

Analysis of Causes of Tragic Fate in Romeo and Juliet Based on Shakespeare's View of Fate

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ABSTRACT. *Romeo and Juliet* is the most famous play of Shakespeare, and the tragic fate of its characters is mainly revealed by the tragic story between Romeo and Juliet, which has high literary aesthetics and artistic values. Based on the Shakespeare's view of tragic fate, this paper mainly analyses what Shakespeare's views of fate were in his time and discusses what kinds of causes eventually trigger the death of Romeo and Juliet. Besides, the author aims to explore different personal weaknesses that these characters may have in the play, and finally concludes how these characteristics of different characters push the whole play to develop. Through the full analysis, the author finds out that various reasons are contributing to the tragic ending such as the two households' resentment and rage, Paris' love to Juliet, Romeo's pursuit for idealistic love, Juliet's insistence on free love, and the old and patriarchal society, etc. At last, the author concludes that at the very start of writing *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare would like to express his indignation to the feudal society and the patriarchal rules by telling the tragic fate of Romeo and Juliet, with which he also criticized the decadent and feudal system at that time.

KEYWORDS: *Romeo and Juliet*; Tragic Fate of Characters; Shakespeare's View of Fate; Shakespeare

1. General Introduction of Romeo and Juliet

Romeo and Juliet, as one of Shakespeare's most popular works of play, since its birth, has been welcomed by the worldwide readers. We must admit the fact that this drama, *Romeo and Juliet* is very original and groundbreaking because it encourages young people to break the shackles of feudal society in mediaeval times and then calls for young generations to pursue free love.

Nowadays in China, this work of play has also left a deep impression on many Chinese audience, which is far more than any other work of Shakespeare. Even in recent years, this play, *Romeo and Juliet*, still appears on many drama stages. In addition, in many Chinese people's views, the names of Romeo and Juliet are frequently mentioned together with Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai, the Chinese love

story of tragedy. To some extent, the rebellion against the feudal society and the patriarchy, and the pursuit of free love in *Romeo and Juliet* have inspired many Chinese young generations to seek free love and helped to reshape their values of love (Tang 2014: 46). As a successful work of love tragedy that enjoys a high reputation in the world, *Romeo and Juliet* unavoidably arouses the audience's regret through the tragic ending of love between Romeo and Juliet, and also offers its audience an unforgettable tragic experience, which definitely has very high aesthetic values.

2. Analysis of Shakespeare's View of Fate

In Shakespeare's view, *Romeo and Juliet* aimed to show the public a social tragedy. Then it took the tragic fate as the narrative center and took the love tragedy of Romeo and Juliet as the narrative subject (Luo 2017). This work of play profoundly and successfully revealed the love tragedy in that mediaeval time. The struggles of young man against his fate, and the fights against the society have left the future generations deep and far-reaching impression and reflection.

Shakespeare's writings mainly concentrated in Elizabeth period. At that time, social individuals, especially for the female individuals, were weak and vulnerable, and they must follow all kinds of family and social rules. Under these circumstances, especially for those young individuals, it's almost impossible for them to decide for themselves, including their love and marriage. Therefore, to a certain degree, if some individuals wanted to challenge the feudal system, they would be mostly faced with the unavoidable tragic fate. As it said in the opening prologue of *Romeo and Juliet*: "From forth the fatal loins of these two foes, a pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life. The fearful passage of their death-marked love, and the continuance of their parents' rage, which, but their children's end, nought could remove (William 2014)". From these words, we could easily know that Romeo and Juliet's love was doomed to be a tragedy.

As a result of this, the fate was an unavoidable theme when we tried to analyze this work of play, *Romeo and Juliet*. As was known, many Shakespeare's works of drama were influenced by the ancient Greek tragedy. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the Capulets and the Montagues were two households in Verona, both alike in dignity but had deep mutiny, and they often fought with each other. Montague had a son called Romeo, who fell in love with Juliet, the only daughter of the Capulet. The two people fell in love with each other at first sight, but faced with the family mutiny and resentment, and they were too weak and helpless and had no courage to open their love. All these shackles of family resentment finally led these two people into death.

Meanwhile, the whole work of drama was set between the 14th and 16th centuries, and it was exactly during the Renaissance period, when humanism was the soul of that time, and so was in *Romeo and Juliet*. In this drama, Shakespeare used a lot of words and a series of coincidences to remind the audience that the two lovers must end up dead. They were at the mercy of fate. It seemed that it was fate that

pushed them to the abyss of death. It could be said that Shakespeare had a very strong complex of tragic fate, which was also reflected well in *Romeo and Juliet*. This drama also expressed the playwright's sympathy to the two young lovers and the indignation and criticism to the feudal rules.

3. Exploration of the Root Causes of Romeo and Juliet's Tragic Fate

Romeo and Juliet should have been happy lovers but ended up dead. Therefore, this love tragedy might make many people ponder the real causes. Here based on some analysis of the play, the author tries to give some reasons for this tragedy.

3.1 The two households' resentment and rage led them into the final tragedy.

The social and family rules under that feudal and patriarchal system led to their final tragic fate. After years of fighting between the two families, Juliet's father forced her to marry Paris. Besides, both parents stubbornly aimed to maintain the so-called honor and interests of the family, which were extremely narrow, outdated, and backward ideas. All these ideas left a serious suppression on human nature. At last, the love tragedy of Romeo and Juliet made the two stubborn families pay a huge price for their patriarchal thoughts. This drama also aimed to criticize the selfishness, arrogance, narrowness, and arbitrariness of parents in that stale and declining feudal system. Also, this play showed its sympathy for young people in that age to pursue free love but ended up in tragic fate.

3.2 Different people's characteristics sped up the love tragedy.

Different people's characteristics in this work of play, finally contributed to the tragic fate, whether in a direct or an indirect way. Here, based on the understanding of the drama, the author tries to analyze the three main characters: Paris, Romeo and Juliet and then summarizes their connections with the final tragedy fate.

3.2.1 Paris' love to Juliet sped up the tragedy.

As a matter of fact, Paris was also the victim of the tragedy. He loved Juliet, and really would like to marry her, so he wished that Juliet's father could agree on their marriage. Considering Paris' decent and noble identity, and out of his so-called love and care to Juliet, Juliet's father forced his daughter to marry Paris in three days. This move, undoubtedly, pushed Juliet to ask Lawrence for help and then swallow the medicine to feign death. Then as planned, Paris' wedding became a funeral. Knowing nothing of the whole story and out of his love to Juliet, Paris went to Juliet's tomb to mourn Juliet at that night, where he happened to meet Romeo. He thought that Romeo came here just for destroying something and doing bad things. Then he had a sword duel with Romeo but ended up in death. This poor Paris knew nothing of Romeo and Juliet's love, but his love to Juliet hastened the final tragic

fate.

3.2.2 Romeo's pursuit for idealistic love sped up the tragedy.

In the beginning of the drama, we could see Romeo was very sad and disappointed. As his father said, he often came back home in the mornings with his eyes wet. He often shut himself in his dark room and stayed away from sunshine. All these were because of Romeo's love for a girl called Rosaline. Romeo didn't get the girl's love so he was deep in his sadness. Before his first sight of Juliet, he thought no girl could match Rosaline. Then when Romeo and Juliet met for the first time, Romeo changed his ideas immediately and said "Forswear, my sight! I never see a real beauty before (Zhu Shenghao 2003)." Therefore, to some extent, we could believe that Romeo's love to Juliet was based on a kind of idealistic love.

Since this love started, Romeo's life was stuck in all kinds of fate traps. Because of a duel with Juliet's cousin brother, Romeo stabbed Juliet's cousin to death, which not only made their love more difficult to be accepted by the two households, but also led to his exile to Mantua. Later, when he heard that Juliet was dead, he bought a bottle of poison water, and decided to go back to Verona as soon as possible for the sake of being together with Juliet even though for death. From the whole play, we could know that Romeo and Juliet didn't actually know each other very much, but Romeo's pursuit of free love and the idealistic love eventually led him to have drunk the poison without much hesitation. In a word, Romeo's pursuit for idealistic love sped up the final tragic ending.

3.2.3 Juliet's insistence on free love sped up the tragedy.

As it said in the play, Juliet was born in a noble family and had a very strong desire for free love. She didn't want to be decided on her marriage by other people, even her parents. When she saw Romeo for the first time, she began falling in love. Since then, she insisted on her love for Romeo and even gave her whole life on this love. This is not difficult today, but under that background, this needs great courage and huge bravery. For insisting on her love, Julie betrayed her family and even stood on the opposite side to cheat her parents.

As for Juliet's parents, they wanted Juliet to marry a good person. This person must be nice to her, and his family had better be noble, too. At least, his family couldn't have conflicts with the Capulets, such as the Montagues. Considering all these conditions, Juliet's father wanted Juliet to marry Paris. But this was not what Juliet really wanted. Then she asked Lawrence for help when she found it was useless to change her parents' decision. Eventually, when she knew that Romeo was dead, she stabbed her heart with Romeo's dagger, and died with Romeo. Therefore, Juliet's insistence on free love with Romeo sped up the final tragedy.

3.3 Patriarchy was another cause of the tragic fate.

Under that traditional and patriarchal society, men were often dominated while women often became the oppressed objects. Generally, the whole society lacked the basic respect for female groups. They were always expected by men to restrain themselves and even their fates must be controlled in the hands of men to conform to various family interests and benefits.

Juliet was exactly a victim of such a patriarchy. Her father, Capulet, forced her to marry the noble Paris in a short time. But without any doubt, such an arrangement of marriage triggered the strong resistance of Julie, and eventually led to the final love tragedy. Obviously, Capulet took his daughter Juliet as part of his private property. This kind of suppression of human nature did pose a serious and terrible harm on women's human rights. Such arbitrariness eventually led to Juliet to pay the cost of her young life. From the story, we could see how weak and vulnerable women could be under that oppression of the patriarchal system. As indicated, many women took the price of their life to seek free love, but all ended up in failure.

4. Conclusion

Romeo and Juliet tried to break through the family shackles of hatred but finally failed to change the fate and ended up in death. Through this paper, the author analyzed several causes of the tragic fate in *Romeo and Juliet* such as the two households' resentment and rage, Paris' love to Juliet, Romeo's pursuit for idealistic love, Juliet's insistence on free love, and the old and patriarchal society, etc. Then based on the analysis of Shakespeare's view of tragic fate, the author found that at the beginning of writing *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare would like to express his indignation to the feudal society and the patriarchal rules by the tragic fate of Romeo and Juliet.

Overall, this kind of tragic fate criticized the decadent and feudal system at that time. This work of play also has very high artistic esthetic, which could explain why it has got so much population worldwide. *Romeo and Juliet* has already become the classic images in the world literature. The persistent pursuit of free love and the rebellion against the stubborn feudal society have also become the model for today's young men and women to pursue free love and strive for freedom.

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