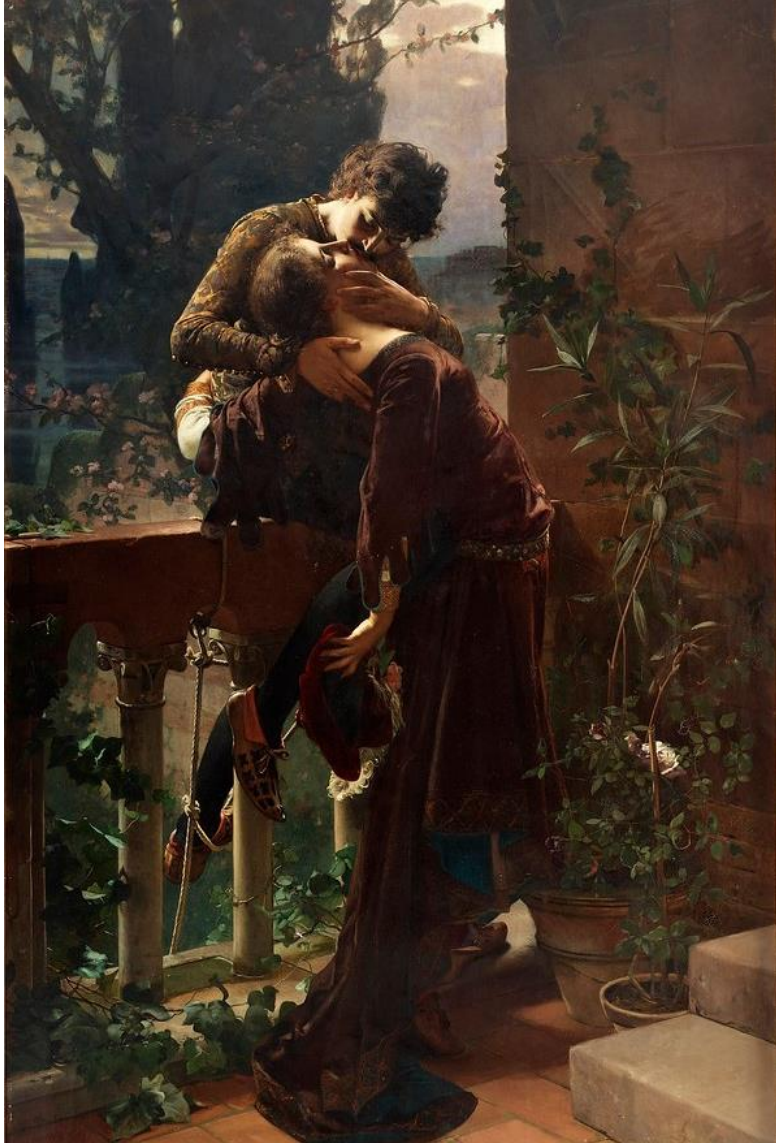

**LOVE STORY THAT TRAVELS
THROUGH TIME: IS SAM
LEVINSON'S *EUPHORIA* A
REFERENCE TO *ROMEO AND JULIET*
Georgia Stevenson**



The cult-like popularity of the first season of HBO's *Euphoria* left Season 2 highly anticipated, with social media hype doubling viewership to over 13 million. *Euphoria* could be seen in the number one spot for trending on Twitter after every new Season 2 episode aired, making audience opinions easy to find. The artistic and modern directing style leaves a lot up for interpretation, which encouraged a wave of fan theories and predictions as to how the wild storyline would unravel.

Craig Mathieson for *The Age* sums up the newest season: 'The new episodes still pinball between the bombastic and the solemn, between understanding and exploitation, and that is its uncompromising identity.' The show focuses on a group of teenagers trying to navigate their transition into adulthood as they explore drugs, relationships and sexuality. The show is unpredictable- as is life at that age- however, is this story more familiar than we realise?

A popular theory during the release of Season 2 is that the main characters Rue and Jules are somewhat a representation of Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet*, and the evidence is quite compelling. A TikTok user 'Hahahahdbss' discussed this theory in their post: 'Someone said that Rue and Jules are parallels to Romeo and Juliet...honestly, it's not that far fetched.' The main character of the show, Rue experiences an on-again, off-again relationship with her counterpart, Jules, however their sporadic relationship isn't the only similarity fans have noticed.

The pair are portrayed to juxtapose each other in a way that is similar to the Shakespearean star-crossed lovers. Season 2 opens with Rue singing along to a Tupac song, when immediately after the camera switches to a shot of Jules with a Biggie song playing in the background. This is seen to be a reference to the epic rivalry of the 90's between the two rappers, paralleling the rivalry between Romeo and Juliet's feuding family. A more obvious clue is seen when Jules dresses up as an angel for Halloween, the exact costume that Claire Danes (who plays Juliet) wears in Baz Luhrmann's film adaptation of the play. Rue is also dressed similarly to Leonardo DiCaprio's portrayal of Romeo, who wears a suit. Jules ends up in a pool, like Juliet in the play, and even recites a line from Act II: 'Although I joy in thee, I have no joy of this contract tonight. It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden'.

This theory is completely justifiable; Shakespeare was- and still is- a huge influence on contemporary works. Successful modern authors are still retelling his stories, for example Toni Morrison writing *Desdemona* as a female led ode to *Othello*. Shakespeare has even started to penetrate children's cartoon films, with Kelly Asbury's *Gnomeo & Juliet* becoming a huge box office hit. It is not a reach for Sam Levinson, a filmmaker notorious for his artistic symbolism, to include a reference to Shakespeare somewhere in his works.

The highly anticipated finale of Season 2, however, left fans disappointed. Rue and Jules' relationship was left untied- like many existing plotlines. Brian Lowry explains in his review for *CNN*: 'It was, as usual, a lot, though the episode did close on a quieter note, with Zendaya's Rue exchanging an embrace with Jules (Hunter Schafer), before seemingly leaving that relationship behind. At least for now.'

This raises the question: was the seemingly complex and highly orchestrated symbolism all a coincidence? Are fans of *Euphoria* so desperate for the show to have a higher meaning that they conjure up these exciting plotlines all to be let down by the producers? The second season ultimately received deflated reviews as a result of huge build ups in the plot which unravelled to anticlimactic (or completely missing) resolutions. In my opinion, *Euphoria* is a result of modern works catering towards the highly dramatic and fast paced plotlines which generate a larger viewership, rather than exploring deeper meanings which gives the piece some substance. The show does not have to relate to canonical texts such as *Romeo & Juliet* to be considered successful, however untied plotlines and disappointing resolutions are unlikely to make Sam Levinson be considered the new Shakespeare.