice of a proper match for her illustrates that a lack of communication between the generations is not unique to the 1960's.

Myriad approaches to studying Shakespeare's plays can be thought up, especially when more than one medium is involved. We (at Kent School) prefer to have the students see this film first. Then, with the images and moods of the performers vivid in their minds, students can return to the written play more ready to "see" the words.

The oft-quoted and much abused line, "Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?" will have a vivid poignancy for the student who remembers Olivia Hussey as Juliet standing on her balcony longing for her newly discovered love. When Romeo rises from Juliet's bed early on the morning he is to leave Verona by decree of the Prince, Juliet pleads to him to stay. In this moment there is no cute silliness in the line, "It was the nightingale, not the lark . . . believe me, love, it was the nightingale." Juliet's emotion is real. She is speaking from her heart.

The following questions may help to stimulate and guide a discussion of Zeffirelli's film, *Romeo and Juliet*.

—1. How is Tybalt's gang like the street gangs of today? How do these groups act? What do they talk about, and



Franco Zeffirelli's production of ROMEO AND JULIET. Distributed by Paramount Pictures Corporation.

what do they do? After Tybalt's gang baits the Montagues with harsh jokes and raw insults, what are the immediate visual and audible reactions to the violent deaths of Mercutio and Tybalt? Does the Shakespearean language bother you in the opening scene in the market place? How about the brightly colored costumes of Tybalt's gang? Do they seem foreign and weird, or do they seem "mod" and "in"? Are they helpful in revealing the character of Tybalt and his gang? Does the length of their hair seem old-fashioned? Someone observed that there is in the film such a likeness to the young people of today that all the kids in Zeffirelli's street gang need are transistor radios cocked to their ears. Shakespeare himself used anachronisms in some of his plays; but suppose Zeffirelli had called for his players to carry transistor radios; what would the effect be?

—2. Why does Romeo fight Tybalt? Is he a good enough swordsman to defeat Tybalt in a formal duel? What is the effect of having them fight a hot-blooded, youthful scramble on Verona's streets rather than a graceful contest masterfully executed? While Romeo inflicts the fatal wound on Tybalt by sheer chance, what does the whole struggle do for the character of Romeo, the young lover with stars in his eyes?

—3. Put yourself in Romeo's place. You are a 17-year-old boy, intelligent, energetic, with a group of buddies to go around with, and you are very much interested in girls. Or put yourself in Juliet's place. You are a girl not quite fourteen, pretty and passionate, yet dutiful. You have just been told by your mother that girls younger than you are wives and mothers already, and that your parents have chosen your future husband, and that they expect you to behave accordingly towards him at your parents' party this evening. Do you think that Leonard Whiting, the seventeen-year-old actor who plays Romeo, and Olivia Hussey, the sixteen-year-old actress who plays Juliet, act naturally in their parts? Can you believe in them? What do they do with Shakespeare's dialogue that gives the words warmth, humor and immediacy? If the words sound silly to you, can you imagine similar conversations between a boy and a girl today who are sure they have fallen in love at first sight?

—4. The song, "What Is Youth," the young man sings during the Capulet's party was written especially for this movie. What does it add to the scene of Romeo and Juliet's first meeting? How does it help the young lovers to meet?

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How do the words comment on the behavior of the lovers? Their joys? Their frustrations? In what ways do they foreshadow coming events? Although "What Is Youth?" is a new song, it could have been written in the 1400's. What does this suggest about other folk songs written today by Bob Dylan or Joan Baez or Simon and Garfunkel? Can you name some other modern folk songs that may have relevance to Romeo and Juliet? Is the poetry in the folk songs of today worth studying?

—5. Friar Laurence wears an old robe and lives in a practically bare cell in an old monastery, yet he is portrayed as a youthful man of God with worldly experience and knowledge. Does he show or express any feelings against the establishment? That is, the society represented by the Capulets and the Montagues? Friar Laurence kids Romeo about being fickle and about staying up all night. Yet in church he decides to help Romeo and Juliet marry. Why? Later, he harshly urges Romeo to be a man, to show some courage, and to stop sniveling about his troubles. Later still, he calls on Juliet to show courage and stamina in their plan to reunite her with Romeo. What motivates Friar Laurence to do the things he does? Do you know a clergyman today who would act as boldly to aid young people asking for help? If he does the right thing in helping them, does Friar Laurence deserve any blame for what happens to the two lovers?

—6. How do the actors and director illustrate the so-called generation gap between the older and younger members of the Capulet and Montague families? What seems to matter most to Capulet and his wife? Love? (Remember the first view we have of Lady Capulet at a window looking across the courtyard at her husband?) Money? Social position? Etiquette and proper behavior in society? How do they show it? Can you tell how much regard they have for Juliet's thoughts and feelings? How? How much attention and guidance do you think Romeo receives from Montague and his wife? Do you think that they know their own son? How do you know? The nurse, a robust, earthy woman, relishes her part in the romance of Romeo and Juliet; yet when Romeo is exiled to Mantua, the nurse sides with Juliet's parents in calling for Juliet's marriage to Count Paris. What does the nurse reveal about her own character in doing so?

—7. How are the similarities and differences between the two families—Capulets and Montagues—shown on the screen? How does each family respond to the battle in the streets early in the film? How does each family respond to the words of the Prince of Verona? Do the families have similar reasons for nating each other? Do we know what either family's reasons are? What is distinctive about the costumes of each family? What is the difference between Tybalt's behavior and Benvolio's, or Romeo's, or for that matter, that of the bitter and cynical Mercutio? Do you get the impression that the men of the Capulet family are noisy, boastful, and arrogant to contrast with the no-less-passionate, but more moody, scholarly, and artistic men of the Montague family?

—8. Why do the scenes between Romeo and Juliet seem so natural and passionate in spite of the Shakespearean language they use? Does Juliet's joyously happy laughter seem appropriate to what is happening between her and her young lover? Does their parting on the balcony seem like "sweet sorrow"? Why *do* they part to await their meeting the next day? Do you think that the director was trying to make a point by having Juliet's hair pulled tight, bound in a single braid, and confined by a cap while she wears tailored, formal costumes in her "public" appearances, yet in her scenes with Romeo after the party, her hair is down, hanging loose, and her costumes are less formal and more loosely fitting? When is Juliet more free to be herself? Does the nudity of the young lovers after their wedding night together offend you, or does it seem quite natural and tastefully handled? Does the poetry they speak, including their references to the lark and the nightingale, seem natural or artificial and stilted? Does it help to preserve the beauty and honesty of their relationship or do their words seem strange and out-of-place? Why?

—9. The Prince of Verona stands for law and order; when he speaks, everyone listens. He is above those he rules, as the camera angles on him help to illustrate, but how effective is he in governing or directing the human passions at work in the characters of the story? He warns against acts of passion, assigns more or less just punishment when they are committed, and he records their cost, but how much law does he enforce and how much order does he establish? How much *can* he do? What is the effect of his cry, "All are punish'd," near the end of the film as the corpses of Romeo and Juliet lie between him and the crowd of mourners dressed in black? Is he blaming the two families for what has happened? Is he giving up all attempts to govern Verona? Is he saying, in effect, "I cannot govern well as Prince until all of you learn to govern yourselves as responsible human beings"? Is he similar to any of those in authority today whose job it is to rule wisely and well?

—10. Zeffirelli made two changes in the plot of Shakespeare's play. In the play a plague prevents Romeo from learning the truth about Juliet's "death." In the play Romeo, arriving at Juliet's tomb believing that she is dead, meets Paris, who has arrived only moments before, and Romeo kills him. In the film these things do not happen. Do Zeffirelli's changes make sense to you, or do you think that Shakespeare's script would be better left unchanged? If you think these changes are improvements, what does your conclusion suggest about Shakespeare as a professional dramatist?

—11. What was your impression of the misty beginning of the film with the camera moving down into Verona? Did you get the feeling that you were going into the past? How about the end of the film as the characters walked toward the camera which was focused on them from below? What was your impression of the exchange of looks, the handshakes and embraces, and then the blending of the two family groups while the credits came on the screen? Does the ending have anything to say to us today? Does tragedy unite us?

Tom Andrews and Jan Austell teach at the Kent School in Kent, Conn. Mr. Andrews recently organized a very successful film festival which is noted in the News column at the front of this issue.

[PUBLISHER'S ASIDE:]

Paramount's new Romeo and Juliet *gets four stars from me. Shakespeare lives! (Where did I read that?) Saw Zeffirelli's exciting film in a preview in New York City several weeks ago. In the audience were a number of Negro youth leaders from Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant section. Among the enthusiastic reactions was this one: "Man, we the Capulet's and you the Montagues." East and West Berlin, are you listening? North and South Vietnam? Arabs and Israelis? Zeffirelli's* Romeo and Juliet *is my nomination for teacher of the year!* R.D.