

Towards a Study of Potentially Tragic Romantic Events of Romeo and Juliet Style (Happening in the World Today and Mythological)

David Evans, Bert Jenkins and Susan Davies

Prologue

'There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not;

The way of an eagle in the air;

The way of a serpent upon a rock;

The way of a ship in the midst of the sea;

And the way of a man with a maid

(Proverbs ch 30 vs 18-19 King James edition of the Bible).

This Old Testament biblical quote alludes to the challenges of qualitative research where we look at and admire the real world and things we do not fully understand, while, with the aid of philosophers, positivist scientists, social scientists, and qualitative researchers who have gone before and tried their best, we long to know more.

Introduction

Incidents reported in the media have led to the choice of 'potentially tragic romantic events' as a topic for personal research. One such report was in the Guardian Weekly some time ago and involved an Indian man who hanged his son in public view for proceeding with a liaison that offended the family in their cultural setting. Another incident was the killing by sniper fire of a couple attempting to leave the city during the Balkan wars. The bridge where this happened is now called the Romeo and Juliet bridge.

My background is in medicine, having graduated from the University of Adelaide in 1960, and later specialising in pathology and sexual health medicine. Coronial autopsy work has made me aware of youth suicide, and there is a story within my own family of one of my uncles committing suicide as a young man because he was not allowed to marry the girl of his choice. Voluntary pathology work has taken me to Nepal and my first visit was shortly after the royal massacre in 2001 where it is reputed that Crown Prince Dipendra, heir to the monarchy, killed his family having been forbidden by his mother to marry the girl of his choice.

However, also from Nepal is the story of a couple who now enjoy good relationships with the woman's parents although at the time she had to elope and it took two years and the birth of a child before reconciliation was realised.

In this study an attempt will be made to document and critically analyse stories, events and responses made by people involved, and to look for grounded theory pertinent to the responses of people and communities involved.

Qualitative Research and Philosophical Orientation

The collected essays found in the Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research (Denzin & Lincoln 2005) establish a well founded claim that Qualitative Research is a discipline in its own right and has matured to a stage where a working definition and research methodology are acceptably agreed (p.23).

Denzin and Lincoln suggest that there will be two main streams of future research, one along a 'gold standard' line of verifiable analytical research, and the other along a line of value analysis within society and the world at large. The study of Potentially Tragic Romantic Events of Romeo and Juliet Style lies in the second category with reliance on values acceptable to the writer and to the reader.

Nevertheless words used are likely to remain troublesome. In the 2nd Edition of the Handbook (Denzin & Lincoln 2000), it is suggested that there is a 'sacred' element to be acknowledged as we look at and reflect on a world that we can only partially understand. To the writer, spiritual issues are acknowledged, but regarded as being beyond objective scrutiny or definition.

Unresolvable questions on the relevance of 'nature' and 'nurture' in educational issues aimed at providing children with best opportunity during their learning years will remain. These questions are pertinent to the study when lovers reject family influence in favour of 'inner' compulsive drive. In matters of personal and social justice, there are questions of jurisdiction, including the basic question 'whose opinion matters'. An 'a posteriori' problem is the need to be an equally experienced participant in order to appreciate issues examined. Philosophical issues such as equality, universals, and pragmatism, are relevant to the study.

The research project aims to communicate as objectively and effectively as possible in looking for new ideological concepts that may alter our terms of reference. Postulates conceived as a starting point for research include the following:

- Every culture has its own stories of Romeo and Juliet style
- Every culture has recurring tragedies of Romeo and Juliet style
- There is, or can be, a moral progression in responses to family oriented dilemmas of this kind
- The telling of legendary stories and the writing of plays and theatre productions assists moral progression whilst preserving cultural values at the same time.

Five Research Avenues

1. Mythological and Legendary Stories

A collection will be made of cultural stories of Romeo and Juliet style together with literature reviews of critical analyses of the stories. From these findings it is expected that themes will emerge that can be examined for grounded theory related to an axiological progression in attitudes and actions by key characters. Line 13 of the prologue to Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet states:

'what here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend'.

Romeo and Juliet

Until beginning the study I was unaware of sources used by Shakespeare for Romeo and Juliet (Mabillard 2000). A most significant contribution comes from historian Edward Muir (1993) in his book 'Mad Blood Stirring-Vendetta in Italy' which refers to a ten generation family vendetta in Northern Italy in medieval times. A romantic episode amidst the atrocities of the Cruel Carnival of Udine is retold in a novello by Luigi Da Porto (1535) entitled Guilietta e Romeo.

Shakespeare's sources may be as useful for material pertinent to this study as the play itself, although inherent within the play are 'extras' from Shakespeare's own life experience. There seems no doubt that if Shakespeare had not written this play, another story with the same universal philosophy would be widely known and promoted in theatre and other ways.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772 – 1834) has written a famous critique on Romeo and Juliet based on his legendary and influential Shakespeare notes and lectures. This makes an excellent starting point for examining critical analyses, even though Coleridge's critique is more about literary skills than romantic tragedy. The following reference gives a plot summary of Romeo and Juliet together with critical analysis. It serves as a guide for examining the stories and developing critical analyses:

http://absoluteshakespeare.com/guides/romeo_and_juliet/essay/romeo_and_juliet_essay.htm (reference accessed 1.5.06)

Hinemoa and Tutanekai

From precolonial Aotearoa (New Zealand) comes the reputedly true legendary Maori story of Hinemoa and Tutanekai, where Hinemoa swam several kilometres across Lake Rotoiti at night to meet her lover on Mokoia Island, against the wishes of her chieftan father. Happily, the next day there was acceptance instead of the expected tribal war. Hinemoa has her name preserved on ships, stamps, buildings, and in films, as well as street names and memorials (Orbell 1992).

Koong-se and Chang

The Willow Pattern Story (Fontanaz 1981) is a Chinese fable about a rich widowed Mandarin called T'so Ling, and his daughter Koong-se who is in love with a humble clerk called Chang. The couple escaped the wrath of T'so Ling and lived to raise a family. However the success of their business caught them out and the thwarted suitor took his revenge and brought in soldiers who killed the two lovers.

Phra Law and Phra Phuan and Phra Phaeng

The ancient Thai poem Lilit Phra Law involves royalty, where two princesses Phra Phuan and Phra Phaeng with magical aid together seek the love of Phra Law from the neighbouring kingdom. Their grandmother takes revenge for her husband's death in a previous war, and has the three lovers slain (Bickner, R.J. 1991).

Anarkali's Tomb

It was in Lahore in Hindustan that Prince Salim set eyes upon Anarkali, King Akbar's favourite dancing girl. Legend has it that Akbar was furious and had the lady entombed outside the fort. When Salim succeeded Akbar in 1605, he built the Tomb for Anarkali. The gravestone bears the inscription, 'Could I behold the face of my beloved once more, I would thank God until the day of resurrection'.

http://www.4to40.com/discoverindia/places/index.asp/article=discoverindia_places_la reference accessed 20.05.06

Also from Hindustan is the story of The Lady of Bambore, and from Persia, Layla and Majnun. Other Western classic stories include Lord Ullin's Daughter, and Abelard and Heloise.

2. In-depth Interviews

An attempt will be made to collect in-depth interviews with individuals or couples who have a personal story to tell (Minchiello et al,1995).

Mamata and Prateek

Recently in Nepal, Topsy (my wife) and I were staying with a Nepal couple, who, whilst talking about the subject of Romeo and Juliet, volunteered their own story. Prateek and his wife Mamata met at school. Mamata refused Prateek's first proposal but later said yes. Mamata's parents were Brahmin and Prateek a Newar. The parents forbade the liaison and at times kept Mamata at home. Eventually they allowed her to attend her college and she eloped. It was two years after the birth of their son that reconciliation took place.

The story (recorded with permission) is fascinating and there is the suggestion that the parents were caught in a social bind where they could not approve of the liaison, but were pleased to be reunited as a family after due 'penalty' had been paid. We had met the parents in their home before being told the story.

Margaret and Henry

Although not available for interview, a true story is told by John Ferry (1999) in his book, *Colonial Armidale*:

Among the middle class, marriage was often an alliance between families, and although the daughter had some choice, that choice needed family approval. Margaret Dangar eldest daughter of pastoralists Henry and Grace Dangar learned that lesson when she fell in love with Arthur Hunter Palmer, the trusted manager of all the Dangar's pastoral properties. Henry and Grace simply did not regard their manager as a suitable match for their daughter and tried to end the relationship. Margaret had other plans, and she and Palmer eloped from the Dangar's home in Neotsfield in the Hunter Valley, in 1856. In a classic example of the histrionics of Victorian elopement, Henry Dangar and his men rode out after the couple, bringing Margaret home, before presumably, any damage had been done, and locking her up in her bedroom with the windows bricked up until she came to her senses. Within 12 months, she was steered in the direction of widowed banker, businessman pastoralist, Walter Lamb, whom she married in February 1858. That alliance had dynastic potential. However Margaret lived to see her erstwhile lover move to Queensland where he became Premier, Treasurer and Knight of the Realm, while her eminently suitable husband went bankrupt at the height of the 1890's depression, and never recovered his fortunes.

I am aware of other people in Australia who have stories to tell and are willing to be interviewed.

3. Community Opinion

An attempt will be made to survey community groups regarding attitudes of parents and their 'children' where there is/has been opposition to the latter's choice of partner. This may include a comparison of first and third generation attitudes to the survey questionnaire.

An initial talk has been given to a Probus Club on the subject of Hinemoa and Tutanekai. Those attending were invited to respond to a questionnaire with the following questions:

- What feelings do you have about the story of Romeo and Juliet, and, or, Hinemoa and Tutanekai and its place in the folklore of the relevant culture?
- In your experience are you aware of people who have married in spite of parental/family resistance?
- In your experience are you aware of reasons why attempts to prevent a marriage take place?
- Can you say what degrees of resistance you have seen brought to bear on couples deciding to ignore

their families or society, and go ahead with their marriage?

- Do you know of people who have regretted ignoring parental advice?

Five attendees gave response to the questions and these illustrated variance, some with opposite opinions being expressed.

4. Media Reports

A search for current international media reports of tragic romantic outcomes and commentaries about social responses to these events will be made.

Parbati and Jagadish

The love affair between Jagadish Khadki, a Dalit youth of Bishanpur, and Parbati Raut, a girl from the upper caste in the same VDC culminated in marriage on December 31 last. This step not only hurled them into a quagmire but also dragged some 12 Dalit families into the mess, thanks to the ire of the upper caste people (The Kathmandu Post Feb 10 2004). The Asian Human Rights Commission has urged the government of Nepal to intervene. It has been reported that the Dalit families of the village now live in miserable circumstances and those who have tried to return have been chased away by upper caste people.

Shailendra and Pushpanjali

Shailendra and Pushpanjali eloped on January 12th 2006 and married contrary to the Hindu Religion which forbids those of the same gotra (equivalent to incest) to marry.

On returning home Shailendra's brother informed Pushpanjali's father, who came with others to the house, dragged them to the temple and beat them with sticks and stones. Shailendra died immediately and Pushpanjali was critically injured (*The Times of India*, New Delhi. Saturday February 4th 2006).

Ujjala and Asad

A BBC television documentary entitled *Modern Love Versus Old Taboo* reports interviews with two lovers Ujjala, a Hindu woman, and Asad, a Muslim man. Their nine year romance which included a forced marriage between Ujjala and another man that failed, eventually culminated in their marriage. It was necessary for Ujjala to become Muslim, and she has since been totally rejected by her family. Her father's comments in the documentary were, 'We don't want it, we won't attend the marriage, but we won't become violent'. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/this_world/3732343

Recently, I got an invitation to attend the wedding party for my friend's sister. It was going to be and inter-caste marriage. The bride was Newar and the bridegroom a Brahmin.

I knew that inter-caste marriage was being accepted in today's society. But I didn't know that even the parents have started taking it normally. I remember till some years back, parents would accept the marriage only if it would be done in a temple so that many people wouldn't know about it. The invitation cards would hardly be printed; and even if printed, it would only have the first names of the couples.

All human beings are made up of flesh and bones and the red blood flows through their veins. However it took years for people to understand this when it came to marriage. So, why did they fail to understand this simple stuff? Personally, I see two reasons, first, they fear there would be problems in adjusting. A person grown up in a certain environment since childhood would definitely find it hard to adjust an environment that is different altogether.

The second reason could be the fear of losing one's culture or the fear of acculturation. In the case of this couple, the bride is from a Newar community, which has its own mother tongue, and its own culture. The bridegroom on the other hand doesn't have the same mother tongue and has his own set of traditions and customs. Generally, it's okay to drink in Newar community while it's a taboo in Brahmin family.

Though this drinking thing doesn't apply in the present day, there are various other aspects that don't go hand-in-hand, culturally. And the parents wouldn't want their sons/daughters to forget their culture and embrace another's. But fortunately in this case, their parents realised that if there is something called 'love' then it's possible to make a good difference.

But it's sad to come across murder cases because of inter-caste marriage or love affairs in our neighbouring countries who claim themselves to be living in a postmodern age. Even in some parts of Nepal, there have been cases of suicide because a high-caste girl falls in love with a low-caste guy, or vice versa. It is not at all a sin to love a person just because s/he comes from a 'so called' high/low caste. And it is a real sad case to see people still being apathetic towards their own children's emotions. Maybe the parents need more than enough examples of successful inter-caste marriages or maybe the people should themselves move ahead to change the face of society.

Newspaper commentary from Nepal (Kathmandu Post. Thursday Nov 24th 2005, by Prerana Marasini)

5. Theatre and the Arts

As an aid to critical analysis, an examination of the relevance of the stories in theatre and the arts will be made. Where possible, interpretations by writers, composers, and reviewers, of relevant art productions will be examined.

Classic operas include, 'A Village Romeo and Juliet' by Frederick Delius (1862-1934), 'Romeo and Juliet' by Charles Gounoud (1818-1893), 'Westside Story' by Leonard Bernstein (1918 -1990), and 'Pelléas et Mélisande' by Claude Debussy (1862-1918).

There is also the Orchestral Fantasy Overture 'Romeo and Juliet' by Pyotr Tchaikovsky (1840-1893), and the Ballet 'Romeo and Juliet' by Sergey Prokofiev (1891-1953).

The Prokofiev ballet featured exquisitely in the book 'Mao's Last Dancer' by Li Cunxin (2003) who tells his own Romeo and Juliet story alongside defection to the USA towards the end of the Mao era.

Themes for critical analysis arising from commentaries on Shakespeare's play Romeo and Juliet and from other sources

The overriding theme in Romeo and Juliet is the collision of family pride/honour with the imperative of love. Will either side give in, before suicide on the part of the lover(s), or insistence by those maintaining the family honour leads to murder or banishment? The imperative of love/desire is manifested in Romeo who vainly seeks the love of Rosaline, but then falls instantly in love in the presence of Juliet. Instant love is manifested also in Juliet who obtains help from her nurse to continue the contact. Their determination eventually leads to suicide.

The family feud, or vendetta, is often continued most vigorously by the younger family members. In the play, parental and societal restraint is exerted ineffectually to lessen extremes in the brawls. The scenario includes daring deeds that take to the limit what is possible, and bring risk of death or banishment to Romeo. Juliet is prepared to elope and to marry in secret. The place of the magic potion in the storyline mixes unreality with reality and lessens the tension of the play.

The respect for the dead in Shakespeare's play is interesting. Romeo places Paris' body alongside Juliet after he has killed Paris in a fight. Disrespect for the dead is seen in the real life story of the Cruel Carnival of Udine where dismembered bodies of nobles were left to be eaten by animals and birds of prey.

Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet tells me (the writer) not to trust a messenger with an important message. A personal recollection is of a man who wrote a proposal of marriage and asked a friend to post it. The letter was never posted and decades later the woman said she would have accepted.

The story of Hinemoa and Tutanekai reflects themes in common with those of Romeo and Juliet, but there is an understanding shown by Hinemoa's father towards the couple, and he is prepared to surrender his ambition for her to be found the best husband possible. He is also able to weather the sociological disapproval of his daughter marrying an illegitimate man (Orbell 1992).

Henry Dangar, like Umukaria (Hinemoa's father), had ambitions for his daughter, but unlike Umukaria, Henry Dangar insisted on his own way and used all his resources to accomplish his aims, regardless of the consequences. Like Mamata in Nepal, the only option available to Margaret Dangar was to elope, and presumably would have remained in fear of her father if she had been successful.

Importance of the stories within a culture

This is a phenomenon needing examination as it reflects the importance of story-telling in pedagogical teaching of young people growing up in any community. The integration of stories such as Romeo and Juliet with art, such as in plays, opera, and ballet, further confirms the importance of the story in that culture. There is also wonderment in the reflections on all aspects of community living, including the maturation of individual thought, beautifully illustrated by Shakespeare's reference to seven ages of man.

Parental and lovers' dilemmas

Individuals in these stories have to choose between options that determine the most important components of their lives. With intense desire the individual wishes to retain and enjoy conflicting life matters that cannot be reconciled. It leads to great sadness for at least some of the players

Summary of Themes for Investigation

For the Family

Family pride and honour, feuds, and vendettas

Parental ambitions for their young

Punishment for disobedience

Social customs/pressures

For the Lovers

Instant love and the imperatives of love and desire

Single-mindedness and determination

Elopement and cutting of ties

Suicide

Risk taking

Parental or societal restraint

Social customs/pressures

For Onlookers

Sharing the sadness and joy

Reflecting on societal expectations of tradition

Learning from example, for example, learning not to trust a messenger either to deliver a message or to give the right message.

Grounded Theory

It is anticipated that a grounded theory will be able to be stated based on the evidence that come to hand. There is expectation of a positive axiological progression based on the interplay of significant social and personal factors.

Conclusion

The myths, legends, and true stories referred to indicate an extraordinary array of human emotions, responses, and religious and cultural ideologies. A positive axiological progression of responses may be revealed, and through story telling, literature, theatre, opera, ballet, and art, the community is exposed to the dilemmas of young love, parenthood, and community life. The ethical goal is to achieve an appropriate balance between free choice, the acceptance or rejection of advice, and family and community considerations.

This thesis is envisaged to investigate the axiological progression from violent intervention, to disownment, to negative acceptance, and to positive acceptance.

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