## MOVIES

## Shakespeare dominates in 'Romeo,' 'Twelfth Night'



Late last month I took 50 high school freshman to the premiere of the new "Romeo and Juliet" movie. I

mix of iambic pentameter and in-your-face filmmaking. The adult chaperones walked out exhausted. As one aptly put it, "it reduces the beauty of Shakespeare to the lovel of Quentin Tarantina"

new Romeo and Juliet' movie. I teach at a suburban high school and, for the last three weeks, we have been studying Shakespeare's star-crossed lovers.

The kids, for the most part, were exhilarated by this modern in between. The strenge target audience, it works like crazy. Immune from critical slings and arrows, it spent its opening weekend at number one.

Leonardo DiCaprio, who is making a career out of troubled youths, was a good choice for this pistol-packing Romeo. Smooth in is Hawaiian shirt, wisps of blonde hair falling across his face, he and his Montogue Boys are a sharp contrast to the swarthy, darker-skinned Capulets, who mix it up on the boaches and boulevards of Verona Beach, Florida.

The opening is a dizzying often headache-provoking) display of shaky camera and lighting-fast editing. The story is now framed by a newspaper report as we see the stately families.

The baleony scene now takes place around and inside the Capulet's swimming pool. Paris, who Juliet's parents want her to marry, is a bachelor-of-the-year patterned after JFK, Jr. and a horrible dancer. The mixed up letter that further scals the lovers' doom is a Federal Express screw-up. If you didn't recognize the Friar as a holy man, just look at the full-size cross tattoocd on Pete Postlethwaite's back.

Roligious imagory dominates the fill, not used as a coherent symbol as much as a coherent symbol as much as a broadly painted backdrop. The church may stand between the Capulet and Montague high rises, but it's also on the handles of the gangs' guns, which are branded Longswords and Daggers to make 17th-century lines like "hand me my long sword" and 'O happy dagger' fit with the '90s visuals.

About half of Shakespeare's original words are used in the film. The director, Baz Luhrman, who made the equally dizzying (if overrated) musical "Strictly Ballroom," prefers to tell the story with the camera and, for the most part, conveys it well. He even improves on it a bit, heightening the drama of the final scenes, leaving the audience literally mouthing warnings to the characters on screen.

A woek later I spent anowning with a nother Shakespeare adaptation in virtual a silonce — a bad sign for a comedy. "I'velith Night," at the Birmingham and Maple Theatres, is far more tasteful, better cast, truer to the sea. Thinking each other dead, they make their way through a potentially hostile foreign country. Viola thinks she'll have a better chance for survival as a man, so she lops off her hair and pledges service to Count Orsino, who she has a crush on.

He sonds his new boy' to deliver measages of love to Olivia, (Helena Bonham Carter) but she falls for Viola instead. The romantic complication is one of the funniest and most bizarre in all of Shakespeare, working to

Shakespeare is vying with Michael Crichton and Jane Austen as the screen's most popular sources of material. Al Pacino's free-wheeling "Looking for Richard" remains at the Main wille Kenneth Branagh's new 'Hamlet' opens around Christmastime, just a few years after Mel Cibson made it with France Zefferell.

What the Bard would think of the Rap and rolling "Romeo and Juliet' is anyone's guess. Before anyone labeled him as England's greatest peet and playwright, Shakespeare was an entertainer, trying to capture the attention of rowdy Elizabethans at performances that often turned into free-for-alls.

Would Shakespeare turn around in the theater and tell the movie's young audience to settle down and be quiet? He'd have to be at least partially pleased at how well his words, even backed by explosions and gunplay, still have the power to charm.

n satisfying conclusion and hy far the best part of the film.

A great deal of screen time is spent with Sir Toby Belch (Mel Smith) and friends, who drink, exchange witticisms, and play vicious tricks on stuffy houseman Malvolio. He's played by Nigel Hawthorne, the respected Shakespearean actor and Oscar nominee ("The Madness of King George") and to me too old for the part.

Diama: Leonardo DiCaprio as Romeo and Claire Danes as Juliet in "William Shakespeare's Romeo & Juliet."

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George") and to me too old for the part.

The broad comedy doesn't inspire the desired laughs, despite the best efforts of Ben Kingsley's wise fool, who has a definite poignancy beneath his typically intense brow.

Trevor Nunn, who has spent at least 130 years directing Shakespeare, probably thinks he's radical by staging the 16th-century play in the Victorian era, but only neademics will appreciate the difference. A general audience will still see it as stuffy classical actors in old clothes spouting dialogue only half understandable.

It's Christmas Eve and Howard Langston is frantically searching for the toy every child's wish list.—Turbo Man, in "Jingle All the Way," opening Friday at metro Detroit movie theaters.

Parents, share your "Holiday Toy Search," story with us to win a "Jingle All the Way," prize package for your child. Dendline to enter is Tuesday, Nov. 26.

Share your toy search story Twenty-five prize packages containing a Jingle All the Way, memo board, T-shirt, stocking cap, and coloring book, will be given away. Send entries to: Keely Wygonik, Entertainment Editor, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, Inc., 36251 Schoolcraft, Livenia, MI 48150. To fax entries, cali (313) 591-7279.

