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Wherefore Art Thou, Romeo?: A Study of Three Late Twentieth-Century Film Adaptations and Appropriations of Romeo and Juliet

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WHEREFORE ART THOU, ROMEO?: A STUDY OF THREE LATE
TWENTIETH-CENTURY FILM ADAPTATIONS AND APPROPRIATIONS
OF ROMEO AND JULIET

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
English

by
Geoffrey Way
May 2007

Accepted by:
Dr. Elizabeth Rivlin, Committee Chair
Dr. Alma Bennett
Dr. Barton Palmer

ABSTRACT

This thesis is an audience-centric study of the socio-political aspects of three late twentieth-century film versions of William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. The three films this thesis covers are Baz Luhrmann's William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet (1996), Lloyd Kaufman's Tromeo and Juliet (1996), and Andrzej Bartkowiak's Romeo Must Die (2000). The thesis explores how each film utilizes elements of popular culture and American society at the end of the twentieth-century in tandem with the themes and concepts from Shakespeare's play.

The focus of this thesis is to analyze the different techniques each director used to create a sense of recognition for the audience through the use of various elements of pop culture and modern American society. While each director took a similar approach, combining pop culture, American society, and Shakespeare, the three films yielded widely different results. The thesis explores these different results, as well as the commonalities between the three films. First discussed is how Luhrmann's film worked to bring Shakespeare's language and characters to a new audience. This is followed by discussion on how Kaufman's film uses the idea of Shakespeare to challenge the establishments of both art and society. The thesis ends with a discussion on how Bartkowiak's film is indicative of the movement towards Hollywood Shakespeare: films that use some elements of Shakespeare's play in aggressively modern appropriations with the goal of entertaining an audience.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the loving memory of my grandparents, Dominick Joseph and Mary Elizabeth Arone, and to the memory of my thirty-two brothers and sisters in the Virginia Tech family who lost their lives on April 16th, 2007.

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First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge my thesis director, Dr. Elizabeth Rivlin. It was in her class that I first began working with Romeo and Juliet in film, and it was with her assistance and guidance throughout the entire process that this thesis was written. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Alma Bennett, who not only served as a reader for this thesis, but who has helped guide me through these two years at Clemson, as well as throughout the cities and streets of Italy last summer. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Barton Palmer, the final member of my thesis committee, for his feedback, support, and suggestions for continued research.

I also want to acknowledge my parents, Robert and Barbara Way, and my two brothers, Christopher and Jason Way. It is their continued love and support that has helped me through both my undergraduate and graduate careers, and will continue to help me throughout the rest of my life. I would also like to acknowledge my good friends Chase Hart, Eric Hawes, Erin McCoy, and Joseph Schumacher, who have either helped edit this thesis, offered ideas, listened to me rant, or simply kept me moving forward when things got rough.

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION
ROMEO, JULIET, AND SHAKESPEARE IN MODERN FILM

Romeo and Juliet (1599) is one of the most well-known of all Shakespeare's plays; it is so recognizable that when someone hears the names "Romeo" and "Juliet," more often than not he or she immediately thinks of Shakespeare's two lovers and their tragic fate. The very name "Romeo" has been separated from Shakespeare's play and found its own meaning in our language as a general term that refers to a male who is considered a lover or seducer. The play's familiarity and popularity continue to make it a constant subject to be adapted or appropriated into film, so much so that there are more film versions of Romeo and Juliet than any other of Shakespeare's plays, save Hamlet. Some of these films, such as George Cukor's 1936 version and Franco Zeffirelli's 1968 version, have been lauded as classics. Others have been less successful, and some have been considered complete failures. Regardless, other writers and directors are still creating new film versions of Romeo and Juliet. From 1996 to 2000, for example, three films were made that all use Shakespeare's play as their premise, but while each film utilized several common ideas and themes from Shakespeare's original work, they yielded widely different results. These three films, Baz Luhrmann's William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet (1996), Lloyd Kaufman's Tromeo and Juliet (1996) and Andrzej Bartkowiak's Romeo Must Die (2000), are unique because all three directors essentially started with the same

premise for their films by taking Shakespeare's work and viewing it through the lens of popular culture and capitalist society. Even though each film relied on the same basis, the results were three extremely different films that used Shakespeare's play and popular culture to make distinctly modern versions of Shakespeare's classic play, while also making direct and indirect commentaries on popular culture and late twentieth-century American society.

If asked to identify recent films based on Romeo and Juliet, most people would probably answer Baz Luhrmann's Romeo + Juliet. This most well-known, recent adaptation of Shakespeare's play is familiar to a broad audience for a variety of reasons. Two of the major reasons the film drew a large audience were Leonardo DiCaprio and Claire Danes. The two actors, both originally associated with the teenage audience from shows like "Growing Pains" and "My So-Called Life," headlined Luhrmann's film. However, there was much more of Shakespeare in the film than audiences may have expected because even though Luhrmann created a modern setting for his film and cast two well-known teen actors, he remained true to most of Shakespeare's language (though with a heavily edited script) and to Shakespeare's original plot. This approach allowed Luhrmann to explore several of the themes from the original play in conjunction with issues he saw in modern society. This made for an interesting adaptation as audiences were shown a modern world filled with contemporary characters who spoke a language the audience may have considered completely archaic.

The aspects of popular culture and American capitalist society that have been worked into the visual imagery of the film are what stand out about

Luhrmann's version, but not only for its MTV-inspired scenery and tone.

Luhrmann uses popular culture and capitalist society as a way to highlight several of the themes of Shakespeare's original play that audiences may or may not be familiar with; in some instances this is to justify the plot to a modern audience, such as having two corporate towers stand in contrast to one another in the middle of Verona Beach, reinforcing the feud between the two families by making it an economic competition. Luhrmann made the head of each family mob-like in his role, especially with Paul Sorvino, known for his role in the mob-film *Goodfellas*, portraying Capulet as a volatile and abusive patriarch. Decisions like this are good examples of how Luhrmann takes advantage of his audience's mindset by giving the audience outside points of reference.

Much like the decision to cast DiCaprio, Danes, and Sorvino, the choice to create a setting that is filled with images that are overtly obvious references to other well known aspects of modern popular culture helped Luhrmann to create a world in Verona Beach that his audience would find both new and familiar. The film is full of advertisements that resemble several common products, such as the visual advertising scheme of Coca-Cola, so that, even if the actual advertisement in the film is for some product in Verona Beach, his audience would recognize the style and make the connection to the advertisement's original inspiration.

Luhrmann uses devices like this throughout the film to highlight several of the themes from Shakespeare's play that Luhrmann has translated and updated into his modern-day city, such as the role and power of economy in modern society, the power relationship between parents and children, and the recklessness that can

occur on both sides of that relationship. While exploring these themes, at the center of Luhrmann's film is the preservation of Shakespeare's play; even though the film is set in a modern city and is filled with modern characters, the film works to hold true to Shakespeare's original work. By doing so, Luhrmann's film shows how many of the aspects and themes from Shakespeare's play are still seen and recognized in society today.

Tromeo and Juliet is a film that stands in stark contrast to Luhrmann's film, but it also acts as a bridge between several of the concepts and themes in Romeo + Juliet and Romeo Must Die. Lloyd Kaufman and his company Troma Entertainment are recognized as huge supporters of independent film, and Tromeo and Juliet follows suit. Kaufman's film is a noticeably low-budget, independent production, keeping with conventions from other Troma Entertainment films and also pulling on conventions from other low-budget "B-movies." Kaufman's company not only produced the film, but Kaufman co-wrote the script with James Gunn and directed the film himself; as such, he had several choices to make about the story and characters of Tromeo and Juliet. Like Luhrmann, Kaufman's chose a contemporary setting for his film, but instead of a fictional Verona Beach, Kaufman set the film in New York City. Tromeo and Juliet takes an interesting approach to using Shakespeare's language in the film. It blends modern-day speech with Shakespeare's language, which is used on and off throughout the film by the characters. Adding to this dialogue are several other lines from Shakespeare's various plays, and even references to works like Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Ozymandias," that supplement the lines and language from Romeo and

Juliet. Nuances such as this help to signify some of the subtleties of the film, showing the audience that there is more to the film than a simple gimmick and rewarding a viewer with fairly extensive knowledge of Shakespeare's work.

While Tromeo and Juliet, like Luhrmann's film, uses the idea of a capitalist economy to establish the conflict between the Capulets and the Ques (the film's version of the Montagues), it takes this concept farther by defining the conflict. In contrast to Luhrmann's two mob bosses that head undefined businesses, the two families in Tromeo and Juliet are warring with one another after Capulet extorted Que's softcore pornography business away from him, in exchange for Que's right to keep Tromeo as his son. Further highlighting the economic themes of the film is the fact that London Arbuckle (the film's version of Paris) is the head of a meat company that Capulet desperately wants to be tied to for his personal financial gain. As a result, Juliet becomes nothing more than a commodity to be bartered with so Capulet can raise himself higher economically than he has ever been before. The associations and comparisons between Juliet and meat are raised throughout the movie with scenes where she cradles a stuffed cow in bed, or scenes such as the party where Juliet and Tromeo meet, at which Tromeo is dressed in a full cow costume. These scenes establish a running commentary throughout the film that explores the overlying idea of a consumer-based economy as a fixture of modern-day society. The film revolts against these cultural aspects in its ending when Juliet leaves with Tromeo, shunning the lives and wealth of both London and her father in favor of her true love.

The theme of revolt is prevalent throughout Kaufman's film, especially considering the punk culture that the film explores and uses as a base for the characters of Tromeo, Juliet, and their friends and companions. With the film set in New York City, Kaufman creates an association with an area that has been the beginning of several cultural revolutionary movements, including punk culture. Kaufman utilizes this culture and expands on the themes of rebelling against authority and the recklessness of impassioned youth that Luhrmann's film doesn't explore in depth. The punk theme lends itself well to the rest of the film's elements, such as the campy violence and intentional scenes meant to disgust and turn away the average movie-goer. The shock appeal of Tromeo and Juliet is meant for a specific audience, one that consists mainly of fans of independent films, but more specifically of fans of Kaufman's work, such as his film The Toxic Avenger. Even with the intentional shock appeal of the film, its exploration of these various themes make Kaufman's film much more than a simple campy horror-punk adaptation of Romeo and Juliet. Kaufman is known for challenging the establishments of society, and he uses Tromeo and Juliet to raise questions about American society at the end of the twentieth century. He accomplished this goal while also raising issues about the status of Shakespeare and how his works are viewed in society today. Like many of Kaufman's films, though, Tromeo and Juliet does not provide answers to its audience because the issues that Kaufman challenges are not necessarily answerable; the film asks these questions and raises the issues, and leaves the audience to continue working with them long after the credits have finished.

Standing at the opposite end of the spectrum from Luhrmann's film is Andrzej Bartkowiak's film Romeo Must Die. Unlike Tromeo and Juliet, Romeo Must Die shares no real direct connection to Luhrmann's film except for a vague claim to be based on Shakespeare's play and the heavy use of popular culture in a highly re-imagined appropriation of Romeo and Juliet. Even direct links to Kaufman's film are hard to establish. Instead, it can be considered a unique film appropriation of Romeo and Juliet since the film has discarded several aspects of Shakespeare's play, most notably Shakespeare's language and the theme of love. In exchange for these things, Bartkowiak's film creates a new story using the mainstream action film genre as a vehicle to explore a variety of themes and concepts that were prominent when the film was made. Romeo Must Die serves as an excellent example of the move towards Hollywood Shakespeare, a movement that uses select ideas and themes from Shakespeare's plays in an effort to create supposedly new and different films.

At the center of Romeo Must Die are the two main characters: Han Sing, portrayed by Jet Li, famous for his roles in Chinese martial-arts films and action films such as Lethal Weapon 4, and Trish O'Day, played by the late pop-singer Aaliyah. The film is Li's first lead role in English, and it is Aaliyah's first role at all in a major film. The focus of the film, though, is not a story of two lovers, but the economic struggle between Han's Chinese family and Trish's black family over control of the Oakland, California, seaport. Each family wants to control the seaport so that they can then sell it to Jewish benefactor Vincent Roth, who wishes to bring another NFL franchise to Oakland and wants the seaport as the

land for the new stadium. This racial and economic struggle pushes the action forward throughout the film, and in familiar action-film style, several twists and turns are brought into the plot, making Han and Trish question what they know and question the bonds of their own families. After resolving the war between their families, the two find themselves engaging in an ambiguously happy moment, walking away hand-in-hand with one another after Han has renounced his family and Trish has reconciled with hers. While this ending stands in complete contrast to Shakespeare's original tragic ending, it shows how the film employs more modern conventions of the action film genre. The film leaves the audience without any real knowledge as to whether Han and Trish are even in love, much less whether they will enjoy the love that Shakespeare's original Romeo and Juliet could not; however, as the two leave the scene, the audience is left with the idea that racial barriers can be broken and greed can be conquered.

Racial tension, one of the most prominent themes in Romeo Must Die, results from the economic competition between the two families. They align themselves along racial lines, and even the businesses that the families attempt to buy out in the seaport are racially aligned with the families as well, even if they aren't aligned with the families economically. With these themes unfolding in the film, the lines of racial loyalty begin to blur in favor of the personal gain of wealth that benefits the few over the many. Thus, the conflict for the families resides on two levels: the first is loyalty to racial lines, and the second is the battle for economic gain to attain supremacy over the other family, seemingly at all costs. The deadly competition between the two families leaves a trail of violence

and death behind them, and as the film progresses, there is more of a shift to certain members of the two factions doing whatever they must to attain economic supremacy. As the tension continues to build, the lines blur even more, and the brothers of both Han and Trish die as a result. As they unravel the mysteries around their brothers' deaths, Han and Trish discover what atrocious acts their families committed in order for each of their families to move towards economic supremacy in Oakland. The two eventually shun their families for valuing economic gain over family and racial loyalties. Han and Trish uphold the values of family over greed and corruption, but more importantly, they both live while most of their families die, resolving the film in a manner entirely unlike Shakespeare's original play.

While race and economic superiority are the most prominent themes of Romeo Must Die, the film is also important because it is a prime example of the move in the film industry towards Hollywood Shakespeare. When considering this film in terms of Hollywood Shakespeare, the issue turns more towards the lack of Shakespeare in the film, and the subtle influences that have worked their way into the film regardless. The theme of love, probably the most prominent aspect of Shakespeare's play, is nonexistent in Romeo Must Die. The lack of love in the film does allow for more of a focus on the turf war between the two families, and the film takes full advantage of this. The action builds as the feud moves towards the climatic final scenes in which Han and Trish are both given the opportunity to avenge their brothers. The Oakland police appear just in time to watch Han and Trish walk away together in the final scene. Romeo Must Die

shares some similarities with Shakespeare's play through an indirect connection of themes; even though the film tries to become more its own entity than a film adaptation of Romeo and Juliet, by claiming any ties to Shakespeare's work, the film is bound to several of the themes and concepts of Shakespeare's play that may or may not have been intended.

Through a study of these three films and their utilization of themes and concepts from Shakespeare, popular culture and late twentieth-century American capitalist society, this thesis intends to uncover the trend inherent in the spectrum of these films. Each film takes a similar approach, bringing in elements of modern society and combining them with themes from Romeo and Juliet to create each production. Even though all three films pull on similar elements from Shakespeare, such as the economic underpinnings of the family feuds and the isolation of Romeo and Juliet from their surroundings, and common popular culture elements from the times the films were made, the results varied widely. At one end of the spectrum stands Luhrmann's film. Romeo + Juliet is a film that works to preserve Shakespeare's story, themes, and characters, while still bringing Romeo and Juliet to an audience that has become noticeably less inclined to read and study the works of Shakespeare. Through a variety of decisions concerning the casting, setting, and language, Luhrmann created a film that is distinctly modern, yet still recognizably Shakespeare.

In the middle of this spectrum stands Kaufman's Tromeo and Juliet. Kaufman's film utilized several aspects that Luhrmann's film did, as well as some aspects that are found in Bartkowiak's film, while still maintaining Kaufman's

distinct style of his 'gross-out' films. Tromeo and Juliet doesn't attempt to preserve Shakespeare as Luhrmann's film did; Kaufman instead chose to create a film based on one of Shakespeare's most famous plays in order to challenge the establishment, something he has been known to do. In Tromeo and Juliet, Kaufman uses Shakespeare's play to challenge the very idea of what Shakespeare is and what defines a work as Shakespeare; at the same time, he explores a variety of issues he found prevalent in American society towards the end of the twentieth-century. As a result, Kaufman raises more questions than he provides answers, but his intent is to make his audience part of the dialogue by bringing these issues to them and challenging them to question these issues.

At the other end of the spectrum is Bartkowiak's film Romeo Must Die, indicative of the move towards Hollywood Shakespeare. More action film than Shakespeare adaptation, Romeo Must Die is representative of a shift in the film industry to create films that take a general concept from one of Shakespeare's play and adapt the concept into a common film genre, such as action films and teenage comedies. These films actually consume Shakespeare and use his works as a commodity to create a profit. While not necessarily faithful Shakespeare adaptations, this group of films is representative of the clash between consumerism and art and, as a result, films like Romeo Must Die are examples of what happens when consumerism overtakes art. Films like Romeo Must Die serve to show why films such as Luhrmann's are still relevant and very much needed; at the same time, they display how, even when trying to consume Shakespeare

amidst a larger idea, Shakespeare and his works are so ingrained in our mindset that his ideas and themes still work their way into the films.

Through the process of exploring and analyze these films, this thesis will work towards uncovering the various aspects and elements that each director worked into their separate productions of Romeo and Juliet. The three films are excellent examples of some of the different versions of Shakespeare on film; each is a unique production that utilizes the same basis, but all three films yielded widely different results not only from each other, but from other films based on Shakespeare's plays as well. By studying the various elements of each film and analyzing how each director portrays one of Shakespeare's most famous plays, this thesis will work to uncover the status of Shakespeare in film towards the end of the twentieth-century, and the movements and trends that continue today.

CHAPTER TWO
LUHRMANN, THE MAINSTREAM, AND THE PRESERVATION OF
SHAKESPEARE

Before it even made it to theaters, Baz Luhrmann's film William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet (referred to from this point on as Romeo + Juliet) caused a stir among the film community. As Michael Anderegg describes it:

At first glance, Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* could be mistaken for yet another (mis)appropriation of Shakespeare's play for purposes of parody or even burlesque, a hip (hop?) retelling aimed at an irredeemably low-brow audience of clueless teenagers inhabiting an intellectually bankrupt culture.

(58)

This idea of turning the high-class Shakespeare into a film that uses popular culture and low-brow references that appeal to a "clueless teenage" audience immediately created a resistance to the film among critics and Shakespeare scholars alike. Comparisons were immediately drawn between Luhrmann's film and Franco Zeffirelli's 1968 version, which received a similar initial response as Luhrmann's film did but is now considered a classic version. Regardless of that fact, none of these initial comparisons looked favorably on Luhrmann's film. Zeffirelli himself commented on the film, saying that Luhrmann's "film didn't update the play, it just made a big joke out of it" (Donaldson 61). As the theater release for the film approached, the criticism of the film continued to grow as

“Earnest critics decried: ‘there are ‘bad films,’ there are ‘worst films of all time,’ and then there’s Baz Luhrmann’s *Romeo & Juliet*” (Hamilton 159). Most critics had similar opinions about the film, so when it opened and grossed \$11,133,231¹ on opening weekend, it came as a surprise to the critics.

Critics and scholars did not approve of Luhrmann’s film because of his approach, feeling that it was a travesty to create a postmodern film portraying one of Shakespeare’s most well-known plays. What the critics either did not realize or grossly underestimated was the specific audience that the film was intended to attract (and did indeed draw). Critics labeled the film as “MTV Shakespeare: the kind of mindless visual candy we associate with rock videos” (Walker 132), but this label of “MTV Shakespeare” was one that Luhrmann welcomed and embraced. He didn’t simply want to create another film version of Shakespeare’s classic play, he wanted to create a new film that would bring Romeo and Juliet to an audience that was more inclined to watch television and play video games than to devote time to the Bard’s classics. Luhrmann’s intended audience were these clueless teenagers, specifically teenagers who watched shows on channels like MTV and would relate to the ideas and techniques that he utilized in the film. Since he targeted this audience, his approach to the film had to be different than what had come before. Zeffirelli’s film was (and still is) a landmark film version of Romeo and Juliet, but unlike Zeffirelli, Luhrmann’s challenge came from a more unique audience that was more accustomed to a visual-based culture than any film audience witnessing Romeo and Juliet had been before.

¹ All box-office numbers have been obtained from the *Internet Movie Database* (IMDB.com).

At this point, Luhrmann's challenge in making the film became two-fold. Not only did he have to draw a teenage audience, but he also wanted to deliver a film in such a way that he would preserve Shakespeare's original story in a modern-day environment, and in turn bring Shakespeare's play to a new audience. For Luhrmann to reach his goals, in his film he "literally re-cognizes Shakespeare; that is, [he] uses a contemporary setting as a means to *know again* the play at the heart of the film" (Balizet 123). To accomplish this re-cognizing, Luhrmann had two specific issues to address: the performers and the setting. Both would play a major part in creating this new and modern version of the classic play, and this made the choices for each pivotal to Luhrmann's film.

Two Households Both Alike in Dignity: Finding the Players

Luhrmann's choices for the actors to portray Romeo and Juliet were important. He had the choice to seek out, as Zeffirelli did, two unknown actors to play the lovers, or even to pursue veteran Shakespearean actors. Instead, he chose two young actors who would be recognized by his target audience. Luhrmann cast Leonardo DiCaprio in the role of Romeo and Claire Danes in the role of Juliet; these choices reflected some of his intentions for the film, as both actors were familiar names to a teenage audience around the time the film was released in 1996. DiCaprio was known for his role on the show Growing Pains and had recently been nominated for an Academy Award for his supporting role as Arnie Grape in the film What's Eating Gilbert Grape? Opposite him would be Danes, known for her role as Angela Chase on the show My So-Called Life, for which

she received a Golden-Globe. In the two, Luhrmann had found a pair of young actors to play the star-crossed lovers, and at the same time, he brought an immediate audience to the film.

Once he had the two principal characters cast, the task then turned to the supporting cast. Luhrmann had almost as big a choice when determining the families as he did in casting DiCaprio and Danes. The challenge was how to cast the families so that they resembled Shakespeare's original "Two households both alike in dignity" (Prologue) and maintained the context of the feud, but at the same time create families that could be related to a new audience. The Capulets and Montagues were originally rival mercantile families, but Shakespeare doesn't make that the focus of the feud between the two families in his play. He instead chose to focus on an "Ancient grudge" that broke to "new mutiny" (Prolouge), something that a modern audience may not necessarily understand. The families themselves were fighting more because they had been warring for so long than for any specific reason. Luhrmann makes the family lines more drastic in the film in an attempt to emphasize the feud to a new audience: "The Montagues and Capulets, rival construction firms, are ethnic rivals; the Montagues are Anglo and the Capulets are Italian, or, more broadly, Latin" (Palmer 69). Luhrmann uses these ethnic lines, along with the economic competition between the two families, to justify to his audience the cause of the feud between the two families. By creating the families and aligning them along both ethnic and economic lines, Luhrmann anticipated that his audience would recognize and understand how these two families would find themselves in a feud against the other. Luhrmann's

approach in creating the family lines took advantage of his audience's pre-existing familiarity with racial and economic conflict and competition to justify the feud.

Luhrmann did more than simply update Shakespeare's feud along ethnic and economic lines. Montague (Brian Dennehy) is given the first name Ted, while Montague's wife (Christina Pickles) is named Caroline. Even though Luhrmann gives them first names, most of the brief scenes they're involved in show the two being chauffeured around in a limousine, creating a straightforward association with a rich and powerful family that has the ability to be a major economic force in Verona Beach. The Montague boys "wear Hawaiian shirts and drive beach buggies and have blond haircuts" (Palmer 69); they traverse the city like rich playboys with nothing to do but live carelessly, and they appear often at the beach where they do nothing except play and brawl. In the Montagues, Luhrmann has created a family that is well-established within the city of Verona Beach, and he uses this to explain how the Montague boys have the ability to run around the city with no real obligations. In turn, he justifies to his audience how three civil brawls have occurred in Verona Beach, even with law enforcement in place around the city. Luhrmann also gives the Montagues a distinctly Anglo-American identity, highlighting common notions of economic success and wealth being held mainly by this ethnic group in America.

Opposite the Montagues stand the Capulets. Some of the Capulets actually appear to be of Italian descent in the film (like Shakespeare's two original Veronese families), though overall the Capulets' ethnicity is more Latin than

Italian. Paul Sorvino plays Fulgencio Capulet, who rules over his family as an abusive and controlling patriarch. Luhrmann's choice of Sorvino for the role enforces his concept of Capulet as a type of mob boss because of Sorvino's work in the film Goodfellas, in which he actually played a small-time mob boss. Tybalt, played by John Leguizamo, is portrayed as an eventual successor to Capulet, though he does more to display his flair and flamboyance than to prepare to take over the Capulet empire. He drives much of the conflict of the film with his quick temper and general hatred for the entire Montague family, instigating fights with Benvolio, Mercutio, and Romeo. He is followed around by the other Capulet boys, and together they stand in contrast to the Montague boys with clothing and accessories (including guns) that are covered with religious (specifically Catholic) imagery. All these aspects reinforce the idea that the Capulets are an Italian/Latin mob family through the utilization of both film and religious stereotypes in the characters. Giving the Capulets this ethnic identity again utilizes the audience's preconceived notions, this time taking advantage of Italian and Latin mob families and violent aspects that are associated with them through various depictions in mob films such as Goodfellas and The Godfather.

Unlike the rest of her family, Luhrmann's version of Gloria Capulet (Diane Vernora) has a unique role in the Capulet family. While most people would simply consider her another member of the family, she is more of an outsider as there are "hints also she is a southern belle, acquired by Capulet in some earlier diplomatic move" (Palmer 69). Gloria Capulet stands out from the rest of the Capulets with her definitive blond hair and Southern accent. Capulet's

obtaining his wife through an earlier “diplomatic move” is interesting, because he intends to use Juliet in the same way when he plans to marry her to Paris after Tybalt’s death. The use of women for Capulet in the film seems to be as much trading chips as actual family members, and this is evident in the scene where Juliet is informed that she is to marry Paris. Upon the discovery, Juliet voices her disagreement to the plan, and when Capulet discovers this, he becomes violent, striking his wife and the Nurse before grabbing Juliet by the face and delivering the line “And you be mine I’ll give you to my friend” (3.5.191). Capulet’s violent temperament in this scene adds to his credibility as a mob boss and reinforces this to his audience through a forceful display of power and the emphasis on the idea that Juliet is his to give to whomever he pleases.

Luhrmann’s decision to establish the families as ethnic as well as economic rivals was an important one, because this is an aspect of the film that a teenage audience would be able to recognize and associate with in some way. They would recognize issues such as interracial violence and relationships from the television shows and films that he knew his audience was familiar with. Luhrmann created his cast and characters to draw in an audience by taking advantage of the audience’s familiarity with such characters. While Luhrmann now had these aspects working for him, his setting for the play was going to be the determining factor that would either draw or repel his audience.

In Fair Verona, Where We Lay Our Stage: The World of Verona Beach

For Luhrmann, the setting of the film was equally as important, if not more so, than casting the roles and defining his specific characters. Luhrmann was again faced with a decision similar to Zeffirelli's; this time the choice Luhrmann faced was whether to set the film in Shakespeare's Verona (like Zeffirelli's film) or to create a more modern setting. Again, Luhrmann bucked the trend in favor of creating a modern interpretation of Shakespeare's Verona, not wanting to explore the play with a method which had already been recently used by Zeffirelli. The result was Verona Beach, a city that Luhrmann envisioned as a modern-day combination of Shakespeare's Verona, cities connected with gang violence like Miami or Los Angeles, and the film's actual shooting location of Mexico City. Verona Beach was meant to attract his target audience and show them a city that his audience would recognize and relate to while bringing them into the world of Shakespeare's play.

Verona Beach is a city rife with images of consumerism and popular culture, and one that would be familiar to an audience of moviegoers who were bombarded almost daily in television and film with advertisements and fast-paced action. Luhrmann intended Verona Beach to be a city that his audience would find familiar, using popular culture as well as conventions from other movies and television shows to make it recognizable. At the same time, Luhrmann created it specifically so that it would maintain several aspects of Shakespeare's original Verona, aiding him in his effort to preserve the essence of Shakespeare's play in a modern setting.

Thus the gauntlet was thrown down by Luhrmann from the very beginning of the creation of Verona Beach. His challenge was to create what Lucy Hamilton describes as “a world where the youth might conceivably always go armed; a world where love can still be so thwarted and endangered; where the innocence and passion of the protagonists can be so out of step with the current mood” (161). Luhrmann’s Verona Beach couldn’t act simply as a setting for the film; it had to be as much a part of the film as the families and the two lovers. Verona Beach had to stand up in the film with Romeo and Juliet and justify to the audience how a modern city could act as a ground for Shakespeare’s original ideas, which some audience members might find foreign. It had to be as much modern as it was Shakespeare for the story to take place believably and for a new generation to experience the timeless story of these star-crossed lovers.

Verona Beach is a city full of consumerism and popular culture, and at its center are the two towers of Capulet and Montague. One of the first images in the film’s opening montage shows the two towers at the center of the city, looming high above every other building. Luhrmann makes it clear from the opening shot that these two competing families are an established part of the city, with the city seemingly sprawling outward from the towers. While the economic competition between the families adds to their feud, it is far from the only financial aspect of the city. Based on cities like Miami or Los Angeles, Verona Beach is a capitalist city driven by its economy; it is a city full of consumers, and as one would expect in this type of society, the corporate towers are only one of a variety of images that reinforce these capitalist aspects of Luhrmann’s imagined city.

Verona Beach is overloaded with images and advertisements that are recognizable to the audience, but at the same time these images play with the idea of Shakespeare as a commodity. Ads like “Out, Out Damn Spot Cleaners” and “Prospero’s Finest Whiskey: The Stuff Dreams Are Made Of” permeate the streets of Verona Beach. One sign that appears multiple times throughout the film “displays the white words ‘Wherefore I’ amour?’ against a red background: the colors and script imitate an advertisement for *Coca-Cola*” (Walker 134). With images like these, Luhrmann combines the ancient and the modern, using ancient text in a modern-day advertisement to create a visual familiarity, even if the audience does not understand the actual textual reference. As Courtney Lehmann notes, Luhrmann “seizes every opportunity to convert the potentially ‘dead language’ of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* into a distinctly cinematic visual language” (201). Luhrmann does seem to take every opportunity offered to him in the film; even the pool hall where Romeo and Benvolio are seen early in the movie is named “The Globe,” referring to Shakespeare’s original theater of the same name. Luhrmann’s move towards this cinematic visual language saturates the film, and is meant to give the audience a glimpse into the world of Shakespeare through the city of Verona Beach; as Jim Welsh points out, Luhrmann intertwines Shakespeare and these visual images so much that the audience may feel that “The film’s spectacle constantly overpowers and overwhelms the poetry” (152). Romeo + Juliet does become bogged down at points by all the visual details of the film, but instead of simply confusing his audience, Luhrmann actually encourages a second and third viewing of the film.

This approach rewards the viewer each time he or she watches the film, allowing him or her to uncover or unravel another piece of Luhrmann's visual puzzle.

Luhrmann's setting of Verona Beach and its heavy emphasis on visual effects had earned the film the label of "MTV Shakespeare," because, as Elise Walker noted, "Like MTV videos, the film contains a bombardment of imagery and music; it is a postmodern assault of the senses" (132). This postmodern assault was what grated against critics and scholars and led to the initial negative response to the film. The critics and scholars simply did not (or could not) appreciate the film's "textuality and its involvement with kitsch" (Palmer 67). Scenes like the opening montage of the film were not what these critics and scholars expected. Looking for a more classic Shakespearean film, they found themselves revolted by what Courtney Lehmann described as the "pastiche visual nightmare known as 'Verona Beach'" (Lehmann 192). Luhrmann, however, did not intend to appeal to critics and scholars; his audience was teenagers who may or may not have been familiar with Shakespeare's play and language. By creating a city full of references to popular culture and placing it amidst a distinctly capitalist society, Luhrmann intended to create a city which his audience would find familiar and recognizable, even if Shakespeare's language and play were anything but. Luhrmann's approach definitely worked, but even though the audiences proved the critics wrong with their strong showing, the question still remained: in the midst of Luhrmann's Verona Beach, the two families, and the film in general, where was Shakespeare?

Baz versus the Bard: Finding Shakespeare in Luhrmann's Film

In an interview about Romeo + Juliet, Luhrmann was questioned about why he chose to adapt Shakespeare's play. His response was, "I'd always thought about doing a kind of funky Shakespeare, telling a Shakespearean story the way Shakespeare would have presented the material when he was at the Globe" (Luhrmann interview 216). This meant creating a film that could maintain the elements of Shakespeare's play that defined its very essence—the two lovers, their isolation from the rest of the society, the family feud, the unavoidable end to their ill-fated love—and work them into the modern world of Verona Beach. With his use of pop culture and visual images, Luhrmann definitely created a "funky Shakespeare" film, but, as many critics and scholars had expressed, the question still was whether Luhrmann's film was really Shakespeare, or a film that only claimed to be Shakespeare. Was Luhrmann preserving the essence of Shakespeare and Romeo and Juliet, or was this film really just Baz Luhrmann's Romeo + Juliet?

Anyone watching Luhrmann's film would have to admit that Shakespeare was indeed a part of it. While Luhrmann had updated the feud and its setting, he decided to keep Shakespeare's original language, albeit in a heavily edited script. The use of Shakespeare's language in his film was something that Luhrmann fought hard to keep because he wanted to maintain "the integrity of the language" (Luhrmann interview 221) in the midst of his modern setting. Later in the interview, Luhrmann discussed how there was pressure put on him to change the language and update it like every other aspect of the film. Regardless of this

pressure, Luhrmann and his crew remained loyal to their original idea because they truly wanted to preserve Shakespeare's language, an aspect of the play they felt was essential to creating a Shakespeare production. Verona Beach was a device Luhrmann used to deliver Shakespeare's play to a new audience, and with this goal in mind, maintaining Shakespeare's language became important.

Luhrmann had created this world of Verona Beach that was a place for Shakespeare's play and language to be put on display, but it also acted as a key to break the code of Shakespeare's language for an audience unfamiliar with the language.

On the same level as the advertisements for items such as "Prospero's Whiskey," as Barbara Hodgdon points out, Luhrmann's "film restyles textual culture as fashion or fetish and writes it onto actors' bodies or their props, as with Montague's 'Longsword' rifle, Tybalt's Madonna-engraved pistol, or Mantua's 'Post-post haste' dispatch van" (248). Luhrmann uses instances like these throughout the film to establish the textual culture, and on the most basic level this may seem like nothing more than a simple gimmick. However, Luhrmann's intentions in creating this textual culture were "so that some young student from the Bronx goes, 'Yeah, okay. I get it'" (Luhrmann interview 219). Luhrmann created this film to help a new generation watch and understand Shakespeare's original play. The various elements in the film work to help the audience understand the events that unfold in Verona Beach where Shakespeare's language could not.

Even with this idea in mind, the use of Shakespeare's language alone was not enough to call the film Shakespeare. At the core of the film, the themes and ideas of Shakespeare's original play had to still be there for this to be considered an actual Shakespeare film. For Luhrmann to create a film that preserved the essence of Shakespeare's play and delivered it to a new audience, he had to make sure the very heart of Shakespeare's play was in the film. Thus, Luhrmann had to recreate the story of the two lovers, their feuding families, and their tragic fate, all in the midst of Verona Beach and a cast that was four hundred years removed from Shakespeare's time.

The first thing that audiences had to accept about Romeo + Juliet, as Alfredo Michel Modenessi points out, was that Luhrmann's film is a definite postmodern approach to Shakespeare. Modenessi states "Practically no review I have read, nor any colleague with whom I have discussed the film, has failed to label Luhrmann's version of *Romeo and Juliet* 'postmodern'" (64). Luhrmann welcomed this label, much like the label of MTV Shakespeare, because at the center of the film were the defining elements of Shakespeare's play. However, with this postmodern label came the risk of the film being perceived as nothing more than a gimmick, and since Luhrmann wanted to create a modern version of Shakespeare's play that was true to its source, avoiding this stigma became the challenge for Luhrmann while creating his film and deciding the specific details. Thus, Romeo + Juliet had to strike a balance between Luhrmann's modern world and Shakespeare's classic story.

While the film updates the play with its modern setting, Luhrmann still worked to maintain most of the original themes of Shakespeare's play, many of which he focused on or emphasized through his postmodern approach to the text. On a basic level, he uses direct textual references, but on a deeper level, the world of Verona Beach works to create Shakespeare's warring families in a new and modern context. At the center of Verona Beach are the two lovers, and around them a violent world unfolds to try and stop them from being together. This is emphasized by instances in the film where Luhrmann highlights things from Shakespeare's play and makes them more extreme than Shakespeare chose to. Capulet and Montague are still fathers who cannot listen to and communicate with their children, but Luhrmann makes Capulet a violent and abusive patriarch juxtaposed against Montague, who "watches Romeo gloomily out of the tinted window of his limousine, unable to speak to his son" (Loehlin 123). Caroline Montague is almost non-existent in the film, and Gloria Capulet "is a chain-smoking, pill-popping trophy wife with no time for her daughter's problems" (Loehlin 122). Neither set of parents has healthy or established relationships with their children; this fact emphasizes the gap between the two generations. As many of his target audience members were teenagers who would either have recognized or experienced similar situations, they could relate to the characters of Romeo or Juliet and their isolation from the rest of their families. By creating this familiarity, Luhrmann helped his audience not only to understand Shakespeare's play, but also relate to it. At the same time, he used this lack of parent-child relationships to explain the recklessness of youth in Verona Beach, meanwhile

showing his audience how Romeo and Juliet find themselves caught in the path of events that lead to their tragic end.

Luhrmann uses several instances in the film to establish the lovers as independent from the rest of Verona Beach in an effort to emphasize their detachment from the other characters. He portrays the lovers as believing “they are hermetically sealed off from the rest of Verona, able to guide their own destinies” (Walker 134). Given the lack of guidance from their parents, they do really find themselves without any real outside companionship. The other youth in Verona Beach seem more concerned with continuing the feud between the two families, leaving both Romeo and Juliet with very few people to confide in. The only guidance they receive is from the Nurse (Miriam Margolyes) and Father Lawrence (Pete Postlethwaite). The Nurse, Juliet’s companion and confidant, helps to arrange the marriage, while at the same time protecting Juliet as she chastises Romeo upon their first exchange. Romeo also receives guidance from Lawrence, but Luhrmann, playing on the ambiguity of Shakespeare’s original Friar Laurence, makes him even less capable of guiding the two young lovers. In Laurence, Luhrmann displays how it isn’t only the youth of Verona Beach who are reckless in their actions, but the leaders and role-models of the city as well. He may mean well, but Lawrence’s blind agreement to marry the two lovers leads in turn to the events that force the lovers toward their inescapable fate; moreover, his actions and recklessness leave Romeo and Juliet with no real role-model in Verona Beach after the events that unfold following Tybalt’s death. Thus, Luhrmann’s film effectively seals off the two lovers from the rest of Verona

Beach by this point, and lacking guidance, Romeo and Juliet then continue onward to their deaths.

The ending of Luhrmann's film brings the hectic actions of the film to one final resting point. Luhrmann chose to eliminate all outsiders (Paris, Lawrence) from the final scene, making it what Douglas Brode refers to as Luhrmann's "one truly great moment" in the film (57). The focus is placed solely on the two lovers, and Shakespeare's dialogue between Romeo's death and Juliet's death has been eliminated. Instead, the tragedy of this final scene is heightened by Juliet waking at the instant that Romeo takes the poison. The audience then witnesses Luhrmann's final culmination of his film in this moment, as "Romeo turns, in the process of dying, and comes to grips with how very much alive [Juliet] is, how terribly close they came to defying all odds against them" (Brode 58). In this scene, Luhrmann captures the raw emotions of Romeo and Juliet in their final moment, and in turn brings climax to the film in a scene that stands in contrast with the fast-paced movement of the film. The film places an emphasis on fate, as the audience becomes first-hand witnesses to the events that go wrong; in an earlier scene, the audience watches the failed delivery attempt of Lawrence's letter, and they see how close the letter was to being delivered and the tragedy thus being avoided. These events work to focus the audience on the tragedy of the lovers' deaths; with mere moments separating success from failure, Luhrmann heightens the tragedy of the final scene, something that many performances on both film and stage fail to accomplish.

The framing device that Luhrmann uses for the film best exemplifies the modern world of *Romeo + Juliet* that he created. Following the death scene, a brief scene involving the Prince screaming “All are punished” is followed by the image of a television set that was used to open the movie. By having a newscaster deliver both the opening and closing lines of the Shakespeare’s play, Luhrmann closed his film with the image of a newscaster delivering the final lines of the play before fading into black. This starts and ends the film with a tone of irony, alerting the audience that they are watching a series of events unfold that have actually already occurred, and then reminding them of the fact that the events that occurred were unavoidable. At the same time, Luhrmann reminds his audience that they are watching a film, a reminder that plays with the meta-theatricality that Shakespeare often used in his own plays. Luhrmann keeps with the rest of his film in using a newscaster on an old television set; he essentially signifies to his audience at the beginning and end of his film that they are an audience to events that have already unfolded and cannot be undone. This device serves to bring the audience back to the ideas of Shakespeare’s original play of the inescapable fate of the two lovers and the tragedy that surrounds their fate. Thus, Luhrmann uses his modern setting, techniques, and references to introduce a new audience to the themes and ideas of Shakespeare’s classic tale.

From the very beginning, Luhrmann’s film plays with his audience, announcing that the film is *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet*. The setting, the cast, and the language work together and intertwine to create Luhrmann’s film, while still making the audience question the actual authorship of the film.

Romeo + Juliet operates both as a part of the Shakespeare culture and as Luhrmann's unique creation. The city of Verona Beach and the popular culture that permeates it work to help the audience understand Shakespeare's original play and to introduce them to Luhrmann's vision. To some, Luhrmann's film may appear radical, but, even with its modern setting and contemporary references, it still is distinctly Shakespeare.

CHAPTER THREE
KAUFMAN, INDEPENDENT FILM, AND THE QUESTION OF
SHAKESPEARE

Released in 1996, the same year as Luhrmann's film, Lloyd Kaufman's film Tromeo and Juliet stands in stark contrast to Luhrmann's Romeo + Juliet. Tromeo and Juliet is a very different kind of Shakespeare film; the film's production is equally different. Whereas Luhrmann received much criticism about his film when it was released, Kaufman's film received little criticism, and the scholarship devoted to the film is minimal at best. Only Margaret Jane Kidnie has devoted an article to the film, while Xavier Mendik and Steven Jay Schneider discuss the film at some length in conjunction with Kaufman's overall body of work. Several other scholars devote a sentence or paragraph to the film, but these comments do not serve much purpose except to use it as a base for the comparison of other films or to make their own commentary on the film (which often results in their coming to the conclusion that the film has no real merit in any discussion of Shakespeare on film). This lack of critical and scholarly feedback results in some ways from Kaufman and his film studio, Troma Entertainment. Kaufman is a huge proponent of independent films, and as such, the films that Troma Entertainment creates and produces are intended to preserve the original idea of the film and ensure that it doesn't get the big "Hollywood" treatment. Therefore, Troma productions give free rein to the writers and directors to create the film they have envisioned without major studios interference.

Kaufman and Troma Entertainment work constantly towards giving aspiring screenwriters and directors the ability to enter the film industry; at the same time, however, independent films do not earn the money that major studio productions have the potential to earn. Thus, Troma Entertainment makes a decision with their films: in order to create the independent films of their choosing, Troma does not rely on the budgets available to major studio productions to lure in big-time actors like Luhrmann did with DiCaprio and Danes, nor does it have a large production budget. The independent film aspect alone seemingly puts Tromeo and Juliet immediately at the other end of the spectrum from the high-cost production of Romeo + Juliet. However, even though Tromeo and Juliet doesn't utilize big stars or large budgets, the film can hold its own beside Luhrmann's contribution. Tromeo and Juliet explores a variety of issues, and the film takes a very different approach to Shakespeare and popular culture than did Luhrmann's film. Both films utilized modern settings and popular culture in their renditions of Shakespeare's classic play, but Kaufman did not intend to preserve Shakespeare as Luhrmann did; Kaufman's film explores and questions the establishments of Shakespeare, modern society, and capitalism. Even though he is known for a gross-out style in his films, Kaufman does much more within his films. In Tromeo and Juliet, for example, Kaufman challenges his audience by raising questions about the establishment without offering them any easy answers.

Kaufman's films in general are known for their gross-out tactics, and this, combined with his devotion to supporting independently made films, has elevated

him and Troma Entertainment to a cult status among his fans. Xavier Mendik and Steven Jay Schneider describe Kaufman's body of work in their article "A Tasteless Art: Waters, Kaufman and the Pursuit of 'Pure' Gross-Out":

Kaufman has created a series of underground classics whose imagery trades on grotesque and humorous depictions of the body—notably blood, buns and bodily dismemberment—whilst also utilising established literary and cinematic motifs for parodic purposes. (205)

This description most certainly holds true for Tromeo and Juliet. The tagline for the film alone—"Body Piercing. Kinky Sex. Dismemberment. The Things That Made Shakespeare Great."—establishes the premise of the film and its (often very loose) basis in Shakespeare's play before the audience even begins to watch the film. It is immediately obvious from this tagline that Kaufman's film is anything but a simple, updated performance of Romeo and Juliet, and Kaufman made sure the film would be recognized as such. He also ensures that he would not disappoint his audiences and what they had come to expect from Troma films. Since Kaufman already had an established audience from previous films, he had the freedom to create the film that he and co-writer James Gunn imagined. What resulted was a film that used elements of punk and popular culture amid the ideas of Shakespeare's play to create a highly gross and irreverent, yet in some ways quite entertaining, re-imagining of Romeo and Juliet. In true Kaufman fashion, at the very center of the film is Kaufman's distinct version of Shakespeare's play; he uses the film and his interpretation of Shakespeare's play to question the very idea, the very essence, of what is Shakespeare.

In Fair Manhattan: New York, Punk Culture and Modern Society

Much like Luhrmann did with Romeo + Juliet, Kaufman and Gunn had several specific decisions to make about Tromeo and Juliet. The setting of the film was one of these major issues; instead of setting the film in Verona or a modern version of it, they chose instead to set the film in Manhattan. This made immediate sense from a fiscal standpoint, since the only office of Troma Entertainment is located in New York City, but it also served a greater purpose for the film. Kaufman's film uses punk culture as a basis for much of the film, and since the punk music scene originally began in New York City, the choice of setting the film there reinforces this theme. In one of the first scenes of the film, the audience watches several dancers at a punk nightclub; because of the film's setting, the audience doesn't question why the film would start off this way, and this in turn sets the tone for the rest the film.

The setting of Manhattan also allows Kaufman to bring another dynamic to his film. Tromeo and Juliet makes several social commentaries and keeps them running throughout the film, covering such topics as the economy and consumerism, abusive families, and the idea of youth culture and the degeneration of society at the end of the twentieth-century. Manhattan is the perfect backdrop for these commentaries, and Kaufman takes full advantage of these associations throughout the film. The city is also host to a multitude of businesses and establishments; as a result, it becomes quite easy for the audience to envision the characters moving around the city from nightclub to tattoo parlor to church with relative ease. As one of the major centers of the American economy, New York

City could even conceivably be the home of questionable companies such as London Arbuckle's Meat World and Cappy Capulet's Silky Films. Thus, Manhattan served as the perfect setting for Kaufman's film by allowing him to explore the various commentaries and employ the subtleties that he intended for the film, while giving him a setting that made it easy to justify the plotline to his audience.

The use of Manhattan as a setting also introduces another aspect to the film. Tromeo and Juliet draws on a variety of popular culture references, whether they refer to literature, cinema, or more generally, modern society. As one of the most well-known cities in the United States, and a hub of both high and low culture, New York City serves as a tool for Kaufman to bring these references into the film in a setting that does not need to constantly justify these various aspects to the audience as Luhrmann's *Verona Beach* had to. In doing so, Kaufman side-stepped many of the issues Luhrmann faced when creating his *Verona Beach* establishing it to his audience. By taking advantage of a pre-existing and easily recognizable setting, Kaufman gave himself the freedom to focus more exclusively on the plot and commentary of the film and to worry less about the validity of his setting.

It is the commentaries in Kaufman's film that makes it one of the most interesting, if not one of the bawdiest and most irreverent, films based on one of Shakespeare's plays to date. Kaufman uses mid-1990s Manhattan to address a series of issues about modern society and about the status of Shakespeare as society moved towards the beginning of a new century and millenium. Tromeo

and Juliet brings forth a variety of questions and issues to its audience without offering answers. Kaufman excels in creating gross-out films, but his approach with each film is meant to do more than simply create a tacky, tasteless film for his audience. He employs this low-brow approach deliberately, and his audiences realize this. Kaufman films utilize what Xavier Mendik and Steven Jay Schneider describe as “comically offensive, disgusting and disturbing images to examine more serious issues and inequalities within US society” (206). It is this approach to the material and his usage of these images that give a deeper meaning to Tromeo and Juliet, and make the film more than simply the grotesque and mindless production that scholars and critics have often mistaken it for. Kaufman did not intend to preserve Shakespeare as Luhrmann did; Kaufman intended to use Shakespeare as a tool to raise discussion and explore the various commentaries of the film.

Shakespeare in Lust: Troma’s Spin on the Timeless Tale

In her article “‘The Way the World is Now’: Love in the Troma Zone,” Margaret Jane Kidnie states that “*Tromeo and Juliet* asks unsettling questions without offering tidy answers” (117). This may actually be an understatement, considering the number of issues and ideas that Kaufman’s film tackles within the space of about two hours. With the film set in Manhattan, Kaufman took advantage of his unique style to create a film full of references, parodies and commentaries. Some of the most notable commentaries in the film refer to various aspects of late twentieth-century society, and his unique version of Shakespeare’s play

allowed Kaufman to explore such issues as abusive families, the meat industry, consumerism, and how these separate issues may be indicative of the larger issue of the degeneration of modern society.

Luhrmann's film made some use of the economic competition between the two families, but Kaufman's film brings this aspect forward as the actual reason behind the feud. Both families are well aware of the reasons for their feud, which adds a dynamic to the film that even Shakespeare's play didn't have. However, Kaufman also made the feud a source of humor in the film, because the economic competition that causes the feud is a pornographic film outfit, Silky Films. Originally owned by Monty Que, Tromeo's father, Cappy Capulet extorts the business away from Monty in exchange for allowing Monty to keep Tromeo as his child. As Benny describes the cause of the feud to Murray, the audience is also informed that what Monty made were soft-core pornographic movies that catered to the art crowd. Once Cappy took over the business, everything Silky Films produced was nothing more than trash. Benny's commentary establishes a line of good versus evil between the families, if only indirectly, something that neither Shakespeare nor Luhrmann chose to do. Establishing this moral line brings an aspect to the film that Kaufman's audience would recognize as a familiar convention in films: the battle between good and evil. As this convention manifests itself throughout the film, Kaufman uses Capulet to raise a variety of the issues concerning capitalism in late twentieth-century America.

Pure greed drives Cappy Capulet, and his greed begins to amplify Cappy's evil qualities and establishes him solidly as the film's villain. At the beginning of

the film Cappy has already held Silky Films for a number of years, but as the audience discovers, Cappy is in the midst of another business move to increase his wealth exponentially. Cappy's daughter, Juliet, has been engaged to London Arbuckle, owner of Meat World. London himself is an obsessive, manic business owner, making use of every meat product available to him, no matter what the results are. This becomes evident in London's first scene of the film, when one of his workers brings him the corpse of some unknown animal that had crawled into the establishment and died. Instead of trashing the corpse, London looks at it for a moment, says, "That's disgusting," and then has the worker throw the corpse on the pile of ingredients for hot dogs. Arbuckle and his business exemplify a late twentieth-century capitalist sentiment of American society that everything has some use, no matter its state. Arbuckle's intent to use everything offered to him to create more products that he can profit from becomes a parody of the American idea of success by taking it to extremes. At the same time, Arbuckle and Meat World ironically act as a representation of the larger scope of Tromeo and Juliet; the film's use of Shakespeare echoes the sentiment of Arbuckle's business by proving that even a classic work such as Shakespeare's has a use, regardless of the state it is used in.

While Cappy has no actual interest in becoming a part of the meat market, what he desires is more wealth, and he plans to acquire it through Juliet's marriage to London. For Cappy, Juliet is not really a daughter, but a thing, a commodity. He gives his daughter to London in exchange for the wealth of Meat World, making her a part of the transaction. As his possession, Cappy views Juliet

as a thing that he can control, and he exerts this control by threatening and beating Juliet not only physically but sexually as well. When Juliet doesn't follow Cappy's orders, he either beats her or locks her in the Time-Out Room, a room that houses a Plexiglas case in which Cappy imprisons Juliet. The Time-Out Room and Cappy's beatings are representative of his power-hungry nature to control everything he owns by any means necessary. He therefore utilizes a variety of physical means to exert his power over Juliet, treating her as a pet in some instances, and as no more than a possession in others. Cappy is an extreme representation of the ultimate businessman in that he has no real code of ethics that stand in the way of his quest for more wealth and power. Kaufman uses Cappy's lack of ethics to establish him as the villain of the film and offer one specific character for the audience to vilify among the film's many sordid characters.

Running against Cappy's quest for power is the youth culture of which Tromeo and Juliet are a part. The punk scene is one that emphasizes rebellion and independence, especially among youth, and Kaufman's film makes full use of this concept. The characters of the film are often seen discussing the idea of normal lives, even though it is very clear that none of them are a part of one. The first few scenes show two such instances that establish this theme that continues to run throughout the film. In the first scene of Act 1, Sammy Capulet and his sister Georgie are on the dance floor of a punk night club, and Sammy hits on his sister, stating "You know the way the world is now. We've got pantyliners, we've got perverts, we've got anorexia, everything's in style. If we just throw a little incest

in the mix, pretty soon the world will be like one great big hug.” Georgie responds by hitting Sammy in the testicles and denying his advance, giving the scene a comedic feel, but Kaufman has nonetheless introduced the idea of society’s degeneration. He continues this in the next scene where Benny, Murray, and Tromeo are all having a conversation while Benny pierces his girlfriend’s nipple. As one point while the three are discussing the feud, Benny tells Murray and Tromeo “You’re supposed to be normal people, leading normal lives. Working nine to five. Going to church on Sunday. Normal. Maiming, murdering, crippling park animals, it’s a little bit abnormal, you know what I mean?” This scene uses a very abnormal situation, the nipple piercing, to redefine normalcy, a definition that heightens the ironic tone of the scene. The contrast is quite obvious because none of the three are leading normal lives, or even understand what a normal life really is. Sammy and Benny’s comments highlight one of the major issues the film explores: the degeneration of modern society and youth’s role in that degeneration.

This issue becomes the center of the film as Tromeo and Juliet first discover their love for one another and are then forced to fight for it. Their relationship is one based more on longing and lust, as the two have several sex scenes that display the lust each has for the other. At the same time, as Tromeo and Juliet lose themselves in the bliss and lust of their relationship, Capulet manifests himself as the force that tries to stop them from realizing their love; his continued insistence on Juliet’s marriage to Arbuckle and the means by which he accomplishes this become the main obstacles that the lovers are forced to

overcome. Cappy's dominant control over his family, and the control he exerts over Juliet through his beatings and punishments, increase throughout the film. His need for total dominance first becomes clear upon the Capulet's discovery that Juliet has broken her engagement to Arbuckle to be with Tromeo. Capulet confronts Juliet, beating her savagely before forcing her to beg Arbuckle to take her back as his fiancée. In doing so, Capulet feels as if he has fully exerted his power over Juliet and conquered her, but as a result, it is this instance that drives Juliet to rebel against her father and pushes the film forward to its conclusion and Cappy's downfall.

In order to be free to lead their lives as they choose, Tromeo and Juliet are forced to conquer and defeat Cappy Capulet at the end of the film. Juliet, receiving a potion from the apothecary Fu Chang, consumes the potion and is transformed into a disfigured cow creature. Arbuckle, upon encountering her in this state, jumps out a window and kills himself. Capulet, after seeing Arbuckle's dead body on the ground, bursts into the room, pins Juliet on the bed, and threatens her: "I'm going to kill and fuck you at the same time." Tromeo enters the room and intervenes, and, in the fight that follows, the lovers use a variety of household appliances and materials—even a copy of the Yale Shakespeare—to beat down Capulet. The scene becomes a physical manifestation of Juliet's conquering her father and the oppression and wrong he has caused her by using a variety of distinctly modern products, and so it is not only fitting but empowering that Juliet kills Capulet by plugging in the monitor that Tromeo and Juliet have encased Cappy's head in through the course of the fight. Thus, Juliet finally

defeats Capulet and rids herself of the menacing power that had been controlling her, and the lovers have finally earned the freedom to live their lives however they see fit.

Kaufman, however, does not allow the lovers to enjoy their newfound freedom for long. After they defeat Cappy, the two stand outside with one another in momentary bliss before the fact is revealed to them by their (shared) mother that Tromeo and Juliet are in fact brother and sister. They stare at one another briefly before Juliet says, “Fuck it, we’ve come this far,” and the two run off together. The obstacle of incest, while a major taboo in modern society, is not an issue to the two lovers after what they had to come through to be together, and so it becomes nothing more than a bump in the road that they choose to ignore. At the same time, the final scene returns to the ideas of incest that Sammy raises in the first scene of the film. Thus, to have the freedom to be with one another, Tromeo and Juliet revolt against the idea of normalcy established at the beginning of the film.

The happy ending, though a strange one, is a major departure from Shakespeare’s play, and so is the epilogue that Kaufman adds to the film. The epilogue places the two lovers in the imagined Tromaville, New Jersey, locating Tromeo and Juliet outside of Manhattan and away from everything that stopped them from being together before. At the same time, the two protagonists are still within the shadow of the area and society they escaped from six years before. The family, complete with Tromeo and Juliet’s mutant inbred children, enjoys a barbeque and the happy ending that Shakespeare’s play never had. Even though

Tromeo and Juliet have found what they consider a normal life, the last scene highlights its irony of as an incestuous relationship resulting in mutant children seems like the antithesis of a normal life. Even in the ending, Kaufman does not take a stance on the issues; he does not endorse the incestuous relationship, nor does he vilify it. Instead, Kaufman ends the film in the same manner that he began it: raising questions without offering answers.

The choice of having a happy ending is not new to interpretations of Romeo and Juliet, but it does serve a specific purpose within the scope of Kaufman's film. The irony of the epilogue reinforces the rest of the film, even though the two lovers have found their peace, it is one that by modern standards of society would never be allowed to exist. The epilogue closes the film in a distinctly ambiguous manner; the ending forces the audience to consider the film they have just watched. Kaufman ends the film continuing the questioning that was prominent throughout. As Margaret Jane Kidnie notes:

By constantly, and deliberately, wrong-footing its audience, and drawing into question at every turn complacent and restrictive assertions of 'normal', *Tromeo and Juliet* jolts its viewer out of mute complacency, challenging them to reflect upon, and interrogate further, the belief systems on which structure of power are premised. (115)

Thus, even in offering a happy ending to his film, Kaufman does not really resolve any of the issues he raised. Tromeo and Juliet may have conquered Capulet and earned the right to live their supposedly normal life, but the audience

is left to question how Tromeo and Juliet could see it as such. In turn, Kaufman leaves his audience to continue questioning and exploring the issues that Tromeo and Juliet presents them with. At the same time, he introduces another issue that is central to the film and seemingly any late twentieth-century production of Shakespeare made towards the end of the twentieth-century: the status of Shakespeare and the idea of what actually defines a work as Shakespearean.

Troma's Shakespeare: Finding the Bard in the Madness

From the opening moments, Tromeo and Juliet works directly against what the audience would expect from a production of Shakespeare's play. The prologue of the film begins with narration by a British voice, one the audience might expect to be a dignified reader of Shakespeare's work. The narrator is quickly revealed as Lemmy from the British heavy metal band Motörhead. This is only a small twist for the beginning of the film, but it is one that is indicative of the greater differences the film makes from Shakespeare's play. Lemmy and Motörhead have ties back to the punk culture that Kaufman utilizes, and from the opening prologue the film announces that this most definitely is not Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. It continues introducing all the characters with quick vignettes while their name and relationship to the other characters are displayed on the screen. The vignettes are often comic or crude, and these brief cameos help set the tone for the audience. This brief prologue culminates in the title screen, which reads "Romeo and Juliet" in script placed on a background resembling parchment. The audience only sees it this way for a moment before

the name “Tromeo” overwrites “Romeo” in red graffiti, complete with harsh-sounding guitar chords. Kaufman thus announces to his audience that the film they’re about to see both is and is not Shakespeare. Thus, Tromeo and Juliet announces that the film is unique, and it lives up to this claim throughout.

While the prologue delivered by Lemmy is Shakespeare’s original prologue from the play, the language the characters use in the following scene is anything but Shakespeare’s. The first scene in the night club uses colloquial language, and this juxtaposition between Shakespeare’s language in the opening and the modern-day language of the night club emphasizes one of the major issues of the film. Unlike Luhrmann’s film, which maintained and preserved Shakespeare’s language, Kaufman and Gunn chose not to write a script using solely Shakespeare’s language. This resulted in the characters mostly using contemporary, colloquial language, except in certain scenes from Shakespeare’s original text that were too significant to eliminate. Even in these scenes though, some of the dialogue is written only to resemble Shakespeare’s style, as the dialogue is obviously Kaufman and Gunn’s. This is apparent in their version of the balcony scene, which actually takes place in Cappy Capulet’s Time-Out Room. When Tromeo sneaks in the room and approaches the glass case, he utters the line, “What light from yonder Plexiglas shines?” A few moments later in the scene, Juliet delivers Shakespeare’s actual “What’s in a name?” speech to Tromeo, and soon after that the two revert to the colloquial language used throughout the majority of the film. This scene is an excellent example of the juxtaposition that the language reinforces throughout the film. There are some

speeches that are known and recognized as Shakespeare, such as Juliet's speech in the scene, and Kaufman and Gunn recognized that to raise questions in a film based on Shakespeare they had to utilize some elements that are innately Shakespeare among the film's elements of parody. These elements are so ingrained in the audience's mind that they represent what Shakespeare is, and Kaufman and Gunn chose to maintain them to highlight the aspects of the film that were Shakespeare and take full advantage of what these well-known pieces of Shakespeare could represent. By introducing these elements, Tromeo and Juliet makes the audience constantly question the status of Shakespeare, his works, and his language by introducing some of the most well-known parts of Romeo and Juliet and then immediately creating a contrast with either the mock-Shakespearean tongue or with the film's contemporary language.

Though the film keeps some of Shakespeare's most important passages, maintaining them didn't mean that the film was trying to be a Shakespearean reproduction. Kaufman's intent was to raise questions through the varied use of language in the film. In another scene, as Margaret Jane Kidnie points out, "When Juliet...says to Tromeo, 'Parting is such sweet sorrow', it is unclear whether she is delivering the line as Shakespeare's heroine, or simply using a well-known Shakespearean quotation that is especially appropriate to her present circumstances" (Kidnie 103). As a result, this ambiguous use of the language constantly makes the audience question the status of Shakespeare at the end of the twentieth-century. The characters' use of Shakespeare's language, their imitation of it, and even their departure from it, all force the audience to consider what is

and isn't Shakespeare. Is Shakespeare a thing? The question of whether Shakespeare's words and ideas are a commodity to be used, such as Kaufman does, or whether Shakespeare's work is high art that shouldn't be "desecrated" with such base imitations and appropriations becomes a focal point of the film. Tromeo and Juliet calls into question the status of Shakespeare and, as a result, the film almost demands for the audience to consider what it means to define a work as Shakespearean.

Kaufman raises this issue of Shakespeare's status, but he never really offers the audience an answer as to what that status is. He instead challenges the audience to find these answers for themselves. Kaufman's choice of creating an epilogue in the film strengthens this challenge. Tromeo and Juliet uses brief pauses from the action to introduce each act of the film, accompanied by Lemmy's continued narration. The introduction of each act encourages the audience to draw a direct connection to Shakespeare's play, but then Kaufman raises questions again by completely changing Shakespeare's ending and adding an epilogue to the film, something that Shakespeare's play never had. By the time the audience reaches the epilogue, there is no clear idea what statement Kaufman intended to make about Shakespeare in the film, and as Kidnie noted when discussing the power structures of the film, the audience is then left to further ponder the issue of Shakespeare's status.

Possibly one of Kaufman's most interesting choices is the brief final scene of the film, which portrays actor Brian Fox, dressed to resemble Shakespeare, laughing as the scene fades to black and then into the credits. The laughing

Shakespeare is a fitting end to Kaufman's Tromeo and Juliet. After constantly drawing the status of Shakespeare and the very idea of what Shakespeare is into question throughout the film, it closes with a simple image of a laughing Shakespeare. Kaufman doesn't offer any answers with this move, but he actually shows his audience that this was his intended message all along. The image could be viewed as Shakespeare laughing at the film's ludicrousness or it could be seen as insinuating that Shakespeare would have enjoyed Kaufman's production of the film (harking back to the idea in the film's tagline of the things that made Shakespeare great). Either way, it does not answer the issue because Kaufman did not want to answer it; he wanted to introduce it. Kaufman's film raises tough questions, and it is quite possible that Kaufman did not even know the answers to the questions he was raising. Tromeo and Juliet, much like many other of his films, introduces a variety of ideas, problems and commentaries to its audience in order to make the audience aware of them. Thus, the laughing Shakespeare provides one last image at the end of the film to keep the audience thinking about these issues and problems long after the credits have rolled.

Tromeo and Juliet is hard to define in terms of a simple comparison to Romeo and Juliet, especially since the film announces from the beginning that it is more Kaufman than Shakespeare, and maintains that premise throughout the film. The film is a distinct appropriation of Shakespeare's play, because though it is a unique film, Tromeo and Juliet can by no means be considered its own entity. Kenneth Rothwell tried to define the film by comparing it to several Playboy productions that use Shakespeare's plays as a premise, but these are nothing more

than soft-core pornography meant for a late night crowd. Rothwell lumps these and Tromeo and Juliet together, referring to them all as “Shakespeare movies of no kind whatsoever” (218). This is not an accurate treatment of Kaufman’s film at all, because even though the film has several disgusting elements, underneath the gross-out is the question of the status of Shakespeare in modern society, something that no Playboy production accomplishes or even attempts. Tromeo and Juliet’s purpose is not to simply entertain; neither is the film’s purpose to serve only as a vehicle for Kaufman’s grotesque ideas. Instead, it accomplishes a great deal more by commenting on late twentieth-century society and challenging the audience to consider the issues the film raises. It makes the audience continually question what is Shakespeare, is Tromeo and Juliet Shakespeare, or do either of these questions even matter? Obviously, Kaufman’s style and delivery of the material are not meant for everyone, especially considering the specific audiences he draws to his films. However, it is foolish to simply dismiss Tromeo and Juliet as nothing more than trash. Kaufman’s film uses a unique approach and style to make its audience question the very idea of what defines Shakespeare and why we hold his works in such high regard. At the center of the film is the challenge to the audience to find the answer to this question, and it is this that makes Tromeo and Juliet much more than a “Shakespeare movie of no kind.”

CHAPTER FOUR
BARTKOWIAK, ACTION, AND HOLLYWOOD SHAKESPEARE

Andrzej Bartkowiak's Romeo Must Die (2000) is one of the best examples of the move towards the genre of Hollywood Shakespeare, which began to develop towards the end of the twentieth-century and continues today. The film sits at the other end of the spectrum from Romeo + Juliet, and it offers some answers to the questions raised by Tromeo and Juliet. Romeo Must Die is exactly what Romeo + Juliet did not want to be perceived as, a film that was meant to do nothing more than entertain by using some aspects of Shakespeare's play. In both Luhrmann and Kaufman's films, Shakespeare's original themes from the play were intertwined with aspects of modern society and popular culture, most notably the focus placed on the American capitalist society. This intertwining was done in an effort to either preserve or question Shakespeare, but in Bartkowiak's film, Shakespeare seems to be swallowed up by the commercial and capitalist aspects of the film. As a result, Romeo Must Die stands at the opposite end of the spectrum from Romeo + Juliet. Luhrmann's film worked to bring Shakespeare's classic play to a new audience by utilizing aspects of modern society in a modern setting; Bartkowiak's film uses some elements of Shakespeare's basic plot to create a film that really intended only to entertain its audience.² Because of this approach, Romeo Must Die stands out as one of the prime examples of the

²It should be noted that it would have been pointless to make another film in the same vein as Luhrmann's four years after *Romeo + Juliet* was released, so expecting *Romeo Must Die* to be a film of the same breadth and scope as Luhrmann's is an unfair basis of comparison for the film.

movement towards Hollywood Shakespeare: films that take Shakespeare and use his ideas and works to create a film to entertain audiences without making any effort to preserve Shakespeare's works.

Defining Romeo Must Die as Hollywood Shakespeare is by no means saying that the film is irrelevant to the field; it actually means quite the opposite. Romeo Must Die is an excellent example of films in which American economy and capitalism essentially consume art to create an entirely different product. Critics and scholars often decry such works as Romeo Must Die for their lack of worthwhile contribution to the academic dialogue; still, unlike Tromeo and Juliet, Romeo Must Die received attention from the critics because it was a major studio release. However, like Tromeo and Juliet, there is little scholarship on the film, and what scholarship there is tends to focus more on the racial and sociological aspects of the film. Regardless of the lack of scholarship and the perception that Romeo Must Die doesn't further the academic dialogue, the film is representative of what one could describe as the Hollywood Shakespeare genre. Shakespeare is consumed by the other aspects of the film, but even so, the influence of his work is prominent throughout the film. Romeo Must Die allows the audience to witness how Shakespeare can subtly influence a work, even if the film tries to become its own entity separate from Shakespeare. By claiming any tie to Shakespeare, the film immediately begins to utilize certain conventions, whether intentionally or not, because the basics of the play are so ingrained in our mindset that it is almost impossible to make a film that references Shakespeare in only one small manner. The film itself is at best an extremely loose adaptation of Shakespeare's play, but

there are elements of the film that do hark directly back to Shakespeare's work. It is these elements that make the discussion of Romeo Must Die worthwhile. This makes Romeo Must Die an excellent example of how the elements of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet work in a film that tries to be anything but Shakespeare.

Romeo Must Die paints a glorified and violent image of two crime families striving to reach the ideal of American success, while also navigating the issues of racial conflict and violence that still permeate American society and linger some fifty years after the Civil Rights Movement. Romeo Must Die does take some bold steps forward by utilizing racial lines to establish the conflict of the film. This is an issue that both Luhrmann and Kaufman incorporated into their films, but neither made it a central source of conflict in their films. Therefore, while Bartkowiak's film lacks a deep message for its audience—its main goal is to entertain—its examination of Shakespeare, race, and capitalism throughout the film's events create a commentary about Shakespeare and Hollywood that the audience might not expect, or find, when watching Romeo Must Die. By uniting these different elements together in one film, Romeo Must Die offers a snapshot into the late twentieth-century Hollywood mindset where nothing is sacred and everything is fair game.

Modern Stars for a Modern Audience: Catering to a Hip-Hop Culture

Much like Luhrmann, Bartkowiak wanted to draw an audience, so he needed well-known actors to portray his modern-day Romeo and Juliet whom he

named Han Sing and Trish O'Day. Since Romeo Must Die pulls heavily on the conventions of the action genre, Bartkowiak's actors had to be talented and able to thrive in the action sequences of the film. With this in mind, Bartkowiak cast Chinese action star Jet Li and the late R&B singer Aaliyah for the roles of Han and Trish. This casting move worked, as the film grossed roughly \$55,000,000, making Romeo Must Die "the second highest gross[ing] of all Shakespeare based films" (Lee 835). The only film to gross more was John Madden's 1998 film, Shakespeare in Love.

Even though the film is considered successful in comparison to other Shakespeare films, the matter of defining the film as based on Shakespeare becomes more convoluted due to the fact that Romeo Must Die is often considered a vehicle for its two stars, the five-time Chinese wushu champion Li and the late R&B singer Aaliyah. In many ways, the film fulfilled this label, as it was the first English-speaking lead role for Li and the first major film role of any type for Aaliyah. The film takes full advantage of both leads' respective skills: Li is featured in several complex fight scenes and Aaliyah is seen showcasing her dance skills in a variety of scenes; Bartkowiak also took advantage of her singing talent as she recorded four songs on the film's soundtrack. In some of the film's scenes, Li and Aaliyah are actually placed in a scenario together in an effort to showcase each others respective skills. One such scene pits Li's character Han against a female opponent, and after telling Trish that he cannot hit a woman, he then incorporates Trish into the fight as a weapon, performing his martial-arts moves through her to defeat his opponent. Later in the film, the two are placed

together in a dance club scene where they move onto the dance floor as Trish tries to teach Han how to dance. Scenes like these help the film showcase each lead's talents not only individually, but with the help of the other as well. These scenes work to place a focus on making the audience view the two characters together as a pair, separate from the war between their families and, as a result, separate from the other characters of the film. Both Luhrmann and Kaufman's film worked to isolate the lovers from their families and give them a separate identity, and Bartkowiak's film arguably is the best at achieving this isolation. As they leave their family identity behind, the two work together in an effort to move beyond the differences of their families and resolve the violence that exists between them.

It is obvious that casting these two actors was one of Bartkowiak's primary intents with the film, and for audiences looking to see the film's two stars doing what they excel at, Romeo Must Die didn't disappoint. Casting decisions like these show how Romeo Must Die tries to break away from the influence of other films and some of the conventions of the action film genre in an attempt to be considered as its own entity. Bartkowiak's casting of Aaliyah was one such move that was intended to bring a modern spin to both the film and its soundtrack. Another such move was casting the rapper DMX in the role of Silk, a nightclub owner in the film. While Silk has a minor role in the storyline, casting DMX added another name to the cast that the target audience for Romeo Must Die would recognize and in turn be drawn to watch. DMX, like Aaliyah, also recorded two songs for the soundtrack, one of which accompanied the opening credits. Bartkowiak wanted to create a film that emphasized action and hip-hop with some

elements of Shakespeare's play in an effort to create a fresh story, and by employing the talents of both Aaliyah and DMX, two well-known hip-hop singers, the film makes a visible effort to attract an audience familiar with the hip-hop scene.

However, attempting to create a film that resists being classified as both a Shakespeare film and an action film becomes quite difficult, especially considering the use of the name "Romeo" in the title and the multiple action sequences in the film. In trying to create its own identity as a film that exists outside of these genres, Romeo Must Die fails; the film actually pulls many elements from both, whether intentional or not. It is almost impossible to label a film as action or Shakespeare and then try to break away from the conventions of both genres, and so what resulted was a film that blended old and new in an effort to create what producer Joel Silver described as a film that shows "interesting relationships." The film was meant to focus on "Characters [and] how they relate to each other. [To] Make a story that's fresh and then incorporate the action into it." With this goal in mind, Bartkowiak's task was to create a film that lived up to these expectations, but to accomplish them and create a truly new story would be a challenge.

Hip-Hop Shakespeare: A Modern Spin on the Timeless Tale

Romeo Must Die is different in terms of the film's setting because it was not limited by the same means as either Luhrmann or Kaufman's films. Bartkowiak's film had a large budget that Kaufman's film lacked, and at the same

time, there was no need for Bartkowiak to create a modern version of Verona as in Luhrmann's film. This allowed Romeo Must Die a freedom to give the film a setting that would act not only as a base for the film's plotline, but would actually help drive its action throughout the film as well. The decision was made to set the film on the West Coast of America in the San Francisco Bay Area in California, and the film makes an effort to focus the audience's mindset on the city of Oakland through the film's various references to the Oakland Raiders professional football team. The choice to set the film in the Bay Area immediately establishes Romeo Must Die with a variety of American societal constructs. The city of Oakland provides a recognizable setting for an audience that would be familiar with several of the film's aspects, and draws a direct connection to a city that hosts an NFL team.

Setting the film in the Bay Area also helps establish a base for the feud by invoking similarities to the Rodney King riots in 1992. The film establishes the long-standing basis of the violence between the two families by drawing on the audience's pre-existing knowledge of the King riots. By creating a connection to the riots, the film pulls on recognizable events to establish the long-standing feud to the audience, taking advantage of the fact that "When the Simi Valley jury announced its not-guilty verdict and South Central Los Angeles exploded with decades of suppressed rage, Korean Americans became the primary targets of the most destructive urban uprising in US History" (Kim 167). Though details are different, anyone familiar with the riots would recognize the influence in a film made only eight years later. Romeo Must Die establishes the two warring sides of

the feud as the Chinese Sing family and the black O'Day family, exchanging the Korean Americans for Chinese; as James Kim notes, "this...displacement is facilitated, of course, by the tendency of the US racial imaginary to efface differences between distinct Asian and Asian American subgroups" (167). The film uses this tendency in order to establish the family lines so the audience would draw a connection to the riots, and also so the film could utilize Jet Li as its protagonist by having the Sing family reflect Li's actual nationality.

Romeo Must Die emphasizes this idea of lingering resentment and violence as a result of the riots, making it one of the reasons behind the war between the Sings and O'Days, but it doesn't rely on this idea to drive the plot. Like the other two films, Bartkowiak's film makes economic competition one of the central aspects of the feud, combining it with the racial lines effectively to polarize the families against one another. Unlike the other two films though, Romeo Must Die sustains this economic competition as a major part of the film's plot. In true action film fashion, the plot of Romeo Must Die employs several twists and pitfalls resulting from a variety of unsavory business tactics, such as blackmail, extortion, and murder, to spur the competition forward. Whereas extortion and blackmail were a result of the feud between the Capulets and Ques in Tromeo and Juliet, the extortion and blackmail of Romeo Must Die actually results from the economic competition between the two families. The Sing and O'Day families are fighting to gain control of waterfront property to sell to Jewish investor Vincent Roth, who plans to bring an NFL expansion team to the area he has just acquired with the help of his business partners. This economic

competition to achieve the American dream carries the film from almost beginning to end, as the action continues to build as the families move closer to completing their deal with Roth under the deadline from the NFL. The film centers itself on the American dream by stressing the need for success and a secure life that each family is striving for, and the choice to fix this representation of success as an NFL expansion team reflects a notion of reaching success in America through the world of professional sports.

Amid these two warring families stands Bartkowiak's version of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Han and Trish. The son and daughter of the respective heads of their families, each has overcome hardship resulting from their families before the film even begins. Han, for instance, has been imprisoned in Hong Kong for withholding evidence that would have put his brother and father in jail, instead allowing them to escape to America. On the other hand, it is clear from the reactions to her family in her first scenes that Trish has tried to separate herself from her brother and father and the criminal actions that they are a continued part of. Han and Trish are introduced into the film as separate and isolated from the rest of their families, and throughout the film an effort is made to emphasize this isolation not only from their families, but from the rest of the film's characters as well. This isolation, of course, is one of Shakespeare's original themes he explores throughout the play, but instead of isolating the pair as youthful, reckless lovers, Romeo Must Die places the two in isolation so that they can unravel the mystery of their brothers' deaths and drive the plot forward.

The pairing of Han and Trish adds an interesting dynamic to the film because few if any films in the action genre had prominently paired a male Asian lead actor with a female black lead actress. Thus, Romeo Must Die achieves the isolation of the two characters not only from the other characters of the film, but from pairings in other action films as well. The film succeeds in separating itself from other action films in this respect; however, even though their isolation is meant to display the bond shared between the two and emphasize their relationship with one another, the film falls flat in creating some type of romantic chemistry between the two. The only real romantic moment of the film occurs in the final scene of the film, when, as James Kim describes it, “Han is climatically reunited with Trish, with whom he shares a scintillating, long-awaited, deeply passionate, completely platonic hug” (158). Kim’s sarcastic tone resembles that of most audience members who may have expected a love story to unfold throughout the film, an idea the film’s advertising scheme emphasized. Whether the absence of romance in the film was intentional or whether it was a lack of chemistry between Li and Aaliyah, Romeo Must Die sacrifices this love story in exchange for a broader focus on the main plot and the action sequences that unfold. In other words, the film fails to bring in the main recognizable aspect of Shakespeare’s play, instead centering the film around the feud between the two families.

While the film fails to utilize the theme of love that Shakespeare’s play made central, Romeo Must Die does take advantage of several other general themes. The film notably pulls on the conventions of other action films, while also making use of popular culture and themes from Shakespeare. A study of the

film's intertextuality reveals the heavy reliance on pre-existing sources. In one of the first scenes of the film, Han gets word of the death of his brother Po (Jon Kit Lee) while he is in prison. Han then incites a one-man riot, resulting in his being dragged into solitary confinement, where he takes down several armed guards while being suspended in midair, escapes the prison, and departs Hong Kong for America. As Kim notes, "Prison is the movie's synecdoche for Hong Kong—an age-old orientalist trope not without relevance for the movie's self-understanding as intervention in the process of globalization" (155). Thus, the film utilizes one of the common motifs of action films and, at the same time, gives the film a distinct American identity. This sequence follows other conventions of action films: neglecting to give an explanation of how Han could escape the jail without being detected or pursued, and how an escaped criminal could board a plane for America and leave Hong Kong without incident.

While the film employs a variety of action-genre conventions, it does not rely only on these to drive the film. The conflict in Romeo Must Die, as previously mentioned, is driven by economic competition and the violence that results from it. As the film unfolds, Trish's brother Colin (D.B. Woodside) becomes a casualty of the war between the two families. The continued violence pushes the tension between the two families to new heights as the events of the film unfold. One interesting move in the film is that Ch'u Sing (Henry O), Han's father, and Issak O'Day (Delroy Lindo), Trish's father, have a few direct, civil conversations in various scenes with one another, unlike Shakespeare's Capulet and Montague who are only seen either fighting one another or dealing with the

repercussions of their feud. During the first exchange between the two, Issak expresses his sorrow for Ch'u's loss of his son, but Ch'u assures him that regardless, the competition for the waterfront will continue. This scene occurs towards the beginning of the film and establishes how fierce the competition actually is. The next time they meet is outside Roth's office after Ch'u has closed his portion of the deal with Roth. In the scene, Ch'u returns the condolences to Issak over his son's death, but he delivers these condolences in a smug manner. This is representative of a move in Romeo Must Die, similar to one in Tromeo and Juliet, to define one of the two families as either evil or definitively wrong in their part in the feud. Romeo Must Die, however, makes Ch'u Sing, the film's vague version of Montague, serve in this role, unlike Cappy Capulet in Kaufman's film. While the film echoes some versions that came before it, the decision to make Ch'u more of a true villain in the film shows one instance in which the film tried to depart from its predecessors. The departure is not groundbreaking by any means; it is more of a superficial change between the roles of the two family patriarchs than a real alteration to the story. It does, however, establish the conflict of the film and follows the conventions of many films by creating a basic plot of good versus evil, or at least focusing on the lesser evil prevailing.

As their fathers compete with one another for control of the waterfront, Han and Trish stay focused on unraveling the mystery behind the murders of their brothers. Though chance brought them together in their first meeting when Trish enters a taxi cab that Han hijacks, Han is led to Trish again as he continues

investigating the death of his brother. The film continues to bring Han and Trish together, and the events that begin to accelerate after the death of Trish's brother force them to work together. The film establishes the death of both Po and Colin originally as the result of interracial violence, but as Han and Trish begin to understand the events unfolding around them, they discover the truth behind the struggle between their families. At the film's climax, "Han and Trish discover that what had seemed to be interracial violence was in fact intraracial violence: Han's brother was killed by order of his own father...Trish's by the lieutenant of her father's gang, Mac (Isaiah Washington)" (Kim 156). Han's brother was actually killed by Kai (Russell Wong), Ch'u's right hand man and Han's (formerly) close friend, on orders from Han's father. Instead of being Shakespeare's feuding Capulets and Montagues, the Sings and O'Days embody the attempt to reach the American dream, forfeiting all family and racial ties in favor of achieving economic success. The film then condemns the idea of realizing the American dream through these means by allowing both Han and Trish to exact revenge on their brothers' killers; Trish actually saves Han by shooting Mac, and then Han defeats Kai in the film's climatic battle scene. Thus, in the film's final scenes Han and Trish are able to exact revenge for the death of their brothers, something that Shakespeare's lovers could not accomplish while following the events that led to their tragic end.

It is notable how both Ch'u and Issak are portrayed in the film's final scenes. Mac unveils his true intentions after Issak has proposed to Roth that he become a partial owner of the NFL franchise they plan to bring to the area,

shooting Issak and going on a killing spree. Throughout the film, Issak has made it clear that even though he has lived a life of crime, he wants to change all that and lead an honest life for his children, and so he attempts to accomplish this by becoming a partner in the venture for the NFL franchise. Issak represents an idea of action films, as well as the American mindset, that even though he has committed great wrongs throughout his life, he still has the opportunity to do accomplish something worthwhile to redeem himself at least partially. Standing opposite him is the ruthless Ch'u, who ordered the death of his own son because Po was standing in the way of Ch'u completing his portion of the deal. Unlike Issak, Ch'u does not seek, and therefore loses the opportunity, to redeem himself. His actions and guilt lead to his suicide at the end of the film as the only possible means of redemption that Ch'u has available, but even this is nothing more than a token gesture for Po's life and the violence Ch'u has caused throughout the film. The two fathers both embrace their quest to gain economic prosperity and success, but they represent two ends of the spectrum: Ch'u will let nothing stop him from getting what he wants, whereas Issak's motives are not for profit, but for family. Thus, the film manages to establish the common Hollywood formula of good versus evil, even among the violent competition between mob bosses and crime syndicates.

This idea is reinforced as Issak lives after being shot by Mac in Roth's office. On the other hand, Ch'u's fate is not as fortunate as Issak's. Han confronts his father after the climatic battle with Kai. Ch'u asks him if he will kill the father to avenge the son. Han informs him that he has already avenged Po, and as he

leaves, Ch'u kills himself to avoid being taken to jail. Thus the film is resolved in a tidy manner, even if the events that led to this resolution were anything but. It also ties back to the idea of fate versus choice prevalent in Shakespeare's play and the other two films. In Romeo Must Die, everything that occurs is a result of the choices made by the characters, and so in these final scenes it is clear that these events could have been avoided. So, after vanquishing their foes, Han and Trish simply walk out of the scene as the police arrive (in one of two brief appearances of law-enforcement in the film). Amid the violence, Han and Trish are allowed a happy ending that Shakespeare's lovers never enjoyed, but at the same time, it is hard to say that Han and Trish are modern representations of these two lovers; a more accurate way to describe the pair would be that Han and Trish have developed a friendship while navigating the film's events, because nothing in the film shows the audience that Han and Trish's relationship has developed into anything more.

Romeo Must Die utilizes racial relations and economic competition, two common elements of action films, as well as two concepts that permeate much of the mindset of late twentieth-century American society, to create a film and drive it with a conflict that its audience would easily recognize. By creating this recognition, the film attracted a large audience to turn a fairly successful profit but unlike Luhrmann's film, which used Shakespeare in the title and advertised the film as a modern version of Shakespeare's play, Bartkowiak's film did quite the opposite. The use of the name "Romeo" in the title is the only direct reference to Shakespeare's work; the film actually tries to be something other than

Shakespeare, but while it tries to accomplish this goal, there are elements of the film that are either reminiscent of or directly from Shakespeare's play. The crux of the issue of Shakespeare in Romeo Must Die is not how the film uses Shakespeare for its own purposes, but how even when trying to leave most of his themes behind, the film cannot do so. By creating the tie to Shakespeare through the use of the name Romeo, the film automatically finds itself operating in the genre of Shakespearean films, something that Bartkowiak may not have intended.

Wherefore Art Thou, Shakespeare?: Finding the Bard in the Action

Romeo Must Die is one of several successful films (by Hollywood standards) that use Shakespeare to create their own modern tale. Other recent films that follow similar outlines are 10 Things I Hate About You (1999), based on The Taming of the Shrew, O (2001), based on Othello, and She's the Man (2006), based on Twelfth Night. Each of these films utilizes a basic premise from Shakespeare's original plays and then works to encode that premise within a modern setting and environment. Unlike Luhrmann's Romeo + Juliet, which updates Romeo and Juliet to a modern setting, these more recent films leave behind many of the elements that compose Shakespeare's play, and instead focus on a few of the aspects that the writers and directors feel would work when trying to make a profitable Shakespeare film. Thus, these films are all indicative of the movement away from artistic renderings of Shakespeare's works and towards the idea of Hollywood Shakespeare: films that use some aspects and elements of Shakespeare's play to create a product that contains elements of Shakespeare's

plays amid an aggressively modern updating of the setting and characters. This movement is interesting because it has already provided a variety of films from teenage comedies (10 Things and She's the Man) to more dramatic and violent renditions of Shakespeare's works (O and Romeo Must Die), and may continue to do so for years to come.

The movement towards Hollywood Shakespeare is both interesting and important to consider because it reflects a trend in modern American society to turn everything into a commodity, even the works of a master like Shakespeare. This is one of the issues that Tromeo and Juliet raised, and while Kaufman's film challenges this amidst the parody, Bartkowiak's film highlights the ideas that Kaufman's hinted at. As Michael Bristol notes in his book, Big-Time Shakespeare, "Shakespeare's name, together with his image, has extraordinary currency in contemporary culture at a time when the practice of reading and careful study of his works appear to be in decline" (4). Romeo Must Die is an excellent example of this trend. The film does not claim to be a production of Shakespeare; it is not considered a worthwhile adaptation of Romeo and Juliet. The film is at its best a modern action film, very much following the formula laid out by other films of the action genre that Romeo Must Die tried to avoid. The film's only direct tie to Shakespeare is the use of the name "Romeo" in the title. Considering this, it would be simple to say that, other than the reference to the name, Romeo Must Die is its own production that situates itself neatly into the action film genre. However, underneath the surface of the film, several of the film's concepts and themes show how Shakespeare is very much a part of the

film, and how he was part of it from the moment the film identified itself with Romeo's name.

While the film, for whatever reason, eliminated the theme of love that exists at the core of Shakespeare's play, simultaneously eliminating the love that the very names "Romeo" and "Juliet" embody, Romeo Must Die sacrifices this love to focus on a broader story of racial violence and economic competition. As the film moves forward, it is obvious that there are traces of Romeo and Juliet underlying the flashy action sequences and intricate plot of violence and betrayal. The film opens with a fight sequence establishing the violent background between the Chinese and blacks, reminiscent of the brawl between the Capulets and Montagues with which Shakespeare's play begins. The war between the two families helps to drive the film alongside Roth's motives and the NFL deadlines, much as the continuing violence in Shakespeare's play forces Romeo into exile, and leads to the play's tragic end. The film situates itself in the action genre, and in doing so, it focuses on creating a plot that would take advantage of Li's abilities and also keep an audience interested with its constant action and intriguing plot. Thus, Romeo Must Die pulls out this aspect of Shakespeare's play and makes it the focus of the film, taking what many may consider a secondary plot to the story of Romeo and Juliet and making it the main emphasis of the film's storyline.

In the scene where Trish saves Han by shooting Mac, it is interesting to note the speech Mac delivers to Han informing him of his impending doom. Mac ends the speech with the line, "Sorry Romeo, but you got to die." This line is

interesting not only because it is the only reference in the film to anything Shakespearean, but also because it ties to the questions raised in Tromeo and Juliet concerning whether the characters were delivering some of their lines as Shakespeare's characters or simply citing well-known lines that had been ingrained into popular culture. Here, Mac's line fully realizes the idea raised by Kaufman by naming Han "Romeo," because it is obvious to the audience that Han is anything but Shakespeare's Romeo. This line solidifies Romeo Must Die as a film that utilizes much more popular culture than Shakespeare. Mac's use of the name "Romeo" is not meant as a reference to Shakespeare's character; his intent is to mockingly call Han a "Romeo," a name which the Oxford English Dictionary defines as "A lover, a passionate admirer; a seducer, a habitual pursuer of women." The word itself has become so ingrained in our language that, while not completely unattached from Shakespeare's original character, the word has created a more general meaning separate from the context of Shakespeare's play. This allows the film to utilize it as a slang-insult instead of a label referring to Han as the film's version of Shakespeare's young lover. Thus, even if the film tries to assert Han as the film's actual version of Romeo, the meaning the word pulls on results from its definition in our everyday language, and loses most of power to make the actual tie with the reference.

Romeo Must Die essentially rips the core out of Shakespeare's play, forsaking the love story to focus solely on the action and the feud between the two families. Even though the elements of Shakespeare in the film are more subtle than in either Romeo + Juliet or Tromeo and Juliet, the influence of Shakespeare's

work can be seen asserting itself. In trying to make the film its own entity by only utilizing a single aspect from Shakespeare's play, Bartkowiak's film falls short. However, Romeo Must Die is an excellent example of the move towards Hollywood Shakespeare at the end of the twentieth century that continues today. This move is not representative of the idea that Shakespeare is lost or art is forsaken, but it is indicative of a move by the film industry to utilize pieces of art and high culture, combine them with themes of popular culture and modern society, and in turn create films that are neither new productions nor classic adaptations. Whether this is a trend that will continue or not, it is important because it calls attention to the film industry's prioritizing profit over creating art. Society, in turn, has given credence to the idea, whether monetary or otherwise, that films like Romeo Must Die can be successful. Nevertheless, it is obvious, however successful such films may be, that by trying to fit themselves into Hollywood conventions and leaving aspects of Shakespeare's works behind, these films are not works of art comparable to Shakespeare's classic plays.

CHAPTER FIVE
CONCLUSION:
SHAKESPEARE, HOLLYWOOD, AND THE NEW MILLENNIUM

As America moves into the new millennium, the climate in Hollywood is constantly in flux. At the center of Hollywood's struggle are two competing values: art and profit. Directors and studios are necessarily obsessed with turning a profit; the top-ten grossing films are reported at the end of each week. With the constant profit and entertainment pressure applied to directors and film, attempts to create art within film are often pushed aside in favor of films that audiences will be more readily drawn to.

Romeo + Juliet, Tromeo and Juliet, and Romeo Must Die are three films that stand as excellent examples of how art and profit compete within the film industry. Each film starts with Romeo and Juliet, one of Shakespeare's most well-known and recognized plays, and using the capitalist society and popular culture that American society has become representative of, each of these has yielded widely different results that range from a postmodern adaptation to an action film appropriation, with the unique work of Kaufman standing in the middle. In each film, the competition between creating art and turning a profit is constantly at work, and as a result, each film negotiates this conflict in a different manner.

Luhrmann intended to preserve Shakespeare in his modern setting. He wanted to create a new version of Shakespeare's play and bring it to an audience that was less likely to read Shakespeare and more likely to watch MTV. By

utilizing the style and conventions of MTV and other aspects of modern society, he produced a film that would draw in his target audience. Luhrmann was constantly under pressure to change the language of the film, one of the distinct Shakespearean aspects of the film, in order to appeal to the audience so the studio could in turn make a profit. As Luhrmann proved, he could accomplish both; Romeo + Juliet maintains the language, characters, and themes of Shakespeare's play while giving the film a distinctly postmodern setting. Verona Beach became an important part of the film, as the visual images surrounding his characters helped his audience understand the play by breaking the code of Shakespeare's language, even if the audience was still unfamiliar with the actual language at the end of the film. Luhrmann's film also proved that Shakespeare could turn a profit, as it is one of the most successful Shakespeare films to date.

Whereas Luhrmann intended to preserve Shakespeare, Kaufman made Shakespeare a tool to open up commentary within his film. Tromeo and Juliet had a much smaller target audience as an independent film, but Kaufman's goal was not profit. He intended to make what he considered a work of art, taking full advantage of his gross-out style. While this would have repelled mainstream audiences, Kaufman intended to challenge the audience that did view his film as often as he could. For Kaufman, Romeo and Juliet is representative of the establishment of Shakespeare, and Kaufman revels in challenging the establishment at every opportunity. By highlighting several aspect of Shakespeare's play and setting the film in Manhattan, Kaufman gave himself the ability to raise questions about Shakespeare and modern society; Kaufman's style

is only to challenge, so there are no easy answers in the film. Instead, Tromeo and Juliet is a tool that he wanted his audience to use; Kaufman's intention is to instill his challenge within the film, and in turn pass this on to his audience; in this intention, he and the film succeeded. While Tromeo and Juliet will probably never have a place in the pantheon of Shakespeare films, Kaufman's film helps to further the discussion on Shakespeare, his influence in film, and his status in our society today.

What Kaufman questioned, Bartkowiak answered with Romeo Must Die. Bartkowiak's film is Hollywood Shakespeare; the film takes some ideas, themes and concepts from Shakespeare's play, and works to interweave them in a distinctly modern plot. Where Luhrmann brought Shakespeare's play to a new generation, Bartkowiak used it to make a film meant only to entertain. While it is considered one of the most successful Shakespeare-based films to date, the heart of the issue is whether Romeo Must Die is really Shakespeare; on the most basic level, the film is. Even when trying to create its own identity and use only limited parts of Shakespeare's play and conventions of the action film genre to create a new story, elements of both still find their way into the film. In short, the film uses Shakespeare; it leaves behind the most central aspect of the play, the theme of love, in exchange for the war between the two families, which was better suited to create the action film that Bartkowiak wanted. At the same time, it cannot fully break away from being identified as a Shakespeare film. It cannot become its own film because it claims some tie to Shakespeare in using the name "Romeo" in the title, and from that time on, the film finds itself part of the discussion on

Shakespeare in film. Although not a great film, or even a decent adaptation of Shakespeare's play, Romeo Must Die shows what happens when Shakespeare is consumed by the other aspects of the film, much like other films that define the movement towards Hollywood Shakespeare.

Romeo Must Die sits at the opposite end of the spectrum from Romeo + Juliet, but the movement from art to entertainment is not a one-way track. Luhrmann's film proved that a Shakespeare film could entertain a modern audience while still preserving Shakespeare's work; thus, Hollywood Shakespeare is not where the trend ends. But what these three films help to uncover is the battle that is being waged between Hollywood and Shakespeare/art. In a society that places an increasing emphasis on entertainment as a means of success and profit, making a work like Luhrmann's that updates Shakespeare for a new audience while still maintaining the integrity of the original play has become more of a challenge. To give in to either preserving art or making a profit may cause a film to fail in one aspect but succeed in another. The challenge that exists from this point on is to strike the balance between art and entertainment in an effort to continue to bring Shakespeare to a new audience. Film has given Shakespeare new life at a time when fewer people seem to be reading the Bard's works than ever before, and so the challenge for Shakespeare filmmakers from this point on is to continue to create new and exciting adaptations of Shakespeare's work that entertain audiences while remaining true to the original source.

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