Film Text Analysis—The Coming-of-Age Genre, Baz Luhrmann's Production of William Shakespeare's "*Romeo and Juliet*" (1996) Alias *Romeo + Juliet* and Kate Wood's "*Looking for Alibrandi*" (2000)

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Abstract

Analysis of a film text warrants a thorough understanding of the genre, and the codes and conventions used in the film to gauge the effectiveness of the film. The stages of production and postproduction measure the success of films. The coming-of-age genre is analysed with a focus on codes and conventions in films. First, a theoretical review of film terminology, codes and conventions is shown. Second, the application of codes and conventions to coming-of-age genre films is discussed with reference to Baz Luhrmann's production of William Shakespeare's "*Romeo and Juliet*" (1996) alias *Romeo + Juliet* and an Australian Film, Kate Wood's "*Looking for Alibrandi*" (2000). The former is a modern cinematic adaptation of William Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet* (1597) which received both favourable and adverse criticisms. However, the scope of this analysis is not on the adaptation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (1597) or to show the similarities and differences between the play and the film, rather, the analysis is on how Luhrmann used codes and conventions to make meaning of *Romeo + Juliet* to the demands of contemporary young teenage audience and how Luhrmann fulfilled this aim. *Looking for Alibrandi* (2000) based on a novel of the same name is the first Australian Film about the Italian community in Australia, which portrays the growing-up of the character from an Italian background and finding identity in an Anglo-Australian society. The film is highly acclaimed, has unique cinematography, and keeps the plot of the film close to the novel. This analysis is aimed at entry-level (undergraduate) students of Film and media studies. The codes and conventions discussed in the analysis of the two films are uni-

versal and can be contextualized to analyse film texts of other genres as required in the film and literature studies curriculum.

Subject Areas

Literature

Keywords

Film Genres, Codes and Conventions, Coming-of-Age Genre, Stages of Production

1. Film Terminology

A *genre* is a categorisation, classification or group of films [1]. Prominent genres include comedy, crime, westerns, war, spy, adventure science fiction, fantasy, horror and drama [2]. Film sub-genres are categories of main film genres with their own distinctive subject matter, style, formulas, and iconography like "chick" flicks, courtroom dramas, detective/mystery films, romances, superheroes, supernatural films, etc. [3].

Codes and *conventions* are styles and features pertinent to a film. Codes create meaning with the structure of signs. Like visual texts, films are texts that represent people, ideas, and issues/problems to the viewer [4]. Codes and conventions help the viewer understand and interpret the film. Codes are technical, *written* (*script*/*dialogue*) and *symbolic* codes. Technical codes are *camera angles*, *camera shots and movement*, *lighting*, *framing*, *layout*, etc., also called cinematography.

2. Film Codes

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Camera angle in filming is a significant technical code. Camera works involve angles (low and high), front, side, and back shots close-ups, panoramic or birds' eye view to portray characters and images and show relationships. Different camera angles help viewers understand a scene and characters. Camera positioning like close-ups encourage the audience to identify with a character or wide shots to show the beauty of a scene/landscape. Different camera angles can make characters appear powerful and threatening like Joker in *Dark Night* or weak and frightened like Froddo in *Lord of the rings*.

Lighting is an important code in films that helps the audience to understand a scene. For example, an evenly lit room with few shadows conveys a feeling of calm and security, whereas highly contrasted light and shade can create fear or unease. Lighting can also create a sense of place, atmosphere, and the state of mind of the character [5]. Lighting, soft or harsh also can manipulate a viewer's

attitude towards a setting, scene, or a character. Frontlighting highlights beauty of a scene, for example, the protagonist is frontlit to create an aura of his/her physical beauty or backlighting used to highlight beautiful hair of the romantic heroine of the film like (Gwyneth Paltrow as Viola in Shakespeare in love 1998). *Audio* is another code and includes music, sound effects and dialogue. The type of audio used builds up the atmosphere in the film. Sounds build up the atmosphere; a scary scene with creepy music in background, creaking door, footsteps coming etc., like in horrors (*The Shinning*), sad scene with slow and emotive music as in (*Million Dollar Baby*), happy scene heard with laughter, joy, and upbeat music (*Despicable Me* 2) and a sad and somber scene may use silence to enhance the atmosphere (12 *Years A Slave*).

Written codes are written words present in film; headings and subheadings, subtitles, logos, labels, font size and signs. **S***ymbolic codes* have symbolic meaning and can include use of colour, lighting, juxta positioning of objects, animals, shadows, and people, for example, presence of black bird, key and windows in "*Woman in Black*" *representing* death, entrapment, and fear. Symbols can signify love, hate, emotions, power, inequality, stereotypes, death etc. Thus, the use of codes in films gives the film structure and helps the viewer draw meaning and understand the film.

3. Film Conventions

Film conventions are important features. Conventions are the distinguishing features of a genre. Conventions are the definite expectations of how a film is made and how the codes are used in the film. Conventions include ***theme(s)***, ***plot*** (narration), ***setting*** or ***background***, ***characterisation***, ***casting***, ***performance***, and ***costuming*** (props, sets locations) endowed in the film. The **theme** is the central convention of a film. It is the key idea, premise, message, meaning, purpose, deep human experience or moral of the film. The theme regulates the film, and the codes, plot, cinematography, or genre are elements that regulate the theme or demonstrate how the theme is displayed in the film [2]. Themes can be analysed by the period or decade in which the film is made, and themes reflect the social, economic, or political climate of the time in history. For example, theme of a film in the 1920's would resonate on class structure or fear of Communism, in the 1930's during the Great Depression, film theme could include emotional optimism or 1940's (during time of World War 11) would concentrate on lack of trust. In the 21st Century, in a rapidly changing society and use of technology, film themes include the notion of "searching" [2]. Thus, the theme of a film is dynamic and change in subsequent period or decade to engage and sustain interest and entertain the audience.

The **plot** is a significant convention. The plot is the story in a film [6]. The plot could be chronological as in real life or flashbacks also referred to as "in medias res" [2]. Film plot includes six parts, the exposition and conflict in the beginning, the rising action, and the climax in the middle and the falling action (return or fall) and the resolution or denouncement at the end. The plot could

be suspenseful and dramatic or a sting in the tail where the ending is a complete surprise and unexpected or an open ending where the audience are left clinching to the seat pondering that the plot seems not over yet [7].

Moreover, **setting** or **background** is a significant film convention. The setting or background creates the atmosphere to reinforce the desired mood like a graveyard or an abandoned building in an isolated place for horror films. The setting also creates realism where time and place is made known. In addition, **casting** or who are the actors is an important element of film convention. The appearance of actors in a film is associated with their personality and it reflects on plot, background etc. Sometimes prior knowledge of an actor can influence the audience response, for example, the narrative may have sympathetic characters with whom the audience identify themselves and share values and qualities, like Jessica in *Ladies in Black* and unsympathetic towards characters who the audience dislike, like Jessica's dad, Miles in *Ladies in Black*. The main character in a film (protagonist) and the supporting characters must develop like people do in real life. The film character must be three-dimensional and exhibit growth in three areas for the characters development: sociology (economic class, occupation, education, religion, race etc.), psychology (moral standards, ambition, frustrations, attitudes towards life etc.) and physiology (sex, age, weight, height, posture, appearance etc.). Thus, good characters must be three-dimensional based on the character's physiology, psychology, and sociology. One of the three areas may be more predominant over the others due to the development of the plot but the character development must show dynamism in all three areas in changing context to give depth to the character [2].

Along with casting, **performance** is an underlying convention. Elements of performance include facial expressions, body language and delivery of lines. For example, Joker's performance has crazy look in eyes, eccentric style, crazy ecstatic walks and unsettled mannerisms making the performance effective. Many actors do a lot of research and preparation before a role. For example, Heath Ledger locked himself away in a hotel for a month to make himself within the realm of a psychopath with zero empathy [8]. **Costuming** is a significant aspect of film conventions. The type of costuming can affect the audience interpretations of the characters. For example, it may make a character glamorous and attractive or conservative or rugged etc. Costuming is also integral to portray the period that the film is set in, for example, classical, war or future etc. Finally, props, set, and locations are important as it influence audience's interpretation of characters as it contributes to the atmosphere of the film. Thus, codes are technicalities and conventions are styles adopted in making of a film. The use of codes follows the conventions adopted in the film.

4. Coming-of-Age Genre

Typically, the coming-of-age genre is characterised by its own Codes and Conventions. The genre is generally categorised with (who am I, relationships, fami-

ly, gender role, friendships, rebellion, home, everyday life, community beliefs, values, and stereotypes, education and the arts, political, social, and cultural realities and discourse, the external world and it may incorporate subgenres of love, romance, comedy, as well as tragedy. The films appeal to adolescence and to mature aged audience due to the reality and honesty portrayed. The fundamental element of the genre is the character's development from childhood to adulthood via an inner conflict resulting in psychological or moral growth or death [9]. The characters development is guided by the personal relationships, attitudes, appearance, and the interaction with the immediate and wider socio-economic, cultural, and political contexts. The codes and conventions are like those used in any dramatic film [10]. The genre depicts a world as true to reality as possible, the authenticity depicted maintains the relatability and emotional influence of the characters persona on the intended audience [11]. The expectations of the film are drawn from the genre's codes and conventions. The conventions heavily use plots with stereotypes and most often the stereotypes are the jock, the cheerleader, the nerd, the rebel, the new girl/boy, etc. Many coming-of-age films also focus on the characters' relationships and even sexual experience, usually the loss of one's virginity and almost always having the prom or a homecoming dance as a focus point [12]. In many modern coming-of-age movies, the conventions include a loss of innocence for the protagonist, moral dilemmas, the protagonist accepting the complex system of the world, becoming aware of oneself, and facing the adult world and even death [13]. Thus, the theme of maturity, acceptance and growth and seeing the world with a different lens for progress becomes the ideal in this genre.

5. Applying Understanding of Codes and Conventions: The Coming-of-Age Films

To draw meaning for the viewers it is important to examine the implementation of codes and conventions in the two films. As mentioned in the abstract, Baz Luhrmann's production William Shakespeare's "*Romeo and Juliet*" (1996) alias *Romeo + Juliet* is an adaptation of Shakespearean 16th Century *Romeo and Juliet* (1597). However, the adaptation or its critique is not the scope of this analysis but the emphasis is on the codes and conventions Luhrmann used in the film to engage and appeal to younger audience. Also, although the film is classified as a romantic tragedy, for the purposes of this paper, it is analysed in the context of coming-of-age genre. Kate Wood's *Looking for Alibrandi* was the first film made in Australia about Italian people and culture and thus it is unique. Like Luhrmann, in *Romeo + Juliet*, departs from Shakespeare's play, but at the same time retains the strings that attach his film to its dramatic source [14], similarly, Kate Woods, the director of *Looking for Alibrandi* (2000) kept the script as original as the novel on which the film is based. The use of specific codes and conventions in both films is cleverly done to draw meaning for the viewers. The analysis explains the codes and conventions used in the two film texts concurrently.

Lighting is a symbolic code used in coming-of-age films to symbolise and emphasise emotion. In a scene in *Looking For Alibrandi*, Josie is seen crying in her dark room reading a note from John Barton, the lighting in this scene symbolises the cold, lonely, grief of losing a friend or loved one [15]. In contrast, *Romeo + Juliet's* lifeless bodies after their double suicide surrounded by hundreds of candles shining a warm yellow toned light symbolises a sacrificial alter and religious iconography and idealises that only dark gloomy lighting is associated with death, sadness, soberness, and grief [16]. The use of lighting arouses emotion and sympathy for the characters.

The technical code of *camerawork* and angles varies from close-up shots of a character's facial expressions, to wide angle panoramic shots. The different camera angles exhibit characters feelings, emotions, and thoughts. The camera work in *Looking For Alibrandi* varies from close-up shots of facial expressions like that of Josie's grandmother to emphasise disdain or confusion or the panning out of the camera in the scene when a slight breeze picks up and carries the torn up letter from John Barton, that Josie throws out her window, the camera focus is on pieces of paper flying in the night, symbolising freedom [15]. The camera works shows close-ups, high, low, and mid shots to show attitudes, feelings and changing relationship of characters. Close-up, for example, Josie's eye-rolls in many scenes showing disagreement or frustration. Low angle shots are used, for example, when Nona explains her history, she looks like an elder who deserves Josie's respect. High angle shots are used in scene where Josie sees that Nona is vulnerable and shows empathy for her and helps her pick the photos scattered on the floor. Mid-shots are used, for example, Josie and Michael Andretti in coffee shop, the profile shows that they are similar and low-angle shots when Josie is in the car sticking her head out on a ride to Bondi Beach with friends when she escapes the family tomatoe festival which makes her look powerful [17]. Thus, like the lighting effects, the different camera angles in the film confirm emotions and feelings of the characters.

Cinematic techniques in *Romeo + Juliet* are unique. Fast moving cameras, low angle shots, special effects, close-ups, slow motion camera shots and music made the audience feel a sense of suspense and thrill. The focus of the camera and appearance on props and face of characters convey the idea of a higher power creating an unchangeable destiny for Romeo and Juliet like in death scene is effective. The use of slow-motion shots, low angle shots and close ups puts across the meaning of Shakespearean dialogue. Romeo is introduced as depressed, smokes cigarette whilst writing poetry wandering aimlessly on a grey clouded day. The cameras zoom on face of Romeo's melancholic expressions portrays that Romeo is upset and a lost man. Juliet is introduced as a young girl with an innocent personality. Her father's face is zoomed into when he speaks of Juliet being still a stranger to the world implying, she is naive and vulnerable and can be easily seduced. The camera is zoomed on the face for emphasis on the dialogue. In other scenes, close-ups are done on Juliet's plain face with no cosmetics that makes her more innocent. At the point of meeting, Romeo and Juliet's faces

are zoomed in to help the audience understand the deep love between both characters. The camera techniques made the audience believe that love at first site between these two people was possible [18].

Moreover, in another scene, Juliet puts the gun to her temple to commit suicide with camera down on Juliet from above as if to imitate God looking down on her and she looks up towards to the audience with dispersed tears on her face [16]. This builds up and extenuates the emotion and change the perspective of the audience. *Soundtrack* is a significant element. In *Romeo + Juliet*, the soundtrack is electric and somber. As Romeo is sitting by the water and journaling, brooding over his love for Rosaline remains around the sandy, orange-drenched beach, Radiohead's "Talk Show Host" starts playing. The moment is very emotional and teen viewers could relate to Romeo. Also, the meet-cute between Romeo and Juliet in the bathroom of the Capulet mansion, as "I'm Kissing You" by Des'ree is playing in the background. The soundtrack expresses feelings for the young audience. The late Quindon Tarver who sings Prince's "When Doves Cry" and Rozella's "Everybody's Free (To Feel Good)." further adds tranquility and heightened emotions to the scene [19]. Similarly, in *looking for Alibrandi*, the music creates emotions, for example, in the funeral scene of John Barton. The beautiful voice from Cordrazine's lead singer, Hamish Cowan, singing U2's "With or Without You" is heartbreaking. It feels very poignant to younger people. The music and song is suitable as all students were upset with the death and instead of making the scene totally melancholic it lifted the spirit of the cast [15].

Further, the convention of *costume* design and use of *props* are significant to coming-of-age genre. Costume portrays the popular and fashionable variations of the stereotypical adolescent and compliments the characterisation within the film. Costume design also represents the time being portrayed [3]. *Romeo + Juliet* is a radical postmodern film which directly addresses the issue of authority [20]. The authority is shown by 90's aesthetic costume to make the characters seem relevant, relatable and appealing to a younger audience. The bold, vivid colours, romantic and religious iconography, for example, the hearts printed on Romeo's shirt symbolises his love and passion [20]. Thus, the 16th Century costumes were not used. The generational divide and a rebellion are revealed through the costume. The Montague and Capulet boys share a common rebel cause: defying the older generation. The costume exhibits the link between the two households and their distinct identities. For example, the senior Montagues and Capulets have the 1960s-1970s look, whereas the younger generation has rejected that. The Capulet clique has sleek, sexy and super-tailored looks who wear black garments with streamlined silhouettes with decorative embroidery. Their gun holsters are high fashion accessories, and they wear their shirts tucked in to show off their bold belt buckles [21]. Though the Montague boys are of the same comfortable social class as the Capulet clan, their costume is simple, easy and utilitarian; unbuttoned Hawaiian shirts, baggy work wear-inspired pants and shorts and combat boots. Unlike the Capulets, who have quilted, velvet bullet-

proof vests, the Montagues have their own unique code of lavish decoration. Their clothes are not expensive but their Hawaiian shirts are vibrant enough and their hair is not glossy but dyed pink and spiked. Thus, the two factions are distinctive but both wear their rebellious attitudes through their clothing that connects to the created world they share. The rebellions to this rebellion are Romeo and Juliet themselves. Though Juliet hails from the house of Capulet, she doesn't appear in a transparent black feather slip dress and Leonardo DiCaprio has no macho look. Romeo and Juliet's clothes are simple, clean and not exaggerated [21]. Thus, the costumes and props, tattoos, gold chains, loud Hawaiian shirts, leather vests and silver teeth decorate the characters and swords replaced with Uzis and pistols and displays of a great deal of car chase sequences and chorus with television screen which all appeal to the contemporary young viewers. In every way Luhrmann made the film feel gangster and dangerous brutal and hostile. The decision to introduce the film in a dangerous way was to make the target audience understand the cinematic discourse [14] [21] [22].

The costume design in *Looking for Alibrandi* is reflective of the 1990's popular fashion trends amongst teens in Australia [23]. However, the choice of costume differs amongst characters based on their individual stereotype, socioeconomic class, and ethnicity. For example, John Barton is polished donning his private school uniform with tie and blazer in comparison to Jacob Coots' untucked, oversized, and untidy public-school uniform [15]. The strategic implementation of costume design in a coming-of-age film helps the audience to quickly identify the status of a character or form an opinion of a character's personality and identify with or disapprove of a character.

The costumes mirror the characteristics of the characters in the films. The characters are typically the age of or close to a teenager, living as a dependent or still at school, confronted with a mature conflict and on a quest of self-discovery [9]. The convention of characterisation executed in both films, demonstrate that not all characters in this genre share the same personality traits, physical appearances, or journey. Josie can be described as opinionated, stubborn and feisty [24]. In contrast, Juliet is timid, innocent and passive [25] [26]. However, both characters are young, rebelling against the traditions of their respective families and fighting for relationships that are hindered by familial obligation. The characters in both films get sympathy from the audience.

The *setting* or background is an important convention in films. The coming-of-age films are typically set in the time period of production usually in a high school or educational institution, family home or typical suburban setting depicting a true to life portrayal of an adolescent who would typically spend most of their time at school or at home. Setting can also include modes of transport modern technology, clothing, and slang to further indicate the youthfulness of the characters [25]. Due to the versatility of locations and settings, the film set can vary throughout the world. *Romeo + Juliet* is set in a created world, an amalgamation of modern and classical images drawn from religion, theatre, folklore, technology, and pop culture [26]. Verona Beach can be described as a

mix of Venice Beach, Miami and Mexico. Luhrmann believed that to Shakespeare and Elizabethan audiences the depiction of Verona was that of a hot, sexy, violent, catholic country and that Luhrmann's adaptation of Verona in a modern-day time was an equivalent depiction of the intended setting by William Shakespeare [26] [27]. The created world is partly connected in the aesthetic and cultural traditions of the regions. The dilapidated carnival rides remind Venice Beach's past history in the 1950s. As seen in the film, the once-thriving tourist hub became a place for gang activity. There is use of Mexican religious folk art throughout the lush and romantic sets [21]. *Looking for Alibrandi* is set in Sydney, Australia, and surrounding suburbs. Scenes are located at iconic Sydney landmarks such as Bondi Beach and the Anzac Bridge [15]. The choice and execution of the setting and location of scenes in films are important and symbolic. The use of Sydney as the set gives the film a certain look and originality.

The *plot* is a significant convention in any genre. The narrative in both films is of young characters who question their sense of belonging, identity and morale, a revolt towards the adult perspectives, a fundamental feature in coming-of-age films. Romeo and Juliet have fallen madly in love but are faced with the obstacles of an on-going conflict between their families. This causes them to mature quickly and make life impacting decisions, for example, marriage and suicide [28]. Similarly, Josie in *Looking for Alibrandi* questions her identity and belonging in an Anglo-centric world through emotions of love, grief, and joy [15]. Personal growth and the sense of identity and belonging are significant in the plot which is expressed through emotions in the dialogue rather than the physical actions of the characters. The plot though chronological in both films also differ in development. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the resolution is the fall of characters, death of Romeo and Juliet (suicide). In contrast, in *Looking for Alibrandi*, Josie rises, develops, grows strong and independent, and appreciates her culture and adults in her world. She is proud of being an Italian and accepts her culture. She believes her family is blessed and she is loved by two of the strongest women, her mum and grandmother. Although she is not sure of her destiny, but she accepts this uncertainty in terms of her future. Josie finds freedom and her identity. Like in *Romeo and Juliet*, there is death of a character, in *Looking for Alibrandi* (John Barton's death-suicide) in the climax of the film was deliberate as his death in the middle of the plot gave Josie a catalyst for change [28].

In the film, *Looking for Alibrandi*, there are many *themes*, but this analysis concentrates on three key themes. There is theme of feeling like an outsider, peer pressure, immigration and family ties, community tradition, cultural differences and racism and self-discovery [29]. The key concepts of themes conveyed in the film include self-identity, cultural heritage and social barriers and the themes are expressed in various instances throughout the film. The theme of self-identity is expressed when Josie says to her mum that she is changing, she is growing up and she is finally seeing light at the end of the tunnel. Cultural heritage is revealed when the family eats spaghetti one night which is handmade. It is a tradition that will never go and Josie says that she will never let this tradition simply

go because like religion, culture is nailed into you so deep you cannot escape it. No matter how far you run. The theme of social barriers is shown in many instances, for example, when Josie feels that by acting the Australian way, she will feel that she will be part of "their" society (Anglo Australian society) but she hates it because she is just as smart as her other Anglo school mates.

Similarly, among many themes, the key themes in *Romeo and Juliet* are love, conflict and family. These three themes interlink and illustrate how love, conflict and family intertwine with one another. It also shows that sometimes through love comes conflict and hatred. In the film the theme of love is explored through a variety of ways like Romeo and Juliet's first meeting, their friendships with Mercutio and their deaths. The theme of love is made tragic with Romeo and Juliet's death. The implication is that at times, love can have a damaging effect on individuals involved or those surrounding them, the course of love never runs smooth and families must listen to one another and have honest relationships. The theme of conflict is shown between many characters and the two families involved so that the audience can relate to the themes of conflict as they will have been a part of conflict in their lives. Conflict makes the film tragic and it is because of the families conflict that Romeo and Juliet die. Finally, the theme of family is shown in the film through the depiction of the two families (the Capulets and Montagues) who are seen as similar but are wary against each other and finally are apologetic and repent for their past behaviour [30].

An important feature in the two films is the use of *language*. It can be argued that there is a somewhat parallelism in the use of language in the two films. The language used in *Romeo + Juliet* maintains a traditionally Shakespearean iambic pentameter common in Shakespeare's plays and films [31], "Two households, both alike in dignity, in fair Verona, where we lay our scene" [16]. This portrays a traditional Elizabethan script to a modern film. The only words spoken in the film are Elizabethan English and the film is only one of Shakespeare's adaptations which retains its "thine's" and "thou's" [21]. However, some words in the script are changed to sound relevant, comprehensible or colloquial to a younger or broader audience, for example, when Romeo farewells Benvolio "farewell my cuz" [16]. Although the nuance and poetry of Shakespeare's language is lost in the flamboyant and sparkle environment in the film but the incorporation of contemporary jokes, music and pop culture in the film appeals to young contemporary fans who still could understand Shakespeare and Luhrmann made Shakespeare accessible to everyone [22] [32].

In *Looking for Alibrandi*, the use of Italian language with English translation gave the thematic effect of cultural diversity and identity. It was important for Josie's development. Like *Romeo + Juliet* uses Shakespeare's Iambic pentameter used in traditional English poetry and verse drama, *Looking for Alibrandi* is a traditional film and uses the Italian language very often. Since everyone is not familiar with the Italian dialect subtitles are used mainly when the three Alibrandi women are speaking. When Nonna speaks Italian, she is usually talking about her past and how she wishes she would be treated with respect. When Jo-

sie speaks Italian, it is usually directed at her Nonna, Katia. This shows how Josie is familiar with her mother tongue and how she cannot be walked over just because she does not understand what is being directed at her. When Christina uses the Italian dialect, she uses it when she is frustrated with her mother and does not want Josie to know what she is saying. When Italian is used it is generally because the character is going through a hard time and speaking their mother tongue expresses their emotion and how they are feeling. The use of language is also effective in portraying the theme of cultural identity and diversity and development of the character (Josie) [17].

6. Stages of Production

The *stages of production* of a film are significant for its success. There are three main stages of production: **pre-production**, **production**, **and post-production**. Pre-production is the development, acquisition, planning or writing of a script. Pre-production phase also includes the pitching of a film idea and attainment of funding, casting, and decisions on location(s). Production includes the beginning of recording footage and initial implementation of lighting. Post-production incorporates the editing and reviewing of footage, the addition of sound effects and graphics, as well as the assembling and polishing of the movie. The final stage of film production is distribution, whereby the film is distributed to cinemas or media platforms and in different forms, DVD, Blue ray, 35 or 75 mm etc [33].

The Australian coming-of-age film, *Looking for Alibrandi*, is an adaptation of the multi-awarded debut novel of the same title, written by Melina Marchetta in 1992 [34]. It was later converted to a screenplay by Marchetta. However, this adaptation did not diminish the quality or essence of the storyline. The film was directed by Kate Woods and produced by Robyn Kershaw, funded by the Australian independent production company, Robyn Kershaw Productions, with an expenditure of US$4.5 Million with a turnover of $8.3 million [23].

In the pre-production phase, Kate Woods decided and gave the film a grounded, authentic feel to justify the source material, the novel. For casting, the audition was by people who had a lived experience close to the characters they would be portraying. It took three years to write the script as the originality of the plot needed to be authentic and there was lack of material written about the cultural experience of Italians or migrant stories and cultural diversity and identity in a positive way and thus every step was taken to get the script right [28]. It was important to present the story of a young teen in a down-to-earth, relatable manner. The realistic dialogue and narrative plotlines follow the novel closely which made the film *Looking for Alibrandi* successful [35].

The film was released in Australia on January 1st, 2001, with a runtime of 102 minutes [36] and a cast casting consisting of Pia Miranda, Matthew Newton, and Kick Gurry, amongst others [23]. Written, directed and produced by three women on their first feature film, *Looking for Alibrandi* was a critical and commercial hit, winning best film at the Australian Film Institute awards in 2000

[37]. The film is entertaining and moving and did well at the Australian box office as it has so much to offer in the way of Australians identifying with themselves and their need to find a place in life. The film has been critically acclaimed by Australian reviewers. David Stratton quoted in [38] "With its gallery of fine performances, its realism, humour, tenderness and intelligence, "*Looking for Alibrandi*" is a welcome and important new film".

In the pre-production of *Romeo + Juliet* the original casting included Leonardo DiCaprio as Romeo Montague and Natalie Portman as Juliet Capulet. This initial casting was changed by producers who thought 13-year-old Portman as too young to be starring next to 21-year-old DiCaprio and the role of Juliet was subsequently given to Clare Danes [39]. The expenditure of *Romeo + Juliet* was approximately USD $14 Million and the 120-minute production was distributed in Australia on 26th December 1996, with an opening weekend gross of approximately USD $11 Million in the United States and a cumulative international gross of approximately USD$155,841,661 [23]. The film grossed over ten times its $14.5 million dollar budget. No other direct Shakespeare adaptation has come close to this sort of monetary success [22]. The 1996 sensation succeeded in its aims of refashioning Shakespeare for the younger generation [21].

7. Conclusion

William Shakespeare's *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) and *Looking for Alibrandi* (2000) demonstrate many distinguishing features, codes and conventions expected in a coming-of-age genre which made the films successful. The directors used the codes and conventions cleverly to make the films meaningful to the viewers. Kate Wood's production *Looking for Alibrandi* is unique in its cultural and linguistic context to Australian viewers, especially to the Italian community in Australia, establishing cultural heritage and hegemony. The film provides scope and potential for the film production of cultural diversity. Baz Luhrmann in *Romeo + Juliet* took bold decisions and made radical changes to Shakespeare's text with clever use of codes and conventions in the film to engage new Shakespeare viewers. Baz released the glorious spectacular version of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and executed the meaning to 21st-century young teenage viewers and made the film successful. The pre-production, production, development and distribution of the two films were significant to making the films successful.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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