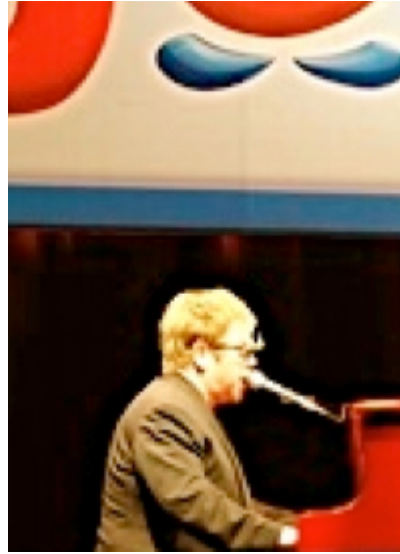




Gnomeo & Juliet Pays Homage to Shakespeare

The new children's movie *Gnomeo & Juliet* is of course an adaptation of William Shakespeare's classic work, *Romeo & Juliet*. In this new world, the bickering enemies are red and blue garden gnomes. The blue garden belongs to the Montagues of 2B and the red Capulets live next door, at not 2B.

To the delight of Shakespeare fanatics such as myself, the film embodied the very same themes that lent quality to his beloved play; however, it could not avoid some of the darker and more tragic undertones of *Romeo & Juliet*, perhaps proving problematic for parents of young children interested in the film.



Gnomeo and Juliet are garden gnomes belonging to rival lawn jockeys, the Reds and the Blues. Juliet is a free-spirited red garden gnome whose father often attempts to stifle her passion and independence, in fear that he may lose her. Gnomeo is a daring blue gnome whose loyalty to the Blues is indisputable. More importantly, Gnomeo appreciates and supports Juliet's free-spirit, capturing her heart quickly as a result.

In their first encounter both young gnomes are disguised, and they fall in love at first sight, each unaware that the other is an enemy by nature. But challenging for the two, and true to Shakespeare's original plot, Juliet is betrothed to Paris, another gnome whom her father has chosen for her.

Once Gnomeo and Juliet discover they are rivals, however, they are far too enthralled with one another to allow their families' feud to influence their love. As in *Romeo & Juliet*, the two meet in secret with a chaperon of sorts in the form of a friendly, loquacious lawn flamingo, whose character adds a great deal of humor to the film.

Much of the action found in *Gnomeo and Juliet* bears similarities to the original play. The feuding gnomes engage in lawnmower races which eventually take a turn for the worse, resulting in the "death" or destruction of Tybalt, as he crashes into a wall and breaks into pieces.

This element in the film, though true to Shakespeare's plot, is perhaps a bit too dark for younger children — some of whom in the audience could be heard asking their parents what happened and whether Tybalt was all right.

Also, in one semi-violent scene of the film, the gnomes witness what they believe is Gnomeo's death when a garbage truck crushes a blue teapot in the street. This misunderstanding is an element taken straight from *Romeo & Juliet*, and one that in both cases propels the plot to its climax.

As in Shakespeare's work, the blue Montagues are anxious to avenge the death of their dear Gnomeo. What follows is an adventurous and somewhat violent scene, involving a monstrous new lawnmower which brings about the destruction of both gardens.

Suddenly Gnomeo appears in the midst of the brawl — very much alive — to the delight of the



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combatants. The happy surprise is short-lived, however, as the lawnmower crashes into the very pillar on which Gnomeo and Juliet are standing, leading the dueling gnomes to believe both main characters are dead.

Both gnome families finally come to terms with the devastation their never-ending feud has caused, and—moved by grief over the loss of their beloved Gnomeo and Juliet—they elect to end the feud and restore their lives and gardens.

Though Shakespeare's play ended at this point, Touchstone Pictures has thankfully added a fairytale ending.

Gnomeo and Juliet emerge from the rubble unharmed, and the final scene of the film reveals blue and red gnomes co-mingling delightedly, dancing and gardening together.

Both stories emphasize the moral that hate can bring about destruction of relationships and lives. It also teaches children the importance of asking questions and confronting problems peacefully. After all, the present-day gnomes have no idea why their ancestors originally began the feud, and are simply continuing it out of habit.

A wonderful attribute of the film is that it does not try to mask its relevance to Shakespeare's work. At one point, Gnomeo finds himself in a park resting atop a statue of William Shakespeare. The gnome begins to discuss his conflict involving Juliet and the two families with Shakespeare, to which the bard replies that the story "sounds very familiar." Shakespeare then warns the gnome that the story with which he is familiar ends tragically, resulting in the death of the two star-crossed lovers. Gnomeo, naturally disconcerted by this information, storms off.

At the same time, younger children in the audience may find the information about the death of the two lovers to be unsettling as well.

Gnomeo and Juliet is a humorous film for young and adult audiences alike. For adults, the close similarities to Shakespeare's work will certainly inspire chuckles, particularly at the nuances that ultimately separate the two.

However, some of the clever puns may be somewhat troubling for parents. For example, one spirited gnome eager to engage in battle shouts, "Let's go kick some grass" as he prepares for yet another lawnmower war.

Similarly, when one gnome calls another "illiterate," the other gnome responds, "I'm not illiterate — my parents were married," certainly a comical response but one that may perturb parents. Also, when Juliet first disguises herself prior to her encounter with Romeo, her friend Lynette tells her, "Nice junk in the trunk," complimenting Juliet on her shapely rear end.

Also, to the chagrin of some parents, there is a bit of underlying sexuality in the form of a Dolly Parton lookalike gnome, who wears tight jeans and a low-cut shirt that bares her cleavage. Another male gnome sports a revealing swimsuit which resembles the one worn by Borat in the Sacha Baron Cohen film.

The film boasts a jazzy soundtrack that pays homage to Elton John, which the children in the audience seem to love.

Overall, *Gnomeo and Juliet* is an entertaining and adventurous film, and those seeking a good family film should consider it, though they may wish to reserve it for their older children.



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Photo: Singer and musician Elton John performs at the premiere of the animated 3D feature film "Gnomeo & Juliet" in Los Angeles on Sunday, Jan. 23, 2011.: AP Images



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