

DENY THY FATHER, YET SEEK TO PLEASE HIM?:
SUBVERSIVE SHAKESPEARE AND THE AUTHORITATIVE DESIRE OF
SHAKESPEAREAN TEEN FILMS

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines questions of authority in teen adaptations of Shakespeare. Drawing on the fields of Shakespeare studies, film studies, and cultural studies, I focus on four Shakespeare film adaptations—Baz Luhrmann’s *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet*, Gil Junger’s *10 Things I Hate About You*, Tim Blake Nelson’s *O*, and Michael Almereyda’s *Hamlet*—and maintain that discussions of these films must be grounded in discussions of Shakespeare’s plays and of the teen film genre. By comparing Shakespeare’s plays to other early modern texts, examining early modern cultural practices, and considering the plays’ critical and theatrical histories, I argue that *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Othello*, and *Hamlet* present radical challenges to particular structures of authority in early modern England, including marriage, gender roles, racial and cultural difference, and tyranny; these plays seek a future in which traditional forms of authority are questioned, reworked, and reformed. In contrast, teen films, according to scholars of the genre, promote and uphold hegemonic values, typically represented in the form of patriarchal control. Authority operates on different levels, as the films themselves reflect the values of the adult generation and as the young characters within the films express a desire for more, not less, authority in their lives. Using these studies, I argue that Shakespearean teen films frequently present restrictive views of teen autonomy. Rather than challenge, subvert, or rebel against received social structures, these films depict young characters who yearn for parental or social acceptance; similarly, the films themselves limit challenges to

authority by presenting a return to order. In comedy, this restoration appears as protagonists learn to navigate social expectations, thus winning approval from peers and adults alike; in tragedy, the police restore authority by arriving to survey the scene and punish wrongdoers, or the media anesthetizes the tragedy by reporting it as just another story on the evening news. In this dissertation, I do not privilege Shakespeare's plays over contemporary films, but rather attempt to demonstrate how Shakespearean teen films adapt and interpret their source texts within a particular set of generic and historical conventions.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Jennifer Ireland and to my grandparents, especially Grandpa Leo, who was always proud of me and who would have read every word.

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INTRODUCTION

Terms and Conditions of the Shakespearean Teen Film

The cinematic highlight of my junior year of high school was the release of Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*. In the fall of 1996, my friend Kara and I waited weeks for the film's release. A collection of postcards that I found tucked within the pages of my *Seventeen* magazine already decorated the bulletin board in my bedroom; these postcards featured a dreamily lovely Claire Danes as Juliet and a breathtakingly gorgeous Leonardo DiCaprio as Romeo. Upon the release of the film's soundtrack, I removed the album artwork from its plastic casing and pinned it up too, so that by the time the film arrived in theaters I was eager to see how the film would use the crosses, hearts, guns, angel wings, water, and fish that appeared in this publicity. On opening night we waited in line at the Broadway Theater, a 1920s-era cinema that had recently been remodeled but scarcely renovated—springs still poked out of the seat cushions, and the balcony was off limits. The film was everything I had hoped for: exciting, beautiful, shocking, and romantic. It made us laugh, cry, and gasp with pleasure. We couldn't wait to tell Ms. King, our English teacher, about it; she told us frankly that she would stick with the 1968 Zeffirelli version. I was puzzled by her dismissive reaction, but that didn't stop me from going to see the film again the next weekend.

As a teenager growing up in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, a small college town on the banks of the Mississippi, this was my first exposure to Shakespeare outside of the classroom, and at the time I thought that it captured perfectly why Shakespeare continued to appeal to contemporary

audiences. During high school and in college at Quincy University, my out-of-class Shakespeare repertoire grew to include *10 Things I Hate About You*, released during my sophomore year of college, the films of Kenneth Branagh—*Henry V*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *William Shakespeare's Hamlet*—and Franco Zeffirelli's *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Hamlet*. A few months after graduation, I saw *O* on DVD. I much preferred the modernized versions that made the texts come alive in the present moment, and my senior seminar paper at Quincy argued that, despite the poor critical response Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* had thus far received, it was worthy of study and represented an innovative and exciting adaptation of Shakespeare.

As a graduate student in the Hudson Strode Program in Renaissance Studies at the University of Alabama, I concluded that, despite my new appreciation for textual studies and the study of sonnet sequences, the most exciting area of early modern studies was still Shakespeare on film; and, because it sparked my interest in Shakespeare in the first place, *Romeo + Juliet* and other Shakespeare films targeted toward teenagers would be the focus of my dissertation. When I told people about my project, they looked at me in either bewilderment (teen films are not Shakespeare!) or encouragement (that's so cutting edge!). But, I soon found that Luhrmann's film had earned the respect and admiration of Shakespeare scholars, while other teen adaptations of Shakespeare were being discussed more frequently. An early desire to defend these films turned into a more critical study of how, specifically, Shakespearean teen films transform their source texts in order to reach contemporary audiences. In particular, I became interested in how these films portray various forms of authority. What I discovered surprised me, as I came to realize that, while these films adapt Shakespeare's plays in inventive and compelling ways, the

narrative content of the Shakespearean teen film presents a view of authority that departs, sometimes quite radically, from its Shakespearean source.

As both an adaptation of Shakespeare and as a teen film, the Shakespearean teen film operates on several levels. As a teen film, it appeals to young audiences either through the use of particular marketing and filmic techniques or its focus on the experiences of young characters, or both. As a Shakespearean film, it adapts a play written by Shakespeare. According to Thomas Cartelli and Katherine Rowe, adaptation is a cultural process; film adaptations “reflect not only different ideas about Shakespeare’s plays and classic works more generally, but a different *cultural imaginary*: that prevailing set of fantasies, values, desires, and assumptions which effectively identifies a specific cultural moment and differentiates it from other cultural moments past or to come” (25). Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier place a similar emphasis on culture, arguing that adaptation “includes almost any act of alteration performed upon specific cultural works of the past and dovetails with a general process of cultural recreation.... [Adaptations] radically alter the shape and significance of another work so as to invoke that work and yet be different from it—so that any adaptation is, and is not, Shakespeare” (4). Adaptations change Shakespeare’s texts while relying on his cultural authority. Graham Holderness stresses the implicit value of the source text’s authority:

By “adaptation” we would normally understand a version of the story which did not simply reproduce Shakespeare’s text and Shakespeare’s words, but developed the basic story into a more or less different treatment: transferring the action to a different time and place; substituting a modern script or screenplay for the Elizabethan text; translating the play into a new form, such as the popular musical. An adaptation, we might say, is formed by composing variations on a theme. (156)

For these writers, an adaptation is different from the Shakespearean original and reflects its own cultural point of view. A teen adaptation of Shakespeare offers a “variation” on its source text

by relocating it into a contemporary setting; it reflects a “prevailing set of fantasies, values, desires, and assumptions” by using elements from the teen film genre (Cartelli and Rowe 25); and it “dovetails with a general process of cultural recreation” by showing the uses to which Shakespeare is being put in contemporary culture (Fischlin and Fortier 4). To put it as simply as possible, the Shakespearean teen film adapts a work of Shakespeare to the teen film genre; it appeals to youth audiences via marketing, casting, or music; it usually updates the play using contemporary settings, costumes, props, and even language; and it cuts or alters the text in order to focus on the experiences of its young characters.

Scholars use various terms for this group of Shakespeare film adaptations, including “teenpix” (a term borrowed from film scholar Thomas Leitch), “teenflix,” “Shake/spawn” or “Shake/spinoffs” (Keller and Stratyner 3), and “Shakesploi flicks” (Burt *Unspeakable ShaXXXspeares* xiii). I choose the term “Shakespearean teen films” for several reasons. To echo Fischlin and Fortier, the films both *are* and are *not* Shakespeare; that is, they use Shakespeare’s plots, his characters, and sometimes his words, so they are “Shakespearean.” They are teen films in that they focus on young characters and are usually targeted toward a young audience; they are released within a set of historical circumstances that connects them to other films in the teen film genre; they contain themes that are prevalent in many other teen films; and upon reception they are frequently grouped together in discussions about Shakespeare and contemporary youth. They add to Shakespeare’s cultural capital while contributing to the social significance of the plays’ roles in contemporary society. They adapt Shakespeare’s plays into a variety of settings, including a fast food restaurant (*Scotland, PA*), the streets of Los Angeles (*King Rikki*), and the suburban American high school (*Never Been Kissed*; *Get Over It!*; *She’s the Man*).

Because it is impossible to offer close readings of every Shakespearean teen film, I focus on four films in this study, released over a five year period: Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (released in the United States on 1 Nov. 1996), Gil Junger's *10 Things I Hate About You* (31 Mar. 1999), Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet* (12 July 2000), and Tim Blake Nelson's *O* (31 Aug. 2001). Although Shakespeare adaptations appealed to young viewers in previous decades—the most significant and financially successful examples are *West Side Story* (1961) and Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* (1968)—Luhrmann's film is the first in a series of Shakespearean teen adaptations, which dominated the Shakespeare film market for a decade. Douglas Lanier argues, "Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* established the template for teen Shakespeare adaptations, the signature genre" of the 1990s ("Recent" 107). This "teening" of Shakespeare," was due, in part, to "producers' increased awareness of the relationship between film Shakespeare and the captive market of the classroom, as witnessed by the nearly mandatory study guides accompanying releases of even unfaithful Shakespeare adaptations" (108). Luhrmann's film and the other Shakespearean teen films became part of a larger group of teen literary adaptations, including *Clueless*, a 1995 adaptation of Jane Austin's *Emma*, and *Cruel Intentions*, a 1999 adaptation of Choderlos de Laclos's *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*.¹ In addition to being financially successful and popular among young audiences, these teen films also helped turn several promising—and sometimes already popular—young actors into celebrities, including Claire Danes, Leonardo DiCaprio, Heath Ledger, and Julia Stiles, whose starring role in three Shakespearean teen films made her the signature star of the Shakespearean teen film.²

¹ For a discussion of these teen literary adaptations, in particular *Clueless*, *10 Things*, and *Cruel*

² To date and to my knowledge, Stiles is the only contemporary star with critical articles dedicated to her work in Shakespeare adaptations. These include Elizabeth Deitchman's "Shakespeare Stiles Style: Shakespeare, Julia Stiles, and American Girl Culture" and Robert L. York's "'Smells Like Teen Shakespirit' Or, the Shakespearean Films of Julia Stiles."

I begin my study with a discussion of Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* and continue with the three films of Julia Stiles because these four films have been among the most influential in the genre. In his annotated bibliography of teen film criticism as of 2008, José Ramón Díaz Fernández lists ninety-three entries for *Romeo + Juliet*, sixty-five for *Hamlet*, and twenty-seven each for *10 Things* and *O*; most other films include between one and fifteen entries. Quite a few of the entries mention the films only in passing, but I choose these films because the body of criticism demonstrates the high regard afforded them by critics, and I wish to demonstrate new approaches to understanding them. More specifically, I argue that discussions of these films must be grounded in discussions of Shakespeare's plays and of the teen film genre in order to understand how their radical departures from the source texts do not produce radical ideas about contemporary culture, a point to which I will return. These films approach Shakespeare adaptation in different ways: two, *Romeo + Juliet* and *Hamlet*, retain Shakespeare's language while transferring the action to the postmodern settings of fictional Verona Beach and Manhattan, respectively. The other two films jettison Shakespeare's language and transfer the action to contemporary American high schools: *10 Things* is set in suburban Seattle, while *O* is set at a private boarding school in Charleston, South Carolina. All of these films retains key aspects of Shakespeare's plays, including character development, narrative elements, and denouement, but they also transform their sources in order to focus on the relationships between the young characters and the worlds in which they live. By drawing on studies of teen films, I argue that the films frequently present restrictive views of teen autonomy, and that as a group, these Shakespearean teen films depict a yearning for authority that I find less pronounced in Shakespeare's plays; the plays, in contrast, seek to subvert or challenge early modern structures of authority.

The study of Shakespeare on film has emerged gradually in recent decades, and scholarly acceptance of Shakespearean film has been hard-won. In *Shakespeare on Film*, published in 1977, Jack Jorgens called for an interdisciplinary approach to Shakespeare adaptations, arguing that scholars should take into account the fields of literature, theater, and film. In addition to discussions of major film adaptations of Shakespeare, including films by Franco Zeffirelli, Laurence Olivier, Orson Welles, Grigori Kozintsev, and Roman Polanski, Jorgens provided a list of seventeen major films along with cast lists and short summaries that match scenes in the films to their corresponding scenes in the plays. Until relatively recently, scholars discussing Shakespeare films, like Jorgens, tended to couch their arguments with questions of fidelity while justifying the expansion of the Shakespeare canon to include films and other media texts. The 1987 issue of *Shakespeare Survey*, edited by Stanley Wells, focused on media Shakespeare and demonstrated the problems facing critics who wish to discuss film, television, and radio adaptations of Shakespeare. In his introduction, Anthony Davies reviewed the relatively slow rise of criticism on film adaptations of Shakespeare, explaining that “the motives behind the production of all films were seen to be brashly commercial,” that “the historical moment of cinema’s meeting with theatre was especially traumatic,” and that “cinema was quickly perceived as posing a threat to traditional aesthetic distinctions” (1). The journal issue itself reflects these problems by attempting to balance this relatively new form of criticism with more traditional approaches to Shakespeare: the selective filmography includes only “complete” and straightforward adaptations of the plays, and six of the fifteen feature articles have nothing to do with the issue’s special topic and focus instead on strictly textual or theatrical concerns. Still concerned with questions of fidelity to Shakespeare’s plays, other scholars in the 1980s and 1990s created elaborate taxonomies that sought to organize Shakespeare films into categories

based upon the film's or director's relationship with the Shakespearean text. In one of the most comprehensive of these studies, *A History of Shakespeare on Screen: A Century of Film and Television* published in 1999, Kenneth Rothwell offered the following scale: a film with a value of one is "faithful to [the] stage tradition or textual authority" of its Shakespearean source, a five is "realistic as cinema but conservative in textual changes," and a ten radically changes or rearranges the text (219). Only in the last decade have scholars felt free to discuss Shakespeare adaptations without focusing on questions of fidelity, so that more recent studies include an ever-expanding range of films and other media texts that adapt, cite, or use Shakespeare's plays in a variety of ways.

Thus, the study of Shakespeare on film has gradually become an important sub-field of Shakespeare criticism, despite Gregory M. Colón Semenza's assertion in 2010 that some prominent scholars and even journals such as *Shakespeare Quarterly* continue to snub the field ("Introduction" 20). And indeed, two prominent Shakespeare journals recently published issues focusing on scholarly considerations of Shakespeare for teenagers (*Shakespeare Bulletin* in 2008) and trends in studying Shakespeare adaptation (*Shakespeare Studies* in 2010). Major academic conferences routinely include panels or seminars on Shakespeare adaptations, while some focus on screen Shakespeare exclusively. The program bulletins for the meetings of the International Shakespeare Association in 2011 and the Shakespeare Association of America conference in 2012, for instance, demonstrate the range of scholarly discussions of Shakespeare's place in film and in popular culture, with seminar topics including "Global Spin-offs" and "Shakespeare's Romantic Comedies: Uses, Appropriations, and Adaptations" (ISA) and "Shakespeare and Hollywood" (SAA). In 2012, the meeting of the Northeast Modern Language Association offers a panel on "Filming Shakespeare," while an international

conference in France, sponsored by the university of Le Havre and the University Paul Valéry Montpellier III, focuses entirely on “*Othello* on Screen”; in its call for papers, the latter mentions Tim Blake Nelson’s *O* as one important adaptation to consider.

This move toward critical acceptance relies in part on the critical and financial success of Shakespeare films in the 1980s and 1990s, particularly the films directed by Kenneth Branagh and those targeted toward youth audiences (Friedman “‘To Think’” 1-2; Semenza “Introduction” 19; Lanier “Recent” 106-8). The 2008 special issue of *Shakespeare Bulletin* devotes five articles to teen Shakespeare adaptations: in addition to Michael Friedman’s introduction, two articles focus on adaptations of *Twelfth Night*, including the teen film *She’s the Man*, released in 2006; one article focuses on *The Animated Tales*; and one article offers an extensive annotated bibliography of Shakespearean teen film criticism. As a group, these essays challenge an assumption that Shakespearean teen films oversimplify or “exploit the shallow sensibility and economic viability of their primary audience” by “Bowdleriz[ing] the playtexts” or exploiting “only those elements of the text that are violent, sexual, or spectacular” (Semenza “Teens” 37). As Friedman argues in his introduction, “Far from ‘dumbing down’ Shakespeare, teen adaptations of his plays can offer new and important ways to perceive the significance of his dramatic efforts and their implications for modern times” (“‘To Think’” 5). Both Laurie Osborne and Elizabeth Klett, who write about teen film adaptations of *Twelfth Night*, argue that the films are culturally relevant and offer important insights about Shakespeare’s play. Osborne argues that “Shakespearean teen film is important as a genre whose intertextuality participates in valuable reconstructions of Shakespeare’s works” and that “Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* and its teen intertexts enable mutual insights” (“Cinematic Adolescents” 11). Klett, too, argues for this mutually beneficial relationship between teen films and Shakespeare. Shakespearean teen films,

argues Klett, “exploit certain intersections between the traditional teen film genre and the Shakespearean canon,” including “romance and heterosexual coupling” and rebellion, while Shakespeare’s cultural capital adds “legitimacy to a teen film” (71). Although I disagree with Klett’s position about rebellion in these films—a point to which I will return—her essay, along with the others in the issue, demonstrates the reciprocity between Shakespeare and teen films.

Even as studies of Shakespeare on film continue to evolve and to press for new understandings of this relationship between Shakespeare and contemporary culture, some suggest that Shakespeare films themselves are on the decline. In 2010, *Shakespeare Studies* asked a group of eleven Shakespeare scholars to explore the idea of “after Shakespeare on film” by addressing the future of Shakespeare on film and its scholarship, how newer technologies may “supplant film as the primary vehicle for disseminating Shakespeare within mass culture markets,” and how these technologies will affect pedagogy and theory (Semenza “Introduction” 19). Most of the issue’s contributors qualify the prompt, such as Thomas Cartelli, who finds “the phrase and the prospect opened up by ‘after film’ a tad preemptive” and who does not “think the cinema, which has already died as often as Shakespeare’s Cleopatra, will be truly dead anytime soon, at least as we now know it” (“Doing it Slant” 27). Despite this reluctance to embrace the premise behind the issue’s tagline, the contributors all take up the challenge in different ways. Some, such as Laurie Osborne (“iShakespeare”), Katherine Rowe (“Crowd-sourcing”), and Lauren Shohet, discuss how technologies such as Second Life, YouTube, and digital games offer new platforms for Shakespeare adaptation. Mark Thornton Burnett discusses the increasing prevalence of global cinematic adaptations of Shakespeare (“Applying”), while Richard Burt and Scott L. Newstock offer a brief history of Shakespeare on film criticism before analyzing a *Hamlet* reference in Quentin Tarantino’s *Inglourious Basterds* (2009). Courtney Lehmann

suggests that critics must excavate already-discussed films in order to find new histories. She applies her theory of “countermemory” to Luhrmann’s *Romeo + Juliet*, exploring the director’s Australian roots in order to uncover “the silent dissent of a distinctly Aboriginal voice” in the film (“Looking” 83). Lehmann argues “there is *more, much more*, to be gained from the Shakespeare film when it is wanted, dead or alive, as a means of listening to history” (86). In other words, critics should continue to search for new ways to interpret films, which can continue to offer new insights about the past. These articles all point to the ways the study of Shakespeare’s place in contemporary culture continues to evolve. I agree with the critics who do not believe the study of Shakespeare on film is going away anytime soon. In the past year, *Gnomeo and Juliet* proved that Shakespeare adaptations can continue to draw huge audiences (to date, the film has made nearly two hundred million dollars worldwide, according to boxofficemojo.com); Julie Taymor’s *The Tempest*, which was released in only a few cinemas and distributed via Blu-ray and Internet streaming (not DVD), demonstrates that film releases will continue to evolve with changing technologies; and the much maligned *Anonymous* has revived the authorship controversy by suggesting that Shakespeare did not write his plays, allowing Shakespeare scholars to debunk the theory in publications such as *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, and even local newspapers across the country, including *The Tuscaloosa News*. This latest film suggests that conversations about Shakespeare will continue outside of scholarly publications and the classroom, and that the relationship between Shakespeare and contemporary culture continues to thrive.

In “Recent Shakespeare Adaptation and the Mutations of Cultural Capital,” published in the “Shakespeare after film” issue of *Shakespeare Studies*, Douglas Lanier argues for a “reciprocal relationship between Shakespeare and mass culture,” in which Shakespeare provides

a level of “highbrow depth, ‘universality,’ authority, continuity with established tradition, or seriousness of purpose,” while “mass culture lends Shakespeare street credibility, broad intelligibility, and celebrity” (104). Lanier’s words recall the arguments made by scholars discussing Shakespearean teen films, including Burt, Friedman, Klett, Lehmann, Osborne, and others, who look to the films to understand how this relationship operates. As adaptations of Shakespeare continue to evolve, Lanier argues, critics must find new ways to understand and discuss them: “By attending to how our Shakespeare is constituted as a specific collection of qualities, intensities, and tendencies in flux at any moment in history...we may be better able to chart the ever-nomadic paths” of Shakespeare’s place in contemporary society (113). Lanier offers one way of reading Shakespearean teen films: they depend upon Shakespeare to achieve “highbrow depth, ‘universality,’ authority, continuity with established tradition, or seriousness of purpose,” while they also help promote Shakespeare’s coolness and celebrity by drawing on the generic conventions of teen films and by appealing to youth culture via casting, visual style, music, and advertising.

These generic factors are important because they demonstrate that Shakespearean teen films operate within a set of conventions that interpret the plays according to an understanding of youth culture and film history. In keeping with a trend in films more broadly, the most financially successful Shakespeare films appeal to young audiences. “Without the support of the teenage audience,” claims teen film scholar Thomas Doherty, “few theatrical movies break even, fewer still become hits, and none become blockbusters” (1). This is true of film adaptations of Shakespeare, too; teen audiences helped the financial success of Kenneth Branagh’s *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Henry V* and made Luhrmann’s *Romeo + Juliet* the highest-grossing

Shakespeare adaptation of all time (Lanier “Recent” 107; Lehmann “Looking” 78).³ Because of this financial incentive, film producers have sought youthful audiences since the 1950s (Doherty 2; Considine 6-7), leading teen film critics to determine the major films, themes, cycles, and ideological perspectives that constitute what David Considine calls the “cinema of adolescence,” Thomas Doherty calls “teenpics,” and Jon Lewis calls the “teen film.” An understanding of the teen film genre is crucial to understanding the Shakespearean teen film, for the genre influences these films almost as much as Shakespeare himself does.

In *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s*, Doherty argues that during the mid-1950s, Hollywood studio executives realized that movie audiences were no longer “pluralistic,” consisting of men, women, and children of all ages, but instead were comprised mostly of young people, who possessed “the requisite income, leisure, and gregariousness to sustain a theatrical business” (2). As a result, moviemakers began to target these young audiences, which, claims Doherty, “initiated a progressive ‘juvenilization’ of film content and the film audience that is today the operative reality of the American motion picture business” (2). Because of this focus on capturing the attention and money of a particular segment of the population, teen films are a type of “exploitation film,” a term which “refers both to the advertising and promotion that entice an audience into a theater and to the way the movie then endears itself to that audience.... A movie is said to ‘exploit’ an audience when it reflects on screen the audience’s expectations and values” (Doherty 2, 5). The term is descriptive, referring both to the methods used to attract audiences to see particular films and to the films themselves, and also analytical, as it implies that teen films exploit young audiences “in a

³ I wish to qualify Lehmann’s assertion that *Romeo + Juliet* is the highest grossing Shakespeare adaptation; it is the highest grossing adaptation that uses Shakespeare’s language, but other “loose” adaptations, such as *Gnomeo and Juliet* and *The Lion King*, have earned more money.

particularly egregious and manipulative way through subject matter that is particularly accessible or disreputable” (5). The relationship between viewers and films, in Doherty’s view, works on several levels, so that filmmakers work to give viewers what they desire to see while also attempting to shape those desires. Doherty does not see teenagers as entirely passive and malleable, however, and he concludes his book by saying that “teenagers retain a subcultural solidarity that makes them elusive marks for Hollywood’s gamesters.... Generation after generation, that autonomy has been the American teenager’s best defense against exploitation, from Hollywood and elsewhere” (212). When Shakespeare scholars such as Semenza and Friedman refer to the “dumbing down cliché,” they refer to the exploitative view of teen films: that these films unfairly exploit young audiences by assuming teens are incapable of sophisticated analytical practices and that teens passively accept whatever message film producers and marketers are trying to promote. Although I agree that young viewers are capable of various and complex readings of teen films, my own experiences—as a former teenager who watched and wrote about these films and as a university instructor who has taught and read student essays about these films—suggest that young viewers are often captured by a film’s visual style, young stars, hip soundtrack, or modernization of Shakespeare’s themes without necessarily understanding how these films transform the source texts in fundamental ways.

Jon Lewis, whose book *The Road to Romance and Ruin: Teen Films and Youth Culture* approaches teen films from a narratological rather than historical perspective, defines the “teen film” as “the principal mass mediated discourse of youth; a discourse that rather glibly and globally re-presents youth as culture” and encompasses “films about teenagers, not films targeted at teenagers” (2). Lewis focuses on narratives,

how teen films narrativize—how they give order to—the otherwise chaotic and contradictory experience of youth. These narratives historicize youth,

contextualize youth, re-contextualize youth, re-present youth. Narrative is seen here as inherently ideological, inherently social—an authorizing force in a culture that is at once systematically ridiculed and idealized by those unlucky of us on the outside looking in. (2)

Although some may take issue with Lewis's claim that adults ridicule youth culture, his approach is nonetheless useful because it addresses themes that occur across a broad spectrum of teen films, including "alienation," "deviance and delinquency," "the politics of sexuality and gender," "the politics of consumption," "the apolitics of youth(ful) rebellion," and "the regression into nostalgia" (7). These themes correspond to trends Lewis notes within American society, and he draws on statistics, historical anecdotes, sociological and psychological studies, and other theoretical works to support his ideas about the connections between youth culture and filmic narratives. Lewis's book is important to the study of Shakespearean teen films because it emphasizes the focus these films place on theme and narrative, rather than strict adherence to textual authority. By destabilizing the text and by "resituating Shakespearean narrative in a new setting or time period," Shakespearean teen films of the 1990s "recast the relationship between fidelity to Shakespeare's language, period performance, and photo-realistic mise-en-scène, so that cinematic Shakespeare might (or might not) include Shakespeare's language and almost certainly would resituate the narrative" (Lanier "Recent" 106-7). In other words, Shakespearean teen films not only occur during a particular historical moment—my study focuses on those released between 1996 and 2001—but they also "resituate the narrative" to reflect the themes and narrative elements common in teen films.

One prevailing concern of teen film scholars is the relationship between the film, the film's producers (including the director, studio, production company, marketing team, and so on), and the audience. As Steve Neale asks: "[W]hose fantasy is being enacted? To whom is that fantasy addressed? What process of negotiation and exchange, of deterritorialization and

reterritorialization is taking place?” (124). Closely related is the issue of authority in teen films—the extent to which the narratives themselves present figures of authority (and the characters’ responses to authority) and also how the films themselves serve as cultural touchstones of (primarily) dominant values. David M. Considine argues that in the cinema of adolescence, “the images we see, the plots we encounter, the recurring themes and motifs that unfold, reflect not simply the views and values of the audience, not only the attitudes and ideas of the film creators, and not just the social conditions of the day, but an intricate and interwoven association of all these factors” (11). For Considine, teen films typically reflect patriarchal desires, and often teens who rebel or experience problems do so because they lack proper role models. Although the films’ endings and depictions of teen life usually are not realistic, these films have the power to influence their young audiences and to hold adults responsible for how they raise their children. In her discussion of coming of age narratives in teen and girls’ films, Sarah Hentges argues that “mainstream coming-of-age narratives may challenge certain characteristics of adult and teen culture, but they do not fundamentally challenge these structures. Instead, they reinforce structures of power and privilege” (60). I found this to be the case in Shakespearean teen films, too, which sometimes depict teens rebelling against their parents or against social expectations of them; in the end, however, these films limit youthful empowerment and reinforce adult values.

In teen films, these limitations most often result from generational conflict, particularly between parents and their children, between teachers or administrators and their students, or between law enforcement agents and juvenile delinquents. Although it may appear that young characters seek to distance themselves from adult society, several scholars argue that the opposite is actually true. Doherty notes that teen films often depict teens who yearn for more,

not less, parental control: “Since the 1960s, the most fascinating trend in teenpics has been their palpable desire for parental control and authority, not their adolescent rebellion and autonomy”

(196). Lewis takes a similar view, arguing that

despite stylistic, tonal, industrial, and by now even generational differences within the genre, teen films all seem to focus on a single social concern: the breakdown of traditional forms of authority: patriarchy; law and order; and institutions like the school, the church, and the family. But while sociologists argue that the rapid succession of youth subcultures since the Second World War seem to have rejected the convention of authority *tout court*, the teen film has rather enthusiastically negotiated the reverse. By and large, the teen film presides over the eventual discovery of viable and often traditional forms of authority (for example: patriarchy at the end of *Rebel Without a Cause* [Nicholas Ray, 1955], law and order at the end of *The Wild One* [Laslo Benedeck, 1954], the charismatic elite at the end of *Heathers* [Michael Lehmann, 1989])—in effect, the restoration of the adult culture informed rather than radicalized by youth. (3)

Although I would qualify his use of the word “all” to suggest that teen films are homogenous and present the same themes across the board, I quote Lewis at length because his views reflect what I have discovered about the Shakespearean teen films in my study. Even though it appears that young characters in these films seek rebellion and autonomy, in fact they are searching for authority. Problems arise when figures of authority fail as role models, leading in several cases to teen suicide. Despite this failure of adults, Shakespearean teen films, like other teen films, seek to restore authority. In comedy, this restoration appears as protagonists learn to navigate social expectations, thus winning approval from peers and adults alike; in tragedy, authority is restored as the police arrive to survey the scene and punish wrongdoers, or as the media anesthetizes the tragedy by reporting it as just another story on the evening news.

This view of authority in teen films contradicts Klett’s assertion that Shakespearean teen films accurately reflect themes found in their sources, particularly as she interprets teenage rebellion: “marriages in [Shakespeare’s] plays often result from children rebelling against restrictive parents, as in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, and *The*

Taming of the Shrew. (It is no accident that all of these plays have been adapted into Shakespearean teenpics)” (Klett 71). I agree that these plays portray youthful rebellion, and in the chapters that follow, I argue that *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Othello*, and also *Hamlet* promote socially progressive views that question various figures and forms of authority. But, taking my cue from Lewis, Doherty, and Considine, I argue that these films downplay teenage rebellion in order to focus on a quest for authority and thus I disagree with Klett that teen films portray rebellion straightforwardly.

What is most important about Shakespearean teen films is that ultimately they serve the purposes of an adult culture that continues to be dominated by hegemonic values. In adapting Shakespeare’s plays to focus on the experiences of young characters, the films offer limited narratives that suggest young people’s need for more authority in their lives. These films may appear progressive, and indeed many of them have been praised by Shakespeare scholars for their innovative approaches to the source texts and for the ways in which they adapt Shakespeare for contemporary audiences while using tools available to filmmakers. As I began to learn more about teen films and to explore the particular ways such cinematic narratives unfold, however, I came to realize that teen adaptations of Shakespeare reveal many of the attitudes contained in other teen films, in particular the idea that teens desire more, not less, authority in their lives.

This discovery surprised me—don’t *Romeo and Juliet* kill themselves in order to escape their restrictive parents? Isn’t Katherine being ironic when she talks about wives submitting to their husbands? Isn’t *Othello* a tragic hero who challenges people to look beyond his skin color? Doesn’t *Hamlet* disturb and threaten the court because of his rebellious behavior? To answer these questions, I returned to the plays—not to determine whether the films are being “faithful” to a restrictive or idealized view of the source texts or to focus solely on what the films leave out,

but rather to understand how the plays led me to these assumptions, and from there to trace how and why the films depart from what I thought I knew. My study of the plays and the environment in which they were written uncovered a radical Shakespeare who worked against prevailing norms to challenge and provoke his audiences, resulting in plays that seek a future in which traditional forms of authority are questioned, reworked, and reformed; the films, in contrast, present a return to traditional structures of power and social hierarchy.

My use of the word “radical” derives from the work of Jonathan Dollimore, who introduced the idea of a “radical” Shakespeare in his book *Radical Tragedy*, originally published in 1984. Seeking to debunk the idea of Shakespeare as a universal author whose works speak, to quote Ben Jonson’s famous dedication, “Not of an age, but for all time,” Dollimore argues that the theater of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century offers “a substantial challenge; not a vision of political freedom so much as a subversive knowledge of political domination, a knowledge which interrogated political beliefs, submitted them to a kind of intellectual vandalism; radical in the sense of going to their roots and even pulling them up” (li). This idea of radicalism draws on several definitions of the word “radical,” including “of change or action: going to the root or origin; touching upon or affecting what is essential and fundamental; thorough, far-reaching” (*OED* def. 7a), which Dollimore describes by the action of pulling up political beliefs by their roots. The word also encompasses a particular agenda, “Advocating thorough or far-reaching political or social reform” (*OED* def. 7b), or, more generally, “Characterized by independence of or departure from what is usual or traditional; progressive, unorthodox, or innovative in outlook, conception, design, etc.” (*OED* def. 7c). Dollimore claims to use “radical” in this general sense: “Marked by a considerable departure from the usual or traditional” (*Radical* 274n17). His focus on power relations carries the other, more political,

connotations of the word “radical,” however, especially because he insists that the drama of early modern playwrights, including Christopher Marlowe, Jonson, Shakespeare, and others, “interrogated structures of belief which legitimated prevailing power relations, and that it often did this by seizing upon, intensifying and exposing those contradictions in the prevailing social order which it is one of the effects of ideology to efface” (lii). They did this by writing plays, even in the face of censorship from the Master of the Revels and other court orders, which limited the content of their works. “What makes an idea subversive,” claims Dollimore, “is not so much what is intrinsic to it or the mere thinking of it, but the context of its articulation—to whom, and to how many and in what circumstances it is said or written. That the theatres in early seventeenth-century England were a potentially subversive context is evidenced by the fact of their censorship” (22). Dollimore argues that, “unlike the influential movements in recent literary criticism, the response of the drama to crisis was not a retreat into aesthetic and ideological conceptions of order, integration, equilibrium, and so on; on the contrary, it confronted and articulated that crisis, indeed it actually helped precipitate it” (5). In other words, Shakespeare’s plays do not submit to a harmonious “Elizabeth World Picture,” a position advocated by E.M.W. Tillyard in 1943; rather, they point to the problems with this world picture.

Ivo Kamps summarizes this critical debate over Shakespeare’s supposed universality. On the one hand, “the prevailing sentiment...is that Shakespeare transcends his historical moment—he is not for an age but for all time—because his genius allowed him to capture what is most true, universal, and enduring in human nature” (1). On the other hand, critics more recently have “focused close attention on the various ways in which the playwright’s texts participate in, or are subversive of, or reflect on Renaissance institutional practice and ideologies designed to oppress and control the people” (1). Dollimore and Alan Sinfield associate this second method of critical

practice with cultural materialism, a theory they define in *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*:

Historical context undermines the transcendent significance traditionally accorded to the literary text and allows us to recover its histories; theoretical method detaches the texts from immanent criticism which seeks only to reproduce it in its own terms; socialist and feminist commitment confronts the conservative categories in which most criticism has hitherto been conducted; textual analysis locates the critique of traditional approaches where it cannot be ignored. We call this ‘cultural materialism’” (vii).

Cultural materialism is not politically neutral: “On the contrary,” write Dollimore and Sinfield, “it registers its commitment to the transformation of a social order which exploits people on grounds of race, gender and class” (viii). Without consciously setting out to do so, I came to understand Shakespeare’s plays according to this set of guidelines; the plays I discuss in this study—*Romeo and Juliet*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Othello*, and *Hamlet*—participate in early modern conversations about contentious issues such as marriage, gender, and social status, and overall the plays present socially progressive views. My use of the word “radical” reflects this idea that Shakespeare’s plays “interrogated political beliefs, submitted them to a kind of intellectual vandalism; radical in the sense of going to their roots and even pulling them up” (Dollimore *Radical* li).

Some argue that Shakespeare’s plays may subvert authority, but that they ultimately restore order. In an influential essay published in 1985, “Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and Its Subversion,” Stephen Greenblatt argued that the plays of Shakespeare present “subversive voices,” but that in the end challenges to authority are contained (29, 38, 45). “It is precisely because of the English form of absolutist theatricality,” argues Greenblatt, “that Shakespeare’s drama, written for a theatre subject to State censorship, can be so relentlessly subversive: the form itself, as a primary expression of Renaissance power, contains the radical

doubts it continually provokes” (45). For Greenblatt, the theater does not allow for outright resistance because of its close ties to the monarchy and to other powerful figures of authority, which limits drama’s power of subversion. More recently, however, Linda Woodbridge has argued that Greenblatt’s “insistence that power always contains subversion... has been a major stumbling-block to the recognition of radical writing in this period” (31). In *English Revenge Drama*, published in 2010, Woodbridge argued that themes of revenge on stage allow for more political resistance than Greenblatt allows: “Where the powerful can oppress and humiliate, revenge asserts honor and dignity; against oppressive authority, it asserts personal agency. In a world of inequity—economic, social, political, and legal—revenge is a blow for equality” (252-3). Neither of these critics would say that all of Shakespeare’s plays can or should be read in the same way, but that good criticism should emphasize how these broader ideas apply in each play. In this dissertation, I do not claim that all of Shakespeare’s plays are radical, or equally radical, but rather that they present radical or subversive ideas about specific forms of authority in specific instances, thus participating in cultural conversations about marriage, gender hierarchies, social status, and tyranny.

Shakespearean teen films have a different goal. Rather than use Shakespeare’s plays to confront or subvert contemporary structures of authority, these films reflect a cultural understanding of Shakespeare’s universal power to uphold traditional views of the world, to speak for common goals, or to transcend difference. To return to Hentges’s understanding of teen films, the films in my study “may challenge certain characteristics of adult and teen culture, but they do not fundamentally challenge [but rather] reinforce structures of power and privilege” (60). They do this by seeking to restore order in the wake of tragedy, by seeking a return to social harmony, or by seeking to return outsiders to the social fold. Shakespearean teen films

adapt the source texts to the turn of the twenty-first century in order to show the continued relevance of Shakespeare's plays, to connect his themes of honor, love, devotion, suffering, and loss to contemporary concerns, including the desire to escape from the prying eyes of technological monitoring and the ever-present news media, the emergence of personal autonomy within a restrictive school or home environment, the discovery of personally meaningful techniques of self-expression, the search for attention and respect in a society that rewards only the most self-promoting achievers. Underneath these modernized themes, however, lies a more basic desire to return to an idealized past. These films reveal a nostalgic desire for authority, and their young characters compromise their futures in their quest for parental control. The one comedy in my study shows the ways in which its heroine earns the acceptance she secretly seeks after admitting her own vulnerability and softening her political critique. The three tragedies, meanwhile, each respond differently to the problems of authority and control, but all three films end in their protagonists' deaths. Shakespeare's plays, of course, mandate these tragic endings, but within the context of the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries, the young characters' deaths are symptomatic of social ills to be resolved through traditional forms of order.

In the chapters that follow, I attempt to contextualize and historicize Shakespeare's plays in order to argue that—in the face of certain forms of authority including paternal and patriarchal control—they presented radical or subversive social views in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. I follow these close readings of the plays with discussions of teen film adaptations, in which I argue that the films, influenced by views of authority prevalent in the teen film genre, offer an alternate view of the plays' radical agendas. Some might object that bringing together close readings of the plays and the films in this way is unfair to the film adaptations. Friedman argues, for instance, that “if faithfulness to Shakespeare's verbal

ingenuity is the sole criterion by which such films are to be judged, they will be inevitably found wanting” (“To Think” 2), while Semenza argues that “the validity of the [dumbing down] cliché depends largely on a particular mode of reading film as adapted literature—not as film—and this mode hinges on excessive emphasis on textual cutting” (“Teens” 37). Although my study may incite criticism such as this, particularly because I do show how cuts and other alterations change the political nature of Shakespeare’s plays, I am not concerned with questions of fidelity; rather, I insist that we must know how and why the films adapt Shakespeare as they do. This knowledge reveals not only the reciprocal relationship between early modern plays and contemporary culture but also the uses to which art is being put to use by different societies in different historical moments. I agree with Semenza that these films should be read as films, not simply as adapted literature, but he misses the fact that these films often “perpetuate bourgeois ideology” (“Teens” 37) because of the genre into which they are being adapted. Teen film scholars argue that this is precisely what many teen films do, Shakespearean or not.

I am not arguing that the films cannot or should not be enjoyed on their own, as films or as reflections of and products of contemporary culture. But I do think it necessary to understand why filmmakers adapt the plays as they do; this understanding can change our views of not only the films but also of “Shakespeare.” According to Kamps, “The test of a shrewd analysis is not whether it produces the truth, but whether it can recognize what is at stake in adopting one system of representation over another” (10). In this dissertation, I try to heed this advice. I do not think that Shakespeare’s plays are inherently better than the films, that my readings of the plays are the only ways to read them, or that the films fail because they depart from what I find important about the texts they adapt; I do think, though, that the films in my study offer a particular vision of authority because of the genre into which they have been adapted. As I

stated earlier, my findings about these films surprised me; I fully expected them to be even more radical than their source texts because it seemed to me that much social progress has been made in the past four hundred years. After all, arranged marriages are no longer the norm in most parts of the world, women and racial minorities have freedoms unimaginable in early modern England, and children and adolescents enjoy many freedoms not afforded to their young ancestors. This view of the world is somewhat naïve, however; after all, people continue to suffer injustice and inequality. Censorship still happens. Parents continue to fail their children, but instead of rebelling against adult culture, these children say they want greater accountability for wrongdoing, greater parental support, and greater acknowledgement for their accomplishments.⁴ Shakespearean teen films were created in a society that is far from perfect, but rather than challenge social structures, the films search for what is universal in Shakespeare and exploit it in order to seek harmony and peace, not dissidence or rebellion.

In chapter one, “Deny thy father, and refuse thy name”: Feuding Authorities in Baz Luhrmann’s *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet*,” I argue that Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* participates in a cultural conversation about companionate marriage. His young lovers subvert the authority of their parents and of the state in order to stake the claim that children should be able to decide whom to marry, and that marriage should be based upon mutual love

⁴ For example, Neil Howe and William Strauss, who compile a variety of polls that surveyed teens in the late 1990s, argue that “most teens say they identify with their parents’ values..., [h]alf believe that lack of parental discipline is a major social problem, and large majorities favor tougher rules against misbehavior in the classroom and society at large” (8). David Brooks says this same group of teens is hard working, organized, “extremely respectful of authority,” and optimistic; they get along with their parents, desire punishment for wrongdoers, and are goal-oriented. Patricia Hersh argues, “Kids need adults who bear witness to the details of their lives and count them as something. They require the watchful eyes and the community standards that provide greater stability. They need to be appreciated for who they are.... The kids...who do best are those who have a strong interactive family and a web of relationships and activities that surround them consistently” (363).

and respect. In the end, the play presents a radical challenge to the idea that the clan, the church, or the state should dictate the lives of children, and it also challenges traditional declarations of love, particularly as expressed through the tradition of Petrarchan poetry. In contrast, Luhrmann's film depicts Romeo and Juliet's desire to escape from the prying eyes of their parents; they fall in love because neither is satisfied with their parents' way of life, but rather than advocate for increased autonomy, the teens withdraw into solitude. The film and its marketing celebrates the timelessness of the Romeo and Juliet story by stressing the romantic arc of their short life together, but in the end it contains the tragedy through the reductive storytelling of the news media.

Chapter two, "I Want You to Want Me": Authority and Gender in *10 Things I Hate About You*," also examines marriage and romantic relationships, but from a different perspective. By looking at early modern narratives about marriage, wife taming, and female subjugation, I argue that Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* invokes these narratives in order to challenge or subvert them. Gil Junger's *10 Things I Hate About You* features an outspoken young heroine who challenges restrictive views of women, but over the course of the film her outspokenness is revealed as a mask. Although she claims to disdain teenage dating rituals and attacks the literary canon for its lack of diversity, Kat Stratford comes to use both the prom and a "dead white guy," Shakespeare, in order to regain social acceptance. Kat uses the tradition of the Petrarchan sonnet in order to apologize to her boyfriend, a move that I argue simplifies the genre and restricts the female speaker. Although it initially appears more radical than Shakespeare's play by foregrounding contemporary feminist ideals, in the end the film simplifies its social commentary in order to achieve a romantic ending, in which a comic resolution returns the heroine to the fold of high school life.

In chapter three, “*O* and the Authority of Racial Difference” I argue that Shakespeare’s *Othello* shunned convention and challenged stereotypes in order to present a tragic hero who defies easy categorization. The play exposes contradictions in society, suggesting that audiences must be attuned to their own prejudices. Tim Blake Nelson’s *O* confronts racism in the American South, but in the end the film perpetuates racial stereotypes. It does so, in part, through the visual metaphor of the hawk, which was tamed and used for hunting in early modern England. By equating the hawk with the film’s African-American protagonist, Odin James, the film shows how he, too, is tamed and controlled by his white “master,” Hugo. In a twist, however, Hugo reveals his desire to be a hawk; he believes that if he could “fly” like Odin, perhaps his father will admire him, too. In this way, *O* becomes a story about the search for parental authority and social approval, a common motif of teen films.

Chapter four, “To Rebel or Not to Rebel: Challenge and Submission in Almereyda’s *Hamlet*,” argues that Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, as a revenge tragedy, challenges and resists the authoritative structures of Jacobean society; the play’s presentation of madness performs a similar function by showing how the corrupt court cannot contain its subjects. Two words, “obey” and “rebellion,” are used throughout the play to suggest that, even when people claim to submit to figures of authority, in fact they should do the opposite, thus promoting a politically radical social agenda. Almereyda’s *Hamlet* also explores the idea of rebellion, but it arrives at a different conclusion. The film’s depiction of rebellion recalls a motif in teen films, in which rebellious teens seek parental approval. In *Hamlet*, this desire comes to be read through the nostalgic register, in which both Hamlet’s and Ophelia’s memories of the past and longing for an idyllic family life prevent them from seeking a more realistic or independent future. Their disappointment with the world prompts their deaths, but the film, rather than challenge the

authoritative structures that restricted or contained its young characters, depicts a return to the social order through the accession of a new CEO and the restrictive commentary of a news anchor. In this way, Almercyda's *Hamlet* recalls Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* in a moment of cinematic nostalgia. Although separated by time and space, the films retain a similar view of the world, in which young people may momentarily challenge the society into which they are born, but they lack the power to change it.

As a group, these four Shakespearean teen films address different forms of authority: between parents and children, men and women, students and teachers, coaches and athletes. They depict teens who may challenge figures of authority through various forms of rebellion, but in the end, the films reveal a nostalgic desire for more, not less, authority. This authority may come from a restoration of adult culture, a comic resolution, a news report, or even Shakespeare himself, who becomes the ultimate authority on all things teen.

CHAPTER ONE

“Deny thy father, and refuse thy name”:

Feuding Authorities in Baz Luhrmann’s *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet*

Baz Luhrmann’s *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet* became the most influential Shakespearean teen film of the 1990s, creating a “template” for subsequent films and proving that marketing Shakespeare to a teen audience could help a film succeed financially (Lanier “Recent” 107). The film uses a contemporary mise-en-scène, popular young stars, and an ambitious marketing campaign in order to appeal to young viewers, all while retaining Shakespeare’s language and insisting on Shakespeare’s authority by including the playwright’s name in the title. Luhrmann claims his purpose for the film was to make it “rambunctious, sexy, violent, and entertaining the way Shakespeare might have if he had been a filmmaker” (“A Note”). Shakespeare, says Luhrmann, “used all the devices at his disposal, the clash of low brow comedy with high tragedy, the use of popular song (pop music) etc. Similarly, we developed a specific cinematic language for *Romeo and Juliet* that transformed all of these devices into cinematic equivalents in order to achieve the same goal with our noisy, disparate, savage yet honest audience” (“Shakespeare in the Cinema” 269).

The result has been alternately condemned and hailed by critics. Many criticize the film’s modernized setting, the teen actors’ American accents, or the “MTV-style” filmic techniques. Franco Zeffirelli, whose own film adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* appealed to teenagers born a generation before Luhrmann’s target audience, complained that “[t]he Luhrmann film didn’t update the play, it just made a big joke out of it. But apparently the

pseudo-culture of young people today wouldn't have digested the play unless you dressed it up that way, with all those fun and games. We have to help young people face the past with honesty, courage, and greed, because we learn so much from the past" ("Shakespeare in the Cinema" 285). Zeffirelli's comments reflect the cliché that these modernized Shakespearean teen films dumb down Shakespeare's plays. Dismissing the film in this way risks missing many of the important and interesting ideas it does accomplish, and yet Zeffirelli's ideas about the past are useful; as I argue in this dissertation, we need to know something about the past and about the historical context of Shakespeare's plays in order to understand how film adaptations interpret the plays within a contemporary setting, something many critics of Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* neglect to do.¹ Over the past decade and a half, critics have discussed the film as a bold and innovative adaptation that successfully updates the play to critique contemporary society (Donaldson "In Fair Verona"), to "translate the power of Shakespeare's story to a visually-attuned generation" (Hamilton 119), or to "renegotiate the fictions of and frictions between the academic study of filmed Shakespeare and the 'popular'" (Hodgdon "Everything's Nice" 89). James Loehlin argues that the film "evinces a romantic nostalgia that is a surprising and poignant response to the frenetic excess of late twentieth-century culture" (121). Elsie Walker, who wrote in 2000 that "Luhrmann's production should be embraced into the 'canon' of revolutionary Shakespeare films" has proved prophetic, as the film is now regarded as an innovative and even canonical adaptation that sets the standard for other Shakespearean teen films (132). And yet, even though Luhrmann's film is "surprising," to quote Thomas Cartelli and Katherine Rowe (59), and even though as an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, it is fresh and exciting—as well as

¹ One notable exception is Courtney Lehmann, one of the first scholars to publish on the film; Lehmann's analysis includes a discussion of Shakespeare's source, Arthur Brooke's *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet*, which she argues bears an uncanny resemblance to the film (*Shakespeare Remains* 130-60).

“rambunctious, sexy, violent, and entertaining,” to quote its director—the film’s changes to the play reduce the power of its young characters to challenge social norms, while its marketing capitalizes on Shakespeare’s supposed universality without demonstrating the subversive potential of Shakespeare’s play. Luhrmann’s *Romeo + Juliet* demonstrates many flaws of contemporary society, but it suggests that its young characters’ only recourse is escape.

Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, I argue, presents a pair of young lovers who challenge familial, patriarchal, and even literary forms of authority, and their actions demonstrate that young people have the power to prompt social change. Jonathan Dollimore argues in *Radical Tragedy* that “[i]n the early modern period, one of the reasons why those in authority feared the theatre was because it imparted ideas and information which they, the authorities, regarded as threatening to social order” (xxx). These facts are tied directly with knowledge, which “becomes most dangerous when it is crossed with, or driven by, dissident desire” (xxx-xxx). Moving beyond the theater to a broader cultural concern about this “dissident desire,” Dollimore cites Adam and Eve in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* as a pair of lovers who “disobey, and their transgressive desire for forbidden knowledge brings death and disintegration into the world, into desire. In other words, transgressive desire is inseparable from forbidden knowledge and together they kick-start history and become the driving forces of tragedy” (xxx). The marriage of Romeo and Juliet operates in a similar fashion. Shakespeare’s play, by showing the extent to which Romeo and Juliet are willing to sacrifice their futures and the futures of their families in order to pursue the possibility of a marriage (and an afterlife) based on love instead of social responsibility, intervenes in a cultural debate about the purpose and expectations of marriage. *Romeo and Juliet*, by subverting the authority of their parents and of the state despite the consequences, challenge the practice of arranged marriage and insist that mutual love should be

the driving force of marriage. Juliet asserts the power of young women to choose their own husbands and to direct their own lives, and her actions force her father and the other patriarchs to recognize and honor her illicit marriage. Juliet also challenges the literary authority of Petrarchan poetry, as Romeo, under her tutelage, moves from passive Petrarchan lover to active participant in a loving marriage; the play begins a new poetic tradition. The lovers' dissident desire offers the possibility of social change and serves as a powerful alternative to early modern cultural practices.

In contrast to Shakespeare's play, in which the lovers challenge received poetic forms, social customs, and the authority of patriarchal society, Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* suggests that escape is the only option available to young people faced with a corrupt or confusing world. Because arranged marriage is no longer the norm in the contemporary world of the film, Juliet's choice to defy her parents appears as a personal desire to escape their way of life, not as a challenge to widespread social practices. And because our world is so far removed from the Petrarchan tradition, the play's challenge to its literary predecessors becomes a generalized celebration of a romantic poetic ideal. Rather than portray a young couple that challenges an older generation to reconsider the relationships among family life, social expectations, political maneuvering, and individual forms of expression, Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*, as a late twentieth-century teen film, approaches generational conflict and social strife as inevitable and even unsolvable. The film's Romeo and Juliet desire a marriage in which they are free to pursue happiness and privacy outside of familial influence, and Luhrmann consistently depicts them in a private space that emphasizes their alienation from the world. The film suggests that young people may escape a troubling and meaningless world through suicide, but they do not have the power to change the world into which they were born.

Teen alienation and suicide are relatively common themes in teen films. Since the 1950s, teen films have portrayed families fractured by weak parents, divorce, and a general breakdown of social norms and expectations. According to teen film scholar Jon Lewis, post-World War II American adults were “in many ways unable to cope with their own lives, let alone the lives of their teenage children. The net result of such a cultural breakdown is a mixed bag of signals regarding fidelity and diversity, community and individuality, family and selfhood” (23). As a result, teens became alienated from the adult world, withdrawing into anomie. Described by Emile Durkheim as “normlessness” (qtd. in Lewis 24) and defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “disregard of law” or “absence of accepted standards or values” (“anomy”), anomie results when young people are “unable to answer fundamental existential questions regarding the meaning of life and [is] clearly indicative of a larger and collective cultural breakdown” (Lewis 24). In other words, the world’s laws and standards hold no meaning for the anomic person, and so he or she rejects those dominant values. This rejection comes with a price, though, as Lewis points out: “At the far end of teen anomie one finds the rationality and rationalization of suicide, an alternative to coming of age that renders the prevailing romantic view of anomic youth absurd.... But what does such self-sacrifice, such a refusal to come of age, say about the adult culture?” (33). Lewis maintains that this self-sacrifice is ultimately meaningless, and that it lacks the power to change adult culture, which I argue is the case in Luhrmann’s film.

Instead of rejecting their world in order to change it, Luhrmann’s *Romeo and Juliet* instead seek solace with each other, withdrawing into a “watery cocoon” that shelters them from the world (Loehlin 121). Lewis argues that one of the “cultural determinants” that prompts teen alienation and anomie is “[t]he failure of adult society to provide adequate role models” (34). In

Luhmann's film, parents and other adult mentors fail to provide Romeo and Juliet with adequate standards by which to live, and the lovers escape their world because they reject their parents' model of adulthood. Romeo and Juliet remain separate from their world, transcending it and its skewed values. Love, the film implies, can change individuals, providing solace in a confusing and meaningless world, but the film does not suggest that theirs can "kick-start history" (Dollimore xxxi). At the end of the film, suicide becomes an escape, but instead of Shakespeare's ending that memorializes the lovers and stresses the effect of this double suicide on the survivors, the film's ending deletes most of the dialogue and concludes with a news story, suggesting that adult society will explain and contain their story, rather than learn from it.

One could argue that the love between Romeo and Juliet in Luhmann's film is subversive because in the wake of a cultural trend of divorce and fractured families, loving marriages once again appear radical; the lovers' anomie and suicides challenge their society and ours to reconsider, again, the purpose and expectations of marriage. Although the film does offer this potential, I argue that it falls short because in the end, the anchorwoman's delivery of their story on the evening news suggests that the lovers' subversive potential will go unrealized; their story, like many others, will soon be replaced by something more sensational. This is not to suggest that the film is not as good as the play, or that it does not deserve the reputation it has earned as one of the most innovative and interesting adaptations of Shakespeare in recent decades. My goal here is to show the ways in which Luhmann's *Romeo + Juliet*, as a contemporary teen film, transforms several key elements of the play; in particular, I argue that the film reduces particular social critiques offered by the play's young characters in order to stress Shakespeare's universality and transcendent power.

Shakespeare's Subversive Lovers

The young lovers in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* challenge their society to reconsider cultural norms. One way the play demonstrates the ability of young people to shape the future is through its presentation of companionate marriage as an alternative to arranged marriage.

Shakespeare's play presents a cultural shift that Lawrence Stone describes in his book, *The Family, Sex & Marriage in England 1500-1800*. Although much has been published on Stone's methods and on the family since his book was written,² his description of the changing family dynamics of early modern England proves useful, particularly in how he describes the shifts in authority and the family dynamic. These he divides into three categories. The first category, "The Open Lineage Family," lasted from roughly 1450 to 1630 and relied on family networks defined by kinship and loyalty to ancestors and living relatives. Marriage "was primarily a means of tying together two kinship groups, of obtaining collective economic advantages and securing useful political alliances" and is arranged by parents and other kin (5). *Romeo and Juliet* are born into families that define themselves based upon these norms: the Montagues and Capulets are proud of their lineage, and Capulet seeks to marry Juliet to a man who will benefit the family. Shakespeare's Verona, however, is shifting toward the second category, "The Restricted Patriarchal Nuclear Family." Under this model, which lasted from approximately

² Stone's book, published in 1977, has been criticized for its methodology, which assumes a continuity of change that many view as reductive or even historically inaccurate because the majority of Stone's conclusions are based upon aristocratic families. See, for example, Cressy 121-33, Wrightson, and Macfarlane. Dymna Callaghan takes up the charges against Stone and concludes that his work is nonetheless useful because "[f]or Stone, the modern family of capitalist development is presented as a more significant site of sexual and emotional satisfaction than its early modern precursor" (68). Some claim that Stone's assertions about the differences in emotional needs among early modern and modern families are overly generalized, but Callaghan argues convincingly that the "ideology through which these relations are constituted" are different (69). Similarly, I use Stone not to make claims about *Romeo and Juliet*'s place in history, but rather to point out that the play presents the family in such a way as to participate in an ongoing ideological shift.

1550 to 1700, loyalties “to lineage, kin, patron and local community” were replaced by loyalties “to the nation state and its head, and to a particular sect or Church” (7). Despite these shifting loyalties, the state and church upheld the power of patriarchy within the home, particularly a husband and father’s authority over wife and children (7).

Dympna C. Callaghan argues that *Romeo and Juliet* presents this shift in authority, from the feudal state represented by the family clans to the centralized state represented by Prince Escalus: “the *shifting configurations* of patriarchal law and the changing formations of desire which attend it comprise the structure and substance of Shakespeare’s text” (72). She continues, “In this case, the play articulates a crisis in patriarchy itself—specifically the transference of power from the feuding fathers to the Prince so that sexual desire in the form presented here produces the required subjectivities and harnesses them for the state above all other possible levels of allegiance” (72). To Callaghan, the politics of desire, including the love between Romeo and Juliet, are tied to the authority of the state. In the end, “Romeo and Juliet are simultaneously sacrificed to the old feudal order of Montague and Capulet and to patriarchy’s new order of the unified power of the state represented by Escalus” (87). Callaghan also claims that the love between Romeo and Juliet represents another shift in authority, one noted by Stone, from arranged marriages that benefit families socially and financially to marriages that stress love and compatibility: the modern nuclear family. Shakespeare’s play does not fully reconcile this shift, she argues, but instead presents the contradicting forms of authority. In the end, because of the tragic genre, the play is unable to resolve these contradictions, which ultimately are “subordinated...to a single ideological effect” (87). *Romeo and Juliet* has become “the iconic text of romantic love” (88), claims Callaghan, because it stages the tension between opposing viewpoints and lends itself to repetition. This repetition includes adaptations such as

Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*. I do not believe the ending is closed in this way, however, but that the contradictions are precisely the point. By presenting competing views of authoritative structures, the play allows for the possibility of a future in which the third category of family life, as defined by Stone, becomes possible.

In this third category, authority is decentralized, giving individuals authority over their own lives. According to Stone, "The Closed Domesticated Nuclear Family (1640-1800)" was "organized around the principle of personal autonomy, and bound together by strong affective ties. Husbands and wives personally selected each other rather than obeying parental wishes, and their prime motives were now long-term personal affection rather than economic or status advantage for the lineage as a whole" (7-8). They enjoyed "intensified affective bonding of the nuclear core at the expense of neighbors and kin; a strong sense of individual autonomy and the right to personal freedom in the pursuit of happiness; a weakening of the association of sexual pleasure with sin and guilt; and a growing desire for physical privacy" (8). *Romeo and Juliet*, who marry for love rather than for riches or family status, appear to anticipate this model of marriage, even if it is not fully realized in Elizabethan England. I am not suggesting that Shakespeare was cognizant of the shifts in power described by Stone, nor am I claiming that his play consciously or fully contains all three types of family patterns described above. *Romeo and Juliet* does, however, offer an alternative to both the authoritarian family and authoritarian state by presenting lovers who deny their fathers, defy the state, and marry for love and companionship, despite the social consequences. Their illicit marriage becomes recognized at the end of the play, when their fathers offer to build statues to honor their children and end the feud, thus acknowledging the cultural validity of their children's sacrifice. This union, then, offers the possibility of social transformation. Before exploring the possibilities of this ending,

however, it is first necessary to note how the lovers' choices throughout the play challenge the authoritative structures of the world in which they live.

To begin, the Capulets' desire to marry Juliet to the County Paris should be understood within the cultural norms of arranged marriages. Shakespeare wrote *Romeo and Juliet* during the mid-1590s, when noble families still relied on desirable marriages to form alliances with other families and to secure the family name and heritage. Shakespeare's play portrays a family that seeks to secure its lineage through the marriage of its sole heir, Juliet. Capulet is legally responsible for Juliet until she is married, and both he and Lady Capulet wish to see her married well. The play initially presents a caring father who values his daughter's consent in his choice of suitor, a position he reverses later in the play; this reversal demonstrates the fragile position of daughters in early modern England. Capulet's negotiations with Paris reveal that Capulet considers both Juliet's feelings and the familial benefits of the match. Capulet tells Paris that his daughter is "yet a stranger in the world," not yet fourteen. "Let two more summers wither in their pride," he says, "Ere we may think her ripe to be a bride" (1.2.8-11). He invites Paris to "woo her...get her heart.... / An she agreed, within her scope of choice / Lies my consent and fair according voice" (16-19). This scene establishes the terms of the marriage contract: the father must give his consent, and the suitor must win his approval. It is also clear, however, that Capulet cares for Juliet and wishes her to play a part in the negotiations. She must agree to the marriage before Capulet will give her away. By acknowledging Juliet's desires, Shakespeare's play suggests that her choice holds value. She is an important part of the family, and her happiness matters as much as a beneficial monetary or political alliance, which was not always the case in arranged marriages; this concern with Juliet's happiness could indicate the shift in Elizabethan views of marriage described by Stone and Callaghan.

Although Capulet stresses the importance of Juliet's opinion, her parents nevertheless expect her to marry their chosen suitor, and it is her mother's task to get her to agree. The relationship between Juliet and Lady Capulet reflects the social expectations of women to help secure the family line. As Lisa Jardine points out, noble children "were investments in a lineal future for the family, and thus had a public identity from birth, and a place in the power structure. As such they were less suitable objects of intense, possessive affection of the kind dubbed 'maternal' in our own family" (81). A mother in Lady Capulet's position was not in charge of her daughter's emotional or physical well being; she served as "custodian of the carriers of the line...the children [were] her badge of office, to be 'worn' as evidence in themselves of her wifely role" (81). In their first scene together, Lady Capulet asks Juliet, "How stands your disposition to be married?" (1.3.65). Even though she demonstrates her filial duty in this scene, Juliet responds coyly, replying that marriage is an "honour" that she "dream[s] not of" (66). Lady Capulet reminds her that ladies younger than Juliet are already mothers and that she herself was a mother at Juliet's age. Paris, she tells her, "seeks you for his love," and she urges her daughter to love him; doing so will allow Juliet to "share all that he doth possess," both his fairness and, presumably, his wealth (74, 93). She asks Juliet: "Speak briefly, can you like of Paris' love?" (96). Like her husband, Lady Capulet suggests that love should be part of the marriage equation, and the unspoken assumption is that Juliet will comply. Juliet's response allows her to assert her own point of view while also submitting to her parents' wishes: "I'll look to like, if looking liking move, / But no more deep will I endart mine eye / Than your consent gives strength to make it fly" (97-9). In other words, Juliet will look at Paris and will expect to like him, to be moved by him. If she does like him, she will not pursue a relationship, will not capture him with her eyes (a common conceit in Petrarchan poetry), until she earns her

parents' approval. On the surface, Juliet consents to the match, but her empowered "if" leaves open the possibility that she will not. She appeases her mother by using the word "consent," but the implication is that once she has earned her parents' approval, Juliet will take control of the relationship, endarting her eye, ensnaring her lover. In this scene, Juliet is established both as dutiful daughter and as conventional lover, the Petrarchan mistress who will control her beloved with her eyes.

Her relationship with Romeo overturns both of these conventions, as well as traditional hierarchies within marriage. Juliet defies her parents' expectations by selecting a husband not of their choosing; to complicate matters further, he is a member of a rival family. In her relationship with Romeo, Juliet is an active and equal—and perhaps even the dominant—partner. She is not the submissive wife concerned with preserving her family's heritage. She says, "Romeo doff thy name, / And for thy name which is no part of thee, / Take all myself" (2.2.47-9). In imagining a relationship with no names, no family history, and no outside influences, Juliet presents a view of marriage that defies the expectations of their parents and the society in which they live. She also departs from another view of women, the cruel and distant Petrarchan mistress found in poetic tradition. Juliet prefers instead to speak frankly: "Fain would I dwell on form, fain, fain, deny / What I have spoke; but farewell complement. / Dost thou love me?" (88-90). Juliet proposes marriage, presses Romeo to make the arrangements, and finally wishes she could do even more to assert herself. Using a metaphor from falconry, to which I will return in later chapters, Juliet expresses her desire to control the comings and going of her beloved: "O for a falconer's voice, / To lure this tassel-gentle back again" (159-60). Whereas a falconer is typically gendered male and the bird female, Juliet overturns these expectations. In asserting herself in this way, however, Juliet must face the consequences of her dissidence.

Juliet's relationship with her parents stresses not only her deviance from tradition but also a broader cultural critique of arranged marriage. Capulet, not knowing that his daughter has already chosen her own mate, is shocked when his wife informs him that Juliet has refused the marriage to Paris. His response is a series of questions, as if he cannot believe what he is hearing:

How? Will she none? Doth she not give us thanks?
Is she not proud? Doth she not count her blest,
Unworthy as she is, that we have wrought
So worthy a gentleman to be her bride? (3.5.142-5)

This speech reveals the expectations placed on daughters: they should be thankful for and proud of their fathers' choices. A daughter is "unworthy" of independent choice and should conform to her father's idea of worthiness. In this scene, Juliet is no longer "the hopeful lady of my earth," a beloved daughter whose consent matters (1.2.15). Now, the disobedient Juliet is "Mistress minion," "green-sickness carrion," "baggage," "tallow-face," "disobedient wretch," "a wretched puling fool / A whining mammet" (3.5.151, 156, 157, 160, 183-4). Capulet will listen to neither Lady Capulet who asks if he is mad and tells him he is "too hot" (175), nor to his daughter who begs him on her knees, nor to the Nurse. After all, he has spent "Day, night, hour, tide, time, work, play" working "to have her matched" (176-8). If she refuses to acknowledge this hard work, she can "hang, beg, starve, die in the streets" (192). Capulet's return to the patriarchal prerogative, in which a father chooses a suitor beneficial for the family, regardless of his daughter's wishes, emphasizes the extraordinariness of his initial desire for Juliet's opinion.

Capulet's response reflects the perspective of a patriarch in early modern England, in which a father is tasked with providing for his daughter. He has secured her a good husband, and because she is his only heir, the match must benefit the entire family. Marriage and heritage are directly tied to land and the family estate, and so a man in Capulet's position must prepare for

what will happen to his lands after he dies. If he dies before Juliet is married, she can be seized as ward by another nobleman, who would be responsible “for the keep and education of the ward, but in return could sell the wardship to another landlord, and could also sell the marriage of the ward, provided he did not marry the ward downwards in the social class structure” (Jardine 80). Juliet, if she became a ward, would have no say in her own marriage. In the event of Capulet’s death, his wife could retain “one-third of all his estate for use during her lifetime,” but Juliet’s future must be secure in order for the land to remain within the immediate family. Otherwise, the land goes to the “next-of-kin on [the] husband’s side” (79). In other words, Juliet’s decision threatens to jeopardize the family line and Capulet’s goods.

Juliet, in refusing her approved suitor and jeopardizing both her dowry and the family estate, resembles another of Shakespeare’s tragic daughters whose defiant behavior challenges social norms. In *King Lear*, Cordelia threatens the social order when she refuses to tell her father how much she loves him, even if this refusal costs her an inheritance. Dollimore argues that Cordelia “threatens to show too clearly how the laws of human kindness operate in the service of property, contractual, and power relations” (*Radical Tragedy* 198). Lear’s disowning of her “brutally foregrounds the imperatives of power and property relations. . . . Even kinship then—indeed *especially* kinship—is in-formed by the ideology of property relations, the contentious issue of primogeniture being, in this play, only its most obvious manifestation” (199). He argues that in *Lear*, the “conflicts and contradictions” of the “social order” are “render[ed] visible” (200). A daughter’s refusal takes on a broader social significance because by departing from what is expected of her, she shows what is wrong with a broader society in which “power and property relations” are more important than kindness or personal happiness. Although many

critics including Dollimore tend to focus on Shakespeare's later tragedies as sites of such conflict, *Romeo and Juliet* exposes many of the same problems.

Juliet does not set out to break from her family, but her choice to do so subverts traditional power structures and calls for a re-examination of marriage. Throughout Shakespeare's play, Juliet stresses that her love for Romeo is more important than anything else. She tells Friar Laurence that, rather than marry Paris, she is willing to do "things that to hear them told have made [her] tremble / And [she] will do it without fear or doubt, / To live an unstained wife to [her] sweet love" (4.1.86-8). Contemplating the possibility of waking in the tomb before Romeo's arrival, Juliet dismisses her fears by thrice repeating Romeo's name (4.3.58). When she wakes and discovers Romeo's dead body, Juliet scarcely hesitates to follow him in death: "Yea, noise? Then I'll be brief. O happy dagger! / This is thy sheath; there rust, and let me die," she says, and stabs herself (5.3.169-70). Juliet's swift action demonstrates her commitment to her husband; willing to endure unimaginable horrors for the possibility that she will be reunited with Romeo, his death prompts her to commit suicide as a sign of her belief in the sanctity of marriage, a marriage she has chosen for herself. She will not flee Verona and hide as a nun in a convent, as Friar Laurence suggests. She will not submit to her parents' authority and marry Paris. She will not follow the Nurse's advice and seek a marriage more desirable than her first. Instead, she will keep her wedding vow to Romeo, showing her parents and the rest of the world that love of one's spouse is more important than social or familial expectations. One could argue that Juliet's suicide allows her to escape from a world that would require her to follow one of these pathways, which is true. Her words and actions throughout the play, however, demonstrate that Juliet consistently makes brave and independent choices, and so the decision to kill herself preserves her integrity; it is not a mere escape. Because of this, Juliet

serves as a model of youthful independence and the ideal lover, to whom statues will be built. She demonstrates that a committed and loving marriage trumps the feudal authority of family lineage and the social authority of the state.

Whereas Juliet exposes the problems of arranged marriage and female submission, Romeo serves a different purpose in the play: to expose the problems of an abstract and idealized form of love that fails to account for the desires of both lovers. Petrarchan poetry, with which Romeo identifies, is a male-dominated form that focuses on the male voice and his desire for an unattainable mistress. The play introduces Romeo as a character who experiences a tortuous love for the cruel and elusive Rosaline. Juliet strives to teach Romeo the words and actions of true love, and the play demonstrates his attempts and his failings to enter into a truly mutual relationship with her. She challenges him to put aside clichés and expectations, both social and parental, and over the course of the play Romeo's love for Juliet offers him incentive to challenge what is expected of him: participation in the feud and submission to the state's punishment. Romeo's death, which occurs because he fails to realize that his wife is still alive even though he notes that "Death's pale flag is not advanced" in her face (5.3.96), reveals simultaneously how much he has learned and how much he has failed to learn about the need to pay attention to the beloved herself, not just the words that describe her. Despite his failings, Romeo's evolution from passive Petrarchan lover to active husband who defies his banishment to rescue Juliet demonstrates his power to influence others. As a young nobleman, he too would have been expected to marry for familial gain, and so, like Juliet, Romeo thwarts paternal authority by marrying for love. The power of his choice offers to end the feud, as after Romeo's death, his father honors his son's choice by vowing to build a statue of gold to memorialize Juliet.

Unlike Juliet, who is constantly called to do her parents' or the Nurse's bidding and whose break from them is rather sudden and determined, Shakespeare's Romeo is, for the most part, left alone to contemplate his heartache, and so his transformation from abstract lover to active husband is more subtle and less fully realized. Before he appears on stage, we learn that Romeo's parents are worried about his "[b]lack and portentous... humor" (1.1.139). His mother says that he shuts himself up in his room, "locks fair daylight out / And makes himself an artificial night" (137-8). These are the signs of love's melancholy, but the concerned parents ask Benvolio to discover the cause. As soon as Romeo begins to speak, he reveals his Petrarchan heartache. His behavior is typical of a besotted lover, and like any good Petrarchan lover, his beloved Rosaline makes him happily miserable. Romeo's speech to Benvolio is so laden with clichéd paradoxes that he risks ridicule:

Why then, O brawling love, O loving hate,
O anything of nothing first create!
O heavy lightness, serious vanity,
Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms!
...Dost thou not laugh? (1.1.174-7, 181)

Benvolio's response, "No, coz, I rather weep...[a]t thy good heart's oppression" can be interpreted as sympathy, as veiled mockery, or as both (181-2). Romeo reveals that love has transformed him so that he has lost himself: "This is not Romeo, he's some other where" (196). In Romeo's place is a lover who groans and weeps because his beloved has sworn to be chaste. Nothing matters except this woman and his love for her, which is a "madness most discreet, / A choking gall, and a preserving sweet" (191-2). As in Shakespeare's sonnets that challenge the Petrarchan tradition by portraying lovers who differ from the ideal—the speaker's beloveds include both a man and a woman whose dark features defy poetic tradition—this play shows that abstract and idealized expressions of love are outdated.

This scene presents Romeo as a lover influenced by a poetic tradition that can be traced to fourteenth century Italy and the writings of Petrarch and Dante. Petrarch's *Rime Sparse*, a collection of sonnets and songs dedicated to his beloved Laura, a married woman whom the poet admires from afar, is laden with paradoxes, references to Greek and Roman myths (including Diana, Cupid, and Danaë, whom Romeo mentions), and ruminations on time, mortality, and fame. Inspired by Petrarch, English noblemen including Sir John Wyatt, Sir Philip Sidney, and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey wrote their own sonnet sequences in sixteenth century England. One of the most famous sequences, Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*, is allegedly addressed to Penelope Devereux, whose parents arranged her marriage to Lord Robert Rich. In this sequence, Astrophil loves Stella from afar, unable to have her because both are married. Whether or not Astrophil's poetic declarations express Sidney's own emotions, the sequence serves as a model of Romeo's metaphors and his tendency to idealize the beloved, as well as his relative freedom to do so publicly. Shakespeare uses Romeo's melancholy, however, to question the tradition. By the time Shakespeare wrote *Romeo and Juliet* and his own sonnet sequence at the turn of the seventeenth century, the tradition was so well established that it had become clichéd. Romeo's pain may align him with many of the great poets, thinkers, and politicians of his day, but the play suggests that love is more than well-turned phrases. As both Juliet and Romeo demonstrate later in the play, lovers must be willing to act, to sacrifice anything in order to be together; this is a bold departure from the tradition of poets loving from afar or of spouses marrying for social gain, and it suggests that people do have the power to achieve their desires.

After establishing Romeo as a traditional Petrarchan lover who pines for Rosaline, the play subverts the Petrarchan tradition by introducing Romeo to Juliet, who challenges him to follow through on his declarations of love. Throughout their first two scenes together, Romeo

speaks in elevated metaphors, while Juliet attempts to ground him in reality: when he tells her that “With love’s light wings did I o’er-perch these walls, / For stony limits cannot hold love out,” she replies with a frank, “If they see thee, they will murder thee” (2.2.66-7, 70). He vows, “Lady, by yonder blessed moon I swear / That tips with silver all these fruit-tree tops—” but she cuts him off: “O, swear not by the moon, th’ inconstant moon” (107-9). He wants the “satisfaction” of her “love’s faithful vow” (126-7); she wants confirmation that his “bent of love be honorable / [his] purpose marriage” and makes plans to send a messenger to discover what time they shall be married (143-4). Juliet disrupts tradition by not only choosing her own partner in defiance of her parents’ wishes but also by demonstrating that the beloved can be an active and desiring subject, too. Romeo follows through on his promises to Juliet, and he even begins to speak using her more grounded language. For example, the morning after they consummate their marriage, Romeo tells Juliet that he must leave before her parents discover him there: “I must be gone and live, or stay and die” (3.5.11). He regresses to idealized thoughts of love, however, at the end of the play. When he sees Juliet on her deathbed, he again speaks in metaphors: “Beauty’s ensign yet / is crimson in thy lips and in thy cheeks, / And death’s pale flag is not advanced there” (5.3.94-6). Were he thinking about Juliet, and not merely about his own love and his grief, he might wonder why she still looks so fair. He might notice that she is, in fact, alive. Unlike adaptations that provide Romeo and Juliet a final moment together before his death, Shakespeare’s Romeo dies unaware that his suicide is premature, that had he waited, he and his beloved might be able to enjoy a new life together. Romeo’s mistake gives Shakespeare’s ending its potency, for it suggests that if he could only pay attention to Juliet herself and not to his own grief, both might live.

Romeo and Juliet, then, offer the possibilities of companionate marriage, in which lovers choose their own spouses, participate in active and equal partnerships, and ground their love in actions rather than words. The play's ending, too, anticipates a shift in authoritative structures, in which individual choice is recognized and, potentially, valued. News of the lovers' death causes chaos, as their families and the prince attempt to make sense of what has happened. Montague, whose wife has died "out of grief of [her] son's exile," chastises his dead son for defying social norms: "O thou untaught! What manners is in this, / To press before thy father to a grave?" (210, 213-4). Montague's grief is couched in the duty Romeo owes him as his son. Dying before his father, destroying the family line, and taking his own life—these events represent the power of a young man to disrupt social hierarchies through love.

The lovers' deaths urge their parents to look beyond the feud and to a new understanding of love. Capulet asks for Montague's hand as his "daughter's jointure," the dowry given from the bridegroom to the bride, "for no more / Can I demand" (5.3.296-7). Montague offers more than just a handshake; because both men continue to equate marriage with the exchange of goods, Montague will

raise [Juliet's] statue in pure gold,
That whiles Verona by that name is known,
There shall no figure at such rate be set
As that of true and faithful Juliet. (298-301)

Even though he did not approve the marriage, he will honor his son's bride. Capulet, not to be outdone, offers a statue too: "As rich shall Romeo's by his lady's lie, / Poor sacrifices of our enmity" (302-3). Both men may be punished by their children's deaths and by the feud, but in the end they will fulfill their social obligations. Building the statues indicates that they retain traditional views of marriage as a social rather than personal act, but their vows also indicate that as a result of their children's choices, they will reconsider their own positions in society and their

attitudes toward the feud. Even if Verona's social world is not radically changed at the end of this play, the fathers' acknowledgement leaves room for a new type of social order, one in which the power of young people undermines the authority of their parents and of the state, which is powerless to contain them. Shakespeare's play, I argue, presents a pair of young lovers whose actions have the power to challenge, to subvert, and even to change their society.

*William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet as Teen Film:
Or, Shakespeare—Young, Modern, and Full of Anomie*

Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* presents a view of society in which the young have little power to challenge the authority of their parents or of the state because, as a teen film, it reflects the values of this parent culture and, to quote Lewis, "presides over the eventual discovery of viable and often traditional forms of authority" (3). According to film scholar Thomas Doherty, teen films are products "of parent culture peddled to teenage subculture" (73). Doherty argues that the young audience may buy the tickets and bring the film commercial success or "marketplace validity," but the film itself "receives...its textual values" from the parents' culture, thus serving the interests of its creators, not the members of its target audience (73). For this reason, Doherty speaks of teenpics as "exploitation films," which means that marketers focus on "effective advertising" to attract a particular audience—in this case, teenagers (3). Advertisers use the Internet, television ads, web sites, and music videos in order to reach and manipulate teen viewers (4-5). Like teen films, the plays of Shakespeare typically are considered products of adult culture, but *Romeo and Juliet* has become a standard "young persons' play," used in the classroom and in the music industry to make Shakespeare "relevant" for students and young audiences (Buhler 246-8). Because of the focus on the play's appeal to young audiences, some critics overlook how film adaptations of the play nevertheless advance the agendas of their adult creators. In the wake of successful adaptations of the play—particularly Jerome Robbins and

Robert Wise's *West Side Story* (1961), itself an adaptation of a stage musical, and Franco Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* (1968)—the play has become a forum for showcasing divisions among people, particularly between generations, ethnic groups, or social classes. Its themes seem suited for young audiences, so that when Baz Luhrmann directed his own adaptation in 1996, part of the marketing campaign featured the words “‘Family,’ ‘Honor,’ ‘Love,’ ‘Hate,’ and ‘Revenge,’” all tattooed in Gothic script on “semi-naked male and female bodies.” These images were shown on an MTV special promoting the film and also appeared on the film's companion website (Burt *Unspeakable ShaXXXpeares* 3-4). These tattoos function on several levels, showcasing not only the film's themes but also the “sexy” side of the play, which Luhrmann was keen to emphasize (Twentieth Century Fox). In its focus on broad themes, however, the film demonstrates Shakespeare's universal appeal rather than the subversive potential of young people. Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* encourages audiences to identify with the lovers' alienation from the world, but it does not demonstrate how youthful dissatisfaction can prompt social change. Unlike the play, which challenges particular forms of familial and literary authority, the film suggests that the only viable option for dissatisfied young people is escape from the world. The film serves the interests of its creators through an effective marketing campaign that resulted in financial success; ironically, in its desire to reach young audiences, the film restricts the powerful social positions Shakespeare's play provides to its young characters.

The film's marketing draws on previous successful film adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* in order to appeal to young people; it stresses Shakespeare's popularity and demonstrates the play's emotional value by focusing on the themes of love and hate, which are as relevant now as they were in Shakespeare's day. Luhrmann and his marketing team used “effective advertising” (Doherty 3) in order to exploit their young audience, who helped make the film a financial

success. According to Maurice Hindle, Luhrmann's goal of communicating "with an MTV-influenced youth audience" in order "to have large-scale international appeal...attracted ample funding from Hollywood both for making and...publicizing the film" (7-8). The film opened "wide (i.e. simultaneously across over 1000 cinema screens in the USA)," resulting in "massive audiences and profits" (7-8). The carefully designed marketing campaign included two soundtrack CDs, print advertisements, television trailers, an MTV special, and an official website, which "marked one of the first occasions on which a web site played a significant role in the marketing of a film" (French 111). This campaign helped *Romeo + Juliet* become the top-grossing film during its opening weekend in early November 1996, earning \$11.1 million with a per-screen average of \$8,725—more than double the per-screen average of the second highest-grossing movie that weekend, *Sleepers* (a thriller starring Kevin Bacon, Billy Crudup, Robert De Niro, Minnie Driver, and Dustin Hoffman) ("Romeo + Juliet"; "Sleepers"). *Romeo + Juliet* retained the number two spot during its second weekend and remained in the top ten for six weeks, ultimately taking in over \$46 million domestically and over \$101 million internationally—for a total of \$147,554,998 ("Romeo + Juliet").³

Although the film's international success likely had much to do with the popularity and cultural status of both Luhrmann and Shakespeare, its success in the United States has been attributed to young filmgoers who were drawn to its themes, its stars, its soundtrack, and its visual style. The marketing campaign was designed to attract a teenaged audience by targeting

³ For a point of comparison, Kenneth Branagh's four-hour "uncut" *Hamlet*, released in the U.S. nine weeks later, grossed \$4.7 million domestically and just \$31,000 internationally ("Hamlet" [1996]). *West Side Story*, which used the popular musical format to attract a wide audience, grossed \$43.7 million domestically in 1961. When adjusted for inflation, that figure would be more like \$445 million today, according to Box Office Mojo, an impressive figure that emphasizes the broad appeal of *Romeo and Juliet* adaptations. More recently, the comic cartoon *Gnomeo and Juliet* (2011) grossed just under \$100 million domestically and \$94 million internationally (figures as of 30 Nov. 2011).

television shows and stations popular among that demographic—thus drawing on the cultural authority of television and its stars. The week before its release, the film sponsored *My So-Called Life*, which starred Claire Danes, who plays Juliet in Luhrmann’s film. Commercial breaks featured “ads for the film blaring forth tracks from the first soundtrack CD performed by bands such as Garbage, Radiohead, Everclear, and Butthole Surfers.” Additionally, “That same week MTV itself aired a half-hour Special [sic] on the film three times,” during which “clips of the film were intercut with interviews of local high school and college students” who “say semi-articulate things” about how the film illustrates Shakespeare’s timelessness (Burt *Unspeakable ShaXXXpeares* 3-4). This special, argues Richard Burt, “tries to reposition Shakespeare as something cool instead of something silly, feminine, or distasteful,” but in stressing Shakespeare’s relevance to today’s students, it offers, not a “critical response to the film itself or to the play,” but instead focuses “on how the stars DiCaprio and Danes felt when they performed particular scenes (such as those in which they kissed each other, of course)” (4). Burt emphasizes how the film’s marketing relies on appeals of relevancy without providing any particular reading of the play or of the film. Burt’s point highlights what I have discovered about the film: it is visually and emotionally appealing, but it transforms the play’s social critique into a romanticized view of young love. In trying to make Shakespeare accessible and cool, Luhrmann—supported by a team of people whose goal is solely to sell the finished product—urges the audience to relate to the film on a personal level, to connect with its themes, stars, *mise-en-scène*, music, or other content. The film uses the authority of popular culture, the cultural authority of Shakespeare, and the social relevance of the play’s themes in order to invite viewers to draw connections between Luhrmann’s film, other media texts, and their lives, but the film’s transformation of the play limits its potential as a particular social or cultural critique. It

encourages escapism without demonstrating how, specifically, young people can challenge the society into which they are born.

One way the film's marketers appeals to its young audience is through its web site, which invites visitors to find out more about all aspects of the film, including its theatrical background, its stars, its themes, its iconic images, and its corporate connections. Like the MTV special, this web site focuses on generalizations and appeals to Shakespeare's universality and cultural relevance rather than particular readings of the play. The web site's main page is subdivided into four categories, each with its own set of links. "The Author" offers a biography of Bill Shakespeare, who, when not trashing inns or getting drunk like a rock star, was writing the most "electrifying" words in the English language or hanging out with King James backstage. In this way, the Shakespeare of high culture is brought to the level of popular culture, encouraging the young audience to relate to him. On the author page, visitors can also play a game, read "outrageous headlines" that explain Elizabethan theatrical and printing practices, or find a filmography of other Shakespeare films—all of which translate "Shakespeare" into contemporary terms. To focus more clearly on *Romeo + Juliet*, "The Setting" section of the web site takes visitors to Verona Beach, where they can read a plot summary, learn about the feuding families, or view the city's fashions, cars, and sponsors. "The Players" allows viewers to learn about "the amazing actors," meet the production team, download clips and trailers, or find links to other sites including the soundtrack CD, the published screenplay, and a sweepstakes. At "The Party," users can communicate with each other via discussion boards and a chat room. The language throughout stresses Shakespeare's accessibility and trendiness; as in the MTV special, the marketers want Shakespeare to be "cool" but also stress his cultural authority. A sidebar on his biography, for instance, tells readers: "For the kind of detail and scholarship worthy of

Shakespeare we suggest enrollment in Oxford University for a few decades” (Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation). In other words, Shakespeare is both accessible and inaccessible, highbrow and lowbrow; one can appreciate him now, but there’s much to learn.

The appeal to Shakespeare’s popular and cultural authority, as well as the film’s focus on lovers who have become alienated from the adult world, also appears on a series of postcards printed as part of the film’s marketing campaign. The web site invites users to download and share these free postcards, which were included as part of the print campaign: according to the home page, “some people are stealing these limited-edition postcards from magazines” (Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation). The postcards, like the tattoos featured on the MTV special, emphasize the film’s themes without pointing to anything particular about the play. Each postcard features a still from the movie, with one word that corresponds to that image. Half ampersands frame each postcard, so that placing the cards side by side will highlight the relationships among the images: Romeo (seeing Juliet for the first time through a fish tank) & Juliet (looking back at Romeo through the fish tank), “violence” (Tybalt stabbing Mercutio) & “passion” (Juliet caressing a shirtless Romeo), “vengeance” (Romeo with a gun, his face contorted with rage and grief) & “forgiveness” (Juliet praying before a statue of Mary), “despair” (Romeo, shirtless, wet, and bloody) & “hope” (Juliet at the balcony in her angel costume), “love” (Romeo and Juliet embracing at the ball) & “death” (the lovers on their deathbed).



Fig. 1. Publicity postcards of Romeo (Leonardo DiCaprio) and Juliet (Claire Danes) (Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation).

These ten postcards reiterate what Barbara Hodgdon notes about the site's home page: "Romeo and Juliet kissing, framed by boys with guns, all pointing at the couple—perfectly condenses one of the film's central tropes: the desire for a private, utopian space within a threatening social world" ("Everything's Nice" 92). Romeo and Juliet's kiss is an attempt to reject the authority of their parents, the feud, and the social world of Verona Beach. The postcards, the web site, and the film all stress the lovers' desire to escape their "threatening social world," to echo Hodgdon, but none suggests that they have the power to challenge or to change that world; rather, the only way they can fully escape it is through suicide. As a result, the film reduces the potential for social change suggested by the play's Romeo and Juliet.

In Shakespeare's play, Juliet is bold, confident, and unwavering in her pursuit of a companionate marriage with Romeo. She tutors Romeo in the rules of love, urging him to view their marriage as a partnership and asserting her desires in a way uncommon for a young early modern woman. The decision of Shakespeare's Juliet to defy the social expectations of arranged marriage and to determine her own future marks her as subversive, strong, and even radical. Her decisions question existing forms of authority and challenge others to reconsider traditional

views of women's roles. The film's Juliet, in contrast, is an innocent romantic whose relationship with the troubled Romeo is loving and sweet. Her decision to pursue Romeo and to reject Paris seems rushed but understandable, for her parents fail to show that they care about her happiness, which in contemporary society is a goal of marriage. If the anomic teen rejects adult culture or values, Juliet does so to distance herself from the partying and social swanning of her parents. In Luhrmann's modernized film, Juliet's pursuit of Romeo stems from an emotional and physical disconnect between her parents' desires and her own. The film portrays Juliet's mother as a narcissistic alcoholic and her father as a violent drunk; Juliet is already distant from them, and so her break from their authority is unsurprising.

Romeo + Juliet, like other teen films, stresses generational difference and shows how Juliet's alienation and eventual suicide result in part from her troubled relationship with her mother and father. According to Lewis's explanation of alienation in teen films, the adults in Juliet's life fail "to provide adequate role models," which is partly to blame for Juliet's recourse to "suicide, an alternative to coming of age" (34, 33). The scene that introduces Juliet focuses on neither her nor her Nurse, as it does in the play, but on Gloria Capulet, a pill-popping, alcoholic socialite who is more concerned with appearances than with her daughter's happiness. The first shot of Gloria is an extreme close-up of her mouth, the rouged lips offset by a penciled-in beauty mark; she is shouting Juliet's name. The extra-diegetic and frenzied strains of Mozart's Symphony 25 play as the camera cuts to various shots of the Capulet mansion, where Gloria Capulet and her household are preparing for a lavish party. She wears a bustier, thigh-high stockings, and a gauzy pink dressing gown, and her bleached blonde hair is fitted under a skullcap. So intent is she on calling for her wayward daughter that she scarcely realizes that she is half naked. Seeing the Nurse, the frazzled mother pulls herself together and asks her to find

the girl. The Nurse then takes up the call—Julietta!—until all three women converge on the grand staircase. Juliet, dressed simply in a white cotton robe, has been taking a bath. Her calm response, “Madam, I am here, what is your will?” marks her as a grounded force in a chaotic household and also signals her distance from the adults in her life. Her whimsical smile shows that she is used to the frantic excess of both her mother and the Nurse and also marks her as different. While her mother rushes around the dressing room—downing a pill with a glass of scotch, issuing orders, working herself into a frenzy over the handsome Dave Paris, and examining herself in the mirror—Juliet sits calmly on the chaise longue, listening and smiling. She does not speak until the end of the scene, when she delivers her “I’ll look to like” speech with a frankness that causes her mother, now bedecked in a glittering gold and black Cleopatra costume, to wave her hands in frustration and strut out of the room.

Juliet’s speech, which retains Shakespeare’s language, plays a role different from that in Shakespeare’s play. In the play, Shakespeare’s Juliet uses the speech to show both her apparent but by no means assured submission to her mother’s wishes—“*if* looking liking move” (1.3.97; emphasis added)—and also her own potential as a powerful lover—“will I endart mine eye” (1.3.98). The powerful image of love’s arrows shooting forth from the young woman’s eyes in order to capture her beloved loses some of its significance in the film because the metaphor makes little sense in contemporary society—love scarcely works this way anymore, and, if it does, no one talks about it in these terms. The scene, instead, contrasts the grounded Juliet with her flighty mother, emphasizing the emotional gap between them. The scene portrays Juliet as visibly and verbally different from both her mother and the Nurse. She appears to have a mind of her own, and she is largely unfazed by their attempts to control her. Even though she looks at the picture of Dave Paris and appears to listen to the women’s praises, Juliet’s calm expression

and assured demeanor mark her as an adolescent who struggles to define herself against her parents' desires. Juliet's obvious lack of excitement over Dave Paris suggests that, whether she meets Romeo or not, this Juliet will not marry Paris. Because she is already quite different from her parents, marriage to their chosen suitor becomes just something else to escape. Juliet does not challenge arranged marriage itself; rather, when she meets Romeo, she finds a way to break free of her parents' control.

Juliet's decision to defy her parents by choosing her own mate loses purchase, in the film, because arranged marriages are no longer practiced in most parts of the world. As a result, Juliet's defiance of her parents' wishes is not as subversive as that of her Shakespearean counterpart. There is no doubt that Dave Paris is rich and handsome and would likely benefit the family socially, but Juliet is so far removed from her parents' way of life that the match never appears worthy of her consideration. Instead, her parents come off as cold, uncaring, and tyrannical. Gloria Capulet, who flirts with Paris at the party and who appears afraid of her own husband, seems to want Juliet to marry Paris only because she cannot. When Juliet tells her mother that she will not consent to the match, Gloria bids Juliet to tell her father the news herself, "And see how he will take it at your hands" (3.5.125). Fulgencio Capulet's reaction to Juliet's refusal is one of the most potent moments in Luhrmann's film, as both the Nurse and Gloria Capulet try to protect Juliet from her father's rage. The scene is more physically violent than in any other screen adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*. In the play, Capulet tells Juliet, "My fingers itch" (164), but there is no indication that he actually hits her. In this film, Capulet grabs Juliet and throws her to the ground. When she stands, he goes after her and appears as if he could beat her. When his wife attempts to break his grip, crying "Are you mad?" he strikes her hard enough that we hear her fall to the ground. The Nurse also tries to interfere, but he shoves her away.

Despite all of this, when Juliet begs for her mother's help in delaying the marriage, Gloria Capulet tells her, "Talk not to me, for I'll not speak a word. / Do as thou wilt, for I have done with thee" (202-3). Diane Venora, who plays Gloria, slurs these lines, and her deadpan expression and vacant eyes indicate that she has withdrawn again into the bleak comforts of emotional withdrawal and drugged disconnect; her face bears a mark from where her husband hit her. The scene demonstrates that Juliet's decision to pursue life with Romeo will allow her to escape an abusive father and an unsupportive mother. Rather than challenge the structures of family life, thereby making a larger claim about contemporary marriage, the film suggests that Juliet must leave her parents and reject their way of life if she does not want to end up like her mother. This is not to suggest that Dave Paris will turn abusive like Juliet's father, but his status as "Bachelor of the Year" and his courtship of Juliet's father, not her, represents a type of life that runs counter to the film's interpretation of a reserved and idealistic Juliet.

The film recasts the power of Juliet, whose defiance in Shakespeare's play signals her rejection of social norms, into that of an abused daughter fleeing a frightening relationship. Both Lady Capulet's rejection and the Nurse's advice to marry Paris stem from a fear of Capulet's rage should Juliet disobey him. In both play and film, Juliet seeks comfort from her Nurse after her parents have threatened to disown her. In the play, Juliet asks her Nurse what to do, and the Nurse advises her to marry Paris. Trying to make light of the situation, she calls him "a lovely gentleman. / Romeo's a dishclout to him" (3.5.218-9). This "second match," she says, "excels your first; or if did not, / Your first is dead, or 'twere as good he were / As living here and you no use to him" (222-5). This is a turning point for Shakespeare's Juliet. After the Nurse exits, Juliet calls her "wicked fiend" and says, "Go, counselor; / Thou and my bosom henceforth shall be twain" (235, 239-40). Juliet asserts her independence; if her closest confidante is no longer

on her side, she will ask the friar about “his remedy,” but “If all else fail, myself have power to die” (241-2). She takes decisive control of her life.

Luhrmann’s film emphasizes not Juliet’s growing independence, but rather the loss she experiences after the adults in her life reject her. The film cuts the Nurse’s “Romeo’s a dishclout to him,” softening the harshness of the comparison between the two men. Miriam Margolyes plays the scene with much sadness; she hates telling Juliet that her husband’s banishment makes him as good as dead, but she also knows Capulet’s temper. As in Shakespeare’s play, Juliet’s encounter with the Nurse after Capulet’s rejection marks a turning point, but rather than vocalizing her decision to move forward despite the lack of support, the film’s Juliet appears sad and alone. The film also cuts Juliet’s lines after the Nurse leaves, so that Juliet’s assertion of power and independence is replaced by grief. Her tear-stained face and refusal to look at the Nurse indicate that she has come to the conclusion of other anomic teens who feel betrayed or abandoned by the adults in their lives. Neither reconciliation nor mutual understanding with them appears possible, and so Juliet is left with no choice but to leave home. Her “Amen” (3.5.228), which can be translated as “It is finished,” signals the finality of Juliet’s decision, and she utters the word with a note of painful resolve. She decides to leave her family because she has no other option.

In Luhrmann’s film, Juliet’s eventual decision to commit suicide, which requires little deliberation on her part after she witnesses Romeo’s death, stems from her alienation from the world around her. This alienation does not begin with Juliet’s decision to marry Romeo but is emphasized from her first appearance, when Juliet’s difference from her parents is marked visually (her quiet demeanor and her simple costumes, hair, and makeup) and verbally (her words and speech patterns are typically well-planned and sober, in contrast to her parents’

drunken slurring and passionate outbursts). Rather than marry for status or out of duty to a tyrannical and even abusive father, Juliet seeks to create her own future. She chooses to marry based on love, not on social obligation, seeking individual happiness over filial duty. Within a contemporary context, the decision to seek happiness in love seems obvious—Juliet’s parents appear unhappy in their marriage, and their lifestyle is not something Juliet desires. Juliet’s marriage to Romeo, then, is romantic and daring, but it does not challenge authoritative social structures such as arranged marriage or the social codes governing daughters because these ideas are anachronistic. The love between Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet questions the structures of power, including the goals and purpose of marriage, and their deaths force their fathers to legitimate their marriage. Luhrmann’s teens, in contrast, commit suicide because they cannot imagine a future apart from each other, particularly within a world that offers little else to live for. They escape the world because they lack the power to change it. This is largely a problem of adaptation, for the film is limited by Shakespeare’s text. It could offer a critique of contemporary society, and in some ways the film does criticize a world ruled by violent and wealthy patriarchs, but because the adults do not appear to change in the wake of their children’s deaths, the film fails to show why these deaths matter. The film’s ending, to which I will return, offers no sense that the parents realize the extent of Juliet’s choice, and neither they nor anyone else appears to have learned anything new about marriage or family. In contrast to Shakespeare’s Juliet, whose bold break from her parents’ authority signals changing social structures, Luhrmann’s Juliet appears as another teenager whose death will become a statistic.

Unlike Luhrmann’s Juliet, whose parents prompt her alienation, Romeo’s alienation results from a general desire for love and poetry over the violence associated with the feud. Romeo is a writer whose use of Petrarchan phrases lends to his credibility as a lover. In

Shakespeare's play, Romeo's oxymorons show his reliance on the clichés of love while highlighting his lack of experience; Juliet must teach him the goals, actions, and mutuality of true love. Romeo does learn from her, but it is not enough, and his failure to note the signs of her survival shows that he has much to learn. Still, Shakespeare's Romeo progresses toward understanding, and as such he represents the potential of a lover's transformation from abstract lover to active partner, paving the way for companionate marriage. Lurhmann's film, in contrast, suggests that Romeo is already an ideal lover, and that his encounter with Juliet is merely the culmination of his desires. As with the practice of arranged marriage, which loses purchase in the film, the Petrarchan tradition does not retain the same meaning as it holds in the play. Romeo's friends may make fun of his declarations of love, but the film is careful not to mock Romeo; instead, it stresses that his emotions are sincere. Because of this, Romeo has little to learn from Juliet, and so Lurhmann transforms the way in which both Romeo and love itself are presented. Lurhmann's Romeo is a lover who needs no schooling; it is precisely his attitude toward love that makes him desirable. This Romeo may pine for Rosaline and fall in love with Juliet rather quickly, but the film portrays Romeo's earlier love as preparation for his relationship with Juliet, not something to reject. Whereas Shakespeare's Romeo is initially derided for his use of love poetry and relies on Juliet to show him the proper ways of expressing his love, Lurhmann's Romeo is presented from the start as an anomic lover who finds a partner in love, not a tutor, when he meets Juliet. The film stresses, again, that the lovers' union is inevitable and their deaths understandable, for they are already so separated from their world that escape appears as the only option.

If Shakespeare's Romeo is subject to ridicule for his earnest and all-embracing love and for his reliance on Petrarchan clichés, Lurhmann is intent on making him a romantic hero whose

poetic disposition is serious, not silly. The opening shots of Romeo show him walking along the beach toward the ocean, his back to the camera, and then sitting on the stage of a crumbling theater, the “Sycamore Grove,” writing in his journal and smoking a cigarette. A melancholic Radiohead song, “Talk Show Host,” plays on the soundtrack. The song’s haunting melody, which features a simple bass line, repetitive chords, a minor key, and muted vocals, sets a romantic tone for Romeo’s introspection. The lyrics, meanwhile, signal Romeo’s separation from his world: “I want to be someone else or I’ll explode... You want me...I’ll be waiting with a gun... You want me, well, come on and break the door down... I’m ready.” This song suggests the desire to do something new, to break out of the cycle associated with the feud and with the society in which Romeo lives. It signals his anomie—his alienation from a world that holds no meaning. The image of Romeo as poet was one of Luhrmann’s earliest contributions to the film and appears in the rehearsal footage shot before the film was pitched to Hollywood producers; in the early footage, Romeo sits on a low wall, smoking and writing, deep in thought. The image, coupled with the extra-diegetic Radiohead song, is repeated later in the film, when after Romeo’s banishment to Mantua he sits alone in the desert, writing and smoking. This Romeo is more than an early modern Petrarchan lover, characterized by his oxymoronic speech and worship of his beloved from afar; he is a late twentieth-century teen idol, whose solitude is used to reflect on his love and whose props—a journal and a cigarette—recall poets and other figures of anomie, including James Dean (see Lewis 20-2, 24-5). In addition to serving as Romeo’s motif in the film, “Talk Show Host” also plays on the DVD menus (rather than “Kissing You,” the film’s love song) and signals the film’s overall concern with portraying Romeo’s distance from the world of his parents and friends. This distance prepares him for his meeting with Juliet, who helps him escape from the world but does little to challenge his view of

it; in turn, Romeo does not challenge his world but instead escapes it through his poetry and, later, through suicide.

Romeo's first scene stresses how poetry distances him from society. He sits on the edge of a stage, which is nearly all that remains of a crumbling theater; the ocean and the rising sun are visible behind him. The yellow sun forms a halo around Romeo as the camera moves upward from his crossed ankles to his face, lingering on his profile as he takes a drag of his cigarette. His speech to Benvolio ("Why then, O brawling love, O loving hate, / O anything of nothing first create...") plays in voiceover, while Romeo scratches in his journal. Pairing this speech with shots of an angelic-looking Romeo introduces the character's transformation from ridiculed lover to idealized poet. The scene also emphasizes how his poetry serves as an escape from the world of his parents. The footage of the young lover is intercut with shots of Ted and Caroline Montague, who ride in their limousine with Benvolio; they implore their son's friend to discover the cause of Romeo's melancholy, of which Montague's face shows disapproval. Both their conversation and the shots of Romeo establish his distance from all around him, peers and parents alike. Like Juliet, he is already set apart from the world, and so his relationship with her will serve as a continuation of his alienation, not a trigger of social defiance as in the play, and his poetic sensibility romanticizes this alienation. When he sees the limo pull up, Romeo stands and walks away toward the ocean. A slow-motion shot captures his flawless face, his serious eyes that gaze directly toward the camera, his carefully disheveled hair, his white shirt unbuttoned at the collar, his black suit: a late-twentieth century James Dean.

By showing Romeo's Petrarchan sensibility as romantic rather than outdated or lacking in sincerity, the film also transforms the play's gender dynamics, which results in a less powerful Juliet. The play retains Juliet's frank lines in which she attempts to ground Romeo's love in

reality but downplays the meaning of her words. Instead, the film emphasizes their pairing as two alienated teens searching for mutual understanding. This Romeo appears as Juliet's literal knight in shining armor at the ball; he whisks her away to the elevator, where they share their first kiss in private. Their encounter figures into the film's marketing, as the cover of the published screenplay depicts Romeo, dressed in his knight's costume, about to kiss the angelic Juliet for the first time. Romeo draws Juliet into his privatized world, and together they seek shelter from the confusing world in which they have been raised. James Loehlin provides the apt description of the "watery cocoon in which Luhrmann shelters his young lovers" (121); he refers to the water imagery used throughout the film, in particular to the swimming pool in which the majority of the "balcony scene" is shot. Loehlin finds in the film "a romantic nostalgia that is a surprising and poignant response to the frenetic excess of late twentieth-century culture" (121). The lovers' distance from the world should not be surprising, however, when viewed within the context of teen anomie and alienation. That is, Romeo and Juliet recall other figures of anomie, who withdraw from and possibly reject their world through suicide because they find adult society empty and meaningless. In this film, the lovers withdraw from their society because their parents and the other adults in their lives fail them as role models. The film's ending continues this theme of alienation by stressing the lovers' distance from the world without showing how the world might change as a result of their deaths.

Instead of depicting the after effects of Romeo and Juliet's death, including Friar Lawrence's confession, the news of Lady Montague's death, and the fathers' vow to build statues to honor their children, Luhrmann focuses on the young lovers and then on the parents' silent grief, the prince's admonishment, and the news footage. The lovers' death scene, the culmination of their withdrawal from society, is beautiful and serene, a still point in a frantic

world. It takes place in a church that is lit by hundreds of candles and the glow of crosses made of flowers and surrounded by blue neon. Juliet lies on a bier where the altar should be, surrounded by so many candles that she appears to glow. This Juliet does not have to fear waking among the bones of her ancestors and the rotting corpse of her cousin; this locale is not terrifying but resembles a larger version of her bedroom, which also glows with candlelight and religious iconography. By situating Juliet in a church, the film implies that she is a saint, a martyr even, and yet suicide is never the path to sainthood, and the film never clarifies how her self-sacrifice could benefit a larger cause; rather, the film continues to emphasize the lovers' withdrawal from the world. As in Shakespeare's play, the depth of his grief causes Romeo to miss the signs that the effects of the friar's potion are wearing off and that Juliet is alive, but in a departure from Shakespeare's play, the film, following in theatrical tradition, allows the lovers a final brief moment together. Just as Romeo drains the vial of poison, a still-drowsy Juliet lovingly caresses his cheek. They realize his error simultaneously, the horror reflected in their eyes. Their final moments together emphasize this horrified realization that a few seconds more could have changed their ending, but it also emphasizes their love, as they share one final kiss before Romeo's death. Luhrmann cuts Juliet's final words, and the background music fades away, leaving only silence. The silence emphasizes Juliet's loud sob, the loud click of the gun's hammer, and the reverberating gunshot that echoes through the church as she shoots herself; the lack of background music heightens the drama of this moment and signals her isolation. Juliet's lack of hesitation indicates that she views suicide as inevitable, the only alternative to living without Romeo. The music swells again as her body falls onto the bier, next to his, and a soprano sings the *liebestod* from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* while a crane shot looks down on the lovers from above. As the camera gradually pulls away to show the lovers surrounded by the

candles, crosses, and flowers, shots of their short life together flash across the screen—their meeting at the ball, the wedding ring engraved with the words “*I love thee*,” the morning after they consummate their marriage, their underwater kiss in Juliet’s swimming pool. The beauty of this scene, including the setting, the camera work, and the music, idealizes the lovers’ suicide. Their world is corrupt, confusing, and unjust; they are right to leave it.

And yet the aftermath immediately questions their decision. The screen fades to white for several seconds and then cuts to a white-shrouded body being loaded into an ambulance. Shakespeare’s play demonstrates the double suicide’s profound affects on the survivors, who vow to end the feud and honor their children with elaborate and expensive memorials. The play also demonstrates the power of young people to subvert social norms, whether arranged marriage or poetic discourse. Luhrmann’s film celebrates Romeo and Juliet’s love, but it does not show how that love can promote social change. The film cuts most of the play’s final scene in order to focus on the lovers and their tragic ending, not the effects on the survivors; in this way, it stresses the lovers’ sacrifice without showing how their deaths will influence adult culture. After the lovers’ deaths we see both fathers emerging from their limos, while the grief-stricken mothers stay inside. Montague’s face is taut and drawn; Capulet is disheveled and sober. The men do not speak and avoid each other’s gaze, focusing instead on their children’s sheet-covered corpses being wheeled into the waiting ambulances. Captain Prince’s line, “all are punished,” is reflected in the fathers’ weary faces. The survival of Romeo’s mother shifts the tragedy in order to suggest that Caroline Montague will have to cope with her son’s loss. The moment is sad and poignant, but it lessens the social power of Shakespeare’s Romeo, whose exile was enough to stop his mother’s breath (5.3.211). To Shakespeare’s Lady Montague, exile is as painful as death, for it destroys her hope of legitimate offspring who will continue the Montague line in

Verona. For Romeo's father, the loss of both his wife and his only son signals the end of his family line; his future will be forever changed. The film depicts the four surviving parents' heartbreak, but it does not signal how it will affect their futures.

If Shakespeare's play offers the hope that the father's grief and eventual acceptance of their children's marriage will end the feud, or will press the survivors to reconsider their attitudes toward marriage, Luhrmann's film demonstrates only loss. The families grieve for what they have lost, but it is possible that they will again blame each other, thus continuing the feud. There is no hand-shaking, no promise of golden statues, only two childless men standing roughly three feet apart, watching the ambulances pull away while the news cameras roll and an anchorwoman reports their tragedy on the evening broadcast. Instead of challenging the structures of their society and offering the potential for social transformation, Luhrmann's lovers demonstrate that the only way to cope with contemporary society is to escape it.

To return briefly to the film's marketing, the web site and the publicity postcards summarize the film's purported message. Even when in the depths of passion or grief, the young lovers appear young and fragile. Their story, in the end, can be condensed into two images:



Fig. 2. Publicity postcards of love and death (Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation).

In both of these images, the lovers are cut off from the world. In the first, surrounded by a halo of light, they float among the clouds, Juliet's angel wings and Romeo's coat of armor protecting them from outside influences. In the second image, the black background suggests that the world itself no longer matters; the lovers, so still and peaceful that they could be sleeping, die with their faces touching, locked in an eternal embrace. There is no hint of the feud, of parental conflict, or of the violent nature of their deaths. The prevailing mood is simply their love for each other, which supersedes everything else. Even in death, the young lovers are united, free of the worries and responsibilities of adulthood. But, as Lewis asks, "what does such self-sacrifice, such a refusal to come of age, say about the adult culture?" (33). The images idealize the lovers, just as their final scene together stresses the beauty of their final moments together, but the film fails to show whether their deaths will cause others to reconsider their views of the world. The fathers, who continue to serve as ineffectual figures of authority, make no gestures toward reconciliation. The news media attempts to provide closure, as the film cuts to a television, on which the same anchorwoman who recited the prologue speaks the play's final few lines. After the conclusion of her story, "For never was a story of more woe / Than this of Juliet and her Romeo" (5.3.308-9), the television screen framing her fades to static and then begins to shrink, finally disappearing into the blackness. The lovers' lives and deaths have become a news story. Unable to imagine a future without each other, Romeo and Juliet escape the world through suicide. But what then?

Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* offers an ending but no solution, a resolution but no glimpse ahead. Unlike Shakespeare's play, which anticipates a new form of family life and a new social ideal in which young people force their parents to honor their choices, the film closes as it began, suggesting that society has not changed as a result of the young lovers' alienation and suicide,

nor will it. Despite this hopelessness, the music that plays after the newscaster's exit allows the lovers the last words. Radiohead, whose other contribution to the film becomes Romeo's anthem, wrote "Exit Music (For a Film)" to play over the end credits. The song begins with a haunting melody, sung softly and soothingly. About a young couple's escape from their parents, the song slowly builds to a crescendo, so that the line "We hope your rules and wisdom choke you" precedes the loudest portion of the song: "Now we are one in everlasting peace / We hope that you choke, that you choke." This last line is repeated three times, getting softer each time, until finally fading away. Serving as the lovers' farewell to the world, it expresses satisfaction with their decision. They are "one in everlasting peace," in contrast to their parents and everyone else who failed them. But the lyrics also stress annihilation, not change: "we hope that you choke" is an angry response to the adult world, but it does not say how that world could better serve its young people.

CHAPTER TWO

“I Want You to Want Me”: Authority and Gender in *10 Things I Hate About You*

Like Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, which presents contrasting views of parental authority and marriage in early modern England, Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew* examines early modern gender hierarchies, in which fathers arranged marriages without consulting their daughters, wives were submissive to their husbands, and husbands were instructed on how to assert their authority within the household. As I argued in the previous chapter, Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* challenges traditional expectations of marriage in order to suggest young people’s potential for social transformation. *Shrew* presents a similar view of marriage as an arena of patriarchal control, but the play participates in another conversation about the expectations of marriage. Early modern sermons, popular ballads, folk tales, and other texts demonstrate the hierarchical nature of family life, as well as methods for establishing peace within the household, for “taming” unruly women, and for ensuring domestic and civic tranquility. These texts present marriage in multifaceted and often contradictory terms (one text, for example, condemns wife beating while another allows that it is necessary in certain situations), and they highlight the problematic gender dynamics found in Shakespeare’s plays. *The Taming of the Shrew* presents the complexity of marriage, particularly when a headstrong woman is expected to submit to her equally headstrong husband. In the end, Katherine the shrew offers a sermon on marriage, which the other characters take as a sign that she has been tamed. The play suggests, however, that her taming is only an act; it presents other female characters

who also question the gendered hierarchies of marriage; and in the end, it questions the lessons it appears to teach.

Despite the complex cultural background that informs Shakespeare's play, Gil Junger's film adaptation, *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999), introduces problematic gender relationships only to reduce their complexity; a less ambiguous ending allows the film to be situated more fully within the teen romantic comedy genre. *10 Things* appears to do away with the more troubling aspects of the source play; no overt references to shrew taming are used, men and women are posited as equals, and relationships appear consensual. In the end, however, Kat (played by Julia Stiles in her first of three starring roles in a Shakespearean teen film) is "tamed" by embracing the cultural status of a canonical author, Shakespeare; by conforming to the dating rituals she initially derides; and by admitting that she is more vulnerable and less independent than she has led everyone to believe. Kat's submission is expressed most succinctly in her adaptation of Shakespeare's Sonnet 141, which she reads aloud to her English class. Her poem, I argue, misreads Shakespeare's sonnet, and like the film as a whole, it masks but fails to erase a message of subservience and compromise. Whereas the play ends with two women (Bianca and the unnamed Widow) defying their husbands, and with Kate's at least potentially ironic speech, the film ends with the neat and happy pairing of its three central couples.

Junger's ending recalls the life of bliss anticipated in the early modern ballad "The Cucking of a Scold," in which the wife learns her lesson, shuts her mouth, and allows her husband and neighbors to live peacefully, free of her scolding. Kat's taming is not as violent as that of her early modern counterparts—the woman in the ballad is strapped to a chair and dunked repeatedly in the river until she becomes silent, and Shakespeare's Kate is deprived of food and sleep, whereas Kat is only embarrassed in front of her peers, who reward her vulnerability. Yet

as critics including Jennifer Clement, Elizabeth Deitchman, and Monique Pittman point out, the film's taming is there: disguised as progressive feminism and romantic comedy, Kat's taming transforms her from an outspoken and self-assured rebel to a vulnerable conformist. At the heart of the taming is not a forceful husband or an overbearing father but a circle of peers and an author who has been dead for over four hundred years. *10 Things* appears to present a progressive view of female independence but actually conforms to generic expectations that uphold the status quo. Indeed, it may not be such a stretch to say that the film suggests a regression to the gender hierarchies and restrictive notions of female submission found in Shakespeare's sources. In this chapter, I argue that Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* is radical in the sense of "going to the root or origin; touching upon or affecting what is essential and fundamental" (*OED* def. 7a), here a particular view of female subservience. The play invites debate over the repressive ideas of a particular genre (literature that deals specifically with maintaining gender hierarchies in marriage), whereas the more conservative teen film (specifically, the high school comedy) seeks a romantic ending that subtly reinforces patriarchal standards without drawing attention to how it does so. In this way, *10 Things*, like Shakespeare's literary contemporaries, suggests that personal compromise, for women in particular, is necessary for the good of society.

The film transforms the play's dual marriage plots into a high school world of dating, cliques, and adult incompetence by moving the play's setting to Padua High School in Seattle. In contrast to *Romeo + Juliet*, *10 Things* replaces Shakespeare's language with contemporary speech, and the high school mise-en-scène situates the film within a sub-category of teen films that focus on student experiences. The main characters are two sisters, Kat and Bianca (Larisa Oleynik) Stratford. Kat scorns her school's social customs and enjoys making people angry,

which makes her a social outcast, whereas her sister is cute, perky, and ditzy, which makes her popular. Other major players are bad boy Patrick Verona (Heath Ledger), nerdy new kid Cameron James (Joseph Gordon-Levitt), his geeky friend Michael Eckman (David Krumholz), and pretty-boy rich kid Joey Donner (Andrew Keegan). Each of these characters reflects a “type” often depicted in teen films that feature a high school setting.¹ *10 Things* translates the play’s marital negotiations into a dating scheme. Bianca, who is desired by Cameron and Joey, cannot date until Kat does. Michael comes up with the scheme to make Joey pay Patrick to date Kat; meanwhile, Cameron will serve as Bianca’s French tutor and win her affections. Of course, the ploy eventually works, and the film ends with three happily paired couples: Bianca and Cameron, Kat and Patrick, and Michael and Kat’s best friend Mandella. Even Joey, who emerges as the film’s villain, is able to find a date, Bianca’s former best friend, Chastity. The film does away with the more disturbing aspects of Shakespeare’s play by glossing over the taming and by repositioning the sisters as allies rather than as competitors for male attention, and it suggests the couples can look forward to a life of peace and harmony. Shakespeare’s authority is invoked throughout the film, through the characters’ names, the settings, several out-of-context direct quotations (including lines from *Shrew*, *Macbeth*, and the sonnets), and the hero-worship of Mandella, who goes so far as to say that she and Shakespeare are “involved.” Even as the film

¹ For a description of the teen “school film,” see Shary 26-79. The most commonly discussed teen film that portrays teens as particular types is John Hughes’s *The Breakfast Club*, which classifies its five characters as “the nerd, the jock, the rebel, the popular girl, and the delinquent” (Shary 9), a classification that forms the basis of Shary’s work on the genre. Early in *10 Things*, Michael gives Cameron a tour of the school, pointing out such groups as the future MBAs, the white rastas, the coffee drinkers, the popular kids, and so on. Each student, it appears, is a “type” designated by the group to which he or she belongs. What many critics fail to mention is that the groups are also fluid: Michael has been kicked out of his group for failing to conform to its dress code, Kat and Patrick have rejected the group system in favor of one friend (hence their rebel status), and Bianca eventually leaves the “don’t even think about it” group to be with Cameron. The film suggests that one can transcend high school cliques by being an individual, although in the end the outcasts are normalized through the dating process.

marks its difference from the play by modernizing the plot, updating the language, and shifting the gender dynamics, it pays homage to its source in ways that recall the taming methods described in other early modern texts, methods that Shakespeare subtly challenges.

Several critics have drawn connections between Shakespearean teen films and the source plays' early modern contexts, but they have failed to do so for *10 Things*. For example, Courtney Lehmann reads one of Shakespeare's principal sources, Arthur Brooke's *The Tragicall Historie of Romeus and Juliet*, alongside Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* in order to illuminate the film's water imagery and the ways in which Shakespeare and Luhrmann grapple with the "ghostly fathers" of their sources (*Shakespeare Remains* 146-160). In a similar pairing of early modern and postmodern, Katherine Rowe discusses early modern mnemonic devices that inform her reading of memory in Almercyda's *Hamlet* ("Remember Me"). Although many articles have been published on *10 Things*, no one has mentioned early modern taming narratives in connection with the film, likely because the modernized adaptation appears fully to dissociate the film from its early modern context: shrew taming, wife beating, and nonconsensual marriages appear relics of a distant past. But, I argue, these practices find contemporary equivalents in the film.

Critics instead tend to focus mostly on the film's presentation of feminism² or on its relationship with Shakespeare's play and/or its theatrical tradition.³ Like critics, actors, and directors who continue to divide over how to read Shakespeare's shrew taming and the extent of the play's misogyny, critics of the film differ about the film's politics, particularly Kat's feminism. On the one hand, Michael Friedman argues that Kat's evolution from second-

² These critics include Burt "T(e)en Things" 212-9; Clement; Friedman "Feminist as Shrew"; Hentges 47-51; Kaveney 119-28; and Pittman 97-114, 131.

³ See, for example, Balizet, Clement, Henderson, Leggatt 245-53, and Pittman.

third-wave feminism⁴ reflects her growth as an individual, while Roz Kaveney admires the film for “replacing most of the misogyny with a sympathetic view of the principal heroine’s feminism” (119). On the other hand, Jennifer Clement, who finds Friedman’s essay “unconvincing” but nonetheless useful, claims the film “exploit[s] the generational divide between second and third-wave feminism in order to ridicule both forms of feminism and to suggest that feminism in general is outdated, irrelevant, and even harmful.” Richard Burt argues that *10 Things* is too conservative in its feminism, that it dumbs down Shakespeare’s writings, and that it constrains women even as it claims to empower them (“ShaXXXploitation” xx). Melissa Jones claims the film’s conservative politics are derived from the play’s misogyny; the majority of her analysis focuses on how the film’s patriarchal perspective reflects problems within contemporary education systems, particularly violent behavior, sexual repression and aggression, a limiting use of the literary canon, and “gendered violence” (152). Burt, Clement, and Jones all argue that the film, despite stressing Kat’s feminism, misrepresents the feminist movement and reasserts patriarchal values. I agree with these critics that the film ultimately portrays a conservative view of gender, despite an initial positive presentation of feminism, but I argue that the film’s conservatism should be viewed alongside the generic norms of early modern texts and contemporary teen films. Doing so reveals how the film’s concern with Shakespeare’s authority, and its concern with the conventions of the teen film, reassert early modern gender hierarchies and represent a regression to ideals questioned by Shakespeare’s play.

⁴ Specifically, in “The Feminist as Shrew in *10 Things I Hate About You*” Friedman argues that Kat “evolves from a second-wave feminist, a follower of the old-school feminism of the 1970’s, to a third-wave feminist, one who embraces the contradictions and personal empowerment fostered by the Riot Grrrl movement of the 1990’s” (46). Pittman cites Friedman’s article as presenting a different view than her own (132n7), and while Clement challenges Friedman’s assessment of the film’s use of feminism, she praises his attention to the “wave terminology typical of public debates over feminism.”

“’Tis a wonder”: Taming Texts and Shakespeare

Like *Romeo and Juliet*, which, I have argued, participates in early modern discussions on marriage and love, Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew* participates in a cultural conversation about gender hierarchies within marriage. In her *Texts and Contexts* edition of the play, Frances E. Dolan places the play alongside an array of early modern texts: religious and secular, scholarly and popular, pre- and post-Shakespeare; her edition shows how the play “participates in a long history of representing violent spousal conflict as a slapstick struggle for dominance” (3). These texts often present contradictory views about marriage, but in the end they emphasize the necessity of men and women conforming to their prescribed social roles, which inevitably includes a husband’s dominion over his wife. Even texts that claim sympathy for the woman’s position inevitably require her compliance in the social order. *An Homily of the State of Matrimonie*, first published in 1547, counsels that a husband “ought to be the leader and authour of love” because his wife is “a weake creature, not endued with like strength and constancie of mynde” and thus may “be the more prone to all weake affections and dispositions of minde” (255r). A man, says the homily, should be kind to his wife, but he should also “have her hart in [his] power and wyll” (256v). Women should obey their husbands, “ceasse from commaundyng, and perfourme subjection” (256r). This includes quietly accepting any potential beatings (which the homily strongly discourages) and looking instead to a heavenly reward for her goodness (i.e. silence) (260v).

A text that takes a slightly different approach to gender dynamics within marriage is *A Bride-Bush, or A Direction for Married Persons* by William Whately, with editions published in 1617, 1619, and 1623. Whately defines authority as “a power of exercising government and dominion over another, and this hath two parts, to guide and to recompense; to direct, and to

requite” (105). After describing the different ways authority might be established and kept, he goes on to say that “it is lawful for an husband to exercise them all upon his wife” (106).

Although a man should reserve physical violence for his bondwomen rather than his wife, in some cases “the rod, or staffe, or wand” is acceptable as a last resort (107). In the end, he argues, “let it bee the wisdome of a man, to make choyce of one that shall not need this rigor, rather than to dispute about the lawfulnessse of using it” (109). Whereas the homily on marriage is much stronger than *A Bride-Bush* in urging marital concord and discouraging violence, and both texts emphasize the rights belonging to wives, both ultimately emphasize a woman’s duty to submit to her husband’s authority.

Another text, William Gouge’s *Domesticall Duties* (with editions in 1622, 1626, and 1634) appears to take a different approach to spousal abuse, stating, “The Scripture being so silent in this point [wife beating], wee may well inferre that God hath not ranked wives among those in the family who are to be corrected” (224). One reason a man should abstain from harming his wife is that she will likely, “if she can, rise against him, over-master him (as many do) and never doe any duty aright” (225). And even if she is made to “yield some outward subjection, yet inward hatred of her husbands person may bee joined therewith, which is as bad, if not worse than, outward disobedience” (225). The alternative is not much better, though. In lieu of wife beating, “she may bee restrained of liberty, denied such things as she most affecteth, be kept up, as it were, in hold; and, if no other meanes will serve the turne, bee put over to the Magistrates hands” (225). The law, not the husband, should deal with her in extreme cases. But like the homily, which strongly discourages spousal violence but allows that it happens, the treatise ends on a rather glum note, saying that if the wife assaults her husband, he has the right

to defend himself, and in that case, “striking her...is not to be reckoned an unlawfull beating her” (225-6). In the end, the woman must be subdued.

Shakespeare’s play, composed in the early 1590s, predates several of these texts, but together they participate in an ongoing cultural discussion about wife taming. Petruchio exercises “government and dominion” (Whaley 105) over Kate, describing his methods with metaphors derived from the taming of birds of prey:

Another way I have to man my haggard,
To make her come and know her keeper’s call:
That is, to watch her, as we watch these kites
That bate and beat and will not be obedient.
She ate not meat today, nor none shall eat.
Last night she slept not, nor tonight she shall not. (4.1.162-66)

Petruchio likens his wife to a wild female hawk in need of taming, a metaphor to which I will return when I consider the image of the hawk in Tim Blake Nelson’s *O*. In *Shrew*, Petruchio refers to the methods put forth in early modern documents, which describe how to gain control over a hawk; he will deprive his wife of food and sleep in order to “curb her mad and headstrong humor,” as a falconer tames his bird (4.1.178). Unlike the texts that assume that men will inevitably beat their wives, Petruchio never beats Kate, but he does deny her things she enjoys, as Gouge ordains, by presenting her with and then taking away a fashionable hat and dress. Kate eventually follows Petruchio’s commands and appears to conform to her wifely role as the homily instructs, but the play also demonstrates that she has not lost the power to speak, nor is she weaker than her husband. Shakespeare’s play shares content with wife-taming texts such as these while also challenging their underlying assumptions about women.

Shakespeare invokes and questions the status quo by referring not only to political views on marriage hierarchies but also to historical legends, fictional works, and social practices. *A Looking Glasse for Married Folkes*, published in 1610 by Robert Snawsel, is based on a dialogue

among women originally written by Erasmus, with which Shakespeare may have been familiar (Dolan 185). Erasmus's dialogue features two characters, Eulalie, an honest wife, and Xanthippe, the wife of Socrates, a legendary shrew. Snawsel adds additional characters and expands on Erasmus's text, but the point of each is to show how a wife might amend her shrewish ways (184-97). In Snawsel's version, Eulalie explains to her friends Xanthippe and Margery how moderate and submissive behavior can improve a marriage, and although the others initially challenge her claims that it is a "horrible sinne" for a woman to "usurpe the mans authority," they listen attentively if skeptically (Snawsel D3). Shakespeare's play uses Xanthippe as a way for Petruchio to express his difference from other men. Before meeting Kate, he tells Hortensio that even if she is "as curst and shrewd / as Socrates' Xanthippe, or a worse, / She moves me not, or not removes, at least / Affection's edge in me" (1.2.65-8). The speech is designed to show that only money matters to Petruchio—he concludes with a vow to "wive it wealthily in Padua" (70)—but it also shows that he will not be swayed by her reputation or behavior. Later, Gremio tries to warn Petruchio of her faults, to which Petruchio answers: "I know she is an irksome brawling scold. / If that be all, masters, I hear no harm" (178-9). A conversation with Bianca's suitors shows that Petruchio is aware of a more socially desired sister, and yet he asks for Kate. Tranio speaks of the sisters: "The one as famous for a scolding tongue / As is the other for beauteous modesty" (244-5), and Petruchio answers, "Sir, sir, the first's for me. Let her go by" (246). He desires Kate, and when even her own father tries to dissuade Petruchio from marrying her ("She's not for your turn, the more my grief" says Baptista [2.1.62]), Petruchio persists and promises to give her everything he owns in the event that he dies before she does (119-22). Throughout the opening scenes, Petruchio shows that not only is he not afraid of marrying a

scold but also that he is eager to get to know her—she may be like Xanthippe, but that is no reason to avoid marriage.

In addition to private methods to ensure a woman's submission are public spectacles, which Shakespeare's play dismisses. The ballad "The Cucking of a Scould," published roughly twenty to thirty years after Shakespeare's *Shrew* (1615 to 1630), offers one example of peace achieved through a woman's public humiliation. Unlike texts that focus on the domestic advantages of a woman's silence, this ballad focuses on the public sphere. It involves a young woman, "Just seventein yerres of age," who "would scold with any one," sometimes for days on end ("Cucking" 5, 7). When she turns her wrath on the constable, calling him names because he "did / But pisse against her wall," he vows to get revenge (64-5). His first attempt at public shaming by placing her in a cage only leads to more unrest as she brawls "worse then before" (80), and so the constable sentences her to the cucking stool.⁵ On the day of her punishment, she is carted through the town in a wheelbarrow, accompanied by a grand parade of people, a marching band, and "forty parrots...[o]n sundry pearches hie" (112-3). She is "[s]tripped naked to the smocke," a necklace of "Neats tongues" is hung around her neck, and she is strapped to the stool (123, 125, 127). The crowd carries her to the river, where she is dunked repeatedly to the point of drowning. The cucking (dunking) does not stop until she stops cursing; she eventually holds up her hands and vows, "Ile no more doe so" (155). The narrator concludes with this happy ending:

And after, for her life,
She never durst begin to scould
With either man or wife.
And if that every Scould

⁵ Cucking stools are not just the subjects of popular literature; according to an inventory of Shakespeare's hometown, by the year 1620 Stratford-upon-Avon had its own cucking stool for punishing its scolds (J. Jones 120).

Might have so good a diet,
Then should their neighbours every day
Be sure to live in quiet. (158-64)

The ballad does not indicate how the silenced woman feels about her lesson learned (other than a sense of dread, perhaps—she “durst” not scold again), but the rest of the town is certainly happy. Gremio refers to a similar punishment at the beginning of *Shrew* when Baptista asks if he has come to “court her [Kate] at your pleasure” (1.1.54). Gremio responds, “To cart her rather. She’s too rough for me” (55). This is the first reference to her shrewishness, but rather than endorse such a punishment, Kate is allowed to defend herself, asking her father whether it is his “will / To make a stale of me amongst these mates” (57-8). Shakespeare introduces the possible punishment of carting (which can serve as punishment in its own right, or which may be part of the punishment of cucking) only to dismiss it immediately.

Shakespeare’s *Shrew* draws on early modern narratives about taming unruly wives, training birds of prey, and preserving gender hierarchies, and in its final scene, the play presents a woman who appears to have recanted her shrewish ways. The ending is not as straightforward as is the case in these other texts, however, and invites critique of its apparent lesson. Shakespeare’s play presents contradictory views of its heroine from its first scenes and presents her as more complex than the shrews and wives found in other early modern texts. By opening up its female protagonist to both sympathy and critique, the play challenges audiences to consider her situation carefully—and the situations of others like her. When Gremio mentions carting, and Kate appeals to her father for defense, his silence leaves her to defend herself against Gremio and also Hortensio, whose insult, “No mates for you / Unless you were of gentler, milder mould” (1.1.59-60), suggests that she will find friends (or more specifically, a husband) when she learns to mold herself into a more personable demeanor. But in a departure from the genre,

in which female characters tend to be one-dimensional—the only thing that matters about them is their shrewishness—the play sympathizes with and develops Kate’s character, providing reasons for her behavior. Someone else always provokes Kate’s aggression, and even as she defends herself, she also expresses vulnerability. For example, she tells her father:

What, will you not suffer me? Nay, now I see
She [Bianca] is your treasure, she must have a husband.
I must dance barefoot on her wedding day
And, for your love to her, lead apes in hell.
Talk not to me! I will go sit and weep
Till I can find occasion of revenge. (2.1.31-6)

Kate’s “shrewishness” comes across in the last line of this speech, but she also expresses hurt over Bianca’s place in the family and in society and also fear about what will happen to her. Her tears reflect the socially uncertain future of an unmarried (and eventually fatherless) woman. Later, she shows kindness and concern for others when she attempts to shield Petruchio’s servants from their master’s anger, breaking from the self-centeredness of other literary shrews (4.1.56-7, 125).

Later in the play, Kate’s relationship with Petruchio interrogates the male-female relationships described in other early modern texts. No one speaks of Kate in a positive light until Petruchio enters the scene, and, before he has seen her, he decides he will love her, albeit for financial gain. When he hears Hortensio’s account of how Kate broke the lute over his head, Petruchio exclaims, “Now, by the world, it is a lusty wench! / I love her ten times more than e’er I did. / O how I long to have some chat with her” (2.1.156-8). Petruchio’s aim is to tame her, according to the genre, but throughout the play he expresses delight, not disgust, at her boldness. When she commands the wedding guests to go in to dinner, even though Petruchio has said the couple is not staying, he tells the guests to obey her (3.2.211-2). He asserts his authority after acknowledging hers, saying that she must leave with him, but he uses the language of romance

narratives, telling Grumio to “rescue” his “mistress” because they “are beset with thieves” (3.2.225-6). He casts himself as the heroic knight, not the dominating villain: “Fear not, sweet wench, they shall not touch thee, Kate! / I’ll buckler thee against a million” (227-8). This language is used for comic effect and achieves its aim of ensuring Kate’s compliance with his authority, but it also positions man and wife on the same side, against those who do nothing to protect or aid her. When they return to Padua, they are again aligned as allies. Petruchio asks her to stand aside with him to watch the outcome of the quarrel between Vincentio and the Pedant who has been imitating him, and he cheers Kate on at the dinner table. It cannot be denied that Petruchio’s taming methods are in keeping with the standards set forth elsewhere—he contradicts his wife, withholds daily necessities and simple comforts, and he achieves his aim of getting her to agree with him. He also establishes his authority; by the end of the play, she submits to his commands, helping him to win the bet over whose wife is most obedient. But the bet is won by her words and actions, not by his, and the play shows the complex relationship between husband and wife without silencing the woman’s voice.

Kate’s voice is heard most clearly in the sexual banter she shares with Petruchio during their first meeting. The longest conversation they have with each other, the scene marks the only time they are alone onstage, and it represents another divergence from the genre by showing the intellectual game of verbal sparring that has little to do with the social stigmas of scolding or taming. With no audience, the couple exchanges a series of one-liners designed to best the other. They test each other’s intellect and wit, and they use a shared language of insults, often borrowing words from the other to construct new ideas, such as in the following exchange:

Petruchio: Come, come, you wasp, i’ faith you are too angry.

Kate: If I be waspish, best beware my sting.

Petruchio: My remedy is then to pluck it out.

Kate: Ay, if the fool could find it where it lies.

Petruchio: Who knows not where a wasp does wear his sting? In his tail.
Kate: In his tongue.
Petruchio: Whose tongue?
Kate: Yours, if you talk of tales, and so farewell.
Petruchio: What, with my tongue in your tail? Nay, come again. (2.1.205-213)

This exchange uses wordplay, wit, and double entendre to show that Kate is Petruchio's verbal and intellectual equal, and it establishes a mutuality that subtly undercuts the act of taming. Indeed, this is Kate's first opportunity to speak to someone who actually listens to her. In 1.1, Hortensio quickly turns away from her to speak to the other men; at the beginning of 2.1, Kate and Bianca's conversation stresses Bianca's obedience and submission to her sister, not equality or mutual respect; and Baptista speaks to his elder daughter only to scold her. Petruchio, in contrast, is willing to talk to and of her in ways no one else has. In conversation with the other men, he speaks of her mildness, virtues, and beauty (2.1.283-310, 3.2.185), and even though this may be read as reverse psychology, all part of his strategy to tame her, his refusal to label Kate a shrew or a devil suggests that there is more to her person than society believes.

Even as Shakespeare stages the taming of a shrew, Kate's response, as well as the reactions of other characters, can be read as a subtle critique of the genre. Throughout the play, Kate's behavior alternates between righteous indignation and polite entreaty; she becomes violent (hitting Bianca, Petruchio, and Grumio and breaking Hortensio's lute over his head) when she feels slighted or insulted. Her violence ceases after the scene in which, after sending away a beautiful dress, Petruchio tells her:

For 'tis the mind that makes the body rich....
O, no, good Kate; neither art thou the worse
For this poor furniture and mean array.
If thou account'st it shame, lay it on me.
And therefore frolic; we will hence forthwith,
To feast and sport us at thy father's house. (4.4.164, 171-5)

Petruchio accepts the blame for any judgment others will lay on her. If they have focused on Kate in order to ridicule her, Petruchio shifts the focus to himself. Here, he invites her to “frolic” and “sport” along with him when they arrive at the feast, telling her that outward appearances do not matter. Even though the play demonstrates that outward appearances do matter—such as in the Induction, when the beggar Christopher Sly comes to believe in his nobility because of his clothing, and when various characters in the Bianca plot use clothing to assume new identities—clothing is not enough to change a person’s birthright or reputation. In this way, the play, like Petruchio, presents a challenge to look beneath outward appearances. Others may label Kate a shrew, but Petruchio claims to see through that guise. Instead, the couple will focus on entertaining the others with their behavior, not their garb. These lines introduce a sense of play into the closing scenes, and this playfulness carries with it an element of irony that cannot be ignored.

The playfulness continues on their way to Padua, when Petruchio bids Kate to call the moon the sun and to pretend an old man is a young maid. Kate complies in order to speed their journey to her father’s house, but this command allows her to use her imagination, to participate in another game of wits with Petruchio. She gets in a jab at her husband by saying that “the moon changes even as your mind,” and she amazes both Hortensio and Vincentio with her role-playing, as when she calls the old man a “Young budding virgin, fair, and fresh, and sweet” (4.5.19, 36). The mood is light, with Petruchio telling the old man they will “be joyful of thy company” and Vincentio calling Kate his “merry mistress” (51-2). In this scene, Kate and Petruchio work and play together rather than being at odds with each other and with the world.⁶

⁶ Amy L. Smith suggests that in this scene, “Kate parodies wifely subjection” and reads it as a critique, not a simple acceptance, of gender roles.

In light of the previous scenes, the final scene should be interpreted with a similar sense of play, wonder, and skepticism. After a banquet in which Bianca and the unnamed Widow demonstrate that they are as capable of wordplay and feisty speech as Kate, their three husbands make a wager: the man “whose wife is most obedient / To come at first when he doth send for her / Shall win the wager” (5.2.65-8). Both Bianca and the Widow refuse to answer their husbands’ summons. Lucentio and Hortensio believe they have married obedient wives, but instead these wives assert independence and even attempt to reverse gender hierarchies, as when the Widow not only refuses her husband but also establishes herself as commander, bidding him to “come to her” (96). The men’s shock is even more pronounced when the most unruly woman of all, Katherine, comes immediately at her husband’s command and then proceeds to scold the other women.

Kate’s speech addresses marital roles, both that of the wife and the husband. She begins by chastising Bianca and the Widow, telling them to “dart not scornful glances from those eyes / To wound thy lord, thy king, thy governor” (5.2.141-2). She goes on to assert the hierarchies and expectations of marriage: “Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper, / Thy head, thy sovereign; one that cares for thee” (150-1). Men, she says, endure bodily discomfort while working for their wives, who remain safe and warm at home; in return, the men want nothing more than “love, fair looks, and true obedience” (157). When a woman strays from her duties, Kate asks, “What is she but a foul contending rebel / And graceless traitor to her loving lord?” (163-4). Although Kate appears to condemn female rebellion, rebellion in Shakespeare’s plays is not so straightforward; *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, and *Hamlet* present rebellious women, whose actions over the course of the plays complicate or even challenge this condemnation. Many critics read these lines as signs of Kate’s submission, but many agree with me that she is

being ironic. She goes on to confess that in the past, she too was haughty, forward, and disagreeable, but she claims to have learned her lesson. At the end of her speech, to prove that she has changed her ways, Kate bids the other women to “place your hands below your husband’s foot, / In token of which duty, if he please, / My hand is ready; may it do him ease” (181-3). Kate’s speech wins her praise from Petruchio, a kiss, and a promise to go “to bed” (188). In other words, her husband, assured of his wife’s obedience and love, is ready to consummate their marriage in the final legally binding act. The other men, meanwhile, acknowledge that Petruchio has won the bet and tamed his wife. Bianca’s husband Lucentio is given the last line of the play: “’Tis a wonder, by your leave, she will be tamed so” (193). He cannot quite believe what he has just witnessed, introducing a skepticism that should be maintained. Throughout the play, Shakespeare has portrayed his heroine as multifaceted. She scolds in order to protect herself, but she also demonstrates kindness toward servants, a witty tongue and an intellect that allow her to banter with Petruchio, and a sense of propriety in order to achieve her goals, as when she complies with her husband’s outlandish declarations on the way to Padua in order to speed their journey. Here, her speech allows her to admonish her sister, with whom she does not have a kind relationship, as well as to exercise her tongue, to command everyone’s attention without being interrupted or scorned, and to surprise the other guests.

Audiences and critics are right to doubt that Kate’s final speech is in earnest or that she believes her own submission,⁷ although Shakespeare’s ending can allow for multiple readings. In performance, to quote Elizabeth Schafer, performers “have a wide range of choices” for Kate’s final speech: “is Katherine ironic, sincere, angry, exhibitionist, lobotomized, in love,

⁷ According to Dolan, “Few modern critics read either Katherine’s final speech or this last enactment of subjection ‘straight’—that is, few argue that Petruchio has tamed Katherine and that she submits willingly” (35).

masochistic, feminist, indulgent, threatening, or does she just have her eyes on the cash...?”

(34).⁸ All of these choices are possible because Shakespeare’s play invites debate and provides for multiple interpretive possibilities. If critics and performers wish to read the play’s ending as masochistic, its heroine broken and submissive, they emphasize the scenes in which Petruchio withholds food, drink, sleep, clothing, and other comforts in order to “tame” his wife. Those wishing to read the play as redemptive, comical, or romantic focus on the scenes in which Kate journeys from a miserable loner whose relationships with her sister, her father, and the rest of Padua are problematic to a wife who discovers in her new husband an ally who presents her with the chance to display her new-found social superiority. In this reading, Kate’s verbal acrobatics allow her to participate in a rhetorical game that emphasizes the performative aspects of relationships and social standing.⁹ Others might focus on the play’s revelation that *everything* is a performance, that nothing is stable, emphasized particularly by the Induction, in which the beggar Christopher Sly becomes convinced that he is a nobleman.

The complexity of Shakespeare’s *Shrew* allows for all of these readings, but examining it alongside other texts that deal with similar themes reveals a subtle critique of early modern gender hierarchies. Shakespeare’s play introduces punishments such as carting only to dismiss them; a husband’s dominance appears established, but the wife demonstrates her capacity for witty and intelligent speech, and her performance at the banquet should be read within a context of playfulness that has been established in earlier scenes. Kate, Bianca, and the Widow all show that they are intellectually on par with their male counterparts. Shakespeare’s play invites

⁸ For a lengthy discussion of how the play’s ending has been treated in performance, see Schafer 227-32.

⁹ The sub-plot lends itself to a similar reading that stresses the importance of performance, as gentlemen and servants exchange clothes and nearly everyone gets away with pretending to be someone else.

sympathy for its shrew by revealing her vulnerability and by showing that her actions are mostly reactive or playful. The play's final scene represents some of the ideals found in *An Homily of the State of Matrimonie* or *A Bride-Bush*, or *A Direction for Married Persons*, particularly in the conventional roles of man and wife, but the play challenges these assertions by suggesting that taming methods are more cosmetic than substantial. Even though Kate says nothing more after her speech, there is no indication that her female companions follow her words and actions. Both the sense of play leading up to this scene and Lucentio's wonder invite audiences to question what they have witnessed and to read beyond Kate's apparent submission.

Tame a Teen in Fourteen Lines: Shrew Taming in *10 Things*

What do all of these early modern ideas about wife beating and marriage have to do with late twentieth-century teen films? After all, the films under discussion here do not depict married couples, and they certainly do not condone domestic violence. A major divergence between the teen film and early modern texts, including Shakespeare's play, is the concern with gender hierarchies outside of and within marriage. The early modern texts assume that, other than parent-child relationships or master-servant relationships, the conflicts between men and women occur within the institution of marriage. For the most part, these relationships are binding, and unlike teens who are dating, the married couple does not have the option of breaking up or moving on to someone who is more compatible. Even though marriage is not the focus of teen films like *10 Things*, teens in these films are encouraged to find a suitable mate: personal independence or autonomy is shunned, and unpaired characters are viewed as flawed or not to be taken seriously (in the case of *10 Things*, this group of people includes all of the adults, with particular judgment placed on the absent mother). Like *10 Things* and other films in the teen genre, Shakespeare's contemporaries suggest that domestic and social happiness relies on

compliance with certain social norms. Both sets of texts—early modern and postmodern—offer similar lessons about achieving domestic tranquility. In contrast to Shakespeare’s *Shrew*, which questions received norms, both the teen film and the early modern texts discussed in this chapter serve as instructive texts that promote social harmony at the expense of female autonomy.

To cite one example of these similarities, “The Cucking of a Scould” presents a lesson of female conformity that anticipates the film. Kat’s compliance to the social order is not bought with so stiff a price as the ballad’s subject (she is not caged, carted, or cucked), but she appears to have learned a lesson of submission at the age of seventeen. Speaking her mind and upsetting her neighbors does not, in the end, earn their respect or gain her personal happiness. Like the ballad’s scold, Kat is humiliated and “put in her place,” in front of all of her neighbors, when the bet is revealed at the prom and then when she confesses her hurt feelings in class. Kat’s tearful departure from the classroom resembles the young scold’s concession to her neighbors, after which everything changes. Like the peaceful town at the end of the ballad, the upbeat ending of *10 Things* suggests that a similar compromise has been reached and that Padua High School has been freed of its scold.

One might protest that equating these oppressive early modern texts with the lighthearted teen comedy is problematic and that the small acts of violence portrayed in the film have nothing to do with wife beating or shrew taming. Only two scenes in *10 Things* contain physical violence between the genders¹⁰: a paintball war between Kat and Patrick, which culminates in their first kiss; and the prom, where Bianca punches Joey twice in the face before kneeing him in the crotch. In both cases, the violence serves as an equalizing force that stresses women’s

¹⁰ I do not count the drunken fistfight between male characters at the keg party, nor do I count something that occurs before the action of the film, Kat allegedly sending a classmate to the hospital for testicle retrieval surgery. (Kat tells Ms. Perky, “I maintain that he kicked himself in the balls.”)

abilities to hold their own. For the most part, the women in *10 Things* are treated with respect, and they are not afraid to speak their minds. And yet, as Pittman points out, “the agency of the narrative’s sympathetic young men gradually expands while Kat’s diminishes” (107). Indeed, the male characters orchestrate the plot while Kat is left ignorant, thus creating “a disproportion in power relations within and outside the narrative” (108). Pittman continues, “While in the denouement Kat as desiring agent may choose Patrick, this only occurs after much of the film has positioned her as unwitting pawn no better than Joey within the machinations orchestrated by Cameron, Michael, and Patrick” (108). This “disproportion in power relations” has been seen in early modern texts and emerges as a central theme in many teen films. Even though *10 Things* and other teen films replace marital problems with dating and inter-generational conflict, both early modern and postmodern narratives present situations in which women are forced to compromise and men emerge superior. Of particular note is the way in which the ideas presented in these works are unquestioned; only careful reading of the film reveals its ideological conflicts, whereas Shakespeare draws attention to the disturbing gender relationships throughout his play. *10 Things* conceals its lesson of conformity underneath a veneer of comedy and romance, but one reason it does so is its genre.

Films in the teen genre, like early modern texts about marriage and shrew taming, can take contradictory stances to issues such as gender, sexuality, and individuality. But despite social gains made by women over the past century, commercial teen films of the 1990s, particularly those set in high schools, tend to present conservative views of gender and uphold patriarchal values. In their volume *Sugar, Spice, and Everything Nice: Cinemas of Girlhood*, Frances Gateward and Murray Pomerance argue that in most films about girls, “the female subject is an exemplification—often through exaggeration—of hegemonic attitudes and values

about girlhood, and the films are instructive texts rather than documents of revolution” (14). Gayle Wald argues that another teen adaptation of a literary text, *Clueless*, presents an “empowered” heroine, Cher, but the film ultimately embraces “conventional gender and class narratives cloaked in the rhetoric of the charming, the cute, or the clueless” (121). Cher “acquires subjectivity and consciousness, [but] the ‘price’ of her insight is submission to the heterosexual romance narrative” (119). Along a similar vein, Ann De Vaney uses the 1980s films written by John Hughes, particularly *The Breakfast Club*, *Pretty in Pink*, and *Sixteen Candles*, to argue that the girls in these films “perform white, neoconservative teen sex roles and offer a powerful invitation to girl viewers to do likewise”; that is, to care for their fathers, to dress conservatively, and to be “no threat to the patriarchal status quo of family or school” (202). The films offer the girls in the audience “the promise of insight but give them only the smallest kinds of rebellions within safe geographies of school and home” (204). Although none of these essays mentions *10 Things* specifically, all of the films discussed promote similar perspectives—they serve as instructional texts designed to reinforce normative values, and they introduce a heroine’s small acts of rebellion or insight only to uphold the status quo.¹¹ *10 Things*, as has been noted by several critics, also appears to promote female independence, empowerment, and

¹¹ Not every teen film operates this way, however. Mary Celeste Kearney insists that “heterosexual romance no longer works as the primary ideology grounding cinematic portrayals of teenage girlhood. While many contemporary films continue to place female youth in the role of girlfriend or sexual fantasy figure..., since the early 1990s there has been a significant increase in the number of films about teenage girls that do not privilege heterosexual romance narratives” (130). Examples include *The Incredibly True Adventure of Two Girls in Love* (1995), *Foxfire* (1996), *Girls Town* (1996), and *All Over Me* (1996) (Kearney 133-40). Indeed, newer studies of teen films attempt to bring to the surface films ignored or glossed over by early scholarship on teen films, in order to show the depth and complexity of the genre. Sarah Hentges shows how all of these critics are correct by contrasting what she calls mainstream films, like those Gateward, Pomerance, Wald, and De Vaney discuss, with independent films, such as those Kearney mentions. My study focuses on the more traditional approaches to teen films because I argue that Shakespearean teen films follow the more mainstream examples within the genre.

self-awareness, but ultimately it suggests that the best way to achieve these goals is through a negotiation process that is rewarded by romance and social acceptance at the expense of autonomy.

Also at stake in discussions of gender in teen films is female sexuality, a topic that demonstrates the lessons of conformity and submission in *10 Things*. In the film, Kat and Bianca's father is an obstetrician concerned with protecting his daughters from unwanted pregnancy. Before the girls go to a party, he makes Bianca don "the belly," a pregnancy suit designed to show the uncomfortable and, to the teenager whose appearance is a primary concern, visually unappealing consequence of sex (contraceptives are not mentioned, and the unspoken lesson is that sex ultimately leads to conception). What Dr. Stratford does not know is that Kat had sex with Joey when she was a year younger than Bianca is now. Joey broke up with her because she decided she wasn't ready to continue a sexual relationship; his actions led her to decide to no longer follow her peers for the sake of popularity or acceptance, and her shrewishness was a direct consequence of her failed sexual relationship. Kat's choice appears to be progressive in that it empowers her by demonstrating that she can resist peer pressure and forge her own way through high school, but it also causes other characters to view her as a one-dimensional shrew whose words and behavior are easily dismissed. When Kat eventually tells Bianca about sleeping with Joey, she reveals that her demeanor is meant to protect herself and her sister from getting hurt, not necessarily because of allegiance to a particular political ideology. Kat's reasons for leaving the popular crowd may be complex, but by keeping her motivations private she opens herself to criticism.

In Shakespeare's play, Petruchio publicly challenges Kate's poor reputation, but *10 Things* places the burden of proof solely on its heroine. Patrick may dedicate a song to Kat and

take care of her when she is drunk, but he remains largely silent when the occasion arises to defend her from judgment. Instead, the film uses Kat's sexuality to show her progression from popular to shrewish to popular again. Kat's decision to separate herself from her peers after sleeping with Joey leads to her being classified as a "heinous bitch"—which, according to guidance counselor Ms. Perky, is what Kat's classmates call her behind her back. Bianca, too, calls her sister a "bitch" on more than one occasion. The dichotomy between the virginal Bianca and the bitchy Kat conforms to familiar sex roles in teen films, according to Robin Wood: "the women are divided into 'nice girls' (usually virgins) and 'bitches,' depending upon whether they attach themselves to the central male character or dump him; notions of sexual freedom or 'free love' are never offered as desirable alternatives to the traditional forms of sexual organization" (5). Bianca is a "nice girl" until she chooses Cameron over Joey, who confronts Cameron at the prom and tells him that he and that "little bitch" Bianca will pay. In retaliation for Joey's treatment of Cameron, Kat, and herself, Bianca punches him twice in the face and then knees him in the crotch. Still, the virginal Bianca is not really a bitch because Joey's status at the top of the dating pyramid has dropped, and her relationship with Cameron appears safely chaste, which is an important aspect of the 1990s teen film. Several critics note the trend in teen films—especially those made in the wake of the AIDS crisis—that stresses teen chastity, particularly, according to Jon Lewis, for female characters (Doherty 200-1; Lewis 76; Shary 211-2). As long as she is at odds with her peers, particularly with the popular Joey, Kat is a bitch, a shrew. But when Joey becomes a laughingstock, Kat confesses her feelings for Patrick (which, according to her poem, have nothing to do with sex), and she returns to her school's dating world. The film's message of adherence to dominant values is closely aligned with chastity at the end of *10 Things*:

the central couples are all in relationships, but even Dr. Stratford no longer worries about his daughters becoming pregnant.

I have been arguing that *10 Things* generally interprets Shakespeare's story as romantic, redemptive, and comical—but the film's sunny ending, which purports to have solved the problems of all of its central characters, provides an overly simplistic conclusion. *10 Things* gestures toward gender equality and a dismantling of early modern family hierarchies; rather than question the need to tame its heroine at all, however, or offer a more progressive ending than Shakespeare's, the film instead resembles other early modern literature in which domestic peace relies on female submission, a social norm that Shakespeare's play subtly questions. In particular, the film moves toward this restrictive ending by presenting Kat's longing for parental and canonical authority. The young rebel in *10 Things*, like her counterparts in other Shakespearean teen films, is revealed as a girl secretly searching for approval and whose reliance on Shakespeare's authority to express her "true" feelings betrays the film's patriarchal slant.

A negative sexual encounter led to Kat's initial decision to alienate herself from her peers, but this decision also relied heavily on Kat's difficult relationship with figures of authority, particularly her parents. The film positions Kat's independence as an admirable trait, which even her father commends, but underneath teen autonomy lies a desire for more parental involvement and adult approval, a central component of teen films. Kat tells Bianca that she slept with Joey "right after mom left," linking her rebellion to the absence of (or abandonment by) a mother. "Everyone else was doing it," she says, "so I did it. Afterwards I told him I didn't want to anymore because I wasn't ready. And he got pissed, and he dumped me. After that I swore I would never do anything just because everyone else was doing it." Faced with an overprotective but emotionally distant father and no mother, Kat decides she must negotiate the world on her

own, becoming her own authority figure; she will no longer base her decisions on others' standards. This break from the idea that her peers must approve her choices leads to her outcast status, which Kat represents as a personal choice (her first appearance onscreen is accompanied by Joan Jett singing, "I don't give a damn about my bad reputation"), but which is closely aligned to her desire for parental direction. On the one hand, the film celebrates Kat's feminism and appears to depart from the constricting gender dynamics of its early modern predecessors. On the other hand, it is constricted by the limitations of teen films, revealing the reasons behind Kat's behavior: her actions stem from a desire to avoid emotional encounters that will betray her fear of rejection and her longing for parental authority.

The film's treatment of family life reveals its concern with preserving patriarchy, and even though it purports to liberate its young women, it is actually critical of female independence. In this way, it follows a trend noted by Murray Pomerance in films at the end of the twentieth century (not just teen films): "Liberation is everywhere, *but only as a garb*, and under it is the same old disenfranchisement, the same old inequality, perhaps even more brutal now than ever because painted as something else" (7). Throughout *10 Things*, Kat portrays herself as a rebel and claims to be an authority on topics ranging from feminism to dating. Her assertion of authority affects her relationship with Bianca, whom Kat both controls and resents until midway through the film when they are repositioned as allies. Conversations with Bianca and with their father, however, reveal that Kat's rebellious attitude is a front designed to conceal her pain over her mother's departure and her desire for a stronger father figure, but she avoids difficult conversations about these feelings by shifting the focus away from herself. Early in the film, Kat receives an acceptance letter from Sarah Lawrence, her dream college. In the exchange that

follows, when her father expresses his desire for Kat to stay in Seattle and attend his alma mater, she changes the topic by talking about Bianca's dating life:

Dr. Stratford: I thought we decided you were going to stay here and go to school, at UW, like me. Be a Husky. Grrr.

Kat: No, you decided.

Dr. Stratford: Oh, okay, what, so you just pick up and leave, is that it?

Bianca: Let's hope so.

Kat: Ask Bianca who drove her home.

Dr. Stratford: Kat, don't change...drove? Who drove you home?

The conversation shifts from the implicit comparison between Kat and her mother, who also (the film implies) just picked up and left, to the dating status of the sisters. Kat avoids any direct challenge to her father's authority here and instead attempts to fill her mother's shoes, restricting Bianca's dating life in order to protect her from "miscreants" like Joey. The younger generation inherits the duty of the older to restrict teen freedom under the mantle of protection.¹² The conversation is cut short when Dr. Stratford's pager beeps and he is called to the office to take care of his patients—one of whom includes a fifteen-year-old drug addict who has just had an unwanted baby and who told him, he says, that she "should have listened to her father." In this scene, Kat changes the subject and avoids a painful conversation about the past, but she also expresses annoyance at her father's lack of attention and inability to sustain a meaningful conversation because his priorities are elsewhere.

The problematic relationship among Dr. Stratford, his departed wife, and their daughters reveals an implicit critique of the modern family. Kat questions her father's authority and parental abilities and expresses a desire for him to acknowledge her needs, but she also appears hurt that he does not participate more fully in her life. When Dr. Stratford confronts Kat after she rams into Joey's car, the conversation quickly turns to the parent-child relationship. He asks

¹² Later, Bianca will challenge her sister's intervention, and even though Kat agrees to let Bianca date, she favors the seemingly harmless, chaste Cameron over Joey.

her, “Is this about Sarah Lawrence? Are you punishing me because I want you to stay close to home?” The inverted authority here, in which the daughter is “punishing” her father, emerges as another consequence of an absent mother. Kat asks, “Aren’t you punishing me because mom left?” When her father asks to leave her mother out of it and asserts his right as a parent to make the decisions, Kat challenges him: “I want to go to an east coast school. I want you to trust me to make my own choices, and I want you to stop trying to control my life just because you can’t control yours.” His reply, “Yeah, well you know what I want,” is cut short by another page from his office. This exchange shows how deeply affected Kat has been by her mother’s departure, as well as her assessment of how her father has handled himself for the past three years. It also shows Dr. Stratford’s inability to sustain a meaningful conversation with his daughter. She asserts the right to take ownership of her life because he has not, and she resents his incapacity. These scenes vilify the mother whose apparent choice to pursue an independent life has led to many of her family’s problems.¹³ The film’s depiction of the parent-child relationship departs from early modern practices, in which a father negotiated his daughter’s future without her input, but Kat appears as powerless here as the women in the texts discussed. Even though she expresses a desire for independence, she does not take the initiative to pursue her goals, which are dependent on her father’s approval and financial support.

At the end of the film, after Kat and Bianca show that they can date and stand up for themselves without becoming pregnant (again revealing the film’s concern with chastity), Dr. Stratford reveals that he is proud of them, and he concedes to their requests for certain freedoms. He tells Kat, “You know, fathers don’t like to admit it when their daughters are capable of

¹³ Clement offers a compelling reading of Kat’s relationship with her absent mother, claiming that Kat commits “psychological matricide” (a term derived from second-wave feminism) in order to connect with her peers and her sister, which leads to a patriarchal return rather than an evolution from second- to third-wave feminism (9).

running their own lives; it means we've become spectators. Bianca still lets me play a few innings; you've had me on the bench for years. When you go to Sarah Lawrence, I won't even be able to watch the game." Instead of engaging in a sustained conversation with his daughter (and without making sure she still wants to go to Sarah Lawrence), he writes a check and hopes his gesture will make her happy. Clement insists that Dr. Stratford's check and Patrick's gift to Kat serve only to show her continued reliance on patriarchal values, not independence from them: "The movie's conservatism demands that Kat wait to have her desires for music and for college validated by males, and economic independence—an issue centrally important to both second and third-wave feminisms—is ignored" (16). Certainly, Sarah Lawrence is an expensive school, and most middle-class students rely on their parents' financial support, but smart students like Kat also help pay tuition by applying for scholarships and other financial aid. According to Sarah Lawrence's web site, "The College determines financial aid awards to incoming students on the basis of need, motivation for learning, and the potential for active participation in the campus community" ("Financial Aid"). Mr. Stratford's gesture of sending in a check offers little incentive for Kat to be resourceful in pursuing her education. By admitting his own place on the sidelines of her upbringing, he validates Kat's critique that he has been an ineffectual figure of authority. Dr. Stratford may be offering Kat an independent lifestyle, but he also does not show that he understands her needs any more than he did at the beginning of the film.

The tendency of *10 Things* to appear progressive while upholding patriarchal values reflects a problem of genre; in its quest for a traditional romantic comedy ending, it reverts to the instructive lessons offered in early modern literature. To return to another early modern example, Snawsel's *A Looking Glasse for Married Folks* offers a similar lesson to *10 Things*, although the two works appear very different. In the dialogue, the former shrew who changed her ways in

order to achieve a peaceful marriage tells her two female friends that the best way to deal with oppressive husbands is to emulate their moods, to bear their tempers, to flatter them, and to gently suggest ways the men can mend their ways, but to “breake off that talke” as soon as possible (D5v). Initially, the film inverts these gender relationships. Patrick in *10 Things* is far from the brutish husbands mentioned in this text, although he does initially pursue Kat as a know-it-all, telling her during their first conversation, “I’ll pick you up on Friday” and then, “I’ll take you to places you’ve never been before.” Kat replies sarcastically to both pick-up lines and tells him it is “Doubtful, very doubtful” that he knows her name or anything about her. Unlike *A Looking Glass*, Patrick has to mend his own ways (dropping the cheesy lines) and to flatter Kat in order to get her to go out with him (professing a common interest in Riot Grrrl music and feminist authors, even though he learns about Kat’s interests from Bianca). But his initial motive is to win the bet with Joey, and, even though he develops feelings for Kat, he does not attempt to tell her the truth. She is skeptical of Patrick’s invitation to the prom but meets him there anyway, and it is there that Joey reveals that he has paid Patrick to go out with Kat, a revelation that humiliates and angers her. Nevertheless, Kat decides to forgive Patrick, and here the film reverts to the lesson taught in the early modern dialogue. Kat’s final poem, in which she lists the things she “hates” about Patrick, resembles the advice distilled by the wife in *A Looking Glasse*: “she [should] moderate her complaint & temper her speech so, that she may seem not to hate her husbands person, but only his ill conditions” (D5v-D5r). Kat’s list of grievances ranges from the way Patrick drives to how he dresses to his treatment of her, but she avoids any direct attack on his person and concludes that she does not, in fact, hate him. Kat’s approach—listing aspects of Patrick’s behavior that could be changed, while maintaining her loyalty to him—resembles the wife’s conclusion in the early modern text. Neither Kat nor the women in the early modern text

appears to actually hate the men of whom they speak; they attempt to find peace in their relationships and do so through speech. The reformed shrew advises that if a woman takes the correct approach to dealing with her husband, he “may be forced to acknowledge his wives courtesie, and kind dealing, & to say...*She is more righteous then I*” (D5r). The wife may have earned her husband’s respect, and he may even amend his behavior (as Patrick does when he apologizes to Kat and buys her a guitar) but in the end it is the woman who has compromised.

10 Things stages this compromise by invoking Shakespeare’s authority. Instead of revising or updating Kate’s final speech in *Shrew*, the film draws from a different source: Shakespeare’s sonnets. Doing so allows the film to distance itself from the sexist content of the marriage homily and the other taming literature that Shakespeare’s ending evokes, but the substitution of one literary form for another does not free *10 Things* from a problematic ending. Whereas the last lines of Shakespeare’s play invite skepticism and wonder at its heroine’s transformation, the film paints Kat’s revised perspective as sincere, her reinstatement to group identity and normative values as complete.

In the film, the scene analogous to Kate’s speech leaves little room for debate; it depicts a transformed Kat whose feelings for Patrick are unquestionable. The scene takes place in the classroom, which has served the purpose of establishing Kat as the outsider but which also charts her slow transformation to conformity. She first establishes her feminist politics at the beginning of the film when she argues that Hemingway is *not* romantic, as one of her female classmates tries to suggest, and she critiques the course’s syllabus for not including more women. A second classroom scene depicts the beginning of her transformation from scornful outcast to rehabilitated peer. Situated just after Bogie Lowenstein’s party, in which Kat entertained her classmates with a drunken table dance, this classroom scene emphasizes the comments of Kat’s

classmates, which focus on her actions at the party, not her words or social critique. Although unflattering, the comments show that Kat's peers are beginning to recognize her for behavior not associated with shrewishness. Also in this scene, Mr. Morgan raps the first four lines of Shakespeare's Sonnet 141 and assigns the class to re-write the poem. In another sign of her ongoing transformation, Kat does not fight him but instead agrees that it is a great assignment. His surprise is evident when she reads her assignment in the next classroom scene, but unlike Lucentio, who expresses wonder at the end of *Shrew*, Mr. Morgan does not question her sincerity.

Instead of a speech about marriage, feminism, or other social hierarchies, Kat's poem is personal. The film's choice of the sonnet form attempts to put distance between the film's politics and those referred to in Kate's speech: sermons on marriage, gender difference, and the subservience of women. Instead, Kat's speech participates in a different literary tradition, which is not as hotly contested as the anti-feminist literature invoked in the play but which approaches similar themes of marriage and gender difference. During the early modern period, the sonnet (like all other literature) was a male-dominated form, with a few notable women contributing to the genre, including Gaspara Stampa in Italy, Louise Labé in France, and Lady Mary Wroth in England. For the most part, the sonnet tradition idealizes the beloved, who can be distant, cold, and cruel but who also brings light and meaning to the speaker's life. Because of (or in spite of) the beloved, the speaker is a better and more famous poet, an active citizen, a recluse, a besotted lover, and a miserable wretch—sometimes all at the same time.

The sonnet form is ideal for expressing the contradictions of love, and Shakespeare's sonnets follow a pattern that is both predictable (nearly standard meter and rhyme scheme) and surprising (structurally, the theme of the first three quatrains is often reversed in the final couplet, while thematically the sonnets are addressed to several lovers, including a young man and a

“dark” lady). Just as Shakespeare’s *Shrew* challenges ideas found in other texts about marriage and shrew taming while following certain generic expectations, his sonnets—including Sonnet 141—are both predictable and innovative. The speaker in Shakespeare’s poem loves against his will, or at least against his better instincts. The first four lines, quoted by Mr. Morgan, read:

In faith I do not love thee with mine eyes,
For they in thee a thousand errors note,
But ‘tis my heart that loves what they despise,
Who in despite of view is pleased to dote. (1-4)

The speaker’s critique of the beloved will be used in Kat’s poem. Like Shakespeare’s other anti-Petrarchan sonnets, in which the speaker loves in spite of, rather than because of, the beloved’s physical characteristics, the speaker in Sonnet 141 concludes that he will love even though he finds fault with the beloved’s appearance, voice, touch, taste, and smell (lines 4-7). The final couplet reveals that the setbacks of loving this person will be rewarded, making it all worthwhile: “Only my plague thus far I count my gain: / That she that makes me sin awards me pain” (12-14). At a glance, the poem offers the familiar paradoxes of love and hate, of misery and rapture, of loving despite the consequences. But it also uses the language of taming that *10 Things* is so careful to avoid. The speaker admits to the beloved that he is “Thy proud heart’s slave and vassal-wretch to be” (line 12). The image of slavery in sonnets is nothing new, nor is the idea found in the final line, that the beloved “makes” the speaker “sin” and also “awards...pain.” But when viewed within the context of the film, the images become more disturbing.¹⁴ Because only the first four lines are quoted, the poem is tamed of its darker context—that of the speaker’s

¹⁴ One could argue that the power dynamics are different between the sonnet and Kate’s speech in *Shrew* because of the speakers’ genders; but because the sonnet is then appropriated by a woman, the dynamics shift yet again. Unlike many sonnets written by women, Kat’s revision neither questions the basic assumptions of the sonnet nor does it empower the female speaker. Instead, she adopts the tone of the first four lines without realizing the implications of the sonnet’s final three lines.

transformation into a slave, into someone who must become subservient to the beloved in order to gain reward. But Kat, the insightful student, would have read these lines when revising the poem. Her version, like the film in which it appears, strips away the language of inequality, but it is unable to divorce the poem from its context.

Kat's modern revision of this sonnet shows that she has applied its theme of love's misery to her own life. The film's choice of and placement of the sonnet is significant, for each time it is mentioned, Kat has been rejected by Patrick. When Mr. Morgan recites the first four lines and gives the assignment, Kat is still stinging from Patrick's refusal to kiss her after the party. When she stands up to read her poem to the class, it is after she finds out about the bet at the prom and breaks up with Patrick. Her poem allows her to explore her feelings for Patrick; she wants to hate him, and her list of grievances includes his external appearance, his behavior, and his effect on her:

I hate the way you talk to me,
And the way you cut your hair.
I hate the way you drive my car.
I hate it when you stare.
I hate your big dumb combat boots,
And the way you read my mind.
I hate you so much it makes me sick; it even makes me rhyme.
I hate the way you're always right.
I hate it when you lie.
I hate it when you make me laugh, even worse when you make me cry.
I hate it when you're not around,
And the fact that you didn't call.
But mostly I hate the way I don't hate you,
Not even close, not even a little bit, not even at all.

Kat's poem is not a true sonnet, is not in iambic pentameter, and is not even very good. It is believable, however, in the way its writer uses the assignment to express her feelings—Kat finally lets down her guard in front of everyone, and by the end of her poem she is in tears. Instead of getting kicked out of the classroom in the usual way (for challenging Mr. Morgan's

authority), she leaves of her own accord, too emotional to stay, but not before exchanging a meaningful glance with Patrick.

In the poem, Kat says “I hate” ten times (in keeping with the film’s title), but the fourteen items she actually lists gesture toward a sonnet structure. Two of these items are self-reflexive and address her new-found conformity: “I hate you so much it makes me sick, it even makes me rhyme” shows that even her words have begun to conform to a traditional structure over which she has no control. Like the majority of Shakespeare’s sonnets, the turn comes in the final two lines, which are again self-reflexive and express Kat’s lack of control: “But mostly I hate the way I don’t hate you.” Kat’s feelings for Patrick make her acknowledge that she does not have all the answers, and she has changed as a result. Kat accepts Shakespeare because she relates to his sonnet, which speaks to her concern about Patrick, who said he cared not for the money, but for her. But by focusing only on the tone of the first four lines, Kat misses the implications of her choice; loving Patrick is more than just an emotion. Choosing to love Patrick means both compromising and contradicting herself. It requires change on her part. She appears willing to do so, but the screenplay masks the ideological implications of this choice, swapping the self-awareness of the sonnet’s speaker (and of Shakespeare’s Kate) with a more general idea that Kat’s love for Patrick is difficult but worthwhile.

Kate’s speech on marriage can be read ironically, but Kat’s poem serves as expression of her “true” feelings. The film reveals that Kat’s shrewishness was an act designed to mask her vulnerability; her critique of gender politics is forgotten, and even though Bianca has shown her strength in beating up Joey, neither she nor the other female characters show signs of embracing Kat’s feminist ideals. Whereas Shakespeare’s ambiguous ending invites debate and even “wonder” while leaving open the possibility for Bianca and the Widow to challenge Kate’s

speech, *10 Things* simplifies such an ending. After she reads her poem and leaves the classroom crying, Kat makes her way to the school parking lot, where she finds a guitar in her car—a gift from Patrick. The gift, bought with the money from Joey, is Patrick’s apology for how he treated her. “I thought you could use it,” he says, “you know, when you start your band. Besides, I had some extra cash, you know. Some asshole paid me to take out this really great girl.” Patrick’s gesture serves as another example of the film’s faux progressivism: the guitar may allow Kat to achieve her goal of starting a band, and the gift shows Patrick’s kindness. But the guitar also shows Kat’s dependence on male prerogative: just as she relies on her father to send her to college, she never conceives of buying the guitar for herself.

The final scene showcases the happily reconciled couple while silencing Kat’s critique of the world around her and upholding the idea that happiness can be accessed only by personal compromise. Patrick admits he “screwed up” by falling for Kat, and their kiss provides romantic resolution. Suggesting that she has not really changed, Kat breaks the kiss to remind him, “You can’t just buy me a guitar every time you screw up, you know,” but he has a response ready: “Yeah, I know. But then you know there’s always drums and bass and maybe even one day a tambourine.” They kiss again, and, when she tries to speak again, “And don’t think you can...” he silences her with another kiss. These protests again perform two functions: on the surface, they show that Kat has not lost her spirited attitude, but her tone suggests that her words are perfunctory; her classroom confession was worthwhile because it mended her relationship with Patrick. Kat is smiling, and she has gained a new guitar, a good-looking and caring boyfriend, and the promise of attending the college of her choice. But, as critics including Pittman and Melissa Jones point out, she is ultimately silenced by Patrick’s kiss (114, 148).

The final shots demonstrate the film's concern with social harmony, much like the early modern texts discussed in this chapter (again, with the exception of Shakespeare's more skeptical play). A crane shot pulls back to reveal the happily kissing couple amidst their peers, who linger by their cars, walk in groups, or engage in a game of street hockey. Gone are the strictly divided groups from the opening sequence, and, by the time the shot fades to an aerial view of their high school, Kat and Patrick are indistinguishable from the other students. With Kat's concession to play along, the high school assumes a sense of normality and peace, like the town in the ballad "The Cucking of the Scould" after the seventeen-year-old finally throws up her hands, says "enough," and ceases her scolding.

Shakespeare's *Shrew* ends with an expression of wonder and a conversation among the other characters about the meaning of Kate's speech, inviting audiences to question the genuineness of the reinscribed gender hierarchies. In contrast, the film allows no further dialogue among its characters but ends with Letters to Cleo singing their cover of Cheap Trick's "I Want You to Want Me" from the rooftop of the gothic high school's central building.¹⁵ The lyrics, sung by the female lead singer of Kat's favorite band, summarize the film's ethos:

I want you to want me.
I need you to need me.
I'd love you to love me.
I'm begging you to beg me.
I'll shine up the old brown shoes, put on a brand new shirt.
I'll get home early from work if you say that you love me.

These lyrics suggest that despite her earlier indications otherwise, what Kat really wants is to be wanted, needed, and loved (this goes for the other characters, too, including Dr. Stratford who

¹⁵ Richard Burt also discusses this closing song ("T(e)en Things" 217-9). Rather than looking at the lyrics, however, Burt focuses on the song's status as a cover of another (all-male) band's music: "the cover song here covers over the (rebellious) female voice, limiting it to being the copy-Kat, as it were, of the male voice, conceived of as much freer and originary" (219).

wants Kat to say she needs him). The last two lines of the song's refrain, which say what the speaker will do, also stress that Kat is willing to change to gain this acceptance and love. Even though there's nothing to say that feminists cannot be in relationships, or that being politically outspoken necessitates being a social outcast, the film fails to consider merging the political with the personal. It does not question whether characters who express individuality or who challenge the status quo can achieve personal happiness, social recognition, or political change without personal compromise. In the end, *10 Things I Hate About You* suggests that only compromise and conformity (or at the very least, finding a like-minded mate) will lead to acceptance and lifelong happiness.

CHAPTER THREE

O and the Authority of Racial Difference

Thus far, I have argued that, whereas Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Taming of the Shrew* challenge early modern views of marriage and gender hierarchies, the teen films *Romeo + Juliet* and *10 Things* undermine the subversive elements found in the plays. The former suggests that escape is the only option available to young people who are dissatisfied with their environment, whereas the latter suggests that the only option is personal compromise. Both films eventually uphold the status quo by portraying a return to the social order, thereby reducing the potential of its young characters to promote change. The teen film *O* operates in a similar fashion by suggesting that its young hero's downfall is inevitable, based upon the environment in which he has been raised.

In *Political Shakespeare*, Jonathan Dollimore argues that ideology includes "the cultural connections between signification and legitimation: the way that beliefs, practices and institutions legitimate the dominant social order or *status quo*—the existing relations of domination and subordination" (6). Shakespeare's *Othello* calls into question "the existing relations of domination and subordination" in both his fictional Venice and Cyprus and his England. The play depicts an outsider who has become a great military leader. It features a marriage in which a young woman turns down multiple worthy suitors and chooses her own husband without her father's knowledge. Unlike Juliet, who keeps the secret from her father and would rather die than be found out, Desdemona owns up to her choice, defends it, and insists her marriage be recognized by the state. The play defies the unities of time, place, and action,

challenging critics to defend its “double time” scheme, to make sense of its multiple locations, and to explain the action in a reasonable way. The ending offers little hope, resolution, or closure, leading Samuel Johnson to claim, after analyzing the play’s final scene, “I am glad that I have ended my revisal of this dreadful scene. It is not to be endured” (200). Despite all this, the play proved popular on stage. *Othello*’s earliest commentator, Henry Jackson, wrote in 1610 that the tragic performances he witnessed in Oxford “moved (the audience) to tears” (qtd. in Pechter 165). Focusing on *Othello*’s final scene, he continues: “But truly the celebrated Desdemona, slain in our presence by her husband, although she pleaded her case very effectively throughout, yet moved (us) more after she was dead, when, lying on her bed, she entreated the pity of the spectators by her very countenance” (165). That Jackson chooses to write about the strong female character, impressive for her rhetoric as well as her appearance, points to the play’s rich analytical possibilities—for as Johnson points out, there is much to disturb the audience in this scene.

Just as Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* has become synonymous with discussions of anti-Semitism, the most dominant feature in discussions of *Othello* is its treatment of race. *Othello* directly confronts racial prejudice, particularly through its villain, Iago. Shakespeare’s Londoners were not steeped as Americans are in questions of racial difference and subjugation, nor was a fight for equal rights and respect of all peoples a major concern for early modern England. The play introduces these issues, however, as topics of concern, and critics have shown that race was certainly a topic of discussion and contention in early modern England; Shakespeare’s play, I argue, introduces racial difference in order to challenge stereotypes in matters of gender, marriage, family relations, and social status, as well. Iago introduces the unnamed Moor in derogatory terms, representing the marriage of Othello and Desdemona as

tainted, dirty, animalistic, a theft. Othello then defies these expectations by proving honorable, well spoken, and charismatic, while Desdemona is assertive, kind, and the ideally obedient and submissive wife—their union is hardly to be described as revealing “a beast with two backs” (1.1.113). Even though Iago’s major contention is that both he and Othello have been cuckolded, onstage everyone is faithful, and there is no indication that anyone has been otherwise.

Dollimore argues in *Radical Tragedy* that “Jacobean theatre interrogated structures of belief which legitimated prevailing power relations, and that it often did this by seizing upon, intensifying and exposing those contradictions in the prevailing social order which it is one of the effects of ideology to efface” (lii). Shakespeare’s *Othello* is radical in how it stages contradiction by delivering on a number of fronts alternate possibilities to the status quo—within the social realms of the government and military, within the familial realm of parent-child relationships and marriage, within the racial realm of white and black, and within the dramatic realm of plotting and characterization. Appearances are deceptive: the villain is consistently deemed “honest”; the defiant woman turns out to be perfectly submissive; the outsider, the black man, is the tragic hero; the bodies are not cleared from the stage; the time is out of joint. The play revels in contradiction in order to expose and subvert the dominant social order.

Tim Blake Nelson’s *O*, released in 2001, attempts to be equally subversive, and on several fronts it succeeds. Like *10 Things I Hate About You*, *O* adapts the play to a late-twentieth century American high school and updates Shakespeare’s language; but, as several critics have noted, *O* is more “faithful” to its source than *10 Things*, transposing the play nearly scene for scene, keeping the majority of the cast intact with only small changes to characters’ names, and retaining most of the key plot devices, including the handkerchief. Othello becomes Odin James (played by Mekhi Phifer), an outsider who, like his Shakespearean predecessor, has achieved

success through an impressive work ethic, here as the leader of his school's basketball team. Like Iago, the film's villain, Hugo Goulding (Josh Hartnett), masks his jealousy and easy manipulation of others by appearing honest and trustworthy—everyone's confidante who hides his own motives. In the end, however, rather than reveal the contradictions in contemporary society in order to challenge them, the film's sharp focus on racial difference and the adolescent longing for authority does little to dispel racism; it suggests that, in contrast to the variety of reasons that lead to Othello's downfall, Odin is doomed from the beginning because of his race. Furthermore, the film reduces Iago's complex and even inexplicable motivations to a single focus; like other teen films that portray an adolescent longing for authority, *O* explains Hugo's villainy as a longing for paternal attention and guidance.

Set at a nearly all-white, elite boarding school in Charleston, South Carolina, which features antebellum-style buildings and Spanish moss-draped trees, the film's location deliberately invokes racial prejudice and the history of African-American subjugation in order, it seems, to challenge continued racism in America. The characters acknowledge race and claim that a person's problems or behavior cannot be explained by skin color alone, even though the film consistently suggests otherwise, as far as Odin is concerned. The film focuses on the themes of jealousy and prejudice, and its transposition of the plot to a contemporary high school allows it to explore the social problems of racism, drug use, and, most poignantly, school shootings. In a much discussed move, the film's Hollywood studio, Miramax, found too much contemporary reality in the film, shelving it for two years in the wake of the massacre at Columbine High School on April 20, 1999, during which two students killed twelve of their

peers and a teacher, wounded twenty-four others, and then committed suicide.¹ The studio feared that *O*'s ending, in which three students are shot, one is strangled to death, and one commits suicide, could be viewed as sensationalizing or even promoting teen violence, although the connection between media violence and homicidal teens is much more complex than this.

The film has garnered praise for the way it uses Shakespeare's play to approach these contemporary issues, and its deliberate presentation of difficult problems indicates that it generally does a better job of challenging norms than the other films I have discussed. Gregory M. Colón Semenza voices the positive critical response: "the film's realism, as well as the respect it pays its primary audience, announces a notable break from previous teen-Shakespeare films.... Teen Shakespeare...grows up rather quickly after the horrors of Columbine" ("Shakespeare After Columbine" 101-2). In his view, this film "works to complicate—rather than construct or exploit—the notion of universal teen experience" (106). He writes that this film "may be the best example of a teenpic that deliberately highlights the negative effects of both the dumbing down of teen Shakespeare and the propagation of the myth of teenage innocence" (106). Rejecting suggestions that the film is "yet another attempt to socialize teens through a simple appropriation of Shakespeare," Semenza calls *O* "a very different sort of film" (106). Semenza's essay is perhaps the most detailed and well-argued considerations of the film currently in print, but I think that, in the end, *O* is more reductive than Semenza admits.

Although it introduces contemporary social problems such as racism, drug use, teen violence, and sexual aggression, *O* transforms the social critique of the play by presenting stereotypical understandings of these difficult issues; it resembles the other teen films in my

¹ In addition to *O*'s director Tim Blake Nelson, others who mention the film's release date and connections to Columbine and other school shootings include Balizet 133-4, Brown 74, Buchanan 110, French 123, Jess-Cooke 173, Leggatt 258, and Semenza "Shakespeare After Columbine" 100.

study by suggesting that, rather than rebelling against or subverting social norms, young people act as they do in order to earn social or parental acceptance. In particular, *O* confronts prejudice against interracial dating and other racial stereotypes, such as the idea that African-American men are sexually violent or drug users who escape their lot in life only through small miracles—“My mom’s ain’t no crackhead. I wasn’t no gangbanger. It wasn’t some hood rat drug dealer that tripped me up,” says Odin in his final speech—but in the end it upholds the stereotypes it seeks to dismantle. Odin admits to a history of drug use (“I told you I’m not on that shit anymore,” he tells Coach Duke, who is oblivious to his own [white] son’s drug use), and in the end he buys drugs (from a black drug dealer, no less) to “get by” when his life turns difficult. Odin may say that his heritage and his past drug use did not contribute to his downfall, but the film implies otherwise. Shakespeare’s Venetian setting allows for an outsider, a black man, to become a well-respected figure of authority, and Othello’s downfall can be attributed to a number of reasons; his skin color is only one of them. *O*’s setting in South Carolina makes it difficult to attribute Odin’s downfall to anything other than his skin color; in a state that still carries the taint of slavery, Odin allows himself to blame all of his troubles on race, and the film does little to dispel this notion or to offer an alternative point of view.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the film’s use of a strong visual metaphor, the hawk, unwittingly reasserts social hierarchies and white privilege. In the film’s opening sequence, a voiceover plays over images of cooing white doves: “All my life I always wanted to fly. I always wanted to live like a hawk. I know you’re not supposed to be jealous of anything, but to take flight, to soar above everything and everyone, now that’s living.” As the speech ends, the sequence cuts to a close-up shot of a hawk, which turns out to be the school mascot, watching over a highly charged basketball game; a cut to Odin associates him with the hawk, and this

visual association continues in several basketball scenes during the film. Only later do we learn that the voiceover belongs to Hugo, and that his dream of becoming a hawk motivates his actions. Whereas many critics discuss the hawk's status in the film as a symbol of otherness, power, or racial difference—particularly as it is contrasted in the film with a group of white, peaceful doves—they fail to note its early modern significance, in which hawks were used as hunting tools subject to their (white) masters' control.² Indeed, as I mentioned in my discussion of *10 Things*, wife-taming literature often derived from manuals on taming these birds of prey, and Shakespeare drew on hawking metaphors when describing the marital relationship. Hawks may appear free, but in early modern England and in Palmetto Grove High School the hawk is a kept bird, controlled, not free. Associating Odin with this symbol demonstrates the way in which the history of slavery is kept alive in racial stereotypes, particularly in the American South. Like a hawk, Odin is powerful and respected while on the hunt (here, winning basketball games for his team), but this symbol, tied up as it is in racial difference, controls and limits him and causes his downfall. The symbol also shows that Hugo, in his dream of becoming a hawk, reveals his wish to be controlled—in typical teen film fashion—by his father, the basketball coach whose apparent preference for Hugo's black teammate incites Hugo's jealousy and homicidal intent. At the same time that he dreams of flying, however, Hugo plays the role of falconer, a more powerful role than that of a hawk, which allows Hugo to control and manipulate the other characters, particularly Odin. Hugo casts aside this powerful role, however, in his dream of becoming hawk-like, and in the end, Hugo is captured. Nevertheless, he survives to survey the destruction he has wrought, and he retains the power of speech in order to manipulate his audience and to control how the story is told.

² See, for example, Ardolino 9, Criniti 116-20, Hodgdon "Race-ing *Othello*" 102, Sanders 171, and Semenza "Shakespeare After Columbine" 107.

Radical *Othello*

The textual, stage, and critical history of *Othello* is as complex as any in Shakespeare's canon. In particular, its portrayal of a clandestine interracial marriage, its unexpected tragic hero, and its villain's masterful manipulations have caused the play to be celebrated, censored, and criticized; it has been used to challenge racial stereotyping, to uphold racial stereotypes, to explain away racial difference, and to combat racial prejudice. In the nineteenth century in particular, critics and actors debated Othello's skin color, some of them attempting to make him less black in keeping with audiences' sense of propriety. In 1811, for example, Charles Lamb called Othello a "*coal-black Moor*" and wondered whether anyone else found the sight of Othello and Desdemona together on stage revolting (262). And in 1813-4 and 1818 Samuel Taylor Coleridge argued that Othello was not a "barbarous negro" but was rather "a gallant Moor, of royal blood, combining a high sense of Spanish and Italian feeling" (477). This argument allows Coleridge to discuss the "solemn agony of the noble Moor" (393) without being turned off by the "monstrous" idea of "this beautiful Venetian girl falling in love with a veritable negro" (386). On stage, meanwhile, white actors in blackface, such as Edmund Kean, gradually lightened their makeup or attempted to make Othello more exotic than black; Edwin Booth's Othello was Oriental (Collins 91). Also during the nineteenth century, bawdy and farcical minstrel versions of the play, which also featured white performers in blackface, parodied the high drama of Shakespeare's play and, argues Kris Collins, "posited as their center for comic discourse what the mainstage productions denied: an African—'negro'—heroic Othello" that nevertheless emphasized "Othello's violence, sexuality, and blackness" and "insisted upon the sexual/social dysfunction of the black man in white culture" (95). On other stages, black actors too played the famed Moor of Venice, including black New Yorker Ira Aldridge, who made his

London stage debut as Othello in 1833 and became famous for playing not only Shakespeare's Moor but also "heroic black characters" in "a series of appearances throughout the British Isles in a repertory largely consisting of adaptations of Renaissance and Restoration plays" (MacDonald 231, 237).³

In the twentieth century, white actors continued to perform Othello on stage and on screen until the latter half of the century. Despite the tradition of white actors taking on the part, black actors have gradually taken over the role. Paul Robeson played Othello in 1930 in England and in the United States in 1943-44 and 1959, while actors such as Errol Hill and James Earl Jones played Othello in the latter half of the century (Marks 109, 111-3). On screen, it was not until 1995 that Laurence Fishburne became the first black actor to play Othello in a major production.⁴ Othello has become something of a touchstone of success for black actors, "the glass ceiling for black male Shakespearians," according to Celia Daileader, who uses the example of casting practices at the Royal Shakespeare Company to criticize the stereotypical typecasting of black actors (190). The color of Othello's skin continues to be controversial, but allowing color to overshadow other aspects of the play risks reducing its rich construction of character and plot.

The critical response to *Othello* has been highly contentious, as scholars have attempted to understand the play's complicated presentation of plot, character, and theme and to demonstrate how the play works with or against cultural and historical fact. The first sustained criticism of *Othello* began with Thomas Rymer, who published *A Short View of Tragedy* in 1693.

³ For further discussions of minstrelsy, black actors, and race on the nineteenth century stage, see Collins 87-98, McAllister 11-21 and 167-83, MacDonald 231-49, and White 127-84.

⁴ Francesca Royster argues that Laurence Fishburne's Othello is subtly racist because of the film's focus on his "athletic black male body," which reduces "Othello's black identity to an appetizing and culturally black icon" that silences its hero in its emphasis on his physical presence.

Rymer criticizes the play's treatment of its source text, Giraldi Cinthio's *The Moor of Venice*, saying Shakespeare alters the tale "for the worse" by bestowing a name on the socially elevated Moor and by making Desdemona "the daughter and heir of some great lord or privy councillor, and all the town should reckon [the marriage of Othello and Desdemona] a very suitable match" (87, 92). He claims the tale is "improbable and absurd" and the "characters or manners...unnatural and improper," while the villain Iago is "most intolerable" because he does not behave as soldiers should; Iago is "inconsistent...something new and surprising, against common sense, and Nature" (92-4). By postmodern standards, these criticisms can be seen as signs of Shakespeare's success, his progressiveness; denying expectation, Shakespeare presents a story in which characters cause audiences to question their basic assumptions about the world and its people. In other words, Rymer points to the play's radical nature. Rymer complains, "They [the audience] must deny their senses, to reconcile [the plot] to common sense: or make it any way consistent, and hang together.... The poet must do everything by contraries to surprise the audience still with something horrible and prodigious, beyond any human imagination" (123, 127). Rymer would prefer a neater story, one with a moral, one in which the villain is decidedly punished, in which an actual cause is given, an "unnatural crime" committed by "Desdemona or her parents" in order to explain why she would "wed a blackamoore and, innocent, to be thus cruelly murdered by him" (141). But Shakespeare's play withholds such easy answers, leaving Rymer to hope that the audience should "for the good of their souls...go to the playhouse as they do to church—to sit still, look on one another, make no reflection, nor mind the play more than they would a sermon" (146). In other words, he wishes audiences could absorb only what they need for moral instruction while quickly forgetting anything more disturbing or personally challenging.

I quote Rymer at length because subsequent critics have had to contend with his analysis, typically by defending Shakespeare against Rymer's attacks and, more rarely, by defending Rymer against other critics. The passages I cite here point to, I think, what is most extraordinary about *Othello*: the ways in which Shakespeare adapts his source text in order to subvert social expectations and to challenge his audiences, to make them uncomfortable without providing easy answers. Or, to be more textually specific, Rymer's essay points out the rich interpretive possibilities the play provides, the questions it raises that might frighten those who wish to suppress or ignore difficult matters such as interracial marriage, spousal murder, un-soldierly behavior, female assertiveness, or xenophobic tendencies to classify immigrants as "Other."

Shakespeare's play presents a nuanced view of race and gender, political hierarchy, and social justice, and its complexity has prompted heated debates on the causes of Othello's downfall, on the blackness of his skin, and on how audiences should feel about him by the end of the play. Jane Adamson outlines this debate by arguing that one group of critics, which includes Coleridge and A.C. Bradley, seeks to vindicate Othello by arguing that the play "evokes our pity for him as the noble, 'not easily jealous' victim of Iago's hellish cunning" (11-12). Bradley, for instance, says Othello "is so noble, Othello's feelings and actions follow so inevitably from it and from the forces brought to bear on it, and his sufferings are so heart-rending, that he stirs, I believe, in most readers a passion of mingled love and pity which they feel for no other hero in Shakespeare" (155). In the opposing camp, a group of critics, which includes F.R. Leavis and T.S. Eliot, blames Othello "as an egoist made brutal by a jealousy that is largely self-generated, a man guilty not only of maltreating and killing his innocent wife, but of not even having the grace, courage or humility to accept his guilt" (Adamson 12). In his oft-quoted analysis, Eliot says that in his last speech, Othello seems to be "*cheering himself up*. He is endeavouring to escape

reality, he has ceased to think about Desdemona, and is thinking about himself.... Othello succeeds in turning himself into a pathetic figure, by adopting an *aesthetic* rather than a moral attitude, dramatizing himself against his environment” (39-40). Both sides of the debate, of course, risk oversimplifying the play. As Adamson points out, the first line of thinking risks over-sympathizing with the hero and neglecting to account for his guilt; the second line of thinking risks stripping the hero of any sympathy at all (13-4).

Many critics seek to weigh both sides of the debate and place themselves somewhere in the middle, or they arrive at their conclusions by looking at not just the play but also at the play’s history. Marvin Rosenberg, after a lengthy consideration of the stage and critical history of *Othello*, which includes interviews with actors who have played Othello, concludes that Othello is “an outsider, a splendidly talented professional employed by a sophisticated society to which he can never belong”; he “is essentially noble” and “his tragic flaw is that he is human” (197, 200, 202). To Rosenberg, Othello’s passion is “so elemental, so entire that once roused it seizes and dominates the man,” and the only reason for his fall is that he has been betrayed “by a friend so close, so trusted, that Othello has no choice but to listen to him” (202-3). Even if Rosenberg’s analysis is overly sentimental, he makes a good point that Othello does not fall victim to Iago’s machinations based solely on his skin color (which Rosenberg scarcely mentions) or outsider status, but from a variety of factors. Othello is a character noted for his difference, but this difference is connected to his speech, his behavior, his personal history, and much more, so that his tragic fall cannot be tied to just one cause.

The play introduces this complex understanding of its hero in the very first two scenes, when it provides paradoxical assessments of Othello in order to subvert audiences’ expectations. At the beginning of the play, a conversation between Iago and Roderigo reveals their malice

toward an unnamed Moor whose race is brought up only after the men have identified him as a military leader who has just chosen as lieutenant the “bookish theorick” Michael Cassio, rather than the more experienced Iago (1.1.21). Rymer’s disappointment over military protocol should begin here, where promotions—if Iago is to be believed—are awarded on criteria other than field experience. Roderigo is the first to use a racial epithet, calling Othello “thick-lips,” but Iago deepens the insult, using Othello’s blackness against him in a series of sexual slanders that include phrases such as “old black ram,” “Barbary horse,” and “the beast with two backs” (1.1.63, 85, 108, 113).⁵ Iago stresses the unnatural, animalistic, and sexual nature of Othello’s union with Desdemona in order to discredit Othello in front of Desdemona’s father Brabantio, who confronts Othello with imaginative language derived from Iago’s and Roderigo’s insults. Calling him a “foul thief,” Brabantio accuses Othello of binding Desdemona in “chains of magic,” which cause her to reject “[t]he wealthy curled darlings of our nation” in favor of “the sooty bosom / Of such a thing as thou—to fear, not to delight” (1.2.62-71). Othello is not a man who stole another man’s daughter; he is instead a magician, a captor, a “sooty” outsider (black, unclean), a fearful “thing” who is also accused of abusing Desdemona’s “delicate youth with drugs or minerals / That weakens motion” (74-5). Brabantio wants Othello arrested for being “an abuser of the world, a practicer / Of arts inhibited and out of warrant” (78-9). Othello, according to Brabantio, transgresses the rules of courtship, seduces Desdemona unnaturally, and abuses not just the wronged father but the whole world—the patriarchal order. Rymer echoes both Brabantio and Roderigo when he writes about Othello’s status as an outsider, a

⁵ Although Othello is most famously slandered in this way, it should be noted that Iago’s animalistic metaphors are not reserved for Othello alone. Iago speaks of Cassio in similar terms and accuses Cassio and Desdemona of being “as prime as goats, as hot as monkeys, / As salt as wolves in pride, and fools as gross / As ignorance made drunk” (3.3.404-6). In this way, the play does not allow for a solely racial interpretation of animalistic sexual behavior.

“blackamoor” who, in his opinion, rises unnaturally through the ranks of the Venetian military and weds a senator’s daughter. It is not interracial marriage *per se* that bothers Rymer; he allows that a black man “might marry some little drab, or Small-coal wench,” suggesting that skin color is not as important as social standing (92). The play, suggests Rymer, invites audiences to equate blackness with low social standing, but immediately it undercuts that invitation when Othello announces that the Duke has summoned him for official state business. The court, where the outsider is a valued member of the higher ranks of society, trumps the individual family and challenges assertions of Othello’s unworthiness.

The scene in the Duke’s palace challenges deep-seated ideas about social hierarchies by presenting neither a foul, sooty thief nor a brute beast but rather an eloquent, upstanding military general who defends himself and is vindicated by his equally well-spoken new bride. No longer the unnamed Moor of Shakespeare’s source and of the first two scenes, Othello is named when the Duke welcomes him, therefore establishing Othello’s importance and humanity: “Valiant Othello, we must straight employ you / Against the general enemy Ottoman” (1.3.47-9). In contrast to the man discussed in the first two scenes, this Othello is valued, necessary, and esteemed, given control over an entire army to defend Venice against a common enemy. He speaks eloquently and respectfully, prompting the Duke to tell Brabantio, “If virtue no delighted beauty lack, / Your son-in-law is far more fair than black” (287-8). In this way, the play voices traditional assumptions about fairness and blackness, virtue and deviance, roughness and eloquence in order to demonstrate that people should be understood and judged according to merit, not preconceived notions.

The complex reactions to Othello, his blackness, and his status as both a respected military commander and as an outsider are voiced throughout the play and resist easy answers

about the cause of his downfall. The tragedy requires its hero to fall victim to its villain's machinations, however. Despite the lack of proof, Iago's allegations alter Othello's views of his wife, his lieutenant, and also himself: "My name, that was as fresh / As Dian's visage, is now begrimed and black / as mine own face" (3.3.389). And yet throughout the play, Othello is valued and respected. He is called "our noble and valiant general," "noble general Othello," and "[w]orthy Othello" (2.2.1-2, 2.2.11, 2.3.187). He speaks and acts with authority, having been granted supremacy over Cyprus. He halts the fight between Cassio and Montano (a fight provoked by Roderigo and Iago) and scolds, "Are we turned Turks? And to ourselves do that / Which heaven hath forbid the Ottomites? / For Christian shame, put by this barbarous brawl!" (2.3.160-3). His authority as a Christian and as a military general is unquestioned, and his judgment is accepted. His good nature is also valued. Even as Desdemona worries about losing the handkerchief, she does not believe Othello capable of jealous anger, telling Emilia, "my noble Moor / Is true of mind and made of no such baseness / As jealous creatures are.... I think the sun where he was born / Drew all such humors from him" (3.4.25-9). That is, rather than making him hot-blooded and prone to anger, Desdemona believes Othello's origins produced the opposite qualities.

Othello's actions at the end of the play are greeted, not with accusations that his blackness caused him to become jealous and to commit murder, but with surprise and sadness at his transformation. Lodovico, Desdemona's kinsman, is shocked when he witnesses Othello mistreating Desdemona. He asks Iago,

Is this the noble Moor whom our full Senate
Call all in all sufficient? Is this the nature
Whom passion could not shake? Whose solid virtue
The shot of accident nor dart of chance
Could neither graze nor pierce? (4.1.259-63)

Lodovico—who like the Prince in *Romeo and Juliet* speaks with the authority of the state—grieves at the changed Othello, but at the end of the play he turns his wrath and judgment on Iago, not on his kinswoman’s husband-murderer. To Lodovico, Othello is a “rash and most unfortunate man” (5.2.288). Iago is “that viper...the villain” (290). Othello “was once so good, / Fallen into the practice of a cursèd slave” (296-7). Iago is a “wretch” (301). After Othello’s death, Lodovico calls Iago a “Spartan dog, / More fell than anguish, hunger, or the sea,” and he charges Gratiano with Iago’s punishment: “To you, lord governor, / Remains the censure of this hellish villain / The time, the place, the torture—O, enforce it!” (367-8, 372-4). This scene demonstrates that although Othello committed a horrible crime, Iago’s villainy is censured, and the Venetian ruling class places the blame on Iago, not on any inherent quality in Othello, Shakespeare’s tragic hero.

In his final speech, Othello wishes to be remembered fairly, and he does not attempt to escape blame for his actions. He points out, “I have done the state some service, and they know’t,” but he does not dwell on his public life: “No more of that” (5.2.344-5). Instead, he wants to be acknowledged for who he is:

I pray you in your letters,
When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
Speak of me as I am. Nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice. Then must you speak
Of one that loved not wisely but too well;
Of one not easily jealous but, being wrought,
Perplexed in the extreme; of one whose hand,
Like the base Judean, threw a pearl away
Richer than all his tribe; of one whose subdued eyes,
Albeit unused to the melting mood,
Drops tears as fast as the Arabian trees
Their medicinable gum. Set you down this;
And say besides that in Aleppo once,
Where a malignant and turbaned Turk
Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,
I took by th’ throat the circumcised dog,

And smote him—thus! *He stabs himself.* (5.2.345-61)

Unlike Eliot, who says he has “never read a more terrible exposure of human weakness” than in this speech (38-9), and Leavis, who claims, “Contemplating the spectacle of himself, Othello is overcome with the pathos of it” (152), I do not think this speech demonstrates Othello as weak, nor can it be reduced to overwhelming pathos; rather, I interpret Othello’s call for kindness in remembering him as a sign of his understanding of what he has done and the ensuing consequences. Here, Othello demonstrates his strength, not his weakness. He acknowledges his folly and his uncharacteristic behavior and grieves that he threw away his “pearl,” which could symbolize both Desdemona and his own social standing. This moment is full of pathos, yes, but it is more than just “a superb *coup de théâtre*” (Leavis 152). Rather, it marks the tragedy of Othello’s situation. Bradley says Othello’s description of jealousy “is perfectly just” because Othello’s “whole nature was indisposed to jealousy,” but that once he became deceived, Othello’s passion made him act “with no delay, and in the most decisive manner conceivable” (151). It is difficult to summarize Othello’s “whole nature” in this way, but the play does support Bradley’s reading by contrasting the noble Othello with the changed man who becomes so overwhelmed that he kills his wife and then, after accepting responsibility for the murder, himself.

Even this changed Othello is still honored in memory by Lodovico and others, who, like Othello, are left attempting to comprehend their losses. Here, Othello owns that he (not Iago or anyone else) was the one who threw away the pearl. To Leavis, Eliot reflects the view that “Othello’s last speech is radically untragic,” and both criticize a tendency to sentimentalize Othello in this scene (128). I think it is difficult not to be moved by this scene, however, and I cannot agree with Leavis that Othello “is of all Shakespeare’s greatest tragedies the simplest”

(136). The speech, like the rest of the play, resists easy stereotypes by blurring the lines of race, ethnicity, and religion, so that Othello associates himself with a Jew (“base Judean”), a Muslim (“turbaned Turk”), and a Christian (“Venetian”)—and in the final lines he appears not only to associate Iago with the Turk but also to become both the “malignant” villain and the undeserving victim, culminating in his suicide. This difficult and complex speech, in my view, establishes Othello as the wronged hero who accepts what has happened to him. Othello admits that he was “wrought,” “perplexed,” and “subdued,” but he does not directly blame Iago, his skin color, or any other factor for his downfall. Instead, he deems his deeds “unlucky” and desires to be spoken of “as I am,” with all of the complexity that “I” engenders.

I have been arguing that Shakespeare’s play is radical because it challenges assumptions and presents a tragic hero whose countenance, personal history, and behavior run counter to what audiences are led to expect by Iago, Roderigo, and Brabantio. Othello treats his wife unfairly and murders her, and, although Iago led him to do so, Othello was the one to act. In the final scene, Othello blames Iago, but he also takes responsibility for his actions. Iago’s ability to manipulate Othello can be attributed to several factors, and Othello’s skin color is only one of them, something important to keep in mind when considering the ending of *O*. Another important aspect of the play that I have scarcely mentioned is Shakespeare’s use of the hawk. Two speeches—one by Desdemona and one by Othello—use hawking metaphors to describe the balance of power within their marriage. This metaphor was used in *The Taming of the Shrew* as part of Petruchio’s project to tame his wife; he played the role of falconer, while Katherine became his hawk. Here, Shakespeare extends the metaphor to show how both husband and wife can take on either role—falconer or hawk—and their use of hawking imagery marks an important turning point in their relationship. That *Othello* places Desdemona and Othello in the

position of both falconer and hawk adds to the radical nature of the play by defying expectations of how hawks were used and understood in early modern England.

I return to this later, in order to argue that *O*'s use of the hawk demonstrates an unequal balance of power in which Hugo takes on the role of falconer in order to tame Odin, his hawk. By restricting the options available to its characters, the film erases the play's deliberate questioning of traditional roles. The teen film adaptation of the play seeks to confront many of the political and social questions posed by Shakespeare's text as well as issues Shakespeare never could have anticipated, such as bullying and drug use. In the end, however, it perpetuates stereotypes by suggesting that, unlike Othello, whose downfall cannot be attributed to any single factor, Odin's tragedy is all about race; although the film does not go so far as to equate violence with blackness, it certainly suggests that despite his brilliance on the basketball court and his popularity among the other students, teachers, and fans, Odin falls victim to Hugo's scheme because of his skin color alone. If teen films typically depict a return to the social order, *O* depicts a social hierarchy that continues to be dominated by white men, particularly because it gives Hugo the last word.

O and the Authority of Racial Subjugation

Most critics writing about Tim Blake Nelson's *O* focus on its portrayal of race and violence in high school; many mention the film's delayed release in the wake of the Columbine shootings, which relates to the film's portrayal of high school violence,⁶ or the title character's name, Odin James, which connects him to former football star O.J. Simpson, an African-American whose highly publicized murder trial drew frequent comparisons to Othello's murder

⁶ See, for instance, Balizet 134-5, Jess-Cooke 173-4, and Semenza "Shakespeare After Columbine."

of Desdemona.⁷ This concern with current events addresses the perceived connection between media texts—such as film, music, and television—and teen violence, connections that were being made by people hoping to explain a sudden upsurge in deadly school shootings.⁸ These shootings occurred at Columbine High School and several others, including a high school in Eugene, Oregon, where in May 1998 shooter Kip Kinkel was “ostensibly inspired by” the soundtrack to Baz Luhrmann’s *Romeo + Juliet*; and Red Lake High School in Minnesota where in 2005, “a seventeen-year-old male entered during a Shakespeare on film class, shooting and killing seven co-students” (Jess-Cooke 173). Carolyn Jess-Cooke argues that reading Shakespeare, watching film adaptations, or listening to the soundtracks of these films “neither implicates the Bard in these murders nor solves problems of high-school aggressivity,” but does suggest how involved is “Shakespearean cinema in the debate over the relationship between film and teen violence” (173). In this view, films such as *Romeo + Juliet* and *O* are culturally significant because by adapting Shakespeare’s plays for contemporary audiences, they participate in a cultural conversation about violence in today’s world.

⁷ See Brown 75, Buchanan 110-1, Burnett *Filming Shakespeare* 66-8, Sanders 173, and Welsh 226.

⁸ In May 1999, less than a month after the Columbine shootings, the U.S. Senate Commerce Committee heard testimony from a panel of experts on Media Violence; among them was Henry Jenkins, the Director of the Comparative Media Studies Program and a Professor of Literature at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Jenkins’ testimony attempted to contextualize the connections between teen violence and media images and to explain differences between teen and adult cultures; he argued that people whose violent acts reflect the influence of violent media texts have taken these texts out of context. “The media backlash against popular culture in the wake of the Littleton shootings,” he says, “reflects...our generational anxiety about the process of adolescence, our technophobic reaction about our children’s greater comfort with digital technologies, and our painful discovery of aspects of our children’s play and fantasy lives which have long existed but were once hidden from view. Read in this context, the materials of youth culture can look profoundly frightening, but much of what scares us is a product of our own troubled imaginations and is far removed from what these symbols mean to our children.” In other words, the issue is complex, and adults do adolescents a disservice by attempting to oversimplify their appropriation of popular culture.

O in particular appears to reflect contemporary reality because it transfers Shakespeare's murderous bedroom scene to a high school dormitory. The film was originally set to be released by Miramax films in the fall of 1999, but "[o]n April 20, 1999, less than two weeks into the edit, the massacre at Columbine High School occurred, projecting in American homes images that the bloody ending of '*O*' seemed to imitate" (Nelson "There's a Price" AR15). As a result, Miramax shelved the film. A different production company, Lion's Gate Films, eventually released the film in August 2001. Some critics use this delayed release to comment on the film industry's (in this case, Miramax's) reluctance to release a film that seemed, in Nelson's terms, too "real" (AR15). Semenza argues that by shelving the film, Miramax "adopted one of the American film industry's foundational premises: that readers of film, especially young ones, are not critically astute enough to understand what they are watching" ("Shakespeare After Columbine" 100). In other words, instead of seeing the film's potential to help understand and work through the pain of school shootings, the company saw it as possibly another media text that would lead to more violence. This decision to withhold the film from audiences, argues Semenza, was misguided because the film's violence "is neither gratuitous nor sensational," suggesting that only gratuitous or sensational media violence prompts students to kill their classmates, teachers, and parents; again, the connection between media violence and real-life violence is complicated and often overstated (100). Semenza claims that *O* is "haunting and particularly relevant," as "[t]he final shots of the film appropriate quite powerfully the stock imagery and symbolism of an increasingly familiar American scene: the realist, but highly performative 'aftermath coverage' of countless high school shootings both before and after Columbine" (100). In fact, the "aftermath coverage" of five school shootings occurring "in the year or so leading up to" the filming of *O* prompted Nelson's realization "that a high school setting could be not only a

credible environment for a Shakespearean tragedy but, at least if set in America, the most appropriate one as well” because the towns’ names—Jonesboro, Pearl, Eugene, Springfield, and Edinboro—“had become shorthand for what seemed an epidemic of teenage violence” (Nelson “There’s a Price” AR8). *O* is intentionally disturbing because it does not shy away from current events that stress the continued cultural significance of Shakespeare’s tragedy. I agree with this assessment of the film’s astute treatment of teen violence, but I question the foregrounding of racial difference as the major motive in the student deaths at the end of *O*.

Whereas some critics use the shootings at Columbine and other schools to make broader claims about the film’s cultural significance, those such as Semenza call for a more nuanced reading of the relationship between contemporary violence and the film’s narrative. I argue that critics should also be more astute to the film’s depiction of racial difference. It is not surprising that many critics focus on race, especially because of the film’s deliberate scene-by-scene rendering of Shakespeare’s play. Like Othello, Odin is the only black character in his immediate environment, but in contrast to Othello’s acceptance of punishment and blame, Odin blames Hugo (“this white, prep school motherfucker”)—not his skin color or anything else—for what has happened to him. The film includes dialogue that shows Nelson’s and screenwriter Brad Kaaya’s concern with racial issues—including a conversation in which Odin and Desi discuss the use of the word “nigger” (which Odin can say but Desi cannot, because she is white) and a conversation between Desi and Emily in which Desi accuses her roommate of disliking Odin simply because of his skin color. Yet despite these scenes, some critics fault the film for not making race its primary focus. H.R. Coursen, for instance, argues that as an adaptation of a play “inevitably...about race,” *O* chooses instead to emphasize envy, adolescent culture, school shootings, and drug use (54), while Tony Howard argues that “American violence,” “gun laws,”

and “even race [are] unstressed” (59). James M. Welsh argues the contrary, saying that *O* “reduce[s] the tragedy to a spectacle of miscegenation and pathetic identity confusion” (227). I argue that although it may appear that race is deemphasized in order to focus on teen culture, violence, and the “spectacle” of media aftermath coverage, race remains a primary focus, but not in the way many critics note.

When critics discuss the film as a teen film that adapts a Shakespearean tragedy within a context that speaks to modern concerns, they generally praise Nelson’s accomplishments. Barbara Hodgdon applauds the film for “its sophisticated attitude towards [sic] young adults, its refusal to condescend,” and she argues that it “represents the secondary-school milieu as a crisis culture where adolescents define their relation to the world through performances of maturity, a microcosm of a larger culture that idolizes sports heroes and is shot through with violence” (“Race-ing *Othello*” 99). Alexander Leggatt considers how *O* forms a dialogue with the original play in order to reach a teen audience: “An important part of that dialogue is in an interplay between Shakespeare and the teen world, with its volatile mix of rebellion, conformity, insecurity, self-consciousness, competitiveness, and hormonal energy” (245). The film, he says, “uses its serious concentration on *Othello* to touch on deeper fears about what lies behind the pictures in the yearbook” (258). Semenza argues that the film “explores how such problems as racism, family abuse, peer ostracism, and countless other factors combine to make the turn of the century such a terrible time for many American teenagers” (“Shakespeare After Columbine” 101). These readings credit Nelson for making a film that possesses emotional and critical depth and that neither oversimplifies the realities of adolescent behavior nor makes caricatures of its characters. The serious focus on teen problems did not come automatically, however; the director initially turned down the project before reading the script, afraid that it was another

example of a film “ruining...classic texts by teening them down,” one that “typified the film industry’s appetite for soullessly copying previous hits” (Nelson AR8). But once he read Kaaya’s script and decided it was “provocative as it was challenging,” he wanted to make “a serious film” that portrayed high school violence with the same sophistication he observed during visits to high school hallways and basketball games (AR8).

The final product is a compelling film that does present a sophisticated view of high school students and the problems they face daily. Instead of glorifying partying as comedies including *10 Things* tend to do, the film shows the darker side of drug and alcohol use. To help his performance on the basketball court, Hugo uses steroids, and as part of his scheme to surpass Odin on the court and in life, Hugo convinces Odin to use cocaine, so that Odin is under its influence during his most violent moments. A keg party does not lead to romance as it does in *10 Things*, when Patrick takes care of a drunken Kat, but instead is the setting of a fistfight that lands Hugo, Michael, and Odin in the dean’s office and results in Michael’s suspension from the basketball team. Shakespeare’s treatment of Roderigo is updated to address the problem of bullying, as Roger’s motivation for helping Hugo is to gain popularity; instead, the bullying increases, which suggests that mistreatment by his classmates—an apparent motivation of the school shooters at Columbine—prompts Roger’s decision to go along with Hugo’s murderous scheme. Dating is also less chaste and more violent than in *10 Things*, in part because the students live in dorms away from parental control and have relatively easy access to each other’s rooms. A brutal sexual encounter between Desi and Odin leads to a conversation between her and Emily about date rape, which Desi denies even though she told Odin “no.” For all of these reasons, *O* deserves its reputation as a film that addresses difficult issues without condescending

to its teen audience, although it does subtly attempt to socialize young viewers by warning them of consequences for their actions.

The film presents quite a few issues that trouble contemporary high school students, but the main focus is on Odin's downfall, which results from received and persistently upheld notions of racial difference. The film does little to challenge these ideas, suggesting that his downfall is inevitable. *O* is set in South Carolina, an anti-abolitionist slave state, which became the first state to secede from the Union in 1860 and was the site of the initial battle of the Civil War the following year. The state's connection to the Confederacy is still controversial: in 2000 (the year after the film's original release date), the state legislature finally succumbed to pressure to remove the Confederate flag from atop its capital building in Columbia, moving it to a Confederate Soldiers monument on the Capital grounds. The NAACP and other groups continue to boycott the state for the flag's presence on government property,⁹ while the NCAA issued its own boycott in 2001, issuing a rule that no championship game in which the venue is chosen in advance of the season can be played in the state ("Confederate Group"). In choosing the film's location, Nelson was concerned about "the danger of the story's deeper forces being eclipsed by the cliché of the South as perpetually backward and irredeemably racist," but he argues that in fact "white suburban kids strive to emulate the inner city tastes in dress and manner of speech that are described in rap music or depicted in its videos," and that "[t]eenagers in the South are as hip-hop as they are Southern, making Odin far easier for students to venerate and therefore far easier for Hugo to envy" (Nelson "There's a Price" AR15). Odin's peers, then, "worship rather than fear this singular embodiment of hip-hop culture in their midst" (AR15). Nelson's

⁹ In July 2011, the president of the NAACP urged Governor Nikki Haley of South Carolina to end the controversy by removing the flag, but she said she had no plans to do so, a response which has attracted criticism of the state's first minority governor ("South Carolina "; O'Connor).

comments undoubtedly reflect one reality of Southern teenagers, but he fails to account for continued racism and the legacy of the Old South, which is present throughout the film. Nelson envisions a “New South” in which people are free from racist attitudes, a vision represented in the film by the NuSouth brand image displayed during one of the film’s key scenes; despite this logo, however, the film restricts its two main African American characters to stereotypical ideas of racial difference.

Into a single image that could easily fade into the *mise-en-scène*, and which no critic has mentioned, *O* combines a veneration for hip-hop as well as the allegations of racism associated with the Confederate flag controversy. During the Southeast Regional Slam Dunk Contest, which has gathered the region’s best players to perform for scouts from many of the prominent NCAA conferences, an advertisement for NuSouth features prominently on a banner draped beneath the scorekeepers’ table. The banner depicts a Confederate flag in which the colors have been changed—the white background is now red, while the X, which in the traditional flag is trimmed in white, with white stars on a blue background, is colored in green and black. At a glance, the flag could be mistaken for a slight modification of the original, but these new colors—red, green, and black—figure prominently on many flags of African nations and are associated with African liberation. On the banner, the logo “NuSouth” appears under the altered flag.



Fig. 3. The slam dunk contest in *O*, featuring the NuSouth logo (Nelson *O*).

By embracing a symbol associated with racism, NuSouth attempts to confront and overturn stereotypes; the film attempts to do the same, but as the brand never achieved the success it sought, *O* fails to effectively confront racism.

NuSouth was a clothing line created in 1993 by African-American Sherman Evans and Cuban-American Angel Quintero as a way to confront racial prejudice and to create a new brand of Southern pride. The flag began as a design to promote rap group Da Phlayva, whom the duo hoped to market as a uniquely Southern urban music group. According to Quintero, the biggest symbol of the American South was the Confederate flag, and they envisioned their use of the image as a way to make a statement. One T-shirt design “had the words, ‘The future is Da Phlayva,’ surrounding the altered Confederate flag on the front, and, ‘The past is the past,’ on the back” (“A New Brand”). From its roots, the purpose of the NuSouth brand was both capitalist and aspirational: Evans and Quintero speak in interviews of their hope that their clothing will reach the global marketplace, competing with brands such as Ralph Lauren and Tommy Hilfiger, as well as a desire for the brand to promote better race relations, to help people become “free and liberated” from oppression (“A New Brand”). Their vision gained national attention when high school student Shellmira Green wore the Da Phlayva shirt to school in 1994; her white principal

suspended her for being disruptive, and when she wore the shirt a second time, he expelled her (Hitt 268). With the aid of the NAACP, she filed a lawsuit, which she hoped to take to the U.S. Supreme Court, but eventually the case was dismissed.

The ensuing media attention not only helped sell more clothes, but also helped promote the owners' idea that their brand could bring about social change. Evans explains that the red, black, and green redesign of the flag is a way to re-associate the symbol with African liberation: “[W]e all know the Confederate flag is a negative image. So we figured we would take the opposition's worst image and wear it with pride. It's the strategy of going right into the fear and claiming it. By wearing it, you look at it, you pronounce it, taste it, chew it, digest it. You embrace it and make it mean something else” (Hitt 266). This bold confrontation of racial prejudice was an excellent marketing strategy. By 1998, the NuSouth brand had been mentioned in several national newspapers and was the subject of a *GQ* feature article; its founders had been invited to participate at a national race symposium at Fisk University in Nashville; and the line had expanded to include active wear, business wear, women's clothing, and license plates. The variety of offerings was intended to reach as broad an audience as possible in order to promote better race relations, and by 1999 its clientele was seventy percent white (Steiner). This statistic supports Nelson's claim that white teenagers emulate hip-hop culture (although it is unclear exactly what the white buyers were purchasing), but it also emphasizes the ways in which white consumers are necessary for the financial viability of the brand; in order for a true “NuSouth” to materialize, people of all races must understand and “buy into” its goals. The presence of the NuSouth logo in the film pushes viewers to reconsider the Southern legacy and to imagine a future in which Odin is not automatically different from his peers based on his skin color, but the film fails to show how this might happen. Unfortunately, the brand too failed to reach its goals,

and it is difficult now to find information about NuSouth online: its web site is no longer active, one must dig to find the handful of articles and web pages that speak glowingly of the brand's promise, and its founders appear to have moved on to other small business ventures in South Carolina but are not longer active in the media. In this way, the brand represents Nelson's desire for an idealized South Carolina, in which "the story's deeper forces [are not] eclipsed by the cliché of the South as perpetually backward and irredeemably racist," but unfortunately, neither the NuSouth brand nor the film gets very far in this goal ("There's a Price" AR15).

The NuSouth logo becomes a symbol of Odin's promise, for success on the basketball court offers him the possibility of a college scholarship and perhaps a career in professional basketball. Despite this promise, however, Odin continues to be associated with the Old South, in which African-Americans are not treated as equal to their white neighbors. This point is emphasized by Odin's basketball uniform, which retains the crisp colors of the Confederate flag—blue with white trim and red accents. In close-up shots of Odin's face, his jersey's V-neck recalls the blue interior and white trim of the bars on the Confederate flag, which remains controversial for how it recalls a history of oppression, a history in which Odin remains trapped.

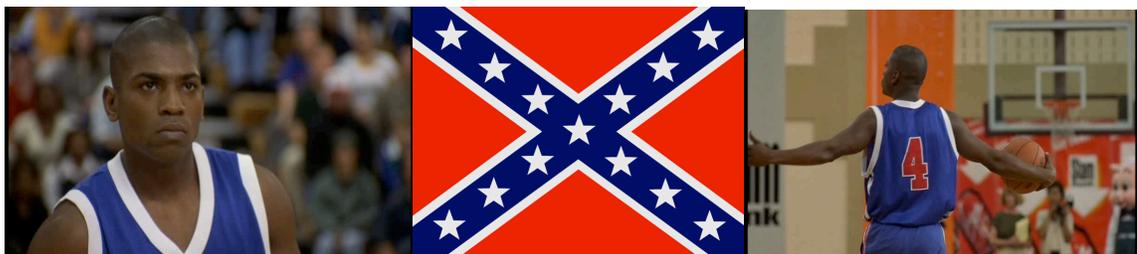


Fig. 4. Odin's basketball uniform and the Confederate flag.

The Slam Dunk Contest emphasizes the pull between Odin's potential and his demise. As the contest begins in the gymnasium, the drug dealer joins Odin in the utility room; he tells Odin, "This ain't even your style, playa" and refuses his money: "Money's for customers; this here is a

one-time thing, right?”¹⁰ After Odin ingests the drugs and Hugo enters to discreetly pay the dealer, Odin tells Hugo, “You really fucked me up, man,” and Hugo reveals his jealousy: “You’ve fucking got everything; I would give my left nut to be in your shoes. Fuck Desi! She’s not some fucking gold medal you need to win. You’re the fucking medal, man!” Obsessed with the preferential treatment Odin gets from Hugo’s father, Coach Duke, and Odin’s apparently effortless sporting ability, Hugo neither understands Odin’s precarious social situation nor the depth of his feelings for Desi. Hugo claims he wants to be more like Odin, but in reality his jealousy stems from feeling usurped, and this leads Hugo to assert control over Odin. The scene reveals the shortsightedness of both young men: Hugo uses the privileges of his white upper-middle class upbringing but claims to care only about athletic success and pleasing his father. Odin de-emphasizes his own talent and potential by telling Hugo that Desi is “the only reason I ever wanted to do something big, so that she would be proud and stand next to me.” Both narrow viewpoints lead to the characters’ downfalls, but the stakes are higher for Odin because the film suggests that athletic success is his only chance to succeed in life.

Odin’s anger and bravado fuel his performance on the court, which serves as a microcosm of his life—his potential future and his tragic downfall. Passing in front of the judge’s table and the NuSouth logo, Odin declares that he needs only one shot. His powerful and confident dunk breaks the glass backboard, prompting wild cheers from the crowd and a perfect score from the judges; he has lived up to Coach Duke’s promise that he will not disappoint the scouts. The cheers turn to boos, however, when Odin breaks decorum, violently shoves the ball

¹⁰ Earlier in the film, Odin admits to past drug use, and the implication here is that this man is his former dealer; the two know each other, and Odin’s excuse that he hasn’t slept in a few days and just needs a hit to get by sounds like one he has used before.

boy, rips the dangling hoop from the backboard, and holds it over his head with a defiant and uncharacteristically angry expression on his face.



Fig. 5. Odin's changed demeanor.

He assumes the stance of a victor enjoying the spoils of his success, but in reality he reveals the extent to which Hugo's machinations have unsettled him, and the final close-up of his face—framed by reaction shots of a concerned-looking Desi, who is sitting with Michael—shows hurt, not anger or bravado. This competition, which should have helped secure Odin's future, instead prompts his downfall. The inclusion of NuSouth's re-envisioned Confederate flag only serves to show, within the context of the film, the difficulties of moving beyond the past—both a more generalized history of racism and Odin's own troubled history. Neither Odin nor any other character wears the NuSouth logo or appears aware of its presence in their gymnasium; instead, the film's main African-American characters, the drug dealer and the athlete, remain limited by their race.¹¹ Shakespeare's Othello earns respect and trust for a number of reasons, and his violent actions incite shock and sadness in the other onlookers because they never expected him to behave in such a fashion. Odin's actions are shocking, too, but they do not incite responses about Odin's character; instead, he must defend himself against the idea that his skin color led to

¹¹ Not all African-American characters fall into this pattern; several of the judges at the slam-dunk contest are black, as are many of the other competitors, but they fade into the background against the more prominent characters.

his downfall. NuSouth may say that “the past is the past,” but Odin and the other characters have been raised to believe that he cannot escape this past.

O continues to recall the history of racial segregation by placing its primary characters in a nearly all-white, elite private boarding school. In contrast, the neighborhood to which Hugo journeys to buy drugs is full of modest frame houses and chain-link fences, with more utility poles than trees and people loitering in the streets. The African-American dealer¹² is courteous and professional—Hugo calls him a “pharmacist,” and he lives up to this description by warning Hugo of the side effects of the steroids he’s on (a “fifty-fifty chance” that they will have him “all twisted up”), asking whether Hugo is drinking enough water, and saying that he’s going to modify the regimen the next week. The dealer also offers advice, telling Hugo not to “trip” if “this basketball thing don’t work” because “there’s some things in life we weren’t meant to have.” In other words, he understands his position as a black man in his society, and he is doing the best with what he has, looking for perks along the way, such as potential court-side seats when Hugo goes to play for North Carolina. This mix of pragmatism and concern is also evident in the scene with Odin, in which the dealer warns Odin not to make a habit of drug use but then silently pockets Hugo’s money. The dealer is not around when Odin and Hugo commit murder, but the film suggests that his products are at least partially to blame for Odin’s and Hugo’s actions, thus implicating the drug dealer as a guilty party. If Nelson is trying to recapture the exotic and foreign world in which Othello, the play’s sole black character, finds himself, then the addition of this other black character only further emphasizes the apparent inevitability of Odin’s fall in a world that seems to hold little promise for someone of his race and class; the dealer appears to

¹² His lack of name recalls the beginning of *Othello*, when Iago’s refusal to name Othello becomes part of the project to discredit him—to rely on stereotypes rather than knowledge of his character.

know that Odin cannot succeed in his quest for acceptance at an all-white high school and beyond.

This background, and the racism associated with it, follows Odin throughout the film. When Dean Brable, Desi's father, confronts Odin with the accusation, that according to a witness, Odin forced himself on Desi, Odin denies it. Brable asks, "You mean to tell me you've never had a run-in with the police?" This run-in, apparently, has nothing to do with Odin's sexual past but instead is about drug use. Without ever saying what his past involves, Odin challenges the dean's implication: "What are you trying to say? What, you're trying to say that I'm not clean, is that it? Cause I'm not on that shit no more. Come on, Coach, you know this. I mean, test my ass. Test me. I mean, this is fucked up, this is fucked up." Odin resents the implication that past drug use has led him to corrupt Desi, and he appeals to his coach, who finally intervenes. Odin asks him, "If you were so worried about me, how come this school bust its ass to get me here?" and Duke replies, "Because you were worth it." The basketball coach supports his young star and stands by his choice to recruit him, but he does little to defend Odin's reputation. Coach Duke is more concerned with Odin's ability to perform than with his character. The scene demonstrates the fragility of Odin's position: throughout the scene, he sits in a chair while the two men who have control over his future tower over him, and Dean Brable shakes his finger in Odin's face, threatening him. The only person who can help him is Desi, whose own position is not much better than his. Desi stands up for Odin, telling her father that they have been together for four months and that the extent of their relationship is none of his business, but although this information quiets her father, Desi, too, is in a relatively powerless position. She, like Odin, sits during questioning while the men stand, and even if she were a victim, the odds of her admitting this in front of alleged perpetrator Odin, who stands with the other men upon her entrance, are

slim. Coach Duke, eager to smooth things over, tells Dean Brable that this is a “family matter” best dealt with elsewhere, but he does little to support Odin. Whereas this scene in Shakespeare allows both Othello and Desdemona to demand respect and to showcase their strength in standing up to their accusers, the teen version of this scene places its main characters in a subordinate position, showing their relative powerlessness as (black and female) teenagers.¹³

The scene also invokes the taboo against interracial dating; Desi may say that their relationship is none of her father’s business, but her keeping it a secret hints that she wanted to escape her father’s judgment. This taboo is emphasized most in a scene between Desi and Odin; lying half naked in her bed, their talk turns to how they met, and he reveals that he “pulled” her “because I’m that kind of nigger.” She turns away from him in mock anger, and he tells her, “see I can say ‘nigger’ cause I am a nigger; you can’t cause you ain’t...you can’t even think it.” She challenges him by saying he started the conversation about their racial difference: “You said I was so fine that you’d let me dress you up and play ‘big black buck got loose in the big house.’” Odin makes a joke out of this talk, telling her not to repeat it because “if another black person knew I said something like that I could get my Suffering Negro League card revoked.” They laugh at the joke, but the conversation reveals a disturbing undercurrent of continued concern about racial difference, inflected by the history of slavery. Odin’s words suggest that their relationship is a socially transgressive act with potentially dangerous consequences, reinforced by their separate vocabularies and calling to mind fears about miscegenation. Although NuSouth attempts to embrace the past in order to move beyond it, Odin cannot let go of the past and becomes trapped by it. During the basketball game that follows this scene, a hip-hop song plays on the soundtrack, “Astronomy (8th Light)” by Mos Def and Talib Kweli; the song’s lyrics use

¹³ This powerlessness connects Desi to Kat, who compromises her power at the end of *10 Things*, and Ophelia, who commits suicide rather than stand up for herself.

the word “black” for an ever-expanding list of similes that describe the black experience, including “black like a slave ship that later brought us here / black like the cheeks that are roadways for tears...blacker than my granddaddy armchair / he never really got no time to chill there / cause this life is warfare, warfare.” As the song plays, Odin battles it out on the court, racking up points for his team. The close proximity of the conversation, the song, and the images of Odin leading his team in the warfare of basketball suggests that he will never escape the forces that define his history, which is reinforced by his confrontation with Dean Brable and his conversation with Desi; he participates so fully in the myth of black suffering that it comes to destroy him.

Because of the racism directed toward Odin throughout the film, his descent into violence does not seem as sudden or as shocking as Othello’s does, and the focus shifts from disbelief that he could be capable of such a thing as murder to a more generalized horror of students killing other students. The film, in this way, achieves verisimilitude by depicting the aftermath of what has become familiar news footage while sidestepping the difficult suggestion that had Odin not been black, the murders could have been avoided. Odin comes to believe Hugo’s claim that Desi is cheating on Odin because “white girls are snaky” and because he’s black; if Odin knew more about dating white girls, Hugo claims, he would be better equipped to understand Desi’s motives and desires, and without this alleged insider information he is led down the path to murder. In contrast to *Othello*, in which the tragic hero’s motives are complex and depend upon more than just his skin color, *O* fails to show, in the end, how anything other than Odin’s racial background is responsible for his downfall. After smothering Desi, Odin picks up Hugo’s gun. Amidst the screams of other students, who cower away from him, Odin attempts to put into words the difference between his tragedy and theirs:

My life is over; that's it. But while all ya'll are out here livin' yours, sittin' around talking about the nigger who lost it back in high school, you make sure you tell them the truth. You tell them I loved that girl! I did! But I got played! [*Points to Hugo.*] He twisted my head up. He fucked it up. I ain't no different than none of ya'll. My mom's ain't no crack head. I wasn't no gangbanger. It wasn't some hood rat drug dealer that tripped me up. It was this white, prep school motherfucker standing right there! You tell them where I'm from didn't make me do this.

He turns the gun toward his chest, and the film freezes for a moment, capturing the brilliant white glare of the bullet just before it enters his black body. A reaction shot of Hugo shows him jump when he hears Odin's body fall. Throughout the speech, the emphasis is as much on Hugo as it is on Odin—the pale white face bearing the relative expressionlessness of shock, the other face dark, sweaty, teary, and twisted by grief and agony. Odin may say that his background didn't lead to his suicide, but the film has shown that it did, and the subtext of his speech reinforces this idea. Throughout, Hugo has preyed on Odin's difference, telling him that he doesn't understand the way white girls operate, planting the information that Odin forced himself on Desi, paying the dealer to give Odin drugs, and later offering more drugs just before Odin kills Desi. Odin, unlike Othello, refuses to take responsibility for his actions and blames instead his white friend. His claim of powerlessness reinforces the idea of African-American subjugation; he may say he's no different from his witnesses, but his difference from them has become clear.

Alexander Leggatt claims that throughout the film, Odin “departs from his Shakespearean original in his relative lack of authority,” from his lack of real power on the team, which belongs instead to Coach Duke, to his murder of Desi, when “he is not so much a powerful force unleashed as a stricken young man” (256). Odin's final speech, argues Leggatt, is “reduced from the original: the effect is equivalent to the contrast between Katherina's rhetorical control [in *Shrew*] and Kat's breakdown” in *10 Things* (256). Whereas Othello's final speech is eloquent,

Odin's final speech is "broken, distraught, and slurred" (256). Indeed, this speech contrasts starkly with Othello's highly literary and complex parting words, with his bid that "I have done the state some service, and they know't" (5.2.344). In the end, Odin cannot realize his potential because he sees only the raced version of himself: "the nigger who lost it back in high school." Odin is right that Hugo did manipulate him into committing murder, but the sense remains that, contrary to Odin's belief that his background did not cause his downfall, it nevertheless set him up for failure within an environment where he will always be defined by his blackness, in a state boycotted by the NAACP because the Confederate flag flies within eyesight of the state capital building, where the past is still present.

To Soar Like a Tethered Hawk

This concern with racial difference is carried over into *O*'s most prevalent visual symbol, the hawk.¹⁴ The film's opening sequence contrasts this powerful bird with a group of white, cooing doves. The hawk is aligned visually with Odin through a shot that cuts from a close-up of the hawk to a close-up of Odin's face, and, during a later scene, shots of the flying hawk are intercut with shots of Odin playing basketball. The bird serves as Palmetto Grove High School's mascot and is present at all of the school's basketball games, but it is kept tethered, held by its jesses so it cannot fly away. The only place it soars is above the heads of the players and

¹⁴ Steve Crintini argues that the opening sequence invites us to associate Hugo with the preening white doves and Odin with the black hawk; this association, along with the monologue about jealousy, establishes the prevailing themes of jealousy and race, but he argues that their roles are reversed as the film progresses (117, 119). Semenza reads the hawk/dove symbolism as a major difference between Hugo and Odin: "what Hugo considers superiority Odin considers difference and, in many cases, aloneness. Whereas Hugo strives to fly like a hawk, Odin struggles to 'fit in' like a dove" ("Shakespeare After Columbine" 107). At the end of the film, Hugo has misinterpreted Odin, who was only a hawk on the basketball court; and in the end, Hugo "oddly has become...the sort of creature he always wanted to be...despised by all and unable to fit in" (107). Although both critics capture the importance of the hawk's symbolism, they misread the power struggle and fail to note the significance of the hawk's captivity.

audience at an indoor basketball game, where it is aligned visually with Odin. As part of his scheme for personal advancement, Hugo kidnaps the hawk and follows the taming methods outlined in early modern hawking manuals: he keeps it caged and hooded but gradually earns its trust until he can hold it on his gloved hands, stroking its feathers. Hugo's taming of the hawk parallels his manipulation of Roger¹⁵ and Odin, who both accompany Hugo to the hawk's hiding place and observe Hugo's interactions with the bird without realizing their affinity with the captured bird; like the hawk, they are in Hugo's control.

The hawk serves as both an actual character in the film and as a symbol of Hugo's ambitions and Odin's racial entrapment. According to Richard Dyer, films often associate characters "with a particular object or an animal (consider Hitchcock's use of birds of prey in relation to Norman/Anthony Perkins in *Psycho* and caged birds in relation to Tippi Hedren in *The Birds*)" (112). These "object correlatives" both "reflect or express character" and "may also reveal personality by the character's attitude to and 'control' over things" (112). Nelson's use of a hawk, then, is rooted in classic cinema and serves to reveal certain characters' mental states. Hugo associates the figure of the hawk with his own dreams in two voiceovers that frame the film. In the opening sequence, Hugo confesses, "All my life I always wanted to fly. I always wanted to live like a hawk. I know you're not supposed to be jealous of anything, but to take flight, to soar above everything and everyone, now that's living." As the speech ends, the sequence cuts to a close-up shot of a hawk. This speech implies that a hawk is free. A hawk enjoys a vantage point not afforded to many. A hawk can fly away, freeing itself from the land below. Hugo, in his dreams of being a hawk, reveals that he feels trapped in his own body.

¹⁵ Roger, like Odin, is manipulated by Hugo and dies as a result of Hugo's scheme, but he is never visually or symbolically aligned with the hawk. Instead, Hugo's control over Roger plays out in the arena of social status, not race.

As the film progresses, the sources of Hugo's discontent, contrasted with his dream of flying, gradually emerge. On the basketball court he plays every position and assists his teammates, but Odin gets more attention for making the big plays; in the opening sequence, Coach Duke calls his son Hugo a "decoy" and instructs his teammates not to let him touch the ball. When Coach Duke names Odin team MVP, Odin picks Michael, not Hugo, to share the award. Hugo's father says Odin is like a son to him, and he appears more concerned about Odin's success than Hugo's. On the court and in the locker room, Coach Duke speaks to Hugo only to criticize him; in his office and at home, Hugo's father largely ignores him, saying that he doesn't have to worry about Hugo. Hugo is jealous of Michael's easy way with their female classmates and of Odin's relationship with Desi, while Hugo treats his own girlfriend, Emily, as more of a spy and a liability than a partner. Hugo's vengeance is a cry for help, a way to get attention, a way to stand out from his peers, and a way to punish those whom he sees as threats; but he is cunning enough to manipulate Roger and Odin while avoiding detection or punishment until his plan goes awry. Hugo voices his motive as jealousy of Odin, but it stems from his desire for paternal approval. The scene in the boiler room crystalizes these thoughts when Hugo tells his teammate, "You're the fucking medal, man!" Odin represents everything Hugo desires; in particular, Odin enjoys natural athletic ability and the admiration and affection of Hugo's father. To Hugo, Odin is a hawk; he can fly. The film reveals how misguided is this belief through the symbol of the hawk. Instead of representing freedom or power, the hawk becomes subject to control, its will guided by another. Even though Hugo uses his white privilege to trap and tame Odin, just as a falconer controls his hawk, Hugo wishes to be a hawk; this desire expresses his longing for his father's approval and guiding presence.

In early modern England, hawks were used for the benefit of their masters. During the

Tudor and Stuart dynasties, hawks were used for hunting and were often exchanged by noble families as gifts, and it was common practice to present the monarch with the gift of a hawk (Grassby 41-3). A minor trade grew around the buying and selling of hawks and hawking equipment, and the title of “falconer” was granted to men charged with keeping a noble family’s hunting birds (Grassby 44-5). Manuals such as Edmund Bert’s *An Approved Treatise of Hawkes and Hawking* (1619), Simon Latham’s *Latham’s Falconry, or, The Faulcons Lure and Cure* (1614, 1615, 1633, and 1658), Gervase Markham’s *Coutrey Contentments* (1615), and George Tuberville’s *The Book of Falconry or Hawking; For the Only Delight and Pleasure of All Noblemen and Gentlemen* (1575 and 1611) offer advice on how to capture, tame, train, and care for hawks.¹⁶ The early modern authors, like Hugo, respect these birds and stress the care and the commitment of time that should be taken when dealing with them. But unlike Hugo, who speaks of hawks as they appear in the wild and who uses masculine language to describe the birds, early modern texts stress the relationship between hawks and their masters. This relationship is typically gendered—female hawks, which are more aggressive than their male counterparts and thus make better hunters, are usually paired with male falconers (Benson 189, 191). In order to tame a wild adult female hawk (called a haggard), the manuals guide her master through a series of steps (including controlling her food intake, her sleep, and her freedom to see and to fly) in order to create a trusting and loving bond of mutual respect. This bond masks the nature of the relationship, in which the master controls his bird.

Shakespeare, as Sean Benson points out, uses hawking images and metaphors throughout his works, including *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Othello*, and these references typically serve as metaphors for the marriage relationship. According to Benson,

¹⁶ See Benson 193-4, Dolan 304-312, and Grassby 38-40.

“From the heavy impasto of Petruchio’s extended metaphor to Othello’s deft, ‘If I do prove her haggard,’ the attempted control of one person over another is always central to Shakespeare’s appropriation of hawking language” (205). In *Othello*, Desdemona destabilizes the traditional idea of male falconers and female hawks by using hawking language to describe how she will convince her husband to reinstate Cassio:

My lord shall never rest:
I’ll watch him tame and talk him out of patience;
His bed shall seem a school, his board a shrift;
I’ll intermingle everything he does
With Cassio’s suit. (3.3.22-6)

Desdemona’s language recalls Petruchio’s method of taming Kate—sleep deprivation and singularity of purpose—and echoes advice found in hawking manuals. Desdemona takes on the falconer’s role with her husband, and in this way Shakespeare’s play suggests an alternate marriage dynamic.

In the end, however, Othello’s use of the metaphor trumps hers. In a soliloquy, Othello applies the language of hawking to Desdemona after Iago tells him she is having an affair with Cassio:

If I do prove her haggard,
Though that her jesses were my dear heartstrings,
I’d whistle her off and let her down the wind
To prey at fortune. (3.3.261-65)

A haggard is a wild hawk that either cannot be tamed or which has broken from its master’s authority and must be let go.¹⁷ Othello fears that Desdemona has broken their bond, and if so, he

¹⁷ According to Benson, “Not only are they difficult to tame, haggards alone of all hawks are, according to Glasier, ‘usually very quickly lost.’ In *Euphues* (1580), John Lyly succinctly captures this general susceptibility of haggards and what must be done with them: ‘Hawkes that waxe haggard by manning, are to be cast off.’ Lyly’s usage signals a shift from a technical specification of a kind of hawk—those captured in the wild—to a specific behavior to which all hawks are susceptible—haggardness” (203).

is willing to release her to her fate, to the wild. In the end, he goes a step further: he kills her. Benson provides a compelling analysis of this scene, arguing that “prove her haggard” is “ambivalent, androgynous even, allowing for either Othello or Desdemona to serve as the referent for ‘haggard,’” so that either could be understood as the wild outsider (204). More important, though, this scene marks Othello’s distrust of his wife, whom he fears he has lost, and he takes control by killing her. In *Othello*, the hawk is certainly not free, as Hugo imagines, and in Othello’s mind a hawk that strays from its master’s authority is subject to death. In Shakespeare’s play, both Desdemona and Othello imagine themselves in the role of falconer, and in the end either—or both—can be seen as the hawk. In *O*, however, Odin is not given the opportunity to play the role of falconer.¹⁸ He remains a hawk, controlled by his falconer Hugo.

Seen in this way, the hawk in *O* symbolizes the lack of freedom for the character with which it is primarily associated, Odin. Odin may appear to fly above his peers, and during the slam dunk contest, his spectacular leap recalls the most famous and talented basketball player of the 1990s, Michael “Air” Jordan, who appeared to fly through the air on his way to the backboard. (Also like Jordan, Odin sticks out his tongue in concentration just before taking flight.) Jordan, who led the basketball team of Hugo’s dream college, North Carolina, to a national championship before being drafted into the NBA, represents a future Odin does not even imagine for himself; Odin declares that he merely wants to make Desi proud of him. He accepts the MVP award but shares it with Michael; he expresses frustration with the accusation that he has pushed himself on Desi, but he is powerless without her support and later does have sex with her after she asks him to stop; he lets Hugo convince him that Desi has turned on him but does

¹⁸ Nor is Desi, who is not an active participant in the plot to get Michael reinstated to the basketball team. Instead, Michael approaches her, and Odin observes them together in a series of wordless shots. In the absence of the hawking metaphor, with which she is never associated in the film, Desi loses some of Desdemona’s self-assurance and power.

not believe her when she tries to defend herself. His history of drug use points to his wild past, and his matriculation into a white school represents his capture. He eventually comes under the control of a white master, Hugo, who has become Odin's falconer, directing him in the hunt and prompting him to kill Desi. Hugo tames Odin into believing his lies, but Odin was primed for taming, as the film's focus on racial stereotypes demonstrates.

The final sequence demonstrates the difference between Odin and Hugo. Odin grieves over having been used, while Hugo desires to be a hawk. It seems unlikely that he will ever be like Odin, however, and his quest causes him to misuse and discard a more powerful social position. After Odin's death, the soundtrack returns to the strains from Verdi's *Otello* that play over the opening scene.¹⁹ On screen, a montage plays in the style of news footage from other high school shootings (and also recalls the montage at the end of *Romeo + Juliet*): the police officers close in on Hugo, handcuff him, and lead him away from the crime scene; ambulances, police cars, civilian cars, and media vans crowd onto the front lawn, where people gather in clusters to soak in the tragedy; Dean Brable looks frantically for his daughter; a student eyewitness is interviewed on camera; authorities arrive at the other crime scene, where Michael and Roger lie on the side of the road. It is here that Hugo's voiceover begins, at the scene where his plan began to unravel. His words play over the music, while images continue to flash across the screen: Coach Duke is told what happened and runs from the gymnasium; Desi's shrouded body is loaded into an ambulance, her grieving father by her side; a dove flies out of its cage; Odin's dead body lies on the sofa where he fell, his eyes still open in a blank stare while police photograph the scene; Coach Duke sobs alone; and finally, Hugo looks out the back window of a police car, his shocked face surveying the scene while cameramen chase the car as it pulls away.

¹⁹ For a discussion of music in *O*, in particular its juxtaposition of opera and hip-hop, see Hodgdon "Race-ing *Othello*" 101 and Sanders 172-5.

Hugo survives to witness the effects of his abuse of power, and although he has been captured, he is still the falconer—he made it all happen, and he continues to manipulate his audience by asserting that he is still in control. The sequence, as many have pointed out, is eerily similar to the aftermath of other school shootings, and it captures the horror that grips those present as well as the sensationalism of the media. Hugo’s voiceover performs a role often sought in the wake of such violence: trying to determine a motive for the killer. Odin has already had his say, but Hugo, despite repeating Iago’s vow to “say nothing,” shares his thoughts with the audience.

In voiceover, Hugo repeats the first three sentences from the film’s opening sequence—about wanting “to live like a hawk...to take flight, to soar above everything and everyone,” and then he adds:

But a hawk is no good around normal birds. It can’t fit in. Even though all the other birds probably wanna be hawks, they hate him for what they can’t be. Proud. Powerful. Determined. Dark. Odin is a hawk. He soars above us. He can fly. And one of these days, everyone’s gonna pay attention to me. Because I’m gonna fly too.

But will Hugo fly? Will he escape not only prison but also his racial and social background, in order to become a hawk like Odin? I don’t think so. Like Odin, who cannot see beyond racial prejudice and his own limited experiences, Hugo’s perception is limited by his inability to understand the pressures of Odin’s life and also the actual conditions of a hawk, particularly within the context of this film.

For Hugo, Odin is a hawk because he soars above his teammates on the basketball court. Playing appears effortless, and Odin’s talent leads Hugo’s father, Coach Duke, to respect him and to love him. In this model, if Odin is the hawk, then Coach Duke is the falconer—guiding Odin’s abilities to win games, establishing a trusting and loving relationship in order to obtain the best performance out of his prize catch. Hugo, too, plays the role of falconer, but with a

different motivation: Hugo manipulates Odin's loving friendship in order to guide him in the hunt, to kill Desi, which will secure Odin's downfall and, presumably, Hugo's ascent. Hugo does not want to be a falconer, though; he says he wants to be a hawk. He wants his father to show as much care for him as for Odin. In a scene that takes place after a disastrous practice, Coach Duke invites Hugo to his office. Hugo expresses his gratitude at his father's attention, noting, "You haven't invited me in here in a long time," but his father wants only to talk about Odin. Hugo attempts to turn the conversation to himself, "By the way, I'm making an A in English again," but Coach Duke dismisses him to again focus on Odin: "That's great son, congratulations. You know I don't ever have to worry about you, thank God. You've always done well, and you always will, but Odin's different. He's all alone here. Hell, there's not even another black student in this whole damn place. We're his family." Coach Duke asks Hugo to keep an eye on Odin because "If he's got a problem, we've got a problem." The implication here is that Odin cannot fit in because of his race, and he must be watched and controlled because of this difference. Coach Duke needs his best basketball player to perform well, and so he asks Hugo to guide Odin through the social arena of his white peers.

In addition to reinforcing Odin's racial difference, the scene emphasizes Hugo's desire for paternal affection and attention, and the framing of the shots emphasizes the emotional distance between them as well as Hugo's childishness: the camera is situated behind a door, which is visible in the foreground of the shot; through the door's glass window can be seen a small waiting area and the coach's open office door, flanked by two high windows. Hugo sits on a chair in his father's office, a small figure dwarfed by his father's environment. A slow zoom draws viewers closer to Hugo, but the presence of the door prevents the camera from filming the two men together. Throughout their conversation, Coach Duke remains off screen, symbolic of

his absent authority over his son, a faceless and indifferent voice issuing commands. At the end of the scene, the father enters the frame, rubs his son's head, invites him to finish his supper there, and leaves. Only then does a new shot begin, taken from inside the office, behind the absent father's desk. Hugo sits looking glum for a moment and then zips his jacket up to his chin as if to disappear, to recapitulate his feelings of invisibility while in his father's presence. If Hugo is invisible, then his African-American teammate is all too visible, and Hugo resents this fact. Instead of training Hugo to succeed, controlling his food intake, paying attention to every aspect of his being as a falconer would a hawk, Coach Duke scarcely pays attention to his son, and this lack of attention more than anything else spurs Hugo's actions. Hugo cannot fly on his own; he needs guidance. His last words show this desire: "One of these days, everyone's gonna pay attention to me. Because I'm gonna fly too." In reality, he will become famous only for his role in causing others to fall. In taking on the role of the falconer without proper care for or knowledge of consequences, Hugo allows himself to be trapped and denied a future.

O, by playing with the idea of falconers and hawks, of tamers and victims, allows for some questioning of authority, but in the end it reverts to a similar social hierarchy present in other films in my study. The hawk—seen as a powerful symbol—is merely a pawn in a game that has played out for centuries. In contrast to Shakespeare's play that celebrates its noble tragic hero while calling for Iago's punishment, *O* provides little support for its hero but instead reduces him to the level of victim, tamed and manipulated by the white world that surrounds him. The film likewise reduces its villain by explaining his motivations. Hugo is revealed as a teen like many others in the teen film genre. Hugo claims to want freedom, to crave recognition, to have broken the mold through his bold actions, but in the end he betrays his desire for parental control, for patriarchal standards, and for a return to the status quo. He becomes alienated,

desires the authority of his father, and failing that, he destroys the lives of Odin, Roger, Desi, Emily, Michael, and himself, along with countless parents, school associates, and people who remain at the periphery of his tragedy, all because he cannot stomach the idea of his black teammate surpassing him on the court and in life.

In the conclusion to his book on teen films, David Considine warns that an adolescent viewer may sometimes mistake the images on film as reflective of “the self he or she is to become” (276). Henry Jenkins argues convincingly in his testimony before Congress that media images themselves do not directly influence behavior, but that a range of one’s personal history, tastes, interests, and psyche shape how these images are consumed, internalized, and released. There is merit to Considine’s argument, however, when he says he “rejects the notion of the movies as deliberately manipulative equally as much as [he] rejects the belief that the young people are passive pawns surrendering to the images and ideology of the screen,” while also acknowledging that sometimes teens may mistake the stereotypes they see in movies for something to model their own identities on, which “subverts the natural emergence of an authentic self” (276). If, argues Considine, films are so influential “in perpetuating stereotypes of adolescence, the film industry, rather than merely mirroring reality, helps to create it” (277). This last point is especially significant when viewing a film like *O*, in which racial stereotypes depart so radically from Shakespeare’s play that they establish a parallel discourse, in which Shakespeare is appropriated to call into question the possibility of social progress and real change. Shakespeare’s *Othello* allows for a black character to become an esteemed and respected member of Venetian society, and Othello’s fall is not blamed on his skin color alone; in contrast, Odin James falls because he is black. Born and raised in a culture that cannot move beyond the history of slavery, Odin allows himself to be overcome and controlled by the sense

that his skin color holds him back; Hugo uses his racist environment to his advantage, taming Odin, controlling him, getting him out of the way so that perhaps, one day, Hugo can be noticed too.

CHAPTER FOUR

To Rebel or Not to Rebel: Challenge and Submission in Almereyda's *Hamlet*

In this dissertation, I have been arguing that, in contrast to teen films that present young characters who appear to be searching for stronger figures of authority, the Shakespeare plays in my study present radical views of early modern society by challenging particular forms of authority: marriage, gender hierarchy, and racial difference, to name the most prominent. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* challenges a different form of authority: tyranny. As a revenge tragedy, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* participates in a genre that, according to Linda Woodbridge, challenges "systemic unfairness—economic, political, and social" (7). In *English Revenge Drama*, published in 2010, Woodbridge argues that revenge plays are texts of resistance and that beneath the gory spectacle lies a systematic challenge to the authoritative structures of Elizabethan and Jacobean society. Audiences, she insists, recognized these plays as such: "Flooding the stage with tyrants and aggrieved subjects, revenge plays inspired ordinary people to take arms against a sea of grievances. To later ages of tyranny and inequity, they bequeathed hope: equality was real, and resistance was possible" (274). This play, then, should be read, not in isolation, but as one text among many that challenged audiences to question the social order. The play's depiction of madness also allows for social critique. Madness, argues Woodbridge, "makes visual the breakdown of moral order" (43). The mad showings of Hamlet and Ophelia should be read as subversive challenges to a corrupt court, and they offer Shakespeare a chance to question the society in which he lives. Jonathan Dollimore argues in the third edition of *Radical Tragedy*, published in 2004, that a "destructive, dangerous and suffering state of freedom," such as Hamlet

experiences, is “not a matter of regret,” for it drives the tragedy and allows him to violate “the restraints of the very history which has produced” him (xxxix). The play is radical because it questions the authoritative structures that produce its characters.

Several critics also argue that Michael Almereyda’s film adaptation of *Hamlet*, which transfers the action of Shakespeare’s play to contemporary Manhattan, is radical, a view that I wish to both build on and unsettle. Critics generally praise the film’s updated mise-en-scène, which transfers the corruption of court life to the corruption of corporate capitalism. Samuel Crowl, for instance, compares this film to Luhrmann’s *Romeo + Juliet* and argues that if the former “took the Shakespeare film triumphantly from the urban art house to the suburban Cineplex, Michael Almereyda’s equally radical and daring *Hamlet* (2000) snatches it back again” (187). Both films offer a “postmodern perspective,” but Almereyda’s film is “even more radical and interesting in its use of Shakespearean material” than Luhrmann’s because of “its relentless slashing and repositioning of the text and its radically imaginative film style” (187, 189). The film, argues Crowl, is among “the most radically inventive of the many major Shakespeare films of the decade.... It has the essential quality—imagination and respect, but not reverence—for its source” (202). Although I cannot disagree that the film is inventive in its use of its source, Crowl defines “radical” somewhat differently than I have in this study; he uses it in a more general sense, suggesting “independence of or departure from what is usual or traditional” (*OED* def. 7c). The film does break from other film versions of the play, but when viewed according to another definition of radical, “advocating thorough or far-reaching political or social reform” (*OED* def. 7b), the film is actually quite traditional in its content; instead of advocating political or social reform, it offers a nostalgic view of authority.

I am not the first to refer to a prevailing sense of nostalgia in Almereyda's *Hamlet*, but I read it differently from the way Mark Thornton Burnett does, who argues that Almereyda's film interprets the play

through the lens of a late-capitalist mindset...brand names and surfaces communicate a vision of human interaction in thrall to technology. At the same time, Almereyda offers alternatives to this dystopian perspective by investing in images of countermovements that throw into relief the seeming dominance of a soulless metropolis. Crucially, it is through Almereyda's filmmaking—a self-conscious representational practice—that Hamlet is allowed to achieve his tragic integrity, a form of felt autonomy. (“To Hear and See” 48-9)

Burnett focuses on the film's use of technology, which illuminates and critiques postmodern society and exposes “the unfeeling quality of the film's human relations” (51). He argues that Hamlet and Ophelia “come to be read through a nostalgic register”; the film infantilizes them and shows their attempt “to exist independently of incoherent and adulterating institutional relations” (57). Burnett claims the “lovers are caught between, and frustrated by, competing older and emergent technological disciplines.... [The] nostalgic yearning for a precapitalist order of experience” makes them “the millennial descendants of Luhrmann's Romeo and Juliet..., lovers who through romantic iconography are elevated above the technological frenzy of their media-saturated surroundings” (57). I quote Burnett at length because, although I agree that Hamlet and Ophelia are associated with older technologies (she uses a Polaroid camera, he a Pixelvision video camera originally designed for children), they do not shy away from technology, *tout court*, but rather embrace their chosen technologies as a means of self-expression. And rather than attempt to exist separately from adult society, they express nostalgia for adult authority and approval, not “for a precapitalist order of experience.”

The film may question postmodern society, but it presents a tragic hero who, in the end, uses technology to express his nostalgic desire for an idealized family life. Like many other

characters in teen films, Hamlet is not the rebel he appears to be, but instead he desires more, not less, parental authority in his life. The film virtually erases Hamlet's madness, which in the play allows him to expose the tyranny and folly of Claudius's court, and it recasts him as a struggling artist who yearns for acceptance and validation. By focusing on Hamlet's struggle to form lasting relationships with those around him, Almereyda's film downplays the political and social importance of revenge in Shakespeare's play and instead depicts Hamlet as an alienated youth, akin to many others in the teen film genre. This Hamlet kills only because he sees no other choice, and his revenge is personal rather than broadly social.

Ophelia, the film's other alienated youth, eventually commits suicide because she cannot balance competing desires to please her family, to pursue a relationship with Hamlet, and to assert herself as an independent young woman. In Shakespeare's play, Ophelia's madness becomes her way of challenging patriarchal control; her public songs and declarations of loss disturb the court and reveal its corruption. The film, by writing Ophelia into more scenes and moving her from the periphery of the play to the center of the film, presents a young woman who disturbs society by resisting efforts to control her body and her voice. And yet, the film shows that this resistance relies on nostalgia, particularly for her father's authority and for an idealized past relationship with Hamlet, in a way that downplays her social critique.

In this chapter, I argue that Shakespeare's play of revenge and madness questions the authority asserted by parents over their children and by monarchs over their people, and in doing so it demonstrates how small acts of disobedience and rebellion can produce social change. Almereyda's film, in contrast, presents its young characters' struggles as personal. Instead of depicting an undercurrent of widespread dissidence, the film focuses on the struggles of a young woman whose inability to rebel causes her to end her life and of a young man whose accusations

of unfairness stem from his nostalgic desire for an idyllic family life. When Hamlet's dead father asks Hamlet to avenge his death, Hamlet obliges, but even his final moments reveal his desire for social harmony. In the end, the film demonstrates a return to the social order: a new CEO takes over, while a newscaster reads a script that reflects on a lost past, not on the future.

Radical Rebellious Revenge

Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, as a revenge play, resists a corrupt society. The vogue for revenge on stage, argues Woodbridge, is primarily about fairness¹: "Unfairness was like the weather: everyone talked about it. But revenge plays did something about it. Many revengers are disempowered people, unjustly treated, who step up and take control" (6). She suggests "that the fairness fixation and relish of vigilantism reveal widespread resentment of systemic unfairness—economic, political, and social—as the Renaissance witnessed severe disproportion between crime and punishment, between labor and its rewards" (6-7). In Shakespeare's England, the consequences were steep for those who publicly opposed the throne: dissidents were imprisoned, denied fair trials, or even killed for speaking out against tyranny. Many fled the country or disguised their identities in order to publish their views. In light of these dangerous consequences, Woodbridge argues that drama—and specifically revenge plays—offered writers a mode of dissidence in which "outlandish gore and fantastic plots made ideal camouflage" (170). Shakespeare, by including plots of revenge in his plays (and not just the revenge tragedies *Titus Andronicus* and *Hamlet*), joined writers such as George Chapman, Samuel Daniel, John Day,

¹ Woodbridge uses the *OED* definition of "fairness" to indicate "equitableness, fair dealing, honesty, impartiality." Revenge carries multiple connotations, encompassing not only our ideas of private retaliation but also public retribution, which is now commonly understood as justice (20).

John Fletcher, Thomas Kyd, Christopher Marlowe, Philip Massinger, Thomas Middleton, and John Webster who used their art to subtly² question social norms (Woodbridge 179-185).

Twenty-five years before Woodbridge published her ideas about revenge plays, Jonathan Dollimore argued in *Political Shakespeare* (originally published in 1985) that tragedy is not transcendent or universal but is, instead, political; that is, early modern discussions of tragedy, including tragic plays, “were appropriated as both defences [sic] of *and* challenges to authority” (“Shakespeare” 9). Literary tragedy, he says, “intervened in contemporary history in the very act of representing it” (10). Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* is radical because it participates in a cultural conversation about the authoritative structures of early modern England. The play promotes obedience and discourages rebellion, but it also questions and challenges tyranny. The play’s use of two words, “obey” and “rebellion,” demonstrates this paradox. The word “obey” occurs eight times in the play, but characters’ pledges to obey are either undermined or reversed in subsequent scenes. “Rebellion,” which occurs four times, likewise takes on a greater significance, as those who are warned against rebellion show that, in fact, it is necessary when faced with the threat of tyranny.³ Hamlet resists authority even before revenge drives him to assassinate a tyrant, and his failure to obey marks him as a hero; Gertrude redeems her earlier rebellion against the memory of her first husband by exposing Claudius as a murderer; Ophelia claims obedience, but her madness shows the state’s inability to control her; and Laertes, who warns his sister against rebellion, threatens the Danish succession through his own public resistance to Claudius’s power.

² Some playwrights were not so subtle, as Kyd’s imprisonment and Marlowe’s murder suggest.

³ To put these words in context, “revenge” occurs thirteen times and “peace” eleven, demonstrating the play’s careful balance between submission and disobedience.

Claudius, as a usurping king, must fight to maintain power over his people from the opening scenes, but this power is never as stable as he would like. Curtis Breight calls Claudius's court "slimy...infected with surveillance and betrayal" (220). Woodbridge claims that in *Hamlet*, "Claudius presides over a heavily fortified police state—no one enters or leaves without permission. His accession to power, bypassing young Hamlet, was smoothed by compliant, non-resistant advisors like Polonius.... He spies on subjects—an early warrantless wiretapping—and suborns Laertes to murder Hamlet. He constantly fears insurrection" (174). Whereas in many plays, including Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, in which the assassinated rulers "have abused subjects' rights," in *Hamlet* the "assassinated king is a double tyrant—usurper and despot" (168). The grounds for this assassination, and the undermining of Claudius's authority as king and as stepfather, are established early in the play. The play asserts Hamlet's authority over Claudius—in the minds of the prince's loyal supporters—in its opening scene. Horatio and Marcellus, after seeing the ghost of the dead king, determine to tell Hamlet what they have seen, "fitting [their] duty" (1.1.178). Without ever mentioning Claudius, the two assert their duty to Hamlet, not to the new king to whom they should be dutiful. Indeed, Claudius's distance from his subjects becomes evident, as Marcellus asks why soldiers have begun to patrol the battlements day and night, and Horatio attempts to answer but admits that his assessment of the external threat from Fortinbras is guesswork: "And this, I take it, / Is the main motive of our preparations" (1.1.74-81, 107-8). Claudius may command the obedience of his subjects, but this obedience, as Woodbridge suggests, is never certain.

Hamlet, unlike nearly everyone else, never pledges obedience to his uncle, and he resists Claudius's claims to power beginning with his first punning speeches, in which he minimizes the relationship between himself and his usurping uncle (1.2.65, 67). Even when Hamlet does say

he will obey, he resolutely undermines the king's authority. Gertrude asks Hamlet to stay in Denmark, and Hamlet uses the word "obey" for the first time in the play: "I shall in all my best obey you, madam" (120). This line is less dutiful than it appears. "In all my best" leaves open the possibility that he will not be fully obedient, and "you," addressed to his mother, omits any promise to obey Claudius, who was the first to ask Hamlet to remain in Denmark. Hamlet pledges obedience to his mother again when Rosencrantz and Guildenstern report Gertrude's desire to speak to Hamlet after *The Mousetrap*. He tells them, "We shall obey, were she ten times our mother" (3.2.324). Hamlet's interactions with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern allow Hamlet to use the language befitting his privilege to rid himself of men who would "play upon" him (3.2.355), and he invokes the royal "we" in order to assert his authority over them. Hamlet's pledge to obey is, again, more nuanced than it sounds. He has no intention of obeying his mother in the way she desires; she wishes to scold him for upsetting the king, but he has other plans for their meeting.

As soon as he is alone, Hamlet says that he will "speak daggers" to his mother, turning the blame for his actions onto her (3.2.387). Hamlet criticizes his mother's relationship with Claudius, telling her she "cannot call it love; for at your age / The heyday in the blood is tame, it's humble, / And waits upon the judgment" (68-70). He refers here to a traditional view of love in which youths are ruled by passion and sensual desires; as people age, this lust is replaced by reason, an intellectual understanding of the beloved that moves beyond the purely physical. Gertrude, as a middle-aged widow, should not be ruled by the youthful clutches of lust. Within this context, Hamlet accuses his mother of rebellious desires:

O shame, where is thy blush?
Rebellious hell,
If thou canst mutine in a matron's bones,
To flaming youth let virtue be as wax

And melt in her own fire; proclaim no shame
When the compulsive ardour gives the charge,
Since frost itself as actively doth burn
And reason panders will. (3.4.81-88)⁴

Shame should cause Gertrude to blush at her actions, but instead her “reason panders will”; that is, the “rebellious hell” of her will, her lusty desire, overrules her reason. The rebellion here is contained within Gertrude’s very bones, melting her virtue. Her face may not blush, but Hamlet reminds her that “frost itself...actively doth burn,” so that even her pale face cannot conceal what is happening inside of her. Gertrude’s response confirms her son’s assessment: “Thou turn’st my eyes into my very soul, / And there I see such black and grained spots / As will not leave their tinct” (89-91). This exchange is important because it suggests that rebellion is so powerful that Gertrude is unaware of its hold over her. The rebellion contained within Gertrude’s body has caused her to rebel against the memory of her first husband, Hamlet’s father. Hamlet offers her the chance to redeem herself by transferring her allegiance from her second husband, the usurping king, to her son, the rightful heir. Gertrude’s earlier vow to Claudius, “I shall obey you” (3.1.37), is more sincere than Hamlet’s pledges to obey her, but Gertrude, like her son, eventually reverses her obedience. In the last scene, Gertrude disobeys her husband’s command (“Gertrude, do not drink” [5.2.294]), and she dies because the cup, intended for Hamlet, is poisoned. Before dying, Gertrude reveals her husband’s treachery: “O my dear

⁴ Jenkins points out that “sexual desire” is identified “with the rebellion of man’s lower nature” in *All’s Well That Ends Well* (4.3.13-18) and with hell in *King Lear* (4.4.117-28), but he does not attempt to explain the meaning of this speech in particular. Bevington glosses lines 84-85 as follows: “When it comes to sexually passionate youth, let virtue melt like a candle or stick of sealing wax held over a candle flame (there’s no point in hoping for self-restraint among young people when matronly women set such a bad example).” He paraphrases lines 86-88 as follows: “Call it no shameful business when the compelling ardor of youth delivers the attack, commits lechery, since the *frost* of advanced age burns with as active a fire of lust and reason perverts itself by fomenting lust rather than restraining it” (89). Neither critic mentions how Gertrude’s actions operate more broadly within the play’s political arena.

Hamlet! / The drink, the drink! I am poison'd" (5.2.315-6). In this way, she claims allegiance to Hamlet, not Claudius, in public, while her disobedience and death encourage Hamlet to complete his revenge.

In addition to the sexual connotation of rebellion, the play offers a more overtly political use of the word. Upon meeting the players, Hamlet requests a speech about the death of Troy's elderly king, Priam. In this speech, Phyrrus—himself the avenging son of Achilles—battles Priam, whose "antique sword, / Rebellious to his arm, lies where it falls, / Repugnant to command" (2.2.465-7). This "rebellious" sword, by refusing Priam's commands, allows for the king's death by leaving him unarmed. Phyrrus strikes him down, but then the avenger's own sword "seem'd I'the' air to stick" (475). Like Hamlet himself, who at this point in the play has been incapable of action against his uncle, Phyrrus "stood, / And like a neutral to his will and matter, / Did nothing" (476-8). Eventually, however, Phyrrus's "bleeding sword / Now falls on Priam" (487-8). Critics make much of this speech's relationship to Hamlet's own revenge, but as interesting as this relationship between Hamlet and Phyrrus is, I find the sword's rebellion just as interesting; by refusing to serve the king, the king's sword allows for—and even speeds—his downfall, while the avenger's sword enables revenge after its wielder pauses to consider whether murder is the best course of action. In this way, the speech serves the larger purpose of showing how rebellion at the most basic level can resist dominant power, and that a momentary pause does not prevent future action. The speech also contains a motif woven through the play—that of a fatherless son whose actions lead to the overthrow of an established monarchy, thus providing the opportunity for a younger generation to assume authority and power.

Another young character to follow this motif is Fortinbras, who, like Hamlet, promises to obey but does not. Early in the play, Voltmand reports to Claudius about his recent visit to old

Norway, whose nephew Fortinbras threatens Claudius politically. The stories of Fortinbras and Hamlet are similar, but Young Fortinbras poses a more direct threat to Claudius, who is afraid Fortinbras will take back his father's lands. Claudius checks this power by appealing to Norway, who "sent out to suppress / His nephew's levies" (2.2.61). Fortinbras "in brief, obeys, / Receives rebuke from Norway, and, in fine, / makes vow before his uncle never more / To give th'assay of arms against" Claudius (68-71). Like Hamlet, Fortinbras must, on the surface, submit to the will of his ruling uncle; he, like Hamlet, eventually disobeys orders. Fortinbras retains his army and goes to fight in Poland, a move that requires his army to pass through Denmark and motivates Hamlet to act.⁵ Hamlet's admiration for Fortinbras leads him to nominate Fortinbras as Denmark's next ruler: "He has my dying voice" (5.2.361). In this way, one avenging son will replace another.

The words "obey" and "rebellion," then, come to signify opposition to established figures of authority. Hamlet pledges, twice, to obey his mother, but in fact he asserts his authority over her. Gertrude pledges to obey Claudius, but she is the one to expose him as a murderer. Fortinbras appears to submit to his uncle's command, but he manages to advance his own ambition. Several other uses of the word "obey" come from relatively minor characters, but collectively they indicate the subversive means to which words can be put to use. During the scene in which Hamlet encounters his father's ghost on the battlements, he instructs Horatio and Marcellus to stay where they are. His friends worry about him, and so Marcellus says, "Let's follow. 'Tis not fit thus to obey him" (1.4.88). In this case, disobedience comes from a desire to protect the prince and demonstrates loyalty to Hamlet, not to the ghost of the dead king, which they distrust. Toward the end of the play, the loyal Horatio uses the word "obey" in order to

⁵ Claudius allows this passage to occur, as part of his deal with Old Norway, but it also conveniently positions Fortinbras nearby, giving him good a tactical position to reclaim the lands.

protect and support his friend. Hamlet has been summoned to a duel with Laertes, which he will likely lose. Horatio tells him, “If your mind dislike anything, obey it. I will forestall their repair hither and say you are not fit” (5.2.213-4). Here, Horatio gives Hamlet the opportunity to preserve his own life, and he also expresses confidence in the powers of Hamlet’s mind, unlike those who believe Hamlet is mad. Obedience to the mind, to one’s own purpose, is more important than obedience to the court.⁶

Madness is another way of resisting the dominant social order. After hearing the ghost’s story and swearing to revenge his father’s “foul and most unnatural murder,” Hamlet says he will “put an antic disposition on,” pretending madness in order to pursue his vengeance (1.5.25, 180).⁷ His actions mask his efforts to discover Claudius’s guilt by convincing Polonius that Hamlet shows the madness of love’s melancholy.⁸ Hamlet also suggests to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that something is not right (“I have of late...lost all my mirth”), and they tell the king that they have been unable to find the cause of Hamlet’s “turbulent and dangerous lunacy,” to quote Claudius (2.2.295-310, 3.1.4). That Claudius entertains Polonius’s ideas and also employs Hamlet’s former friends to spy on him demonstrates Hamlet’s threatening power. When Claudius realizes Hamlet’s threat and decides to send him out of the country, he claims, “Madness in great ones must not unwatch’d go” (3.1.165-171, 190). Despite all of this, Claudius seems almost surprised to be murdered; his last words, “O yet defend me, friends. I am but hurt,”

⁶ What happens when people are fully obedient to the court? This example comes from Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, whose obedience to Claudius costs them their lives. Claudius asks Hamlet’s friends to spy on him, and Guildenstern replies, “we both obey, / And here give up ourselves in the full bent / To lay our service freely at your feet / To be commanded” (2.2.29-32). This obedience causes the pair to carry Hamlet’s death warrant to England, and when he discovers the plot, he changes the letters and calls for their deaths instead.

⁷ This plot is not unique to *Hamlet*. For instance, Kyd also makes his vengeful hero Hieronimo feign madness in the wildly popular *The Spanish Tragedy*.

⁸ See, for example, 2.1.84 and 102-6 and also Polonius’s report to Claudius and Gertrude, 2.2.92-167.

offer the illusion of a good king with loyal subjects, but no one comes to his defense (5.2.329). Hamlet's madness, whether real or feigned, leads to the overthrow of a tyrant.

What of the other case of madness in the play? Ophelia does not feign madness but suffers it; however, her madness, like Hamlet's, is a form of rebellion. The play establishes Ophelia as a young woman whose family asserts control over her actions. During her first scene in the play, her brother Laertes warns Ophelia about her relationship with Hamlet, who as heir to his father's throne must make decisions based upon the well being of many people. Just as Gertrude's marriage has broader implications for the state, and her sex life is equated with a form of rebellion, Ophelia's relationship with Hamlet is social rather than personal. If Ophelia forgets Hamlet's greater social obligations, says Laertes, and "with too credent ear...list his songs, / Or lose [her] heart, or [her] chaste treasure open / To his unmastered importunity" (1.3.30-32), she risks losing more than just her heart and her chastity; she will lose her honor and her self. Laertes warns, "Be wary then; best safety lies in fear" (43). Ophelia's relationship with Hamlet can never be personal or private because of who Hamlet is; Hamlet's identity is based upon the role he will eventually occupy in society. Ophelia must be careful because Hamlet's future may not include her, and to lose her honor now would be to lose her own future. But she has something else to fear, which is more personal: "Youth to itself rebels," Laertes concludes, "though none else nears" (44). In this view, rebellion is inherent in youth, but for an unmarried young woman, it should be avoided at all costs. In Jenkins's reading, this usage of the word "rebels" signifies "the stirring of passion, or sexual desire...as *rebellion* (against one's higher nature)" (1.3.44n). As I have shown, Hamlet himself connects rebellion with youthful sexual desire when he confronts his mother, but in that conversation, Hamlet's critique is more particular: Gertrude's sexual rebellion is hellish because she is too old to act in such a way, and

her actions corrupt the memory of Hamlet's father by aligning her with Claudius. In both passages, the sexual nature of rebellion (for women, at least) is perverse and corruptive, able to ruin a woman who has no shame. Neither woman appears to have control over rebellion; it overtakes Gertrude's very bones, and it has the potential to corrupt Ophelia even if "none else nears." When these women do rebel, however, their words and actions have the power to undermine male authority.

The scene establishes Ophelia's obedience to her brother and later to her father. If rebellion is wrong, the scene implies, Shakespeare's Ophelia will do her best to avoid it. Or will she? Since the 1970s, many critics have read Ophelia as a character of dissidence, whose words and actions defy the patriarchal authority of her father and of the state. In the words of Elaine Showalter, feminists have discussed "Ophelia's madness as protest and rebellion. For many feminist theorists, the madwoman is a heroine, a powerful figure who rebels against the family and the social order; and the hysteric who refuses to speak the language of patriarchal order, who speaks otherwise, is a sister" (91). Richard Finkelstein argues that when Ophelia tells Polonius, "I shall obey," she is not being submissive but is rather "ending and evading Polonius' harangue," just as Juliet appears to submit to her father while silently defying him (19n9). In his view, both Ophelia's speech and her body resist male efforts to contain her (13). "The play," claims Finkelstein, "identifies the forces of rebellion with Ophelia's body which, during madness, becomes an efficient emblem of related challenges to male authority" (14). Carol Thomas Neely posits that Ophelia "is perhaps not simply driven to madness but freed for it" (10). Ophelia's madness "incorporates the earlier pressures on her," and her solitary death by drowning "completes Ophelia's separation from her roles as daughter, sweetheart, subject, and from the literal and metaphorical poison which kills the others in the play" (10-11). To Neely, Ophelia's

madness is significant because it allows her a level of freedom not afforded to the other characters, while the deaths of both Ophelia and Gertrude allow them “to break their ties with the corrupt roles and values of Elsinore” (11). Neely does not go so far as to suggest that Ophelia chooses madness in order to free herself in this way, but her claim about their deaths reduces the power Ophelia and Gertrude claim in life. In particular, both characters operate within a larger movement toward disobedience and rebellion, which affords them more agency than Neely allows.

None of these critics mentions the larger threat Ophelia poses to the state. Before she enters for her famous mad scene, a gentleman reports to Gertrude and Horatio that

The unshaped use of [Ophelia’s speech] doth move
The hearers to collection. They aim at it,
And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts,
Which, as her winks and nods and gestures yield them,
Indeed would make one think there might be thought,
Though nothing sure, yet much unhappily. (4.5.8-13)

This suggests that Ophelia, in her madness, has gathered an audience, and her words command attention and have the potential for causing mischief. Horatio voices this concern: “’Twere good she were spoken with, for she may strew / Dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds” (14-5). He leaves these “dangerous conjectures” unspoken, but in an aside, Gertrude fears her “guilt” will be “spilt” (19-20). Ophelia’s mad speech consists mainly of songs about death and the loss of virginity.⁹ Whether or not the quoted song “*Before you tumbled me, / You promis’d me to wed*” (63-4) refers to her own sexual experience, Ophelia’s open discussion of sex defies Laertes’s bid to keep her chastity close and private. Her speech also resists efforts to be silenced. Gertrude and Claudius both attempt to speak with her, but they manage only half lines, while she scarcely

⁹ For an extended discussion of Ophelia’s songs, the allusions in this scene, and the significance of the flowers Ophelia distributes, see Jenkins 529-43.

acknowledges their presence (34, 56). Like Hamlet's mad speech, however, Ophelia's also offers a subtle challenge to the court. Before exiting, she says, "I hope all will be well. We must be patient. But I cannot choose but weep to think they would lay him i'th' cold ground. My brother shall know of it" (68-70). Her bid for patience sounds much like Hamlet's decision to wait for the opportune moment to carry out his revenge, while her appeal to Laertes foreshadows his rebellion.

Showalter argues that after the theaters reopened in 1660 and allowed women on stage, female actors, through the presence of their bodies and voices "created new meanings and subversive tensions" in roles originally written for boys (80). Like the other critics, she locates Ophelia's subversive power in her madness: "The mad Ophelia's bawdy songs and verbal license, while they give her access to 'an entirely different range of experience' from what she is allowed as the dutiful daughter, seem to be her one sanctioned form of self-assertion as a woman, quickly followed, as if in retribution, by her death" (81). Ophelia, then, challenges the notion that female rebellion should be avoided at all costs, as Laertes advises. On the contrary, it is precisely by refusing to be contained—by using the words and actions of a madwoman—that Ophelia challenges the patriarchal order, forces her voice to be heard, and breaks free of the restrictions put upon her by the men who would control her life.

Although Laertes warns his sister against rebellion, Polonius's death turns him into an avenging son who actively threatens Denmark's social order. Unlike Hamlet, who delays his revenge until the end of the play, Laertes confronts the king forcefully, publically, and immediately. Before Laertes enters the scene, a messenger reports to Claudius that "young Laertes, in a riotous head, / O'erbears your officers. The rabble call him lord" and "cry, 'Choose we! Laertes shall be king!'" (4.5.101-6). Laertes breaks into the king's chamber, calls him "vile,"

and refuses to be silenced (116). Claudius asks Laertes why his “rebellion looks so giant-like” (121), prompting Laertes to respond: “To hell, allegiance! ...Let come what comes, only I’ll be reveng’d / Most thoroughly for my father” (131, 135-6). Claudius, ever the skilled manipulator, convinces Laertes that Hamlet, not he, is responsible for Polonius’s death, and as such, the young man should turn his vengeance on Hamlet.

This shift in Laertes’s revenge is necessary, for it forces Hamlet to act and allows Laertes and Gertrude to join Hamlet in defying the king. After fatally wounding Hamlet and receiving his own death wound, Laertes admits, “I am justly kill’d with mine own treachery.... The foul practice / Hath turn’d itself on me.... Thy mother’s poison’d. / I can no more. The King—the King’s to blame” (5.2.312, 323-6). Laertes’s public proclamation of Claudius’s treachery, which follows Gertrude’s, prompts Hamlet, finally, to kill the king with both the poisoned blade and the poisoned cup. Woodbridge argues that this double murder allows for both a private and a public revenge: “Hamlet deals the multiple blows dear to revenge tragedy (stabbing *and* poison), as if to emphasize by an over-determined killing that he acts on behalf of the many. Political assassination and filial revenge coincide” (175). The use of two weapons—the masculine sword and the feminine cup—also stresses the need for both men and women to participate in these acts of political opposition. Hamlet’s revenge is important because it rids Denmark of a tyrant, but the dissenting voices of Gertrude and Laertes, who encourage this revenge, are important too, for they show that even initial claims in favor of obedience and against rebellion are rightly overturned when faced with proof of Claudius’s treachery. In this way, *Hamlet*, as a revenge play, emphasizes the need for disobedience and willful rebellion on a broader social scale; revenge represents the people, not simply the play’s hero. If a ruler proves tyrant, action must be taken. In the end, the play looks toward the future by bringing in a successor, Fortinbras, who

speaks of Hamlet's potential: "For he was likely, had he been put on, / To have prov'd most royal" (402-3). Horatio promises to tell the story to Fortinbras, and his vow that "this same be presently perform'd" allows the play to continue beyond the confines of the stage (380-93, 398).

Almeryda's *Hamlet* and Nostalgic Non-Rebellion

Critics including Crowl and Burnett argue that Almeryda's film critiques and resists contemporary capitalist society, but I think that the film limits the possibility of this resistance because it transforms the nature of Hamlet's revenge. In this film, Hamlet's revenge is less important than his desire for acceptance, understanding, and love. The play's emphasis on rebellion and disobedience, voiced by several different characters, is lost amid the sharp focus on Hamlet's own problems. As a result, Claudius's death does not resonate as it does in the play. Rather than ridding the world of a tyrant, Almeryda's Hamlet has merely rid Manhattan of a CEO, who will be replaced by another one: the suit-clad Fortinbras, whose takeover is relegated to the business sector of news reporting.

Almeryda's film downplays the social importance of rebellion and disobedience by focusing on the nostalgic and sentimental desires of its central character. An amateur filmmaker, this Hamlet inhabits a bustling, postmodern Manhattan, but he lives in the past, constantly reviewing old footage of his parents and of Ophelia. His *Mousetrap* becomes, not a play enacted at court to reveal Claudius's political treason, but rather a film he has created to reflect on the past and the destruction of a happy nuclear family. According to Susan Bennett, nostalgia serves "as a marker of both what we lack and what we desire; expressed another way, nostalgia is constituted as a longing for certain qualities and attributes in lived experience that we have apparently lost, at the same time as it indicates our inability to produce parallel qualities and attributes which would satisfy the particularities of lived experience in the present" (5). For

Hamlet, his longing for a lost past renders him incapable of finding happiness, or even satisfaction, in the present. But, as Frederic Jameson points out, nostalgia can never fully regain the past as it was; rather, works in the nostalgic mode “do not represent our historical past so much as they represent our ideas or cultural stereotypes about that past” (20). Jon Lewis notes a similar trend in teen films, which “wallow in a past that never existed, a past wholly comprised of images and plots from our shared past as spectators, as viewers” (130). Although Almereyda’s film is set in contemporary New York, its inclusion of older technologies, clips from classic cinema, and even Shakespeare’s text invite spectators to share in the characters’ nostalgia. Hamlet can never return to the past, but his ideas about the past, including what he believes happened to his father, shape his current dissatisfaction with the world.

In Shakespeare’s play, many characters share in this dissatisfaction, including Marcellus, Horatio, Laertes, Fortinbras, and even the mythical Phryrus—all of whom express a desire to rebel or disobey. The film cuts the lines referring to Marcellus’s disobedience and Laertes’s rebellion against Claudius, and it cuts the players and their tale of Phryrus entirely. Fortinbras never appears as a character on screen. Instead, he appears in a newspaper, which Claudius tears in half at the beginning of the film; on a news broadcast Hamlet sees while riding in an airplane; and in a news story at the end of the film. No longer an avenging son with personal ties to Hamlet’s kingdom, Fortinbras is a rising CEO whose takeover will be a corporate merger. As a result of its revised focus on nostalgia rather than revenge, the film’s references to disobedience and rebellion take on a different significance. The film retains the line in which Horatio tells Hamlet to obey his mind if he dislikes the planned duel, but his distrust appears generational rather than political. Thomas Cartelli and Katherine Rowe note “the generational themes and grunge stylings of a film that pits the oppositional moods of Hamlet and Ophelia, Horatio and his

girlfriend, Marcela, against the corporate slickness, lusts, and ambitions of Claudius, Gertrude, and Polonius” (67). But, as the examples of Fortinbras, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern show, generational difference does not necessarily translate to broader social critique. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern never pledge obedience to Claudius in the film, but they do report to him; the reason for their actions is unclear. In the play, the story of their deaths, with Hamlet’s forged letter and capture by pirates, sensationalizes the tale of two men who betray the rightful hero by obeying the tyrant who would have him killed. In the film, the two appear as naïve goons whose death sentence by floppy disk dismisses their importance and serves only as further proof that Hamlet should obey the ghost of his dead father.

Rather than demonstrate how Hamlet’s revenge operates as part of a larger movement toward disobedience and rebellion, the film focuses on Hamlet’s personal dilemma, which is understood as nostalgic desire for parental authority and approval. Betrayed by Ophelia, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern, misunderstood by Gertrude, and challenged by Laertes, Hamlet commits murder when the people (save Horatio) whom he loves appear to conspire against him, ruining any chance of returning to an idealized past in which his parents are both alive and happy and in which he and Ophelia have a future together. His dead father is there with him throughout the film, urging him forward, silently encouraging Hamlet to be a good and loyal son. The ghost appears inside Hamlet’s apartment at Hotel Elsinore, on the balcony, in the lobby, in the hallways, and on the security monitors. He shows up in Gertrude’s room and in the apartment Horatio shares with Marcela; he watches over a sleeping Marcela and signals his approval when Hamlet tells Horatio how he sent his former friends to their deaths. His portrait is on the wall in Claudius’s conference room, and his memory is preserved in the home videos Hamlet watches. Hamlet may appear to rebel against authority—shutting himself up in his room, scowling at

Claudius, toying with Polonius—but in fact he seeks approval and affection from his dead father and his distant mother. This longing for parental authority is a staple of teen films, according to Thomas Doherty: “Since the 1960s, the most fascinating trend in teenpics has been their palpable desire for parental control and authority, not their adolescent rebellion and autonomy” (196). In these films, “parents are more likely to be condemned for being self-centered, weak, and uncertain than for being overbearing, intrusive, or present” (197). Almereyda’s *Hamlet* does not seek revenge as a way of protesting the unfairness of Claudius’s political takeover; rather, he kills his uncle for taking away his parents and disturbing the happy life Hamlet imagines they had together.

From its inception, the film was an act of nostalgia, as its director sought to create an adaptation that resonated with his own memories of the play and of his childhood heroes. In the preface to his screenplay of *Hamlet* (2000), Michael Almereyda remarks that, even though he originally resisted the idea of adapting *Hamlet*, which already existed in “dozens of versions” on film, he kept “thinking back to [his] first impressions of the play, remembering its adolescence-primed impact and meaning...the rampant parallels between the melancholy Dane and [Almereyda’s own] many doomed and damaged heroes and imaginary friends: James Agee,¹⁰ Holden Caulfield, James Dean...” (*William Shakespeare’s Hamlet* viii). At the time Almereyda began his project, no actor under the age of thirty had played Hamlet on screen, and most were over forty; Mel Gibson, who played a youthful Hamlet in Zeffirelli’s 1990 film, was thirty-four. Almereyda wished to “entrust the role to an actor in his twenties,” for “[t]he character takes on a different cast when seen more clearly as an abandoned son, a defiant brat, a narcissist, a

¹⁰ Agee (1909-1955) was a poet, novelist, film critic, and journalist whose autobiographical novel *A Death in the Family*, about the death of a young boy’s father, won him a posthumous Pulitzer Prize.

poet/film-maker/perpetual grad student—a radiantly promising young man who doesn't quite know who he is" (viii). He chose twenty-seven-year-old Ethan Hawke to play the lead, and the two collaborated "to see how thoroughly Shakespeare can speak to the present moment, how they can speak to each other" (ix). Their goal was to create a film that incorporated their own experiences with the play, to use Shakespeare's text to create something personally meaningful and modern, to infuse it with a youthful perspective.

Both Almereyda and Hawke claim to be influenced by characters from popular culture, both fictional and real, whom they see as modern incarnations of Hamlet. According to Hawke,

the reason Hamlet comes off so annoying, infantile, and self-indulgent is that the guy playing him is ten to twenty years too old for the part. He is a bright young man struggling deeply with his identity, his moral code, his relationship to his parents and with his entire surrounding community. These are archetypal young man's concerns. Hamlet was always much more like Kurt Cobain or Holden Caulfield than Sir Laurence Olivier. (Almereyda xiii-xiv)

In other words, Hamlet is a young man whose problems stem from his relationship with various figures of authority, including himself, his parents, and the community at large. These are the same problems that drive many teen films, particularly those starring James Dean, to whom many critics discussing this film refer.¹¹

During his short career, Dean became famous for playing young characters at odds with adult society while nevertheless fighting for paternal approval: Cal Trask in *East of Eden* (1955) is a misfit who struggles to gain his father's love and attention, while Jim Stark in *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) is a defiant teenager who fights his peers and his parents but who seeks affection and wants his father to be more manly.¹² Through his films, James Dean came to represent not

¹¹ See, for example, Crowl 195-6 and Walker 322.

¹² In Dean's other major film, *Giant* (1956), his character Jett Rink is older than Dean's previous two roles. This character becomes an oil tycoon, but like Dean's other characters he too is at

only a particular type of teen character but also a whole generation of teen films. *Rebel*, Dean's most famous film, marks the influence he had on popular culture. According to Thomas Doherty, "Through [Dean], *Rebel* did more than depict the style and autonomy of teenage life in the 1950s: attractive in his alienation, self-assured even in his confusion, Dean validated it" (86). The film, continues Doherty, "visually renders the emotional distance between the generations" (86). Other critics argue that the film nevertheless presents a view of teen alienation that reflects a deeper desire for parental control. David Considine argues that teen films of the 1950s, as represented by those starring Dean, "presented the archetypal image of the disenfranchised adolescent alienated from his family and in open conflict with his father. In many senses it was a regressive decade longing for the security of a more ordered past" (78-9). The ending of *Rebel Without a Cause*, Considine argues, "promises hope through the return of the patriarchal order" (89), as is demonstrated when Jim Starks's father tells him, "Stand up and I'll stand up with you. I'll try and be as strong as you want me to be" (qtd in Considine 89). Lewis reads the ending similarly: "*Rebel Without a Cause*, like so many other teen films, reinscribes the family ideal despite its apparent failure for teenagers depicted in the film.... [It] is both a critique of fifties' conformity and a film about 'a rebel' conforming to some sort of family ideal, or ideal family" (27-8). These authors view *Rebel Without a Cause* as a film about teen alienation, but in the end it upholds an idealized view of family life and a longing for patriarchal control.

Hamlet, too, emphasizes its hero's alienation, defiance, and "longing for the security of a more ordered past." According to Crowl, "There's something very 1950s-ish about [Hawke's] performance: the sensitive, brooding, inarticulate soul caught in a world whose values (whether of *Rebel*'s middle class or *Giant*'s Texas) he despises" (195). Even though he despises the

odds with his society, and at the end of the film he is revealed as a fallen man who has nothing left but his money.

corporate, consumerist values his uncle represents, Hawke's Hamlet nevertheless longs for intimate, meaningful relationships like Dean's characters do. Hawke plays Hamlet as a young man deeply disappointed by the present world, and his alienation is marked by nostalgia for a past in which his father was CEO of the family business, his parents loved each other and doted on him, and his uncle/stepfather was not a threat. Unlike Shakespeare's young rebel, this Hamlet would rather be consoled and acknowledged in his misery than feared for his mad behavior. Doherty writes, "Since the 1960s, the teenpic hero has more often been a Weird or Wimpy One, more liable to flash watery eyes than snarling lips. He is a hapless kid seeking direction, not a tough rebel fleeing restriction" (197). Hawke's Hamlet combines "watery eyes" with a sarcastic snarl, but his barbs hide a desire for acceptance and direction. He rebels (sending Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths and killing Claudius and Laertes) only when he sees no other choice, but to the end he clings to his memories and relationships.

Some might protest that, as a teen film, Almercyda's *Hamlet* does serve as a site of resistance, particularly in its deliberate evocation of James Dean as a figure of teen alienation and anomie. I have argued that Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* stresses the young lovers' alienation and anomie, which results when young people are "unable to answer fundamental existential questions regarding the meaning of life and clearly indicative of a larger and collective cultural breakdown" (Lewis 24). In other words, the world's laws and standards hold no meaning for the anomic person, and so he or she rejects those dominant values. As a result, teens became alienated from the adult world, withdrawing into anomie; this move may expose flaws in normative society. In this view, Hamlet's anomie and alienation allow him to challenge contemporary society, specifically "the corporate slickness, lusts, and ambitions of Claudius, Gertrude, and Polonius" (Cartelli and Rowe 67). There are problems with this reading, though.

Lewis points out the need “to question what teen anomie as/like James Dean signified: separation or solidarity (all teens alienated together), collective resistance (empowerment, strength in numbers), or acquiescence to order and dominance (fragmentation, isolation, apathy)” (20). *Hamlet* does not emphasize protest along generational lines, as Laertes, Fortinbras, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern are members of Hamlet’s generation and appear to have no problem with corporate ambitions. Horatio and Marcella, who are sympathetic to Hamlet’s struggles, do little more than listen to his complaints. Only Ophelia resists her father’s generation, and her suicide marks her decision to reject the world altogether, but, as I will argue later, she too is trapped by nostalgia, and her death offers mixed messages about her rebellion. Overall, this film transforms Hamlet’s public revenge, madness, and vocal resistance to a corrupt court into a personal and nostalgic yearning for a “more ordered past” (Considine 79); with most of the play’s references to rebellion and disobedience either cut or downplayed, the resistance to Claudius’s reign becomes personal, not political, and the film’s ending acquiesces to “order and dominance” (Lewis 20).

The personal nature of Hamlet’s revenge, in which he resents his uncle for destroying the nuclear family, is revealed in one of the film’s opening scenes. In Shakespeare’s 1.2, Hamlet is silent while Claudius performs his duties as the new king. When he is finally addressed, Hamlet uses the opportunity to speak about his dissatisfaction with his mother’s remarriage to his uncle and to express grief about his father’s death. In a soliloquy at the end of the scene, he wishes he could die, contrasts his father and Claudius, condemns his mother’s behavior, and concludes that “it cannot come to good” (1.2.158). The film uses the scene to establish important aspects of Hamlet’s life: he records Claudius’s press conference on his camera, he engages in a brief and private conversation with Ophelia in defiance of her family’s glares, and he entertains his mother

to listen to him. After the press conference, Hamlet walks ahead of Claudius and Gertrude as they make their way to the waiting limo, ignoring them even as they try to ask him what's wrong. Not until his mother asks, "Why seems it so particular with thee?" does Hamlet stop (1.2.75). He turns to her, removes his glasses, and looks her in the eye: "Seems, madam? Nay, it is; I know not 'seems'" (76). He tells her that neither his clothes, nor his actions, nor his

forms, moods, shapes of grief
Can denote me truly. These indeed seem,
For they are actions that a man might play.
But I have that within which passes show;
These but the trappings and the suits of woe. (82-6)

In other words, his demeanor may indicate that both his grief and his detachment are just for show. In reality, he is shaken by his father's death and upset by his mother's remarriage. He is not just playing the role of suffering artist; his suffering is real. The camera remains stationary during this speech, emphasizing Hamlet's sincerity; he leans toward Gertrude and tries to maintain eye contact with her, even as she struggles to avoid his gaze. The action continues only after Gertrude breaks away to look at Claudius, who takes over the dialogue while Gertrude walks ahead and climbs into her limousine. Hamlet fights back tears, but his face also shows contempt for Claudius. When Gertrude removes her glasses to ask Hamlet to stay, he replies, "I shall in all my best obey *you*, madam" (120, emphasis added). The emphasis on "you" stresses his desire for her approval while excluding Claudius, whom Hamlet pointedly ignores. This exchange is public in Shakespeare's play; it takes place at court, where Claudius and Gertrude express their authority and Hamlet subtly undercuts that authority. Here, the only witness is Claudius's driver, who does not appear to be listening. The focus shifts, then, from Hamlet's public display to his private suffering and desire for maternal sympathy.

The film's emphasis on Hamlet's desire for a family life that he can no longer have extends to his soliloquies. After Gertrude brushes off Hamlet's declaration of grief, he retreats to his room where he watches home videos of his parents intercut with footage of Ophelia. The soliloquy, "O that this too too solid flesh should melt," plays in voiceover (1.2.129-159). The footage of his parents, happily laughing and embracing, is a visual accompaniment to the speech's musings on their marriage, contrasted with his deeply negative views of Gertrude's remarriage. He fast-forwards his camera to arrive at footage of Ophelia, stopping when he gets to an image of her lying on the bed, reading a book. She looks directly into the camera, and he pauses the footage on her solemn gaze staring steadily at the screen. In addition to this footage, shots of Ophelia frame the scene; the film shows her waiting in vain for Hamlet at the fountain where they agreed to meet. The sequence highlights Hamlet's dilemma: he has shown that he cares about Ophelia, both in his interaction with her after the press conference and in the intimate video footage depicted on his monitor. But his father's death and his mother's remarriage have caused him to question relationships and women. Hamlet's line, "But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue" is directed toward his mother in the play—he will say nothing, yet, about his misgivings about her marriage to Claudius, for this statement would be a public declaration against Denmark's new king (1.2.159). In the film, however, he watches footage of Ophelia as the line plays in voiceover, possibly implying that he will try to distance himself from her. Ophelia has been his confidante, but could she be frail and fickle, like his mother? Instead of approaching either Ophelia or Gertrude directly, Hamlet retreats into his room where his videos become symbols of a life he can never regain.

Hamlet's interactions with his father's ghost and his subsequent actions stress his personal anguish and nostalgia rather than his public rebellion. Instead of meeting Hamlet on the

ramparts, as he does in the play, the ghost enters the domestic sphere of Hamlet's apartment to tell his story. As when Hamlet desperately tried to get his mother's attention, Hamlet here is rapt, focusing on his father's face without side glances or distractions. He barely speaks but instead listens to his father. Free of the concealing effects of his hat and sunglasses, his wide eyes reflect the fear and awe he experiences while he listens to the harrowing story. He has tears in his eyes when his father embraces him, telling him to "[r]emember me" before disappearing (1.5.91). Although the film retains Hamlet's instructions to Horatio and Marcela, in which he tells them not to tell anyone about what they have seen, it cuts Hamlet's speech that hereafter he will "put antic disposition on," talking and behaving strangely (171). This cut downplays Hamlet's supposed madness and focuses, instead, on his desire to keep his encounter with and memories of his father private.

Although it retains the revenge plot, the film also introduces an alternative path that could allow Hamlet to escape his alienation without resorting to murder. Shortly after talking to the ghost, Hamlet sits alone in his room, watching Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh on television. The monk preaches ideals of peace and harmony, projecting wisdom through his calm demeanor and contemplative look. He offers an alternative to Hamlet's famous "to be or not to be" speech. He says, "We have the word 'to be', but what I propose is the word 'to inter-be'. Because it's not possible to be alone, to be by yourself. You need other people in order to be" (Almeryda *William Shakespeare's Hamlet* 37). He goes on to say, "Not only do you need mother, father, but also uncle, brother, sister, society. But you also need sunshine, river, air, trees, birds, elephants, and so on" (37). The idea of "inter-being" reflects Hamlet's dilemma as he contemplates the loneliness of his situation. He has seen his father's ghost and has not told anyone about its message. He misses his father and wants to be rid of his uncle. As Hamlet

listens to the speech, he watches the footage shown earlier of Ophelia reading a book. Titled *Living or Dying*, the book also foreshadows both his “to be” soliloquy and her inner conflict. Again he pauses on the image of her looking directly into the camera. The scene ends with the monk’s reiteration that “it is impossible to be alone. You have to inter-be with everyone and everything else. And therefore ‘to be’ means ‘to inter-be’” (37). The video offers an alternative to the life-or-death binary of Hamlet’s “to be or not to be” speech. “To be” encompasses numerous ways of living, but to the monk being alive, yet solitary, is not really living. It is necessary to connect to other people and to nature. These ideas directly contradict those found in revenge tragedy, in which characters express discontent by rebelling against those in power and killing or mutilating their enemies, not seeking common understanding. The inclusion of this speech, coupled with the sentimental footage of Ophelia, offers an alternate to revenge and suggests that, if at all possible, Hamlet should forget past hurts and strive for reconciliation, not rebellion.

In another interpolated scene, the film hints again at this possibility of reconciliation, which again prioritizes Hamlet’s desire for acceptance and love over his desire for revenge. After watching the “inter-be” footage, Hamlet sits in a coffee shop, composing a poem for Ophelia. In Shakespeare’s play, the poem is contained in a letter Polonius reads to Claudius and Gertrude; this letter is one of the objects Polonius uses to diagnose (however wrongly) Hamlet’s madness. Here, the poem represents the private space the young couple seeks, a love separated from the prying eyes of their parents. Hamlet struggles to write it, the typical lover who tears up the first page, starts over, and then sits staring into space as he tries to express his feelings. The final product is an attempt to reach out to Ophelia, to let her know that no matter what happens or how he behaves, she should not doubt his love for her:

Doubt thou the stars are fire,
Doubt that the sun doth move—
Doubt truth to be a liar—
But never doubt I love.” (2.2.115-8)

The poem, which contains paradoxes typical of Shakespeare’s sonnets, elevates Hamlet’s love for Ophelia over a consideration of the outside world. The poem also addresses his truth-bending, as Hamlet urges Ophelia to see through his lies, to trust in his love even though he may act or say otherwise. He goes to her apartment to deliver the poem. This encounter replaces Ophelia’s report in Shakespeare’s play, in which Hamlet enters her closet and frightens her with his mad gestures (2.1). Instead of “repel[ling] his letters and den[ying] / [Hamlet’s] access” to her, Ophelia accepts the note, and they embrace warmly, almost desperately (2.1.108-9). Hamlet watches anxiously as she reads the letter. His nervousness implies his need for her to understand the poem’s message, but before they can speak, Polonius enters carrying gifts for his daughter. Hamlet rushes out without trying to explain himself or to directly challenge Polonius’s authority, whose face indicates disapproval. This scene, rather than stressing Hamlet’s socially subversive and fearful madness, emphasizes his desire to reconnect with Ophelia. His inability to stand up to her father shows his reluctance to rebel outright against his father’s generation.

Hamlet attempts to reach out to Ophelia, who might understand his alienation and grief, but after she cooperates with the adults’ plan to spy on him, Hamlet turns to his art as a way to express his distress over his mother’s remarriage. Throughout the film, Hamlet’s videos are both confessional pieces and works of nostalgia. They represent the private nature of his rebellion and eventual revenge, and even when he makes his art public in *The Mousetrap*, the film’s content reflects his nostalgia for an idyllic family life. Hamlet’s grainy black-and-white videos are produced on a Fisher Price PXL 2000 camera, which was originally designed as a children’s toy in the late 1980s, but it “was later adopted by alternative and experimental filmmakers” such

as Sadie Benning and Almercyda himself (Donaldson “Remediation” 218). Peter Donaldson argues that “Hamlet’s ‘grainy’ medium...not only marks him as ‘independent,’ identifying with opposition to the corporate media spectacle; it also suggests that in ‘remembering’ his father and his childhood by replaying video he has shot, he is continuing a childhood practice, cherishing a childhood toy, and rehearsing the unresolved and perhaps now unresolvable issues of childhood” (“Remediation” 223). The camera’s double status as childhood toy and avant-garde instrument allows Hamlet to blend childhood nostalgia with a desire to be seen as a mature artist, culminating in the screening of his *Mousetrap* video. Like his anomic alienation, Hamlet’s choice of medium marks his rejection of the digital images, neon signs, fax machines, and other emblems of postmodern corporate life that surround him, but the content stresses a deeper need for acceptance over a rebellious dissidence.

The short film becomes Hamlet’s public plea for attention and understanding, an attempt simultaneously to address his father’s death, capture his mother’s attention, publicize his grievances against Claudius, and express his nostalgia for an idealized childhood. In contrast to Shakespeare’s play, in which one of the players recites a poem about another avenging son, and in which the players’ performance at court involves common people in Hamlet’s rebellion against Claudius, the film’s *Mousetrap* is personal. The performance takes place in a private screening room with a limited audience, not in the public space of the court. Almercyda’s film, which cuts all of the dialogue and condenses the dumb show into a pastiche of images, makes the presentation more personal than Shakespeare’s play-within-a-play. There are no players, only Hamlet’s video. Whereas it is unclear which lines Shakespeare’s Hamlet adds to the players’ production, Almercyda’s Hamlet presents a work more clearly his own, even though he has culled his footage from other media texts—old movies, television shows, cartoons, and pop art.

The video opens with “The Mousetrap” typed in white letters on a red background, followed by “a tragedy by” (new screen) “HAMLET” (new screen) “Prince of Denmark.” The first shot of a blooming rose indicates love and hope, exemplified by the idealized shots of family life that follow. A 1950s family consisting of two doting parents and their young son sits in a living room. The parents pull their pajama-clad son up to sit between them on the couch. The next shot (of a similar-looking but different family) shows a young boy sitting on his father’s lap, kissing his cheek while the father hugs him. The father leads the boy out of the room while the mother remains behind, knitting. Upstairs, the father watches from the doorway as his son climbs into bed. The film cuts abruptly to a different scenario. A rotating globe indicates the passage of time; a bottle of poison indicates, in Hamlet’s explanation to Ophelia, “mischief” (3.2.135). A pop-art man reclines in an armchair, and a vial of poison is poured in his ear; a different man staggers around, dying. A Roman king is strangled while his queen turns her back; an elephant collapses; two rows of people fall board-like to the ground. The rose dies. The young boy sneaks back downstairs, but instead of seeing his parents in the living room, Hamlet’s film cuts to a mother’s betrayal: the Roman queen allows her hand to be kissed by a soldier. A couple kisses pornographically and then engages in rough sex.¹³ An audience claps, delighted with the show. A man puts on a crown and smiles into the mirror. Whereas the dumb show and play in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* focus on the king, queen, and usurper, here the prevalent images are familial and social and, significantly, are rooted in the past. The nuclear family that appears in several of the images portrays an idealized family life that is replaced by images equally unreal: black-and-white images from classic cinema; 1970s pornography; works of art that, spliced together, create a narrative of betrayal and loss.

¹³ Burnett identifies the film as *Deep Throat* (1972) and discusses its significance (““To Hear and See”” 60).

Hamlet's filmic pastiche is made in the nostalgic mode described by Frederic Jameson, who argues:

In a world in which stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles, to speak through the masks and with the voices of the styles in the imaginary museum. But this means that contemporary or postmodernist art is going to be about art itself in a new kind of way; even more, it means that one of its essential messages will involve the necessary failure of art and the aesthetic, the failure of the new, the imprisonment in the past. (18)

Hamlet's *Mousetrap* shows nothing new; it uses "dead styles" (including Shakespeare's dumb show) to show the artist's "imprisonment in the past." By making his film about a lost childhood, about what he imagines happened to his father, and about his mother's guilt, Hamlet participates in a type of filmmaking that, according to Jameson, traps its creator in an art form that dooms him to live in the past rather than the present: "we seem condemned to seek the historical past through our own pop images and stereotypes about that past, which itself remains forever out of reach" (20). In other words, Hamlet will never be vindicated, despite Claudius's guilty retreat from the cinema, because even Claudius's death will not help Hamlet to regain the family life that he imagines he once had.

Katherine Rowe connects early modern mnemonic devices with Hamlet's use of technology in the film to argue that Almereyda's Hamlet (both the film and the character) is not nostalgic; for her, "[a]cts of memory...serve as opportunities to assess the adequacy of different technologies in relation to present needs, not past actualities" ("Remember Me" 43). She argues that Hamlet's videos are not nostalgic according to Jameson's definition because "What Hamlet seeks in his videos is not a history but a connection between collective experience and his own loss. We are asked here to understand his interiority in terms of the video record he manipulates" (47). This "collective experience," for Rowe, is culled from the variety of forms and images Hamlet uses in his videos, including "Renaissance painting, military footage, cartoon

monster” (46). I agree with Rowe that Hamlet’s videos depict his interiority, and also with her assertion that “Replay and collage...serve to appropriate found footage from the media environment and recycle it for private purposes” (52). This interiority, however, is precisely what traps Hamlet in the past and prevents him from participating in a “collective experience,” because Hamlet’s appropriation of images does not allow for anyone else to participate in his experiences. Shakespeare’s play presents a collective experience of rebellion and disobedience, of revenge that will benefit society, not just the one; the players and the conversation throughout the play-within-a-play emphasize the communal aspect of Hamlet’s plot. In contrast, hardly anyone comments on or understands the images found in Almereyda’s *Mousetrap*: hence Ophelia’s “What means this?” and her concerned but confused expression after the screening. Almereyda’s Hamlet employs technology to record and understand his memories, but his use of pastiche causes these memories to be skewed by nostalgic desire for an unattainable family life, which dominates his *Mousetrap* but remains unintelligible for his film audience. Claudius understands the accusation of guilt, but both he and Gertrude misunderstand the rest of the film’s message; this misunderstanding becomes clear during Hamlet’s subsequent encounter with his mother.

Hamlet’s desire for parental understanding culminates when he visits his mother’s bedroom after the screening. Until this scene, Gertrude does not appear to think anything is wrong with her son, but here he is determined to make her realize the full effects of her marriage to Claudius. Hamlet shows more emotion in this scene than he has yet, nearly weeping at Polonius’s death and yelling accusations at his mother. The screenplay cuts many of Hamlet’s lines, including “rebellious hell,” and focuses instead on his anger and Gertrude’s fear. Both are crying, frantic, driven to the brink of breakdown, and just when Hamlet appears ready to smother

her on the bed, his father's ghost appears, sitting coolly on a chair. Hamlet freezes as if he has just remembered his dead father's instructions to "Taint not thy mind nor let thy soul contrive / Against thy mother aught" (1.5.85-6). Like a penitent boy, Hamlet asks, "How would you, gracious figure? ...Do not come your tardy son to chide?" (3.4.104-6). The presence of his father's ghost changes Hamlet's demeanor from rage to respect, and he follows the ghost's instructions to speak to his mother. Looking over his shoulder for approval from his deceased father, Hamlet faces his mother and speaks slowly and clearly to her. Looking into her eyes with the same earnestness he expressed earlier in the film, he stresses that "It is not madness / That I have uttered" (145-6).¹⁴ He pleads with her to "Repent what's past, avoid what is to come / And do not spread the compost on the weeds / To make them ranker" (152-4). Sobbing, Gertrude tells her son he has "cleft [her] heart in twain" (158), and when she kisses him, she acknowledges that she understands his grief and her guilt. The scene stresses Hamlet's desire for the approval and understanding of both of his parents. Chastened by his father's ghost, Hamlet's tone toward his mother changes. When he warns her against further relations with Claudius, her tears indicate that she has come to understand her son's plight, and a new intimacy forms between mother and son. I have argued that in the play, this scene is important in how it stresses rebellion; it allows Hamlet to assert authority over his mother, so that at the end of the play Gertrude shows her allegiance to Hamlet by exposing Claudius as a murderer. In the film, Hamlet seeks his dead father's approval and his mother's understanding. Her actions at the end of the play reflect her realization that her son was right about Claudius's guilt. She drinks the poison in a gesture of maternal protection, not social rebellion.

¹⁴ As one of the few references to madness in the film, this line loses purchase here, for this Hamlet never feigns madness; Polonius's references to Hamlet's madness also make little sense.

The film's final scene demonstrates the personal nature of Hamlet's revenge by focusing on his relationships with Laertes, Gertrude, Horatio, and the dead. Although Shakespeare's play does not specify whether Gertrude knows the cup of wine is poisoned, here her expression reveals suspicion, and she drinks the poison to save her son. A gun replaces the poisoned foils, and Laertes's final three speeches are condensed to three lines, one of which is "Forgive me," thus answering Hamlet's heartfelt apology to him at the beginning of the scene.¹⁵ Laertes tells Hamlet his mother is poisoned and "the King's to blame," and he gives him the gun (5.2.299). In the play, both Gertrude and Laertes declare loudly that they have been unjustly served; here, in keeping with the personal nature of the rest of the film, the moment is more private: Gertrude dies wordlessly, while Laertes speaks quietly to Hamlet alone. When Hamlet shoots Claudius, it is as if the knowledge that Claudius killed both of his parents has caused Hamlet to finally act. Not the madness of a murderer, and not the rebellion of a rightful heir, but the solitary grief of a son propels him to kill Claudius.

Hamlet's final moments stress his relationship with Horatio, who comes to hold his dying friend, and with those who have died. In order to focus more fully on Hamlet's request for Horatio to tell his story, Almereyda's film relegates Fortinbras's entrance to a brief news story just before the closing credits. Hamlet's story, shot in the grainy black-and-white Pixelvision of his video diaries, emphasizes neither grief nor madness nor revenge but his memories of the people in his life. The montage begins with a close-up of Ophelia's face. Hamlet's right hand is on her cheek, his cheek and hair just visible in the far left of the screen. Next we see a man, blurry at first. He turns: Hamlet's father. The third shot is of Gertrude, whose face is buried in

¹⁵ In the play, Laertes says, "Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet" (5.2.334), and he frees Hamlet from blame for his and his father's deaths; the effect is the same, however. This speech also comes after Claudius's death in the play, and so the film omits Laertes's "He is justly serv'd" (332).

her hands, hiding her grief. The camera then jumps to the present, revealing, in color, a close-up of Hamlet's eye, a red streak of blood on the bridge of his nose. Next Hamlet remembers Laertes, who appears to be joking around or fighting with someone, perhaps Hamlet. The sixth shot is a continuation of the moment with Ophelia that began the montage. She is looking away from Hamlet, who again is just visible to the left of the screen. Her eyes are downcast as she turns to look at him. Memories of Ophelia again give way to memories of Hamlet's father as the montage cuts to the back of someone's head. He turns, and again it is Hamlet's father. Next we see a fight; someone is being punched in the stomach. It is the fight in the Laundromat, when Claudius punches Hamlet, shoving him against the washing machine as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern look on. The story returns to Ophelia. Hamlet, slightly more visible than in the previous two clips, again holds her cheek in his right hand. He kisses her. The montage ends by returning to a close-up of Hamlet's blood-splattered face. His eyes are red, teary. He tells the grieving Horatio, "The rest is silence" (5.2.363). The film cuts to a close-up of Horatio, who utters his famous epitaph: "Now cracks a noble heart. Goodnight, sweet prince, / and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest" (364-5). Another cut shows a close-up of Hamlet, eyes closed, head to the side. Dead.

This final montage stresses, again, Hamlet's desire for acceptance and love, not his rebellious revenge. The one shot of Claudius is significant because it emphasizes the betrayal of Hamlet's two former friends and Claudius's bullying meanness, not his political tyranny. The shot of the grieving Gertrude recalls the moment when she finally understood her son's agony. The shots of Hamlet's father demonstrate that, even if he does not appear to be watching Hamlet, he is; the shadows suggest that Hamlet's memories, as he depicts them through his videos and his *Mousetrap* film, are nostalgic uncertainties. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, Ophelia

emerges as the dominant figure in Hamlet's story. Her face is in three of the eight flashback shots, including the first and the last, which culminates with a kiss. How would Hamlet's story have been different had he insisted on pursuing a relationship with Ophelia, regardless of her father's feelings? Ophelia represents the future Hamlet could have had, if only he had chosen to pursue it; instead, he remains trapped in nostalgia for a relationship that ended in his girlfriend's suicide.

The montage shows the problematic nature of Hamlet's memories. Although throughout the film he idealizes the past and is unable to imagine a future because of it, here the memories appear more pure. Unlike earlier footage, which juxtaposes other media images with Hamlet's own home videos, creating a pastiche that reveals Hamlet's reliance on stereotypes about the past à la Jameson, this montage includes the good and the bad, the shadows and the hope. In this way, Hamlet's impending death allows him to finally reconcile his past with his actions, to come to peace with his memories, after which he has nothing to add: "the rest is silence." Shakespeare's play assigns Horatio the task of telling his audience not only Hamlet's story but also about

Carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,
Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,
Of deaths put on by cunning and forc'd cause,
And, in this upshot, purposes mistook
Fall'n on th'inventors' heads. (5.2.386-90)

In other words, Horatio relates the social aspects of Hamlet's story, the external events that led to the final slaughter, which clear the way for Fortinbras's succession. As his final act, Shakespeare's Hamlet gives Fortinbras his "dying voice" (5.2.361). This blessing looks toward the future, in which another fatherless son will take over Denmark, asserting the authority of the younger generation and defying the treaties of dead monarchs. Almercyda cuts these lines relating to Fortinbras, though, leaving his Horatio (and the audience) to fill in the gaps, to choose

the most important parts of Hamlet's story to share with the world. By cutting Fortinbras's entrance, the film makes the story more personal, more about individual memory than social repercussions. This ending does not "advocate[e] thorough or far-reaching political or social reform," to cite my working definition of radical, nor does it show how revenge can bring about this social change; instead, it tells the story of a young man whose memories of his parents and his lost love dominate his thoughts and stress his nostalgia for a life he can never have.

Ophelia, Whose Suffering is (Mostly) Silent

I could end this chapter here, but to do so would be to silence the story of the film's other primary character. Almeredy's film shows that Ophelia's life and death are as important as Hamlet's, and as Burnett points out, the tragedy of Hamlet and Ophelia recalls Shakespeare's earlier pair, Romeo and Juliet. As closely as her story is intertwined with Hamlet's, however, the two are not the same. Ophelia's madness is real, and it is not cut from the film. Ophelia, unlike Hamlet, does not have a network of friends with whom to socialize, does not have a Horatio to tell her story, does not move in relative freedom. Instead, her father and brother attempt to control her life, Polonius joins with Claudius and Gertrude in forcing her to spy on Hamlet, and Hamlet's behavior to her vacillates between affection and neglect, tenderness and rage; and this is all before he kills her father. If the film subsumes Hamlet's rebellion to a final act in which he kills the man who murdered his parents, Ophelia's rebellion is closer to the surface. Throughout, her expressions indicate resistance to the controlling gestures of the men in her life, but her madness and death result from a failure to rebel; in the end, the film suggests that, like Hamlet, Ophelia is nostalgic for a life of love, affection, and parental approval.

In recent decades, critics including Finkelstein and Neely have argued that Shakespeare's Ophelia should be read as a rebel whose madness undermines male authority by freeing her of

the pressures placed on her “as daughter, sweetheart [and] subject” (Finkelstein 13-4; Neely 10-11). I agree that the play portrays Ophelia in this way, but I also argue that her rebellion should be read alongside that of other characters, and that her resistance is not necessarily a conscious decision. That is, she does not choose to go mad just so she can challenge patriarchal control; nonetheless, her madness affects and disturbs not only the court but also her unnamed “hearers” (4.8.9). As Showalter points out, however, understandings of Ophelia typically reflect cultural attitudes:

The alternation of strong and weak Ophelias on the stage, virginal and seductive Ophelias in art, inadequate or oppressed Ophelias in criticism, tells us how these representations have overflowed the text, and how they have reflected the ideological character of their times, erupting as debates between dominant and feminist views in periods of gender crisis and redefinition. The representation of Ophelia changes independently of theories of the meaning of the play or the Prince, for it depends on attitudes towards women and madness.... There is no ‘true’ Ophelia for whom feminist criticism must unambiguously speak, but perhaps only a Cubist Ophelia of multiple perspectives, more than the sum of all her parts. (91-2)

Showalter is right: readings of Ophelia frequently are divorced from readings of the play as a whole, as well as from readings of Hamlet’s character; readings and depictions of Ophelia reflect cultural attitudes and critical trends; and it is impossible to pin down the character according to any one reading. Criticism of Almereyda’s *Hamlet* supports Showalter’s analysis. Several critics mention Ophelia only in passing, including Cartelli and Rowe, who mention her alongside other members of her generation that oppose their parents’ generation (67). Other critics discuss Ophelia alongside Hamlet in order to support broader claims about the film or about his character. These include Burnett, who argues that the pair is trapped by a nostalgia for a precapitalist existence (“‘To Hear and See’” 57); Donaldson, who mentions Ophelia’s presence in Hamlet’s videos and discusses how Hamlet misunderstands the message of inter-being (“Remediation” 226-8); and Walker, who, while discussing allusion in the film, suggests that

underwater shots of Ophelia allude to Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* (323-4). The critics who offer closer readings of the character tend to focus on the stardom of the actress who plays her, including Crowl, who discusses Julia Stiles's youth and Ophelia's repression (196-201); Hodgdon, whose essay focuses on Stiles's performance and argues that "As Ophelia, [Stiles] offers a portrait of a young woman who is doubly subjected to the visions of others" ("Cinematic Performance" 107); and Elizabeth Deitchman, who argues that Stiles's "Good Girl" image and her whiteness stress Ophelia's sexual purity (488-9). Although I argue in a separate article that reading Ophelia's character through the star status of Julia Stiles is important, here I would like to focus instead on how the character operates according to the film's broader depictions of authority, rebellion, and madness.

In this chapter, I have been arguing that, contrary to what most critics claim, Almereyda's *Hamlet* is less radical than it appears, and that in particular Hamlet is portrayed as a nostalgic son seeking acceptance and increased parental authority, not a rebellious revenger seeking justice. I have also shown that this depiction of Hamlet operates contrary to Shakespeare's depiction of revenge, disobedience, and rebellion. Ophelia, I argue, operates in a similar fashion. On the surface, she appears to challenge patriarchal authority as her Shakespearean counterpart does, particularly in her madness. In contrast to Almereyda's Hamlet, who in the film expresses his grief in private, including a semi-private screening of *The Mousetrap* and intimate conversations away from the public eye, Ophelia expresses grief over her father's death in public: her mad scene takes place at a crowded museum gala, and she refuses to be silenced. Stiles's Ophelia attempts to break free of the efforts to control her body and her voice, and she commits suicide in a public fountain. Despite these efforts at rebellion, however, the film portrays Ophelia as one whose story is limited in its telling. Almereyda presents Ophelia as something of a paradox:

both a dutiful daughter and a rebel, someone who refuses to be silenced but whose words are dismissed. In the end, only Hamlet's memories of her remain, and it is unclear whether her story will prompt social change.

As befits a young woman in modern-day Manhattan, Ophelia lives alone, occupies her time with photography, and does not appreciate her father's and brother's attempts to meddle in her personal life. Although it is unclear whether she is financially independent, is a student, or has a job, this Ophelia is nonetheless more in control of her own destiny than her counterpart in Shakespeare's play. She actively pursues a relationship with Hamlet, who appears to be her only friend and confidante. As Hodgdon points out, *Almeryda* cuts many of Ophelia's lines, but rather than reducing the part, the film expands on it by inserting Ophelia into scenes in which she does not appear in the play.¹⁶ Several nonverbal scenes situate her in various Manhattan locations, where she is typically alone: when not with her father, brother, or Hamlet, she is shown riding her bicycle through the busy city streets, waiting for Hamlet at a fountain, or developing photographs in her apartment. Ophelia appears in several of Hamlet's Pixelvision video diaries, to which he returns throughout the film, and in his story montage at the end of the film. The film thus expands the role to make Ophelia one of the most important characters in the film, whose intimate relationship with Hamlet becomes a key component of the plot. In this way, Ophelia becomes an independent young woman comfortable navigating city streets or being filmed when alone with her boyfriend, but she remains constrained by filial duty and an inability to rebel against a society that refuses to acknowledge her voice.

¹⁶ Hodgdon says Stiles offers "a silent performance" because she is "[g]iven little to say (by Shakespeare and even less in *Almeryda's* script)"; surrounded and controlled by the male characters, she "inhabits [the screen's] margins" (107). And yet, "her performance crackles around those edges: although she seems to be doing less, she is actually doing more, calling up thoughts and emotions that fill her to the brim but which she cannot, dare not, express" (107).

The film emphasizes this pull between filial duty and independent desire by inserting Ophelia into an early scene analogous to Shakespeare's 1.2, a scene in which Ophelia does not appear in the play. During Claudius's press conference, Ophelia divides her attention among Hamlet, Claudius, Polonius, Laertes, and a small gold packet on which she has drawn a picture of a waterfall and a time, "3:30?". Her self-consciousness is apparent as she glances around to see whether Hamlet is watching her, and she rolls her eyes in frustration when Laertes refuses to pass Hamlet the packet. After the press conference, Ophelia and Hamlet break away from the group, but first Polonius and then Laertes assert their control over her by interrupting the couple's whispered conversation. Throughout the scene, Ophelia appears small and controlled, torn between Hamlet, who occupies her attention, and also her father and her brother, who both seem uneasy about the relationship and who listen to Claudius halfheartedly because they are so concerned about keeping Ophelia away from Hamlet. Stiles's youthful face and her movements show Ophelia's stubbornness—she makes sure Hamlet notices her and she breaks away from the group to talk to him—but also her vulnerability, as she is physically pulled between her family and her boyfriend. This vulnerability resurfaces when later, she sits alone at the waterfall fountain, looking around and struggling to fight back tears: Hamlet has missed their rendezvous. The sequence reveals Ophelia's alienation—she speaks to no one but Hamlet and appears trapped by her family, but her alienation is different from Hamlet's. She does not mourn the loss of an idealized family; as with many of Shakespeare's heroines, Ophelia's mother is neither mentioned nor, apparently, missed. Instead, Ophelia's alienation stems from an inability to control her life, which is constantly negotiated by the men around her.

This male prerogative to control her becomes clear in Ophelia's next scene. In Shakespeare's 1.3, Laertes counsels Ophelia against becoming too involved with Hamlet because,

as a prince, Hamlet's obligations are to the state and not to her; any indiscretion on her part will result in a loss of honor, both for her and for her family. He warns her to fear rebellion, which can take control without any particular action on her part. Shakespeare's Ophelia promises to remember her brother's lesson, and later in the scene promises her father she will stay away from Hamlet. Although Ophelia plays the part of the dutiful daughter in this scene, I have argued that her answers may not be so straightforward, and that in fact the scene could foreshadow her later rebellion. Almereyda's film uses visual cues to show Ophelia's resistance to her brother's ideas about her relationship with Hamlet, but the scene also emphasizes her reliance on male approval and the alienation that pushes her toward suicide. The scene opens with a shot of an old black-and-white photograph of a young Hamlet, crouched in a closet beneath men's jackets—presumably his father's closet. He holds an old camera and looks straight ahead, his gaze just to the left of the lens. Ophelia studies the image while her brother lectures her about its subject. The photograph works on several levels: it suggests that Ophelia's relationship with Hamlet is longer lasting and deeper than Laertes would like to believe, and it represents her nostalgia for this relationship. The film has already shown that Hamlet is no longer the wide-eyed and innocent young man he is in this photograph, and Ophelia's relationship with him is no longer sure. The photograph also represents Ophelia's art, which enables her to control the images she produces; this art could become her future should she choose to pursue it as a career. She never achieves this level of independence, however, because she withdraws into alienation, hiding behind her camera, her photographs, and her memories of the past, as she becomes more distant from the world.

This scene, unlike Shakespeare's, does not foreshadow Ophelia's rebellion but instead foreshadows her death, which occurs because she is unable to escape her memories of the past.

This moment is fleeting, however, and the rest of the scene suggests that she has the power to rebel against her father and brother in order to pursue an independent future. Ophelia does not look at Laertes during the first part of his speech; in profile, she chews her gum and fingers the photograph with blue-tipped nails, showing her preference for Hamlet (and her art) over lectures by her brother. When Laertes suggests that Hamlet cannot continue to love her because “his will is not his own / For he himself is subject to his birth” (1.3.17-18), she sighs, looks at the ceiling in frustration, puts down the photograph, and begins to pace the room, still not looking at her brother. Laertes’s ideas are outdated in postmodern New York. It is difficult to imagine this Hamlet marrying out a strict sense of social or political obligation, and his nostalgia for a 1950s nuclear family suggests that love, not arranged marriage, will drive his choice. Ophelia, too, appears to find her brother’s words irksome, as she paces the room, agitated, before sitting again. When she does look at her brother, her expression is blank and emotionless, until he warns her not to get too close to Hamlet, or else she may “lose [her] heart, or [her] chaste treasure open / To his unmastered importunity” (1.3.31-2). She grows still and stares straight ahead as he tells her to “fear it” (1.3.33). Her pained expression echoes the sadness she showed at the fountain. Rather than fearing for a future act that could threaten her honor or her chastity, Ophelia appears to reflect on Hamlet’s recent distance and the changing nature of their relationship. This sadness fades, though, as Laertes continues the speech. At the mention of rebellion, Ophelia bristles, and her response to him is incredulous and self-assured, as she asserts her right to choose who and when to date. She tells Laertes that she will keep “the effect of this good lesson” (1.3.45)—being wary of Hamlet’s intentions—as long as Laertes holds himself to the same standard of sexual responsibility. Ophelia will not abide a double standard. Stiles conveys with a simple

look an Ophelia who may concede to keep Laertes's warnings in mind, but who will do so on her own terms.

Almeryda's decision to replace Shakespeare's 2.1—in which Ophelia tells her father about a horrifying encounter with Hamlet—with a scene in Ophelia's apartment highlights her potential independence as well as her inability to stand up to her father. Earlier, I suggested that this scene stresses not only Hamlet's desire to reach out to Ophelia but also his ultimate inability to do so because he cannot stand up to Polonius; it also deemphasizes Hamlet's apparent madness in order to emphasize his desire for acceptance and approval. For Ophelia, the scene alters her relationship with her father. The scene's presence in the play, which also includes Ophelia's longest speech, strengthens the father-daughter relationship by stressing her dependence on him to analyze Hamlet's strange behavior; Polonius apologizes to his daughter, telling her that he misunderstood Hamlet's intentions. Deleting Shakespeare's scene loosens the bond between Ophelia and Polonius, while the added scene again shifts the focus to the relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia. This relationship represents Ophelia's desire to regain a childhood companion while allowing her to rebel, should she ignore her family's warnings. Hamlet finds Ophelia absorbed in her work, developing photographs at the back of her dimly lit apartment—the independent young woman whose work could offer her freedom from a restrictive patriarchy. She does not hear him come in, but she welcomes him wordlessly with a warm embrace that expresses comfort, gratitude, and passion. When a disapproving Polonius interrupts them and Hamlet rushes away, Ophelia's face reveals a mixture of fear, annoyance, and bewilderment—what did Hamlet's visit mean, why did her father have to interrupt them, and what will happen next? She tries to follow Hamlet, but her father stops her, causing her to drop the letter. She bites her finger and swipes at her hair nervously as Polonius picks it up, looking

more like a chastened teenager than a young woman who lives alone. The scene emphasizes the choices Ophelia must make: on the one hand, a life of her own, with or without Hamlet, and on the other, her father and his efforts to control her choices. The letter and Polonius's interference trigger the beginning of Ophelia's mental breakdown, for she cannot be independent or happy as long as she continues to submit to her father's will. She is incapable of outright rebellion, however, because she still relies on his approval.

Ophelia's struggle comes to the fore in yet another scene in which her character does not appear in Shakespeare's play (2.2); her presence in this scene signals the early stages of her withdrawal into madness and foreshadows her death. Polonius leads her by the hand to visit Claudius and Gertrude at their indoor swimming pool, and while her father is talking, Ophelia stands behind him, clearly distraught—she alternates between crossing her arms tightly in front of her, shoving her hands in her pockets, and wiping at her hair, and her face reflects a mixture of anger, grief, and stubborn refusal to believe her father's words. When Polonius shows Claudius and Gertrude the letter, Ophelia tries to grab it unsuccessfully. Ophelia's participation in the scene—the visual reminder of her unwillingness as co-conspirator to reveal Hamlet's love for her—again showcases her struggle between filial duty and independence. She does not want her father to share the letter, but she does not stop him. As the others discuss her relationship with Hamlet, Ophelia distances herself from them. She walks along the edge of the pool as if it is a balance beam and stops by the edge, gazing into the water; when Polonius reports that he told her Hamlet was “a prince out of thy star. / This must not be,” she jumps in (2.2.141-2). The camera is positioned underwater at the bottom of the pool, looking up at Ophelia as she slowly sinks, her hands moving up to cover her face. This Ophelia has made a choice: she escapes the prying eyes of controlling adults, taking her life into her own hands. As the possibility of her drowning

begins to sink in, a jump cut reveals that it was just a vision; she is still standing, dry, by the side of the pool. She starts, as if surprised to realize the power of her vision, and wipes her face nervously. Almereyda, by inserting Ophelia into this scene, shifts the focus from the adults to the troubled teen. The scene depicts her alienation and misery and foreshadows her death by drowning, showing what will happen if she cannot stand up for herself or balance her competing desires for acceptance and independence, which do not have to be mutually exclusive. A young woman in the twenty-first century can be a loving daughter, a faithful partner, a hard-working career woman, and an independent person. Constrained by the idea that seventeenth century women lacked social power, however, the film ultimately silences its heroine and reduces her memory to Hamlet's story.

The final few scenes emphasize Ophelia's inability to find balance in her life and her failure to find strength in her own potential. Ophelia's madness is portrayed as a mind torn asunder by its inability to navigate its competing desires; unable to please her father *and* Hamlet, to forgive the one for killing the other, to imagine a future in which she answers to no one but herself, Ophelia becomes unhinged. According to Richard Dyer, audiences relate to characters by "placing" them "in terms both of the understanding we are to have of a character and our judgment of or feeling for him/her" (121). Through certain "cultural/ideological values and attitudes" associated with a character and through the *mise-en-scène*, films encourage viewers to feel a certain way about characters (122). Almereyda's *Hamlet* works to invoke sympathy for Ophelia by privileging her story, including her in more scenes, and casting a talented young star to play her. Ophelia's madness is particularly jarring, then, when she appears at a gala in the Guggenheim Museum looking wild-eyed and unstable, tearful and confused. Whereas Shakespeare's Ophelia conveys her madness by singing bits of old songs about lost love and

death, Almereyda cuts most of her lines and rearranges the scene in order to focus on Stiles's physical performance. At times, her voice is distant, her eyes blank as she sings about her loved one being "dead and gone" (4.5.29-30). She screams at Gertrude, "Pray you mark" and tearfully tells Claudius, "Pray let's have no words of this, but when they ask you what it means, say you this" (4.5.35, 46-7). Instead of singing the Saint Valentine's Day song as she does in the play, Ophelia moves to the center wall of the spiraling atrium and screams out over the open space. She has to be dragged away by a bodyguard. This public spectacle, unlike Hamlet's private and personal expressions of grief, resembles Shakespeare's play in that Ophelia's madness has the power to resist and trouble the court. She has an audience: museum patrons who strain to see the source of the public disturbance. But when Claudius waves them off and Gertrude smiles reassuringly, Ophelia's audience turns away. In this way, the film's adults reduce her behavior to that of a troublesome teenager who disturbs their peace, but whom they can control, both physically and socially.

The rest of Ophelia's mad scene takes place in a private side gallery, where her only witnesses are Claudius, Gertrude, and Laertes. No longer raving, she is lost in her own world, teary and wistful, her eyes full of loss. In her hands are Polaroid pictures, which she drops on the floor, one by one, crying, "He will never come again" (4.5.191). She briefly responds to Laertes, but then her eyes go blank, she begins to cry again, and she returns to her pictures, tearfully naming each flower and its quality. Rosemary, "for remembrance," goes to Laertes, as does rue, which she also keeps for herself (4.5. 173-4, 178-9). The artist, left alone with only her images and her grief, has become lost in the past. At the end of the scene, Ophelia strokes her brother's cheek and says, "I would give you some violets, but they withered all when my father died. They say he made a good end" (4.5.181-3). The last time we see her alive, she is sobbing into

her brother's chest. Ophelia's madness appears to stem from dual causes: grief for the loss of the life she had with her loved ones as well as a life she wished she had. Bennett's ideas about nostalgia operate here, as well: "nostalgia is constituted as a longing for certain qualities and attributes in lived experience that we have apparently lost, at the same time as it indicates our inability to produce parallel qualities and attributes which would satisfy the particularities of lived experience in the present" (5). Ophelia's ravings indicate that she has become obsessed with a life she can never reclaim or perhaps never had: both a trusting, intimate relationship with Hamlet and a loving, safe relationship with a caring and supportive father. Neither her brother, nor Hamlet who is still alive, nor anyone else will satisfy her longing for a different sort of life. She may have had the option of a happy, independent future, but Ophelia's nostalgia does not allow her to seek this life. Shakespeare's Ophelia breaks free of patriarchal control through madness, which frees her "from what she is allowed as the dutiful daughter," while her death "completes Ophelia's separation from her roles as daughter, sweetheart, subject" (Showalter 81; Neely 11). This may be true of the film's Ophelia, as well, but because she has been afforded a degree of independence and lives in a world in which women are not automatically restricted by these roles, her madness, like Hamlet's revenge, becomes a personal escape rather than a social critique.

Shakespeare leaves Ophelia's cause of death ambiguous, as different characters explain her death by drowning as both an accident and a suicide. Almereyda's film makes this death a definite suicide. Instead of an extended description of her death, Gertrude reports that "One woe doth tread upon another's heels, / So fast they follow. Your sister is drowned, Laertes" (4.7.162-3). The film cuts to a wide-angle crane shot of the fountain where Ophelia had waited for Hamlet earlier. In an inversion of the pool scene, the camera looks down on Ophelia's body,

which floats face-up in the shallow basin, her arms stretched out at her sides, sheets of paper floating around her. A security guard enters at the top left of the screen and wades into the fountain. In medium close-up, he pulls her body out of the water. The red and white box that had contained Hamlet's "remembrances" floats to the surface, its contents scattered throughout the fountain. All that Ophelia leaves behind is paper, containing memories to which she clung. Lewis argues that many teen films demonstrate a nostalgia for authority, and that some rationalize suicide as "an alternative to coming of age," a view that "renders the prevailing romantic view of anomic youth absurd" (33). In other words, suicide appears as the only choice for teens who either cannot escape their alienation or refuse to grow up. Lewis's ideas help explain the difference between this Ophelia and the rebel of Shakespeare's play, whose madness poses a political and a social threat to the patriarchal court.

The film's Ophelia commits suicide because she cannot balance the competing pressures placed on young women in contemporary society: she cannot be the dutiful daughter, the loyal sister, and the faithful girlfriend because the men in her life force her to choose between them, and her inability to choose destroys her. Without their approval, she cannot imagine a future, and she fails to embrace her independence. Instead, she withdraws into madness and seeks recourse in death. How are we to interpret this death? I am of two minds. On the one hand, I think it limits the character because not much appears to change after her death; she escapes life, and those who loved her grieve at her graveside. But because the film focuses so closely on the personal experiences of the characters rather than their social critiques, this death can appear as an "absurd" escape, to quote Lewis (33). In other words, her death does not really change anything. On the other hand, because Almercyda's film has insisted that Ophelia's presence is important, and because her image dominates Hamlet's final thoughts, her story continues beyond

death. In life, she may have been unable to rebel, but in death, she serves as a reminder to young women to learn from her mistakes; she demonstrates the importance of resisting the urge to collapse when faced with rejection or loss. The museum patrons may turn away from Ophelia's disturbing voice, but it has forever shattered the peaceful silence of high society.

Literary Extras: An Alternate Ending

According to the screenplay, Almereyda intended to end the film with Fortinbras (played by Casey Affleck) flying in on a helicopter and surveying the scene on his video camera.

Described in the screenplay as “*a scruffy young man wearing a sharp suit, a hat with earflaps, [and] a bag slung on one shoulder,*” Fortinbras represents the man Hamlet could have been had he chosen to embrace the future (*William Shakespeare's Hamlet* 128). Instead of an alienated young man, a struggling artist who shuts himself away editing videos, Fortinbras is a successful businessman who will take over the Denmark Corporation. Fortinbras merges Hamlet's artistic eye with Claudius's ruthless business practices. He is a corporate Hamlet, an artist who has made it in the cutthroat world of stocks and mergers. Fortinbras will bring his youthful perspective to his role as the new CEO of Denmark Corporation. The shoot for this final scene was a disaster, however, and the footage was not used (142-3). Instead, Fortinbras appears only in the newscast that closes the film, thus changing the tone and implications of the entire film. Had it been retained, Almereyda's alternate ending would have anticipated a future in which a younger generation succeeds an older one, learning from its mistakes and refining its practices.

Instead of exploring the potential of a younger generation to transform society, the film's ending offers a news story that, like the rest of the film, nostalgically looks backward rather than forward. A picture of the clean-cut young man wearing a suit appears to the left of the newscaster, with the caption, “FORTINBRAS Denmark's New King.” But rather than report on

Fortinbras's succession, newscaster Robert MacNeil reads from Fortinbras's speech and the Ambassador's reply:

This quarry cries on havoc. O proud death,
What feast is toward in thine eternal cell
That thou so many princes at a shot
So bloodily has struck?
The sight is dismal. (5.2.369-72)

The picture is removed and the newscaster pauses. Rather than looking to the future by forming a plan to remove the bodies and to tell Hamlet's story, as Shakespeare's play does, the newscaster's closing words are taken from earlier in the play: "Our wills and fates do so contrary run / That our devices still are overthrown; / Our thoughts are ours; their ends none of our own" (3.2.206-8). Almereyda says he was inspired to close with this speech, spoken by the Player King during *The Mousetrap*, after reading Harold Bloom's *Shakespeare, the Invention of the Human*. Bloom uses the lines as an epigraph and, according to Almereyda, "makes a convincing case for their centrality in Shakespeare's skeptical long view of things" (*William Shakespeare's Hamlet* 143). I strongly disagree with the idea that Shakespeare presented a skeptical view of the future, but I concede that Shakespeare's words here express the idea that our lives will end, in spite of "our wills" or "our devices." The notion that "Our thoughts are ours; their ends none of our own" implies that we may be free to think as we choose, but ultimately we have no control over what will happen. The speech occurs in the play as the player king tells his wife that one day, he may die and she may remarry; these things happen, and there's no stopping death. This does not imply, however, that death is meaningless, but rather inevitable. Grafting this speech onto the play's description of the arriving army's reaction to the bloodshed creates a pessimistic ending that, like Luhrmann's film (which also includes a nostalgic montage that gives way to an item on the evening news), offers little idea of what the

future might hold. Taken out of context and assigned to a newscaster with no personal involvement in the story, these final words suggest that the deaths of Hamlet and Ophelia were the result of fate alone, and that the characters lack the power to influence others through their lives or deaths.

Lewis claims that the teen film “presides over the eventual discovery of viable and often traditional forms of authority (for example: patriarchy at the end of *Rebel Without a Cause* [Nicholas Ray, 1955], law and order at the end of *The Wild One* [Laslo Benedeck, 1954], the charismatic elite at the end of *Heathers* [Michael Lehmann, 1989])—in effect, the restoration of the adult culture informed rather than radicalized by youth” (3). Even though forms of authority appear to break down over the course of these films, authority is eventually restored, albeit differently. Almercyda’s ending offers this restoration of adult culture. Young Fortinbras, the savvy businessman, represents the “charismatic elite” who will replace the Denmark Corporation’s former CEOs; his disassociation with the family will allow their memories to fade away. Unlike Shakespeare’s avenging, mad, and dissident characters that promote rebellion, disobedience, and resistance to a corrupt court—and to different forms of authority—in every act of the play, Almercyda’s characters are more concerned with individual action, personal approval, and introspective nostalgia. The survivors may be “informed” by youth in a literal sense, when Horatio tells Hamlet’s story, but adult culture will not be radicalized because it has rarely been challenged. The only character to resist adult control is Ophelia, but as I have argued, the result of this challenge is ambiguous. Moving forward, Almercyda’s *Hamlet* offers the possibility that retellings of Hamlet’s story may offer a broader critique of contemporary society, particularly if these retellings stop to dwell on the story of the troubled young heroine, Ophelia. These retellings, though, must recall the stories of the other characters that this film relegates to

the margins or eliminates altogether—those whose voices I have tried to represent in this chapter. In this way, Almercyda's *Hamlet* begins to move away from the other teen films I have examined in this dissertation because, although it lacks the radical emphasis on social change reflected in Shakespeare's play, it begins to suggest how an adaptation might resist the tendency to accept or even yearn for various forms of authority and to show how young people do have the power to insist on political or social reform.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have argued that the four Shakespeare plays in my study—*Romeo and Juliet*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Othello*, and *Hamlet*—present radical challenges to particular structures of authority in early modern England, including marriage, gender roles, racial stereotypes, and tyranny. Shakespearean teen films approach authority differently; rather than challenge, subvert, or rebel against received social structures, these films depict teens who yearn for parental or social acceptance, or the films themselves limit challenges to authority by restoring order in the end—through news stories, police intervention, or even happy endings. One reason these films seek authority in this way is a result of genre. As teen films, they depict young people searching for more, not less, authority in their lives, and they uphold hegemonic values.

In chapter one, I argued that Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* participates in a cultural conversation about marriage; its young lovers challenge patriarchal authority by resisting the social norm of arranged marriage, insisting that marriage should be based on love, not on familial advancement. The play also questions the Petrarchan tradition by suggesting that the beloved's desire is just as important as the male speaker's desire, and that love should move beyond a set of poetic conventions. Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*, in contrast, celebrates a highly idealized form of love, rather than presenting a specific view of the poetic tradition. Because the idea of arranged marriage is anachronistic, the lovers escape their parents rather than challenge their parents' views; in the end, the film restricts the power of its young characters by cutting the

lines that suggest that their deaths will change their society. Although the Radiohead song that plays over the closing credits gives the lovers the final words, its placement in the film does not guarantee that anyone will listen to it. The lyrics (“We hope that you choke”) do not offer any specific challenge to parents or to contemporary society, but rather express a generalized dissatisfaction with the world, which aligns the characters with other figures of teen anomie. In this way, the film both celebrates Shakespeare as the ultimate authority on love, able to transcend his time to represent suffering teens of all time, and downplays the more powerful social positions Shakespeare’s play provides to its young characters.

10 Things I Hate About You restricts its heroine’s power via a comic resolution and a Petrarchan sonnet, as I argued in chapter two; Kat misreads one of Shakespeare’s anti-Petrarchan sonnets in order to demonstrate her secret desire for authority. Some argue that Shakespeare’s *Shrew* reasserts gender hierarchies, and some argue that *10 Things* inverts these hierarchies to present a powerful young woman who subverts patriarchy, but I argue differently. When read alongside other early modern texts about wife taming, the film actually emerges as the more conservative work. Shakespeare’s ending includes an element of surprise at Kate’s apparent transformation. Even if her closing speech, which I read as ironic, appears to promote patriarchal control, both her actions throughout the play and the actions of the other female characters suggest that women should not submit to their husbands’ authority. *10 Things*, in contrast, presents Kat as a feminist whose taming comes from a hidden desire for acceptance and parental authority. She criticizes her father’s parenting methods, which have been lacking since her mother’s departure, and the film suggests that absent parents are at least partially to blame for their children’s problems. Kat’s rebellious attitude is gradually tamed in a series of classroom scenes, and in the final one, she uses Shakespeare to reveal her vulnerable desire for

love and her willingness to change. The film's closing song, "I Want You to Want Me," reveals the film's message, which undercuts Kat's earlier assertion of independence.

My third chapter, on *O*, argued that in contrast to Shakespeare's play, which presents contrasting views of its hero in order to challenge expectations about skin color, the teen film upholds racial differences. Shakespeare's *Othello* offers alternate possibilities to traditional views of the government, military, marriage, and even plot and character. For these reasons, and because of the play's complex depiction of both its hero Othello and its villain Iago, the play has become one of Shakespeare's most controversial plays for scholars, performers, and directors. *O* does not shy away from controversy but rather invites it, particularly because of its location in South Carolina, a state that remains a site of racial discord. Even though it confronts ideas about racial difference, the film nevertheless suggests that Odin's background is the sole cause of his downfall, despite his insistence otherwise. The symbol of the hawk subtly upholds this idea by depicting Hugo's taming of Odin. And like other teen films in my study, the hawk also serves as a symbol of teen desire for parental authority, as Hugo desires to be a hawk so his father will notice him.

This desire for parental authority becomes a major motif in Almereyda's *Hamlet*, as well, as I discussed in chapter four. Instead of Shakespeare's rebellious revenger seeking justice in the face of tyranny, the film depicts a young man nostalgic for an idealized childhood dominated by the happy nuclear family. Whereas Shakespeare's *Hamlet* depicts acts of disobedience and rebellion by several characters, the film sharpens its focus to its two primary characters: Hamlet and Ophelia. Like Hamlet, Ophelia, too, is nostalgic for the past, but she dwells on her relationship with Hamlet, which represents her independence from her meddling father and brother. Restricted by Shakespeare's text and by her family, Ophelia goes mad because she

cannot break free of patriarchal control. Whereas madness in Shakespeare's play becomes a way for both Hamlet and Ophelia to subvert the court, the film nearly cuts Hamlet's madness altogether and suggests that Ophelia's madness is contained by the adults, her voice silenced like Kat's, like Desi's, like Juliet's. The film's corporate setting and its ending limit the possibilities for social change, as Claudius's death and Fortinbras's takeover have little impact outside of the business sector, whereas Shakespeare's ending stages the death of a tyrant and the succession of an upstart akin to two of the play's rebels, Hamlet and Laertes.

On the subject of endings, some critics argue that this play and the others are not radical at all, but that the subversive possibilities ultimately are contained. Stephen Greenblatt, for instance, claims that "subversive voices are produced by the affirmations of order, and they are powerfully registered, but they do not undermine that order" (38). I have argued that this is not the case, at least not in the plays I have studied: particular characters do have the power to "undermine...order" through their words and actions, and as a result the plays look forward to a changed social order. I arrive at this reading by comparing the plays in my study to other early modern texts, by examining early modern cultural practices, and by considering the plays' critical and theatrical histories. Shakespearean teen films offer good examples for the different ways Shakespeare's plays have been interpreted over the course of the past four centuries, for they demonstrate how the plays can serve the particular purposes of creators desiring to reach a particular audience in a particular historical moment. Whereas I think Shakespeare's plays resist containment, the teen films support Greenblatt's argument.

In the end, the Shakespearean teen films discussed above present a return to patriarchal order. This is largely the result of their participation in a genre that reflects the values of the adults who create the films, in which many films present ideas of rebellion or alienation while

simultaneously depicting young characters' desire for the authoritative presence of their parents, teachers, coaches, friends, and other mentors. Romeo and Juliet become alienated from the world because their parents are ineffectual role models, but rather than find more suitable role models or challenge their parents' way of life, the teens escape through suicide. Ophelia, too, commits suicide, but hers is triggered by grief over her father's death and her boyfriend's rejection, not a desire for love in the afterlife, as Luhrmann's film and the publicity postcards imply by depicting Romeo and Juliet's embrace in death. For Ophelia, death represents a refusal to consider a future in which she asserts her independence. The presence of Hamlet's remembrances, which float in the fountain around Ophelia's dead body, demonstrates her inability or unwillingness to consider a future without Hamlet, although the film has shown her ability to be alone, particularly when she is engaged in photography.

Odin's suicide appears different because he shoots himself before the police arrive to arrest him for Desi's murder. Seen in this way, his suicide is an escape from the law and from the other consequences of his actions: as he says, his future is over. But, like the characters in other films, Odin also kills himself in the name of love. He implores his witnesses to "tell them I loved that girl! I did!" Even though his final speech turns to blame, as he cries how Hugo "twisted [his] head up," Odin's words about Desi suggest that, in addition to avoiding legal consequences, Odin also cannot live with the guilt of killing his girlfriend. Although he resembles Othello, who commits suicide out of grief for what he has done and accepts responsibility for his actions, I maintain that Odin kills himself and Desi because he has been tricked into believing that they are different, that his skin color will not allow him the stability and success afforded to his white classmates.

Other characters do not commit suicide, but the films limit them, too, by suggesting that love and social advocacy are incompatible. Kat—like Romeo, Juliet, Ophelia, Odin, Desi, and others—discovers that, rather than independence, she prefers the security of a stable relationship, and her apologetic sonnet indicates her willingness to compromise in order to achieve this desire. Her transformation suggests that women cannot be outspoken critics of their society and also be accepted by their peers, teachers, and parents. Hamlet alternates between neglecting and reaching out to Ophelia, and he rejects her only after he discovers that she has allowed her father to spy on him. His playful behavior during the *Mousetrap* screening, however, along with the montage of his final memories, which are dominated by images of Ophelia, demonstrates his desire for her affection. Hamlet also desires the affection of his parents, both dead and alive, and in this way his story becomes one of nostalgia for authority, not political or personal revenge. Whereas the plays (particularly *Romeo and Juliet* and *Shrew*, but also *Othello*) suggest that characters can find love while also challenging social norms, the films suggest that young people cannot have both.

One explanation for this is the problem of adaptation. Although I would never claim that films of Shakespeare should not be made, or are not worthy objects of study, I do think that the goal of modernizing a play while remaining faithful to Shakespeare's work limits a film's potential. These four films are concerned with maintaining Shakespearean authority, from the playwright's name in the title of Luhrmann's film to Kat's (mis)appropriation of Shakespeare's sonnet to *O*'s faithful transposition of the plot to *Hamlet*'s retention of Shakespeare's language and plot. Although these films all modernize Shakespeare's plays, they also become constricted by the early modern particularities of the plays. For instance, the substitution of guns for swords in Luhrmann's film appears perfectly reasonable, but Juliet's arranged marriage to Paris does not

quite resonate in contemporary America. Ophelia's madness in Almereyda's film makes a disturbing comment about the treatment of young women in contemporary society, but Laertes's warnings to her about Hamlet sound outdated and prudish. The process of adaptation requires a certain amount of cutting, transposing, and changing, and the different medium allows for a greater use of visual substitutions or aural additions. But, combined with four hundred year old plays and a genre that largely limits the power of its young characters, Shakespearean teen films are unable to sustain the intricate possibilities offered by the plays, and understandably so. Does this mean that every Shakespearean teen film is or will be similarly limited? Not necessarily. Not every teen film presents young people's submission to authority, and not every Shakespeare play offers the same views on early modern culture; because of this, new teen film adaptations of Shakespeare, and even other Shakespearean teen films that I have not considered here, may offer richer possibilities for their young characters. Like Ophelia, who resists through body language and wordless screams, films do not need Shakespeare's language to capture the radical possibilities of his plays.

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