

The Challenge of Being Yourself:

Adaptation, Adolescence, and Disguise in Teenage Romantic Comedy Films
of the Late 1990s and Early 2000s



Isabel Stirling Clark

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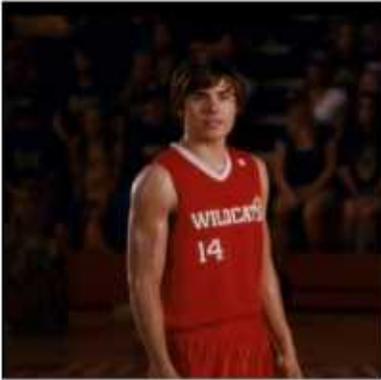
Adviser: Professor Rebecca Sheehan

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The drama teacher in Kenny Ortega's *High School Musical 3: Senior Year*, Ms. Darbus, tells her student, high school senior Troy Bolton, "The stage can be a wonderful partner in the process of self-discovery" after finding him on the stage at school after hours. In the film, Troy (Zack Efron) must make the ultimate decision about his future—whether to pursue a career as a point guard or performer. He faces pressure from his friends, his parents, his school. The film bears a self-reflexivity to Troy's situation that assists in his decision: the spring musical featured in *High School Musical 3* is to be about seniors in high school, performed by seniors in high school. Lines between the fiction within the diegesis of the stage and beyond the diegesis of the stage (but within the film) become obscured as Troy and his peers adapt their reality to the stage. This process of adaptation brings to the surface Troy's fears but also his true desires—he wants to be a star both on the court and on the stage. Through the performance in the musical from which the film gains its title, Troy is able to discover who he truly is and what he truly wants with his life, the concerns of Troy, onstage and off, are relatively similar. These similarities are not necessarily the case in contemporary adaptations of novels and theatrical works into film. Contemporizing a novel or play comes with an entirely new set of concerns, for both characters and the societies they occupy. Combine that with the shift to a new medium—from text to film—and the process of adaptation takes on its own set of concerns surrounding self-discovery. In order to work through the issues of adaptation—attempting to remain "faithful" to source material while simultaneously creating an innovative approach to the text, navigating the space between the

page and the screen—it seems, adaptation must take on its own “onstage” counterpart. This “onstage” element is that of the teenage character, and just as Troy struggles with his dual occupation, so too does the adapted teenage romantic comedy.

The teenage romantic comedy adaptation offers a gesture of self-reflexive irony that permits the difficulties of adaptation to be mapped onto the difficulties of transitioning to



On the court or on the stage? Troy Bolton must choose between a future as a basketball star or a performer.

adulthood—adolescents coping with the struggles between independence and reliance upon parents and peers find their reflection in the film-text as the film struggles as an adaptation with the balance between originality and fidelity to a source text. Just as Troy uses his performance on stage

as a type of disguise through which he can act out his true feelings, characters of the selected films of this genre take on



disguises themselves to cope with the anxieties of adolescence. Through these characters, the process of adaptation gains an embodiment in the process of disguise, permitting the film as adaptation to itself work through its possible definitions and manifestations. These issues of

disguised identity are complicated in both adaptation and

adolescence by the presence of the commodification of identity. Troy’s identification as an actor would earn him a full scholarship to Julliard, but his place in society as a basketball player provides him with a full ride to the fictional University of Albuquerque. Just as Troy’s decisions have monetary consequences, the decision to adapt a text into a film of a particular genre can help a film achieve box-office success. In the teenage romantic comedy film

adaptations this paper analyzes, the commodification of identity for the characters is performed by a secret bet of wager of one kind or another—a disguised commodification to match the disguise of identity being performed. Just as Troy must seek to achieve a balance of between the freedom of individuality and the social demands regulated by the commodified aspects of identification in *High School Musical 3*, so must the characters of these film adaptations, as well as the process of adaptation itself.

Film adaptation is inherently a liminal endeavor, a balancing act between the preservation of the source material and the innovations necessary to translate that material into a new medium. Modernized adaptations compound this dynamic even further—the characters and the language shift to function in modern times, modern settings. The turn of the millennium saw an emergence of modernized film adaptations, all within a similar vein—plays of much earlier centuries moved into the space of the teenage romantic comedies of late 1990s and early 2000s. Films such as *She's All That* (1999), based on George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999), based on Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Whatever It Takes* (2000) from Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *Get Over It!* (2001), a film that gains its inspiration from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Never Been Kissed* (2002), loosely inspired and informed by *As You Like It*, present issues of fidelity and originality in the modern film adaptation. Just as adaptations function in a space caught between a source text and the moving image, the teenager portrayed in modern adaptations also struggle with their position as individuals determined in part by parents, the institution of high school, and themselves. These teenage characters confront novel and sometimes differing perspectives on life, but are essentially socially and economically dependent upon their parents and their high school. This dependence, though,

is something teenagers, both within these films, and as the industry which produces them assumes, in their audiences, continually seek to deny, to ignore, in their pursuit of self-discovery and independence. Adaptations function in a similar fashion—they require an audience who is willing to pay little or no heed to the literary tradition they transform.

Thomas Cartelli and Katherine Rowe write in *New Wave Shakespeare on Screen*,

Whatever their mode of adaptation, most film and video adaptations demand that audiences suspend what knowledge of Shakespeare we do have in a specific way. They ask us to accept the idea that characters that use the same names, speak the same lines, or act out the same plot as *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, or *Romeo and Juliet* themselves have no acquaintance with these stories or their history...few screen adaptations bring the question of what it means to retell a story that has been told numerous times before into fiction represented on screen...films may be haunted by earlier films...However, they rarely address this haunting directly...

The convention by which an audience agrees not to ask what Hamlet thinks about *Hamlet*—to suspend its disbelief in the ignorance of the characters—is, of course, the *premise* of these films...One reason that so many Shakespeare films since the 1990s are interesting is that they make visible the restored behaviors named by these different characters (Hamlet, Iago, Juliet). (142-143)¹

Cartelli and Rowe introduce and accentuate a space these films and the characters of these films occupy, a “suspension of disbelief” that, for example, Kat Stratford can share the same name as her *Taming of the Shrew* counterpart and happens to attend Padua High School, an institution that shares the same name as the city in which Shakespeare’s play is set, yet never makes the connections between the two herself. She does not make this connection because the audience does not ask her to, yet it is exactly this suspension, this shift in setting that, as Cartelli and Rowe state, “make[s] visible the restored behaviors.” Kat’s ignorance is constructed—by the genre, by the audience, but this construction allows for a paradoxical discovery of independence—a restored independence—Kat is not the shrew from which who

¹ This chapter from Cartelli and Rowe titled, “Surviving Shakespeare: Kristen Levring’s *The King is Alive* is particularly interested in this suspension given the natural of Levring’s film in which the characters, lost somewhere in the African desert, decide to put on a performance of *King Lear*. The authors require this suspension of disbelief in order to distinguish between character “effect” and character “function,” a fine line in a film that acts as a performance of a performance. This performative aspect is one seen in *Get Over It!*, as well as in some ways in *Never Been Kissed*.

she gets her name. Of course, the most essential requirement of the teenage romantic comedy is the teenager. If adaptations navigate a space between reliance and independence, adolescence suffers a very similar occupation—straddling the line between child and adult, dependence and autonomy. Yet with this desire for individualism also comes an incongruous desire to conform, to be part of a bigger throng. Monique Pittman speaks to this in her essay, “Taming *10 Things I Hate About You*: Shakespeare and the Teenage Film Audience” when she writes on Gil Junger’s film,

...the film perpetuates the contradictory ideology of subjectivity embraced by young adults. At the same time they desire independent identity, they also long for acceptance, to feel part of a larger, socially condoned model for the self. (150)

Indeed, it would seem almost hypocritical of an adaptation to deny the liberties of a dual occupation to its plot and its characters, and while adaptations work between originality and ingenuity, the teenage desire “to feel part of a larger, socially condoned model for the self” is in some ways present in the conventions of these teenage romantic comedies—the socially condoned model of the film genre.² Genre allows for an institutional establishment and acceptance of the liminal space that adaptations occupy—the space of the inherent contradictions of content and form that the films present. In a similar fashion, there is no better exemplar of an institution that fosters the negotiations of the adolescence existence than that of high school. The teenage romantic comedy navigates issues of both adaptation and adolescence by exploring the constructions of genre and high school. The processes of adaptation and adolescence compounded in the teenage romantic comedy film directly deal with issues of identity. The interpretation of these classic works in these films work to highlight those issues of identity through mistaken identity and disguise. The liminal occupation of the adolescent and the adaptation as emerging states presents an environment

² And indeed, Pittman believes, “The movie appears to allow teenagers to have it both ways.” (150)

in which attempts at self-definition are inherently problematic; both adolescence and adaptation, in terms of the structure of society embodied by high school and of genre, continually attempt to escape from those definitions and restrictions that determine them in these films.

This attempt at escape, of separation, can be understood through two approaches—emphasizing the identity, or emphasizing the definitions and restrictions that work to define the individual. Ariane M. Balizet in “Teen Scenes: Recognizing Shakespeare in Teen Film,”

[*Romeo + Juliet* (1996), *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999), *Get Over It!* (2001), and *O* (2001)] are connected through their production of a unique experience for the audience in which the figure of Shakespeare—as defined by his name, language, work, and/or broad cultural impact—appears with significant consequences for the adolescent world portrayed within the film.

This particular experience can be summed up in what I term *recognition*. In certain instances, these films invoke recognition as a function of the familiar: the immediacy of the action on screen is highlighted when a film reveals a storyline or plot device as Shakespeare’s. *10 Things I Hate About You* and *Get Over It!* rely upon the praxis on *recognition-as-familiar*. In this way, these films fit a Shakespearean lens over the modern world depicted on screen, offering an understanding of the high school prom through a familiar framework of Shakespeare’s names and themes...Re-cognition highlights Shakespeare’s work, whereas recognition-as-familiar uses Shakespeare’s work as a means of addressing contemporary concerns. (122-123)

Balizet sets up a dynamic between the teen film adaptation and Shakespeare applicable to the adaptations outside the Shakespearean canon. She presents a dichotomous argument—these adaptations can either be a “re-cognition” or a “recognition-as-familiar,” viewing the source text through cultural shifts, or viewing “contemporary concerns” through an interpretation of the adapted play. In looking at the teenage romantic comedies that will be the focus of this paper, it seems that both elements of recognition and recognition-as-familiar are present; for while these films obviously share common elements in their modernization, the source texts also share many common variables—elements of disguise, mistaken identity, and secret wagers and purposes behind character motivations. However, in looking at the parallel relationship between adaptation and adolescence in conjunction with the emphasized

elements of disguise that the founding texts share and the similarities in the way that these elements are brought forth in the teenage romantic comedy adaptations, the authorial or textual presence, “re-cognition” does not seem to be the prevalent element. Rather, it is the “recognition-as-familiar,” as Balizet suggests of the teen films that is implemented “as a means of addressing contemporary concerns.” Of course, then, the recognition-as-familiar should be seen as a vehicle of analysis in which the questions of contemporary concerns would be answered, just as Cartelli and Rowe’s “suspension” is the vehicle for viewing restored behaviors. These contemporary concerns tend to center on issues of identity, more specifically the self-fashioning (or manipulation of) disguise of identity, in an attempt to reinforce or disrupt the establishment of adolescent societal norms. The adaptation of these source texts creates a common, contemporary set of concerns in the films, through disguising the source text, just as disguise is used in many of these films as an attempt to establish the set of adolescent societal norms, sometimes those exact norms against which the characters in the films are attempting to work against. Adaptation as disguise is, like the disguised teenager, torn between functioning as a tool of defining self-identity and realizing a societal function regulated by the demands of commodification.

Feeling Freer: Disguise, Recognition, and Disguised Recognition

In *Generation Multiplex: The Image of Youth in Contemporary American Cinema*, Tim Shary speaks to a possible conflict that these “youth films” are addressing. “[T]hey are imbued with a unique cultural significance: they question our evolving identities from youth to adulthood while simultaneously shaping and maintaining those identities” (10). This in some ways speaks to the process of adapting one text into another as

much as it speaks to the “evolving identities” of the teenager. Adaptations, indeed, provide an environment in which the evolving identities of the texts and characters can be questioned in its “shaping and maintaining” of those texts and their characters through the progression of the film. Shary argues later in his book that in trying to establish independence from earlier generations, the youth of the twenty-first century might, “do so by taking on ever more radical means of promoting new identities” (262). Here, Shary points to a different generation transition, but looking at his analysis of youth and their desire for disentanglement echoes Balizet’s description of the recognition-as-familiar function—to simply re-cognize would only emphasize the source, the past generations, while recognition-as-familiar emphasizes the relevance of the current moment, the “new identities.” In thinking back to Cartelli and Rowe’s comments on the suspension of disbelief that is required of adaptation in order to “make visible the restored behaviors named by these different characters,” the “radical means” of promoting new identities, from the source text to the teenage romantic comedy adaptation, seems to be the modernized environment and the innovative medium. It is the modernization compounded with the adaptation that works to establish the new identity of the text within the modernized medium. These films invoke a feature of the recognition-as-familiar that is essentially contradictory in its application, for the emphasis in these teenage romantic comedies seems to be on disguising the familiar and hiding the true self as a way of “promoting” new identity. The “recognition” then, stems from the common, the paradoxically familiar, element of disguise. The teenage romantic comedy adaptation uses the element of disguise “as a means of addressing [the] contemporary concerns” of identity. In the incongruous condition of hiding an identity to reveal a new one—a condition of *disguised recognition* is created. Disguised recognition would suggest that disguise is used

as a way of seeking promotion of identity within the realm of contemporary concerns— recognition is achieved by social acceptance and acknowledgement; but only an identity based on deception and pretense is one that earns recognition by a given particular societal structure, potentially a high school clique. Balizet’s term creates an intentional concealment, a denial of source—whether it is the original text that an adaptation stems from or the former identity of a teenager trying to revamp his image, non-diegetically or within the framework of the film. Disguise in these teenage romantic comedy films is used as means of engaging with issues of the liminal condition of identification, recognition, acceptance in adolescence and adaptation.

In a classroom scene from *Never Been Kissed*, English teacher Sam Coulson (Michael Vartan) engages his class on a discussion of disguise in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*:

Aldys: All the world’s a stage, / And all the men and women merely players.³

Sam: Does anyone know what Shakespeare meant by that? Anyone? It’s about disguise, about playing a part. And that’s the theme of *As You Like It*. Now, does anyone know where we can see this?

Aldys: Well, Rosalind disguises herself as a man, and then she escapes into the forest.

Sam: Right. And it’s when she’s in costume that she can finally express her love for Orlando. See, the point Shakespeare’s trying to make is that when we’re in disguise, we feel freer. We do things we wouldn’t do in ordinary life.⁴

Sam’s statements present quite a few problematic sentiments for his classroom audience.

The argument of authorial distinction that can be made between the thoughts and words of

³ Act II, Scene 7 (lines 140-141)

⁴ Richard Burt writes in his essay, “Afterword: T(e)en Things I Hate About Girlene Shakesploitation Flicks in the Late 1990s, or, Not-So-Fast Times at Shakespeare High” on this scene, “*Never Been Kissed* goes undercover and thematizes Shakespeare in terms of the visual register of disguise. While more high-minded, *Never Been Kissed* is, in my view, actually the cheaper film. It undoes the feminist and homoerotic potential of *As You Like It*, turning the theme of disguise in the play into a means by which heterosexual love can discover itself. The film revises the standard teensploi plot about a nerdy girl, Josie Gellar (Drew Barrymore), who finds true love with a hunky guy, into a pastoral comedy in which an adult can go back to high school to undo her traumatic experiences there. When Josie walks into her English class, her teacher, Sam Caulson (Michael Vartan) says, “Welcome to Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*.” The film offers a humanist, thematic reading of the play...” (219). Of course, his formulation is problematic in its foundation of establishing *Never Been Kissed* as a pastoral comedy, for the exposition of the film works directly to establish the definitions of “pastoral” as something set in the country—defined by Josie herself. Note: the slight difference in the dialogue of the scene is a difference between script and transcript—Burt pulls from the former, this analysis from the latter.

“Shakespeare” versus his character, Jaques—it may be “the point Shakespeare’s trying to make,” but it could very well be the point “Jaques” is trying to make. Rosalind expresses her love for Orlando without her disguise in the play, a clarifying element to Sam’s claim must be, then, that Rosalind does not express her love *for* Orlando *to* Orlando without the aid of a disguise. The most interesting of Sam’s claims is, that in disguise, “...we feel freer. We do things we wouldn’t do in ordinary life.” The second assertion—“We do things we wouldn’t do in ordinary life”—may be true, but in the film it does not necessarily rely upon the first—“we feel freer.” This classroom scene ends with Sam asking Josie to read from Act V, Scene 2 of *As You Like It*, and as she stands and begins reading (it must be noted, not at the beginning of Rosalind’s speech but rather mid-sentence) the shot cuts from Josie to Sam as he walks across the frame from left to right behind him the classroom transforms from the contemporary to the past, the present day to the time of “Josie Grossie” as she reads her writing in front of the class.⁵ The scene offers a juxtaposition of the two times, Josie reads from *As You Like It* as one of the class—Sam in front of the chalkboard— while Josie Grossie occupies the position of Sam at the front of the classroom and reads her love poem to the class, who mocks her words with stifled laughter and exchanged glances. This mirroring draws a sharp contrast between the physical differences of Josie then and now, yet it also works to illustrate a parallel between the



Never Been Kissed—Two very different Josies.



⁵ DVD Appendix Clip 2.4

sentiments of the two speeches. Josie's disguise, then, is not functioning in a way that makes her "feel freer." Rather, her disguise is working to make her words and actions more socially acceptable—by speaking her own thoughts towards her teacher through the words of Rosalind, her disguise, she avoids mockery and humiliation. Her avoidance of mockery is contingent upon her disguise—she is trapped by it. The text of *As You Like It* for Josie forms a disguise of her character, a way for her to express her own emotions obscurely. This same obscurity occurs in *Get Over It!* and *Whatever It Takes*, one through a performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in a similar style of *Never Been Kissed*, and the other in a way that points almost directly to the element of disguise in *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Josie's speech act in this classroom conveys the paradoxes that constitute adolescence and adaptation, for her words would be empty without her individual understanding of them, but this expression of emotion requires the constructed elements—the classroom of a high school as well as the structure of the play itself—to avoid complete "failure." Failure in this case would be the rejection by society of Josie's individuality, as it is in her earlier embarrassing high school experience, in which she does not use Shakespeare as a conduit for emotion expression; rather than using Shakespeare as a conduit for her emotions, she speaks them freely, with the insulation of disguise. This emphasis on form also draws upon the conflated distinction between internal and external disguise.

Josie's physical transformation from a mousy brown mid-twenties copy editor into a platinum blonde supposedly seventeen-year old high school student marks drastic exterior changes, but these exterior changes work cinematically to reflect an interior transformation.⁶

Eleanor Hersey writes in "Love and Microphones: Romantic Comedy Heroines as Public

⁶ *She's All That* also demonstrates this reflection.

Speakers” of Steve Neale’s analysis of romantic comedy films throughout the 19th century and places her own analysis onto Neale’s claims:

Neale claims that romantic comedies center around a learning process that is often linked to plot elements of disguise, deception, and adopted or mistaken identity that lead to “the revelations of a character’s true identity”...in these films the makeover serves as a confidence-building process that pays off in the public speech, not in the first kiss. (151)

Hersey’s work with Neale here points almost explicitly towards this classroom moment as an example of the “public speech,” as well as many other moments in *Never Been Kissed* which Hersey reads through a slightly more feminist critique as she says that “[t]he point of Josie’s physical transformation is not to capture the hero’s attention...but to give Josie the confidence to write journalism that speaks directly to all types of women” (152). Society, identity, and both the internal and external facets of disguise are all functioning within Hersey’s reading of Neale, the disguise leading to a “revelation of a character’s true identity,” but also to the “pay[] off” of social acceptance in a moment of disguised recognition in which, because of the makeover, Josie is accepted by her peers, both the peers of her disguise and of her original identity. This distraction from the romantic aspect of the teenage romantic comedy and focus upon the societal, the “public speech,” the teenage, aspect of the teenage romantic comedy speaks to the construct of the teenager as a manipulating force within these films, a force that does not exist in the same sense in the source texts.

The purpose of a disguise is essentially to alter the way an individual is perceived by society—Rosalind dresses as man in *As You Like It* initially as a way to avoid being robbed along the road⁷, Professor Higgins dresses Eliza in fancy clothes and teaches her the “proper” way to speak in *Pygmalion* so that she may “fit in” with high society. Adaptation as disguise

⁷ Act I, Scene 3 (lines 105-119)

works in almost equivalent fashion—the film’s modernizations and alterations of the text signal a way to avoid being robbed of originality while trying to “fit in” with a classical canon of works. Robert Bulman writes in *Hollywood Goes to High School: Cinema, Schools, and American Culture*, “I would suggest that adolescence today is marked by two distinct social processes. First, the adolescent must search for an identity... Second, the adolescent must search for independence” (37). Bulman sees these processes as a metaphor for American culture, and it seems the same set of processes can be applied to the “culture” of adaptation, especially in the realm of the teenage romantic comedy. Bulman points not only to the societal construction of the teenager, but also to the implications and expectations that construction creates (35).⁸ This passage speaks to the genre of teenage romantic comedy in as much as it confronts/addresses the conforming aspects of being a teenager. The genre is socially constructed, but with the genre come moments of expectation, the formation of clichés. Teenage romantic comedy is presented with an interest paradigm however, for the films’ plots and characters are inherently dependent upon the construct of the teenager, it is a genre defined by adolescence. *Never Been Kissed* works against this in some ways, for example, the central character is not a teenager but a 25-year old disguised as one, yet the film continually falls back on the clichéd moments characteristic of the genre—the first time she sees the “popular guy,” the house-party, the prom. *Never Been Kissed* is a disguised recognition of the power of the genre of teenage romantic comedy and as a by-product the power of the societal construct of a teenager—the acknowledgment of the influence of the teenage environment concealed by Josie’s assignment to “fit in.” This assignment, getting

⁸ As a distinct phase of life, adolescence is...the result of social, cultural, economic, and political developments that have created it and imbue it with certain meanings and expectations. Adolescents are responding...to the social demands placed upon them by the organization of society. (Bulman, 35)

paid, in essence, to maintain a disguise, is exemplary of one of the through lines of these teenage romantic comedy adaptations—self-identity as commodified, intrinsic to society while dependent upon society.

When It Comes to Teenagers, All Bets Are On

Disguise is explicitly a common theme among the source texts, but the secret wagers, bets, or arrangements that arise in their modern film adaptations are specific to the teenage romantic comedy—disguise becomes a commodified product of society. While disguise is used by the characters in the films as a tool for discovering or deliberately manipulating identity, disguise exists only as the tool within the framework of the wager—no secret bet, no secret identity. Of course, this must be the case if all aspects of identity are contingent upon societal influences, but in these films the “bet” serves as an excuse for the behaviors initiated by the disguise and deception, disguise and the wager seemingly intertwined. In *10 Things I*



10 Things I Hate About You—Joey Donner pays Patrick Verona to take Kat Stratford out on a date.

Hate About You there are multiple wagers going on—Joey Donner (Andrew Keegan) pays Patrick Verona (Heath Ledger) to date Kat Stratford (Julia Stiles) so that he will be allowed to date her younger sister Bianca (Larisa Oleynik), an idea presented to him by Michael (David Krumholz) in

exchange for recognition, so that, as Joey puts it he becomes “cool by association.”

Meanwhile, Cameron James (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) pretends to be fluent in French so that he can tutor Bianca and win her heart. *She’s All That* sees a bet between Zack Siler (Freddie

Prince, Jr.) and Dean Sampson (Paul Walker)—that Zack can make an unattractive girl prom queen. In *Whatever It Takes*, Ryan Woodman (Shane West) wants Ashley Grant (Jodi Lyn O’Keefe) and Chris Campbell (James Franco) wants Maggie Carter (Marla Sokoloff). The two guys work together to transform the other into exactly what each girl wants. Berke Landers (Ben Foster) is dumped by his girlfriend Allison McAllister (Melissa Sagemiller). In an attempt to win her back, Berke joins the cast of the high school performance of “*A Midsummer Night’s Rockin’ Eve*” and enlists the help of his best friend’s sister, Kelly Woods (Kirsten Dunst) to avoid humiliation on stage and in his romantic pursuit of Allison. In *Never Been Kissed* Josie Gellar goes undercover as a high school student in her first major opportunity to break into writing for the newspaper she copyedits. These central plot devices draw out the connection between disguise and the disguised wagger as well as identity’s inescapable imbrication within society and commodity. Hersey’s sentiment, that disguise “pays off” takes on a slightly more literal meaning here, in the “plot elements of disguise, deception, and adopted or mistaken identity that lead to ‘the revelations of a character’s true identity.’” This true identity, though, is also essentially tied to the commercial as it mediates the relationship between the teenager and society.

In each of these films the wagger is that of a particular individual’s standing in relation to the society he or she occupies. What is being commodified by these films is the identity of an individual in relation to society. The purpose of these wagers in each film differs— attracting a romantic interest, reclaiming lost love, fulfilling a job assignment, or proving that a lost love is easily replaced. What the wagger really allows for, though, is similar to how disguise performs in each film—disguise allows for a character to move from one societal position to another, the wagger opens the society of “popularity” for the entrance of the

character. The innovation of film—another source of revenue in the entertainment industry, similarly allowed for the entrance of adaptations, films, in some ways disguised, to fit into the culture of the established genre. Essential to the secret wager plot, as well as the nature of disguise stands the eventuality that all will be discovered, the truth found out. In these moments in each film, when the guise is lifted, the secret wager discovered, either in separate moments or as one in the same, both the characters and the films must deal directly with issues of adolescence and adaptation—the struggle between individuality and conformity, originality and fidelity. These moments speak less to the prevention of being discovered than to the issue of discovering the self and discovering the self as part of the regulatory other, the society of high school, the limitations of popular culture, the film industry.

10 Things I Hate About You places much more emphasis on the monetary exchange going on between the suitors of Bianca and Kat in relation to its Shakespearean source, which focuses rather on the transformation of the character of Kate, her speech in Act V preceded by wager concerning the obedience of the two sisters to the two husbands, which Petruchio does win:

Baptista: Now, in good sadness, son Petruchio,
I think thou hast the veriest shrew of all.

Petruchio: Well, I say no. And therefore, for assurance,
Let's each one send unto his wife,
And he whose wife is most obedient,
To come at first when he doth send for her,
Shall win the wager which we will propose. (V.2, 63-69)

This wager from *The Taming of the Shrew* works in a quite different way in the modernized adaptation; Kat does indeed come when beckoned—to the prom—as does her sister.

However, it is Joey's (an amalgam of a few of Shakespeare's characters—the suitors of Bianca outside of Lucentio) call that Bianca rejects, not Cameron's (Lucentio in the play)

invitation to the prom. Joey, upset at all of his money wasted for nothing, confronts Patrick, revealing to Kat the real motivations behind Patrick’s advances. Simultaneously, Bianca’s

friend Chastity (Gabrielle Union) reveals to her that Joey’s motivations for asking her to the prom were also the result of a wager—“Joey

only liked you for one reason; he even had a bet going with his friends. He was going to

nail you tonight.” At the prom, an event that serves as the climatic point in each of these

films—minus *Get Over It!*—center, Patrick, dancing with Kat, tells her the big mystery

behind his reputation at school; he was caring for his sick grandfather, “End of

story.” Joey’s confrontation then

compounds upon this revelation, as Kat

discovers the “real” reason for Patrick’s

interest. After Bianca confronts Joey,

leaving him lying on the ballroom floor in

agony, the film steps off the prom dance

floor to Patrick and Kat. For a second time,

Kat’s “shrew-ishness” finds her making a snappy comment and trying to run away and for a

second time, Patrick runs to stop her. Patrick says to Kat, “No, I didn’t care about the money,

okay? I cared...I cared about you” to which she responds, “You are so not who I thought you

were.” A desperate kiss by Patrick follows and then Kat runs down the stairs—this time



Kat descends as the camera pans up the staircase and zooms in on Patrick.

Patrick does not follow. Kat's decent down the stairs begins in a long shot, but the camera slowly zooms in on Patrick, almost following the path up the stairs before stopping on a medium shot of Patrick with Bianca lingering in the background.⁹ This camera movement works directly against Kat's own, but as her poem in class later demonstrates, the camera may indeed in this moment mimic her desired actions. Here, the camera works against Kat's attempts at disguise, the camera functioning to assist Kat in the process of self-discovery by bringing her true emotions to the forefront. Patrick in this sequence is completely revealed, yet it is not his guise that the film finds problematic—it is Kat's. She recognizes in herself similar feelings for him, but continues to disguise them. It is only through disguise, or rather, the lifting of disguise, however, that Patrick can reveal his true feelings for Kat.¹⁰

The fragmentation of character and emotion—the element of these adaptations in which multiple characters experience an emotion originally attributed to a single character or emotions of multiple characters are experienced by a single individual in the adaptation—speaks to the struggle for dual occupation of being an individual and a member of society for the adolescent, but also through the narrative gives rise to the issues surrounding adaptation—with a modernization the story in some ways naturally shifts. Lynda Boose and Richard Burt write in their essay, “Totally Clueless? Shakespeare Goes Hollywood in the 1990s,”

...Popularization has meant the proliferation of representations...of what can be legitimately studied as part of the Shakespeare canon. But it has also meant the disappearance of (what was also the illusion of) a single, unified, Shakespeare whose works could be covered...Shakespeare's accessibility is guaranteed, but along with this move to film comes a perhaps inevitable sense of Shakespeare's reproduction... (18-19)

⁹ DVD Appendix Clip 1.4

¹⁰ This works in direct contrast to *As You Like It*—Patrick can only reveal his feelings to Kat once his disguise has been lifted, unlike Rosalind who initially needs her disguise to admit how she feels about Orlando.

Boose and Burt focus on performative aspects of adaptation rather than poetic or rhetorical elements that have dominated adaptation theory in the past. They also note a shift that has arisen as a result of adaptation—the move from the “what” of works such as *Hamlet* to the “who” of characters such as Hamlet. What is most interesting, though, is that their notion of a spliced “Shakespeare” that arises from mass production, the “inevitable sense of Shakespeare’s reproduction” works directly with Cartelli and Rowe’s formulation that the belief of this inevitability must be suspended. The “inevitable sense” is shared by the audience, but not by the characters, who live in a world in which “Shakespeare” does not exist at all. We cannot associate one emotion to only one character in *10 Things I Hate About You*, the emotion of a character disguised by their own actions but revealed through the work of a camera. Directly relating one Shakespearean adaptation to the singular source of *The Taming of the Shrew* works against the liminality of adaptation, as well as the liminality associated with being a teenager—these direct correlations imply a single traceable track of “Shakespeare’s” movement through film, a direct causality or connection that cannot exist, as Boose and Burt write, because of the “inevitable sense of Shakespeare’s reproduction.” The shift from the “what” to the “who” is an important one when discussing teenage romantic comedy, in which the entirety of the film focuses on the discovery of the “who,” as Balizet frames it, through the “what”—the recognition-as-familiar.

Performance in the Setting: Location’s Influence on Plot

With this splicing of source text, setting plays a fundamentally connecting role between the selected films of the teenage romantic comedy genre. Just as society seems to possess a certain type of power over identity, place maintains a certain control over story.

For the most part the prom, or prom preparation, is the most climatic scene of each film. The home environment of the teenagers in the films creates caricatures of embarrassing parents.

The drunken house party requires some form of slap-stick entertainment. This pressure of



10 Things I Hate About You—
“He was going to nail you tonight.”

setting upon plot is no better exemplified than in a comparison of scenes between *She’s All That* and *10 Things I Hate About You*. Both take place in the bathrooms of the respective venues hosting the prom and both reveal the true motives behind the prom dates, the

aforementioned line from *Ten Things I Hate About You* and Dean’s words from *She’s All That*—“I’m this close to closing the deal. She’s eating up every word I say.” The scenes unfold in a similar fashion and are blocked almost identically. While this might be explained



She’s All That—
“I’m this close to closing the deal.”

through cliché, the continually problematic issues between individuality and society, originality and fidelity are once again raised. This scene, this moment, in the conventions of the genre may leave no room for navigation—if characters find themselves in a

bathroom, at the prom, their discussion must focus around the commodification of their sexuality—the bet used only as a way of “closing the deal.” The climactic prom might also be a symptom of this necessity—the setting forcing plot upon each film, and because of

prom's convention within the social constructs of high school, prom itself becomes a necessary progression within the film. Once again, though, we see Balizet's recognition-as-familiar at work with Boose and Burt's distinction between the "who" and "what." How characters manage to function differently within these conventional settings is the establishment of their individuality.

Celestino Deleyto argues in her essay, "They Lived Happily Ever After: Ending Contemporary Romantic Comedy" against common assumptions of endings as working with or against classic genre conventions but, instead, "one that explores the individual texts' incorporation of cultural transformations within their structure and, more specifically, how the strategies of containment and closure negotiate new attitudes in the realm of romantic and sexual relationships" (40). The power of setting within the adaptations mirrors (much like in the bathroom scenes) the power of societal influence upon the individual, and yet again employs another avenue through which the teenage character and teenage romantic comedy adaptation can discover the "who" through the "what." This staging of the confrontation scenes within these films is confounded in *Get Over It!* in which the performance of a play—in which lines are written and actors are "forced" to perform the scenes—within the film adds to the aspect of self-discovery as well as to the suspension of disbelief of the audience of the teenage romantic comedy. Each film is itself an established set of lines and scenes with no room for navigation, but audiences must forget about the practical aspects of the film in order to witness the character growth of the adolescents within the films.

Setting the Stage: Performance in Disguise

The adaptation within an adaptation of *Get Over It* presents a paradoxical degree of separation within the film—for while *Get Over It!* works explicitly to draw the connections

between Burke and Lysander, Striker Scrumfeld (Shane West yet again) and Demetrius, Allison and Hermia, Kelly and Helena, the film in its climatic moment discredits the very connections between adaptation and source it has labored to develop. Every central figure is cast into the role of the predecessor they are meant to embody, with the exception of Berke, who finds himself as Lysander in *A Midsummer Night's Rockin' Eve* through a freak accident involving nunchucks and a suspension harness. This initial “mis-casting” (Berke is first cast as Attendant Number Three before taking on the role of Lysander) already speaks to the mutability of character within the realm of adolescence and adaptation—Berke transitions from one character to another within the play seamlessly, a transition that speaks to the same ability of characters within adaptations. The climatic moment in the film in which Berke steps “out of character” and “out of the play” navigates a space between the significance of character, identity, and the consequence of altering both an established text as well as recognized societal influences. Berke’s realization that he is love with Kelly leads to his alterations of Lysander’s words within the play, words whose sentiment seem to in many ways mirror the words of Demetrius in the original *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:

BERKE (as Lysander)

My lord, I shall reply amazedly, half sleep,
 half waking.
 I came with Hermia hither.
 Our intent was to be gone from Athens,
 so we might, without the peril of Athenian
 law, be wed. However. My lord, we slept and
 slept, as well you know,
 things did change, as love did grow.
 Although, in ways fair Hermia’s soul and
 mine shall forever intertwine,
 alas we must forever part,
 for lo to another belongs this heart.

DEMETRIUS

My lord, fair Helen told me of their stealth,
 Of this purpose hither, to this wood,
 And I in fury hither followed them,
 Fair Helena, in fancy following me.
 But, my good lord, I wot not by what power -
 But by some power it is – my love to
 Hermia,
 Melted as the snow, seems to me now
 As the remembrance of an idle gaud
 Which in my childhood I did dote upon,
 And all the faith, the virtue of my heart,
 The object and the pleasure of mine eye,
 Is only Helena. (Act IV, Scene 1, lines
 159-170)

Both monologues begin with a love for Hermia, a love of a childhood, a fond memory, and progress towards an expression of love for Helena.¹¹ Yet the film does not demand that Berke pull from the text to express his feelings, but rather that he form his own text. Here, the disguise of Lysander that Berke has been forced to wear in some ways still exists, but he makes the identity his own—he remains in disguise, remains under the textual construct of Lysander, but the recognition of his own identity, his own emotion, becomes part of the character, part of Boose and Burt’s “disappearance of a single, unified, Shakespeare” and part of the “who” of Lysander. Berke pulls from the original text of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, but in the teenage romantic comedy of *Get Over It!* puts the words towards a different end product, simultaneously engaging in the process of adaptation while working to establish his own independence in the world of the teenager.

Popularity and Popularization

In thinking about turn-of-the-millennium teenage romantic comedy adaptations that “restructure [] the play according to the conventions of the teenpic” in conjunction with these questions of societal constructs and their relationship to text, *She’s All That* occupies a space almost entirely dedicated to issues of social standing that rival independent standing. Both *She’s All That* and *Pygmalion* deal directly with issues of social acceptance. Eliza Doolittle is the object of a bet between Henry Higgins and Colonel Pickering, who challenges Higgins to transform a low-class flower girl into a woman of high-society. By the same turn, Zack Siler and Dean Sampson make a bet that challenges Zack to turn the lowliest of social rejects, Laney Boggs (Rachael Leigh Cook), into prom queen. While in *Pygmalion* Liza’s

¹¹ Transcription of Berke’s ad lib performance, Appendix Clip 2.1

knowledge of the bet is far from a secret, *She's All That* works in a way similar to *Ten Things I Hate About You*—the confrontation stems from the discovery of the bet in conjunction with the discovery of the façade that has led up to this moment. Both women, however, possess anger that comes from insecurity; Eliza fears what will become of her now that the bet has been won, her financial support soon to disappear—she will be forced to return to a life of poverty and mistreatment after being introduced to a world of garden parties and “large down-at-heel slippers,”¹² worn from so much time spent in leisure.¹³ This moment reveals Liza feels something deeper than anger—fear. Fear that everything she has lived in the past few months will disappear in an instant, the relationships she has developed along with it. In the moment of confrontation in *She's All That*, the film offers a similar fear in Laney—that she is nothing but a bet, nothing but, maybe, slippers—a fear that her identity is dependent upon the societal constructs that surround her.¹⁴ More than that, Laney fears that her identity is purely a result of the transaction between Dean and Zack, hers is only a commercial value.

¹² The description of Higgins's slippers given by Shaw (74).

¹³ Shaw writes,

LIZA [breathless] Nothing wrong – with you. I've won your bet for you, havnt I? That's enough for you. I don't matter, I suppose.¹³

HIGGINS. You won my bet! You! Presumptuous insect! I won it. What did you throw those slippers at me for?

LIZA. Because I wanted to smash your face. I'd like to kill you, you selfish brute. Why didn't you leave me where you picked me out of – in the gutter? You thank God it's all over, and that now you can throw me back again there, do you? [*She crimps her fingers frantically*].

HIGGINS [*looking at her in cool wonder*] The creature is nervous, after all.

LIZA [*gives a suffocated scream of fury, and instinctively darts her nails at his face*]!!

HIGGINS [*catching her wrists*] Ah! would you? Claws in, you cat. How dare you shew your temper to me? Sit down and be quiet. [*He throws her roughly into the easy-chair*].

LIZA. [*crushed by superior strength and weight*] Whats to become of me? Whats to become of me?

HIGGINS. How the devil do I know whats to become of you? What does it matter what becomes of you?

LIZA. You dont care. I know you dont care. You wouldnt care if I was dead. I'm nothing to you - not so much as them slippers.

HIGGINS. Those slippers. (76)

¹⁴ Appendix Clip 1.1

During this confrontation the staging of the film creates a triangle between Dean, Laney, and Zack, a triangle absent in *10 Things I Hate About You* at the top of the stairway and in *Get Over It!* the number of people on stage create multiple triangles between characters. In this triangle Dean does not represent a competing love interest but rather the societal element in the film, just as the others on stage in *Get Over It!* represent societal influence in a similar fashion. This moment in *She's All That*, however, creates a more intimate engagement with societal constructs—the bet, inseparable from Laney and Zack's relationship, hinges on both Zack and Laney's societal acceptance—both their acceptance of the rules of society and society's acceptance of them as members. Kat runs down the stairs, away from the societal construct that is prom, in essence moving down the social ladder. This is not to suggest a negative connotation in her descent; it is rather just one way of confronting the peer pressures associated with adolescence. Laney, on the other hand, after confronting Zack, storms out of the hallway being decorated up the stairs, Dean only a few steps behind her. Laney's movement is a climb, society's representation on her heels, a suggestion that Laney is not defying society, but rather rejecting in this moment her independence; or at least, rejecting the “romantic” aspect of the film. Taylor Vaughan (Jodi Lyn O'Keefe) says to Laney before her exit, “You didn't think you became popular for real, did you? Oh, you did. That's so sweet.” In fact, she has become popular “for real,” but what is problematic in this moment is that the “for real” only applies to the popularity, not to Hersey's “true identity.” Laney is recognized by society but it is a disguised recognition on multiple levels—Laney must remain disguised to continue to fit in. What *She's All That* most directly engages in is the paradoxical space of adolescence in which the desire to fit in seemingly in no way works against the desire to establish independence—the romance

becomes an expression of true identity but because it is intrinsically attached to a construct of the genre, independence works through the lens of conformity.¹⁵ The romantic space is supposed to be one that subverts “popular” society, but because of the expectations of the genre, the space in the end subscribes to the societal constructs that it initially seeks to escape.¹⁶ Both Laney and Zack deal with these issues through the initiation of the bet and the disguises both take on—Laney’s the typical “makeover” that Hersey refers to which “serves as a confidence-building process,”



She's All That—“Is that true? Am I a bet?
Am I a bet?”

Zack’s an internal disguise—hiding his true feelings from even himself, disguising his own recognition of individuality because of societal repercussions. As with *Ten Things I Hate About You*, in *She’s All That* the moment when the romance and commerce come into direct conflict is the climax of the film. There is a “clashing” here, but not of cultures, rather of culture against the individual. These moments, these clashes, speak to the issues of emphasis that come with adaptation—the mutable or enduring qualities of each text and the pervasive power of the situation and environment over those sources from which the films stem.

Get Over It’s parallel speeches illustrate a shift, a merging, a collaboration of the language of the source text and the language of adolescence. *Never Been Kissed’s* direct engagement with the text of *As You Like It* and the direct parallels to which the film itself draws attention to serve as the exemplar of the variability that the source texts allow for.

Once again, it is at prom that the disguise comes off, the secrets revealed, yet it is more than

¹⁵ Shary writes of this paradoxical space, “Perhaps ironically, popularity among high school students is often determined by a fine combination of conformity *and* rebellion, as popular students must appear an act acceptable to a wider range of people while also staking out an individual identity that makes them special and desirable.” (61)

¹⁶ This “romantic space” also in many ways refers back to Celstino Deleyto and the reading of the convention of the “happy ending.”

just high schoolers vested in what occurs. The newspaper staff sit in the office watching closely through Josie’s hidden camera until she disconnects it; and then there is Josie herself—a twenty-five year old absorbed in the high school culture—not to mention Sam Coulson, an adult caught in the societal construct because of his role in its foundation, high school is simply a building without its teachers. The popularization Boose and Burt refer to, “an enlargement of what can be legitimately studied as part of the Shakespeare canon,” is in place. Josie Gellar prevents an incident similar to what happened to her during her high school days, which provokes her to reveal herself as an undercover reporter “beating my brains out trying to impress you people.”¹⁷ Just as *Get Over It!* presents a distanced aspect to its adaptation, so too does *Never Been Kissed*—this is a prom where everyone is explicitly in a disguise (the importance of the skin-tight bright blue leotard as a sort of shedding of this disguise must be noted), in costume, a performance without a stage. Josie is dressed as Rosalind and while she sheds her disguise as a teenager, the disguise of Rosalind remains throughout her monologue, which ends “Find out who you are and try not to be afraid of it.” When returning to Act I, Scene 3 of *As You Like It*, this sentiment carries similar weight, for Rosalind’s main reason for taking on her disguise is her fear of being who she is and being punished, robbed, because of it. In some way, by revealing one disguise, Josie takes on another, one that leaves Sam thinking, “I just can’t look at you the same way.” The adaptation of these plays into teenage romantic comedies, however, through the popularization of the story and its characters, does speak to a need to be popular, to be accessible, while at the same time establishing a contradictory sense of independence and originality. By placing the adapted text into the environment of the high schooler, the source text and the character work through the same issues. These adaptations invoke a type of

¹⁷ Appendix 1.5

disguised recognition surrounding the issues of high school—the film disguises the importance of being popular by using the adolescents themselves as the disguise.

While these films do attempt to disavow the importance of popularity, the ultimate goal behind the production of film is commercial success. This need for popularity, for commercial recognition, is part of what creates genre and what creates the shift in emphasis in these modernizations. Imelda Whelehan writes in “Adaptations: The Contemporary Dilemmas”:

In any case...any critical consideration of an adaptation’s reception might benefit from recognizing some of the practical realities involved in producing a commercially successful film—such as pruning culturally anachronistic features, trimming sophisticated narrative strategies into a recognizable popular film genre which is, in turn, an adaptation of other films, with intertextual links with its contemporary filmic counterparts. (4)

Boose and Burt’s concept of a spliced Shakespeare, and in relation, a splicing of any classic work of literature along with Shary’s conceptualization of the combination of “conformity and rebellion, as [the] popular student must appear an act acceptable to a wider range of people while also staking out an individual identity that makes them special and desirable” (61) work with Whelehan’s suggestion of an intertextuality. These films depend upon other sources, text or film, for meaning as genre films. At the same time, each film uses its original source text as a point of orientation—the “culturally anachronistic features” and the “narrative strategies” specific to one work, one source. Intertextuality itself is a form of disguised recognition, playing off sentiments from other texts and films but for the most part avoiding explicit references to these other works, hidden by the commonalities shared between the films—setting, climactic event, happy ending—in other words, hidden by the conventions of the genre.¹⁸ The genre, the societal construct, brings forth the similar element

¹⁸ One example of this intertextuality might be in the climactic scene of *Never Been Kissed* in which the attempt to dump dog food on Aldys in many ways mirrors the film *Carrie* (1976). One of the boys opening the can is

of disguise from each text into each film, creating a space in which genre is more than a classification as it becomes a tool in which to engage further with the works—teenage romantic comedy becomes the “Shakespeare” Boose and Burt see fragmented. The conditions of the bet in *She’s All That* are revealed (words not used lightly in this case) in the final scene of the film in which Zack Sylar graduates high school wearing nothing but a



She’s All That—Zack Sylar, *sans* nearly everything.

graduation cap and an Honors stole, carrying a volleyball to keep the PG-13 rating.¹⁹ In Jaques speech from *As You Like It*, a speech started in *Never Been Kissed*, the final lines “Last scene of all, / That ends this strange eventful history, / Is second childishness and

mere oblivion, / *Sans* teeth, *sans* eyes, *sans* taste, *sans* everything” carrying an interesting meaning when watching the final scene of the film based on *Pygmalion*. That the bet is “*sans* taste” can easily be agreed upon, and the “*sans* everything” speaks for itself, but in Jaques speech we hear the tale of a man growing old, decaying, and reverting back into the state from which he rose. This liminal space of adolescence becomes in some ways self-containing, the conventions of the genre providing limits to the scope and reach of each film.²⁰

It is this scope that seems to shift the delivery of the plot when the source is brought into the “spliced” world of the teenager and the adaptation. *Whatever It Takes*, based on

dressed as Tony Manero (John Travolta) from *Saturday Night Fever*. Of course, one of Travolta’s first roles was as Billy Nolan, the guy who dumps the blood on Carrie. Rob Geller (David Arquette) makes a direct reference to this film when he says, “Wow, that was just like *Carrie*. I thought she was going to kill us all.”

¹⁹ Clip 2.3

²⁰ Through the element of disguise and the discovery of “true identity,” this reversion “back into the state from which he rose” is the exact fate that all of the characters in the films avoid, for the films end before we see the rest of their lives progress, . . . they’re already complete when the credits roll; all they need is the break they’ve been denied. Their romance plots lead not to the promise of permanent commitment and social renewal but to the timeless apotheosis of teen love . . . the perfect ending for an audience whose fears and fantasies are structured by the systematic exclusion of growth or change” (Leitch 45).

Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* engages in aspects of intratextuality, adapting the play's famous balcony moment (Act III, Scenes 6-10) in two separate moments within the film. The Cyrano of the film, Ryan, does not initially have the affections for Roxane (Maggie) that Cyrano possesses in the play. This brings different meaning to the first adaptation of the balcony scene, for Ryan is still motivated by his desire to be with the popular girl, Ashley Grant. Davis writes in "I Was a Teenage Classic,"

Other commonalities within these adaptations can also be traced easily...life-long neighbors whose rooms (and even balconies) directly face realize their true love for each other only after the cameras roll; e-mail and three-way phone calls allow deceptions to occur...and romantic scenes occur at a carnival. (54)

Indeed, it is three-way calling that allows Ryan, best friend and "life-long neighbor[] whose room[](and even balcon[y]) directly face[s]" Maggie's, to perform Cyrano's role in this balcony scene²¹:

MAGGIE. Are you okay? 'Cause you sound kinda different.

RYAN (as Chris throughout). Yeah, well um, yeah, see, um, the battery's running low on my wireless. I have to put you on speaker. Can you hold on?

MAGGIE. Okay.

RYAN. Just a second. Okay, sorry about that. Can you hear me now?

MAGGIE. Yeah, sort of. Listen, I hope you're not sick.

RYAN. Well, you know. I'm sick about this not happening. I mean, I know I'm a jock; brainless, conceited, in love with myself. Or at least that's how you must see me. But let me tell you how I see you. The you I see...is a big heart. She's smart, fun to hang around with, doesn't take my shit. And I like that. I like that you look nervous sometimes for no reason, and when you do you bite your lip. I like that you probably riffled through your closet tonight and settled with what you'd started out with. I like your smile. You know, I don't usually talk this way, but, uh, I think being with you wouldn't be irrelevant, know what I'm saying?

CHRIS. Or maybe I should just stop with all this weak shit.

MAGGIE. No, it's nice.

CHRIS. Oh, alright.

RYAN. So let's do this, huh? No pressure. We'll go hang out, the four of us, get to know each other, talk, maybe, uh—

CHRIS. Swap some spit.

MAGGIE (laughs). Okay.

CHRIS. Famous!

MAGGIE. What?

RYAN. I said, uh, thank you.

²¹ While the entirety of Act III is entitled "Roxane's Kiss," the balcony scene takes place in its majority from Scene 6 through Scene 10.

Just as the words of Berke seem to mirror a character from the literary source, this moment plays out in a very similar fashion to parts of the moment underneath the balcony in

Rostand's work:

ROXANE

Your words are halting – why?

CYRANO [quietly imitating CHRISTIAN]

The night is dark.

To reach your ears they have to feel their way.

ROXANE

Mine can reach yours more easily, it seems.

CYRANO

They find their way at once? That's not surprising,

Since they go straight to my heart. My heart is big,

Your ears are tiny, and your words are falling

While mine must rise: of course it takes them longer. (Act III, Scene 7, lines 206-213)

...

CYRANO

New...yes...saying what I feel...

I'm always so afraid of being laughed at...

ROXANE

Laughed at? Why?

CYRANO

Oh, you know...enthusiasm...

I always hide my feelings under wit.

Longing to pluck a star down from the firmament,

Instead I stoop a pick a flowery compliment.

ROXANE

Compliments can be fun.

CYRANO

But not tonight.

ROXANE

I've never heard you talk like this before.

CYRANO

Oh, let's leave Cupid's darts and flames alone

For once, and talk of something...nearer home!

Instead of sipping from a tiny cup

Of gold the Lignon's waters, drop by drop.

Let's see what happens if we let our souls

Drink deeply of the river as it rolls! (Act III, Scene 7, lines 239-252)

Through adaptation, characters merge with one another; in *Whatever It Takes* Maggie has the “big heart,” while in the source material Cyrano assigns that quality to himself, or rather, to Christian. The “something...nearer home” is the “wouldn't be irrelevant” sentiment expressed by the later work. In both cases, the words are effective, and in *Whatever It Takes*

the words convince Maggie to go on the double date, to Davis's "carnival." However, the balcony scene in *Cyrano de Bergerac* ends with a kiss, painful to Cyrano because of his love



Whatever It Takes—Out of sight from Maggie, Ryan feeds Chris his lines.

for Roxane. A second scene unfolds in the teenage romantic comedy adaptation, this time on a stage as Maggie arranges the set, Ryan's interaction beginning with Chris's line—"Man, where you been? I'm dying over here" (Christian's line in Rostand's work: "If I can't get her back / I'll die, I swear...") and including a play on Cyrano's line "Instead I stoop a pick a flowery

compliment" as Chris bends down to pick up a fake flower from the stage after repeating Ryan's first genuine words of affection towards Maggie—"Wow, she's really beautiful." This is the moment of Ryan's realization of his own feelings and also the moment of the first kiss between Maggie and Chris.²² This scene in the film "stages" the moment in a way more closely tied to the source material—Chris and Ryan below, Maggie above, the dynamic created by the balcony in the play.

Here, a recreation of the moment in the play serves as the vehicle through which Ryan discovers his true desires, his "true identity." Ryan in this moment truly becomes a "modern Cyrano," with all that that implies—a



Cyrano comprised of other characters, other emotions; an intertextual Cyrano, placed within the societal structures and constraints of the high school environment. The disguise is lifted, a self-imposed case of mistaken identity, of disguised recognition. Through *Cyrano de Bergerac*, Ryan discovers himself, Balizet's recognition-as-familiar. Yet, while through the

²² Clip 2.2

play, it is also through the element of disguise that he makes this discovery, a disguised recognition. The performative aspect of this moment cannot be ignored; it's unfolding on a stage suggests a direct reference to its source material. Yet one moment from the play is divided, spliced, and in each piece a different emotion evoked, a new emphasis introduced. The source text proves its mutability intratextually and the enduring qualities of the play still exist within the final product of adaptation. Yet the emphatic shifts through adaptation speak to the power of the social construction. The element of disguise is present in *Cyrano de Bergerac*, but



“Did you say that I looked beautiful?
“Uh, yeah, uh, just like a little flower.”

in *Whatever It Takes*, and in all the other teenage romantic comedy adaptations, disguise becomes a vehicle of self-discovery. Disguise as a social construct becomes inherently



attached to the self, the self forced into the constructs of society. Adaptation seems to suffer a similar paradoxical fate; its disguised recognition of its source in so many ways shapes the film—through the many attempts to remain original and the many attempts to establish

originality—and those attempts create the conventions that shape the genre.

The shift into a new medium also raises issues of recognition; for recognition is intrinsically based on the assumption that something has been seen once so that it can be recognized when it reappears. The move from text to film, even the intermittent move from stage to screen, presents new avenues for the exploration of texts and raises interesting questions surrounding the emphasis of disguise these films play upon. The society that

functions as the audience to these films indeed could be responsible for forcing this issue of identity, but these films must also willingly engage in these issues. Frank Krutnik writes in “Love Lies: Romantic Fabrication in Contemporary Romantic Comedy,

To succeed, romantic comedies must do more than simply redress themselves in contemporary fashions: they must engage with shifting priorities and possibilities of intimate culture and with broader cultural, social, and economic spheres that organize its forms and meanings. (16)

Krutnik presents a complicated formula for a successful romantic comedy, a formula that resonates just as much within the realm of adaptation. His call to “redress” is, in some ways, the call for the element of disguise (disguise in order to reveal truth—Zack Syler “redresses” in what might be considered a similar fashion). Yet here the sentiment also implies that even through redressing a romantic comedy can still be recognized for what it is—the conventions of the genre aid in providing this recognition while the issues of identity are what “engage” the “shifting priorities and possibilities of...culture...that organize its forms and meanings.” It is the element of disguise in these teenage romantic comedy adaptations that seems crucial in recognizing the importance of societal influence in the search for balance between belonging and independence, fidelity and originality.

High School Musical 3 ends with Troy Bolton’s decision to pursue both acting and basketball at the University of California, Berkley. With this decision he reaches that point of self-discovery—balance achieved. This final verdict is only reached through the performative aspects of both Troy’s persona and the film itself. Of course, the societal elements cannot be ignored—his performance is for an audience, the film is for an audience, and both audiences work to shape the constructs of Troy Bolton and *High School Musical 3*. Troy’s decision occurs while still in the space of the play he is performing, but by the end of

the film the space between reality and stage is almost completely amalgamated. Both the characters within the play (and the film) as well as the audience (of the play and the film) come to recognize that Troy's operations through his disguise are the thoughts and feelings of Troy himself, in a state of disguised recognition. This societal influence is what creates the need for a balance between innovation and fidelity, independence and reliance—identity shaped through an individual's compliance with and rebellion against the constructs that shape it.



With Ms. Darbus's help, Troy finds a balance between his identity as a basketball player and his identity as an actor.

Disguise is essential to that navigation, as a subversive tool as well as one of conformity. The liminal spaces of adaptation and adolescence are continuously fluxuating, as societal implications of the teenage change, contemporary concerns shift, and methods of communication and presentation change with the evolving technology shaped by the concerns of society. Even from the turn of the millennium to 2008 the romantic teenage comedy shifted, as the addition of the musical element to *High School Musical 3* demonstrates. The engagement and re-engagement of “the shifting priorities and possibilities of culture” constantly recreates and reshapes both adolescence and adaptation, requiring endless redefinitions and rediscoveries. As Ms. Darbus says before the seniors engage in the project of creating their spring musical,

“Playing a role is easy. But being yourself, now that's a challenge.”

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