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The Auteurism of Baz Luhrmann: An Analysis of Moulin Rouge! And The Great Gatsby

Ana Kristel Gamboa

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THE AUTEURISM OF BAZ LUHRMANN:
AN ANALYSIS OF *MOULIN ROUGE!* AND *THE GREAT GATSBY*

A Thesis

by

ANA KRISTEL GAMBOA

Submitted to Texas A&M International University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2016

Major Subject: English

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AN ANALYSIS OF *MOULIN ROUGE!* AND *THE GREAT GATSBY*

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May 2016

Major Subject: English

ABSTRACT

The Auteurism of Baz Luhrmann:

An Analysis of *Moulin Rouge!* and *The Great Gatsby* (May 2016)

Ana Kristel Gamboa, B. A., Communication with a Minor in Marketing;

Chair of Committee: Dr. Manuel Broncano

Baz Luhrmann is widely known for his personal vision in his five feature films. Luhrmann has claimed that the first three films have the “Red Curtain” style, and their style is different from his last two films. Through the Auteur theory and Formalist style, it is shown that Luhrmann has a consistent personal stamp in all his films. The visuals, the editing, the narrative use of the characters, the symbols and themes of *Moulin Rouge!*, a Red Curtain style film, is compared to *The Great Gatsby*, Luhrmann’s last film, to show how strikingly similar they are. Before the analysis of the oeuvre, Luhrmann’s career is overviewed. My contribution to the field is to show that Luhrmann is an authentic auteur by proving a detailed analysis from areas in his films that have not been deeply discussed.

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Les doy un agradecimiento muy especial a mis papas y a mi hermana por su gran apoyo incondicional.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Baz Luhrmann is a celebrated international theatre and film director, an innovator of contemporary cinema, a legendary perfectionist, and, more importantly, an *auteur* which means that he leaves a personal stamp on his body of work. Luhrmann has created five feature films: *Strictly Ballroom* (1992), *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996), *Moulin Rouge!* (2001), *Australia* (2008), and *The Great Gatsby* (2013). He has been the co-producer (except *Strictly Ballroom*), the director, and the co-writer of all of his films. The first three films are described as the *Red Curtain* trilogy although the plots of the films are not related to each other. However, they are considered a trilogy because they conform to the so-called "Red Curtain" style which is "the combination of theatricality and cinematic complexity," the exuberance of the visuals and *mise-en-scènes*, the postmodern cross references, and the emphasis on music (Walker 1303). After *Moulin Rouge!*, Luhrmann declared that his next films would be a trilogy with an epic style. *Australia* became his first epic film, but it is unclear if *The Great Gatsby* can be considered as his second epic film or if this film and *Australia* are stand-alone films. I assume that *The Great Gatsby* is his second epic film since Luhrmann realized during the production process that he was creating an "emotional epic, and a physical epic" (qtd. in Szklarski). In addition, his approach to *Australia* is more poetic (Cook 143), and Luhrmann specified that *The Great Gatsby* is a "poetic cinematic" film (*The Great Gatsby: Special Feature*). Therefore, he may be giving a more poetic feeling to this trilogy. Although Luhrmann claims that his first three films and his last two films all have different styles, I still find many similar *Formalist* stylistic elements. This

This thesis follows the style of *Australian Humanities Review*.

style applied in film is to show how the aesthetics call attention to itself. In addition, the characters, symbols and themes are also comparable. For these reasons, this thesis compares in detail *Moulin Rouge!*, which is the culmination of the Red Curtain style, and *The Great Gatsby* under the scope of the Auteur theory and Formalist style to show that Luhrmann is an authentic *auteur* to show that his whole body of work has his own consistent unique personal vision. Although my thesis analyzes *Moulin Rouge!* and *The Great Gatsby*, his other Red Curtain films (*Strictly Ballroom* and *Romeo + Juliet*) are mentioned occasionally in the course of the analysis to reinforce my argument that all his films have similar characteristics.

The thesis is divided into four major chapters: Visuals, Editing, The Narrative Use of the Characters, and Symbol and Themes. The chapter on Visuals deals with the similarities of the visual techniques between *Moulin Rouge!* and *The Great Gatsby*, which include openings, superimposition, the look of the narrators, colors, filters, mise-en-scene, closed form, vortex, movement, freeze frame, imperfections and recurring visual elements. The second chapter, Editing, analyzes the similarities between the editing of the two films in the light of Christian Metz's theoretical characterization of the editing process and my findings. The Narrative Use of the Characters analyzes the various ways in which the characters and story arcs of Christian from *Moulin Rouge!* and Nick from *The Great Gatsby* are impressively similar. Gatsby and Satine from *Moulin Rouge!* are similar as well. The section on Symbols and Themes analyzes the ways in which the filmmaker uses similar symbolism in both movies such as seasons, jewels, flying, the sparkling sky and shooting stars. Seasons shows the moods of the narrators, Christian and Nick, jewelry is about security, flying objects parallels the characters dreams while the sparkling sky and shooting stars also shows the character's dreams, but the shooting stars specifically demonstrates the destinies of the lovers (Christian and Satine, Gatsby and Daisy) being changed

once they embrace a romantic relationship. In this section I also analyze the themes of impoverishment vs. wealth, “love cannot conquer all things,” foolish love vs. security (wealth), and lifestyles which are present in both films. Impoverishment vs. wealth shows the differences between the penniless and the rich people. “Love cannot conquer all things,” a quote by Luhrmann, shows that even if Satine and Christian love each other, and Gatsby becomes a millionaire because he loves Daisy, they are bigger things that do not let them get together. Foolish love vs. security (wealth) shows that Satine and Daisy are in between having a foolish relationship or being with someone that provides them security. Lifestyles are about how Luhrmann shows, in an exaggerated manner, the Bohemian Revolution in *Moulin Rouge!* and the Jazz Age in *The Great Gatsby* which includes the night life of Moulin Rouge and the parties at Gatsby’s mansion.

Before undertaking the analyses of the two films, I provide an overview of Baz Luhrmann’s career as well as an explanation of the methodology I follow in this thesis: Auteurism and Formalism. The characteristics of Luhrmann’s Red Curtain Style are also explained. Finally, I review briefly all of Luhrmann’s movies and emphasize some of their characteristics. Aside from my own findings, the description of the Red Curtain Style and the characteristics of the films include information from journalists and academic researchers, mainly from Pam Cook’s book *Baz Luhrmann* because she analyzes in detail Luhrmann’s creative style as well as his evolution as film director.

Baz Luhrmann’s Career

Luhrmann is referred to as a “showman-auteur” because he is a “mixture of entrepreneur, performer and artist” (Cook 4). Luhrmann creates innovative forms of art and entertainment which include music records, musicals, opera, fashion, theater, film, music videos (most of them

connected to his feature films), and short films like his commercial *No. 5 The Film* for Chanel perfume, which also follows the Red Curtain style. Luhrmann says he and his team are famously known for investigation and research a great deal of time in his films (qtd. in Malone 1081). For instance, they spent two years researching the Elizabethan stage for the film *Romeo + Juliet* (Walker 1350).

Baz Luhrmann was born in September 1962 in Australia, and his artistic career began during his late teens as an actor, performing and directing in theater and opera. He acted in several film productions, which include a minor role in *Winter of Our Dreams* (1981), appeared in the television series *A Country Practice* (1981-1994) and in the 1981 documentary (which he also co-directed) *Kids of the Cross* (Cook 16). In 1982, he founded his first theater company, The Bond, and later, in 1986, the Six Years Old theater company in which he was also the artistic director (Cook 36, 38-39). In 1997, he created his own independent production company, Bazmark Inq., “with divisions handling design, film, live entertainment, music, and housewares” (Galloway 3095). His credits in musicals and plays include *Crocodile Creek* (1986), *Haircut* (1988), and his first version of *Strictly Ballroom*, a thirty minute play (1984), while some of his opera productions include *Lake Lost* (1988) and *La Bohème* (1990) which was premiered at the Sydney Opera House (Ryan, *Baz Luhrmann: Interviews* 319). He is also an alum of the National Institute of Dramatic Art, where he had some difficulties in following the styles and methods of theater because he wanted to articulate his own language. Nonetheless, he learned some techniques, such as the collaborative method, while he was engaged in preparing his play, *Strictly Ballroom*. The collaborative ethos of devised theater consists of “individual group members occupying a ‘hot seat’ and having to answer searching questions from the rest of the group” (Cook 17). Everyone is a contributor and Luhrmann has continued to use this method in

all his stage and screen projects (Cook 18). Overall, his background in theater and opera has shaped the style of his films. However, it is unclear where Luhrmann acquired his technical knowledge of cinematic techniques. Although Cook's book is one of the most detailed biographies of Luhrmann, she does not mention where he was educated in film techniques. She mentions that prior to creating his first film, his only serious film directing credit was a zero-budget music video (Cook 24). Therefore, I assume that the director taught himself film techniques.

Luhrmann usually works with the same team in all of his movies, particularly with his wife, Catherine Martine, and with Craig Pearce, who has been the co-writer in all of his scripts (Cook 19, 16). Catherine Martine gives material form to Luhrmann's vision since she has collaborated as the costume designer, production designer and producer. Some of Luhrmann's creative colleagues are usually producer and art director Martin Brown, editor Jill Bilcock, choreographer John "Cha-Cha" O'Connell, cinematographer Donald McAlpine, and Craig Armstrong as the music director and orchestrator.

Auteur Theory

The Auteur Theory is based on the premise that, although a film requires contributions from many people, the director has the last decision for the finished work. The term "auteurism" began in *Cahiers du cinéma*, a French film magazine in the 1950s, and it reached its height with Andrew Sarris in America (Luhr and Lehman 26). Sarris indicates that Auteur Theory is to evaluate the "technical competence, the presence of a distinctive visual style, and an interior meaning" of a director's body of work (Cook and Bernink 256). The similar thematic and formal relationships of the different projects by a single director demonstrate that he is an auteur. An extensive analysis of a single director's body of work will find "complex and fascinating

parameters” (Luhr and Lehman 26-27). Louis Giannetti further notes, “A filmmaker’s ‘signature’ can be perceived through an examination of his or her total output, which is characterized by a unity of theme and style,” (512). Donald Staples says that “the progress of the auteur’s talent from one work to the next is an important tenet of the auteur theory” (4), while Dudley Andrew says that an auteur’s body of work “displayed notable style, and, through style, consistent world views” (119). The camera is commonly seen just as a window to present what is happening in the film. However, creative filmmakers can achieve much more than just presenting the events of the film with the camera and editing (Luhr and Lehman 33-34). Therefore, auteurs use devices and techniques to create their own unique visions.

Richard Corliss believes that an analysis on an auteur is not about the visual style, but about the writer’s themes expressed through plot, characterization and dialogue. According to him, the director’s job is to transcend the script visually. An example he provides is *Le Charme Discret de la Bourgeoisie* where Luis Buñuel did not contribute to dialogue in Jean-Claude Carriere’s script, but Buñuel is listed ahead of Carriere as the author of the screenplay. Many critics do not agree with Corliss’s idea of auteur. Vincent Canby argues that if Corliss’s criticism is followed, shooting the film would be pointless and criticism should be only on the script. Luhr and Lehman agree that films start with a preexisting script, and it is the basis on shaping the film. However, Luhr and Lehman do not agree that auteurism should be analyzed separately from plot, characterization, and dialogue from the script since the finished film might end up being different. “A performance of the film is not the enactment of the script but the projection of the film,” argue Luhr and Lehman, “and the projection of the film includes much more than the words of the screenplay” (27-29). This means that there are many elements, aside from the script, that create the finished film, such as visuals. William Froug also argues that is hard to believe

that the exuberant visuals from *The French Connection* come from the screenplay. The story “is a matter of style,” mentions Douglas Sirk, such as the director’s use of angles and lightning (Luhr and Lehmann 28, 30). Andrew says that auteurs were treated with seriousness even if they worked with “insignificant scripts and ideas” (120). Filmmaker Josef Von Stenberg thinks a manuscript is a “deceptive document” (qtd. in Luhr and Lehman 29-30). Von Stenberg argues that “manuscripts,” which he might mean scripts, are used to obtain funds, and for actors to read before accepting the film; and Von Stenberg believes a manuscript does not do justice to what he has in mind, such as the visuals and sound: “Words cannot describe an image, particularly when it is in motion, and no two human beings can visualize an idea in an identical or even a similar manner” (qtd. in Luhr and Lehman 30). In other words, a script cannot show the final film.

Since Luhrmann co-wrote the screenplay in all his films, Corliss may have considered him an auteur. *Moulin Rouge!* is even in Corliss’s “Top Ten Movies of the 2000s” article for the TIME magazine. Although Corliss claims that the screenwriter is the auteur and the director brings it to life, Luhrmann kept re-writing and re-shooting scenes in *Moulin Rouge!* during its production. For instance, during the theatrical show of *Spectacular Spectacular*, Luhrmann wanted to close the red curtains and open them again to reveal another stage with more performers. However, he could not use the red curtains due to budget and time restrictions, so he used a puff of smoke instead, where in an instant of a white smoke that covers the whole screen, the set is joined by another set with more performers (*Moulin Rouge!:* Special Feature). Hence, a script may lead the direction of the movie, but it does not create the final movie due to many factors.

Nonetheless, critics view auteurism differently. For instance, Jim Kitses “seek[s] to lionise Peckinpah as an artist victim of philistine studio front-office intervention,” while

“Elsaesser said Fassbinder was an ‘undisputed auteur’ whose films had been overwhelmed by the details of a pathological and sensational life...” (Cook and Bernink 312-13). Auteurism is applied in different ways and achieves different results. Even so, auteurism leads critics to the filmmakers that should be studied, according to James Naremore (Cook and Bernink 312).

An auteur, my understanding and how I apply it in this thesis, is of a director that has a unique creative vision, and a vision that can be perceived systematically throughout the director’s body of work. The auteur has the same constant themes, and they are expressed in the director’s unique style. Sometimes, the name of the director is used for marketing a film because it draws a large and knowledgeable audience which means that the audience likes the style and themes of the director’s previous films (Cook and Bernink 237). These directors, whose names are used for promotional purposes, are the auteurs whose body of work should be analyzed. Luhrmann’s films are well known for his spectacular visuals and his use of anachronistic music, but his films show many more similarities, such as the different types of visual and editing techniques which derive from the Formalist style.

The Formalist Style

Formalism in film is how the aesthetics call attention to itself (Stam 49). This theory originated in a school of literary criticism in Russia from around the 1910s to the 1930s, which contributed to “the methods and aims of literary scholarship” and examined “the rhythm and meter, or style and composition” of a literary work (Erlich 11, 20). The Formalists extended the ideas and principles they had already formulated about literature to filmmaking, and they focused on self-expression and independence (Stam 48).

Through Formalism, views of the world can be expressed in a creative way. For a better understanding of the Formalists, it is important to realize that they are the opposite of the Realists, since the latter use the camera as a window to the real world, while Formalists call attention to their techniques, and they go beyond the customary perception of the real world in order to express their ideas: “Formalists and realists differ in their ideas about symbolism, dream effects, cutting, editing, choice of subject matter, and in general the nature of a filmmaker’s inventiveness” (Singer 1). This means that Formalists use all these elements to express their views in an abstract way, while the Realists use these elements to mirror the real world as much as they can. Eisenstein, like many other Formalists, argues that meanings can only be communicated through visual effects (Singer 22). Formalists Roger Fry and Clive Bell also claim that cinematic art can transcend truths through artistic techniques that go beyond “whatever appears in ordinary experience” (qtd. in Singer 5). Singer claims that movies are about expressing feelings, to share what we are, to present ideas about the world, and to show the economic, political, and psychological problems that humankind has to face in order to promote harmony. Film transforms these realities by communicating them in creative ways, and Formalists can convey them through technological devices (Singer 6-7). “What strikes the eye must also reach the mind and heart,” points out Singer. “Whatever its theme or subject matter may be, a film has meaning only because it is about the world as observed from a viable perspective” (11). Therefore, Formalist filmmakers can express world views through imaginative lenses.

Since the real world is altered with abstract techniques, Formalism is considered art. Formalists Sergei Eisenstein, Rudolf Arnheim, and Bela Balazs argue that a film becomes art by transforming what is real rather than just recording it (qtd. in Singer 4). According to Russian

Formalist Victor Shklovsky, art has to be strange and the forms difficult, so it can heighten the art's perception (qtd. in Stam 48): "Art exists so that one may recover the sensation of life," expresses Shklovsky, "it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*" (qtd. in Ben-Shaul 488), which means that any abstract art makes the audience feel something. To "make the stone *stony*," Shklovsky may mean that the object has to be somehow distorted. Art is about how artistic the object is, not about the object itself (qtd. in Ben-Shaul 488). Therefore, Formalists preferred unconventional forms of combining elements that were suggested by avant-garde movements over the correct rules (Stam 51). This is achieved by different devices that distort familiar objects from customary perceptions; therefore, Formalists favor artists that accomplish abstraction. Composition and style are the major functions of a work of art (Ben-Shaul 495).

In 1927, Russian Formalist Yuri Tynjanov's article "On the Foundations of Cinema" applied the Formalist aesthetics to the cinematic medium. Like the other Formalists, Tynjanov also rejects the realist and naturalist approaches to film. He asserts that the mechanical reproduction of film has nothing to do with art. The film is artless because it resists abstraction and focuses the viewer's attention on the reality of the photograph, and for him, this was ordinary perception. Tynjanov agrees that the photograph can be distorted due to, for example, camera lens, angle, or distance, but those techniques do not have an artistic context because the viewer still sees the object. Tynjanov concludes that the art of film is the "cinematogenic" (the transformation of the objects within shots) and the "montage" (the mounting or editing of film shots). Tynjanov means that he considers art whatever object is transformed by means of the techniques of the camera and the editing. Tynjanov finds the close-up of particular interest because it detaches a part of an object from the whole, and this allows filmmakers to create abstractions such as symbols and metaphors. Tynjanov also thinks that adding color and sounds to films is part of

naturalism and realism. However, Ben-Shaul states that filmmakers can create abstract images with color and sounds. Tynjanov also believes that a montage resembling the continuity of time, space and action is naturalistic. He explains that viewing shots should not be in an “additive way, but as exchanges like lines of poetry” (qtd. in Ben-Shaul 523-97). The editing as “exchange of lines” should form metaphors and symbolism. For Tynjanov, a film should be recognized if it derives from the “cinematogenicity” and “montage.” He rejected films that were influenced by the styles and genres from other art forms because these art forms already had their own specific techniques (Ben-Shaul 523-97).

My understanding of Formalism is that the film does not look like real life, but it still expresses views of the real world. Luhrmann’s *Red Curtain* style and his last two movies have all the characteristics of the Formalist style for his unique cinematic language and the different and complicated techniques he uses to express simple stories. Crowds notices Luhrmann’s true passion in the end credits of *Romeo + Juliet*, “which list dozens of technicians for special effects, visual effects, stunts, car design, gun design, fashion design, and digital animation” (15). Although Luhrmann may not express the original text of *Romeo and Juliet*, he still shows the essence of the story through his exaggerated stylistic visuals. “Stylistic excesses” is Luhrmann’s personal stamp and many critics do not like *The Great Gatsby* for it (Stern and Wilkinson). Kinder describes *Moulin Rouge!* as “an extravagant movie full of excess. Most spectators either love it or loath it” (52). Hudson also describes the narrative of the film as constantly turning “to

the nonnaturalistic, to excess” (259); and his attention to detail is “both admired and despised,” notices Ann Van Der Merwe (37).

Red Curtain Style

In this section, I explain the characteristics of the Red Curtain style, and how they are implemented in all Luhrmann’s films. This section also proves that the characteristics of the Red Curtain style still surface in his last two epic films, even if Luhrmann claims that they have a different style from its Red Curtain trilogy.

As previously mentioned, Luhrmann’s Red Curtain style is the mixture of theatrical and cinematic techniques; the exuberance of the visuals and mise-en-scènes; the postmodern cross references; and the emphasis on music (Walker 1303). Although *Moulin Rouge!* is Luhrmann’s only musical, he says all the Red Curtain films are “driven by rhythm and music” (qtd. in Smith 1666). The Red Curtain style is fundamentally based on: (1) mythologies, so the audience already knows the ending from the beginning; (2) heightened creative worlds; and (3) the demand of audience participation (Cook 31). When Luhrmann visited India, he was amazed by the Indians’ interaction with film screenings as they sing aloud along with the songs in the film, and that is what he tried to accomplish with *Moulin Rouge!* (Shedde 24). He wants his audience to actively participate with the film by singing to the songs. Also, he does not want his audience to have a passive viewing experience; Luhrmann wants them to be paying attention.

Theatrical Cinematic Language

The combination of theatrical and cinematic devices does not mean that Luhrmann produces filmed theater; he creates a theatrical cinematic language (Cook 57). What would make his theatrical approach a “cinematic language” is the movement of the camera, which sometimes

has “physically impossible, computer-effects-enhanced shots” (Pride 1805). *Romeo + Juliet* has “rhythms of whip pans, lightning cuts, super-macro slam zooms, static super-wide shots, tight-on point-of-view shots, and other vertigo-inducing angles courtesy of crash-crane camerawork” (Lehmann 206). Because of these unique techniques, Lehmann also characterizes Luhrmann’s production company, “Bazmark,” as having its own cinematic language (206).

Luhrmann draws attention to the “dazzling displays” of his “visual and aural artistry,” and the look of the films are very flashy (Cook 3-4), with “rich multi-colored palettes exploding from the screen” (Mottram 2814). The sets and costumes are very extravagant, and all the visual flair is the center of the attention (Adamek 970). Actually, most of his movies contain a grandiose set where there is an important event going on filled with hundreds of extras dressed in lavish costumes. He also gives a great emphasis to the aural design which includes sounds and music. Some movements of the characters, for instance, when they dance or make abrupt actions, produce sounds that do not exist in real life, while the music can span from the orchestra of the film score to contemporary songs. These visual and aural elements compose the general style of Luhrmann.

The Red Curtain style also contains very histrionic performances, which means that the acting is very cartoon-like or exaggerated (Cook 3). Hudson says that the acting in *Moulin Rouge!* is “melodramatic” (258), and Jayamanne notices Nicole Kidman’s acting in *Australia* (a film which is not part of the Red Curtain trilogy) and *Moulin Rouge!* is similar (137). Jayamanne states that Kidman has “a wide repertoire of burlesque gestures and rhythms in her acting, which are not constrained by realist or naturalist codes of character consistency in (what is considered) serious acting.” Kidman parodies the uptight upper-class English lady with “instant gestures, postures, movements and rhythms, [and] creates a joyous fun-loving spectacle of exchange

between audience and performer” (138). Therefore, the acting Jayamanne describes can be considered as part of Luhrmann’s auteur since this type of acting is seen in both his Red Curtain and epic styles.

Although Luhrmman has a theatrical cinematic language, Lindroth says there are arguments that Luhrmann and filmmakers not succeeding in adapting Shakespeare to film because stage and cinematic conventions are different. However, Lindroth argues those arguments miss a point: “both stage and cinematic devices call the audience’s attention to the work’s status as a play or as a film” (61). In both forms, the audiences are reminded “that they are watching a performance or presentation of *Romeo and Juliet* rather than Romeo and Juliet themselves” (61). Lindroth also points out that Luhrmann calls the attention of the audience through cinematic devices such as “soundtrack, slow-motion, and jump cuts” (62). For these reasons, the film has a “theatric cinematic language.” Luhrmann comes from a theatrical background, and he looks for ways to adapt the theatric techniques to a cinematic context.

Heightened Worlds

Luhrmann gives special attention to all the settings of his movies since their time and place collapses, “creating a consciously artificial world through a collage of different styles” (Cook 22). He produces a timeless zone multilayered with images, sounds, and cultural references (Cook 63). *Strictly Ballroom* is set in Australia, but it lacks a sense of a time period since the colorful costumes, hair and makeup have a mixture of period styles and span the 1940s, 1950s, and 1970s (Cook 46, 48). *Romeo + Juliet* is set in the 1990s in the invented world of Verona Beach, which is a pastiche: “a curious hybrid of Shakespeare’s Veronese setting, LA’s Venice Beach, and the film’s on-location shots of Mexico City” (Lehmann 192). Luhrmann is specific with the setting of his movies in the following films: *Moulin Rouge!* is set between in

1889-1900 in Paris; *Australia* is set between 1939 and 1942; and *The Great Gatsby* is set in 1922, during the era of the Roaring Twenties. Still, Luhrmann adds contemporary elements to all of his films such as contemporary songs or modernized costumes. For instance, *Moulin Rouge!* includes songs such as The Police's "Roxanne," and *The Great Gatsby* contains hip hop songs. With these songs, the modern audience can have an idea on how people in those periods of time felt when they listened to their actual music.

Pastiche

One of the most fundamental auteur aspects of Luhrmann's work is based on pastiche. Pastiche is an aesthetic form which mixes various styles, and it is typical of postmodernism. Luhrmann wants to engage audiences by the unexpected, but through materials that are already familiar to them. Pastiche is seen in two ways: as an artistic expression that lacks originality, or as a rather complicated method that produces multilayered works. A work based on pastiche may come out in any kind of association, and it "can be critical, humorous, intellectual, emotional, or a combination of all these" (Cook 3, 22-23). Fredric Jameson notices that his "personal style" is now "the random cannibalization of all styles of the past" (qtd in. Lehmann 191). A scene in *Moulin Rouge!* which Nicole Kidman sings a mixture of "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend" and "Material Girl" while a group of tuxedoed males chase her around with gifts emulating Madonna's "Material Girl" music video (1985), which was already a homage of a scene in the film *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953), where Marilyn Monroe sings "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend" (Yang 274). Merwe notes that Luhrmann left an "unusually distinctive mark" on *Moulin Rouge!* due to his heavy use of "preexisting material" (31). However, this "distinctive mark" was already seen in his previous films. The opening scene of *Romeo + Juliet* "is filled with glancing references to and overt borrowings from the cinema of violence: the Western, the

gangster movie, the kung-fu pic, the urban drama, the crime thriller, the action comedy” (qtd. in Lehmann 193). Jameson argues that “intertextuality has become ‘a deliberate, built-in feature of the aesthetic effect’ designed to tap into ‘our awareness of the pre-existing of other versions”” (qtd. in Lehmann 193). This scene claims “for itself innovation rather than originality” (Cook 77).

Even Luhrmann’s films establish an intertextual dialogue among themselves. In *Strictly Ballroom*, when Scott and Fran dance on the rooftop, there is a huge red spangle billboard type of the Coca-Cola (letters in white) brand in the background. This same red billboard type appears in *Romeo + Juliet*, but instead of reading Coca-Cola, it reads “L’Amour.” The letters contain the same font as the brand of Coca-Cola, and they are in white. The “L’Amour” sign appears once again in *Moulin Rouge!*, but this time a little differently. “L’Amour” is a gigantic neon sign in the building where Christian’s apartment is. The font remains the same, but the color is now red. Luhrmann says he cross-references to point out that this is his production company’s way of telling stories (Smith 1670). The sign is an emblem of their style, and it was first shown in the theatrical production of *La Bohème* (1990). It was also shown in *No. 5 The Film* (Cook 166).

Conor points out that *Australia* is saturated with intertextual references. In this film, Australian writer Xavier Herbert, who chronicles the events of Northern Australia, is referenced in *Australia*. Lady Ashley’s horse *Capricornia* is named after Herbert’s 1938 novel while the rum bottles “Poor Fellow” are named after his 1975 novel *Poor Fellow My Country*. Luhrmann also references *The Overlanders*, *Jedda* and *The Wizard of Oz* (98).

According to Cook, pastiche is “accused of lacking depth, emotional affect and a sense of history,” but it also engages audience in a playful way and “can be seen as a strength rather

than a weakness” (76). For this reason, I find Luhrmann’s work original since he mixes many references to praise other works of art and to create a single art form.

The Subject Matter

According to Ray Prides, Luhrmann wants to attain the authentic through the inauthentic which might mean that he wants to attain the concerns of the real world through flamboyant visuals. Luhrmann pens it as creating “‘a real artificiality’ rather than ‘an artificial reality’” (qtd. in Ryan, *Baz Luhrmann: Interviews* 174). Luhrmann says that the stories from Red Curtain are common, and he invents an uncommon way to convey them (qtd. in Pride 1983). Therefore, behind the complexity in the layering of Luhrmann’s style (the way he tells), the stories are very simple with predictable endings (Cook 3). The essence of the films is the concerns of the real world. “To quote Oscar Wilde, it’s dealing with a very serious subject matter in a very silly way, so that you can deal with it,” explains Luhrmann. “It’s disarmingly fun, but it deals with something of meaning” (qtd. in Mordue 807).

Genres

The primary genre of all Luhrmann’s films is romance, but he also mixes with other genres such as comedy and drama. “Comedy and tragedy together are not common on screen, but they should be, because our audience is used to swinging from comedy to tragedy,” insists Luhrmann (qtd. in Kubernik 2577). In *Moulin Rouge!*, music helps transform “the comedy into romance” (Yang 275). Lindroth also noticed that the rhythms of the disco song, “Young Hearts,” in *Romeo + Juliet* is used several times throughout the film “to signal a change in scene, a change in tone, and a change in pace” (60). Like in the original play, the film challenges the definitions of comedy and tragedy (60). *Moulin Rouge!* is a mix of many stylistic elements

including Bollywood films (Hudson 256), and which “toss in several genres - romance, melodrama, comedy, spectacle, action, adventure, with at least six high-protein songs and dances” (Shedde 24). This mixture of genres is found in Luhrmann’s other films as well. *Strictly Ballroom*, for instance, is a movie about dance which includes drama, comedy and romance.

Themes

Luhrmann’s themes are about universal ideas, and, as an authentic auteur, most of his films revisit the same themes. His most prominent theme is love, where the main characters cannot love each other because they come from different backgrounds. The rules of each class or culture lead to social breakdowns or destruction (Ryan, *Baz Luhrmann: Interviews* 146). Romeo and Juliet cannot be together because of their family’s disputes. Christian cannot love Satine because she is a prostitute. Gatsby cannot be with Daisy because he is penniless and she is rich. Although Gatsby becomes a millionaire, Daisy still decides to stay with her aristocrat husband, Tom. This subject matter also applies to the theme of confronting the established order. For instance, in *Strictly Ballroom*, Scott wants to create his own dance steps and compete at the Pan-Pacific Grand Prix Dancing Championship even if his steps do not follow the rules. In *Moulin Rouge!*, The Duke forces Harold to change the ending of the *Spectacular Spectacular* show because he finances it. In *Australia*, Nullah is taken from Lady Sarah, who treats him as an adopted son, because he is half aboriginal and children of this race are taken to live in Mission Island to be educated as whites. In *The Great Gatsby*, although Gatsby achieved the American

Dream of becoming a millionaire, he is still not accepted by the aristocracy. These are some of the subjects that Luhrmann constantly repeats in his films because he is an auteur.

Music

“...One of the things that Baz has [is] a reputation for treating the music like... a star,” acknowledges Jay-Z, famous rapper, who served as executive producer on *The Great Gatsby* (*The Great Gatsby*: Special Feature). According to Hugo Musterberg, visual images joined with a symphony are peculiarly cinematic since music expresses feelings and ideas through its tones (Singer 30). Luhrmann likes a wide range of music: “whether it’s rap, opera, or rock... the universality of things, is what attracts me, not the division” (qtd. in Kubernik 2435). His principal auteur aspect is mixing all kinds of music and using anachronistic songs. Kinder notices the music from *Moulin Rouge!* is “from a diverse melange of songs from different decades that acquire new meaning within this new narrative context” (54). Lindroth notices that *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet* not only includes rap, but it also has “opera, symphonies and cabaret songs” (58). “He uses Jay Z’s hip-hop music as an equivalent for the then-new jazz music [of the roaring twenties],” Shumway observes in *The Great Gatsby* (136). However, according to Merwe, Luhrmann is not the pioneer of adding contemporary music: “As he himself recognizes, variety of musical style is certainly germane to his work, but it is neither his most obvious stamp nor his invention,” says Merwe (31). Kinder notices this technique is traced back to eighteenth-century ballad opera (54). Still, his use of modern music in other time periods is his most notorious auteur element, and Luhrmann uses this method so that the audience understands how people felt back in the time of the films. Luhrmann believes that if the audience hears the original music from that time, they are not going to understand the excitement the people from that time felt (*The Great Gatsby*: Special Feature). He does not want to be accurate

with the music of its time period because Luhrmann might think that outdated music does not excite modern audiences. For instance, Luhrmann parallels hip-hop to jazz to “illustrate [the filmmaker’s] strategy of making the film appeal to twenty-first-century viewers by taking their tastes, manners, and morals into account” (Shumway 136). In this way, the audience can associate the music with the message that Luhrmann wants to get across. Above all, however, Luhrmann selects specific songs that serve the character, the story and themes. As Merwe notices in *Moulin Rouge!*: “songs function as narrative, as dialogue, and in the special manner of the backstage musical as show-within-a-show production numbers,” and songs also enhances the story (31). The use of music through the narration is Luhrmann’s creative and interesting way of telling a story.

The Films

Strictly Ballroom (1992)

Strictly Ballroom is based on Luhrmann’s own play. The story is about Scott (Paul Mercurio) devising his own dance steps with Fran (Tara Morice) to win the Grand Prix Dancing Championship even if their steps are not strictly ballroom. Many forces make Scott abide by the accepted dance steps, but he ends up creating his own steps with Fran in the competition. Fran transforms herself from ugly duckling into a good-looking dancer, and she and Scott inevitably fall in love.

Strictly Ballroom was the debut of the Red Curtain style. This film contains all the elements of this particular style: classical story structure, theatrical devices, deliberately artificial performances, and colorful visuals (Cook 24, 42). “The heart of the movie is really quite conventional,” claims Horton, an “old fashioned musical” placed in a “modern context” (7). As mentioned before, Luhrmann’s style uplifts simple stories. Horton also mentions that the

adaptation “betrays” its original source, the play, since it has “quick cuts and inserted non sequiturs,” and Horton notices that it has a “quick-stepping pace” which he might refer to Luhrmann’s fast editing cuts (7). Cook also mentions that the editing is fast and has a dynamic visual style that alternates between “big close-ups and medium and long-shots to maintain a punchy rhythm” (44). Horton describes a scene that fits these characteristics: Liz... stamp[s] her foot prettily and wail[s] that she wishes veteran ballroom champion Ken Railings (John Hannan) would walk in and speak the words “Pam Short’s broken both her legs and I want to dance with you.” Cut to Pam, seen cartwheeling in an auto accident. Cut back to a resplendent Ken dramatically entering the studio, striding into a noble close-up and saying, “Pam Short’s broken both her legs and I want to dance with you” (7). This scene shows artificial performances with the characters having colorful costumes, and quick cuts which allow a “punchy rhythm” (Cook 44). The soundtrack contains a mix of classical, pop, and dance music such as “Time After Time” and “Love is in the Air.” The themes are love, resisting artistic oppression, self-expression, and living without fear.

William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet (1996)

Luhrmann adapts Shakespearian’s language for the modern audiences to make it relevant for them (Lindroth 67). As Lorenz emphasizes, “Romeo and Juliet fast-forwards the play four hundred years to where it applies exactly: an inner-city gang culture with a bizarre blend of wealth and barbarism” (50). Luhrmann’s Red Curtain style went to the next level since Romeo and Juliet are part of the “contemporary youth culture,” as Romeo “listens to a Walkman” and Juliet “wears a t-shirt and jeans” (Lindroth 56-57).

Luhrmann shows the language of Shakespeare through visuals: “Our philosophy in adapting *Romeo and Juliet* for the screen was to reveal Shakespeare’s lyrical, romantic, sweet,

sexy, musical, violent, rude, rough, rowdy, rambunctious storytelling through his richly invented language” (qtd. in “Shakespeare in the Cinema” 48). Worthen calls the film a “visual saturation,” that is “replete with visual allusions to, citations of, and stagings of the text” (1103). For instance, the gangs, instead of carrying swords, carry “elaborate, jeweled pistols inlaid with religious icons” (1103). In Shakespeare’s play, Juliet is described as “bright angel,” and in the movie she literally dresses up as an angel for her parents’ costume party (Lehman 202). Luhrmann also uses a great variety of visual techniques with the camera, as Crowds points out: “fast zooms, swish pans, offbeat camera angles, hand-held shots, camera speeds changing within one shot, underwater and aerial photography, and lots of flashy camera movement and quick cutting” (14). This is the way Luhrmann employs his theatrical cinematic language, and because of this Lehmann believes he represses Shakespeare’s language (207). Crowds also notices that in the final credits there is only “one dialogue and speech coach, and a non-Shakespearean specialist at that... [He] focuses on cinematic language and style, with nary thought about the original text” (15). This shows that Luhrmann’s auteurism is focused mainly on visuals since he transforms Shakespeare’s words into visuals and does not really put effort in the dialogue.

According to Lindroth, the film’s contemporary soundtrack, which includes a “mixture of classical music and rap” emulates what the original audience from 1597 may have had experienced (60, 58). The film also demands participation from the audience, as Lindroth states that the film, as the original play, “reminds their audiences that they must participate in the effort to create the illusion of reality” (61).

The postmodern technique is also applied in this film. Lehmann argues that the film is postmodernist since the opening sequence of the film is “pure pastiche” as it contains “a violent montage of newsreel footage, newspaper headlines, and prime-time-drama flashbacks to the

awestruck face of Capulets and Montagues that collectively document the ongoing war in Verona Beach” (192). Worthen observes that the film also references Shakespeare’s cultural icons throughout the film: “the Montague boys’ taunting nuns with the line ‘bubble, bubble, toil and trouble’ in the opening scene; the Globe Theatre pool hall where Romeo hangs out” (1103).

Moulin Rouge! (2001)

Moulin Rouge! is a love story set between 1889-1900, in which Christian (Ewan McGregor), a very talented writer, is immersed in the crazy world of Moulin Rouge, a cabaret, and meets courtesan Satine (Nicole Kidman). Although they fall in love, she is torn between continuing to be a prostitute, becoming an actress, or leaving everything for Christian. The film explores the bohemian ideas of freedom, beauty, truth and love, and the conflict between love, art and commerce.

Luhrmann based *Moulin Rouge!* on the myth of *Orpheus in the Underworld* and by opera conventions. Orpheus is a poet, and he plays beautiful music. Eurydice, his bride, dies on their wedding and descends into the Underworld, and Orpheus, heartbroken, follows her. He adapted his interpretation of the myth by showing that love does not conquer all since, even if Satine and Christian get together in the end, Satine dies from consumption. Additionally, Yang and Hudson state the roots of *Moulin Rouge!* are found in opera conventions. Yang observes that Luhrmann express heightened emotions with music and engages “dialogue with other texts” (272). For instance, Yang adds that the scene of Satine singing “Diamonds are a Girl’s Best Friend” and “Material Girl” resemble both the first act of *La traviata* and the second act of *La bohème* (272-73). Hudson also notices that although the film comes from “various traditions (film, Bollywood, popular, music, the musical),” it is also derived from *La bohème* and *La traviata*. She explains that opera is “primarily stylistic” and departs “from the ‘realistic’ aesthetic” (256-

57). The elements of opera also include melodramatic acting, romantic comedy and a predictable plot that are also features of the film (258). Luhrmann's use of various traditions including myth and opera conventions is part of pastiche and postmodernism.

The visuals of the film are extravagant. Kinder recognizes the film as a "dazzling visual spectacle" (53), while Yang states, "Luhrmann has fashioned a cinematic tour de force that gives exuberant expression to his aesthetics of postmodern eclecticism" (269), and that his "love over-the-top visual effects, his productions are extraordinarily attuned to the subtleties of music" (280).

As mentioned above, *Moulin Rouge!* uses anachronistic music. For instance, Luhrmann uses Nirvana's "Smells Like Teen Spirit," a rock song from 1991, in a melange. He uses the lyrics "here we are now, entertain us" which means young peoples' "desire to be entertained generally exceeds their desire to be informed" (Merwe 33). Luhrmann, however, uses the lyrics literally, as the images show Parisian gentlemen seeking entertainment from the courtesans (Merwe 33). Therefore, Luhrmann transforms the context of the songs to tell the stories.

Australia (2008)

After the success of his trilogy of films with the Red Curtain style, Luhrmann created *Australia*, his first film of the epic style trilogy. This film spans many genres: action, adventure, romance, drama, and even comedy. Although *Australia* has a more realist style, it still has artificial tones. As Jayamanne says, *Australia* contains "meticulous craftsmanship and digital technical wizardry" (135).

Australia is set between 1939 and 1942 and is about Lady Sarah Ashley (Nicole Kidman), an English aristocrat who is owner of the cattle of Faraway Downs, an Australian drover (Hugh Jackman), and a half-aboriginal boy, Nullah (Brandon Walters). The trio drives her

cattle to be sold at Darwin while Lady Sarah and the drover fall in love, and she becomes attached to Nullah. Some subject matters are about the Stolen Generations, the half-aboriginal and half-white children forcibly taken from their families and the bombings of the Japanese forces from World War II. Nugent also notices that the film shows racial segregation in cinemas (6).

The look of the film is not as sensational as the Red Curtain style, but it is still heightened. The colors, such as in the sets, props and costumes, are still artificial, but they are de-saturated, in contrast to the saturated colors of the Red Curtain style, which gives a sense of the 1930s and 1940s photography. The Australian landscapes have a romantic rather than realist look because they externalize the emotions and thoughts of the characters (Cook 109, 116, 125). Nugent states Luhrmann and his team are faithful to the historical sources from the Aboriginal people's memories and photographs of Australian cinemas (9). The film portrays realistically some historical facts and settings, but as Jayammane points out, "the film 'frees itself from the obligation to mirror history with the accuracy of a realist aesthetic' even as it 'situates itself in culturally, racially and sexually miscegenated, multicultural milieux' that made up mid-twentieth century Australia'" (qtd. in Nugent 9). Therefore, the film still has some fictional and fantastical qualities such as Nullah having magical powers.

The complexity of *Australia's* score is no different from Luhrmann's previous films, but *Australia* includes new sounds. This soundtrack includes "ancient tribal chants, mission choirs, country and western, bush ballads, American classics, and Filipino guitar music" (Cook 121). When Nullah's mother dies, Lady Sarah comforts him by narrating the classic film of *The Wizard of Oz*, and singing to him its iconic song, "Over the Rainbow." The same song is used at the end in a theatrical way. Near the end of the film, there is a scene in which Lady Sarah

believes Nullah dies on Mission island with the other half aboriginal children after the bombing by the Japanese forces, but it is revealed that the Drover has rescued them. Lady Sarah is about to evacuate when she hears children singing “Over the Rainbow” from a ship sailing back to the port. This song reunites Lady Sarah, Nullah, and the Drover. This is a technique Luhrmann has used in his other films such as when he reunites Christian and Satine with “Come What May.”

The Great Gatsby (2013)

Luhrmann’s first 3D film, *The Great Gatsby*, is adapted from F. Scott Fitzgerald’s novel. The story is set in New York during the Roaring Twenties when Americans were searching for the American Dream, and they were becoming wealthy. Nick Carraway is one of the aspirers, as he arrives in New York for the American Dream. He meets millionaire Jay Gatsby who asks Nick to help him have an encounter with Daisy, Nick’s cousin. She has a love affair with Gatsby, but she is already married to another millionaire, Tom. In the world of the wealthy, Nick is between being allured and repulsed by his new lifestyle.

Luhrmann adapted *The Great Gatsby* for several reasons. Nick gives a “poetic internal description” of its hectic surroundings, so Luhrmann saw potential by interpreting Nick’s internal thoughts visually (Ryan, *Past* 3284). In addition, the novel captures the essence of the American Dream. Luhrmann was also intrigued by the story because it is a “massive compression of epic emotions and epic physical locations into what seems a slender novella. When you go in to make it cinematic, somehow it grows” (Maddox 3012). Luhrmann may mean that these elements would make great visuals because, as previously mentioned, the style of this film is more “poetic” (*The Great Gatsby: Special Feature*). As usual, Luhrmann uses other materials for the film, but this time he uses other writings from Fitzgerald such as *Echoes of the Jazz Age*.

As a typical feature of his auteurism, Luhrmann contemporizes the world of the roaring twenties (Goldfarb). The visuals are energetic, brightly colored, theatrical, and anti-naturalistic (Scott). These are all the elements that a Luhrmann film typically features. Scott also points out that Leonardo DiCaprio overdoes his accent, as when he repeats “old sport.” However, this accent may have been exaggerated on purpose since the performances in Luhrmann’s film are always histrionic. The world of the film is a mixture between craftsmanship and digital effects. One of the greatest sites is Gatsby’s ballroom where massive parties take place. Luhrmann’s intention with the film is to show the “inner world in an outer way,” says Martin (qtd. in Goldfarb). Luhrmann’s constant modernized costumes are much more glamorous in this film. Tiffany’s, Prada, and Brooks Brothers collaborated with Martin on the designs of the costumes and jewelry (Maddox 2906).

As expected in a Luhrmann’s film, the soundtrack is a mixture of musical styles. Luhrmann blends orchestra, jazz, and modern sounds. Originally, Fitzgerald included in his book jazz, which is African-American street music. When he was asked why he added it, he would say that it was “of the moment.” Therefore, Luhrmann decided to include a modern form of African-American music, hip-hop. Luhrmann thought that the world of the roaring twenties would “merge neatly” with the modern world (Ryan, *Past* 3284). Luhrmann’s intention of this mix was for the modern audience to understand, through hip-hop, how people from the roaring twenties felt by hearing jazz (Goldfarb). Jay-Z contributed with his hip-hop song, “\$100 bill.” Other contemporary songs with different styles created for the film include the electro pop song, “A Little Party Never Killed Nobody (All We Got)” from Fergie, Q-Tip and GoonRock, and the pop song “Young and Beautiful” from Lana Del Rey.

Since Luhrmann's first three films are categorized as having the Red Curtain style and the last two might be part of another trilogy categorized as epic films, I categorize all of his films as having the Formalist style because they still share similar elements. As mentioned before, Formalism is about views of the world that can be expressed in a creative way, which is what Luhrmann does in all his films. Now that I have made some general observations and conveyed what researchers, journalists and critics say about Luhrmann's style, I proceed with my thesis where I examine deeper *Moulin Rouge!*, a film from the Red Curtain Style, and *The Great Gatsby*, from a different style, to enforce my argument that Luhrmann is an auteur since all of his films have Formalist elements. I say deeper because researchers say the films are noticeable for their excessive visuals, so I analyze in detail the visuals and editing of these two films. I also compare the narratives, symbols, and themes to show how strikingly similar they are.

CHAPTER II

VISUALS

Openings

Luhrmann introduces *Moulin Rouge!* and *The Great Gatsby* with the same opening style. The beginning of *Moulin Rouge!* starts with an extreme long shot of a theater with red curtains with an orchestra conductor before them, and with sounds of a crowd applauding and cheering. He starts conducting the 20th Century Fox theme music, as the red curtains open to reveal a screen with the logo of the studio. Then, as the orchestra conductor still conducts music, the curtains closes and opens again to show silent film title cards with a frame design: “Twentieth Century Fox presents,” then cuts into “A Bazmark Production,” and then cuts into “Moulin Rouge!” with its font in red, and then cuts into “Paris, 1900” as the camera moves forward, cropping out the theater and the conductor, with only the silent film card left on the screen. The “Paris 1900” dissolves (the frame design is still showing up overlapping the following images) into Toulouse-Lautrec singing from the rooftop of the Moulin Rouge (he is on the left part of the screen) in the foreground with Christian’s apartment in the background. Then a close-up of Christian overlaps the image at the right part of the screen since Toulouse-Lautrec is singing about him. Then the image dissolves out (along with the frame) into an extreme long shot of Paris. With computer effects, the camera swirls from the extreme long shot to the streets of Montmartre. The camera keeps moving around in the streets until it enters to Christian’s apartment, through the window, where he is revealed to be depressed, and the film finally goes into colors.

The Great Gatsby starts with a silent film look as well, with a detailed artistic gate design surrounding the Warner Bros. logo, and it then fades into the same gates but with the Village

Roadshow Pictures logo, then fades into the Bazmark logo before fading into the J.G. (standing for Jay Gatsby) symbol. The gates turn golden and they start to move forward as the symbol minimizes until it disappears. The camera move forward to the center as an away far light fades in and out as the golden gates are being cropped out. The light is revealed to be the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. Snowflakes begin to appear, and the whole screen fades into white to show another lake. In the distant is the psychiatrist's building covered with snow. In it, there is a depressed Nick Carraway telling his story about Gatsby to the psychiatrist.

Both introductions show that Luhrmann has his own signature from the very beginning of his movies. Luhrmann starts with the red curtains in *Moulin Rouge!* and the gates in *The Great Gatsby* which can symbolically mean that audiences are entering Luhrmann's unique worlds. "Right from the Fox logo, the audience is aware that they are participating in this motion picture," explains Luhrmann in *Moulin Rouge!'s* audio commentary, "that this [film] is not about naturalism... [it] is signaling really clearly that is a theatrical cinematographic experience." Actually, Luhrmann has previously used the red curtains at the beginning of his first film, *Strictly Ballroom*, which signals that it and *Moulin Rouge!* are part of the Red Curtain trilogy. On the other hand, *The Great Gatsby* might begin with a golden gate and somber music because the audience is introduced what Luhrmann calls "a cinematic poem" (*The Great Gatsby: Special Feature*). The openings start with something that is constantly seen through the films: the Moulin Rouge and Christian's apartment in *Moulin Rouge!*, the J.G. symbol and the green light are motifs in *The Great Gatsby*. The green light signifies Gatsby's dream of having a future with Daisy; therefore, the green light might also be a key component to remind the audience of Gatsby's dream. Afterwards, the depressed protagonists are introduced, which are also the narrators. Luhrmann uses a silent film look in both introductions perhaps because of the settings

of each film, 1900 in *Moulin Rouge!* and the 1920s in *The Great Gatsby*. Hence, this is the way Luhrmann introduces his visionary world to his audiences, and to let them know they are going to experience a Formalist film: a theatrical experience in *Moulin Rouge!* and a poetic cinematic experience in *The Great Gatsby*.

Superimposition

Luhrmann is very fond of using the superimposition technique, which is to place an image or video over another image or video. This technique is first seen in *Romeo + Juliet* when Father Laurence (Pete Postlethwaite) explains his plans to Juliet. Laurence is in the foreground, and his words are pictured in a moving montage in the background. According to Cook, “the background footage was compiled from different sequences, treated, colour-graded and edited together...combined with blue screen shots of Father Laurence. The lighting was also digitally adjusted to enhance the separation between foreground and background” (72). Laurence is shot solely against a blue (or green) screen, and then he is placed over the moving montage. There are some shots that resemble this scene in *The Great Gatsby*. As the voice over of Jordan Baker narrates the triangle love story of Gatsby, Daisy and Tom to Nick, there is a montage that includes a medium shot of Gatsby, in the foreground, facing the camera then turning his back, and in the background is old footage of soldiers marching. This superimposed video dissolves to another superimposed video: a medium shot of Tom, as the foreground, with the background of a newspaper headlining “AMERICA’S WEALTHIEST BACHELOR TO WED.” Jordan narrates that Gatsby and Daisy had a love affair but Gatsby left and never returned, and she ends up marrying the wealthiest bachelor in America. *Moulin Rouge!* even begins with the superimposed technique. When Toulouse-Lautrec, who is in the left side of the screen, is singing on the rooftop of the Moulin Rouge, the right side of the screen appears a superimposed video of Christian

because he is singing about him. In a single superimposed image, Luhrmann can provide information effectively and in a simple, but ingenious, way.

The Look of the Narrators

Throughout the entirety of the films, *Moulin Rouge!* and *The Great Gatsby*, Luhrmann goes back and forth between the narrators, Christian and Nick, writing/typing their stories. and the images they are narrating. In *Moulin Rouge!*, Luhrmann provides a variety of shots of Christian typewriting the story including many extreme close-ups of the words he types. In the audio commentary of *Moulin Rouge!*, Pearce explains that Christian's typewriting was implemented to condense some scenes because Christian would explain the scenes. Pearce calls this technique a "fragmented punctuated storytelling with the typewriter." Luhrmann evolves this technique in *The Great Gatsby* since Nick's writing (literally the letters of both his handwriting and typewriting) is superimposed on to the scene he is writing about. "Baz wanted to be able to express Fitzgerald's written world, so the words would come literally to life in 3D," states Catherine Martin (*The Great Gatsby: Special Feature*). Luhrmann called this technique "poetic glue": "In essence, they're like old silent film montages, but they are in 3D," says Luhrmann. "They've got three levels and layers. And through it we flow images and words, and it's bound together by voice and music. So it's a kind of a little poem that joins a very ordinary scene... We have a drama scene and then a kind of poem. A cinematic poem, I guess" (*The Great Gatsby: Special Feature*). Luhrmann takes advantage of the 3D format to make the words pop out to make the film more poetic. Since there is a great use of voice overs, Martin explains that Luhrmann uses these "opticals" to explain or emphasize the state of mind of the characters and to underline dramatic moments (*The Great Gatsby: Special Feature*). For instance, at the end, there is a scene of a extreme long shot of New York, with superimposed letters floating around in the

entire screen, as Nick's voice is heard saying, "After Gatsby's death, New York was haunted for me, that city, my once golden shimmering mirage, now made me sick." The words, "After Gatsby's death," pop out with an emphasis on "death." As the words fade-out, the sentence, "New York was haunted for me," fades-in and pops out with an emphasis on "haunted" and then the sentence disappears. Shots appear of a bearded Nick wandering in the streets of New York as the sentence, "That city, my once golden shimmering image, now made me sick," appears, but they are moving and falling down as if they are snowflakes. These images show that Nick becomes disappointed with the ideology of the "American Dream" after witnessing Gatsby's tragedy. Although the visual technique is somewhat different in both films, Luhrmann still uses the protagonists' writing/typing their story as a device to condense some scenes and explain the film.

Colors

The looks of Luhrmann's films are very colorful and very artificial. The use of colors expresses "narrative and thematic goals" (McClellan 51). The colors of *Moulin Rouge!* are saturated while those of *The Great Gatsby* are de-saturated, but they are still very heightened. The dominant colors of each film are red in *Moulin Rouge!* and gold in *The Great Gatsby*. Red dominates *Moulin Rouge!* because "rouge" is French for "red," and red is mostly symbolically linked with sex (Giannetti 26). The Moulin Rouge is a cabaret where courtesans give seductive dances and practice prostitution. In addition, Satine wears many red dresses, and she has to prostitute herself with the Duke, so he can invest in her dreams of becoming a real actress. The color gold is often seen in *The Great Gatsby* in the production design and costumes, and Luhrmann may have used golden gates in its beginning because the color is often associated with wealth and glamour. The golden gate might symbolize Gatsby's story of becoming a millionaire

and Nick wanting to reach the American dream. In addition, the word “golden” is used in the film as Nick refers to New York as the golden city, and he describes Daisy as “the golden girl.”

In addition, the variety of colors is highly noticeable in the films. *The Great Gatsby* features Gatsby’s yellow car, the red train that goes through the Valley of Ashes, and the red and green dominated auto shop of George Wilson. Red dominates the living room of Tom’s secret apartment, perhaps to symbolize Tom’s secret love affair with Myrtle. The attention to colors is also conspicuous in *Moulin Rouge!* such as The Green Fairy, the colorful costumes of the can-can dancers, and the interior design of the elephant building. Silver plays an important role in the female protagonists, such as Satine’s first appearance with a silver costume since she is the Sparkling Diamond, and Daisy’s silver with cream gown and accessories when she is at one of Gatsby’s parties. The use of colors is a very common expressionistic device in Formalist movies; therefore, Luhrmann emphasizes the use of colors in his movies.

Filters

A filter is a piece of glass placed in front of the camera lens to intensify or suppress qualities (Giannetti 30, 576). Today, filters can be applied digitally. Luhrmann constantly adds filters to emphasize the scenes. Whenever there are flashbacks of Gatsby and Daisy, the colors look more washed out. When Satine breaks up with Christian, he is heartbroken and the scene is in black and white (only the red colors pop out). As Giannetti says, paraphrasing McLuhan’s theory: “the information we receive in each instance is determined by the form of its content” (509). When Luhrmann wants to express melancholy, he uses a sort of bluish filter. After Gatsby’s death, Nick walks through Gatsby’s abandoned mansion, and there is a blue filter in the scene to intensify Nick’s sorrow. This same filter is used in *Moulin Rouge!* in the scene where Satine is forcing herself to please the Duke. In addition, both films are set at the beginning of the

1900s, when films were still silent. Therefore, Luhrmann begins both films with a silent film filter, as previously mentioned.

Mise-en-scène

Mise-en-scène (“placing on stage” in French) is the arrangement of visuals that are constantly in flux. Luhrmann’s most typical mise-en-scène technique is creating symmetrical images and repetition of patterns. The symmetrical images are pictures that if they are folded in two look like a mirror between the two separated images. Luhrmann sets up the camera to capture the middle point of a setting, character or object to capture the symmetrical image. For instance, an image in *Moulin Rouge!* shows the Duke in the center while the two edges of the background have two gigantic folded Red Curtains and two exact golden statues. In an image from *The Great Gatsby*, at a party inside of Gatsby’s mansion, inside a marble pool there are two pathways in the right and the left side leading to a rounded floor in the middle of the pool. Behind the back of the center of the pool, there is a 180-degree flat turn staircase, which leads to two passages in each side. There is great number of people partying in the image, with silver serpentine falling down, which makes the image very well balanced, symmetrically, along with the mansion. The great number of people shows another of Luhrmann’s mise-en-scène techniques: the repetition of patterns. An image of Gatsby on the sofa has an exaggerated number of colorful cushions, and there is an excess number of candles behind the sofa. With this repetition of the same pattern, Luhrmann manages to show the great amount of wealth that Gatsby has. An image of the theatre of Moulin Rouge shows an excess of red curtains. This can also show how much the Duke invests in the theater just to have Satine. The repetition of patterns may be one of the reasons that Stern and Wilkinson say *The Great Gatsby* has “stylistic excesses,” and Kinder says *Moulin Rouge!* is “an extravagant movie full of excess” (52).

Luhrmann has used the repetition of patterns from *Romeo + Juliet*, where he displays a large number of Christian crosses throughout the whole film, particularly at the church. He also adds a great number of candles in Juliet's funeral, which resembles the candles behind Gatsby's cushion. As a result, Luhrmann manipulates the image for its beauty or for the message he wants to transmit.

Closed Form

Closed form, which is commonly used in the Formalist style, manipulates and emphasizes the visual elements to provide information. One of Luhrmann's most distinguished uses of closed form is that he encloses characters through door or window frames mainly when something torments them. Many times in *Moulin Rouge!*, Christian is framed by the window outside of his apartment. Satine, at one point, is framed by the shaped heart window in the elephant building. Christian's apartment is also framed by this window. Also, when Satine is leaving, and she is going through the door, Harold tells her that she is dying. She stops, and she is framed in the door. Framing might be used for its aesthetic design, but it may also be used to visually show that the characters are captured since Satine is dying of consumption. Nick and Gatsby are also framed by windows. Nick is framed when he is with his psychiatrist to show that he is tormented by Gatsby's death. Gatsby is framed in a window while he is talking to the phone and smirks and waves to Nick who is outside. His smirk fades into a serious face when he continues talking to the phone. Eventually, the film shows that his phone calls are related to criminal activities. Therefore, this framing shows that he is enclosed by the criminal business he is in. Luhrmann also uses the framing device in other creative ways in this film. When Nick is with the psychiatrist, there is a close-up of Nick in the foreground, his arm is curved as his hand is touching his forehead. In the background, between the space of Nick's arm and his face, is the

psychiatrist. The camera is focused on Nick while the doctor is blurred. When the psychiatrist speaks, the camera blurs out Nick and focuses the psychiatrist. This framing is used as a repoussoir, to direct the viewer's eyes. This method is also used when Gatsby is at his pool while George Wilson is at his back preparing to murder him. In the foreground, there is an extreme close-up of only Gatsby's arm and his body, and the space between his arm and body reveals George Wilson in the background. In *Moulin Rouge!* Christian is framed by his window, from inside his apartment, and outside the window is the Moulin Rouge. Luhrmann placed the Moulin Rouge there for Christian to look at from his window. Therefore, some of Luhrmann's uses of framing are for the films' aesthetics, enclosing feel and as a repoussoir method.

Vortex

Luhrmann says he stages his spectacular scenes in what he and his team call *vortex*. Luhrmann place the characters in the middle with a crowd or other elements surrounding them. In Satine's spectacular entrance, she comes down in a swing from the ceiling, inside the center of the Moulin Rouge, while the rich men, performers and courtesans are surrounding her. Later, in that same scene, Satine and Harold are surrounded very closely by the courtesans who are dancing around them. They have their long skirts lifted up, as they dance the can-can, to hide them from the public because Satine is changing her costume, and she is talking with Harold about how she should act with the Duke, her next client. Colorful dresses moving can be seen in both of their backgrounds. Luhrmann explains, in the audio commentary of *Moulin Rouge!*, that this vortex staging gives this scene a "crazy energy." The vortex staging is also used in the musical piece "Like a Virgin," the scene where Harold and The Duke are singing and dancing. There is a bird's-eye view shot of both of them in a spinning bed, with servants dancing around them. With this type of shot, the vortex placement can be appreciated. Luhrmann applies the

vortex device when Satine and Christian are singing “I Will Always Love You” inside the elephant building, which is very fantastical. The camera is moving around a medium shot of Satine and Christian, without any editing, while the background is filled with sparkling stars and golden spiral adornments in motion. This scene slightly resembles to Romeo and Juliet’s first kiss in the interior of an elevator since the walls of the elevator has golden adornments. The camera moves slightly around Romeo and Juliet, but this short scene is edited. The same vortex arrangement can also be seen in *The Great Gatsby* in Gatsby’s mansion. At one of Gatsby’s parties, Nick and Jordan Baker are dancing in the rounded floor in the middle of the pool, which is positioned in the middle of the backyard of the mansion, and the whole crowd is around them. There is also a bird’s-eye view shot showing these two characters partying in the center of the shot. Additionally, when Gatsby is first introduced, he is in the middle of his courtyard, in the upper section with the fireworks in his background. Therefore, vortex, which is characters positioned in the center with moving elements surrounding them, is a very authentic feature of Luhrmann’s auteurism.

Movement

Luhrmann gives the illusion of shooting impossible camera movements. These are accomplished “by using a digital suture to blend live action with CG enhancements” (McClellan 49). As mentioned before, Pride says that Luhrmann uses “physically impossible, computer effects enhanced shots” (1805). Luhrmann tends to move the camera around the cities in both films; therefore, Martin says Chris Godfrey, the visual effects supervisor, created a 3D world of Paris that can be traveled into. This is clearly Formalist because it is impossible for the human eye to see. As Giannetti says, paraphrasing Rudolf Arnheim’s theory on Formalism, “[what] is based on the different modes of perception of the camera on the one hand and the human eye on

the other” (509). The camera moves long distances from an extreme long shot of Paris to go inside the streets. At the very beginning of the film, the camera travels from an extreme long shot of Paris, with the iconic Eiffel tower, to the entrance of the village of Montmartre, where there is a priest exclaiming, “turn away from this village of sin.” The camera then goes through the entrance and travels throughout the streets, stopping for a moment to show a prostitute, and then a drunken man in front of a bar named “Bar Absinthe.” The camera keeps traveling until it enters Christian’s apartment through the window. More than ten years later, Chris Godfrey collaborated once again with Luhrmann and created the same 3D world for *The Great Gatsby*. The camera also travels long distances from East Egg to West Egg, through the buildings of New York, and extreme long shots of the Valley of Ashes and New York can be seen. In a scene where Daisy and Nick are talking outside her courtyard of the mansion at East Egg, the camera passes them and travels through the lake, stopping for a moment at the green light and keeps traveling until it reaches West Egg where Gatsby, in the shadows, is walking on his dock. This shows that Luhrmann has the camera travel and stops for a moment on objects or people to provide some kind of information. As mentioned before, the green light means Gatsby’s dream of having a future with Daisy; therefore, this moving shot shows the great distance between the green light and Gatsby, which means that his dream is almost unreachable.

Luhrmann’s most particular movement shot with special effects is extreme distances from one point to another. Usually, there is a shot of an object, then the camera moves back a great distance as other objects appear or an extreme long shot of the city is shown. In *The Great Gatsby*, Nick is on the balcony of a building, and then the camera moves back very fast where the buildings of New York City are emphasized. As the movement ends, workers constructing taller buildings appear in the foreground. One of the themes is New York’s booming with

businesses by demeaning the workers, so Luhrmann shows this theme through this movement technique. In *Moulin Rouge!*, there is a musical piece that shows Christian and Satine's love where they are at a balcony, as well, and the camera moves back until they are not visible and the buildings of Paris are being emphasized. As the camera continues moving back, the foreground shows once again Satine and Christian in a park then the Duke appears in the right side showing that Christian and Satine's love is forbidden.

Freeze Frame

Luhrmann uses the freeze-frame technique for a couple of seconds on medium close-ups on the narrators for the exactly same reason: to show when they first reveal their aspirations. Freeze frame is a single shot that is reprinted a number of times and gives the illusion of being a still photograph (Giannetti 577). Christian wants to become a writer, and Nick wants to reach the American Dream by becoming wealthy. This freeze frame technique is shown from the very beginning of the films, right after the narrators arrive to their respective locations: Christian in Montmartre and Nick in East Egg (close to New York City) where he works. After Christian narrates that he arrived at Montmartre to write "about truth, beauty, freedom, but above all, love," his shot is freeze-framed. The freeze frame is applied to Nick after he says, "Wall Street was alluring the young and ambitious, and I was one of them." Maybe Luhrmann uses this technique to underscore the narrator's ambitions at the beginning of the films because at the end of the films they become disappointed with their realities, and they do not fulfill their ambitions.

Imperfections

Although Luhrmann is known for being a perfectionist, he does not correct some imperfections in his films because for him that is "real life." For instance, in the opening

sequence of *Moulin Rouge!*, he combines old and new techniques with old-fashioned models and digital technology. Luhrmann says he did not look forward to making this sequence digitally perfect, but “cinematically imperfect” (qtd. in Keefe 2076). There is a similar sequence that has imperfections in *The Great Gatsby*. When Nick is describing New York City, Luhrmann combines shots that appear to be old footage taken from documentaries with footage from the film. Cook discuss that these imperfections “[point] up its own trickery” (93). A work drawing attention to its trickery is part of the Formalist style.

Recurring Visual Elements

Some visual elements are constantly seen in Luhrmann’s movies. Fan blades are constantly seen in his films, such as the windmill of the Moulin Rouge (Moulin is French for mill) and the multiple fans in *The Great Gatsby*. Many fans are used at The Plaza hotel when Tom, Daisy and Gatsby are arguing over who Daisy really loves. Luhrmann decided to film the scene as if it was a very heated day to increase the tension of the scene (*The Great Gatsby: Special Feature*). He also uses curtains such as the conspicuous number of red curtains in the Moulin Rouge, and white curtains are used in the Buchanan mansion. At the Buchanan’s mansion, when Tom pushes Nick into some doors, they open and reveal “[a] shimmering, sun-dazzled room in which enormous white curtains whip, and snap in the breeze” (*The Great Gatsby: Special Feature*). Luhrmann also uses falling silver confetti at festivities. When Satine is introduced by coming down from the roof in a swing, silver confetti falls down, and there is always silver confetti at Gatsby’s parties. In one instance, there is a man throwing silver confetti from a huge bottle of champagne. According to Cook, digital effects such as crash zooms are used in *Romeo + Juliet* “to increase dramatic tension” (Cook 72). Crash zoom is a very quick zoom-in, and it is seen in Luhrmann films. In the beginning of *Moulin Rouge!* when Christian

exclaims, “I’ve never been in love!” there is a very rapid zoom-in to his face. This technique is also slightly seen in *The Great Gatsby* when Nick is about to leave Tom’s apartment, and Catherine arrives. There is a zoom-in on her, but not as rapid as in *Moulin Rouge!* Additional recurring visual elements are round paper lanterns: there are colorful ones in *Moulin Rouge* while there are white ones in *Gatsby*’s mansion. Sparkles are also constantly seen in Luhrmann films. The very first sparkle is seen in the opening of *Strictly Ballroom*, when the title appears and a sparkle traces “Ballroom.” Sparkles and shimmering are seen throughout the movies in costumes and sets such as the shimmering on Satine’s silver costume or the sparkling chandelier of *Gatsby*’s mansion. Lights are emphasized as there is an excess amount of decorative lights in *Moulin Rouge* and the lights of Times Square Plaza in *The Great Gatsby*. Finally, Luhrmann always ends his films with extreme close-ups of the words the narrators write. Nick types “Gatsby,” but then he decides to handwrite “The Great” above “Gatsby” while Christian typewrites “THE END.”

CHAPTER III

EDITING

A very noticeable aspect of Luhrmann's auteurism is editing. The Red Curtain trilogy films were edited by Jill Bilcock, while *Australia* was edited by Dody Dorn and Michael McCusker, and *The Great Gatsby* was edited by Matt Villa. "Bilcock brings a tremendous energy to [*Romeo + Juliet*], with her rapid-fire editing and sculptural vision" (Adamek 968). Bilcock's editing can be very fast-paced; for instance, a great variety of shots are edited together during the first musical at the Moulin Rouge. Cook also agrees that Bilcock's editing has fast cutting and that it energizes the main story-line, but it is more slowly paced during the lovers' intimate moments (96). Although *Moulin Rouge!* is known for its fast editing, and this film and *The Great Gatsby* have different editors, I still found many similar editing techniques.

Christian Metz found that films have their own "different recurring editing constructs" to what he calls *syntagms*. I am using two syntagms to analyze Luhrmann's editing: (1) Non-chronological with its subcategory the bracket syntagm and (2) Chronological with its subcategories, the descriptive and narrative syntagm (Ben-Shaul 952-980).

Non-chronological: Bracket Syntagm

The bracket syntagm is the editing of "a series of locations in different times" and may be used to convey metaphors (Ben-Shaul 960). This syntagm resembles the Soviet montage theorists' idea that editing can have more meaning since "the film director selects certain expressive details from the chaotic plenitude of physical reality. By juxtaposing these space and time fragments, the filmmaker creates a continuity that doesn't exist in raw nature" (Giannetti 509). In addition, as previously mentioned, Tynjanov adds that the montage should be "viewing shots not in an additive way but as exchanged, like lines in poetry.... This comprehension of

montage emphasized rhythm and the correlating and differentiation underlying artistic abstraction. Such ‘jumpy’ montage shifts the naturalist-oriented movement within the shot to an abstract rhythmical context and allows the forming of metaphors and symbols” (Ben-Shaul 589). Tynjanov may mean that editing should not only be adding images of what we see in real life, but editing other images in between, such as extreme close-ups of objects that may make no sense to give a symbolic meaning to the scenes. In the following paragraphs I give detailed examples of scenes in *Moulin Rouge!* and *The Great Gatsby* to show how Luhrmann applies the same bracket syntagm.

Moulin Rouge! has a scene where Satine is forced to end her relationship with Christian to save him after the Duke threatens to kill him. There is an extreme long shot of Satine leaving Moulin Rouge as the camera moves through Paris, and even goes through the Moulin Rouge’s windmill, to Christian’s apartment, where he is standing in the window. The camera enters the apartment, and time is trimmed into a couple of seconds as Satine is already entering his apartment. The editing is standard while Satine tells Christian that she chose the Duke over the sound of thunder. Right after, the bracket syntagm is added in the following montage. As Satine leaves the apartment it cuts to the sky with clouds moving to cover the moon that is in the center of the image. It starts to rain, and then it cuts to a close-up of a blade of the Moulin Rouge’s windmill, and as the blades moves down, an image of a sorrowful Christian wipes down as well. The next shot is a close-up of Zidler, with his costume of the Maharajah, swiping his sword towards the camera yelling “Jealousy has driven him mad!” Then there is a cut again to Christian, then a close-up of Satine walking away superimposed with the thunder and raining sky. Then a cut to an extreme long shot of the back of the Moulin Rouge and Christian’s apartment building, and then a cut again to a close-up of the branches of a tree with a leaf falling

down. Then there is a cut of the tower of the Moulin Rouge with an emphasis on the window, followed by a quick zoom into the window from inside the tower, and finally a very quick shot of the Duke closing the windows. The sequence is followed by a long shot of the first door entrance to the Moulin Rouge, then an extreme close-up towards the windmill, then again the long shot of the first door entrance to the Moulin Rouge, but now Christian is in the shot running to the door entrance as he shouts "Satine!" Then there is a bird's-eye view shot of Satine walking to the second entrance of the Moulin Rouge, a cut again to Christian in the long shot, then a superimposed image of a sorrowful Satine with the cloudy, rainy sky. In this shot, there is no continuity with Satine's costume, as she does not have the veil and the hat she was wearing with Christian some instants earlier. Sometimes the use of a bright light (as if it is lightning) with the sound of a thunder is used as a transition between the shots. Luhrmann and Pearce indicate that the scene where Satine ends her relationship with Christian is a naturalistic scene, which is very rare to see in this film; therefore, the editing is unnoticeable. However, Luhrmann returns to his Formalist style in the following sequence which turns it into a bracket syntagm because he chooses specific and symbolic fragments that are not related to the continuity of the narration: the superimposed images of a sad Satine with the cloudy sky, the leaf falling from the branch, the Duke, Zidler, and the use of the weather (rain, lightning, clouds are always symbolically associated with sadness) all illustrate the sorrow between Christian and Satine because of the Duke. In Tynjanov's terms, these specific fragments are what make the film poetic.

The Great Gatsby includes elements that convey metaphors. The green light, located at the end of Daisy's dock, appears many times in different ways: with an extreme long shot, the camera passing through the green light, but it is mostly seen with Gatsby trying to reach it from his dock (his dock and hers are separated by a vast lake). Nick explains that the green light is

Gatsby's hope of having a future with Daisy. There are also cuts to the bespectacled eyes on an old billboard advertising Dr. T.J. Eckleburg's optometry, located in the Valley of the Ashes, which is a large dumpsite stretch, from West Egg to New York, of people working in the rising industries. Nick believes the billboard is like the eyes of God, and the audio of George Wilson saying "God sees everything" is intersected with the image of the bespectacled eyes. George Wilson believes that his wife is killed by Gatsby in a hit and run, so he seeks vengeance. The significance of the billboard is not explained, but since it is placed in the Valley of Ashes, it may mean the eyes of a dead God watching the decadence of American society. Also, since Wilson's line is edited with the billboard, it may also mean the injustice in making false accusations against Gatsby. The green light and the billboard are expressive details Luhrmann uses from the novel, and they are constantly juxtaposed with images and audio to convey metaphors.

A whole scene that includes the bracket syntagm is where Tom, Myrtle (Tom's lover), Nick, Catherine (Myrtle's sister), and another couple have a social gathering at Tom's hidden apartment in West Egg. They start drinking alcohol, partying until they get very drunk and they are left with some few clothes on. The time in this scene is condensed, and it shows that they have spent most of the day there by showing their neighbor on a balcony playing a jazz trumpet, while the sky darkens in a very unrealistic and Formalist way. The scene then is edited back and forth between Nick partying with everyone else, and then a close-up of a serious Nick with the party going on in the background. This editing is explained when Nick has a moment of reflection, and the bracket syntagm is unfolded with the following superimposition techniques: Nick is already at the window watching the windows of his neighbors as he narrates that all the windows must have their own share of secrets "to the casual watcher in the street." Then he

imagines himself in a corner of a street as he feels that “he was him too” because he was “within and without.” As he says “I was within,” the scene is cut to the present where Nick is in his bed writing in his notebook, and a close-up of the notebook, with the words he is writing, is superimposed on the left side of the image. Then when he says “without,” the scene is cut to the imaginary Nick in the corner of the street with a superimposition of the word “without” being written. Then there is a superimposed image of only Nick’s face and neck in the center of the image, and in this background is a building with many windows. Each window, with people inside, starts pop out from the building (as if it was 3D) as he thinks the words “enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life.” Each window includes something different; for instance, in one is a young African American woman seducing an old man, in another is a couple fighting, one includes two mysterious men, and in another is a mother with her baby. Luhrmann added this bracket syntagm because it is symbolic to Nick’s feelings of his new lifestyle. He likes his new life, but he is also disgusted.

Luhrmann adds bracket syntagms in his films because it is his style to have symbolic images and to convey metaphors. In *Moulin Rouge!*, he adds the traditional rainy sky to convey sadness; however, in *The Great Gatsby*, he takes advantage of the symbolic images from the novel, the green light and the old billboard. These two objects have their own meanings, and Luhrmann uses them greatly throughout the film. Luhrmann also uses the bracket syntagm to explain Nick’s repulsion and fascination by his new lifestyle in a very Formalist way.

Descriptive Syntagm

The descriptive syntagms are “transitions between different shots of the same location that appear simultaneous in time. They often open a film, describing the ambiance and the

location where things will happen” (Ben-Shaul 965). Luhrmann uses this editing technique almost exactly in both of his films.

At the beginning of *The Great Gatsby* when Nick narrates to his psychiatrist his arrival in New York City, there are several shots of the essence of New York life with a filter that makes it look as if it were old footage. The sequence begins with a slow camera movement of a bird’s-eye view and extreme long shots of New York City, followed by many businessmen walking on the streets; Times Square; high buildings; stocks going up; many stacks of coins; people partying, emphasis on women dancing, people serving alcohol, factories with mass bottles of alcohol being filled by employees; and then a biplane flying in the sky as it descends down. The sound of the biplane can be still heard as the camera goes down from a high building, very fast, as if it was the biplane, to reveal Nick on the ground as he takes off his hat and looks up, enthusiastically. He is looking up to the sky, which may be interpreted as his eagerness to reach his dreams in the new city. The sequence ends with the same slow camera movement of the bird’s-eye view shot and extreme long shot of New York City. As these images are shown, there is contemporary rap music while Nick is narrating, “Stocks reached record peaks, and Wall Street boomed in a steady golden roar. The parties were bigger, the shows were broader, the buildings were higher, the morals were looser and the ban on alcohol had backfired, making the liquor cheaper. Wall Street was luring the young and ambitious. And I was one of them.” This sequence describes the essence of the whole film: Tom and Gatsby are shown to both be very wealthy, the workers in the Valley of the Ashes; the parties are crazy due to the easy access to alcohol; the parties at Gatsby’s mansion are magnified; and the lifestyles are immoral and corrupted.

Moulin Rouge! starts with Christian describing (as he typing it) Moulin Rouge. The sequence starts with the Moulin Rouge already abandoned, followed by a juxtaposition of clips of many different shots inside the Moulin Rouge while the courtesan dances, a close-up of Harold Zidler (the owner of Moulin Rouge), different close-ups of the courtesans dancing, shots of the rich men, and a close-up of Satine in the shadows. This sequence ends with the Moulin Rouge abandoned. During this part, Christian narrates:

The Moulin Rouge. A nightclub. A dance hall and a bordello. ('The Moulin Rouge,' a spoken word by Harold Zidler is intersected here) ruled over by Harold Zidler. A kingdom of nighttime pleasures, where the rich and powerful come to play with the young and beautiful creatures of the underworld. The most beautiful of all these was the woman I loved, Satine, a courtesan she sold her love to men. They called her 'the sparking diamond,' and she was the star of the Moulin Rouge. The woman I loved is dead.

This whole section explains the viewers what the Moulin Rouge is and that the film will be about Christian's love relationship with Satine. Although viewers learn from the very beginning that Satine dies by the end of the film, the viewers do not know the story between him and Satine. As a feature of his auteurism, Luhrmann describes from the very beginning, through the protagonist's narrative, the ambience and the settings where the story will unfold throughout the film. Actually, the beginning of *The Great Gatsby* is very different from the novel: Nick never goes to tell his story with a psychiatrist nor does he begin by describing the city of New York. This is Luhrmann's input because he prefers to explain first the setting of his films. In addition, Luhrmann gives the ambience of the films a special emphasis at the beginning because he is fascinated by the lifestyles of the times. This is analyzed in chapter 4 of this thesis.

Narrative Syntagm

The narrative syntagm has two subcategories: the linear and the alternate. The linear syntagm is the continuity of space and time in a chronological order. Both films mostly follow a

chronological order (Ben-Shaul 969). They are narrated by the protagonists, Nick and Christian, so the films go back and forth between the narrators, as they write/type their stories that unfold in chronological order. According to Donald McAlpine, Director of Photography, Christian typewriting the story is used as a device to clarify the story of *Moulin Rouge!*. Luhrmann applied this same device in *The Great Gatsby* because, originally, Nick is the first-person narrator in the novel; the novel does not mention that Nick is writing the story. There are some instances in the film where Nick does not follow the story chronologically, as is also the case in the novel, to explain some background information about Gatsby.

The alternate syntagm is the continuity of time while it changes between two or more settings (Ben-Shaul 972). A perfect example is the musical scene from the song “Roxanne” from the film *Moulin Rouge!* which features a man who falls in love with a prostitute, which parallels Christian’s and Satine’s story. Satine and the Duke are dining together at the tower of the Moulin Rouge, and she will eventually have to prostitute herself to him. Meanwhile, on the dance floor, a narcoleptic Argentinean starts to sing and dance *Roxanne* as Nini, who represents Roxanne, and other performers join him in the dance. Christian then starts to sing *Roxanne* as well. He then leaves Moulin Rouge, so there is now a juxtaposition of three scenes: a defeated Christian singing as he walks in the garden, the Argentinean singing and dancing with Nini and the performers at the Moulin Rouge, and Satine and the Duke at the tower. When the Duke tries to rape Satine, the editing goes faster back and forth between the scenes, the dance becomes more aggressive, and Christian sings more passionately. The song and the three scenes edited together intensify Satine’s obligation of selling herself to the Duke. This scene would not have had the same impact if it only included Duke and Satine excluding, the tango performance and Christian walking in the garden.

The ending scene of *The Great Gatsby* has a similar editing style as the *Roxanne* piece. In one of the last parts of the movie, there are several shots juxtaposed: Gatsby swimming in the pool as he waits for Daisy to call, Nick waiting for a phone call at his job, Daisy contemplating the phone, George Wilson with the gun walking to Gatsby's mansion. The following cut shows Daisy's hand lifting up the receiver of the phone and then cuts to Gatsby hearing the phone ringing. He gets out of the pool, as he is giving his back to George, and the butler answers the phone. George shoots Gatsby as the scene alternates between him dying and shots of his mansion. His last word is "Daisy," and then dies as he falls to the pool and then George kills himself too. The scene is cut to Nick with the phone which reveals that he had been the one who was calling, not Daisy. Then there are images of a dead Gatsby going down in the pool superimposed with other several images: first the receiver of Gatsby's phone hanging as we hear Nick's voice coming from the receiver, Daisy's hand putting down the receiver to the phone, and then Nick at his work insisting that someone answer the phone. This type of editing gives more tension to the scene and fools the viewers for an instant into believing that Daisy was the one calling, but it had been Nick. Luhrmann uses the alternate syntagm because it is his way to intensify the scenes. He juxtaposes shots that are from different locations that are going in chronological order to make them more dramatic or to trick the audiences.

Observations

In my studies, I found many other editing devices Luhrmann constantly uses in his films: white light or white smoke, clashing through objects, fragmented editing and long dissolves.

As repetitive transition devices, Luhrmann uses white light or white smoke. In a scene in *The Great Gatsby*, Nick and Daisy are talking outside in her mansion in West Egg, and the green light on the deck is in the background. The camera passes them and moves forward to East,

passes through the green light and the lake. The camera reaches Gatsby, in the shadows, walking on his dock and a white light comes behind Gatsby and goes through the camera, which transitions to a closer look to the lights which are the headlights of a car, which belongs to Nick who is already arriving at his cottage. This transition is used to reduce the time of Nick traveling from West Egg to East Egg in a very creative way. White light is also used when a mass of people enters Gatsby's mansion for the party. There is a white light in the entrance, then it cuts to a huge chandelier in the ceiling. Another instance is a shot of a biplane in the sky which immediately changes to the point of view of the plane and goes down directly where Gatsby and Nick are driving. However, the camera then encounters white smoke coming out of a building and cuts to a vapor revealing an extreme close-up of Meyer Wolfsheim's face. The next shot reveals that he is at a barbershop where Gatsby and Nick arrive since the place has a secret bar. The use of white smoke is also used in *Moulin Rouge!*. In the very Formalist scene where Christian starts singing "Your Song" to Satine, they glide from the elephant building to dance in the top of the clouds. As the clouds go through the camera, the shot cuts to Satine and Christian dancing from another angle. As mentioned before, Luhrmann uses a puff of smoke (an instant white flash in the whole screen) to join two sets. These examples show that the use of white and smoke is one of Luhrmann's consistent editing devices.

Another one of his repetitive devices is that right after the camera travels a long distance, for instance, from one location to another location, the camera collides with or goes through an object and it immediately cuts to another scene. Luhrmann consistently goes through the blinds of the Moulin Rouge, and with a wipe, he transitions to another scene. An example of the clashing editing is found in a scene where the camera is traveling fast and moving forward through the entrances of the Moulin Rouge the camera clashes with each door entrance, and cuts

to the following passageway until it finally reveals the beginning of the show in the new theater. In *The Great Gatsby*, when the camera travels through a vast lake, from West Egg where Nick's house and Gatsby's mansion is, to East Egg where Tom and Daisy Buchanan's mansion is, the camera clashes with a white sail on a boat and cuts to the extreme long shot of the Buchanan mansion. Luhrmann edits through objects that are relevant to the story; for instance, he clashes through the sail of a boat because it is later revealed that Gatsby, in his youth, sailed around when he met multi-millionaire Dan Cody in his boat, who taught him about behaving like a millionaire.

Luhrmann uses a very fast editing style to convey the crazy night lifestyles in *Moulin Rouge* and the parties at Gatsby's mansion. Giannetti calls Luhrmann's editing style in the musical numbers of *Moulin Rouge!* "volcanic explosions of split-second shots" (174), which can also be applied to the parties in *The Great Gatsby*. Aside from the flamboyant costumes and sets, he communicates this lifestyle through the fast editing of quick and fragmented shots of both overcrowded places. Each shot shows a different part of the place with different people and things going on. Gatsby's mansion shows people dancing, acrobats, show girls, people in the pool, or, as Nick mentions, musicians, "billionaire playboy publishers and their blond nurses... gossip columnists, gangsters and governors exchanging telephone numbers, film stars, Broadway directors," and even Ewing Klipspringer, the pianist, a "dubious descendent of Beethoven." Since Luhrmann tends to introduce historical references in his films, there are people in the party that existed in real life (*The Great Gatsby: Special Feature*). On the other hand, when Christian goes to the *Moulin Rouge* for the first time, there are a variety of fragmented shots of everything that goes on in the *Moulin Rouge*: the courtesans, the rich people, performers, a mermaid, a performer with a serpent, tattooed men, musicians, dancing girls in booths, men dancers in tutus,

a band stand, boxing ring, donkey rides, and the giant elephant. Additionally, he likes to show how exciting these night lifestyles were, historically, both at the Moulin Rouge and in the pervasive parties of the Jazz Age.

Luhrmann has the tendency to intersect many shots of the past, through long dissolves, in a shot of an abandoned location. As was previously noted, the beginning of *Moulin Rouge!* shows the Moulin Rouge abandoned, with intersected dissolved shots of the night life the Moulin Rouge used to have. When Gatsby is already dead at the end of the movie, Nick wanders in the abandoned mansion while shots of previous scenes are intersected. He uses this editing device because for Luhrmann it is important to get the essence of the locations: the Moulin Rouge and Gatsby's mansion.

CHAPTER IV

THE NARRATIVE USE OF THE CHARACTERS

The characteristics and narrative use of the characters, between Christian and Nick and Satine and Gatsby, are impressively similar, which makes it a highly relevant feature of Luhrmann's auteurism. Although *The Great Gatsby* is a story from Fitzgerald, the trait of his characters may have appealed to Luhrmann since they are similar to his original characters from *Moulin Rouge!*

Christian and Nick

The narrative use of Christian from *Moulin Rouge!* and Nick from *The Great Gatsby* resemble each other; they are both writers, the internal narrators, and have similar beginnings. Both films are about them remembering their best moments in their new settings, and how they progressively end up with their tragic conclusions. The film starts with a depressed Christian beginning to type his tragic love story about him and Satine, and the film goes back and forth between him typing and the images he narrates. Similarly, *The Great Gatsby* starts with a melancholic Nick reminiscing about Gatsby. Originally in the novel, Nick narrates the story, but Luhrmann did not like the idea of Nick narrating the story to the viewers (*The Great Gatsby: Special Feature*). Therefore, he changed the beginning where Nick narrates his story to a psychiatrist, a new character. Then, for rehabilitation purposes, he writes/types the story. The film goes back and forth between narrating the story to the psychiatrist (later on writing/typing the story) and the images he narrates. The films end with Christian and Nick finishing writing their stories. According to Kozloff, the voice-over narrator subordinates to the images which dramatize the story (48-49). Therefore, Luhrmann reinforces his scenes with the narrator's voice-overs.

Luhrmann also make the characters have a purpose to write their stories. Christian has a reason to write because Satine, who asked Christian to tell their tragic love story when she was dying in his arms, knows that he is a storyteller, Luhrmann explains. In *The Great Gatsby*, Luhrmann added the psychiatrist, so Nick “had someone not only to confess to, but also something to write for and then someone to read to.” This adaptation also “allowed us to use more of Fitzgerald’s actual poetry,” says Luhrmann (*The Great Gatsby: Special Feature*). Luhrmann was able to include in the script and be visually influenced by other writings from Fitzgerald. The difference between the internal narrators is that, although Nick’s true vocation is writing, he originally wanted to focus in bond sales. Ironically, Nick’s and Christian’s stories are from their own burdens.

The specifics of the beginnings of the internal narrators show auteur elements. At the beginning, Nick and Christian are shown to have developed alcoholic issues due to their tragedies, and it is subtly shown to the audiences. Christian is shown depressed by him being on the floor, sitting in a curved position as he embraces his legs with his arms and hides his face, with empty liquor bottles scattered all over his apartment. Nick’s miserable condition is seen in the psychiatrist’s notes about his diagnosis that say “Morbidly alcoholic, Insomniac, Fits of Anger, Anxiety and Depression.” The other element is, when they narrate their stories, they both look through a window. Christian’s desk with the typewriter is besides a window that shows the Moulin Rouge. When he is typing the story sometimes he looks through the window to see the building. When Nick starts to narrate his story, he looks through a foggy window, because it is snowing, and, as the camera pulls back, it transitions into his memories. Luhrmann might use windows to show that characters are looking back to their past.

The narrative continues being similar with the first part of Christian's and Nick's stories. They mention the people that impacted their lives: Gatsby because, as Nick says, "He was the most hopeful man he had ever met;" and Satine because Christian was in love with her. Then they narrate about reaching their dreams by moving on to their new places in summer: "It was 1899, the summer of love," as Christian remembers arriving in Montmartre, a village near Paris; while Nick arrives in East Egg, which is near New York City, and begins, "in the summer of 1922, the tempo of [New York City] approached hysteria." Afterwards, they describe the good and bad qualities of the settings, yet they want to be part of it. Christian remembers his father exclaiming that Montmartre is "a village of sin! ... You'll end up wasting your life at the Moulin Rouge with a can-can dancer!" However, Christian sees Montmartre as "...the center of the bohemian revolution. Musicians, painters, writers. They were known as the children of the revolution. Yes, I had to come to live a penniless existence. I had to come to write about truth, beauty, freedom and that which I believed in above all things – love." On the other hand, Nick is in the Jazz Age, and he wants to succeed in New York "Stocks reached record peaks and Wall Street boomed in a steady golden roar," Nick explains, "the parties were bigger. The shows were broader. The buildings were higher. The morals were looser, and the ban on alcohol had backfired, making the liquor cheaper. Wall Street was luring the young and ambitious, and I was one of them." The difference is that in the Jazz Age people want to become wealthy and have outrageous lifestyles, and in the Bohemian Revolution people are willing to be poor in order to follow their artistic ambitions. This shows that a crucial component of Luhrmann's auteurism is to emphasize, through their narrators, the historical revolutions and the lifestyles from the very beginning of the films.

The films also contain scenes where the narrators get drunk, which shows that they are not used to drinking alcohol. Luhrmann use these scenes to show how their new lives in the cities are influencing them to incur immoral behaviors. When Christian makes plans with other bohemian artists to sell “Spectacular Spectacular” to Harold Zidler, they celebrate by drinking absinthe. Christian remarks that it was his first time drinking it, and then they go to the Moulin Rouge where it is Christian’s first time being exposed to the madness of the place. As previously mentioned, Nick gets drunk, for the second time in his life, at Tom’s secret apartment. This is Nick’s first time encountering an insane party in his new life and he admits that he likes it, but he is also repulsed by it. Therefore, their first times getting drunk is the way Luhrmann shows that they are being immersed in a world of decadent lifestyles.

Satine and Gatsby

How Satine and Gatsby are introduced, and their characteristics are also quite similar. They are seen as mysterious characters until they make their big entrances. Gatsby is seen in a silhouette, mostly from his window and the dock. People speculate about Gatsby, and they all have different versions about him. The first shot of Satine shows her in shadows, in black and white, and she is referred as the Sparkling Diamond. Their entrances are quite spectacular when they are finally seen. As I said before, inside the Moulin Rouge, Satine comes down in a swing from the ceiling, with silver confetti falling down, to the center of the dance floor while the rich men, performers, and courtesans surround her. Then she performs her musical number, and she sings “Diamonds are a Girl’s Best Friend.” On the other hand, Gatsby is introduced at one of his extravagant parties; Gatsby is the center of the image, and he is in the upper floor as he raises his glass, with a tremendous amount of fireworks in the background, while the momentum of “Rhapsody in Blue” by Gershwin is used as the musical score. These characters are also

performers. Gatsby tells Nick an invented story about his past, so that he can form a good opinion of him. Gatsby even uses Meyer Wolfsheim to confirm to Nick that Gatsby's story is true. Satine has to change according to the type of her clients since she asks Harold to see how to prostitute herself with the Duke, ““Wilting Flower, hmm? Bright and bubbly? Ah! Or smoldering temptress?”

Like Christian and Nick, Satine and Gatsby are dreamers as well, but they take drastic measures to achieve their dreams and suffer from their true identities. Satine prostitutes herself to the Duke to become an actress, but she falls in love with Christian. Gatsby's dream is to marry Daisy, but he is penniless. Therefore, he engages in criminal activity to become a millionaire in order to marry her, but when he returns for her, she is already married to Tom, which makes it even more difficult for him. Tom makes it clear that Gatsby's impoverished roots would always be an obstacle for him.

The movies seem to show that there are no limits to the decadent lifestyles, but Luhrmann shows that being false has its limits since in the third part of each movie, neither Gatsby and nor Satine can pretend anymore: Satine can no longer prostitute herself to the Duke because of Christian. When she is with the Duke at the tower, and sees Christian in the garden, she rejects the Duke. When Tom irritates Gatsby at The Plaza by telling him that he never went to Oxford, and that he is a gangster and will never have aristocratic blood, Gatsby is enraged and almost punches Tom. Satine confesses to Christian that she cannot pretend anymore, while Gatsby tells his true story to Nick.

They also have similar tragic deaths since they die in settings in where they have debuted. Gatsby mentions that he never used his pool during all summer and when he does, he gets shot

and dies. Satine makes her first debut in the new theater at the Moulin Rouge, and when her performance ends, she dies of consumption.

CHAPTER V

SYMBOLISM AND THEMES

Symbolism

In this chapter, I analyze how Luhrmann conveys the same ideas through the same symbols in both films: seasons, jewelry, flying, and the sparkling sky and shooting stars. In seasons, summer is used when the narrators arrive to their new places while winter is used to represent their melancholic state. Jewelry represents security while flying, and the sparkling sky and shooting stars represent the character's dreams.

Seasons

Seasons play important roles in both films. As mentioned earlier, it is summer at the beginning of the movies when the narrators excitedly arrive at their new locations, and autumn arrives when the films are already getting to their approaching climax, as the falling leaves suggest. When Gatsby is waiting for Daisy to call, with Nick, he is at the courtyard of his mansion as there are leaves falling to the floor. When Satine ends her relationship with Christian, there is a shot of a leaf falling from a tree. Winter is shown at the end of *Moulin Rouge!* when Satine dies, and it starts to snow outside. On the other hand, winter is shown at the beginning of *The Great Gatsby* when a depressed Nick is about to tell his story about Gatsby to the psychiatrist. Therefore, Luhrmann parallels the mental state and narration with each season in both films. Summer is for the excitement of new beginnings, autumn is for the climax, and winter is for the narrator's melancholic state. Rain also plays an important role for somber scenes

as it is raining both when Nick visits Gatsby's abandoned mansion and is mourning him and when Satine ends her relationship with Christian.

Jewelry

Luhrmann is particularly interested in glamorous jewelry. According to him, courtesans were traditionally given jewels by the rich men, and he wanted to emphasize this in the film. Luhrmann conveys this historical fact by introducing Satine with her musical number, "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend." Satine is seen as superficial for wanting jewels, but then another, deeper side of her is seen when she sings "One Day I'll Fly Away" to show that she wants to leave her current lifestyle at the Moulin Rouge. When the Duke gives her the expensive necklace, she rejects him moments later. "[The necklace] signifies the bargain between the Duke and Satine," explains Catherine Martin in the audio commentary of *Moulin Rouge!*, "a glimpse of the world that the Duke was offering Satine of opulence of security." This means that Satine's love of jewels is all a performance since she wants to be with Christian, even if he is penniless. She prefers love to security and a materialistic world. Luhrmann also uses jewels on *The Great Gatsby*. Tom Buchanan gives Daisy a very expensive pearl necklace as a wedding gift. However, one day before the wedding, she receives a letter from Gatsby which makes her want to cancel the wedding, and she rips off her necklace. She still marries Tom, and she is always adorned with very expensive jewelry of pearls. Since the Age of Jazz meant the excess of wealth, Luhrmann shows it through the over-stylization of jewelry. Therefore, he collaborated with jewelry makers such as Tiffany & Co., Miu Miu and Prada (*The Great Gatsby: Special Feature*). Some jewels are very extravagant; for instance Daisy wears two pearl and diamond hand ornaments that are connected with a ring, and she matches them with a tiara at one of Gatsby's parties. Thus,

Luhrmann uses jewelry not only for the aesthetics of the films, but to symbolize security and wealth in both movies.

Flying

Luhrmann's films are concerned with the theme of reaching dreams, and he symbolizes dream fulfillment through flying. In *The Great Gatsby*, the symbol is a plane flying over the city which symbolizes unlimited dreams. Luhrmann might have been inspired by the following passage in Fitzgerald's *Echoes of the Jazz Age*:

In the spring of '27, something bright and alien flashed across the sky. A young Minnesotan who seems to have nothing to do with his generation did a heroic thing. And for a moment, people set down their glasses in country clubs and speakeasies and thought of their old, best dreams. Maybe there was a way out by flying, maybe our restless blood could find frontiers in the illimitable air. But by that time, we were all pretty much committed and the Jazz Age continued. We would all have one more. (qtd. in *The Great Gatsby*: Special Feature)

Luhrmann also uses birds to symbolize reaching dreams in *Moulin Rouge!* When Satine is getting prepared to see the Duke, she tells her caged bird that one day "we'll fly away." Also, when Harold tells her that she is dying and that she has to hurt Christian in order to save him, since The Duke is threatening to kill him, the caged bird appears again in the frame with Satine, meaning that she will never reach her dreams. Then she sings with lyrics that include "Today's the day when dreaming ends."

The Sparkling Sky and Shooting Stars

Luhrmann uses the sparkling sky and shooting stars to also show the characters wanting to reach their dreams. When Nick is narrating Gatsby's past, there is a symbolic and superimposed image of a full shot of a young Jay Gatsby walking towards a sparkling sky, which means that he is walking towards his dream of becoming successful. Luhrmann also includes

shooting stars for this meaning. When Gatsby tells Nick, “my life has to be like this,” he makes a gesture with his hand of going up as he looks up to the sky, and then an image of a shooting star appears. “It’s got to keep going up,” Gatsby adds as he continues looking up to the sky. Gatsby means that he is still fighting to reach his dream of marrying Daisy. Luhrmann also uses the shooting stars to symbolize how destinies of the characters are changed because of love. When Nick narrates that Gatsby “knew his mind would never again be free to romp like the mind of God, that falling in love would change his destiny forever,” there are images of a younger Gatsby and Daisy who are about to kiss. However, Gatsby first looks up to the sky to see a shooting star and then he embraces Daisy with a kiss. The shooting star symbolizes that Gatsby meeting Daisy changed his life because he cannot envision his future without her. In a very Formalist scene in *Moulin Rouge!*, in which Christian sings for Satine “Your Song,” they jump from the elephant building to dance and spin in the top of buildings and clouds, and with an Eiffel Tower that is the size of the characters. The background is filled with a sparking sky, clouds, and literally, a moon with a face singing. This scene symbolizes each character’s dream of having finally met the loves of their lives. Later, when Christian and Satine share their first kiss inside the elephant building, the camera passes them and goes through the window to show a sparkling sky and two shooting stars that look alike and clash together, creating fireworks.

Themes

Luhrmann explores the same themes in both movies. The films emphasize the contrast between the impoverished and the wealthy people. They also show that love does not conquer all, and that the character’s struggle between choosing love or security. Lastly, I show how

Luhrmann conveys the lifestyles of the time periods of each film in an exaggerated and modernized way.

Impoverishment vs. Wealth

The films show a great contrast between penniless and wealthy people. The penniless in *Moulin Rouge!* are Christian and the bohemian artists who are willing to live in poor conditions in order to follow their artistic ambitions. Also, the prostitutes from the Moulin Rouge fall to the indigent group since they have to prostitute themselves in order to survive, as Luhrmann states in the audio commentary of *Moulin Rouge!*. The wealthy people are the people who spend on the prostitutes at the Moulin Rouge, which Christian describes as a place “where the rich and powerful came to play with the young and beautiful creatures of the underworld.” The Duke invests in converting the Moulin Rouge from a cabaret into a theater just because he is obsessed with Satine. The biggest contrast in wealth and poverty is seen in *The Great Gatsby*. However, this film shows two types of wealthy people: East Egg, where the old aristocracy such as Tom and Daisy belongs, and West Egg, which has the newly rich like Gatsby. His new and excessive wealth can be seen through his flashy parties in his mansion. Meanwhile, the indigent people are represented by the Valley of Ashes, which is located between West Egg and New York City, and its people are covered with ashes from the factories. *The Great Gatsby* also includes a secret bar where wealthy people fool around with women, a location that resembles Moulin Rouge.

“Love Cannot Conquer All Things”

Moulin Rouge! and *The Great Gatsby* are both romantic stories, so love is the main theme and Gatsby and Christian are obsessed with the women they love. Daisy is already married, while Satine is a prostitute. Gatsby and Christian do foolish things; Christian risks his job as a

writer by being with Satine while Gatsby throws parties just to see if Daisy walks into one of them. Luhrmann points out that the theme he specifically approaches is that love does not conquer all. When Satine dies in Christian's arms, "it's the transition from the youthful, reckless, Romeo and Juliet love into a kind of more spiritual and more mature relationship to the emotion of love," says Luhrmann in the audio commentary of *Moulin Rouge!*. Christian and Satine's love seems impossible because of her status as a prostitute and because she is sort of The Duke's property. In the last musical number of "Spectacular Spectacular," Satine and Christian choose to stay together. The musical show parallels the triangle love between The Duke, Satine, and Christian since The Duke is the evil maharajah, Satine the courtesan, and Christian the penniless sitar player. The original ending was that the courtesan ends up with the sitar player, but The Duke changes it with the courtesan ending up with the evil maharajah because he represents himself. Christian interrupts the live show, and Harold, who plays the evil maharajah, lies that he is the sitar player in disguise to the audience. Therefore, the show then tells the true story of the love triangle: Christian and Satine reunite by singing "Come What May," The Duke and his bodyguard try to kill Christian, but they fail. It seems that love conquered, but when the curtain closes, Satine falls and dies of consumption. "Love cannot conquer all things," says Luhrmann in the audio commentary of *Moulin Rouge!*. Luhrmann also uses this theme in *The Great Gatsby*. Although Gatsby became a millionaire for his deep love for Daisy, his love cannot conquer her because she already created a relationship with Tom. Nick tells Gatsby that he cannot repeat the past, but Gatsby insists that he is able to repeat it. In the end, Gatsby's recklessness kills him.

"Foolish" Love vs. Security (Wealth)

Ultimately, wealth versus love is one of the dominant themes in Luhrmann's films. In *Moulin Rouge!*, there is a clash of different ideas between Christian and Satine. "All you need is

love,” sings Christian as Satine responds, “A girl has got to eat.” Christian keeps singing, “All you need is love,” but Satine replies “She’ll end up in the streets.” Christian keeps insisting, “All you need is love,” and Satine is firm to her idea that “Love is just a game.” Eventually, Satine chooses love over security and her dream to become an actress. On the other hand, Gatsby walks away from Daisy because he is “penniless.” He decides to become a millionaire and then win her back. Gatsby thought she only loved him, but Daisy developed feelings for Tom too. In a deleted scene where Daisy is unsure of telling the truth to Tom about Gatsby, Nick reassures Gatsby that she still loves him; “her voice is full of it,” he adds. Gatsby, however, denies it by replying that “her voice is full of money.” The scene was deleted because the director wanted the audience to believe that Gatsby is convinced that Daisy wants him over Tom. This scene was going to be inserted before the match between Tom and Gatsby at the grand hotel. Still, this shows that the director wanted to express directly that Daisy chooses wealth over love. She decides to stay with Tom, even before Gatsby’s death, because of his aristocratic blood, and the security he provides.

Lifestyles

Luhrmann demonstrates the lifestyles of the Bohemian Revolution in *Moulin Rouge!* and The Jazz Age in *The Great Gatsby* in a very exaggerated and modernized way. Nick goes to crazy and extravagant parties such as at Tom’s secret apartment and at Gatsby’s mansion while Christian is bewildered by the Moulin Rouge. The Moulin Rouge has an exaggerated number of rich people and courtesans with colorful can-can dresses. As previously mentioned, the cabaret is seen with a variety of exotic performances: a mermaid, a performer with a serpent, tattooed men, musicians, dancing girls in booths, men dancers with tutus, a band stand, boxing ring, donkey rides, and the giant elephant. At Gatsby’s parties there is a “performer from Broadway, Brass Knuckled from the jazz band, rivers of alcohol, Gatsby creates the parties we all dream

about going to,” describes Luhrmann, “Fashionably attractive, the strange, the interesting, the exotic, food wine, intoxication, dancing and multiple levels” (*The Great Gatsby*: Special Feature). People standing by the beach.” This same description applies to the exuberance of the *Moulin Rouge*. Catherine Martin says that there were 300 hundred extras and 1200 costumes in total for the *Gatsby* parties (*The Great Gatsby*: Special Feature). In addition, *Gatsby*’s mansion includes “rubber zebras in the pool, a giant organ, giant transparent balloons, (the golden gate is from Jay Gatsby’s place). All these things have a ground historical reference: “The cars were just a little bit faster, they were a little bit louder, the costumes were just a little bit more outlandish,” explains actor Leonardo DiCaprio, “everything is a little bit more extravagant to make you understand how enormously wealthy these people were, and how outrageous their lifestyle was” (*The Great Gatsby*: Special Feature). Luhrmann contemporize these scenes by modernizing the costumes and by adding contemporary music. *Moulin Rouge!* includes covers from “Material Girl” (1984) and “Rhythm of the Night” (1985) while *The Great Gatsby* has original and modern songs such as “A Little Party Never Killed Nobody (All We Got)” (2013). Luhrmann over-exaggerates with the visual and aural elements in his films to make the audience understand the lifestyles these characters are living.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to see if Baz Luhrmann is an authentic auteur even if he has claimed that his first three films are exclusively part of the Red Curtain style. Therefore, his last two films have a different style. Through this detailed examination of the visuals, the editing, the narrative use of the characters, and symbols and themes of both films, I have confirmed that Luhrmann is a true Formalist auteur.

Moulin Rouge! and *The Great Gatsby* share many Formalistic characteristics since their aesthetics call attention to themselves because Luhrmann has developed some very creative visuals. *Moulin Rouge!* and *The Great Gatsby* have Formalistic characteristics. The way both films start and end has the same ingenious pattern, and he uses the same techniques such as superimposition, vortex and closed forms. Aside from my observations, I have been able to be more specific in how the films are edited since I have followed Christian Metz's ordering of each editing style. Some of his scenes are edited together symbolically, and are used to describe the atmosphere at the very beginning of the movies. Luhrmann also has chronological scenes that show different locations, and the camera constantly clashes to objects to cut to the following images.

I further confirm Luhrmann's auteurism by showing how the characters have the same narrative use and how he uses the same concrete and abstract ideas to invoke the same symbols and themes. Nick and Christian are both narrators and share similar characteristics. They enthusiastically move to the city to follow their dreams, but they end up miserable and alcoholic. Gatsby and Satine are also impressively similar since they are performers, but they are first perceived as mysterious characters. They also have spectacular entrances and tragic deaths. Some of the symbolism Luhrmann constantly uses is seasons to convey the moods of the

characters, and shooting stars and the sparkling sky to show the character's dreams. Most of the themes are about love, the differences between the impoverished and the wealthy, and the lifestyles of each period of time.

I noticed there is not enough research on Luhrmann as an auteur. I actually did not find in scholarship any indication that his work resembles the Formalist style, only his Red Curtain style. Researchers, journalists and critics do point out Luhrmann's extravagant visuals and his distinctive editing, but they do not really examine in-depth the visuals or the editing, as my detailed findings show. For instance, Walker says that the exuberant visuals and mise-en-scènes are part of the Red Curtain style (1303) while Adamek points out that the visual flair is the center of the attention (970). Yet, they do not provide enough details about the visuals nor how they are edited together. Most of the research is focused on the application of pastiche in the films, and there is a great amount of research dedicated solely to *Romeo + Juliet*. Therefore, this study was limited with supporting information due to the lack of scholarships on the subjects I have analyzed in Luhrmann's films. Even though Cook's book offers deep insights into the style of the films, she published the book before *The Great Gatsby* was released, and it mostly focuses on the Red Curtain style. Thus, I was able to contribute a more detailed insight into Luhrmann's work.

In order to analyze a body of work of an auteur, I recommend that the most outstanding characteristics of the auteur should be analyzed in depth, such as in the case of Luhrmann whose visuals are highly noticeable, but there are no explanations in how he executes them. This study should help to have a more clear understanding of the most relevant characteristics of Luhrmann as an authentic auteur, and to enjoy a more active viewing experience while watching films from a prominent filmmaker, so we can truly appreciate great works of art.

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