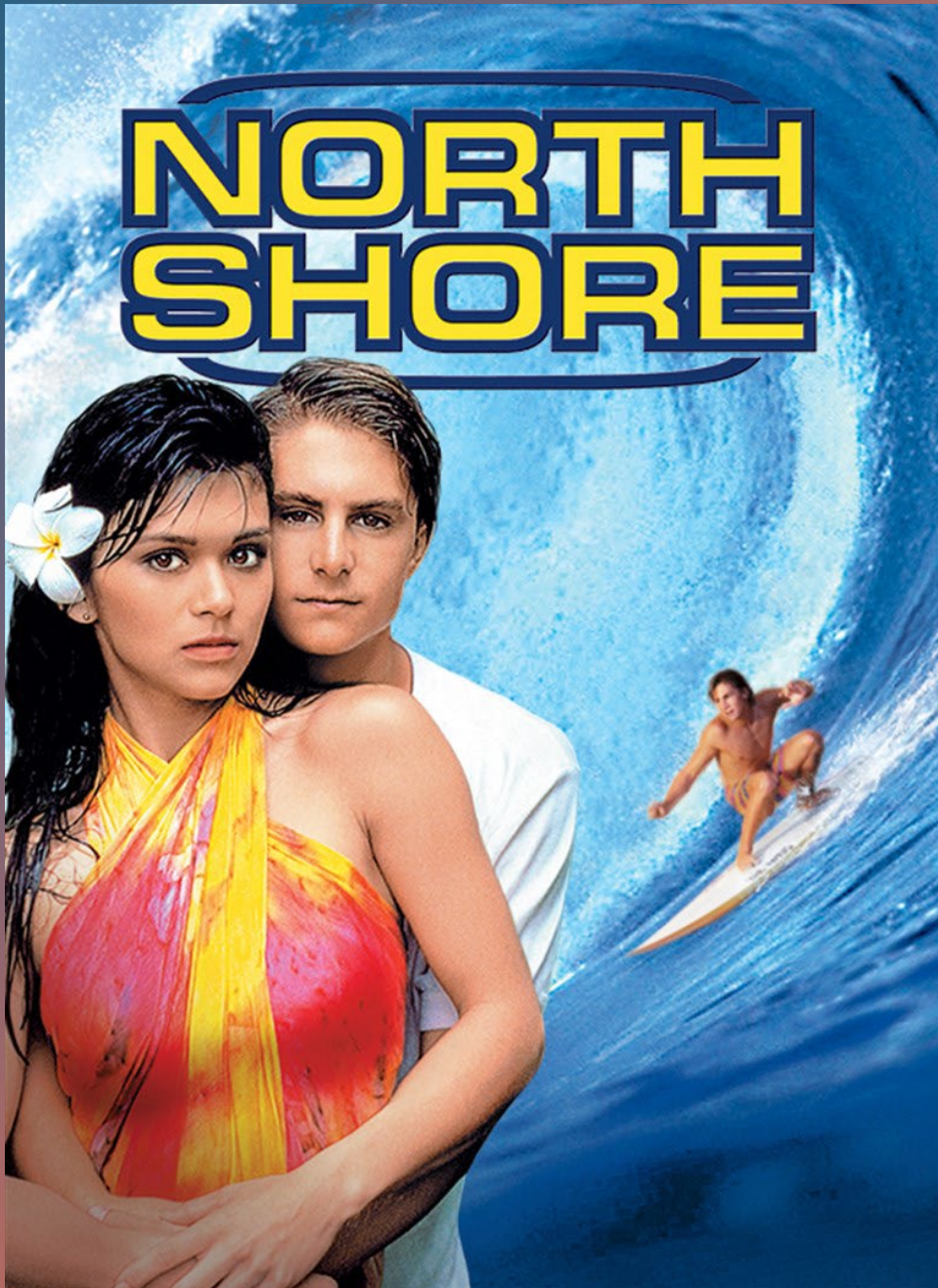




# Hoku Kea

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# Introduction

“But first let me tell ye, if ye should lead / Her in a fool’s paradise, as they say, it were a very / Gross kind of behavior” (II.iv.172-174).

This quote, taken from the Nurse as she is speaking to Romeo as a go-between with Juliet, comes when she is making sure that Romeo doesn’t have prurient intentions with her lady. However, the word choice of the nurse, specifically “fool’s paradise,” reminded me of a place that could have a strong appeal as an interpretation of *Romeo and Juliet*:

My concept for an adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* is *Hoku Kea* (“star crossed” in Hawaiian), a miniseries that depicts the tragedy of two young lovers and explores themes of nativism, intercultural love, and postcolonial attitudes in the setting of contemporary Hawaii. The lovers are Monty, the son of an aging professional surfer from mainland America, and Kuliana, the daughter of Cappy, Monty’s father’s longstanding rival. When the two come in contact at a contest afterparty they are instantly enamored with each other, but Kuliana’s cousin Kaikoa doesn’t approve of their feelings. This leads to an inevitable brawl and the unfortunate tragedy of the story.

*Hoku Kea* argues that both natives and foreigners must be able to come to a healthy resolution to avoid serious and tragic loss. Loss, which, when viewed from a distance, only reveals the perpetrators of the prejudice, and those willing to accept them, as fools.

# Setting and Context

Set in the town of Haleiwa on Oahu's north shore, Monty and Kuliana seek to make their love official, but find only difficulties. The native Hawaiian community is unfriendly towards the idea of foreign guys making off with local girls, and Monty's family doesn't want to stir the pot and cause any trouble. A former farming community and modern surf-media hub, *Hoku Kea* will be in a region where violent localism (even in the modern world) is not uncommon and the controversy surrounding the young lovers will be exacerbated. It is a region popular with visiting and local surfers alike, but has a storied history marked by isolation colonization, and gentrification – all of which contribute to unfavorable ideas of tourists and mainland Americans.

Hawaii is a place that many people think of when they think of paradise, and for many surfers it is *the* place to prove themselves. If a surfer can make it in Hawaii, they will most likely be able to cement their career. In a sense, it is Hawaii or bust. This is a similar attitude that Romeo holds towards his hometown of Verona when he says:

“There is no world without Verona walls,  
But Purgatory, torture, hell itself.  
Hence banished is banished from the world,  
And world's exile is death...” (III.iii.17-19).

This occurs when the Friar is explaining to him how he has been banished for the killing of Tybalt. Romeo believes that being exiled from Verona is comparable to being executed, and that Verona is the world, since everything he loves and cares about is in Verona. Through portrayals as a desirable location, both Verona and Hawaii are places that people would like to be and are reluctant to leave.



# Monty

The son of an aging professional surfer, Monty is well-versed in the ebb and flow of the ocean, but not his own emotions. Non-competitive by nature, Monty is reluctant to follow in his father's tracks, preferring instead to surf on his own or with friends. However, he is at the mercy of forces beyond his control, like Romeo.

Romeo is a character who does not hide from the audience that he is driven by fortune's impulses. All the same, he experiences a great amount of suffering through the play, being subject to social and kinship-related obligations while at the same time following his own heart's desires.

“Thou canst not speak of that thou dost not feel.

Wert thou as young as I, Tybalt murdered,  
Doting like me, and like me banished,  
Then mightst thou speak, then mightst thou tear thy hair,  
And fall upon the ground, as I do now, Taking the measure of an  
unmade grave” (III.iii.64-70).

We feel sympathy for Romeo not as we pity an adult in a tough situation, but as we mourn the loss of a child. Monty, like Romeo, is impulsive and reckless at times, but as a teenager, who isn't? Romeo is expected to behave according to a vague family tradition of variance with the Capulets and an obligatory-revenge social code but is prevented from acting according to the one completely natural and human desire he has: to love. Similarly, Monty will want to break away from traditional attitudes and embrace his love for Kuliana.

In feeling the strong draw of love when he is leaving the Capulet's party, Romeo says: “Can I go forward when my heart is here?/ Turn back, dull earth, and find thy center out” (II.i.1-2).

This highlights an early instance of Romeo revolving his world around his heart's desire, an action that is arguably obsessive and immature, but only natural to a teenager. When he meets Kuliana at the Volcom house after the Pipe Pro, Monty is immediately stricken and inquires about her, not allowing family and ethnic differences to get in the way of his love. This quote also foreshadows Monty's demise as he seeks to find out Kuliana in the series' tragic climax.



# Kuliana

Kuliana is the daughter of Cappy, the rival of Monty's father. Like Juliet, though, Kuliana is highly aware of the arbitrary differences that keep her from being able to openly love Monty. In the balcony scene, Juliet clearly reflects this sentiment when she says:

“ ‘Tis but thy name that is my enemy.

Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.

What's Montague? It is nor hand, nor foot,

Nor arm, nor face. O, be some other name

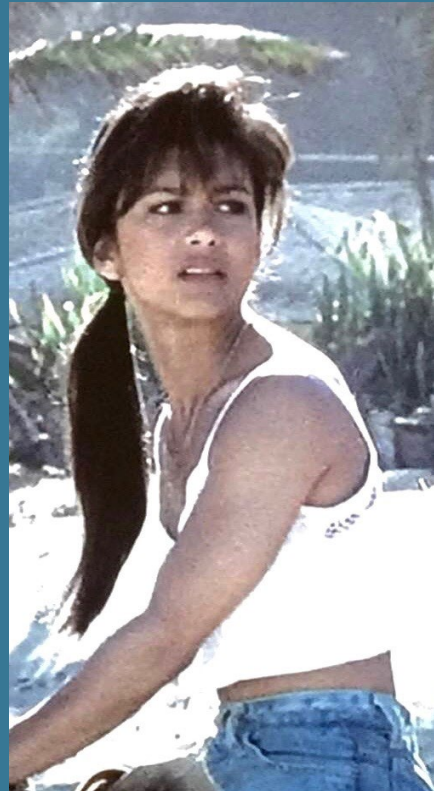
Belonging to a man.

What's in a name? That which we call a rose

By any other word would smell as sweet” (II.ii.38-44).

Here, Juliet is stating words simply for what they are: sounds that represent objects or ideas. She acknowledges that a word is just a placeholder for something else, and that the names could be interchanged without any difference to the thing in question. According to her reasoning, by removing the "Montague" from Romeo, she is removing the familial variance that her family holds with his.

This is a conception that could be applied to other realms, too. In Kuliana's case, she applies this thought to the pointless nature of race-based prejudice. Unable to love Monty because he is a mainlander, she begins to see not name as the reason for their separation, but race and origin. We cannot choose where we are born or what color we are, and Kuliana highlights how this is a pointless way to differentiate among people.



# Kaikoa (Tybalt)

In *Hoku Kea*, Kaikoa represents the aging hatred that the native Hawaiians hold against foreigners, especially white Americans. In modern Hawaii, most natives do not feel a belligerent hatred towards whites, but experience something akin to a lingering distaste for them. Kaikoa, however, cannot stand haoles, and is known for instigating fights and his strong pride in being a Hawaiian.

Even though the dispute between the Montagues and the Capulets doesn't come across as any extreme or violent hatred, and even considering that Old Capulet prevents the harassment of Romeo at his party, Tybalt continues to represent pure hatred towards an outgroup. In the beginning of the play, Tybalt bluntly states his disposition: "...talk of peace? I hate the word, / As I hate hell, all Montagues, and thee" (I.i.72-73). In this case, Tybalt is ruled by his hatred and truculence, which do not change throughout the play. As one of the most recognizable flat characters in *Romeo and Juliet*, it is important to pinpoint his exact set of beliefs in order to understand Kaikoa.

Like Tybalt, Kaikoa will be motivated by his often out-of-proportion hatred for white Americans on the island, which will manifest in blatant disrespect (such as "dropping-in" on others while surfing) and physical violence. Strongly nativistic, he believes Hawaii is solely for Hawaiians. At the party where Monty and Kuliana meet, Kaikoa continually brings up his gripe that haoles are there to Cappy, who suppresses the potential fight at the house.

This fight finds another time however, and Kaikoa ends up confronting Monty at Shark's Cove, where he stumbles during the fight, hitting his head on a rock. Monty flees the scene and winds up at Guru Larry's shack.



# Guru Larry

A wizened product of the 1960s, Guru Larry is an acid-head spiritual leader. He encourages the love between Monty and Kuliana as a way to break down social barriers and create a lasting peace between the two families, whose disagreement represents to Larry a conflict between people based on a concept as arbitrary as race. While pragmatic in his approach to solving the problem of Monty's banishment, he is also, like Friar Laurence, sure of good things to come:

"...thou shalt live till we can find a time

To blaze your marriage, reconcile your friends,

Beg pardon of the prince, and call thee back

With twenty hundred thousand times more joy

Than thou went'st forth in lamentation" (III.iii.150-154).

In this scene, when the Friar is calming Romeo after the death of Tybalt and his subsequent banishment, a plan is depicted of everything going right – the whole debacle will blow over while Romeo lays low, the marriage will be revealed, and, with a little luck, Romeo will be pardoned. Just like Friar Laurence, Guru Larry is able to find happiness in all the good things of life – even in a bad situation. While calming Romeo, Friar Laurence lists all that Romeo has to be happy for: Juliet is still alive, Romeo is still alive, and the forces that would have him slayed (i.e., Tybalt and the law) are extinguished. The Friar says that Romeo has "A pack of blessings light upon thy back" (III.iii.141), and just like this, Guru Larry keeps a level head and optimistic outlook throughout the course of the series. Once finding out about the incident with the two lovers, however, Larry places the responsibility on himself for encouraging them.



# Auntie

In *Hoku Kea* Auntie plays an important role. As the aunt of Kuliana in this adaptation, Auntie is closer to her than any of Kuliana's immediate family members. As such, she knows a lot about Kuliana's plans with Monty, although she changes her mind about supporting them after Monty's incident with Kaikoa. In shifting her opinion and advice, Auntie plays the role that the Nurse occupies in *Romeo and Juliet*. Both characters have only the best in mind for Juliet/Kuliana, and this involves a change of heart. As the nurse claims in act 3, scene 5:

“Then, since the case so stands as now it doth,

I think it best you married with the County.

O, he's a lovely gentleman!

Romeo's a dishclout to him...” (217-220).

Later in the same train of thought, the nurse tells Juliet that “Your first is dead – or 'twere as good he were / As living here and you no use of him” (226-227). She seeks to get Juliet's mind off of Romeo and sway her to marry Paris, which is the safest and most pragmatic decision that Juliet could make, albeit the least romantic. In this sense, the nurse seeks Juliet's safety first, then her interests.

Auntie, likewise, helps Kuliana in securing Monty, but after Kaikoa's death and Monty's escape changes her mind about him; she wants to ensure Kuliana's welfare. It is this protective over-reaching, however, that contributes to her pushing Kuliana away, and Kuliana runs off in search of Monty after his fight with Kaikoa.



# Conclusion

After the death of Kaikoa, Guru Larry had told Monty to hide in the crop of the nearby Kahuku plantation. While he is hiding, however, Monty decides that Kuliana is not coming and paddles into the ocean after dark to try to find his way to her house. Kuliana, though, had gone according to Larry's plan to find Monty hiding in the sugarcane field. Unknown to Kuliana, the farmers were in the process of burning the fields to prepare for the harvest. As the flames circle around her, Monty is stuck in the water as a swell fills in, the waves breaking over him in the dark and drowning him. This symbolic reinterpretation of their deaths represents the hot and cold, indecisive nature of love. It is also ironic in that Kuliana's death comes at the hands of her own people and an agricultural tradition, while Monty perishes in the waves – the reason for his being there in the first place. It is not the conflict between families that kill the young lovers, but the families' own reluctance to change their antiquated views that causes Monty and Kuliana to die. By trying to control the two lovers according to what is ethnically appropriate, those who refused their love end up consuming them.

This adaptation of Shakespeare's play is not only entertaining for viewers, but it addresses the themes of ethnicity-based conflict and the dangers of being too stuck in your old ways. In the modern world, there are few people living who actually contribute to the way the world is run, yet residual ideas still cause negative attitudes towards groups that, today, have no control over what happened in the past. In a way, *Hoku Kea* communicates just how powerless the individual is in the face of prejudice, but also claims that, with a bit of understanding and an open mind, tragedy can be evaded.



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