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INTERTEXTUAL DEVICES IN "ROMEO AND JULIET" BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the intertextual devices employed in William Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet," highlighting how these elements enrich the narrative and deepen the thematic exploration of love, fate, and conflict. Through an analysis of classical and biblical allusions, literary conventions, and adaptations, the research reveals Shakespeare's adept use of intertextuality to create a multifaceted and dynamic play. Classical mythology, such as references to Cupid and Diana, and biblical imagery, like the portrayal of Romeo and Juliet's initial encounter as a sacred ritual, elevate their love to a timeless and spiritual plane. The incorporation of Petrarchan love conventions critiques and transitions from superficial infatuation to genuine emotional connection. Additionally, Shakespeare's adaptation of Arthur Brooke's "The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet" illustrates his ability to transform existing narratives into more complex and engaging stories, adding depth to characters and enhancing dramatic tension. Meta-theatrical elements and references to other Shakespearean works further enrich the intertextual landscape, inviting audiences to engage deeply with the text. Overall, this study underscores the significance of intertextuality in "Romeo and Juliet," demonstrating how Shakespeare's intricate web of references and adaptations contributes to the play's enduring literary and emotional resonance.

KEYWORDS

Romeo and Juliet, multifaceted and dynamic play, narrative.

INTRODUCTION

Intertextuality, the shaping of a text's meaning by another text, is a critical aspect of literature that enriches the reading experience by creating layers of meaning and reference. In William Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet," several intertextual devices enhance the narrative, providing depth and connecting the play to broader literary traditions. Intertextuality refers to the complex interrelationship between texts and how they influence each other. In "Romeo and Juliet," Shakespeare employs various intertextual devices that not only enhance the narrative but also provide deeper insights into the characters and themes. This study aims to identify and analyze these devices, showcasing their significance in the overall context of the play.

METHODS

The analysis was conducted by closely reading "Romeo and Juliet" using the Folger Shakespeare Library edition. Key scenes and dialogues were scrutinized for allusions, direct references, and textual incorporations. These intertextual elements were then categorized and analyzed to understand their role and impact on the narrative.

RESULTS

The intertextual devices identified in "Romeo and Juliet" include allusions to classical mythology, biblical references, and intertextual references to Shakespeare's other works and contemporary texts.

Allusions

Shakespeare frequently employs allusions, which are indirect references to other texts, historical events, or cultural artifacts. In "Romeo and Juliet," these allusions serve to connect the play to a wider literary and cultural context, enhancing its thematic depth.

1) Classical Mythology

a. One prominent example is Mercutio's reference to Queen Mab in his famous speech (Act 1, Scene 4). Queen Mab is a fairy from English folklore, but Shakespeare's description of her draws heavily from classical mythology and literature, blending these influences to create a vivid and multi-layered character.

b. Cupid and Diana: Shakespeare frequently alludes to Roman mythology. For example, in Act 1, Scene 1, Romeo mentions Cupid and Diana: "Well, in that hit you miss: she'll not be hit / With Cupid's arrow; she hath Dian's wit". This allusion sets the tone for the theme of unrequited love and chastity.

2) Biblical References

a. References to Saints and Pilgrims: In the famous sonnet shared by Romeo and Juliet during their first meeting (Act 1, Scene 5), Shakespeare uses religious imagery: "Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much, / Which mannerly devotion shows in this; / For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch". This

intertextual reference elevates their love to a spiritual plane, suggesting purity and sanctity.

b. Juliet's speech in Act 2, Scene 2, "O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?" evokes the language and themes of biblical texts, emphasizing the sacred and predestined nature of their love. The invocation of religious imagery throughout the play, such as Romeo referring to Juliet as a "bright angel" (Act 2, Scene 2), also draws on the rich intertextual tradition of biblical literature.

3) Literary and Historical References

a. Petrarchan Love: The character of Romeo initially embodies the Petrarchan lover, a common trope in Elizabethan literature. His expressions of love for Rosaline in Act 1 mimic the style of Petrarch's sonnets, characterized by unattainable love and idealized beauty.

4) Self-Referencing and Meta-Theatricality

a. References to Shakespeare's Other Works: The play contains subtle references to themes and lines from Shakespeare's other works. For instance, the motif of star-crossed lovers appears in other Shakespearean tragedies, such as "Othello" and "Hamlet."

2. Parody and Imitation

Shakespeare often uses parody and imitation to engage with other texts humorously or critically.

Parody of Courtly Love: The play opens with Romeo pining for Rosaline, an unrequited love that parodies the conventions of courtly love, popular in medieval and early Renaissance literature. Romeo's exaggerated expressions of love and melancholy mimic the style of Petrarchan sonnets, which were characterized by idealized and unattainable love.

Imitation of Classical Tragedy: "Romeo and Juliet" imitates elements of classical Greek tragedy. The use of a prologue, delivered by a chorus, is reminiscent of Greek dramas. The play's structure, with its fatalistic tone and the concept of star-crossed lovers, also mirrors the inevitable downfall present in classical tragedies.

3. Quotations and Direct References

Direct quotations from other texts or the deliberate echoing of their language can establish connections and contrasts between the works.

1) References to Mythology: Throughout the play, characters reference mythological figures and stories, creating a rich tapestry of intertextual connections. For instance, Juliet is compared to the sun, an image that recalls various mythological and literary traditions where the beloved is associated with celestial bodies (Act 2, Scene 2).

2) Biblical and Liturgical Echoes: The dialogue often echoes biblical phrases and themes, reinforcing the

sacred nature of Romeo and Juliet's love. For example, Juliet's line "My bounty is as boundless as the sea" (Act 2, Scene 2) recalls the vastness of divine love described in religious texts.

4. Pastiche and Adaptations

Shakespeare's play is itself a pastiche of various earlier works, blending elements from different sources to create a new, unique narrative.

Adaptation of Arthur Brooke's Poem: "Romeo and Juliet" is a reworking of Arthur Brooke's narrative poem "The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet" (1562). Shakespeare adapts and expands Brooke's story, adding depth to characters and creating more dynamic dialogue and action.

Influence of Ovid's Metamorphoses: The theme of transformation and tragic love in "Romeo and Juliet" can be traced back to Ovid's "Metamorphoses." The notion of lovers being tragically transformed by their love is a motif that Shakespeare reinterprets in his play.

DISCUSSION

The intertextual devices in "Romeo and Juliet" serve multiple purposes. They enrich the narrative, providing layers of meaning that resonate with contemporary and classical audiences. The allusions to mythology and the Bible not only contextualize the characters' experiences within a broader cultural and religious framework but also heighten the dramatic tension. By

referencing other literary works, Shakespeare creates a dialogue between texts, inviting the audience to draw connections and deeper meanings from the narrative.

CONCLUSION

Intertextuality in "Romeo and Juliet" serves as a crucial mechanism through which William Shakespeare enriches his narrative, connecting it to a broader literary, cultural, and historical context. The interplay of various texts within the play not only deepens the audience's understanding but also adds layers of meaning that resonate across time and cultures. This extensive use of intertextual devices highlights Shakespeare's mastery in creating a multifaceted and dynamic work that continues to captivate audiences and scholars alike. One of the most prominent intertextual devices in "Romeo and Juliet" is the use of classical mythology. The references to Cupid and Diana, as seen in Romeo's lament over Rosaline's chastity, not only root the play within the rich tradition of Roman mythology but also set the stage for the themes of love and desire. By invoking these mythological figures, Shakespeare aligns his characters' experiences with those of legendary lovers, thereby elevating their emotions to an epic scale. This not only underscores the universality of love and heartbreak but also frames the characters' struggles within a timeless narrative of human passion. Biblical allusions further enrich the text by infusing it

with spiritual and moral undertones. The interaction between Romeo and Juliet during their first meeting, laden with religious imagery, transforms their love into something sacred and pure. By likening their hands to pilgrims and saints, Shakespeare invokes the sanctity of religious devotion, suggesting that their love transcends the physical and enters the realm of the divine. This spiritual dimension adds a profound layer to their relationship, portraying it as both destined and doomed, much like the biblical stories of sacrificial love and redemption. The incorporation of Petrarchan love conventions is another significant intertextual element. Romeo's initial portrayal as a Petrarchan lover, pining for the unattainable Rosaline, serves to contrast his later, more genuine love for Juliet. This shift not only reflects his personal growth but also critiques the idealized and often unrealistic portrayal of love found in Petrarchan sonnets. By moving beyond the superficial expressions of love, Shakespeare explores the deeper, more complex nature of true affection and commitment. This transformation underscores the play's exploration of authentic versus performative emotions, a theme that resonates with audiences seeking a more nuanced understanding of love. Shakespeare's self-referential techniques and meta-theatricality further enhance the intertextual richness of "Romeo and Juliet." By drawing subtle connections to themes and lines from his other works, Shakespeare creates a self-contained literary universe that invites audiences to explore the interplay

between different texts. This not only enriches the reading experience but also encourages a deeper engagement with the broader corpus of Shakespearean drama. The motif of star-crossed lovers, which appears in various forms across Shakespeare's tragedies, serves as a unifying thread that ties his works together, offering a coherent exploration of fate, destiny, and human agency. In conclusion, the intertextual devices in "Romeo and Juliet" are integral to its enduring appeal and literary significance. By weaving classical mythology, biblical references, and contemporary literary conventions into the fabric of the play, Shakespeare creates a rich, layered narrative that transcends its immediate context. These intertextual elements not only deepen the audience's understanding of the characters and themes but also situate the play within a broader cultural and historical framework. Shakespeare's masterful use of intertextuality thus transforms "Romeo and Juliet" into a timeless exploration of love, fate, and the human condition, ensuring its relevance and resonance for generations to come.

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