



To explore the diversity of 'contradiction' creation techniques in 'Romeo and Juliet'

Shangwen Zhou

Academy of arts, Xi'an International Studies University, Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, 710128, China

2114254575@qq.com

Abstract. As one of the representative tragedies created by Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* utilizes a plethora of contradictory rhetoric in its writing. Simultaneously, within its narrative structure, it employs contradictory creation through the depiction of the social environment and social criticism to enhance the dramatic effect. This paper aims to analyze the conflicts, connotations, and significance of *Romeo and Juliet* from multiple perspectives.

Keywords: Shakespeare; creative techniques; contradictory modification connotation.

1 Introduction

Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* exemplifies the contradictory and ambiguous nature of love. Throughout the play, love is depicted through a series of dichotomies, such as light and dark, haste and slowness, and virtue and vice. Against the backdrop of societal depression and anguish, Shakespeare expresses a liberated and pluralistic perspective on love, echoing the ethos of ancient Greek mythology and challenging the constraints of Christian ethics. In this brief portrayal of "balcony love," the play reflects the tragedy of its time, the helplessness stemming from religious oppression, and the transient nature of fate. It serves as a reminder that society has long been bound by secular and ecclesiastical regulations, curtailing the pursuit of love and happiness. The fate of *Romeo and Juliet* serves as a mere starting point, unveiling the tragic "potential" that lies within.

2 Contradictory Rhetoric

Contradictory rhetoric is a common rhetorical device that transcends different languages. It refers to the use of two opposing words for modification [1]. G.N. Leech contends that "although this rhetorical device may appear semantically illogical, it can achieve a linguistic effect beyond the capabilities of other rhetorical devices" [2]. The fusion of opposites better reflects the unique characteristics of the object being de-

scribed and enhances the expressiveness of tone and emotion. Shakespeare demonstrates exceptional skill in employing oxymorons to depict the ambivalence of love and hatred, love and death between the protagonists. By portraying the complexity of the characters' emotions, the play's theme is strongly emphasized. Against the historical background of the 16th century, the Middle Ages were gradually fading away, giving rise to capitalism and modern ideas that clashed with ancient feudal culture. This era of social transformation and ideological conflict gave rise to a plethora of contradictions that fundamentally affected the use of rhetorical devices, resulting in various dramatic effects.

2.1 Destined Love Tragedy and Fate Intertwined

The opening scene of 'Romeo and Juliet' depicts the irreconcilable hatred between the two families, dooming the protagonists to a tragic love entangled in societal conflicts and fate. The young lovers find themselves engulfed in the darkness of medieval asceticism but ultimately break free into the realm of humanism.

Fate leads Romeo to fall in love at first sight during the ball, prompting him to use numerous words to extol Juliet's beauty: "Ah! Her brightness outshines the torch; she gleams on the cheek of the darkening sky like a radiant ring on a black slave's ear; she is a heavenly pearl descending to earth! Watch her move alongside her companions, akin to a white dove amidst a flock of crows. My previous love was mere pretense, for I have just encountered tonight's unparalleled beauty!" The stark contrast between light and dark is striking, with "bright," "ring," "pearl," and "white dove" illuminating Juliet's dazzling allure, while her companions are likened to "black slaves" and "crows." In Romeo's eyes, Juliet is the luminous moon in the sky, eclipsing everything else. She is the sole unparalleled beauty that captivates him [3].

Following the ball, Romeo swears an oath to Juliet under the moonlight, only to have Juliet interject, "Don't swear by the moon, for it is ever-changing, experiencing gain and loss every month; if you swear by it, your love may be as fickle as it." Despite the moon's shifting tide, Juliet cannot discern the veracity of Romeo's declaration and worries about his capriciousness. Nevertheless, beneath the moonlight, they lay bare their feelings, baring their true hearts. Amid the moonlit night, the conflict between religious oppression and the trials of love spawns a fervent and uncontrollable passion.

Assisted by Friar Laurence, the two clandestinely wed in the abbey. As Juliet awaits Romeo's arrival in the evening, oblivious to Romeo having slain her cousin, she eagerly anticipates her lover's appearance: "Come, night! Come, Romeo! Bring forth day in the night! For you will rest on the wings of the night, fairer than fresh snow on the crow's back." The stark contrast between day and night, fresh snow and crow, accentuates Juliet's perception of Romeo as pure, flawless, noble, and handsome. Overwhelmed with joy, Juliet is suddenly plunged into profound despair upon learning the dreadful news, torn between love and duty until she opts to feign her death to reunite with Romeo.

2.2 The Closed Loop of Fate: Death and Reunion

This period of love, observed by Himolos in the moonlight, ultimately concludes under the moon, completing a cyclical fate. After Romeo's exile from Verona and Juliet's feigned death, he summons the courage to defy the feudal and patriarchal constraints and pursue their love. "This is a beacon, for Juliet slumbers here. Her beauty transforms this tomb into a hall of resplendent celebration. A lifeless man lies there, but it is love that entombs you. As one nears death, contentment often arises. Spectators deem this the return of light before demise; ah! Is this my final glimpse of light?" Juliet's tomb represents triumph, where even death exudes tenderness. It serves as the sole means of reuniting with their beloved after contending with the harsh wintry reality. The specter of death crumbles beneath the radiance of the god of love. "For the sake of my love, I raise this cup," the poison in Romeo's grasp ceases to instill fear, but rather becomes a vessel of joy; in Juliet's perspective, the poison on Romeo's lips acts as a "stimulant" for death. In the ultimate throes of death, agony yields to ecstasy, consummating the fusion of death and love.

Within a specific societal milieu, the pure and endearing love between these two individuals becomes ensnared as a casualty of familial animosity, compounded by various misfortunes. This narrative not only extols the virtues of love but also censures society, denouncing its oppression and apathy toward love. Shakespeare's portrayal encapsulates not just a tale of tragic love, but also the societal and religious censure and suppression of emerging social classes and cultures. The use of contradictory rhetoric better highlights the splendor of love marred by familial enmity, evoking readers' empathy for both love's emancipation and ideological liberation.

3 Contradictions in the Structure of Drama

A fundamental contradiction permeates the entire play, depicting the opposition between the Montague and Capulet families, constituting an irreconcilable binary opposition. The love that blossoms within this contradiction remains unacceptable and unrealizable. The narrative unfolds against the backdrop of familial conflict, with Romeo and Juliet serving as the focal point, thus forming an almost flawlessly contradictory structure. The two families' servants and their respective nephews converge, leading to the fateful encounter between Romeo and Juliet, further intensifying the contradiction of falling in love with a daughter from the enemy camp. Father Lorenzo assumes the role of mediating their love, while Juliet's confidante from her own faction assumes the role of an informant. Simultaneously, two sets of ternary contradictions emerge, revolving around Romeo's relationship with the Montague and Capulet families, and Juliet's relationship with the Capulet and Montague families. Multiple groups clash within the confines of the diminutive city of Verona, ultimately culminating in a climactic eruption.

3.1 The Promoting Effect of Secondary Contradiction

The secondary contradiction adds depth to the plot, and the establishment of minor contradictions assists in advancing the narrative, highlighting the primary contradiction. Initially, a verbal altercation arises between the servants, which then nearly escalates into an armed conflict between the nephews of the two families. As tensions escalate, the two families' top figures enter the scene, leading to utter hatred after the stabbing deaths of Mercutio and Tybalt. At the height of tension, Verona's prince, the city's highest authority, steps in to resolve the dispute. Secondary characters, such as the wet-nurse, Father Lorenzo, Mercutio, and Tybalt, play a vital role in advancing the plot. Their actions embody contrasting directions, highlighting their character traits while serving the narrative's needs. For instance, the armed conflict between Mercutio and Tybalt reflects their irritable personalities. Due to these personality traits, Mercutio's death prompts Romeo to seek revenge on Tybalt, further intensifying the conflict. Lorenzo consistently serves as a mediator and mentor.[4] He advises the sentimental Romeo not to fall in love and provides him with guidance, even willing to hold a secret wedding for them. Unfortunately, his involvement leads to a message transmission accident, ultimately resulting in tragedy. The wet-nurse serves as a messenger for youthful lovers, building Juliet's image of Romeo through her help. However, she constantly changes her words as the situation evolves. In her descriptions, Romeo and Paris are better than each other, affecting Juliet's emotional fluctuations. The wet-nurse's fickleness aligns with her role identity, which demands that she demonstrates her self-worth. Consequently, the story progresses with higher and sharper contradictions, maintaining a perfect narrative rhythm with each resolution, promoting plot advancement. The progressive layers of secondary contradictions supplement the primary contradiction, breathing vitality and richness into the story.

3.2 Humanistic Reflections on Love and Contradiction

The narrative structure of a love story typically encompasses the emergence and disappearance of obstacles. This is because love, in its inherent contradiction, must overcome barriers, thereby propelling the story forward. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the convergence of fate and familial animosity generates three contrasting elements: love and hatred, romance and reality, sensibility and rationality.[5] These elements convey the author's profound humanistic thoughts and underscore the story's theme: love transcends hatred and can defy inhumane rules. These three sets of opposing factors yield entirely distinct effects. Love, romance, and sensibility invigorate the zest for life, empowering individuals to conquer animosity, embodying warmth and tenderness, and showcasing the brilliance of human nature. Conversely, hatred, reality, and reason extinguish life, stifling the pursuit of love, contravening human nature, and representing coldness and callousness.

Furthermore, the narrative questions and critiques human rationality to a greater extent. It emphasizes the fusion of reason and love, asserting that embracing human nature is praiseworthy, while cautioning against the utilitarian motives of the two

families, which warrant vigilance and criticism. Only by embracing the warmth of humanism can human reason approach the innate warmth of human nature.

4 Tragic Comedy and Social Criticism

4.1 The Spring Joy of Love and Life

Although 'Romeo and Juliet' is a love tragedy, Samuel Taylor Coleridge evaluated it as being 'full of youth and spring'. The entire play exudes a cheerful tone and optimism. The two protagonists' pursuit of love and freedom showcases vivid vitality. The 'destruction' of their love and life gives rise to a kind of 'tragic beauty' in reality, but ultimately, it is acknowledged by the hostile family, thereby dissolving the hatred, and culminating in the symbol of love and freedom under the statue in the city of Verona. This 'spring'-like joy not only exists at the end of the reunion but also permeates numerous details. Even in the dark tomb, Paris fights with Romeo and meets his demise. Romeo takes poison and ends his life, while Juliet uses Romeo's knife to do the same. None of these deaths occur due to a retreat from their passions. When Romeo faces his beloved Juliet, he likened the place where she was buried to a 'feast hall full of bright joy' and viewed it as a victory tomb, as he could finally liberate himself from the shackles of the feudal patriarchal system and walk side by side with Juliet. In this context, there is no sadness; rather, it is replete with deep love and vitality, forming part of the comedy. The play aptly embodies the unity of Shakespeare's three themes of 'truth, goodness, and beauty', showcasing the seamless integration of authenticity and artistry, and infusing comedic elements within the tragic narrative tone.

4.2 Criticism of the Family System and the Bondage of Feudal Society

Certainly! Here's a unified and slightly revised version of the paragraph:

The longstanding family feud not only complicates the love between the two young individuals but also inflicts destructive consequences upon the city. Simultaneously, a profound conflict arises between familial interests and personal happiness, with the elders prioritizing family interests and status over the well-being of the youth. This mindset restricts freedom and agency, ultimately leading to the tragic fate of Romeo and Juliet. [6]

In the feudal social hierarchy, individuals of higher status enjoyed greater rights and freedoms, and marriage was often seen as a means to secure advantageous alliances. This politically motivated approach to marriage deprived Romeo and Juliet of their right to choose their own partners. Disparities in social standing hindered their acknowledgment and approval, reducing them to pawns that could be manipulated and sacrificed. [7] Juliet was expected to marry Paris as per her family's arrangement, but she defied this dictate and eloped with Romeo. This storyline reflects the suppression of individual freedom and happiness by societal norms, as well as the irreconcilable clash between personal choices and societal expectations. Their love, which transcends social barriers and conventions, serves as a testament to the potency of love and offers a critique of humanity's ingrained perceptions of class and social

norms. The play provides modern society with a lesson on striking a balance between family values and individual happiness.[8-10]

While family and honor hold significance, individual freedom and happiness should also be esteemed. Modern society should be founded on respect or individual choice and agency, endeavoring to achieve equilibrium between familial values and individual empowerment. Romeo and Juliet strive for parity between social hierarchy and personal pursuits. Social status should not curtail the pursuit of love and freedom, and control and oppression rooted in social hierarchy should be discarded. Social norms can establish the groundwork for societal order and standards, but excessive constraints on personal choice and happiness amount to cruel deprivation.

5 Conclusion

Through its contradictory creative techniques, 'Romeo and Juliet' reveals Shakespeare's views on feudal society and humanism. The play does not provide an in-depth analysis of humanism, but instead portrays the yearning for emotion and freedom among young lovers in feudal society through candid emotions and stories. The contradictions in the play, such as love and hatred, family and personal choice, constitute its central dramatic structure. By depicting the conflict between the feudal patriarchal system and love, Shakespeare critiques the societal issues of his time and prompts introspection among modern audiences. Furthermore, the audacious actions of Romeo and Juliet in the play serve to inspire people to pursue genuine happiness and love, while also emphasizing the necessity of social change. However, from a critical perspective, their tragedy also highlights the importance of considering the influence of family and society, and the significance of individual responsibility in the pursuit of happiness. Therefore, while advocating for individual choice, the play also reminds us to balance individual and collective interests, respect social norms, and reconsider the choice between rationality and emotions. Through 'Romeo and Juliet,' Shakespeare champions the elimination of prejudice and discrimination, promotes social change, and imbues humanistic ideas with broader societal needs and content.

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